

SEERA Summary of Draft SE Plan panel report

Chapter 18 - East Kent and Ashford

The Panel accepts the rationale for the sub-region, recognising that there is a need to spread the benefits of an Ashford growth area to surrounding areas; it will allow the sub-region to be marketed as a whole; and there is a common need to improve connectivity in this area at the periphery of the region.

Core Strategy

The Panel feels that introduction to the strategy gives a good indication of the challenges facing this sub-region, although the importance of the Kent AONB should also be recognised. It agreed with most participants that Ashford provided the best opportunity for large scale inward investment that would hopefully provides spin-off advantages through supply chains to the rest of the sub-region.

Economy and Regeneration

The Panel recognises that development agencies and partnerships have a major role in seeking to stimulate demand and development interest throughout this sub-region, but particularly in the coastal towns and recommend that a reference to this be added to Policy EKA4.

Referring to the extensive discussion at the EiP on Lydd-Ashford International Airport, the Panel concludes that it would be inappropriate to refer to the potential role of the airport in the plan. It makes it clear; however, that this does not indicate that growth will be prevented but that the case for expansion should be determined through the development control process.

On jobs forecasts, the Panel accepts the figure of 50,000 jobs as a policy led target but acknowledge SEEDA's advice that its achievement is heavily dependent on the success of Ashford and the hoped-for transformational effect of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). It also acknowledges that this target implies a higher rate of job growth than labour supply which is a reasonable objective given the nature of the sub-region's commuting patterns.

As with other sub-regions, the Panel feels that the issue for employment land is one of quality rather than quantity and the fact that rental levels are not high enough to encourage investment in the necessary infrastructure or access improvements to unlock existing provision. Where new employment land is concerned, the Panel recommends that the fundamental objective of exploiting potential at locations served by CTRL domestics should be included in the core strategy.

The Panel agrees with Kent CC that the objective to attract knowledge-based jobs at Ashford should still remain in Policy EKA7 but that the location should instead relate to the urban growth area and not include a specific reference to Wye Campus, particularly since Imperial College has already indicated that it was no longer pursuing the proposal for Wye Campus.

Settlement Shaping

The Panel accepts that investment in new sources of water supply will be necessary to meet the proposed growth.

On flood risk, the Panel is satisfied that a process is in place to manage flood issues at Ashford.

The Panel recognises that the plans for Ashford include transport infrastructure without which development cannot proceed, which includes the new M20 junction 10A. It is less clear what influence transport has had on the remainder of the area (outside Ashford) as transport studies have not been completed. Where the Dover area is concerned, it does not support it as a regional hub but does accept that the international dimension of the town's cross channel ferry services make it unique in the region. It believes that this reflected in its 'Gateway' status and the three regional spokes that connect the town but also recommend that the corridor north from Dover to Thanet be designated as a regional spoke.

Housing

The Panel recommends an increase from 48,000 dwellings to 53,000 (2,650 dpa) which it feels would better reflect regional imperatives and local needs. This partly reflects the fact that the sub-region has the least stress on its strategic highways network and will also benefit from major public transport accessibility improvements from the introduction of CTRL domestic services in 2009.

A summary of the district and sub-regional allocations are included in Annexes 1 and 2.

On Affordable Housing, the Panel concludes that it is justifiable to set a lower level (30%) than the regional target (35%).

Implementation

The Panel welcomes the establishment of the Ashford's Future Delivery Board and strongly endorses the partnership working on delivery mechanisms and the business planning approach that is leading to a costed implementation plan for capital expenditure.

The Panel concludes that transport improvements are so vital to support the spatial planning framework that a separate section is justified. It also considers that, given the gateway status, landside access issues to Dover Port are particularly important and are concerned about the short-term disruption that accompanies Operation Stack.