

The Government has recently published the changes it wants to see in the South East Plan – the document which will shape the future of the South East region over the next twenty years. We were shocked to see that these proposed changes would not just increase the level of environmental damage associated with the Plan, but would also substantially lower the quality of life of the region's population.

These are not just Sussex Wildlife Trust's conclusions, but the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal of the South East Plan, commissioned by the Government itself. Here are some of the changes the Government wants to see:

- **Housing.** The Government wants to see nearly 90,000 new homes in Sussex by 2026 (for comparison, that is about twice the number of houses currently in Worthing), an increase of over 21,000 on figures published in the first draft of the South East Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal states that this will be unlikely to improve affordability, but will increase carbon emissions, air pollution, and traffic.
- **Water.** The draft South East Plan made any new development dependent on the provision of necessary infrastructure, such as new water supplies or new waste-water treatment works. The government wants to do away with this, against the advice of the experts who prepared the Sustainability Appraisal. The result will be even more demand for ever-dwindling supplies in a county where there is virtually no more water available from existing supplies.
- **Wildlife.** Although there are policies in the South East Plan to protect and enhance the natural environment, they will be difficult to implement. The Sustainability Appraisal concludes that the Plan would not even guarantee to protect the most important wildlife sites – those protected because of the international importance – let alone nationally or locally important wildlife habitats. According to the government's appraisal, increased urbanization and ever-higher visitor numbers could damage important wildlife areas. The increased housing numbers for Shoreham are particularly worrying (up from 2,600 to 12,000) – it is difficult to see how these could be built without damaging the Adur Valley, the adjacent South Downs National Park or Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the area.

What can be done? Sussex Wildlife Trust, together with all the other Wildlife Trusts in the South East Region, will be using every available channel to make its views known to government, including making formal comments during the current consultation on the proposed changes.

Anyone can comment on the government's proposed changes to the South East Plan. Go to <http://gose.limehouse.co.uk/portal> to make your views known via the on-line system, or download a comment form from http://www.gos.gov.uk/497648/docs/171301/Draft_SE_Plan_comments_form.doc. But make sure that you get your comments in before 5pm on Friday 24 October.

You may wish to:

- **Object** to the proposed changes to **Policy H1**, which sets out proposed housing numbers, because the new housing cannot be delivered in a sustainable way. Remember, the government's own planning policy says that planning should protect and enhance the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside, and existing communities.

- **Object** to the proposed changes to **Policy CC7** on infrastructure and implementation, and argue that new development must be conditional on there being sufficient capacity in existing infrastructure, or new infrastructure being provided.
- **Support Policy NRM5** on the conservation of wildlife. This is a strong and positive policy, but we will need to see it delivered in full if there is to be any chance of maintaining the astonishing richness and variety of the wildlife of the South East.
- **Support Policy CC8** on Green Infrastructure, which sets Local Authorities the task of providing substantial networks of new green space in and around built developments – critically important for the quality of life of anyone living in Sussex’s towns. It will be important for government to ensure that this is taken up, and that the proper funding and resources are made available.
- **Support Policy CC2** on Climate Change, but with the proviso that every effort must be made to implement this policy and meet its targets.
- **Support Policy CC3** on Resource Use, which aims to halt and reverse the growth in the regions ecological footprint. This is an important policy, but one without any clear mechanism for making it happen. We need to emphasise the need for it to be taken seriously by all government bodies.

Additional information

The draft South East Plan is a document prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA). This document sets out how the southeast of England will develop in the next twenty years. The Regional Assembly is a part of regional government and includes all local Authorities as well as representatives from groups such as from the faith communities and those interested in sustainable development. You can learn more about the South East England Regional Assembly from their website <http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/>.

The pages <http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/planning.html> set out the background and detail of the regional planning process.

The draft South East Plan has been reviewed by an independent Panel as part of last year’s examination in public (EiP), and then by the Government Office of the South East (GOSE). GOSE has subsequently proposed changes to the Plan on behalf of the Secretary of State. These ‘proposed changes’ are currently open to public consultation.

The GOSE website planning pages start on <http://www.go-se.gov.uk/gose/planning/regionalPlanning/>. The proposed changes to the draft South East Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal document (both as a short ‘non-technical summary’ and the full report) can be found on <http://gose.limehouse.co.uk/portal>.

The Trust is also part of a much larger partnership of voluntary bodies called the South East Forum for Sustainability (SEFS). The response of SEFS to an earlier edition of the Plan is available on their website: <http://www.sefs.org.uk/downloads/SEFS%20SE%20Plan%20Response%20Final%20June%202006.pdf>.