

South East Forum for Sustainability Annual Report 2008-09

1. POLICY & EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (P&EC) and SEFS MANAGEMENT

- SEFS membership for 2008/09 was made up of 61 full members and 1 associate member. SEFS continues to communicate with members through newsletters, membership meetings, e-bulletins and website. SEFS held two membership meetings in 2008/09. The AGM in October was well attended and members appreciated the updates on; SEFS work in general, the Sub National Review (SNR), SEFS Behaviour Change work and the final consultation on the South East Plan (SE Plan).
- A new Chair of SEFS was elected at the AGM, Lynnette Leeson from Sussex Wildlife Trust. Members offered a vote of thanks to Chris Corrigan who has chaired SEFS ably over the last 10 years.
- The General Meeting in March 2009 covered the new Regional Structures, SEFS Behaviour Change work, the South East Biodiversity Strategy and working with Local Development Frameworks.
- P&EC met 7 times during 2008/09 and there were also regular management team meetings. P&EC recruited a new member organisation, Food Matters, to replace the vacancy left by Civic Trust who stood down at the end of 2007/08. The full complement of seats are currently taken and include RSPB, CPRE South East, Wildlife Trusts in the South East, National Trust SE Region, Friends of the Earth South East, Railfuture London & South East, Woodland Trust, WWF – UK, CTC South East, Association of Preservation Trusts South East, Groundwork South East and Food Matters.
- The SNR and changes to Regional Governance have dominated SEFS discussions at P&EC due to the concern over lack of significant reference to Sustainable Development or the Environment and the role of Stakeholders. One Planet Living/Behaviour Change, Eco-Towns, LAAs, RES Action Plans, Transport issues (particularly Aviation and the Bexhill Hastings Link Road), Regional Funding Allocations, Water Framework Directive, SE Biodiversity Strategy and the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the SE Plan were all covered at P&EC meetings amongst other things.
- SEFS received the first year of funding (£20,000) of a two year package totalling £40,000 from SEEDA
- SEFS worked closely with the Assembly Social partners and the wider groups particularly on issues such as the SNR which is an issue of continuing concern.

2. SEFS PLANNING GROUP (LEAD IAN HEPBURN)

The SEFS Planning Group last met in July 2008 to discuss the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the SE Plan. Subsequent to this SEFS produced a response to this the final consultation on the SE Plan. The Plan was adopted and published in May 2009. Work on the plan has been a major undertaking for SEFS since first discussions took place in 2003. SEFS has achieved substantial gains over the period of the development of the plan in various policy areas and we would like to extend our thanks to Ian Hepburn for spearheading SEFS work on this over the last 6 years.

3. SEFS CORE TRANSPORT GROUP (CTG)

The group held three formal meetings in 2008/09. In addition to the five members who were able to attend some or all of these meetings an email circulation list of sixteen is kept informed of the group's discussions and of broader transport issues.

CTG representatives met SEEDA officers immediately prior to the CTG meetings in June and September to explore areas of common interest and in particular the potential for funding of sustainable transport projects. More recently we were disappointed to learn that SEEDA has decided, as a result of the economic downturn, to focus on more substantial capital infrastructure projects to stimulate the economic development, and that consequently plans to fund small scale schemes have been temporarily shelved.

Peter England attended a SEERA workshop in Windsor at which proposals for a number of quality bus and coach routes in the Thames Valley were discussed. Implementation of the proposals would form part of the Regional Bus and Coach Network.

Simon Pratt represented SEFS on the Regional Transport Board at meetings in May, July and October 2008 and in January 2009, continuing to argue the case for schemes which promote sustainable transport, in the face of a regional programme dominated by road building and widening.

In February the Region presented to Government its Regional Planning Advice. The document sets out the context for Government funding of regional schemes through the Regional Funding Allocation. It also refers to specific schemes which it wishes to promote and includes a list of the currently programmed transport schemes.

SEFS responded to the draft of this document voicing concerns over a lack of urgency in addressing the challenges of climate change, and that it was not clear how or if the programme would help deliver on the Government's commitment to the Climate Change Act.

The Region's expressed intention is to continue implementation of the so called committed schemes, the majority of which involve road building and widening. There is an indication that from 2013 and in line with DfT policy (set out in their document Towards a Sustainable Transport System (TaSTS)) a programme which promotes a range of choices in responding to transport problems will be initiated. SEFS considers the development encouraging but believes that continuing with business as usual until that date is unacceptable.

Following the Government's decision to approve a third runway for Heathrow we remain aware that pressure to expand is also directed at other airports, and that those with whom we have made common cause in respect of opposition to Heathrow may take a different view of proposals to expand elsewhere. With this in mind SEFS has produced a document setting out our position on aviation. This will be posted on our website.

In response to the consultation on the South East Plan, SEFS expressed continuing opposition to the Government's Aviation policy with particular reference to safeguarding land at Gatwick for an additional runway and to the list of transport schemes which did not reflect broader policy objectives.

CTG has been actively involved in SEFS work leading to the formation of an Action Plan to reduce the Region's Ecological Footprint through behaviour change. We have highlighted the significant negative impact of transport in this area and the important positive role of changes in behaviour associated with travel choices.

4. SEFS BEHAVIOUR CHANGE WORK

In April 2008 SEFS received the first tranche of two years of funding from SEEDA. The funding helped secure SEFS core work until March 2010 but also gave a focus for developing a project on Behaviour Change. Using this funding SEFS has:

- Set up a Behaviour Change Working Group which includes members of SEFS P&EC, other members of SEFS and representatives from SEEDA, Wakehurst Place, Climate South East, RAISE and Energy Savings Trust. The wider group met 3 times in 2008/09 and the project has been overseen by SEFS Policy & Executive Committee.
- Identified a set of 'behaviour change themes' (energy, water, waste, travel, food) which were circulated to SEEDA in August 2008
- Developed consistent key environmental messages to reduce the region's ecological footprint.
- Started work on developing a programme to promote those behavioural changes which will contribute most to achieving more sustainable lifestyles to SEFS members

The wider group proposed that an overarching Action Plan be produced to drive the regional Behaviour Change agenda. However, SEEDA requested that SEFS focus on the Behaviour Change messages and their dissemination and that will make up the focus of the work going into 2009/10.

5. REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY – Implementation Plan

After the consultation on the RES Implementation Plan in 2007 SEFS continued throughout 2008/09 to work with SEEDA on the RES Action Plans particularly in relation to Transport. SEFS members attended the SEEDA Partners conference in July 2008 and Chris Corrigan was invited to sit on the re-constituted RES Steering Group.

6. WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

Report from the South East River Basin District environmental NGOs (SE RBD eNGO) Group

The EU Water Framework Directive is being delivered through River Basin Plans in a process overseen by the Environment Agency (EA). The South East River Basin runs to some 10,000 km² including the Isle of Wight, most of Hampshire, and then runs in a broad band across West and East Sussex and into southern and eastern Kent (see map at http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/se_rbd_map_1458529.pdf). The District is further subdivided into 9 river catchments (stretching from the New Forest through Cuckmere & Pevensey Levels to the River Stour), plus intertidal waters and groundwater catchments."

In very broad terms, the Directive aims to improve the standard of surface waters (inland and intertidal) and groundwater. In principle all these waters should reach a 'good status' by 2015, but in certain cases this can be delayed to the second or third phases of the programme (with deadlines of 2021 and 2027 respectively). All this has to be achieved against a background of increasing demands on water resources – driven for example by increased housing numbers – and the impacts of climate change.

The SE RBD eNGOs group has participated in the development of the South East River Basin Plan through the EA's 'South East River Basin District Liaison Panel', bringing valuable environmental and site-based expertise to the table. SEFS 'Water Group' acts as the focal point for the eNGO network for this river basin district; Ian Hepburn (WTSE) and Steve Gilbert (RSPB) continue to be the eNGO Liaison Panel reps. A parallel group has been working in the Thames River Basin District. A consultation on The Draft River Basin Plans ran until 22 June 2009.

The views of the eNGO community in the South East on the draft plan echo those expressed nationally. There are three key areas of concern. Overall the level of ambition is very low, and it is not clear that the EA can meet its targets by 2027. Secondly, we have serious concerns that a 95% confidence threshold is the trigger for regulatory action by EA – a balance of evidence approach would be more appropriate. Lastly, the information held on individual water bodies is difficult to interpret so it is neither easy to understand how the EA has taken particular decisions on their classification nor whether actions might be delayed or deferred due to technical reasons or because they would be 'disproportionately costly'.

The eNGO group responded at the regional level on the draft SE River Basin Management Plan.

7. SEERA SELECT COMMITTEES

SEFS attended the Select Committee on SEEDA's coastal strategy. Whilst SEFS comments on the natural environment were received sympathetically the feeling was that the focus was mainly on the economy of coastal communities.

8. SUSTAINABLE FUTURES GROUP

SEFS continued to be represented on the Sustainable Futures Group by Chris Corrigan and members of SEFS attend the Master Class on Creating value – reducing footprints: Strategic leadership on sustainability at a local level' in November 2008. The overriding problem for the SFG following the closure of the Regional Assembly, is one of resources.

9. RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM

Substantial changes took place this year in relation to the management of rural affairs at a regional level. A new body was formed - the South East Rural Board (SERB) - by amalgamating the South East Rural Partnership and the SEEDA Rural Advisory Committee in order to provide a single strategic rural body for the region. Meanwhile, the South East Rural Affairs Forum conducted an internal review of its effectiveness and will not be meeting again in its current form. Chris Corrigan as an assembly member was invited to sit and represent the wider Regional Assembly on the new Rural Board.

10 SUB NATIONAL REVIEW

SEFS continued to work on issues raised as a result of the Sub National Review and responded to the Consultation on Prosperous Places: Taking forward the Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration. Our key points were concerned with the focus on the economy and the lack of emphasis on Stakeholder engagement and we recommended:

- The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) must be given a statutory duty to deliver sustainable development. Changes to the RDA Act will be required to do this.
- RDA's performance must be measured on more than GVA. We recommend the use of ecological footprint and the ISEW or equivalent.
- A change to the structure and make-up of RDAs to ensure that a range of skills and expertise is present to inspire confidence that they can deliver sustainable development, not just economic growth.
- The new SRS should incorporate the policies and objectives from the existing SE Plan and RSF with the overriding aim of delivering sustainable development.
- The economic assessment duty should be deleted. To avoid inevitable bias, statutory duties should encompass all three aspects of sustainable development, not solely economic development.
- RDA structures must incorporate a greater ability for a range of stakeholders to be meaningfully involved in the development of policies, action plans and scrutiny arrangements.

- In the event that a Forum is established for the region's local authorities, then a similar Forum of equal status must be established for all stakeholders.
- Government should set minimum standards for effective stakeholder engagement and guidance on best practice.
- Stakeholders must be involved at the start of any discussions about managing change and how new processes and institutions will work.

SEFS attended a national meeting of regional environmental NGOs to discuss the issues arising as a result of the SNR and joined other Stakeholders at a meeting with Paul Carter from GOSE to try and cement the position of the stakeholders within the proposals for the new regional structures.

11. SEFS 2009/10

Over the coming year SEFS priorities will be focussed on continuing to provide a strong voice for the environment within the new Regional structures focussing on:

- The proposed new Regional Strategy for the South East
- Continuing to work on a behaviour change project with members and SEEDA to look at how the region can work to best achieve the reduction of the SE Ecological Footprint
- Working with environmental NGOs and statutory bodies to set up and take forward an Environmental Summit for the Region
- Working with other stakeholders to make best use of the two Stakeholders seats on the Partnership Board.
- ensuring that members receive high quality information about regional issues via the website and newsletters

THANKS

SEFS would like to thank:

- 1) All P&EC members past and present for their hard work and dedication to ensuring environmental sustainability is central to regional policy
- 2) Dave Burges & Diane Millis as Chair of P&EC, Chris Corrigan & Lynnette Leeson for their work as overall Chair of SEFS
- 3) Ian Hepburn for his unstinting work as SEFS lead on the South East Plan
- 4) Members for their financial support and input to and backing for our work
- 5) SEEDA for extending funding to secure SEFS finances until March 2010
- 6) Jo Shockley & James Clarke at the Partner Support unit
- 7) Surrey Wildlife Trust for acting as SEFS Treasurer
- 8) And most importantly of all, Alison Walters for her continued dedication and hard work in the SEFS Secretariat, which remains so vital to our ability to act as an effective and cohesive force and voice for the environment and sustainable development in the South East.