

THE FUTURE OF THE REGIONS

Since the announcement of the general election the future of regional level planning has been up for debate. Even now the results are mainly in, the future is uncertain. The Conservatives have increased their hold on seats in the region but for the first time there is a Green MP. We don't know how things will pan out in the scheme of a hung parliament but SEFS will be discussing the issues at the General Meeting on Tuesday 15th June (details on the SEFS website). In the meantime here is a reminder of what the different parties have said about regional level planning in their manifestos:

Conservatives:

- Abolish regional tier including RSS and building targets
- Councils/business to have the power to form partnerships instead of RDAs but allow them to have regional based enterprise partnerships if they want them
- Any quangos that do not perform a technical function or a function that requires political impartiality, or act independently to establish facts, will be abolished.
- Hold referendums on whether to have directly-elected mayors in 12 of England's largest cities outside London; allow local people to trigger referendums on "issues of local importance" by amassing petitions signed by 5% of local people over a six month period; use Cabinet Office budgets to fund the training of independent community organisers to help people establish and run neighbourhood groups.

Greens:

- Referenda on local govt decisions if called for by 20% of electorate
- Revive local government, with the introduction of proportional representation and with grassroots democracy spreading through the use of smaller community and district councils. Such authorities should have enhanced powers, and in due course new tax-raising powers.

Labour:

- Enhance RDAs and Regional Ministers
- Enhanced role for local government
- Regional growth fund
- Help for city regions to enable them to become powerhouses of growth and innovation with devolved power to shape transport and skills. With the possibility of directly elected mayors

Liberal Democrats

- Reform Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to focus solely on economic development, removing duplication with other parts of government and allowing substantial budget reductions. We will give responsibility for economic

development to local authorities. Where existing RDAs have strong local support, they may continue with refocused economic development objectives. Where they do not, they will be scrapped and their functions taken over by local authorities.

- Scrap govt offices for the regions/Regional Ministers
- Implement the Sustainable Communities Act Amendment Bill, which gives local communities the right to propose actions in their area to improve sustainability.
- Scrap nationally-set targets and performance indicators;
- Give councils control over housing and planning

NEW REGIONAL STRATEGY

Despite the uncertainty over the future of regional bodies, work has started on the new Regional Strategy (RS). The RS will bring together the South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy into one streamlined document. It will provide an overarching regional plan for economic growth, transport, housing, skills and the environment over the next 20 years. Since the beginning of the year there have been workshops taking place looking at the key themes of:

- Economic growth and technological innovation
- Climate change and a low carbon society
- Funding for infrastructure and investment
- Tackling housing affordability
- Demographic change and an ageing population
- Dealing with economic disadvantage

Work has also been taking place around environmental limits and the Sustainability Appraisal.

SEFS responded to a consultation on the Scoping Report for the Sustainability Appraisal which finished just after Easter (this can be seen on the SEFS website).

There are some concerns about the Appraisal process; 1) that the focus of the new RS will be very much on the economy and will fail to address all aspects of sustainability; 2) that the Regional Sustainability Framework will not be used as a central pillar of the appraisal 3) that environmental limits will fail to look at the full global impact of our lifestyle 4) that the SA of the new RS will fail to develop from the SA's of the previous South East Plan and RES. These issues will be raised for SEFS by Christine Drury (Chair of CPRE South East) our representative on the RS Sustainability Appraisal Sounding Board.

ANNUAL MONITORING OF THE SOUTH EAST

Every year the region produces a report which looks at how the region is faring in environmental, social and economic terms. This year's report was submitted to government in February.

The overarching headline is that there is some progress towards reducing our ecological footprint, however, we

in the south east are still living beyond the capacity of the natural environment to support us. Small reductions have been achieved, for example, in domestic and commercial CO2 emissions, and there has been a stabilisation in municipal waste production and water consumption. However, road transport CO2 emissions, car trips to work and school have increased as have the number of houses at risk from flooding. So, there is still much more work to be done if we are to reduce our ecological footprint from 3.5 planets to something rather more sustainable.

SEFS will continue to highlight these issues through our engagement with the development of the new RS and its Sustainability Appraisal. The Annual Monitoring report can be found at: http://www.se-partnershipboard.org.uk/pdf/monitoring/amr2009_exec_summary.pdf

SEFS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

To support our work in relation to the development of the Regional Strategy SEFS has produced an overarching position paper summarising where we stand on: Sustainable Development, Spatial Strategy, Climate Change, Green Infrastructure, Housing, Transport, Natural Resources and Wildlife, Water, Waste, Countryside and Landscape Management, Town Centres and Urban Renaissance, Food and Behaviour Change. You can find the statement on the SEFS website: http://www.sefs.org.uk/?page_id=41

SEFS AND THE OTHER REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

Since the change to the new regional structure, SEFS has been working with the other stakeholders in the region (social, economic and the Town and Parish Councils) looking at how best to be organised to get maximum input into the regional policies and processes.

Given the diverse group of organisations involved things have taken a while to sort out. However, it has now been agreed that there should be a Stakeholder conference (likely to be held at the end of June) to discuss the way forward. SEFS will of course be looking at this issue from our own perspective at our General Meeting on the 15th June. However, the Stakeholder conference will allow us to combine our thoughts with others and develop an overall view of where regional activity needs our input. Members will receive a formal invitation via the SEFS Secretariat in the coming weeks but if you are interested in attending this event please let Alison in the SEFS Secretariat know.

HOUSING

Late in January SEFS responded to a call from the South East Regional Select Committee for a response on issues related to Housing.

The response can be found on the SEFS website (http://www.sefs.org.uk/?page_id=41) but our overall comment was that housing will, in most respects, continue to be of major importance in the South East region. The sustainable construction of new housing in the South East provides an opportunity for improving the health, environment and economy of the region.

However homes in the South East must minimise negative impacts on the environment while seeking to maximise social and economic benefits for occupants and society at large. Government policy should seek to ensure that the necessary provision of new housing in the region is affordable for people and the planet. The role of new settlements, eco towns and urban extensions should be carefully considered, to ensure greater sustainability.

In the document we went on to respond to questions on housing growth, location of development, affordability, type, energy efficiency, occupancy, sustainable communities, impact of the recession, consequences of undersupply and the role of regional bodies.

SEFS was asked to attend the hearing on the topic however was unable to provide a representative. Edward Dawson did attend on behalf of CPRE.

SEFS BEHAVIOUR CHANGE WORK

SEFS is currently developing a flyer to promote our messages around; travel, energy, waste, water and food. This will be available at the General Meeting in June. In the meantime here's a couple of tips on travel and food.

Travel

With the volcano exploding in Iceland it has never been better to look at alternatives to air travel. As a result of the 10:10 campaign a new journey planner has been launched to help you get across Europe over land. <http://loco2travel.com/journeyplanner> But there is also the trusty Man in Seat 61 website as well

<http://www.seat61.com/>. For travelling in the UK check out your local rail company online as discounts are often available. Also if your weekend travel is blighted by engineering works try buying a single for each stage of your journey. I managed to knock £20 off the price I'd been quoted both on line and in the ticket office for a journey I needed to do. Though be warned it can be rather time consuming to work out!

Food – Seasonal

Two of top foods are in season this month asparagus and rhubarb so you should be able to get plenty of locally or UK produce in the shops or farmers markets around the region. For ideas on what to do with it visit: www.eatseasonably.co.uk/what-to-eat-now/this-months-best/category/may-best/#best

TRANSPORT LTP3

All 19 transport authorities in the region are preparing their 3rd Local Transport Plans (LTP3s). A number of authorities have already consulted residents and stakeholders on the proposed content of the plans, prior to the publication and consultation on the first full draft, which will take place later in the year. Background and more detailed information on what has been happening across the region have been posted on the SEFS website (<http://www.sefs.org.uk/?cat=11>). If you have not yet had the opportunity to engage with your local authority (LA) contact details can be found on the site. All LAs are advised to draft their third LTPs to be in line with 5 goals set out in central government's policy 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS)'. Plans should tackle climate change and contribute to improving the quality of life and a healthy natural

environment, but documents accessible from the SEFS site demonstrate that promotion of sustainable transport will contribute to all the goals - to better safety, security and health, to promoting equality of opportunity as well as supporting sustainable economic growth.

Delivering a Sustainable Transport System. (DaSTS)

The South East Region has undertaken eight studies focussing on transport challenges and identifying investment priorities in areas larger than those covered by LAs. Options emerging from these studies are required to comply with the DaSTS goals (see above). SEFS took part in a Peer Review of emerging options at which were able to question how well they fitted with the requirements of tackling climate change and how they might impact on the environment. We are particularly concerned that the environmental challenges of CO₂ emissions, air quality, landscape/wildlife/biodiversity, noise and flooding should be identified in all the study areas and that the emerging options recognise the value of a smarter choices agenda in tackling problems raised by transport challenges.

High Speed Rail (HS2)

Details of the proposed route for HS2 have recently been published. Although a national project which has already seen the involvement of national NGOs, SEFS is aware of the potential for a damaging environmental impact on our region, particularly in the Chilterns AONB. SEFS will be monitoring developments and is likely to discuss questions relating to prioritising speed over issues such as capacity and reasonable fares which could play a larger part in encouraging more people onto rail.

Airports – Some Small Some Big

Early in March councillors in Shepway gave the approval to expand Lydd Airport. Late in March however, as a result of action against the expansion of Heathrow, the High Court ruled that the 2003 Air Transport White Paper – the foundation of expansion plans across the country – is obsolete because it is inconsistent with the Climate Change Act 2008. Prior to the High Court decision campaigners against the Lydd expansion asked GOSE to call in the decision for a Public Inquiry and are currently waiting news. A decision is expected post the election on the 11th June. But campaigners view that the High Court decision will affect all expansion proposals so we wait with baited breath.

To keep up to date with the Lydd campaign visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/casework/details.asp?id=tcm:9-227827>. The AirportWatch website will keep you up to date with the big picture: www.airportwatch.org.uk

WATER

Water Framework Directive

Back in December last year, the Environment Agency asked the environmental NGOs to sign up to the final version of the River Basin Management Plan for the

South East which has been in development over the last year or so.

At the meeting and later in a letter to the EA the eNGO network declined to do this. This was not because we don't think there is a need to improve the quality of water bodies in the region. The reasons were as follows:

- The level of ambition for improvement is currently unacceptably low. The revised pledge, to work together towards a 6% improvement in status by 2015 is, in our view, well below the level required to take significant steps towards achieving the objectives of the Directive;
- The classification of water bodies has been undertaken without sufficiently taking on board locally available information (for example from fisheries associations and local conservation groups), which could have assisted the process considerably;
- A very high proportion of the significant actions fall upon the water companies. They are of course important players in the process, but the actions fail to identify sufficient measures to deal with diffuse agricultural pollution and the effects of urban development and transport;
- Relatively few of the Measures are new – many are things that are already happening or were already programmed to occur;
- We feel that our involvement in the Panel has not really led to many changes to the way the Plan has been developed.

Since then the e-NGOs have had a discussion with the environment agency and we feel that there's an opportunity to engage positively with RBMP delivery - including improving the ambitions – if not for this first cycle of the Plan, then for the following cycles. A much more accessible summary of the conservation status and objectives of each water body is now available (http://wfdconsultation.environment-agency.gov.uk/WFDcms/Libraries/Supporting%20documents/classification_objectives%20for%20WFD%20cycle%201.sflb). Together, these might give us a reasonably good opportunity to work out how the eNGOs might re-engage with the RBMP – less on process and more on actively contributing to delivering the objectives (and promoting higher ambitions).

As a result a group, under the SEFS umbrella, has an opportunity to pursue this amongst ourselves and with the EA in May to consider:

- how we take the engagement forward;
- the outline for our presentation at the next Liaison Panel meeting;
- our views on how to engage effectively with the RBMP implementation process.

If you are interested in water issues and would like to be involved with the Water Framework Directive work please do contact Alison in the SEFS Secretariat.

Chalk Rivers and Streams

Chalk streams and rivers not only provide a unique habitat for wildlife, they are an important source of water for our everyday needs.

The River Itchen which springs from the South Downs already supplies drinking water to half a million people. But its course through Winchester and Southampton is also an area earmarked for housing growth.

Looking after this important source of water is important both for us and a diverse natural environment. WWF have recently published a report (Rivers on the Edge a study on the Rivers Itchen, Kennet and Upper Lee) which outlines a way forward to prevent over abstraction and destruction of this important natural resource.

The South Downs National Park is also targeting work on conserving chalk streams. Research has recently been carried out into over 100km of chalk streams which until last year had never been surveyed. A report has been produced and the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC), shadowed by the new Park Authority, will be working with landowners and others to enhance and restore streams where and when they can.

The WWF report can be found at: http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/rivers_on_the_edge.pdf and more detail on the SDJC work can be found at: <http://www.southdownsonline.org/news/?id=2&pressid=151>

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

On 1st April 2010 after over 60 years of discussion, debate, disappointment and campaigning on the issue the South Downs became the 10th national park to be designated in England. SEFS member Brighton & Hove Friends of the Earth joined the campaign for the National Park back in 1995. Chris Todd, spokesperson for BHFOE (and former South Downs Campaign officer) reviewed the campaign since 1995

“At the time it seemed a remote possibility and its achievement is something quite remarkable. Many people are unaware exactly how long this campaign has gone on for and the persistence and dedication it has demanded. BHFOE’s involvement of 15 years seems small compared to some who have campaigned on this for over quarter of a century.

The fact that we now have a South Downs National Park is a testament to all the hard work that has been put in over many years. It hasn’t been easy a number of obstacles and set-backs have had to be overcome. But, says Chris, “the final result has been worth it.” The South Downs Campaign was brought to a close at an event in Chichester back in February and looking round the room it was a delight to see it had engaged both old and young. Sophie Lewis one of the younger campaigners was inspired enough to start campaigning for this iconic landscape at the tender age of 15 she regularly blogs, takes pictures and writes poems about the South Downs.

The Western Weald

If you have stood upon the Downs,
Whilst flowers dance about your feet,
With butterflies on dainty wings.
If you have watched a soaring speck,
And listened to its skylark song,
Wondering how it stays, aloft so long?
If you’ve ever seen a Red Kite glide,
On the thermals where Buzzards hang,
Watching a Hare, as through the grass it ran
You may never have travelled down the hills,
To the valley that lies below.

Here you can wander through village streets
Where coloured bunting blows, and
Children’s laughter echoes, across the green.
Where you can feel the scented south west wind,
From across the flowering Lowland Heath,
And Honey Bees hum to the warmth of the sand.
Will you stop to stand and stare?
And wonder, what would life be like?
If these places, were no longer there?
All could be, so easily lost,
If we don’t stand up, and show we care.

Sophie May Lewis
© S-May 2007

You can follow Sophie’s blog at:
www.SophiEcoSussex.blogspot.com

MAKING BIODIVERSITY WORK

SEFS has always been aware of the need to emphasise the value of our natural environment to society, business etc, hence our support for the concept of Green Infrastructure. More is being done on this than ever before and the South East England Biodiversity Forum is running an event on 26th May called Making Biodiversity Work details are on the SEFS website (<http://www.sefs.org.uk/?p=586>) but please note the event is currently fully subscribed however, SEEBF are happy to have a reserve list of attendees.

SEFS INTERNAL NEWS

Finances and Funding

SEFS received its last tranche of funding from SEEDA last year. This has, bar a little left in reserve for Behaviour Change work, now run out. SEFS has in the past been prudent with its spending and has built up sufficient reserves for one year’s worth of operation. This will take us to April 2011. After that we will be dependent on increased contributions from members or funding from other sources. We have been investigating opportunities but, at present nothing concrete has presented itself.

Even for this year we are dependent on the generosity of our members and I would like to thank those of you who have renewed your membership for 2010/11. If you’ve not renewed please use and return the membership form available from our website:

http://www.sefs.org.uk/?page_id=142

SEFS CONTACTS

SEFS Secretariat: Alison Walters – tel: 01273 766643, email: alison.walters@foe.co.uk

SEFS Chair: Lynnette Leeson - lynnette@hareslandscape.co.uk

P&EC Chair: Diane Millis – dianemillis@woodland-trust.org.uk

SEFS Transport & Behaviour Change: Peter England - hscap@ukonline.co.uk

Events

26th May – Making Biodiversity Work, Ashburton Hall,
Hampshire County Council, Winchester

15th June - SEFS General Meeting Speakers on Retrofitting,
NHS Forest and Delivering a Sustainable Transport System.
Venue: National Trust, Queen Anne’s Gate, London, SW1H 9AB

Date & Venue TBA - Stakeholders Conference

SEFS, 39-41 Surrey Street, Brighton BN1 3PB, tel: 01273 766643
email: alison.walters@foe.co.uk, website: www.sefs.org.uk