



The Kent Coalfield Regeneration Programme



Background

The Kent Coalfield Regeneration Programme is the South East England Development Agency's (SEEDA) largest derelict land reclamation project. It involves the recovery of more than 190 hectares (470 acres) of brownfield industrial land in East Kent, on four colliery sites: Betteshanger, Snowdown, Tilmanstone and Chislet.

Three of these collieries closed in the 1980s as a result of the radical restructuring of the UK coal industry; the fourth – Chislet – had ceased mining operations much earlier, in 1969. The closure of these collieries has had a significant economic impact on the communities of the surrounding areas. SEEDA believes that the regeneration of the Kent Coalfield will greatly improve the economic prospects of the area and bring lasting benefits to the regional economy – improving the physical environment and infrastructure, bringing new businesses and jobs into East Kent and assisting local business expansion.

Led by SEEDA, in conjunction with English Partnerships (the Government's national regeneration agency) the Kent Coalfield Programme started in 1998 and is due for completion in 2007. By this time, the Programme will have delivered up to £35 million of public sector investment (funded mainly through English Partnerships' National Coalfields Programme) and created up to 2,500 new jobs to boost the East Kent economy.

Community-based solutions

A key objective of the Coalfield Regeneration Programme identified by SEEDA and English Partnerships is to generate long-term sustainable solutions for the former Kent Coalfield sites. These sites are driven by community needs and are based on extensive consultation with local people as well as the Coalfield Communities Campaign, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Kent County Council, Dover District Council and local parish councils.

SEEDA's approach seeks to address long-term issues such as job creation and the improvement of the area's transport infrastructure. The initial phase of the Coalfield Regeneration Programme has been focused on the remediation and decontamination of the colliery sites, and demolition of some of the existing buildings. This will prepare for major mixed-use development that will create new business and employment opportunities for the local community.

The sheer size of some sites (at Betteshanger and Snowdown for example) means that only a small proportion will be reused to create land for development. There will also be significant areas set aside for a range of new recreational uses, provision of new environmentally improved landscaped areas for public open space and new habitats for wildlife and nature conservation responding to the need identified by Kent County Council for such additional facilities.

Committed to sustainable development and the need to balance economic development with protection and enhancement of the natural environment, SEEDA is working closely with the Environment Agency, English Nature, The Kent Wildlife Trust and the National Trust, and has incorporated in its plans a range of environmental schemes such as new footpaths and cycle paths.



Betteshanger

This 120 hectare site near Deal is the largest within the Kent Coalfield Programme. By 2005 the project will have received a total of £18.8 million English Partnerships investment, aimed at creating a sustainable, mixed-use development, with a strong emphasis on high quality design and landscaping. Planning permission for the scheme was granted in February 2003.

This development has planning permission for a new country park, covering 85 hectares, and a range of community leisure amenities, including playgrounds and a social club, together with 22,500 square metres of commercial development. This includes the refurbishment of an existing building to create 550 square metres of new office space for small expanding businesses with new occupiers already established.

As a model mixed development, the regeneration of Betteshanger exemplifies SEEDA's commitment to sustainable development and enhancing the physical environment to raise the quality of life for local people.



Snowdown

The former Snowdown colliery site extends to 50 hectares and is adjacent to the parishes of Aylesham and Nonington, which together have a population of 4,700 (approximately 1,750 households). It has been identified as having potential for economic regeneration, and as such is currently the subject of a detailed feasibility study to assess the appropriate scale of development. The objective is to prepare a planning application which will set out the detailed case supporting comprehensive re-use of the site for the appropriate balance of hard and soft end uses. To complement the regeneration of Snowdown, new community workshop facilities are being developed in Aylesham, which will provide 950 square metres of incubation space for start-up businesses. These new workshop units will be completed in mid 2003.



Tilmanstone

At just 10 hectares, the smallest of the East Kent colliery sites, Tilmanstone – between Betteshanger and Snowdown – has already been completely remediated and the land prepared for development. The centre of this development is the new 15,000 square metres food-processing factory that has already created over 500 new local jobs. SEEDA and English Partnerships' financial commitment to this project is £4.95 million and the site has demonstrated a rapid and effective response to its incorporation by the Coalfields Task Force into the National Coalfields Programme in 1998.



Chislet

SEEDA completed the purchase of four hectares of derelict land in January 2003 in order to unlock a total site area of 12 hectares and act as a catalyst to wider improvements. The core of the project is focused entirely on business growth and will provide up to 25,000 square metres of new employment floorspace for local Canterbury businesses needing to expand. The Chislet project aims to help job creation in the area and enable businesses to overcome the shortage of serviced development land in the area around East Kent's historic cathedral city.





SEEDA's role

East Kent is one of SEEDA's priority areas for action, and this is highlighted in its Regional Economic Strategy (RES). SEEDA has appointed an area-based team of five full-time staff to work on the Kent Coalfield Programme. This team comprises an SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) Regeneration Project Manager, a Community Development Manager, two Chartered Surveyors with extensive planning and regeneration experience, and a Rural and Sustainable Development Programme Manager.

SEEDA is committed to encouraging the active participation of the local communities in all four sites by establishing a Community Regeneration Forum in each locality. These groups have been given a pivotal role in expressing the views of local people to directly influence the nature, scale and context of the regeneration programme for each site.



English Partnerships' role

English Partnerships is the national regeneration agency, a key delivery agency for the urban renaissance and the Government's new 'sustainable communities' agenda, which addresses housing shortages, homes for key workers, affordable housing and the problems of abandonment and decay.

As manager of the National Coalfields Programme, English Partnerships has overall responsibility for securing the regeneration of 98 former coalfield sites throughout England for the benefit of the affected communities. The Programme has a ring-fenced budget of £385 million.



Coalfield Communities Campaign's role

CCC is the all-party association of more than 80 local authorities in present and former coalmining areas in England, Scotland and Wales. Since its formation in February 1985, CCC has grown to be one of the UK's foremost lobbying organisations, at Westminster and in Europe. CCC's main focus is rebuilding the social, economic and environmental fabric of coalfield communities.



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