

SEEDA's Achievements for: Delivering Sustainable Communities - Physical Environments 1999-2003



An aerial view of the village of Aylesham in Kent. Superimposed on this is an early draft masterplan produced with the community as part of SEEDA's and the Prince's Foundation's Creating Quality Places initiative. Image courtesy of EDAW.

Introduction

Making sustainable communities in towns and cities across the region requires concerted action by all agencies and stakeholders if the social, economic, environmental and physical fabric of those places is to support the people living in them over the longer term. The part that SEEDA plays in delivery takes different forms – for example, catalyst, leader of partnerships, and direct investor.

The design of the physical, built environment (including public open space) has a strong influence on the overall quality of life in any town or city, and can play a part in business

investment and location decisions. Over the last four years SEEDA has been working with partners across the region to achieve a renaissance of the physical fabric in urban areas. Our activities have focused on:

- Developing a regional structure of design advice, guidance and good practice;
- Providing expertise and support to local partners on masterplanning and development frameworks;
- Promoting good practice and sustainability in construction and development;
- Establishing and demonstrating best practice in SEEDA's own developments;
- Developing skills.

RES Context

SEEDA's work to deliver sustainable communities contributes in particular to the Vibrant Communities and Effective Infrastructure objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

Key Facts

- The South East is the largest of the English regions, in both spatial (19,069 sq. km.) and population (over eight million) terms. It is characterised by a large number of small and medium sized towns and cities, together with extensive suburban development.
- There are about 10,700 hectares (March 2002) of previously developed (brownfield) land that is unused or may be available for development. However, except for the Thames Gateway area, the region does not have significant numbers of large brownfield sites and we must maximise use of smaller sites where they are available.
- With over 93,000 designated historic buildings, towns and cities in the South East, the region has a wealth of built environment history to enhance its future.
- Transport congestion is a particular challenge for the future – people in the South East travel further than those in any other region (8,000 miles per year against the 6,800 England average), vehicle trips are forecast to grow by 17.5% between 2001 and 2011, over 73% of the workforce travels to work by car against the England average of 70%.

Results

Since SEEDA began operations in April 1999, its investment has:

- Enabled over 600 buildings to be improved and brought back into use;
- Enabled over 450 hectares of land to be reclaimed or improved, including 260 hectares for open space;
- Funded the Regional Design Panel that has reviewed 10 major schemes in its first year and commented on a further six schemes either by an advisory letter or formal assessment report;
- Launched the first regional Design Champions Club to which 44 local authorities have nominated members;
- Enhanced the activities of the Architecture Centre (Kent) with plans being developed for a further two Architecture Centres.

SEEDA has taken a number of practical steps towards its vision of changing the culture of design in the South East.

- **Regional Design Panel**

The South East is the only region so far to have a Regional Design Panel. The 32 panel members, announced in October 2002, were selected for their professional expertise covering an extensive range of design and development skills. The Panel met for the first time in December 2002. The Regional Design Panel is independent but funded by SEEDA through the Architecture Centre (Kent). Its role is to offer free advice on the design of significant projects in the South East as well as the preparation of masterplans and consultancy briefs. (www.architecturecentre.org).

Year one was principally concerned with establishing the Panel and its method of working. The types of schemes the Panel has been asked to comment on vary from a factory redevelopment in Chichester lying within a conservation area containing a number of listed buildings and ancient monuments, to an evaluation of design proposals for the King Alfred Development in Hove. This project is arguably the highest profile architectural competition in the South East in 2003.

- **Architecture Centres**

SEEDA has continued its support for the growth and development of the Architecture Centre (Kent) based at Chatham Historic Dockyard. With other partners, including the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Partnerships, the Architecture Centre (Kent) has been working to develop two new centres in Milton Keynes and the Solent, creating a regional structure that is unmatched nationally. Both new centres have a great deal of support within their respective areas, at a community and professional level. In Milton Keynes, a steering group of nearly 30 organisations has come together to identify the core activities that a centre will deliver and to start to develop the business case. In the Solent, there is also a steering group, and a similar process to that in Milton Keynes is now underway.

- **South East Design Champions Club**

SEEDA has encouraged all local authorities to nominate a Councillor and Officer to be part of a South East Design Champions Club, and has launched the first regional Design Champions Club. It will provide a network of senior figures to raise and maintain a high profile for quality design within their organisations, and to share experience and expertise throughout the region. Already 44 authorities have nominated Design Champions and they have started to identify their top priorities offering workshops and experience to share with others in the region.



SEEDA launched the first regional Design Champions Club in 2003. Its aims are to raise and maintain a high profile for quality design in the built environment within organisations and localities and to ensure the inclusion of quality design considerations within relevant strategy, policy and development documents.



Design Champions take part in a 'live' case study exercise, helping them to explore the breadth of what the design agenda means for their organisations.



A professional advisor's vision of how the Market Square in Aylesham may look following the ongoing SEEDA and Prince's Foundation Enquiry by Design process. (Image courtesy of EDAW).



Community members in Aylesham, Kent, drawing their vision for the village's expansion during one of the SEEDA and Prince's Foundation Enquiry by Design Events. (Image courtesy of EDAW).



The Creating Quality Places initiative, supported by SEEDA and the Prince's Foundation is very visual in nature with participants contributing to area diagrams and conceptual drawings. This picture shows a professional advisor's sketch of what a typical residential street in Aylesham may look like. (Image courtesy of EDAW).

Securing high quality urban environments has as much to do with the community's level of awareness of urban design, as it has with the skills of the professionals involved in the day-to-day management and implementation of schemes.

Creating Quality Places is a joint initiative between SEEDA and The Prince's Foundation. It uses pilot projects to develop best practice and provide a practical demonstration to the rest of the region. The two current Creating Quality Places projects in Aylesham, Kent and Leigh Park, Havant are using a new community enabling process in local masterplan development based on the Enquiry by Design model. The collaborative process allows all stakeholders, including the community, to play a direct part in the production of development frameworks, delivery strategies and design codes for development.

■ Aylesham

Sir Patrick Abercrombie designed the village of Aylesham in the late 1920s as a mining village serving the East Kent Coalfields. The sweeping curves and avenues owe much to early Garden City design principles, but the plans were never completed. Indeed, mining itself ceased in East Kent in the 1980s. The Dover District Council Local Plan now identifies the village as a strategic location suitable for expansion and allocates greenfield sites totalling 38 hectares for between 850 to 1,000 new homes (representing a 50% to 60% increase in the size of the existing community).

SEEDA and The Prince's Foundation have been working with Dover District Council, English Partnerships, Kent County Council, Aylesham Parish Council and Aylesham Community Development Partnership to ensure that the new developments will be built as a seamless extension to the existing community, based around a strong boulevard concept and walkable, interconnected and sustainable neighbourhoods. Above all, the objective is to ensure that the existing community's public realm and amenities will be enhanced. The project is being taken forward in tandem with SEEDA's and English Partnerships' renaissance of the Snowdown colliery site.

Using the Enquiry by Design process of visioning, group workshops and technical review, a series of detailed plans and sketches have been developed. The final documents (masterplan, design codes and implementation strategy) will be published at the end of September 2003 followed by further public consultation and exhibitions. The aim is to translate the documents into Supplementary Planning Guidance by early 2004. Development partners will then be appointed and development should start in mid-2004.

■ Leigh Park

Leigh Park was conceived in the 1940s as “The Garden City of the South: A Place for Heroes to Live” following the destruction of 7,000 dwellings in Portsmouth during the Second World War. It was built in the early 1950s and was Europe’s largest social housing estate at the time. It is now home to 27,000 people within 541 hectares of land. One of the Leigh Park wards is amongst the most deprived in the South East, and the 1940s design of the estate no longer works for the benefit of its 21st Century residents. SEEDA’s work in Leigh Park through the Creating Quality Places initiative, aims to demonstrate how suburbs can be adapted through infilling or limited development, to meet the needs of today’s residents.

In October 2002, six neighbourhood events were hosted over three weeks in schools across Leigh Park and in the shopping centre. These encouraged residents to voice their ideas for and concerns about Leigh Park. Residents developed priorities and started to identify appropriate geographic neighbourhoods in follow up meetings. Working with neighbourhood groups ensures attention to local concerns and helps to guarantee that local people are part of the process of change. In July 2003, a four-day Enquiry By Design (EbD) event took place. By the end of the EbD, outline frameworks had been produced indicating how Leigh Park might develop in the future. Discussions are now underway with the three local authorities - Portsmouth, Havant and Hampshire – to identify how best to deliver the ideas in the frameworks.



Leigh Park in Havant is also undergoing an Enquiry by Design type approach to its future. Members of the Warren community present their ideas for improving the layout of the Warren. (Image courtesy of Llewelyn Davies).



A professional advisor's vision of how the Warren, Leigh Park, may look following the enquiry by design process. (Image courtesy of Llewelyn Davies).



A professional advisor works on the SEEDA and Prince's Foundation Creating Quality Places initiative in Leigh Park. (Image courtesy of Llewelyn Davies).

In March 2002, the Government confirmed £38 million for the comprehensive regeneration of Hastings and Bexhill. The programme will be delivered by SEASPACE, Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Ltd. which is an Executive Delivery Vehicle (EDV) set-up in partnership with SEEDA, Hastings Borough Council, Rother District Council, East Sussex County Council, the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and other leading partner groups within the towns.

The approach in Hastings and Bexhill is ground breaking in combining continuing community consultation and sustainability appraisal with the development of a spatial masterplan covering the two towns. The initiative will present best practice in achieving an urban renaissance.

The following projects have been established:

- **Media Centre**

Three redundant buildings in the heart of the town are being acquired to develop a Hastings Media Centre (HMC) which will provide serviced incubation office space for media, creative and digital technology companies, in a flexible working environment. Architects Baker-Brown McKay have designed a contemporary, highly fashionable building in consultation with the industry and local partners. Works will commence in the autumn of 2003.

Nearby vacant retail premises have also been acquired for refurbishment and these will house 420 sq. m. of incubation space. This building will also house the Regeneration Centre and Broadband Experience, a demonstration centre for increasing awareness, promoting usage and applications of Broadband across business and the community.



An architects impression of the new Hastings Media Centre, being developed by SEEDA, Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Ltd. and other partners in three redundant buildings.



The joint SEEDA and Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Ltd. funded University Centre Hastings Project – Architects' impression.

- **The University Centre Hastings (UCH)**
The University Centre Hastings is a joint SEEDA/Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Ltd. funded development project to bring quality higher education to Hastings and Bexhill. This is a substantial re-development to refurbish an under-used building in the town centre as a top quality centre for Higher Education. The University of Brighton and Hastings College of Arts and Technology are major partners in the project. Discussions are taking place with other Universities and Higher Education Institutions within the South East to develop further courses to be delivered from UCH.

- **The Station Plaza**
This gateway site to the town will provide business, educational and commercial space, grouped around an outstanding landscaped plaza with car parking below 120 contemporary homes. The development will be integrated with the transport hub and provide important links to the town centre, seafront and surrounding areas. The design procurement process attracted a large amount of interest from many renowned national designers. The winners are a consortium comprising architects Michael Hopkins and Bill Dunster along with engineer Scott Wilson.

Redevelopment work on site was formally marked by a visit from the Deputy Prime Minister in early August 2003.

- **Pelham Square**
This involves the creation of a new major civic space providing an appropriate setting for St. Mary in the Castle. The scheme will comprise an 80-bedroomed four-star hotel, conference facilities and commercial space, with shops, cafés and restaurants forming an active edge to the civic space. Existing car parking will be replaced underground. After a strong response, the shortlist for the public design competition for this scheme includes Foreign Office Architects, Foster & Partners and Lifschutz Davidson. The winning team will commence design work in November 2003.
- **Bexhill Town Centre**
A comprehensive regeneration programme is proposed, breathing new life into Bexhill Town Centre. The aim is to carefully integrate some vibrant mixed-use development including a new 60-bedroom hotel and a business centre, raising its image and profile and providing a fitting setting for the seafront's icon Modern Movement building – the De La Warr Pavilion.

Thriving town centres are at the heart of urban renaissance. SEEDA has supported partners around the region in tackling the full range of issues facing town and city centres including: centres that have lost their traditional role due to social and economic changes; centres facing pressure to expand; or those that require work to maintain their position.

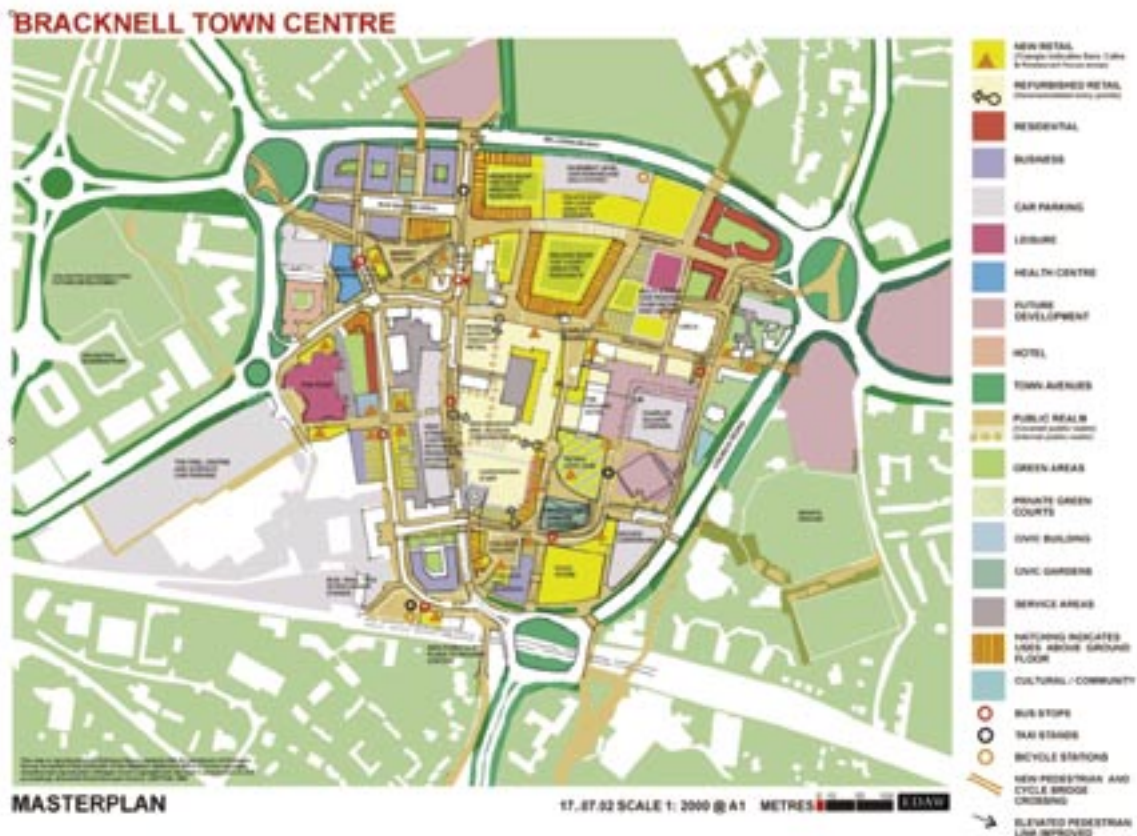
■ Bracknell Town Centre

Bracknell Town Centre was built in the 1950s when the post war New Town was developed. Unsurprisingly it has been showing its age in recent years. In May 2001, two competing proposals for major development were refused planning permission. This proved the catalyst for a new approach. SEEDA, working with Bracknell Forest District Council and the two principal landowners, jointly funded a complete review and masterplan of the town centre. The preparation of this masterplan has involved considerable community involvement. The final masterplan was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in July 2002 and a planning application based on it will be submitted in due course. The two main land owners have now agreed on a joint approach.

■ Wolverton Works and Symbiosis Scheme

SEEDA has funded physical and social improvements in Wolverton (located just north of Milton Keynes) as part of the Wolverton Works & Symbiosis Scheme. Funding has addressed town centre parking and access improvements making the town safer for pedestrians. Streetscape lighting has been enhanced in a more traditional style and a programme of shopfront renovations undertaken, combined with new seating. A new routeway links the two main shopping areas that had been separated for 20 years, encouraging pedestrian movement and improving pedestrian safety.

The Wolverton Works & Symbiosis Scheme is due to complete at the end of September 2003. The partnership is developing its forward strategy for the town centre work. This will build on the Countryside Agency's healthcheck of the town as part of its Market Towns initiative and SEEDA's and English Partnership's support for the preparation of Development Frameworks for both Wolverton and Bletchley.



SEEDA and the Bracknell Forest District Council are working in partnership to redevelop the central areas of Bracknell Town Centre. The masterplan of the redevelopment has involved considerable community involvement.



As part of the Government legislation for the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), SEEDA is working to disseminate lessons learnt from pilot schemes run in Reading (pictured above) and Maidstone.

■ Business Improvement Districts

The Government is currently paving the way, through new legislation, for the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Where BIDs are adopted, the commercial and retail partners agree to pay an additional business rate to fund public realm and other improvements within the BID boundary. The new legislation will take effect in mid-2004. In advance of that the Government with the Association of Town Centre Management is running a number of pilot projects. Two places in the South East are part of the pilot scheme – Reading and Maidstone. SEEDA aims to help disseminate lessons from Reading and Maidstone across the region so that other towns and cities can learn and benefit from them.

■ Believing in Folkestone

A comprehensive programme of town centre improvements was completed in 2002-2003 as part of the 'Believing in Folkestone' Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) scheme. These will be the catalyst for a larger commercial development including a new shopping centre. SEEDA funding has also enabled the completion of a feasibility study to develop a 'Creative Quarter' for Folkestone. The study proved encouraging and set the scene for a number of projects that will provide workspace, training and support for the creative industry.

■ Dartford Town Centre

In 2002-2003, SEEDA continued to work in Dartford town centre to provide a 'visionary' yet deliverable strategy to secure physical and environmental improvements to the Lowfield Street Area. SEEDA is working with key stakeholders, including Dartford Borough Council, Kent County Council, landowners and retailers, to take this work forward as part of wider regeneration strategy for the town centre in response to the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan.

Working with Partners to Improve the Public Realm

10



SEEDA is supporting partners on the Isle of Wight to improve public realm areas in Ryde. A design framework has been produced that will focus on special aesthetic, economic and social characteristics of the town.



SEEDA through its Fund for Renegeration (formerly the Single Regeneration Budget), has invested in the delivery of the Ryde Public Realm Strategy with partners.



SEEDA awarded £1.3 million to the Netherfield Regeneration Partnership scheme in Milton Keynes to regenerate the area. This includes the Alphabet Park initiative which consists of 26 artworks where the letters of the alphabet are represented as seating, play equipment, planting and sculptures. Its launch marks the completion of a seven-year regeneration programme that has had a tremendous impact on the local community.

Despite their vital everyday functions, streets and public spaces are often forgotten and neglected. SEEDA's support to partners through its Fund for Regeneration, formerly known as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), has led to substantial investment in the public realm:

- **Ryde Public Realm Strategy**

The Ryde Public Realm Strategy on the Isle of Wight will provide a design framework based on the special aesthetic, economic and social characteristics of the town. Producing the strategy has involved a partnership that includes the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership, the Isle of Wight Council, Ryde Community Forum, Ryde Development Trust, the Police, English Heritage and SEEDA. Stakeholder consultation included place check questionnaires with the local community and visitors and showed that Ryde residents have a strong community spirit and a passion for the town in which they live. It is already clear that there are some key priority areas. One is the retail centre – Union Street to the top of the High Street - where the work on the strategy provoked discussion about the shop frontages and has demonstrated how shop fronts can be an integral part of Ryde's lasting image.

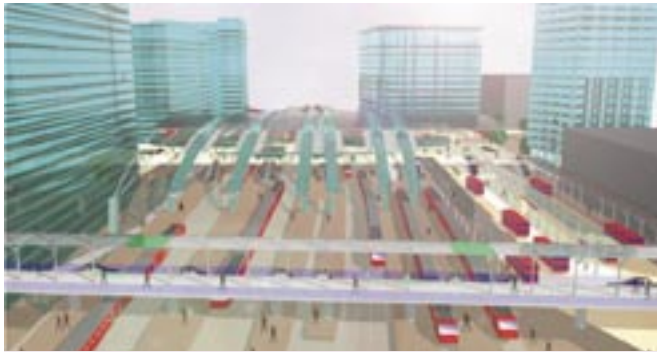
- **Netherfield, Milton Keynes**
Alphabet Park was opened in March 2003 situated in the centre of Netherfield, it is one of the first prefabricated housing estates built in Milton Keynes. Netherfield is one of the most deprived parts of the South East and with the help of SEEDA's Fund for Regeneration, formerly known as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), the community has been undertaking a range of regeneration projects. Alphabet Park consists of 26 artworks each representing a letter of the alphabet. The letters that were designed by the local community and artist Pete Coding, are characterised in seating, play equipment, planting and sculpture. The artworks have greatly improved the image of the park, which was previously seen as run down and not used by most residents.
- **Brighton Seafront**
The extensive and comprehensive regeneration of Brighton's seafront began in 1993 and in 1996 was awarded SEEDA funding. The project was delivered in six phases at a total cost of £1.5 million. Phases one to five won the Special Landscape Award at the 2001 Civic Trust Awards. In 2002-2003, an Economic Evaluation of Brighton Seafront Regeneration was completed. A survey of business activity and investment amongst seafront enterprises demonstrated a considerable success story of public sector investment prompting a private sector rejuvenation.



Through its Fund for Regeneration (formerly the Single Regeneration Budget), SEEDA has supported the Netherfield Regeneration partnership scheme with the regeneration of the Netherfield estate in Milton Keynes.



Brighton seafront where SEEDA's investment in public space has encouraged new businesses to the area.



Reading Station, Berkshire, is a key hub in the national rail network. SEEDA has made the delivery of Reading Station renaissance a top priority.

SEEDA encourages integrated transport and development schemes of strategic national and regional value and has been supporting partners to take the concept forward in the region.

■ Reading Station

Reading Station is a key hub in the national rail network and the second busiest interchange in the UK outside London. But it is also a critical bottleneck on the rail network. SEEDA has made the delivery of Reading Station renaissance, jointly with Reading Borough Council and other strategic decision makers, a top priority. There are now established plans to upgrade the signalling at Reading Station in order to reduce train congestion. As part of these plans, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has agreed to consider how, in conjunction with key interested parties, it is possible to initiate a large-scale redevelopment of the area around the station. SEEDA is supporting Reading Borough Council in preparing a detailed business case for the redevelopment.

■ Oxford West End

Oxford City and Oxfordshire Councils are working on a joint approach to the redevelopment of the West End of Oxford city centre with active support from SEEDA to ensure that the major urban renaissance project will go ahead. The West End project is a major initiative for Oxford involving about a third of what people regard as the city centre. Several drivers for redevelopment include an ambitious proposal to move the station to a site south of its current location.

This will make the City and County more accessible by public transport. Other plans include focused public space at the Gloucester Green Canal Basin as well as new retail, commercial and residential sites and homes for small creative industries.

Achieving renaissance across towns and cities in the South East is a long-term process – often taking 10 to 20 years – requiring continuing commitment. SEEDA will continue to work with all partners in the community, public, private and voluntary sectors to build on the successes achieved so far. We will continue to support and promote design quality in the built environment, and the involvement of communities in achieving that quality. We will continue to develop excellence in the urban renaissance and sustainable communities agendas with the long-term aim of ensuring that the region has the right professional and community skills to create places in the South East that people take pride in and that encourage businesses to invest.

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