



Building a World Class Region

An Economic Strategy for the South
East of England

A Report on the Consultation Process

SEEDA SOUTH EAST
ENGLAND
DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY
Working for England's World Class Region

Regional Economic Strategy: A Report on the Consultation Process

1. Formal consultation on this strategy started on 22 July 1999, with the publication of the consultation document, "Towards an Economic Strategy for the South East of England", and its presentation to the Regional Assembly. However, extensive consultation with partners across the region had already taken place. This had included visits by the Chairman and other members of the SEEDA Board and executive team to every county and unitary authority area in the region. More than 5,000 people from the region were involved in the various meetings and events which these visits included.
2. SEEDA also took an early opportunity to involve regional interests in the development of the strategy through establishing a series of board committees covering the key areas of infrastructure, skills and learning, sustainable development, rural development, the role of the voluntary sector, regeneration, innovation and technology transfer and business and enterprise development. Though chaired by a SEEDA Board Member, each committee includes expert advisers from across the region, together with representatives from the Regional Assembly and the Government Office. These committees played an influential role in the preparation of the consultation document and in informing the preparation of the strategy itself, taking into account the responses to consultation.
3. More than 7,000 copies of the consultation document were sent to organisations, representative bodies and individuals from across the business, public, academic, environmental and voluntary sectors. 10,000 copies of the Executive Summary were also sent out. Both documents were also available on SEEDA's web site. Many of the organisations consulted have a representative role covering large numbers of member bodies and individuals. Through consulting with such representative bodies, with the Regional Assembly and directly with all the region's county, unitary and district authorities, SEEDA sought to have as wide as possible an input into the strategy. Further publicity for the consultation exercise was gained through extensive coverage in the region's press and other local media.

Consultation Events

4. The following consultation events (attended by a total of more than 1,000 people) were held to inform strategy development:

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Voluntary Sector | Brighton | 06 September |
| Sustainable Development | Guildford | 10 September |
| Transport | Bracknell | 17 September |
| Rural Economy | Dorking | 21 September |
| Learning and Skills | Brighton | 23 September |
| Urban Renaissance | Southampton | 23 September |

5. In addition, the region's Economic Partnerships all held extensive consultations including well attended meetings, discussion groups and action plan workshops drawing together a cross-section of interests from within their areas. At least 3,000 people were involved in these consultations.
6. To inform its own response to the consultation document, the Regional Assembly organised six workshops covering the themes of business, workforce, infrastructure, environment, regeneration and rural areas.

Responses to the Draft

7. 409 responses were received via the web site, by e-mail and by letter. Many responses were from representative organisations that had consulted their members. Indeed, excluding the local authorities, the 409 respondents reflect the interests of some three million people living or working in the South East.
8. 93% of the responses were at least broadly supportive of the thrust of the draft strategy. Most offered constructive comments on how it could be improved.

| RES RESPONSE CATEGORIES | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Total | Percentage |
| District/Borough Council | 55 | 13.4 |
| Business | 54 | 13.2 |
| Support/Service/Consultancy | 52 | 12.7 |
| Business Representative Body | 39 | 9.5 |
| Individual | 32 | 7.8 |
| Educational Body | 23 | 5.6 |
| Voluntary Sector | 23 | 5.6 |
| Environment Body/Agency | 19 | 4.6 |
| Trade Union | 14 | 3.4 |
| Unitary Authority | 12 | 2.9 |
| Council Group/Association | 12 | 2.9 |
| Economic Partnerships | 9 | 2.2 |
| Parish/Town Council | 7 | 1.7 |
| County Council | 7 | 1.7 |
| Professional Body | 6 | 1.5 |
| Training & Enterprise Council | 3 | 0.7 |
| Other | 42 | 10.3 |
| Total | 409 | |

9. The following is a summary of some of the main recurring comments and ideas expressed by respondents; it is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all comments received:

General

- Set the strategy in a wider context reflecting links with London, other neighbouring regions, Europe and the world.
- Need for clarity on the relationships between the strategy and Regional Planning Guidance.
- Fully integrate sustainability, social inclusion and environmental capacity considerations throughout the strategy.
- Define the goal of becoming a “world class” region in wider-terms than GDP per head. Social, environmental and other regional indicators are also needed.
- Address housing issues, including the provision of affordable housing.
- The sustainability implications of further growth.
- The need for the strategy and SEEDA’s own programmes to be subject to sustainability appraisal.
- The need for the final strategy to be action orientated.

World Class Businesses

- The importance to the region of larger businesses, as well as small and medium sized enterprises.
- The future wealth creating potential of the region’s key industrial sectors.
- Consider existing initiatives, whether nationally or regionally based, so as to learn from best practice.
- Importance of inter-regional working, particularly on cluster development, links with universities, inward investment and aftercare.
- Inward investment should fill gaps in the supply chain and link with the work on enterprise hubs, networks, and clusters.
- More detail on the Enterprise Hubs and Wired Region proposals.

World Class Learning

- The need to motivate people to learn and to co-ordinate marketing activities.
- Develop ways of gathering information and sharing good practice, possibly by means of a web site as part of the wired region.
- Importance of employer influence on skills and learning provision.
- Take full account of the Government’s post-16 learning recommendations and the move to Learning and Skills Councils.
- Importance of achieving higher level ICT skills.
- Address the social inclusion aspects of skills and learning provision.
- Importance of National Learning Targets

Many of these issues have been addressed through the Skills Action Plan, which expands the proposals contained in the regional economic strategy. Copies of the first draft of the Skills Action Plan can be obtained from the Skills and Learning Development team at SEEDA headquarters or from our web site at www.seeda.co.uk. The final Skills Action Plan will be published later in the year.

World Class Workforce

- The potential contribution of regional and county-based workplace forums, and the need to involve small and medium sized enterprises.
- The need to draw on the creativity and innovation of the whole workforce to facilitate growth, recognising the diversity of the workforce and the need to ensure equality of opportunity for all.

- Build a culture of lifelong learning across the South East, with particular emphasis on involving retired people, the unemployed and individuals with disabilities.
- The need for early warning systems to monitor the prospects of vulnerable sectors of employment.

World Class Infrastructure

- Need for 'vision' of what transport would be like in the future.
- Remove all road schemes from the strategy / add further priority road improvements.
- Speed up planned studies (especially Multi-Modal studies being led by Government Office).
- Over-riding environmental constraints may prevent some infrastructure proposals.
- Predict-and-provide' approaches to transport planning cannot be sustained, but demand management will not provide the full solution. Address backlog of urgent infrastructure needs.
- Oppose further taxation of motorists where this is seen to be indiscriminate and competitive; but support for the potential role of charges if they are transparent and fully hypothecated.
- The need for urgent action to tackle under-investment in infrastructure, recognising that the current situation is unsustainable.

World Class Environment

- Need to protect and enhance environmental assets, and to investigate and quantify the contribution of the environment to the economy.
- The sustainability implications of further economic growth.
- More focus on biodiversity.
- Implications for development of potential water supply constraints.
- Impact on business of environmental legislation needs to be understood.
- Reducing reliance on private cars.
- Working with schools and young people on issues of sustainability.

World Class Communities and Urban Renaissance

- Strong wish among local authorities and economic partnerships to be fully involved in implementation.
- Purpose of Area Based Economic Development Strategies (ABEDS - referred to as Area Investment Frameworks in the final strategy) needs to be carefully defined.
- Role of ABEDS and Enterprise Hubs supported as a means of stimulating regeneration and reducing social exclusion.
- Role of Thames Gateway as a major urban regeneration opportunity needs to be fully recognised.
- Need to reflect social inclusion throughout the strategy, and not just as an aspect of regeneration.
- Concern about availability of resources to bring forward the use of brownfield sites, and urban renaissance generally.
- Emphasis on the role of market towns as agents of rural regeneration.

World Class Rural Economy

- The need for a specific 'rural' chapter to highlight rural issues in the region.
- The important role of agriculture and the land-based sector across the region.
- Strong support for small market towns as centres for the rural areas.
- Crucial importance of rural businesses to the well-being of rural areas.
- Need for specialised arrangements for delivering advice to rural businesses, with some Enterprise Hubs having a particular rural emphasis.
- The need to retain the existing Rural Development Areas, and have programmes to meet the needs of other deprived rural communities.
- Lack of affordable housing and transport/accessibility in rural areas.
- The need for a pro-active and supportive planning system.

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