



Building a World Class Region

An Economic Strategy for the South
East of England

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

Building a World Class Region: An Economic Strategy for the South East of England

The South East has the potential to be a World Class Region. World class in economic prosperity and in our ability to combat deprivation and enhance environmental quality. A successful South East will also stimulate wealth creation across the country as a whole.

We are doing well compared to other UK regions, but the region has lost much ground to our European competitors - at least 22 other European regions are outperforming us. We are suffering from a lack of ongoing investment in our people, infrastructure and other assets.

We must provide the modern communications infrastructure (both physical and electronic) this region demands. Failure to make the necessary investment in infrastructure will shortly begin to have a cumulative and catastrophic impact on the region's economy, communities and the environment.

We have also failed to invest in the world class learning and business support needed to create the knowledge-based, high valued-added economy essential to our future prosperity. People in the South East are naturally innovative. We must provide them with the support they need to turn innovative new ideas into wealth-creating enterprises.

The marginalisation of rural communities and the deprivation both in our coastal towns and in pockets across the region must be addressed. The communities concerned need to be rebuilt - both physically and socially.

We cannot afford to let down the people of the South East either in delivering gainful employment or in providing a quality of life and environment that is second to none. This strategy does not press for maximum growth regardless of the cost, but we must create the competitiveness and wealth base needed to support the region's social and environmental aspirations.

There is much that this region can do for itself. However, to tackle the chronic under-investment outlined above, we need a new partnership with central Government. We must agree with Government a formula for re-investing in this region a greater proportion of the wealth our businesses and people create. With the right investment, the South East region would create substantial and increasing taxable revenue every year to benefit not only the region, but the nation as a whole.

A comprehensive approach

Informed by SEEDA's extensive consultations, this strategy establishes a framework of seven region-wide programmes to enable us to become a World Class Region. For each programme, informed by our consultations, we have identified strategic priorities and objectives for moving forward. We have prepared draft action plans for achieving these objectives which we are publishing as working documents with the strategy for further consultation and development.

1. World Class Businesses

Strategic Priorities

- Ensure that support networks for ambitious businesses are both world class and accessible.
- Increase significantly the level of business-to-business e-commerce.
- Increase the rate of innovation and technology transfer by exploiting the extensive and world class research and development resource within the region.
- Stimulate business growth through improved access to investment support.
- Develop strategies to create and sustain globally competitive sectors to include the support of established and emerging business clusters.
- Develop the opportunities for our businesses and institutions to benefit from enhanced links with key regions, sub regions, clusters and institutions in other parts of the world.
- Enhance pro-active support services to attract and retain high added value companies particularly those in priority business sectors/clusters and those which meet supply chain opportunities.

Specific objectives include:

- establishing a network of 25-30 Enterprise Hubs within five years and creating a 'Wired Region';
- establishing a portfolio of independently managed regional funds to provide finance for new start-up and expanding enterprises; and
- drawing together leaders and experts from the region's key business sectors to form sector groups charged with developing strategies to promote the international competitiveness of each sector.

2. World Class Learning

Strategic Priorities

- Excite people to learn and build a culture of lifelong learning across the South East.
- Engage employers in both influencing learning provision and the delivery of learning opportunities.
- Develop high quality provision that meets the needs of key sectors.
- Develop many more world class managers.
- Raise achievement levels across the South East and develop opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find and remain in work.

Specific objectives include:

- establishing a Regional Skills Research Unit to help people and businesses plan for the future;
- developing a marketing campaign, with national and local partners, to substantially increase participation in all levels of learning; and
- along with employers, national training organisations and Learning and Skills Councils, expanding and developing Centres of Excellence in key sectors.

3. World Class Workforce

Strategic Priorities

- Open up new regional partnerships between employers and trade unions and other employee representatives (social partners) on the future of the region.
- Promote innovation, job enrichment and growth through a culture of participation and inclusiveness.
- Ensure that the workforce is fully part of the Learning Region.
- Establish intelligent early warning systems to anticipate change.

Specific objectives include:

- establishing life-long learning forums;
- co-ordinating research into best practice in employee participation and inclusiveness; and
- setting up an early warning system to monitor the prospects of vulnerable sectors of employment.

4. World Class Transport

Strategic Priorities

- Develop a sustainable transport network across the region.
- Enable the region to contribute fully to the national economy (including maximising the benefits of links with London).
- Sustain growth in areas of economic success.
- Release the potential of the currently less economically successful areas.

Specific objectives include:

- progressing the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) Phase 2 to completion as rapidly as possible;
- investment in East-West rail (Oxford-Cambridge) and other key cross-regional rail connections;
- investment in rail links to and between airports;
- establishing Regional Airports and Ports strategies to guide investment priorities;
- improving access across the South Coast from Southampton and Portsmouth to the Channel Tunnel;
- tackling congestion 'pinch points' on both road and rail; and
- improving road and rail access to north and east Kent.

5. World Class Environment

Strategic Priorities

- Ensure that the development of our region's economy and its infrastructure is undertaken in a sustainable way.
- Raise the quality threshold - develop and disseminate environmental business Best Practice on sustainability.
- Develop programmes to nurture industries with strengths in environmental technologies and services.

Specific objectives include:

- establishing sustainable development criteria to inform decisions on economic investment.
- undertaking a full sustainability assessment of the Regional Economic Strategy;
- promoting the highest environmental standards in building and urban design and in management practice; and
- developing an internet-based information exchange system for use by environmental businesses.

6. World Class Communities and Urban Renaissance

Strategic Priorities:

- Support sustainable and strategic regeneration.
- Disseminate best practice.
- Promote social inclusion.
- Encourage and enable local communities and the voluntary sector.
- Stimulate a major urban renaissance of the region's many towns and cities.

Specific objectives include:

- preparing area investment frameworks at the local level, bringing together all principal public, private and voluntary sector partners to focus funding in an integrated way;
- promoting renaissance of the region's urban areas and communities, embracing the public, private and voluntary sectors and integrating arts, culture and heritage;
- creating a land assembly fund to bring forward urban regeneration schemes; and
- making the most of European funding programmes for the region.

7. World Class Rural Economy

Strategic Priorities:

- Harness people's cultural attachment to the countryside to the economic benefit of the region.
- Encourage fully integrated approaches to sustainable land management which deliver environmental, economic and social benefits.
- Use modern technology to support sustainable forms of business / enterprise development in rural areas.
- Sustain and enhance the social and community infrastructure in rural areas.
- Sustain and enhance the quality of the environment in rural areas.
- Develop effective indicators of rural success and disadvantage, and disseminate best practice.

Specific proposals include:

- ensuring the delivery of quality advice and training to rural-based firms;
- promoting the importance of accessible, integrated and sustainable transport in rural areas; and
- delivering integrated programmes for economic and social regeneration of deprived rural areas.

What happens next?

This is a strategy for the region as a whole. It sets a demanding but achievable programme of activity not just for SEEDA, but also for its partners. The strategy must therefore be seen as the beginning, not an end. SEEDA will work with partners to monitor and evaluate its impact against the underlying objectives of economic prosperity, social inclusion and an enhanced environment, i.e. the sustainable development of the region. The vision for the future must be one in which the South East is a World Class Region which fully utilises its formidable strengths to provide enhanced quality of life for all.

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