

**Box 2: Hastings and Bexhill Regeneration**

In Hastings and Bexhill, SEEDA, in collaboration with the 3 local authorities and over 30 other local partners, has taken a fast track approach to develop a comprehensive regeneration framework and improve implementation capacity. The strategy is focused around five themes, including: urban renaissance; learning and skills; enterprise and business growth; ICT and Broadband supply and use; and transport and accessibility. Within each theme a series of projects are being developed.

A special purpose delivery company, similar in concept to an URC but adapted to local circumstances, will be established by the partners to implement the strategy. Substantial new funding has been allocated by Government, and existing funding streams will be better co-ordinated, to deliver integrated regeneration.

The approach is also ground breaking in combining an iterative process of community consultation and sustainability appraisal with the development of a spatial master-plan covering the two towns, led by the internationally recognised architects MBM.

SEEDA's role has been pivotal in the development and implementation of a vision for integrated regeneration. It has included leadership of the strategy and structuring of the partnership, funding consultancy work, acquiring key sites and buildings, pump priming investment in key aspects of the physical infrastructure, lobbying to secure investment, and – with the Government Office for the South East – drawing together an Inter-Departmental Working Group across Whitehall.

**Working in partnership with the Regional Assembly**

Working alongside SEEDA and the Government Office for the South East, the South East England Regional Assembly has also focused on the urban renaissance agenda in two major areas of policy – regional planning guidance and the recent consultative regional transport strategy. In drafting the latter, a main policy strand is for the transport system to support delivery of the RPG's spatial strategy - focusing on urban renewal and renaissance as a means of achieving a more sustainable pattern of development.

The Assembly has also been pro-active in promoting best practice. A series of seminars has aimed at sharing practical experience and the Urban Renaissance advisory group has been looking at 'obstacles to delivery'.

**Concluding comments**

SEEDA has embraced the urban renaissance agenda, tailoring initiatives to the circumstances of the region. The Agency has been both innovative and persistent in tackling key constraints on effective and integrated regeneration and renaissance.

However, the fact remains that SEEDA's influence and particularly the resources made available by Government in the South East are limited, so its efforts need to be focused. Arguably, other organisations are better placed to carry forward many of the specific recommendations of the Task Force and Urban White Paper. But no organisation is better placed to deliver integrated regeneration in the South East region. Programmes such as those initiated by SEEDA, in collaboration with local partners, in Hastings and Thanet, demonstrate what can be achieved through an integrated approach to regeneration and renaissance.

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# Response to the Urban Renaissance Agenda

## A Report to SEEDA by SQW and BBP Regeneration

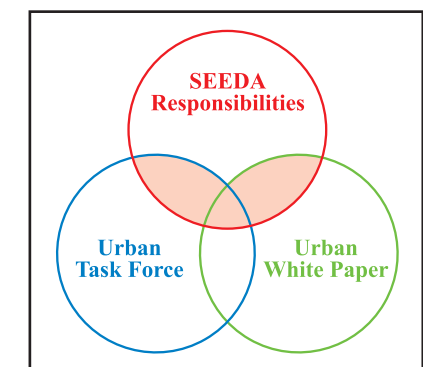
### Executive Summary

October 2002

**Introduction and overview**

This report examines SEEDA's response to the Urban Task Force report, 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' (1999), and the subsequent Urban White Paper, published by the Government in 2000.

The main focus is on those recommendations of the Task Force and the White Paper which SEEDA can affect directly – including particularly those for which RDAs can, and should, take a lead responsibility (shown in the figure opposite as the shaded areas which overlap with SEEDA's responsibilities). There are many other areas in which SEEDA may be able to exert influence, but where other organisations are much better placed to take action.



The urban renaissance agenda set out by the Urban Task Force (UTF) and in the Urban White Paper (UWP) includes approximately 35 recommendations of direct relevance to the RDA's. Overall, SEEDA has responded enthusiastically to these. It has been pro-active in several key aspects of urban renaissance, including re-use of brownfield land, provision of affordable housing, skills development and the delivery of regeneration. In some areas, SEEDA has taken a genuine leadership role: for example, the Deputy Chairman of the Centre for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) recently remarked that "CABE welcomes the creation of a Design Panel [by SEEDA] as a model for other regions to follow". Based on SEEDA's experience, key national policy implications are summarised in Box 1 and other themes are examined below.

**Box 1: Potential policy issues**

While 22 best practice points have been identified from the experience noted in the South East (see concluding section of the main report), the following issues are of particular import to national policy makers:

- Publicly held land (especially MoD; NHS; DfES) should be disposed of for best value (and not best consideration) in close co-operation with the local authority and RDA to ensure it achieves its sub regional and regional optimal strategic use and potential;
- RDAs have a unique opportunity and role to co-ordinate across the sustainable economic development agenda, and to drive sustainable master planning to deliver the agreed regional and sub regional strategies;
- National organisations and agencies have a key role to play in providing specific expertise to support the integration, joining up and local project management that the RDA can bring;
- National policy should seek to empower and enable local and regional bodies, local authorities and RDAs to insist on the delivery of excellence and quality. Specifically, all publicly supported buildings should be required to meet BREEAM standards;
- With respect to planning, the minimum land size thresholds (above which local authorities can insist on affordable housing) should be removed.

## Managing the land supply

More effective re-use of brownfield land is a key objective of both the Task Force and the White Paper. In the South East region there are few extensive brownfield sites available for re-use. Therefore to meet the regional target set by Government, to remediate 75 ha of brownfield land per year over the next two years, SEEDA has to focus on securing development of a large number of small sites, as well as its own land holdings. In addition, it has pursued a number of changes in current national policies and practices to ensure better use of brownfield land.

In order to secure development of more small, brownfield sites, SEEDA has developed the Brownfield Land Assembly Trust (BLAT), in association with the Housing Corporation and local authorities, with pilot studies in Forest Row, Hastings and Reading. The intention is to identify, assemble and facilitate the development of small sites throughout the region which do not appear in urban capacity studies because of their size, and which otherwise are unlikely to be developed. Extrapolating region-wide from the three pilots, the total amount of land in the category targeted by BLAT could be up to 1,000 ha. In practice, the complexity of bringing forward a very large number of small sites for development will limit the scale of land developed through BLAT. However, it could have an important demonstration effect on other land owners and developers.

In parallel with the setting up of BLAT, SEEDA is developing the major brownfield site in its ownership, at Chatham Maritime, to a high standard, and in keeping with a number of UTF and UWP recommendations. It has also demonstrated its willingness to use CPO powers (in relation to Ropetackle, Shoreham) to acquire land and buildings to secure regeneration objectives.

In relation to national policies and practices, SEEDA has argued for higher densities (e.g. at the examination in public for Regional Planning Guidance, and in evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Housing) in order to ensure brownfield land is used effectively to meet housing needs. It has also sought to ensure that the sale of land in the ownership of Government Departments is based on best value, instead of best consideration mandates, in order to reduce the subsidy necessary to secure affordable housing or other key uses on these sites.

## Planning for change

A key constraint on economic development in the South East region is the availability of affordable housing. 80% of demand for housing in the region is from single person and single parent households, of which half is for affordable housing. Yet the great majority of development is of “executive style”, low density dwellings.

SEEDA is seeking to secure the development of more affordable housing in a variety of ways consistent with UTF and UWP recommendations. These include the BLAT initiative (see above), by encouraging high quality design of high density housing, and by lobbying Government to change regulations which have the effect of reducing the amount of affordable housing developed. The latter includes removing the minimum size of site on which local authorities can insist on a percentage of affordable housing, which is particularly important in the South East because of the shortage of large brownfield sites.

## Designing the urban environment

SEEDA has established a regional Design Panel, in collaboration with the Centre for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), to comment on the design quality of major development projects. It is expected to advise on around 50 cases per annum including design briefs, feasibility studies and project designs. SEEDA will put all its projects to the Panel, the Housing Corporation has agreed to submit major schemes, and local authorities and developers will also be encouraged to channel proposals through the Panel.

SEEDA has also sponsored the expansion of architecture centres to promote good design, supported improvement of skills in building design and construction in the region, and held design competitions for major developments such as housing on St Mary’s Island, Chatham Maritime. Design masterplans and community consultation are requirements for all projects in which SEEDA is involved. In addition, the inclusion of public art in development schemes is being promoted as a catalyst to increase community pride and care of the environment.

## Investing in skills and innovation

SEEDA has a key role in developing workforce skills in the region, but it has taken a particular interest in supporting improved skills for urban regeneration professionals. SEEDA has sponsored research to identify gaps in training (in collaboration with the London Development Agency), and as a result is supporting improved provision through several centres of excellence within universities in the region, and (in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Builders) through FE Colleges. On-site training provision to complement FE-based courses is also being sponsored by SEEDA – for example, at Chatham Maritime. In addition, Enterprise Hubs and Enterprise Gateways will help link all parts of the region into specialist business support and skills networks, including those relating to urban renaissance.

## Managing the urban environment and delivery of integrated regeneration

Delivering integrated regeneration in the South East region is complex because the limited public sector funding, the relatively small size of most local authorities, and the need to co-ordinate the efforts of a large number of different organisations in public and private sectors.

Two major initiatives have been taken to overcome these problems. First, Area Investment Frameworks (AIFs) have been developed to identify mismatches between investment programmes and needs, and to enable funding agencies – including SEEDA – to target needs more effectively. Experience derived from pilot AIFs in five areas (including Thames Gateway, NE Kent, Sussex Coast, Isle of Wight and Solent Gateway) will be used to roll out the concept to other parts of the region in order to guide future investment decisions by SEEDA and other funders.

Second, the UWP envisaged the establishment of several Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) in each region, to support regeneration of the worst problem areas. SEEDA considers URCs to be unsuited to the particular circumstances of the South East region, and has instead piloted the establishment of special purpose delivery vehicles. These are led by local partners, and have devolved responsibility to manage major funding streams, including site acquisition, infrastructure improvement and ‘softer’ aspects of regeneration. Such vehicles have already been actioned in Thanet and Hastings (see Box 2), and others are likely once the pilots become operational.