

## Sustainable Development

1999-2001

### Introduction

Any development in the South East should be sustainable – it should generate not only economic wealth but should also contribute to social well-being and environmental quality. Such development has to incorporate a longer-term view, and not sacrifice the region's assets – particularly its natural assets – for the sake of short-term gains.

SEEDA is committed to this approach and, from the outset, has taken very seriously its statutory responsibility 'to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK where it is relevant to its area to do so'. SEEDA has also recognised that Sustainable Development requires us to look at the world in a different way. In doing so, it challenges some of our long-held assumptions, for example, about how we use natural resources and how we relate to the environment and its ability to cope with the wastes and pollution we generate.



*One third of England's lowland meadows and lowland heaths are found within the South East region.*

Sustainable Development is at the heart of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) prepared by SEEDA on behalf of the region. It set out sustainable objectives and priorities across a wide range of programmes – business, learning & skills, workforce, environment, regeneration, rural and transport. SEEDA is also integrating the principles of sustainable development across the full range of its own activities.

### Some of SEEDA's specific initiatives to support Sustainable Development are:

#### ◆ SEEDA Sustainable Development Advisory Committee

SEEDA gave early priority to establishing this Committee to advise the Board across the three pillars of Sustainable Development (economic, environmental and social well being) ensuring that it is at the core of SEEDA's activities.

#### ◆ Sustainability Appraisal of Projects and Proposals

From the outset, SEEDA has undertaken sustainability appraisals of the RES, its own direct activities and the projects of others which it supports.

#### ◆ Role of the 'Environment Sector' in the Region's Economy

SEEDA has commissioned a study of the role of the environment sector in the region's economy, including environmental industries, the natural and historic environment, farming and forestry, tourism, film and media. This will highlight priorities for SEEDA's involvement in promoting environment-related sectors, assist in identifying new market opportunities for business, and improve our understanding of the role and operation of the sector as a whole. It will also contribute directly to the review of the RES.

#### ◆ South East Water Resources Forum

In response to the need for better understanding and management of water resources in the region, SEEDA has worked in partnership with the Environment Agency to establish a Water Resources Forum for the South East. Launched at a conference in September 2001, the Forum will enable open and timely discussion about the aspiration of developers, set against water supply opportunities and constraints. It brings together planning officers, conservation policy makers, local authorities, water companies, regulators, environmental management groups, building firms and the business sector more widely.

#### ◆ SE Climate Change Partnership

SEEDA has played an active enabling role in the South East Climate Change Partnership, which brings together key organisations to address the impacts of climate change on the region.

### ◆ South East Sustainable Business Partnership

SEEDA has assisted the establishment of the South East Sustainable Business Partnership, which it now chairs. The Partnership brings together the region's six sub-regional Business-Environment Fora along with the Government Office for the South East, the Environment Agency and business support organisations. The partnership has a work programme which includes joint funding bids, eg. 'e-generation', a web-based Centre of Excellence for the dissemination of best sustainability practice for business; a Waste Market Development project; and a project which seeks to introduce environmental management systems in 30 small and medium-sized companies.

### ◆ Renewable Energy

SEEDA plays an active role in the South East Renewable Energy Partnership, which seeks to identify and promote opportunities for renewable energy facilities in the region.

### ◆ Environmental Technology Sector Group

SEEDA is developing an Environmental Technology Sector Group, bringing together key companies in the sector, to identify and respond to opportunities and challenges they face in increasing their competitiveness.

### ◆ Sustainable Construction

SEEDA's site development briefs identify and promote opportunities for sustainable development, including the highest standards of sustainable construction. Work is underway with Surrey County Council and the Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development to prepare sustainable construction design guidance, with a view to promoting best practice across the region. SEEDA's policy in supporting any housing schemes is to insist that the homes meet BREEAM EcoHomes rating standards.

### ◆ Building for Nature

SEEDA is leading the 'Building for Nature' project, which aims to incorporate biodiversity into development proposals. The project has wide ranging support from the private, public and voluntary sectors. SEEDA's funding has attracted contributions from local authority and government agency sources and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. A partnership Steering Committee has been established and the Project Officer has been appointed.

### ◆ South East 'Mass Balance' Study

SEEDA has contributed funding for a two year 'Mass Balance' study of the South East. This will identify resource flows in and out of the region and highlight opportunities for greater resource efficiency. The project will engage policymakers and the public in the process by identifying the region's 'ecological footprint', as a basis for sustainability comparisons.

### ◆ SEEDA Sustainable Business Awards

The annual 'SEEDA Sustainable Business Awards', starting in 2001, will encourage good environmental management and social responsibility in business in the South East, with companies guided by sustainable development in their decision making.

### ◆ South East River Catchment Research Study

SEEDA has engaged consultants to undertake a feasibility study, on a river catchment basis, to identify the scope for generating direct economic benefit to the region through improving water management in agriculture and business.

## Priorities for the Future

As well as taking forward the initiatives mentioned above, SEEDA will attach particular priority to:

- the development of sustainable construction and
- demonstrating to businesses that best practice driven by sustainable development brings real commercial benefits

SEEDA sees addressing Sustainable Development as a major opportunity. Our aim is to engage with all our partners and make use of their considerable expertise so that we can jointly understand how we can achieve sustainable economic growth that enhances the quality of life for people who live and work in the region.

The region's Sustainable Development Framework, prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly, working closely with SEEDA and other regional organisations, will continue to provide the context within which we pursue this aim. In addition, we will continue to develop links with other Regional Development Agencies, in this country and abroad, recognising that sustainable development needs close co-operation across boundaries.

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