

# Matter 6B/South East England Regional Assembly



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**Matter 6B: ENVIRONMENT - COUNTRYSIDE AND COAST**

**6B.1 Does the Plan set out a positive, integrated strategy for the Region's countryside in general? Would it be appropriate to include a 'Countryside Quality' Indicator as a measure of the success of the strategy?**

1. As set out in the South East Plan, the South East has a particularly rich diversity and quality of environment, and this includes both urban and rural areas, built environment and countryside. The mixture and quality of the countryside is a significant factor in the region's character, and plays an important role underpinning the region's economic success.
2. In developing the Plan, the Regional Assembly considered countryside issues to be an integral part of the structure and identity of the region. The Plan identifies how important the region's countryside is for a number of reasons, including environmental, economic (both direct e.g. farming and tourism, and indirect e.g. attracting people to invest business capital in the region), and social, for example health through access to the countryside for recreation.
3. The Plan sets an appropriate level of strategic guidance, complementing national level guidance (for example in PPS7). The approach set out in the Plan is positive, emphasising the need to manage all countryside, whether formally 'protected' or not. It also identifies that some appropriate development will be required in order that the countryside is managed positively in the future. A package of measures - focusing on land management in its own right, and for the other benefits it can deliver on wider agendas - is incorporated across a range of policies in the Plan, including those in Chapter D7 (Countryside and Landscape Management). Furthermore, the strong package of policies to address natural resource issues (Chapter D5) also addresses how the countryside should be managed, and the role it plays in wider issues for the region.
4. Any additional monitoring indicators on this subject would need to be seen in the context of the wider monitoring processes. If a suitable 'Countryside Quality' indicator is available, its appropriateness would need to be considered within the policy context as set out in the Plan - that is to recognise the social and economic concerns that are key parts of delivering a high quality and sustainably managed countryside in the longer term.

**6B.2 Does the Plan set out a positive vision for National Parks and AONBs that reflects the opportunities they provide for the region and beyond? Is the policy guidance on New Forest and proposed South Downs National Parks appropriate (Policies C1a, C1b and C2)?**

1. The Plan recognises the specific importance of the protected landscape areas in the region, and includes policies emphasising this. In developing these we were mindful of the need to not repeat national policy, or to address issues that are more appropriately dealt with at the local level.

The Assembly recognises that both AONBs and National Parks receive the same level of protection in national policy. However, we are aware that some consultees have raised concerns that the policy wording in the Plan does not reflect this. The Assembly acknowledges that minor policy rewording could help provide clarity on this issue.

2. National guidance is clear in its coverage, and the management plans and other strategies in place at the local level provide for the specific needs at the local level. We therefore believe that the Plan does set out a positive vision which is suitable given the national and local policy context, and which reflects the current stage in the designation process for the proposed South Downs National Park.

### **6B.3 Is there a need for regional guidance on the River Thames Corridor? What should this contain?**

1. Strategic Planning Guidance for the River Thames published in 1997 (RPG9b/3b) pre-dates Regional Planning Guidance for the South East. It set out the Government's planning policies for the River Thames from Windsor to the sea. In relation to the stretch of the Thames within Greater London it has been replaced by the London Plan (2005). Upon adoption the South East Plan will replace RP9b in so far as it relates to the tidal and non-tidal stretches of the Thames within the South East.
2. The Thames to the east of London is very different in character to the Thames to the west of London, and very different policy approaches will be needed in each area. A single uniform policy approach would lack coherence and a clear rationale. The Plan does however provide a strong regional policy framework for addressing the key issues identified RPG9b including landscape and countryside management (Policy C3), floodrisk management (NRM3) and inland water based recreation (TSR2).
3. To the east of London, the management of the Thames-side environment in terms of its recreational functions and landscape value will be an integral element of the 'Greening the Gateway' initiative which promotes the concept of functional green and blue space. Specific guidance on this initiative, which promotes opportunities for an integrated approach to managing flood risk, enhancement of landscapes and public access, is contained in Policy KTG10.
4. To the west of London, RPG9b acknowledges that the predominant use of this non-tidal stretch of the river is recreational. The draft South East Plan emphasises the regionally significant recreation role played by the river in this part of the region in Policy TSR7, which identifies the Thames as a priority area for tourism and promotes joint working to improve informal recreational and sporting opportunities and improved management of, and access to, the river.

The objectives of this policy (which has been brought forward from the November 2004 alterations to RPG9)<sup>1</sup>, are being addressed by the River Thames Alliance (RTA) through the Thames Waterway Plan<sup>2</sup> which was published in early 2006. The RTA comprises all the riparian authorities as well as the Environment Agency, the River Thames Society and other key stakeholders including river users and businesses.

5. The Waterway Plan aims to achieve coordinated planning between councils on matters of river front development, and protecting and promoting access, transport and open spaces; protection of habitats and the environment for the future; more and better riverside leisure facilities such as moorings, toilets and tourism information, making the trip to the river a more enjoyable experience; plans to regenerate old industrial and working sites; and more cost efficient promotion of the river, boating and leisure to encourage more visitors and support local businesses. It will be implemented by the members of the RTA and progress will be reviewed annually. The Assembly strongly supports this initiative which represents an important and appropriate mechanism for delivering the objectives of the South East Plan. It is identified in the revised Implementation Plan.

### **6B.4 Would it be appropriate to provide more regionally-specific guidance on the opportunities that may be available to improve land-use management and access including the provision of green space in town and country?**

1. The South East Plan is intended to provide policy guidance on issues of a spatial nature. As such while it is important for the Plan to highlight the importance of land management in maintaining quality of environment, economy etc, and the Plan indeed sets out a suite of policies for land management (as discussed under 6B.1), it should not give specific guidance on land-use management which is rather more a matter for land managers, and other agencies and organisations. Furthermore, given the changing nature of the rural economy, whilst it is important to recognise the need to manage the landscape effectively, it would not be appropriate for a 20 year strategic level plan to set this in place.
2. The Plan, identifies the role of local authorities in promoting and enabling suitable access to the countryside (Policy C4). In terms of access to other green space Policy NRM4 identifies the need to maintain and establish accessible green networks and open green space in urban areas. The Plan also contains policy emphasis on the need for appropriate provision in settlements (Policy BE1).

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism and Related Sport and Recreation: alterations to Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9) for the South East (November 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Thames Waterway Plan 2006-2011 (River Thames Alliance) [www.riverthamesalliance.com](http://www.riverthamesalliance.com)

The issue of 'green infrastructure' has also been raised as a result of the recent work undertaken on the Appropriate Assessment of the South East Plan, and the proposals that the Assembly has submitted to the EiP Panel as a result of the findings of this work should also be taken account of, which are the subject to separate discussions at Matter 6A.

### **6B.5 Does the Plan provide appropriate, regionally-specific guidance on coastline planning and management (Policy NRM6)? In particular:**

#### **a) are realistic forecasts of the impacts of climate change on the coast taken into account in framing policies for managing coastal development?**

1. Climate change is expected to accelerate natural changes of the coast through increasing sea level rise and storminess. This will require a variety of responses, including improving the standards of defences in some locations to protect important built and natural assets, or managed realignment and softer engineering approaches that work with nature and allow encroachment of the sea, with opportunities to create coastal habitats. All measures will require increased investment.
2. The UK Climate Change Impact Programme (UKCIP) has developed scenarios of potential impacts of climate change over the next century. Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs - see also under b) will play the key role informing the long-term planning horizon for coastal areas. In accordance with Defra guidance for the production of SMPs, they must address the implications of climate change.

#### **b) are the expectations for areas subject to Shoreline Management Plans, Coastal Habitat Management Plans and Estuary Management Plans made sufficiently clear?**

1. Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) will identify options and set the context for investment in flood and coastal protection. They are informed by detailed assessments of options, taking into account their costs and benefits and based on an understanding of the nature of different parts of the coast. This will include identifying long term policies for improving coastal defences or where other options such as managed realignment should be considered. These take account of climate change forecasts. The potential spatial consequences of SMP policies therefore could be significant.
2. However, most SMPs were not up-to-date or were under review during the preparation of the South East Plan. The 'new generation' of SMPs are expected to identify areas for managed re-alignment, but (reviewed) draft policies are only available for two pilot SMPs covering South Foreland (east of Dover) to Selsey Bill (south of Chichester). The two SMPs are in the process of being agreed by each local authority involved. For the other 5 SMPs covering the rest of the South East coast, no draft policies are available. For

some of them the review process is only about to start. An overview of progress on SMPs is included as Annex A.

3. This lack of up-to-date policies means that it has not been possible to include more spatial policies in the South East Plan and so a more general policy has been included. The South East Plan policy stresses the importance of ensuring consistency and integration between emerging SMPs and development plans, including avoiding development in locations where managed realignment may be an option in the future.
4. Coastal Habitat Management Plans and Estuary Management Plans focus specifically on the protection and management of flora and fauna within the coastal environment.

**c) should the draft RSS be more clear about the actions at regional and sub-regional levels that need to be taken to protect Heritage Coasts?**

1. The South East Plan policy refers to restrictions for the development of the undeveloped Heritage Coast. Heritage Coast is a non-statutory local designation – they are designated by local authorities in consultation with (now) Natural England. The objectives of Heritage Coast designation are set out in PPG20 on Coastal Planning. Most areas designated as Heritage Coast are also protected under national designations such as AONBs . It has not been considered necessary to duplicate policies and action set out in management plans for those designated areas. SMPs will also address issues related to landscape protection and management including the Heritage Coast.

**Overview of Shoreline Management Plans**

<b>Flood Risk Management Plan</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Stage (Lead Authority)</b>
SMP	<i>Medway &amp; Swale Estuary</i>	<i>Review started Sept. 05 – no draft policies available yet (EA)</i>
SMP	<i>Isle of Grain to South Foreland</i>	<i>Review started Nov. 05 – no draft policies available yet (Canterbury)</i>
SMP	<i>South Foreland to Beachy Head</i>	<i>Draft published Jan 05 – sign off by some Local Authorities outstanding (Shepway)</i>
SMP	<i>Beachy Head to Selsey Bill</i>	<i>Draft published Jan 05 – sign off by some Local Authorities outstanding (Arun)</i>
SMP	<i>Selsey Bill to Hurst Spit</i>	<i>Review started Nov 06 (Solent Operating Authorities)</i>
SMP	<i>Isle of Wight</i>	<i>Review started Nov 06 (Isle of Wight + EA)</i>
SMP	<i>Hurst Spit to Durlston Head</i>	<i>Review not started (Bournemouth)</i>