

South East Plan EiP: Sub Matter 2B Green Belts and Strategic Gaps

Statement by Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (ref 7138)

2B.1. Are the policies CC10a and CC10b consistent with the emphasis of the spatial strategy on urban areas and regional hubs?

1. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) considers that the policies are consistent with the Spatial Strategy of focusing development on urban areas and regional hubs. With respect to Policy CC10b, the use of strategic gaps to identify and protect gaps between settlements, and thus maintain the character and identity of settlements is an integral part of the proper planning of the South East in general and South Hampshire in particular.
2. The larger urban areas provide the most sustainable locations for development in terms of access to a wide range of facilities and to public transport which operates at a level which provides a feasible alternative to the car as a mode of travel.
3. The strategy when applied to South Hampshire will require, in addition to substantial redevelopment of brownfield sites, the release of land outside existing settlement boundaries in the form of Strategic Development Areas (SDAs) and other smaller urban extensions. To maintain the identity of those settlements and of the sub-region itself, a number of areas of undeveloped land need to be retained. The use of Policy CC10b is the appropriate mechanism to retain those which are of sub-regional importance
4. The designation of strategic gaps is considered to be consistent with and an integral part of achieving a sustainable pattern of development in the sub-region. PUSH regards the designation of strategic gaps within South Hampshire as an essential complement to the substantial urban development (housebuilding at 20% above current RPG level) which is proposed as part of the South East Plan. The proposals for gaps are necessary to ensure that this substantial development does not result in an urban sprawl, and provide tangible re-assurance to the public on that point.
5. In support of this view PUSH would draw the Panel's attention to the character of south Hampshire. The majority of the population, of the largest urban area outside London, live between the M27 and the coast. The principal settlements of Totton , Romsey Southampton, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth and Havant are linked by a number of road and rail routes. These routes pass through a number of relatively undeveloped areas of land e.g.; the river valleys of the Test, Itchen, Hamble, Meon and their tributaries. It is from the transport

2B/Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (7138)

corridors that the openness and separateness between settlements is most apparent; these views demonstrate the narrowness of these breaks between settlements and the importance of retaining them in that form. Importantly these gaps make a significant contribution to retaining the sense of identity of those individual settlements.

6. The identification of strategic gaps as a policy tool to control the spread of development and maintain the identity of settlements is a well established approach in South Hampshire, eg. The South Hampshire Structure Plan (1987) and County Structure Plan Review (1996-2011)¹. At district level, through the preparation of Local Plans and the definitions of precise boundaries, there has been considerable public support for the principle of strategic gaps.

2B.2 Is there a case for a strategic review of the Green Belt?

If there is a case

- i) are there any particular locations in the region that should be identified for review (for the purposes of additions to or deletions from the Green Belt),**
- ii) what are the criteria for review that should be specified in the Plan?**

7. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire has no comment to make on this question at this stage.

2B.3 Is it appropriate to encourage the identification of strategic gaps in certain circumstances? If yes, are the criteria defined in policy CC10b appropriate and justified?

8. PUSH considers that it is appropriate to identify strategic gaps within the South East Plan, for the reasons set out in the supporting text to the policy (ref Para 2.7, page 240) with respect to South Hampshire.
9. The case for identifying Gaps is succinctly articulated in the extant Hampshire Structure Plan. Paragraph 82 states:-

“Strategic Gaps are designated to protect those areas of land which, although not necessarily of the highest visual attractiveness, have particular importance as open and undeveloped land. This land is an important element in the structure of the settlement pattern at a strategic level, providing a clear visual and physical break in the built environment. They keep individual settlements separate and distinct. They may also have other important benefits for local communities as areas with recreation, amenity, and/or nature conservation value. Strict control of development is necessary if their importance is to be maintained.”

Paragraph 93 adds:-

“Within the densely urbanised parts of the southern and north-eastern parts of

¹ Hampshire County Structure Plan 1996-2011 (Review) Final Version for the Counties of Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton – can be viewed at <http://www.hants.gov.uk/structureplan/>

2B/Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (7138)

Hampshire there are substantial areas of open or undeveloped land which are of fundamental importance for shaping the settlement pattern. They perform a role in providing extensive breaks in these large and complex built-up areas. In the south, they help to break up the otherwise continuous built-up area with its population of over one million people.”

10. In a strategy for the sub-region which envisages significant new development, the individual identity of the towns and cities within it needs to be respected. The residents of the area place great importance on the sense of place distinguishing between the two cities and the adjoining towns. It is also important in terms of the character of the area, notwithstanding the significant development which has already taken place, that areas of land remain relatively free from development.
11. There are areas which clearly perform the function of separating the major built-up areas and it is appropriate that their significance at a sub-regional level should be recognised.
12. In its submission on June 2006, PUSH requested that a new policy be included within the South East Plan which would provide the framework for the defining of local gaps. The basis of the submission was that the current text ref Para. 1.3.8 (page 52) did not provide a sound basis for local planning authorities to define local gaps. As currently drafted Para. 1.3.8 identifies that local gaps could be defined having regard to PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
13. PUSH considers that such an approach is not appropriate for South Hampshire given the character of the area which is one of a large urban based population where preventing coalescence of settlements is an important and long established policy objective. Within South Hampshire the definition of local gaps is considered to be very much about retaining a settlements character and the function of an area of land in maintaining that character rather than about defining landscape character as envisaged in PPS7.
14. PUSH considers that a policy is needed to provide the strategic framework for defining local gaps across the region. A policy would then provide a complimentary approach to the defining of strategic gaps. With respect to South Hampshire it would appear that the South East Plan has that approach in mind (ref Para. 2.9 page 260).