

Best Value Review of Sustainable Communities

Report by the Project Board:

Councillor Rupert Simmons (Chairman)

Councillor Jon Freeman

Councillor Bob Tidy

Councillor Michael Tunwell

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1 Recommendations

1.1 The Board's findings in this report are intended to both assist the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) preparations from 2005 onwards and to inform the Council's response to the draft South East Plan.

1.2 The recommendations highlight the Best Value Review Board's key findings during its investigations into some of the sustainability issues surrounding the draft South East Plan. These are the issues that the Board wishes the Cabinet to address when compiling its response to the draft Plan at its meeting in April 2005.

1.3 The South East Plan is scheduled to be published in its final form during winter 2006/07. It is suggested that the same timescale be used to address these recommendations whilst using the normal reporting milestones for County Council best value reviews where appropriate.

	Recommendation	Page
R1	The East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to investigate issues of sustainability, particularly around the provision of accident and emergency, GP and dental services in the context of an ageing population in East Sussex, as part of its future programme.	5
R2	The following definition should be used as a starting point for future consideration of sustainability issues in East Sussex: "Sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life and successful communities for everyone, now and for generations to come. This means that we in East Sussex County Council together with our partners should: 1. Encourage a thriving and improving local economy supported by education and training. 2. Promote better transport facilities. 3. Use natural resources wisely and encourage conservation. 4. Protect and enhance the environment. 5. Care for and protect people. 6. Promote affordable housing."	6
R3	Consideration should be given to extending current housing schemes for key workers to wider groups of employees so that harder-to-recruit skills fall within the remit for subsidised accommodation.	9
R4	Further investigations should be undertaken into whether development contributions can be obtained economically and effectively from smaller developments that are currently below the threshold for making any contribution.	10
R5	a) Given the overall evidence, particularly concerning problems of infrastructure, the Board is unable to support housing development above the rate of 25,500 new homes per year for the South East at present. b) Housing development should, as far as practicable in East Sussex:	11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) include a significant proportion of affordable dwellings; ii) comprise one or two bedroom dwellings; and iii) comprise larger scale developments. 	
R6	<p>East Sussex County Council needs to ensure that it works effectively with the water companies, Environment Agency, OFWAT and the district and borough councils, by developing new mechanisms for joint working if necessary, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) agree need, location and timing for new strategic water resources (particularly reservoirs); and b) ensure adequate wastewater handling and processing facilities. 	13
R7	<p>The merit of creating a single waste collection and disposal authority, as has been tried elsewhere and suggested previously in East Sussex, should be explored further with a view to removing the disincentives to recycling.</p>	14
R8	<p>Further possibilities for increasing the amount of green waste collected for composting in East Sussex, building upon the successes achieved by Wealden District Council, should be investigated with a view to reducing the demands on landfill and producing a marketable compost product.</p>	14
R9	<p>The Government should be urged to be more proactive in supporting local authorities' aims of promoting and sustaining viable waste disposal and recycling programmes. Action includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) promoting research towards effective commercial recycling of plastics into marketable or biodegradable products; b) promoting effective legislation to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging; c) requiring higher standards for waste recycling or biodegradability; and d) promoting research to increase capacity for providing energy from waste in a more publicly acceptable way, recognising the likely increased demand over the next 20 years. 	15
R10	<p>The Council should research and develop all possible funding sources, through partnerships with the Government and in Europe, to address the strategic transport infrastructure shortfalls (road and rail) in East Sussex.</p>	16
R11	<p>There is a significant need for greater integration between bus and train services in both rural and urban areas, for example, by promoting greater use of through ticketing and greater integration of bus and train timetables; alongside such initiatives must be better publicity campaigns.</p>	17
R12	<p>Further clarity is needed on the effectiveness of the Council's objective of providing a co-ordinated county-wide passenger transport service that meets the urban and rural travel requirements of schools, social services and the public.</p>	17

2 Findings

Overview

2.1 This review investigated four key areas relating to sustainability within the South East Plan:

- housing levels, water and sewerage;
- environment, particularly domestic waste and recycling;
- transport infrastructure, particularly access to services and employment; and
- health, especially in the context of an ageing population.

2.2 The Board had insufficient time during the course of this review to deal adequately with the health element but felt this area needs further evaluation.

Recommendation 1

The East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to investigate issues of sustainability, particularly around the provision of accident and emergency, GP and dental services in the context of an ageing population in East Sussex, as part of its future programme.

Definition of *sustainability*

2.3 Appendix 1 details a recent history of the evolution of “sustainability” in East Sussex. The policy document, “A Sustainable East Sussex” and its associated action plan dates from April 2001. Since then many of the issues identified in that action plan have been incorporated into both the Council Plan and the Community Strategy, “Pride of Place”.

2.4 Definitions and interpretations of the terms “sustainability”, “sustainable communities” and “sustainable development” have mushroomed in recent years and are now wide and varied. The Board reviewed a range of definitions and interpretations being used elsewhere alongside the Council’s current perspective described in “A Sustainable East Sussex” and “Quality of Life Counts in East Sussex” (May 2002).

2.5 The Board’s findings led it to question whether the earlier definition needs updating. To take the debate forward, the Board proposes the following definition of “sustainable development” as a starting point for further discussion.

Recommendation 2

The following definition should be used as a starting point for future consideration of sustainability issues in East Sussex:

“Sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life and successful communities for everyone, now and for generations to come. This means that we in East Sussex County Council together with our partners should:

- 1. Encourage a thriving and improving local economy supported by education and training.***
- 2. Promote better transport facilities.***
- 3. Use natural resources wisely and encourage conservation.***
- 4. Protect and enhance the environment.***
- 5. Care for and protect people.***
- 6. Promote affordable housing.”***

South East Plan

2.6 The South East Plan (otherwise known as the Regional Spatial Strategy for South East England) is being developed by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) between 2004 and 2006. It will set out a vision for the South East region through to 2026, focusing on improvements considered necessary to ensure the region remains economically successful and an attractive place to live, visit and work. It will address important issues such as housing, transport, the economy and the environment.

2.7 A draft version of the Plan was published for consultation on 24 January 2005. The finished Plan will be submitted for Government approval. Once approved it will become a legal document that local authorities and other government agencies in the region must follow.

Housing water and sewerage

Housing levels

2.8 The Government considers that the South East is not building enough houses and that this is leading to inflated house prices in the region. The draft Plan seeks views on three different levels of overall housing development for the whole South East region:

- 25,500 new homes per year, reflecting annual average house building seen in the South East over the last 5 years;
- 28,000 new homes per year, reflecting a continuation of the planned requirement in the existing planning targets; and
- 32,000 new homes per year, reflecting the level of development likely to be needed to meet requirements if existing trends in net migration continue unchanged.

2.9 In the draft South East Plan the housing provision figures for the Sussex Coast (which also includes Brighton & Hove and part of West Sussex) range from 2,300 to 3,600 dwellings per year (3,000 is equivalent to the current structure plan target for the sub region). The equivalent figures for the rest of East Sussex are 300 – 500 dwellings per year.

2.10 New housing development levels as a whole for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove are in line with the existing structure plan target. However, this global result hides local variations.

2.11 Since 1991 fewer than 1,600 dwellings have been built in East Sussex per year. This represents just 88% of the structure plan target for the County which requires an average annual rate of 1,800 to 2011. Eastbourne uniquely in East Sussex has exceeded the target. By contrast, Brighton and Hove has exceeded its structure plan target by 40%.

2.12 Appendix 2 (page 25) provides more detailed reasons why houses have not been built at the rates set out in the current structure plans across the South East. Some specific reasons why certain parts of East Sussex have not met the target are:

- Rother and Wealden have made provision for housing, however the required trunk roads for the new development have not been built by the Highways Agency; and
- there is less development in Hastings as there has been a weak market for new housing development.

2.13 Future housing demand stems from a number of factors: demographic trends; changing social trends around extended and split families etc. Historic trends in pupil numbers do not provide a clear picture as to the long term population changes in East Sussex.

2.14 The decision on future levels of housing provision in the region is ultimately a matter of political judgement. A range of factors, such as the economy and the adequacy of the infrastructure, as well as population change, need to be taken into consideration. Detailed consideration of housing levels in the districts is ongoing and the complete picture will be available in July 2005.

Affordability of housing

2.15 In the planning system, affordable housing is defined as that which is provided with subsidy in the social sector. The Government's definition goes further and includes cheaper (with perhaps a one-off discount) housing provided in the private market.

2.16 Housing in East Sussex costs 8% less than the regional average but is 20% higher than the national figure. A range of possible factors contribute to this:

- proximity to airports;
- within a commutable distance from urban centres including London; and
- a perception that the quality of life in East Sussex is good (based on MORI polls).

2.17 The affordability gap between local earnings and house prices is higher in East Sussex than in any other county in the South East region. The average house price in East Sussex is 7.2 times average local earnings. This compares with regional and national ratios of 6.3 and 5.1 respectively. The Board questioned the sustainability of this position.

Inward migration and commuting patterns

2.18 Population growth in East Sussex is almost all due to net inward migration mostly from London and neighbouring counties. The inward migrants tend to be younger than the average population in East Sussex. Retirement migration is not as significant as it was 20 years ago.

2.19 Inward migrants are now typically commuting further to work, by car in many cases. Census data shows that the number of East Sussex residents commuting out of the County to work has increased considerably over the last 20 years to approximately 48,000 in 2001. There is no apparent evidence to suggest that people are moving to East Sussex to register as homeless.

2.20 However, there is little data available on how migration and large scale commuting affects local communities, or indeed how people's lives are changed by moving to East Sussex and then having to commute to work elsewhere. People undoubtedly see housing as an investment as well as somewhere to live.

2.21 The Board questioned whether it would be possible to reduce inward migration by selling a proportion of housing to local people. One of the problems of doing this would be that the relatively richer in-migrants compete for housing in an open market, which is not growing at previous rates, and continue to out bid people on local incomes. The effect would be to force up house prices as demand further increases over supply.

2.22 The Board concluded that even as initiatives are undertaken to improve the local economy and ensure that people live and work locally, as long as fuel prices and public transport costs remain affordable, there may continue to be significant commuting movements. Nonetheless, improving the number and range of local jobs is critical in ensuring that better opportunities are provided within the County.

Social housing and backlog of need

2.23 District council statements of need for affordable housing are well researched and so can be taken as good estimates of need. Whilst the pressure on housing is universal across East Sussex, all the evidence suggests that problems are most acute in the urban areas.

2.24 In April 2004 there were over 10,000 households registered on waiting lists in the County. This compares to 5,166 in 2000 and 3,400 in 1991. Three quarters of these households need small homes with one or two bedrooms.

2.25 Levels of housing need and homelessness in East Sussex have increased and are continuing to do so. In 2003/04, 1,500 households had been accepted by the housing authority as statutorily homeless and in priority need. These are

people likely to be in temporary accommodation. Only 4% need larger than 3 bedrooms. In 2004 social housing stock was just 11% of the total.

Local economy

2.26 The low level of average earnings in East Sussex is the main cause of the affordability gap, rather than the particularly high prices of houses. Part of the solution requires:

- improving the local economy to increase local earnings;
- improving the number and quality of local jobs and careers; and
- increasing the range of jobs, especially at the higher end of the salary spectrum.

2.27 Sussex Enterprise is currently conducting a study of the impact of high house prices on the local economy. The interim findings are:

- high house prices affect the ability of many employers to recruit and retain staff; many initiatives to combat this have had limited impact because of the sheer strength of the housing market;
- in most areas of Sussex there is a shortage of one or two bedroom units; and
- occupations most affected by high housing costs are: customer services staff, low-skilled staff and skilled technicians in sectors such as the public sector, retail, transport and financial services.

2.28 The Board supports a number of the report's recommendations to address these issues, in particular:

Recommendation 3

Consideration should be given to extending current housing schemes for key workers to wider groups of employees so that harder-to-recruit skills fall within the remit for subsidised accommodation.

Developers and planning contributions

2.29 Development contributions should be financed out of the rise in value of land conferred by the grant of planning permission by the local planning authority; and not, as commonly imagined, by taking a cut of developers' profits nor by adding to the cost of a development.

2.30 The contribution sought is directly related to the costs of providing infrastructure. The Council's guidance sets out formulae which indicate those costs.

2.31 Developers tend to make more profit from three, four or five bedroom houses rather than one or two bedroom houses. In the open market, smaller households often live in larger accommodation where they can afford it. Developers generally seem willing to consider including affordable housing in new developments. However, there is a fear expressed by some developers that seeking affordable housing as a development contribution could make a desirable development unviable.

2.32 The Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance "A New Approach to Development Contributions" (October 2003) helps developers assess what level of development contributions is to be expected towards infrastructure and services for which the County Council has some responsibility. This assesses and makes explicit the costs arising from a development.

2.33 How the costs should be met is the second stage in the process. Normally, the County Council would expect the developer to meet those costs but if the developer claims this renders the development unviable, the council would ask for some substantiation of this claim and negotiate as necessary. It is the district councils, as local planning authorities, that make decisions on most planning applications; they also have contribution requirements, for example, affordable housing and open spaces.

2.34 Development contributions are sought only for developments comprising more than 15 properties (6 in Lewes District). Officers maintain that the administrative costs and resource demands of seeking contributions for smaller developments place too great a demand on staff resources and can make it financially unviable. This view has been established by the district and borough councils as local planning authorities who essentially required these sieve levels to make the workloads manageable. This has meant that some developers have in the past attempted to package developments in a way so as to try to minimise their planning contributions.

Recommendation 4

Further investigations should be undertaken into whether development contributions can be obtained economically and effectively from smaller developments that are currently below the threshold for making any contribution.

Housing sustainability assessment

2.35 If sustainable development means striking a balance between economic, environmental and social factors then have we achieved sustainable development or sustainability now?

2.36 The Board does not consider there are good grounds for optimism. Even assuming zero housing growth the economic factors detailed above indicate an imbalance, especially in terms of the housing affordability gap. Social factors including long social housing waiting lists, pockets of social deprivation, and high out-of-county commuting all indicate current difficulties. Maximising affordable housing and promoting economic regeneration are key to addressing these factors.

2.37 There is an assumption by many parties that building significantly more houses than at current levels will help to reduce house prices and so aid sustainability. The Board remains unconvinced since such an approach could easily result in increased net in-migration or the spectre of "negative equity" – neither of which would assist with sustainable development in East Sussex.

Recommendation 5

a) Given the overall evidence, particularly concerning problems of infrastructure, the Board is unable to support housing development above the rate of 25,500 new homes per year for the South East at present.

b) Housing development should, as far as practicable in East Sussex:

i) include a significant proportion of affordable dwellings;

ii) comprise one or two bedroom dwellings; and

iii) comprise larger scale developments.

Water and wastewater sustainability

2.38 Hastings and Lewes receive their water supply from SWS and the remainder of East Sussex from South East Water. SWS provides sewerage services for all East Sussex and works closely with OFWAT and the Environment Agency in sharing resources and developing new joint resources.

2.39 Southern Water Services Limited (SWS) considers that future water and sewerage service demands within the South East Plan region can be met subject to the requirements described below.

2.40 SWS adopts a twin track approach of water conservation and identifying new sources; the balance between the two is determined by the levels of cost effectiveness required by OFWAT. The Environment Agency considers that security of supply and increased demand from new developments in the South East can only be accommodated through such a twin track approach.

2.41 The South East Plan also supports the twin track approach and recommends that local authorities should work with water companies and the Environment Agency to agree need, location and timing for new strategic water resources, particularly reservoirs. The Board concurred with this view.

2.42 The system of prioritisation imposed by OFWAT on SWS means that:

- SWS has an investment programme to maintain and improve current assets to provide increasingly high standards set by the Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.
- Investment to address needs for new development (some 10% of the investment programme) takes priority over addressing service deficiencies to existing customers.

Water source development

2.43 SWS considers that there is significant flexibility in the system of water supply. In general, the network can provide water to any planned development in East Sussex subject to sufficient lead in times and provision of a strategic reservoir at Bewl in East Sussex and Broad Oak in Kent.

2.44 The draft South East Plan identifies five major reservoir schemes that could be required over the Plan period to 2026, including enlargement of Bewl Water by 2015. In addition, enlargement of Darwell reservoir could also be an option.

2.45 SWS do not at this stage seek to make provision within the lifetime of the Plan for rainwater collection or water recycling systems. This is because the costs of ongoing maintenance and addressing bacteriological issues make schemes commercially unviable at this time. Desalination schemes are also considered to be currently unviable.

Water conservation and leakage control

2.46 SWS undertakes a range of activities to promote water conservation:

- SWS maintains that it leads the industry in leakage reduction. It intends to continue to maintain leakage at the lowest economic level and remain within the targets set by OFWAT;
- increased use of metering will promote careful water use; however, the introduction of metering for domestic users is not compulsory except for high volume users; it can be introduced to new properties and to existing ones when occupancy changes; and
- the additional costs for water efficiency measures in a new house are approximately £200 – £400. Savings can be in the region of 8% - 10% if, for example, water efficient taps, showers and toilets are used. Whilst developers are encouraged to incorporate these designs, there is no requirement to do so. There needs to be vigorous enforcement through building regulations for new developments.

2.47 Whilst increasingly stringent building control regulations set the fuel, water and insulation efficiency standards for new housing, the significant amount of older housing is not covered by the newer standards. Larger housing developments can be designed to be more environmentally efficient than smaller developments.

2.48 The Board concluded that if higher levels of conservation and recycling using, for example, grey water systems, are desirable then they have to be paid for. Ultimately a balance is needed between further water conservation activity and developing new sustainable water sources.

Foul sewerage infrastructure and flooding

2.49 Waste water and foul sewerage processing are much less flexible than water supply and much more sensitive to the location of developments. For example, the Environment Agency considers that “developments in the catchment areas of the two treatment works in Hailsham would be of particular concern due to the low dilution rates in the receiving watercourses flowing to the Pevensy Levels. Initial assessments indicate that these are critical works in terms of environment impacts of further development and we would recommend that development is directed away from this area”.

2.50 SWS does not preclude development in Hailsham but emphasises the need for clear planning within realistic timescales to provide the necessary infrastructure. What might be of concern would be if the Environment Agency were to impose higher standards than at present as a result of proposed new development.

2.51 In its Business Plan, SWS proposes a major investment programme to significantly reduce the number of properties at risk of foul flooding – a customer priority. However, OFWAT has only funded part of this programme over the next five years.

2.52 SWS's concern in respect of flooding is to avoid rain water entering drainage systems. The issue of flood defences is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. SWS advises, in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance, that no development should take place in floodplains where there is an unacceptable risk of flooding, taken to be where the risk is greater than 1 in 100 years (river) and 200 years (tidal).

Planning and water

2.53 SWS welcomes the South East Plan and associated new planning systems as the need for new water supply infrastructure is recognised. The current planning system, in SWS's view, has not always supported their needs perhaps because local government has not adequately understood the needs of the water industry.

2.54 In the past, water companies have submitted planning applications for new reservoirs but have subsequently been advised by the planning authority to address leakage and management issues first. The planning applications have subsequently not been pursued. Supportive policies in spatial development plans are now considered essential.

2.55 SWS now ensures it responds much more effectively to all local authority plans and consultations and ensures it is represented at public inquiries where appropriate.

2.56 Approved developments that are not in the local plan or are unknown to SWS for other reasons are likely to cause the most significant problems for SWS in being able to maintain its services in the future. Long lead-in times are required to enable adequate infrastructure to be put in place.

2.57 Developer contributions towards the cost of providing infrastructure for new developments do not help to address the current backlog of investment, but at least do not make the situation any worse.

Recommendation 6

East Sussex County Council needs to ensure that it works effectively with the water companies, Environment Agency, OFWAT and the district and borough councils, by developing new mechanisms for joint working if necessary, to:

- a) agree need, location and timing for new strategic water resources (particularly reservoirs); and***
- b) ensure adequate wastewater handling and processing facilities.***

Environment – recycling and waste

2.58 The County wide target for recycling next year is 27% of household collected waste which is envisaged to be difficult to achieve. The County Council

works closely at all levels with districts and boroughs to stimulate recycling activities.

2.59 Recycling credits from the County Council are paid to district and boroughs authorities currently at the rate of £33 per tonne of recyclables produced. This helps to fund their recycling activities.

2.60 However, this system leads to anomalies when assessing the success of different approaches. Lewes District Council, for example, is a low overall generator of waste per head of population but is lagging behind its recycling target because it does not collect “green waste” (vegetation left over from gardening etc). Wealden District Council, conversely, is performing significantly above its recycling target but generates more waste per head of population because it collects “green waste”.

2.61 The Board noted that some county councils have created, in effect, a single waste authority with their district councils responsible for waste collection and disposal. This approach avoids the complex systems of recycling credits in operation in East Sussex. This would help to achieve a common approach across the County where local best practice becomes the norm.

2.62 It is becoming increasingly difficult to find outlets for recycled materials and products, especially plastics. This is adding to the economic pressures facing local authorities and the recycling industry. Aluminium is perhaps an exception where the market is currently buoyant.

2.63 Options to make recycling more viable are emerging. Some authorities have been able to successfully market composted green waste (with added nutrients) through household waste recycling sites and, in one case, a local DIY store. Nonetheless, the future sustainability of waste disposal and recycling is dependent on further action by central Government.

Recommendation 7

The merit of creating a single waste collection and disposal authority, as has been tried elsewhere and suggested previously in East Sussex, should be explored further with a view to removing the disincentives to recycling.

Recommendation 8

Further possibilities for increasing the amount of green waste collected for composting in East Sussex, building upon the successes achieved by Wealden District Council, should be investigated with a view to reducing the demands on landfill and producing a marketable compost product.

Recommendation 9

The Government should be urged to be more proactive in supporting local authorities' aims of promoting and sustaining viable waste disposal and recycling programmes. Action includes:

- a) promoting research towards effective commercial recycling of plastics into marketable or biodegradable products;***
- b) promoting effective legislation to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging;***
- c) requiring higher standards for waste recycling or biodegradability; and***
- d) promoting research to increase capacity for providing energy from waste in a more publicly acceptable way, recognising the likely increased demand over the next 20 years.***

Transport issues

Access to services and employment

2.64 Economic development targets do not feature within the Local Transport Plan directly, although the economic vitality assessment of local schemes is assessed as part of a balanced scorecard approach to selecting traffic schemes that meet both national and local objectives. This ensures a balance between doing what is right for East Sussex and meeting national government transport targets so that the necessary funding is obtained.

2.65 The business community is sympathetic to the County Council's current position regarding the constraints imposed upon it by central Government, particularly in respect of the struggle to achieve road improvements across the County over the last 20 years or so.

2.66 The substandard nature of key roads, such as the strategic box comprising the A21, A27 and A259 (in East Sussex), ie. the weak east west links across the County are a real handicap as journey times are considered to be excessive. East Sussex is considered to have "missed the boat" in developing these strategic routes. This delay makes it doubly difficult to resolve these problems in the near future.

2.67 Not all the infrastructure improvements identified in the South Coast Corridor Multi Modal Study as being essential have been approved by the Government. The projects that have been agreed are slow in being implemented. Even when these improvements are made, East Sussex may still be unattractive to many commercial operators, according to the business community.

2.68 Had policies been different and the strategic box, say, been enhanced earlier then there may have been more speculative development along key routes before now. Instead there is, with a few exceptions, a shortage of speculatively built commercial space sufficient to attract business investment in East Sussex. There is strong anecdotal evidence that businesses have left East Sussex because of poor transport infrastructure, and, new businesses have not come here for the same reason.

Recommendation 10

The Council should research and develop all possible funding sources, through partnerships with the Government and in Europe, to address the strategic transport infrastructure shortfalls (road and rail) in East Sussex.

Congestion

2.69 Officers consider that congestion in East Sussex is primarily a feature of the trunk roads with a number of bottlenecks of traffic congestion on local roads at a small number of key locations at certain times of the day.

2.70 Officers contend that East Sussex cannot sustain the higher levels of housing development envisaged in the draft South East Plan unless and until the strategic and local transport issues are resolved. They have little confidence that these will be achieved because not all the recommendations of the South Coast Multi Modal Study have been agreed by the Government. The resulting issues then become more about accessibility of public transport, provision for cycling, walking etc.

Development contributions

2.71 The Council seeks planning contributions to address traffic safety and capacity issues. For residential developments it is often necessary to seek contributions to improve local accessibility for traffic schemes, local bus services, footpaths etc.

2.72 Commercial organisations consider that whilst planning contributions towards transport infrastructure improvement may be appropriate for housing developments, commercial developers consider such burdens unaffordable. This economic frailty is recognised and as a consequence these are not currently pursued in East Sussex.

Public transport

2.73 The business community considers that good east west rail links across the County and to Ashford will improve mobility of employment. Better access is needed to Newhaven, Gatwick and Ashford to facilitate high value added business and employment in the County.

2.74 The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is moving towards providing faster connections with fewer halts over longer distances together with improvements to rolling stock. So, future improvements planned in some areas (eg. the Brighton to London line) may result in inferior services elsewhere including proposals for fewer direct local services from smaller stations on the south coast line.

2.75 The Board considers it important to strike the right balance between meeting strategic and local objectives in respect of the rail network. Given the moves taken by the SRA, it is increasingly necessary to ensure integration between rail and bus timetables.

Recommendation 11

There is a significant need for greater integration between bus and train services in both rural and urban areas, for example, by promoting greater use of through ticketing and greater integration of bus and train timetables; alongside such initiatives must be better publicity campaigns.

2.76 The size of the task is immense if public transport is to become a viable alternative to the car. To reduce car usage by 1% requires a 13% increase in rail usage. There arguably is not the rail capacity at present to do this.

2.77 Bus services do not reach all areas of East Sussex. The national target for bus services in rural areas is not helpful in understanding the problem nor in identifying solutions.

2.78 School travel plans are being extended to many parts of East Sussex, but there are significant obstacles in promoting effective alternatives to using the car for the school run in some areas. School buses provide a safe and reliable alternative for many pupils. Whilst it is desirable to encourage walking to school through means such as walking buses, these are considered unsuitable for many areas.

Recommendation 12

Further clarity is needed on the effectiveness of the Council's objective of providing a co-ordinated county-wide passenger transport service that meets the urban and rural travel requirements of schools, social services and the public.

Attracting commerce and industry to East Sussex

2.79 The East Sussex Economic Partnership is undertaking an independent commercial study into possible development of mixed use sites comprising housing and commercial development. The Partnership considers that investments in infrastructure and transport are needed in order to help commerce, and ultimately to attract more jobs to East Sussex. The business community advocate the provision of a few sites that are immediately accessible and available cheaply to commercial operators.

2.80 Whilst the Board supports this approach as a way of making East Sussex more attractive to employers, it considers that care must be taken to avoid mixed use sites ending up being used solely for housing development.

2.81 The Board agrees that the provision of a range of business parks in East Sussex would be a valuable step in sending out a positive message that would help attract new businesses to and maintain current businesses in East Sussex.

2.82 Market town revitalisation would result in benefits that contribute to a number of sustainability factors:

- reducing reliance on out-of-county commuting;
- increasing the viability of local bus services; and
- stimulating local support services such as shops.

2.83 Many employers argue that, even if such an approach were adopted, they may still have to recruit skilled people from afar who may then commute long distances to work. The widespread introduction of Broadband across East Sussex is highly praised by the business community as it potentially reduces the need for travel to work and supports higher quality employment.

2.84 Successful introduction of a market town revitalisation strategy would require closer working with local councils, including parishes, to ensure successful integration of new businesses into the rural economy.

The East Sussex landscape, agriculture and tourism

2.85 Much of East Sussex comprises a rural landscape shaped primarily by agriculture and is ideal for wider development of tourism. The sustainability of tourism and agriculture are arguably interdependent in East Sussex. Farming is increasingly diversifying, although this is not possible for all. The continuation of the Hailsham market is considered critical for local animal farming to continue to be practicable.

2.86 The business community considers that the East Sussex landscape lends great potential for the development of equestrian tourism, golf courses and even larger scale holiday centres such as *Center Parcs*. As well as the transport and other infrastructure problems, the businesses have identified the business rates requirements for smaller ventures, such as equestrianism, as a key deterrent to small enterprises and farming diversification.

2.87 Tourism and farming diversification are undoubtedly important aspects of the East Sussex economy. But additionally, a range of jobs in service industries (especially the knowledge based sector) are needed to address some of the sustainability issues described above such as high levels of out-of-county commuting.

Ageing population and transport

2.88 Transport is a key issue for helping older people to maintain independence and quality of life. The elderly population is growing in East Sussex and there is an obvious link between good health and transport that allows mobility for older and disabled people.

2.89 Some villages in East Sussex have limited public transport, a lack of bus shelters and, in some cases, no pavements, all of which make accessibility difficult for older and frail people.

2.90 Bus access for people with disabilities is more a feature of urban bus routes, particularly on the new Quality Bus Partnership routes. However, such buses are rare on the rural routes. Since bus deregulation, the Council has little control over the types of buses used by operators.

2.91 The Local Transport Plan aims to provide for accessibility planning which takes account of services such as health and education etc. Such planning is intended to inform the investment in bus routes and the creation of new development locations.

2.92 The County Council has limited resources to subsidise bus routes currently providing in the order of £10m annually. It does provide features on the highway that give priority to buses over cars, and provide shelters and real time bus information in return for new fleets of accessible buses provided by the bus operators.

2.93 The particular transport concerns/issues of older people are:

- Community transport services are perceived to be very important in East Sussex and should be a mainstream service.
- Concessionary fares should be standardised across the County.
- Concessionary fares for rail transport are often a disincentive because of early morning restrictions on discount card use.
- Transport links to hospitals in the County are difficult partly due to changes in hospital provision and changes in bus services – greater planning is necessary to take account of this particular need. Age Concern is working with health to attempt to move more services out into the community to minimise the need to travel.

Self help

2.94 The Board questioned the extent to which local communities could be expected to take responsibility for local transport to fill some of the gaps left by the public transport service. The discussion has yet to conclude as a range of issues need to be addressed, such as costs and insurance implications for volunteers providing community transport using their own vehicles.

3 Objectives and scope

3.1 The Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee established this Best Value Review on 14 September 2004. The original aim, to be carried out in two phases, was to contribute to the County Council's preparations for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) from 2005 onwards by focusing on one of the five shared priorities – sustainable communities and transport.

3.2 The original scope for the best value review was:

- To audit and develop a comprehensive database of activities that supports the shared priorities, including *sustainable communities*, across all Council service areas and by East Sussex Strategic Partnership partners;
- To agree a definition of *sustainable communities* and an evidence-based definition of each of the shared priorities in terms of the needs of the communities in East Sussex; and
- To identify and explain any differences between the Council's view of the wider definition of *sustainable communities* and that of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister indicating whether action should be taken to address such differences.
- To report to the Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee on 10 March 2005.

3.3 The Board considered that the best way of achieving its aim was to examine sustainability from the point of view of the draft South East Plan which was under consultation during the course of this review. The Board's findings would then serve both as a practical example of Member investigation into sustainability and would support the Council in its deliberations on the draft South East Plan.

Membership and background to the review

3.4 The Best Value Review Board comprised Councillors Rupert Simmons (Chairman), Jon Freeman, Bob Tidy and Michael Tunwell.

3.5 The Project Manager was Paul Dean (Scrutiny Lead Officer) with support being provided by Amanda Watson (research), Margaret Fuller (scrutiny support) and Camilla Marlow (preliminary research).

Evidence sources

3.6 The Board considered the following documents as evidence:

- Project Initiation Document dated 9 December 2004 outlining the background to the review and its scope;
- Best Value and Sustainability – Solace, I&DeA and LGA Checklist;
- Sustainable Communities: discussion about definitions – short County Council research paper;
- Audit Commission Inspection Report on Sustainable Development in Oxford County Council (September 2004);

- Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report (July 2004);
- A Sustainable East Sussex: East Sussex Sustainability Strategy (April 2001);
- High Weald Sustainable Settlements Project;
- Quality of Life Counts in East Sussex (May 2002);
- The East Sussex Economic Study 2004-2005 (November 2004);
- Briefing Notes on the draft South East Plan by Strategic Policy and Information Group Manager (1 February 2005);
- South East Counties: Costing the Infrastructure Needs of the South East Counties – Roger Tym & Partners Research Findings (November 2004);
- Focus on East Sussex – Annual Monitor (May 2004 version);
- Consultation on the draft South East Plan;
- Sussex Coastal Towns Sub Regional Study – a report prepared for the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) (April 2004);
- Sussex Coast Sub-Regional Strategy – Options Appraisal;
- The South East Plan: Proposed Sub-Regional Strategy for the Sussex Coast – advice presented by East Sussex County Council on behalf of the principal planning authorities (October 2004);
- Covering letter to Mr Paul Bevan, Chief Executive, SEERA, 29 October 2004;
- Cabinet report by the Director of Transport and Environment on the Sub-Regional Strategy for the Sussex Coast (November 2004);
- The State of Housing in East Sussex: An Analysis of Housing Affordability in Sussex – a presentation from Step Ahead Research Limited by Sussex Enterprise (2004);
- Draft Executive Summary of a report Step Ahead Research Limited are producing, on behalf of Sussex Enterprise, looking at the state of housing in Sussex, from a business and economic perspective;
- All our Futures: Enjoying later life in East Sussex – conference report (September 2004);
- Best Value Review of Transport: Action Plan (July 2004);
- Housing Statistics – paper on housing need, affordability of housing, housing development, the South East Plan and economic statistics;
- Southern Water Services Limited (SWS) paper on its responsibilities and regulation in East Sussex, investment planning, assessment of growth, Water Strategy, Wastewater Strategy, plans for managing change and the South East Plan;
- Environment Agency letter dated 7 February 2005.

3.7 The following County Council officers have provided oral evidence during this phase of the Review:

- Bob Wilkins, Director of Transport and Environment

- Alistair Robson, Assistant Director, Policy Division
- Paul Treadgold, Strategic Policy and Information Group Manager
- Peter Hayward, Group Manager, Transport Planning
- Martyn Perry, Waste Services Manager
- Andy Arnold, Environmental Co-ordinator

3.8 The Board met with and took evidence from the following witnesses:

- Chris Kneale, Planning Manager, Corporate Strategy, Southern Water
- Meyrick Gough, Water Planning and Strategy Manager, Southern Water
- Diane Parr, Age Concern
- Hamish Monro, East Sussex Economic Partnership

Contact officer:

Paul Dean
Scrutiny Lead Officer

Telephone number: 01273 481751

E-mail: paul.dean@eastsussex.gov.uk

Appendices section held in the Members' Room. Copies available from name, Scrutiny Support. Telephone: (01273) 481581 or e-mail: scrutiny@eastsussex.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Recent history of sustainability in East Sussex

Date	Action
December 2000	<p>Local Agenda 21 (LA21) coordinator employed on 12 month contract to focus on strategy development. LA21 Panel of Members and external representatives established with Cllr McPherson as chair.</p> <p>Sustainability Strategy adopted subject to final consultations with external partners.</p>
April 2001	<p>Best value review of sustainable economic development reports on its assessment of the effectiveness of the County Council's activities aimed at promoting the attainment of sustainable economic development within the County.</p> <p>Final version of "A sustainable East Sussex" published with action plan. Contains the vision statement:</p> <p>Our vision is of a sustainable East Sussex in which everyone – in present and future generations – will share an improving quality of life.</p> <p>It will be a County of distinctive, prosperous, vibrant and accessible communities, providing a high quality of life and environment for everyone.</p> <p>The social, economic and environmental well being of all who live and work in the County will be a primary factor in all decision-making.</p> <p>The County will make a positive contribution towards achieving a sustainable global future through the careful use and protection of natural resources and through minimising the environmental impact of all activities within the County area.</p> <p>A sustainable East Sussex can only be achieved through partnership and shared effort – and if everybody accepts that they have both a role to play and a contribution to make.</p>
May 2001	<p>Conference held to discuss the establishment of a sustainability partnership.</p> <p>LA21 coordinator leaves. LA21 panel dissolved along with inter-departmental officer group.</p> <p>Survey of partners establishes that there is a level of interest and a monitoring sub group is established to develop the first annual sustainability monitoring report.</p>
May 2002	<p>Publication of "Quality of Life Counts in East Sussex". Includes the definition:</p> <p>'Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.'</p> <p>'A sustainable East Sussex is one in which everyone – in present and future generations – will share an improving quality of life. It will be a County of distinctive, prosperous, vibrant and accessible communities, providing a high quality of life and environment for everyone. The social, economic and environmental well being of all who live and work in the County will be a primary factor in all decision making.</p> <p>The County will make a positive contribution towards achieving a sustainable global future through the careful use and protection of natural resources and through minimising the environmental impact of all activities within the County'.</p> <p>Sustainability appraisal included as a key element of all the council's best value</p>

	reviews.
June 2003	The first community strategy for East Sussex "Pride of Place" published with the support of partner organisations. The strategy includes the promotion of sustainability as one of its four main objectives. A key factor in this document is a focus on "the improvement in the health and well being of our communities" .
February 2005	Best value review examining sustainability issues related to the draft South East Plan reviews the various definitions and suggests that the following elements should be included in an appropriate definition for East Sussex.

Appendix 2: Obstacles to housing development

RPG9, which is the Regional Spatial Strategy until the South East Plan is approved, sets an annual average target housing level for each Structure Plan area. East Sussex and Brighton & Hove (because that is the area for which regional planning guidance sets figures) have together almost reached this level. However, generally across the South East this has not been reached.

Housing completions in East Sussex including Brighton & Hove, between 1991 and 2004 achieved 99% of the provision figure set in the joint Structure Plan (annual monitoring report for 2004 *Focus on East Sussex*).

There are variations from the figures set for each district, with Eastbourne and Brighton & Hove over delivering and others, particularly Hastings, under delivering.

SEERA reported to their Planning Committee on 12 November 2002 on housing supply in the South East. The report is based on detailed interviews with the region's strategic planning authorities and inputs from the Regional Assembly's Housing Advisory Group. The report identifies several obstacles to housing development, not all of which may be applicable in East Sussex. These are:

- The Greenfield land directive in PPG3 requires that any proposals to develop greenfield land for housing relating to sites of at least 5 hectares or 150 dwellings and which the local authority resolves to approve, are to be notified to the Secretary of State before permission is granted. This slows down the process. However, there are few examples from the South East where notification has resulted in applications being called in. Local authorities state that this is influencing proposals to develop greenfield land across the region on a significant scale.
- Much new housing development, whether greenfield or previously developed land, requires co-ordinated infrastructures. Securing the necessary infrastructure is often difficult.
- There are long lead-in times before development can commence and a number of the sites have development lives of many years.
- There are also significant up-front costs associated with ground improvements, transport and community infrastructure and flood defences. This is creating cash flow problems in the early years.
- There are many cases around the region where transport infrastructure constraints are hindering the delivery of housing potential. The report highlights the particular problems in East Sussex along with Kent and West Sussex.
- The perceived impacts on physical, social and economic infrastructure are contributing to increasingly strong and vocal opposition to development of urban areas. It is argued that further development will overload existing transport networks, sewerage and drainage systems, schools and general practitioners surgeries.

- There are cases around the region where land ownership is acting as a major obstacle to development.
- There are complaints by local authorities of delays by the Government where planning applications are called in: examples of as long as 70 weeks between Committee date and the Secretary of State's decision have been reported for what are relatively small schemes.
- The requirement for local authorities and other public bodies to dispose of their surplus landholdings at the highest possible price can lead to protracted negotiations with planning authorities over acceptable alternative uses for sites.