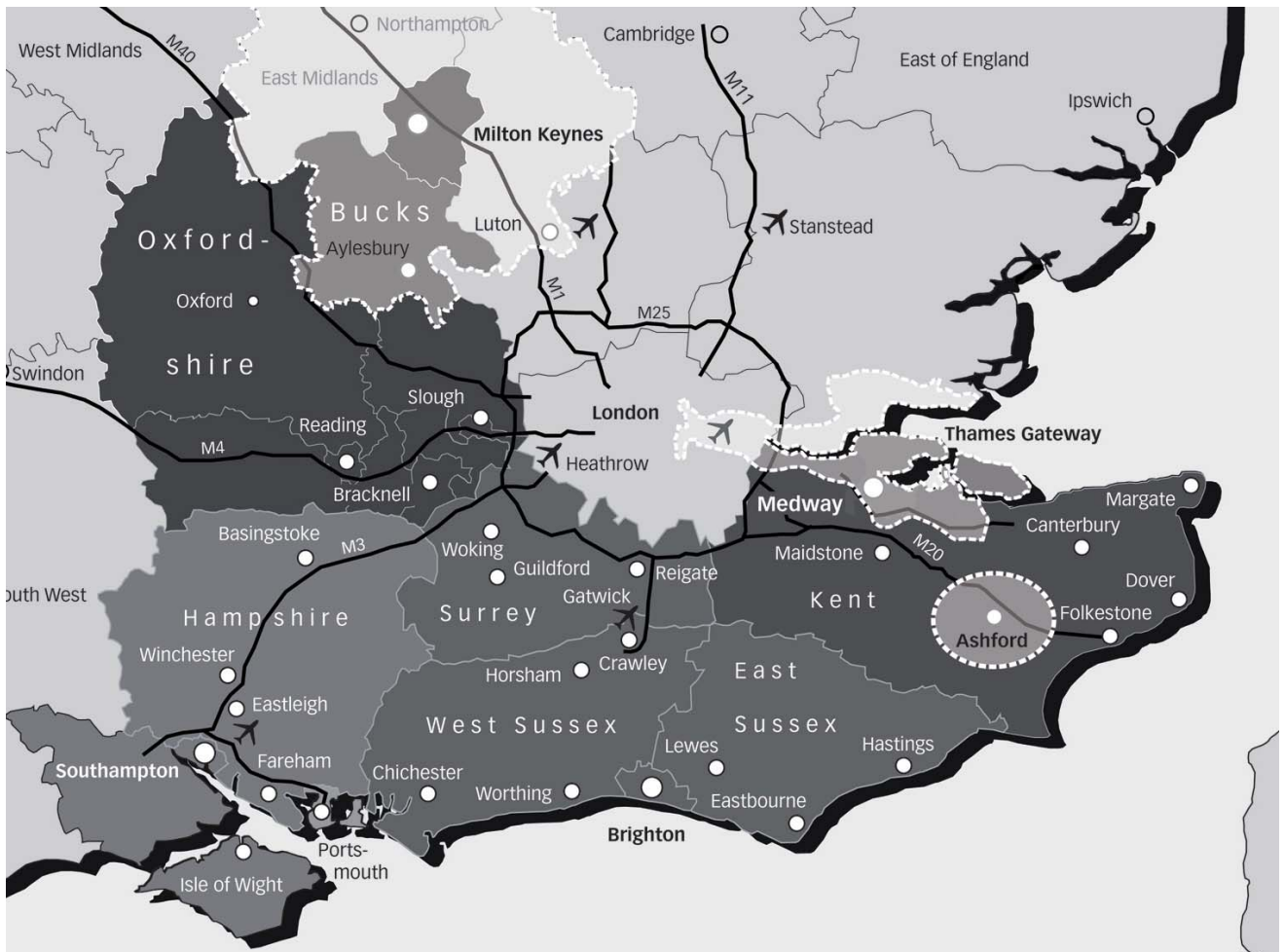


Strategic Developments

A report from South East England



There is a continuous tendency within democratic societies to hand down administrative responsibilities as keynote speaker Hamish McRae, editor of the Independent, pointed out on a SEEDA event in Brighton. For example, in 1999 the newly founded Regional Development Agencies took over functions previously carried out by central government. Since then their scope of responsibilities and their budget have been extended continuously. However England has still got a rather centralised than federal administrative structure.

The national level

Urban Task Force

Since New Labour came into power in 1997 various policy initiatives and acts have been established to promote a more positive and integrated role for planning. The Urban Task Force, chaired by the architect Lord Rodgers, was created in 1998 to develop practical solutions to tackle urban decline in England. The report "Towards an Urban Renaissance" established a vision for urban regeneration aiming at the revitalisation of English cities and towns. The comprehensive report (DETR, 1999) listed over 100 recommendations. Key objectives involved the re-use of brownfield land sites, the construction of compact mixed-use developments including affordable housing, environmental protection and investment in public transport infrastructure. The Task Force also recommended strengthening the power of local administrations.

The Communities Plan 2003

Although not all recommendations were adopted the Urban Renaissance has been successful in creating a positive image of urban regeneration and brought people back into cities and towns. After a turn in urban development policy was undertaken the government started to focus on rather specific problems like the housing supply in the South East and the low demand in other parts of the country. The Communities Plan (ODPM, 2003) is seeking for instant solutions to these problems due to forecasts about growing household numbers. The Plan highlights four national growth areas similar to the post war New Towns program with the intension of shifting growth and pressure of new developments away from economically successful areas west of London to the economically weaker rural and coastal areas and areas with capacity for growth involving new constructions on green-field land sites in the Greater South East. In 2005 Urban Task Force members published the short report "Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance" expressing their concern that urban regeneration might be unattended in favour of sustainable communities as regards the inequality in cities, social housing supply and the quality of design.

The regional level

Imbalances within the South East Region

The South East is the biggest and most successful English region in economic terms after London. Unemployment is below the national average and the region is the natural access point and international gateway to the UK. However there are significant imbalances within the region, as economic indicators proof (SEEDA, 2005). Most of the coastal areas run behind the regional and national average. In contrast, the western parts face problems of success including congested roads, the lack of affordable housing, skills shortage, the pressure on land and resources as well as a poor quality of the urban environments. Milton Keynes,

All figures by the author,
except for those indicated

Fig. 1 (previous page)
*The South East Region with
correspondent national
growth areas*

1998
Urban Task Force
1999
Report Towards an Urban Renaissance
Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
2000
Urban white paper
London Development Agency (LDA)
2003
Communities Programme
2004
PCP Act (New planning legislation)
2005
Towards an Strong Urban Renaissance

Fig. 2 (above)
*English planning policy, a
selection of acts and initiatives*

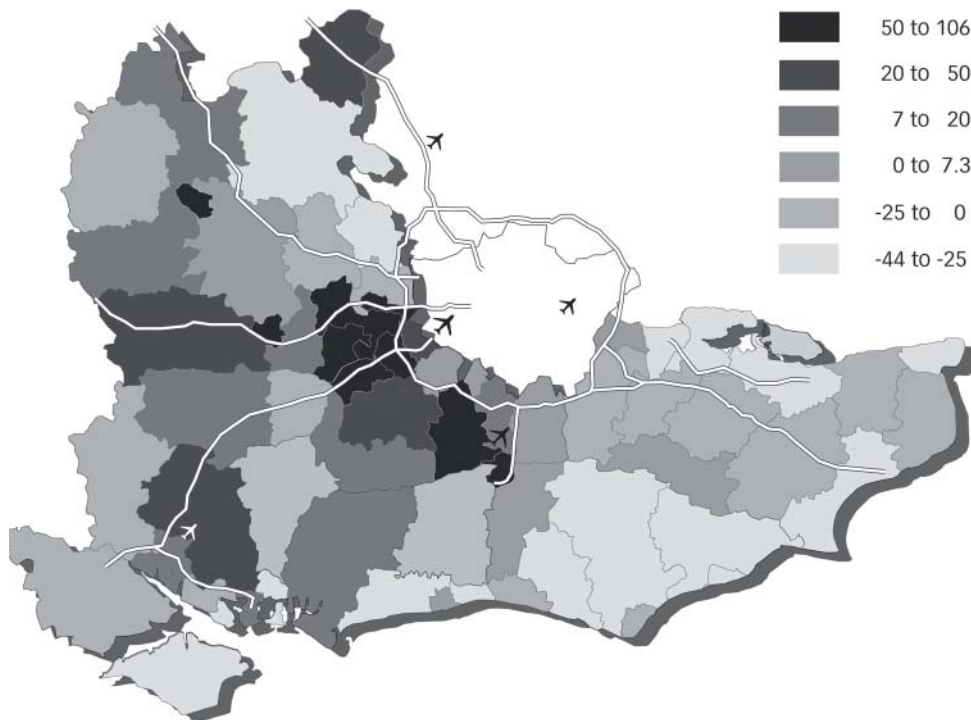


Fig. 3
 GVA per head (2002) relative to UK average. Used as indicator for economic condition in relation to transport infrastructure
 Own illustration (SEEDA, 2005)

Ashford and Thames Gateway are three of four national growth areas located in the South East Region.

Regional development

The policy initiatives involve two new public regional bodies. The Regional Assembly is the political representation and responsible regional planning body and consists of elected members of local authorities and experts. In contrast the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are subordinated to central government and have got to provide a macro-economic stability and to tackle market failures on the regional and local level. The RDAs develop a strategic vision of their regions using their statutory and non-statutory powers to achieve economic development, successful businesses, employment and skills and more in general, sustainable development. Their budget is determined by a formula reflecting the economic situation in each region. In recent years the RDAs received further duties in planning, transport and housing. SEEDA is one of nine English Development Agencies.

Strategic developments

The Statutory Role in planning engages SEEDA to get involved in important developments by defining consultation criteria to overcome structural imbalances within the south east region. Since 2004 local authorities and private developers have to consult the agency before a planning permission is granted. The criteria involve strategic infrastructure developments, projects above a certain size and priority areas defined through a Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

Strategic infrastructure

road and rail networks, airports, ports and inter-modal freight terminals

Size

- > 10 hectares
- > 10,000 m² commercial floorspace

Priority Areas

Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes, Coastal Kent & Sussex, the Channel Corridor South Hampshire

Fig. 4
 Definition of Strategic Developments

Monitoring Report

Methodology

Few things are known so far about the number and quality of future developments in the region. Thus the first monitoring report will give useful evidence and will be the basis for SEEDA's promotion strategy and the report to the Secretary of State in 2006. The analysis of the 3.3 development proposals monthly is based on a collection of information ranging from status, type of use to impact on infrastructure schemes. The analysis involves data collected at SEEDA between June 2004 and August 2005.

Spatial Patterns – Priority Areas

1. Just about one third of all 67 local authorities in south east England submitted strategic development documents to SEEDA.
2. Every second proposal involves residential developments bringing in over 23,000 housing units.
3. 60% of all development proposals derive from Kent where 11 of 13 Local Authorities submitted at least one development proposal.
4. 85% of all infrastructural developments (11) are clustered in Kent.
5. 75% of new housing developments are located within the growth areas of Kent and Milton Keynes. There huge developments are provided with about 9,500 units (Dartford) and 4,300 units (Milton Keynes) respectively.
6. Activities along the south coast are rather sparse except the urban areas of Brighton and Folkestone which account for 20% of all developments in the south east. The projects there are made up of housing, mixed-use schemes and infrastructure.

Summary

The analysis of spatial patterns highlights an unequal distribution of development proposals in respect of the priority areas. And there is evidence that less prosperous coastal areas in the periphery have failed improving their situation in terms of employment. They have only succeeded to attract infrastructural investment. The provision of office space is still focused on the inner South East and the growth areas.

Another aspect is the new planning legislation that encourages pre-application meetings. The so-called front-loading involves private developers at an early stage before an application is submitted. Thus the smooth and quick running of the formal procedure and the inclusion of regional economic aspects shall be assured. This procedure has failed so far because just one pre-application meeting was hold.

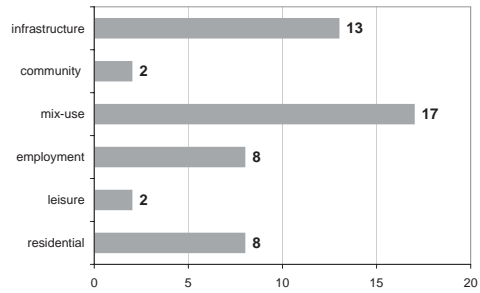
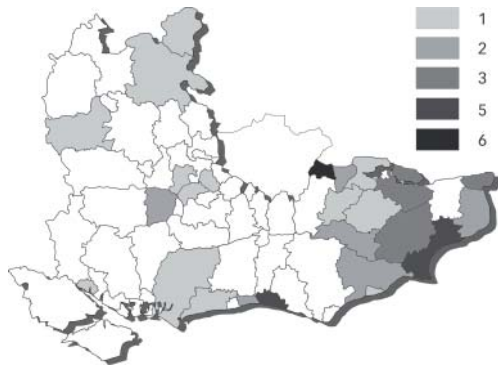


Fig. 5a
Strategic developments (50)
Spatial distribution and
land use

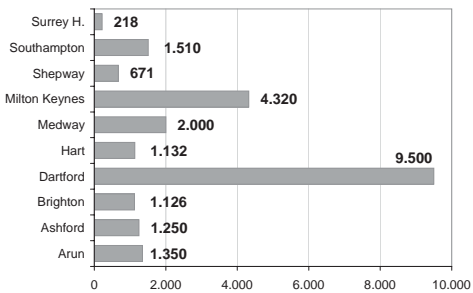
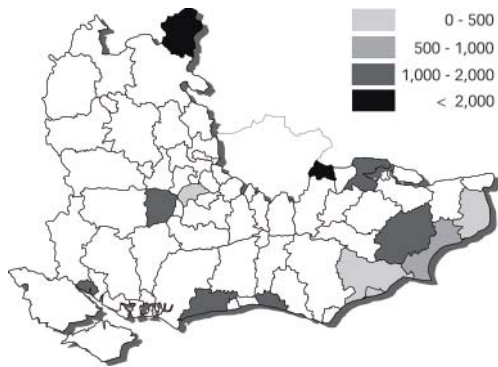


Fig. 5b
New housing units
Spatial distribution and
numbers

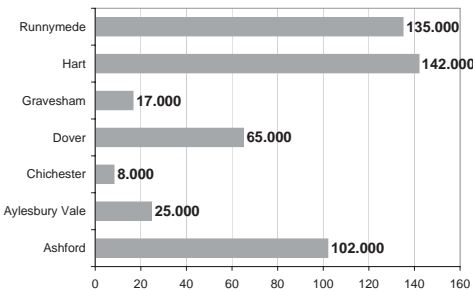
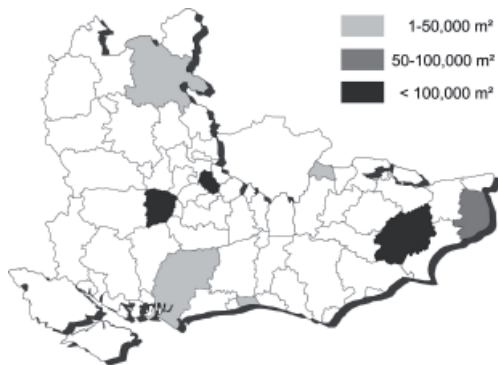


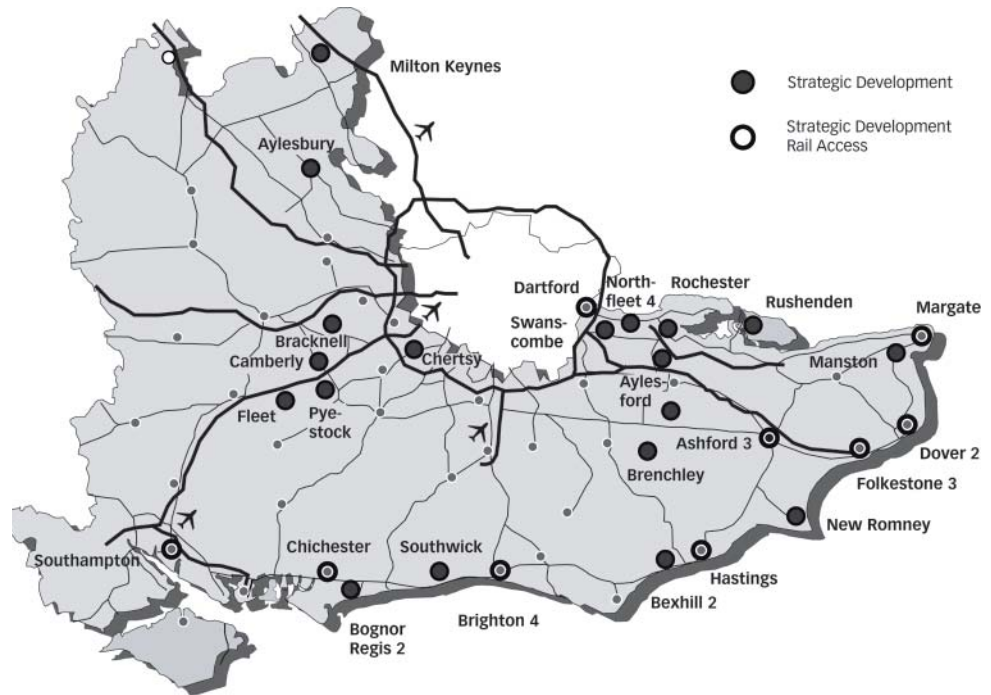
Fig. 5c
New office floorspace
Spatial distribution and
numbers

Fig. 5 a-c
Evaluation of data collection relative to
strategic developments

Consultation Brochure

The analysis has shown that there is still uncertainty about the type and scope of documents to be submitted by those who consult SEEDA. In terms of its statutory role in planning the agency is constrained to play a more proactive role in the future. The evidence taken from the report will help to promote this role among private developers and local authorities by producing a striking brochure. The 12-page brochure addresses developers and local authorities alike. It uses both text and graphic elements to illustrate SEEDA's statutory role and provides

Fig. 6
 Local distribution of strategic
 developments in relation to
 existing road and rail networks



guidance to the front-loading process and the type of document to be submitted. The brochure contains a map and detailed appendices about the current priority areas. It is due to be printed in spring 2006 with an initial edition of 1000 pieces.

The Woolston Riverside Development

The term Urban Renaissance has already become a branding name. But how are the abstract policy goals transferred into physical and social reality ?

A Case for Regeneration

The Woolston Riverside Development in Southampton will be used as a study case (Application No.05/00816/OUT).The Project is a joint initiative of SEEDA, English Partnerships (EP) and Southampton City Council (SCC). The former 12,5ha shipyard site near the mouth of the river Itchen will be redeveloped by 2013. A mix of uses including residential, marine related businesses, retail and community facilities shall create a liveable complement to the existing ward of Woolston.

The Site

Before any kind of construction can be started various preparative measures like the decontamination of ground and the removal of old industrial infrastructure have to be undertaken. The demolition and clearance of redundant buildings has already been determined by March 2005. Additionally the tidal flood protection walls need to be adjusted to current standards. Furthermore a solution has to be found to integrate the sewage works to the south into the scheme.

Illustrative Masterplan

The Planning Brief 2004 provides an early design framework for the development. The brief includes an illustrative masterplan conceived by Lord Rodgers. Three main elements characterise the proposal. The northern part of the area will maintain the identity of the place providing space for marine related employment uses. The southern part will be transferred into a residential quarter offering various types of housing including family townhouses, maisonettes, apartments and affordable housing. In the centre of the site a public main square will be located. The square connects the new buildings internally and integrates the adjacent areas externally. Grouped around the square shops, restaurants and community facilities will be provided. New public spaces open access to the river Itchen and alongside the waterfront. They contribute to overcome current barrier effects between the site and its immediate context. The nearby nature reserve will be extended by an inter-tidal garden.

Architecture and Access

Some of the warehouses will be kept and preserve the industrial character of the marine employment quarter. A central yard provides access to the deepwater riverside quays, boat building sheds, office and manufacturing units.

The residential quarter will be outlined with low-rise town houses nearby existing street frontages gradually rising to six and eight storey apartment blocks within the site. At the rivers edge, taller landmark apartment buildings, including three towers of up to 23 storeys will be located. About 25% of the 1,500 residential units will be affordable housing. The existing network of major and minor routes will be extended into the site opening up the river frontage to the Woolston community. The site is well linked by train and bus services and is within walking and cycling distance to the city centre. River crossings are provided by the Itchen (toll) bridge, which is free to cyclists.



Use	m ²
Marine-Related Employment	45.000
Retail/Leisure/Community	15.000
Residential	140.000
Total	200.000

Fig. 8 a,b

a Siteplan Woolston

b Woolston Riverside, floorspace

(SEEDA, 2004)

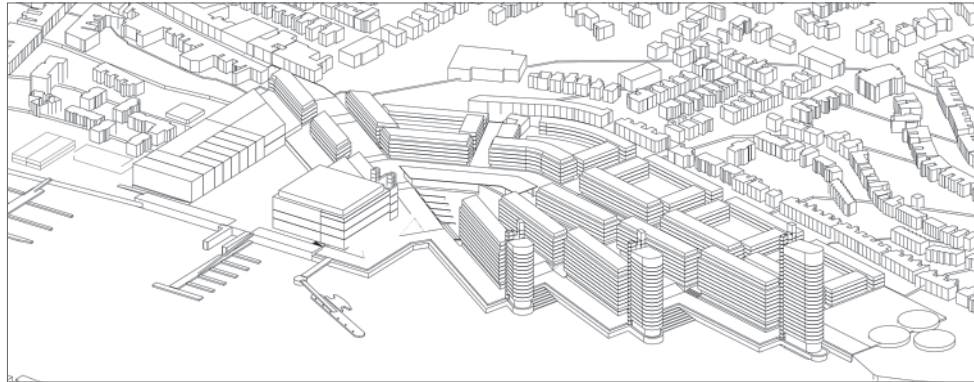


Fig. 9

Brochure „Consultation Requirements“ front & reverse cover

Conception by author (SEEDA, 2004)

Fig. 10
South west view from river Itchen
R.Rodgers Partnership 2005 (SCC,2005)



Public Involvement

As SEEDA and EP are public organisation the consultation process is used as indicator. As a result an extensive process involving the public, local communities and interest groups has been started. Information was spread and updated regularly by means of a website, newsletters, meetings and exhibitions involving the local media. Planning Brief and Masterplan were subject to a public consultation and endorsed by the City Council in 2004. SEEDA, as the owner of the site, submitted the planning application to SCC in 2005 asking for permission of the scheme in principle and for the alteration of the flood protection walls in particular. SCC has now to undertake a required consultation process among various stakeholders before the application can be granted.

Timetable

Developers for the residential and commercial projects are currently shortlisted. The beginning of construction works is scheduled for 2007 when all planning applications are granted and the decontamination and re-profiling of the river walls has been determined.

Conclusion

The Woolston Riverside Development led SEEDA to the paradoxical situation to comment on its own planning application. Obviously, the RDAs have to manage an increasing number of responsibilities in different fields like the statutory role in planning. They take the risk to water down their original duty as development agencies. Otherwise there is scope for the agencies how to play their new role. The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) is SEEDA's most important instrument and is required to be indication for the new statutory role.

Two things are crucial to fulfil the new task successfully. First, the role and the key objectives of the RES have to be promoted among local and private partners (cp. Brochure). Secondly, the revised RES framework needs to support the new statutory role in planning. The new planning legislation introduces community involvement to all kinds of stakeholders on the local level. People and interest



Fig. 11
*Public space in Chatham, a SEEDA
flagship project*

groups are asked to “have their say”. There are many opportunities to get involved and there is already a kind of “consultation fatigue” among local stakeholders. Even so, most positively community involvement does create local ownership for developments and projects.

In general, a more positive role for planning involves short process times. However the analysis of strategic developments in the south east proved that local authorities hold up various projects. Less than one third of the 50 proposed developments (14) have already been decided locally. Some of them were submitted more than 10 month ago. The empowerment of local authorities is an objective of the Urban Task Force and the new planning legislation likewise. But the intension will fail without the basic capacity and expertise in planning on the local level.

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