

Narrow outlook of housing consultation

Impact on South Downs ignored, particularly from road infrastructure

The South Downs Campaign (SDC) [1] is calling for greater consideration to be given to the impacts on the South Downs in response to the various housing consultations currently taking place in Sussex and Hampshire [2]. It strongly supports the focus of the new development being on existing urban areas and on brownfield sites. However, it remains concerned that despite it generally being accepted that building vast housing estates on the South Downs is not an option, most authorities are ignoring the potentially huge impacts that other infrastructure needed to support the new housing will have on the Downs. In addition, in the eastern Downs, the pressure is particularly acute to build hard up to the edge of this protected landscape.

The SDC has formally responded to the housing consultations carried out by the county councils and Brighton & Hove City Council on behalf of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA). The consultations will inform the housing distribution that will be written into the final version of the draft South East Plan before it is presented to government next year [3].

The SDC has found that the various consultations vary wildly in quality and complexity across the four authorities in question. In addition, there is little or no information being given out about the environmental implications of the proposals, so potentially damaging conclusions will be drawn about the level of housebuilding needed. Where information is available on a Council's website it is often hard to find, out of date, or far from thorough in its analysis of the environmental impacts.

The SDC is also concerned that in the debate about infrastructure, many people are missing the fact that the environment as a form of 'green' infrastructure also needs investing in. As more housing is crammed into the South East there will be greater pressure on landscapes such as the South Downs. The Downs will provide a respite for an increasing population, but this will require greater investment in visitor management, restoring the landscape, removing eyesores and improving access.

Chris Todd, Campaign Officer for the SDC said:

“Housing numbers are all the talk at the moment, but the full impact of this new development on the environment is all too often ignored or misunderstood. Places such as the South Downs need to be at the forefront of thinking when planning new development to ensure that they are properly protected for future generations. At the moment there is the distinct feeling that they are not. The knock on implications of building thousands of new homes in the South East could be devastating, for example as more people commute by car across the Downs or draw on its water supplies.

“All too often, when people talk of needing investment in our infrastructure they forget about landscapes such as the South Downs. There seems to be an assumption that these areas just look after themselves and that it is not necessary to spend money on them. This cannot be

further from the truth. Yet while this ‘green’ infrastructure requires some funding, the amounts are not extortionate and actually can provide very good value for money.”

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Notes to Editors:

- [1] The South Downs Campaign is a network of over 100 organisations. As well as many national conservation, environmental and amenity organisations who are members, the SDC has a growing number of members who are parish and town councils as well as many other local organisations – a full list of members is available on request. The SDC is generously supported by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.
- [2] Hampshire County Council finished its consultation on 21 October.
West Sussex County Council finishes its consultation on 4 November.
Brighton & Hove City Council finishes its consultation on 11 November.
East Sussex County Council finished its consultation on 31 October.
- [3] The Councils have to supply their advice to SEERA by 9 December 2005 so that it can be incorporated into the final version of the draft South east Plan which is to be presented to Government by 31 March 2006.