

Proposed South Downs National Park

Public Inquiry 2008

Proof of Evidence regarding objection by East Sussex Economic Partnership

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Introduction

1. I am Michael G. Cogswell Location Services Manager, Locate East Sussex. I have been employed to deliver inward investment services for East Sussex Economic Partnership since January 2004, with my office being based at Hastings. I have considerable experience in this role having managed investor promotion services in both East and West Sussex since 1996. I hold degrees of BA (Hons) and Master of Business Administration (MBA).
2. East Sussex Economic Partnership Ltd (ESEP) operates the investor promotion service for the County of East Sussex under the brand Locate East Sussex. Its purpose is to contribute to the County's prosperity by encouraging and facilitating the growth and retention of mobile investment into East Sussex. Its strategic objectives are as follows:
 - Encourage mobile investors to locate in East Sussex
 - Retain companies proposing relocation and to facilitate expansion and reinvestment
 - Promote the County of East Sussex as a business location
 - Work with the strategic organisations, developers and commercial agents to improve the property 'offer' including both sites and premises.
3. Sponsoring organisations for ESEP – and therefore its inward investment activities – include East Sussex County Council (ESCC) the South East England

Development Agency (SEEDA), and the five District/Borough Councils of East Sussex, including Lewes District Council.

4. ESEP has championed the refresh of the East Sussex Economic Development Strategy. A key factor is the development of commercial land and property which it believes is a major component in delivering sustainable economic prosperity in the County. ESEP has, through the Locate East Sussex service, the remit to facilitate the improvement of the poor quality and quantity of commercial sites and premises in the County – which is seen as an obstacle to increasing the levels of investor success. This approach is informed by an on-going programme of property evaluations and other studies commissioned by ESEP and funded by the Area Investment Framework, a programme devolved to the Partnership. Property evaluations have been commissioned for sites at Newhaven Eastside and Polegate, both affected by the National Park proposal.

About this proof

5. My intention is to set the commercial sites and premises context, illustrating the importance of the two strategic sites at Newhaven and Polegate (Wilmington) affected by the National Park proposals. I do not intend to reproduce the detailed arguments on boundaries made ably by colleagues at Lewes District and East Sussex County Council. I am concerned to assert the economic development consequences of these boundary decisions.

General Economic factors

6. East Sussex is underperforming, creating much lower levels of wealth (Gross Value Added per capita) than the UK (68%) and South East (62%) averages (*source ONS*) and with median gross weekly average workplace earnings some 88% of the UK in 2006 and 85% of the South East (*source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), Office for National Statistics*).
7. My opinion is that there is a general shortage of suitable sites and premises in the County which contributes to this poor performance. A case for protecting existing and increasing commercial floorspace in East Sussex can be demonstrated statistically through a comparison between commercial floorspace and the number of people of working age. As can be seen from the figures reproduced in full in Appendix 1, the floorspace ration per person of working age is -45% lower for offices and -48% for industrial than the average in England and Wales with an additional 207,000 sq.metres of office floorspace and 852,480 sq.metres of industrial needed in East Sussex to conform with the England & Wales average by 2011 (*Source Vail Williams 2004*). Other data shows that the quality (categorised by age) of commercial property infrastructure in East Sussex is generally very poor when compared to other areas in Sussex.
8. Concerns about the nature of transport links continue to underpin the challenges facing strategic planning for longer term sustainable economic development. The East Sussex Business Survey – which examines business attitudes to transport – found that around two thirds (66%) of businesses in East Sussex do believe that road traffic congestion/ journey times have some impact on their business (*Source: Step Ahead Research 2007*). The East Sussex Economic

Development Strategy has the ambition to improve the existing transport infrastructure essential to the success of key developments.

Newhaven

9. ESEP objects strongly to the inclusion within the boundary of the proposed South Downs National Park of the Eastside Business Park development site, Newhaven. The gross area of this site is approximately 11.2 hectares and could produce up to 360,000 sq.ft. of employment floorspace at a modest 30% site coverage. We consider that development of this site will, together with the regeneration of Newhaven Port, play a key part in the economic transformation of Coastal East Sussex. Inclusion of this site within the National Park will clearly stymie this ambition.
10. Newhaven and the Port/Eastside area is specifically referenced by SEERA in the Draft South East Plan (Policy SCT3: Local authorities are to unlock and implement sites with economic development potential, including port sites at Newhaven. Policy SCT6: Newhaven area - continue the regeneration of the town to strengthen its economic base, revitalise the port and improve the environment. Multi-agency plans should focus on the provision of appropriate balance of additional employment space etc).

This area is also specifically referenced in the following documents:

- SEEDA - Regional Economic Strategy: Priority (6) to invest in the long term sustainable growth of key ports particularly...Newhaven.
- East Sussex Economic Partnership - East Sussex Economic Development Strategy: as one of the industrial growth areas
- East Sussex Economic Partnership - Priority Sites Strategy: Eastside Business Park is a Priority Site
- Newhaven Partnership - Newhaven Eastside Masterplan: as the strategic commercial development site in Newhaven.

Wilmington

11. East Sussex Economic Partnership also objects strongly to the inclusion within the boundary of the proposed South Downs National Park of Wilmington.
12. Eastbourne and Hailsham and the land between, including Polegate and its hinterland, and to the west of Wilmington, have been identified as a major growth node for the economy of East Sussex. The Eastbourne Hailsham triangle as the area is known has been the subject of an economic blueprint identifying future growth potential including land for housing, and employment generating uses. This is highlighted in the Draft South East Plan, the East Sussex Economic Partnership's East Sussex Economic Development Strategy and Priority Sites Strategy.
13. Transport infrastructure for this area is also highlighted as requiring investment as a major link for east - west transport across the coastal south east. Accordingly, the South East Plan's Implementation Plan identifies the necessary

strategic infrastructure and specific reference is made to the need to improve the A27 at Wilmington.

14. Moreover, the Regional Funding Allocation for the A27 Wilmington improvements was agreed by the Secretary of State on the basis of the Regional Programme to 2016, with an anticipated start date of 2015.

Conclusion

15. The threat from the proposed National Park to a strategic employment area in Newhaven with generally good communications, close to the economic engines of Gatwick and Brighton, causes concern. This, together with a threat to strategic transport improvements at Wilmington, must be removed if the aspiration of the South East Plan is to be realised and the East Sussex economy is able to contribute more to reduce the present disparity with the regional economy.

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Appendix 1

	Total Working Population (2011 projection)	Total Stock sq m(current)	Floorspace ratio per person of working age	Variation from average for E&W	Extra floorsapce needed to conform with E&W ave. by 2011
East Sussex	292,486	460,000	1.57	-45%	207,000
Eastbourne	57,056	106,000	1.86	-35%	37,100
Hastings	51,823	103,000	1.99	-31%	31,930
Lewes	48,619	112,000	2.30	-20%	22,400
Rother	50,793	47,000	0.93	-68%	31,960
Wealden	84,195	91,000	1.08	-62%	56,420
England & Wales	31,734,779	90,855,000	2.86	0%	-

	Total Working Population (2011 projection)	Total Stock sq m	Industrial Floorspace ratio per person of working age	Variation from average for E&W	Extra floorsapce needed to conform with E&W ave. by 2011
East Sussex	292,486	1,776,000	6.07	-48%	852,480
Eastbourne	57,056	294,000	5.15	-56%	164,640
Hastings	51,823	337,000	6.50	-45%	151,650
Lewes	48,619	401,000	8.25	-30%	120,300
Rother	50,793	247,000	4.86		145,730
Wealden	84,195	498,000	5.91	-50%	249,000
England & Wales	31,734,779	372,960,000	11.75	0%	-

Source: Vail Williams 2004