

Coastal South East: A Framework for Action

March 2008

1: Background

As set out in both the Regional Economic Strategy and the RES Implementation Plan, the Coastal South East¹ has often been seen as “underperforming” economically: within the South East it is the area in which activity rates are low, the skills base is weak, and the incidence of deprivation is high. Indeed, if its economic performance was to match the regional average, GVA would increase by £13bn.



This underperformance is typical of many coastal areas. It reflects a combination of characteristics including relative remoteness,

¹ Coastal South East is broadly represented by four sub-regions and one special policy area as defined in the draft South East Plan: Kent Thames Gateway, East Kent (excluding Ashford), Sussex Coast, South Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight

isolation, deprivation, an ageing population, a transient population, poor quality housing, and limited agglomeration advantages resulting from a restricted (180°) hinterland.

Yet the Coastal South East is also different.

It is close to one of the most buoyant and successful world city economies (London) and within reasonable reach of a second (Paris). It also has a distinctive and important role within the Greater South East – the UK’s engine for growth and prosperity.

Added to that, ways of working and living are changing. Forced in part by congestion and high costs, but also by the possibilities offered by advanced telecoms, more people now work at least part of their time at home, or in more flexible working arrangements. The high quality living environment of the coastal area has become increasingly attractive as solutions to the problems of remoteness have started to become available.

2: Purpose

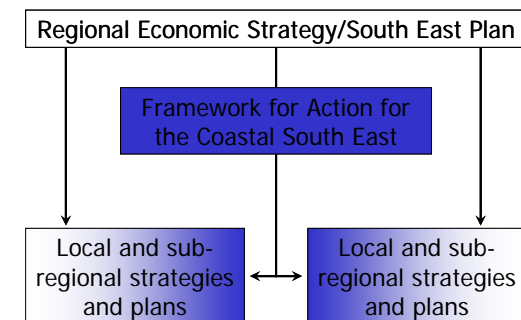
Against this backdrop, both the Regional Economic Strategy and the RES Implementation Plan included a commitment to working with partners to develop a strategic framework for the Coastal South East.

The purpose of the Framework for Action for the Coastal South East is to “*raise the [area’s] economic performance, by realising its untapped potential in an inclusive and sustainable way*”.

The Framework for Action **does not replace strategies and plans that have been developed at sub-regional and local levels**. In the context of wider targets and objectives, those prepared by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership, and partners in East and West Sussex, Isle of Wight, Brighton and Hove, East Kent and Hastings already identify and respond to specific opportunities and threats.

Equally, the Framework for Action **is intended to complement – not replace – the delivery of actions identified in the RES Implementation Plan**.

Figure 1: Fit of the mezzanine Framework



In both cases, the Framework will support implementation and delivery by providing a “mezzanine” perspective that takes the themes of the Regional Economic Strategy and develops their relevance and application at the scale of the Coastal South East (Figure 1).

Over time, it will add value by:

- providing a common and coherent reference point for local economic strategies and plans across the Coastal South East as they are refreshed
- supporting local partners from across the area in advancing a few Transformational Action Areas which are specific to, and relevant at the scale of, the Coastal South East.

These purposes are illustrated and explained further below.

3: The Vision underpinning the Framework for Action

The Framework for Action for the Coastal South East will contribute to a transformation in the way the area works and looks.

By 2016, a profound transformation of the economy of the Coastal South East – consistent with its assets and its prime location

in relation to London and the Greater South East – will be well underway. Significant progress will have been made in advancing a growth model that is consistent with carbon neutrality and in which the distinctive character of particular coastal places – both urban and rural – is enhanced and maintained.

In the process, decades of under-investment in the built environment and physical infrastructure will be reversed, and spirals of inter-generational economic exclusion and deprivation will be broken. At the same time, communities in the Coastal South East will be more balanced in terms of demography, providing opportunities for people of all ages to meet their aspirations and enjoy a high quality of life.

The strategies for achieving this overall Vision need to be bold and adventurous, but they must also reflect the particular challenges, opportunities and circumstances which exist in different parts of the Coastal South East’s geography.

In line with this Vision – and alongside locally developed strategies and plans – the Framework will help in two main ways.

First, the Framework reflects and distils **new forms of thinking, leadership and commitment to growth and change:** a transformation of how the Coastal South East

economy works and its economic positioning within the Greater South East. The Framework embraces growth but does so through a business model that differentiates itself by the creative use of coastal assets, renewing waterfront activities and supporting innovative – and sustainable – ways of living and working.

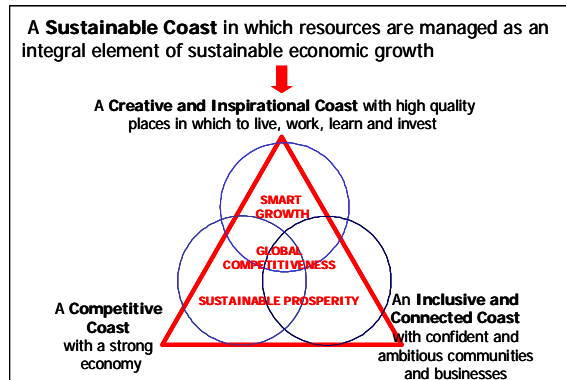
Second, the Framework **creates scale benefits** which enable the Coastal South East to be a major contributor to overall regional success. It provides new and sustainable solutions to pressures of growth across the wider South East. The Framework is premised on the Coastal South East becoming, over time, a real source of sustainable growth, changing internal and external perceptions and reversing a century of relative coastal decline.

4: Framework Priorities

Underpinning the Vision is an Overarching Priority that the economy of the Coastal South East must be genuinely sustainable.

The area’s natural environment is of a high quality and much of it is of designated status. Development pressures and opportunities need to be managed carefully and environmental assets harnessed appropriately. At the same time, there is a need to anticipate the emerging opportunities and threats linked to climate change, recognising that parts of the coastal environment are especially vulnerable.

Figure 2: Advancing the Vision for the Coastal South East: Framework Priorities



Beyond this, the Framework is structured around **three main Priorities, defined at the mezzanine scale** (Figure 2). All three are informed by the headline Objectives from the RES – Sustainable Prosperity, Smart Growth and Global Competitiveness – but with particular interpretation at the scale of the Coastal South East.

I: A Creative and Inspirational Coast with high quality places in which to live, work, learn and invest

Although in need of new investment, the built environment across much of the Coastal South East is of a high quality and most of it is situated in environmentally outstanding locations. In the context of changing lifestyles and working practices, there are substantial

pan-coastal opportunities to garner new wealth and derive substantial local benefits – in terms of sustainable economic development – from it.

More particularly – and in a context that is both *urban* and *coastal* – significant growth across the cultural and creative industries, linked in part to higher education, is attracting people to live, work, learn and visit. The transformation of Brighton and Hove over the last decade is a case in point. Elsewhere (e.g. Hastings) significant strides are being made in establishing a revitalised coast which is creative and inspirational, providing high quality places in which to live, work, learn and invest; creating vibrant coastal town centres is absolutely key to this. Ensuring that this process continues is an on-going priority.

II: An Inclusive and Connected Coast with confident and ambitious communities and businesses

Across the Coastal South East – as in coastal areas elsewhere – the challenges relating to isolation have been a primary cause of economic under-performance. Although physical connectivity may be less of an absolute imperative than it once was, it is still very important. It matters because it impacts on the available opportunities for both individuals and businesses. Hence connectivity solutions need, in addition, to

recognise the fundamental importance of socio-economic inclusion and addressing inter-generational challenges as well as responding to the needs, threats and opportunities linked to transient population groups; transport is a major part of the solution, but not the whole story.

From across the Coastal South East, there are already clear examples of the opportunities unleashed through improved connectivity. The resurgence of coastal towns in East Kent in the context of the CTRL domestic (due to open fully from 2009) provides ample evidence of the impacts that can potentially follow.

III: A Competitive Coast with a strong economy

The economy of the Coastal South East includes businesses from all sectors. Their growth needs must be recognised through the provision of appropriate workforce skills, premises, business support, and so on. Existing sub-regional economic strategies have already responded to the needs of locally defined priority sectors; in Urban South Hampshire, for example, the potential linked to advanced manufacturing has been researched and priority interventions have been defined in response. Progress with regard to the implementation of these actions needs to be supported.

At the same time, however, it is clear that where the economy of the Coastal South East is distinctive is with regard to businesses which are intrinsically maritime – in sectoral focus, location or infrastructure – and therefore are inextricably linked to a coastal location. These firms and sectors warrant particular attention within the Framework for Action – recognising the opportunities that may be afforded at the mezzanine and pan-Coastal scale. These must be pursued in a manner that complements the delivery of the wider sectoral development needs and opportunities identified in local and sub-regional strategies and plans.

5: Transformational Action Areas

Underpinning the Framework for Action is **an over-arching need for actions relating to re-branding and marketing**. These will need to capture the distinctiveness of coastal assets together with the outstanding quality of life choices that coastal/waterfront communities and locations can provide. These will also need to reflect the area's huge opportunities and potential in the context of the Greater South East.

In addition, working with key partners, four substantive Action Areas need to be advanced. These are summarised below.

Action Area 1: Identify coastal sites where redevelopment could enable the creation of new mixed use communities including high quality, high density, living and working environments with outstanding physical and virtual communication links

Potentially, key coastal locations could act as demonstration projects which harness economic potential through the creation of mixed use communities offering new ways of carbon neutral living and working.

To achieve this, strategies should be developed for key sites and opportunity areas (where it is possible to achieve transformation through tackling a number of small sites across a wider area), and a long term (15-20 year) perspective taken on implementation.

Site strategies need to be based on an understanding of economic, social and environmental conditions and opportunities, and take account of activities which depend on a waterside location for their continued viability.

Over the long term, an appropriate mix of high quality development will help to change perceptions of an area, particularly if intervention is planned to enhance existing assets (e.g. important buildings or public spaces - including the waterside, and maritime-related economic activities). Demanding

sustainability criteria must form a core element of the development frameworks for coastal sites, where climate change is a critical consideration. Strategies should identify the need for public sector interventions, the scale of that involvement and the potential funding sources available, and attract support from all the key stakeholders.

Action Area 2: Focus on improving productivity and business performance across a range of sectors, but paying particular attention to businesses which rely on the coast as a primary resource

The Coastal South East economy underperforms on various dimensions, and steps must be taken to improve its competitiveness. Key to this are measures to increase the skills of the local workforce, to improve rates of business start-up and growth, and to encourage business investment.

In addition, there is a need to recognise the scope and potential of business sectors which are intrinsically maritime including ports and port-related logistics, marine industries, offshore renewable energy, creative and cultural sectors, and the visitor economy. Many of these activities are knowledge-based and in advancing Action Area 2, there will be a need to ensure that relevant higher education

institutions (HEIs) and other research bodies are engaged fully and effectively.

Action Area 3: Develop priorities for long term investment to improve coastal connectivity for the main urban areas (including major new developments), recognising the distinctive contributions that can and should be made by different transport modes, and responding to the different imperatives surrounding orbital and radial routes (including links to London)

Given the need for lower carbon growth and the limited available resources, the emphasis must be on high density public transport solutions and next generation broadband (including equipping businesses and communities to use it to full effect). However the need for selective improvement of strategic road links must not simply be ignored as too difficult or too controversial.

Transport and connectivity issues exist at three levels:

- *Coastal South East Gateway Functions:* A fundamental role of the Coastal South East is its function as a gateway to the UK. Defining, strengthening and safeguarding this role is critical to the economy

- *Connect Coastal South East:* The challenge of connecting the Coastal South East “internally – east and west” as well as facilitating better links to London remains central to improving the attractiveness and performance of the sub-region
- *Innovative Transport Lifestyle Choices:* One possible differentiator for the Coastal South East will be new ways of organising work-life-leisure balances to reduce dependence on private vehicles as part of the Coastal South East lifestyle brand. Leading edge thinking around urban design and Smart Growth increasingly looks toward walking, cycling and public transport as the cornerstones of sustainable futures.

Against this backdrop, key priorities include the following:

- maximising the economic and social benefits of recent and committed improvements, such as CTRL international and domestic, and A3 Hindhead Tunnel
- improving the provision and take-up of broadband, including much more extensive wireless networks in the Coastal South East towns
- improving connectivity within the Coastal South East’s functional urban areas, and

supporting the effective functioning of the urban hierarchy

- improving orbital connectivity along the south coast, particularly between Dover and Thanet and within East and West Sussex, through investments in road, rail and innovative bus schemes
- exploiting the regeneration potential for the Coastal South East ports of increased short sea shipping and more marina facilities.

Action Area 4: Build civic leadership and alignment across the geography of the Coastal South East so that a transformational Vision for the area will be embraced and delivered, and to support the development of strong and inclusive communities whose members have the aptitude and skills needed by the new economy

The overall governance and performance management framework within which the Framework for Action will be implemented is undergoing changes as a result of the Government’s Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, and resulting adjustment to sub-regional partnership arrangements in the South East. To take forward the new governance proposals

and the demands of the Coastal South East Framework for Action:

- investment should be made in developing board, management and leadership competencies at sub-regional and local scales
- working groups should be established, on a time limited basis, to focus on a small number of priorities which are best developed and implemented at the scale of the Coastal South East
- following on from the activities of these working groups, it may be appropriate to establish Multi Area Agreements at Coastal South East scale to take forward some aspects of the Framework.

To support implementation, a monitoring and evaluation framework should also be put in place, reflecting the imperatives of the Framework for Action.

Fit with other actions

These four Transformational Action Areas are distinctive to the Coastal South East and it ought to be possible to add value and impact by advancing them at this scale.

However they are not the complete solution: the mezzanine scale needs to be a partial one,

if it is to serve its purpose of adding coherence and providing a “check and challenge” for other interventions. In delivery, the four Transformational Action Areas must complement – and be supported by – a range of interventions undertaken both across the South East as a whole, and more locally within specific sub-regions and localities.

6: Moving Forward

The Framework for Action for the Coastal South East outlined above is:

- adventurous in approach
- anchored around the distinctive assets and opportunities which define the Coastal South East
- consistent with the opportunities afforded by the mezzanine scale
- transformational in starting to define a new Framework for sustained and sustainable economic development across the Coastal South East.

Over the months ahead, delivery priorities should be reviewed in response. Across some parts of the Coastal South East, this will mean that existing priorities are endorsed and energised. Elsewhere, it may require some re-focusing of activity, such that across the

Coastal South East as a whole, the purpose of the Framework for Action can be realised to the full: to “*raise the [area’s] economic performance, by realising its untapped potential in an inclusive and sustainable way.*”