

A Strategic Vision for Hampshire

The Hampshire Vision has been prepared by CPRE Hampshire as a stimulus to debate the future of the county. It emerges from a concern within CPRE Hampshire and others that the essential qualities of the county are at risk of unplanned and uncoordinated growth. The Strategic Vision for Hampshire is a first step to a more defined and sustainable approach towards meeting the needs of the area.

Hampshire Strategy

The demise of structure plans for the county and regional plans for the south east, removed the strategic framework for managing the impact of new development pressures. They have been replaced by plans and strategies of a number of organisations including all the local authorities, PUSH, two national park authorities and two local enterprise partnerships.

None of these provide an overview of the economy, housing, infrastructure, and the environment over a geographical area of sufficient size to provide real or spatial options for development, improved infrastructure, green infrastructure or communities.

There have been major changes within Hampshire following the financial downturn of 2008, demographic changes, the designation of two national parks, and a new emphasis on natural capital and ecosystem services. Few of these have been considered in terms of impact across the county, or in terms of spatial options.

Hampshire needs to develop a strategy that retains and enhances its distinctiveness, provides viable policies for the future and which is supported by key organisations operating in the county. It needs to underpin Local Plans, should not just be a land use strategy, but one that cuts across all sectors, and links both the private and public sectors. In developing a strategy, the views of local communities must be considered to help inform its content. The coming departure from the EU and devolution of powers and funding to the area will be a part of this process.

Case study: The New Forest

The New Forest has long been recognised as a place of special importance for landscape, nature conservation, ecology, cultural heritage, tranquillity, as well as recreation and well-being for the benefit of those who live in surrounding areas and the public at large.

The New Forest has sub-regional, national, and international importance and this was recognised in the recent creation of the New Forest National Park. Not all of the National Character Area of the New Forest enjoys National Park protection, however. Much of the area outside the National Park is designated as Green Belt. Overall, over 90% of the New Forest district is designated as National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Site of Scientific Interest (SSI), or Green Belt.

As such it plays a vital role in a sub-regional context, sitting between the large built up areas associated with the cities of Southampton and Bournemouth

Accordingly, in County Structure Plans and the South East Regional Plan, the strategic position and importance of the New Forest was acknowledged as an area of restraint for development by providing for a low net additional dwelling requirement to the District. Strategic planning then allowed additional numbers, so far as necessary, to be allocated to more appropriate locations such as Southampton, where brownfield sites can accommodate them.

Yet today, based on local Objectively Assessed Housing Need, which makes no allowance for its sub-regional, national and international importance, the wider landscape of the New Forest is faced with an expectation to provide a massive additional 11,740-13,740 homes between 2016-2036, 3-4 times the current target. This cannot be done without serious adverse impact on the special contribution that the landscape of the New Forest, which does not merely begin and end in the National Park, makes to the County. A Strategic Vision for Hampshire, underpinning reviews of Local Plans, would prompt appropriate solutions to be found, as in the past.



Vision

The vision statement must be aspirational, robust, realistic, and flexible subject to a wide debate through partners and stakeholders. The aim is for Hampshire's countryside to be protected and enhanced for the future.

The larger towns of the county and Solent urban area would continue to be hubs of significant but appropriate development, and focused on regeneration in place of urban sprawl, with good access to green space. A formal Green Belt around the southern cities should be defined and designated to prompt urban regeneration, prevent sprawl, Southampton, Portsmouth and Winchester from joining together and losing their separate identities, and protect the 'ecosystem services' provided by the adjoining countryside, helping to maintain a continuous area of green rural landscape between the New Forest and South Downs National Parks.

The smaller towns and villages of the county should be able to grow, with the scale of development reflecting their needs, rather than wider demand. We should promote the health and well-being of the residents of the county, as well as low carbon economies.

Development & Economy

The special character of Hampshire can only be protected if future development is managed to take account of its full environmental impact. Hampshire should be an attractive and prosperous place, in which to live and visit. The Hampshire economy is varied, and its diversity and strength should be cultivated and encouraged.

We should also promote the best use of the county's labour force matching its skills and developing them to meet new challenges. An emphasis on better paid and full-time jobs would be welcome. Separately, the ability to work from home, either in new start-ups, or more generally, continues an established trend with reductions in seasonality of employment and commuting. The impact of high speed broadband and self-employment needs to be examined. Large-scale commuting to work has brought considerable strain on infrastructure and its impact on the environment needs to be reduced.

Housing

Future requirements for housing should be based primarily on the number of homes to meet the housing needs of the county. The County Council could play a role in advising on housing numbers and locations for development. They should be based on the latest available household forecasts. They should also reflect existing dwelling stock and be balanced to ensure consistency with ONS whole country and whole region projections. Housing numbers in Local Plans need to be realistic and achievable.

New homes provision should aim to meet the needs of all residents; both in terms of affordability and choice of tenure, be adaptable to changing circumstances, and be of good quality design as well as environmentally friendly. A significant proportion of new housing will need to be types of social housing.

The aim should be to foster and build communities rather than just provide houses. There will be a variety of development concepts needed. To discourage commuting, new development should be located close to employment opportunities, facilities, and public transport to promote more sustainable forms of transport.

The possibility of free-standing settlements with new employment opportunities in suitable locations should not be excluded. Major re-development schemes, such as at the former garrison towns of Whitehill & Bordon in East Hampshire, and the Wellesley new neighbourhood in Aldershot, are examples.

Environment & the Countryside

Hampshire contains a great variety of landscapes, habitats, historic features, villages and small towns. It has two national parks, three AONBs, chalk steams of international renown, large areas designated for nature conservation, and stretches of protected coastline. These have special protections, but there are also many 'valued' landscapes, often of down land and heathland, which are undesignated.

This rich variety needs to be celebrated and acknowledged, and Hampshire's essentially rural character needs to be protected and enhanced.

The countryside provides extensive ecosystem services, including food, water and raw materials, water purification, air quality, flood prevention, soil formation, nutrient recycling, and health, well-being, recreation and inspiration. Beautiful landscapes, dark skies and tranquillity, are essential elements of well-being. It is vital that these ecosystem services are recognised for the benefits they provide to the population of Hampshire, and that they are held in trust for future generations.

Protection and enhancement of rural character will involve identifying, for development, 'restraint countryside' of high landscape value and ecosystem benefit outside the protected areas.

So, the impact of new development on Hampshire's natural environment and cultural heritage needs to be better understood, and carefully evaluated. Hampshire's cities, towns and villages need to be revived, improving the quality of life for those who live and work in urban areas.

The connection of residents of the county with the natural environment also needs to be improved. The countryside is one of Hampshire's most important assets and its future closely linked to the rural economy and farming. Its contribution to the county should be better supported.

Transport & Connectivity

Reliance on the private car should be reduced by ensuring new development has good access to public transport networks. New roads should be avoided where they may attract additional traffic and development in the countryside, but other improvements in infrastructure essential to the county should be taken forward, such as health provision and schools.

Conclusions

Hampshire could achieve a remarkable transformation and one that respects its character, and yet remain part of the wider geography. Economic growth would not be suppressed but would be more closely defined and channelled. The detail required of a strategy and vision is a matter of conjecture, but it needs to be underpinned by evidence.

There is already a wealth of data that can be co-ordinated at county level. One of the problems of developing and implementing such a strategy will be competing or conflicting ideas, but a new approach, well-articulated, will have significant benefits for the county.