



Surrey prepares for projected growth with pioneering county-wide infrastructure study to help manage development

Summary

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South East, also known as the draft South East Plan, will require over 59,000 new homes to be built in Surrey renewing concerns about how such growth is to be managed.

The county's response, one of the first of its kind in local government in England, is taking the form of a county-wide infrastructure study to assess the overall impact of a projected 20 per cent increase in new build homes between 2006-2026 on its roads, rail, schools, hospitals and other infrastructure. The work will involve Surrey County Council, 11 district and borough councils, key infrastructure providers (transport, utilities, education, health) and other interested stakeholders (the voluntary sector, community services, business).

The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project started life in late autumn 2008 with a three-year remit to plot a

practical path towards managing the county's proposed population, employment and housing increases, and their likely impact on the local economy. It will identify historic deficits in current infrastructure provision as well as assessing its present condition and future needs.

David Hill, Chief Executive, Guildford Borough Council:

"The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project is of major significance in Surrey. We hope to develop a robust understanding of the infrastructure provision needed to manage future development in the county, starting by identifying the current shortfall in provision."



“Through the Project, Surrey is taking a pioneering approach to partnership working that seeks to improve the quality of life for residents and businesses through provision of, and access to, local services that fit the needs of our communities.”

“Sustainable development is our watchword.”

Project background

The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project is a response both to the recommendations of the RSS for the South East and its potential impact on the county’s place-shaping policies, which are directed towards creating a better quality of life for the county’s residents. It is one of the first studies of its kind to be undertaken in a two-tier authority in England and is particularly complex, given both the size of the area and the large number of district and borough councils involved.

Development in Surrey has traditionally been on small sites that do not attract associated infrastructure provision. These, in turn, have led to an uneven spread of growth and increased pressure on some parts of the County. The RSS proposes a 20 per cent increase in Surrey’s housing output adding, in real housing numbers, more than 59,000 new homes to the county’s districts and boroughs by 2026, with all boroughs experiencing some growth. The full effects of such an influx are uncertain. While Surrey has historically managed to deliver its housing targets, it has been dependent on windfall sites becoming available, a largely ad hoc approach which has lacked a county-wide perspective and resulted in a cumulative strain on infrastructure.

In its initial stages, the project will incorporate an infrastructure audit of existing provision in transport, health, employment, education, community services and the environment, and project this against the county’s future needs.

“The Project will bring key infrastructure and service providers together both to identify current deficits in provision and assess the impacts of growth on Surrey and its future infrastructure needs,” explained Project Manager Damian Testa. “It will give us the ability to look at current pressures, assess the effect of the proposed growth and set the strategic direction for infrastructure provision in a way that keeps the best interests of the community at heart.”

The work involves all 12 Surrey authorities together with a working group of key providers and technical experts in transport, highways, utilities, the emergency services, health, adult social care and education. A Project Board has been set up to provide strategic direction and to monitor progress against key deliverables.

The chair is David Hill, Chief Executive Officer of Guildford Borough Council, who is sponsoring the project on behalf of the Surrey Improvement

Partnership (SIP). SIP is an alliance of local councils, and a sub-region of Improvement and Efficiency South East, the South East’s Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, which is funding the project.

Objectives

The Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project will deliver a set of strategic infrastructure schedules (together with the financial costs of delivering them) as a blueprint for managing projected growth in the county. These will be used by all stakeholders in the county (and not just by local government) with the clear intention of creating sustainable communities rather than isolated housing estates.

The project will also develop the expertise of councillors and officers and equip them with the skills sets, understanding and perspective to better manage the planning process and assist in the culture change required. Their buy-in, and those of other stakeholders, will be secured, in part, by facilitating councillor and officer training on a county-wide basis, in particular on how to use the schedules when considering planning applications for strategic infrastructure.

The project’s first year is focused on an infrastructure capacity audit being carried out by a consultant team led by Colin Buchanan, a leading transport, planning, urban design and economics consultancy.

This will look at the current deficit in the county and the likely pressures affecting future provision as well as the economic cost of doing nothing. Any planned development in neighbouring counties with a potential impact on the infrastructure needs of Surrey will also be examined.

Engagement with the broad spectrum of stakeholders is also being targeted through the Surrey Infrastructure Forum.

This will give around 200 stakeholders drawn from across the local government, public services, utilities, transport and the voluntary, community and faith sectors the opportunity to input and share their views on the core issues.

In year two, there will be an emphasis on producing infrastructure schedules at both district and borough level. GIS maps showing infrastructure capacity and condition (derived from the earlier audit) will be produced together with seminars and training on the use of the schedules. There will be continued engagement with stakeholders and a focus on fostering strategically driven partnership working between all Surrey authorities.

Anticipated benefits

The Surrey Infrastructure Forum (SIF) will contribute to the Project by drawing on a wide cross-section of opinion from all stakeholders involved in the county's projected housing, economic, employment and population growth.

"The perception is that Surrey has grown without adequate infrastructure provision and that some of what exists is worn out," commented Project Manager Damian Testa. *"The Forum will provide valuable input into how forecast growth will affect employment, population and community development, and how it can be managed."*

The SIF was launched on 4 February 2009 as a half-day workshop centred on the infrastructure capacity audit. The consultation team led by Colin Buchanan introduced the core infrastructure planning issues and provided an update on the early streams of work. This was followed by a working session in which delegates sought to identify the strategic and local pressures in Surrey, the key infrastructure planning issues in managing the projected growth and how these can be addressed and who needs to be involved.

It is anticipated that the SIF will meet twice a year to give the broad spectrum of stakeholders the opportunity to attend and be heard.

A tangible benefit of the project is that it will provide strategic support to Surrey's 11 districts and boroughs. Importantly, it will avoid duplication of effort by assisting districts and boroughs in the development of their respective local infrastructure schedules and, in due course, in the development of their Local Development Frameworks.

"This will save time, money and resource," said Damian. *"Without the project there is a risk that gathering the evidence base could be repeated 11 times in some shape or form."*

"This way we move forward together and in a manner that will also provide a foundation on which to base further partnership working."

Risks

Political buy-in from all sides and from all Surrey Authorities is a pre-requisite for the project's success.

Damian Testa again: "We need to manage the delivery of the RSS by working in partnership across Surrey and that needs the full support of elected members and officers for the strategic approach we're adopting. We'll be addressing complex issues around place-shaping – how communities are to develop strongly and sustainably rather than just absorbing growth.

"We intend providing officer and member workshop training on handling planning applications whose scope extends beyond local areas and which affect Surrey as

a whole. This will help secure their commitment to and use of the strategic infrastructure schedules."

There is a risk too, that the project could lose momentum due to the current economic climate should this result in a loss of political interest.

Recognised progress during this first year of operation remains crucial in securing continued funding for the project during years two and three.

This will, in part, be assessed in relation to the governance structure put in place, including the success of the Surrey Infrastructure Forum and, by May 2009, clear progress on the infrastructure capacity audit and the provision of a set of strategic infrastructure schedules.

The launch of a dedicated website to serve as an information portal for all stakeholders will also be a measure. This will contain essential details about the project and have a discussion forum for stakeholders, who will also be able to identify important contacts.

Transferability

As one of the first studies of its kind, the Surrey Infrastructure Capacity Project is building a replicable model that could be applied across the south of England, or in any region where housing, economic, employment and population growth will place extra strain on existing infrastructure.

Managing projected growth will be an issue for every county, and the solution will demand an integrated approach to spatial planning that local government cannot deliver in isolation or with currently available resources and skills.

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