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PUSH: South Hampshire Strategy 2012 and its update

Matters of concern raised by the Hampshire Chamber and for discussion with PUSH Chief Executive

The Chamber's Planning and Transport Committee has been monitoring the economic policies of local plans throughout the life of this strategy. Over the last 5 years or so, they have focussed, in particular, on the western half of the PUSH area including Fareham. The Chamber has discussed and commented on all of these and has appeared at several Examinations.

There has been a constant theme to the Chamber's contributions ... and that is that the amount of land being allocated by Local Plans for business purposes has been inadequate, firstly, because it is out of step with both the aspirations of PUSH and the needs of business and, secondly, that PUSH's "cities first" approach has not delivered the city centre offices on which the strategy depends.

However the Chamber's views have been consistently opposed by the Local Authorities. At the Public Examination stage the Planning Authorities have relied on PUSH as the justification of their economic policies in the face of the Chamber's and other's objections and this argument has been accepted by Inspectors as a sound basis for approval. This is despite the PUSH Strategy not having been independently scrutinised.

PUSH's Economic Strategy was then embedded in the Strategy of the Solent LEP published in March 2014 and was in turn quoted by Inspectors, for instance on Eastleigh's Local Plan as justifying its economic and employment policies.

However neither PUSH nor the LEP comment consistently on Local Plans or take part in Public Examinations. Nor it seems do they have any measure for monitoring delivery.

Now that PUSH's Strategy is being reviewed, the Hampshire Chamber wishes its comments/views to be taken into account in the following ways:

1. Delivery of existing PUSH strategy:

The following information should be collected and published as "Monitoring and Review":

- a. What city centre office development has taken place and what losses;
- b. Provision of additional land for business by local plans and what losses
- c. Sectoral analysis of business land allocations
- d. Distribution of commercial allocations between the western half of the PUSH area and the east
- e. The take up of allocations
- f. The number of years reserve of land

In setting benchmarks for this monitoring and review, this analysis should look at **the loss of employment land** as a starting point., and in particular :-

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- the change of use of existing office space in city and district centres to housing
- development of prime city centre sites to other uses eg student housing.
- Redevelopment of commercial sites for housing .

In both Southampton and Eastleigh, significant sites and acreages have been changed to housing, for a number of reasons. In Southampton, there has been a net loss of commercial land and premises which cannot be made up in the City and has not so far been made up in Eastleigh or the other adjacent district, Test Valley.

The overall picture is of a strategy for economic growth which is not delivering, aggravated by significant reduction in the quantity of commercial land and the needs of an expanding population.

2. For the Updated strategy:

The following key points should be explored as the basis for a refreshed spatial strategy for economic growth:

- a. Downgrade reliance on city centre offices (see Hampshire Chamber's views on Southampton City Council's Issues and Options; Sept 2015)
- b. Upgrade provision for logistics especially port based and rail freight. (see emerging Logistics study of Solent LEP)
- c. Identify and make provision for specific sectoral businesses such as composites and a second knowledge based science park
- d. Upgrade provision for small and general businesses, both as replacement space and new .
- e. Explore opportunities around rail stations eg Boltey
- f. Look at imbalance between the East and west of the LEP area. The east has Dunsbury Farm, and Daedalus
- g. No reliance to be put on Eastleigh's Riverside
- h. Make provision for relocation of businesses from flood threatened areas eg Soton's Itchen Riverside (west bank)
- i. Avoid any reliance on Government or public funded infrastructure.
- j. Be realistic about limited options for transport improvements and rising levels of congestion.

In general, make the PUSH strategy more Business focussed than policy led as it is at present ...and make this a separate test from the employment/floorspace balance.

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3. The timescale for Local Plan review versus the LEP Strategy to 2021

There seems to be a major problem in the speed with which PUSH and Local Plans can react to changing needs and investment opportunities. The LEP's economic strategy seeks to deliver improved growth in the period 2015 to 2021. The lead time in the PUSH update and then of the Local plans means that there will be no change to any of the economic policies or allocations within the next three years or so.

4. The independent scrutiny of the PUSH strategy

The independent scrutiny of the PUSH strategy is urgently required; there is currently no effective means by which PUSH's policies can be looked at critically. Objections and comments of business and others are not independently examined. There is a democratic deficit here.

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Hampshire Chamber of Commerce is the Independent Voice of Local Business across the county and is one of the largest business representational groups in the UK. It brings together the combined influence, expertise and business support of the county's three former major Chambers of Commerce. This substantial business network engages businesses of all sizes and in all sectors, whether throughout Hampshire, or in local groupings as and when required to focus on the areas of Solent LEP, Enterprise M3 LEP, South Hampshire, the New Forest, North or East Hampshire, or the city regions of Portsmouth, Southampton, Winchester and main towns such as Aldershot, Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Fareham, Farnborough, Fleet, Gosport, Havant.