

SESPLAN RESPONSE

The overarching premise of the plan – to “identify where future growth is best directed” is fundamentally flawed. It is too narrowly focussed to meet the needs associated with population and economic development over the time frame being considered. It therefore needs to be radically changed to ensure that it is more adequately balanced to meet the tripartite components of sustainable development rather than just one of its components. This is in keeping with the commitment of the Scottish Government to sustainable development and but is too focussed on only one of the components: so-called “sustainable economic growth”.

At the drop-in consultation meeting I attended in Musselburgh it was claimed by the professional planners that the environment is a cross-cutting issue which gives it greater prominence in decision making about land allocation. This is patently nonsense as environment does not figure in the three components of the spatial strategy, nor in the definition of “what success look like”. The stated vision for the plan meets the wider objectives of achieving sustainable development, but in its details looks at growth to satisfy housing demand and stimulate industrial development as if these were the only two elements that mattered which is patently not correct.

The spatial strategy should be reworded to reflect the need to achieve a genuine balance between social, environmental and economic components. The following wording should therefore be adopted in the revised plan:

“A clear spatial strategy which achieves improved care for the natural and cultural environment and protection of the priceless high quality agricultural land, whilst providing space for meeting the need for additional housing and other development.”

The three elements of the spatial strategy are acceptable as far as they go, but miss out the environmental component. I propose that a fourth element is added ***“A place for nature for people to protect, use and enjoy”***. This is wholly in keeping with the emerging healthy people agenda based on the fact that residents are more likely to in good health and recover more quickly from illness if they live in and have access to a pleasant, green, attractive and well cared for environment. It is also in tune with the ability to successfully market an area for industrial investment if the outdoor environment is attractive and well cared for.

Similarly, for the SESplan vision there is no outcome measure for the natural and built environment. Nor is there any reference to the importance of agricultural land. The plan should therefore have revised outcome measures to include the following:

Communities recognise the importance of protecting the key natural and cultural environmental assets.

The highest quality agricultural land remains available for food production.

On the strategic growth options, I agree with the recommendation in the plan that the majority of the growth for housing and commercial/industrial land should be secured within Edinburgh. The simple reason for this preference is that there is plenty of land within the city boundary and that such development substantially reduces its environmental footprint compared with locating growth outside the city. For example, it provides opportunities to develop local energy supply schemes which are mandatory in other European countries, such as district heating and combined heat and power schemes and therefore help urban communities consume their waste, so reducing the amount to be land-filled. For example, it avoids developing new infrastructure, especially transport for journey to work, and is a more efficient way of providing educational, health and other infrastructure. Building within the city also avoids totally changing the character of the towns and villages, which would make them less inviting places to live.

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