



## **Policy Framework for Gaps**

**December 2008**

## **Foreword**

This is one of a series of Policy Frameworks produced by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) to guide the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. The Policy Frameworks are intended to provide a sub-regional context for detailed policies and proposals in individual Local Development Documents, within the overall regional policy framework contained within the South East Plan.

Gaps are spatial planning tools designed to shape the pattern of settlements. They command wide public support and have been used with success in successive structure and local plans to influence the settlement pattern of South Hampshire. Local Development Frameworks are being prepared which will replace Local Plans, and these LDFs need to re-designate Gaps.

This Policy Framework sets out criteria to guide LDFs in designating Gaps and also identifies the location of cross-boundary Gaps. The aim is to ensure a consistent approach to Gap designation across South Hampshire.

This, and the other Policy Frameworks, can be seen on the PUSH website at: [www.push.gov.uk](http://www.push.gov.uk).

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Whilst the focus of the strategy for South Hampshire is to secure improvement in economic performance, this is set within a wider policy context that seeks to safeguard and enhance the environment and improve the overall quality of life for those living here.
- 1.2 From the outset of spatial policy formulation PUSH has placed great weight in safeguarding the separate identity and character of settlements in South Hampshire.
- 1.3 In the past, the Hampshire County Structure Plan safeguarded strategic gaps between significant settlements. District local plans then identified boundaries for each strategic gap. They also designated local gaps to protect open breaks between other settlements.
- 1.4 The Draft South East Plan includes a policy (SH3) for sub-regional gaps across the region and also lists the sub-regional gaps in South Hampshire to be defined in detail within Local Development Frameworks(LDF). However, the Government proposes to delete this policy in finalising the Plan. PUSH is objecting to this proposed change. It does not give sufficient weight to the importance of gaps and leaves planning authorities with insufficient statutory guidance, especially where such gaps might cross administrative boundaries.
- 1.5 Irrespective of whether the final version of the South East Plan identifies sub-regional gaps in South Hampshire, this Policy Framework has been prepared by PUSH to inform the preparation of LDFs, with the aim of ensuring a consistent approach to the designation of gaps across the sub-region. The submission which PUSH has made to the Government that a policy and list of sub-regional gaps should be included in the final South East Plan, is consistent with the content of this Policy Framework. Even if the final version of the South East Plan does not include such a policy and a list of strategic gaps, the approach advocated remains relevant to the designation of gaps entirely through LDFs.

## **2 Need for Gaps in South Hampshire**

- 2.1 Gaps are spatial planning tools designed to shape the pattern of settlements - they are not countryside protection or landscape designations. They command wide public support and have been used with success in successive strategic plans to influence the settlement pattern of south Hampshire.
- 2.2 The Government has acknowledged that the particular circumstances of South Hampshire may justify the designation of Gaps, through the following statement which it proposes to include in the final version of the South East Plan: *“South Hampshire has a dense and complex settlement pattern, and accommodates a population of nearly a million people. Within the urbanised parts of the sub-region, there are substantial areas of*

*undeveloped land. If local authorities in South Hampshire consider the inclusion of local gaps as essential in terms of shaping the settlement pattern, this policy approach will need to be tested through Development Plan Documents.”*

- 2.3 PUSH believes that the designation of gaps within South Hampshire is essential to help shape the future settlement pattern, so that the 2 million square metres of new employment floorspace and the 80,000 new homes 2006 – 2026 can be accommodated but in ways which will avoid the coalescence of settlements and the loss of settlement identify.
- 2.4 Gaps can have other positive aspects: in retaining open land adjacent to urban areas which can be used for new/enhanced recreation and other green infrastructure purposes.

### **3 Criteria for the designation of Gaps**

- 3.1 To ensure consistency across South Hampshire and to avoid any proliferation of gaps which could preclude sufficient land being made available for employment and housing development, the following criteria should be used by local planning authorities to select locations for the designation of gaps in South Hampshire:-

**a) The open nature/sense of separation between settlements cannot retained by other policy designations;**

**b) The land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence.**

**c) In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.**

3.2 Local Development Documents will identify the location of the gap(s) and include a policy and ancillary documentation which show on an Ordnance Survey map base the extent of land included within the gap(s). The policy will set out the types of development which will be permitted within the gap(s) based on the principle that development within Gaps will only be permitted if:-

a) it would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of settlements; and

b) it would not individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development compromise the integrity of the gap.

- 3.3 The designation of a gap therefore does not completely preclude development. Proposals which would not adversely affect the function of the gap and which would otherwise be acceptable in planning terms could

be permitted. However the cumulative impact of a number of even small scale developments could have a significant impact on the sense of separation between settlements and would be a consideration in the decision making process.

- 3.4 In considering the future planning of the land within defined gaps, the local planning authorities will consider opportunities for the positive uses of the land within the gap to meet wider planning objectives, such as provision of green infrastructure.
- 3.5 The designation of gaps is an integral part of the overall strategy for South Hampshire. Their role and their boundaries will therefore be included as part any review of strategic development requirements.

## **4 Gaps which cross administrative boundaries**

- 4.1 Gaps which cross local planning authorities administrative boundaries would benefit from a coordinated approach to ensure that gap designation and the extent of the gap is aligned across the administrative boundary. This Policy Framework deals with the former by identifying the location of those cross-boundary gaps which PUSH considers are of sub-regional importance in terms retaining the settlement character of south Hampshire and with the latter by proposing a joint approach to gap boundary delineation by the authorities involved. In the event of any differences in gap delineation, PUSH could provide a forum to mediate and assist in their resolution.
- 4.2 The following cross-authority gaps will be designated in Local Development Documents subject to further studies and consultation between the authorities involved:-

1. Between Southampton and Eastleigh/Chandlers Ford
2. Between Southampton and Hedge End/Bursledon/Netley
3. Between Fareham and Fareham Western Wards/Whiteley
4. Between Fareham/Gosport and Stubbington/Lee-on-the-Solent

*(NB: Some of these may also be designated as sub-regional gaps if Policy SH3 is retained in the final South East Plan).*

## **5 Review**

- 5.1 This Policy Framework will be reviewed at each review of the South Hampshire sub-regional strategy/South East Plan.