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Councillor John Beare (SESplan Convenor) &
Councillor Russell Imrie (SESplan Vice-Convenor)

SESplan Joint Committee

By email c/o SESplan Acting Manager to:
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16 May 2019

Dear John, & Russell,

I write to advise you that the Scottish Ministers have decided to reject SESplan 2. The reasons for this decision are set out in the decision letter that has now been issued to the SESplan Strategic Development Plan Authority by the Scottish Government's Chief Planner.

I appreciate that this will be disappointing for the authority. I am also aware that the issues that have arisen in this case are not new, and that for some years now the constituent authorities have found it challenging to achieve an effective approach to strategic planning in the SESplan area. However, I strongly believe that it would not be in anyone's interest to continue to accept a less than satisfactory situation and adopt an inadequate plan that has not been properly supported by robust evidence and appraisal. The South East Scotland area is critical to the success of Scotland's economy and growth, and development must be effectively aligned with infrastructure planning to ensure that the needs of existing and future communities across the area are properly understood and met.

Whilst I fully respect that it is for the authority to decide what it will now do, I recognise that you may have questions about the implications for local development plans in the area. In the short term, ahead of future legislative change, the constituent authorities should continue to work towards preparing local development plans for their areas that are consistent with SESplan 1. There will also still be benefit in the authorities completing the work on transport infrastructure required for the SESplan area as this can be used to inform future local development plans.

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In the medium to longer term, the Planning Bill provides an opportunity for authorities to move forward from the unsatisfactory legacy of strategic planning in the area. The positive co-operation supporting the Edinburgh and South East Scotland city region deal and partnership could be a catalyst for improved alignment of strategic planning with infrastructure investment in the future, with fuller collaboration and more purposeful partnership working. A longer-term, strategic approach to housing delivery would clearly also benefit from further input and support from the development sector and infrastructure delivery partners. Following the Planning Bill, and depending on the outcome of Parliament's scrutiny, I also expect that the next National Planning Framework (NPF4) has the potential to provide a clearer basis for more flexible, collaborative and effective strategic planning for the area.

In the meantime, I have asked John McNairney, the Scottish Government's Chief Planner, to meet with your officials to discuss the matter further.

Young age
Kevin

KEVIN STEWART

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