

What are the South West Debates?"

The Regional Economic Strategy for South West England (RES) sets out a shared vision for the development of the region's economy to 2015 and provides a delivery framework to influence and guide what regional partners do.

Although the core vision, drivers and strategic objectives are right for this timescale, the recent RES process identified five emerging themes which are going to influence regional economic success beyond 2015:

Securing economic growth within environmental limits

A growing, ageing and more diverse population

Energy challenges

Leadership

Competitive threats and opportunities from globalisation

We don't yet know how these themes are going to develop or what impact they will have on the region's economy. The purpose of the SW Debates, therefore, is to scope out and research the main issues around each theme, debate what they mean for the region's economy and seek agreement on the way forward. The outcomes will help shape the development of the next Regional Economic Strategy in 2008. And the business voice needs to be heard else those most important to the economy will not have a voice. Please get involved in this debate.

The website for the debate is at :- <http://www.swdebates.info/>

Securing economic growth within environmental limits

The first debate is 'Securing economic growth within environmental limits'.

The FSB in the SW has had several debates around this issue over things like Energy, waste and Transport. However for this debate we need to look at the topic as a whole and it will inevitably cross over into other parts of the SW Debate like globalisation and energy challenges, but don't worry about that. It is more important for business owners to say what they think and for those thoughts to be fed into the debate.

1. We are told that the SW currently uses resources as if there were 3 planet Earths instead of one. Does this worry you? Should we be taking action?
2. What are the business implications of taking action or of not taking action? It might help to think of them in terms of business opportunities and business problems.
3. What are the particular issues affecting small businesses?
4. Is there a timescale for living within environmental limits? Is it permanent or temporary?
5. What is the timescale for action? Are we too late?

One of the problems is that the environmental impact of choices by individuals or individual small businesses is negligible, but when put together, the impact is large.

The UN Climate Change Expert group has just published its report. They are 90% certain that the warming that has already been observed is the result of human activity.

White surfaces reflect heat away. Melting glaciers and melting Arctic sea ice means there is less to reflect heat away. This is an example of a feedback mechanism and there are many more. Scientists are very concerned that we are nearly at the stage where so many feedback systems are helping climate warming that nothing we do will make any difference. They all seem to think we have no more than 10 years to change matters.

6. What do you think would convince people and/or businesses that changes are required?
7. What kind of changes do you think are required?
8. What is the best way to get the message over to people?
9. Is this just a white middle class agenda?
10. Is there an inevitable link between social inequality and environmental degradation? If so, how do we engage both ends of the income spectrum?
11. Do – should - all people have a right to the same ecological footprint?
12. Are all parts of the environment - water quality, biodiversity, landscape – of equal importance? Which parts of the environment can be sacrificed? In other words, there can be a conflict between 'the pretty' and reducing carbon dioxide levels. In such a conflict, which should take priority? In what circumstances? Eg dualling the A303 – the 'pretty' won and the 'cost' will be at least an extra 3500 tonnes of CO₂ released into the atmosphere a year
13. How do we create a level playing field?
14. Can we significantly limit connectivity to national and international markets and still maintain a successful sustainable economy?
15. Do we need to limit connectivity? To what extent do we need global and national markets?
16. Must everything be local?
17. Will we need to close doors to second homes in the region to preserve the SW way of life?
18. How can we have a regional view when we are part of a national system?
19. Are we truly prepared to constrain economic growth to conserve environmental quality?
20. Is spending to cut economic growth sustainable?
21. Is regulation and legislation the only way - or can we achieve the same outcomes with the carrot approach – using incentives such as tax credits?
22. Do we know what generates how much CO₂ and where it comes from? Can we use this information to agree a system of priorities? Who is the 'we' and how might it be 'agreed'?
23. Should we introduce carbon rationing or a carbon allowance that can be traded?

Explanatory note:- one idea is that every good or service have 2 prices; a monetary price and a carbon price. People will either be given a carbon allowance which they can use or sell. Or they will have a basic allowance and if they want any more, they will have to buy it. The trading option

is attractive for a number of reasons – it could be another way of helping those on low incomes such as pensioners for example.

24. Is it possible for the region to become 100% self sufficient in energy?
25. How do we tackle transport and energy – the big environmental issues for the South West?
26. Can we carry on doing what we are doing in an economic way but in a less resource intensive way?
27. What's actively in our ability to control (focusing effort?)
28. What actions do we take to reduce CO2 to acceptable limits?
29. What can the public and private sectors do to increase the pace of transition?
30. Can/should the public sector lead by demonstration?
31. Should the public sector lead regional procurement of food and drink?
32. Should the public sector lead regional procurement of goods and services generally?

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8th January 2007 – questions based on scoping report on SWRDA website

Amended 11th January following comments from Pete Ashton

Amended 14th February following publication of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report