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FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

South London Business Hosts Construction Sector Forum

TODAY: South London Business hosts a lunchtime construction forum to promote the strengths and opportunities for the construction sector in South London. The forum, hosted by engineering consultants Mott MacDonald, coincides with the launch of South London Business' 2006 Construction Report. The forum provides an opportunity for public and private sector organisations related to the construction sector to meet, network and comment on the report's draft recommendations. South London Business director of operations, Susan Shaw, said, "South London has an extremely strong construction sector, and is well placed to benefit from future large-scale construction projects like the Olympics, and transport infrastructure improvements such as Crossrail. But, like any sector, it faces challenges, and we will be using today's forum, and the results of our report, to lobby government at all levels".

The report identifies that within South London there is considerable expertise in operating through Private Finance Initiatives, and companies that can provide high-tech solutions to specialised environmental construction projects. However, the report also identifies that there is a lack of understanding, within the sector, surrounding the opportunities for tendering for public sector contracts including the Olympics, particularly for the smaller companies. There is also an acute shortage of skilled employees, at all levels, and a corresponding shortage of appropriate training courses.

The research undertaken has formed the basis of a series of recommendations that South London Business will be working on, with partners, designed to help benefit local businesses in the construction sector, including:

- Improved awareness of opportunities, and how to tender for public sector projects i.e. the Olympics,
- Unified planning regulations, a simplified planning process, and a consolidation of environmental regulations,
- Improved communications between local authorities and the construction sector,
- Encourage public sector training providers to provide appropriate training. Courses need to be shorter, more flexible, and locally demand-led, and

- Encourage closer formal relationships between private sector organisations and local education providers.

The 2006 South London Business Construction Report was prepared by South London Business' Business Retention Team, which is funded by the London Development Agency – the Mayor's agency for business and jobs. For further information, please contact South London Business' business retention manager, Con O'Brien on 020 8256 1290 or via con.obrien@southlondonbusiness.co.uk .

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Notes to Editors:

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South London Business (SLB) is a business organisation that exists to represent and promote the South London economy. SLB provides strategic political support to companies by bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. South London Business:

- Can facilitate access to senior public figures and policy makers, including key figures within the 'Mayoral Family' and local and regional politicians.
- Co-ordinates an employer-led Skills Alliance for South London; working to influence the skills agenda to ensure school-leavers and graduates have the skills required by business.
- Supports and promotes sub-regional initiatives in the innovation and tourism sectors, and promotes business-led regeneration through two 'City Growth' projects.
- Lobbies on strategic issues such as:
 - Transport network improvements
 - Safeguarding commercial land from residential redevelopment, and
 - Solutions to issues such as planning, skills and 'crime and grime'.
- Provides access to markets, new contacts and new business opportunities

South London Business also supports smaller companies through 'Work Smarter' – which seeks to encourage greater investment in staff training and development.

Construction Industry Facts

The UK construction sector is ranked amongst the top ten in the world. It represents 8% of the UK's Gross Domestic Product. 160,000 people are employed in the construction industry in London, 20% of whom are based in south London. 8,000 engineering and architectural students are enrolled in South London universities each year and staff retention within the industry is excellent.

The South London construction sector has grown by 3% since 2003, with Croydon and Bromley having the strongest construction and engineering clusters, followed by Richmond and Sutton. Local companies expect this growth to continue. The sector is dominated by a large number of small-to mid-sized organisations with a number of 'key industry players' such as Mott MacDonald and Faber Maunsell.