

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**Date: 30/08/07**

**Ref: 2007 3008**

### **Regional Spatial Strategy – Developing the Preferred Option**

September and October are important months for the West Midlands Region as members of the Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership start to finalise the submission to government - the Preferred Option.

This will set out revisions to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in respect to centres, waste, employment land and the number and distribution of new homes across the region to 2026.

On 20 July, the Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership (RPP) met to consider progress made with developing the Preferred Option for Phase 2 of the RSS Revision. A decision on the Preferred Option has not been made – this is expected on 22 October.

In the lead up to the meeting in October, Members will hold a 'special' full RPP meeting on 24 September. At this meeting members will have an opportunity for a full and open debate on the emerging draft Preferred Option. They will also provide a strategic steer to officers, prior to the October meeting when the final Preferred Option will be signed off for submission to the Secretary of State.

Over the past few months, officers at the Assembly have been working on the development of the draft Preferred Option to be considered by Members. And have taken on board discussions with stakeholders and the findings of a range of technical work.

A meeting of the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) will be held on 5 September. This group is an officer group which will consider the outcome from the technical work and the emerging policies. It will advise on the draft Preferred Option for discussion by RPP on 24 September.

The focus of the current approved RSS is to concentrate on development (74 per cent) wherever possible on brown field land, particularly in the Major Urban Areas where there are vast opportunities to re-use redundant industrial land. This form of development can be a major boost to urban renaissance.

Key benefits include:

- improving the environment
- using existing infrastructure
- limiting pollution by supporting the development of better public transport networks.

The RPP agrees that this policy approach must continue to be adopted in the RSS Revision and the Assembly has held discussions with urban authorities to explore levels of new housing provision to be accommodated in this way.

### **Scale of New Housing required**

- Government has made it clear to all English Regions that more houses must be provided to accommodate all sections of society, this will include the increase in the number of single person households. In addition around a third of new homes built should be affordable homes.
- On the basis of latest Government household projections, there is a need to secure 19,000 new homes per annum or 380,000 net from 2006 – 2026.
- Higher housing targets will inevitably require some further green field land to be identified for development, but its impact will depend on:
  - where it is allocated
  - the form the development takes
  - the overall scale of development.

Rose Poulter, Director, Regional Assembly said: "The Assembly aims to concentrate such development in the Major Urban Areas of Birmingham, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire Conurbation and beyond these areas, in and around towns that are capable of balanced and sustainable growth - particularly ensuring that local peoples' housing and employment needs are met.

"In this way, environmental impact can be minimised and, if jobs and services are provided locally, the need for travel is reduced.

"The challenge for the Assembly is to secure the level of housing that the people and communities of the West Midlands need in a way that brings real social, environmental and economic benefits."

Meetings scheduled with Members to develop and finalise the Preferred Option are as follows:

- Planning Partnership 24 September
- Planning Partnership 22 October.

- ENDS -

### **For further information contact:**

Rose Poulter [r.poulter@wmlga.gov.uk](mailto:r.poulter@wmlga.gov.uk) 0121 678 1024.

### **Notes to editors:**

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional

Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.

5. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.
6. For further information, visit our website [www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)
7. The Independent Performance Assessment was undertaken by the National Audit Office as part of an examination of all 8 English Regional Development Agencies at the request of the Department of Trade and Industry.
8. The final report can be downloaded from Advantage West Midlands' website [www.advantagewm.co.uk](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk)