

NEWS RELEASE

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Regional Housing Study Threatens Agreed Growth Plan

At West Midlands Regional Assembly's annual meeting last week members re-iterated their grave concerns about the direction being taken by a government-commissioned study into yet higher housing numbers for the West Midlands region.

Meeting in West Bromwich, the Assembly heard chief executive Olwen Dutton report on a presentation from Government Office for the West Midlands' consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners earlier in the week. This proposed a substantial increase in housing numbers across the Region over and above the proposals put to government by the Assembly last December as part of its Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy. The consultants have taken account of the recommendations from the Government's National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit which has made its own calculations of the higher number of houses needed in the Region. This could mean an increase of up to 445,700 new houses by 2026 instead of the 365,000 proposed by the Assembly.

Members of the Assembly from the local authority, business and environmental sectors, were united in their condemnation of the study and its options for accommodating this growth. These options included new settlements, substantial expansion of the major urban areas and towns and more rural housing.

Assembly chairman, Cllr. David S. Smith said: "These proposals put into question our strategy for increasing the regional housing supply in a sustainable way, a strategy that was carefully developed in detailed consultation across the Region. The level of detail at which the Government's consultants are working risks undermining the work of local authorities who are currently trying to produce their local development frameworks. This study can only serve to create confusion and uncertainty for everyone."

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Note to Editors

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly is the regional planning body charged by Government with the preparation, monitoring and review of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS). WMRSS is currently being updated through a phased series of three Revisions.
2. WMRSS Phase Two Revision covers housing, employment, transport, town centres and waste policy areas. Revisions are submitted to the government and after scrutiny through Examinations in Public. The final version is issued by government and becomes official government policy.
3. WMRSS Phase Two Revision was submitted to government last December and is due to be debated at an Examination in Public in spring 2009.
4. West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, together with the relevant local development framework, forms the statutory development plan for that local authority area.
5. The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit published its 'Advice to the Minister about the housing supply range to be tested by Regional Planning Authorities' on 26 June 2008.
6. Planning and economic development consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners were commissioned by the Government Office for the West Midlands to prepare a study for 'The Development of Housing Options for the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.'