

NEWS RELEASE

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'City Living' on the increase as Monitoring Report identifies positive progress towards Urban Renaissance

City Living is on the rise for the first time in years as people are living and working closer to urban areas with data showing a reduction in commuting distances.

This is highlighted in the Annual Monitoring Report which sets out progress towards implementing the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) published by the Regional Assembly. And is a trend that will need to be further encouraged if there is to be an effective response to climate change.

Urban Renaissance lies at the heart of the WMRSS where the aim is to make the Major Urban Areas of Birmingham/Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire Conurbation once again places where more people choose to live and work. In turn, it is hoped that this will help support the renaissance of the rural areas by reducing housing pressures by commuters so that these areas can concentrate on meeting their own local housing and employment needs.

Five years on from the government's approval of the WMRSS, it is now clear from a range of monitoring indicators that this strategy is starting to work. Increasingly more housing is being built in the Major Urban Areas - much of this is on previously developed land, including the reclamation of derelict sites.

There is increasing efficiency in the use of land through higher housing densities, and the rate of out-migration from the Major Urban Areas has reduced by 25 per cent from previous high levels.

Overall, the picture emerging from the monitoring data is encouraging. However, a number of concerns still remain particularly the fact that the number of affordable homes being built remains disappointingly low. There is also a worrying sign that the economy may be slowing as the amount of employment land developed across the Region in 2007 was lower than previous years.

Commenting on the results of this year's Monitoring Report, Councillor Rex Roberts, Chairman of the West Midlands Regional Planning Partnership said: "I am very happy to report that the Region is starting to develop in a more sustainable direction. However, I am somewhat fearful of the government's intention to consider higher rates of new

housing development as reflected in its commissioning of a new study to look at further development options.

“What is clear from our monitoring data is that, if this was to lead to large scale releases of green field land, it could be highly damaging to the Region’s strategy. Not only would attention be diverted away from the use of brown field sites but this could also lead to more dispersed patterns of development and increased travel. This would undoubtedly undermine Urban Renaissance with serious long-term economic, social and environmental consequences.”

To view the Annual Monitoring Plan visit <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=52>

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For further details about the government’s study, please contact Government Office for the West Midlands at rss.team@gowm.gsi.gov.uk

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

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