

## **Agenda Item No. 7**

### **WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

#### **Assembly Meeting – 5 April 2006**

#### **RSS UPDATE**

#### **Report of the Director of Policy**

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##### **1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update Members on the progress of the phased RSS Revision.

##### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 To note the report.

##### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is a statutory development plan and as such forms the regional spatial framework up to 2021, to inform the preparation of all Local Development Plans, Local Transport Plans and regional and sub regional strategies that have a bearing on land use activities. It incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy.
- 3.2 The RSS covers a wide range of subjects including housing, economic development, the built, historic and natural environment, renewable energy, minerals, waste and transport. The overall aim is to achieve a more balanced and sustainable pattern of development focusing on; urban and rural renaissance, diversification and modernisation of the Region's economy and modernisation of the transport infrastructure of the West Midlands.
- 3.3 One of the key features of the RSS is the role it plays in addressing the links that exist between economic, social and environmental issues and the importance of adopting an integrated approach in response. It is particularly at the Regional level where the spatial inter-relationship between many of these issues becomes apparent along with their implications for the principles of sustainable development.
- 3.4 As a Spatial Strategy it informs the development of strategies and programmes of other public agencies and service providers including those in health, education, skills and learning and crime reduction. To be successful it must be aligned with, and supported by, other strategies and investment in the Region. It provides the longer term planning and land use framework for the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Housing Strategy.
- 3.5 Since the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (September 2004) the RSS has an additional statutory function and has been used to assess the 'general conformity' of Local Development Plans and regionally significant planning applications with the RSS. The "opinion" of general conformity is forwarded to the Secretary of State and is taken by the Planning Inspectorate as a key test as to the soundness of a Local Development Plan and a key consideration regarding a planning application.

3.6 When the RSS was published by the Secretary of State in June 2004 the Secretary of State recommended that a number of issues were immediately considered as a revision to the document. The Regional Planning Partnership took the decision to manage this through a phased revision.

#### **4. Phase One: Black Country Study**

4.1 The Black Country Study as Phase One of the Revision will be reporting the Preferred Option to the Regional Planning Partnership Members on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2006. This will be submitted with supporting documents, including the Sustainability Appraisal, to the Secretary of State on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006. A formal consultation period of 12 weeks will follow.

#### **5. Phase Two**

5.1 The Project Plan sets out the aims of the Revision, the issues being considered, including housing, employment land, transport issues and waste, the timetable, resources and how alignment with other Regional strategies will be achieved. The Project Plan for Phase Two has been approved by the Regional Planning Partnership and will be available for Members at the meeting.

5.2 Under the provisions of the Planning Act, the Regional Planning Body may seek the advice of the Strategic Authorities, known as Section 4(4) Authorities, in the development of the any sub regional policies or proposals within the RSS Revision. To this end, a Brief setting out the issues on which advice is required to help shape the Options was issued in April. It has been requested that the advice should be returned in mid May.

5.3 Following receipt of this advice, the RSS Task Group in liaison with the RSS Reference Groups will develop the Options and it is anticipated that these will be reported to the Regional Planning Partnership in July. A formal public and partner consultation exercise will take place in September 2006, launched at a consultation conference, for an eight week period.

5.4 In developing the Options and moving forward to the Preferred Option an evidence base has been developed since June 2005 to support the policy position taken by the Assembly in a robust and thorough manner. This body of evidence, in the form of technical reports, is available on the Assembly website.

5.5 As Phase Two progresses it is intended that the issues raised by the WMES Review are taken into consideration and vice versa. The success of both processes and the implications for the future of the Region rely on this complementarity and alignment.

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