

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Regional Planning and Environment Executive

**Notes of a Meeting held on 22 September 2009
Held at Groundwork UK**

Present: Cllr Rex Roberts, OBE – Chairman (Staffordshire)

Cllrs: Neil Roberts (Lichfield), Keith Austin – Vice Chair (Telford & Wrekin), Bob Stevens (Warwickshire), Peter Douglas Osborn (Birmingham) and John Everall (Shropshire)

Business Council: Roger Stone – Vice Chair

OSG – Gerald Kells.

Officers: Mark Middleton (WMRA), Sharon Britton (WMLB/WMRA), John Pattinson (WMRA), Andy Donnelly (CEPOG), Paul Wilcox (Staffordshire), Chris Blakeley (WMRA), Michael Barker (Telford and Wrekin), David Clarke (WMRA), and Marie Greer (AWM)

Before the commencement of the meeting the Chairman advised that he would be taking Items 5a and 5b before the other items on the agenda.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from

Roger Evans – Vice Chair (OSG), M Kinghan (OSG), Cllr T Wright (Dudley), Cllr Bob Badham – Vice Chair (Sandwell), Ian Smith (GOWM), Cllr Nigel Hartin (Shropshire), Julian Dolan (Business Voice WM), Geoff Minshull (Business Voice WM) and Sarah Faulkner (Business Voice WM).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations stated.

3. Notes of last meeting held on 4 March 2009 and Matters Arising

The notes were **AGREED** as a true record. There were no Matters Arising.

5a. UK Low Carbon Transition Plan

Members were advised about the comprehensive national government plan to move the UK onto a permanent low carbon footing, whilst maximising economic opportunities. The report set out initial implications for planning and environment and RSS Phase Three energy matters as below:

- The plan reinforces the existing PPS 1 supplement on climate change; the proposed policy approach in the draft RSS Phase Two Revision and sets out to increase the pace of achieving a low carbon approach in planning and regeneration. Nationally, the Government will be combining elements of PPS1 and PPS22 on renewable energy into a single planning policy statement on climate change by the end of 2009.
- The new Office for Renewable Energy Deployment will have a role working with local authorities to identify renewable energy opportunities. A national renewable deployment task force will take forward new work for all regions to develop evidence based assessments of their potential for energy developments.
- Nationally, the new Infrastructure Planning Commission that comes into operation in 2009, will consider larger renewable energy schemes of at least 50MW onshore. A national policy statement on renewable energy is also expected in the autumn.
- At the regional level, there are proposals to develop regional renewable energy targets, the need to consider updating the evidence base and work with AWM on the refresh of the Regional Energy Strategy.
- As energy matters are part RSS Phase Three work streams, consideration would need to be taken of the consultation responses and the new national approach in progressing the RSS Three work stream and the emerging Regional Strategy work.

Members were invited to discuss the report and made the following comments: -

- Members asked if the plan included wind farms and, if so, was there a policy regarding where these would be. They were advised that locations of such were the responsibility of local authorities and their LDFs as there was no policy on the distribution of renewable energy.

The report recommended that the Executive supported the establishment of an officer task and finish group to coordinate the regional response to the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan and to ensure that renewable energy and low carbon policies are taken forward into the new Regional Strategy (RS).

Business Voice WM felt that a task force would contribute to a 20 year resource waste on low carbon matters. A show of hands was requested on the recommendation(outlined above) as follows: -

Local Authority Members and OSG **AGREED**
Business Voice West Midlands - **AGAINST**

Therefore, with the majority in favour, the recommendation was **AGREED**.

5b. Quality of the Environment and Climate Change (For Information)

Members received an update on the following Environment and Climate Change matters: -

- Regional Water Resources Action Plan Consultation
- Regional Habitats Targets Project
- Draft Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning for the Historic Environment
- Putting the Historic Environment to Work: A Strategy for the West Midlands - Consultation Draft July 2009
- Landscape Update
- Regional Aggregates Working Party (RAWP) Annual Report
- Climate Change

Members **NOTED** the report.

4a. Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two – Panel Report

Members were provided with an update on the progress of the RSS Phase Two Revision following the recent Examination in Public (EiP) and in anticipation of the Panel Report.

The Panel Report had not been published at the time of the meeting and members were advised that this would be available for their next meeting in October and would be the substantial item on their agenda.

The report advised that the outcome of the RSS Phase Two process would ultimately be determined by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State would need to take account of the Panel Report and consider proposed changes to the RSS Phase Two Revision Draft. It was understood that the Secretary of State intends to

publish the Proposed Changes by the end of 2009. The Proposed Changes would be subject to formal consultation and the Assembly would need to consider a response at that time. Following the consultation on the Proposed Changes, the Secretary of State would then finalise the revision in 2010.

The report recommended that Members noted the progress of the RSS Phase Two Revision and the next steps in the process.

Members requested that their thanks be recorded for the outstanding work achieved by RA Officers and colleagues across the region.

The report was **NOTED**

The Panel report to be the substantive item on the October agenda of RPEE.

4b. RSS Phase Three – Draft Summary of Options Consultation Responses

Members were provided with feedback and an initial draft summary of responses to the RSS Phase Three Options consultation.

Despite a relatively short consultation period over the summer, there was a very good response to the Phase Three Options consultation.

Around 440 responses were received with a good balance of responses across all 5 Phase Three topics.

URSUS Consulting Ltd had been commissioned to collate and analyse the responses. A final report of the responses was expected on 16th October.

The report outlined the following:

Critical Rural Services

- Generally recognised that there are difficulties defining “critical” rural services because rural service needs vary so much over the region.

Gypsy Travellers & Travelling Showpeople

- Most polarised views on this issue, with very strong views about the number of pitches required.
- Approximately one-third of respondents thought the pitch requirement identified by the sub-regional Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments were about right, with fairly equal numbers thinking the figures were either too high or too low. District Councils, Parishes and individuals generally thought the figures were too high whilst

individuals from Gypsy & Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities thought the figures were too low.

- Respondents generally favoured figures at County level rather than local level to provide more flexibility.
- Amongst the G&T community there was strong preference for sites in urban areas with access to employment opportunities and facilities such as health, education and transport services.
- Draft report indicates that we did not receive a response from Travelling Showpeople but we have now received a response from the Travelling Showpeople Guild.

Culture, Sport and Tourism

- Strong support for a new policy on this issue where assets were protected (not just improved) and which includes an updated list of assets – although the difficulties of compiling a consistent assets list were recognised.
- There was strong support for addressing access to culture, sport & tourism assets

Quality of the Environment

- In terms of an overarching environmental policy, general preference for a policy that was environment-led rather than Development or Spatial Strategy led.
- Generally, significant support for the suggested policies QE2-QE9
- On energy there was a very strong steer towards an energy efficiency policy and a slight preference for sub-regional renewable energy targets (rather than a regional target).
- On the Green Belt, opinion was divided on whether there should be a regionally specific Green Belt policy, or apply national policy (PPG2).

Minerals

- Opinion was divided over whether a safeguarding policy should safeguard all or just key minerals.
- On the future supplies of aggregates, a large majority of respondents said the apportionment figures were not realistic and there was a significant body of opinion that Staffordshire's allocation was too high, with some feeling that the regional figure was also too high.
- The responses to the consultation will need to be taken into account in the Sub-Regional Apportionment of Aggregates exercise which is to be considered in the next item on the agenda.

The report recommended and Members **NOTED** the initial draft summary of responses.

4c. RSS Phase Three – Progression of Phase Three Workstreams

The RPEE were advised on the preferred arrangement for progressing the RSS Phase 3 Revision.

The report recommended that the most effective way of taking forward individual workstreams was as follows:

Critical Rural Services

- Take forward through the RS because these are important issues for Local Development Frameworks covering rural parts of the Region and it is important to ensure a suitable policy framework is in place to guide work at the local level.

Gypsies & Travellers

- In advance of a RS there could be a policy void and some interim guidance to LPA's is therefore required. An Interim Policy Statement should be developed to provide this, given that this policy area is relatively well developed.

Culture, Sport & Tourism

- Take forward through the RS as a new and positive theme.
- It may be more appropriate to develop a new policy on culture, sport and tourism rather than a revision of the existing RSS Policy PA10 because the focus of the current policy is on the benefits for economic growth. Response to the Options consultation indicate strong support to develop a new policy with more emphasis on the social benefits of culture, leisure and support to complement the economic benefits.
- The topic should include historic environment which aligns very closely with culture and tourism as well as environmental work.

Environment

- Water and Flood Risk policies may be incorporated into Phase Two (pending contents of the RSS2 EiP Panel Report). If these issues are not included in Phase Two, they need to be taken forward through Interim Policy Statements to fill the policy void in advance of a RS.
- Renewable Energy should be taken forward into RS to reflect Government initiatives including the recently-published UK Renewable Energy Strategy.
- Green Belt issues can be taken forward through the RS with the scope of the topic potentially widened, but this would require major further technical work. It would make sense to await the EiP Phase 2 Panel report before considering this further.

- All other environment issues needed to be considered as part of the RS. The RSS Phase Three work completed to date will therefore be “banked” and further technical consideration be given by the RSS Quality of the Environment Task Group to the level and nature of policies in the light of emerging guidance on Regional Strategies (reported separately on your agenda).

Minerals

- CLG have issued Regional Guidelines on aggregates provision and have requested that Regional Assemblies undertake a sub-regional apportionment of aggregates by the end of December 2009.
- Policies relating to safeguarding and brick clay provision be progressed for inclusion in the RS.

Appendix A to the report provided more detail of the above for initial consideration and approval. A further report would be submitted for final approval by RPEE in October, following publication of the RSS Phase 2 EiP Panel Report. There would also need to be approval by the West Midlands Leaders Board, AWM and Government.

The report recommended and Members **AGREED:**

- (a) The most effective way of taking forward work on RSS Phase Three as outlined in the report, and
- (b) That arrangements for progressing the individual policy topics be reported to the October meeting of RPEE following receipt of the RSS Phase 2 EiP Panel Report.

4d. Draft Government Policy Statement on Preparation of Regional Strategies

Members received a report that advised them about the Government consultation on the preparation of Regional Strategies and also advised about the proposed regional response arrangements.

The report highlighted some key points about the implications for the RPEE.

RPEE members were asked to consider and discuss the 14 key points on this Regional Strategy guidance consultation document. They may wish these and any other key points to be drawn out, and be fed in, as appropriate, to the higher level response.

RPEE was also requested to encourage other regional partners to respond to this consultation process on the basis that it is important to all that this guidance provides a suitable replacement for PPS11 (Regional Spatial Strategies) and enables the West Midlands to produce a Regional Strategy fit for regional needs.

Members were recommended and **AGREED** to note the contents of the report and **ENDORSED** the way forward as set out above.

4e. National and Regional Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England 2005-2020: Carrying out and Completing West Midlands Sub Regional Apportionment

Members were advised about the Government's request for the Regional Assembly (as the Regional Planning Body) to carry out and complete a Sub-Regional Apportionment of the new revised National and Regional aggregates provision for the West Midlands.

The report recommended and Members:

- (a) **NOTED** discussions about the way forward with GOWM.
- (b) **ENDORSED** officer proposals that:
 - (i) Sub-regional apportionment of aggregates provision in the West Midlands be undertaken by the Regional Assembly as requested by Government.
 - (ii) The West Midlands Regional Aggregates Working Party (WMRAWP) be requested to undertake the required sub-regional apportionment exercise and regional consultation on behalf of the Regional Assembly.
 - (iii) A request be made to GOWM to extend the deadline for completion of the sub-regional apportionment work to March 2010.
 - (iv) Independent consultants be commissioned to undertake the sustainability appraisal which is required to accompany the sub-regional apportionment.
 - (v) A request be made to GOWM to provide the additional funding required for the sustainability appraisal of the sub-regional apportionment.

4f. The update to NHPAU advice to Ministers on housing levels to be considered in regional plans, July 2009.

The above report was information only and was duly **NOTED** by the RPEE

6. AOB

There was no other business stated.

7. Dates of Future Meetings:

14 October

17 November

16 December