

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Regional Planning and Environment Executive**

**Notes of a Meeting held on 15 December 2009
Held at the Regional Partnership Centre**

Present:

Cllr Rex Roberts, OBE – Chairman (Staffordshire)

Cllrs: Keith Austin - Vice Chair (Telford & Wrekin), Bob Badham – Vice Chair (Sandwell), Peter Douglas Osborn (Birmingham) and John McNicholas (Coventry)

Business Voice WM: Roger Stone - Vice Chair, Sarah Faulkner and Geoff Minshull

OSG: Roger Evans - Vice Chair and Gerald Kells

Officers: Chris Blakeley (WMRA), David Clarke (WMRA), Michael Craggs (WMRA), Mark Edwards (Telford & Wrekin), Steve Forrest (WMRA), Mark Middleton (WMLB / WMRA) Pat Niner (University of Birmingham) John Pattinson (WMRA) and Stefan Preuss (WMRA)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Local Authority Members: Cllrs Trevor Davies (Shropshire), John Overall (Shropshire), John Lines (Birmingham), Cllr Val Richards (Lichfield), Cllr Gary Ridley (Coventry), Neil Roberts (Lichfield), Bob Stevens (Warwickshire), Tim Wright (Dudley).

Business Voice West Midlands: Martin Chambers, Julian Dolman
Officers: Marie Greer (AWM), Ian Smith (GOWM).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. Notes of last meeting held on 14 October 2009

The notes of the last meeting were **AGREED** as a true record.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. PLANNING

5a. RSS Phase Two

Members received a short report and a verbal update regarding the latest position on RSS Phase 2. Members were advised that GOWM had informed WMRA that the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the RSS Phase 2 Revision would not be published before the New Year. GOWM could not confirm the expected date of the release or the length, although this was not expected before 5 January 2010.

GOWM and CLG were considering the length of the subsequent consultation period and, therefore, the draft consultation schedule outlined within the report was subject to confirmation. Members would be advised of changes to the consultation timetable when confirmed by GOWM. The Assembly Board would receive an update on the position on the Proposed Changes at their meeting on 15 January 2010. It was hoped that the Proposed Changes would be available for consideration at the next Planning & Environment Executive meeting on 23 February 2010.

Members requested that WMRA circulate a note advising of these delays to include those not present at the meeting.

The Executive **NOTED** the report.

5b. RSS Phase Three

Members received a report which updated on the progression of the RSS Phase 3 work streams. Members were informed that it had been agreed between WMRA, AWM and GOWM on 9 September 2009 that work streams would be taken forward into the new Regional Strategy through Interim Policy Statements or Policy Recommendations. Interim Policy Statements would provide guidance to assist the preparation of Local Development Frameworks and Policy Recommendations would feed directly into the preparation of the Regional Strategy. Interim Policy Statements would be developed on the provision of pitches per local authority for Gypsies, Travellers & Travelling Showpeople; and on the sub-regional apportionment of aggregates. Policy Recommendations would be developed on the remaining RSS Phase 3 topic areas.

Members noted that the Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations needed to be approved by the existing RPB arrangements (RPEE and Assembly Board) and then ratified via the new regional arrangements (Joint Strategy Investment Board (JSIB)).

Members agreed that the Assembly Board should consider the main thrust of the Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations on 15th January prior to consideration of refined versions by the RPEE on 23 February. If significant policy changes occurred, these would

need to be considered by the Chief Executive during the second half of January and February, in consultation with the Assembly Chairman, in terms of appropriate sign-off by the RPEE. Following approval by RPEE the Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations would be forwarded to the JSIB for ratification on 23rd March.

Members comments on the Draft Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations are summarised below:

Rural Services

Members noted that key messages arising from the Phase 3 Options consultation included the difficulty of defining “critical” rural services because perception varies by locality and over time. Options consultation respondents had also generally favoured a “community-based approach” to development in rural areas rather than regional prescription.

Members suggested that an indicative list (for example, retail, schools, access to towns etc) could be included to provide guidance on what rural services need to be considered by local authorities. BVWM requested reference to the ‘One Stop Shop’ approach in rural areas which was piloted in Shropshire. Members also requested that the term “community” be more tightly defined in the Policy Recommendation.

Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Members were advised that consultations on gypsy and traveller pitches had not provided a clear regional steer due to the polarity of opinion. It was therefore WMRA’s intention to reach the fairest regional outcome as reaching a consensus would not be possible

Telford and Wrekin (T&W) expressed concern that its allocation of three additional pitches might have been based on its decision not to respond to the consultation. They were advised that T&W had been allocated the three additional pitches due to a relative lack of planning constraints within T&W and the need to re-distribute an over supply of existing sites from South Staffordshire to neighbouring authorities. The decision of T&W not to respond to the consultation therefore did not prompt its increased allocation.

In response to a query about whether the proposed distribution of pitches was moving away from a “need where it arises” approach, it was explained that it was the RPB’s responsibility to allocate pitches based on both the GTAA’s and a strategic view.

Members were informed that if there was further evidence that local authorities wished to make available then it was still possible to make representations on the draft Interim Policy Statement. Coventry confirmed that it may wish to submit further evidence.

At CPRE's request, it was agreed that a digest of responses would be produced.

In response to CPRE's query relating to delivery of pitches beyond 2017, it was explained that further refinement of the Draft Interim Policy Statement would include consideration of a mechanism to ensure delivery post-2017.

In relation to encouraging local authorities to provide additional plots for Travelling Showpeople, Members were advised that the intention was to adopt a facilitative rather than prescriptive numerical based policy for the provision of additional plots.

Aggregates

Members were advised that technical work on developing options for the sub-regional apportionment of aggregates to meet the Government requirement was still in progress. Options for the sub-regional apportionment would be circulated to the Regional Aggregates Working Party (including all Minerals Planning Authorities (MPA's)) for technical comment on 18th December, with responses required by 22nd January. MPA's would be requested to liaise, where appropriate, with their Districts on the apportionment options. In the light of responses received a proposed sub-regional apportionment would be prepared for consideration by RPEE at its 23 February meeting.

Members expressed concern about the tight timescale for agreeing the sub-regional apportionment. Officers advised that the Government had originally requested the sub-regional apportionment to be agreed by the end of 2009. At WMRA's request, this deadline had now been extended to 31st March 2010 for the West Midlands.

At Members request, it was agreed that a copy of the technical consultation on the apportionment options be circulated to RPEE. Members were requested to submit any comments they may have on the technical consultation to their Minerals Planning Officers to help facilitate coordinated MPA responses.

It was commented that concern had been expressed at the Regional Aggregates Working Party about the methodology for developing alternative apportionment options, particularly in relation to the fact that data on the depth and quality of mineral resources had not been used. Members were advised that the WMRA would explore the availability of "depth data" but that consistent data on the quality of minerals resources was not readily available.

In relation to consultation, Members were advised that the WMRA had consulted on the sub-regional apportionment of aggregates as part of

its Phase 3 Options consultation. A large number of respondents to the consultation had indicated that they did not favour an apportionment based on historical shares and this had led to the commissioning of further technical work to examine alternative apportionment options. Members were also informed that GOWM had indicated that they expected the process for developing Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations to be similar to that which would have been in place had the WMRA been developing a RSS Preferred Option – which would not have included a further round of public consultation. Furthermore, guidance from CLG on preparing sub-regional apportionments of aggregates clearly indicated that the RPB's should consult RAWP's and MPA's.

Notwithstanding the above, Members were advised that a RSS Reference Groups workshop was being held on 5th January which would provide an opportunity for representatives from a wide range of interests to comment on the apportionment options along with all the other Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations.

Culture and Sport

In relation to the low participation rates referred to in the Draft Policy Recommendation, Members requested that this be evidence-based. The importance of signage to attractions was also highlighted by Members.

Integrated Approach to the Management of Environmental Resources

Members suggested that a definition of landscape assets would be helpful.

Restoring Degraded Areas and Managing and Creating High Quality New Environments

Members suggested that mining include reference to quarrying.

Greenery, Urban Greenspace and Public Spaces

Members indicated that this issue may already be covered by national policy. However, the importance of greenspace, including public parks (particularly for urban areas) was stressed.

Protection of Agricultural Land

Members supported the principles outlined in the draft Policy Recommendation but requested that officers give consideration to how, if developed into a full policy, this would influence potential development proposals in the future.

Renewable Energy - Targets

Despite the UK Renewable energy Strategy expectation that all regions set targets for renewable energy capacity at least in line with

national targets, CPRE suggested that it could be dangerous to have a 15% target in the West Midlands.

BVWM advised that the farming community recognised the opportunities provided by new technologies such as anaerobic digestion and welcomed further support to put new technologies into practice. Members also wished to emphasise the opportunities for renewable energy in urban areas.

Positive Uses of the Green Belt

Members were advised that the Draft Policy Recommendation sought to extend, rather than repeat, national Green Belt policy. It was also explained that RSS Phase 2 was likely to address any strategic boundary changes in the West Midlands Green Belt and that the draft Policy Recommendation only addressed uses of the Green Belt.

Safeguarding Mineral Resources in the West Midlands

Members welcomed the inclusion of coal in the Draft minerals safeguarding Policy Recommendation.

The report recommended that Members:

- a. **NOTED** the timetable for developing Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations and
- b. **CONSIDERED AND COMMENTED** on the emerging draft Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations as outlined in Appendices D to U.
- c. **AGREED** that refined versions of the Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations be submitted to the Assembly Board on 15th January for consideration, as outlined in this report

ENVIRONMENT

6a. Regional Biodiversity Delivery Plan and review of Regional Biodiversity Strategy

Members received a report which advised that the production of a Regional Biodiversity Delivery Plan was in accordance with new national England Biodiversity Delivery Framework required under the England Biodiversity Strategy. Members were also advised that the majority of local authorities had signed up to the Regional Biodiversity Pledge.

The report recommended and the Executive:

- (a) **NOTED** that the Regional Biodiversity Strategy was due for renewal and that a regional biodiversity strategy delivery plan was required in accordance with the new national Delivery Framework for the England Biodiversity Strategy.

- (b) **SUPPORTED** the revised Regional Biodiversity Strategy being taken forward into the development of the new Strategy for the West Midlands and Investment Plan.

6b. Green Infrastructure in the West Midlands

Members received a report about a renewed West Midlands initiative to promote the benefits of green infrastructure in the West Midlands.

The Executive **supported** the initiative.

6c. Quality of the Environment and Climate Change Information Report

Members received a report updating on Quality of the Environment and Climate Change. It was expected that the West Midlands Regional Observatory report '*Challenge or Opportunity? How to plan for Climate Change*' would be published before the New Year.

BVWM would submit comments to WMRA regarding the report.

WMRA noted that the Natural Resources chapter did not include reference to how food production might be influenced by Climate Change.

The Executive **noted** the report.

7. AOB

There was no other business stated.

8. Date of Next Meeting:

23 February 2010