

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

**Regional Planning and Environment Executive
22 September 2009.**

**Quality of the Environment and Climate Change
Information Report**

1. Purpose of Report

To **update** the Executive on Quality of the Environment and Climate Change matters for information.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the report be **noted**.

3. Items for Information:-

Regional Water Resources Action Plan Consultation

3.1 The Midlands Environment Agency requested comments on the Action Plan that sets out a number of actions related to adapting and mitigation to climate change, creating a better water environment and sustainable planning and management of water resources. This forms part of the implementation of the national Water Resources Strategy. The Chair responded on behalf of the Executive in July 2009 (**Appendix 1**)

Regional Habitats Targets Project

3.2 As part of the WMRSS Phase Three Revision work, the Regional Biodiversity Partnership supported by the WMRA has been updating the regional biodiversity habitats targets to reflect national biodiversity target work undertaken by defra. Further work has been carried out during the summer and a final report has been used to input into the RSS Phase Three process.

Draft Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning for the Historic Environment

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/consultationhistoricpps.pdf>

3.3 The draft PPS 15 Planning for the Historic Environment was launched for consultation in July. It updates planning policy affecting archaeology, historic areas, buildings and landscapes and, once finalised, will replace the current Planning Policy Guidance notes PPG15 and 16. The draft PPS 15 provides a new integrated approach to the historic environment and affirms the Government's broad aim that the historic environment, and heritage assets in particular, should be conserved, enhanced and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations. The draft PPS is accompanied by a Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide, which provides more detail on ways the new principles in the draft PPS can be applied. The public consultation for both documents runs until 30 October 2009. The Executive will be responding to the consultation prepared by the Regional Environment Group.

3.4 Key features of the draft PPS include the following:

- It deals with all types of heritage in a single document. The PPS brings in a new, integrated approach to the historic environment and 'heritage assets' moving beyond the outdated distinction between buildings and archaeology.
- It offers a new rigour for decision-making, putting greater emphasis on pre-application planning and discussion focussing on evaluating the significance of the heritage asset in question.
- It ensures there is a focus on understanding what is significant about a building, site or landscape and from that it becomes easier to determine the impact of the proposed change.
- It supports constructive conservation. This encourages active exploitation of the heritage and instrumental values of the historic environment as assets rather than seeing them as potential barriers to development.
- It emphasises the importance of the principles of sustainable development applying to the management of change in the historic environment.
- It maintains the same level of protection to the historic environment as the current PPG 15 and PPG 16, but expresses the policy much more succinctly.
- It fills in policy gaps. In particular, there are new, clearer, policies on setting and design.

- It provides greater clarity on key topics e.g. archaeological interest, conservation areas and their preservation and enhancement, World Heritage Sites, conflicts with other planning priorities and recording.
- It establishes a clear requirement that the Regional Spatial Strategy (and Regional Strategy) should ensure a consistent approach across the region to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment.

Putting the Historic Environment to Work: A Strategy for the West Midlands - Consultation Draft July 2009

3.5 The West Midlands Historic Environment Strategy and accompanying Action Plan was produced by the Regional Historic Environment Forum. The public consultation on the document closed in September and it is intended to launch a finalised Strategy and Action Plan by the end of the year. A vision for the historic environment of the West Midlands is set out together with a series of priorities under the themes of people, places and policies. The headline priorities identified in the consultation draft are:

- reducing barriers
- increasing community engagement
- developing traditional skills
- better understanding of the historic environment
- respecting character
- contributing to sustainable development
- influencing and raising the profile
- better understanding of the contribution to economy and quality of life
- aligning the objectives of the sector

3.6 These priorities are carried through to the Action Plan which seeks to realise the vision over the coming years with the support of the heritage sector as well as other key regional partners and stakeholders.

3.7 A draft response co-ordinated by the Regional Environment Group on behalf of the Executive is being prepared.

Landscape Update

- 3.8 Natural England is currently consulting on its Draft 'Protected Landscapes' Policy. The Draft has been widely circulated within the region, and responses should be submitted by 5 October. The Policy is particularly relevant to the region's five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Cannock Chase, Cotswolds, Malvern Hills, Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley – and to the Peak District National Park.
- 3.9 The Draft Policy sets out the context and issues, and proposes seven individual policies that represent Natural England's view on the future role and management of protected landscapes, and the legislative framework. It complements consultations held earlier this year on the 'All Landscapes Matter' and 'Future Landscapes' Policies.
- 3.10 A Regional Landscape Partnership has been established under the leadership of Natural England. Membership includes local authorities, Government Office, the Forestry Commission and English Heritage, and other environmental organisations such as CPRE. The main aims of the Partnership are to act as a champion for all landscapes, to co-ordinate a consistent approach to landscape work across the region, to influence other regional organisations and processes, and to provide a focus for landscape expertise and good practice.
- 3.11 The European Landscape Convention (the first international convention to deal with landscape in an integrated manner) came into effect in the UK in March 2009. The Convention provides the framework for the work of the Partnership, and Natural England has provided a small budget to support work that contributes its implementation. A number of projects are under way and a regional conference focusing on Convention Action Plans, to be hosted by Herefordshire Council, will take place on 22 September.

Regional Aggregates Working Party (RAWP) Annual Report

- 3.12 The RAWP have produced the annual technical report for Government on aggregates in the region. This includes the results of the annual monitoring survey of aggregate sales for 2007. Further details are available at **Appendix 2**.

Climate Change

- 3.13 The West Midlands Climate Change Action Plan was launched in late 2007 to provide a coordinated approach to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.
- 3.14 The third progress report of the Climate Change Panel for the Regional Minister that set out progress over the last six months has been prepared. (**Appendix 3**). Annex C includes a number of core messages and facts regarding climate change in the region.
- 3.15 As part of the climate change work a Climate Change Adaptation Partnership has been established in the region. This has produced a report on Climate Change Adaptation in the West Midlands that sets out an assessment of the current level of adaptation activity in the region and provides a framework for moving forward.

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