

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Assembly Board of Directors

30 September 2009

Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Three – Responses to the Options Consultation

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Assembly Board on the responses to the RSS Phase 3 Options Consultation and on interim proposals for progressing the development of policies.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Board note the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Issues being considered in the RSS Phase Three Revision are:
- **Rural Services:** Identification and provision of services that are critical to the sustainability of rural communities
 - **Housing:** Provision of pitches and plots for gypsies, travellers and travelling show people
 - **Culture, Sport and Tourism:** Strengthen RSS policies to support cultural, sport and tourism needs of the Region
 - **Environment:** Update existing Quality of Environment policies in the RSS and consider the need for new policies related to flood risk, renewable energy and Green Belt
 - **Minerals:** Safeguarding minerals and examining future supply of aggregates
- 3.2 Consultation on the Phase Three Options closed on 14th August 2009. The 445 consultation responses are currently being analysed and a summary of them will be available for the Full Assembly Meeting on 23 October 2009.

- 3.3 Following the RSS Phase Three Options consultation the intention was to develop a Preferred Option which would then be submitted to the Secretary of State in February 2010.
- 3.4 The Board will be aware, however, that the Local Democracy Bill currently before Parliament proposes bringing together Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Economic Strategies into a single Regional Strategy (SRS) for each of the English regions.
- 3.5 The RSS Phase Three Project Plan and Options consultation document therefore made it clear that the Phase Three Revision timetable was provisional and showed how the revision would be completed under existing regulations. The consultation document also stated that the Assembly, GOWM and AWM would review the process following the Options consultation to agree how the Phase Three work could be taken forward in the most effective way.
- 3.6 Key points and proposals emerging from the subsequent Phase Three “stock-take” between Assembly officers, GOWM and AWM are:
- GOWM does not consider it appropriate to progress the Phase Three Revision under the RSS process outlined in the Project Plan. Focus and resources on the Phase Three Revision during its later stages will inevitably impact on the ability of the region to progress the RS (“the Strategy for the West Midlands”). Developing the Phase Three Revision issues through the RS will overlap with the RS, risk confusion amongst stakeholders and divert resources from the RS, preparation process.
 - Incorporating RSS Phase Three issues from the outset, on the other hand, will ensure that the RS has an appropriate focus on the Phase Three issues. Some RSS Phase Three issues may, however, need to be re-cast for inclusion in the more strategic and concise RS.
 - The Phase Two EiP has raised some important environmental issues, such as water supply and quality, which are closely linked to the development of housing. There are indications that these issues may be addressed in the Phase Two Revision, in the report of the EiP Panel.
 - It is considered that the Phase Three work streams can be taken forward into the RS in one of two main ways:
 - (a) Preparation of Interim Policy Statements which will provide short term guidance to assist the preparation of Local Development Frameworks and will then feed into the RS or

(b) Preparation of RS Policy Recommendations which will feed directly into the RS.

- It was noted that free-standing Policy Statements will be a material planning consideration in future planning applications but will not have the full weight of a policy that has been tested through the Development Plan process. Policy recommendations will assist RS preparation but will carry even less weight.
- Additionally, CLG has issued Regional Guidelines on aggregates provision and has requested that Regional Assemblies undertake a sub-regional apportionment of aggregates by the end of December 2009. The WMRA have written to GOWM requesting that the deadline for this work be extended to 31st March 2010.

3.7 Interim and provisional proposals for taking the Phase Three work forward through the RS were considered by the Regional Planning and Environment Executive at its 22nd September 2009 meeting and their decision will be reported verbally. Firm recommendations on the way forward will be made once the impact of the RSS Phase 2 Revision Panel Report and the Government's response on the timetable for aggregates apportionment are known.

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