

## What does "general conformity" mean?

Only when a development plan document inconsistency or omission compromises the implementation of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy can it be considered not to be in general conformity. In other words, the key questions that your conformity advisor will be asking are:

- ✓ how does your DPD affect the West Midlands Spatial Strategy?
- ✓ will it significantly compromise the delivery or implementation of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy?
- ✓ Are there any inconsistencies or omissions that will compromise the implementation of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy?

## How can we work together to ensure there is general conformity?

By talking to your conformity advisor from a very early stage of plan development. They will be able to assist in the interpretation of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy and help avoid potential conflicts. To assist in this process, the Assembly has adopted a self assessment tool to help this dialogue at an early stage. Ask your conformity advisor for a copy.

## How long does it take to get an opinion?

The regulations give the Assembly six weeks to do this. If a view is not issued within the six weeks, you can assume that the DPD is OK with regard to the West Midlands Spatial Strategy.

## What weight will be given to the opinion?

The opinion of general conformity will be considered as a representation by the Planning Inspectorate at the Public Examination, and will also be forwarded to the Secretary of State.

In those cases where general conformity issues have arisen, it is likely that the Assembly will be represented at the Public Examination by its conformity advisors, so that the concerns relating to the West Midlands Spatial Strategy can be explained.

## What about planning applications?

In future, the Assembly is likely to be a statutory consultee on regionally significant planning applications. Until this is formally agreed through Planning Regulations, the Assembly will offer an opinion on such planning applications from a West Midlands Spatial Strategy viewpoint on an informal basis. This will be in line with the protocol agreed at the Regional Planning Partnership in September 2004

## What is a regionally significant planning application?

The Planning Partnership has agreed a list of criteria to define what is regionally significant in anticipation of this responsibility. Ask your conformity advisor for a copy of this if you do not already have one.

## Where can I get more information?

The West Midlands regional planning conformity protocol is available on the Regional Assembly website ([www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)) with hard copies also available from the Assembly, ( see contacts below). As reports on Development Plan Documents and regionally significant planning applications become available they will all be placed on the Regional Assembly website.

## Will these arrangements change in the future?

Possibly - the Regional Planning Partnership has agreed to monitor and review the procedures on a regular basis as required.



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# Effective Plans for Effective Action

## West Midlands Spatial Strategy



A guide for Local Planning Authorities  
on the general conformity of  
Development Plan Documents

If you have any comments on this guide or any questions relating to the conformity process, please contact:

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**West Midlands**  
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Speaking out for the region

## Is this guide for you?

This guide is for anyone involved in the preparation of a Development Plan Document (DPD).

## Why?

Under the new Planning Act, all Development Plan Documents must be submitted to West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly'), as Regional Planning Body, for an opinion of 'general conformity' with the West Midlands Spatial Strategy.

## How do we get an opinion?

The Assembly has adopted a decentralised approach to carrying out this conformity role drawing on the bank of knowledge and expertise held by strategic authorities.

This table shows who your conformity advisor is in this new system, and who to send your DPD to.



## Mineral/Waste Planning Authorities in West Midlands

Birmingham City Council  
 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Shropshire County Council  
 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Staffordshire County Council  
 Stoke on Trent City Council  
 Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council  
 Herefordshire Council  
 Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Warwickshire County Council  
 Wolverhampton City Council  
 Worcestershire County Council  
 Coventry City Council

## Geographic Areas of Responsibility

Regional Conformity Advisor	Authority
Shropshire County Council Andy Mortimer 01743 252566 andy.mortimer@shropshire-cc.gov.uk	Bridgnorth District Council North Shropshire District Council Oswestry Borough Council Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council South Shropshire District Council
Staffordshire County Council Tony Lovett 01785 277363 tony.lovett@staffordshire.gov.uk	Cannock Chase Council East Staffordshire Borough Lichfield District Council Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council South Staffordshire Council Stafford Borough Council Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Tamworth Borough Council
Principal Assistants Group Andrew Donnelly 0121 214 7338 andrewdonnelly@centro.org.uk	Birmingham City Council Coventry City Council Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council Wolverhampton City Council
Warwickshire County Council Pam Brown 01926 412061 pambrown@warwickshire.gov.uk	North Warwickshire Borough Council Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council Rugby Borough Council Stratford-on-Avon District Council Warwick District Council
Worcestershire County Council Mark Middleton 01905 766720 mmiddleton@worcestershire.gov.uk	Bromsgrove District Council Malvern Hills District Council Redditch Borough Council Worcester City Council Wychavon District Council Wyre Forest District Council
Tri-partite arrangements Jim Kerrigan 01952 203037 jim.kerigan@telford.gov.uk  Christine Ide 01782 232302 christine.ide@stoke.gov.uk  Kevin Singleton 01432 260137 ks1@herefordshire.gov.uk	Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council Stoke-on-Trent City Council Herefordshire Council



## What other hoops are there?

None, you simply have to submit the DPD to the conformity advisor.

## What do the Regional Conformity Advisors do?

It is their job to ensure that, when DPDs are submitted to the Assembly, these documents are in general conformity with the West Midlands Spatial Strategy.

### They will do this job by:

- Liaising with the Local Planning Authority in the preparation of the DPD - providing 'front loaded' advice on the interpretation of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy where necessary;
- Carrying out an assessment of general conformity when the DPD is submitted to the Assembly, taking into account any views received from other Assembly partners;
- Advising the Assembly whether the submitted DPD is in general conformity, providing an accompanying report to justify this view.

## What does the Assembly do?

### The Assembly co-ordinates the process, meaning:

- ✓ ensuring that the six week period the Assembly has to issue a general conformity opinion is kept to;
- ✓ keeping the Regional Planning Partnership informed;

- ✓ making sure the Business Council and Other Stakeholders Group have an opportunity to pass on thoughts to the conformity advisors;
- ✓ making sure that the interpretation of 'general conformity' is consistently applied across the region
- ✓ providing information to Local Planning Authorities
- ✓ promoting best practice across the West Midlands region
- ✓ review and monitoring of the application of the test of general conformity and the processes in place

## How does the Assembly guarantee an unbiased opinion?

The Assembly has to issue the opinion, and therefore has to be happy with the advice received from its conformity advisors in terms of consistency and balance of arguments. This means that the chair and vice chairs of the Regional Planning Partnership make the decision in non-contentious circumstances, or they refer the decision to the Regional Planning Partnership if general conformity issues arise.

If this happens, the Local Planning Authority will receive an opinion of non conformity - which will either be confirmed or withdrawn at a later date depending on the decision of the Planning Partnership.

