

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

22 April 2009

**Regional Policy Partnerships' Activity for West Midlands Regional
Assembly**

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Assembly on key issues undertaken by the Secretariat on behalf of the Board and Assembly Partnerships over the last quarter.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Assembly considers the report and notes progress made.

3. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS)

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Assembly, as the Regional Planning Body, is bringing forward the partial phased revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. In addition, ongoing work is being conducted in relation to RSS implementation, monitoring and conformity. Reports have been submitted to Assembly Members on a regular basis to update and inform them of the progress. Further information on the RSS is provided in Agenda Item 11

Eco-towns

- 3.2 On 4 November 2008, CLG published the draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-towns for consultation. The draft PPS is accompanied by a number of supporting documents including draft Sustainability Appraisals (SA's) for short-listed locations.

- 3.3 The draft PPS sets out the standards for an eco-town and the planning policy context. The draft PPS also sets out the planning process for eco-towns.
- 3.4 The short-listed locations include "Middle Quinton" (near Stratford).
- 3.5 The Sustainability Appraisals assessed only one location as generally suitable for an eco-town, and one location as Grade C unsuitable for an eco-town. The majority of the short-listed locations (including "Middle Quinton") were assessed as "Grade B" sites, which government consider could be suitable for eco-towns subject to meeting specific planning and design objectives.
- 3.6 The Regional Assembly's draft response was considered and approved by the Regional Planning and Environment Executive on 30 January and Regional Housing Executive on 18 February. The final WMRA response is available on request
- 3.7 The deadline for consultation responses has been extended to 30 April 2009.

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Conformity

- 3.8 Regional Assembly has provided advice to Rugby Borough Council concerning a planning application submitted to them by Advantage West Midlands for a High Technology Park at Ansty. The site is located to the north east of Coventry and is designated as a Major Investment Site in the current WMRSS. However, in the WMRSS Phase 2 Revision Preferred Option the Assembly is promoting this site as a Regional Investment Site that can be occupied by multiple users with a clear focus on providing accommodation to facilitate the diversification and modernisation of the Region's economy. The site is well positioned to serve the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire High Tech Corridor as well as the Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration Zone.
- 3.9 The proposals also seek to increase the amount of developable floorspace within the boundary of the site so as to make more efficient use of the land available. In providing advice to Rugby Borough Council that the application is in accordance with the WMRSS and Phase 2 Revision, the Assembly's advice was subject to any planning consent having a condition or legal agreement attached to it to ensure that the detailed development of the site is controlled so that any office floorspace allowed is ancillary or clearly associated with the research and development and light industrial uses proposed.

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4. RURAL**West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum**

- 4.1 The 29th Meeting of the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum was held on 12th March 2009 at Stratford upon Avon Town Hall under the new Chair, Bob Forster. Building on the successes of the past, the Forum is presently undergoing a review identifying what people expect, what people want, and what people need from it. The terms of reference are likely to be recast and a paper will be presented at the next meeting on 11 June 2009.

Rural Proofing

- 4.2 Work is ongoing to produce a Rural Disadvantage Indicator that will help to gather the most effective statistics for the monitoring of the WMES Delivery Framework.
- 4.3 With the help of WMRAF and the Rural Renaissance Working Group, the WMRSS Phase Three options for rural services that are critical to the sustainability of rural areas and rural communities have been drafted and these were approved by the Regional Assembly Board on 25 March 2009. Initial Rural Proofing has been carried out on the other Revision Topics: Communities for the Future – Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People; Culture, Sport and Tourism; Quality of the Environment; and Minerals Policies.
- 4.4 The Government has at last responded to the Matthew Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing. Of the 48 recommendations, 46 have been readily accepted particularly seeing them in the context of the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities. This will help with the RSS Phase Three Revision and much of this will inform local decision making and policy formulation processes, particularly LDFs.
- 4.5 The Commission for Rural Communities is re-launching the rural proofing agenda, engaging with DEFRA and other Government Departments and seeking how best to deliver the Government's commitment to ensure rural mainstreaming. A major event in London is scheduled in May but, meanwhile, we have been offered the new rural proofing toolkit to trial with the WM RSS Phase Three Revision.

Rural mainstreaming and WMRAF Sub Group organisation changes

- 4.6 A small task group has been appointed to update the European Strategy Environment and Rural Group's terms of reference and ensure that rural mainstreaming will feature across the other topic areas of the European strategy. With Stephen Fox, the EU Connects Rural Bidding Champion now in post, it is pleasing to report that there has been an upsurge in interest with bids received for INTERREG and LEONARDO funding. Contact and capacity building will continue.

Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)/Leader

- 4.7 The RDPE Programme continues to make good progress. Key achievements include:
- A number of projects approved and in delivery e.g. Rural Hubs (information & signposting), Rural Enterprise Grants (REG), Heart of England Fine Foods (food & drink enabling project), Cobrey Farms (asparagus pack house facilities).
 - Additional projects in appraisal/being approved e.g. Business Link – Going for Growth, LANTRA Landskills, Strategic Investment Grants, Tourism Destination Management Partnerships;
 - Approval of the third LEADER Local Development Strategy;
 - Significant interest in the Rural Enterprise Grant (REG) with awards of funding to projects;
 - Positive process assurance visit from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA); and
 - Agreed budget management position with DEFRA.
- 4.8 With regards to Axis 2 funds, forthcoming changes to the England Woodland Grant Scheme for 2009-2010 include higher rates, higher percentage contributions and eased eligibility criteria. Natural England's Environmental Stewardship is being reviewed in 2010
- 4.9 LEADER – Eight Local Action Groups 8 (LAGS), including two cross border, have been selected. The third Local Development Strategy has been approved. The remainder of the Local Development Strategies are now in an advanced state of development and will be submitted for approval by end May 2009.

Cross Border working with Wales

- 4.10 On behalf of the West Midlands Regional Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government, the Cross Border Strategic Forum Event was held in Newtown on 2nd April 2009. With over 100 people in attendance the Welsh Minister and Cllrs David Smith and Roger Phillips re-affirmed the commitment and support for the Memorandum.

- 4.11 Meanwhile the work of the thematic task groups continues and, in particular, the Offa's Dyke Regeneration Strategy Study. With financial support from Natural England, AWM and the Welsh Assembly the consultants are engaging with partners and stakeholders to find solutions to the challenges faced by border communities and highlight opportunities that can build on the outstanding natural assets, the resilience and entrepreneurship that already exists within the communities and increased cross-border collaboration.
- 4.12 Additional funding has been secured from the Welsh Assembly Government and AWM to finance a Coordinator/Facilitator Officer post as support for the Memorandum of Understanding is still strong and work areas are continuing to develop. Recruitment, through secondment, is imminent.

Trees, Woods & Forestry - Regional Forestry Framework

- 4.13 Monitoring and evaluation of the 2008-2009 Delivery Plan is underway. Additionally this year we are carrying out a re-run of the Business Health Check that was completed last year, capturing the detail of the economic downturn and opportunities for increased intervention or support.
- 4.14 The "refresh" of the Regional Forestry Framework is in an early phase. Not only will it inform participants of its achievements in the last few years, and the current context for trees, woods and forests in the West Midlands but it is hoped that it will re-enthuse participants of the value of joint/partnership working to increase the profile of the trees, woods and forests sector.
- 4.15 The West Midlands Woodland and Forestry Forum meet next in Hereford on 01 July.

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5. HOUSING UPDATE

Implementing the Regional Housing Strategy

- 5.1 As part of the Regional Housing Executive's responsibility to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Regional Housing Strategy, the Regional Housing Executive has approved for consultation draft guidance for preparing Sub Regional Housing Strategy following the completion of the Sub Regional Housing Market Assessments. The draft guidance is supported in principle by the GOWM and Homes and Communities Agency as carrying forward CLG's expectations and

assisting with the HCA's new business model, the 'Single Conversation'.

Regional Funding Advice (RFA)

- 5.2 Regional Funding Advice has now been submitted to Government and the submitted version is available at:

http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Regional_Working/Regional_Funding_Advice_II.aspx

- 5.3 WMRA's housing team worked extensively with AWM and HCA colleagues to formulate the housing input into the submission, supported by advice from the Sub-Regional Housing Market Areas.

Housing Sector Response to the 'Credit-Crunch'

- 5.4 The Regional Housing Executive has commissioned a consultancy report on the impacts of the economic downturn on the West Midlands housing market, including an analysis of the potential long-term implications for the market under a range of potential scenarios for recovery. The project will report during April and a seminar will be held in April to discuss the findings.

RSS Revision Phase 2

- 5.5 In preparation for the Public Examination continual support is given to the RSS Policy Lead for Housing;- in discussions with the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit, commissioning updated evidence on the Region's long term affordable housing requirements, obtaining a regional perspective on affordable housing from sub regional partnerships' work, and drafting text for the RPB's Written Statements for the Examination Panel.

RSS Revision Phase 3: Provision of sites for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

- 5.6 WMRA's housing team has continued to support the Regional Planning Body in the Gypsy and Travellers element of the Phase 3 Revision process and is currently progressing work in relation to the Public consultation stage. Consultation will be undertaken in relation to three Options for new Policy, which have been developed in response to the advice submitted by the Strategic Planning Authorities, outcomes from Gypsy & Traveller EiPs in other Regions and comment from the RSS Gypsy & Traveller Reference Group – 1) upon the basis of need where it arises (findings from the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments), 2) upon the basis of Planning criteria – environmental constraints and opportunities and 3) upon the basis of a re-distribution of existing provision.

- 5.7 It is anticipated that sub-regional consultation workshops for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople will be held during July and August 2009 and a meeting with 'Travellers' is arranged for 24 April, to enable their direct input to workshop arrangements, for example, the most appropriate locations and dates for consultation workshops, to ensure maximum participation by all communities. In relation to this, WMRA's Housing team is working with WMRA's Communications team to create early awareness amongst local authority officers / Members and key organisations, for example the distribution of an 'info-leaflet' to local authority sites and circulation of the 'Somewhere to Live' DVD.

The RTPI Planning Awards 2009 – Winner: 'Somewhere to Live – Meeting Gypsy and Traveller Needs'

- 5.8 The West Midlands Regional Assembly with the South East England Regional Assembly, 4NW and the East of England Regional Assembly won the RTPI Planning Awards 2009 under the Equality and Diversity category. 'Somewhere to Live – Meeting Gypsy and Traveller Needs' was an awareness raising DVD highlighting the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers. For the West Midlands the DVD is part of the Phase Three revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy which, amongst other things, will be considering site provision needs for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

For further information, please contact: Jo Hill on 0121 678 1064, email: j.hill@wmra.gov.uk

Gypsy & Traveller Site Grant Programme – Bidding Round 2009-2010:

- 5.9 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is now responsible for the delivery of the Site Grant Programme and funds of £2.5 million is available to the West Midlands Region for the 2009/2010 period. To encourage bids for these funds, the HCA held a Regional workshop on 18 March, when advice on how to develop bids was explored and innovative approaches discussed. The deadline for bids to the 2009/10 round is 30 June 2009, with the Regional Housing Executive due to make Regional recommendations to the HCA in September, with an announcement on successful bids expected in October 2009.

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Regional Housing Research Programme

- 5.10 WMRA's housing team has commissioned updating work to inform the RSS Phase 2 Public Examination, and in refreshing the joint shared evidence base (RSS and RHS) is putting in place the Regional Housing

contribution to the forthcoming Regional Strategy. The following research commissions having been let so far:

- Most recent occupiers in new build housing. A field survey for 2005-2008 and report
- Credit Crunch implications for the West Midlands Region and the long term implications for recovery
- A Regional overview assessment of various affordable housing estimates in preparation for the RSS 2 Examination in Public next April – June 2009.
- An update on Regional House Price change and analysis.
- A literature review on the contribution of new housing development to the delivery of Urban Renaissance.
- An analysis of the implications of the NHPAU affordability model and proposed housing figures range for affordability in the West Midlands Region.
- Updated affordable housing needs figures based on 2006-based household projections, and
- Development of a planning constraints and opportunities based Option for RSS 3.

'Retrofitting for the Future' report

- 5.11 As part of their input into the West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan, WMRA's secretariat and AWM commissioned an important project to assess the current level of refurbishment in existing housing (social and private sector), to assess the impact on CO₂ reduction; and recommend how the Region can support households, housing managers and industry in meeting the challenges of regional carbon reduction targets. The report was launched on Monday 23rd March 2009 at the Orange Studio, Birmingham **and copies are available upon request – please contact Michael Craggs on 0121 245 0155.**

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6. TRANSPORT

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

- 6.1 The RSS Phase 2 Examination in Public (EiP) begins in April 2009 and continues through to June 2009. It is important that transport retains

its profile within the RSS Revision and implementation process. This will help to strengthen the link with sustainable growth.

Regional Transport Priorities Action Plan

- 6.2 The Assembly, AWM and the RTP Chair continue to provide the strategic lead in monitoring the progression of the key actions identified in the Action Plan, working in close cooperation with a wide range of partners and stakeholders from across the region.

Regional Funding Advice (RFA)

- 6.3 Regional Transport partnership (RTP) will continue to provide input to the Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JSIB), to help ensure the timely delivery and management of the RFA transport programme.

Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS) White Paper

- 6.4 RTP will provide input to JSIB on the development of the White Paper, as and when appropriate.

Milton Keynes South Midlands

- 6.5 Partners are developing closer inter-regional working relationships.

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7. THE REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

- 7.1 The West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan was launched in January 2008. Progress on its 30 actions is continuing and a progress Report has been presented to the Regional Minister. In respect of the specific Planning and Environment actions work has been completed on a report to scope out the potential to improve energy efficiency to reduce CO₂ emissions from existing housing stock. A launch seminar is planned for the 23rd march 2009
- 7.2 A further action focuses on transportation and the Assembly have commissioned consultants to calculate the CO₂ emissions from the Region's transport schemes in the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA).

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8. QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 Halcrow Consultants have completed an update on the Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA). This spatial understanding of flood risk issues will incorporate the latest national guidance as well as the substantial regional and sub-regional flood risk work that has been undertaken since the original RFRA was published and the outcome of the Pitt Review.

- 8.2 Mott Macdonald have carried out a stage 1 Green Belt study to map the present state of the green belt within the West Midlands. This is the first stage of a process to consider how more positive uses of Green Belt could contribute to the achievement of the WMRSS and its aims for Urban and Rural Renaissance. A stage 2 Green belt study has been completed to investigate the positive uses of land around the conurbation and Stoke on Trent that will feed into the development of the RSS Phase 3 preferred option work
- 8.3 Treweek Consultants are working to carry out a Regional Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). This will identify whether there is a 'likely significant effect' on any European sites arising from the WMRSS Phase Three Revision process. Where there is a 'Likely significant effect' and adverse effects cannot be excluded this assessment will identify the avoidance or mitigation measures required to avoid any adverse effects on site integrity. Further work on the existing RSS Phase Two HRA is complete and this will support the Examination in public process starting in April 2009.
- 8.4 Consultants have been appointed by English Heritage to develop a draft of the Regional Historic Environment Strategy supported by the Assembly that will go out for public consultation in April 2009.
- 8.5 Work has been completed on guidance on enhancing biodiversity across the West Midlands prepared by a task group lead by Natural England and supported by the Assembly. Treweek Consulting were appointed in July to update the regional habitat targets and a regional seminar has been carried out with partners a final report draft regional habits targets will be incorporated into the consultation draft of the RSS Phase 3 .
- 8.6 RTAB are working with AWM to develop the first Waste Infrastructure programme in the Region which has set up a Waste Infrastructure Board.
- 8.7 A Environment working group has developed draft Policy Options for the RSS Phase Three public consultation for all the Quality of Environment topics except waste policy which was considered in RSS Phase Two. Preparation of the examination statements for the cross cutting climate change polices and the regional waste strategy within RSS Phase Two has commenced.

- 8.8 The Regional Environment Group is proposing to respond to the Severn and Humber draft River Basin Management Plan consultations and input into the new Regional Landscape Partnership.

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9. Culture

- 9.1 The Cultural element of Phase Three of the WMRSS revision is looking to identify the Region's most significant cultural assets, identify any strategic gaps in provision, establish priorities to address any shortfall and identify policy approaches that could facilitate appropriate provision in the future.
- 9.2 We anticipate the cultural section of this revision will help to strengthen WMRSS policy to ensure development encapsulates cultural, sporting and tourism needs to support urban and rural renaissance.
- 9.3 Work to ensure culture is fully embedded within a new Single Integrated Strategy is also underway.

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10. EUROPE

- 10.1 **The European Strategy Board** met on February 27th and discussed the following items:

10.2 EU Territorial Cohesion: responding to the Green Paper

The Board discussed and endorsed the response to the EU consultation – which looked at what the EU role in balanced economic development should be. The response was based on the idea that EU funds could be coordinated under a regional strategy – with the EU providing support at the strategy rather than project level - and is available at http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Europe/European_Consultations.aspx

EU Connects update

- 10.3 The successful pilot project had brought in an estimated Euros 4-5M – other regions have taken a great deal of interest to the strategic approach to transnational funding adopted by the West Midlands.
- 10.4 A successful bid to ERDF for an expanded team has resulted in a high quality team of funding advisors now in place. See EU Connects webpage http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Europe/EU_Connects/EU_Connects.aspx

10.5 Progress of European Strategy Environment and Rural group

The group has the responsibility to work towards mainstreaming the environment and rural agenda aspects of the European Strategy. To date the group has contributed to the regional response to the CAP health check, and developed a work plan with tasks allocated to individuals.

- 10.6 The immediate priority is to examine other sources of funding and develop links with partner regions to make bids.

European Aspects of Economic Recovery Proposals

- 10.7 West Midlands in Europe updated the Board on the European Commissions Economic recovery plan – this is an evolving picture in which public sector funding is seen as part of the instruments assisting recovery, including the potential for pre commercial procurement.

- 10.8 At the regional level the Chair of the European Strategy Board is taking the role of vice chair of a group of automotive industry regions - supported by Interreg and ERDF priority 4 bids.

European Institute of Innovation and Technology

- 10.9 An AWM coordinated bid that would give the region the potential to act as a catalyst linking key climate change developments in the region with EU regions and cities in the same field.

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11. Health

- 11.1 The next Health and Well-being Partnership meeting will take place on 26th March 2009.
- 11.2 The Partnership will consider the Action Plan to support the delivery of the health and well-being strategy.
- 11.3 A significant amount of activity is being undertaken to implement the Strategy in parallel to developing the Action Plan. One of the key focuses over the last quarter has been about inter-professional learning.
- 11.4 The next Excellence in Public Health conference will be in June focusing on Work, Wealth and Health.
- 11.5 The West Midlands Public Health Observatory held a conference on 10th March on Sustaining Healthy Communities in Hard Times – The Information Needs. As a result of this conference the Observatory will be identifying suitable health indicators for tracking and monitoring the effects of the recession.

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12. LIVING WELL

- 12.1 So far, there have been over 5,300 beneficiaries of the programme, the available data suggest that around: 70% are female; nearly 50% are under 16 years of age; 62% are White British; and 7% consider themselves to have a disability;
- 12.2 Projects continue to generate lessons and issues through their implementation. Points raised this quarter relate to gaining appropriate referrals, working with mainstream services, promoting behavioural change, partnership working, recording outcomes and the suitability of the WEMWBS (mental wellbeing) monitoring tool. Evaluation findings can be found in the latest Living Well Newsletter. (visit the Living Well website to sign up to the newsletter www.livingwellwestmidlands.org)
- 12.3 The development of the themes suggested in the Annual Report are currently a priority for the programme. Lessons generated by projects will add value at regional level if they are shared within a purposeful and supported framework. With respect to this, a series of workshops have been planned for the 5th June 2009 to discuss future Commissioning and Voluntary and Community Sector provision of mental wellbeing services. Living Well WM also ran workshops at the Obesity Conference held at Aston Villa on the 6th March and will be running further workshops at the Work, Health and Wellbeing Conference being organised by Department of Health to be held in June this year.
- 12.4 The development of criteria for any re-allocation of any potential underspend within the portfolio has begun and it has been agreed that this will go towards developing the emerging portfolio themes and this work will be led by the projects.

13. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY (SOCIAL INCLUSION)

- 13.1 Please refer to the Chief Executive Report – Item 7

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