

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Regional Spatial Strategy improves development on the ground, but how far is it affecting the 'Hearts and Minds' of the Region?**

New figures show that 15,800 new dwellings were built in the West Midlands between 2007 and 2008, exceeding the target of 12,355 set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy. The figures also revealed that the amount of land developed for employment purposes hit a five year high at 270 hectares, 75% of which was on previously developed land.

The figures are from the latest Annual Monitoring Report of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, which is produced by the West Midlands Regional Assembly. The Report looks at a range of criteria including housing, land and development for employment purposes, transport and accessibility and quality of the environment. It measures the progress of the Region in meeting the targets and objectives set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and helps both Government and the Region to understand how far down the line the West Midlands is in becoming a more sustainable Region.

The figures show that many of the policies such as distribution of housing and employment are having a positive impact on development patterns across the Region. For example derelict land in the Region has reduced by 25% and people are depositing 30% less waste to landfill sites. However there is still a shortfall in affordable housing and also too many people are still choosing to move out of the Major Urban Areas.

Councillor Rex Roberts, Chairman of the West Midlands Regional Assembly Planning Partnership which produced the report commented:

“With Sustainable Development at its heart, the Regional Spatial Strategy includes a challenging range of policies designed to achieve complementary Urban and Rural Renaissance. Acknowledging the sheer scale of this challenge, I am extremely pleased to report that considerable progress towards this has been made. There is however, a great deal more to be done, particularly around providing

affordable housing and changing behavioural patterns towards out-migration and the use of public transport.”

Overall the findings of this year’s Report are very positive and suggest that significant progress towards the Spatial Strategy is being made. However, with signs of the Credit Crunch only becoming significant at the end of the reporting year, the report reflects trends and progress made mostly before the current economic downturn. In light of the vastly different current economic backdrop the report cannot be used to predict likely future development rates particularly in the short term.

Key indicators in the report that urban and rural renaissance is continuing to make progress. For example, there has been a shift towards more housing and employment related development in the Major Urban areas and the Region continues to make increasingly efficient use of its brownfield land. However, the report highlights that there is still a significant shortfall in the number of affordable housing, a challenge that will not get any easier in the current recession.

Whilst development on the ground is supporting the achievement of the Strategy, as initially anticipated hearts and minds would seem to be taking time to follow. This is demonstrated by some re-emergence of traditional migration patterns between the major urban and rural areas of the Region and a lack of progress in changing individuals and business’ transport behaviour.

### **A Sample of the report findings for the West Midlands:**

#### **Housing**

- The number of dwellings built (15,800 NET) again exceeded the RSS target (12,355).
- The balance of housing completions between the Major Urban Areas and elsewhere continues to change and is moving towards the balance required by the RSS
- The amount of affordable houses (4043) showed a significant improvement in comparison to the previous year, but is still well short of the RSS target (6-6500 per year)

#### **Employment Land**

- Levels of employment land completions were good with 270HA being delivered compared to an average of 233HA for the past 5 years.

- Development is still focused on the Major Urban Areas. The proportion of employment development taking place on previously developed land increased from 50% to 75% in comparison with the previous year.
- Hotel and Leisure completions fell in 2007/8 and there were very low levels of retail development.

### **Quality of the Environment**

- The area of derelict land in the Region is continuing fall and now stands at just over 2,400 hectares, representing a 25% fall in the derelict land area since 2001
- The Region has seen the largest single year improvement in the quality of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), with 76% by area in favourable or recovering condition.
- There has been a 30% reduction in waste deposited at landfill sites, reflecting the target to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill

### **Transport and Accessibility**

- The transport policies contained within the WMRSS largely seek to reverse long established national and local trends, such as increasing car ownership and declining bus patronage. Whilst several indicators showed progress towards the WMRSS's transport objectives during 2007/08, the majority (where data was available) showed little or no progress.

The Annual Monitoring Report will form a key piece of evidence at the forthcoming Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 Examination in Public (EiP) starting on 28th April. The Report will help to establish whether more needs to be done to bring about the challenges set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy and whether any of these policies need to be looked at or revised in order to achieve these changes.

If you would like a full copy of the report please contact Paul Bayliss at West Midlands Regional Assembly on 0121 678 1027 / email [p.bayliss@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:p.bayliss@wmra.gov.uk), or visit

[http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning\\_and\\_Regional\\_Spatial\\_Strategy/Monitoring\\_/Monitoring.aspx](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/Monitoring_/Monitoring.aspx)

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**Notes to editors:**

1. Robust monitoring of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is essential in order to establish what is happening now, what may happen in the future and then compare these trends against existing policies and targets to determine what needs to be done.
2. The results of the Annual Monitoring Report are used extensively to inform the Revision and implementation of the RSS.
3. The Regional Planning Partnership carries out the Regional Planning Body function on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Assembly. It has a statutory duty to review matters relating to the Regional Spatial Strategy and matters relating to the ongoing planning and development of the Region.
4. The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is part of the statutory development plan and includes the Regional Transport Strategy. It provides a framework for all Local Development Frameworks and Local Transport Plans and aims to influence wider strategies and plans. It is the Government who publishes the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy and therefore it is Government policy.
5. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
6. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
7. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
8. The Regional Assembly is required by DCLG to submit an Annual Monitoring Report by the end of February each year.
9. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
10. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.

6. For further information, visit our website [www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)