

NEWS RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

Date 07 01 2008

Ref. 2008 0701



West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision – Letter from Baroness Andrews

Following submission of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in December 2007, the Assembly has received a letter from Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In the letter, the Minister thanked the Assembly and its Partners for the hard work that had gone into producing the Phase Two Revision Draft. However, the Minister expressed concern about the housing proposals put forward by the Assembly in light of the Government's agenda to increase housing building across the country.

In particular, the Minister has asked the Government Office for the West Midlands to commission further work to look at options which could deliver higher housing numbers. The Government Office intends to complete this further work by mid April and, in order to provide an opportunity for consultees to consider this work when making responses on the Phase Two Revision Draft, the Minister has proposed to extend the consultation period to 23rd May 2008.

In submitting the Draft Revision, the Assembly made it clear that the policies and proposals put forward represented an ambitious growth strategy for the Region but one that was well balanced taking into account a wide range of important considerations. The Assembly particularly emphasised that it had worked hard with its regional partners to meet the Government's housing objectives and it believed that it had achieved this in a way that maintained the drive towards sustainable development and growth emphasising the Urban and Rural Renaissance so important to the future of this Region

The Government's letter now appears to challenge this view and seems to imply that, in order to provide for a higher level of house building, certain principles underpinning the Spatial Strategy may need to be reconsidered.

Although the contents of the letter has yet to be formally considered by the Assembly, Cllr Rex Roberts', Chair of the Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership initial reaction was that he was disappointed at the Government's position stating: "While we recognise the need to improve housing affordability, it is important that we do not fall into the trap of a simple numbers game. This could lead to the worst of all worlds if more greenfield sites are released

and efforts to regenerate brownfield land and derelict sites is diverted such that the overall Urban and Rural Renaissance agenda is undermined”.

Cllr Roberts also questioned whether even higher housing numbers could in practice be achieved given constraints in the construction industry and wider infrastructure and sustainability concerns.

While it is clearly open for the Government to undertake any further work it deems necessary, the Assembly will need to assess carefully the full implications of the Minister’s letter. Officers will therefore be considering the contents of the letter and possible ways forward and will advise members in due course. Following this, the Assembly will inform its partners and the public on its views including any implications for extending the consultation period.

ENDS

For further information contact Chilufya Dawo on 0121 678 1044.

West Midlands Regional Assembly

1. West Midlands Regional Assembly (‘the Assembly’) represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. The Assembly’s Regional Planning Partnership is the designated Regional Planning Body for the West Midlands, 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
7. The Independent Performance Assessment was undertaken by the National Audit Office as part of an examination of all 8 English Regional Development Agencies at the request of the Department of Trade and Industry.
8. The final report can be downloaded from Advantage West Midlands’ website www.advantagewm.co.uk

- ENDS -

