

WMRSS UPDATE

July 2009

Welcome

A warm welcome to this edition of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Update, your source for news and information about the revision of the WMRSS and its ongoing implementation and monitoring. The updates are designed to inform those interested on the general progress of the WMRSS and opportunities to get involved.

Overview of the current WMRSS Revision

When the WMRSS was published in June 2004, the Secretary of State supported its principles but suggested several issues that needed to be developed further. This Revision process is being undertaken in three phases:

- **Phase One** - focused on developing a long term sub-regional strategy for the Black Country. The final Phase One Revision was published by the Secretary of State in January 2008. The revised WMRSS continues to be part of the Development Plan for the Region and the specific revisions concerning the Black Country sub-region will form the strategic framework for the Joint Core Strategy which is being prepared by the four Black Country Authorities (Dudley MBC, Sandwell MBC, Walsall MBC and Wolverhampton CC). The documents can be viewed on our website: [http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_1_\(Black_Country_Study\).aspx](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_1_(Black_Country_Study).aspx)
- **Phase Two** – focuses on issues around housing, employment land, centres, transport and waste. A public consultation on the Draft Revision document, which was prepared by the Assembly, closed on 8th December 2008. The Draft Revision document was considered at an Examination in Public (EiP) which closed on 24th June 2009. The Panel will issue a report in Autumn 2009, which will be considered by Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM). A final consultation on any Proposed Changes by the Government will take place before the revised WMRSS is approved by the Secretary of State.

Further details about the EiP process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website: http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/west_midlands_phase_two/index.htm. In addition, you may like to refer to the Assembly's website: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_2/RSS_Revision_Phase_2.aspx

Contact: Stefan Preuss on s.preuss@wmra.gov.uk or Tel: 0121 678 1018

Please view our website to access consultation forms and background material for Phase Three: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_3.aspx. Please see overleaf for our postal and email address.

Focus on WMRSS Phase Three Options Consultation

Content

The topic areas being considered in WMRSS Phase Three Revision are as follows:

- **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 Showpeople.
- **Culture, Sport and Tourism:** Strengthen WMRSS policies to support cultural, sport and tourism needs of the Region.
- **Environment:** Update existing Quality of Environment policies in the WMRSS and consider need for new policies related to flood risk, renewable energy and Green Belt uses.
- **Minerals:** Safeguarding minerals and examining future supply of aggregates.

Background Technical Reports for each of the five topics being considered can be downloaded from our website.

Options Consultation

The Options consultation document for Phase Three is out for consultation between 29th June and 14th August 2009. As there are likely to be a number of choices to the nature and content of new or revised policies, the Options document has been issued for consultation to identify those choices and the consequences of adopting them. At this stage, policies are not fixed and everybody has a chance to say what they think about the Options before a Preferred Option is developed.

Assessments and Appraisals

At all stages of the Phase Three process there will be a Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulations Assessment and Rural Proofing. Copies of all of the Appraisal and Assessment reports can be downloaded from our website.

Consultation events

During the WMRSS Phase Three Options consultation the Assembly and its sub-regional partners are facilitating a number of events to help anyone who wishes to get involved in this important discussion and ensure that there is an opportunity for all to input into the report.

On 2nd July the Assembly held a "drop-in" event at the Burlington Hotel, Birmingham which was attended by 100 people.

All responses must reach the Assembly by 5pm on 14th August 2009.

Phase Three Options contd.

Consultation events contd

The Assembly is also arranging a workshop event for WMRSS Reference Groups at the Birmingham Midland Institute on the 30th July. Strategic Authorities are also arranging sub-regional events for Members and officers during the consultation period. Invitations are being arranged by the relevant sub-regional authorities. Events have already taken place in **Herefordshire and Warwickshire**, and are planned in **Stratford upon Avon** (20th July), **Worcestershire** (21st July), **Staffordshire & Stoke** (22nd July), **Birmingham and Black Country Authorities** (27th July), **Shropshire** (6th August). Further sub-regional events will be added on the website as soon as they have been confirmed.

The Assembly is also arranging sub-regional gypsy and traveller focus meetings. They have already taken place in **Worcester, Hereford, Stoke and Nuneaton** with one planned for **Telford** (22nd July). Further focus meetings will be added on the website as soon as they have been confirmed.

How to make a comment:

It is possible to respond to the WMRSS Phase Three Options consultation in one of three ways:

1. Via the online questionnaire (www.wmra.gov.uk)
2. By downloading an electronic questionnaire - completed forms should be emailed to wmrss@wmra.gov.uk
3. Completing the detachable questionnaire in the Options Consultation document and posting it to the address below.

The deadline for consultation responses is 5pm on 14th August 2009.

What next?

In light of responses received during the consultation, a "Preferred Option" will be developed. The intention is that the Preferred Option will be submitted to the Secretary of State in February 2010. However, the Local Democracy Economic Development and Construction Bill, which is currently before Parliament, proposes the introduction of a Single Integrated Strategy to replace the existing RSS and Regional Economic Strategy (RES). It is unclear at this stage whether the Phase Three work will be incorporated into a revised WMRSS or the new Regional Strategy. GOWM, the Assembly and Advantage West Midlands will start a stock take process in September 2009 to guide on the best way forward for the Phase Three Revision work. Either way the policy content will remain relevant to regional interests and

necessary to fill policy gaps until with the new Regional Strategy is developed. Further information should be available in our next edition.

If you have any comments please contact: David Clarke at WMRA (0121 678 0123; d.clarke@wmra.gov.uk)

Monitoring

Copies of the 2008 Annual Monitoring Report can be obtained from the Assembly or via website at http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/Monitoring/Monitoring.aspx

In preparation for the EiP, the Proposed Monitoring Framework was re-drafted to enable users to link indicators and policies more readily. This included a section on the structure and network of groups of specialists for monitoring the WMRSS in the West Midlands. The revised framework can be downloaded from http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/WMRSS_ps2revision_UMFSBI_March09.pdf.

During the EiP the need for more indicators for monitoring climate change was identified. An addendum to the monitoring framework can be downloaded from <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/Exam%2046%20Monitoring%20of%20Climate%20Change.pdf>.

Collecting monitoring data for the year ending 31st March 2009 is under way, local planning authorities have until 11th August to return forms to Mott MacDonalds, who are collating returns. The annual stakeholders monitoring event will take place in early September, details will be available shortly.

Conformity

The Assembly has recently given formal opinions that both the Coventry Core Strategy and Central Telford Area Action Plan are in general conformity with the published WMRSS and are also aligned to policies emerging in the Phase 2 Revision Document.

Following an Examination in Public, the joint Core Spatial Strategy submitted by Newcastle under Lyme and City of Stoke Councils has been found "sound", subject to a number of changes. The Assembly also considered that this Document was in general conformity with the WMRSS.

For the year ending 31st March 2009, the Assembly again responded to all consultations on planning applications within the time agreed with the relevant local planning authority. The number of applications sent to the Assembly for comment was slightly down on the previous twelve months.

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