

# WMRSS UPDATE

February 2010

## Welcome

A warm welcome to the latest 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 the principles of the strategy but suggested that several issues needed to be developed further. This Revision process is being undertaken in three phases:

**Phase One** of the Revision has been completed and sets out a long-term strategy for the Black Country area.

**Phase Two** is still in progress. This phase has focused on housing development, employment land, town centres, transport and waste together with overarching policies relating to climate change and sustainable development.

The **Phase Three** Revision topics are 'Rural Services', 'Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople', 'Culture, Sport and Tourism', 'Environment' and 'Minerals'.

## Phase Two – Update

The Secretary of State is currently in the process of preparing the Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Phase Two Revision. This follows the Examination in Public which took place in Spring 2009 and the publication of the independent Panel Report in September 2009. Once published, the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes will be subject to a period of public consultation. The Panel Report and latest news on the Proposed Changes is available on the Government Office West Midlands website. <http://www.gowm.gov.uk/gowm/Planning/515750/863204/?a=42496>

Contact: Stefan Preuss on [s.preuss@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:s.preuss@wmra.gov.uk) or Tel: 0121 678 1018.

## Phase Three - Update on progression of Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations

From April 2010, the WMRSS will be merged with the other principle Regional Strategies – particularly the Regional Economic and Housing Strategies – to form the new Strategy for the West Midlands. The Phase Three issues will be taken forward into the new Regional Strategy in one of two main ways:

- a) Interim Policy Statements that would provide interim guidance to assist the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. It is anticipated that Interim Policy Statements would be material planning considerations in future planning decisions but would not have the full weight of a policy that had been fully tested through the Development Plan process.
- (b) Policy Recommendations that would be fed directly into the preparation of the Regional Strategy.

Interim Policy Statements will be prepared on the provision of pitches per authority for Gypsies, Travellers & Travelling Showpeople and also the Sub-regional Apportionment of Aggregates. All other Phase Three workstreams will be progressed as Policy Recommendations.

The Policy Recommendations were approved by the Regional Planning and Environment Executive on 23rd February 2010. The Interim Policy Statements will be considered by the Assembly Board on 17 March 2010 for approval. These will go to the Joint Strategy and Investment Board meeting on 23rd March 2010 for ratification.

Contact: David Clarke on [d.clarke@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:d.clarke@wmra.gov.uk) or tel 0121 678 0123.

## Monitoring

The final West Midlands Annual Monitoring Report was considered and approved at the Regional Planning and Environment Executive on 23rd February 2010. The submitted document will be available from the WMRA website in early March with the printed version being available shortly afterwards. The 2009 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) covers the period April 2008 – March 2009, the sixth prepared since the publication of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS).

It is encouraging that this AMR provides continuing evidence of progress towards complementary Urban and Rural Renaissance. In terms of population change key findings are:

- Between 2007 and 2008, the growth rate in the population in urban areas was higher than in rural areas for the first time since 1981.
- Furthermore, the number of people moving from urban areas to other parts of the region was lower than in any year since 1999.
- The rate of growth of population in rural areas is beginning to stabilise, though the ageing population and out-migration of young adults continues to be evident

Latest data (2007) also indicates some positive signs of changes which are complementary to the aims of urban and rural renaissance relating to employment. In particular:

- The range and number of jobs in rural areas has increased since 2001 permitting greater self containment,
- In urban areas, although there has been some reduction in employment the contribution of knowledge intensive industries has increased;
- The qualification gap between urban and rural areas has reduced for young people, with a continuation in positive trends.

The Annual Monitoring Report paints a rather mixed picture more generally, with strong indications that further progress over the next few years is likely to be impeded by the impact on development of the economic downturn. Data for 2008/9 demonstrates that:

- Whilst there was an increase in the proportion of net housing completions in Major Urban Areas, the overall total for the Region showed a 19% fall on 2007/8 and was 30% below the Preferred Option target; the shortfall was more marked for MUAs.
- The rate of employment land completions overall and the proportion in MUAs remained high, though it is worth noting that many of these schemes commenced prior to the recession.
- There were no major retail completions in 2008/9, with overall retail development remaining at a very low level.
- Activity in the office sector fell and the proportion of in and edge of centre completions dropped significantly.
- Development levels in the hotel and leisure sectors rose in 2008/9 and there is a healthy development pipeline in both sectors.

It is clear from the AMR that a number of challenges face the West Midlands in the coming years. In particular:

- The severity of the economic challenge facing the West Midlands in comparison to other regions. This challenge has been compounded by the current recession;
- To meet the higher levels of housing now required, a dramatic increase in the rate of completions will be needed when the economic climate improves.
- Our Transport policies seek to reverse long established trends: the evidence provided by the Report demonstrates that the region is struggling to meet the majority of its transport targets. These will only be achieved by the full implementation and promotion of the RSS and Economic Strategy by the Region's Local Authorities, their partners and the general public.

This is the last AMR before the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (LDEDCA) is fully implemented on 1st April 2010 and the consequent wind up of the West Midlands Regional Assembly. At this time of change, the successful publication of the AMR once again represents a considerable achievement. We would like to record our appreciation to all those involved, particularly the authors and the local authorities and other partners who undertook the extensive data collection required to support this activity. Our tradition of working together has enabled us to build up the reputation as one of the best, if not the best, of the English Regions when it comes to monitoring activity.

From April 2010, the WMRSS will be merged with the other principle strategies – particularly the Regional Economic and Housing Strategies – to form the new Strategy for the West Midlands. Annual monitoring will continue to be required by Government. We are currently working with partners to assess the monitoring requirements of the new system and to devise and implement the new arrangements. We shall advise you of these new arrangements as soon as we are able. Contact: Paul Bayliss on p.bayliss@wmra.gov.uk or telephone 0121 678 1027.

## Conformity

The Regional Assembly has recently provided positive opinions of general conformity with the WMRSS in respect of four key planning documents that have been published for formal consultation prior to their submission to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public. These being Core Strategy documents for the Black Country, Wyre Forest and Staffordshire Moorlands as well the Area Action Plan for Brierley Hill in Dudley. Contact: Tim Williams on t.williams@wmra.gov.uk or telephone 0121 678 1050.

**How to Join the RSS Revision Consultation Database:** If you would like to join our consultation database and be kept updated with progress on the WMRSS Revision by emailing your contact details to wmrss@wmra.gov.uk.

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