

WMRSS UPDATE

April 2009

Welcome

Welcome to this 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 WMRSS Updates are designed to keep you up to date on the general progress and inform you of 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 several issues that needed to be developed further. This Revision process is being undertaken in three phases:

- **Phase One** - has 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 will continue 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. Relevant documentation 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. The Assembly has prepared a Draft Revision document which was out for public consultation until 8th December 2008. The Draft Revision document will be considered at an Examination in Public starting on 28th April 2009.
- **Phase Three** - topics are:
 - Rural Services
 - Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople
 - Culture, Sport and Tourism
 - Environment
 - Minerals

The Assembly is developing an Options document that will identify choices as to the nature and content of new or revised policies. Everybody will have a chance to say what they think during the consultation period which will commence in July 2009.

Phase Two and Phase Three

Phase Two - Examination in Public 2009

The Examination in Public (EiP) for the WMRSS Phase Two Revision will open on 28th April 2009 at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton. It is expected to last a maximum of seven sitting weeks. Further details about the EiP process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website including:

- the EiP Timetable
- Participants Statements
- The EiP Library list
- EiP meetings and minutes including the recent Housing and Water seminars.

See http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/west_midlands_phase_two/index.htm

In addition, a number of Assembly technical documents relevant to the EiP can be accessed on our website:

http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_2/RSS_Revision_Phase_2.aspx

For further information contact: Sharon Doak at WMRA (0121 678 1042; s.doak@wmra.gov.uk)

Phase Three - Options Document

The draft Options consultation document was approved by the Assembly Board subject to minor amendments on 25th March and is available on the Assembly website at: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Meetings_and_Agendas/Board_of_Directors/25_March_2009.aspx. A final version of the Options document, including design refinements and maps, will be available on the Assembly website in June 2009.

The Options consultation will run from **29th June 2009 to 14th August 2009**. A consultation event is planned for 2nd July at the Burlington Hotel, Birmingham, further details will be issued closer to the date. Whilst the 7 week consultation partly coincides with the summer holiday period, there is an early opportunity for organisations to consider the Options and possible responses in advance of the formal consultation by accessing the draft document on the Assembly website (see above).

Consultation responses will be used to develop a "Preferred Option". This will be considered by officers and Members in Autumn 2009 prior to submission to the Secretary of State in February 2010. Following submission, the remaining stages of the Phase Three Revision, under the existing arrangements, would be led by Government Office for the West Midlands on behalf of the Secretary of State.

All technical work regarding the WMRSS can be found on our website at http://www.wmra.gov.uk/planning_and_regional_spatial_strategy/technical_work.aspx

West Midlands
Regional Assembly

Speaking out for the region

Phase Three Options contd.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, which is currently before Parliament, proposes the introduction of a Single Regional Strategy to replace the existing RSS and Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The intention is for the Bill to receive Royal Assent in July 2009, with an operational date of April 2010.

On the basis of this timetable, it remains to be seen whether the partially completed Phase Three work will be incorporated into a revised RSS or the new Regional Strategy. Either way the policy content will remain relevant to regional interests and necessary to fill policy gaps until the new Regional Strategy is developed.

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Implementing the WMRSS

The WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft Implementation Plan Supplement was published in March 2009. It provides an update to the Draft Implementation Plan and should be read alongside that original document. It will form a crucial piece of evidence to the EIP and is now available from 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

Monitoring

At the end of February the Assembly submitted the latest **Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)** of the WMRSS to government. It forms a key part of the evidence base for the Region and helps to indicate areas for future review.

It is important to note that trends and achievements reflected in the report fall outside the current economic climate, which only became significant at the end of the reporting year, and cannot be used to predict future development rates. Overall the findings are very positive and suggest that significant progress towards the WMRSS is being made. Evidence suggests that whilst the WMRSS is now strongly influencing development on the ground, it is still not impacting on the "hearts and minds" of individuals' and business' behaviour. This consideration will need to impact on the future WMRSS and its implementation as the Region responds to the challenges of the future – both in terms of need and policy.

The final report is available on the Assembly's website at: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/Monitoring_/Monitoring.aspx. Alternatively you can request a printed copy from Sharon Doak (0121 678 1042, s.doak@wmra.gov.uk)

In anticipation of the Examination in Public a technical document "Updated Monitoring Framework and supporting Background Information" has been prepared which provides the rationale and detail behind the proposed monitoring framework. The document can be downloaded via: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/WMRSS_ps2revision_UMFSBI_March09.pdf

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Conformity

The Assembly has provided advice to Rugby Borough Council concerning a planning application submitted by Advantage West Midlands for a High Technology Park at Ansty. The site, to the north east of Coventry, is designated as a Major Investment Site in the current WMRSS. However, in the Phase Two 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. The Assembly's advice to Rugby Borough Council was subject to any planning consent having a condition or legal agreement attached to it. This was 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.

Eco Towns

On 4th November 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published the draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-towns for consultation. It sets out the standards for an eco-town and the proposed planning process. CLG has extended the deadline for responses to the draft PPS consultation to 30th April 2009.

A copy of the Assembly's response, jointly approved by the Regional Planning & Environment Executive and Regional Housing Executive, is available on the Assembly website at <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/Agenda%20Item%202012%20-%20Consultation%20on%20Draft%20Eco-towns%20PPS.pdf>.

CLG has announced that a decision on Middle Quinton as a potential location for an eco town will not be taken until after the Secretary of State has considered the WMRSS Phase Two EIP Panel Report

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