

# WMRSS UPDATE

October 2009

## Welcome

A warm autumn 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. It is 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** - 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 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). Relevant documentation can be viewed on the Assembly's 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 prepared a Draft Revision document which was out for public consultation until 8th December 2008. The Draft Revision document was considered at an Examination in Public (EiP) which closed on 24th June 2009. An independent Panel issued their report on the EiP on 28th September 2009 which is now being considered by the Secretary of State via the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM). The Government is due to publish the Proposed Changes to the Draft RSS by the end of 2009. This will then be subject to a final period of consultation before the revised WMRSS is approved by the Secretary of State, hopefully in spring 2010.
- **Phase Three** – The topics being addressed in the Phase Three Revision of the WMRSS are 'Rural Services', 'Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople', 'Culture, Sport and Tourism', 'Environment' and 'Minerals'. The consultation period on the Phase Three Options Document ended on 14th August 2009.

## Phase Two Panel Report Publication

The Examination in Public (EiP) took place between April and June 2009 and following this the Panel Report on the EiP was published by GOWM on 28th September 2009. The Report includes the Panel's findings and recommendations to Government about changes to the draft Strategy. The Panel Report is available electronically: <http://www.gowm.gov.uk/gowm/Planning/515750/panelreport09/?a=42496>

By mid October copies of the Panel Report should be made available by GOWM for inspection at the same places where the draft RSS was deposited: local authority planning departments, GOWM and the offices of West Midlands Regional Assembly. GOWM will also send hard copies of the Report to all participants at the EiP and local authority Chief Planning Officers. CD versions will be available to view at public libraries. Any queries regarding availability of the Panel Report should be addressed to GOWM (email: [rss.team@gowm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rss.team@gowm.gsi.gov.uk) tel: 0121 352 5054).

The Secretary of State will now consider the findings and recommendations of the Panel Report together with all representations on the draft RSS. It is anticipated that the Secretary of State will publish the Proposed Changes to the draft RSS by the end of this year. This will then be subject to a final period of consultation before the revised WMRSS is approved by the Secretary of State, hopefully in spring 2010.

Further information about the EiP can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website at:  
[http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/west\\_midlands\\_phase\\_two/index.htm](http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/west_midlands_phase_two/index.htm)

You may also like to refer to technical documents prepared by the Assembly to inform the EiP which are accessible from our website:  
[http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning\\_and\\_Regional\\_Spatial\\_Strategy/RSS\\_Revision/RSS\\_Revision\\_Phase\\_2/RSS\\_Revision\\_Phase\\_2.aspx](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](mailto:s.preuss@wmra.gov.uk) or Tel: 0121 678 1018

## Joining the Database

If you would like to join our consultation database and be kept updated with progress on the RSS Revision please email your contact details to [wmrss@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:wmrss@wmra.gov.uk).

## Phase Three Options consultation

Consultation on the WMRSS Phase Three Options closed on 14th August 2009. A total of 442 responses were received and a final report analysing the consultation responses will be available in late October 2009. The Assembly would like to thank everyone who responded.

In early September there was a "stock-take" meeting involving officers from the Assembly, GOWM and Advantage West Midlands to consider how the RSS Phase Three workstreams be taken forward, in the most effective way, in the light of anticipated legislative changes to the regional strategy arrangements\*. It was considered at that meeting that the Phase Three issues should be progressed through the new Regional Strategy process rather than through a RSS Phase Three Revision.

It was proposed that the Phase Three issues be taken forward into the Regional Strategy in one of two main ways:

(a) Policy Statements that would provide interim guidance to assist the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. It is anticipated that 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.

The Regional Planning & Environment Executive (RPEE) and Assembly Board at their meetings on 22nd September and 30th September respectively, accepted this approach subject to clarification from the Department of Communities and Local Government (via GOWM) that (a) work undertaken to date through the Phase Three Revision can be "banked" and counted as part of the preparation process for the new strategy, and (b) weight is given to Interim Policy Statements in decisions on Local Development Frameworks (LDF's) and major planning applications.

Subject to satisfactory reassurances on the above issues it has been agreed that work on developing the Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations should progress expeditiously with a view to final sign-off by the Joint Strategy & Investment Board at its meeting on 3rd March 2010.

\* Further information on the changes to the regional strategy arrangements can be found at <http://www.partnershipwestmidlands.co.uk/>

It is proposed that progress on the emerging Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations be reported through, and approved by, the existing Regional Planning Body arrangements (RPEE and Assembly Board) and the new regional arrangements (Joint Strategy & Investment Board (JSIB) and West Midlands Leaders Board. For more information please visit the Assembly's Phase Three webpage: [http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning\\_and\\_Regional\\_Spatial\\_Strategy/RSS\\_Revision/RSS\\_Revision\\_Phase\\_3.aspx](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_3.aspx)

Should you have any queries in relation to Phase Three please contact: David Clarke at WMRA (0121 678 0123; [d.clarke@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:d.clarke@wmra.gov.uk))

## Monitoring

The annual stakeholders monitoring event was held on 25th September 2009 which gave the opportunity to reflect on last years monitoring output and to look forward. In respect of the data being currently assembled for the February 2010 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) the emerging findings, in light of the current economic climate, unsurprisingly show a significant decrease in number of dwellings completed accompanied by only a relatively small decline in employment completions. The event included workshop sessions which provided the opportunity to discuss how the AMR was performing in the various topic areas of the RSS.

Looking to the future, the Stakeholders conference also considered how the monitoring work might be taken forward under the new arrangements. Whilst it is too early to form any firm views as to the precise arrangements, the continued strong commitment to monitoring across the West Midlands was very encouraging.

The Assembly is currently on track to produce next year's AMR in February 2010. All credit must be given to all Local Planning Authorities for providing us with their monitoring data which is essential to this process.

For further details and for an electronic copy of the AMR please view the Assembly's website, hard copies available upon request:

[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)

Should you have any comments in relation to Monitoring please contact: Paul Bayliss at WMRA (0121 678 1027; [p.bayliss@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:p.bayliss@wmra.gov.uk))

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If you would like to receive future WMRSS Updates electronically, or if you wish to be removed from the database or change any of your details please email [wmrss@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:wmrss@wmra.gov.uk) or call **0121 678 1053**.