

WMRSS UPDATE - Final Edition

31st March 2010

Welcome

A warm welcome to the final edition of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Update. As ever, this is your source for news and information about the revision of the WMRSS and its ongoing implementation and monitoring. We shall also give some pointers about the new arrangements which come to play as of 1st April 2010.

Transitional Arrangements:

Developing a Regional Strategy

The Regional Strategies Policy Statement (23rd February 2010) sets out the Government's policy framework for the preparation of Regional Strategies prepared under Part 5 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. It provides policy guidance on the preparation and revision of Regional Strategies and sets out the main expectations on their form, content, implementation and monitoring.

On 1st April 2010 the West Midlands Leaders Board (WMLB) along with Advantage West Midlands, as the Responsible Regional Authorities, will take forward all Regional Strategy work following the statutory guidance. The Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JS&IB) continues to be the body to take forward the Strategy for the West Midlands on behalf of both WMLB and Advantage West Midlands. Further information on this will be sent to you shortly by WMLB.

Saving of WMRSS Policies

From 1st April 2010, the Regional Strategy will consist of the existing Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) as of January 2008, which incorporates WMRSS Phase One. Any WMRSS Phase Two and Phase Three legacy work will be incorporated in developing the new Regional Strategy, as set out below.

Following the wind up of the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) on 31st March 2010, the WMRA website will act as an archive site from 1st April 2010 and will be available at www.wmraarchive.org.uk. For further information regarding the Strategy for the West Midlands, please view the WMLB website at <http://www.wmleadersboard.gov.uk/policy>.

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 has been 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 latest position is explained in more depth below.

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

Phase Two – Secretary of State's Proposed Changes

On 12th March 2010, Lord McKenzie, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), wrote to the Chairman of the Assembly advising that, following detailed consideration of the WMRSS process to date, CLG has decided that further work is required before the Secretary of State can publish his Proposed Changes. In his letter Lord McKenzie advised that CLG hopes to be in a position to publish the Proposed Changes by July 2010.

To access the letter please view the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) website <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gowm/Planning/515750/863204/>. Any queries relating to the Proposed Changes should be directed to the GOWM on tel: 0121 352 5050 or email: rss.team@gowm.gsi.gov.uk.

Future WMLB contact: Stefan Preuss on s.preuss@wmleadersboard.gov.uk or Tel: 0121 678 1018.

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

Phase Three issues have been taken forward in one of two main ways:

- Interim Policy Statements which will provide a framework for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.
- Policy Recommendations which will provide an important input into the preparation of the Regional Strategy.

Interim Policy Statements have been 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 have been progressed as Policy Recommendations.

The Policy Recommendations were approved on 23rd February 2010 by the Regional Planning and Environment Executive (RPEE). The Assembly Board approved the Interim Policy Statements on 17th March 2010.

On 30th March 2010 GOWM confirmed that they now expect planning authorities to ensure that their Development Plan Documents are sufficiently flexible to enable them to deliver the requirements set out in the Interim Policy Statements.

GOWM have also confirmed that the Policy Recommendations should now be progressed as part of the new Regional Strategy. The Interim Policy Statements and Policy Recommendations are now available on the WMRA archive website: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_3.aspx

Future WMLB contact: David Clarke on d.clarke@wmleadersboard.gov.uk or telephone 0121 678 0123.

Monitoring

From April 2010, the WMRSS will be merged with the other principal strategies – particularly the Regional Economic Strategy – to form the 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.

The February 2010 WMRSS Annual Monitoring Report is now available on the WMRA website: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/Monitoring/Monitoring.aspx. If you do not have access to the internet a limited number of copies are available on request to Paul Bayliss.

Future WMLB contact: Paul Bayliss on p.bayliss@wmleadersboard.gov.uk or telephone 0121 678 1027.

Implementation

At the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Examination in Public, an WMRSS Implementation Plan Supplement was submitted by the WMRA to demonstrate the infrastructure and other investment needs necessary to deliver the Spatial Strategy. This document continues to provide an important reference point for helping to determine investment priorities across the Region.

An Implementation Plan will be produced as part of the preparation of the new Regional Strategy.

Future WMLB contact: Stefan Preuss or John Pattinson.

Conformity

From 1st April 2010, a local authority's duty to seek a specific opinion of general conformity from the WMLB with respect to the Regional Strategy upon the Publication of a Development

Plan Document will be removed. However, it remains a legal requirement that all local authority Development Plan Documents (DPDs) must be in general conformity with the Regional Strategy.

CLG indicate that the WMLB will have statutory consultee status for DPD preparation and that relevant revisions to the Local Development Framework regulations will be prepared accordingly. The Leaders' Board responses to such consultations will help to ensure that the regional and local halves of the statutory development plan align with each other. WMLB will continue to be a statutory consultee with respect to certain planning applications which would be of major importance for the implementation of the Regional Strategy.

The WMRA has operated its role as a statutory consultee under an approved and well established Protocol between the WMRA and the Region's local authorities. The restructuring of the organisation from the WMRA to the WMLB has required the review of our role and the need to focus our limited resources where they have the greatest effect. In light of this, the existing Protocol for WMLB operating this function will require amending so that it is streamlined, less prescriptive and focused on matters of regional significance and the delivery of the Regional Strategy.

Amending the Protocol in relation to future procedures will need careful consideration and close liaison with local authorities in the Region, especially those directly involved in the provision of advice. We are though working to a timetable that these new procedures will be finalised and agreed in principle by the WMLB on 13th April 2010. Such agreement will then be translated into proper protocols with the aim of having new formal arrangements operational by the 4th May 2010. Once approved, we at WMLB will notify local authorities accordingly of the changes. Until such time as these working arrangements are amended it is proposed to continue operating under the existing Protocol throughout April.

Current contact: Tim Williams on t.williams@wmleadersboard.gov.uk or telephone 0121 678 1050. Future WMLB contact: In first instance Stefan Preuss or John Pattinson.

Consultation Database

In the short term we may continue to use our consultation database so we can keep you updated with progress. In time this will be replaced by a WMLB database which we shall advise you about in due course.

"Farewell but not goodbye"

We should like to thank everyone who has been involved in WMRSS for their contributions and comments. WMRA is wound up as from 31st March 2010. Please be patient with us during this transition period. We look forward to working with you via the WMLB in the future. In the interim here are some contact details to help you with any enquiries.

John Pattinson: Head of Regional Planning (WMRA) and Head of Development (WMLB).

Contact Points:

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