

## **RURAL PROOFING OF RSS PHASE THREE DRAFT OPTIONS**

### **Background**

Initial rural proofing of the draft options on the draft policies was carried out and was a key component for influencing the authors during the development of the draft RSS Spatial Options. In pro-actively assessing the development of the Policy Options for the RSS Phase Three Revision the following has been considered:

- Whether the various options are likely to have a different impact for rural areas/people or uncertainty from that elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas; and
- Where necessary, exploring what adjustments or compensations might be made to reflect rural needs and circumstances and produce the desired outcomes in rural areas or avoid/mitigate any undesirable impacts. Where appropriate, rural proofing may also highlight opportunities to maximise positive impacts in rural areas

### **Rural Proofing RSS Phase Three Draft Options**

Subsequent to the signing off of the Draft Options by the Regional Assembly Board on 25 March, the rural proofing exercise has been repeated. The options and explanatory text for each Policy topic area have been appraised against the Defra-Commission for Rural Communities Checklist which has been designed as a screening tool to help policy makers consider whether their policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas.

A series of papers, one per topic area have been produced and where there are potential issues and benefits, these have been highlighted and suggestions made for ways of mitigating impacts or maximising opportunities. Further rural proofing work will be ongoing by both the RSS Rural Renaissance Working Group and the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum and, in particular, as we progress towards the Preferred Option.

### **Topic Areas**

- Rural Renaissance: RR4 – Critical Rural Services
- Communities for the Future – Provision for Gypsies, Travellers & Travelling Show People
- Culture, Sport & Tourism
- Quality Of the Environment:
  - QE2 Restoring degraded areas and managing and creating high quality new environments
  - QE4 Greenery, urban greenspace and public spaces
  - QE5 Protection and enhancement of the historic environment
  - QE6 The conservation, enhancement and restoration of the region's landscape
  - QE7 Protecting, managing and enhancing the region's biodiversity and nature conservation resources
  - QE8 Forestry and Woodlands

- QE9 The water environment
- Integrated approach to management of environmental resources
- Energy
- Positive uses of the Green Belt
  
- Minerals Policy

### **Overview**

Full consideration and in depth analysis of the topic areas has been given in the papers listed above. In summary, at this stage of rural proofing the following issues of relevance have been highlighted:

#### **Rural Renaissance: Critical Rural Services**

- For Option 1: Sustainable-Climate Change driven - Provision of lower order services (e.g. community halls, local shops, post offices, pubs, petrol stations, banks/cashpoints, GPs surgeries, primary schools, public transport, etc) in smaller rural communities may not be improved and may even decline, although ICT and mobile facilities would be used where appropriate, meaning that residents may need to travel further for these basic services. Housing growth in these areas would also be restricted.
- For Option 2: Community-Based - In simple terms, this option would result in a more dispersed distribution of services across the region's rural communities. Smaller rural settlements would be able to carry out service audits to justify the protection of existing services and development of new services, which in particular would result in a more widespread provision of lower order services. More development of housing and employment land would also be permitted in dispersed rural communities under this option. However, there would be less development of higher order services

#### **Communities for the Future: Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People**

- A clear communications policy encouraging the support from rural communities is essential for either of the options chosen. Failure to properly manage the communications process will have impact upon the stability and sustainability of rural communities.
- There may be a need here to consider and encourage the development of additional or improved infrastructure to support the pitch provision particularly in Districts where infrastructure is already weak or under stress
- It may be possible to suggest that there be some assessment of allocations in terms of links to services and where necessary give encouragement for additional funding allocation to maintain service standards

#### **Culture, Sport and Tourism**

- All five options encourage local authority involvement but many will be hard pushed in terms of implementation particularly to remote rural communities
- All five options rely on sufficient infrastructure being available but in rural areas this typically often much weaker or lacking altogether. It may be necessary to consider using regulation or licences to encourage the development of improved infrastructure; encouraging or co-ordinating demand to make supply viable;

using the public sector's collective demand to stimulate supply; or providing alternative means of accessing the cultural, sporting or tourism offer.

### **Quality of the Environment**

- A clear communications policy encouraging the support from rural communities is essential. Failure to properly manage the communications process will have implications for securing buy-in for planning proposals and the opportunity of promoting community engagement in rural areas
- The green economy and, with it, green employment opportunities – creating jobs and economic value is very welcome particularly in rural areas and amongst rural communities
- Clearly important to see policies embedded in county and district LDDs being mapped and defined ensuring any development is of high quality and will contribute to local character and distinctiveness with minimum environmental impacts in rural areas

### **Minerals Policies**

- There will be the continuing need to carefully examine transport/access issues; minimising the impact on the rural road infrastructure and on road safety considerations
- Identify 'win-win' solutions which deliver economic and environmental benefits to the rural areas. Where there are opportunities for restoration allow for and encourage a diverse range of rural enterprises

### **Next Steps**

With the launch of the RSS Phase Three Options Consultation at the end of June, the Regional Assembly together with the RSS Rural Renaissance Working Group (RRWG) is looking forward to attracting as wide a range of responses as possible. The Consultation closes on 14 August 2009 and the work completed as part of the Phase Three Revision will then be reappraised to ensure it is taken forward into the single strategy in the most effective way. Further rural proofing will be required as the new Regional Strategy is being prepared.

The Regional Assembly and the RRWG are particularly pleased to have helped with the organisation of the facilitated WMRAF workshop, taking place on Thursday 09 July, determining the direction of the revised Spatial Strategy and assessing the WMRSS draft options to ensure that they have taken account and understands the implications for rural areas and communities.

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