

Strategic Review
2003/4

**THE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE
WEST MIDLANDS**

West Midlands
Regional Assembly
Speaking out for the region

Contents

	Page Number
Introduction	3
Recommendations	4
Background	6
Review Methodology	7
Panel Members	8
Research	8
Evidence Presented	10
Theme 1 – Understanding of Sustainable Development	12
Theme 2 – Regional Commitments to Sustainable Development	14
Theme 3 – Integration of Sustainable Development	17
Theme 4 – Regional Structures	19
Theme 5 – Regional Strategies and Policies	22
Theme 6 – The Future	25
Conclusion	27
References	30
Contact Details	31
Appendices	
1 Review Terms of Reference	32
2 Supporting Evidence	33
3 Regional Partnerships and Concordat Signatories	35
4 Glossary of Terms	36

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The West Midlands Regional Assembly has a responsibility to ensure that the plans and strategies of the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands, meet the needs of this region. To fulfil this role, the Assembly has agreed a Strategic Review Process that includes detailed reviews on specific areas of activity.
- 1.2 The research project "The Development of Regional Scrutiny" (2003) commissioned by the English Regions Network recommended that this focus should be widened to include partners. The West Midlands Regional Assembly has agreed to achieve this by the selection of one thematic area for examination as part of the annual review programme. Sustainable Development was the first area to be reviewed in this way.
- 1.3 This review also forms part of the English Regions Network project "Integrating Sustainable Development into Regional Scrutiny". It is one of seven pilots being carried out in the English Regions testing practical ways in Sustainable Development can be incorporated into a Regional Assembly's scrutiny process. A report detailing the findings and making recommendations is expected by Autumn 2004.
- 1.4 The intention of the review was to examine the Strategic Approach to Sustainable Development in the West Midlands. The aim as detailed in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) was to recommend a process that ensures Sustainable Development becomes a key regional driver. The key themes of the review were drawn from the terms of reference. Although these are shown as separate areas for the purpose of producing the report we are aware that they are linked.
- 1.5 The West Midlands Regional Assembly has approved the broad area selected for review and has charged us to examine this on their behalf. As a Panel we have independently agreed the review methodology, terms of reference, recommendations and this report. We would ask that the full Assembly discuss the issues raised by this review and endorse our recommendations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 We have made a number of recommendations for a variety of regional partners as listed below. Some of these combine individual recommendations made in the context of the six themes detailed in the body of this report.

2.2 We consider the relationship between Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) and the Assembly to be crucial to the development of Sustainable Development within the region in terms of championing its principals and in the provision of technical expertise.

2.3 West Midlands Regional Assembly

- That the Assembly champions Sustainable Development in the region with Sustainability West Midlands, whilst retaining its independence, established as Regional Partnership supported by an enlarged Regional Sustainability Officers Network
- That the Assembly, in conjunction with Sustainability West Midlands, lead on developing a common view of what Sustainable Development means, how it can be integrated into delivery and the development of appropriate regional Sustainable Development indicators
- That as part of its role in ensuring coherence of Regional Strategies, the Assembly ensures that the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework is used by Regional Partners during the development of all new or revised Strategies
- That the Assembly works to ensure that Regional Partnerships actively adopt Sustainable Development principles, use the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework and provide an annual report to the Assembly detailing how their work programmes address Sustainable Development
- That the Assembly ensures that any future reviews of the Regional Spatial Strategy further Sustainable Development within the region
- That examination of Sustainable Development becomes an integral part of the Assembly's scrutiny role and that

recommendations arising from the Integrating Sustainable Development into Regional Scrutiny project are adopted

2.4 Sustainability West Midlands

- That the Regional Sustainable Development Framework includes a commitment to increase the level of general understanding of Sustainable Development within the region.
- That SWM ensures its membership is broad enough to address all elements of Sustainable Development
- That SWM actively addresses potential areas of conflict within Sustainable Development in the region and develops mechanisms through the Regional Sustainable Development Framework to help resolve these

2.5 Concordat Partners

- That Concordat Partners work together to explore how the region can move from the current short term approach to spend to a longer term more planning based approach
- That Concordat partners are consulted about the proposed Regional structure for Sustainable Development to ensure ownership and commitment.
- That the Regional Concordat is developed further to address implementation and includes a monitoring mechanism to examine how Sustainable Development is being addressed within delivery
- That Local Authorities identify Officers working with Sustainable Development issues and actively support them to engage at a regional level through the Regional Sustainability Officers Network thus ensuring that this group is more fully representative
- That Concordat Partners work together to develop a training programme initially for regional policy makers that also reflects the recommendations of the Egan Review of skills.

3. **Background**

3.1 A widely used international definition of Sustainable Development is 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

3.2 Sustainable Development is seen as crucial to the development of the West Midlands. This is reflected in the overarching commitment made in the West Midlands Regional Concordat. This states

“Sustainable Development means creating a better quality of life for all, now and in the future, and tackling environmental, economic and social issues in an integrated way to find co-ordinated solutions.

The UK government and national organisations are working together with other international governments in tackling these issues on a worldwide basis around the following broad objectives:

- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment
- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection and enhancement of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources”

3.3 Sustainable Development also lies at the heart of the draft Regional Planning Guidance (soon to become the Regional Spatial Strategy) for the West Midlands. This includes a vision that “is one of an economically successful, outward looking and adaptable region, which is rich in culture and environment, where all people, working together, are able to meet their aspirations and needs without prejudicing the quality of life of future generations.”

3.4 A key principle of the West Midlands Economic Strategy “Delivering Advantage” is to ensure that actions flowing from it deliver an improved quality of life for current and future citizens. It recognises that economic, social and environmental issues should be tackled in an integrated way.

3.5 Sustainability West Midlands aims to be the independent champion of sustainability in the region. Members are drawn from a range of organisations and businesses and provide their time on a voluntary basis. The organisation is funded by

regional partners and is in the process of considering its role, structures and relationships with other regional partners.

- 3.6 The key activity being led by SWM is a review of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF). It is intended that this innovative and dynamic framework will concentrate on the process of integrating sustainable development into the wider regional picture.

4. **Review Methodology**

- 4.1 The review was carried out using a panel hearing approach supported by research. All Assembly Members and Alternate Members were asked if they wished to be involved in the process and subsequently a Panel of eight were identified.
- 4.2 We invited organisations to provide evidence that had either a strategic role within the region or who were leaders in sustainable development. Our wish to discuss the issues more widely had to be balanced with the time and resources available. This resulted in the numbers of witnesses invited being restricted.
- 4.3 The review process consisted of a briefing session for Panel Members, three evidence sessions (approximately fourteen hours in total) and Panel discussions. The evidence sessions were held on 26 February, 3 and 9 March 2004. We appreciate that this review did not examine all aspects of Sustainable Development in the region, however the intention was to obtain a snapshot of the current approach at a regional strategic level.
- 4.4 This report discusses a number of themes in the light of the evidence presented, draws conclusions and makes a number of recommendations for the West Midlands Regional Assembly and other regional partners. Detailed reports of the evidence sessions are available on West Midlands Regional Assembly website (www.wmra.gov.uk). Further details regarding this review can be obtained from Dagmar Waller, Strategic Review Officer, telephone 0121 678 1054 or email d.waller@wmra.gov.uk.
- 4.5 This was the first thematic review completed as part of the Assembly's Strategic Review Process and as such we recognise that there are areas where the process could be improved. These will be addressed in future reviews.

5. **Panel Members**

5.1 The Panel comprised of

Cllr Neil Roberts	Lichfield District Council	Chair
Gerald Kells	CPRE (WMRSF)	
Cllr David Lloyd	Oswestry Borough Council	
Peter Shirley	West Midlands Wildlife Trusts (WMRSF)	
Cllr Steve Bedser	Birmingham City Council	
Cllr David Beechey	Bridgnorth District Council	
Cllr Margaret Rowley	Wychavon District Council	
Cllr Robert Rowden	Worcester City Council	

5.2 Declaration of interests were made by Cllr Bedser (Director of Groundwork Black Country) and Peter Shirley (Member of Sustainability West Midlands).

5.3 Not all Panel members were able to attend each session however all were involved in the identification of recommendations and in approval of this report.

6. **Research**

6.1 Two pieces of independent research were carried out to inform the review. These were also designed to contribute to the review of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. The final reports are available on the West Midlands Regional Assembly website (www.wmra.gov.uk).

Mapping Exercise – Ove Arup and Partners

6.2 Ove Arup and Partners (Arup) were appointed by Sustainability West Midlands and the West Midlands Regional Assembly to conduct a mapping exercise to examine existing sustainable development policy, implementation and monitoring commitments in key national, regional and local strategies. This therefore provided background information regarding the extent to which sustainable development has been considered within key regional strategies.

6.3 A number of national, regional and local documents were examined in relation to the 15 headline regional indicators published in "Regional Quality of Life Counts". These indicators are

Economic Output
Employment
Education
Housing
Climate Change
Road Traffic
Wildlife
Waste

Investment
Poverty and Social Inclusion
Health
Crime
Air Quality
River Water Quality
Land Use

- 6.4 The study concluded that regionally, the existing West Midlands RSDF, and Draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy are both strong. However, a number of documents at this level are particularly weak, even where they have a specific and limited scope. It makes a number of general recommendations particularly in respect of the future RSDF and specific recommendations in relation to the documents reviewed. It also recommended that the Strategic Review Process should consider whether it would be advantageous for the West Midlands Regional Assembly to contribute towards the development of appropriate indicators of sustainable development at a national, regional and local level.
- 6.5 We used these detailed recommendations to inform our discussions and recommendations. It was an informative piece of work that gave us a clear understanding of how Regional Strategies address Sustainable Development

The Process of Developing the West Midlands Housing Strategy – CAG Consultants

- 6.6 This case study examined how sustainable development has been integrated into the development of the Regional Housing Strategy "Putting Our House in Order" which was published in July 2003.
- 6.7 The Housing Strategy was prepared by the Regional Housing Partnership to meet a very short timescale (February to June 2003) imposed by central Government. It underpins the approach to housing investment and identifies priorities for housing in the region. Its main objectives are to contribute to urban and rural renaissance, provide pathways to choice and to contribute to sustainable development.
- 6.8 The report identifies nine key findings nearly all of which have some relevance to the development of any regional strategy. These findings can be summarised as follows;

- **Regional Housing Partnership** – concerns that its membership may not ensure all elements of sustainable development are progressed. Terms of reference should also include a specific reference to ensuring that the Strategy promotes sustainable development and the responsibility of the partnership in reporting progress
- **Regional Concordat** – needs to be made “operational” with clear monitoring and review mechanisms
- **Evidence Base/Research** – sustainability considerations should be fully reflected in the scope of any research and form part of the analysis of the evidence base. The future development of GIS information mapping could be powerful in assessing the spatial aspects of sustainable development and the impact of strategies on particular locations
- **Monitoring Implementation** – an overlap exists between the role of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework and the Regional Implementation Group for Regional Planning Guidance.
- **Sustainability Appraisal** – there is a clear lack of a common approach to sustainability appraisal of regional plans and strategies. This should be the function of the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework.
- **Consultation** – more effective and expeditious systems for stakeholder involvement/consultation are required to support strategy development
- **Sustainability West Midlands** – should take a more active role in ensuring strategy implementation delivers sustainable development. This should also involve monitoring implementation of the Regional Concordat.

6.9 We took these findings into account in our deliberations and some were reflected in the evidence presented by partners. The report has been passed to the Housing Partnership and we would hope that the findings are taken account of during the next iteration of the Housing Strategy. It is also being used to inform the development of the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

7. Evidence Presented

7.1 The West Midlands Assembly does not have the power to summon witnesses to Panel Hearings. We would therefore like to thank those who agreed to be cross-examined. They were generally frank and open and provided us with much to discuss and consider. We were impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated for the principles of sustainable development.

7.2 Unfortunately we had to balance our wish to talk to as many partners as possible with the time and resources available. Key stakeholders invited to contribute were the Concordat signatories, sub regional partnerships and representation from local government. We were aware that this restricted the evidence available to us and were disappointed that we were unable to discuss the roles of a number of organisations such as national bodies and utility companies. We would like to apologise to any organisation that would have wished to participate in the process.

7.3 Evidence was given by;

Terry Jones	Regional Sustainability Officers Network
Andrew Flint	Government Office West Midlands
Simon Hodgson	West Midlands Regional Assembly
Fran Austins	WMRA (Sustainable Development Policy)
Helen Brown West	Midlands Higher Education Association
Owen McFarlane	EMBRACE West Midlands
Stephen Trow	West Midlands Life
Chris Bonnard	Regional Action West Midlands
James Watkins	West Midlands Business Council
Rose Poulter	WMRA (Planning)
David Thew	WMRA (Planning)
Tim Gebbels	West Midlands Regional Observatory
Chris Owen	West Midlands Regional Observatory
Sarah Middleton	Black Country Consortium
Jeremy Howell	Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships
Bob Keefe	Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships
Bernard Doyle	Sustainability West Midlands
Mark Felton	Sustainability West Midlands
Andy Cowan	Regional Planning Officers Group
Richard Hutchins	Advantage West Midlands
Roger Sumpton	Advantage West Midlands
Rod Griffin	Advantage West Midlands

7.4 In addition to the verbal evidence given, written evidence was also considered. This varied from supporting or additional information from those attending the hearings to background papers and reports (Appendix 2).

7.5 The remainder of the report is structured around the six themes. Each section includes a discussion of the theme, a summary of the evidence received, our views and subsequent recommendations.

8. Theme 1 – Understanding of Sustainable Development

8.1 Introduction

Regional Partners need a clear understanding of Sustainable Development in order to take forward commitments made in regional strategies and in the Regional Concordat. A shared view by those developing strategies will ensure a common message is given to the region. We wanted to explore the extent to which key partners understood the implications of Sustainable Development in their areas of interest.

The principles of Sustainable Development also need to be understood by delivery organisations at a local and sub regional level. We therefore also explored how partners felt Sustainable Development was viewed within the wider region.

8.2 Evidence

Partners made it clear that although significant progress had been made in developing understanding of Sustainable Development, there was still a way to go.

"There is a greater sensitivity to SD than there was" – Terry Jones (Regional Sustainability Officers Network)

".. the understanding of Sustainable Development is limited – what does it actually mean for organisations?" – Chris Bonnard (Regional Action West Midlands)

Unsurprisingly the evidence presented suggested that organisations viewed Sustainable Development from different standpoints. For example, for Voluntary and Community Sector representatives the focus was on sustainable engagement reflecting the more immediate concerns of the sector.

"sustainable engagement is important however the capacity of the BME sector to maintain engagement consistently is not there" – Owen McFarlane (EMBRACE)

Partners agreed that considerable effort was needed to extend understanding of Sustainable Development within the wider region.

"We need to raise people's awareness of what they are doing and the implications of the decisions they make – we are in

primary school in terms of our understanding” – Simon Hodgson (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

There was a perception that Sustainable Development is viewed primarily as an environmental or planning issue. Another common view was that individuals were already working to Sustainable Development principles but were unaware of this. It was suggested that some sort of training would help to address these issues.

“There is a need to ensure increased understanding, perhaps through training, in order that Sustainable Development is translated into practice” – Bob Keefe (Coventry and South Warwickshire Partnership)

8.3 Panel Comments

We were concerned that some regional partners were less than clear about how Sustainable Development principles impact upon them and their sectors. As Concordat signatories we would expect partners to be implementing its commitments.

We were not surprised with the lack of understanding about Sustainable Development within the wider region. It is by its nature an all-encompassing approach, and it appears that individuals may latch on to a part of it that means something to them and ignore the other parts. We feel that Sustainable Development should be best viewed as a long term and holistic process of improving quality of life; it is about going somewhere rather than arriving.

We were concerned that Sustainable Development is seen more widely to be an environmental or a planning issue. There is a need to work towards widening this view whilst avoiding the danger of Sustainable Development becoming all things to all people.

It is important that Regional Partners work together to increase individual and institutional understanding of Sustainable Development. We would hope that the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework addresses this as a key issue. However this should not be left to Sustainability West Midlands to resolve but is a responsibility of all Concordat signatories.

8.4 Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework includes a commitment to increase the level of general understanding of Sustainable Development within the region.
- That Concordat Partners work together to develop a training programme initially for regional policy makers that also reflects the recommendations of the Egan Review of skills.
- West Midlands Regional Assembly, in conjunction with Sustainability West Midlands, lead on developing a common view of what Sustainable Development means and how it can be integrated into delivery

9 **Theme 2 – Regional Commitments to Sustainable Development**

9.1 Introduction

Section 3 of this report provides a number of similar definitions of Sustainable Development that have been agreed by regional partners. These regional commitments will require actions by partners in order to make them a reality. We wanted to examine how individual partners were meeting these commitments both within their own organisations/sectors and in the wider region.

9.2 Evidence

It was clear from the evidence submitted that the key regional commitment to Sustainable Development was seen as being that within the Regional Concordat. This is not intended as a delivery document with actions assigned to specific partners.

"The role of the Concordat has been to create a general culture change among partners rather than lead to specific pieces of work." – Fran Austins (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

There is a lack of clarity regarding the role of the Concordat in ensuring its aims were addressed within the development of regional strategies.

"It is unclear how the Concordat will be used as a mechanism for ensuring that the Regional Housing Strategy or any other strategy will progress Sustainable Development." The Process of Developing the West Midlands Housing Strategy – CAG Consultants

Partners were enthusiastic in their support for Sustainable Development and demonstrated their commitment in a number of ways. Some examples of this are

- The partnership approach adopted in developing the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF). It is intended that this will lead to ownership by key players from all sectors.
- The role of the Government Office West Midlands' Sustainability Team that is concentrating on embedding Sustainable Development into policy
- The alignment of the proposed State of the Region report prepared by the Regional Observatory with the four strategic objectives of Sustainable Development.
- The Black Country Consortium's emphasis on the delivery of sustainability principles that are embedded in the national strategy for sustainable development.
- The establishment of a Sustainable Development Policy Team within Advantage West Midlands

"The history of the preparation of RPG demonstrates how sustainable development was embedded within the development of RPG" – Rose Poulter (West Midlands Regional Assembly).

However there were still concerns about how Sustainable Development would be delivered in the wider region and the mechanisms in place to support this.

"Sustainable development has only 'phantom support'. Its status as a general duty further weakens its status; without a driving force the result can be a lack of dynamism." – Simon Hodgson (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

There was some recognition that Sustainable Development was beginning to reach a wider audience who may be encouraged to contribute to delivery. Partners have an

influencing role that can be used to raise the profile of Sustainable Development.

"It is in the interest of businesses to take Sustainable Development seriously" – James Watkins (West Midlands Business Council)

"The Concordat partners, WMRA and SWM need to reflect sustainability more in the way they operate and bring this into who they do business with". – Richard Hutchins (Advantage West Midlands)

9.3 Panel Comments

We welcome the clear commitment of regional partners to Sustainable Development and the variety of practical steps being taken within the region. We feel that the new Regional Partnerships for Environment and Health will contribute significantly to raising the profile of specific elements of Sustainable Development within the region. However we would urge partners not to be complacent.

We have made a start in implementing Sustainable Development principles but there is much still to do. This includes organisations "putting their own house in order", and we welcome the West Midlands Regional Assembly Secretariat's proposal to carry out an internal sustainability appraisal.

The key to moving the region forward is the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework. However Concordat partners also have a key role in ensuring that Sustainable Development principles are more widely disseminated and adopted

9.4 Recommendation

- We would recommend that the Regional Concordat is developed further to address implementation and includes a monitoring mechanism to examine how Sustainable Development is being addressed within delivery

10. Theme 3 – Integration of Sustainable Development

10.1 Introduction

Sustainable Development cannot be viewed as a “stand alone” policy area. It is essential that economic, social and environmental issues be tackled in an integrated way. We wanted to examine the extent to which the region has integrated Sustainable Development into strategies, policies and therefore projects. We also wanted to try and explore with partners how integration could be improved within the region.

10.2 Evidence

Evidence provided to us clearly identified a need to embed Sustainable Development principles into regional working. Partners agree that it is essential that Sustainable Development is integrated in a positive and practical manner and not merely added as an extra.

“It is easy to respond to the call for sustainability by inserting the word into documents and proposals” – Jeremy Howell (CSWP)

Although a number of key Regional Strategies make a clear commitment to Sustainable Development it is much less clear how these are integrated into the strategies’ objectives. The revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework is intended as web based tool to help achieve this.

“As regional policies come up for review this should be an opportunity to embed sustainability via the commitments of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework” – Mark Felton (Sustainability West Midlands)

“Sustainable development values should operate within the Regional Economic Strategy and WMBC would applaud sustainable development being written into all strategies” – James Watkins (West Midlands Business Council)

There is a clear role of the West Midlands Regional Assembly in ensuring integration of Sustainable Development primarily through its scrutiny functions.

“Once the RSDF is revised and published, WMRA should take on a scrutiny role to ensure sustainable development is

implemented through all strategies. It is ideally placed to break down the 'tramlines' between policy areas and make connections between different interests to promote sustainable development in the region".- Rose Poulter (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

10.3 Panel Comments

Sustainable Development is a key driver for the region. We believe that it is essential that it provides an overarching framework within which all other regional strategies such as the Regional Economic Strategy should sit. We therefore welcome the intention that the Regional Sustainable Development Framework plays a key role in ensuring regional strategies and partnerships address Sustainable Development.

We feel that this proposal should be strengthened with the West Midlands Regional Assembly taking a clear scrutiny role. We welcome Sustainability West Midlands' proposal within its' draft business plan to support this function.

We were heartened by the realisation that integration is not only a regional issue but is one faced a national level too. It is important that steps are taken nationally, perhaps through the development of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

10.4 Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The West Midlands Regional Assembly work to ensure that Regional Partnerships actively address Sustainable Development using the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework as a guidance document.
- That as part of its role in ensuring coherence of Regional Strategies, the West Midlands Regional Assembly ensures that the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework is used during the development of all new or revised Strategies
- That examination of Sustainable Development becomes an integral part of the West Midlands Regional Assembly scrutiny role

11. Theme 4 – Regional Structures

11.1 Introduction

There are a variety of regional structures and organisations that could contribute to the progression of Sustainable Development. These include the Regional Sustainability Officers Group, Sustainability West Midlands, Advantage West Midlands, Government Office West Midlands and the Regional Assembly. We wanted to explore relationships, individual areas of responsibility and to identify if any changes were required.

This review coincides with Sustainability West Midlands examining its own role within the region, its structure and relationships with key regional bodies.

11.2 Evidence

The evidence submitted to us provided a picture of a fragmented approach to Sustainable Development structures within the region. Various organisations and networks developed in a piecemeal way in answer to differing imperatives. The role of some of these groups and organisations is beginning to change, but again in an unstructured way.

"The network is now participating in policy development earlier in the process, as opposed to simply being consulted."
– Terry Jones (Regional Sustainability Officers' Network)

We were pleased that partners share our concerns and that discussions initiated by the West Midlands Regional Assembly were currently underway. These will help to focus Sustainability West Midlands' own review.

Partners identified the need for a clear lead for Sustainable Development in the region supported by an advisory body or group. The consensus view was that West Midlands Regional Assembly acts as a regional champion supported by Sustainability West Midlands. This was seen as a way of giving more legitimacy to Sustainable Development. However Coventry and Warwickshire Sub Regional Partnership warned of the danger of *"pigeon-holing sustainable development by only having one champion"*

"If sustainable development is to be cross-cutting then WMRA needs to be a major driver for this across all areas" – Chris Bonnard (Regional Action West Midlands)

"SWM should be used as a soundboard without political/organisational constraints – a kind of think tank for sustainability"- Terry Jones (Regional Sustainability Officers' Network)

"A formal link with West Midlands Regional Assembly is crucial to give some backing to SWM to convince those organisations which are sceptical about sustainable development" –Bernard Doyle (Sustainability West Midlands)

It is important that partners agree to any changes proposed to Sustainable Development structures within the region. The adoption of a partnership approach will ensure ownership.

"The Black Country wants a champion, but sustainability also needs ownership across the whole region" – Sarah Middleton (Black Country Consortium)

There were some concerns expressed about the current membership of Sustainability West Midlands.

"It needs to reflect the broader sustainability agenda, including related sectors like health, on its board" – Rod Griffin (Advantage West Midlands)

Advantage West Midlands are currently developing an internal Sustainable Development framework that will clarify its own role and relationship with other key organisations. Partners were keen that the influence of Advantage West Midlands should be used in an integrated way and break down perceived silo working.

11.3 Panel Comments

From the evidence presented it became clear that no organisation was taking a lead on Sustainable Development within the region. We felt that there was an opportunity for a more coherent approach to be taken with clear areas of responsibility and linkages being identified and agreed by partners. However any new structures should be established within the existing framework of regional working.

It is also important that the actions of individual organisations are linked to any new regional structure, for example

Advantage West Midlands' internal Sustainable Development Framework.

Sustainable Development should not be seen as being prescriptive and wherever possible key players should seek to influence partners and work through the Regional Policy Partnerships. However there is also a need to balance this with the need to audit regional progress. Section 11 recommends that this be addressed by the West Midlands Regional Assembly scrutiny function.

We recognise that Sustainability West Midlands is already taking on a regional advisory role through its preparation of the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework and hope that this role is developed further. We feel that there is an opportunity for them to play a similar role to West Midlands Life, the regional cultural consortium.

We feel that the relationship between Sustainability West Midlands and the West Midlands Regional Assembly will play a critical part in the way in which Sustainable Development is progressed within the Region. This relationship should address the need for a Regional Champion and for technical knowledge and expertise.

The establishment of Sustainability West Midlands as an authoritative respected and recognised regional voice is identified as a key challenge within their draft business plan. We were pleased that Sustainability West Midlands has recognised the issues raised about its membership and is actively working to engage business and the voluntary and community sector.

We welcome the activity of the Regional Sustainability Officers Network but are concerned that some Local Authorities appear not to actively support Officers to work at a regional level. Local Authorities can benefit considerable from membership of such Officer Groups and we would encourage a more active involvement.

11.4 Recommendations

We recommend that:

- That the Assembly champions Sustainable Development in the region with Sustainability West Midlands, whilst retaining its independence, established as Regional Partnership supported by an enlarged Regional Sustainability Officers Network
- That Concordat partners are consulted about the proposed Regional structure for Sustainable Development to ensure regional ownership and commitment.
- That Local Authorities identify Officers working with Sustainable Development issues and actively support them to engage at a regional level through the Regional Sustainability Officers Network thus ensuring that this group is more fully representative
- Sustainability West Midlands ensures its membership is broad enough to address all elements of Sustainable Development

12. **Theme 5 – Regional Strategies and Policies**

12.1 Introduction

The key regional strategy for Sustainable Development is the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. This was originally published in 2000 and is currently being revised. Sustainable Development is considered to be a key element of other regional strategies notably Regional Planning Guidance and the Regional Economic Strategy. The commitments made to Sustainable Development by key partners were discussed in section 8.

We wanted to look beyond the mere inclusion of statements regarding Sustainable Development in strategies to examine how it was included in their development. To this end a case study was carried out looking at the development of the Regional Housing Strategy "Putting Our House in Order". The key findings of this study are detailed in section 5.

The Mapping study clearly identified that the Regional Strategies reviewed did not demonstrate a coherent approach to the inclusion of Sustainable Development. It identified a clear role for the Regional Sustainable Development Framework in disseminating Sustainable Development indicators into other regional strategies.

12.2 Evidence

Evidence presented made it clear that Sustainable Development was not routinely considered during the development of regional strategies and policies. The main reason for this seemed to be the lack of a regional driver for Sustainable Development. This has been recognised and will be addressed by the revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

"The original RSDF ... was not designed to be a tool to integrate sustainable development across all regional strategies. The review will produce a dramatic improvement. It will be more of a web-based tool which can be updated". – Fran Austins (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

The case study identified a number of key areas within strategy development that should address sustainability considerations. These were membership and terms of reference of groups developing strategies, research and analysis of evidence, sustainability appraisal, consultation and the role of Sustainability West Midlands. Other evidence presented supported these findings.

"The region needs a sustainability appraisal tool to determine whether it is getting closer or further away from sustainability. This would need to be able to be used in a variety of settings – from regional to project level." – Terry Jones (Regional Sustainability Officers' Network)

"There needs to be more accountability for those in charge of strategies as to how sustainable development will be progressed by their strategies." – Fran Austins (West Midlands Regional Assembly)

Partners were clear that any guidance provided had to be more than a tick box approach and had to ensure a clear understanding of the wider implications of Sustainable Development.

"A cross-cutting approach needs to be about more than ticking boxes on a project form. This means working in an integrated and strategic way, rather than being project-led". – Stephen Trow (West Midlands Life)

There was a clear consensus that the region needed a framework with actions and measurable outputs that have

been agreed by partners. Sustainability West Midlands explained that as part of the revision of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework, facilitated sessions will be held with regional policy partnerships to examine what sustainability would look like and what would be the best indicators.

"There needs to be some sort of annual qualitative report from policy partnerships which includes some numbers (possibly ten indicators) but also a 'narrative' on why decisions were made. The overall process then would not just be about measuring numbers." – Mark Felton Sustainability West Midlands

12.3 Panel Comments

There appears to be a lack of overarching mechanisms to ensure strategies address the principles of Sustainable Development. While the commitment of many partners is not in question we are concerned that there is a lack of direction within regional strategy development.

We welcome the intention that the Regional Sustainable Development Framework will have an overarching role for all other regional strategies. It is essential that partners clearly support the revised framework and actively work to implement this in the development of other strategies.

We would emphasise that Sustainable Development also needs to be about practical issues not just about strategy. This is linked to section 9 regarding the understanding of Sustainable Development. Regional strategies should work to demystify Sustainable Development by using its principles in a practical manner

12.4 Recommendations

We recommend that

- The revised Regional Sustainable Development Framework is used as a tool in the development and revision of all Regional Strategies
- That Regional Partnerships actively adopt Sustainable Development principles and provide an annual report to the West Midlands Regional Assembly detailing how their work programmes address Sustainable Development

13. Theme 6 – The Future

13.1 Introduction

The previous sections have discussed particular aspects of the strategic approach taken to Sustainable Development in the region and how this could be improved. The aim of this section is to take a wider and longer view.

What are the region's aims in terms of progressing Sustainable Development? How will Sustainable Development in the region be addressed in the medium to long term? What are the key issues that the region needs to address to ensure Sustainable Development makes the transition from strategy to project?

13.2 Evidence

Partners were clear that Sustainable Development should be seen as a cross cutting theme and not be pigeon holed. Success can only be achieved if a partnership approach is adopted that is fully committed to Sustainable Development principles. There must be a concerted attempt to raise awareness with all partners and to ensure that Sustainable Development is embedded within everyday working.

"The region needs to determine how best to take a cross-sectoral approach – Terry Jones (Regional Sustainability Officers Network)

"Sustainable Development is about partnership as demonstrated by the spirit of the Concordat" – Roger Sumpton (Advantage West Midlands)

Communication about sustainable development is key, especially in social and economic sectors. – Rod Griffin (Advantage West Midlands)

"SD has to be presented as being about everyone's job" – Mark Felton (Sustainability West Midlands)

The Assembly was seen to have an important role in leading the development of a clear and shared understanding of what Sustainable Development means. This should avoid jargon and emphasise the practical implementation of principles.

"Sustainability is still perceived as an environmental issue and WMRA could usefully fund work into what sustainable regeneration means, what a sustainable business means, what forms of economic development are sustainable and so on. Future guidance needs to be practically oriented." – Sarah Middleton (Black Country Consortium)

The region has a crucial role to play in Sustainable Development particularly in leading and influencing activity. The Assembly's role as the Regional Planning Body gives it an opportunity to influence how the region develops in the medium and long term.

"Regions are able to take national standards and apply them in a geographically specific way" – Bernard Doyle (Sustainability West Midlands).

"A valuable role for WMRA would be to ensure that practical, joint planning could become a reality. So much is driven by delivering outputs but this leads to 'valuing the measurable' not 'measuring the valuable'. WMRA could also lead on demonstrating an integrated and systematic planning approach to Sustainable Development across the region." – Stephen Trow (West Midlands Life)

One of the key issues facing the region is how to move to a longer-term approach to planning and spend that will enable Sustainable Development impacts to be taken into consideration.

"There is a need for a vision which is long term so that the approach is not project led and dominated by short term wins" – Sarah Middleton (Black Country Consortium)

13.3 Panel Comments

There are a number of key activities that will ensure that Sustainable Development moves forward in the region. These include awareness raising, practical implementation of Sustainable Development principles, measuring impact and monitoring progress.

Regional bodies develop strategy rather than deliver with even Advantage West Midlands having largely a co-ordinating role. We feel that it is possible to highlight areas of agreement in the region about the way forward but the region needs to ensure that people actually implementing strategy take

notice. One of the recommendations from the Mapping Study was that the Assembly should contribute towards the development of appropriate indicators of sustainable development at a national, regional and local level. We believe that this would be one way of ensuring that delivery addresses Sustainable Development.

As part of the review we wanted to assess how the region is balancing the elements of Sustainable Development and addressing possible conflicts. We feel that the region is not yet at the stage where we can comment on this. Partners providing evidence demonstrated a clear commitment to Sustainable Development. We would hope that the planned consultation events for the Regional Sustainable Development Framework start to identify possible areas of potential conflict.

The current review has been part of a pilot study exploring how Sustainable Development can be incorporated within Regional Assemblies' scrutiny function. The Integrating Sustainable Development into Regional Scrutiny Project, funded by the English Regions Network, is expected to report by Autumn 2004 and recommend the most effective ways of achieving this.

13.4 Recommendations

Some of the issues discussed in this section have already been addressed by previous recommendations. In addition to these we recommend:

- That Concordat Partners work together to explore how the region can move from the current short term approach to spend to a longer term more planning based approach
- That the West Midlands Regional Assembly ensures that any future reviews of the Regional Spatial Strategy further Sustainable Development within the region
- That the Assembly, in conjunction with Sustainability West Midlands, lead on the development of appropriate regional Sustainable Development indicators
- That Sustainability West Midlands actively addresses potential areas of conflict within Sustainable Development in the region and develops mechanisms through the Regional Sustainable Development Framework to help resolve these

- West Midlands Regional Assembly adopt recommendations arising from the Integrating Sustainable Development into Regional Scrutiny project

14. **Conclusion**

- 14.1 We found Sustainable Development is a difficult area to examine and it was often hard to get detailed information from participants. It was interesting to observe the level of contention in respect to good practice examples; perhaps this reflected the differing views of Sustainable Development held by partners. An example of this is the Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham, seen by Advantage West Midlands as an exemplar from the economic regeneration perspective but described by others as a “missed opportunity”.
- 14.2 Evidence given to us demonstrates an almost universal support for Sustainable Development principles at a strategic level within the region. There may be some confusion as to what these principles actually are, but regional players all seem to agree that Sustainable Development is key to future balanced progress in the West Midlands Region.
- 14.3 The next step for the Region is to move from fine words to action ensuring that strategies and policies positively support Sustainable Development and encourage change. Fundamental to this is obtaining a shared agreement of what Sustainable Development is, how it applies to strategy development and the difference that this approach will have in the Region. The process of involving partners in the revision of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework has helped to start this process. We have seen that some progress is already being made within the region and welcome the initiatives that have been shared with us.
- 14.4 All Regional Partners will need to be involved in achieving the aims of a shared view and approach. We feel that the West Midlands Regional Assembly has a clear role in co-ordinating this process and championing Sustainable Development within the Region. The establishment of Sustainability West Midlands as a formal Regional Partnership will provide a more focused approach to sustainable development within the Region.

14.5 We believe that the recommendations in this report will help move Sustainable Development forward within the Region. We acknowledge that these will not remove all the barriers that exist but hope that they will contribute to a wider understanding of how Sustainable Development can be implemented.

References

The Development of Regional Scrutiny (Snape, Ashworth, Aulakh, Dobbs and Moore 2003)

The Egan review

Mapping Study (Ove Arup and Partners 2004)

Regional Quality of Life Counts (DEFRA 2002)

The Process of Developing the West Midlands Housing Strategy (CAG Consultants for the West Midlands Regional Assembly March 2004)

Putting our House in Order, Towards a Regional Housing Strategy for the West Midlands (West Midlands Regional Housing Board July 2003)

West Midlands Regional Concordat (July 2002)

Contact Details

For further information regarding specific areas please contact the following

West Midlands Regional Assembly Strategic Review

Dagmar Waller 0121 678 1054 d.waller@wmra.gov.uk

Sustainability West Midlands

Fran Austins 0121 678 1018 f.austins@wmra.gov.uk

Regional Housing Partnership

Emma Kiteley 0121 678 1037 e.kiteley@wmlga.gov.uk

Regional Housing Strategy

Steve Forrest 0121 678 1064 s.forrest@wmra.gov.uk

Emma Kiteley 0121 678 1037 e.kiteley@wmlga.gov.uk

The Strategic Approach to Sustainable Development in the West Midlands

Terms of Reference

Aim

The aim of this review is to recommend a process that will ensure sustainable development becomes a key regional driver.

It is expected that the review will inform the current revision of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

Method

This will be achieved by a series of Panel Hearings taking evidence from regional partners. The Panel will consist of Members or Alternate Members of the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

Objectives

Evidence from partners will allow the panel to:

- Assess the level of understanding of sustainable development within the region
- Review commitments made to sustainable development by regional partners
- Examine ways in which partners are integrating sustainable development within their activities
- Assess how current regional structures are supporting sustainable development
- Identify any changes required to regional structures in order to improve the support for sustainable development
- Examine how sustainable development has been addressed in the development of regional strategies by use of a case study
- Identify how sustainable development can be more successfully integrated into regional strategies and policies
- Assess how the region is balancing the elements of sustainable development and addressing possible conflicts

Outputs

A final report will be produced by the Panel and circulated to all regional partners.

Supporting Evidence

The list below details supporting evidence that was considered by the Panel. These documents were either submitted to the panel by partners as supporting evidence or were made available as part of the supporting information.

Supplementary Guidance for the Regional Development Agencies in Relation to the Regional Economic Strategies - Chapter 6 Sustainable Development

Promoting Sustainable Development Group Overview – East Midlands Assembly

Sustainability South West – Mission, role and Objectives

Sustainability Commission Terms of Reference and Draft Work Programme – Yorkshire and Humber Assembly

West Midlands Tier 2 Targets

West Midlands Tier 3 Targets

Black Country Study Draft Principles - Black Country Consortium

Introduction to the Black Country Study - Black Country Consortium

Forum 2002 – West Midlands Sustainability Network

Directory – West Midlands Sustainability Network

Briefing on Strategic Environment Assessment – WMLGA/WMRA Policy Directorate

Outline Business Plan – Sustainability West Midlands

Regional Sustainable Development Framework Proposal – Sustainability West Midlands

Regional Sustainable Development Framework Review – Implications for Regional Strategies and Regional Policy Partnerships – West Midlands Regional Assembly Briefing

Sustainability Issues – Strategies Update – report to regional
Planning partnership 5 March 2004

RPG for the West Midlands – Public Examination – WMLGA
Participants Statement Sub Matter 2A Sustainability

Report to Regeneration Conference – Draft Regional Planning
Guidance – 21 September 2001

Report to Warwickshire County Council – Government Consultation
on Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 – Sustainable
Development in Rural Areas – 11 December 2003

Presentation re Sustainability and Business – John Sharpe

Appendix 3

Regional Partnerships and Concordat Signatories

Partnerships Responsible to West Midlands Regional Assembly

- Transport Partnership
- Environment Partnership
- Social Inclusion Partnership
- Health Partnership
- Planning Partnership
- European and International Partnership

Other Regional Groups with strong links to the West Midlands Regional Assembly

- West Midlands Life (Cultural Consortium)
- West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum
- Regional Housing Board
- Regional Faiths Forum
- Regional Skills Partnership

There are also other Regional Partnerships with less formal links such as the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership

Regional Partnerships are supported by a variety of Officer Groups such as the Regional Advisory Group and the Regional Housing Partnership

The signatories of the Regional Concordat are

West Midlands Regional Assembly
Government Office West Midlands
West Midlands Local Government Association
Regional Action West Midlands
EMBRACE West Midlands
West Midlands Business Council
Sustainability West Midlands
Advantage West Midlands
West Midlands Learning and Skills Councils
West Midlands Higher Education Association
West Midlands Life (Cultural Consortium)

Glossary of Terms

CSWP	Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership
CPRE	Campaign for the protection of Rural England
ERN	English Regions Network Umbrella organisation of the eight English Regions excluding London
GIS	Graphical Information System
	Regional Concordat A framework for partnership working between regional organisations and for the integration of regional strategies
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance A holistic strategy for the spatial development of the West Midlands Region (soon to become the RSS)
RSDF	Regional Sustainable Development Framework
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SWM	Sustainability West Midlands
WMRA	West Midlands Regional Assembly Appointed body made up of representatives from Local Government, Business and other stakeholders
WMRSF	West Midlands Regional Sustainability Forum Network organisation that is also a nominating body for the West Midlands Regional Assembly