

Chapter 2

Towards a More Sustainable Region

Sustainable development

- 2.1 The Government's sustainable development objectives are set out below and lie at the heart of its planning policies and of this RPG and its Spatial Strategy:
- a) Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
 - b) Effective protection of the environment;
 - c) Prudent use of natural resources; and
 - d) Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.
- ("A Better Quality of Life" – 1999)

The Regional Vision

- 2.2 The broad view of where the West Midlands should aim to be over the coming decades was established early in the RPG review process as:
- "The overall vision for the West Midlands 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."
- 2.3 This Vision incorporates the key theme within the Brundtland Report definition of sustainable development; that is meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- 2.4 Specifically the Vision looks forward to a Region:
- a) where there are opportunities for all to progress and improve their quality of life;
 - b) with an advanced, thriving and diverse economy occupying a competitive position within European and World markets;
 - c) where urban and rural renaissance is successfully being achieved;
 - d) with diverse and distinctive cities, towns, sub-regions and communities with Birmingham as a "World City" at its heart;
 - e) which is recognised for its distinctive, high quality natural and built environment;
 - f) with an efficient network of integrated transport facilities and services which meet the needs of both individuals and the business community in the most sustainable way; and
 - g) where all Regional interests are working together towards a commonly agreed sustainable future.
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Managing Change

- 2.5** To realise the Regional Vision it is necessary to influence and manage some of the key underlying forces affecting the West Midlands. The Regional Sustainability Action Framework (2000) identified some of the Region's key challenges and the direction of change needed if the Government's sustainability objectives are to be met.
- 2.6** For RPG, this means:
- a) adopting positive measures to address the relative decline in the Regional economy in both urban and rural areas;
 - b) reversing the movement of people and jobs away from the Major Urban Areas (MUAs) and ensuring there is a greater equality of opportunity for all;
 - c) tackling road and rail congestion; and
 - d) achieving a more balanced and sustainable pattern of development, across the Region, including rural areas.
- 2.7** In spatial terms, it is particularly the outward movement of people and jobs away from the MUAs which is increasingly recognised as an unsustainable trend and one which provides the Region with a key challenge. The trend is seen as increasing the pressures on the environment, encouraging development of Greenfield sites, increasing the need for car-based travel and creating dangers of abandonment and greater social polarisation within the Region.
- 2.8** A clear sense of common purpose is needed to address decentralisation, supported by a holistic, integrated approach to policies which affect the distribution of people and activities across the Region. The long term Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands set out in this guidance is a first but significant step in addressing this key challenge.

Guiding Principles

- 2.9** In order to balance the Government's sustainable development objectives within RPG, a framework of "guiding principles" was established by partners at an interim stage of the Review to assess options, guide the process of strategy choice and act as a key reference point in the development of policies. These principles, set out in Annex A, guided the development of the Spatial Strategy and the detailed policies that follow.

Climate Change

- 2.10** Climate change is recognised as one of the greatest threats facing the world with climate models indicating that the West Midlands will continue to get warmer with wetter winters and drier summers. The major cause of climate change is the production of greenhouse gases, notably CO₂, through the combustion of fossil fuels to make energy for homes, industry, businesses and transport. While it is usually considered primarily an environmental issue with nature conservation implications, recent experiences of flooding have shown how climate change can cause social disruption and, through reducing property prices and raising insurance premiums, affect people economically.
- 2.11** RPG has a responsibility to help meet national targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases. This will require establishing comprehensive and up to date data in order to enable the local authorities and agencies to develop co-ordinated and effective solutions. The use of the guiding principles in developing the Spatial Strategy has ensured that policies to assist the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions which may lead to climate change are an integral part of RPG.
- 2.12** For future RPG reviews the Regional Energy Strategy and the climate change scenarios generated by the West Midlands Climate Change Impact Study will be a valuable input. These scenarios will provide a basis for identifying
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areas likely to be vulnerable to climate change and, consequently, help future RPG and other interests consider how they might minimise the adverse impacts of climate change and take advantage of opportunities it might present. The Study will also identify proposals and set Regional targets which will form the basis for discussions with neighbouring regions and the integration of policies and proposals.

- 2.13** The global environment is also affected. Transport was responsible for around a quarter of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions in 2000 and more importantly is one of the few sectors in which emissions are growing. Road transport constitutes about 85% of all carbon dioxide emitted from the transport sector, with passenger cars accounting for around half of that.
- 2.14** The challenge for local authorities is to generate corporate responses, through their services and activities, to potential climate change, working with the community and businesses to raise awareness about mitigation and adaptation.
- 2.15** Development plans and the plans, strategies and programmes of local authorities and statutory agencies should be co-ordinated to ensure that all new developments and activities which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions are identified. The impacts should be considered and where possible action taken to avoid, reduce, or offset them. This could include contributions through energy efficiency measures and Regional woodland targets.
- 2.16** Apart from promoting a more sustainable pattern of development which reduces the need to travel and encouraging the use of more sustainable forms of transport (T1,T2), this guidance includes a number of mechanisms for responding to climate change. These include encouraging the use of sustainable drainage systems (QE9), increasing tree cover (QE8), promoting the reuse of materials (M3, WD1), supporting new industries and technologies that address climate change, and encouraging renewable energy and energy conservation (EN policies).

Climate Change and the Black Country

- 2.16A** Planning policies have a major role to play in tackling climate change, including achieving the national objective to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010 and by 60% from 1990 levels by 2050. Whilst such policies apply across the Region as a whole, the scale of change and development in the Black Country which is necessary to meet the objectives of both economic and environmental transformation, and the area's unique environmental character, justify a policy for the Black Country alone to direct the more detailed plans and policies which are to guide that change.
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POLICY CC1: Climate Change

The Joint Core Strategy, the Area Action Plan for Brierley Hill and other LDDs for the Black Country should:

- A. Exploit opportunities to both mitigate and adapt to the worst impacts of climate change by:
 - (i) developing and using renewable energy;
 - (ii) reducing the need to travel; and
 - (iii) reducing the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill;
- B. Enhance and extend natural habitats so that the opportunities for species migration are not precluded and biodiversity can adapt to climate change and hence help to mitigate its affects by reducing 'heat islands', acting as carbon 'sinks', absorbing flood water and providing renewable energy; and
- C. Require all new development to:
 - (i) minimise resource demand and encourage the efficient use of resources, especially water, energy and materials;
 - (ii) encourage the construction of climate-proofed developments and sustainable buildings to help ensure their long-term viability in adapting to climate change;
 - (iii) avoid development in areas at risk of flooding and direct development away from areas at highest risk;
 - (iv) promote the use of sustainable drainage techniques;
 - (v) facilitate walking, cycling and public transport;
 - (vi) facilitate effective waste management; and
 - (vii) protect, conserve, manage and enhance environmental and natural, built and historic assets;
- D. Regularly monitor progress and review policies accordingly.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 2.17 To ensure that the principles of sustainability are woven into RPG emerging options, policies and proposals at key stages were tested using a sustainability appraisal methodology.
- 2.18 A methodology was developed early in the RPG review process which focused on the identification of the key assets of the Region and the criteria for assessing the impact of changes on these assets for sustainability. These criteria were generally consistent with the guiding principles referred to above although developed to a greater level of detail.
- 2.19 Independent sustainability appraisal has been a part of the development of this RPG. The principles will continue to be applied through its implementation to deliver sustainable development of the Region.