

Agenda Item No. 9

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Assembly Meeting – 24 October 2007**

THE REVISION OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY - UPDATE.

Report of the Director of Policy

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Regional Assembly with an update on the current progress in bringing forward the revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and to inform Members of the work that has been undertaken to develop the Phase 2 Preferred Option Submission to the Secretary of State and the development of the Phase 3 Draft Project Plan.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the contents of the report be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is currently undergoing a partial revision in three phases. A full report setting out the details of the RSS Revision programme was submitted to the Regional Assembly on the 25th October 2006 and 17th January 2007 and an update was last reported to Members on the 18th July 2007. This report provides a further update on the progress of the RSS Revision.

RSS Phase One Revision: The Black Country

- 3.2 Members will be aware of the background to the Phase One Revision as reported in various papers previously considered by the Assembly. Following the Examination in Public earlier in the year, the Panel Report largely welcomed the proposed Revision submitted by the Regional Assembly (jointly with the Black Country Consortium) acknowledging that this built on and developed the previously agreed principles of the West Midlands RSS.
- 3.2 Having considered the Panel Report, the Secretary of State published her Proposed Changes on the 10th September 2007 and these have been

made widely available for public inspection. Responses are required by the 9th November 2007.

- 3.3 Overall, the Secretary of State is supporting most of the changes recommended by the Panel. These include:
- new policies to define broad areas for regeneration and growth;
 - a new policy which replaces Dudley with Brierley Hill/Merry Hill as a strategic centre;
 - a new policy to emphasise the importance of transforming the environment;
 - a new policy to encourage development to adapt to climate change; and
 - revisions to the transport priorities to reflect the current status of transport proposals in the Black Country.
- 3.5 The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes (West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase One Revision – the Black Country) are welcomed by the Regional Planning Body and the Black Country Consortium as a landmark in taking forward the urban renaissance of the Black Country, the largest Major Urban Area in the Region. The endorsement of the Panel Report, which supported the approach to urban renaissance with a strategy for future growth and competitiveness through transformation land use and transport restructuring, will contribute significantly to both the sustainability and the competitiveness of the Region while enhancing quality of life for over a million residents of the Black Country.

RSS Phase Two Revision

- 3.6 The Phase 2 Revision includes some important issues for the Region, including future housing and employment land provision, the development of the Region's towns and cities, transport and waste management provision. Central to this is the scale and distribution of housing provision that should be made in the Region over the next 20 years. With regard to this issue, RPP had previously asked officers to liaise with authorities across the Region on whether a 40,000 'gap' between initial estimates of demand (i.e. 380,000 net dwellings as implied by Government household projections) and potential supply (i.e. 340,000 net dwellings) might be filled.
- 3.7 At RPP on 24th September, Officers reported back that, on the basis of positive responses being received from the City-Region authorities of Birmingham and Coventry, it was possible that the Region could accommodate around 363,000 net dwellings without undermining the current strategy based on urban and rural renaissance. (A verbal update on the outcomes of the RPP meeting was reported to the Assembly Board on 26 September). At the meeting RPP Members provided officers with further guidance on the final shaping of the Preferred Option (including all policy issues being addressed – housing,

employment land, centres, transport and waste). In finalising the housing distribution figures, Members stressed the need to ensure that:

- adequate investment is provided for transport and other infrastructure to support the housing proposals;
- proposed phasing policies are strengthened to maintain the emphasis on development within the Major Urban Areas (MUAs) and on brownfield land;
- a strong case is made for 'windfall sites' provision to be included in housing land assessments;
- the right type of housing is brought forward, including affordable housing and appropriate housing for the elderly;
- adequate opportunities are provided for employment growth and that important employment sites are protected from housing development;
- appropriate policies are put in place to limit the risk of flooding; and
- the Green Belt policy should be amended to stress that adjustments to boundaries will only occur where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated.

3.8 As well as setting out new housing proposals, the Preferred Option will also include a range of other revised policies, including:

- policies relating to Climate Change, sustainable communities and sustainable construction
- proposals for employment land provision, with a five year reservoir of supply and indicative longer term estimates of need identified at District level;
- policies to encourage more office developments to be located within strategic centres rather than in out-of-centre locations, with a scale of provision identified for each strategic centre;
- adjustments to current RSS Transport Policies relating to Park and Ride, car parking standards, demand management and airports
- a range of policies for waste management reflecting the move away from landfill provision.

3.9 Since RPP on the 24th September, Officers have finalised the Preferred Option policies, including an amendment to the housing distribution to reflect a requirement for an additional 3,000 dwellings for Stoke on Trent post 2016. The overall housing distribution figure is now in the region of 365,600 net dwellings.

3.10 At its meeting on 22nd October, RPP Members will be asked to consider and sign off the final Preferred Option for submission to the Secretary of State by the end of the year. Following the submission a formal 12 week consultation will commence on the 7th January 2008. Followed by an Examination in Public in the Autumn 2008.

3.11 In shaping the Preferred Option, a number of consultation, workshops and briefing events have been held to ensure stakeholder input into the development of the emerging policies. These events have been well attended and some positive feedback has been received. The events included:

- **6th June – RSS Reference Groups and Key Stakeholder Workshops:** to consider issues arising from the Spatial Options Consultation and to determine the way forward.
 - **26th July – Wider RSS Phase 2 Stakeholder Briefing and Workshops:** to share and discuss emerging draft policies and thinking.
 - **28th September – Stakeholder Briefing Event:** to inform partners and individuals of the emerging draft Preferred Options and the 'steer' provided by RPP.
- 3.12 Both the Phase 2 RSS Revision and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Review have run concurrently and actions have been undertaken to ensure that they are appropriately aligned and that the two strategies are mutually supportive. In taking forward this process a Working Group was established comprising of officers from the Regional Assembly (including RSS Policy Leads and the Assembly's Planning Team) and AWM, to oversee the alignment of the revised RES with the emerging Phase 2 Preferred Option and to ensure that the policies in both were mutually supportive, used the same language, and were updated to reflect current thinking on climate change and working towards the sustainable development of the West Midlands.

RSS Phase Three Revision

- 3.13 The Phase 3 Revision will consider a number of detailed issues including critical rural services, recreational provision, various regionally significant environmental issues and the provision of a framework for sites for Gypsies and Travellers. In order to take the revision forward a Draft Project Plan has been prepared. The Project Plan sets out what elements of the RSS will be revised, how partners and the public can get involved, what timetable will be worked to, what resources and technical work are available and required, and how the Revision will be aligned with other regional strategies.
- 3.14 The launch of the Draft Project Plan marks the formal start of the Phase Three Revision process. The outline timetable for launching the Draft Project Plan and undertaking the Phase Three Revision has been agreed by the Regional Planning Partnership and is as follows:
- Draft Project Plan launch – November 2007;
 - Final Project Plan launch – April 2008;
 - Spatial Options launch – December 2008;
 - Preferred Option launch – August 2009.
- 3.15 A complete draft of the Draft Project Plan has now been finalised and will be considered and signed off by the Regional Planning Partnership at its

meeting on the 22nd October. Following agreement by the RPP, the Draft Project Plan will be launched at a public event which is to be held on 27 November 2007 at the Burlington Hotel in the centre of Birmingham.

- 3.16 There will follow a formal seven week consultation period between 27 November 2007 and 18 January 2008, allowing opportunities for stakeholders and the public to comment on the Draft Project Plan. Following the consultation, the comments received will then be considered in finalising the Project Plan to be published in Spring 2008.

Contact Officers:
Rose Poulter
Director of Policy
r.poulter@wmra.gov.uk

David Thew
Head of Planning
d.thew@wmra.gov.uk