

Agenda Item No. 7

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Assembly Meeting - 16 January 2008**

Regional Spatial Strategy Revision (RSS) Update

Report of the Director of Policy

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Assembly Members on progress and key issues in relation to the RSS Revision.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Assembly considers the report and notes progress made.

3. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS)

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is currently undergoing a partial revision in three phases. Reports have been submitted to Assembly Members on a regular basis to update and inform them of the progress.

Phase 1 – the Black Country

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 Having considered the Panel Report, the Secretary of State published Proposed Changes on the 10th September 2007. These were made available for public inspection and responses were required by the 9th November 2007. A joint response from the Regional Planning Body and the Black Country Consortium was submitted to the Secretary of State in early November.
- 3.4 The Regional Planning Body and the Black Country Consortium welcomed the Secretary of State's proposed changes 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.

- 3.5 The Assembly has been informed by the GOWM that the Secretary of State will publish the RSS phase One final Revision on the 15th January 2008.

RSS Phase Two Revision

- 3.6 The Phase Two Revision has included 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 has been the scale and distribution of housing provision that should be made in the Region over the next 20 years.
- 3.7 The Preferred Option for the Phase Two Revision has been prepared following a period of extensive discussion and debate, including consultations across the Region. Both the Phase Two 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 Two Preferred Option.
- 3.8 At the Regional Planning Partnership on 22nd October, Members agreed and signed off the Preferred Option for submission to Secretary of State. To summarise, the key elements of the Revision are as follows:

Sustainable Region

- New policies on Climate Change, creating Sustainable Communities, Sustainable Construction and Air Quality.

Housing

- The provision and distribution of 365,600 new homes across the West Midlands over the next 20 years;
- 6,000 affordable units to be provided every year;
- The designation of "Settlements of Significant Development" (*Worcester, Telford, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Rugby, Burton upon Trent, Stafford, Nuneaton/Bedworth, Warwick/Leamington Spa and Redditch*) as focus of housing and related development outside the Major Urban Areas.

Employment

- The provision and distribution of employment land supply across the Region over the next 20 years;
- The identification of Regionally Employment Significant Sites including the future provision of Regional Logistic Sites.

Town and City Centres

- The level of both retail and office floorspace provision to be made in strategic centres across the Region over the next 20 years;
- Proposals to encourage more office development to be located within the Region's strategic centres.

Waste Management

- Establishes Regional targets for waste treatment and recycling in order to reduce the amount of waste that currently goes into landfill;
- The location of future Waste Management Facilities.

Transport

- Adjustments to the transport policies relating to the provision of Strategic Park & Ride facilities, car parking standards, demand management and airports;
- Updating Regional Transport Investment priorities.

3.9 The Phase Two Revision Draft was formally submitted to the Secretary of State on 21st December 2007. Following the submission a formal 12 week consultation commenced on the 7th January 2008 to 28th March 2008. Details of the consultation have been forwarded to all WMRA Partnerships and to individual contacts on the RSS database (approximately 3,600). Copies of the submission documents have been made available on the WMRA website, and have been distributed to all Local Planning Authorities and libraries for public inspection. Copies of the documents can be made available to Assembly Members on request and will be available at the meeting on the 16th January.

3.10 Following the formal submission of the Phase Two Revision Draft, the Assembly has received a letter from Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government. In her letter, dated 7th January 2008, the Minister expressed concern about the housing proposals put forward by the Assembly in light of the Government's agenda to increase housing building across the country. In particular, the Minister has asked the Government Office for the West Midlands to commission further work to look at options which could deliver higher housing numbers.

3.11 On receipt of the letter, the Assembly issued an initial response via a press release (see Appendix 1). Assembly officers are currently considering the full implications of the letter and possible ways forward and will advise members in due course. A meeting of the WMRSS Coordination/Steering Group will also be convened shortly.

RSS Phase Three Revision

3.10 The Phase Three 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 and was signed off by RPP on the 22nd October to be launched for public consultation.

- 3.11 The Draft 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.

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.
- 3.12 The Draft Project Plan was launched at a public event which was held on 27 November 2007 at the Burlington Hotel in the centre of Birmingham. The launched was followed by 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.

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07 JAN 2008

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dear Councillor Roberts".

WEST MIDLANDS RSS PHASE 2 REVISION

Thank you for the draft RSS revision submission which you submitted to Hazel Blears on 21 December. I would like to thank everyone who has worked hard to ensure this submission has been produced in accordance with the programme.

I am sure that you understand from recent announcements that housing issues are now very high on the Government's agenda. Affordability is a major issue across the country and The Prime Minister himself is taking a keen interest in housing delivery. Improving performance is essential to the achievement of the wider social and economic objectives of the Government. The recent Housing Green Paper set down an ambitious challenge to review all RSSs by 2011 to reflect plans for 240,000 homes a year by 2016. The initial NHPAU Report also provides an indication of the levels of housing which will be required to impact on affordability in the region.

The Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands has a clear focus on the regeneration of the major urban areas. Clearly this is important as sustainable development will rely on the economic drivers associated with those areas. However, the draft RSS Phase 2 Revision does not even make provision for the levels of homes anticipated to be required by the 2004 based household projections.

Let me make it clear that we do not wish to fundamentally question the Spatial Strategy for the region in advance of the Public Examination, but we are concerned that the very rigid application of some of the principles may be unnecessarily constraining longer-term development. I have therefore asked the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) to commission some further work looking at options which could deliver higher housing numbers. The aim will be to provide the Examination Panel with options that could deliver housing numbers which will start to impact on affordability, whilst maintaining as many of the principles of the Spatial Strategy as possible.

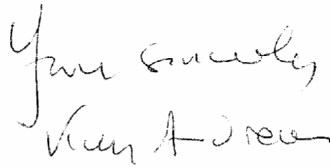
We intend to complete this further work by mid April and in order to provide an opportunity for consultees to consider this additional evidence when making responses on the draft RSS we consider it appropriate to extend the consultation period to the 23 May. I trust you

will find this acceptable.

GOWM will manage the work of the consultants and will involve officials from the Assembly together with other regional stakeholders, local authorities and other interested parties in the work as appropriate through the study.

I understand that this decision will cause you some concerns and I would like to reassure you that the decision has been given very serious consideration along with a range of alternative approaches. However, we consider that given the aspirations of the Housing Green Paper this approach will allow us to build on the work already done for the Revision and minimise the period of uncertainty for the region.

Like the Regional Assembly, we are determined that the West Midlands will benefit and thrive from sustainable growth and we are confident that we can continue to work in partnership with you to ensure that both national and regional objectives are satisfied.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Yours sincerely, Baroness Andrews'.

BARONESS ANDREWS

NEWS RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

Date 07 01 2008



Ref. 2008 0701

West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision – Letter from Baroness Andrews

Following submission of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in December 2007, the Assembly has received a letter from Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In the letter, the Minister thanked the Assembly and its Partners for the hard work that had gone into producing the Phase Two Revision Draft. However, the Minister expressed concern about the housing proposals put forward by the Assembly in light of the Government's agenda to increase housing building across the country.

In particular, the Minister has asked the Government Office for the West Midlands to commission further work to look at options which could deliver higher housing numbers. The Government Office intends to complete this further work by mid April and, in order to provide an opportunity for consultees to consider this work when making responses on the Phase Two Revision Draft, the Minister has proposed to extend the consultation period to 23rd May 2008.

In submitting the Draft Revision, the Assembly made it clear that the policies and proposals put forward represented an ambitious growth strategy for the Region but one that was well balanced taking into account a wide range of important considerations. The Assembly particularly emphasised that it had worked hard with its regional partners to meet the Government's housing objectives and it believed that it had achieved this in a way that maintained the drive towards sustainable development and growth emphasising the Urban and Rural Renaissance so important to the future of this Region

The Government's letter now appears to challenge this view and seems to imply that, in order to provide for a higher level of house building, certain principles underpinning the Spatial Strategy may need to be reconsidered.

Although the contents of the letter has yet to be formally considered by the Assembly, Cllr Rex Roberts', Chair of the Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership initial reaction was that he was disappointed at the Government's position stating: "While we recognise the need to improve housing affordability, it is important that we do not fall into the trap of a simple numbers game. This could lead to the worst of all worlds if more greenfield sites are released and efforts to regenerate brownfield land and derelict sites is diverted such that the overall Urban and Rural Renaissance agenda is undermined".

Cllr Roberts also questioned whether even higher housing numbers could in practice be achieved given constraints in the construction industry and wider infrastructure and sustainability concerns.

While it is clearly open for the Government to undertake any further work it deems necessary, the Assembly will need to assess carefully the full implications of the Minister's letter. Officers will therefore be considering the contents of the letter and possible ways forward and will advise members in due course. Following this, the Assembly will inform its partners and the public on its views including any implications for extending the consultation period.

ENDS

For further information contact Chilufya Dawo on 0121 678 1044.

West Midlands Regional Assembly

1. West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
5. The Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership is the designated Regional Planning Body for the West Midlands, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.
6. For further information, visit our website www.wmra.gov.uk
7. The Independent Performance Assessment was undertaken by the National Audit Office as part of an examination of all 8 English Regional Development Agencies at the request of the Department of Trade and Industry.
8. The final report can be downloaded from Advantage West Midlands' website www.advantagewm.co.uk

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