

Agenda Item 15 – For Information



WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Board of Directors – 24 September 2008

Regional Spatial Strategy

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Board of the recent progress with regard to the RSS Phase 2 and 3 revisions and to set out the key future target dates for your information.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the contents of this report be **noted**.

3. Background

- 3.1 Following the approval by the Minister of the Phase 1 RSS Revision (Black Country) last January, the Assembly has been focused on progressing Revisions 2 and 3. Progress since your last meeting is set out below, in respect of each phase, together with the target dates to which we are now working.

4. Phase 2 Revision

- 4.1 This covers the key topic areas of housing, employment, town centres, transport and waste. The period for formal representations as extended will close on 8 December. This will allow the Assembly and stakeholders to respond to the Government's commissioned study into higher housing ranges when it is published on 7 October 2008.
- 4.2 The Government's commissioned study has now taken into account the report of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU). This has recommended that the West Midlands delivers between 377,900 and 446,300 dwellings 2006-2026, compared with the RSS preferred option of 365,600 dwellings.
- 4.3 The contents of the final study, from consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) will be discussed at a stakeholder conference

organised by Government Office on 9 October and the Assembly's response will be presented to the Regional Planning Partnership for endorsement at the 2 December meeting.

- 4.4 The Assembly and its partners therefore have a concentrated period of work to assess the impact of the NLP study on the RSS Phase 2 Preferred Option. In particular, we will need to assess whether its recommendations can be reconciled with the urban and rural renaissance principles of RSS and whether the recommendations are sustainable and deliverable, particularly in the short-term, given the impact of the global credit crunch. The Assembly has already written to all principal local authorities to set out the advice that we will require and they have commenced work on this based on the contents of the July draft version of the NLP study.
- 4.5 The Phase 2 Revision Examination in Public (EiP) will commence on 28 April at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton. It is likely to sit for six or seven weeks and will be chaired by Alan Richardson. Mr. Richardson also chaired the Phase 1 (Black Country) Revision EiP and so is very well acquainted with the West Midlands and the issues we face.
- 4.6 Thereafter, the Minister will consider the report of Mr Richardson's Panel and will publish her draft recommendations for revision in late 2009 or early 2010.

5. Phase 3 Revision

- 5.1 The commissioning of the Government housing options study referred to above has had the effect of extending the Phase 2 Revision process by an additional nine months. It has also created a clash with the original Phase 3 timetable which would have led to the Phase 3 options consultation being undertaken in the period leading up to the Phase 2 Examination in Public. This would have caused both confusion of processes and conflicting work priorities for the Assembly and its stakeholders.
- 5.2 Discussions with Government Office have now led to the formal agreement of the Minister to adjust the Phase 3 preparation timetable. This will mean that the Options consultation will take place in July and August of 2009, after the close of the Phase 2 Examination in Public.
- 5.3 The Minister has requested that the timetable for the later stages of the Revision programme be revisited to speed them up as far as

possible. When this has been agreed with Government Office, the Project Plan for the Phase 3 Revision will be finalised and re-issued.

- 5.4 In the interim, work will continue work on completing the technical evidence base for all the Phase 3 topic areas (rural services, gypsy and traveller housing needs, environment, green belt, minerals, culture, sport and tourism) and draft options will be developed and tested with partners in advance of approval by the Regional Planning Partnership in March 2009.
- 5.5 Discussions with Advantage West Midlands have commenced to reach agreement on the arrangements for completing the Phase 3 Revision after the 2010 transfer of regional planning powers envisaged in the Government's Sub National Review of Economic Regeneration.

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