

WMRSS UPDATE

January 2009

Welcome

Welcome to this edition of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Update - your source for news and information about the revision of the WMRSS and its ongoing implementation and monitoring. This newsletter is designed to inform those interested on the general progress and opportunities to get involved.

Overview of the current WMRSS Revision

When the WMRSS was published in June 2004, the Secretary of State supported the principles of the strategy but suggested several issues that needed to be developed further. This Revision process is being undertaken in three Phases:

- **Phase One** - focused on developing a long term sub-regional strategy for the Black Country. The final Phase One Revision was published by the Secretary of State in January 2008. The revised WMRSS will continue to be part of the Development Plan for the Region and the specific revisions concerning the Black Country sub-region will form the strategic framework for the Joint Core Strategy which is being prepared by the four Black Country Authorities. Relevant documentation can be viewed on our website.
- **Phase Two** - focuses on issues around housing, employment land, centres, transport and waste. The Assembly has prepared a Draft Revision document which was out for public consultation until 8th December 2008. The Draft Revision document will be considered at an Examination in Public starting in April 2009 (see Headline News).
- **Phase Three** - The topics to be addressed in the Phase Three Revision of the WMRSS are Rural Services, Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, Culture, Sport and Tourism, Environment and Minerals. The Assembly is developing an Options document that will identify choices as to the nature and content of new or revised policies. Everybody will have a chance to say what they think during the consultation period which will commence in July 2009.

Phase Two Headline News

- **WMRSS Phase Two Draft Revision:**
The Assembly submitted the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State in December 2007.
If you would like to view the document and the supporting background material, please visit our website at www.wmra.gov.uk or contact us by telephone on 0121 245 0200 or email wmrss@wmra.gov.uk
- **Consultation closed 8 December 2008:**
The public consultation on the Phase Two Revision Draft closed on 8th December 2008. More than 600 organisations, groups and individuals made representations on the Draft Revision. All consultation responses will be considered by an independent Panel who will hold an Examination in Public in 2009 to discuss the Draft Revision document and make recommendations to Government.
- **Examination in Public 2009**
The Examination in Public will open on 28th April 2009 at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton and it is expected to last a maximum of seven sitting weeks. In advance of this, the Panel is planning to hold preliminary meetings and seminars. Further details about the Examination in Public process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website at www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk

Phase Two Dates for your Diary

Panel holding 1st preliminary meeting	27 January 2009
Seminar on housing numbers and household projections (provisional)	28 January 2009
Panel holding 2nd preliminary meeting (provisional)	18 March 2009
Seminar on housing numbers and household projections (provisional)	18 March 2009
Examination in Public	28 April 2009 to 26 June 2009

Monitoring the WMRSS

The outputs from our extensive monitoring activity form an essential part of the evidence base of the WMRSS. It not only enables us to ascertain whether or not we are progressing in the right direction and achieving the targets set by the Strategy but it is also a valuable source of intelligence to inform the Revision of the WMRSS.

Monitoring the WMRSS contd.

As we move forward to the WMRSS Phase Two Examination in Public our monitoring activity takes upon additional significance with the 2007/08 WMRSS Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) due for publication at the end of February 2009. This document will be vital in demonstrating the extent to which the Region has delivered the Spatial Strategy to date and where we could be doing better.

The February 2009 WMRSS AMR in particular will need to be able to stand the particular scrutiny of the EiP. It is however necessary to acknowledge that the data it reviews relates to the period just before the current economic circumstances – it will not therefore (certainly in the shorter term) be a good predictor of potential future development rates.

Implementing the WMRSS

A draft Implementation Plan was prepared to support the WMRSS Phase Two Revision submission to Government. In submitting this draft it was always acknowledged that it would need further development and updating on a continual basis, particularly in time for the Examination in Public (EiP) in Spring 2009. To this end, a new WMRSS Implementation Group has been established to oversee this work and to ensure that the Assembly is able to present a clear case at the EiP. As a contribution to this sub-regions have been asked to prepare Implementation Frameworks by the end of 2008. This will not only aim to update the infrastructure needs of their areas but also demonstrate that mechanisms are in place to ensure effective delivery.

Conformity with the WMRSS

Planning Appeal decisions in South Staffordshire

Details of decisions made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in respect of three Public Local Inquiries that were held in the summer of 2007 have been brought to the attention of the Assembly's Secretariat. Three Public Inquiries resulted from appeals made to a number of planning applications that were either refused or not determined by South Staffordshire District

Council (SSDC). All of these proposed significant amounts of new housing outside of the Black Country Major Urban Areas (MUAs).

When the applications were initially submitted in 2006/7, SSDC consulted the Assembly as they were all classified as regionally significant planning applications. In line with our Protocols, the Regional Conformity Advisor for Staffordshire presented Assembly Members with advice on the general conformity of the proposals with the WMRSS, which were duly accepted as the basis for the Assembly's response back to SSDC.

The Secretary of State's decision to dismiss the all appeals and refuse planning permission partly on the basis of harm and conflict the policies and objectives of the WMRSS with regard to assisting the urban renaissance of the Black Country MUA is a firm endorsement of the WMRSS and the Assembly's conformity advice. The refusal of the proposals will restrict significant new peripheral housing development that could attract out-migration from the Black Country.

Eco-towns

On 4th November 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published the draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-towns for consultation. The draft PPS is accompanied by a number of supporting documents including draft Sustainability Appraisals (SAs) for short-listed locations. The draft PPS sets out the standards for an eco-town and sets out the planning process. The Government has a short-list of 12 potential eco-town locations, including "Middle Quinton" (near Stratford-upon-Avon).

The SAs assessed only one location as generally suitable for an eco-town, and one location as Grade C unsuitable for an eco-town. The majority of the short-listed locations (including "Middle Quinton") were assessed as "Grade B" sites, which government consider could be suitable for eco-towns subject to meeting specific planning and design objectives.

The Assembly will be responding to the draft PPS before the government's closing date for consultation responses which is 6th March 2009. The draft PPS and Sustainability Appraisals can be found on CLG's website at www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/ecotowns

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All technical work regarding the WMRSS can be found on our website at http://www.wmra.gov.uk/planning_and_regional_spatial_strategy/technical_work.aspx

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