

WMRSS UPDATE

October 2008

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.

The WMRSS Updates are designed to inform those interested about the WMRSS, the general progress of its revision and of 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** - has 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** - after many months of work, discussions and debates, including consultations across the Region, the Assembly submitted the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State in December 2007. Following the direct intervention of the government, a housing study has been commissioned by the government and is due for publication on 7 October 2008. Consequently the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft is now the subject of consultation until 8 December 2008 and further details are given below. An Examination in Public into the Draft Revision is expected to open in April 2009.

- **Phase Three** - examines critical rural services, culture/recreational provision, various regionally significant environmental issues, minerals and the provision of sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. Work towards developing the Phase Three Options is already underway and it has now been agreed that consultation on the Options will commence in June 2009 to avoid an overlap with the build-up to the Phase Two Examination in Public. The final Project Plan will be published shortly.

Dates for your diary

Consultation on WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft
The consultation period closes at midday on 8 December 2008.

WMRSS Phase Two Revision Headline News

WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft Submission

The consultation on the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft started on 7 January 2008 and anyone can make comments (representations) on the Draft Revision. If you would like to view the document and supporting background material, copies are available for inspection in all main libraries and Local Planning Authority offices across the Region. Also, documents can be viewed and downloaded from the Assembly website and hard copies or CDs can be obtained by contacting us on (0121) 245 0200 or by emailing us on wmrss@wmra.gov.uk.

Government Housing Study

Following submission of the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State in December 2007, the Assembly received a letter from Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government. In the letter the Minister expressed concern about the housing proposals put forward by the Assembly. The Minister asked the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) to commission a study to provide the Panel, which will be undertaking an Examination in Public, with further options that could deliver higher housing numbers.

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GOWM has appointed planning consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) to undertake this study. The work started in April 2008 and GOWM will make the final report available on 7 October 2008. Further information about the study can be obtained from GOWM at www.gowm.gov.uk or on 0121 352 5049.

Formal Consultation until 8 December 2008

In the light of this, the consultation period on the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft has been extended to 8 December 2008 to allow all consultees at least eight weeks to take the GOWM study into account in responding to the consultation once the study becomes available. The Assembly has asked that in making responses all consultees distinguish between their comments on the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft and the GOWM Housing Study. All comments will be considered by the Panel of the Examination in Public into the Draft Revision which is expected to start in April 2009.

How to get involved

All written views/comments on the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft must be submitted to the Panel Secretary by either post or email by midday on 8 December 2008 to the address below:

WMRSS Panel Secretary
c/o Government Office for the West Midlands
5 St. Phillips Place
Colmore Row
Birmingham
B3 2PW
Email: wm.panelsecretary@gowm.gsi.gov.uk

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.

In early September 2008 the Assembly published the Regional Housing and Employment Land Supplementary Reports which complement the main Annual Monitoring Report of February 2008. These documents, along with the Green Belt Supplementary Report, provided the focus of discussion at the very successful "Monitoring the RSS" Stakeholders Conference on 8 September 2008. The presentations and workshop reports of that event are available on our website.

Revision to Conformity Protocol

The Assembly has revised its Conformity Protocol. This updates and streamlines existing procedures that govern the arrangements between the Assembly and local authorities with respect to the Assembly's statutory role in providing an opinion of general conformity of Development Plan Documents being produced by local authorities.

The Protocol also includes revised criteria for regionally significant planning applications that the Assembly wishes to be consulted upon, again as one of the Assembly's statutory functions. The criteria are consistent with the new terminology and policies that have been submitted to the Secretary of State in respect of the WMRSS Phase Two Revision Draft.

The Revised Protocol became operational in the Spring of 2008 and all Local Authorities in the Region have been asked to formally sign up to it. Details of the Protocol are available on the Assembly's website.

How to contact us:

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All consultation documents and technical work regarding the WMRSS can be found on our website at www.wmra.gov.uk

Please direct any requests for translation, interpretation, large text or audio tape versions of this document to access@wmra.gov.uk or tel 0121 245 0200. All requests will be dealt with on an individual basis.