

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET - 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2008**

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY REVIEW - PHASE 3**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENT &  
REGENERATION**

**1. PURPOSE**

To respond to the invitation by the West Midlands Regional Assembly under Section 4 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to provide advice on the preparation of Phase 3 of the current revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That Members endorse the proposed Section 4 response summarised in this report.**

**3. SUMMARY**

- 3.1 This report sets out the Borough's response to the consultation brief issued by the West Midlands Regional Assembly on the issues and options that need to be considered in the preparation of the Preferred Options for Phase 3 of the revision of the West Midlands Region Spatial Strategy. It covers issues on critical rural services, gypsies /travellers, environment, minerals, culture and tourism.

**4. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

None.

**5. INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is being progressed in three phases: Phase 1 sets out policy specifically related to the Black Country and this has now been adopted by the Regional Assembly; Phase 2 deals with population, housing, employment and transport and the preferred option is currently out to consultation (a separate report on this will be presented to Members in due course).

Phase 3 considers the remainder of the Region's issues, that is, Rural Services, Gypsies/travellers, Culture, Environment and Minerals.

- 5.2 The West Midlands Regional Assembly is required under Section 4 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to seek the advice of the Strategic Planning Authorities (the County Councils, Unitary Authorities and Metropolitan Councils ) to help shape the options for the partial revision of the current Regional Spatial Strategy. The time table for Phase 3 completion is:-

- Submission of Local Authority Response 25<sup>th</sup> July 2008
- Publication and consultations on preferred Options either January 2009 or May 2009 depending on timing of Phase 2 Public Inquiry
- Phase 3 Inquiry anticipated Autumn 2009
- Adoption – estimated early 2010

The collection and analysis of the evidence that the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) will require to underpin the policy development proposed in Phase 3 is currently incomplete and reference to local evidence will also be required to inform strategic choices. The Council therefore has an opportunity to influence WMRA policy development and to help shape early regional thinking. However, Telford and Wrekin's response must be considered an initial one at this time and we may want to refresh our position on some issues as further information and evidence becomes available. This will be made clear to the WMRA. At this stage our response aims to:

- maximise the recognition given to opportunities and needs in Telford and Wrekin where there is a strategic reason for doing so;
- maximise the clarity provided by policy, but avoid introducing strict criteria where this cannot be justified on the basis of clear and available evidence;
- minimise the possibility for RSS to overlap with the role of Local Development Frameworks, particularly where this would simply duplicate national policy or constrain local policy development;
- Minimise the repetition of generic policy where this does not have a specific regional context.

- 5.3 The WMRA pose a series of questions against which they invite comment. The most important matters are summarised under the key Phase 3 headings below and the proposed full response is available on request.

## Summary of Response

- 5.4 Rural Services: Phase 3 aims to identify and prioritise the services that are critical to the sustainability of rural communities, and to identify mechanisms for promoting their provision

We take the view that rural communities are diverse in terms of their socio-economic make-up and service provision and that no particular model will fit every situation. We argue, therefore, that policy needs to be able to recognise local circumstances and this is best done at the local level. Strategic policy could help by differentiating remote rural areas where population increase could support declining communities from those close in to urban areas where commuting would undermine urban renaissance. We consider that RSS policy already covers this point adequately and introducing further complexity – particularly by trying to define “rurality” - is unnecessary. However, policy needs to be extended to cover the rural areas around Settlements of Significant Development (SSDs) (such as Telford) where a more managed approach to housing growth would be appropriate.

- 5.5 Housing ( gypsies and travellers) Phase 3 aims to identify the number of pitches required for Gypsies, travellers and travelling show people

Local Authorities are requested to quantify accommodation requirements on the basis of three options, as defined by a range of environmental constraints and opportunities. This requires a significant and complex study locally and across the region, and this work has not yet been carried out. At this stage we are unable to predict the outcome of the evidence and analysis arising from this work.

- 5.6 Culture: Phase 3 aims to identify and address gaps in the provision of international, national and sub regionally significant cultural assets

We believe that regional policy should identify regionally significant assets and key strategic and sub regional locations where assets should be developed or protected. Amongst these should be recognition of the role of Settlements of Significant Development – including Telford – as key locations for adding to the stock of regional assets. We set out key cultural/sporting facilities in Telford that we expect will be important to this objective and which RSS should recognise. Criteria based policies are necessary but these should be applied only where evidence is unable to support more specific proposals.

- 5.7 Environment: Phase 3 aims to further develop environmental policies in RSS including flood risk, air quality renewable energy and Green Belt

We argue that the RSS approach to environmental quality and green space issues needs to be more strategic. Where critical natural

features/green space and biodiversity habitats are under pressure or have been eroded Regional Policy should take the lead in identifying these for protection and enhancement. Detailed directions to local authorities are unnecessary. Current Regional policies are generally sufficient but they could be strengthened by establishing policy around the Environmental Quality and Biodiversity maps and by linking wildlife corridors. We also take the view that Environmental Quality policies seeking to uplift the quality of the built environment should explicitly prioritise regeneration zones, Settlements of Significant Development and locations where local housing markets are weak.

- 5.8 Flood risk is clearly a management challenge for the Borough, but is not thought to unduly constrain current RSS proposals for housing growth. It might, however, constrain the delivery of significantly higher growth figures.
- 5.9 We take a cautious approach to supporting policies that seek to impose local energy reduction targets. Whilst the Borough has a clear low carbon agenda and supports in general the creation of region wide criteria and targets it will be difficult to find a single set of criteria that will be appropriate to all cases. We are concerned that criteria, targets and development size thresholds will constrain the balance that Local Planning Authorities will have to make between many factors when considering development proposals. Therefore regional or sub-regional targets may be appropriate but they will need to be proportional to the circumstances and characteristics of sub regions. There needs to be room for local flexibility in their application.
- 5.10 Minerals: Phase 3 aims to develop policies on safeguarding mineral resources and the future supplies of construction aggregates and brick clay

We highlight concern over whether the sand, gravel and crushed rock supplies can be worked within acceptable environmental limits and state that it is unlikely that the Borough would have sufficient capacity to meet any shortfalls in supply arising elsewhere in the sub region. We take the view that most of potential regional policy proposed by the WMRA is already covered by the requirements set out under legislation and government guidance. However, we advocate a strengthening of policy in respect of the exploitation of hydro-carbons such as coal and make suggestions on the monitoring and management of stockpiles.

## **6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The report may have an impact on gypsy and traveller communities. This report comprises the Council's initial response in relation the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 3. RSS Phase 3 will, in due course, set regional policy figures for the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and the Council will then be expected to take action towards meeting the figure specified for the Borough.

## **7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Comment on environmental matters is dealt with in the main body of the report.

## **8.0 LEGAL COMMENT**

The results of the finally adopted Regional Spatial Strategy may have wide financial consequences for the Council but the details are not possible to evaluate at this stage. Varying allocations of housing for instance could create very different pressures on the Council's resources. Once the RSS is adopted by the Secretary of State the detailed resource implications will become clearer and where appropriate the Council will integrate them in its budget strategy process.

## **9.0 LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

Priority 1:– Renaissance of Telford Town Centre, enhancing leisure and cultural facilities, developing the Telford Sports enterprise and learning Village.

Priority 3: – sustainable development, promoting and protecting World Heritage Site – Environmental; Quality

Priority 6:- promoting the area as a visitor and tourist destination, playing an effective role in the region

## **10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional resource requirements arising directly from this report

## **11.0 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

Borough Wide Implications.

## **12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

West Midlands Region Spatial Strategy ( WMRSS) Jan 2008-06-18  
WMRSS Phase 2 Revision December 2007  
WMRSS Phase 3 Section 4 Brief May 2008  
WMRSS All technical Papers located on WMRA web site.

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