

Cabinet – 28 February 2007

The Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 Revision – Spatial Options

Portfolio:	Councillor Andrew, Regeneration and Enterprise
Service:	Regeneration – Strategy
Wards:	All
Key decisions:	Yes
Forward plan:	Yes

Summary of report

This report seeks approval of a proposed response to the West Midlands Regional Assembly's (WMRA) set of options related to Phase 2 of the revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). A copy of the full consultation document with the proposed response from Walsall has been placed in each of the Members rooms, with a summary of the key issues attached to this report as Appendix A and will be available on the Council's Committee Information website (CMIS). The consultation was launched on 8th January 2007, with a deadline for responding by 5 March 2007.

As Members will be aware, the RSS is now part of the Council's Development Plan, and has to be taken into account when the Council determines planning applications. However, the RSS is being reviewed in phases. Phase 1 was geographical and covered the Black Country. Following submission to the Secretary of State the RSS revision for the Black Country was the subject of an Examination-in-Public in January. Phase 2 is concerned with subject areas rather than geography; specifically housing, the economy, transport, waste management and town centres across the region.

Work on Phase 2 started last May. The Region asked various regional stakeholders, including this Council, for initial advice about these issues. Cabinet on 12th July 2006 approved this initial response. In the current consultation the WMRA sets out a series of options and the Council, like other consultees, has to pick its preferred ones, related to these various subjects. This report proposes Walsall's preferred options. A summary of these are set out as Appendix A to this report. Because certain areas have cross-boundary implications and in view of the need to ensure that regional policy continues to support an urban renaissance in the West Midlands, the Authority is also contributing to the overall Metropolitan Area response which is being organised through the West Midlands Planning & Transport Sub-Committee.

After the stakeholders have responded, the WMRA will propose a set of preferred options for submission to the Secretary of State, which is intended to be in December 2007. It is important for Walsall Council to continue to put its view forward about these issues and continue to take an active part in helping the WMRA review the relevant policies, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, the new RSS policies are in tune with the Borough's needs and aspirations.

Cabinet approval is required because the report deals with statutory consultation undertaken by the WMRA in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (particularly Section 5). The response will represent the public position of the Council.

Recommendation

That the proposed response to the spatial options consultation on the phase 2 revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy, summarised in this report, be approved by Cabinet for submission to the Regional Assembly

Resource and legal considerations

The RSS is now part of the development plan for the Borough under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and therefore has to be taken into account in determining planning applications where relevant, as well as providing the strategic context for the Council's Local Development Framework. There are no resource implications caused by approving this report beyond the staff time in compiling the response and contributing to the process.

Citizen impact

The RSS changes will influence planning decisions about where to locate housing, industry, offices, shopping facilities, waste management facilities and the amount of parking available in the town centre. The RSS strategy, and its proposed revisions, are essentially concerned with pursuing an urban renaissance, and the planning decisions based on this should generally affect the Borough's citizens for the better, as long as Walsall's interests can be protected under the changes. It will be particularly important to ensure that housing is balanced by sufficient job opportunities, and to provide the kind of housing that Walsall's citizens want; otherwise they could continue to move away from the Borough to fulfil their aspirations.

Community safety

There are no direct implications for community safety.

Environmental impact

The RSS has sustainable development at its heart. The Environment as an issue is scheduled for Phase 3 revisions to the RSS, though it could be argued that many of the phase 2 topics – notably transport – have an impact on the environment and sustainable development.

Performance and risk management issues

It is important to contribute to this process. If the Council does not, this would greatly increase the risk that we would have to operate RSS policies as part of the Development Plan that are not in the interests of the Borough or its citizens in the long term.

Equality implications

There are no direct implications for equality.

Consultation

The RSS Phase 2 Revision Project Plan includes a Statement of Public Participation, setting out how the WMRA will involve partners and the local community, how it will distribute information and how comments will be dealt with.

WMRA depends on support and input from the local authorities with strategic planning responsibilities, including the shire county councils and the metropolitan authorities such as Walsall. Through regional groupings council officers have sought to have an input into the RSS phase 2 revision via the project plan, the request for initial advice and the framing of the current consultation. At each stage the documentation has required the approval of the Regional Planning Partnership, which brings together members from local authorities across the region and includes members from Walsall.

As stated above, Walsall Council provided initial advice to the WMRA about the topics covered in the RSS Phase 2 Review. This report is concerned with helping them pick a set of preferred options about development to submit to the Government.

Vision 2008

The RSS, as part of the Council's Development Plan, is an important mechanism to turn the Vision's priorities into reality. As essentially a spatial plan, it will have an impact on some of the Vision's priorities more than others – particularly those concerned with the environment, transport, the economy, pride in the borough and consultation, but it should contribute to the achievement of the Vision as a whole.

The RSS Phase 2 revision timescale lasts until 2026

Background papers

WMRA Section 4(4) Brief
Cabinet Report on the RSS Phase 2 Revision – 12 July 2006
Walsall Council Response to Section 4(4) Brief
Walsall Council Response to Spatial Options

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Tim Johnson
Executive Director

8 February 2007



Councillor Adrian Andrew
Portfolio holder

19 February 2006

Appendix A

As part of the preparation of the RSS Review Phase 2, the WMRA has asked Strategic Authorities in the West Midlands to pick options related to the following subjects:

- **Housing.** Essentially the WMRA set out three options about the amount of housing to plan and provide for. Option 1 would be 381,000 houses; option 2 would be 500,000 houses, and option 3 would be 575,000 houses. Walsall's preferred option is option 2 – the middle one. Anything more might impinge either on industrial land resources or greenbelt.
- **Employment Land.** The main issue is whether there should be a reservoir of employment land (so that we can ensure that new housing development is in step with a good range of job opportunities for residents) . Walsall agrees that there should be a reservoir, but also that industrial development should as far as practicable be concentrated in the Major Urban Areas (including this Borough) because there is more need for regeneration here.
- **Shopping/centres.** There are 2 main options here: option 1 is essentially to follow the market and concentrate retail development in centres that the market likes best. This would not include Walsall. Option 2 is to try to give an uplift to fragile centres such as Walsall, again because of the wider objectives of regeneration and sustainable location of facilities. Walsall agrees with option 2.
- **Offices.** There are three options. (1) stick with the present 'sequential approach' to the location of offices which is supposed to direct them into town centre. (2) allow a percentage of offices to go out of centre. (3) have a criteria based approach. Walsall considers that none of these options will help regenerate the Major Urban Areas. Even under the present approach, 6 out of 10 sqm of office development goes out-of-centre. Walsall argues that a tougher approach, which forbids offices from going out of centre until there are no further in and edge-of-centre opportunities left, is the only way to secure regeneration in the long term.
- **Casinos.** The WMRA asks if such developments should be directed to town centres. The Council thinks they should.
- **Waste.** There are two sets of options relating to the tonnages of waste that are sent to landfill, taking into account future housing growth and Landfill Trading Allowance Scheme (LATS) targets. It is recommended that the Council supports Municipal Waste Option 2 (linked to Housing Option 2), which would require the Council to reduce the amount of municipal waste sent to landfill to 90,000 tonnes by 2010/11 and 72,000 tonnes by 2025/26. It is also recommended that the Council supports Commercial and Industrial Waste Option 2, which reflects the targets proposed in the national waste strategy review for diversion of commercial and industrial waste away from landfill. As well as the options, there are questions relating to the location of hazardous waste and landfill sites. The recommended response makes it clear that there is no evidence of a need for further hazardous waste treatment facilities in Walsall, but acknowledges that some mineral workings in Walsall will require restoration by landfill.
- **Transport .** There are four issues here – airports, park & ride, road user charging and car parking. All the options connected with the first three of these issues are broadly in line with Walsall Council's views. The main issue of concern is related to car parking, where the options are to stick with the present approach or to have regional standards that clamp down on car parking in centres such as Walsall, in the hope that people might switch to public transport. Walsall strongly disagrees. It is essential for regeneration that good car parking facilities are maintained in centres.