



**West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy  
Phase Three Revision  
Options Consultation**

**Additional Information from West Midlands Rural Community Action Network (WMRCAN)**

The work of the WMRCAN is focussed on supporting rural communities at a local level and coming together to give those rural communities a regional voice. This response is drawn from the work at a sub regional level supporting rural communities and encouraging the development of these communities to be sustainable. The views have been drawn from individual rural community councils (RCCs) and from a consultation panel with members from different backgrounds and organisations working across the region in the voluntary and community sector. This response from WMRCAN primarily focuses on the Rural Renaissance - Critical Rural Services chapter. However, the view of the WMRCAN is that culture, sport and tourism should also be addressed in this chapter as it they have a role of shaping the future sustainability of rural areas. In addition, the Quality of the Environment chapter is also of interest and is also recommended for inclusion in the Critical Rural Services chapter as it addresses one of the key issues around sustainability and the development of sustainable communities. The section of the consultation pertaining to minerals has not be completed as this is not an area the WMRCAN has particular expertise or understanding.

**Critical Rural Services**

- **Listing critical services**

The list will be subject to change over time does but not allow for flexibility. There are many variables in local communities depending on location and demographic make up of communities

- **New development**

New developments may achieve greater sustainability for smaller remote rural communities. Any new developments, however, should consider the service needs and demands and be built into the development process. Having a policy that does not allow for this may create, in the longer term, more unsustainable communities and highlight need for greater infrastructure improvement in the future. Supporting development in areas with access to

critical rural services would in effect consign existing smaller rural economies to decline and the opportunity to **proactively encourage and support sustainable communities** would be lost.

## **Sustainable communities**

**Social exclusion** is better tackled through provision of accessible job opportunities, affordable houses and building the social capacity of communities.

**Support for the rural economy** and home based business/work - there is a need at regional level that policy should support existing business and the creation of sustainable communities through small scale developments and start up businesses located in smaller settlements.

**Sustainable communities are more than just carbon reduced emission** but are achieved through creation of social, cultural and environment and economic factors.

## **Gypsies and Travellers**

WMRCAN has taken the view on this topic that this community best understands its own needs which need to be identified by the community itself and appropriate provision for this should be made accordingly. The network is aware that this consultation process has organised specific events to engage this community and therefore our comments are limited.

## **Culture Sport and Tourism**

In rural areas, in addition to the high quality landscape and heritage assets, culture, sport and tourism also provide key roles, functions and benefits for local communities. These include:

- Social cohesion
- Social inclusion
- Health and wellbeing
- Cultural diversity
- Contribution to sustainable rural communities
- Intergenerational participation

The WMRCAN therefore supports the response of the WMRAF on the following issues:

- A shift away from the current single focus on the contribution of culture, sport and tourism to the regional economy, to include greater emphasis on the contribution to

social well-being. For this reason we would like to see culture, sport and tourism moved from the 'Prosperity for All' chapter of the RSS.

- As a consequence of this shift, there would be a greater emphasis on the strategic importance of local assets rather than priority being given only to 'major' assets of regional, national or international importance - though we do recognise the importance of these to the region's prosperity.
- More focus on providing good access to sports facilities for all the population, wherever they live, encouraging the widest possible engagement in sporting and recreational activities.

## **Quality of the environment**

Integrated approach is most important to good environmental management. A regional approach is needed with regionally set targets to allow for sub regional flexibility. This approach needs to reflect all aspects of sustainability - social, environmental and economic.

## **Energy**

This is a relatively new area and as such a proactive approach needs to be taken and policies put in place to ensure a strategic approach at regional level is provided. Strict targets need to be set regionally.

Strategic mapping needs to be done at a regional level to ensure that the most appropriate energy installations are implemented at the appropriate places. Currently an ad hoc system is in place with no clear guidelines. Community owned renewable energy projects should be prioritised with guidelines available for planning criteria. These will need to be done at sub regional level through the LDF's and it therefore makes sense to have sub regional targets.

## **Energy efficiency in existing buildings**

This is a key area and needs to be incorporated into WMRSS. Most of the current housing stock in existence nationally (and therefore regionally) needs to be improved as it is one of the largest sources of CO2 emissions. Targets for increasing the energy efficiency of existing buildings need to be in place and national guidance needs to be drawn down to regional level to set targets for implementation. This is particularly important for rural communities, where the housing stock is often very old and energy can be most expensive, inefficient and high in CO2 emissions.

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