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Councillor Bransby Thomas
Chair of West Midlands Regional Assembly
Albert House
Quay Place
Edward Street
Birmingham
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Dear Councillor Thomas,

I am writing to inform you that the First Secretary of State has today issued Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11), a copy is enclosed for your information.

We have carefully considered all of the representations made on the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RPG. Many of the representations were supportive and made helpful suggestions to clarify the document. The Schedule of Changes to Final Regional Planning Guidance is also enclosed and lists the detailed changes. The main changes since the consultation are:

- the guiding principles for RPG have been included as an Annex;
- the Spatial Strategy has been clarified in relation to peripheral expansion;
- some text on urban renaissance from Draft RPG has been re-instated;
- policies and text have been revised to improve alignment with the Regional Economic Strategy;
- previously developed land targets have been corrected, based on data presented to the Public Examination;
- the monitoring indicators have been revised and streamlined following the GOWM/WMRA seminar; and
- there have been corrections to text, improved cross-referencing, and reformatting as necessary.

Publication of RPG11 is a major step forward for the Region, confirming a significant change in direction. The focus on urban renaissance will require all stakeholders to work effectively towards common goals and the Regional Assembly has a key role in leading this.

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Whilst the Spatial Strategy for the Region is now defined, there is a need to develop the RPG in subsequent reviews. Paragraph 1.33 lists a number of policy areas which should be considered for further work. This list necessarily only indicates the issues to be covered and not the scope of the work, you should discuss the extent of any proposals with GOWM. Three of these issues generated significant comment in consultation responses:

- further work on the roles of sub-regional foci should cover their relationships with MUAs, eg Rugby/Coventry. The study should specifically address the role of Rugby. It should also consider the potential for a focus to serve Staffordshire, and whether Burton upon Trent, where there are particular issues in relation to the East Midlands and opportunities on previously developed land, could fulfil that role;
- the implications of the Air Transport White Paper will need to be considered in relation to policy T11 and to the wider Spatial Strategy. The RPB should also consider the future roles of the facilities at Coventry, Wolverhampton, and Cosford; and
- there is a need to develop consideration of inter-regional issues. These will include the impact of the Spatial Strategy on neighbouring regions, including Wales, and the impact of other region's strategies on the West Midlands.

Although not raised in responses, there is a clear need to ensure that appropriate links are made with any current and future growth areas developed in response to the Sustainable Communities Plan. In particular, as the proposals for the Midlands evolve they will need to be reflected in future reviews.

When the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill is enacted the RPG will become the Regional Spatial Strategy, although some Structure Plan policies will need to be saved until further work is completed. Specific issues which have been identified in the consultation responses include:

- the distribution of housing allocations to functional sub-regions;
- the consideration of employment allocations for sub-regions; and
- a Regionally specific policy on Green Belt.

The development of the issues for further work will need to be balanced against the available resources and Regional priorities. You should discuss this with GOWM in order to prepare a programme of priority work leading to the next review of RPG11.

RPG11 provides the framework to inform both the development and implementation of strategies and programmes in the Region, including the Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Housing Strategy, and the plans of infrastructure and service providers. Local authorities must take RPG11 into account in preparing their development plans and local transport plans.

The absence of housing allocations may cause some difficulties for local authorities in the short term. Pending completion of the above work, districts should work on the basis of the current Structure Plan proportions to 2011. Beyond that, the proportions may not be appropriate. However, in the absence of any better information authorities should retain the Structure Plan proportions and the PPG3 'plan, monitor and manage process' should address any issues which arise. It is important that this approach should not lead to significant, particularly greenfield, allocations which could be inconsistent with the principles of RPG11. If there are any doubts, authorities should discuss this with GOWM.

I would like to take this opportunity to repeat how pleased I am with the Regional Assembly's contribution to the development of RPG11 throughout the process. I look forward to seeing the results of the further work, in particular the Black Country Study which will be a key aspect of developing the strategy for that Major Urban Area.

Copies of this letter, RPG11 and the Schedule of Changes have been sent to all local authorities, MPs, and MEPs in the Region, and to all participants at the Public Examination. Further copies of RPG11 may be purchased from The Stationery Office or viewed on the GOWM website.

Yours Sincerely,
Keith Hill
KEITH HILL