

**West of England Partnership  
Planning, Housing & Communities Board  
24th April 2009**

**Sub-Regional Studies- Update Report.**

**Purpose of report**

- To inform members about progress with sub-regional studies being undertaken in support of Core Strategy preparation.

**Background**

- 2 The government has withheld £3m from the potential funding available to the sub-region from the Growth Points Fund for 2009/11 owing to it's concern about joint working in the West of England and the need to provide a more robust, delivery focused programme. A need for greater co-ordination of plan delivery across the sub-region, a joint approach to urban design and for a strategic approach to green infrastructure has been highlighted by the government as necessary to facilitate the timely delivery of high quality growth in the sub-region.
- 3 The government has advised that the £3m withheld from the Growth Points Fund will be made available to the Partnership subject to the Partnership completing a project management plan for delivering the Core Strategies, reviewing the capacity and skills available to the Partnership, and developing a timetable for producing a masterplan/strategic urban design framework for all areas of major urban growth. In response, the Partnership submitted a project management plan to government in February. The plan includes a commitment by the Partnership to undertake a range of sub-regional studies to facilitate consistency between Core Strategies and their subsequent delivery, and bringing forward Priority Key Strategic Development Sites.

**Progress**

- 4 The Partnership is committed to undertaking some 4 sub-regional studies as part of it's response to government concerns about joint working in the West of England. The studies comprise: Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Delivery; Sub-Regional Employment Land Assessment; Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Plan; and, Strategic Urban Design Framework. The Partnership is committed to completing these studies by July or, in the case of the Sub-Regional Employment Land Assessment, August.

## **Sub-Regional Infrastructure Planning and Delivery**

- 5 The overall aim of the study is to secure advice about strategic infrastructure requirements, strategic infrastructure funding and priorities, and the implications for development phasing and the successful implementation of the sub-regional spatial strategy.
- 6 The specific objectives of the study are to:
  - Identify the need for infrastructure to support growth consistent with the spatial strategy for the sub-region;
  - Assess how infrastructure requirements are to be delivered, including organisational responsibilities, costs of infrastructure, availability of funding and potential funding shortfalls;
  - Propose guidelines about the timescales for the delivery of infrastructure, relationships between infrastructure investments and growth and development, critical development thresholds and the implications for development phasing, the delivery of spatial priorities and the overall level of growth that can be supported; and to,
  - Prioritise infrastructure projects taking account of the need to meet housing and jobs targets and the wider objectives of the spatial strategy for the sub-region.
- 7 In pursuing these objectives, the study will give particular attention to establishing and clarifying linkages between development progress and infrastructure provision, and the implications of delivering infrastructure for meeting development targets and achieving other strategic priorities. Particular consideration will be given to strategic issues arising at the Priority Key Development Sites of the sub-region.
- 8 The brief for the study had been drafted and consultants, Roger Tym & Partners, have been appointed to undertake the study. An Interim Report of the Study is expected in mid-May. This will set out the preliminary findings about the infrastructure requirements of development and in particular, key development thresholds. A draft of the final report is then expected in early July and the final report at the end of July.

## **Sub-Regional Employment Land Assessment**

- 9 The Assessment will show how RSS job growth and employment land targets for the West of England could be met in ways consistent with business location requirements and planning priorities. It will set out the implications of the RSS targets for the broad pattern of job growth and business development across the sub-region. It will address the role of the proposed urban extensions in addressing any shortfalls in the supply of business sites.

- 10 The Assessment will take account of the many business and labour market linkages that extend across the West of England and in particular, the wider Bristol area. It will acknowledge the impacts of these linkages in identifying employment land requirements and facilitate the provision of employment land allocations that are consistent with RSS growth targets and sub-regional spatial priorities.
- 11 The objectives of the Assessment are to:
- Determine the broad levels and patterns of business development requirements likely to arise across the sub-region over the period to 2026, taking account of RSS growth targets, planning priorities and RSS job growth targets;
  - Assess the contribution of existing business sites to meeting business development requirements arising over the period ahead to 2026;
  - Clarify how emerging shortfalls in capacity to meet business development requirements could be addressed, in particular the need for new employment sites at the proposed urban extensions;
  - Identify the overall pattern, levels and sequence of business development across the sub-region over the period to 2026; and to,
  - Determine prospects for local employment levels.
- 12 The brief for the study has been drafted. Currently, officers of the Partnership are preparing a preliminary assessment that addresses the objectives set out above. This work relies on a range of existing information, in particular a guidance note prepared on behalf of the Regional Assembly in order to facilitate the application of RSS job growth targets, employment land monitoring data assembled by the local councils and the employment land reviews already completed for B&NES and Bristol in support of the preparation of the local development frameworks for these areas.
- 13 Following the completion of the preliminary assessment, officers will then consider the outcomes, outstanding issues and the need for further work. The appointment of consultants may be required to complete any further work. It is aimed to complete all aspects of this work by August.

### **Strategic Urban Design Framework**

- 14 Discussions with CABI are being held to clarify the scope of a strategic urban design framework and the work required for the completion of such a framework for the sub-region. It appears that the framework will seek to address the following issues:
- Supporting and strengthening the vision;

- Supporting and clarifying spatial priorities and the sequencing and phasing of development;
- Incorporating key planning principles that demonstrate commitment to a step change in the provision of homes and jobs, creating mixed and sustainable communities;
- Aligning delivery programmes;
- Establishing common design standards;
- Enhancing investor confidence;
- Identifying joint investments and associated community benefits; and,
- Securing consistency on level and quality of community involvement.

### **Green Infrastructure Plan**

- 15 The plan is expected to seek to define strategic green infrastructure priorities and the strategic green infrastructure of the sub-region. It will focus on creating a network of multi-functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways and open countryside, and other environmental resources. In determining the network, consideration will be given to securing sustainable resource management, biodiversity, recreational opportunity, landscape enhancement and regional development and promotion.
- 16 The Partnership has already received a brief scoping report by mean of commissioning advice from the Forest of Avon team. Consideration is being given to this report and a brief for engaging further consultancy work will be drafted over the next month.

### **Recommendation**

- 17 Members are invited to note the report and express their views.**

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