

**West of England Partnership Board
14 January 2010**

**REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY:
ADDITIONAL SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL WORK**

Purpose of report

1. To summarise Government's progress with the sustainability appraisal work, based on a response from the Government Office for the South West (GOSW).

Background

2. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) provides an essential statutory context for local councils' preparation of Local Development Frameworks, including Core Strategies. The RSS for the South West has still not been published.
3. In June 2009 GOSW advised that publication was delayed because Government was considering the implications of a High Court judgement on the East of England RSS. The letter received from GOSW is appended to this report.
4. The third paragraph of the letter states that GOSW:

"... would expect (RSS) now to be given considerable weight in consideration of any application for development..."
5. On 18 September 2009, following discussions amongst council planning officers in the West of England, a response was sent to GOSW to object to the advice contained in their letter of 25 June, and to set out the reasons. (The response is appended to this report).
6. On 25 September 2009 GOSW confirmed the intention to carry out a new Sustainability Appraisal of proposed changes to the RSS. Their letter is appended to this report.

Progress with the Government Sustainability Appraisal

7. In their most recent letter dated 21 December 2009 (attached) GOSW explain the steps they are taking to complete the sustainability appraisal work.
8. Land Use Consultants have been commissioned to carry out work and they are expected to report in March 2010. Ministers will then decide how to progress the RSS, which may include additional consultation.
9. In the last section of their 21 December letter GOSW set out their advice on the implications for planning decisions and Local Development Frameworks of the current position with RSS.

10. GOSW state that their:

“.... advice remains that the proposed changes to the RSS are likely to be ‘material considerations’ for any planning decisions bearing on development envisaged in the Areas of Search, or otherwise covered by RSS policies. How much weight to give each policy or proposal is a matter for decision-makers ...”

GOSW also advise that:

“...there is no need for RSS to be issued before progress on Core Strategies can be made...”

Recommendation

11. That the Board notes the report.

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