

**West Wiltshire District Council**

**Cabinet**

**27 October 2004**

**Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026**

**1. Purpose**

To consider the consultation options for a Regional Spatial Strategy and to forward comments to Council which will approve a response at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

**2. Background**

The new planning system requires Regional Assemblies to prepare Regional Spatial Strategies, which will replace both Regional Planning Guidance and County Structure Plans prepared under the previous system. These Strategies will have statutory weight and will, together with Local Development Documents produced by local authorities, form the Development Plan.

The South West Regional Assembly is currently consulting on broad options for a Regional Spatial Strategy, which will, when adopted in 2006, provide a framework for planning decisions over the next 20 years.

Officers have previously circulated a summary leaflet to all members and to all town and parish councils. The West Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnership will also be considering the consultation options at its meeting later in November and officers are investigating working together with neighbouring local authorities to co-ordinate responses.

**3. Key Issues**

Set out in Appendix 1 is an extract from the consultation report, which sets out the 3 broad options, together with the identified strengths and weaknesses of each option. The full report is in the Members' room for information.

Member's initial views on the options are welcomed at this stage. To assist in the process, officers have identified the following key issues:

### *Uncertainty regarding overall levels of growth and the capacity of the Principal Urban Areas*

The consultation report is about the distribution of growth (in particular housing). However, there is uncertainty on the likely overall levels of growth to be accommodated within the region. The current RPG10 plans for 20,000 net new dwellings per annum. However, the latest ONS projected households data estimates a need for 22,600 per annum. The Government commissioned Barker report has recommended a substantial increase in national house building rates to meet perceived needs. However, the Government has yet to determine its response to this report and there is uncertainty as to the implications for the South West region. For the purposes of the sub regional studies of the large urban areas, the Regional Assembly is testing housing figures up to 30,000 per annum.

Joint studies are currently being undertaken into the capacity of the large urban areas including Swindon and the West of England (Bristol/Bath/Weston). The results of these studies will not be available until after this consultation process.

The overall level of growth and the capacity of the PUA's are important matters because these factors could determine the success or failure of the strategy options. They could also determine the scale of development which market towns may be asked to accommodate. Consultants have also concluded that a high level of growth could make a potential new town strategy option more attractive.

### *Little scope for market town regeneration and meeting local needs*

Options 1 and 2 propose the concentration of growth in the PUA's and other designated centres for growth, with market towns and rural areas meeting "local needs" only. Option 3 would appear to allow for some growth at smaller towns. However, clarification of this option at a recent regional conference has determined that any flexibility will be on a sub-regional basis, with the emphasis for the northern region (i.e. Wiltshire) continuing to be on the three PUA "clusters" (i.e. the Swindon PUA for Wiltshire).

The 3 options therefore provide little or no scope for growth in West Wiltshire to continue to meet the current regional, county and local objectives:

- Regeneration of the West Wiltshire towns;
- Promotion of employment opportunities;
- Improvement of transport links in the A350 corridor;
- Meeting housing needs.

Although, in theory, the strategies provide for West Wiltshire to meet some element of "local need", in practice this is unlikely to be achieved without some element of growth. With the withdrawal of refunded Local Authority Social Housing Grant, it is increasingly unlikely that Shire authorities will be able to fund affordable housing or other local needs housing directly without relying on its provision as a proportion of general market housing growth. In terms of employment provision, these strategies are unlikely to allow for significant new employment allocations of land, which

would attract inward investment, to allow West Wiltshire to restructure or diversify its local economy and reduce unsustainable out-commuting to the PUA's.

*A number of other concerns have been raised at the regional conferences*

At the recent consultation events at Bournemouth and Weston, the following additional concerns were raised:

- Need for a more sensitive approach, based upon the results of sub regional work and identifying the role and function of individual settlements
- Too much emphasis on housing - not enough on the economy which is the key driver
- The strategy options are too "top down" with little flexibility for local input through Community Strategies
- Other potential strategies, for example a new towns option, have been dismissed prematurely
- The methodology and evidence basis for the 3 options approach should be more explicit and published for consultation

*Financial and Legal Implications*

This report has no direct financial or legal implications.

*Environmental Implications*

This report has no direct environmental implications. The final adopted regional spatial strategy will have long term implications which will be subject to strategic environmental assessment.

*Human Rights Implications.*

The Human Rights implications recommended in this report have been considered and are acceptable and the checklist has been addressed.

#### **4. Options**

Cabinet is asked to consider the 3 potential strategic options for the spatial strategy and any other potential options. Officers will compile a report to Council taking account of views expressed by Cabinet. Council will determine a response to the consultation report.

#### **5. List of Background Papers**

File Ref: Regional Planning

File Location: Planning Policy and Conservation Section

## **6. Recommendation**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) Considers the strategy options for the future Regional Spatial Strategy;
- (ii) Forwards the contents of this report and any other comments to Council for consideration at its meeting on 10 November 2004.

## **Plain English Guidance Given**

Cllr Michael Mounde  
Portfolio Holder Planning

Mark Russell  
Planning Policy Manager

18 October 2004

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1: Extracts from Regional Spatial Strategy Consultation Report

Regional Spatial Strategy Consultation Report (Members Room)