

Title:	Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Osborn – Planning and Development
Reporting Officer:	Mark Russell, Planning Policy & Conservation Services Manager
Key Decision:	No

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to agree a response to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026 (draft RSS).

Background

The new national planning system replaces the old arrangement of County Structure Plans and District Local Plans with the Regional Spatial Strategy produced by the Regional Assembly and Local Development Documents (LDDs), produced at District level.

The Regional Assembly has produced a draft RSS following a review of existing regional planning guidance, consultation on spatial options and preparation of sub-regional studies.

A 12 week period of public consultation will end on 30th August 2006.

Copies of the executive summary of the draft RSS have been sent to all members together with information on the consultation process.

Key issues

Officers have prepared the attached initial response to the draft RSS (appendix 1).

Cabinet will recall that during previous consultation stages this Council expressed serious concerns that the needs of West Wiltshire and other shire districts were not being reflected adequately within the draft RSS.

In particular, this Council was concerned about the over concentration of future development and investment within the Principal Urban Areas, the lack of recognition given to the role of market towns in meeting local needs and the proposed reduction in future housing supply within West Wiltshire.

The new draft RSS has substantially addressed many of this Council's previous concerns. In particular, the document now includes policies which:

- identify Trowbridge as one of the 21 Strategically Significant Settlements which will be the primary focus for new development;

- support the role of other smaller (market) towns as service centres to provide for locally significant scales of development;
- recognise the ability of smaller towns and villages to accommodate small amounts of development to support small scale economic activity or to promote self containment;
- identify the need to determine the scale of growth locally through a thorough analysis of the changing role and function of settlements;
- increase the proposed housing supply for West Wiltshire (outside of Trowbridge) from 355 dwellings per year to 525 dwellings per year to reflect existing housing commitments set out in the local plan.

The draft RSS now includes a sub regional statement which deals specifically with the future role of Trowbridge. This refers to:

- the provision of 11,700 jobs and about 250 dwellings per year;
- the potential for town centre expansion and the role of Transforming Trowbridge to manage the redevelopment of the town centre;
- the strong functional links between Trowbridge and Bradford-on-Avon, Frome, Melksham, Warminster and Westbury and the economic potential of these other towns.

Officers have identified some remaining areas of concern. These include:

- a potential shortfall in the overall housing provision within the South West to meet projected jobs requirements and in the light of new higher household projections;
- the need for clarification on how calculations of regional housing capacity and future potential are in line with emerging national policy (PPS3);
- the need for further policy guidance on development acceptable within open countryside;
- the need for development to secure needed infrastructure not simply to contribute towards its provision;
- ensuring that the Bath public transport package improves public transport links between Bath and West Wiltshire;
- the need to emphasise that targeted improvements to the western Wiltshire transport network (e.g. A350) are required now to enable the area to achieve its economic potential;
- the need to give additional weight to improving intra-regional rail and road routes and the role of regional and national bodies to secure these improvements;
- the need to do more to set out how affordable housing is to be delivered in areas where significant market housing is inappropriate in spatial strategy terms or when public subsidy is not available;
- a clearer policy on how health needs assessments are to be carried out and funded.

Effect on strategies and codes

The RSS, when finalised, will form part of the development plan for West Wiltshire. It will therefore replace many of the broad strategic planning policies currently contained within the Wiltshire Structure Plan 2016 and the West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration.

The Council's Local Development Framework will have to be in general conformity with the RSS.

Risk management implications

None identified.

Finance and performance implications

None directly. However, the RSS will have a significant impact upon the future funding strategies of regional bodies, which will have a direct impact upon the delivery of, for example, future affordable housing, health and transportation proposals.

Legal and human rights implications

There are no direct legal or human rights implications.

The next steps

Following this consultation period, in spring 2007, there will be an Examination in Public (EiP) of the draft RSS before an independent panel appointed by the Secretary of State.

All consultation responses will be taken into account by the panel and will be used to help determine the matters to be discussed at the EiP.

Following the publication of the panel's report during summer 2007, the Secretary of State will propose changes to the draft RSS and there will be a final period of consultation at the end of 2007.

The final RSS should be issued in early 2008.

Recommendation

Cabinet are asked to consider the report and to:

- Approve a response to the consultation on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West based upon the comments set out in the attached appendix.

Background Papers

File Ref: Regional Spatial Strategy, Planning Policy and Conservation Services (F26)