

3.0 Sustainability Baseline & Policy Context

Characteristics of Areas Likely to be Significantly Affected

- 3.1 Section A4.4 of the SA (2007) analysed the characteristics of the areas likely to be significantly affected in respect of the Preferred Option and concluded that the identified significant effects are likely to be spread very widely across the region and therefore *“the whole region should be regarded as likely to be significantly affected by the Phase 2 proposals”*³
- 3.2 An analysis of the characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected as a result of the housing options has also taken place and it could be assumed that a similarly wide ranging effect would be expected from the housing options.

Summary of Baseline Environmental, Social & Economic Conditions – Update

- 3.3 Annex G of the SA (2007) presents data that give an indication of the baseline economic, social and environmental conditions within the West Midlands. In accordance with Government guidance, and for ease of reference, the SA of the Housing Options has used the same analysis of baseline data as the SA (2007) (Annex G).
- 3.4 To enable an accurate assessment of the likely effect of the housing options on sustainable development, a limited review and update of the baseline conditions has been carried out to identify any changes in key trends that need to be taken into account, and is located at Appendix 1 of the Housing Options SA (Volume 5).
- 3.5 Section 4.0 of the Housing Options SA (Volume 5) provides an indication of whether or not the baseline data for each Regional Sustainability Indicator has changed since the SA (2007) baseline analysis was carried out. Key changes (and key changes to trends identified in the SA (2007) where available) are as follows:
- **Regional Context:** The 2006 Population estimates show growth in population of nearly 2% (99,000 residents) from 2001. More significant growth in some of the rural authority areas in comparison to the MUAs. Population in Stoke on Trent and Bridgnorth has declined.
 - **Access:** SA (2007) indicated access to services and jobs may be expected to improve as a result of positive policies within the RSS and other strategies. The updated baseline indicates this may not be the case, with continued gradual decline in access to rural primary schools, post offices and pubs, therefore further analysis may be required.
 - **Poverty:** SA (2007) indicated levels of poverty may be expected to improve as a result of positive policies in the RSS and other strategies. Some evidence this could be occurring albeit slowly.
 - **Health:** SA (2007) indicated levels of health may be expected to improve as a result of improving socio-economic conditions and health improvement plans and programme. However, there is limited evidence that this is occurring.
 - **Housing:** Net housing completions are below the targets in the RSS and the Phase 2 Preferred Option document although there has been a general increase in completions. The current market downturn could be expected to have a major impact for at least 2-3 years (based on engagement with the development industry) but there are indications that following this time the rate of development can be increased to achieve the RSS policies provided future economic recovery is matched by the release of land that is capable of being developed. There is no evidence that developing beyond this to deliver the additional

³ Final Sustainability Report, 23 October 2007, Ursus Consulting Ltd, Section A4.4

growth in the housing options could not be achieved due to there being finite capacity in the industry but delivery would require sufficient land being made available, cross working between the public sector and house-building industry and mechanisms existing to deliver infrastructure particularly for larger schemes.

- Culture and Recreation: SA (2007) indicated participation could be expected to increase. The update to the baseline does not necessarily support this position but there is no evidence to suggest long term trends will not lead to participation increasing.
- Balanced Development: Information from 2005 indicates the lowest annual net loss to other regions in the country since 2001. Indications that following a high point in 2003, the net loss of population from MUAs has started to slow.
- Environmental Assets: East of the region is changing – much of it in a way inconsistent with the existing character. The west is more stable.
- Environmental Assets: There has been an increase in the number of listed buildings but a decrease in the number of Registered Parks & Gardens and Conservation Areas. Fall in the proportion of Grade I and II* listed buildings and SAMs on the At Risk Register.
- Environmental Assets: 19% of the local areas within Birmingham fall within the bottom 2% nationally for living environment deprivation.
- Biodiversity: Significant decline in farmland bird species from baseline position.
- Land use: Significant increase in the amount of brownfield housing development since 2001.
- Climate Change: Significant increase in the number of properties in the region at risk of flooding.
- Energy: West Midlands is the only region to have decreased its capacity for generating renewable energy. The generation of renewable electricity is also increasing at a slower rate than other regions.
- Efficiency: Continued fall in consumption of primary aggregates but also in reserves of sand/gravel. Crushed rock reserves remain static. Information now available on water resources headroom indicating that there are emerging issues of insufficient water supply to meet demand and without mitigation across the region.
- Standards: Significant increase in the numbers of buildings rated by BREEAM particularly in the Excellent or Very Good rating. Vast majority of BREEAM rated buildings are residential (Eco-homes).
- Transport: Continued upward trend in traffic flows (approximately 15% from 1995 to 2006) which is slightly above the national increase (14%). Staffordshire has the highest estimated traffic flows. Continual downward trend in average traffic speeds particularly in the peak periods. Slight increase in the overall number of trips being made and a continuing decline in the numbers of trips made by public transport/on foot.
- Waste: Overall increase in amount of construction/demolition waste. Recent drop in overall municipal waste generated. Significant increase in recycling/municipal recovery rates from baseline position and consistent with the national growth.
- Responsibility: Levels of volunteering increased between 2001 and 2005. Data from 2007 indicates now levels are above the national average

Summary of Baseline Policy Framework – Update from SA (2007)

- 3.6 Annex I of the SA (2007) is a detailed review of the policies, programmes and sustainability objectives at a European, national and regional level and their relationship with the Phase 2 Preferred Option. A review of key policy documents and strategies published since 2007 has also been carried out and is also located at Appendix 1 of Volume 5.
- 3.7 The general conclusion of the review of plans, policies and programmes is that where documents have been reviewed, revised or reissued, and whilst the overall strategy may remain consistent,

there is a greater emphasis in sustainable development, climate change, housing development and flood risk issues than identified in the SA (2007). There have been smaller shifts in emphasis in skills development, retail and economic development but these are not considered to be significant.