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07 JAN 2008

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rex Roberts".

WEST MIDLANDS RSS PHASE 2 REVISION

Thank you for the draft RSS revision submission which you submitted to Hazel Blears on 21 December. I would like to thank everyone who has worked hard to ensure this submission has been produced in accordance with the programme.

I am sure that you understand from recent announcements that housing issues are now very high on the Government's agenda. Affordability is a major issue across the country and The Prime Minister himself is taking a keen interest in housing delivery. Improving performance is essential to the achievement of the wider social and economic objectives of the Government. The recent Housing Green Paper set down an ambitious challenge to review all RSSs by 2011 to reflect plans for 240,000 homes a year by 2016. The initial NHPAU Report also provides an indication of the levels of housing which will be required to impact on affordability in the region.

The Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands has a clear focus on the regeneration of the major urban areas. Clearly this is important as sustainable development will rely on the economic drivers associated with those areas. However, the draft RSS Phase 2 Revision does not even make provision for the levels of homes anticipated to be required by the 2004 based household projections.

Let me make it clear that we do not wish to fundamentally question the Spatial Strategy for the region in advance of the Public Examination, but we are concerned that the very rigid application of some of the principles may be unnecessarily constraining longer-term development. I have therefore asked the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) to commission some further work looking at options which could deliver higher housing numbers. The aim will be to provide the Examination Panel with options that could deliver housing numbers which will start to impact on affordability, whilst maintaining as many of the principles of the Spatial Strategy as possible.

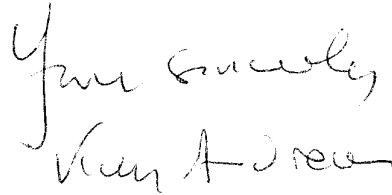
We intend to complete this further work by mid April and in order to provide an opportunity for consultees to consider this additional evidence when making responses on the draft RSS we consider it appropriate to extend the consultation period to the 23 May. I trust you

will find this acceptable.

GOWM will manage the work of the consultants and will involve officials from the Assembly together with other regional stakeholders, local authorities and other interested parties in the work as appropriate through the study.

I understand that this decision will cause you some concerns and I would like to reassure you that the decision has been given very serious consideration along with a range of alternative approaches. However, we consider that given the aspirations of the Housing Green Paper this approach will allow us to build on the work already done for the Revision and minimise the period of uncertainty for the region.

Like the Regional Assembly, we are determined that the West Midlands will benefit and thrive from sustainable growth and we are confident that we can continue to work in partnership with you to ensure that both national and regional objectives are satisfied.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Yours sincerely, Baroness Andrews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'Y'.

BARONESS ANDREWS