



Letter to Parish and Town Councils and for publication on websites

15<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

**West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS)  
South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy (SWJCS)**

As planning portfolio holder members we have been asked to write to you on behalf of the Leaders of the three South Worcestershire authorities setting out the current position with respect to the above documents.

You may already be aware that the Government has announced that it intends to abolish rapidly Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). This intention is set out in the Government's Programme (published May 2010 - [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg\\_coalition.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)) and more recently in a letter from Eric Pickles MP (attached).

Clearly the abolition of WMRSS will have significant implications for South Worcestershire and the SWJCS as it is the emerging WMRSS which establishes housing and employment requirements up to the year 2026.

Behind the Government's announcement to scrap RSS is the intention to enable local authorities to set their own future development requirements at the local level.

The South Worcestershire authorities have stated that they welcome the opportunity to revisit locally development requirements and not be driven by RSS requirements. However, we recognise the importance of continuing with the production of a planning strategy for South Worcestershire as a basis for encouraging investment and dealing with current and future planning applications.

At the time of writing the Government has not yet issued any interim guidance as to how and when the process of abolishing the RSS will be taken forward. Nevertheless, the letter from Eric Pickles MP clearly indicates that the South Worcestershire authorities can now begin the process of revisiting the emerging SWJCS and setting locally determined development requirements.

In the longer term the Government has also indicated that it intends to overhaul the current planning system and introduce a new way of plan

making. However, unlike the announcement on RSS the Government has not suggested that local authorities and communities should anticipate the rapid abolition of the current system for plan production. Consequently, it must be assumed that in the interim local authorities can and should continue to produce Core Strategies and related LDF documents, but without imposed regional requirements and policies.

Before the Government announcement it was proposed that the SWJCS would be presented to the three South Worcestershire Councils for approval in the autumn this year with submission to the Secretary of State in January 2011. This is now unrealistic as we will require additional time to consider how the SWJCS should be revised.

A new timetable for the production of the SWJCS (the Local Development Scheme) will be developed over the coming three months and is likely to be presented to the three councils for approval in September this year. Our aim however, will be to progress a revised SWJCS as soon as possible thereafter and keep further delay to a minimum.

During this period we will be considering how the evidence we have gathered so far to support the production of the SWJCS can be used to support the production of a revised SWJCS based upon locally determined development requirements. Where essential we may need to consider commissioning additional research but we will aim to keep this to a minimum and avoid unnecessary delay and expense.

You will no doubt have seen in the media that the South Worcestershire Authorities have already informally said that increased emphasis will be placed on developing a revised SWJCS which is economic development led and ensures that appropriate infrastructure is delivered. However, I need you to be clear that contrary to recent media coverage the SWJCS is not being scrapped. You can however, be assured that the South Worcestershire authorities will be giving serious reconsideration to its content.

These changes however, can not prevent land owners and prospective developers submitting speculative planning applications for development proposals, including development of a significant scale. In such circumstances it will be for the local planning authorities to consider any current or future planning applications against the policies contained in their existing Local Plans, emerging development plans and national planning policy guidance. In the meanwhile it is completely appropriate for the three planning authorities to continue talking to land owners and prospective developers with respect to their proposals and how they might be aligned with a revised SWJCS.

Your local councillors are aware of the need to keep the community briefed on emerging Government plans and announcements. This letter and any other additional advice regarding the RSS and the emerging SWJCS will be posted on the SWJCS website at <http://www.swjcs.org> and the three South Worcestershire Councils websites.

If you have any specific questions regarding the content of this letter can you please contact one of the planning officers listed below or contact the SWJCS office direct.

Yours faithfully



**Councillor David Hughes**  
**Chairman of the South Worcestershire Joint Advisory Panel\* (Malvern Hills District Council member)**

**Councillor Judy Pearce**  
**South Worcestershire Joint Advisory Panel (Wychavon District Council member)**

**Councillor David Tibbutt**  
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Note: The South Worcestershire Joint Advisory Panel has been established by the three South Worcestershire Councils to oversee the production of the SWJCS. The Panel has no Executive decision taking powers and all decisions regarding the content of the SWJCS will be taken by each of the South Worcestershire Councils involving all District Councillors. Each South Worcestershire Council is represented by three Councillors on the Panel.



**Communities**  
and Local Government

**The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP**  
*Secretary of State for Communities and Local  
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27th May 2010

*Dear Leader*

**ABOLITION OF REGIONAL STRATEGIES**

I am writing to you today to highlight our commitment in the coalition agreements where we very clearly set out our intention to rapidly abolish Regional Strategies and return decision making powers on housing and planning to local councils. Consequently, decisions on housing supply (including the provision of travellers sites) will rest with Local Planning Authorities without the framework of regional numbers and plans.

I will make a formal announcement on this matter soon. However, I expect Local Planning Authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to have regard to this letter as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently taking.

*Yours ever,*

*Eric Pickles*

**THE RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP**