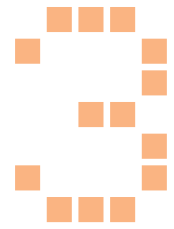
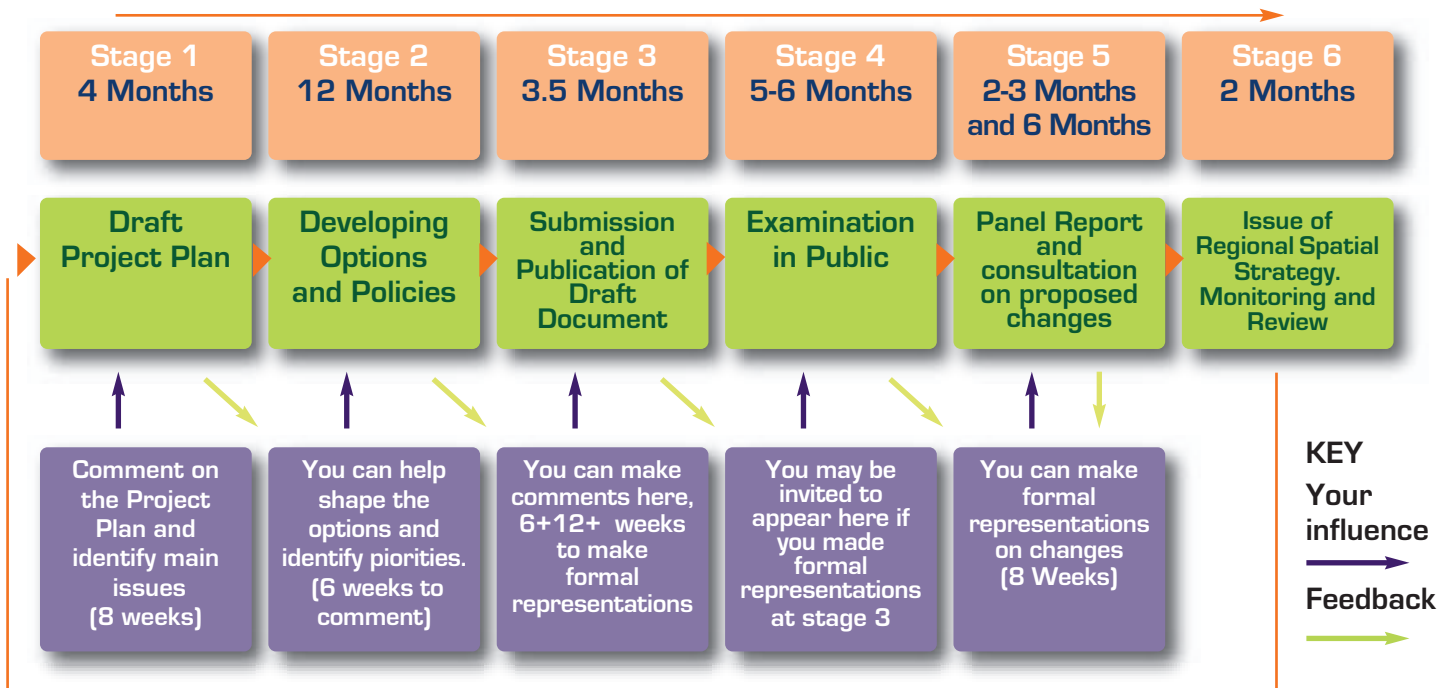


PLAN PREPARATION

Regional Spatial Strategies: How to get involved



The Review Process: How to get involved



Introduction

This information sheet outlines briefly how you can get involved in Regional Spatial Strategies. It is Sheet 3 of a series of 17 that forms an information pack to help you understand and get involved in the planning system.

Community involvement is central to the preparation or review of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). You can make written comments/representations on your region's Draft Regional Spatial Strategy. The earlier you get involved in the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy the more influence you are likely to have. The review process will take place in a number of stages and could last up to three years.

Further information on the preparation of planning policy is available in the following sheets: Sheet 1 provides general information, Sheets 4 and 5 focus on the local level of development plans, and Sheet 6 explains Examinations in Public.

Stage 1

Draft Project Plan – Evidence and Issues

The draft project plan identifies the extent and purpose of the revision being proposed. It also outlines the vision for the Region or Sub Region in question and sets out the timetable for the revision.

Statement of Public Participation/Regional Participation Statement:

The Regional Planning Body has to prepare a Statement of Public Participation. The statement outlines the opportunities for your involvement at the regional level of planning and should be complied with during the preparation of the strategy.

At this stage you can:

- >> Send comments in writing to the Regional Planning Body (you will have six weeks to do this).
- >> Comment on who should be involved and how and when involvement should take place.
- >> Comment on the overall objectives and how you would like to see the region in 20 years time. Think about the issues affecting your area and whether they are reflected in the draft objectives for the region.

- >> Provide the Regional Planning Body with a copy or summary of any up-to-date research, reports or action plans on the needs and aspirations for your area (for example Parish Plans, Community Strategies). These documents can help inform and support your comments and will be taken into account in the plan preparation.
- >> Ask to be kept informed with the revision process. Give the Regional Planning Body your contact details so that you can be added to their contact list.
- >> Contact other groups and individuals who have the same interests, so you can combine resources.
- >> Register an interest in the 'Sustainability Appraisal' process.

Following consultation, the Project Plan and Statement of Public Participation should be revised and published.

Stage 2

Developing Options and Policies

At this stage you can expect to see a series of ideas or options to help deliver the objectives for the region (likely to be in report format). For each different idea it should be possible to see what kind of development is needed and broadly where it should be located in the region. All options are subject to a Sustainability Appraisal and the findings of the appraisal should be available at each stage, for more information see below. Using the consultation material (including technical reports) and your local knowledge, you can say what you think of each of the options and which one you prefer. Comments received on ideas/options should help the Regional Planning Body identify a preferred option and start developing the detailed policies needed to deliver that option.

- >> You can submit written comments on the options to the Regional Planning Body.
- >> There will be a set period of six weeks to comment.
- >> Contact your Regional Planning Body, or local planning authority, to find out how each of the options may affect your local area.
- >> Get together with other individuals, groups and organisations to help prepare comments and share resources.
- >> Find out whether there are groups focusing on specific issues that interest you, for example housing and environment, and ask if you can get involved.
- >> Find out how feedback will be given and whether the Regional Planning Body intends to consult on details of the Preferred Option.

Pre-submission draft consultation (Preferred Options)

Once an option has been chosen and detailed policies have been developed, the Regional Planning Body *may* choose to consult on the 'draft revision', known as the 'Preferred Option',

before the draft is sent to the Secretary of State.

- >> Ask the Planning Body if they are consulting at this stage. If they are, you can comment on the detailed policies proposed and on the supporting text.
- >> Make your comments in writing and stick to the deadlines.
- >> If they are not consulting, find out when the draft will go to the Secretary of State as you will have an opportunity to comment then (see Stage 3);
- >> Ask to be kept informed.

Pre-submission Consultation Statement:

Before the formal submission of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (see Stage 3), the Regional Planning Body has to prepare a document called a pre-submission consultation statement. This identifies who was consulted and how. It shows if/how the Statement of Public Participation has been followed and summarises the main issues raised through consultation, showing how they have been addressed.

- >> The pre-submission consultation statement provides a good means of feedback on issues raised throughout the various stages of consultation. Have your comments and concerns been addressed? If not, contact the Regional Planning Body in writing.

Stage 3

Submission to Government Office

At this stage the Regional Spatial Strategy is submitted to the Secretary of State, along with the sustainability appraisal, any technical documents and the pre-submission consultation statement. Once submitted, the Secretary of State decides on the period for formal consultation. This will be no less than 6 weeks for a minor revision, this is unusual, and no less than 12 weeks for any other revision. The Regional Planning Body then makes all the consultation documents available for comment for the set period.

At this stage you should:

- >> Stick to the timetable.
- >> Make formal comments in writing, known as written representations.
- >> Relate your comments to the 'tests of soundness'. There are 12 tests that a Panel will look at when examining the draft document (see text box).
- >> Look at all the consultation documents.
- >> Contact other groups with similar comments to identify a single representative who could present a shared case at the Examination in Public. You should still submit your own written comments (See page 4 for tips on making effective comments).

Stage 4

Public Examination of selected matters by independent panel

In most cases the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy will be independently tested through an Examination in Public. There may be exceptional cases where an Examination in Public will not be required, where small amendments with little impacts are proposed.

The Secretary of State is responsible for deciding if the revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy will go to Examination in Public. The Secretary of State will also decide on the topics that will be examined and advertise the Examination and the proposed timetable.

Examinations in Public normally last between three and six weeks. They should be informal, roundtable sessions on the selected topics. A Chair leads the session and asks specific questions on the identified topics. This will focus on the 'soundness' of the document, which will be decided by examining the document against 12 tests (see text box). No new information/evidence should be raised at the Examination. If new information is given at Examinations it may be ruled inadmissible.

See sheet 6 for more information on Examinations in Public.

- >> You can only participate in an Examination in Public if you have been invited to attend. There is no right to be heard at the regional level.
- >> If invited, contact other groups who made similar comments to you to help you prepare your case. See sheet 6 for more information on Examinations.
- >> Find out who the Panel Secretary and Panel Assistants are, they will be key in keeping you updated with the Examination.
- >> Make a written request to be notified of the availability of the Report of the Examination known as the Panel Report.

Stage 5

Panel Report

Following the Examination in Public, a report of the Examination will be made available. This should be completed around 2 months after the Examination. It will make a series of recommendations, usually changes to the wording of the strategy. These recommendations are not binding on the Regional Planning Body. The report is published by the Government Office for the Region.

- >> You can view the Panel Report.
- >> You cannot submit comments on the report other than comments about factual errors.

Consultation on Proposed Changes

Following receipt of the Panel Report and its recommendations, a document on the Proposed Changes and reasons for changes

is produced and should be made available for comment for eight weeks. The proposed changes normally include changes to wording in line with the Panel Report recommendations.

- >> At this stage you can only comment on the proposed changes. Do they follow the recommendation in the panel report? Do they reflect your previous comments?
- >> Make any comments in writing; See page 4 for tips on making effective comments.

Stage 6

Issue of Regional Spatial Strategy by the Secretary of State

The Secretary of State is responsible for approving and issuing the Revised Regional Spatial Strategy. At this stage, reasons for any further changes must be made available.

- >> Keep in contact with the Regional Planning Body to find out when the revised document has been issued. Ask them to keep you informed of any future revisions.

Implementation and Monitoring

The main way to deliver the priorities and vision set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy will be through local planning, Local Development Frameworks and Development Control.

The Regional Planning Body is responsible for monitoring and has to produce an annual monitoring report. The purpose of the monitoring report is to identify how the Regional Spatial Strategy is being implemented and whether targets are being met. The monitoring report will help to identify whether the Regional Spatial Strategy needs to be revised.

- >> Monitoring reports will be published annually and should be available for view.
- >> Contact the Regional Planning Body to find out if you can have an input into the monitoring.

Sustainability Appraisal

A Sustainability Appraisal will be completed alongside the revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The purpose of the sustainability appraisal is to ensure that the Regional Spatial Strategy and its policies contribute towards the delivery of a strong and just society, living within environmental limits supported by a sustainable economy, good governance and public policy based on sound scientific evidence.

The Sustainability Appraisal should help to inform decisions made throughout the revision process and be available to help the partners and members of the community consider the options and development of policies.

- >> There is an opportunity for you to get involved in the Sustainability Appraisal process, including formal opportunities to comment on the scope of the Appraisal and Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report. To find out how to get involved contact your Regional Planning Body.

The regional 'Tests of Soundness'

- I. Is the plan a Spatial document ? Does it take into account other related initiatives and programmes relevant to meeting regional economic, social and environmental needs that have an impact on the development of land and does it contain policies which link with those initiatives and programmes to deliver the desired spatial change? (i.e look at your local Local Development Framework and local Community Strategy, Action Plans, and Parish Plans).
- II. Does it meet the Government's objectives for a Regional Spatial Strategy – these are set out in paragraph 1.7 of Planning Policy Statement 11 (get a copy from the Dept. for Communities and Local Government – DCLG).
- III. Is it consistent (in line) with National Planning Policy, if not are there good reasons why? (copies from DCLG).
- IV. Is it consistent (in line) with other regional strategies (housing, economic, sustainable, cultural, neighbouring).
- V. Are all of the policies in the document consistent with each other?
- VI. Has the document been based on robust and credible evidence (the technical reports should be available to view)?
- VII. Has community involvement been satisfactory and have the views expressed been taken into account? (Look at the Statement of Public Participation and Pre-Submission Consultation Statement).
- VIII. Is the document realistic, can it be delivered without compromising its own objectives, have resources been considered?
- IX. Is it robust, can it deal with changing circumstances?
- X. Was the sustainability appraisal satisfactory and were alternative options ruled out correctly taking into account the findings of the sustainability appraisal?
- XI. Has it been prepared following the correct procedures, outlined in the governing legislation (Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), Statutory Instrument 2004, no 2003, The Town and Country Planning (Regional Planning) Regulations 2004) and Planning Policy Statement 11)?
- XII. Does it have clear mechanisms for monitoring and implementation?

Making Effective Comments at a Regional Level

- >> Contact the Regional Planning Body or your local planning authority to find out what stage in plan preparation they have reached and make your views known as soon as possible.
- >> Check and keep to the timescales for comment.
- >> Obtain copies of relevant documents such as the existing Regional Spatial Strategy for your area and the latest version of the revised documents.
- >> Talk to planning officers involved in the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- >> Make comments in writing, keep them simple and organise them in a logical order.
- >> Your comments will need to focus on whether you think the document is sound or not and why. There are 12 tests called 'Tests of Soundness' that the Panel will use to judge whether the document is sound (reasonable), so relate your comments to these tests, see text box (you don't need to comment on all of them).
- >> Clearly identify the policy/proposal you are objecting to, or supporting, using the reference number given in the plan and which test (see above) your comments relate to;
- >> If you want to see a policy or proposal changed say how and put forward your alternative and the reasons for it. Will your suggestions/comments make the policies more 'sound' (see tests)?
- >> If objecting to certain aspects of a proposal it is important to stress where you agree, with so that attention can be focused on the issues of conflict. Try to show you have understood the position of the Regional Planning Body.
- >> Concentrate on the planning issues involved, which are known as material considerations. Your local knowledge is invaluable, but try not to get sidetracked onto non-material, temporary or non-planning issues – noise, disturbance and property values are typical issues to avoid.
- >> Contact other groups/people in your area and find out if they are getting involved. A joint approach will enable you to share expertise, ideas, resources, workload etc. Pooled resources may even allow you to employ professional help. If you can't afford this, your local Planning Aid Service may be able to assist you. Contact them as soon as possible to make effective use of their services.

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