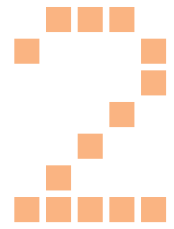


PLAN PREPARATION

Regional Spatial Strategies



This is Sheet 2 of The Planning Pack. This pack has been written by Planning Aid, with assistance from Urban Forum. The Planning Pack is endorsed by the Royal Town Planning Institute

Introduction

This information sheet provides a brief introduction to 'Regional Spatial Strategies'. It is Sheet 2 of a series of 17 that forms an information pack to help you understand and get involved in the planning system.

In England the planning system is a 'plan led' one. This means that decisions on development proposals from extensions to your home to airport expansions are made in the context of up-to-date plans called 'Development Plans'. It is important that you understand what 'development plans' are, what they do and how they are prepared, so that you can get involved and influence what development takes place in your area. The earlier you get involved the better. This is because it is in making of these development plans that difficult decisions will have to be made to ensure that there is a balance between development and economic growth and the conservation of the environment.

There are two tiers to the 'Development Plan' in your area, a regional tier and a local tier. The regional level is called a Regional Spatial Strategy. This sheet will introduce you to Regional Spatial Strategies, what they are, how they relate to planning at a local level and how they are prepared. Importantly, Sheet 3 will explain how you can get involved.

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.

Regional Spatial Strategies: What are they?

The Regional Spatial Strategy is an important document; it is the 'development plan' for a region and provides a vision for the development in that region over a 15 to 20 year period. It sets out a framework to address the 'spatial' implications of issues such as healthcare, education, crime, housing, transport, communications, tourism and leisure, employment, urban/rural regeneration and the environment (including waste and energy). The Regional Spatial Strategy focuses on the general location and scale of development, but does not identify specific sites. These are dealt with at the local level through **Local Development Frameworks**. For example, the Regional Spatial Strategy states whether the focus for new housing development should be on redevelopment within the conurbations (large built up areas) or new sites in the shire

counties. It would also set out the number of houses to be built in each local authority area each year.

Regional Spatial Strategies have a strong influence on local planning because the **Local Development Frameworks** (the local development plans) have to conform to it (be in line with) – as do regionally significant planning applications (applications that will affect the region), such as an airport expansion or a new motorway. It is therefore important that you are involved in their preparation from the start and influence the contents of the document. **(See Sheet 3 for information on how to get involved in the Regional Spatial Strategy).**

The Regional Spatial Strategy covers a range of issues, with sometimes competing objectives, so the process of preparing it can lead to difficult decisions being made. It is the role of the Regional Spatial Strategies to manage these difficult and competing objectives.

Sub-Regional Strategies

Within regions there may be distinct areas that have similar strategic issues and priorities, for example areas, crossing local authority boundaries, that have fallen into industrial decline or that have been identified for growth, or for cities and their surrounding areas. In order to ensure that the specific issues in these areas can be highlighted and addressed, the Regional Planning Body, in discussion with key stakeholders, may feel that it is appropriate to prepare a 'Sub-Regional Strategy'. In this, more specific proposals would be addressed. Sub-Regional Strategies will only be prepared where it is felt that the policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy or Local Development Documents alone cannot adequately deal with the issues.

Sub-Regional Strategies may be prepared by the Local Authorities (counties, districts, boroughs and unitary authorities) included within the Sub-Regional Strategy area, or by the Regional Planning Body if the Local Authorities in question agree. A Sub-Regional Strategy may cross local authority boundaries, as the determining factors are the issues involved not historic administrative boundaries.

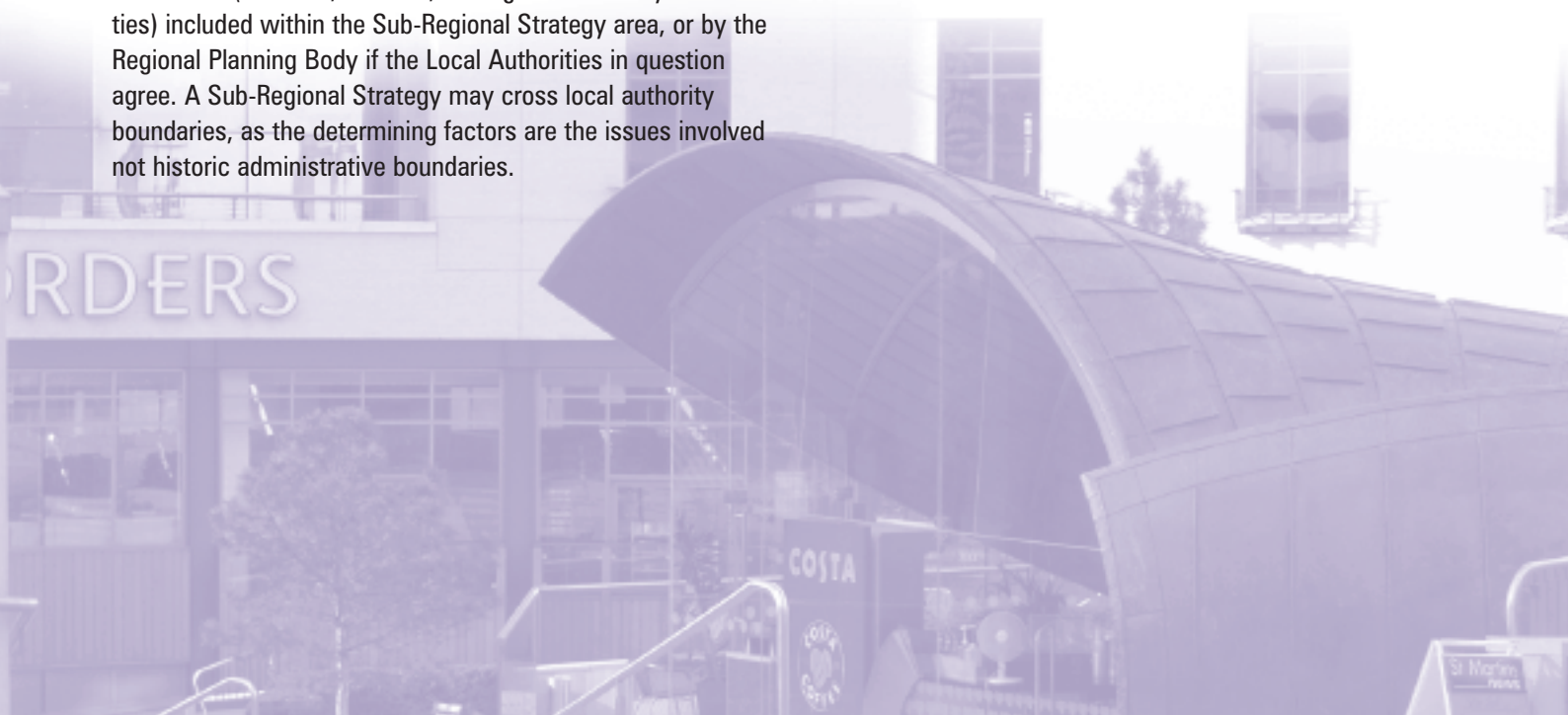
The diagram opposite identifies the different levels of policy and how they all fit together. Each level of Planning Policy within England (national, regional and local) is linked formally; this is known as a '**chain of conformity**'. The intention is that all levels of policy will work more effectively to meet the common goals as set out by the Government.

The Regional Spatial Strategy should be consistent with, and supportive of:

- National Planning Policy and Advice. National Planning Policy will apply to a region UNLESS a there is a specific regional reason or justification for not doing so and the Secretary of State must agree that this is the case;
- other regional strategies, for example the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Sustainable Development Framework;
- other policy documents, for example on crime, health, biodiversity, education and skills;
- neighbouring Regional Spatial Strategies;
- current local policy documents and action plans, for example policies within Local Development Frameworks, Community Plans and Parish Plans;
- resources for implementing/carrying out the plan.

In turn the Regional Spatial Strategy will influence and help to shape other national and regional policies.

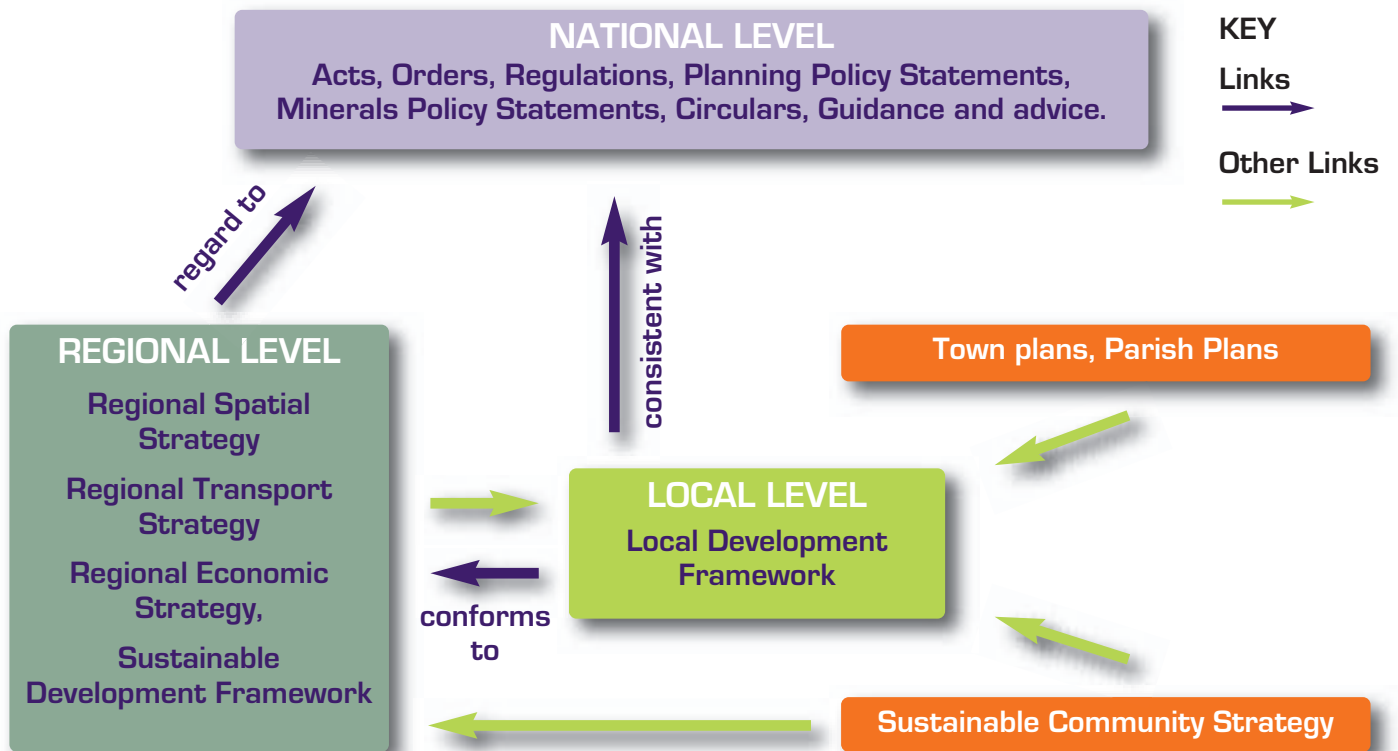
At the local level of planning, the Regional Spatial Strategy is very important as it affects both policy making and decisions on individual planning applications. In preparing their Local Development Frameworks, local planning authorities must ensure that their policies conform to those in the Regional Spatial Strategy in order to make the plan work. *For example,*



Why are Regional Spatial Strategies Important?

How do they fit in with national and local planning?

The 'Spatial' Planning System: A Plan Led Approach



the Regional Spatial Strategy identifies how many houses need to be built over a period of time in a specific local authority area. The local planning authority must then make sure they allocate enough housing sites to meet this requirement.

In deciding individual planning applications, the local planning authority must have regard to (take into account) the '**development plan**' and any other '**material considerations**'. This means that the local authority will have to consider planning applications against the policies within the Regional Spatial Strategy as well as the local layer of **Development Plan Documents (DPDs)** in the Local Development Framework (*refer to Sheets 4 and 5 for more information*).

The Regional Spatial Strategy provides a regional view of what development should take place and where. It has a co-ordinating role across the region's local authorities. The statutory (legal) basis helps to ensure that all local authorities are working to meet the same goals and objectives and that they do not propose anything that would be harmful to the region as a whole. It is the Regional Planning Body's responsibility to ensure local development plan documents and regionally

significant applications conform to the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Regional Spatial Strategies: Who prepares them?

Regional Planning Bodies (generally the Regional Assemblies) are responsible for preparing and updating Regional Spatial Strategies. There will be a Regional Spatial Strategy for each of England's eight regions: East of England, East Midlands, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber. In London, the Mayor of London has the responsibility for strategic planning and is required to produce the Spatial Development Strategy, known as the 'London Plan'.

What is included in a Regional Spatial Strategy?

The Regional Planning Body, in consultation with its partners, stakeholders and the public, decides what will be included in a Regional Spatial Strategy.

Regional Spatial Strategies will:

- >> identify a series of regional issues, priorities and policies on the topic areas. The policies will focus on the how much, how many and where development should be located in general. For example, it may identify towns/cities which should be the focus for development, but not identify a specific site – although criteria to establish acceptable locations may be developed, for example, encouraging development near to existing public transport routes;
- >> provide clear reasons for the policies in the supporting text;
- >> cover the following likely topics:
 - priorities for the protection of the countryside, environment and biodiversity
 - transport infrastructure and accessibility
 - economic development
 - where growth will be focused.
 - scale and distribution of employment land
 - scale and distribution of new housing. Issues of demand and affordability may also be included.
 - rural/urban regeneration.
 - minerals
 - waste treatment and disposal
- >> include a '**Key Diagram**' (or Spatial Strategy Diagram). The diagram will demonstrate the physical extent of policies in general terms, but note that site boundaries cannot be identified;
- >> identify how it will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development objectives;
- >> include Sub-Regional Strategies;
- >> identify how the strategy will be delivered and identify a timescale for implementation;
- >> identify clear targets, so that the delivery of the strategy can be monitored (an annual monitoring report will be prepared).

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