

## SPACED OUT IN SPATIAL STRATEGY

The Regional Spatial Strategy is the most ambitious and comprehensive development plan ever devised for the South West of England. It promises to promote real sustainable development but will also

- Promote rapid housing growth
- Tell every planning authority how many new homes they must build up to 2026
- Promote plans to invest in roads and public transport.

### Understanding the new planning system?

Since 1997 the Labour Government has pursued its agenda to modernise local government. First it changed the conduct of local government. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Act) introduced radical changes to the planning system. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 had two parts; the Local Plan and Development Control. The Bristol Local Plan, adopted in 1997, set the land use and development strategy for the future of the City. It provided the means to deliver the land use aspirations of the Community Strategy. The Local Plan formed part of the 2002 Structure Plan for the larger region - roughly the old County of Avon. The Structure Plan provided a strategic policy framework for land use and transport planning decisions and provided the link in the planning system between Government policy statements and local plans. The new system abolished all Local and Structure Plans. Confused, you are not alone.

### Pile acronym on acronym

The Regional Communities Plan sets out the Government's vision of the region's strategic growth options. The West of England (WoE - sorry but you can't avoid the acronyms) sub-region of the South West Region includes Bristol. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) will include the WoE sub-regional policies.

To replace their Local Plans, Bristol and the neighbouring Unitary Authorities must adopt a Local Development Framework (LDF), which must be in general conformity with the RSS policies. The LDF will be a portfolio of policy documents that will contain the planning policy used to determine planning applications and direct the spatial development of Bristol over the next 20 years. The LDF will plot major planning designations such as the green belt and major development sites. It must be revised annually and replaced every three years.

### Have your say

The Government always talks about involving people in local democracy. Local consultation is at the heart of the new planning regime to give communities more say in shaping the places where we live. But, every silver lining has a cloud. The Government does not give local communities any legally enforceable rights to raise objections. The Barker Review of Land Use Planning (HM Treasury - December 2006) contains an economist's view of the planning system. To improve efficiency and reduce planning costs, the report proposes measures to shift the balance between economic and environmental factors. These include a presumption in favour of development in particular circumstances. A call to redesignate green belt areas to allow unattractive areas to be developed and a shift in the "town-centre first" planning policy for retail uses, which means more out of town supermarkets. Green Belts were designed to prevent urban areas such as Bath and Bristol amalgamating. Read Simon Jenkins's polemic on Barker as a 'philistine' at <http://tinyurl.com/yz7llw>.

### 100,000 new homes

Huge growth is pressed on the WoE by central Government and by the commercial interests that will benefit from it. In the WoE the Government foresees a need for 100,000 new homes over the next 20 years. 60,000 could be built on "brownfield" sites within the existing built-up area. That means that 40,000 homes will have to be built in the green belt. Add at least 100,000 more cars on our roads and there will be more traffic jams, pollution and pressure to build more roads. Extra wealth does not necessarily improve the quality of life nor does it compensate for increased traffic, congestion, pollution and urban sprawl.

### The draft Regional Spatial Strategy

In June 2006 the South West Regional Assembly published the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for 2006 - 2026. The Assembly is a partnership of Councillors from all local authorities in the region and representatives of various sectors with a role in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body. It worked with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to prepare the Draft RSS. There will be an Examination in Public (EiP) before an independent Panel appointed by the Secretary of State between the 17<sup>th</sup> April and the 5<sup>th</sup> July at Exeter.

*Continued >>>*