Introduction

The West of England (WoE) faces a set of significant and difficult challenges. The draft WoE’s Joint Spatial Plan (JSP), published on 9 November 2015, aims to tackle the key issues relating to the delivery of new homes, jobs, transport infrastructure, and tackle climate change over the period to 2036.

The four local authorities that make up the West of England — Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES), North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council — are seeking to work together in a strategic, cross boundary, and cooperative manner, to tackle these important issues.

The Wider Bristol Housing Market Area (HMA), which excludes BANES, identifies the need to deliver 85,000 new homes across the plan period, with 29,000 of the new homes earmarked as ‘affordable housing’. It is estimated that sites identified in the existing local development plans of the HMA, together with small windfall sites, are able to deliver some 56,000 new homes over the plan period. Therefore, the JSP needs to guide the delivery of a further 29,000 homes. The proposed location of these additional homes remains a key topic for discussion.

The JSP also aims to stimulate economic growth in both existing and new employment areas (Enterprise Zones and Enterprise Areas), as well as respond to the challenges of climate change.

Key Issues

Central Government aims to build one million new homes over the next five years, and the demand for new housing in Bristol and the wider WoE area is high. There is significant pressure to meet the 85,000 homes target, as well as increase the supply of affordable housing over the plan period. However, Bristol and the wider housing market area has historically delivered a relatively modest number of dwellings. New housing in the area has in part been constrained by the lack of potential development sites in the WoE.
There have been numerous debates around development on the Greenbelt at the fringes of the existing settlements in the WoE. Given all this, the key questions remain: ‘Where will the 29,000 additional homes identified be built? Are brownfield sites, or “urban intensification”, a realistic solution and capable of solving the WoE’s housing challenge, or are there alternative solutions?

The Joint Spatial Plan also aims to generate employment opportunities, which will require a strategic approach by the WoE authorities, and significant investment in local infrastructure and transport-focused development in sustainable locations. While a Strategic Transport Plan is being prepared for the WoE, the success of development in this area will rely on the synergy and strategic approach of the objectives in both this and the JSP. An issue that the JSP does not appear to tackle is the objectives for the allocated (and unallocated) centres within the WoE, and the strategic approach for the development of town centre uses including retail, leisure, employment and housing.

Next Steps
The draft West of England Joint Spatial Plan has been published for consultation, with comments welcomed until 26 January 2016. The document seeks to guide development in the West of England area and the issues raised are critical to the overall success of the region.

If you wish to discuss this further or require assistance with making any representations, please contact:

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