

Yorkshire and Humber
Assembly

**Evaluation of the
preparation process for
the draft Regional
Spatial Strategy for
Yorkshire and Humber**

Final Report

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May 2007

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Job number 122432-00

Job title	Evaluation of the preparation process for the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for Yorkshire and Humber	Job number	122432-00
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Document title	Final Report	File reference	
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Document ref

Revision	Date	Filename	Report for RSS Evaluation 26.03.07.doc		
Draft 1	03/05/07	Description	First draft		
			Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
		Name	Sarah Layton, Nicole Roche, Tom Bridges,	Tom Bridges	Tom Bridges
		Signature			
Final	03/05/07	Filename	Final Report 03 May 07.doc		
		Description			
			Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
		Name	Tom Bridges, Sarah Layton	Tom Bridges	Tom Bridges
		Signature			
	03/05/07	Filename			
		Description			
			Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
		Name			
		Signature			
		Filename			
		Description			
			Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
		Name			
		Signature			

Issue Document Verification with Document

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1 Introduction

1.1 This Study

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly appointed Arup in January 2007 to undertake an independent evaluation of the process by which the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was produced.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (YHA) is the Regional Planning Body identified by Government as having responsibility for producing the draft RSS and overseeing its implementation. The draft RSS is subject to independent examination by a Government appointed panel, whose report influences changes made to the draft by Government.

The draft RSS sets out a vision and strategic policies on how the region is to develop and change over a 20-year period. It is one of the principal regional policy documents, one that in its final version is issued as policy of national Government, and has genuine statutory weight, including as part of the Development Plan. Delivery of the strategy, in addition to land-use and transport planning mechanisms, will need to be achieved with and through a wide-range of organisations, investment and intervention across different policy areas, much of which are beyond the traditional remit of the land-use planning system.

It is therefore vital that the processes for producing RSSs are robust and effective. The strategy should be informed by the input from an extensive range of stakeholders. Widespread partner consensus and commitment needs to be fostered around the RSS vision and policies, whilst at the same time difficult and contentious issues must be addressed and resolved. There needs to be a robust timetable and approach to managing the programme of RSS production, and clear mechanisms for securing the approval of Assembly members. A sound evidence base is essential to inform debate and decisions on key policy issues.

Work to produce the draft RSS for Yorkshire and the Humber commenced in 2003. The draft RSS was submitted in December 2005. The Examination in Public by the Government appointed panel was undertaken in the autumn of 2006.

The main aims of this study are to:

- Outline the statutory and policy context for preparing the draft RSS;
- Outline the processes for draft RSS preparation by the Assembly;
- Establish the views of stakeholders on the process;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the Assembly's approach; and
- Set out recommendations for the future development of regional planning policy.

1.2 Approach to the Evaluation

The approach to the project was focused on understanding what worked well with the draft RSS preparation process, what worked less well, and identifying issues for the future. The brief required engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the region to capture their views and perceptions of the draft RSS process. The main components of the research are listed below.

- **Scoping.** Desk-based research¹; and discussions with Assembly officers were undertaken to establish the context, understand the process by which the draft RSS was

¹ The main documents reviewed include:
Shaping The Future, Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (January 2004) and Shaping The Future: Second Project Plan Update, Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (August 2005).
Pre-Submission Consultation Statement, Yorkshire and Humber Assembly (December 2005).

produced, obtain the views of Assembly officers on what worked well and less well, and to inform the evaluation criteria (see box 1.1).

- **Online Survey.** An online survey was set up to enable a broad range of stakeholders to feedback their views on process. 150 stakeholders were selected in consultation with the Assembly to participate from a combination of agencies and the wider public who were engaged in the main consultation stages of the draft RSS.
- **Stakeholder Interviews.** Interviews were held with 30 stakeholders from across the region; who were closely involved in draft RSS preparation. These stakeholders were selected by the Assembly and included the main regional agencies (such as Government Office of Yorkshire and Humber and Yorkshire Forward), a selection of Local Authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations and Consultants.
- **Presentation to the Regional Planning Forum.** In addition Arup presented the findings of the report and collated feedback from members and officers at the Regional Planning Forum, held at the end of March 2007. The feedback was used to validate the findings from the report.
- **Stakeholder Workshop.** An important aspect of the study was to explore how good practice and recommendations could be applied to future strategic policy revisions. Arup held a 'Looking Forward' workshop with a selection of the 30 stakeholders interviewed and Assembly planning officers. The findings and recommendations were reported at the workshop. Debate took place on how this would align with current Assembly working practices, focusing on changes which could be made to improve future practice.

Box 1.1 Evaluation Criteria

The issues identified from the initial analysis included understanding the decision making structures within the Assembly and the relationship between decision makers at different levels; the effectiveness of working arrangements within the Assembly and with its partners; project management of the preparation process; use of resources; alignment of internal and regional policies including integration of core topics (such as housing and transport) and sub regional policies; effectiveness of engagement and participation; identification and use of technical studies to inform the evidence base; management and influence of the Sustainability Appraisal process; and consistency and effectiveness of the Assembly during Examination in Public (EiP).

As a result of the desk base analysis the following evaluation criteria were selected:

1. Management of Decision Making, Structures and Processes;
2. Programme Management;
3. Management of Stakeholder Engagement;
4. Process to Develop the Evidence Base; and
5. The Assembly's Management of and Participation in Examination in Public (EiP)

1.3 Structure Of This Report

Chapter 2 of this report sets out the context in which the draft RSS was being prepared, and outlines the approach to the preparation process.

Chapter 3 of the report sets out the main findings from the research.

Chapter 4 sets out recommendations stemming from the research. These are set out in some detail, with a view to providing a clear route-map for the way forward.

2 Context: Management Of The RSS Process Within An Evolving Agenda

2.1 Introduction

There have been important changes to regional planning in the last few years, cumulating in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004. This Act provides for the new regional plans, Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). These are subject to a more rigorous sustainability appraisal than the old Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) and are produced on a more inclusive basis, through extensive partnership working and community engagement.

A main difference to the old system is that RSSs have a statutory status as part of the Development Plan. The transition to RSSs was intended to reflect wider moves towards a “spatial planning” approach, developing planning policy and plans in a way that is visionary, participative, wider in scope, and more flexible than previously, with a greater focus on implementation.

Under the 2004 regulations, RPG 12 was prescribed as the RSS. The Government set the Assembly a challenging target of preparing the revisions to this RSS, in effect a new RSS, in accordance with the new requirements and guidance by the end of 2004. This is referred to as the draft RSS in this report.

2.2 Government Guidance on Preparing Regional Spatial Strategies

2.2.1 Government Guidance on Regional Planning

Both Government’s interim guidance of March 2003 and Planning Policy Statement 11: ‘Regional Spatial Strategies’ published in September 2004, emphasised that RSSs should set out a spatial vision for each region, with a strategy to deliver it focused on outcomes. Integral to this spatial approach is the need for better co-ordination with other regional strategies and programmes and a more sub-regionally specific approach. In summary, the 2004 Act and supporting guidance set a challenge and an opportunity for Regional Planning Bodies to work in a new way and deliver a new product.

2.2.2 Applying a New Process

The Assembly planning team were faced with applying a revised process evolved from the old style RPG process. Among the challenges which the new legislation and supporting guidance posed for the Assembly were:

- Planning the work so that there was sufficient integration of the draft RSS with other relevant regional strategies and programmes. *Advancing Together*, the regional strategic development framework was central to this, however the Assembly still needed to try and ensure that there was sufficient commonality of approach and vision, a shared evidence base and joint consultation where appropriate;
- Ensuring that in drafting the new draft RSS the key regional bodies had an effective voice in decision making - PPS11 (para 2.19) advises that 30% of the steering group should be non-local authority representatives;
- Programming public engagement and partnership working from an early stage, (‘front-loading’, see regulation 11 of the RSS Regulations (2004 no.2203) and para 2.34 and annex D of PPS11), so that the key issues and approach were agreed as far as the Assembly was concerned well before submission of the draft revised RSS;
- Taking account of the different types of stakeholder in planning for their engagement and, where appropriate, partnership working;

- Making sure the different strategic options were identified, appraised and consulted on (difficulty here for the Assembly was that central government's guidance on the new sustainability appraisal (SA) requirements were still evolving as work on the draft RSS revision progressed - indeed, the final guidance on SA was not issued by central government until November 2005); and
- Managing the work so that there was sufficient connection between the new focus on sub-regional specificity and the topic based work and broader strategic vision.

2.3 The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly's Approach to the Draft RSS Preparation Process

2.3.1 Overview

The Assembly Executive gave approval for the planning team to start work on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy in July 2003. The approval to start the new draft RSS was based on the challenging target set by Government to prepare the draft RSS by the end of 2004. Clearly this was challenging for the Assembly, in view of the fact it was preparing draft RPG12 for Selective Review.

2.3.2 The Timetable for Draft RSS Preparation

The Assembly planning team faced a challenge in managing and co-ordinating the complex process inherent in preparing a Regional Spatial Strategy. Figure 2.1 overleaf is a detailed timetable showing the timing and relationship between the national guidance, the draft RSS production (including consultation stages), main technical documents used to inform the draft RSS and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the draft RSS.

The main stages of the draft RSS preparation process were:

- Informal consultation on issues for the draft RSS (2003);
- Preparation and informal consultation on *Shaping the Future* Project Plan (2004);
- Production of and formal consultation on PLANet *Draft Spatial Vision and Strategic Approach* (2004);
- Production of and formal consultation on Topic Papers (2004/5);
- Preparation of and informal consultation on *Heads of Terms* Document;
- Production of SEA / SA reports (2004/5);
- Production of the submission draft RSS (2005);
- Formal consultation on the draft RSS (2006);
- Undertaking Appropriate Assessment (in accordance with EC Habitats Directive) (2006);
- Examination in Public Seminars (Summer 2006); and
- Examination in Public (Autumn 2006).

2.3.3 Main Principles of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly's Approach

The main principles the Assembly applied in their approach to preparing the draft RSS were to achieve:

- Early and widespread engagement of stakeholders;

- Consultation on easily accessible documentation detailing the principles and importance of the draft RSS (PLANet²); and
- Focusing on the spatial importance of the draft RSS by investing time in defining and debating the sub area approach.

At the start of the RSS process the Assembly realised they needed to raise awareness and educate external stakeholders on the new approach to regional planning. By raising awareness the team would also be able to secure buy in and commitment to the draft RSS. The planning team set out the principles for the draft RSS in the Issues Paper, published in August 2003. The Issues Paper was consulted on for 2 weeks and helped inform the issues and themes that would be addressed in the draft RSS. This also guided the project plan to structure further work around the relevant issues.

The major publications from the Assembly came in July 2004 with the PLANet documents. This covered two publications, *A New Approach To Planning* and the *draft Regional Spatial Vision and Strategic Approach*. The Assembly spent time through the PLANet stage to inform stakeholders on the importance of the new draft RSS, and relate why regional planning was important to stakeholders. The PLANet documents raised expectations and set a high standard for the rest of the process to follow.

The PLANet documents were innovative as they were accessible to a wide range of stakeholders. The *New Approach To Planning* publication was a brief guide that explained the reasons for the revised approach to regional planning, and importantly set the expectation that the draft RSS would address a number of difficult policy and strategic choices. The *draft Regional Spatial Vision and Strategic Approach* was a consultation document about how the Assembly intended to develop the draft RSS and introduced details on the sub areas the Assembly wanted to use. This helped advance the debate on the division and characteristics of sub areas within Yorkshire and Humber. It also detailed the kinds of responses that could be put in place to meet the objectives and vision for the Region, as specified in *Advancing Together*, the regional strategic development framework. Overall PLANet was very good at clearly introducing and gaining consensus on the principles supporting the draft RSS.

2.3.4 Development of the Evidence Base

The technical work on the evidence base extended through the entire duration of the draft RSS preparation, with the majority of reports being produced to inform the Topic Papers (see figure 2.1). At the early stages of the process the Assembly focused on the sub regional dimension. The *South Yorkshire Spatial Study* had already been completed through the South Yorkshire sub regional partnership. The Assembly commissioned the *Leeds and Environs Study* in September 2003. The settlement study led by North Yorkshire County Council was completed in 2004 to provide an evidence base for draft RSS settlement policies.

There was a period of intensive activity on technical reports around the end of 2004 and start of 2005, particularly around planning for Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Biodiversity in the Region. This was due to the technical reports being used to inform the content of the Topic Papers. The Topic Papers addressed the core themes of the draft RSS including transport, housing and economy. The Housing Topic Paper included housing number calculations using the 2002 based projections, the Transport Topic Paper was informed by the Regional Transport Studies report published in June 2003, and the employment details were based on the findings from the Regional Employment Land Strategy published in November 2004.

² PLANet – The Regional Spatial Strategy, a new approach to planning (July 2004) and PLANet – Draft spatial vision and strategic approach (July 2004), Yorkshire and Humber Assembly.

There were also a number of reports, particularly on housing and economic integration and housing market growth, which were not completed until late on in the process in 2006 post draft RSS submission. The technical reports commissioned post submission have been used to inform the Assembly's understanding of the changing regional context.

2.3.5 Production Of The Draft RSS

The *Heads of Terms* document was produced in August 2005 to bring together the work completed by the Assembly. The *Heads of Terms* provided outline information on the policy responses to the issues identified in PLANet and the Topic Papers. It was an attempt by the Assembly to progress the draft RSS from the consultation stages through to the draft submission. The *Heads of Terms* was issued for review by the Technical Advisory Group and Regional Planning and Infrastructure Commission. It was not widely circulated beyond these groups, although it was available to the wider public if requested.

The last few months involved a period of intensive activity for the Assembly to achieve the agreed submission date of December 2005. This is when the officers wrote the majority of the policy for inclusion in the draft, and worked to integrate the policies around the core topics with the sub area policies. The draft RSS was reviewed by Full Assembly and submitted to Government Office in December 2005.

2.4 External Influences on the Draft RSS Preparation Process

2.4.1 National Guidance

The period from summer 2003 until end of 2005 was one of significant change in the planning system and resulted in new and revised guidance being published by Government. The significant guidance is detailed in Figure 2.1 and includes the following Planning Policy Statements and directives:

- PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development, published in February 2005;
- PPS3: Draft Guidance for Housing, published for consultation in December 2005;
- PPS11: Regional Spatial Strategies, published September 2004;
- Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents's, published in November 2005; and
- Application of Appropriate Assessment (Directive 92/43/EEC), published March 2006.

One of the tests of soundness for RSSs set out in PPS11 (para. 2.49, (iii)) is whether it is consistent with national planning policy and if not whether the case has been made for departing from it. Subject to that important caveat, any relevant revisions to national guidance needed to be reflected in the draft RSS. This presented a challenge when preparing the draft RSS within an evolving national policy context.

2.4.2 The Northern Way

The Assembly also needed to take account of pan regional policy in the draft RSS. This meant integrating the Northern Way Growth Strategy into the RSS framework. The strategy's remit was to positively influence economic growth of the North of England, helping deliver against the Government's Regional Economic Performance Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to reverse the trend of a widening productivity gap between the North and the England average.

The Northern Way Growth Strategy identified eight city-regions across the North of England, three of which are in Yorkshire and the Humber: Hull and the Humber City Region, Leeds City Region, and Sheffield City Region (also parts of North Yorkshire fall within the influence of the Tees Valley city region, which is mainly in the North East region). In each city region, a partnership of mainly local authorities produced City Region Development Programmes (CRDPs), the first round of which were published in June 2005, and second, more

Figure 2.1: Timetable for the Preparation of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy

Task Name	2003												2004												2005												2006													
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D		
Selective Review of RPG12																																																		
National Guidance			1												2						3	4					5																							6
Main Technical Studies		1				2	3											4		5	6	7	8											9		10												11	12	
Draft RSS Production																																																		
Sub Area Process																																																		
Timetable Extension By Govt																																																		
SEA / SA Process																																																		
Appropriate Assessment																																																		
Consultation on draft RSS																																																		
Preparation for EIP																																																		
EIP																																																		

Key	
Appropriate Assessment	Yellow
Consultation	Red
Timetable Extension Agreed	Blue
SA Draft & Final Report	Pink
National Guidance	Cyan
Main Technical Studies	Orange

National Guidance:	
1	Guidance to PPG11
2	2002 Based HH Projections
3	PPS11 and Northern Way Growth Strategy
4	2004 Planning Act
5	PPS 1
6	PPS 3

Main Technical Studies	
1	South Yorkshire Spatial Study
2	Regional Transport Priorities
3	Leeds and Environs
4	NYCC Settlement Study
5	SEA Baseline Study
6	Urban Capacity Audit
7	Regional Employment Land Strategy
8	Housing Distribution Model
9	Climate Change Study
10	Strategic Public Transport Framework
11	Waste Data Study
12	Housing Markets Summary

substantive versions were published in Autumn 2006. This important policy development work being undertaken in parallel with, but not necessarily integrated with, work to develop sub-area policy for the RSS.

2.4.3 Regional Influences

As detailed in section 2.2 of this report, it was important for the Assembly to ensure alignment of the draft RSS with main regional strategies, in particular the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Transport Strategy³ and Regional Housing Strategy. These strategies were all being reviewed and revised in parallel with the draft RSS.

The context of the region was changing with increased levels of economic and household growth. The scale of growth pressures and the challenge of accommodating it into regional strategic planning were not widely recognised at the start of the draft RSS preparation process. Delays and changes in relation to evidence on economic and household growth impacted on the project timetable as detailed in section 2.4.4 below.

2.4.4 Managing These External Influences

The Assembly formally requested Government approval for two timetable revisions as a result of external influences at the national, pan regional and regional levels. For the first revision the Full Assembly agreed to request the submission date be revised to September 2005. The submission date took into consideration the following factors:

- The Northern Way work was still in progress with the work on City Region Development Programmes (CRDP's) not due for completion until June 2005;
- The draft RSS timetable was ahead of key regional strategies such as the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Housing Strategy putting the alignment between these regional strategies and the draft RSS at risk;
- The Assembly still needed to develop detailed proposals and policies for the draft RSS using the information from technical work already completed;
- The revised timetable would improve alignment with the draft RSS timetables for the other regions in the North of England; and
- The Assembly needed to assess the implications of the SEA Directive.

Ministers agreed to the first revision in March 2005 with the expectation the additional time would be used to ensure the resolution of difficult issues and the alignment of the draft RSS with the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), Regional Housing Strategy (RHS), Northern Way strategy and emerging RSS of adjoining regions.

The second revision was formally requested to Government Office in July 2005. The Assembly raised their concerns that significant work remained on determining housing provision requirements and the approach to economic growth and employment land allocation. The final report on consultation responses highlighted regional stakeholders' concern regarding these topics prompting the Assembly to commission further work including a set of economic projections, and examination of the linkages between economic success and housing.

This additional work was not envisaged at the time of the project plan update in May 2005. The Assembly decided that developing a sound RSS, responsive to the concerns raised by regional stakeholders was more important than producing the draft RSS as quickly as possible. As a result the Assembly requested an extension for submission of the draft RSS from September 2005 to December 2005, which was granted by Ministers.

³ The Regional Transport Strategy is required to be an integrated but clearly identifiable part of the RSS.

2.5 Assembly Structures To Support Draft RSS Preparation

2.5.1 Regional Planning and Transport Team

The Assembly's Regional Planning and Transport team led the management of the draft RSS including the technical work to prepare the strategy. The division of responsibilities for draft RSS production were based around technical specialities and core themes, with officers also taking ownership for specific sub areas. In addition one officer was responsible for managing the overall RSS programme.

2.5.2 Regional Planning and Infrastructure Commission (RPIC)

The Assembly's Regional Planning and Infrastructure Commission oversaw the production of the draft RSS. The Commission advised and made recommendations to the Full Assembly on matters relating to the draft RSS. The RPIC Executive Group (of 12 members) formed from the wider membership of RPIC acted as the Steering Group for the development of the draft RSS.

In addition, the Regional Transport Forum (RTF) was established to advise RPIC on the Regional Transport Strategy element of the draft RSS. Both RPIC and the RTF included representatives from all the region's local authorities and a wide range of regional stakeholders with an interest and expertise in planning, transport and infrastructure.

2.5.3 Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

The draft RSS proposals presented to RPIC were informed and influenced by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Membership of TAG comprised of local authority officers from across the region and officers from a range of other organisations. Particularly in the early stages of the RSS production process TAG was used to provide technical guidance on prioritisation and management of issues identified during consultation. The remit of TAG included undertaking specific advisory functions to aid drafting, advising on areas for prioritisation and resolution, and providing strategic co-ordination, oversight and integration of work.

2.5.4 Full Assembly

It was the role of the Full Assembly (as the Regional Planning Body) to agree the final draft of the RSS before submission to Government Office. Any significant changes in policy direction also required approval from the Full Assembly.

2.5.5 New Governance Structures

It is important to note that in April 2006 the Assembly put new Governance structures in place (see section 2.6 below). Whilst these structures did not play any part in the production of draft RSS, they were in place at the time of the EiP, and it is assumed they will be the means by which future regional planning work will be undertaken (see Recommendation 6, in chapter 4).

2.6 Strategic Review and Restructuring of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly

Through much of 2005 and the early part of 2006 the Assembly went through a process of strategic review, resulting in new governance and funding arrangements being put in place from April 2006. This process of strategic review did impact on draft RSS production. It led to uncertainty in relation to the Assembly's role, a freeze on staff recruitment, and it affected Member and officer relationships.

2.7 Summary

The Assembly's approach to the preparation of the draft RSS was innovative and ambitious. It sought to take forward the principles of the reformed planning system and exploit the opportunities associated with producing a new type of planning document.

There was a concerted effort to raise the profile and prominence of regional planning through the draft RSS, and to engage a wide range of stakeholders in developing policy. The Assembly's early experience of preparation and engagement using PLANet provided best practice recognised by Government, which informed (and is referred to in) PPS11.

The challenges experienced through the RSS process occurred within the context of significant national and regional changes. These changes caused pressures in terms of difficult policy issues, as well as impacting on staff resources and the project timetable.

3 Main Findings

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the main findings from the study evaluation. It covers successes and lessons to be learnt on stakeholder engagement, decision making structures, programme management, commissioning and use of the evidence base, sub-area processes and the Assembly's role in Examination in Public.

3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

The Assembly adopted an innovative approach to produce a different type of strategy in a different way, broader in scope, and with a wider range of stakeholders involved.

An ambitious programme of stakeholder engagement was adopted with targeted consultation exercises, and a concerted and proactive approach to engage a wide range of stakeholders, many of which had not been involved in previous regional planning work.

Innovative work included establishment of an 'ageing panel' and a 'multi-faith steering group', two major rounds of consultation with the voluntary and community sectors and a consultation questionnaire. The Assembly also produced many newsletters and e-newsletters and used radio adverts.

Intensive initial work by the Assembly raised the profile of the draft RSS. The Assembly invested time and effort at the start of the process, holding targeted workshop events to facilitate understanding on how regional planning related to sectors not traditionally engaged in the planning process. This helped achieve a step-change in the quality of stakeholder engagement and way different local planning authorities and agencies worked together. A proactive and wide-ranging approach to stakeholder engagement was maintained throughout the process of producing the draft RSS, although the quality of engagement was somewhat impaired by timetable challenges, and the emergence of difficult issues late in the process.

The structures and processes for coordinating technical and decision-making input, RPIC and TAG, generally worked well. For stakeholders external to TAG and RPIC, there was more of a challenge to find their way into the process and understand how their inputs related to wider draft RSS preparation. For these stakeholders there was less clarity around decision making structures and progress against the draft RSS project plan.

In summary, there was a seismic shift in the quality of stakeholder involvement and joint working, in particular:

- **Joint-working between local authorities across administrative boundaries**, with the approach to developing sub-area policy being particularly positive (see section 3.3 below); and
- Joint-working between local authority and non-local authority stakeholders, including a range of statutory agencies and representative bodies working in the business, environment, community, housing and health sectors.

The profile and prominence of the draft RSS was raised significantly, and the Assembly was successful in building widespread consensus around the strategy and commitment to its delivery.

3.3 Sub Area Planning

The sub-area approach achieved real benefits leading to what, in the words of one interviewee for this study, was a "seismic shift" in the way in which stakeholders cooperated across boundaries.

A proactive approach and significant work was undertaken by Assembly officers to engage stakeholders in the development of the sub-area policies in the draft RSS. This work was undertaken through established groups, or where these did not exist, through ad-hoc groupings of stakeholders. In some respects the approach to this work was somewhat unclear and unstructured. However in general, the sub-area work enabled stakeholders to be engaged in draft RSS production in a new way, and led to significant improvements in the way local authorities worked together across boundaries.

3.4 Challenge of Dealing with Difficult Policy Issues

Difficult issues did not surface until too late in the process, partly as a result of issues in relation to the evidence base.

The main problem with the process to produce draft RSS was that specific detail on the emerging strategy, and in particular the important and difficult issues regarding planning for economic and housing growth, did not emerge until very late in the process. This meant that there was insufficient time and scope to engage stakeholders and the leading decision-makers in the region in dialogue, and consider the relevant evidence and the difficult choices that need to be made. The identification and distribution of housing numbers became a particularly contentious issue in the weeks leading up to submission of the draft RSS.

Assembly planning officers and local planning authority officers actively engaged members to participate in the process. Stakeholders felt some members found it hard to relate their interests and responsibilities at the local level to strategic aspects of regional planning. Members are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of regional planning due to the raised profile of the draft RSS within the Region.

Stakeholders recognised the difficulties facing the Assembly to achieve consensus, and balance competing demands from a wide range of stakeholders. Assembly officers worked hard to find common ground and to maintain general consensus from members throughout the RSS process. This focus meant there was less opportunity to push forward the debate on some of the difficult issues such as housing distribution and levels of economic growth within the Region.

3.5 Challenge of Achieving Policy Integration

Aspects of the process meant that the Assembly faced challenges in achieving synthesis and integration of policies across topics and sub areas.

For much of the process, the working arrangements within the Assembly planning team meant the draft RSS was approached in a topic focused manner (to ensure focus and resolution of issues around main topics and sub areas). As a result stakeholders felt there was some disconnect between the strategic region wide view and the sub regional view. Due to time constraints there was little opportunity for the Assembly to establish strategic relationships between policies within the draft RSS leaving those responsible for implementation to establish the policy connections.

The evidence base was not developed in a sufficiently integrated way (see section 3.6).

Complex decision making structures within the Assembly led to some disconnect between core policies and challenges with the final approval of the draft RSS. Stakeholders observed difficulties regarding the interaction between RPIC and Regional Transport Forum, established to advise RPIC on the Regional Transport Strategy contained within the draft RSS.

3.6 Evidence Base Commissioning and Use

Whilst a generally robust evidence base was developed, there were issues regarding the level of integration of evidence, the timing of key evidence becoming available, and the way in which evidence was used to influence draft RSS policy development.

Some stakeholders felt the Assembly had an extensive array of technical reports, but they didn't necessarily cover the right issues. The Assembly commissioned a wide range of technical reports to inform a variety of issues raised through the draft RSS process. The requirements for specific reports appeared to be in response to emerging priorities as they occurred within the process. The timing of technical reports to provide evidence enabling integration and linking of core solutions, such as housing and economic growth, did not occur until late in the process. The Assembly were constrained by the availability of data and limitations around data used for modelling.

There were limitations around interpreting the evidence and establishing inter-relationships between technical findings. The Assembly put extensive effort into ensuring draft RSS policy was sound and supported by a robust evidence base. Stakeholders felt there was lack of clarity over how the evidence was interpreted, who was involved in understanding the implications and conclusions from the technical reports, and how the evidence was used to inform decisions on policy solutions. The limitations around interpretation of evidence were due to timetable constraints with reduced opportunity to understand and debate the implications of evidence for regional policy.

The shared evidence base was vulnerable to changes in regional context which led to issues with its use at different points in time. Although the Assembly and Yorkshire Forward agreed to the principle of a shared evidence base, there were challenges putting this into practice, as the evidence needed to achieve different purposes. Yorkshire Forward were keen to evolve the modelling over a number of iterations whereas the Assembly needed point in time data to inform decision making and finalise the position for regional policy. The evidence did achieve both functions; however there are opportunities to improve the use of a shared evidence base for future work. The Assembly's inclusion on the Regional Econometric Group may improve future use of the shared econometric evidence base.

The SEA / SA process was considered sound however there were challenges in relating the outcomes to draft RSS policy. Stakeholders were positive about the comprehensive nature of the Strategic Environmental Assessment / Sustainability Appraisal process and its independent nature; however the process went into a lot of detail very quickly resulting in the planning team having to process a vast amount of information and understand the implications for the draft RSS. The consultants were useful in their ability to provide a theoretical perspective; however there were challenges around relating the appraisal back to the spatial focus of the draft RSS. One of the problems was the way the SA was managed by a different team in the Assembly to the Regional Planning Team. This impaired the level of integration with and influence on the development of draft RSS policy.

3.7 Officer Level Involvement, Working Group Structures and Processes

Local planning authorities were committed to the preparation of the draft RSS and invested time in understanding key issues and representing a common view back to the Assembly.

All authorities within the region waived their Section 4(4) rights. This was partly a result of local planning authority capacity and resource availability, as preparation of Local Development Frameworks was progressing in parallel with the draft RSS. Authorities were also keen to maintain the positive progress made by the Assembly.

One issue facing Local Authorities was maintaining communication between officers and members in order to understand the key issues and put forward agreed representation back to the Assembly. The approach taken by North Yorkshire Forum is a good example of how the process to respond to the draft RSS can work at the local authority level. The Forum's purpose was to highlight the importance of the draft RSS, emphasise the influence regional planning has at the sub area and local level, and educate members on the necessity of thinking strategically. The Forum was also used to maintain the flow of information on issues and establish a common North Yorkshire perspective to present back to the Assembly.

Local Planning Authority officers found their involvement in TAG very useful, although the remit of TAG changed from a 'participation' group to an 'informing' group. Local Planning Authority officers felt involvement in TAG kept them informed of progress on the draft RSS and was used as a forum to debate issues. Stakeholders felt TAG worked well as it gave Assembly officers the opportunity to use the group as a sounding board for ideas and enabled Local Planning Authority officers to input specialist technical knowledge and influence policy direction. Some officers expressed concern that there was only limited scope to use TAG as a forum for generating and inputting ideas into policy solutions. They felt the role of TAG changed with fewer opportunities to influence policy. This shift in focus has occurred naturally as a result of dedicated planning officers working within the Assembly.

The structure and formation of task based sub groups was perceived to be ad hoc within the RSS preparation process. Sub groups were originally defined in the 2004 Project Plan; however membership and formation of groups in the later stages of the process appeared to be in response to emerging priorities. Some stakeholders felt there was lack of clarity around the selection of representatives, remit of sub groups, process for involvement and relationship of within the decision making hierarchy.

3.8 Programme Management

The process and issues that emerged posed management challenges and delays to the timetable.

Changing circumstances resulted in the timetable slipping on several occasions. The process became somewhat rushed in the latter stages, mainly due to delays in obtaining modelling information. This meant a working draft of the strategy did not emerge until just prior to approval for publication. Stakeholders felt review of the full draft would have provided a chance for debate on content and policy response. The project plan constraints limited the time available for consultation on the draft RSS until the formal consultation period post submission. This meant the first opportunity stakeholders had to present their responses on a full draft of the document was post submission and at EiP.

3.9 The Assembly's Role Post Draft RSS Submission

The Assembly planning officers were restricted in their role during EiP as they were bound by the remit detailed in national guidance, regarding significant changes to draft RSS direction post submission.

Some stakeholders perceived the officers were defensive in not straying from the draft plan agreed by the Full Assembly consensus, although to a large extent these views stem from a misunderstanding of the nature and role of the Examination process.

The challenge to resolve stakeholder expectations regarding debate at EiP partly links back to the timing of the debate around difficult issues. Stakeholders did not have time to consider their position on the full draft before submission. As a result there were still issues remaining post submission which were highlighted during the EiP.

3.10 Summary

In summary the headline findings from the evaluation of the preparation process for the draft RSS for Yorkshire and Humber are:

- The Assembly adopted an innovative approach to produce a different type of strategy in a different way, broader in scope, and wider range of stakeholders involved;
- It was challenging for the Assembly to engage politically elected members in the regional planning process;
- Difficult issues did not surface until too late in the process, partly as a result of issues in relation to the evidence base;
- There were limitations around interpreting the evidence and establishing inter-relationships between technical work;
- The sub-area approach achieved seismic shift in the way in which stakeholders cooperated across boundaries;
- The draft RSS was prepared in the context of significant change, and this posed management challenges and delays to the timetable; and
- A great deal was achieved in what were at times difficult circumstances.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This section draws on the main findings from the research and sets out 9 recommendations for the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly in taking forward regional planning work and RSS revisions in the future.

4.2 Developing the Evidence Base and Using it to Inform Debate on the Main Policy Challenges and Choices for the Region

Recommendation 1: Put a plan in place to develop the evidence base, focusing on working with partners, particularly Yorkshire Forward and Yorkshire Futures, to develop a clearer evidence base, especially in relation to economic and population growth in the region.

The Issues

Parts of the region are experiencing continued significant economic restructuring, and substantial economic and population growth, which is leading to changing patterns of demand for employment land, housing pressures and stress on the transport network. There is a need to develop a clearer evidence base and understanding amongst regional stakeholders of the nature of these trends and their implications for policy choices across different policy and geographical areas.

An enhanced shared evidence base and an understanding of it is needed to underpin and strengthen alignment between the full-range of strategy development in the region, including the Integrated Regional Framework, and the RES, as well as the RSS. There is currently a strong shared evidence base in relation to economic modelling, which underpins both the RES and draft RSS. The challenge is to enhance understanding of how economic scenarios relate to main policy issues and choices for the region.

Of particular importance is the need to strengthen integration and synthesis of the different elements of the regional evidence base. There is a need to avoid the danger of considering in isolation the evidence on issues such as economic growth, housing demand and supply, demand and supply of employment land, transport demand and congestion, and climate change impacts. A more integrated evidence base will help inform more integrated policy, and lead to more sophisticated policy debates around the difficult choices to be made (see Recommendation 3). This could help avoid the usual situation of issues in relation to growth pressures being considered as single-issue debates. This could be important in relation to transport and housing numbers where a more joined-up understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with planning for growth is needed.

There is a need to enhance the integration of the evidence on the roles of different settlements and sub-areas, with the evidence on growth trends and scenarios. Different parts of the region are likely to be affected by growth and restructuring in different ways. It is clear that economic growth and housing pressures within some sub-areas are far greater than in others. Within sub-areas, spatial issues are complex, often at a fine-grain scale. For instance, areas of housing pressure may exist in close proximity to areas of housing market fragility; or there may be strong demand for city centre employment land, but not for former industrial sites in less central locations which may be in large supply.

There were challenges regarding timing and availability of evidence within a changing regional context, this was apparent with the issues around econometric modelling including modelling growth. Evidence was also required late in the process to respond to emerging national guidance, particularly around Appropriate Assessment and revised baseline

housing projections. The evidence base on econometric modelling was shared with Yorkshire Forward to inform policy decisions on RSS and RES. The challenge was trying to use the modelling for each respective strategy. The Assembly required a point in time snapshot of data, whereas Yorkshire Forward continued to refine the model in response to changing contexts around growth in the Region. This led to challenges during EIP regarding econometric data used to inform RSS policy.

The Way Forward

- **Work with Yorkshire Forward and Yorkshire Futures to develop a clear forward programme of technical work.** A clear forward programme of technical work will help strengthen integration of evidence, and improve alignment of technical work across different organisations, as well as achieving efficiencies. This forward programme needs to encompass monitoring activity (including Progress in the Region, the RSS Annual Monitoring Report, and monitoring in relation to the RES), analysis of current conditions in the region, economic, housing and transport modelling, environmental evidence, specific technical studies and think-pieces, and evidence being produced by organisations at pan-regional (i.e. Northern Way) or sub-area levels.
- **Work with Yorkshire Forward and Yorkshire Futures to strengthen the evidence base in relation to growth forecasts and scenarios.** A clear and common view of economic forecasting and economic growth is important, particularly between the RSS and RES. Therefore it is essential to ensure clarity over the purpose and the use of shared evidence. Establishing a common agreement for base conditions across the region can be realised through the use of shared data and models.
- **Integrate evidence to enhance understanding of inter-relationships between and spatial dimensions of significant factors such as, economic and population growth, demand and supply of housing and employment land, transport impacts, and climate change impacts.** This approach will enhance understanding of implications and policy choices in relation to growth. It will also support the integration of policy across core topics and between regional and sub area levels.
- **Consider using macro modelling as the start point and basis for building a comprehensive and robust evidence base.** Analysis of issues could be completed at the macro scale first and supported by scenario modelling; this can then be used as the basis for further technical work. Making strategic forecasts available at the start of the process will inform the debate on the big issues such as housing, transport, the economy, demography and climate change. This will facilitate discussions around trajectories and future scenarios.
- **Produce an evidence base summary document to accompany the RSS.** Summarising the conclusions from the technical documentation alongside the RSS will help demonstrate how the key issues identified by the evidence relate to RSS policy. There would be potential for this to include the environmental baseline, alongside social and economic data, thereby meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations.
- **Draw on Government Guidance and advice on strengthening the evidence base.** The *Guide to Improving the Economic Evidence Base supporting Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies*⁴ was published by Communities and Local Government in September 2005, and sets out valuable advice on developing and applying a strengthened shared evidence base for regional policy.

⁴ Weblink: <http://communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1505971> This document was produced by Arup, on behalf on CLG.

Recommendation 2: Consider the optimal management approach to ensure the SA work is integrated fully with and maximises the extent to which the assessment informs development of RSS policy

The Issues

The Assembly decided that the regional planning team should not manage the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) requirements. They felt that otherwise the independence and impartiality of the SEA / SA process would be compromised. It is not for this report to comment on the quality of the SA work but there are a number of issues concerning how it was conducted, particularly in relation to the level of integration between the appraisal and the development of policy. These issues include the clarity of the process, the role and remit of the SA Steering Group, and the level of detail of the appraisal at the early stages of RSS preparation.

The consultants had considerable expertise of SEA / SA. A detailed appraisal of issues and policy was carried out at every stage of the RSS process, producing a vast amount of information which then needed to be interpreted and related back to inform decision making on draft RSS policy.

The unfamiliar nature of the new SA requirements and the amount of data the process produced presented the SA Steering Group with a huge challenge to quickly develop their technical understanding of the appraisal process and how it could best inform the evolving draft RSS. Related to this was some uncertainty over the role and remit of the SA Steering Group *vis a vis* the RPIC Steering Group (and also the regional planning team) to influence decision making on the draft RSS in the light of SA findings. There was a problem that some members of the SA steering group approached the SA as a policy-making exercise in its own right, not an *appraisal* of policy with the RSS policy-making activity taking primacy.

A particular problem was that there was too greater level of detail in the appraisal at early stages of the process. This led to a large volume of information, much of it of limited relevance to the main policy choices that needed to be taken at the early stages of the draft RSS preparation process. In short, it was “difficult to see the wood for the trees” in applying the appraisal to inform the development and consideration of strategic options.

The spatial planning approach used within the RSS process was new, so it was challenging for the SA Steering Group to understand the implications of spatial planning and relate the appraisal information back to the spatial focus of the draft RSS. The result was uncertainty over how the SA should influence draft RSS policy decisions. Consultants with expertise in regional planning were introduced towards the end of the process to improve technical understanding of the draft RSS spatial approach, and improve SA influence on the strategy development process.

The Way Forward

- **Consider combining the management of the SA and RSS process using programme management resources within the RSS team.** Using an officer central to the RSS process to manage the overall SA process will ensure greater joint working with policy makers and result in a shared understanding of how the SA process relates to the RSS preparation process. Where consultants are used to carry out the SA work they should be managed so that they work with the regional planning team throughout the iterative process of preparing the RSS.
- **Set a brief for SEA / SA as an integral part of the RSS work programme.** This will improve understanding of the SEA / SA role in relation to the preparation of the RSS and identify key dependencies within the timetable to ensure timely production of SA findings to inform RSS decision making.

- **Consider developing in-house SA expertise to reduce dependency on external consultants.** If consultants are used it is important in the future to transfer consultancy skills to the RSS team so that in-house SA expertise can be developed and in turn enhance integration with the policy making process. Once this in-house expertise has been developed, consultants could still add value by providing an external check and validation of the in-house SA process and how it is being used to refine the RSS to maintain the necessary SA objectivity.
- **Allow sufficient time to appraise RSS policy and develop effective feedback loops.** It is important to ensure sufficient time in the RSS preparation process to enable effective and relevant feedback and input to decisions-making in relation to RSS.
- **Ensure that an appropriate level of appraisal is undertaken to an appropriate level of detail relative to the RSS preparation stage.**

Recommendation 3: Use the strengthened evidence base to engage stakeholders and key decision makers in debate on the 'big issues' facing the region, including how to deliver and accommodate growth.

The Issues

There were two main issues in relation to the way evidence was used to inform debate amongst stakeholders on policy choices for the draft RSS.

- First, there was insufficient focus on, or time for stakeholder engagement and consultation on main policy issues and specific content of the draft RSS towards the end of the preparation process; compared to the significant amount of time for consultation on broad principles at the start of the process.
- Second, and related to the point above, whilst the Assembly adopted an innovative approach to developing economic and housing modelling, vital outputs were only available from this work at a late stage in the RSS process. This meant there was limited time and scope for synthesis of the evidence, and engaging stakeholders in discussions around the main implications and policy choices (see recommendation 1).

The understanding and the debate amongst stakeholders for significant issues and the inter-relationship between issues did not occur until late on in the process and was not particularly widespread or in-depth. Early on in the process there was a natural dominance of discussion around new concepts of spatial planning relating to sub areas rather than focusing debate on existing issues of housing, transport and economy.

A particular challenge was to understand the changing context of growth, as the Region is not used to having to deal with growth issues. Important evidence on growth emerged late on in the RSS process, in early to mid 2005, and has moved on since then. As a result there was limited opportunity to update economic and housing modelling to inform debate on the issues relating to growth.

It is important that well-intentioned efforts to build consensus amongst stakeholders do not lead to a "lowest common denominator" approach, with difficult and contentious issues being avoided. These issues include, planning for housing growth, tackling transport congestion (in the context of limited funding availability), mitigating and adapting to climate change (including flood risk), re-focussing the supply of employment land, and getting the right balance between planning for trend-based growth, and more aspirational "policy-on" scenarios. As set out in recommendation 1, these issues need to be considered in an integrated manner. There is scope for Assembly officers (and partners such as Yorkshire Forward) to be more proactive and confident in engaging key decision-makers in debates and discussion on these difficult policy issues.

The Way Forward

- **Use the evidence base to inform debate about how to plan for and deliver sustainable growth in the region.** Given consensus has been built on many of the main principles for the RSS, there is now an opportunity to engage stakeholders in debates around the difficult issues for the region, in particular specific issues in relation to how to plan for future patterns of economic and housing growth in a way that is sustainable. Assembly officers need to consider how best to work proactively to engage Assembly members and other decision-makers in debate and discussion around the difficult issues. Using the opportunity to debate and consult on the implications presented by the technical evidence will aid understanding and help form policy response.
- **Prioritise the involvement of the key regional decision-makers in the big debates.** Prioritising the involvement of the key regional decision-makers in the big debates will be important in helping broker agreement within the region, exerting influence on national government and agencies within the region, facilitating senior-level policy and political leadership, and minimising political risk to the RSS preparation process. There is a key role for the Assembly's Regional Executive Board in helping manage policy on these key strategic issues (see Recommendation 5).
- **Consider holding the debates on challenging issues outside the formal RSS process.** There is the opportunity for the big debates around growth issues to take place outside the RSS process. For instance, these debates could be taken forward through the production of the Integrated Regional Framework, or as stand-alone regional debates (along the lines of those held in other regions, particularly the South West⁵). There is also scope to consider strategic issues and strengthen the evidence base through the Assembly's scrutiny work, particularly as scrutiny is being approached on the basis of increasing collaboration between the Assembly and Yorkshire Forward, and increasing use of public sessions.

4.3 Developing Sub Area Policy

Recommendation 4: Build on previous success and strengthen the Assembly's approach to developing sub area policy, including consideration of more formal and / or collaborative working arrangements.

The Issues

Preparation of sub area policy was approached in an extremely positive way by the Assembly. Planning officers invested time in researching and debating with members the nature of sub areas and city regions. The Assembly was also sensitive to the emerging partnership arrangements occurring at the sub area level, and decided to work with existing structures and groups rather than impose new sub area working arrangements. This approach led to sub area practices in the Region being cited as best practice examples for other Regions preparing RSSs.

There were challenges for the Region in terms of consistency of sub area working arrangements. While the flexible approach adopted by the Assembly worked well, it meant the value and specificity of the output was dependent on the maturity of working arrangements within the sub area. It also resulted in some variation between sub area and regional policy.

The formation of partnerships and work to produce the City Region Development Programmes emerged in the latter stages of the RSS process, as a result opportunities were limited to use or influence this work within the draft RSS. Some highly useful and

⁵ See: <http://www.swdebates.info>

innovative policy work is being progressed at sub-area / city-region level, and high calibre officer teams are being put in place.

The Way Forward

- **Work with sub-area partnership groupings to agree and set out clear terms of reference for the future development of RSS sub-area policy.** The Assembly should work with partners at sub-area level to discuss, agree and set out clear terms of reference for the development of RSS sub area policy, to clarify the scope and remit of sub area policy, the arrangements for engaging stakeholders in its production and ensure consistency of the overall approach across the RSS. This greater clarity will minimise any significant differences in approach towards RSS sub area policy and achieve a greater consistency in level of detail and specificity. It will also improve integration between sub area and regional policy.
- **Engage partnerships at the sub area level to support and steer work, including development of a sub area evidence base and sub area strategies.** The Assembly should work proactively to maximise the scope and value of sub area work in supporting implementation of the RSS and informing future policy, including strengthening the evidence base and developing understanding of the issues.
- **Build capacity for policy joint-working to develop policy at sub-area level.** The Assembly should work with partners at sub-area level to encourage and support the building of capacity and establishment of structures to develop planning policy. This could include providing advice and transferring best practice and joint-funding of technical studies. There is scope to build on the officer roles that have developed already to identify an Assembly officer to lead on each sub-area (likely to be on a matrix basis, combined with a region-wide policy remit). There may also be scope to re-focus the Regional Planning Forum along sub-regional lines.

4.4 Decision-Making Structures

Recommendation 5: Clarify the relative roles and remit of Assembly decision making boards for RSS preparation, and communicate this to a wider audience.

The Issues

Decision making for the draft RSS was structured around RPIC and the Full Assembly with the Regional Transport Forum and Technical Advisory Group adopting an advisory role. Members within RPIC were responsible for decision making on issues as they occurred within draft RSS preparation. The RPIC Executive was also accountable for driving forward the draft RSS production. Approval of the final draft RSS was the role of the Full Assembly, with members having the authority to sign off the draft for submission to Government.

There were challenges regarding membership of RPIC and the Full Assembly, with different political members and stakeholders participating in these two bodies. In order for the Full Assembly to be fully equipped to sign off the final draft RSS, they were dependent on RPIC to keep them informed of the significant issues and outcomes. This process was largely reliant on robust communication networks between officers and political members within local planning authorities and regional agencies.

In addition stakeholders outside the draft RSS preparation process felt there was a lack of clarity around the decision making and management structures within the Assembly. Confusion around the structures led to stakeholders feeling decision making processes could have been more transparent.

The Assembly put in place new Governance structures from April 2006. This involved the creation of a Regional Planning Board to oversee regional planning work, including draft RSS preparation, a Transport Board, a Housing Board, a Sustainable Development Board

(which is intended to play a challenge role in relation to regional strategy development, not to act as a policy-making Board per se), and a Scrutiny Board to oversee the Assembly's scrutiny of Yorkshire Forward (see figure 4.1). The formation of the Regional Executive Board provides a mechanism to manage strategic policy development on behalf of the full Assembly, and to help coordinate the work of the different policy Boards. The roles and working relationships between these Boards has been bedding down over the past year. There is a need to clarify the respective roles of the different Boards in relation to future RSS revisions.

The Way Forward

- **Clarify the roles and remit of different decision-making Boards in relation to RSS production.** There is value in clarifying and setting out how the decision making structures will relate to each other, have an integrated programme of work, and report to each other and share information in relation to future revisions of RSS. The onus will be on the Executive Board to bring the different boards together. It will be important to clarify the role of the Regional Executive Board in informing strategic policy decisions, and clarify the roles of Housing, Transport and Sustainable Development Boards in informing policy on relevant topics. Figure 4.1 overleaf sets out suggested roles in relation to RSS production.

Recommendation 6: Consider the optimal role of forums and groups to enable technical input from officers and stakeholders across the Region.

The Issues

Local Authority Planning officers found their involvement in the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was positive and beneficial; it allowed debate to occur on issues and enabled officers to directly influence policy. However, the nature of TAG has evolved as result of dedicated planning officers working within the Assembly. Some planning officers now feel TAG has developed into a vehicle to keep officers informed of issues and to flag-up items for discussion at the Regional Planning Board and the Regional Planning Forum, rather than a forum for debate and input of specialist and technical expertise. Whilst a range of non-local authority stakeholders were involved in TAG, there may be scope to broaden involvement in the future.

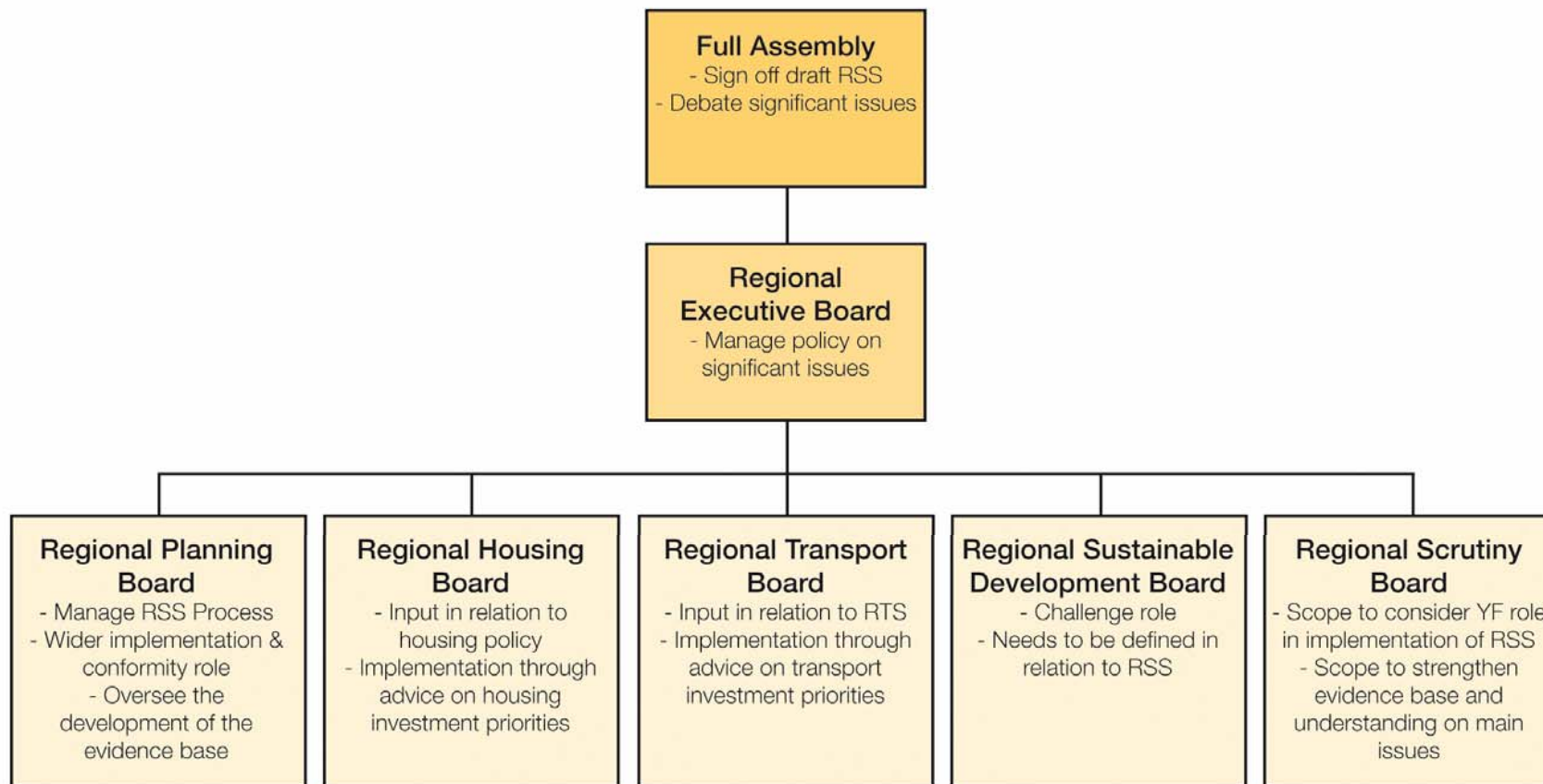
The membership of task based sub groups used for the draft RSS process also appeared to be on an ad hoc basis with lack of clarity around the selection of representatives, group remit, and relationship of sub groups with the wider management structures.

There is scope to consider the optimal role for the Regional Planning Forum in relation to RSS preparation, particularly in light of changing arrangements at sub-area level (see Recommendation 4).

The Way Forward

- **Consider how TAG might be used to provide strengthened specialist technical input, to inform decision making and prioritise issues for debate with members.** The Assembly should consider how to strengthen the technical focus of TAG. Officers could adopt a verifying role for technical evidence, debate the implications of the evidence, and work with Assembly officers to prioritise issues for debate at the RPF and RPB. There is scope for TAG to provide a clearer steer to technical work by overseeing the development of a plan of joint work to strengthen the evidence base (see Recommendation 1) and specifying, overseeing, and synthesising the work of issue-specific technical sub-groups that might meet on a "task-and-finish" basis. However, there is also value in using the group to inform officers of issues, particularly items coming up for discussion at the Planning Board and Regional Planning Forums.

Figure 4.1. Suggested Roles for Assembly Decision-Making Bodies in Relation to Regional Spatial Strategy Production



- **Consider the optimal role for the Regional Planning Forum in relation to RSS production.** The Regional Planning Forum provides an opportunity to engage a wider range of partners in discussion of regional planning issues than that offered by the Regional Planning Board or TAG. However it is important the role of the Forum is clear, and that the Assembly avoids the risk of meetings fatigue amongst stakeholders and overstretch of officers in relation to servicing, preparing for and participating in meetings. Options for using the Forum could include, operating the forum on a “virtual” basis with information disseminated and input provided electronically, retaining the scope for occasional meetings at critical stages of the process. As sub-area partnership structures are strengthened (see Recommendation 4) there may be scope to review the role of the Forum, including considering reconstituting it on a sub-regional basis.

4.5 Managing the Programme for RSS Preparation

Recommendation 7: Manage the process and timetable to take account of time needed to debate issues, integrate evidence and policy across core topics and sub areas, and to build-in the time required by stakeholders to respond to issues and policy.

The Issues

There were a number of revisions to the original project plan agreed with Government Office. Stakeholders felt one of the reasons for delays in the project plan and the intensive period of activity towards the end of the process, was that there was insufficient focus on developing specific policy solutions (as opposed to considering) issues early enough in the process (see Recommendation 3). This meant policy content did not take shape until the last few months of draft RSS preparation. The Assembly were able to extend the deadline from December 2004 to December 2005, however it was still a significant challenge to complete the draft RSS within the agreed deadline. This compressed the time and capacity available for integrating policy, engaging stakeholders in discussions on specific policy choices, and for drafting the document.

There were a number of causes for this problem; delays in relation to economic modelling, publication of revised household projections, the focus on front-loading consultation and stakeholder engagement, and the firm revised deadline imposed by Government office were all factors.

While the project plan provided a detailed list of activities and decision making points through the process, insufficient time was allocated for policy integration. Issues and scenarios identified through the evidence base tended to be considered in terms of the implications for specific topics for the draft RSS to the detriment of synthesis of the issues and implications across different topics. If there had been time available, officers would have had the opportunity to use technical work and debate to develop a clearer focus on the important inter-relationships between issues.

One of the main issues for stakeholders was the timing of the draft submission and the lack of opportunity to review and respond to the draft RSS pre-submission. The project plan allowed sufficient time at the start of the process for stakeholders to respond to issues and high-level approaches proposed by the Assembly. However the PLANet and Topic Paper consultation phases were back to back within the timetable which presented issues for stakeholders who needed to secure feedback and submit representation from a large electorate. The pressures on the Assembly towards the latter stages of the preparation process meant there was not the opportunity for another consultation stage prior to submission. This meant stakeholders were only able to review the full draft in the formal 12 week public consultation, in early 2006.

The Way Forward

- **Assess policy iteration against other core workstreams to ensure integration and include specific tasks in the project plan to achieve integration across core and sub area policy.** Based on the recent experience for draft RSS preparation, it could be beneficial to include time in the plan to synthesise the workstreams. This provides an opportunity to formally adopt a joined up approach reducing the risk of teams working in isolation to complete allocated sections of the regional plan.
- **To improve integration of core and sub area policy, understand the implications evidence will have for other core and sub area topics within the RSS.** This relates to developing an evidence base which assesses the inter-relationship between issues (see Recommendation 1).
- **Plan integration with other regional strategies.** The impact of other regional documentation revisions occurring in parallel to the RSS needs to be understood and mitigated. Experience of the draft RSS shows that it was challenging to finalise key messages between the key regional strategies as they were all under review. The dependencies between regional strategies should be included in future project plans, this will help inform decision making regarding the timing of regional document revisions.
- **Consider planning a consultation stage on the draft plan pre-submission.** This will allow stakeholders the chance to review and formulate a response to the full plan before submission. It provides the opportunity for stakeholders to debate the final plan and minimises the risk of uncertainty and challenge post-submission and during EIP.
- **Identify risks to the project timetable, including seeking to anticipate in advance the emergence of new evidence, policy and guidance.** Changes will always occur, it is important how these changes are managed to minimise the impact they have upon completion of the RSS. One approach could be to conduct risk and impact assessments against changes as they are identified. Assembly officers should continue working with Government Office to represent views back to Government on changes beyond the Assembly's control, based on the outcomes of the risk assessment. The Assembly could also allocate an officer to understand emerging EU and national policy and the influence this will have on regional policy. The proactive management of changes will reduce the chance of unforeseen changes significantly impacting RSS preparation.
- **Make the case to Government Office of Yorkshire and Humber and Communities and Local Government for greater clarity on the forward work programme for new guidance on process, policy and new information on population projections etc.** As well as helping the Assembly in relation to RSS, this would also be valuable to help inform Local Planning Authorities, other agencies, and developers.

Recommendation 8: Consider assigning specific roles relating to the preparation process, in addition to the allocation of resources responsible for developing RSS policy

The Issues

There is scope for the Assembly planning team to reflect on the way its resources could be deployed more effectively and efficiently in relation to draft RSS preparation. The team structure used for draft RSS preparation did mean there was dependency on the programme manager to fulfil a number of roles, including project management, overseeing stakeholder engagement, coordinating technical work, and acting as the principal author and editor of the document. Other team members had specific geographic and topic responsibilities.

The Way Forward

- **Consider the optimal way in which the staff team should work together to manage and drive forward the RSS preparation process in the future.** Consideration might be given to splitting the project / programme management role (including overseeing technical work, stakeholder engagement, and the decision-making process) from the RSS document drafting and editor role. This may free-up more time and resources for these activities, however it would be vital to ensure that there is close integration between the roles.

4.6 Maintaining Momentum

Recommendation 9: Maintain momentum in relation to the engagement of stakeholders in regional planning work, including through activity associated with implementation of the RSS, and work to develop the evidence base and debate policy issues

The Issues

The process for preparing draft RSS was highly successful in terms of the step-change in the quality and breadth of stakeholder engagement compared to previous regional planning work. There is a need to ensure momentum is maintained and stakeholders remain engaged in regional planning work, particularly over the next year when the Assembly will no longer be in the lead in finalising the draft RSS.

The Way Forward

Develop a clear forward programme of regional planning work, and communicate this to stakeholders. The recommendations in this report provide a route-map for the Assembly in taking forward regional planning activity. This will need to be translated into a clear forward work programme, and this will need to be communicated to stakeholders so that they know in what activities they get involved in, when and how. This work programme will need to cover:

- Work to oversee the implementation of the RSS, including the Assembly's conformity role⁶, and the development of an RSS Implementation Plan;
- Work to develop the evidence base, including through consideration of issues raised as a result of the Annual Monitoring Report, and specific technical studies (see Recommendation 1);
- Work to consider and debate the "big issues" for the region, including through wider regional policy development exercises (such as the IRF), scrutiny work, and stand-alone policy discussions / research (see Recommendation 3);
- Activity to strengthen arrangements for developing sub-area policy (see Recommendation 4);
- Communicating the roles of different parts of the Assembly decision making structures in relation to regional planning policy (see Recommendation 5);
- Clarifying the roles of the Technical Advisory Group and Regional Planning Forum (see Recommendation 6); and
- Setting out the broad timetable and main milestones for regional planning work, including the timetable and, in due course, the Project Plan for revising RSS (see Recommendation 8).

⁶ The Assembly is undertaking a series of seminars to brief stakeholders on the conformity role

Consider the future strategy and priorities for stakeholder engagement linked to the forward programme of work. The Assembly developed a clear plan for engaging stakeholders and the community in the production of RSS. There is now an opportunity to consider how best to engage stakeholders as the Assembly enters into a new phase of regional planning work. There is scope to consider the specific approach to engaging the following groups:

- Politicians, including both members of the Assembly who may not be members of the Regional Planning Board or Regional Planning Forum, and the main decision makers in Local Authorities (not just LPAs, and not just planners);
- The key regional bodies and in particular the Yorkshire Forward and Yorkshire Futures;
- Local Planning Authorities, who are the main but not the sole implementation agencies for the RSS, have powers as section 4(4) bodies under the 2004 Act;
- The statutory agencies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, English Heritage and the Highways Agency;
- Partnerships at sub-area level;
- Other social, environmental and economic bodies/interests at the regional and sub-regional level; and
- The wider community.