
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CABINET 13th OCTOBER 2005

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

BLACK COUNTRY STUDY- OPTIONS DOCUMENT AND TECHNICAL DOCUMENTS

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Member endorsement of the process and agree that the Regional Assembly can use the Consultation (Black Country Options) Document (Appendix 1) as a basis for public consultation.
2. To seek Member agreement that the technical work commissioned by the Black Country Consortium can be used by the West Midlands Regional Assembly as the evidence base for consultation on the Black Country Study.

Background

3. The West Midlands Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), also called Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and hereafter referred to a RSS, was approved by the Government in June 2004. In approving the Regional Spatial Strategy the Secretary of State recognised that more work was required to deliver its strategy, and he included a proposal which stated that it is required to undertake
“a Black Country Sub Regional Study to consider a) the regeneration priorities of the Black Country, b) the strategic role of Town centres and Merry Hill, c) Urban capacity, d) Identification of employment land, e) scope of environmental and town centre improvements, and f) ways of improving access to regenerations sites, particularly the eastern side of the Black Country”. (RPG, para 1.32, 2004).
4. To achieve this, the Black Country Consortium produced a 30 year vision building on the objectives of Urban Renaissance in the RSS for the Black Country. This sets out the aspirations for the Black Country up to 2033. The four Black Country Authorities along with the Black Country Consortium and other key parties are undertaking the Black Country Study. This work is being done to under the auspices of the West Midlands Regional Assembly.
5. To ensure delivery and engagement within the Black Country Study, the consortium launched the Project Plan on the 22nd Feb 2005. The project plan set out how the Black Country study would be delivered as the first phase of the review of RSS. This next phase of the Black Country Study is to consult on the spatial options for growth within the Black Country over the next 30 years. The Spatial Options Consultation sets out the findings from the work undertaken so far on the strategy and seeks views from all stakeholders. These choices relate to strategic options for the Black Country’s centres, housing and employment, transport infrastructure and the environment. There are three spatial options.

They are, 'Growth within the 4 key centres', which focuses growth on the four key centres of Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Brierley Hill, 'Growth along transport corridors', which aims to utilise underused land within transport corridors and, 'A spread of growth across the Black Country', this option seeks to spread the focus of growth across a wider number of Centres (not just strategic centres).

6. The Consultation Report (appendix 1) will be presented on the 21 October 2005 for The Regional Planning Partnership to be approved, however the Black Country Consortium have requested that before that date each Local Authority within the Black Country endorse the process and signs off the document for consultation. The document sets out the work that has already been undertaken for the Black Country, presents the options for the Black Country and sets out a number of questions upon which the consultation is based. A copy of the consultation report is also available in the Members library.
7. A number of technical studies have been produced by the Black Country Consortium which test the realism of the Black Country Vision. These are, The Economic Strategy for the Black Country 2011-31, A study of Black Country Centres, Housing Think piece and the Black Country Urban Park. An Employment Capacity Study and an Urban Housing capacity study have also been commissioned. A transport modelling system has also been undertaken to test the housing and employment work.
8. The consultation period for the Spatial Options will commence on the 14th November 2005 and will run until the 6th January 2006. There will be a sub regional event for the whole of the Black Country organised by the Black Country Consortium where regional and sub regional organisations will be consulted on the 23rd November 2005 at Dunstall Park, Wolverhampton. Moreover, due to the important issues which are being considered, which will impact upon the Borough, Dudley MBC will be hosting our own event on the 28th November at the Black Country Living Museum. It has been organised in conjunction with the Dudley Community Partnership and will consist of presentations, workshops and exhibitions. This will allow the spatial options to be discussed. Officers will be facilitating the day and will be available to answer queries on the options presented.
9. To aid in the understanding of the process, the following table sets out the next steps in the process of the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Consultation on Spatial Options 14 th November – 6 th January	To consult on broad spatial options, the Centres Option, Corridor Option and Dispersed Option
Preparation of a Preferred Option Early 2006 – Spring 2006	Responses to representations received will help to inform the draft preferred option .
Submission to the First Secretary of State End of May 2006	The preferred option will be presented to the Secretary of State with a period of consultation to follow.
Examination in Public Early 2007	Representations made on the Preferred Option will be considered at a formal Examination in Public. There will be a panel report setting out findings of the Inspector on the issues raised. There will

	be a further consultation period before the Black Country Study is formalised into the review of RSS and is expected to be formally published by the end of 2008.
Development Plan Document Preparation	The Boroughs will be able to commence work on the individual Development Plans for their area starting with a joint core strategy shared between the 4 Boroughs, making specific reference to Dudley specific issues.

Implications for Dudley MBC

Housing and Employment

10. Technical work has been undertaken on both Housing and Employment land in the Black Country. The work has been carried out by consultants and each study has explored what would be required to meet the aspirations of the Black Country vision. The employment study recognises a long term decline in traditional manufacturing and concludes that there are a significant number of industrial sites and areas which will no longer be fit for purpose over the thirty year vision period. The employment study is closely related to the housing study in that many new housing sites identified are former industrial sites recognised as areas of manufacturing decline.
11. It should be noted that these two studies are technical pieces of work which reflect the findings of the consultants which have undertaken each study. Each study has produced scenarios based on the three spatial options. Once a decision has been reached on a preferred option, further work will be required to interpret the technical studies to arrive at the most suitable planning policy options for Dudley to meet its aspirations as well as those of the Black Country as a whole.

Centres & Retailing

12. One of the key issues facing this Borough is the issue of whether Brierley Hill should be a strategic centre. The existing centre is the Borough is Dudley Town Centre and this would require a policy shift in the form of a direct change in The RSS to designate Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre. The Centres Report commissioned has made clear that Brierley Hill currently performs as a strategic centre. This work is required to justify the transition from Dudley to Brierley Hill as the Borough's Strategic Centre. Officers have been concerned that the centres report does not fully justify the case for the transition, and have embarked on further work to justify this. The consultation document also refers to Dudley transforming into a "National icon for urban living with its strong family focus and its recreation and leisure facilities". This follows the theme that Dudley remains the civic centre for the Borough, whilst Brierley Hill will be the main retail strategic centre.
13. In the event that Brierley Hill is confirmed as the strategic centre, there will be a significant amount of infrastructure which is required to improve the accessibility within and to the centre. This includes the Metro line extension to Merry Hill and the Brierley Hill Strategic Access Network (BHSAN) along with a variety of public transport improvements.

Transport

14. Transport issues although central to the outcomes of the study necessarily have had to await both the availability of the new regional transport model "PRISM" and reports of the various technical studies on economy, housing, centres etc that also need to be modelled by PRISM. Consideration of the access requirements to the western side of the conurbation and access to the motorway network will be one of the key outcomes of the study and is of particular interest to the Council. Initial PRISM modelling has reinforced the need for mitigation of the problem of movement of goods and people to the west. The delivery of an extensive Metro network including the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill line one extension, 5 W's and the Hagley Road routes is a base assumption of any future transport proposals in the study. The importance of Metro network cannot be underestimated, combined with other public transport measures such as Bus Rapid Transit and Bus Showcase they will have a major role to play in sustaining the future economic well-being of the Borough. More detail consideration of the transport needs will be carried out in response to the technical reports and public consultation on the spatial options in due course.

Environment

15. The work undertaken on the Environment has been undertaken to advise on various issues including waste disposal, water resources, renewable energy, air quality, canals, urban design and biodiversity and open space. This has culminated in the production of a landscape master plan for the Black Country. Furthermore, considerable work on contaminated land has been undertaken. The area of brownfield/derelict/contaminated land in the Black Country amounts around 700 hectares, There are a number of key issues surrounding the availability of that land for redevelopment land in the Black Country including those of viability. An appropriate strategic policy is required to achieve the aspirations of the Black Country.
16. The endorsement of this process and the consultation document for use by the Regional Assembly should not prejudice the view of the Council on issues raised by the study. During the consultation period Dudley Council Officers will be compiling The Dudley Council response to the consultation, which will be presented to the Cabinet meeting of the 14th December 2005. This report will also report the key issues from the Dudley consultation event, held at the Black Country Living Museum on the 28th November 2005.

Finance

17. The Black Country Study is managed centrally by the Black Consortium Study, which is part funded by this Council and the three other Borough's. Dudley MBC also provides very significant support in officer time. The Council is undertaking the Local Consultation event from existing budgets.

Law

18. The Black Country Study is the first phase of the Review of Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) (2004) as advised by the First

Secretary of State in RPG 11 (2004). The process is set out in the Planning Policy Statement 11 (2004). Under Section 38 (3) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that the Development Plan for the Borough consists of Local Development Plan documents and the Regional Spatial Strategy. The Regional Spatial Strategy therefore must be taken account of in the consideration of development proposals in the Borough.

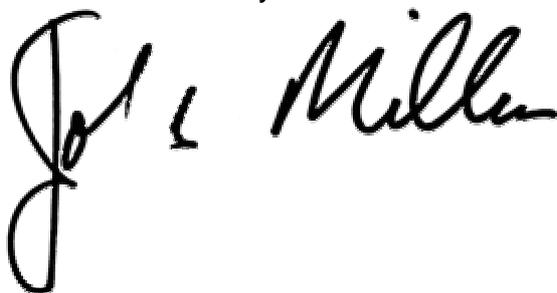
Equality Impact

19. The Black Country Study seeks to create a positive impact to increase regeneration opportunity in the Black Country, to create a better quality of life and create a more prosperous economic base. Moreover, the study seeks to reverse the trends that lead to social exclusion in the Black Country. The consultation methods employed at a sub regional and Borough level will aid in ensuring that the aspirations of all citizens are taken into account in an inclusive manner.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that:-

- Members endorse the process and agree that the Regional Assembly use the (Black Country Options) Document as public consultation.
- Members agree that the technical work commissioned by the Black Country Consortium can be used by the West Midlands Regional Assembly as the evidence base for consultation on the Black Country Study.



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List of Background Papers

Looking Forward: the Black Country in 2033 (May 2033)
The Black Country Study: the Project Plan (August 2005)