

Black Country Joint Core Strategy

ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER

Working draft

**Revision 6
24th May 2007**

VERSION AGREED BY JOINT ADVISORY GROUP 25TH MAY 2007
SUBJECT TO MINOR EDIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS

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Executive Summary

So what is the Core Strategy about?

It is a 'spatial planning document' (dealing not only with land use but also environmental, economic and social issues) that will set out the vision, objectives and strategy for future development in the Black Country up to 2026.

How will it be used?

The Core Strategy will be used to decide planning applications throughout the Black Country. It will provide the strategic framework for other, more detailed plans, produced by the 4 Black Country Local Authorities once it is formally adopted

What is this document about?

Since November 2006, we have been working with key stakeholders to identify the key issues facing the Black Country over the next 20 years. This has led to the production of this **Core Strategy Issues & Options Document**. It sets out the issues facing the Black Country and proposes options for the Core Strategy to address these issues. We want to receive your views on the issues and options identified together with any others that you wish us to consider.

Why should I get involved?

Whether you work, live or invest in the Black Country; it's important to have your say on the Core Strategy as it will set out, in broad terms:

- Where major redevelopment will be focussed
- The location and type of new housing developments;
- Where new jobs should be located;
- Improvements to how people move around the Black Country;
- The location and size of new shopping, leisure and cultural facilities;
- Proposals to Protect and improve the natural and built environment;

What happens next?

We will use the views received on this document to help us choose our preferred options for the Core Strategy. A Preferred Options document will be produced for further consultation in early 2008.

1.0 Introduction

The four Black Country local authorities of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton are currently preparing new planning documents to replace their Unitary Development Plans. These Local Development Frameworks (LDF) will guide future planning decisions in their areas.

The Joint Black Country Core Strategy (the Core Strategy) will be the key document in the LDF portfolio of planning documents. It will be a spatial planning document that will set out the vision, objectives and detailed spatial strategy for future development in the Black Country up to 2026 and specific strategic policies and targets. The document will not just consider land use, but also a comprehensive range of environmental, economic and social issues.

The Joint Black Country Core Strategy will progress work already undertaken by the four Black Country Boroughs and the Black Country Consortium, through the Black Country Study, which has been looking at how to effect comprehensive environmental, economic and social transformation the Black Country. The Black Country Study provided the basis for Phase 1 Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. The aim of the Core Strategy is to produce positive, local policies which will help to change the Black Country into a place where people want to live, work and invest.

Based on the Core Strategy the four local authorities will prepare other detailed plans for their areas. More detail on the range and content of these additional plans can be found in the individual Councils' Local Development Schemes. These are available to view as follows:

www.dudley.gov.uk

www.sandwell.gov.uk

www.walsall.gov.uk

www.wolverhampton.gov.uk

2.0 The Form and Content of the Document

The format of the document is as follows:

Section 3 – How to Use this Document – sets out how we would like people to respond to the issues and options set out in the document

Section 4 - What is the Black Country like Now? – sets out the context for the Core Strategy. It identifies the main characteristics of the Black Country in terms of its geography, economy and environment and local communities

Section 5 – Where are we now? – sets out the Black Country's position with regard to national and regional policy, in particular the RSS Phase 1 revision. This section also establishes the spatial vision for the Black Country at 2026.

Section 6 – Important Issues in the Black Country – sets out the important issues we have identified as a result of our stakeholder engagement and poses a series of questions to further assist our preparation of the Black Country Core Strategy. This section also sets out two broad spatial options for regeneration corridors to demonstrate the different ways of balancing the many issues associated with urban regeneration. We welcome comments on these options.

Section 7 – Implementation and Monitoring – sets out the Black Country's commitment to monitor the progress of the Core Strategy and how the proposals set out in the Core Strategy will be implemented.

3.0 How to Use this Document

Since November 2006, the four Black Country Boroughs have been working with key stakeholders and organisations to identify the key issues facing the Black Country over the next 20 years.

This engagement commenced with a Launch Event on 6th December 2006 and has continued with the engagement of key organisations and individuals through focus groups and a series of local events taking place across the Black Country.

The identification of issues and options for the Black Country is the first stage in the production of the Core Strategy. The role of the Core Strategy Issues and Options paper is to build upon the work and engagement already undertaken and to clearly set out the issues facing the Black Country and propose ways that the Core Strategy could address these issues. The aim of this document is to encourage further responses to the issues and options identified and to provide an opportunity to put forward any new ones.

Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Core Strategy must be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to test how they will contribute to the development of sustainable communities. The parallel SA/SEA processes are taken place in tandem with the production of the Core Strategy and informing key stages of the process. A Scoping Report was published in March 2007 and an appraisal of the issues and options accompanies this document. These appraisals will be taken into account when preparing the preferred options for the Black Country later in the 2007. The Appraisal can be found on the Black Country Core Strategy web-site.

We would like to know what people think of the issues and options set out in this document. We would also like to know if there is anything we have not addressed that you think is important. You can do this in the following ways:

- By visiting the Black Country Core Strategy web-site and completing the questionnaire
www.blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk
- By visiting the planning offices and main libraries in each Borough, where copies will be available for inspection.

Directorate of the Urban
Environment
Dudley MBC
3 St James's Road
Dudley
DY1 1HZ

Directorate of Planning and
Transportation
Sandwell MBC
Development House
Lombard Street
West Bromwich

Urban Regeneration
Walsall MBC
Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1DG

www.sandwell.gov.uk

Planning Policy
Wolverhampton City Council
Civic Centre
St Peters Square
Wolverhampton
WV1 1RP

www.wolverhampton.gov.uk

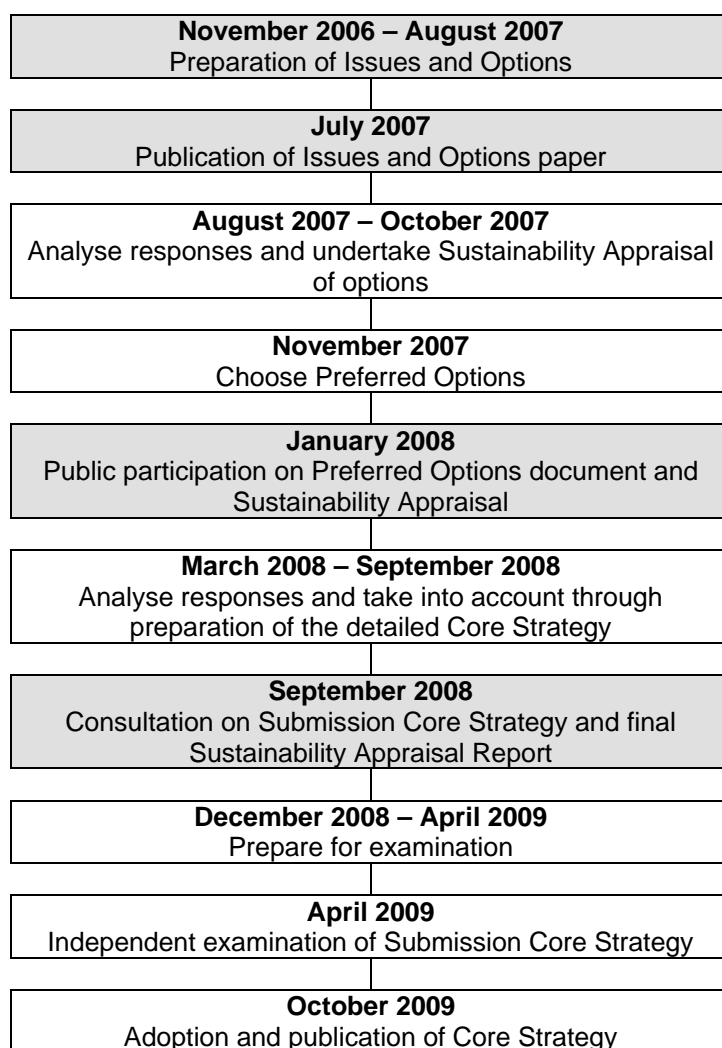
Email: blackcountrycorestrategy@dudley.gov.uk

Write to: Jon Lord
Urban Regeneration
Walsall MBC
Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1DG

What Happens Next

Any suggestions and comments that we receive will help us to prepare for the next stage in the production of the Core Strategy – choosing the Preferred Option.

The process for the production of the Core Strategy is shown below. The shaded boxes indicate those stages where we would like to hear your views.



We will be encouraging all of our stakeholders to be involved with the development of the Preferred Options for the Black Country and will therefore be continuing our programme of stakeholder events and focus group meetings. We will also be commissioning additional technical work to further aid the development of the Preferred Option.

If you would like to be more involved in the development of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy, please make sure that we have your details.

3.0 WHAT IS THE BLACK COUNTRY LIKE NOW?

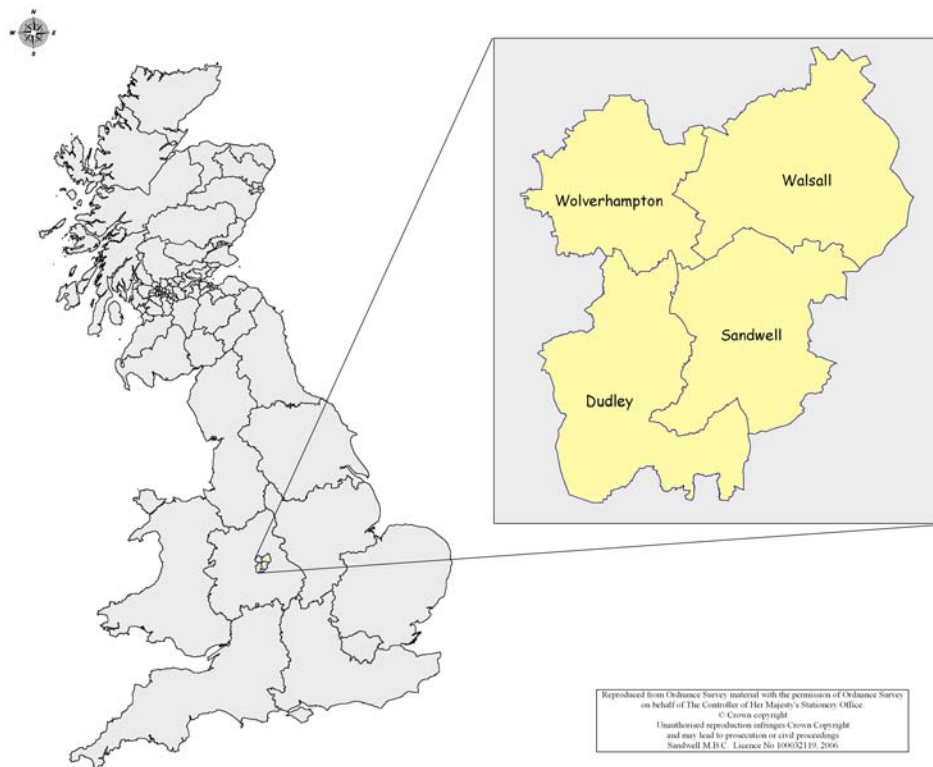
The Black Country comprises the City of Wolverhampton and the Metropolitan Boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall. It is a multi-cultural society with a population of almost 1.1 million. As a centre of cultural diversity it is home to more people of Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) origins (15.2% of total population) compared to the national average (9%).

The Black Country is one of only three areas in the UK experiencing population decline. Since 1990, population has fallen by over 20,000 and some 4,000 people (net) are leaving each year. Although the area has many social and economic strengths, the local economy performs poorly compared to similar sized areas elsewhere in the UK. While retaining a strong manufacturing sector supporting 22% of total employment, it has failed to sufficiently attract new industries that are driving economic growth elsewhere in the UK.

There are low levels of highly skilled, high earning people living and working in the Black Country and some of the most severe concentrations of deprivation. As a consequence, a £2.6 billion output gap with the rest of the UK has emerged and there are some 100,000 fewer jobs today than in the 1970s. The legacy of the Black Country's industrial past continues to dominate the image of the area. From the air, open spaces stand out – along valleys, railway lines, canals and hills – but on the ground many are inaccessible or poorly maintained. The poor quality of the urban environment undermines efforts to attract new industries and their employees to the area. The extent and pattern of congestion on key roads through the Black Country further degrades the environment, undermines public transport services, and imposes severe costs on companies operating in the area.

For workers, there is a lack of choice in the housing market. The Black Country is dominated by uniform concentrations of relatively low priced private housing and very substantial concentrations of poor quality social rented housing, particularly within its inner areas. For businesses, there are few high quality sites providing good access to transport infrastructure and a pool of highly skilled labour. Meanwhile, the Black Country's town centres are not the hubs of retail, office and leisure activity they could be, competing poorly with Birmingham and other surrounding centres.

If current trends continue, employment in the Black Country will decline further, the income gap with the rest of the UK will widen, net out migration will persist, and the population will decline further.



Map 1: The Black Country in its National Context

The Regional/City Region Context

4. WHAT DO WE WANT THE BLACK COUNTRY TO BE LIKE IN 2026?

The Joint Core Strategy is not being prepared in isolation. It will need to take into account existing national and regional planning policies and guidance. These set out some broad planning principles that the Joint Core Strategy will need to deliver including:

- sustainable development
- social cohesion and inclusion
- prioritising previously developed land for development
- Protecting and enhancing the environment

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the West Midlands guides the preparation of this and other local authority development plans. This includes the Phase 1 revision to the RSS (as a result of the Black Country Study), which was subject to an Examination in January 2007. The Report from that Examination was published on 14th March and endorses its proposed strategy for the Black Country. The objectives, the spatial strategy and the detail set out in the Black Country Study, are all based upon a 30 year Vision for the Black Country which was established in 2003 by the Black Country Consortium. Therefore, the vision, objectives and broad spatial strategy upon which the Core Strategy will be based (summarised below) are established. Given the unusually tight framework this imposes upon the consideration of issues and options for the Core Strategy, this Issues and Options document should be read alongside Annex 1 of the Examination Report, which sets out the Phase 1 Revision text as amended by the Panel's recommendations (this can be viewed at: www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=55).

VISION

By 2033, we aim to make the Black Country a confident 'we can do it' place, where our skills, work ethic and diversity are key to our prosperity. The Black Country will be made up of a polycentric network of four centres: Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Brierley Hill / Merry Hill – each offering a distinct, wide range of shopping, leisure and cultural facilities, office employment and housing. A transport revolution will have taken place with our bus, Metro, rail and road networks making it easy to move around the Black Country, into Birmingham and the rest of the City Region.

Our manufacturing companies will be prospering, at the cutting edge of technological innovation but our high quality environment – not our industrial legacy – will dominate the urban landscape. Our canal system, linking our communities together, means we are known as Britain's Venice. All Black Country citizens will have a deep sense of belonging and will be enabled to contribute actively to the social, economic and physical well being of the area. The Black Country will be genuinely inclusive and integrated in residential, economic, social and educational terms.

The Vision is now 4 years old and, since it was developed, there have been some major changes in national and regional policy. For example, addressing

climate change has become a key consideration. New household projections are likely to result in substantially increased housing targets for the Black Country, but less population growth than anticipated.

NEW QUESTION (to be determined by Steering Group)

OBJECTIVES

1. To reverse out-migration
 - Accommodating within the Black Country all locally generated household growth from 2011;
 - Meeting at least the levels of housing provision identified in RSS
2. To raise income levels
 - Raising demand and household incomes (average earnings, GDP per head and reducing unemployment) to the UK average by 2033;
3. To create an inclusive and cohesive society
 - Removing barriers to opportunity;
 - Changing the socio economic mix by increasing the proportion of social grades A and B to match the national profile by 2033 or earlier;
4. To transform the Black Country environment
 - Protecting and enhancing the sub-region's environmental and heritage assets and biodiversity;
 - Implementing the Black Country as Urban Park concept

SPATIAL STRATEGY

A central aim of the RSS Phase 1 Revision is to implement sustainable urban renaissance in the Black Country by securing carefully balanced growth in housing, centres and the local economy, **at a scale, speed and quality never seen before.** The Phase 1 Examination Report highlighted the importance of minimising the potential effects of this growth on climate change, and maximising opportunities to adapt the Black Country to the likely effects of climate change.

Key elements of the spatial strategy are:

- The designation of Brierley Hill as a new strategic centre for the Black Country alongside Wolverhampton, West Bromwich and Walsall.
- Focusing new employment investment and housing growth in strategic centres and along public transport corridors and parts of the canal network, making maximum use of redundant industrial land and premises

- Enhancement of a network of key landscape corridors linking Black Country towns and communities to each other and the surrounding countryside.
- Provision of an integrated, high quality, reliable public transport network, which maximises the accessibility of strategic centres, employment investment areas and housing growth areas, led by extension of the Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill.

The spatial strategy promotes intensification and outward growth of 'centre uses' (retail, offices, leisure, high density housing) in the four strategic centres), and a more significant role for 'town' centres. Fundamental land-use restructuring is proposed along a series of broad corridors which are currently dominated by increasingly outdated industrial uses. These corridors link the four Strategic Centres, to other key parts of the sub region and to key centres outside the Black Country. Within these corridors, four 'Employment Land Investment' areas are identified as the primary locations for high quality employment sites¹. The Urban Park concept encompasses a range of environmental improvements primarily the protection and extension of green infrastructure ; the creation of 'Beacons' which highlight Black Country environmental distinctiveness; and the promotion of excellent design quality which responds to local character and distinctiveness.

THE ROLE OF THE CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy will be central to delivery of the vision, objectives and spatial strategy set out above, by ensuring that, by 2026, the Black Country is well on the way to becoming a place where people from all backgrounds want to live, work, play and invest. The Core Strategy will not cover the whole Vision timescale (to 2033), however, many of the changes necessary to realise the Vision will need to be set in place by 2026,

The Core Strategy will "add value" to the RSS Phase 1 Revision by proactively planning for and managing change. It will provide clarity and certainty for the development industry, local communities and other stakeholders about what development will happen where and when, but will not allocate specific sites. The Core Strategy must also be flexible enough to deal with any changes to regional policy which emerge from the RSS Phase 2 Revision, including significantly increased housing targets and changes to retail targets.

The Core Strategy will include: directions of travel, a detailed spatial strategy, core policies and a monitoring and implementation framework. It must perform a number of key tasks:

- Set out measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change;
- Define the corridors where housing and employment growth will be focussed and environmental renewal is needed;
- Reflect the central importance of transforming the environment by defining beacons, landscape corridors and communities;
- Set out the amount and broad location, type and tenure of new housing development required

- Set out broad areas where high quality and local employment land will be protected.

The Core Strategy will provide key guidance to inform other strategies and plans for parts of the Black Country which will affect what goes where in the area. The Core Strategy will play a major part in delivering the priorities of the four Black Country Community Strategies/Plans, which set out the aspirations of the community and other partners at a local level. These Plans will shortly be replaced by new Sustainable Community Strategies, providing an opportunity to maximise integration with the Core Strategy process. Regard must also be had to plans and strategies produced by areas adjoining the Black Country and cross-boundary regeneration initiatives.

<p>Question V1: Is the vision and the objectives sufficiently comprehensive and bold to reflect the scale of the change needed for the Black Country up to 2026?</p>

5.0 IMPORTANT ISSUES AND OPTIONS FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY

On the basis of national and regional planning policy, including the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 1 submission and Examination Report, our knowledge of the Black Country and the evidence we have obtained so far, together with the consultation responses received to date (May 2007), we have identified what we think are the important issues the Core Strategy will have to address. These are grouped under several themes. For each theme, a direction of travel has been developed to explain how that theme will contribute towards the vision, objectives and spatial strategy set out in Section 4. Key questions arising from the issues are then set out. Your views on the directions of travel and answers to the questions posed would be welcomed to help us develop the Preferred Option.

REGENERATION CORRIDORS

Direction of Travel: By 2026, the Regeneration Corridors will have become model sustainable communities, helping to create a new positive image for the Black Country. They will provide a vibrant mix of uses, set within a high quality environment attracting locals and people from outside the Black Country alike to live and work here, and revitalising the Black Country's traditional economic core.

The RSS Phase 1 Revision Spatial Strategy identifies a series of Employment Land Investment Corridors and Housing Corridors as a main focus for redevelopment and environmental change in the Black Country. Building on this work, and drawing together the employment and housing elements for clarity, fifteen Regeneration Corridors have been defined for the purposes of the Core Strategy (see Map 2). The vast majority of the Regeneration Corridors are located within the 'Broad Locations for Growth Corridors' area shown on Map 2 of the draft RSS Phase 1 Revision.

These Regeneration Corridors follow the broad distribution of 3,000 ha of existing employment land in the Black Country which is not yet committed for another use. In some places this employment land forms continuous corridors and in others it is mixed with housing and other uses. The majority of Regeneration Corridors broadly follow public transport routes and many include stretches of the canal network. All four strategic centres and thirteen of the smaller town centres fall within or adjoin the Regeneration Corridors. A detailed plan and summary of the features and opportunities for each Regeneration Corridor is provided in Appendix 1.

A number of free-standing employment estates, which cover 450ha in total, fall outside the Regeneration Corridors and are too small or isolated to be considered individually at Core Strategy level – these estates have been grouped together as a significant source of regeneration opportunities.

The Regeneration Corridors, together with the free-standing employment sites, are of sufficient size to drive significant change and offer the opportunity to provide a sustainable mix of new residential neighbourhoods, locations for high quality employment land investment and an appropriate amount of retained local employment land. The Regeneration Corridors will therefore be the focus of major land use change in the Black Country over the next twenty years. The Core Strategy will need to balance uses appropriately between the Regeneration Corridors, to deliver the following:

1. Retention of sufficient high quality employment land for high technology, knowledge-based uses, located primarily within the Employment Land Investment Corridors. The Black Country Employment Land Capacity Study defines high quality employment land as have the following characteristics: (1) access to the motorway within ten minutes; (2) very good or good environmental quality; (3) attractive to national and international market demand. The Black Country Study identified the need for 1600 ha of such land by 2031 This is being reviewed as part of on-going technical work. Given the accessibility requirements of such uses, only 1250 ha of the target can be met within the Black Country itself and the remainder will need to be met in neighbouring areas e.g. the 90 ha i54 site, north of Wolverhampton;
2. Retention of a smaller portfolio of land for locally significant employment uses. The Black Country Study identified the need for 950 ha by 2031, made up of 600 ha existing premises and 350ha new premises on large, mixed use developments. These targets are being reviewed as part of on-going technical work.
3. Delivery of up to 35,000 new dwellings on surplus local employment land by 2026, in sustainable new communities, which are well served by green and social infrastructure and co-exist comfortably with adjoining employment uses and existing residential areas;
4. Retention of a reservoir of local employment land large enough to both ensure that the natural rate of industrial decline is not unduly accelerated and to provide a source of housing land for the period 2026-31;
5. Provision of the right types of housing in the right locations to both meet local housing needs and to retain and attract sufficient professional, entrepreneurial and manager households;
6. Environmental transformation by enhancing and extending existing green infrastructure to create a high quality network of landscape corridors interweaving through and linking areas of growth.

•

Although the spatial strategy for the Core Strategy has largely been determined, two broad spatial options have been generated which demonstrate different ways of delivering 1-3 above, and delivering 4-6 to greater and lesser degrees. These options are summarised in Table 1 below. The potential implications of the options for each Regeneration Corridor, in terms of balance of land-uses and housing targets, are illustrated in Appendix 1. There is a clear choice to be made about the role and form of development in the Regeneration Corridors. This choice is between, on the one hand, a strategy which maximises retention of local employment opportunities for the longest possible time by directing high density development to a limited number of key locations and, on the other hand, an approach which promotes more comprehensive and rapid land use change and seeks to secure a much wider range of housing provision.

The total amount (1250ha) and broad areas for location of high quality employment land have been kept constant for both options. It is estimated that around 600 ha of existing employment land is currently of high quality and 650 ha is capable of meeting high quality standards subject to investment. This means that within the Black Country, 1250 ha of employment land in total is capable of attracting the high technology, knowledge-based companies essential to realising the vision and objectives. Technical work also reveals a high dependency on sites outside the Black Country to provide new, high quality employment land to make up any shortfall. Some such land is already committed, such as the i54 sites to the north of Wolverhampton, but it is clear that additional sites will need to be created, in particular to meet the needs of the logistics sector. The West Midlands Regional Logistics Sites Studies (published to inform the RSS Phase 2 Review) indicate that a location in South Staffordshire, to the north of Wolverhampton, may be appropriate for a large logistics site

Map 2: The Regeneration Corridors

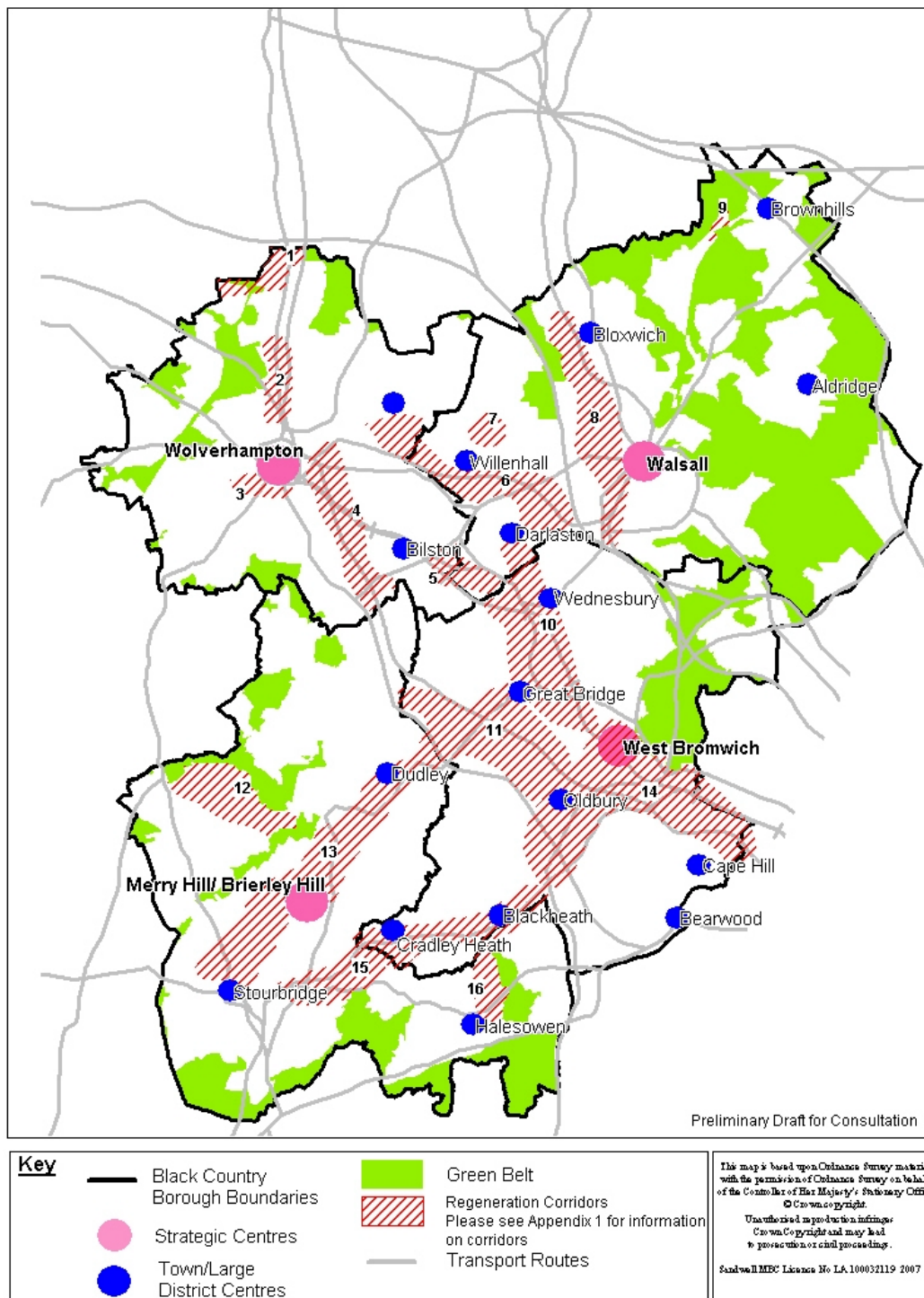


Table 1: Regeneration Corridor Options

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Option 1: Concentrated Development – Safeguarding Local Employment Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of 1400 ha up to 2026 for local employment use – including a reservoir of 450ha. • Release of the remaining 800 ha of existing local employment land for housing, on a range of sites. • New housing would be concentrated at high densities in the most sustainable locations - close to public transport nodes and existing strategic and town centres. A limited range of new residential environments would be provided, focused on meeting local housing needs. • Town centres within and adjoining Regeneration Corridors would expand to accommodate more residential services and centre uses. • New development would help to support existing public transport services and public transport improvements would be focussed on strengthening the existing network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would help to protect local firms and safeguard existing lower skilled jobs in the medium-term. • Would help to meet the housing needs of the majority of local people by providing smaller, more affordable dwellings. • Would increase range of services and employment-generating uses in key town centres. • Housing sites would cover a smaller total area and so could take less time to assemble and develop. • Would make maximum use of accessible locations and so promote maximum public transport use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more local employment land retained, the greater the risk that “bad neighbour” uses will limit the quality of design and attractiveness of new residential development. • The need to achieve high density housing development may compromise ability to create high quality residential environments and therefore limit scope to retain and attract professional, entrepreneurial and manager households. • Risk of limiting the scope to provide significant new green infrastructure, placing limits on the potential for major environmental transformation. • .
<p>Option 2: Area Based Restructuring – Providing Greater Housing Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of 1150 ha up to 2026 for local employment use – including a reservoir of 200ha. • Release of the remaining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lower average housing density would provide more flexibility to create a variety of high quality residential environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of reducing the stock of local employment land too quickly and accelerating the loss of lower skilled jobs. • Great dependence upon high

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>1050 ha of existing local employment land for housing, on a range of sites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New housing in Regeneration Corridors would be spread out at medium densities, making use of a range of sustainable locations, including canal corridors. A wide range of new residential environments would be provided, focused on retaining and attracting professional, entrepreneurial and managerial households. • Within Regeneration Corridors, local services would be distributed between existing town centres and local centres. • Public transport improvements would be dispersed – covering both improvements to and extensions to the existing network. 	<p>and therefore retain and attract professional, entrepreneurial and managerial households.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum scope for major environmental transformation and provision of significant new green infrastructure • Would increase range of services and employment-generating uses across the Regeneration Corridors generally. 	<p>quality employment land and new office uses to generate new jobs required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would require a significant amount of proactive planning and resources. • Housing sites would cover a larger total area and so could take more time to assemble and develop. • Maximising public transport use would depend upon investment to extend the existing network.

Definitions:

Medium densities: 40-60 dwellings per hectare net / average 35 dph gross

High densities: 60 – 75 dwellings per hectare net / average 45 dph gross

Questions to think about:

<p>1. Which Option do you think would best deliver the vision, objectives and spatial strategy and why? For your chosen Option, how do you think development within the Regeneration Corridors should be phased over the broad periods 2009-2016, 2016-21 and 2021-2026?</p>
<p>1. Are any of the Regeneration Corridors more suited to a particular Option or</p>
<p>2. Is the proposed distribution of high quality employment land, as illustrated in Appendix 2, appropriate? Are there any other areas where high quality employment land should be located?</p>

3. Are there any specific large sites within the Regeneration Corridors or free-standing employment sites which you would like to suggest should be protected or allocated for a particular use? What extra infrastructure might be needed to support these sites?

The Environment

Direction of Travel: By 2026, the Black Country will be an 'Urban Park' that celebrates its distinctive communities and heritage. The Urban Park project aims to transform the Black Country environment to increase the quality of life within the area. As part of this, 'beacons' will show off some of the most distinctive parts of the Black Country to residents and visitors. 'Corridors' will create green links throughout the Black Country for wildlife and walking and we will celebrate our distinct character and heritage.

The Black Country has a distinctive topography, characterised by hills and valleys and is located at the watershed between the Rivers Trent and Severn which feed 213 kms of rivers and streams. Its geology is of significant international interest. Wrens Nest, in the heart of the Black Country, was the first urban National Nature Reserve to be designated and the sub-region contains two European protected wildlife sites. Significant remnants of the Black Country's industrial heritage also still remain. The most obvious being the extensive canal network covering 177 kms, with 63 locks and 3 tunnels. The long and complex nature of industrialisation means that much land has been recycled and is therefore at greater risk of contamination above and below ground. The long industrial heritage has also created many wildlife-rich brownfield sites. Much of the urban area is densely developed and Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's) have been identified where air pollution standards for nitrogen dioxide are exceeded, primarily due to road traffic emissions.

The sub-region has many environmental assets including its canals, geology, wildlife and open spaces, but too many are hidden, inaccessible or not celebrated. More needs to be made of these assets.

The RSS Phase 1 Revision places great importance upon transforming the environment of the Black Country, as a necessary condition for achievement of other social and economic objectives and successful mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. A significant net increase in environmental assets and quality is therefore required across the Black Country in order to deliver the vision in this Core Strategy. The traditional approach in the Black Country has been to plan for the protection and improvement of environmental assets, such as important habitats or wildlife species, via the local Biodiversity Action Plan and Geodiversity Action Plan as well as during each development as it comes forward. However, this approach alone will not deliver the necessary dramatic step-change in environmental quality. It is also necessary to plan for green infrastructure networks which cross local authority boundaries and links important wildlife sites (either existing or to be created)

which will create maximum impact. This will enable developer contributions, both on and off-site, to be maximised.

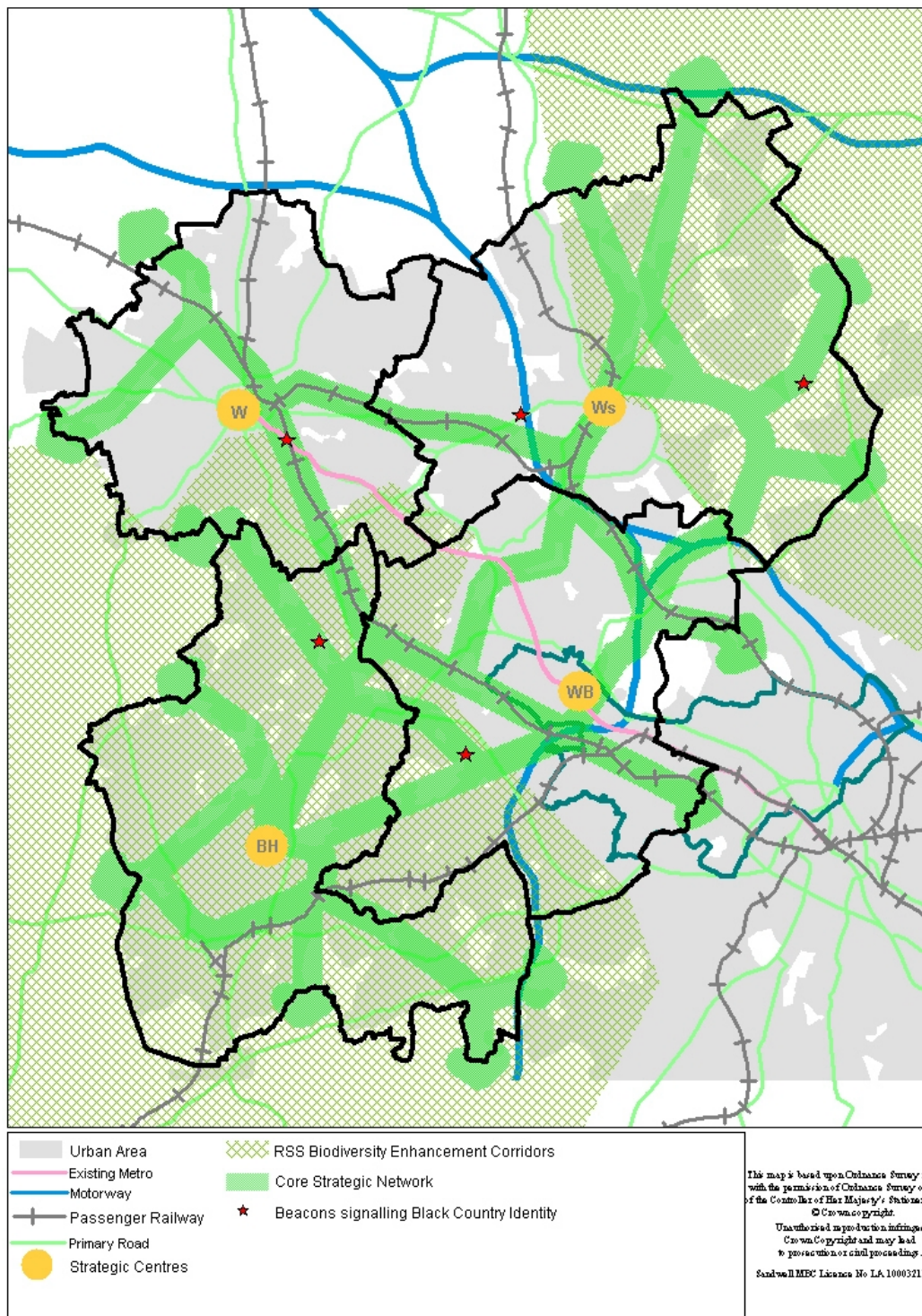
To help achieve this step-change in environmental quality, as part of the Urban Park concept, the Black Country authorities are committed to preparing and implementing a Black Country Landscape Action Plan (LAP) based on a green infrastructure approach. Green Infrastructure is a sub-regional network of features like protected wildlife sites, parks, and other greenway linkages which provide natural “life support” functions for the wider area. This includes controlling high summer temperatures, absorbing heavy rainfalls as well as some air and water pollution while also providing places for wildlife to live and move throughout the area and places for people to relax, walk and cycle. The need for a strong green infrastructure is becoming increasingly important to help places, people and wildlife adapt to the pressures being put on them by climate change.

Key outputs of the Landscape Action Plan will be the identification and enhancement of Beacons, Corridors and Communities (involving the identification of Character Areas); and a Canal Management Plan. This will take forward the work in the Black Country Study which identified potential Strategic Landscape Corridors and Beacons and uses them as a mechanism to “link up” the two Biodiversity Enhancement Areas set out in RSS (these are shown on Map 3).

<p>Question I1: Where should the Landscape Action Plan concentrate on delivering environmental transformation? For example, do you consider that the proposed corridors and beacons identified on Map 3 should be the priority or is it more important to concentrate on the Regeneration Corridors identified in Map 2? Are there any other locations that should be prioritised?</p>

Although the Core of the Black Country is heavily urbanised, 20% of the total land area is designated as Green Belt. Half of this is located at the eastern edge of Walsall, the remainder on the fringes of Wolverhampton and Dudley and in “green wedges” within the urban area. The Black Country has extremely high targets for building housing on previously-developed land and it is considered that there is no strategic need for major housing or employment development in the Green Belt or on open spaces up to 2026. It is intended that the Core Strategy will confirm the boundaries of the current Green Belt as defined in RSS and the UDPs. Development in the Green Belt can only be justified where any harm to the Green Belt can only be justified where any harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by the wider benefits to the Black Country.

Map 3: Strategic Landscape Corridors and Beacons



The Core Strategy needs to identify the main ways that activity in the Black Country contributes towards climate change (particularly carbon emissions) and also the main effects that climate change is likely to have in the Black Country and set out a strategy for tackling both causes and effects. Evidence suggests that in 2003 the Black Country was responsible for around 7 million tonnes of CO₂, of which 2.7 million tonnes were generated by industry/commerce, 2.75 million tonnes by domestic homes, and 1.6 million tonnes by transport. Transport is the only sector where emissions are not reducing. The RSS Phase 1 Revision Inspector's recommended Policy CC1 emphasises the important role that the Core Strategy will have in meeting targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010 and 60% by 2050.

There are many ways that the Core Strategy can contribute towards reducing the causes of climate change and adapting to it e.g. by ensuring new developments are accessible by public transport, and maximising natural habitats. However, given the large amount of new development which will take place in the Black Country up to 2026, there is a danger that the carbon footprint of the sub-region could actually increase unless steps are taken to minimise the non-renewable energy needs of new developments.

National targets are to produce 10% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010 and 20% by 2020. The West Midlands Regional Energy Strategy 2004 targets are lower than this – 4% by 2010 and 10% by 2020. However, current generation levels are tiny – 0.03%. As the West Midlands is an industrialised region, it is a big energy user with comparatively limited potential for renewable energy technologies, and this is particularly true for areas like the Black Country.

Draft national guidance sets out the Government's view regarding how new development should contribute towards the reduction of carbon emissions. This states that at least 10% of the energy needs of large developments (>1,000m²) should be provided through on-site or off-site renewable energy. In addition, by 2016, all new homes should be designed to produce zero carbon emissions, with no non-renewable energy requirements.

The only significant sources of renewable energy in the Black Country are three landfill gas sites, which have a finite life. Therefore, meeting renewable energy targets will be particularly challenging. There may be scope for sewage gas generation at two sewage works, in Wolverhampton and between Stourbridge and Stourton. Although there is little scope for wind farms, due to the need to site them 400m from homes, 20% of the Black Country has scope for micro wind turbines. Better orientation and insulation of buildings and solar panels could also boost micro-generation. There is scope for buildings to be heated by a range of biomass fuels (essentially wood), which could be sourced in adjoining rural areas. This could either be generated on site or at large combined heat and power plants (CHP). Biogas from kitchen waste and the like could also be used to fuel CHPs, but this technology needs to be explored for its viability and suitability for siting within or adjoining the Black Country.

Question I3: Do you consider that the Black Country should adopt the minimum national targets for generation of renewable energy on new developments or set more ambitious targets – if so, how ambitious? How could these targets best be delivered? For example, are there any particular types of renewable energy that you consider to be most suited to the Black Country? If so, please explain what these are and where you consider these could be located. Are there any locations that are not suitable for renewable energy generation?

The character of the Black Country is well documented as ‘the endless village’ It is made up of many small and large centres each of which has a strong association with local communities, its own distinctive identity and a unique character. These historic settlements continue to evolve, and recent iconic buildings such as Walsall Art Gallery are now symbols of Black Country regeneration.

The radical land use change set out in RSS Phase 1 Revision makes it especially important that change is managed in such a way that respects local character and distinctiveness in the Black Country. The approach needs to build upon the diverse character of the many settlements comprising the Black Country but also create new character and distinctiveness in areas of little value. The alternative could be swathes of uniform housing estates with little character along the Regeneration Corridors shown in Map 2 and indiscriminate intensification damaging the valuable character of the suburbs.

There are two main types of area in the Black Country which face different local character and distinctiveness issues – areas of major change and existing residential areas. The areas of major change are largely in the Centres and Regeneration Corridors as set out in Map 2. With the exception of conservation area and listed building designations covering parts of the canal network and the historic core of some centres, there is currently limited information regarding the historic interest and character of the very areas most likely to be subject to change. Given the necessary scale and speed of restructuring and inherent delivery risks there is a danger that existing local character and distinctiveness will be lost or not effectively capitalised on.

Question I4: Are there any areas where local character and distinctiveness should be preserved and enhanced? Are there any locations where a different approach could be taken? For example, where should new iconic buildings be located?

Economy

Direction of Travel: By 2026, **Direction of Travel:** By 2026, the Black Country will have moved significantly towards a high skilled, well paid knowledge economy. The economy will include a vibrant, competitive and adaptive manufacturing and logistics base, and an expanding service sector. The strategic centres will be the focus for office based companies and there will be a step change in the quality of retained employment areas.

The Black Country has a strong industrial heritage but de-industrialisation has seriously eroded the Black Country's economic position. Today, the Black Country economy employs 500,000 people - approximately 20% of the West Midlands total – yet some 200,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost over the last 30 years. As a counterbalance, job creation in other sectors has generated an additional 95,000 jobs but the net effect is approximately 100,000 fewer jobs than in the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the area is left with a tradition of world-class performance in manufacturing; the Black Country is home to nationally and internationally renowned manufacturers such as Hadley Industries plc (steel rolling), Astec International Holdings Ltd (electronics), WYKO Holdings Ltd (precision engineering) and Boparan Holdings Ltd (food). These companies and other manufacturing firms still account for 20% of employment in the Black Country compared to 12% for England.

The decline of industry has left excessive amounts of poor quality industrial land - often contaminated - creating an environment unfit for the needs of modern business. There is a demand for quality land and premises but this outstrips supply, leading to excessive dependence on quality sites outside the Black Country such as at Hilton Cross and the i54 business park on the boundary of Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire.

The great majority of the Black Country is within a Regeneration Zone. The area is served by the Wolverhampton – Telford High Technology Corridor and is within the sphere of influence of the Central Technology Belt (A38 Corridor). Furthermore, the RSS Phase 1 Revision proposes four 'Employment Land Investment Corridors' for the location of high quality employment sites, as shown on Map 4.

The Black Country needs to attract a significant quantity of new jobs, and better quality jobs, focusing on the key growth sectors in services and high technology manufacturing , including research and development facilities.

The Black Country Study identified the need for 1,600ha of high quality employment land to serve the sub-region by 2031. Of this, 540ha is required for manufacturing and 1,050ha for logistics. A major overhaul of the land use and transport structure is required to create modern, fit for purpose, employment sites to take advantage of those opportunities. There is also a need for enhanced training, skills and education so the Black Country workforce can fully contribute to the creation of a modern economy.

The Core Strategy will set out the location and phasing of the employment land requirements in the RSS Phase 1 Revision. Quality locations need a plentiful supply of labour and skills, ready access to the motorway network (5 to 10 minutes reliable journey), and a quality environment, which attracts the workforce and provides investor confidence. These locations will primarily be in the Employment Land Investment Corridors shown on Map 4. The level of growth in offices within in the strategic centres will be set in regional policy.

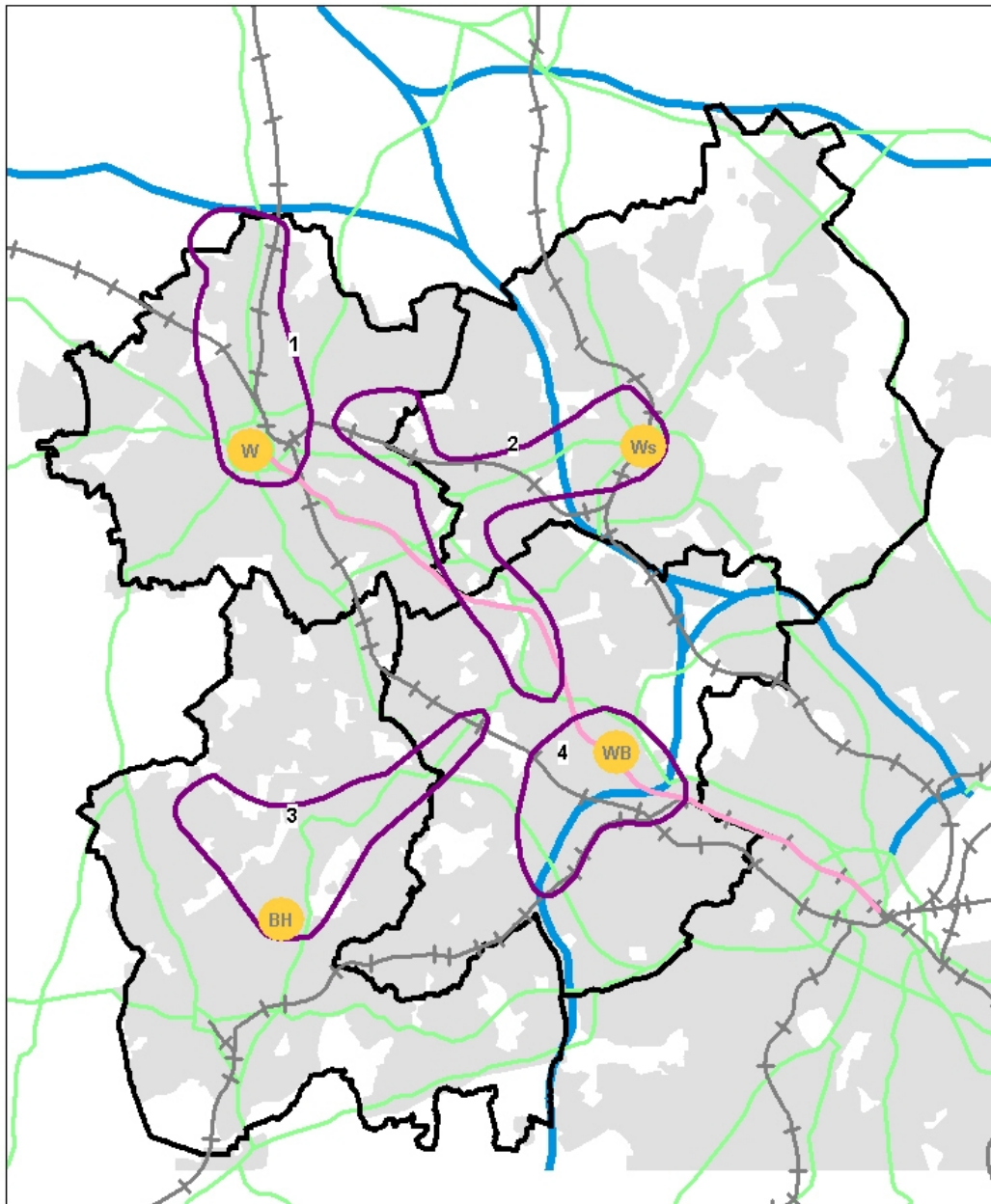
Question I5: Where should innovative new and expanding high technology businesses be located? Do you think that specific locations should be identified, for example, clustered around Wolverhampton University or hospitals or other locations?

Manufacturing and distribution / warehousing uses have particular characteristics that mean they could be best suited to particular types of location. These can be away from residential communities where their operations could be a nuisance and near to the national transport network. If the Black Country is going to capture a share of the growing regionalisation of logistics business, sites for large-scale buildings, near to motorways, will be essential. Meeting all logistics needs will exert pressure upon and competition with manufacturing for space in the most accessible locations. The North Black Country / South Staffordshire area has been identified as one of the four 'Best Regional Logistics Locations' in the West Midlands. However, the Black Country cannot fully accommodate the demand for such sites within its boundary and will be dependant on sites in neighbouring local authorities to deliver the desired growth in logistics activity.

Question I6: Should some employment land locations be reserved only for manufacturing or only logistics, or should we allow a mix of logistics and manufacturing activity? Where should these uses be located?

To explore how much surplus employment land can be released for housing led regeneration, the Joint Core Strategy also needs to determine to what extent employment land which is not considered to be of high quality should be retained. The Regeneration Corridor options at XXXXXXXX seek your views on this issue.

Map 4: Employment Land Investment Corridors



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban Area Existing Metro Motorway Passenger Railway Primary Road Strategic Centres Employment Land Investment Corridors 	<p>1 - Black Country North Wolverhampton Centre - Stafford Rd Corridor (incorporating Wolverhampton Science Park & Wobaston Rd i54/M15).</p> <p>2 - Black Country Central Walsall Centre-Darlaston-Wednesbury Corridor (incorporating Darlaston SDA, Hill Top, Black Country Route, Wednesfield Way, Wolverhampton).</p>	<p>3 - Black Country West Pensnett - Brierley Hill Centre - Dudley Town Centre-Dudley Port Corridor (incorporating Pensnett Estate)</p> <p>4 - Black Country East Oldbury - West Bromwich Corridor (incorporating M5 J1 & 2, & Sandwell & Dudley Station)</p>
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Centres

Direction of Travel: By 2026, Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton will all be successful strategic centres which meet the shopping, leisure and cultural needs of the Black Country's communities and accommodate urban living.. The diverse range of other smaller centres will complement the pattern of housing and employment in the Black Country and meet people's everyday needs.

The four strategic centres proposed in the RSS Phase 1 Revision are Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

Wolverhampton City Centre is distinct from the other Black Country centres in that it has the headquarters of a daily newspaper, a professional theatre, and is served by main line rail and has its own University within the centre. Wolverhampton's retail role is currently around 20% that of Birmingham's and within the centre, there is developer interest in mixed use retail, office, residential and leisure developments, capitalising on Wolverhampton's cultural attractions and excellent accessibility. Plans to significantly expand the retail core and create a modern rail/metro/bus interchange are well under way. An Investment Masterplan for the City Centre and the Stafford Road Corridor to the north is in preparation and regeneration of the City Centre will be a main priority of the new Wolverhampton Urban Regeneration Company.

Brierley Hill, comprising the Merry Hill shopping centre, Waterfront office complex and business park and Brierley Hill High Street, is a major shopping centre and commercial leisure destination. It has the strongest retail centre in the Black Country but for many years its growth has been prevented because of Merry Hill's planning policy status as an out-of-town shopping centre. The recognition that this area should be designated as a strategic centre in RSS Phase 1 Revision will enable its comprehensive regeneration into an integrated, accessible and balanced strategic town centre. The centre has already witnessed the introduction of new uses, for example some 400 new homes have been built in the immediate vicinity in the last five years.

Walsall is a traditional market town which has seen its retail status in the region decline over the last decade. Nevertheless, Walsall has recently seen signs of expansion of homes allied to retail, offices and leisure. It is evident that the national trend towards high density city living, and the creation of genuinely mixed use residential and leisure developments within and on the edge of centres, offer significant potential for Walsall. The Walsall Urban Regeneration Company has a masterplan based on the attraction of £600m public/private sector investment to the central area over the next 10/15 years, including a Business and Learning Quarter and the Waterfront development.

Of the four strategic centres, West Bromwich faces the biggest challenge in establishing a stronger role as a strategic centre, given that it is only 5 miles from Birmingham city centre and has a predominantly low income catchment

area. However, its high accessibility gives it significant potential. A regeneration company ('RegenCo') has been established and will take forward schemes including a new Town Square, retail expansion and office developments.

There is no significant office development in the pipeline for Walsall, and the existing accommodation is generally dated and falls short of current occupier requirements at both Walsall and West Bromwich. West Bromwich has taken steps to address this by securing 30k square feet of new high quality office floorspace in the town center. At Brierley Hill the Waterfront represents a successful integration of a retail centre with "business park" provision and major new office schemes such as the Interchange, are set to increase the existing office market in Wolverhampton City Centre. The RSS Phase 1 Revision will establish the scale of office growth required in the four strategic centres.

The four strategic centres are supported by a hierarchy of other centres which play a more localised role such as Bilston, Lye, Oldbury and Darlaston. There are also major developments outside of centres such as the retail warehouses at Junctions 9 and 10 of the M6.

Historically, the Black Country has had a large number of centres and a large amount of shopping provision but the area has suffered a decline in trade and a key concern is that the Black Country is leaking retail trade to neighbouring towns and cities elsewhere in the region and beyond. There is evidence that the highest earning Black Country residents generally spend their money outside the Black Country. Retail in Black Country Centres is relatively low value, reflecting the income distribution of local consumers. As a result the Black Country's centres are generally in less robust health than centres in surrounding areas, and there are needs and opportunities for investment in the four strategic centres and in most of the smaller centres.

The RSS Phase 1 Revision sets out figures for comparison shopping in each of the four strategic centres (Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton) and a total figure for all of the smaller centres across the four local authority areas. It is however recognised that these figures will be reviewed through the RSS Phase 2 Revision and may be increased. Table X in Appendix X sets out the level of retail, office and proposed indicative housing numbers for each strategic centre.

Much of the retail growth set out in appendix X is already committed. For example, the retail core expansion for Wolverhampton City Centre has planning permission and there is also well advanced plans for West Bromwich. In Brierley Hill, an Area Action Plan is being prepared setting out how that retail growth will be delivered, in accordance with the RSS Phase 1 Revision and ensuring the development of an integrated town centre.

Whilst recognising the need to improve the market attractiveness of the Black Country strategic centres, the Core Strategy seeks to ensure that there is a

fair balance of retail development between the four centres. This is achieved by the distribution of floorspace to each strategic centre set out in RSS Phase 1 (set out in appendix X). Maintaining that appropriate balance will be important should those figures increase with the work on RSS phase 2.

Question 17a: The figures set out in RSS Phase 1 are given, however, if the comparison retail figures significantly increase with the work on RSS Phase 2, do you consider that there is a need to manage the growth, and development, over and above that set out in RSS and post 2021, of comparison retail floorspace in the strategic centres? If so, what mechanisms would you consider appropriate for managing that growth and how could these be monitored?

The Black Country is well-provided with a range and variety of centres, which are generally well-placed to meet needs for convenience goods. Needs might increase but in the Black Country most of these needs should be able to be met within or on the edge of existing centres, although there may be some locations where existing centres cannot accommodate this. The Core Strategy should therefore seek to meet the community's needs for convenience shopping through development (of an appropriate scale) within or on the edge of existing strategic, town, and local centres, whilst recognising there might be circumstances where this cannot be achieved, in which case new local centres or shops might be allowed.

Question 18: Having in mind the potential implications of growth in the Regeneration Corridors and the increase in demand for local centre facilities, are there any particular centres where there is a need for improved convenience shopping/foodstore provision or where existing convenience shops need to be protected? Are there any locations outside of an existing centre that either now or in the future might benefit from a new town or local centre or improved local shopping?

The current culture, leisure and entertainment offer in the Black Country's town centres insufficiently meets the needs of local people and families. In the evenings, there are few options in terms of eating out, going to the theatre, cinema or casino. Many people feel that evening entertainment is limited to bars and clubs for young people. There is also insufficient provision of major cultural and sport tourism attractions.

Question 19: Are there particular needs for cultural, leisure and entertainment facilities for the Black Country? If so, what are they and where should these be located?

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Direction of Travel: By 2026, the Black Country will have facilities for education and learning, health, leisure and culture of the right quality, in the

right locations, and of sufficient quantity to meet the needs and aspirations of all people in the Black Country so that all communities will have the skills and facilities they need to fully enjoy living and working in their local area.

The Black Country Study describes the diverse communities in the Black Country and their needs, particularly with regards to education, health, the labour market and housing.

The four individual Black Country Local Planning Authorities will be working closely with their respective Education Authorities, Primary Care Trusts and the Strategic Health Authority to look in detail at the need for additional education and health facilities and the potential locations for these uses. In particular, continuing investment in the for the University of Wolverhampton, as the only University within the Black Country is essential.

Community and cultural facilities play an important role for social cohesion and the well being of communities. Again, the provision and location of such facilities needs to be focused within sustainable locations in the communities they are intended to serve.

There are good opportunities to locate some community facilities together, such as new community sports halls on school sites when schools are rebuilt, or alongside youth and health facilities.

Question I10: Are there any particular community facilities that are needed in the Black Country and where should these be located? What facilities could best be located together?

Currently, participation in sport is very low in the Black Country. There is evidence that Increasing participation by providing high quality facilities in the right locations could significantly improve the health and well-being of those who live and work in the Black Country, have major social and economic benefits and also contribute towards environmental transformation. The Black Country Consortium is currently producing a Black Country Sports Facility Strategy. This will identify gaps in current sports provision and then look at what new facilities may be required where to both increase levels of participation in sport in the Black Country and contribute towards plans for growth in the Regeneration Corridors and Centres. Early stages of the Strategy have identified the potential for improved local sports facilities, including the enhancement of “clusters” of existing facilities specifically to promote: (1) excellence in sport; (2) tourism; (3) healthy living; and (4) outdoor adventure sports e.g. canoeing. These, together with regionally important “sports beacons”, will build on the strengths of existing facilities. The sports beacons should be accessible to all local communities, attract visitors from across the region and be superbly designed, modern and sustainable developments which put the Black Country “on the map”.

Question I11: Do you consider that promoting clusters and beacons is the right approach? Where would regionally important facilities best be located?

Housing

Direction of Travel: By 2026, housing in the Black Country will provide a well-balanced mix of market and affordable housing that will be located near to jobs, services and leisure facilities, and will meet the needs of our varied and diverse communities.

The Core Strategy must plan to deliver sufficient new homes to meet the vision for the future of the Black Country. The quantity of new homes to be delivered will be set out in the West Midlands RSS. It is expected that current housing targets for the Black Country will be significantly increased through the RSS Phase 2 revision (see Table 1). The target is likely to be no less than Option 2 and not much higher than Option 3.

Table 1: Potential Distribution of New Dwellings 2001-26 (Gross) taken from Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 Revision – Spatial Options Consultation

	No. of dwellings at 2001	Gross no. of new dwellings to be developed in the Black Country between 2001 and 2026.		
		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Dudley	129,753	21,000	23,800	25,400
Sandwell		23,600	34,900	36,400
Walsall		17,400	21,000	22,400
Wolverhampton	101,100	17,400	20,200	22,500
Black Country	438,869	79,400	99,900	106,700

Taking into account past completions and current commitments and allocations, this means that the Core Strategy must identify the main sources of land supply and broad locations for around 59,600 – 66,400 new dwellings (gross).

Achieving the necessary scale of housing growth will require a significant change in patterns of land use. In particular, old and underused industrial areas need to be redeveloped to create new housing environments in Regeneration Corridors (see above), some existing residential areas need to be renewed and more housing needs to be delivered in sustainable locations. Given that the strategic centres will accommodate an estimated 8,000 dwellings in total and housing renewal is likely to generate not more than 20,000 dwellings, the majority of new housing will need to be accommodated on former employment land.

Existing housing in the Black Country is to a large extent a product of the area's industrial heritage. Mining and manufacturing in the heart of the Black Country attracted concentrations of high density, poor quality private housing. Further poor quality Council and private stock was built piecemeal, in the gaps between settlements, to accommodate a population boom in the mid twentieth century. Consequently, today much of the Black Country is characterised by

large areas of uniform low value private housing and former council estates, fringed with higher quality suburban areas which were originally separate villages.

Improving the quality and widening the choice of housing across the Black Country is a key issue. Today the housing market does not adequately meet the needs of many residents. The overall environment in many neighbourhoods is unattractive. As a result, for many years, prosperous households have chosen to move out to areas beyond the Black Country. To reverse this trend it will be necessary to accelerate the rate of house-building and housing stock renewal, and ensure that every neighbourhood provides a wider choice of better quality housing.

The lowest quality homes and residential environments in the Black Country are concentrated in a large “X” shaped area covering half of the Black Country, extending from north of Wolverhampton City Centre down through West Bromwich to Smethwick and from Brownhills through Walsall to Dudley. A further zone of housing market weakness can be identified across north Wolverhampton and Walsall. These areas are characterised by a mixture of monolithic former Council estates and older mixed residential and industrial areas around centres.

Housing market studies have identified the need to promote a major programme of progressive housing renewal to raise the quality of homes and residential environments across the Black Country. The Black Country Study identified four Housing Market Intervention Areas (HMIA's), in addition to the Urban Living Housing Market Renewal Area in Sandwell, where major housing market weaknesses and problems have been identified and housing market intervention should be prioritised (shown on Map 5). These areas are currently experiencing population loss, marginal household growth, rising voids, a rising private rented sector and declining services.

These areas will require sensitive programmes of progressive renewal, combining housing improvements with selective demolition and restructuring of the local environment. It will be essential to work closely with existing communities to ensure that their housing needs are met. Many of the neighbourhoods in need of housing market renewal adjoin Strategic Centres and Regeneration Corridors. This creates exciting opportunities for combining growth and renewal, creating new residential environments that are attractive to a more diverse range of households. The Urban Living Housing Market Renewal Area has already made significant progress and in the other Housing Market Intervention Area's short-term projects are being progressed through the Evolve Housing Market Renewal Area Prospectus.

<p>Question I10: Do you agree with the extent and location of the Housing Market Intervention Areas shown on Map 5? If not, please explain why and where you consider they should be located.</p>
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At the other end of the spectrum, the Black Country provides insufficient variety and choice of homes traditionally sought by higher income households

in high quality residential areas, which are well served by good schools, open space, sport and recreation facilities. In recent surveys, professional, entrepreneurial and managerial households have indicated a requirement for larger, higher quality housing than that currently available in many parts of the Black Country. Although almost half of new properties are occupied by A/B households, this proportion is higher on developments with more houses and less flats, and the Black Country is losing out to the attractions of the north and north west of Birmingham and market towns in the rural areas to the North and West. Therefore, it is essential that new residential development should offer a sufficiently diverse range of housing types for aspirational households.

Question I11: The Black Country needs to attract and retain professional, entrepreneurial and managerial households by providing suitable homes and environments to meet their needs. Where do you consider that such homes should be provided?

Residential intensification in the suburbs, and other residential areas to a lesser extent, currently provides a moderate but reliable supply of new housing. The suburbs are generally characterised by larger houses developed at low densities that have a special character cherished by local communities. However, affordable housing is generally limited in these areas and higher house prices mean these are the areas people in housing need find most difficult to access. Delivering more homes in these areas could help to meet local housing needs and relieve pressure for house building elsewhere.

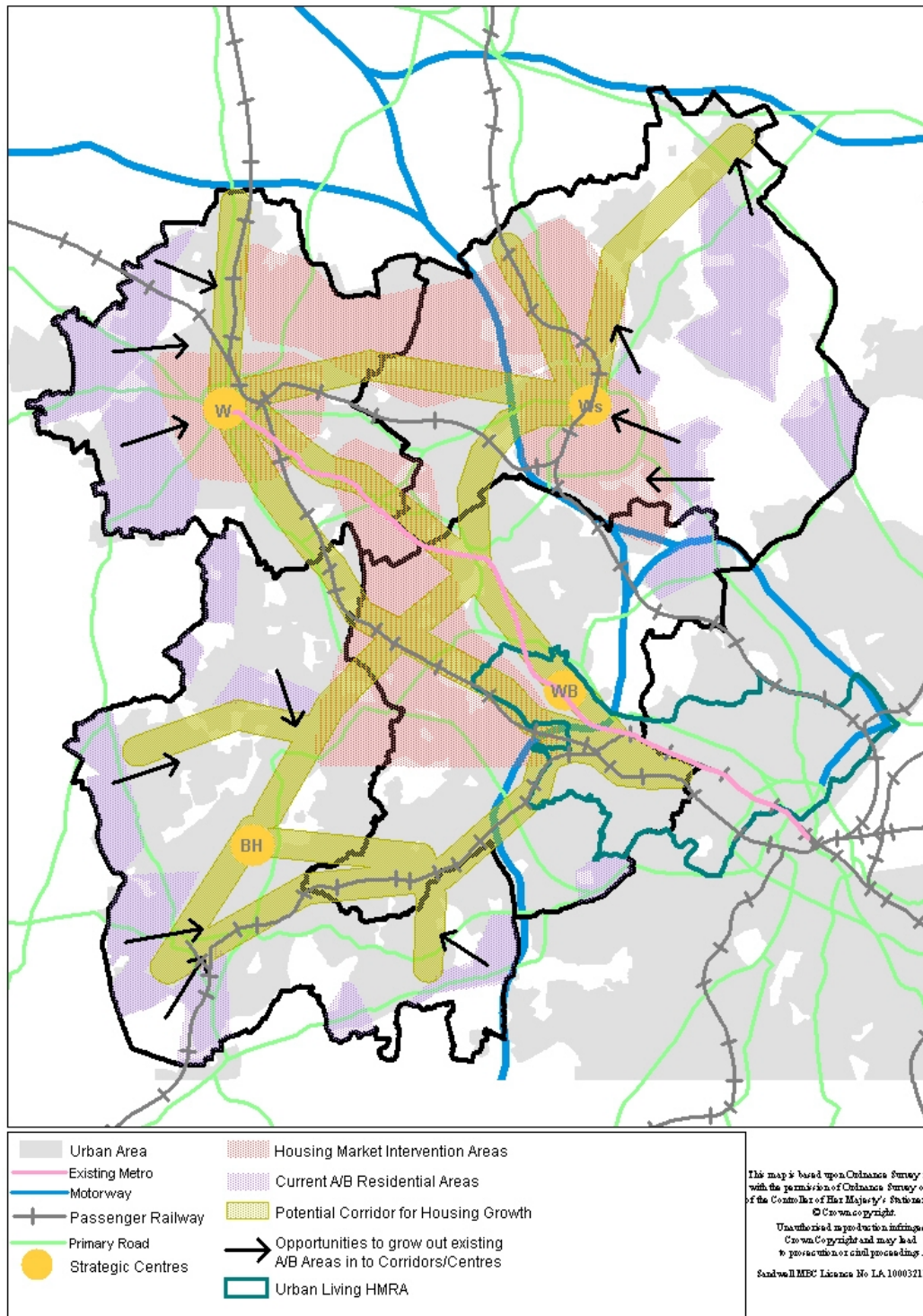
Question I12: Do you consider that currently popular and aspirational housing areas should be protected from further intensification or do you consider that more housing should be developed in these areas? Should the redevelopment of certain types of site, e.g. large houses in large grounds be resisted or are there certain neighbourhoods (e.g. Tettenhall, Wightwick) that should be protected from residential intensification?

Whilst there is an accepted need to attract and retain higher income households, there is also a need to provide sufficient affordable housing. Currently, the Black Country is failing to reach its affordable housing target and housing need is continuing to grow. The Core Strategy will seek provision of an appropriate amount of affordable housing to meet local housing needs, based upon up-to-date housing needs surveys in accordance with national policy. However, there is an opportunity to consider whether higher or lower proportions of affordable housing should be sought on housing sites in particular areas of the Black Country, e.g. strategic centres; regeneration corridors.

Question I13: Do you consider that there is any justification for asking for different levels of affordable housing provision in any particular areas within the Black Country? If yes, please explain where and why.

Map 5: Housing Issues

Need to explain in the title that this is Map x taken from the Black Country Study – as it includes the potential housing corridors – which could confuse people! Either that or take off the corridors and the arrows as we don't refer to either in the text.



Transport and Accessibility

Direction of Travel: By 2026 the Black Country is a place where Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Birmingham are linked by high quality public transport services. Improved transport networks are in place to facilitate the expansion of the four strategic centres and to access the employment land investment corridors. Enough people choose to walk, cycle and use public transport to minimise congestion on a highway network where intelligent traffic management and improvements to key junctions have improved capacity. These improvements deliver an accessible transport system that meets both the needs of citizens and the environment of the Black Country'

The Black Country has established strategic road, rail and air links to the local, national and international markets. . By air, Birmingham International Airport provides the main facility serving the Black Country. The Regional Transport Strategy looks to improve surface links to BIA airport as a priority.

Rail services provide the Black Country with regional and national connectivity for both passengers and freight. Some areas of the network particularly between Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street have little or no capacity for more services during peak times. However, other areas such as around Walsall have more scope to expand. The current strategy to deliver extra passenger rail capacity in the West Midlands is to lengthen trains and platforms rather than to improve service frequencies.

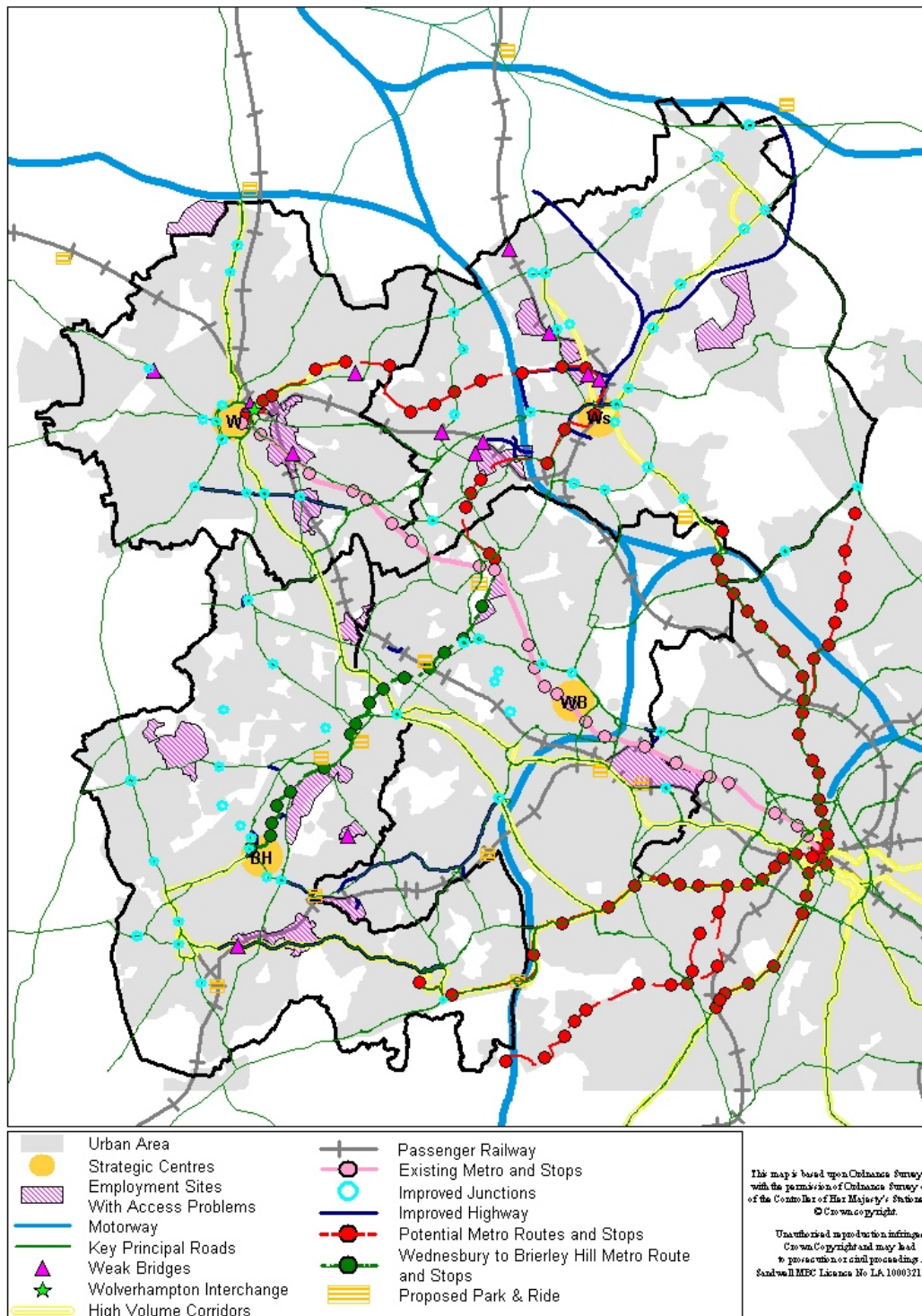
The Black Country benefits from its position at one of the major crossroads of Britain's motorway network, astride the M5 and M6. However, excessive congestion on these and other local networks is now constraining local economic growth, by impacting on local and national freight movements and restricting access to our key industrial areas and retail centres.

Question I12: Poor accessibility to the West of the Conurbation has been identified as a constraint on business. Are there any particular locations where new or better transport networks should be delivered?

The current West Midlands Local Transport Plan sets out the programme of transport improvements across the whole Metropolitan Area, including the Black Country, up to 2012. These proposals, shown on Map 6, aim to stem the rise of congestion whilst delivering good accessibility for all and improved road safety and air quality.

In addition to the Local Transport Plan, major rail improvements are delivered through Network Rail, with works on Motorways and Trunk Roads funded and managed by the Highways Agency. However, where proposals have been published from these two agencies, they have been included on Map 6 to give as complete a picture as possible.

Map 6: Transport Proposals



In order to expand the centres of Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton it will be necessary to improve the transport networks that serve them.

Question I14 How should the transport networks serving Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich, and Wolverhampton be improved to support their expansion. A particular issue on the highways network is the need to encourage walking , and cycling and promote road safety which would be aided by lower traffic speeds and the economic advantage for freight , cars and bus services in having higher speeds and more reliable journey times. Are there particular parts of particular highway corridors where that balance needs to favour cycling and walking or where the needs of other traffic should dominate?

Minerals

Direction of Travel: By 2026, the Black Country will be producing primary, secondary and recycled minerals in appropriate quantities to support the proposed levels of housing growth and development within the area and to support local businesses and industry, without compromising the strategic objective of transforming the Black Country environment.

The Black Country is rich in mineral resources. The main minerals present in the Black Country are: ironstone, fireclay, coal, limestone, sands and gravels, hard rock and brick clay. The brick clay that occurs in parts of Dudley and Walsall is Etruria marl, which is a rare mineral nationally. At the present time only sand and brick clay are actively exploited. Until very recently, hard rock was also quarried, but the quarry producing this has recently closed.

Minerals can only be worked where they naturally occur. This means that quarrying is currently concentrated in particular areas within the Black Country where the mineral resource are, such as Shelfield, Aldridge and Stonnall in Walsall and Kingswinford in Dudley. Most of the Black Country's existing quarries are subject to permissions that require them to be restored by landfill once quarrying ceases. This means that for a considerable time to come, the Black Country is likely to continue to have some capacity for depositing wastes that cannot be re-used, recycled or recovered for other uses.

The Core Strategy will be expected to make provision for the future supply of aggregates and brick clay (and possibly other minerals) up to 2026. The Joint Core Strategy therefore needs to identify locations where mineral extraction is supported and where the Black Country's mineral resources should be safeguarded and protected against sterilisation by other uses.

Although there are existing Mineral Safeguarding Areas (see Map 7) which can contribute towards the Black Country's mineral requirements up to 2026, not all of the resources are allowed to be extracted and it is not clear whether all of the remaining clay reserves are of sufficient quality to be worth

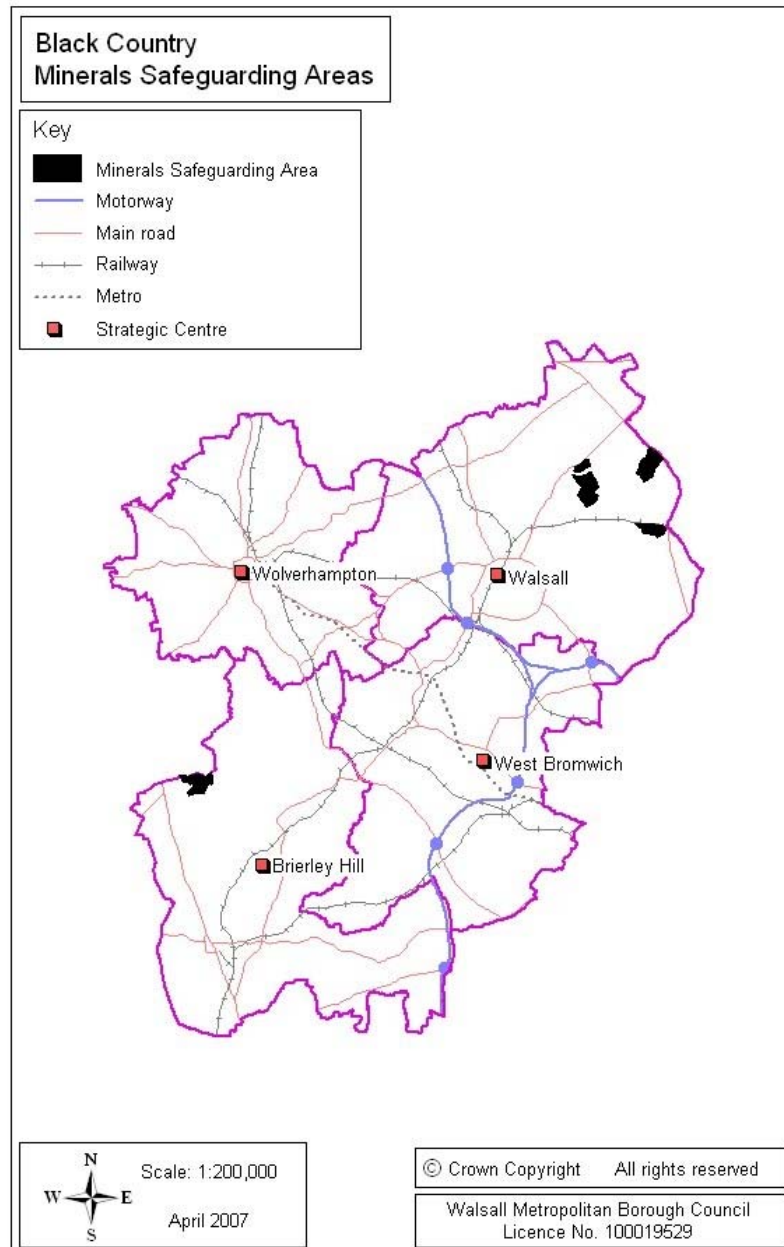
exploiting. There are also concerns about the feasibility of restoring former sand extraction sites (and therefore about the desirability of allowing further extraction), given that the main resources overlie a groundwater protection area. Furthermore, these existing areas are unlikely to reflect the full extent of the resources available, and are unlikely to meet the Black Country's longer-term needs beyond 2026. Quality of the environment is a key issue for the Black Country and it will be vital to minimise the environmental impact of quarrying, and to restrict the number of active quarries to the minimum needed to maintain sufficient local supplies of minerals.

Question I17a: Do you consider that all known mineral resources that are of current or future economic importance in the Black Country should be safeguarded or only those in areas where conflicts are not likely to arise, for example, outside the existing built-up area? Are there any areas within the Black Country where mineral extraction should/ should not be allowed to take place, and if so, which areas and why?

Question I17b: Do you consider that developers should be required to extract shallow deposits of minerals, if economically viable to do so, in advance of major new developments?

There is general support for making maximum use of alternatives to primary minerals, through the conservation of existing resources (e.g. by re-using and extending the life of existing buildings where it is sustainable, feasible and cost-effective), and by maximising local production of secondary and recycled aggregates. Although the full extent of secondary and recycled aggregate production in the Black Country is not known, there are currently five facilities producing these materials in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. A recent study by the Waste and Resources Action Programme suggests that the recycling of construction and demolition waste is already taking place in the West Midlands Metropolitan Area to the maximum extent possible economically, except for certain excavation wastes (e.g. contaminated soils), which are currently not cost-effective to recover. This in turn suggests that there is unlikely to be a huge need or demand for more facilities producing secondary and recycled aggregates in the Black Country in the foreseeable future, other than specialist facilities to treat contaminated excavation wastes.

Map 7: Mineral Safeguarding Areas



Waste

Direction of Travel: By 2026, the Black Country will be a centre of excellence for resource management focused around a major resource recovery park at Hill Top in Sandwell, and will manage as much as possible of the waste that is produced within the area, through a network of local waste management facilities in appropriate locations throughout the Black Country.

The Black Country authorities are responsible for planning for the future management of all of the waste arising in the area.

The facilities currently available in the Black Country for managing municipal waste are limited to the two existing energy from waste plants in Dudley and Wolverhampton, and six civic amenity sites, four of which also include transfer stations. As a consequence, significant amounts of waste currently have to be transported outside the area for recycling, composting and recovery. Sandwell MBC and Walsall MBC still rely heavily on landfill to manage their municipal waste, although the proportion of waste sent to landfill is reducing. Assuming that future levels of housing development in the Black Country will be in line with the highest rate proposed in the Phase 2 review of regional policy, between now and 2026, the Black Country waste disposal authorities will require additional recycling, composting and recovery facilities with a total annual throughput capacity of around 350,000 tonnes.

Although the Black Country already has a large number of commercial and industrial waste management facilities, their capacity also appears to fall short of what we need now and what we are likely to need in the future. Most of the facilities we currently have are involved in vehicle dismantling, metal recycling and hazardous waste treatment. The evidence currently available suggests that between now and 2026, local businesses will need recycling, composting and recovery facilities with a total annual throughput capacity of around 1,000,000 tonnes, and possibly more, given that most of the current capacity is specialised.

The Black Country is already a net importer of hazardous waste for treatment, and there is no evidence of a need for new facilities between now and 2026, other than facilities for the treatment of contaminated soils. Recent research by the Waste and Resources Action Programme also suggests that construction and demolition waste is already being successfully recycled to the extent that is economically viable.

The Black Country has four operational landfill sites: Himley Quarry in Dudley, Edwin Richards in Sandwell and Vigo-Utopia¹ and Bliss Sand & Gravel in Walsall, with a combined capacity of around 8,000,000 tonnes. There is additional capacity of around 2,500,000 tonnes in the pipeline at two sites in Walsall: Aldridge Quarry and Highfields South Quarry. This suggests that the Black Country is unlikely to have enough landfill capacity to last until the end of the plan period. In practice, however, the ability of the Black Country to

¹ This site is due to close by March 2008.

provide new capacity will depend on the availability of suitable voids. It is anticipated that new capacity will come forward when existing quarries cease working or reach the end of a phase of working that allows restoration by landfill to commence. However, sites within groundwater protection zones (such as the two sand quarries in Walsall) are currently restricted to being filled with inert materials only.

Regional policy is expected to identify the tonnages of municipal and commercial and industrial waste requiring management within each area, and the broad location of any regional or sub-regional facilities that are needed. This Core Strategy needs to identify significant gaps in the Black Country's waste management infrastructure, and in broad terms, specify the locations or types of locations where new facilities should be developed, taking into account what the Black Country can realistically provide.

Hill Top in Sandwell has been identified as the main focus for the development of the new municipal waste management infrastructure up to 2026. The site is very large and it is considered that it is capable of accommodating almost all of the facilities that will be needed. It is already a committed site and a Supplementary Planning Document has been prepared setting out detailed proposals for the development of the site, including a proposal for the development of a resource recovery park.

The only waste management facilities that the site at Hill Top cannot accommodate are open windrow composting facilities for the composting of green garden waste, which need to be located in open areas, and landfill sites which, can only be located where there are suitable voids to fill. Hill Top is not considered suitable for open windrow composting because the Environment Agency will not permit such facilities within 250m of residential properties. This means that options for the location of such facilities are very limited and they could only realistically be accommodated somewhere within the Green Belt on the edge of Dudley and/ or Walsall.

The existing network of household recycling sites and waste transfer sites is also inadequate to cope with current and future requirements. It is not realistic to expect all of the Black Country's household waste recycling and waste transfer needs to be met at Hill Top in Sandwell. There is clearly a need to identify suitable sites in appropriate locations throughout the Black Country, but at present, none have been identified.

<p>Question I18: Do you agree that the Core Strategy should identify Hill Top as the principal location for new municipal waste management infrastructure? Are there any other locations that you consider to be as or more appropriate?</p>

<p>Question I19: Do you consider that the Core Strategy should identify broad locations for the provision of new open windrow composting facilities and household recycling sites/waste transfer facilities? Are there any broad locations or types of locations where these facilities should be provided?</p>
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It is clear that a significant number and range of facilities for commercial waste management and treatment facilities will be needed in the Black Country up to 2026, and that the Core Strategy will need to provide flexibility both in terms of providing new facilities and in protecting existing facilities. However, the only specific need identified is for specialist facilities for the treatment of excavation wastes/ contaminated soils. Strategic locations for such facilities include Hill Top in Sandwell and Aldridge in Walsall.

Question I20: Where do you consider that new commercial waste management and treatment facilities, including facilities for managing hazardous waste and construction and demolition waste, should be provided? For example, would employment areas, derelict land or existing waste management sites be appropriate? Are there any locations or types of locations in the Black Country where waste management facilities should not be developed, and if so, what are they?

7. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Monitoring

The four Black Country local authorities recognise that review and monitoring are crucial to the successful delivery of the spatial vision and objectives of the Core Strategy. Therefore, it is the intention of the four local authorities to jointly:

- Make a commitment to monitor and review the implementation of the Core Strategy;
- Put in place a monitoring system that is fit for purpose and that will facilitate reviews of the Core Strategy;
- Set realistic targets for as many policies as possible in order to provide benchmarks for success;
- Define output indicators that can be readily measured to assess policy performance and to check whether policy targets are being achieved;
- Monitor external changes that may affect the policies of the Core Strategy, such as changes to national or regional policy.
- Identify any changes necessary to policies within the Core Strategy
- Produce an Annual Monitoring report that reviews the progress of the Core Strategy

Implementation

Delivering the aims and objectives of the Core Strategy to achieve the Vision for the Black Country will depend upon the co-ordination of joint working between a range of public and private sector delivery agencies.

A considerable amount of regeneration activity is already underway. There has already been significant investment within the Brierley Hill/Merry Hill area, with more committed for the future and housing completions are currently exceeding regional targets with more in the planning pipeline.

In addition, the Black Country Consortium has produced a Black Country Study Delivery Plan Framework and Prospectus which identifies the priorities for development within the Black Country. This states that Investment Masterplans will be prepared for the Regeneration Corridors and Strategic Centres – the first of which, covering Stafford Road / Wolverhampton City Centre, is underway. The EIP Panel Inspectors' Report stated that "it will provide valuable material for the more detailed work to be carried out in preparing and implementing the Black Country Core Strategy." Work has begun on a number of Area Action Plans in advance of the Core Strategy, namely Brierley Hill as a key sub-regional priority, Smethwick and West Bromwich to assist the delivery of the Urban Living HMRA and bring forward major development proposals for the strategic centre and Tipton.

Many of the existing regeneration initiatives and agencies working within the Black Country have agreed to deliver the priorities of the Black Country Study and subsequently the Black Country Core Strategy. The two Regeneration

Zones that fall within the Black Country have produced a combined Zone Implementation Plan (ZIP) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) have established the Wolverhampton/Telford Technology Corridor which supported projects to boost innovation and enterprise. It is anticipated that AWM will continue to support the Black Country's Areas of Change.

In order to facilitate the development of brownfield land, English Partnerships (EP), AWM, the Black Country Consortium (BCC) and the four Black Country Local Authorities have joined forces in a joint initiative to prepare a brownfield Land Action Plan (BLAP). The BLAP aims to identify opportunities and constraints within the employment land corridors.

In 2004, Urban Living – the Sandwell/Birmingham Housing Market Renewal Area (HMRA) was established to address low housing demand through renewal and redevelopment, also supported by English Partnerships. In addition, funding from the Regional Housing Board has also been allocated to work up a prospectus for the whole of the Black Country & Telford Proposed HMRA – called “Evolve”.

Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) in Sandwell and Walsall are now well-established and proposals are underway for a special purpose vehicle in Wolverhampton. In addition, Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership is leading on the integrated expansion of the Brierley Hill/Merry Hill and Waterfront areas. The four Black Country local authorities have taken a lead role in establishing these agencies and will continue to work alongside them to deliver the Black Country Vision for the future.

As part of their contribution to regeneration and delivery, the four Black Country Local Authorities will be producing additional planning documents such as site specific allocations, Area Action Plans, Master Plans and Development Briefs, as well as additional policy documents. These documents will provide certainty for future land uses in particular areas. And will help to secure benefits and infrastructure through planning obligations.

Glossary

Accessibility

The ability of people to move around an area and to reach places and facilities, including older people and disabled people, and those with young children.

Affordable Housing

Housing designed to meet the needs of households whose incomes are not sufficient to allow them to purchase decent and appropriate housing for their needs. Affordable housing comprises both social housing and intermediate housing such as shared ownership.

Air Quality Management Areas

Areas where levels of pollutants exceed the national air quality objectives. Local authorities must prepare action plans showing how it is intended to improve air quality in these areas.

Annual Monitoring Report

A report which assesses the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and assesses the effectiveness of the development plan policies. They are produced by each local authority on an annual basis.

Area Action Plans

These are local plans that focus on areas subject to significant change. They will have development plan status and will be subject to independent testing.

Areas of Change

Areas where major redevelopment opportunities will be concentrated, namely, the four strategic centres and the regeneration corridors

Beacons

Highlighting some of the most distinctive characteristics of the Black Country to residents and visitors, beacons could take a variety of forms, including sculptures on hills, existing heritage/community features, raising awareness by interpretation or flagship events.

Biodiversity Enhancement Corridors

Corridors linking areas of biodiversity interest.

Black Country Consortium

A consortium of organisations, including the 4 Black Country local authorities, contributing to the renaissance of the Black Country through the Black Country Study

Black Country

The Boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall and the City of Wolverhampton

Black Country Landscape Action Plan

A Plan, based on a Green Infrastructure approach, to define and deliver an integrated network of open spaces, waterways and canals; to protect and enhance topographical, biodiversity and heritage features; and to promote walking and cycling

Black Country Urban Park

A concept made up of three key layers: beacons, corridors and communities

Brownfield Land

Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure and its curtilage.

Climate Change

Climate change is the greatest environmental challenge facing the world today. Rising global temperatures caused by pollution will bring changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

Comparison Shopping

The provision of items not obtained on a frequent basis. These include clothing, footwear, household and recreational goods

Community Strategy

Strategies which outline in detail how the future well-being of a local authority and its people will be secured within particular time periods. They represent a shared commitment by key organisations to transform local authority areas.

Convenience Shopping

The provision of everyday essential items, including food, drinks, newspapers/magazines and confectionery

Core Strategy

The document, which will set out the vision, objectives and spatial planning strategy for the area.

Density

The term density is used to describe the existing or proposed number of dwellings per hectare.

Developer Contributions

Developer contributions, or planning obligations, are private agreements negotiated, usually in the context of planning applications, between local planning authorities and persons with an interest in a piece of land, and intended to make acceptable development which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms, the provision of affordable housing, compensate for loss of open space or to mitigate a development's impact.

Development Plan Document

One of a number of statutory documents that are part of the development plan for an area and which are subject to independent testing.

Employment Land Investment Areas

Corridors for the location of high quality employment sites. It is anticipated that these sites will benefit from good access to the motorway network.

Green Belt

Areas of open land designated to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

Green Infrastructure Networks

A network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, towns and villages. It is the open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees, natural heritage and open countryside.

Local Character and Distinctiveness

The visual and physical characteristics associated with an area's landscape and built environment, particularly with regard to historic linkages and existing urban structures.

Local Development Scheme

A document containing information about the production of development plan documents and supplementary planning documents, including the timescales and arrangements for production.

Local Development Framework

The portfolio of development plan and other documents that contain the spatial planning policies for the four boroughs

Logistics

Warehouse and distribution centres.

Primary Care Trust

Health organisations responsible for making sure that patients have access to a wide range of healthcare facilities and follow healthy lifestyles.

Regeneration Zones

Areas of concentrated need but with substantial opportunity for the development of land and property that will regenerate communities and create a diverse and dynamic business base.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The strategic plan for the West Midlands Region which has statutory status and will form the basis for preparing development plan and other documents.

Renewable Energy

Energy derived from sources that are regenerative and cannot be depleted, e.g. wind, water and solar energy. They do not produce as many greenhouse gases and other pollutants.

Residential Intensification

The conversion or redevelopment of existing houses and gardens.

Resource Recovery Park

A modern, clean and sustainable industrial park that is focused on the reprocessing and remanufacturing of waste materials with the efficient use of energy and natural resources.

Sustainable Resource Management

A move away from landfill to more sustainable waste management practices to extract more value from waste materials by recycling, composting and recovering energy.

Statement of Community Involvement

A document which sets out how stakeholders and communities will be involved in the process of producing Local Development Documents and planning applications. The Statement of Community Involvement is subject to independent testing.

Strategic Centre

Important shopping and service centres with a mix of both comparison and convenience shopping. They are the focus for retail and office growth in the Black Country and have established cultural and entertainment facilities to keep them lively in the evenings.

Strategic Health Authority

Strategic organisations set up by the Government in 2002 to manage the NHS on their behalf. They are responsible for developing plans for improving health services in their local area.

Strategic Landscape Corridor

Corridors that will facilitate movement around the Black Country using its environmental assets, including canals, walkways and cycle routes.

Supplementary Planning Documents

Documents which elaborate on policies within development plan documents. These documents do not have development plan status.

Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

A process which assesses the environmental, social and economic effects of the policies and proposals contained in development plan documents and supplementary planning documents

Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

Ten year plans that guide how land should be used within a local authority area. They seek to ensure that there are jobs, homes, shops, parks and other important facilities, while at the same time protecting and improving the environment.