

C VISION, CHOICES AND THE PREFERRED STRATEGY

C1 THE BLACK COUNTRY VISION

- C1.1 The Vision provides the driving force behind the Black Country Study; it sets out where the Black Country should be in 2033. In 2003, the Consortium held a series of workshops attended by over 150 civic and business leaders, community representatives, educationalists and young people. In these workshops, the Consortium identified several alternative futures for the Black Country and a preferred vision. The Consortium agreed that only by aiming high would a renaissance of the Black Country be achieved.

The Black Country Vision

'In 2033, the Black Country is a confident, 'we can do it' place. We are proud of our skills, our proficiency and our work ethic – these are key to our prosperity. The Black Country is now a truly Polycentric City – made up of four thriving and distinct retail and commercial 'City' centres – each one playing a unique role'. Black Country Society will be inclusive and cohesive with equal opportunities for all to work, live and participate.

'In summary, the Black Country Vision for 2033 is of a Black Country comprising many different communities – offering a choice of very desirable housing for all. We will be celebrating our multi-cultural society. Educational attainments will match anywhere in Europe. 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 to the rest of the City Region'.

'Our manufacturing companies will be prospering, at the cutting edge of technological innovation. Our four main centres – Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Brierley Hill/Merry Hill – will each offer a distinctive, wide range of shopping, leisure and cultural facilities, office employment, and housing. Our canal system, linking our communities together, means we are known as Britain's Venice. Our high quality environment – not our industrial legacy – dominates the urban landscape'.

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 Black Country. We will maximise the use of the talents of all our communities and citizens, having dismantled barriers to opportunity and removed discrimination. The Black Country will be genuinely inclusive and integrated in residential, economic, social and educational terms.

C1.2 In setting out this Vision the Black Country Leaders identified **four critical workstreams** to take it forward:

1. To establish a Strategic Plan to achieve the Black Country Vision (The Black Country Study).
2. To establish an integrated Black Country Education and Learning Strategy.
3. To promote the value of the Black Country Canal Network and Its Environs through pursuing World Heritage Status, together with Birmingham.
4. To develop a Youth Inclusion Strategy and Young People's Parliament.

C1.3 Flowing from the Vision, the Consortium set **four headline objectives for 2031** to drive the Black Country Study. If successful in these four areas, the transformation of the Black Country will be well underway. The four headline objectives are to:

1. **Reverse net out-migration** and grow population to 1.2 million (+120,000).
2. **Raise income levels** to 90% of the UK average from 81% today.
3. **Accommodate a more balanced population**, achieving parity with the national profile of social grade in the population by increasing the proportion of A/B households to the national average (22%) from 14.8%; and
4. Create a high quality, **sustainable environment**.

C1.4 In recognition that it is children and young people of today who will inherit the consequences of the Vision-led actions and through their skills and endeavours and decisions will play an ever increasing role in shaping the future Black Country, the Vision-making process specifically engaged with young people. Young people have led some of the Vision-making events, have been engaged in arts-based future scoping and have, through the auspices of the Connexions Service, made contributions to the development of the preferred strategy through the RSS Phase One Revision Choices Consultation process. They will continue to be engaged in this vital activity across the Black Country by working through the network of public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations and individual contributions.