

C2 TRANSLATING VISION INTO THE BLACK COUNTRY STRATEGY FOR GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS

Vision-Led Approach

- C2.1 The Black Country Study adopts a Vision-led approach to planning change in contrast to recent trend-based planning scenarios. The Study set out to articulate what vision aspirations mean in terms of real change and to test that against current trends.
- C2.2 To do this the Black Country Consortium combined the processes of officer-led technical studies and professional advice with 'hands-on' involvement of the political leaders of the four constituent Black Country local authorities working alongside chairs of other key stakeholder bodies and the private sector. This provided a new dimension to planning change, whereby leaders received and responded to evidence and external advice and they in turn provided steers with regard to the scale and direction of change to be tested. The process has involved a series of weekends away to receive evidence, to debate its implications and to agree jointly across four local authorities (and between public and private sector interests) steers for the next stages of work and to build up the Black Country Strategy.

A Public-Private Partnership Process

- C2.3 This approach has fostered a 'Can Do' leadership mentality, informed by real understanding of the scale of the challenge to achieve Urban Renaissance in the Black Country. Critical to this has been the involvement of the private sector who have challenged public sector leaders and provided a sense of urgency regarding the speed, scale and quality of decision-making and change required to enable the Black Country (its citizens and its businesses) to compete in the global market.
- C2.4 The Black Country Study, by the nature of this process, reflects progress to date in setting out the scale and direction of change to achieve growth and competitiveness in the Black Country. It represents therefore a stage in 'work in progress'. Its timing underpins the submission of the draft RSS Phase One Revision to the Secretary of State amongst other functions and provides a key Black Country contribution to the City Region Development Plan. (**See Section A5**).
- C2.5 The process itself has enabled Black Country partners to challenge trends and commence the process of building public/private partnerships to create new markets and sustainable development in the Black Country.

Testing Growth and Competitiveness

- C2.6 The development of the Black Country Strategy has been led out by the testing of the two fundamental premises of achievement of population growth and creation of economic competitiveness in the Black Country, against recent and forecast trends of population decline and reducing relative productivity.
- C2.7 The two key initial studies involved therefore understanding:
1. What RSS house building targets meant for the Black Country in terms of net migration, household and population growth and testing the capacity to accommodate such growth and its implications.
 2. What economic change would be required to the Black Country economy to achieve the Vision-led objective of 100% UK average income (that is the UK average without London and SE).
- C2.8 The **Demographic Study** demonstrated that achieving the proposed minima house building targets to 2021 set out in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy would involve reversing current net out migration of around 4,000 persons pa and replacing it with average net inward migration of some 1,100 persons per annum from 2011 to 2021.
- C2.9 The Black Country leaders were anxious to achieve this and to test whether it would be feasible to grow the Black Country further, either by accelerating growth to 2021 or by extending it beyond 2021 to 2031. Scenarios were therefore tested ranging from holding Black Country growth to natural growth only (nil net migration); to continuing RSS house building rates (further 5% of growth); and onto significant growth scenario of +10/15% from 2021 to 2031. A **Housing Capacity Study** was commissioned to test the implications of these scenarios.
- C2.10 Alongside this, consultants were commissioned to review trends in the Black Country economy (within the framework of regional and national growth forecasts) and to examine how the Black Country economy would need to change to achieve the aspirational income growth scenario, given its current strengths and weaknesses. **The Economic Study** set out the scale and direction of change that the Black Country economy would need to experience and assessed the implications of this with regard to environmental and land use change. An **Employment Land Capacity Study** was commissioned to assess the land capacity for meeting future economic needs.
- C2.11 The findings of these studies (supported by additional work on the role of **Centres**, the functioning of the **Housing Market in the Black Country**, implications of growth on **transport** and accessibility and assessment of **Environmental** issues and assets) provided the framework for the

development of the Black Country Strategy for growth and competitiveness.

The Black Country Strategy

- C2.12 Through the Visioning process the Black Country Leaders concluded that the Black Country Vision was achievable but acknowledged that it would require a major transformation of the Black Country environment, its skills and business base, and the nature of its land use structure and transport network.

The key components of the Black Country Strategy to 2031 which emerged were:

The Black Country Strategy

1 Growing the Black Country:

- Reversing net out migration and increasing (though modest) net in-migration from 2011 onwards leading to population growth of 125,000 people to 1.2m in 2031
- Delivering RSS minima housing targets to 2021 and continuing beyond at a rate of 3,600 new homes per annum to 2031 – 71,000 new households by 2031.
- Recognition that accommodating this growth would require radical land use restructuring involving the transfer of poor quality former employment land into new residential environments.
- Accommodating diversity and better balance of population in socio-economic terms – 50,000 more A/B households choosing to live in the Black Country.
- Recognition that to provide the quality and choice not only will new residential areas need to be created, but also that there would be a need for progressive remodelling of poorer quality and unpopular residential areas of both a public and private nature.

The Black Country Strategy

2 A Competitive Black Country:

- Education and skills and transformation of the Black Country environment have been identified as the two most important drivers of this economic change.
- Creation of a knowledge driven economy with at least 100,000 more people with qualifications and 60,000 more knowledge worker jobs (degree +) by 2031.
- Creation of 160,000 new jobs (94,000 net countering decline of up to 65,000 manufacturing jobs), with a particular focus on new jobs in finance and business services, and in logistics (for which the Black Country exhibits a competitive advantage).
- All business activity in whatever sector, including the manufacturing sector, which would still employ 47,000 people, must be dominated by high value added businesses.
- 63,000 more Black Country people in employment (80% activity rate) by 2031.
- To accommodate this strategic change each of the Black Country's four strategic centres would require expansion (location of retail and office growth elsewhere of the scale required being considered to be unsustainable).
- Additionally new employment land is required of much greater quality and accessibility, including land for the creation of Technology Parks (to foster new business incubation and growth) and Research Institutions.

The Black Country Strategy

3 A Transformed Black Country Environment and Infrastructure:

- Both the new economy and housing will require a new Black Country environment to sustain it – that is to hold onto and to attract wealth generating residents and businesses.
- People and businesses will also require an effective, reliable and sustainable transport system which connects people to jobs and activities in the Black Country Centres (and to Birmingham City Centre) and to new employment land locations.
- Knowledge business requires both access to knowledge workers but also quality reliable access to markets and international opportunities.

C2.13 The Studies also informed the development of Choices regarding future land use patterns and transport to support the Black Country Strategy - the development of a future Black Country Spatial Strategy through the Phase One Revision.

Communities

C2.14 The future Black Country will be one of place, business and above all people. The Consortium has focused on young people in creating the Vision and strategy for the long term (30 year) future of the Black Country. The Vision has been strengthened as a result of the work on diversity and social cohesion. This work is summarised in (**Chapter D6**) of this report, where the importance of being pro-active is recognised in supporting the existence of cohesive communities, of maximising the potential of individuals and communities and of tackling poverty. Housing (**Chapter D3**) in particular highlights these issues. Through this report the need to focus more effort in developing this pro-active approach has been identified as an integral part of delivering the Black Country Strategy.