

Black Country Consortium

Sustainability Appraisal of the Draft RSS Phase One Revision: The Black Country

Sustainability Appraisal Report

Annex E - Appraisal of revised draft RSS
Policies for the Black Country and emerging
Black Country Study technical document.

April 2006

Entec UK Limited

Report for

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Appraisal Methodology	1
1.3	Previous SA Recommendations	1
2.	Findings	2
2.1	Significant social, environmental and economic effects of the preferred option	2
2.2	Revised RSS policies	2
2.2.1	Promoting Good Governance	2
2.2.2	Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society (Objectives 2 - 8)	2
2.2.3	Living within Environmental Limits (Objectives 9 - 16)	2
2.2.4	Achieving a Sustainable Economy (Objectives 17 - 22)	3
2.3	Additional comments on the Black Country Study Technical Report	3
2.3.1	Accelerating Growth of the Knowledge Economy	3
2.3.2	Expanding Four Strategic Town and City Centres	4
2.3.3	Building A High Quality Housing Market	5
2.3.4	Transforming our environment: Black Country as Urban Park	6
2.3.5	Creating a Workforce for the 21 st Century	6
2.3.6	Developing an Integrated Transport Network	6
Appendix 1	Draft RSS Policies and Black Country Study- Technical Report Themes appraised at workshop 20 th March 2006	
Appendix 2	Workshop Attendees 20 th March 2006	

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report sets out the findings of a Sustainability Appraisal of revised draft RSS policies and the emerging Black Country Study – Technical Document undertaken at a workshop on 20th March 2006. The revised policies appraised are set out in Appendix 1 together with an extract showing the key themes of the Black Country Study – Technical Document.

1.2 Appraisal Methodology

The appraisal was undertaken through a workshop attended by individuals from a range of organisations from across the Black Country. Details of the attendees are set out in Appendix 2. The appraisal team examined the revisions to the draft RSS policies in the context of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework and the recommendations of the report – *Sustainability Appraisal of Draft RSS Policies for the Black Country March 2006* (Annex D).

An appraisal of the key themes within the emerging Black Country Study – Technical Document was also carried against the groups of social, economic and environmental objectives in the Sustainability Framework.

1.3 Previous SA Recommendations

The results of the first appraisal exercise are detailed in Annex D: Sustainability Appraisal of draft RSS Policies for the Black Country March 2006. Following this exercise a number of recommendations were made which are summarised below;

1. **Additional reference to the role of local communities is added to Policy UR1A.**
2. **The importance of complementary strategies to support the preferred option policies is made clear in supporting text..**
3. **Appropriate cross referencing should be made to other environmental policies where they are outside the scope of Phase 1 of the RSS review.**
4. **Additional reference to the environmental priorities for Brierley Hill should be added to Policy PA11A.**
5. **Consideration should be given to the references to strategic cycling/walking routes in Policy T12.**

2. Findings

2.1 Significant social, environmental and economic effects of the preferred option

A further appraisal was undertaken following receipt of further revisions to the RSS policies and an emerging draft of the Black Country Study - Technical Report. The key comments from that exercise are set out below in two sections. The first section dealt with the revised RSS policies and the second with the Black Country Study itself.

2.2 Revised RSS policies

For the purposes of summary regarding RSS policies these have been subdivided into four sustainability themes derived from *Securing the future: The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2005*. The fifth principle “Using sound science responsibly” applies universally to the Sustainability Appraisal process.

2.2.1 Promoting Good Governance

Entec note that the specific request to refer to local communities under Policy UR1A had not been taken on board. The appraisal team noted that this was considered to be a matter to be dealt with at the Local Development Framework level through Statements of Community Involvement. Notwithstanding this it remains Entec’s view that Policy UR1A could be strengthened by specific reference to the role of local communities in delivering the strategy.

2.2.2 Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society (Objectives 2 - 8)

Entec’s recommendation regarding complementary strategies had not been taken on board by the time of the second appraisal, however, it was acknowledged that it was intended to make appropriate cross-references in the text to relevant other strategies such as the skills and education strategy.

The introduction into policy PA10 of reference to Dudley Town Centre is likely to have positive benefits for social objectives particularly Objective 7 relating to culture and recreation.

2.2.3 Living within Environmental Limits (Objectives 9 - 16)

Entec’s recommendation regarding reference to other parts of the RSS covering environmental topics had not been taken on board by the time of the second appraisal, however, it was acknowledged that it was intended to make appropriate cross-references in the text to relevant other strategies such as the skills and education strategy.

Similarly the recommendation regarding the environmental priorities relating to Brierley Hill had not been taken on board and Entec remain of the view that this should be included in Policy PA11A

The introduction of Policy PA10 Dudley Town Centre establishing Dudley as a centre for tourism and culture this should be of positive benefit to the environmental objectives. Provided a delivery plan is in place there should be positive contributions towards in particular Objective 12: Historic Environment.

The [Area Development Framework for Dudley Town Centre](#) will provide the basis for this role to be taken forward.

2.2.4 Achieving a Sustainable Economy (Objectives 17 - 22)

The introduction of Policy PA10 Dudley Town Centre establishing Dudley as a centre for tourism and culture this should be of positive benefit to the economy of the Black Country as a whole. Provided a delivery plan is in place there should be positive contributions towards objectives aimed at improving the economy and creating job opportunities.

The [Area Development Framework for Dudley Town Centre](#) will provide the basis for this role to be taken forward.

2.3 Additional comments on the Black Country Study Technical Report

An appraisal of the emerging Black Country Study - Technical Report was carried out at the workshop on the 20th March 2006. Each of the key themes of the preferred strategy was examined in turn against the broad categories of economic, social and environmental objectives and the overall conclusions drawn are set out below.

It should be noted that the Black Country Study - Technical Report became available shortly before the workshop event and this meant it was more difficult to consider the detail within it. The appraisal represents a broad brush consideration of the principles of the preferred strategy.

2.3.1 Accelerating Growth of the Knowledge Economy

Economic objectives

The appraisal team consider the particular issue of logistics. Although concern has been expressed about the ability of this sector to deliver quality employment, advice received from the Black Country Consortium is that modern logistics business can delivered skilled employment opportunities. The availability of that labour force will be a key consideration in relation to the location of businesses, which may in some cases be in more peripheral locations. Careful consideration needs to be given to adapting the existing labour force to fulfil these new roles.

The aim of the strategy is to achieve net self sufficiency in employment within the Black Country and this is considered to make a positive contribution to sustainability.

Social objectives

There are clear potential benefits from the preferred strategy which are detailed within the Black Country Study - Technical Report. The potential for employment within the culture and recreation was also considered by the appraisal team to be under-represented in the strategy and this could provide an area of potential future investment.

Environmental objectives.

The potential importance of the environmental quality in regenerating the economy was emphasised again and it is recognised that this is a key element of the strategy.

Environmental technology is seen as having a potential role in the Black Country and the idea of focus this in a particular location e.g., Hill Top, West Bromwich is welcomed.

A key component of successful delivery of regenerated employment land is management and maintenance. This not only includes new developed sites but also the management of vacant sites and of town centres generally is also critical in raising the overall environmental quality of the Black Country and encouraging economic activity.

A regenerated economy also allows opportunities to make better use of existing buildings and protect distinctive heritage buildings by bringing them back into productive use.

2.3.2 Expanding Four Strategic Town and City Centres

Centres provide a catalyst for wider regeneration and therefore have a key role to play in delivering sustainability objectives. Particular consideration was given to the respective roles of the four centres.

Economic objectives

It is noted that proportionally more retail growth is going to Brierley Hill. This centre is however seen as a catalyst for growth within the Black Country and best able to compete and reduce retail leakage to Birmingham. The appraisal team also considered that there was considerable potential in the centres for employment based on culture and recreation.

Social Objectives

Brierley Hill as a newly designated strategic centre could be seen as having the least sense of community identity and perhaps the most difficult to engage community involvement. Concern was raised at the appraisal about the management of the centre as private space which provides no guarantee of access as public space. It was however, felt on balance that existing structures within Brierley Hill such as the Brierley Hill Strategic Partnership (<http://www.brierleyhill.org/>) and the Brierley Hill Community Forum (http://www.dosti.org.uk/member_brierleyhillcommunity.htm) offer the potential to engage the community in the future development if the centre.



“The BHRP is a public, private and community partnership. The main partners are Dudley Council, Brierley Hill Community Forum and Westfield. So far the Partnership has helped to secure in excess of £28 million of public funding to support the vision. “

Community involvement is however essential to the delivery of the strategy for the Black Country.

Environmental Objectives

The overall effect of the four strategic and town centres on the environmental objectives should be positive. The report refers to the heritage functions of Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley which supports the objectives relating to the historic environment. The emphasis on the centres supports more efficient delivery of services which should help to support objectives relating to the efficient use of natural resources and energy. It also allows for the development of integrated public transport systems which will support the transport objective. There is some concern that there is relatively little information provided on the environmental priorities for the centres. This is considered to be particularly important in respect of Brierley Hill as it is being designated as new strategic centre and is envisaged to accommodate substantial growth.

2.3.3 Building A High Quality Housing Market

Economic Objectives

The large growth in municipal housing in the Black Country has created an imbalance in terms of meeting future market needs. Retaining and attracting A/B households to the Black Country is a key principle of the vision and essential if economic restructuring and regeneration is to be achieved. This is dependent on the delivery of high quality housing. It is also dependent on planning policies adopted in surrounding Counties. These need to be restrictive enough, so that A/B households are encouraged to locate within the Black Country and not in the surrounding Counties.

Social Objectives

In delivering the level of housing growth envisaged there are key considerations around the scale and range of choice of future housing provision. The strategy refers to the need to avoid social polarisation and refers in particular to meeting the needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic population. Positive measures include *“assistance with culturally sensitive house purchase/equity sharing schemes, house conversions to provide more 5/6 bedroom accommodation and ensuring that local service provision is responsive to issues of diversity”* (Black Country Study Technical Report Emerging Draft March 2006).

The Study report could also make reference to the housing requirements of other groups, such as the elderly who also have specific needs.

It was considered important that there should be a complementary health strategy to the Draft RSS Phase One Revision: The Black Country. This is essential if the key health benefits of the preferred option are to be delivered and monitored. Engagement with the health services across the Black Country should be strengthened.

Environmental Objectives

The appraisal team considered the issue of the quality of residential environments and noted the recognition in the emerging Black Country Study - Technical Report to *“prepare a Black Country Landscape Plan to lead the process of environmental change necessary to the creation of new housing environments”*. Whilst the study refers to the creation of *“new Parkland areas”* in former industrial areas consideration needs to be given to the existing green spaces within the Black Country. Evidence from the emerging greenspace strategy in Sandwell indicates that whilst the quantity of open space is restricted in some areas, it is the quality of open spaces which is the key consideration.

2.3.4 Transforming our environment: Black Country as Urban Park

Economic Objectives

The Study recognises that a high quality environment is a priority for attracting investment and knowledge workers and this key principle is recognised under this part of the strategy.

Social Objectives

The potential of environmental transformation to impact positively on social objectives is perhaps not fully explored under this aspect of the strategy. The benefits for example of better parks and open space, a regenerated canal network and improved walking and cycling routes on encouraging healthy lifestyles could be considerable. There is scope for the Study to highlight the links between environmental improvements and wider healthy living initiatives.

Environmental Objectives

The issue of sustainable design and construction is mentioned in this section of the Study Report. The appraisal team felt however that this is a fundamental principle which underpins the whole of the strategy and should be pulled out as an overarching principle rather than one purely relating to this part of the strategy.

Consideration was given to the value which could be added by the achievement of World Heritage Status for the canal network, a priority for action. This was seen as adding profile and status to the Black Country and as a catalyst of future regeneration.

2.3.5 Creating a Workforce for the 21st Century

The Black Country Education and Skills Strategy will be an essential complementary strategy in helping to achieve urban renaissance.

Addressing the quality of education is seen as key to delivering the vision for the Black Country. The preferred option to strengthen further education capacity. The role of City Academies is also seen as important. Opportunities could be explored for franchising arrangements so that further education colleges could offer local degree courses to improve the range of courses available at the local level.

Consideration should also be given to the shortage of basic skills across the Black Country and ensuring that this was addressed.

Further clarification is required as to how developer contributions towards education are calculated and secured.

2.3.6 Developing an Integrated Transport Network

Economic Objectives

A key strand of the strategy is unlocking access to quality employment land. The strategy refers to highway access improvements to achieve this, however it is considered that the emphasis of the strategy should be securing access to employment sites by transport improvements as a whole rather than just by road improvements.

Social Objectives

The strategy outlines the concept of the “Black Country Express” an integrated network of Metro, Rail, Bus and Coach services. This is considered to have considerable benefits in encouraging access to all parts of the Black Country and hence reducing social exclusion. As such it should contribute positively to social objectives.

There is however an issue of the frequency of services in particular in being able to allow workers to access employment sites, 24 Hours a day where this is necessary.

Environmental Objectives

It is considered that in order to help achieve environmental objectives further reference should be given in this part of the strategy to demand management measures and also the need for travel plans to be agreed in association with new employment or other commercial development.

If in road pricing is introduced then there is potential for the funds from this to be diverted into public transport infrastructure improvements.

Appendix 1

Draft RSS Policies and Black Country Study

- Technical Report Themes appraised at workshop 20th March 2006

UR1A: Implementing Urban Renaissance – Black Country Regeneration Priorities

- i) In the Black Country the focus for regeneration activity, development and investment will be the four strategic centres and growth corridors located primarily in the areas illustrated on Map ?. Development and environmental enhancement should also be planned for and encouraged in appropriate locations across the Black Country to support the network of local centres and communities which exists, taking advantage of the availability of suitable sites and accessibility by public transport.
- ii) Local Authorities should ensure, through the Black Country Joint Core Strategy and Local Development Documents (LDDs), that growth of the strategic centres is planned for and carefully managed and that growth corridors are defined and appropriate sites in the corridors are identified for housing and employment, environmental improvement, and transport and other infrastructure provision.
- iii) The range of housing choice across the Black Country must be protected and extended. Local authorities should give careful consideration through their LDFs to issues of density, urban design and the fabric and character of existing residential areas.
- iv) Local authorities should identify in LDDs, and work towards the delivery of, sub-regional employment sites (10 – 20 has) and quality employment land, in particular for technology-led business, focussing on the following four priority Employment Land Investment Corridors: (PA6);
 1. Wolverhampton Centre – Stafford Road Corridor (incorporating Wolverhampton Science Park and Wobaston Road i54/MIS);
 2. Walsall Centre – Darlaston – Wednesbury Corridor (incorporating Darlaston SDA, Hill Top , the Black Country Route and Wednesfield Way, Wolverhampton);
 3. Pensnett – Brierley Hill – Dudley Town Centre Corridor;
 4. Oldbury – West Bromwich Corridor (incorporating M5 Jct 1 & 2).
 - 5.
- v) Local authorities will plan for and promote growth in main town centre uses in the four strategic centres. The overall target for growth in comparison retail floorspace in the Black Country (including commitments) in the period 2004 to 2021 is up to 236,000 sqm. gross. Growth of 185,000 sqm. gross is to be planned for in the four strategic centres in the period 2004 to 2021. The overall target for growth in office floorspace in the Black Country (including commitments) in the period 2004 to 2021 is up to 845,000 sqm. gross. Growth of up to 745,000 sqm. gross is to be planned for in the four strategic centres in the period 2004 to 2021.

- vi) Local Authorities will plan and promote enhancement of the quality of the environment giving physical expression to the concept of the ‘Black Country as Urban Park’ through identification of Beacons, Corridors and Communities. This will include preparation and implementation of a joint Black Country Landscape Plan to define a network of greenspaces, waterways, topographical, biodiversity and heritage features and promote walking and cycling interconnections between centres, communities and the environs.

POLICY CF3. Levels and distribution of housing development.

TABLE 1: Housing

<i>Planning Area</i>	<i>Annual Average Rate of Housing Provision</i>			
	<i>2007-2011</i>		<i>2011-2021</i>	
	<i>Gross</i>	<i>Nett</i>	<i>Gross</i>	<i>Nett</i>
Dudley	700	490		
Sandwell	900	440		
Walsall	500	450		
Wolverhampton	500	390		
Black Country*			3600	2810

*Combined figure conditional upon Black Country Joint Core Strategy

Policy PA10: Tourism and Culture

Add after “Black Country Heritage Attractions”

“ in particular Dudley Town Centre and it surroundings.”

Policy PA11: The Network of Town and City Centres.

A. Delete “Dudley”

Insert “Brierley Hill/Merry Hill”

Policy PA11A: Brierley Hill/Merry Hill and Dudley

The designation of Brierley Hill/Merry Hill as a strategic town centre will enable the development of a balanced network of 4 strategic town and city centres in the Black Country. Carefully managed growth in main town centre uses at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill will enable it to play an important role in the regeneration of the sub-region.

Exceptionally, as a newly designated strategic town centre future retail growth at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill will be carefully phased and conditioned in the following manner:

i) Growth in retail floorspace for comparison goods will be limited to XX,XXX sq metres gross in the period 2004 to 2016. Any operation of new retail development at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill in the period to 2016 is also conditional upon:

- Completion of improvements to public transport, including the extension of the Metro to Brierley Hill/Merry Hill or a range of other public transport initiatives of equivalent effectiveness, to improve the accessibility of the centre by non-car modes relative to the car;
- Introduction of a car parking management regime at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill, including the use of parking charges, compatible with those in the Region's network of major centres;
- Adoption of an Area Action Plan reflecting the Masterplan for Brierley Hill/Merry Hill which will define the centre and provide a clear framework for mixed use development, including residential and employment uses.

ii) further comparison retail development at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill in the period beyond 2016 will be considered in the context of the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country and the need to create a balanced network of strategic town and city centres. This will include an assessment of the overall need in the Black Country and the region for additional floorspace, especially for comparison retail, leisure and office development and, having regard to the capacity and accessibility of the strategic centres, identification of where this need would best be met. In particular, further retail growth in the period beyond 2016 will be conditional upon:

- Evidence through monitoring that the strategy for balanced growth of the 4 strategic town and city centres is being achieved;
- Review of the extent to which development at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill has contributed to the regeneration of the Black Country;
- Further improvements in public transport accessibility to Brierley Hill/Merry Hill;
- Evidence through monitoring that the car parking management regime at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill remains compatible with other major centres in the region;
- Review of the extent to which the adopted masterplan for Merry Hill has been implemented.

Dudley will continue to perform an important role as a non-strategic town centre in the Black Country. The level of new retail development in Dudley will be determined through the LDF in accordance with its revised status.

Revised Policy T12: Priorities for Investment

Scheme	Key Policy Links	Status as of May 2006	Delivery Mechanism	Key Delivery Role	Support delivery	Implementation period
National and Regional Priorities						
Metro extension Wednesbury to Brierley Hill	UR1A, UR1B, T5, UR2, PA11A	C Business case to be presented to Government	TiF/LTP	Centro	LA, Operators	2010-2015
Further Metro extensions in the Black Country and Birmingham	UR1A, UR1B, T5, UR2	TWA orders to be obtained	TiF/LTP	Centro	LA, Operators	2010
M5 Junc 1-2 improvements	UR1A, UR1 B	PI	HA	LA/HA		2010-2021
M6 Junc 9-10 improvements	UR1A UR1 B	PI	HA	LA/HA		2010-2021
Active Traffic Management for M5/M6/M42 motorway box	UR1A UR1 B	PI	HA	HA		1210-2021
Sub-regional-within MUAs						

Improved transport networks to facilitate access to centres of Walsall, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton, and Brierley Hill	UR1 A, UR1 B.	UI	LTP	LA	LA	2011-2031
Improved transport networks to facilitate improved access to Employment Land Investment Corridors; Walsall/Darlaston/Nea-chells/Wednesbury; Pensnett/Brierley Hill/ Dudley; Oldbury/ West Bromwich; Wolverhampton/ Stafford Road.	UR1 A, UR1 B.	UI	LTP	LA	LA	2011-2031

Status

C (committed) schemes approved for the SoS and included in the relevant programme

FA (further appraisal work needed) schemes identified in a MMS or the strategic plan but requiring further appraisal work

UI (under investigation) appraisal work is underway

PI (proposed for investigation) schemes or studies required to deliver the spatial strategy, but not yet clearly defined.

Organisations

HA Highways Agency LA Local Transport Authorities

Extract from Black Country Study – Technical Report

The Preferred Strategy

- 1.1 We have made rapid progress over the last three years formulating a strategy which will **deliver the Black Country Vision**. What has become evident is the scale and importance of the challenge; we will only achieve our Vision by fundamentally changing the way we live, work, learn and move within the Black Country. If we do nothing, trend-based forecasts predict a widening of the gap with more prosperous UK and European counterparts.
- 1.2 The evidence for our conclusions is based on a series of technical reports we commissioned on the **economy, town centres, housing, education, the environment and transport**. Each of these studies analysed the Black Country's position today and identified the key interventions required to meet our objectives for 2033. They have reinforced our belief that many of the challenges facing the Black Country are **interlinked** and highly complex, meaning that intervention in one area can be far-reaching, but also dependent on success in another.
- 1.3 For example, to stem the loss of retail expenditure, we know we must improve the public realm in our town centres to make them attractive places to shop. Improving the public realm will also encourage more knowledge-based industries to locate in our centres and persuade more people to live there, thus fuelling further expenditure. At the same time, all these outcomes are dependent on vastly superior access to our town centres, high quality homes where people can live, and an economy which is creating well-paid office jobs. These interdependencies have convinced us that the **holistic approach** we have adopted is the optimal way forward.

Accelerating Growth of the Knowledge Economy

- 1.4 Our Strategy starts with the **economy** in recognition of its vital role underpinning many of our objectives; without a prospering modern economy generating high value-added employment, we cannot expect to raise incomes or grow the population. The key challenge is for the Black Country to move from a comparatively low skilled, low income economy where our comparative advantage in manufacturing is fading, to a high skilled, well-paid knowledge economy where the service sector is expanding.
- 1.5 The Economic Study (GHK/OEF) identified opportunities for growth in financial and business services, high value logistics, and high tech manufacturing in the Black Country. As many as 160,000 new jobs (gross) will be required in these sectors over the next 30 years. This scale of growth, and the level of restructuring it requires, has profound implications. To begin with, we require a major overhaul of our land use and transport structure to create **modern, fit for purpose, employment sites**; we estimate a requirement for 500ha of new quality employment land and renewal of 1,100ha of existing employment land. In addition, we need a much more **highly skilled, entrepreneurial workforce**; a **high quality environment** to attract world class, innovative companies and their employees; and a better **choice of housing** including more homes suitable for higher income groups.
- 1.6 If we meet these challenges, we can expect to see more knowledge-based companies choosing to relocate or to start life in the Black Country. Where will the Black Country's new companies be located in 2033? First, we have identified five **key corridors** with concentrations of high quality employment sites most suited to high tech manufacturing and business/technology

parks. The location of these ‘corridors’ is shown in Section D1, Map E1; this also highlights areas with fast and efficient access to the motorway network suitable for logistics.

- 1.7 Second, and most crucially, we want a significant proportion of new companies to be based in our **town and city centres**. This is part our wider strategy to bring renewed vibrancy and urban renaissance to the Black Country. Only by creating vibrant, well-connected town centres where people choose to work, live and visit, will we counter the trends of population migration and decentralisation.

Expanding Four Strategic Town and City Centres

- 1.8 By 2033, our town and city centres will be fuelling the growth of the Black Country; providing high quality office space for knowledge-based companies, and vastly improved retail, leisure and tourism offers. New homes supporting ‘city living’ and a higher quality public realm will bring more people into our centres, adding to the level of economic activity.

- 1.9 The Centres Study indicates that the four centres with the greatest capacity for growth are: **Wolverhampton, Brierley Hill/Merry Hill, West Bromwich and Walsall**. While still an important centre for the Black Country, Dudley Town Centre has seen its strategic role diminish and its capacity for expansion without damaging the local heritage and environment is limited. We therefore propose that Dudley be repositioned to focus on residential and tourism growth. In contrast Brierley Hill/Merry Hill has become one of the most important retail and office locations in the Black Country. Further expansion has the potential to act as a catalyst for growth, and it should therefore be recognised as a strategic centre.

- 1.10 All of our strategic centres will need to expand beyond their current boundaries if they are to fulfil our growth ambitions. In terms of the scale of development, we estimate the requirement for **420,000 sq.m of additional retail floorspace** above existing commitments (a total of 600,000 sq.m). Half of this will be distributed across the four strategic centres and the rest between smaller centres. With respect to **office space, 900,000 sq.m of net additional space** is needed to support our aspiration for 101,000 more jobs in the service sector.

- 1.11 Reflecting the key role our strategic centres play in the Strategy, we will make them priority areas for immediate investment. Three of the four strategic centres already have **masterplans** (a new one is required in Wolverhampton); we need to implement key schemes within these and establish how further growth can be accommodated. In doing so, our centres – the places that local people identify with the most – will be areas where the transformation of the Black Country is most visible.

Building A High Quality Housing Market

- 1.12 The Black Country housing market does not sufficiently meet the needs of local people; poor quality private and social housing, low-grade residential environments and a lack of choice, are all contributing to out-migration. Our Strategy aims to overturn this trend, starting from the basic premise that we must **accelerate the rate of house building** and demolitions, and ensuring that our new homes and residential environments provide greater **quality and choice**.

- 1.13 Since 1990, house building has fallen behind household formation for the first time in the post-war period. By 2031, we will have overturned this trend, creating a total of 71,000 additional households by 2031 and raising population by 125,000. Achieving this scale of housing growth will require a significant change in the pattern of land use; old industrial areas will need to be

redeveloped to create new housing environments. The Housing Capacity Study estimates that up to 2000ha of currently designated employment land will need to be converted to residential use.

- 1.14 All new and existing residential areas in the Black Country need to be within sustainable communities; by this we mean ensuring they provide access to employment, local services, retail, leisure and a high quality environment. In line with this approach, we have identified our **strategic centres** and nodes along **public transport corridors** for higher density housing development (see Section D3). These new residential areas will offer a more diverse range of housing types and densities. In particular, we need more quality mid-market and executive homes for A/B households, currently leaving the Black Country to find such homes elsewhere.
- 1.15 Finally, we must embark on a major **programme of renewal** to raise the quality of homes and residential environments across the Black Country. Many of the worst affected housing areas are in the most deprived core of the Black Country, most are isolated council estates where homes often do not meet the decent homes standard.

Creating a Workforce for the 21st Century

- 1.16 Our economic strategy for the Black Country aims to create a more diverse, knowledge-intensive economy with higher average incomes. This can only be delivered with a highly skilled workforce. The Black Country's Education and Skills Plan aims to raise the skill levels of the adult workforce and of our children and young people. In addition, by creating a more upmarket housing stock, improving the environment, and by creating better-paid jobs, the Study aims to attract more highly skilled people to the sub-region and to retain those who currently leave.
- 1.17 We must embed the Black Country Education and Skills Plan into all Community and Education Plans. In terms of immediate action, we will prioritise investment in our colleges to add to the knowledge-base of our strategic centres. We must also strengthen Wolverhampton University, developing its research base and enabling it to attract more students from outside the sub-region.

Transforming Our Environment: Black Country As Urban Park

- 1.18 Creating a high quality sustainable environment is one of our three key objectives. The need for radical change has been identified in both the Economic and Housing studies. High quality urban, residential and working environments will be critical for attracting knowledge-based industries and their workers.
- 1.19 'Black Country as Urban Park' is our strategy to transform the environment. It identifies the opportunities to make the Black Country a national exemplar for urban living and sustainable urban renaissance. In doing so, the Black Country is of sufficient size to make a major contribution to national targets on the environment, such as carbon emissions. The sub-region has many environmental assets including its canals, geology, wildlife and open spaces, but too many are hidden or inaccessible. We need to make more of these assets; in particular, Black Country As Urban Park aims to highlight the area's distinctive topography, communities and connections.
- 1.20 The Urban Park Design Study has identified three principle design layers which we will use to guide future development. First, we will use **beacons** to highlight most distinctive characteristics of the Black Country; these might include physical objects such as sculptures and

buildings or flagship events and festivals. Second, we will create **corridors** for sustainable movement around the Black Country using our environmental assets, including canals, walkways and cycle routes. Third, we will enhance the environment within our **communities** – emphasising past and future community areas by their distinctive character.

Developing An Integrated Transport Network

- 1.21 We need an efficient transport system to ensure the free flow of people, goods and services across the Black Country. Our Transport Strategy outlines our vision for a new **integrated public transport system** to underpin our polycentric network of centres. **‘Black Country Express’** will revolutionise the way people travel between our centres and outside the Black Country, by providing integrated bus, metro and rail services. One of the flagship projects of Black Country Express will be an extended metro service, linking the Black Country’s communities together and to Birmingham.
- 1.22 Our Transport Strategy identifies the priority **highway/junction investments** to support land use transformation. The core objective will be to unlock economic growth; either by enhancing the existing network, creating new roads and junctions to release new employment land, or reinforcing the economic vitality of our centres.
- 1.23 We have also highlighted the key investments needed to improve our **external connectivity** to UK, European and Global markets. For example, if we are to ensure fast and reliable access to Birmingham International airport, City Region and the rest of the UK, we need to prioritise four tracking the mainline railway from Wolverhampton to Birmingham and Coventry.

Appendix 2: Workshop Attendees 20th March 2006

Name	Organisation
Alan Cave	Black Country Consortium
Chris Parry	Black Country Consortium
Amanda Smith	English Heritage
Pam Levy	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Rachael Pipkin	Government Office for the West Midlands
Professor John Glasson	Oxford Brookes University
Tim Perkins	Entec
Jon Lord	Walsall Council
Mike Thompson	Advantage West Midlands
Brian Roberts	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Adiba Farrah	Future Foundations regeneration Zone (North Black Country)
Neil Hansen	Highways Agency
Jessica Harris	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

