

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

F1 TOWARDS A DELIVERY STRATEGY

Components of 'delivery'

F1.1 The Black Country vision is wide ranging in its coverage, with spatial and non-spatial components. As such, the Consortium acknowledges that the delivery approach for the vision will involve a wider range of potential activities beyond solely the spatial dimension:

- Strategy promotion and advocacy;
- Policy initiatives and economic/spatial programme alignment;
- Co-ordination of physical and economic activity across a wide stakeholder group;
- Direct delivery activity, including physical projects and non-physical programmes, such as education and skills.

F1.2 The approach to delivering the strategy and priorities for action set out in this report will be set out in the Black Country Strategy Delivery Plan. In developing a delivery approach critical issues are highlighted which require consideration in establishing a delivery framework for the Black Country Strategy. The Consortium in developing this framework seeks to do so against a background of:

- The context for strategy delivery, with reference to the 'polycentric' spatial outcome reflected in the strategy (economic competitiveness in the Black Country will be Centres led);
- The priorities for change, reflecting the emphasis on urban renaissance as a key regeneration objective;
- The potential sequencing of intervention, recognising the need to accelerate the rate and quality of private sector investment activity, and;
- Establishing principles regarding the governance arrangements for strategy delivery.

CONTEXT – TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

F1.3 Radical transformation is at the heart of the Black Country strategy. Whilst much regeneration activity is currently underway, successful delivery moving forward will be measured by achieving an acceleration in the scale and rate of change. Achievement of this step change needs to be based on a more co-ordinated approach of the many regeneration delivery vehicles in operation across the Black Country.

The Consortium has concluded that this requires a **delivery strategy focused on:**

- A dramatic reversal of negative external image;
- Delivering physical change of sufficient scale and impact to redefine the sub-region;
- Maximising connectivity between economic assets;
- Ensuring sustainable outcomes;

Working towards a 'polycentric' outcome

F1.4 The Black Country's challenge and approach of establishing a 'polycentric' outcome is built upon the following key critical success factors:

- A clear and jointly agreed definition of the roles and functions of different parts of the sub-region, in particular the main urban centres;
- The importance of accentuating the differences and complementarities between centres;
- Districts/boroughs working together to address external competitive threats and exploit opportunities rather than competing amongst themselves;
- New forms of governance that enable decision making to take full account of reciprocal impacts across the sub-region.

F1.5 Much progress has been made in this regard but it is recognised that further refinement is required as a pre-cursor to a successful agreed delivery framework.

REDUCING INVESTMENT RISKS

F1.6 Ultimately the aim of the strategy is to increase the scale, rate and quality of private investment in the Black Country. This requires a delivery framework that:

- Gives clarity to investors on the spatial/policy emphasis for different development types;
- Offers a degree of certainty regarding key infrastructure investments;
- Reduces investment risk by minimising competitive threats through the provision of policy certainty and a credible public sector interface;

- Demonstrates effective co-ordination between public sector agencies.

Developers and investors value

- F1.7 All evidence points to primacy of the key urban 'centres' as drivers of economic competitiveness, and thus they provide a logical starting-point for the required 'regeneration delivery sequence'. If the Black Country is to deliver the transformational change expressed in the Vision and to become a truly polycentric sub-region, renaissance of the four main centres must be a priority.
- F1.8 While this implies investment delivery in all centres, the nature and timing of this is reflected in their respective investment plans which underpin priorities and 'management' of growth. Sequencing priorities between centres will be reflected in a Centres Delivery Framework set out in the Delivery Plan.

Narrowing the focus for delivery

- F1.9 The demands of the Black Country Strategy require regeneration activity across a broad front, addressing strategic centres, employment land, housing, environment, transport and growth capacity. But successful strategy delivery will also require focus on a narrower range of key areas of intervention with best prospects for early impacts and which can be delivered to the highest quality thresholds. Doing a few things really well is the starting point to Black Country transformational change and image reversal.
- F1.10 Given the recognised importance of successful and vibrant centres to sub-regional regeneration, priority actions will be focussed on the main centres of Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich, Brierley Hill and Dudley. The rationale is clear:
- Successful centres present a positive external image for a sub-region;
 - Successful centres support the growth of higher value economic activities, central to the Black Country economic strategy;
 - As locations for 'producer services' (legal, accountancy, project management etc) successful centres can support logistics and manufacturing sector growth, again key to the economic strategy;
 - As cultural and leisure foci, successful centres support population retention and thus labour market enhancement;
 - Successful centres drive housing markets and thus support wider housing market renewal prospects across the Black Country;

- Successful centres provide the 'hubs' to support the case for connectivity improvements;
- Urban centres are key knowledge/learning locations.

SEQUENCING OF REGENERATION INTERVENTIONS

F1.11 The delivery framework set out in the Black Country Strategy Delivery Plan will be based on three sequential phases of activity over a 25-year time horizon thus providing a clear sequence of targeted activity rather than a barrage of initiatives. In practice the Consortium acknowledges that these will overlap given current projects and regeneration activities. However, the notion of a 'regeneration sequence' is supported as a means to highlight priorities for future action and the importance of giving clarity to investors on the role of public sector investment.

Delivery Phase 1 - 'Key signals of change'

F1.12 This phase reflects the need to deliver an early shift in the external perception of the Black Country. This will require key public sector led initiatives that serve to 're-brand' the area as an investment location, with an emphasis on urban centre renaissance. Targeted enhancement to key assets, including cultural and learning facilities in the urban centres, alongside high quality interventions in public realm and gateways will serve to raise the profile and image of the Black Country.

Delivery Phase 2 - 'Investment de-risking'

F1.13 This phase follows the process of perceptual change and a consequential increase in development/investment interest in the Black Country. The role of the public sector moves to one of 'de-risking' investment propositions for the private sector through a combination of policy and intervention priorities. The importance of a clear and positive planning policy framework cannot be under-estimated as a delivery tool where building investor confidence is paramount. Critically, there must be clarity on 'prioritised investment locations' and the form of investment sought.

F1.14 This phase will involve increased levels of public/private sector partnering, with the public sector playing a key role in land assembly/site preparation in targeted locations and promoting exemplar projects to demonstrate the application of higher design standards, particularly in the context of housing market renewal activity.

Delivery Phase 3 - 'Advanced urban management'

F1.15 This phase of delivery reflects a tapering involvement of the public sector in terms of development/investment delivery and a shift in emphasis towards **pro-active urban management**. It will be essential to put in place mechanisms to secure the long-term quality and management of new assets created through the regeneration process. Moreover, the sustainability of private sector activity/markets will require effective long-term governance structures to be in place through which the local

authorities can continue to collaborate. This gives ongoing confidence to the private sector about the long-term management of the renewed Black Country.

GOVERNANCE AND URBAN MANAGEMENT

- F1.16 The level of regeneration ambition reflected in the Black Country Strategy requires a focussed and properly co-ordinated delivery effort – a multiplicity of agencies are involved, a diverse set of policies is under review and the enthusiasm of the community is being harnessed.
- F1.17 The scale of change envisaged clearly comes with a major cost to public and private sectors – but putting a ‘price-tag’ on a vision runs the risk of diminishing its value. Moving forward with fundamental change in the form proposed requires a delivery approach based on ‘strategic management’ not ‘project management’. The Black Country Vision therefore requires an enhanced form of ‘urban management’ – one that:
- Places the strategy at the heart of sub-regional policy making;
 - Is driven by strong political collaboration and leadership;
 - Embraces the widest set of stakeholders within and beyond the Black Country;
 - Gives the highest level of confidence to the private sector and reduces, or at least is perceived to reduce investment risks;
 - Is led by strategic planning not opportunism.
- F1.18 The Black Country has demonstrated an effective collaborative partnership, through the Black Country Consortium. The Consortium model of partnership is founded on the principle of working with Black Country Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives together with Chair and Executive Directors from the Black Country Learning and Skills Council and Black Country Chamber Business Link. The latter provide representation from the private sector.
- F1.19 Black Country Consortium Ltd provides capacity to the City of Wolverhampton and the Boroughs of Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley on three broad function areas.
- Establishing the strategic direction and strategies required. **‘Strategy’**.
 - ‘Really’ understanding Black Country performance. **‘Monitoring’**.
 - Running operations to fill strategic gaps in activity. **‘Operations’**.
- F1.20 To take forward the Vision, existing mechanisms of urban management between the local authorities are under review together with an anticipated

conclusion to the application process with AWM – the Regional Development Agency to realign the current Regeneration Zones of Future Foundations and Arc of Opportunity within the Black Country Consortium company.

ACHIEVING STATUS FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY STRATEGY

F1.21 Consortium stakeholders recognise the need for the Black Country Study to become an embedded feature of regional and sub-regional policy. Indeed, 'policy alignment' will be the primary delivery tool at the outset – coherent alignment of a wide range of policy drivers is a pre-requisite for future funding from public and private sector sources. Three stages are envisaged for achieving policy status for the Vision:

Stage 1 - Securing stakeholder/political support to the principles of the strategy.

Stage 2 - Developing a formal 'concordat' between the Local Authorities giving the Strategy at least materiality and, in time, providing the overall strategic framework for decision-making.

Stage 3 - Aligning key policy tools at local, sub-regional and regional level to create a supportive context to the Vision.

Stakeholder/political support

F1.22 The strategy has evolved through a consultative process. To this extent there is a shared understanding of the rationale and objectives, within the respective local authorities. Initially the case for investment prioritisation based on defined roles and functions for the key centres will be endorsed and articulated widely. In practical terms, it is essential, that the Black Country Strategy becomes the subject of an extended engagement process that leads to widespread understanding of its rationale, implications and potential benefits at sub-regional and regional level. Promoting the Black Country Strategy as a 'regional project' aligned to Regional Economic and Regional Spatial Strategy objectives is a key outcome.

A 'Concordat' between local authorities

F1.23 Long-term visions require more than present day political support. Delivery of the Black Country Strategy relies fundamentally on a long-term political collaboration between the local authorities. The collaboration will be placed on a formal footing that provides a degree of certainty to other stakeholders and confidence to the private sector. A formal 'concordat' is being planned together with a 'sign-up' to be by the four authorities. The symbolic nature of this 'concordat' will provide an important 'key signal of change' to the market and the Government.

F1.24 This '**Concordat**' will be well publicised setting out the collaborative principles that will govern working arrangements between the local authorities and potentially the Local Strategic Partnerships, such as:

- Collaborative strategy development arrangements;
- Communication/consultation protocols;
- Resource sharing, and;
- Decision making frameworks.

An essential part of this Concordat will be the preparation and maintenance of a 'Delivery Plan', as a key governing document for managing partnership arrangements – in effect the Business Plan identifying key projects and programmes, the lead agencies, the sequence of delivery activity, resources and key delivery risks.

Aligning key policy tasks

F1.25 In devising the Strategy, full consideration has been given to the wide range of existing policy mechanisms operating to greater or lesser influence in the Black Country. The Strategy aligns with existing development planning principles and sustainability objectives. This, however, will be kept under review. If the Black Country Strategy is to gain status, then as key policy instruments evolve and are themselves subject to review, links need to be made to ensure complementarity. This should relate particularly to *spatial* policy, reflected in RSS, LDFs etc, but also in *aspatial* policies such as the RES. This is a critical delivery task.

Promoting and marketing the vision

F1.26 Creating 'status for the strategy' is principally about 'internal' governance arrangements within the sub-region and, to a degree, at regional level. The next step involves projecting the strategy beyond the sub-region and promoting its principles to external private sector investors. This requires a high profile and well co-ordinated approach that demonstrates priority opportunities and potential within the Black Country.

F1.27 'Place' branding has become a key feature of many urban strategies. Its importance should not be under-estimated – a poor branding strategy can have long-term negative implications while a successful approach to branding can serve to transform external perceptions of a place.

Managing delivery activity

F1.28 Rather than establish a bespoke new vehicle, the starting point is planned to build upon the established mechanism of the Black Country Consortium and the two Black Country URCs.

- F1.29 The complexity and scale of the Black Country regeneration challenge requires a coherent, prioritised and co-ordinated approach to delivery. As such, the planned delivery governance structure, aims to clarify:
- Who are the key delivery partners;
 - Their respective roles and obligations;
 - The mechanisms through which roles and obligations will be managed;
 - The management structure in terms of strategic direction and executive support.
- F1.30 **In the immediate delivery phase** the focus of delivery effort will be upon generating momentum and profile, which will be achievable by maintaining a dedicated 'commissioning unit', as an evolution of the Black Country Consortium and the co-ordination of activities amongst existing Black Country delivery agencies, such as the existing URCs.
- F1.31 Balance of effort is required between strategic planning / policy alignment and project development – both are critical to securing funding whether public or private sector. Certainly, the skill set required in the delivery unit in advancing the strategy at the outset will go beyond project management skills.
- F1.32 The initial functions and format of a 'Black Country Delivery Unit' will be set out in the Black Country Delivery Plan. This will be based on the establishment of a 'Commissioning Board' including the bringing together of the two existing Regeneration Zone Boards as an integral part of the Black Country Consortium.
- F1.33 Initial focus of commissioning effort will be upon generating momentum and profile against the following objectives:
- **Enterprise and Business Development.**
 - **Employment and Skills** – 30 Year Education Employment and Skills Plan.
 - **Environment** – land use/transportation restructuring, Centres and environmental transformation.

The immediate short term

- F1.34 Between the RSS Phase One Revision Submission and the EIP in January 2007, the Consortium will develop the Delivery Plan and the structure of governance for action programmes.