

COMPLEMENTARY CENTRES STRATEGY TECHNICAL REPORT

FOREWARD

This document is technical evidence prepared by DMBC solely for use in the formulation of strategic policies for the Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy. It should not be interpreted as representing local policy guidance which has been approved by the Local Planning Authority. This document carries no weight whatsoever in the determination of any planning application on any site in the Borough.

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ONE:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF TECHNICAL REPORT

The following document sets out that:

- Dudley Town Centre, along with the Borough's other centres, lacks the physical capacity to accommodate substantial strategic growth
- The Borough's other existing town centres lack the necessary market attractiveness to enable strategic growth
- An attempt to expand the existing centres would prejudice the long established characteristics of the centres
- The Castle and Zoo in Dudley Town Centre could be utilised to enhance the attraction of the centre and to strengthen the town's established leisure and heritage role.
- Retail development of a scale to satisfy the strategic role is not required to achieve planned renaissance of the centre.
- The recognition of key sites within the three centres of Dudley, Stourbridge and Halesowen are required to enable the centres to fulfil their retail-led regeneration. This will allow these centres to grow organically, in an appropriate scale and function.
- The Council is committed to the regeneration of the centres by undertaking planned regeneration of an appropriate scale, and through development initiatives (e.g. The Dudley Town Centre Master Plan, which seeks to focus regeneration and renaissance around residential development).

TWO: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to ensure that the technical work underpinning the vision for the Black Country articulates the strategic role of Brierley Hill. It is essential that the strategy and vision is appropriately and robustly tested against the sentiments set out in national planning policy and demonstrates fully its compatibility with the objectives of the RSS and the overarching principles of sustainable development.

In essence, this technical evidence tests a hypothesis that the designation of Brierley Hill is the only opportunity for the Borough to have a centre with strategic centre status and function. This technical study examines options and alternatives to the Brierley Hill option and concludes that there is no alternative option.

This paper builds on the work undertaken by GVA Grimley which identifies the broad range of retail provision needed in the Black Country. This part of the study now seeks to ensure that the network of centres within the Borough is adequately balanced taking on the sentiments of the paras 2.9 – 2.11 of PPS6. Similarly, it considers whether the recognised deficiency within the centres, as identified in the GVA study, could be addressed by strengthening existing centres, having regard to paragraphs 2.12 – 2.14 of PPS6.

The study demonstrates that the wider Brierley Hill area is best placed to perform the role of the Strategic Centres in the Borough and that this approach conforms with the objectives of the RSS and the underpinning objectives for town centres set out in PPS6. The study similarly demonstrates how the Brierley Hill Centre would function and compliment the existing network of centres.

EXISTING BOROUGH STRATEGY

The Borough's existing strategy for its town centres is set out in the recently adopted Dudley UDP, 2005 which covers the period up to 2011. The detailed history of Brierley Hill is complex and as a result, the Dudley UDP (2005) contains no policy references to Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre (for the avoidance of doubt the Brierley Hill High Street is identified as a district centre under the hierarchy policy in the UDP. It is not within the scope of this study to discuss the ramifications behind this reasoning, and it is suffice to say that the Council remains fully committed to the regeneration of Brierley Hill as a strategic centre for the attainment of retail-led regeneration in accordance with its support for the BCS (RSS Phase 1).

Regarding the existing centres of Dudley, Halesowen and Stourbridge, the Council has well established strategies to deliver their planned regeneration, based upon town centre revitalisation. While still being able to fulfil some enhanced retail role by the execution of the retail floorspace growth envisaged in the 2011 UDP, Dudley town centre will not provide the capacity or market attractiveness to play a strategic role. The regeneration of the town is articulated both by the UDP and the Dudley Town Centre Masterplan, which seeks to address the regeneration needs of the Town. The Masterplan sets

out the key delivery mechanisms required to regenerate the town centre. This vision and strategy concentrates on residential-led regeneration and focusing on the town's role as a core for sub-regional tourism and leisure.

Stourbridge is a long-established town centre which has an attractive atmosphere, complemented by small shopping arcades and independent shopping establishments. Stourbridge also provides numerous high quality restaurants which are an appealing feature of the centre. The Council recognises that a new supermarket is required to draw back the lost food expenditure in retail terms for Stourbridge. It is felt that a foodstore in the scale of 7,000 square metres is required within the existing plan period. The Plan has also allocated 4,500 square metres of comparison retail to Stourbridge. The town's image as an attractive centre offering unique retail and dining experiences is a key asset which the Council intends to build upon. The Council's future vision for the centre will be expressed in the Area Action Plan (AAP) which is scheduled to begin in 2006 as detailed in the Council's Local Development Scheme.

Halesowen is an attractive town which has a close functional relationship with its residential hinterland and with Birmingham City Centre. The centre has an allocation of 4,500 square metres of comparison retail floorspace within the existing plan period. In addition, the town will benefit in retail terms from the recent granting of planning permission for an extension to the Cornbow Shopping Centre which includes an improved comparison and convenience offer. The centre also has an AAP planned to take forward the Council's core strategy objectives.

The Black Country Study, undertaken by the Black Country Consortium on behalf of the four Black Country Authorities which make up the sub-region, incorporates a detailed retail capacity study which provides the context for the retail growth figures (in floorspace terms) for the Black Country. It is thus necessary within this context, that the Borough has a defined and appropriate level of floorspace dedicated for retail use. The position up to 2011 is defined by the UDP, however the position post 2011 is provided mainly within the context of the Black Country Study. This paper does not seek to make assumptions, or forecast growth, which could be translated into floorspace figures, moreover its role is to consider an acceptable division of growth between the Borough's centres.

The following Table presents figures for retail floorspace (in m.sq.) which are considered acceptable.

Total	Up to 2011	2011-21
Brierley Hill		51,000
Dudley	15,000	*
Stourbridge	4,500	*
Halesowen	4,500	*

** To be determined by the Joint Core Strategy and subsequent Development Plan Documents
1. The floorspace deals only with comparison floorspace and not convenience goods.*

2. Lower order centres have no specific allowance provided for, as they are intended to perform a particular local retail function. Retail development with the purpose of meeting the needs of local areas, are likely to require a foodstore development. Other retail development is likely to result in the recycling of space. No accommodation for out of centre retail has been accommodated.

3. The above figures assume unimplemented commitments and planning consents as at 2005 which to be completed before 2011. The figures presented above are over and above the existing commitments.

Summary Table of opportunity areas

Town	Areas of opportunity
Dudley	Opportunity for small scale increases in retail and intensification of the Flood Street site.
Stourbridge	Redevelopment of Crown centre, and phased approach redevelopment at the periphery.
Halesowen	Opportunity to develop site Block 10 in the long term, along with continued and further redevelopment and reconfiguration of the Cornbow centre and potential to expand within Block 4 reconfiguration.

DUDLEY'S ROLE IN THE NETWORK OF CENTRES

Dudley's role within the network of centres in the Borough, sub-region and Region, has changed over recent years. This is due, in part, to the presence of Merry Hill acting as a shopping destination for the sub-region. However, this is not the only factor in the changing role of Dudley Town Centre. Over recent years, other development trends have emerged which have challenged the ability of Dudley Town Centre to perform a sub-regional shopping and leisure role within the Black Country. The growth in out-of-centre retail development incorporating large format stores, has resulted in the gradual and incremental change of use to retail warehouse parks of some industrial areas and units in peripheral town localities. The national growth in large format stores has challenged many traditional town centres (particularly those with important conservation areas) as these town centres have little flexibility in their physical form to provide for the increasing size of units now required by modern retailers. The combination of the presence of Merry Hill (which offers exactly what modern retailers demand) and the inability for Dudley to respond effectively to the changing face of retail, amongst other factors, have had an effect on the way that the centre has developed over the last 20 years and more importantly how it can evolve in the future.

Currently, Dudley as a Borough is not able to fully engage in town centre regeneration due to the lack of clarity in policy. The Borough is therefore operating its planning functions and regeneration initiatives within a vacuum of conflicting policy positions which do not fit the role of each centre. The Black Country Centre Strategy should address this issue. A complementary Centres

Strategy should seek to overcome this policy vacuum through the revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy and inform the Black Country Core Strategy accordingly.

THREE: CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Without doubt, the main comparison retail destination (both in terms of spend and total floorspace) within the Borough is Merry Hill. Whilst in reality the presence of Merry Hill is a significant determining factor in the fortunes for all of the existing traditional centres, Dudley's position within the network and its ability to perform as a strategic centre, is affected by a number of other factors. Firstly, the physical capacity of Dudley town centre limits its ability to accommodate major redevelopment schemes which would deliver the type of development that is now required by the retail industry. The aim of this report is to explore in more detail the physical ability of Dudley Town Centre to provide major redevelopment opportunities in the future.

The boundary of Dudley Town Centre is identified within the Adopted Dudley UDP. The Plan also identifies a retail core and a protected frontage which are used for sequential test purposes. The UDP identifies Development Blocks within the Town Centre which largely reflect the medieval street patterns of the Town. Dudley shares the intrinsic architectural and urban form qualities of many fine English Market Towns. Its architectural and historical town centre core is a particular asset and a feature that the Borough Council is seeking to protect and emphasise in regeneration initiatives.

Dudley's focal point of activity is centred on Market Square and the Churchill Parade, with some peripheral activity around the Upper High Street and the Trident Centre. The market area provides a busy frontage to the High Street and in recent months new life has been injected into the town centre with the introduction of French Markets and Farmers Markets. This is a role that Dudley and the other centres are able to deliver much more appropriately than more modern shopping centres such as Merry Hill which focus on accommodating high street national retailers and chain stores. Dudley's role and the role of the other centres, has therefore become differentiated from the wider Brierley Hill area. The Brierley Hill area is made up of the traditional Brierley Hill High Street area, the Merry Hill shopping centre and the Waterfront Office area.

This paper seeks to demonstrate the contribution that existing centres can make to achieving the regeneration aims of the Black Country Study, whilst having regard to the identified need for growth, the principles of sustainable development and the objectives of promoting viability and vitality of centres. These objectives are set against the regeneration of the wider Brierley Hill area as a Strategic new town centre. Overall the paper demonstrates the appropriateness of the Complementary Centres Strategy approach.

THE EVOLUTION OF BRIERLEY HILL

Brierley Hill, as previously explained, is the one centre in the Borough which performs the most strategic role for comparison retailing. Furthermore it has been demonstrated that the centre has the physical capacity to expand and to perform as a strategic centre over the next thirty years.

This technical paper explores the hypothetical situation should Brierley Hill not be confirmed as a strategic centre and thereby tests the hypothesis of the technical work that there is no alternative to designating Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre. It is felt that Dudley Council would need to adopt a radical approach to identify redevelopment opportunities within Dudley Town Centre which would meet the floorspace requirements of modern retail developments. This, in the Council's view, would have a significant impact on the historic nature and settlement patterns of the Town. In order to understand the likely impact in more detail, this study seeks to systematically review the urban fabric within and on the edge of Dudley Town Centre. Only by undertaking a comprehensive review of the opportunities available, can the impact of major redevelopment be quantified. In addition, this review will also identify the scale of the challenge ahead if Dudley is to evolve as a key sub-regional destination in the shadow of the existing Merry Hill Centre.

After considering whether Dudley, as the most strategic centre, is able to accommodate the growth anticipated in the Sub-region up to 2031, it is necessary to consider whether the Borough's other non strategic centres would be able to accommodate that role. For this reason, Halesowen and Stourbridge have been considered as part of this study. It is not deemed appropriate to consider the capacity of the other lower order centres to meet the anticipated demand up to 2031 as they will continue to perform local roles which are not described as strategic.

The study also considers the network and hierarchy of centres within the Borough and whether there is a need to rebalance the network by adopting a balanced and phased approach. This proactive interventionist approach must be complemented by a balanced and phased approach to the real needs of in the Borough. For example, Stourbridge and Halesowen require particular intervention geared towards the targeted needs of their shoppers and based upon an assessment of the town centre vitality (for example the need for a food store or other features which may be missing from the town centre).

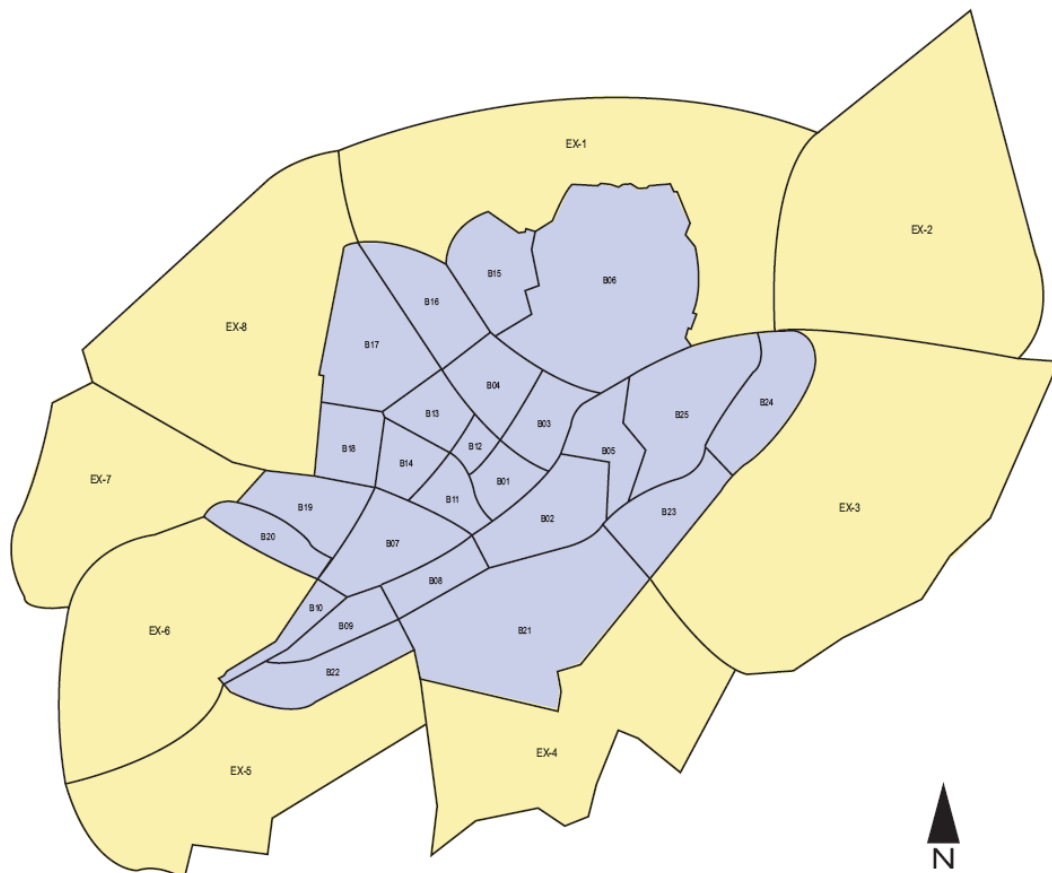
The study also considers the deficiencies within the network and how to strengthen the existing centres in a proactive plan led approach. The proactive encouragement of retail growth appropriate to the scale of the centre does not necessarily mean that the centres considered should have strategic centre status. Moreover, they should have specific packages of improvements planned to ensure that they meet the needs of their residents and businesses commensurate with their complimentary role in the network of centres. The study also seeks to consider the overall fit of the strategy for Brierley Hill against the objectives in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

FOUR: OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN CENTRES

DUDLEY

Dudley's main retail core is centred on Market Place, a pedestrianised area which hosts a daily market and the Churchill centre. The Flood Street/King Street site is identified as being as an area of opportunity which allows for the creation of some 15,000 square meters of comparison retail space and 7,000 square meters of convenience shopping space. Apart from this site, there are relatively few opportunities identified to reconfigure space within the central area without large scale clearance and redevelopment which would be incongruent with Dudley Town Centre's unique character and appeal. This makes it difficult for Dudley (aside from the allocation at Flood Street/King Street) to attract modern format stores which are likely to be attracted to strategic shopping centres.

An assessment of the Town Centre development Blocks has been undertaken considering their appropriateness for redevelopment, the potential for large scale clearance, the effect on the historic environment, ability to link into high street based retail regeneration and the ability to contribute to the general regeneration of the centre.



Blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4

These Blocks represent the immediate areas surrounding the High Street. They are currently utilised as retail space and largely reflect the historic street pattern of the Town Centre focussing around the main trading core of the high street. Little opportunity exists within these areas to provide large scale retail redevelopment. To deliver large format stores, as required by the modern day retailer, would undoubtedly result in large scale clearance and redevelopment. This would be insensitive to the Town's medieval street pattern and would not support the strategy for the Town, which is to capitalise on the development and potential of the historic street patterns in its architectural, archaeological and historical setting. This is demonstrated in the Council's Area Development Framework for Dudley Town Centre where the focus is on development undertaken in a manner which utilises the regeneration advantage of the historic assets of the centre.

Whilst use of upper floor space in properties is encouraged, it is unlikely to create retail floorspace of the kind to attract large companies. It is more likely to be utilised for residential or office business uses which contribute to the night-time activity on the high street and attractiveness of Dudley as a mixed use centre focusing heavily on residential uses.

Having considered the retail core and the immediate blocks surrounding the core within the boundary of the Town Centre, it is reasonable to consider the other blocks within the centre, but of a greater distance from the retail frontages.

Priory Road Car Park Block 17 Opportunity Site 17 in UDP

This area is currently used as a car park, being previously the site of the Castle High School which was demolished some 15 years ago. The site is designated as being an opportunity area within the UDP . Whilst there is in excess of one hectare of developable land, the site lies 264 metres from the main centre and would not necessarily provide an obvious linkage to the high street which would normally be an essential element of any centre redevelopment. Furthermore, the site is seen as providing residential development and as such is designated in the UDP for residential use.

The sale of this land for residential uses is a key component of the strategy to catalyse the centre's regeneration. It is therefore not seen as being able to accommodate any town centre type uses, apart from residential uses. Given the distance from the retail core and the disparity this would create between the High Street and the site, it is considered that this site would create a standalone attraction. There also exists a large open space to the North of this block which is used as both formal and informal public open space. Under current policy arrangements and for the foreseeable future, it is not seen as being able to accommodate any development. The developable area is not envisaged as being able to accommodate any expansion of town centre activity, moreover, it is seen as accommodating a significant element of residential activity compatible with the residential flavour of the surrounding area.

Block 6 and Block 15 (Castle Hill)

Block 15 is considered a physical barrier to the north of the Town Centre. Whilst opportunity exists to redevelop and expand the uses surrounding the zoo in line with the strategy to regenerate Dudley based on its heritage, culture and leisure activity, there does not exist any opportunity for retail development of a scale that will meet the needs of the retail requirements up to 2031. An application has recently been minded for approval for the redevelopment of the site so as to enable the regeneration, and provide the quality infrastructure required for a modern day thriving zoo. This scheme also includes the development of some 5,000 square metres of heritage and craft retail units (and a garden centre) which would be appropriately controlled and restricted in planning terms so as to avoid the site becoming an out of centre shopping destination. This development would be a positive boost for the town in contributing to the development of the town's heritage and leisure role and would promote Dudley as a sub-regional focus for leisure activity.

Block 6 is primarily the college site which sits within an area of car parking. The college is a key contributor to the vitality and viability of the centre, and it is important that there is a higher education establishment in the Town to aid in the creation of a skilled workforce. It is considered inappropriate that the site could accommodate the scale of retail proposals envisaged up to 2031. The College has clear investment plans which are demonstrated by a recent planning application. The application comprises the demolition of a locally listed building known as Blocks D and E, and the erection of new manufacturing centre, care centre and learner services centre with re-organisation of roads and car parking with new highway access points. The distance of this area to the retail core is 173 metres.

Block 16

Block 16 is the area to the North West of the Town Centre. The area is made up of high quality residential villa properties, which is an element of Dudley's character to be celebrated. For this reason, redevelopment of this area is considered inappropriate. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 204 metres.

Block 5

Block 5 contains the existing bus station, some peripheral shopping areas and the church known locally as Bottom church. This area lies directly adjacent to the eastern boundary of the retail core. The area is proposed to maintain its function as the transport hub of the town and the Metro line and is intended to run alongside the site and utilise the area as a Public Transport interchange. The Northern tip of the area is a gateway to the Town Centre and will continue to play an enhanced role when the Castle Hill scheme is completed. Little opportunity exists for large scale redevelopment in this block apart from some redevelopment and recycling of the units that front Castle Street. Opportunity nevertheless exists to create high quality town centre type uses which are complementary to Dudley's role as a sub-regional focus for leisure and tourism activity.

Block 25

Block 25 is an area of mixed use, comprising some small-scale residential uses and some general town centre type activity of the nature expected in outlying centre areas. There exists an opportunity for development which fronts on the Castle Hill on the Northern edge of the block. This area could accommodate leisure uses to continue the leisure activity focus of Castle Hill. The remainder of the site is partly underutilised and could be seen to accommodate residential-led regeneration initiatives. There does not exist any large scale opportunity for retail development within this block as this area lies 250 metres from the retail core.

Block 23

Part of this site would be suitable for retail development (between Porter Street and Hall Street) if the retail was well integrated into the centre, however this element of the site is not envisaged as being able to accommodate any large scale retail opportunity. For the remainder of the site, residential and other uses akin to leisure and tourism activity, would be considered appropriate. The redevelopment of Cavendish House as residential loft type apartments would sit 'full-square' with current residential led regeneration strategies. This area lies adjacent to the eastern boundary of the retail core.

Block 21

The current strategy in relation to the Flood Street site, along with the retail expansion, seeks to promote strong linkages to the high street via the Churchill parade. The northern half of this area lies within the retail core area. This site is identified for 15,000 square meters of comparison retail and for some 7,000 square meters of convenience retail up to 2011. It is intended that this will be completed before 2011. This scheme is an essential element of the regeneration and vitality of the Dudley Town Centre. The Council are committed to ensuring that this development is facilitated.

The Council own part of the site, which is currently used as surface level car parking. The Council have entered into an exclusive agreement with a developer to secure development of that site, and to that end, a planning application for outline consent was submitted to the LPA. To date this application has not been determined due to there being some significant short fallings in the schemes being put forward. This proposal is regarded as a commitment. However, whilst it will help sustain Dudley Town Centre's current role it will not provide sufficient space to accommodate a larger scale of retail development to meet medium and long-term strategic shopping needs.

Blocks 7, 8, 9, 10 and 22

Block 7

Within Block 7 lies the Trident centre which incorporates some vacant space, and could potentially be reinvented for retail uses, should that be required. However, these units have been actively marketed and little interest has been

demonstrated and they are currently vacant. The remainder of the site is flanked by offices, residential and some other leisure type uses. Part of the area is also covered by a local park designation. It is considered that large scale opportunities do not exist within this block for redevelopment over and above that of the reconfiguration and updating of existing retail space. It is considered that any large-scale development would destroy the historic character of the town centre due to the nature of the street blocks and the tightly knit street fabric.

Block 8

Within Block 8 the opportunity exists for redevelopment, with the emphasis on infill development and refurbishment. There exists a former Co-Op store to the south of the site facing the historic Top Church. Whilst opportunity exists for redevelopment for town centre type uses, for this to be feasible, large scale reconfiguration of the area would be required which would impact on the historic conservation element of the area. Redevelopment of an appropriate scale would be acceptable should a suitable scheme be put forward. The scale of the development would be lead by the street character and the focal point of Top Church on the crest of the hill.

Block 9

The eastern tip of Block 9 is St Thomas's Church which is a Dudley landmark. The remainder of the site is a mixture of residential units housed above offices and retail uses. Some of the units are listed or locally listed within this site so their development and demolition would be considered inappropriate or in line with the Council's approach to the Town Centre renaissance. The area offers opportunity for residential-led regeneration, however offers little in terms of opportunity for the wholesale redevelopment of a scale to meet the strategic retail or leisure needs for the Borough.

Block 10

There exists a medium sized discount supermarket store within Block 10, which is flanked by a pub to the north and a car park to the south, the remaining strip of land to the south is open space and landscaping. Whilst the site would provide opportunity for reconfiguration and redevelopment for retail or leisure purposes this would be of a type that would be stand alone, which would be disjointed from the high street and with little opportunity for linkages with little positive effect on the high street. For this reason, it is not considered appropriate, above and beyond the redevelopment and minor configuration for retail uses.

Block 22

The area contains areas of opportunity for redevelopment, partly for office, and leisure uses and residential-led regeneration. Large scale retail led regeneration within this area is unlikely to be appropriate due to the distance from the retail core – i.e., 400 metres.

Blocks 18, 19 & 20

Blocks 18 & 19 are established areas of office buildings, which house the telephone exchange and magistrate's court. These uses are essential components of the town centre's economic base. Any redevelopment within these areas is likely to be small-scale and to be residential-led, based on car park reconfiguration. Little major scale redevelopment is envisaged.

Block 20 is a town centre car park, used for the magistrates' court and surrounding office uses. The site provides opportunity for development should car parking in the area be reconfigured. The site presents the opportunity for redevelopment in retail uses, although this would not provide the necessary linkages or any regeneration benefit for the high street. It is therefore considered that the Council would not support a standalone retail opportunity on this site. The distance of this area to the retail core is 336 metres.

Blocks 11, 12, 13 & 14

This area is identified as being Dudley's Cultural Quarter. It houses the Concert Hall, Library and Town Hall and some of the Borough Council's offices. Whilst small scale retail opportunities exist within the area (at the Southern most tip of block 11 which falls within the retail core area), it is not envisaged that the area has the capacity to meet the retail space needs of the Borough without large-scale clearance. Residential development through conversions and some food and drink establishments akin to a town centre environment would, however, be suitable in this location. This area lies directly adjacent to the northern boundary of the Retail Core.

WIDER CONTEXT

It is reasonable to consider how appropriate it would be to connect the areas and blocks so as to consider whether, cumulatively, the identified blocks could accommodate the redevelopment opportunities required to meet the Borough's shopping needs. The issue arises, however, that the blocks would require redevelopment and clearance to create a format which would be attractive to retail operators. This would be out of character with Dudley Town Centre and the role that it is pursuing as a sub-regional focus for leisure and tourism based on its historical and architectural merits. Furthermore, it is essential that any development which takes place, can deliver effective linkages into the high street to support the future vitality and viability of the retail core.

Even when considering the blocks together, it is evident that, apart from the planned scheme at the Flood Street site, retail development is only likely to be achieved as part of small-scale redevelopments in keeping with the nature of the area. Whilst such developments have been accounted for in recent studies exploring the future capacity of Dudley Town Centre, it is evident that opportunities for further major retail development besides Flood Street, are limited. As highlighted above, the historic fabric of Dudley Town Centre is identified as a key asset in seeking to deliver robust urban renaissance in the future. Given that any future major retail development could significantly

impact upon this asset, it is not considered appropriate to adopt a radical approach to future redevelopment within or adjoining the central core.

POTENTIAL FOR THE TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARY TO EXPAND BEYOND CURRENT BOUNDARIES

In addition to examining redevelopment opportunities within the existing Town Centre, it is important to consider sites/opportunities that may lie beyond current boundaries identified in the UDP. This exercise has identified eight distinct areas which are described in detail below.

EX1

The Town Boundary is defined on the Proposals Map of the Unitary Development Plan. There are significant features which are present in the Town which make the future expansion in retail terms difficult. The northern most boundary of the centre is flanked by the castle and zoo. The physical prominence of the hill provides a barrier to northern expansion of the centre. The retail core is 388 metres to the south. Immediately to the East of the Hill there exists areas of opportunity in the old freightliner site. However, the Council have minded to approve a planning application to develop the zoo and the area of land which fronts Castle Hill. Given this, opportunity for large scale retail expansion is unlikely.

EX2

Directly east from EX1, Castle Gate, lies the Tipton Road area. This area was subject to Enterprise Zone status and has planning consent which has largely been implemented by the provision of leisure and retail uses (Cinema, restaurants etc). It is unlikely that this site would have the capacity to accommodate any town centre expansion which would be appropriate to the particular needs of Dudley Town Centre, or to meet the requirements of the retail strategy for Dudley Town Centre which is based on high street based regeneration. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 672 metres

EX3

Immediately south of the Castle Gate site lies the Kate's Hill housing area, which is an established area of mixed tenure housing stock, some open space provision, schools and amenity shops. It is a tightly drawn area of residential development where there is little opportunity for redevelopment. It stretches down to Waddams Pool Road where there are industrial/employment-generating uses. It is not considered that this area would offer opportunity for large scale retail or leisure uses akin to a strategic centre. Nevertheless local based shops to meet the needs of the local community would be appropriate.

Furthermore, the site is some distance from the high street and provides no obvious linkage opportunity to the retail centre. Linkages such as this are essential for Dudley Town Centre to capitalise on the high street based renaissance of the centre. The distance of this area to the retail core is 328 metres, while the south-western tip of this area lies directly adjacent to the eastern boundary of the retail core.

EX4

The Industrial area to the South of the town centre boundary stretches from Waddams Pool at the east to Vicar Street at the west. This is a significant area of partly underused land between and beyond the Town Centre and the newly constructed bypass. This land also expands over the ring-road currently occupied by employment generating uses and protected as such for employment uses in the current UDP. It would, however, be reasonable to assume that due to the decline in the manufacturing sector, that during the life time of the Black Country Study, this land may no longer be required for its current use. It would be reasonable to consider that the Borough Council will have pursued strategies and seized opportunities to gain development to provide jobs for Borough residents in other less volatile and vulnerable sectors with less land hungry employment opportunities. To this end, it is reasonable to assess the capacity of this land to accommodate the retail opportunities for the expansion of Dudley Town Centre's retail role.

Some of this land would be able to accommodate redevelopment and create sites large enough for retailer interest. However, the ability for these sites to contribute to the enhancement and the regeneration of the high street would be somewhat hampered by the distance, and the presence of the Ring Road bypass. This development could also potentially undermine the high street traditional element of Dudley and could result in the deterioration of the urban fabric and traditional role that the current strategy for Dudley Town Centre seeks to promote.

The redevelopment of this area for retail uses could, due to the distance from the high street, undermine the long-term longevity of the high street. It is recognised that this area offers the potential to provide long term opportunities for residential urban village and leisure space to bolster the regeneration strategy for the Borough and to complement the strategy to deliver long term residential quality opportunities within the centre.

Furthermore, the site is some distance (82 metres) from the high street and provides no obvious linkage opportunity to the high street. As stated these linkages are essential for Dudley Town Centre to capitalise on the high street based renaissance of the centre.

EX5

Extending to the west of the Town Centre, this area is made up of some residential areas around Hellier Street and Brooke Street, comprising residential and industrial uses. The Council occupy an area at the Southern end of the site which includes Council Offices and a training centre. The area also has a primary school, open spaces and recreational areas. This area is some distance (540 metres) from the Town Centre and due to the make-up of the existing uses it is not considered as having the capacity to provide any large scale retail expansion of the Town Centre. It is recognised that some leisure uses may be appropriate at the periphery of the centre which lies at the Northern most tip of this area, but these would be complementary to the centre and not be as a new destination in their own right.

EX 6

Extending west of the centre is an area of tightly drawn terraced residential properties. The area also includes Dudley Leisure Centre and some industrial units. Without large scale clearance of the area, it would be difficult to consider the redevelopment of the area for town centre uses. Development may occur in this outlying area, however it is more likely to be of a type that creates intensification of residential uses to aid in the regeneration and renewal of this area. Opportunity may exist in the medium to long term to redevelop the existing employment area which sits within the middle of the block. This is unlikely to be able to accommodate retail or town centre type uses (other than residential) as it would be severely disconnected from the Town Centre with little opportunity for linkages and connections to the high street due to its distance of 690 metres.

EX7

Extending to the west of the town centre is another area that is predominantly residential in nature with an infant and nursery school. Some of the area is also covered by industrial uses. The site is separated from the main high street area and offers little by way of large scale opportunity for town centre type uses including retail. There is however, opportunity at the periphery of the area which adjoins the town centre to provide some small scale leisure uses of a kind that will support the town centre. It is not envisaged that the area will be able to accommodate significant growth in retail as anticipated within the time period up to 2031. The distance of this area to the retail core is 722 metres.

EX8

To the immediate west of the Town centre lies another area of predominantly residential character of high quality. The area also has large areas of open space and play areas which contribute to the high quality residential environment. Creating high quality residential environment within the Town is a key policy objective for the Council. The Dudley Masterplan seeks to provide high quality housing and increase the residential element of the Town. It is not considered that areas of opportunity exist within this area to redevelop to introduce a town centre expansion. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 684 metres.

Summary

Having considered the areas in a wide context it is considered that the full sequential approach has been undertaken following advice in PPS6 and in the Dudley UDP looking at the retail core, edge of the retail core and edge of centre. From this assessment it is clear that there is little opportunity over and above existing UDP commitments for retail and other town centre development. Rather, the Town will be able to adopt a sub regional role for leisure and tourism and build on its residential quality of life offer, by creating residential opportunities in the centre.

FIVE:
The ability of Stourbridge and Halesowen Town Centres to meet the Borough's retail needs

It is essential to consider the centre network and the spatial distribution across the Borough before we can be confident that Brierley Hill is the most sustainable and appropriate location for future retail provision. The potential to divide the total amount of retail usage for the Borough three ways between the three towns must be considered. One alternative would be to deliver equal retail growth across the three towns.

To do this would require large scale clearance to provide space to meet the needs of the modern day retailer. With regard to Halesowen and Stourbridge this would not be appropriate and could lead to the confusion of hierarchies in the centres, leading to a potential lack of clarity on the centres strategy within the Borough. This would be out of character with the town's traditional focus. Furthermore, this is unlikely to be appropriate in providing a sustainable hierarchy and polycentric network of centres across the Black Country. It is essential to look at a holistic, proactive spatial approach to development of centres within the Borough recognising that a sophisticated complementary centres strategy must be achieved.

The towns of Stourbridge and Halesowen offer opportunity for regeneration and renewal centred around their physical characteristics and spatial position within the hierarchy. Opportunity exists in certain areas within the towns for some small scale retail development and indeed an allocation exists within each town designated by the UDP for 4,500 Sqm of comparison retail development up to 2011. In the long term, small-scale clearance and redevelopment of sites may well be appropriate and this would indeed be welcomed by the Council. However, their historical fabric would prohibit large expansion of a scale appropriate to meet the needs of the Borough's shopping needs up to 2031 akin to that of a strategic centre. However, development of a scale appropriate to meet the needs of the centres themselves will be appropriate and an allowance post 2011 must be made to ensure the longevity and long term sustainability of the centres.

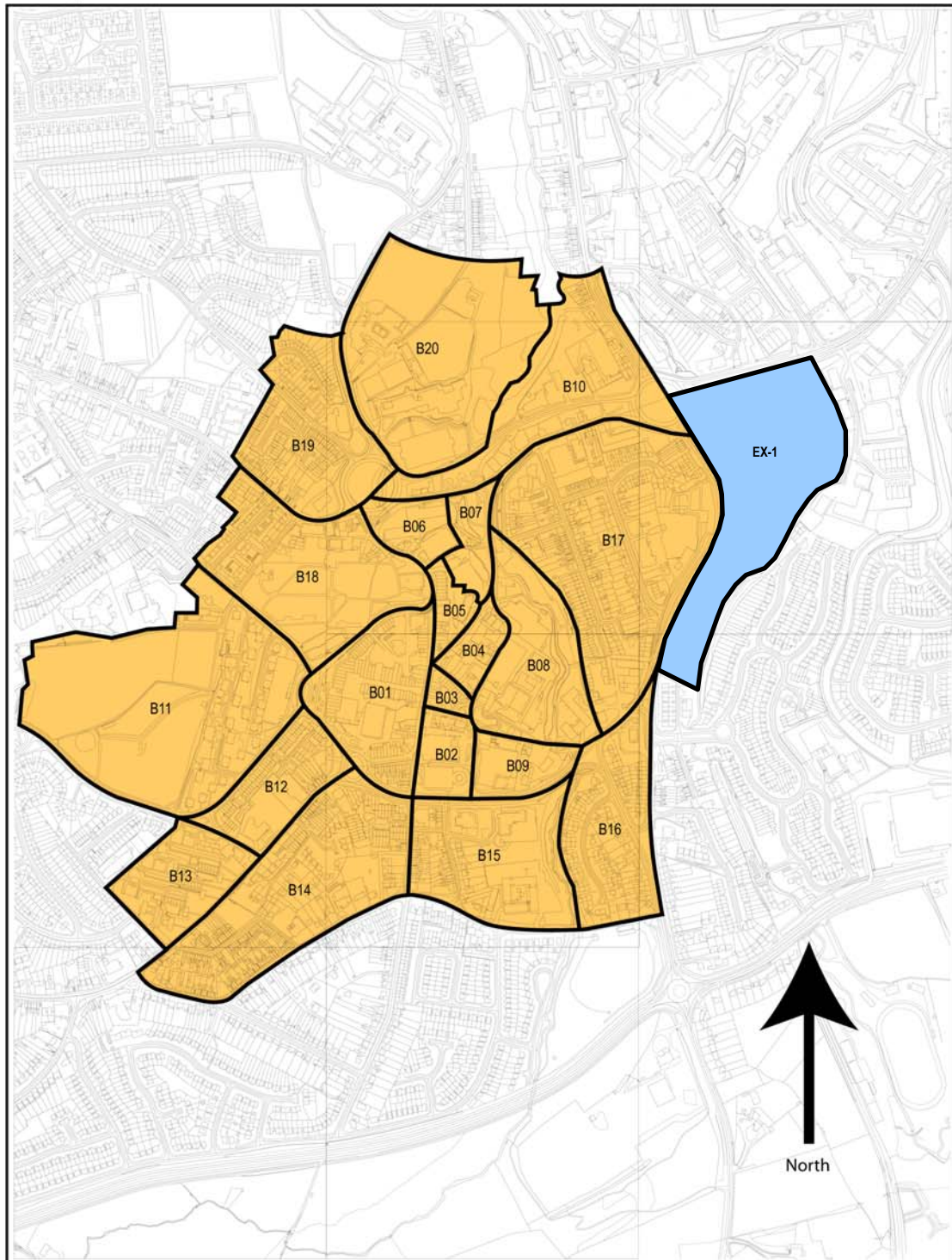
The development of the centres will be catalysed by the Borough's master-planning process, which are scheduled in the Borough's Local Development Scheme. Halesowen Area Action Plan (AAP) has a completion date of 2011, and Stourbridge AAP a completion date of 2008. These are being pursued as Area Action Plans so they can effect land designation changes and can be guided by the core strategy for the Borough.

Equitable Share

In line with the sentiment expressed in para 2.9 of Planning Policy Statement 6 (Town Centres), the strategy which the Local Planning Authority is seeking to adopt would need to ensure that the network is not dominated by the largest centre and that there is an even distribution between the town centres. Also, people's everyday needs should be met on a local level. It is therefore essential that the strategy adopted by the Borough ensures that there is adequate spread of retail development across the Borough at the right scale appropriate to the each centre's role and function. For this reason, it is necessary for the towns of Stourbridge and Halesowen to make allowance for an appropriate level of growth and the retail strategy set out in the Council's Core strategy should address this. A broad capacity assessment has been undertaken to consider the likely appropriateness of the retail expansion within the towns of Stourbridge and Halesowen.

Halesowen Town Centre

Development Blocks



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 Halesowen Town Centre
Inset Area

 Town Centre Development Blocks
and Development Block Number

Given the existing role of Halesowen in the network of centres in the Borough, it is reasonable to consider the immediate confines of the centre and any outlining area which has potential to create linkages with the existing high

street. A similar methodology to that of Dudley has been adopted when considering site suitability. An assessment of the Town Centre development Blocks have been made considering their appropriateness for redevelopment, the potential for large scale clearance, the effect on the historic environment, ability to link into high street based retail regeneration and the ability to contribute to the general regeneration of the centre.

Planning approval in Halesowen has recently been given for the redevelopment of the Cornbow centre which will create a foodstore to increase the attractiveness of the centre and to meet the shopping needs of the local community.

Block 8

Opportunity exists within one block of the centre (Block 8). This site is recognised as being an opportunity area within the strategy for the UDP. The site is currently identified as requiring the provision of food and drink uses, residential, assembly and leisure. The site could therefore provide opportunity for town centre uses akin to the scale of the centre. Opportunity exists for the site to be linked to the high street, however, it is considered that retail opportunity here would be ancillary and would not create a standalone retail development. The site provides an opportunity to create a high quality environment near the river Stour and to create an attractive residential and peripheral town centre location which can accommodate further leisure activity. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 69 metres, but the south-western corner is directly adjacent to the eastern boundary.

Police Station & Magistrate's Court (Block 15)

It is not anticipated that any town centre uses will be likely to flow from the South of the town beyond Queensway as there are a few prominent users of the space, for example the Police Station and Magistrate's Court. This site could provide limited opportunity for greater intensity of office or municipal civic space, however is unlikely to be able to accommodate retail development. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 67 metres from the centre however the north-western corner lies directly adjacent to the southern boundary

Block 10

Opportunity exists within Block 10, however this lies some distance from the retail core and is unlikely to be able to create a linkage to the high street. Development of offices and residential uses within this site may well be appropriate in the long term with ancillary retail development. The distance of this area to the Retail Core is 277 metres.

Birmingham Road

It is considered that an opportunity exists beyond the retail core which stretches further north along Birmingham Road (Block 5) to reconfigure and redevelop the backlands of the block, in the long term, should land assembly issues be alleviated. This, along with the further reconfiguration and anticipated regeneration of the high street (caused by the redevelopment of the Cornbow) is likely to be the extent of the retail expansion opportunity of the within the timeframe of the Black Country Study. This area lies directly adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Retail Core.

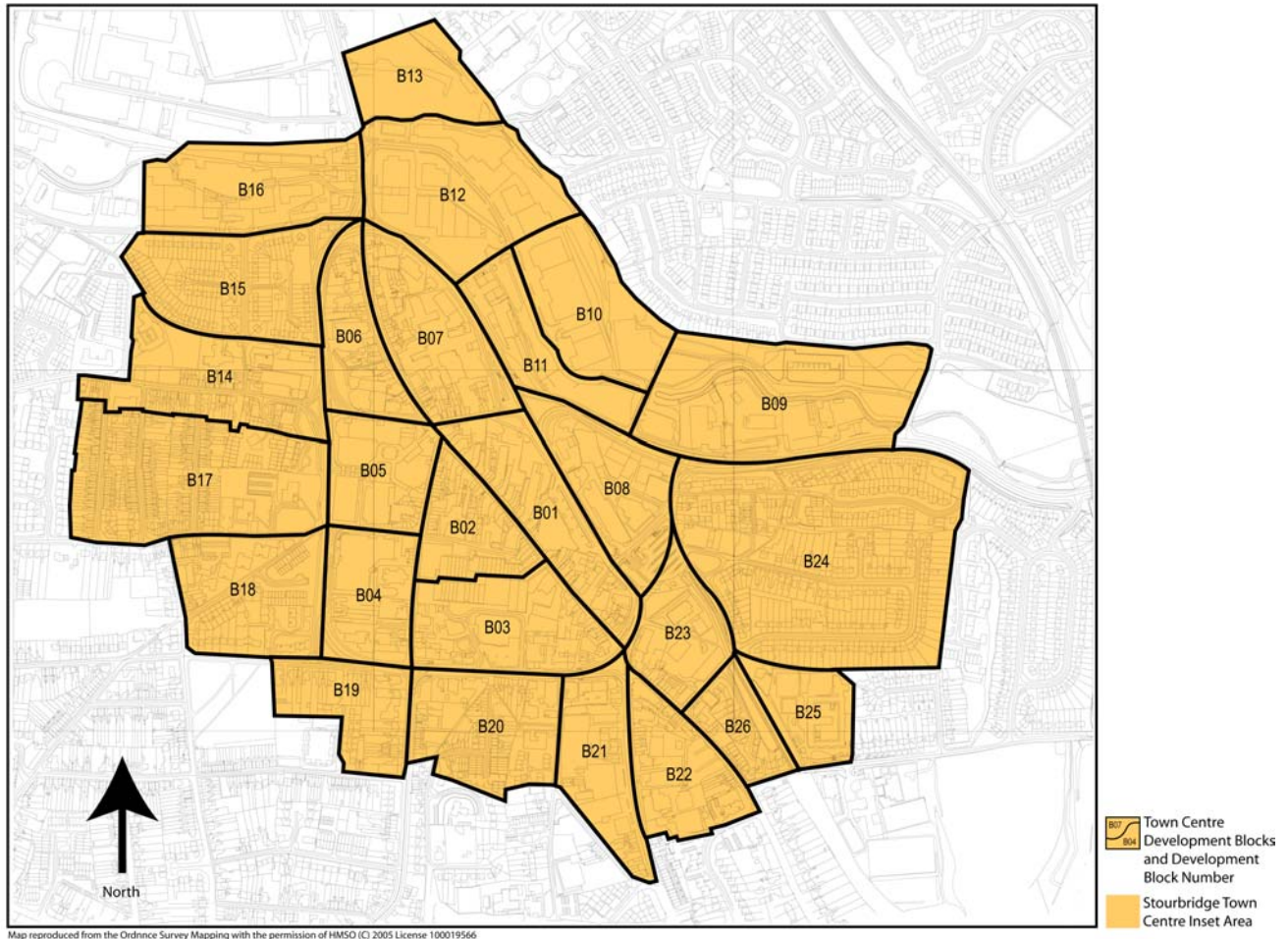
East of Bromsgrove Road (EX-1)

Given the tightly drawn town centre boundary and the residential quality of the surrounding environs, it is considered that there is little opportunity to expand the boundary of the centre beyond its current definition. Space does exist to the east of Bromsgrove Road which is currently occupied by industrial/warehousing and some quasi-trade retail outlets. Whilst this space is of a scale to attract significant retail development, it is considered to be too far removed in distance terms from the high street to be considered appropriate for retail activity. In the medium to long term, clearance and redevelopment for leisure uses or residential uses may be appropriate to increase the activity within the centre, however in the short term, it is likely that these uses will remain. The distance of this area to the Retail Core centre is 502 metres, but 291 metres from its south-western corner.

STOURBRIDGE

Stourbridge Town Centre

Development Blocks



Stourbridge Town Centre focuses around the historic high street and market street. The town has a floorspace allocation of 4,500 square meters of comparison retail on the Birmingham Street site, along with an allocation of 7,500 (approx) for a foodstore up to 2011. There exist two shopping centres within the town, the Ryemarket and the Crown Centre. The Ryemarket is owned and managed by an independent company and the Crown Centre is owned and managed by the Council.

Bell Street Car Park (Block 5)

Opportunity exists in context of redevelopment and reconfiguration of the Bell Street Carpark and the Crown Centre to create additional space over and above that which currently exists. This would aid in the retail improvement for Stourbridge, however would not be of a scale to change the hierarchy position of the town. (ie, it would still not compete with Brierley Hill centre).

Little opportunity for retail expansion above the minor reconfiguration of the Ryemarket (Block 3) exists within the tightly confined area of the centre. Re-use of upper floors on the high street would be considered appropriate and this is likely to take the shape of residential or office service professional uses to aid in the regeneration of the town.

The retail opportunities within Stourbridge need to be taken forward within a phased context. There is opportunity at the periphery of the centre boundary, however this should not be considered as a complementary aspect of high street-based retail regeneration and would occur at a later stage, once significant uplift at high street level has taken place. Nevertheless opportunities at the boundaries of the centre are able to provide a longer term opportunity.

**EIGHT:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRIERLEY HILL VISION, THE
COMPLEMENTARY CENTRES STRATEGY AND COMPATABILITY WITH
NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICY.**

The Masterplan for Brierley Hill is an expression of the Council's ambition for the area. The planning aspirations for the wider area are based upon the potential for new build development to support a more diverse and intense pattern of land use and to provide new and improved connections across the area to facilitate access, movement and integration, new public spaces, intensification of car parking and environmental improvements.

The Masterplan assumes comprehensive redevelopment of a significant scale. The long term aspiration is to reconfigure and integrate Merry Hill into surrounding areas by the reconfiguration of land used for car parking and the redevelopment of surrounding land adjoining the traditional high street of Brierley Hill linking the Merry Hill centre within the Waterfront and the traditional high street. There exist significant areas of land that are developable for town centre uses (leisure, offices, food and drink along side retail and residential) can contribute to regeneration of the wider area.

The development of the centre as a whole is dependant on retail growth. This is required to fund the required significant environmental and public transport infrastructure improvements. There is a need for a comprehensive plan to achieve good quality design/fabric to create an integrated and regenerated centre. The present layout and use of land is inefficient and fails to meet the needs of the community. Retail development is the primary feature in enabling the regeneration of the centres. There exists within the context of Brierley Hill, a realistic implementation package capable of delivering planned improvements to manage the centre alongside private commitment to ensure delivery.

It is essential that the overall Borough strategy is set within the context of the Government's wider policy objectives for retail strategies for centres. The strategy for the Borough focusses on the Government's objectives to promote social inclusion, ensuring that communities have access to a range of main town centre uses and remedying deficiencies within networks.

Furthermore, by focusing retail development (and other town centre uses which can have commercial benefit and thus become a driver for economic and regenerative benefits) within Brierley Hill area, ensures that the retail development is strictly controlled and ensures that the retail development creates additional benefits. This development will encourage investment in areas of deprivation in need of regeneration, and will create additional employment opportunities and an improved physical environment. The comprehensive development of the Brierley Hill area includes a substantial amount of development (in excess of 1,000 new homes and some 51,000 of retail development). These objectives underpin the strategy for the Brierley Hill area and a planned and managed approach to development in the centre will ensure that this takes place in an equitable manner, not at the expense of the Borough's other towns or at the expense of the Towns elsewhere in the Black country.

The regenerative benefits accrued by confirming Brierley Hill as a Town centre will aid in the promotion of the economic growth of regional, Sub regional and local economies. It will ensure, via mechanisms of phasing, and preconditions, that more sustainable patterns of development are delivered and ensuring that locations are fully exploited through high density, mixed use development. Via the promotion of a number of sustainable transport choices including (but not exclusively) the planned Metro line extension, and other public transport initiatives including reducing the need to travel and providing alternatives to car use the patterns of travel within, across and into the Black Country will be proactively managed in a way that will ensure that the Black Country offers real choice and opportunity.

The Borough's strategy for promoting strategic and planned growth of all centres of a scale appropriate to themselves and in a balanced manner, will ensure a compatible centre strategy. It will also ensure that the centre can deliver the strategy at a local level appropriate to meet each town's needs so to reduce unnecessary transport impacts. This also allows a balanced approach to regeneration and renewal and provides opportunities to attract funding.

Promotion of high quality and inclusive design will aid to improving the quality of the public realm and open spaces, protect and enhance the architectural and historic heritage of centres, provide a sense of place and a focus for the community and for civic activity and ensure that town centres provide an attractive accessible and safe environment for business, shoppers and residents.

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

The overall strategy for promoting Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre, Dudley as a principal town centre with a sub-regional focus for leisure and tourism and Stourbridge and Halesowen as Town Centres, must be assessed against the principles of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

The RSS vision encompasses a strategy where there are complementary opportunities for all to progress and improve their quality of life; where there are diverse and distinctive towns; where communities are recognised for their distinctive high quality natural and built environment; and, where there are integrated transport facilities which meet the needs of communities. The RSS seeks to create positive measures to address the relative decline of the Regional Economy. The Black Country Centres Strategy should seek to deliver this by ensuring that a vision is achieved by targeted policy mechanisms. The Complementary Centres Strategy fulfils this objective. It is a proactive mechanism which places an emphasis on proactive town centre development and will create opportunities to allow positive measures in addressing the decline of centres. The RSS vision and guiding principles seek to ensure that the strategies adopted are sensitive to local requirements and to promote development which enables new economic activity where it can deliver environmental benefits in areas of need.

The strategy of confirming Brierley Hill in a planned fashion which can deliver regenerative benefits both within the confines of the immediate area, and also

within the other centres in the region, meets this objective. Furthermore, the RSS states that the RPB will identify demonstration projects which will illustrate the development of high quality environments and illustrating that clearance and redevelopment in some areas may be required to achieve that vision. In allowing Brierley Hill to fulfil its potential, will allow the Black Country to demonstrate a new and thriving identity based on prosperity and opportunity meeting regeneration objectives and needs.

The strategy promoted for Dudley Town Centre is supported directly by *Policy CF1: Housing within the Major Urban Areas* of the RSS. Dudley's role in attracting and focusing on high quality residential development can demonstrate a clear link with the fourth objective of this policy which seeks to attract action for renewal and redevelopment in the neighbourhoods including Dudley. There are specific and measurable policy linkages which are supportive of the Borough Council's policy emphasis on creating Dudley as a sub regional focus for leisure and tourism activity. *Policy PA10: Tourism and Culture*, recognises that the Black Country heritage attractions are assets of the Region which must be supported. Similarly the RSS recognises that the Black Country was formed by the merging of towns and that people strongly identify with their local town. The sense of identity and belonging needs to be celebrated within the Black Country. The complementary Centres Strategy fulfils this identity issue. There is also an emerging identity for the new town centre. This is based on fostering opportunity and renewal and seizing opportunities offered by the private sector to encourage the creation of urban renewal and physical improvement that spreads the benefit across the wider Black Country.

The strategy of promoting the 'Complementary Centres Approach' ensures that the centres in the Borough fulfil the Government objectives as set out in PPS6 of promoting the vitality and viability of all the centres and creating positive and planned improvements. Furthermore, the Complementary Centres Approach aids in enhancing consumer choice by ensuring that all centres have roles to play so there is a spatial spread of centre activity across the Borough, focused on Brierley Hill, Dudley, Stourbridge and Halesowen all playing different roles within the complex and interdependent network. The strategy similarly ensures that sustainable patterns of development exist by focusing development of a scale appropriate to each centre. Thus, by increasing the residential opportunity within the centres, this allows for sustainable patterns of development and ensures that the Borough's towns are exploited through high density development in appropriate locations to aid in their regeneration. The 'Complementary Centres Strategy' depends on an appropriate package to deliver public transport initiatives and improving accessibility.

NINE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategy of promoting and encouraging growth appropriate to the scale of each centre is essential. This meets the government's objectives in terms of strengthening the existing centres as set out in Planning Policy Statement 6. The balancing of the network that will be achieved by ensuring that Brierley Hill performs as the Borough's Strategic Centre, the promotion of Dudley as the Principal centre with a sub-regional foci role for leisure and tourism along with promoting the enhancement and celebration of the diversity of the other two centres in the Borough, will allow each centre to perform at an appropriate level to meet their deficiencies in terms of needs. This strategy performs well with the regional objectives of seizing opportunity for all to progress and improve the renaissance of distinctive cities and towns where high quality centres can deliver benefits in areas of need.

A proactive and managed approach to development in each centre is essential not only in delivering the improvements in the lower order centres, but also in ensuring that there is a joint commitment to progressing plans for the benefit the wider Black Country, by ensuring that the centres with opportunity are able to progress and demonstrate the success of the Black Country centres. This Complementary Centres Strategy approach adopted by the Council, will also aid in the minimisation of detrimental impact on the other centres within the Borough and the Sub-region. This work demonstrates clearly that Dudley is not able to perform a strategic role.

By confirming Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre, it will enhance consumer choice making provision for a range of shopping and leisure provision in a centre where there is real physical capacity and market reality of it being achieved. Similarly allowing the proper and appropriate scale of growth at Dudley, Halesowen and Stourbridge will allow genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community and for the centres to maintain their market share.

The confirmation of the centre as a Strategic Centre will allow real opportunity for the Metro extension to be provided, allow an incentive for the existing Merry Hill Centre to have strict parking controls and improve choice of transport within the hinterland of the centre.

Indeed, by the confirmation of Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre, it will allow the comprehensive development strategy to be fully exploited by the execution of a high-density, mixed use development.

In confirmation with paragraph 2.53 in Planning Policy Statement 6, it is clear that the need for the centre has been established both in floorspace terms and in spatial distribution terms. Similarly, the centre would be created in an area of significant growth as defined by paragraph 2.53 of PPS6. The Black Country Study is a visionary implementation strategy which helps to deliver the fundamental principles embodied in the 2004 Regional Spatial Strategy. Clearly, there is a deficiency in the existing network of centres demonstrated by the clear need of shopping floorspace in the GVA Black Country Retail Centres Report. In addition to this, the centre is clearly an area of deprivation

demonstrated by a domination of excluded groups. Similarly, the continuation of the centre as a Strategic Centre would provide transport infrastructure to broaden the Black Country's choice of travel modes. Indeed, PPS6 specifically advocates the creation of new centres where the need for them has been demonstrated, Para 2.53 of the Statement states "*New Centres should be designated through the planning making process where the need for them has been established*".

It is apparent that the confirmation of the centre would clearly meet the criteria set out in PPS6. It is therefore fully reasonable to assume that the above considerations, coupled with the knowledge that the confirmation of the centre will have little impact on the Borough's other centres, demonstrates the ample expenditure, capacity and planned improvement of centres in the Black Country. Complementing this work, are a number of other key pieces of work that present a comprehensive technical background.

It is clear from the work presented above that the hypothesis has been confirmed and that there is no alternative to the designation of Brierley Hill as a Strategic Centre if the Borough is to gain a fully functioning strategic centre which aids in the regeneration of the wider Brierley Hill area, the Borough of Dudley and indeed the Black Country.