

APPENDIX 5

Study of the Black Country Centres (SBCC)

The SBCC report on the Black Country argues a strong case for a 'four key strategic centre' plan based on investment in Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Brierley Hill/Merry Hill so to better the economic conditions in the Black Country.

Thirty years ago Birmingham was the dominant force in the West Midlands but Wolverhampton was a close second in retail terms. In 1971 Birmingham only had nine more shops than Wolverhampton. This can be seen in Appendix 1, where in 1971 the Black Country contributed 60% of retail activity to the West Midlands as well as 45% of turnover and 44% of total retail floorspace.

From our inspection, the SBCC report and surveys, current retail and investment profiles, tenant demand, and past and future developments, it is evident that Birmingham has retained and more recently improved upon this dominant position while other nearby areas have significantly weakened economically. For example, Wolverhampton has fallen from 17th in 1961 to a trough of 54th in 1995 and 45th in 2004, making only roughly 20% of the turnover that Birmingham made (£454 million in comparison to £2,206 million respectively). From a retail perspective, this type of decline has adverse consequences, as 'key retailers' primarily want their shops in the top 50 national destinations.