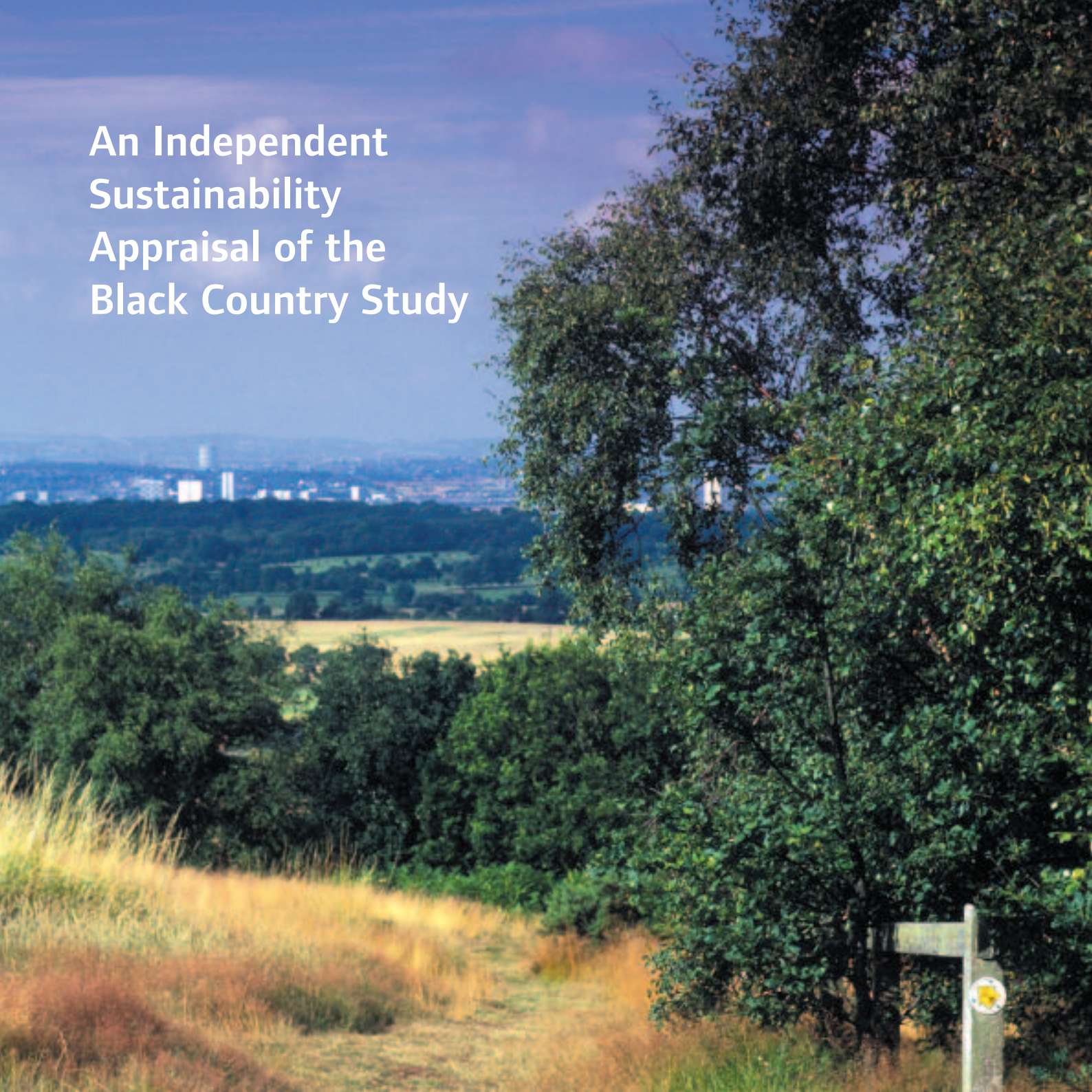


An Independent Sustainability Appraisal of the Black Country Study



What is a Sustainability Appraisal?

Sustainability Appraisal is a process that identifies and reports on the likely significant effects of a plan and the extent to which it will achieve social, environmental and economic objectives.

Why is it needed?

Under Government legislation an objective for the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is to contribute to the goal of sustainable development. The purpose of a Sustainability Appraisal is to promote and integrate sustainable development into the preparation of plans.

A Sustainability Appraisal is required as the Black Country Study will inform the Phase One Revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The process must also fully meet the requirements of the European Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive which came into force in 2004.

Who carries it out?

The Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out by consultants under the guidance of the Sustainability Appraisal Steering Group set up with an independent chair, Professor John Glasson. The Steering Group includes representatives from a

range of partner organisations including the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the Government Office for the West Midlands, Sustainability West Midlands and local authorities.

How is it carried out?

The Sustainability Appraisal process is iterative and seeks to influence the Black Country Study throughout its preparation.

There are a number of key stages:

- 1 Scoping – identifying baseline information and key sustainability issues and setting a framework for the appraisal.
- 2 Developing and refining options - assessing their effects and how they could be prevented or reduced.
- 3 Preparing a Sustainability Appraisal Report suitable for public consultation.
- 4 Consulting on the Sustainability Appraisal Report and the Preferred Option.
- 5 Monitoring the significant effects of the Preferred Option.

Who is consulted and when?

Both the Scoping Report and Sustainability Appraisal Report must be subject to consultation. The latter must involve consultation with the public as well as other agencies and groups. In addition consultation has been carried out at key stages in the process.

What's been done so far?

In March 2005 a draft Scoping Report was published for consultation with the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency, English Nature, English Heritage and other key organisations. As a result of consultation responses and new information the Scoping Report has been revised.

A key recommendation of the Scoping stage was that the study needed to include an overall objective to “transform the environment”. This objective has now been included within the Black Country Study.



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One of the main outputs of the Scoping stage is the Sustainability Framework. This is a set of 23 social, economic and environmental objectives which have been used to appraise the sustainability of the Black Country Study. These are a modified version of a set of objectives for the West Midlands Region, known as the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

An appraisal of the Potential Directions of change and the preferred spatial option for the Black Country was undertaken using the Sustainability Framework. The Sustainability Appraisal looks at effects over time and for different spatial areas as well as looking at secondary and cumulative effects. Detailed comments are also included in the framework report. The appraisals were carried out through a series of workshops involving consultants, Black Country Study team members and individuals from a range of organisations from across the Black Country. These have included, for example, Highways Agency, Environment Agency, Localise West Midlands, Public Health Policy Unit, CENTRO and local authorities.

Sustainability Appraisal Framework – example (detailed comments not included)

	Geographic Scale		Timescale			Cumulative, Synergistic Secondary and Temporary effects		
Potential Directions of Change								
Sustainable Development Objectives and Criteria	Overall effect	Local	Sub-Region	Effects outside the sub-region	Short Term (0-5 yrs)	Medium term (6-- 20 yrs)	Long term (20 + yrs)	e.g Level of housing delivered under this option would result in insufficient land for employment
	e.g. To provide the opportunity for everyone to live in a decent home which reflects individual needs and preference							
	++	++	++	+	++	+	++	

++	Strongly positive impact	+	Positive impact	N	No impact or relationship	-	Negative impact	...	Strongly negative impact	?	Uncertain – Impact unknown
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What are the key sustainability issues which the Black Country needs to address?

Emerging sustainability issues from the Sustainability Appraisal are:-

- > Some areas with high levels of deprivation including poor health, crime, housing quality, education and skills.
- > Some areas with poor quality environment including biodiversity, soil, air and water quality.
- > Traffic growth and the impact on climate change.
- > Modernising and diversifying the economy.
- > Improving the quality and range of housing stock.

What are the key findings of the Sustainability Appraisal?

Appraisal of Potential Directions of Change

The appraisal of potential directions of change resulted in two key conclusions. Overall Potential Directions of Change based on Centres and Corridors performed well against many of the sustainability objectives. It was recommended that a hybrid approach, combining centres and

corridors should be considered, with particular attention being given to transport implications, the balance of employment and housing and the delivery of environmental improvements.

The Potential Direction of Change based on planned dispersal performed poorly against many of the sustainability objectives and for this reason it was recommended that it was removed from further consideration. However there were some potential benefits to this approach including the emphasis given to local centres, potentially less congestion in the centres and the ability to deliver employment land requirements.

Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategy Policies

The appraisal considered the RSS policies for the Black Country as they were being developed by the Black Country Study team. The significant social, economic and environmental effects of the RSS policies are:

- > **Social** – The policies contribute positively to social objectives covering crime, poverty, housing, education and health by focusing development on centres and corridors where the highest levels of deprivation occur. Whilst there are concerns about morale and negative perceptions in some sections of the community, the major changes envisaged by the policies offer potential for encouraging community involvement.
- > **Economic** – There are positive benefits on objectives relating to the economy including those relating to jobs, skills and new technology from the RSS policies. The policies provide a clear framework for economic regeneration with the focus on the four centres and employment land investment corridors. There are close links to other strategies relating to education and skills and innovation.



> **Environmental** – The references in Policy UR1A to the Urban Park and Landscape Action Plan will contribute very positively to objectives relating to the landscape, biodiversity, heritage and local environmental quality. Whilst there will be growth in traffic resulting from the policies the overall approach of corridors and centres plus public transport investment will help in delivering the transport objective. The effects on other objectives covering natural resources, waste and climate changes are considered to be positive although they are dealt with in more detail by other policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

With the exception of transport proposals, Policy PA11A does not make any specific reference to environmental priorities and therefore the contribution to these objectives is uncertain.

How could the RSS policies be improved?

The Sustainability Appraisal of the RSS policies has shown that they perform positively against most of the sustainability objectives. However there are a number of measures which could be taken to enhance the performance of the policies. These are as follows;

> **Communities** – Policy UR1A could be enhanced by specific reference to the role of local communities in delivering urban renaissance within the Black Country.

> **Environment** – Additional reference to the environmental priorities for Brierley Hill should be added to Policy PA11A to help set the context for future growth of the centre and balance social, economic and environmental factors.

Appropriate cross referencing should be made to other environmental policies where they are outside the scope of Phase 1 of the RSS Review

including resource efficiency, sustainable construction.

- > **Transport** – Consideration should be given to strategic cycling/walking routes in Policy T12.
- > **Other Strategies** – Achieving positive effects on skills and education, innovation and health depends on other complementary strategies being in place. The supporting text to the RSS policies should make reference to these where appropriate.

Where can I get further information?

This leaflet represents a summary of the Sustainability Appraisal process to date. For further information please refer to the following report:

Black Country Study Sustainability Appraisal Report - April 2006

This report, together with the Black Country Study and supporting technical documents are available on www.blackcountryconsortium.co.uk



This report has been printed onto a part-recycled, fully bio-degradable paper sourced from sustainable, managed forests.

The Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out by consultants, under the guidance of the SA Steering Group, chaired by Professor John Glasson. It is an independent process that assesses the RSS policies and the Black Country Study in the context of sustainable development.

Requests for translation, interpretation, large text and audio tape will be dealt with on an individual basis, and should be directed to blackcountrystudy@blackcountryconsortium.co.uk or by telephone 0121 569 2396.

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