

Cabinet – 19 November 2008

Building a New Birchills Together

Portfolio: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader & Regeneration

Service: Development and Delivery

Wards: Pleck, Birchills Leamore

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the recommendations of the 'Building a New Birchills Together' report, recently completed by consultancy Shared Intelligence, commissioned by Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC) and jointly funded by the Council and English Partnerships. Cabinet is asked to endorse the recommendations contained within the report.
- 1.2 In view of both the challenges to, and aspirations of, the strong and diverse Birchills community, the area of study has been considered as a potential priority for regeneration investment by the Council, WRC, the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships. A plan indicating the area of study is attached for information. The report establishes the case for Birchills being a strategic priority for regeneration investment, by considering the scale of deprivation within the area, its fit with government, regional and sub-regional priorities and the strategic housing challenge. Unique spatial opportunities also exist for the area, linking to the wider regeneration of the town centre and the A454 corridor. The report also recommends the immediate steps required to develop detailed proposals to move this agenda forward.
- 1.3 The report considers that the development of a shared vision for the future of Birchills is key to moving the Birchills proposition forward. The recommendations made in the report to achieve this shared vision focus upon:
 - committing Birchills to inclusion within the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) programme;
 - the Council and its partners committing to investigation of potential vehicles for securing public investment in Birchills;
 - the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to drive forward the development of a Project Plan for bringing forward proposals;
 - the establishment of a strategic development framework for the Birchills community underpinned by a robust evidence base;
 - the engagement and support of local residents in undertaking this work;

- supporting key community organisations in performing a stronger neighbourhood management role;
 - indicating to land owners and developers that a strategic development framework is being pursued for the Birchills area.
- 1.4 The executive summary of the report, with the recommendations highlighted in bold, is reproduced in Appendix 1. Copies of the complete ‘Building a New Birchills Together’ report, and a technical annex highlighting the scale of the socio-economic challenges in the area, are available in Members’ Rooms.
- 1.5 Cabinet is asked to endorse the recommendations made in the report in order to confirm Birchills as a strategic priority for regeneration investment by the Council. This further investment will build upon the Council’s commitment to the introduction of a Neighbourhood Charter and Neighbourhood Board in Birchills, work which is being led by the Neighbourhoods Directorate.
- 1.6 The project will be overseen by the Project Reference Group (PRG), made up of ward councillors and key community representatives which has been established and has been integral in leading the community involvement in the Strategy’s development.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 endorses the recommendations of the Building a New Birchills Together report, set out in appendix 1 and summarised below which recommends that
- a) the Council and its partners make a commitment to Birchills forming part of the refreshed Strategic Regeneration Framework.
 - b) the Council and its partners commit to the investigation of potential vehicles for securing public investment in Birchills.
 - c) a formal Birchills Task and Finish Group is convened consisting of Walsall Council (Regeneration, Neighbourhood Management and Housing), WRC, English Partnerships/HCA, Advantage West Midlands and Birchills Project Reference Group to drive forward the development of a Project Plan for bringing forward proposals. The project plan will include a working protocol, (roles and responsibilities of partners including who leads) delivery options and an exit strategy. The Birchills Task and Finish Group will formally report to the Birchills Project Reference Group.
 - d) an overall Development Framework to be known as “Birchills First” is scoped and commissioned through the PRG. Plan will include options for developing:
 - a programme of comprehensive housing renewal including:
 - which housing stock to retain / improve
 - where demolition of stock is necessary (for comprehensive redevelopment and/or due to property conditions)
 - opportunities for new housing developments;

- improvements to community facilities and public spaces;
 - the development of new businesses, including social enterprises; and
 - a range of community-led projects to address the causes of economic underperformance of the area and to address worklessness and the digital divide.
- e) the Project Reference Group, in partnership with key community groups in the area, procure a robust evidence base in conjunction with the local community. This may include:
- a residents survey specific to the Birchills study area (including a socio-economic profile); and
 - a comprehensive stock condition assessment to include details about:
 - compliance with Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSR); and
 - energy efficiency
- f) The development Plan should include proposals on how best to strengthen and support key community organisations in performing a stronger neighbourhood management role.
- g) Urgently indicates to all land owners and developers with an interest in sites in and adjacent to Birchills that it is supporting the preparation of a Development Framework for the defined area.
- 2.2 supports the addition of Birchills to the Strategic Regeneration Framework Programme, and that a development framework is commissioned, through the Birchills Project Reference Group (PRG), that will provide the opportunity to embrace wider neighbourhood level service delivery.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The wider Birchills community is located on the northern edge of Walsall town centre, and is partly within the boundary of the WRC. For the purposes of the study, the area includes the majority of Birchills Leamore ward and part of Pleck ward. Its physical proximity to the town centre, and the position it occupies on the gateway into the town centre from junction 10 of the M6, establishes its importance. It is a community with many socio-economic issues, though there are also a number of opportunities to transform the community. The area suffers from high levels of deprivation, and in the opinion of Shared Intelligence, is declining further. In particular, educational attainment, as well as issues with worklessness, crime, a degraded environment and the high proportion of defective properties, has been recognised as a severe problem through the statistical analysis. The divide between Birchills and the rest of the Borough, the region and the UK is increasing and action needs to be taken to halt this trend.
- 3.2 Planned and ongoing investment in the town centre and its environs needs to be demonstrably benefiting Birchills, with residents being positioned to take advantage of the opportunities that are being created nearby. This can only happen if the challenges in Birchills are tackled simultaneously, and the opportunities embraced and maximised.

- 3.3 The Birchills PRG was established in 2006, and comprises ward Councillors, the Deputy Leader, representatives of local community organisations (including the Pakistani Muslim Welfare Association and Burrowes Street TMO), and officers of the Council, WRC and WHG. It was established primarily as a forum to assist in the delivery of the WRC's Canalside Communities project involving major new housing development and other housing renewal initiatives. In this respect, its business has been different to the other PRGs established to deliver the Strategic Regeneration Framework programme. Although this mechanism has proved useful, it has also encountered some community opposition to particular development proposals, and more lately it was recognised that such a mechanism, in the absence of a wider strategic vision for the area, was not effective and lacked clarity.
- 3.4 Given this view, it was considered that a piece of work should be undertaken to establish the strategic case for regeneration investment in Walsall. The Building a New Birchills Together report has identified the case, and makes a series of recommendations to develop the Birchills investment proposition. Critically, this should be used to influence the funding agenda of the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM), the latter of which is expected to undertake a greater role in housing regeneration in the future.
- 3.5 The report recommends that the Council and partners commit to investigating potential vehicles for securing public investment in Birchills. To pursue this, it recommends the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, consisting of the Council (Regeneration, Neighbourhood Management and Housing disciplines), WRC, English Partnerships/HCA, AWM and the Birchills PRG to develop a project plan for bringing forward proposals. The project plan will include a working protocol, delivery options and exit strategy, and the Task and Finish Group will then report to the Birchills PRG. It is then anticipated that the Birchills PRG will commission a development framework to include options for a programme of comprehensive housing renewal, improvements in community facilities and public spaces, the development of new businesses and projects to address the causes of economic under performance.
- 3.6 To underpin the development framework, the report recommends that the PRG procures a robust evidence base, including a resident's survey and a comprehensive stock condition assessment, and that local residents are engaged and supported to undertake elements of this work. It is recommended that the development framework should include proposals to strengthen and support key community organisations in performing a stronger neighbourhood management role. This will embrace and develop ongoing work with the Birchills community through the newly established Birchills Neighbourhood Board. This is a partnership between residents and key service providers, including the Council and the Police, to improve the co-ordination and delivery of services, within existing resources, so that they are more responsive to the community's needs.
- 3.7 It is noted that there are a number of proposed residential sites in Birchills, and the report recommends that the Council informs all landowners and developers with an interest in sites in the Birchills area of its support for the preparation of the development framework.

4. Resource considerations

- 4.1 **Financial:** The fee for the Building a New Birchills Together report was £30,000, with £15,000 funded by the Council from the capital programme. The remainder of the fee was met by English Partnerships. If the recommendations of the report are to be pursued, it is anticipated that further funds may be required to support a development framework document and the robust evidence base. The cost of any additional work is unknown at the moment, though the Council will seek financial support from partner organisations to deliver it.
- 4.2 **Legal:** There are no legal implications at present.
- 4.3 **Staffing:** Due to the nature of the additional work proposed, there will be resource implications, in terms of staff time, in following up the recommendations of the consultant's report.

5. Citizen impact

The delivery of the recommendations in this report will make a positive impact on the community of Birchills. Ultimately, a development framework document will provide the basis to improve the overall attractiveness and housing stock in the area, with the potential to lead to the creation of job opportunities, improvements in educational attainment and generally making the area a more attractive place to live. The delivery of new residential schemes in the area will provide considerable private sector contributions, through section 106 contributions, towards community infrastructure in Birchills. This could include affordable housing, education and health provision, and improvements to open space provision. Co-ordination of this activity with the role of the Birchills Neighbourhood Board will help to integrate new development with the existing community, and so ensure longer term sustainability of the physical regeneration of the area.

6. Community safety

There are existing buildings within the Birchills area which are currently under-utilised, un-safe and the subject of vandalism, and which therefore attract anti-social behaviour. As such, there are environments that are perceived as threatening which present problems amongst the community. Regeneration projects that may arise out of this work with help to eradicate these issues, and ultimately create an environment which provides increased working and living in the area, therefore improving the perception of community safety and helping to deter crime.

7. Environmental impact

The delivery of a development framework will provide the basis for the pursuit of a range of regeneration projects. These projects will have numerous positive environmental impacts in the future, including bringing back into use sites which are currently under-utilised and/or derelict. Section 106 contributions will also be sought to make improvements in the environment, particularly areas of open space such as Reedswood Park, whilst improvements in the quality of the housing stock in Birchills will have a hugely beneficial environmental impact. Integration of this activity with the work of the Birchills Neighbourhood Board will help to ensure the longer term sustainability of these positive environmental impacts through engagement with local residents over the ongoing maintenance of the area.

8. Performance and risk management issues

- 8.1 **Risk:** If a development framework is to be pursued for Birchills, then the appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that the project is effectively managed through the Council's project register. A number of the projects within Birchills (for example the former Reedswood Golf Course, Caparo, Birch Street and Hollyhedge Lane) are included in the Council's project management regime. These projects are therefore risk managed on a monthly basis through the project register process. It is acknowledged that these projects contain considerable elements of risk, though steps will be taken to minimise these risks and ensure effective delivery.
- 8.2 **Performance management:** As mentioned, a number of projects within the Birchills area are included on the Council's project management database and as such are performance managed on a monthly basis.

As private sector investment is a key element of all residential development projects, the Council cannot always be in control over all aspects of the projects, but will endeavour to meet challenges wherever possible.

9. Equality implications

- 9.1 The introduction of improved housing quality and opportunities in the Birchills area will be open to all Birchills residents, and will help to raise the aspirations of the local community. Delivery of a development framework for Birchills will be particularly important because the area is currently one of the most deprived and culturally diverse in the Borough, and steps must be taken to reverse the decline in Birchills.
- 9.2 The projects in the Birchills area could be positioned to help to deliver "Think Walsall", which aims to ensure that the benefits of large capital projects are felt by local people, through training opportunities, supply chain jobs and other economic benefits. Accessibility for all will be embraced through this process.

10. Consultation

- 10.1 The Building a New Birchills Together report, and its recommendations, were presented to and endorsed by the WRC Board on the 2nd October 2008 and Birchills PRG on 15th October 2008.
- 10.2 Some of the emerging development projects in the Birchills area, for example those for the former Reedswood Golf Course, Birch Street and Caparo sites, have been the subject of public consultation events. These projects have regularly been reported to, and shaped by, the Birchills PRG.
- 10.3 Future projects in the Birchills area, including the development framework, will be the subject of formal consultation periods and, in addition, details of the projects will be presented to meetings of the St Matthew's/Birchills Leamore LNP and the Palfrey and Pleck LNP as required.

Background papers

Building a New Birchills Together Report, by Shared Intelligence, October 2008.

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19 November 2008



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19 November 2008

Appendix 1

Executive Summary from Building a New Birchills Together Report by Shared Intelligence, October 2008

Introduction

- 1.1. The regeneration of Walsall is delivering tangible improvements to the economic performance of the Borough and the appearance of its town and district centres. Confidence in Walsall is increasing. Despite the current economic climate there is a strong, positive belief that the town is becoming a place where people choose to live, work and invest.
- 1.2. This renewed confidence however, is not apparent in the Birchills area of Walsall. In recent years, the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area have failed to improve. Birchills is a deprived area which presents a series of distinct, and collectively unique, set of challenges and opportunities.
- 1.3. Birchills' needs and aspirations, articulated by a community-led coalition of partners, have led to its recognition as a potential priority area for regeneration investment by the partnership of Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC), Walsall Council and English Partnerships. Soon to be part of the Home and Community Agency.
- 1.4. This report, commissioned by WRC on behalf of the three partners, establishes the case for Birchills being a strategic priority for regeneration investment. The report then recommends the immediate steps required to develop detailed proposals to move this forward.

Why Birchills should be a Strategic Priority

- 1.5. There are three key strands to the case for Birchills:
 - The Scale of Deprivation and Fit with Government and Regional Priorities
 - The Strategic Housing Challenge
 - The Unique Challenges and Opportunities

1. The Scale of Deprivation and the Prospects for the Future

Birchills Today - A Deprived and Declining Community

- 1.6. Birchills lies immediately to the north and west of Walsall town centre and is situated in the middle of the borough. Birchills houses a relatively young, diverse population of around 8,000 people. 35% are from black or minority ethnic groups (BME) the majority of which are Pakistani. The households in the east of the area live predominantly in high rise social housing. The households in the central core area generally reside in privately owned pre-1919 terraced housing with a high percentage renting from private landlords. The remainder of the area is made up of households living in mainly privately owned, higher quality terraced and semi-detached properties.

- 1.7 In comparison with the borough, the sub-region, the region and nationally, Birchills underperforms on most socio-economic indicators of performance. Birchills suffers from high levels of worklessness, low skills, educational underperformance and low levels of enterprise. The health of its population is poor in comparison with the wider borough and the area suffers from high levels of crime. Its housing stock is generally of low quality, a significant amount should be considered obsolete, and the urban form contributes to high levels of environmental deprivation. Key indicators of deprivation include¹:
- at Key Stage 2 the proportion reaching the expected standard is 11% below the borough average (paragraph 5.3);
 - there has been a faster rise in the numbers of Jobseekers Allowance claimants since 2005 in Birchills compared to the borough as a whole (paragraph 4.7 and figure 1.8);
 - Birchills has a higher rate of premature deaths under the age of 60 (paragraph 6.1);
 - the gap between the total crime rates for the Birchills study area and the borough has widened between 2006 and 2008 (paragraph 7.3);
 - the rates of defective properties in the Birchills area in 2004 were more than double those for the borough (paragraph 8.10); and
 - the Birchills area houses the second and the fourth most deprived SOAs in Walsall in terms of the Living Environment (paragraph 9.2) - both are within the worst 3% nationally.
- 1.8. The trends on most indicators highlight the fact that the situation in Birchills is deteriorating. It is a community in decline and it is this fact, allied to the extent of deprivation, which provides a clear, underpinning argument for wholesale investment.
- 1.9. Importantly, the indicators where Birchills compares favourably with other areas (community cohesion and ability to influence decisions) strengthens its case for regeneration. Despite the extent of deprivation, Birchills is a strong community and is willing to engage with partners and agencies to take decisions about its future (paragraph 3.15).

Fit with New Government and Regional Priorities

- 1.10. The recent publication of the Government's Regeneration Framework² and the Communities in Control White Paper³ provides a clear indication of the national regeneration focus, desired outcomes and precursors for investment. Principally, these are based around the need for investment to address underlying economic weaknesses and to deliver improved outcomes in terms of worklessness and enterprise. The capacity of local communities – whether they are involved and empowered - is now seen as a significant precursor to investment.

- 1.11. The new Homes and Communities Agency (the HCA) is being tasked with delivering against these outcomes and will be invited to prepare clear criteria for targeting investment in light of these national priorities.
- 1.12. Moreover, extant regional spatial and economic policies focus on the need to address the causes of economic underperformance in older urban areas. In the West Midlands, this is attributed to the weaknesses and complex inter-relationship between labour markets, housing markets and centres of economic activity.
- 1.13. In line with these national and regional priorities, the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Walsall and its Local Area Agreement (LAA) delivery plan identify Birchills as a priority for investment. Walsall Council has developed the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) to drive the development and delivery of physical regeneration proposals in district centres of the borough. The Council is now “refreshing” the SRF.
- 1.14. The inclusion of Birchills in a “refreshed” SRF would demonstrate the commitment of the Council and partners to address national and regional priorities. The commitment of WRC and the community itself in providing effective partnership delivery will be a crucial factor.
- 1.15. Birchills is a deteriorating and partially isolated community within a wider area of concentrated deprivation in a town and sub-region that is economically underperforming. It is precisely the sort of area that should be targeted for concerted, transformational regeneration effort.
- 1.16. Thus, the challenge in Birchills is threefold:
 - taking action to better connect residents with the wider economic opportunities resulting from increased economic investment;
 - delivering the housing and infrastructure which supports the aspirations of local people and encourages enterprise and investment; and
 - placing people at the forefront of local decision making and enabling them to play a key role in delivering change within their neighbourhoods.

2. The Strategic Housing Challenge

Addressing Diverse Needs and Creating Successful Places

- 1.17. Strategic Housing priorities in Walsall mirror the national agenda around growth, choice, affordability, access and meeting diverse needs. Reflecting the borough’s important role in the sub-region and its enthusiastic approach to sub-regional housing priorities, Walsall has established ambitious growth targets in its LAA and a clear understanding of its affordability priorities.
- 1.18. In Birchills, the emphasis is upon the need to address poor and obsolete stock, overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure in addition to the factors contributing to economic underperformance – and promote new development on adjacent sites.

- 1.19. Walsall Council's (Draft) Housing Strategy⁴ has significant implications for Birchills in that it adds further reinforcement to its priority as an area in need of wholesale regeneration. It also, importantly, highlights some of the housing priorities facing the borough and encapsulated in the area:
- the continued popularity of poor quality, obsolete stock because of lack of choice elsewhere, affordability and proximity to places of worship;
 - the challenge of working with local people to widen housing supply, increase choice and access without destabilising cohesive communities; and
 - the importance of addressing underlying economic underperformance as part of efforts to improve housing and wider infrastructure and service improvements.
- 1.20. The draft Housing Strategy makes reference to the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment⁵ (NRA) undertaken in part of Birchills during 2004 and completed in November 2006. The study suggested that a potential renewal area of around 725 properties could be declared at some point in the future should the community support the project and should the Council wish to do so. This included 100 properties which, ideally, should be acquired and redeveloped. A further 425 properties were suitable for comprehensive improvement/grant aided group repair schemes for external works and loan assistance for internal work to meet decency standards. Additional environmental landscaping and home zone investments would help to upgrade boundary walls and provide pedestrian safety.
- 1.21. The findings in this study have not been endorsed by the Council, in part due to the recognition that a more comprehensive solution was required for a wider Birchills area. Whilst the Assessment is now out of date it does provide a useful starting point for a thorough understanding of the housing issues presented in this part of the study area. It should, therefore, be revisited as part of any work undertaken to develop a wider housing renewal scheme for Birchills.

3. The Unique Challenges and Opportunities

- 1.22. The Birchills community faces some major challenges and opportunities. These arise from a series of local circumstances and collectively present a compelling, unique case for major regeneration investment. In summary:
- Birchills location in close proximity to the town centre and a wide range of economic development projects presents a real opportunity for people to gain employment. Current projects under the stewardship of Walsall Regeneration Company will create the opportunity to improve the employment prospects and skills of the Birchills community. These include, amongst others, the new Walsall College, a new Office Corridor / Gigaport and the Darlaston Strategic Development area and in total could create up to 5000 new jobs. Entrenched worklessness and low skills currently prevent this from happening;

- proposals for the deployment of a next generation fibre optic platform for the delivery of broadband connectivity to Birchills households presents an opportunity to bridge the digital divide that exists;
- significant amounts of residential land are available within the area to affect wholesale transformation of the housing and environmental conditions;
- a number of strong and active community, voluntary and faith sector groups are working together to improve the area. However, they are opposed to some of the planned residential developments and this opposition is threatening to derail the work of the Birchills Project Reference Group;
- the highly regarded Burrowes Street Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) has a track record in leading effective neighbourhood management;
- the TMO and other community-led groups have aspirations to deliver neighbourhood services through social enterprises supported by the transfer of assets to community-led groups;
- a strong partnership exists between Walsall Regeneration Company, Walsall Council, Registered Social Landlords and English Partnerships and a focus upon effective delivery of improved outcomes for people in Birchills.

1.23. Threats to the community exist in the form of residential and economic development projects which could surround and isolate the community further if allowed to do so. However, these threats, with investment and support become the key opportunities the community needs to transform its housing and economic fortunes.

1.24. The time for action in Birchills is now – delaying or doing nothing is not an option if the area is to be transformed.

Moving Forward

- 1.25. The recommendations set out below stem from our analysis of the area and consultations with key stakeholders and community representatives. We believe they are practicable and reasonable and will help to develop the Birchills investment proposition.
- 1.26. The key to moving the Birchills proposition forward is the development of a shared vision for the future of Birchills. It is essential that the community, key partners and private land owners agree how they will work together to realise the vision.
- 1.27. To formalise Birchills' position as a priority for investment **it is recommended that the Council and its partners make a commitment to Birchills forming part of the refreshed Strategic Regeneration Framework.**
- 1.28. We recognise that the investment requirements of Birchills will be considerable and potentially could involve the pooling of public sector assets and developer contributions as well as major HCA and other regional funding streams. Accordingly, **it is recommended that the Council and its partners commit to**

the investigation of potential vehicles for securing public investment in Birchills.

- 1.29. Our consultations in Birchills lead us to conclude that the focus of the Birchills Project Reference Group (PRG) has been hampered by the lack of a clear vision and plan of action. As such, **it is recommended that a formal Birchills Task and Finish Group is convened consisting of Walsall Council (Regeneration, Neighbourhood Management and Housing), WRC, English Partnerships/HCA, Advantage West Midlands and Birchills PRG to drive forward the development of a Project Plan for bringing forward proposals. The project plan will include a working protocol, (roles and responsibilities of partners including who leads) delivery options and an exit strategy. The Birchills Task and Finish Group will formally report to the Birchills PRG.**
- 1.30. In advance of the Council's refreshment of the SRF it is **recommended that an overall Development Framework to be known as " Birchills First" - is scoped and commissioned through the PRG. Plan ABC will include options for developing:**
- **a programme of comprehensive housing renewal including:**
 - **which housing stock to retain / improve**
 - **where demolition of stock is necessary (for comprehensive redevelopment and/or due to property conditions)**
 - **opportunities for new housing developments;**
 - **improvements to community facilities and public spaces;**
 - **the development of new businesses, including social enterprises; and**
 - **a range of community-led projects to address the causes of economic underperformance of the area and to address worklessness and the digital divide.**
- 1.31. The aim of Plan ABC is to provide a clear long-term delivery and stewardship programme (with options) to provide a sustainable community with a range of housing tenures, types and sizes which can benefit from wider regeneration initiatives in the borough.
- 1.32. To underpin the preparation of this Development Framework, **it is also recommended that the PRG, in partnership with key community groups in the area, procure a robust evidence base in conjunction with the local community. This may include:**
- **a residents survey specific to the Birchills study area (including a socio-economic profile); and**
 - **a comprehensive stock condition assessment to include details about:**
 - **compliance with Housing Health and Safety Rating (HHSR); and**
 - **energy efficiency**

- 1.33. The surveys will complement existing data (including Walsall Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2007 a 2.8% survey of pre-1990 stock in the borough). The findings of the surveys will be set in the context of national and regional data, including the results of the English House Conditions Survey.
- 1.34. **It is recommended that local residents are engaged and supported to undertake elements of this work.**
- 1.35. The importance of the community-led groups' on-going involvement in the neighbourhood management of Birchills is crucial in terms of the long-term deliverability and sustainability of improvements in the area. **Plan ABC should include proposals on how best to strengthen and support key community organisations in performing a stronger neighbourhood management role.**
- 1.36. Finally, we consider the potential impact of the current downturn in the economy and specifically within the property market. We believe that the current climate presents an ideal opportunity for Plan ABC to have a positive influence, welcomed in the community, on the current proposals for residential sites in Birchills and for the scope to introduce more mixed use and affordable options into the plans.
- 1.37. **We therefore recommend that Walsall Council urgently indicates to all land owners and developers with an interest in sites in and adjacent to Birchills that it is supporting the preparation of a Development Framework for the defined area.**

¹ A full Socio-Economic Review accompanies this report in Annex A. The report contains references to numbered paragraphs and figures – these can be found in Annex A.

² Transforming Places; Changing Lives: A Framework for Regeneration. Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2008.

³ Communities in Control: Real people, real power. Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2008.

⁴ Walsall Housing Strategy (Draft) 2008-2011, Walsall Council, August 2008.

⁵ Alumwell/Birchills Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) Study, Professional Partnership Services PLC, 2006.

Appendix 2

Plan of the Study Area

