

Cabinet – 12 April 2006

The Black Country Study – Consultation Responses to the Choices Consultation and the Preferred Option for the Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy

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| Portfolio | Councillor Adrian Andrew – Regeneration |
| Service Area | Regeneration |
| Wards | All |
| Forward Plan | Yes |

Summary of report

This report is to advise Cabinet on the proposals for revisions to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) arising from the Black Country Study, and on the main issues raised by the consultation responses to the spatial options or 'choices' consultation for the Study. The report makes recommendations for Cabinet to respond to the emerging preferred option for the revision to the RSS. The draft submission to the Secretary of State has been placed in the Members' Room, whilst a summary of the main issues raised is provided as **Appendix 1** to this report. As set out in the Appendix, these issues are presently the subject of negotiation. Thus, it is recommended that any necessary future amendments to the submission should be agreed by the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and the Executive Director for Regeneration.

Besides the submission for the RSS revision, the emerging work will also include a write-up of the Black Country Study (presently known as the 'Black Country Story') and an implementation plan. Whilst these will be submitted to the Secretary of State, it is understood they do not have to be completed to the same timescale as the RSS revisions and it is recommended that if these documents raise any issues a response on behalf of the Council should be agreed by the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and the Executive Director for Regeneration.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the draft document setting out the preferred options for revisions to the Region Spatial Strategy (RSS) for submission to the Secretary of State by West Midlands Regional Assembly, subject any necessary future amendments.
2. Delegate the Executive Director Regeneration in consultation with the Leader of the Council and relevant portfolio holder to agree any necessary amendments in respect of issues outlined in **Appendix 1** and in relation to the emerging 'Black Country Story'.

Resource and legal considerations

In legal terms, the Black Country Study follows a requirement of the First Secretary of State / Deputy Prime Minister as expressed in approving the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in June 2004. The Study is intended to inform an early review of the RSS (to provide the first of a number of proposed revisions) and the Core Strategies for the four Black Country boroughs, which are to be prepared under the recently-introduced local development framework system. It is envisaged that, rather than each Borough having an individual Core Strategy, there should be a joint core strategy for the whole of the Black Country.

Government guidance in Planning Policy Statement 11 allows council decisions on RSS reviews to be made at cabinet level, whilst responsibility for the overall approval of RSS policies will be through the regional planning body (West Midlands Regional Assembly, via the Regional Planning Partnership on 26 April) and then with the First Secretary of State.

The Black Country Study is being managed by the Black Country Consortium, which is funded by this council as well as by the other Black Country boroughs and from other sources. The council is also providing support in terms of officer time, which will need to continue through the rest of the process.

More generally, the Black Country Study is seeking to promote substantial change and development in the area. This will require major public and private sector resources for the future and the Study can be seen as seeking to bid for and attract additional resources.

Citizen impact

The Black Country Study is seeking the regeneration of the area over a 30 year period. If successful this should benefit citizens of the Borough in the immediate future and in the longer term.

Community safety

The Black Country Study is concerned with strategic planning and regeneration policies rather than with detailed design / safety issues. However, in broad terms, successful regeneration does tend to be associated with increased community safety.

Environmental impact

Sustainable development is a key aim of the Black Country Study, and the technical work and the preferred option have been the subject of a sustainability appraisal / strategic environmental assessment.

Performance and risk management issues

As a major piece of work seeking to promote an ambitious approach to the regeneration of the area it is important to ensure the Black Country Study will meet the government's requirements for it to be consistent with other strategies and be robust and realistic, including recognition that all of the resources desired might not be available. These issues are reflected in the comments contained in **Appendix 1** and they are the subject of current negotiation and discussion, so it is recommended that any necessary amendments should be agreed by the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and the Executive Director for Regeneration. Any outstanding issues, whether raised among the local authorities and the Consortium or through representations received through the consultation processes, could be considered at the examination-in-public into the RSS revisions, which is scheduled for January 2007.

The full written version of the Black Country Study (the 'Black Country Story') and the delivery plan will not be available in time for the Cabinet meeting. If these have to be finalised before a report can be made to a future Cabinet meeting, authority is requested for comments to be made with the agreement of the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and the Executive Director for Regeneration.

Equality implications

The achievement of the regeneration aspirations of the Black Country Study should make a very positive impact to combat trends that otherwise threaten to lead to increasing social exclusion in the Black Country.

Consultation

Consultation on the RSS revision has to follow a process laid down by government, which involves two principal stages of consultation.

Stage one, between November 2005 and January 2006, was based on a 'Choices Consultation Report', which was reported to Cabinet on 21 December 2005. The issues raised by this council and by others responding to the consultation have been analysed in a report by Consensus Planning, consultants commissioned by the Black Country Consortium, and a copy of this report has been placed in the Members' Room. The main points regarding how issues raised, by this council and others, relate to the preferred option submission are considered in **Appendix 2** to this report.

The second consultation stage will follow the submission of the preferred option to the First Secretary of State (intended to be at the end of May 2006). Then there will be a formal consultation period, which will be managed by Government Office and is likely to take place during the summer of 2006.

In between the two stages a 'stakeholder involvement' event has been held at Brierley Hill on 3 April.

Vision 2008

The strategy for the regeneration of the Black Country is relevant to many of the principles underpinning Vision 2008. In particular, the policies and proposals support the objectives of

- Ensuring a clean and green borough
- Making it easier for people to get around
- Making Walsall a healthy and caring place
- Encouraging everyone to feel proud of Walsall
- Strengthening the local economy.

The long-term perspective of the Black Country Study and the fact that it will feed into a review of the Regional Spatial Strategy, up to 2021, is of clear relevance to work leading towards a Vision for 2020.

Background papers

Analysis and Review of Consultation Responses for the Black Country Study Choices Consultation Report – Consensus Planning, February 2006.

The Preferred Option for the revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands – Draft Phase One Revision: The Black Country, March 2006
[Draft Submission to Secretary of State].

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Signed:



Executive Director:
T Johnson

Date: 06.04.06

Signed:



Portfolio Holder:
Councillor A Andrew

Date: 06.04.06

Appendix 1:

The Main Issues raised by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Phase 1 Revision Submission

Context

1. On the basis of the work so far - including technical studies, sustainability appraisal and the public consultation on spatial 'choices' – the Black Country Consortium, with inputs from officers from the four boroughs, has produced a 'preferred option' for the Phase 1 revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). It is intended this should be submitted to the Secretary of State before the end of May, so during its preparation it has been reported to various groupings involving Black Country Members and Chief Executives and representatives from partner organisations and local authorities from surrounding areas as well as officers advising the WM Regional Assembly and Government Office. After the draft submission has been considered by each of the Black Country councils' Cabinets it is to be reported to the Regional Planning Executive and the Regional Planning Partnership for final approval.
2. The preferred option seeks to maximise regeneration by concentrating activity and resources for change primarily on the 4 strategic centres and broad corridors between them, to reflect opportunities for change to accommodate growth, enhance the environment and support economic competitiveness.
3. It is important to recognise that the RSS revisions seek to set out broad principles for the regeneration of the Black Country. Policies at a more local level will be developed and applied through Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) which will be produced by the four Black Country boroughs (and which are intended to include a joint Core Strategy). However, such policies will need to be in conformity with the RSS, so it is important to ensure the best possible correct strategic approach from the outset.

The Draft Submission

4. A copy of the draft submission has been provided in the Members' Room. It is in two parts.
 - Part 1 sets out the context and background to the proposed RSS revision. It also sets out the key issues that the Black Country needs to tackle and the process by which the revision has been developed, as well as how the strategy will be taken forward (including the need for complementary policies for surrounding areas to be developed through the next RSS revision).
 - Part 2 sets out the proposed revisions to the RSS, including new and amended policies and additional text, together with reasoned justification for the changes.
5. The draft revision policies to the RSS broadly reflect previous discussions and consultations, including the representations made previously by Walsall Council. The main points are as follows.
 - (a) The 4 strategic centres (Wolverhampton City Centre, Walsall, West Bromwich and Merry Hill / Brierley Hill) are recognised as economic drivers for the Black Country and are proposed as a focus for main town centre

uses, complimentary residential development and environmental improvements.

- (b) Merry Hill / Brierley Hill is promoted as one of the 4 strategic centres but developments are subject to important pre-conditions requiring public transport improvements, car parking charges and a masterplan (to be an Area Action Plan prepared by Dudley under the LDF regime).
- (c) Future growth of comparison retail floorspace will be promoted in accordance with the Black Country Vision, and will be shared between within the 4 strategic centres to develop a balanced network of centres. The apportionment of additional comparison retail floorspace is based on current market shares with some uplift for West Bromwich and for Walsall, where a figure of 45,000 sq.m. gross of additional comparison retailing is proposed up to 2021.
- (d) Substantial office development is sought for the 4 strategic centres, with a total increase of 745,000 sq.m. gross (above existing commitments) up to 2021. This is to be divided equally between the four strategic centres.
- (e) It is proposed that two main corridors, linking the 4 strategic centres and the Black Country to Birmingham City Centre, should be promoted for growth as a focus for land use restructuring and for the concentration of resources.
- (f) There is an acceptance of the need to carefully manage the loss of employment land to new housing so as not to undermine the local economy whilst providing high quality employment sites. However, whilst the draft revision combines the current RSS housing figures for the four Black Country Boroughs (to provide for greater flexibility, which will have to be managed through a joint Core Strategy) it maintains the approach that increased housing development after 2011 should be achieved as a minimum.
- (g) There is a recognition that local authorities should give careful consideration, through their LDFs, to addressing the issues of density and the fabric of existing residential areas.
- (h) It is recognised that the strategy depends on transport improvements across the Black Country and a list of priorities – Midland Metro, improvements at motorway junctions, access to strategic centres and to employment areas – is included in the submission.

Issues for consideration

- 6. In general terms the draft RSS revision submission is to be supported. However, it does raise several issues, which are the subject of current negotiation and discussion, involving the Black Country Consortium, Government Office and the WM Regional Assembly. This appendix sets out the current position and the report makes recommendations to ensure that any necessary future amendments can be agreed.
 - i) The strategy to promote growth in the Black Country is essential to its regeneration and the concentration of major retail, leisure and office development into the **4 strategic centres** provides the best means to secure such investment and to do this in a sustainable way. However, there is a concern that the amounts of development sought may be overestimated and

that there is the danger that there could be insufficient developer interest and / or consumer spending to support development in the relatively weaker centres (Walsall and West Bromwich) especially if major development takes place in other locations. The draft RSS revision does refer to the need for development to be apportioned between centres, but it should be recognised that development will need to be phased to ensure that all of the available investment / spending is not taken up by development at Merry Hill and / or Wolverhampton. The wording of the draft RSS submission now reflects this. However, it needs to be clear that the floorspace figures put forward in the draft RSS revision are aspirational and the manner in which they have been derived from the Vision will need to be explained clearly in the 'Black Country Story', which should also include reference to the floorspace requirements derived from work for the emerging regional centres study.

- ii) The wording of the RSS revision with regard to **Merry Hill** has been the subject of considerable discussion. An approach – which ensures retail development will depend upon planning and transport requirements being satisfied and which limits the amount of comparison retail floorspace up to 2016 – has been agreed between the Leaders of the Black Country Councils. The pre-conditions will ensure the potential impacts on other centres are managed, as well as improving accessibility. Specifically the commitment to Metro as the preferred means to improve public transport access to Merry Hill should not be prejudiced.
- iii) Whilst the floorspace figures involved are, again, aspirational, the concentration of **office development** in the strategic centres accords with national policy, provides the best basis for sustainable development and offers the best chance to develop office markets in the Black Country. Attempts by other partners to promote out-of-centre office development, but this has been resisted by the Black Country Consortium. The RSS revision as drafted by the Consortium is to be supported in this regard.
- iv) Whilst the concentration of change along **corridors** reflects particular opportunities for change, as well as the need to focus resources, the importance of major employment areas elsewhere should not be lost. The Consortium has already accepted previous representations from Walsall concerning the importance of employment in Aldridge. It is essential that the RSS revision should allow for needs and opportunities for investment in such places, and in important housing areas, to be recognised.
- v) Walsall Council has commented previously that the amount of **employment land that might become available for housing** development appears to have been over-estimated and that where land does come available it is important to allow time for redevelopment for housing (assuming resources are available). It was, therefore, apparent there could be some constraints on the ability to meet the housing requirements set out in the current RSS. In this context the maintenance of the overall Black Country housing target as a minimum requirement has raised two sets of issues. Firstly, if there are problems in meeting the target then the local authorities are likely to come under pressure in terms of performance indicators and planning appeals and, secondly, it is likely that viable industrial businesses will be lost (and a lack of employment will undermine the ability to attract people to come and live in the

Black Country). In the circumstances, it will be important that resources are available to ensure that land can be properly assembled to manage the release of housing land over time. It will also be important for the RSS revision to make clear that best quality employment land and /or core employment areas should not be given up for housing development. These issues will still require significant further discussion.

- vi) The draft RSS revisions identify major **transport priorities** on a strategic basis, so that it refers to types of schemes rather than providing a comprehensive list of individual proposals. This means that possible ideas for, for example, improving links into Walsall Borough from the M6 Toll are not set out in the document, although it would provide a context to explore such ideas in the future. Such an approach might be seen as disadvantaging the Black Country as quite detailed lists of schemes (primarily for other areas) appear in the RSS at present, so it will be important for a consistent view of the region's priorities to be taken at the next review. It is notable that the list of priorities identified does not include rail improvements, although Walsall in particular offers potential for such improvements which would strengthen links with surrounding areas. There is concern that resources might not be available for substantial spending on railways and that rail investment decisions lie outside the region. Even so, the supporting text for the RSS revision should include a reference to the potential for rail improvements and to the intention to pursue such improvements where feasible.
- vii) The planning system place great emphasis on **monitoring**, but there is no reference to monitoring in the submission as drafted. Monitoring will be important in identifying the extent to which the aspirations for retail and office development can be supported and the extent to which the target for housing development are being met (as well as the consequences for the supply of employment land). At present monitoring is to be addressed through the implementation plan, but all involved recognise there may, technically, be a need to include monitoring within the RSS revision submission.
- viii) The supporting text to the proposed urban renaissance policy for the Black Country refers to consideration being given to the establishment of a dedicated Black Country **delivery mechanism** which, *"subject to progress, might require formal statutory recognition in order to bring forward land and infrastructure."* The Black Country Leaders' view is that the powers and responsibility for the implementation of efforts to regenerate the Black Country should rest firmly with the four boroughs and the RSS revision should be amended to reflect this. The need for such an amendment is subject to discussion between the Black Country council Leaders and will depend upon the outcome of discussion on the appropriate approach taken to delivery of the regeneration sought through the Black Country Study.

Appendix 2:

Summary of the Main Issues Raised by the Responses to the Black Country Study 'Choices' Consultation

1. The consultation period on the Black Country Study Choices Consultation Document ended on the 6 January 2006. Since that time the Black Country Consortium has been analysing the submissions received.
2. In total, 272 submissions were received in response to the consultation. Responses came from residents (25%), business organisations (21%), local authorities (7%) and community / interest groups (27%). Submissions have also been broken down to identify in more detail the source of responses and views of specific groups (e.g. Walsall responses) or interests (e.g. house builders).
3. The Consortium employed consultants, Consensus Planning, to analyse and summarise the findings of the consultation. A copy of the consultants' report has been provided in the Members' Room. Key conclusions include:
 - A general support for the Vision objectives.
 - A general favour (where opinion was provided) towards a preference for a direction of change which combined corridors of public transport and growth in key centres.
 - Support for Merry Hill growing and becoming a recognised strategic centre, but with caveats to ensure growth did not prejudice regeneration of other centres.
 - Support for Dudley town centre retaining a modified future role, primarily for leisure / tourism and housing.
 - Support for a relative focus of retail and office growth upon the 4 key centres of Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Merry Hill but with improved public transport access and accessibility.
 - This support was allied to the need to share growth with smaller Black Country centres whose local community role needed to be protected and consolidated.
 - Support for major growth in office jobs in the Black Country; that the key centres were preferred as a focus for office development but that smaller centres and public transport interchanges should also have a share of growth.
 - Support for providing quality employment locations close to the motorways, served by public transport and where practicable, rail links.
 - Recognition of the need for new technology industries.
 - Recognition of the need to recycle poor quality industrial land for housing.
 - The need to accommodate logistics activity in the Black Country, but also support for large scale Regional Logistics Site in the North Black Country / Southern Staffordshire area.
 - Support for growth in housing with higher densities selectively in town centres and at public transport interchanges. New housing areas needed good cycle and pedestrian access to public transport.
 - Concern at suburban intensification.
 - Recognition of the need to transform previous municipal housing estates.
 - Strong support for extending the Metro system and improving heavy rail services.
 - Support for a new internal strategic route through the Black Country.

- Environmental priorities should be focussed on existing housing areas and town centres.
 - Whilst the need for housing growth was ratified, this should not be at the expense of improvements in job provision and opportunities in the area.
4. The consultation report broadly reflects the response made by Walsall Council (following the report to Cabinet on 21 December 2005) and also the responses from events in Walsall, involving Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP), the LNPs and CEN Forums, Walsall Chamber of Commerce, Walsall CEN & Youth Opinions Unite (YOU).
 5. Whilst the consultants' report takes the view that the strategy for the regeneration of the Black Country is to be supported, it is notable that several consultation responses put forward dissenting views. In general terms:
 - local residents tended to wish for regeneration at a more localised level;
 - business interests wanted to see greater promotion of development and investment, although in several cases with a focus on making the best of existing skills and activities rather than seeking to change the Black Country;
 - a variety of respondents - including Walsall Council and other authorities both within and beyond the Black Country - advocated a cautious approach raising concerns that aspirations for office growth and large amounts of retail and leisure development might not be guaranteed or might cause adverse impacts in surrounding areas;
 - there was some division on the amounts of new housing that might be accommodated as local interests (including the local councils) were concerned to ensure the protection of employment land and premises whilst some commercial interests tended to prefer development on green-field sites outside of the Black Country, whilst on the other hand, surrounding areas and regional interests wished to see more housing development within the Black Country;
 - whilst there was general support for transport improvements, there was some concern as to how the necessary resources might be obtained.
 6. In putting together the preferred option for the revision of the RSS policies for the Black Country, the BCC (with the involvement of officers from the four boroughs) has sought to accommodate and reflect the general preferences reflected in the choices responses. Where there are issues these are identified in **Appendix 1**.

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13 February 2006

Dear David

**MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF WALSALL YOUTH SERVICE FOLLOWING
THE OFSTED INSPECTION IN DECEMBER 2004.**

Many thanks to you, Andy Driver and others who arranged for Government Office to make an assessment of Walsall Youth Service on 24th January 2006. This letter summarises our assessment and makes some recommendations for further or continued action.

Firstly, please pass our thanks to all the people who gave their time to organise the day, and to those who were interviewed. We are very grateful.

The purpose of the assessment was to give an independent appraisal of the progress made against the recommendations in the Ofsted report of March 2005. We deemed this a necessary substitute for an Ofsted re-inspection following their decision not to make a follow up visit to their inspection.

The team who were involved in the assessment were not Ofsted inspectors and the assessment was not made against Ofsted's framework. However, the team consisted of four people, all of whom have considerable experience in youth policy, and youth service management and delivery. Together we looked at the Action Plan progress report and many accompanying documents. We interviewed the youth service managers, senior managers in the Council, two Councillors, community organisations and young people, and took into account information we had gleaned from partners over the past few months. Altogether, we spent in excess of 70 person hours on the inspection.

Our overall assessment is that Walsall Youth Service is no longer an inadequate service and that excellent progress has been made against all the recommendations in a remarkably short time.

We offer the following suggestions for further progress:

- It is important to ensure accurate collection and analysis of Management Information data as indicated on the youth base system in order to make judgements of an improving service. This data enables the youth service to have accurate performance management and monitoring of the service and to gauge improvements. Data from this year should be used as a baseline to plan future delivery.
- To ensure that the youth service maintains it's monitoring of external indicators in service delivery and uses external comparative data to support its continuous development programme.
- Continue to replace SLAs with contracts for Community Associations (and any other contractors) which stipulate outcomes. While developing contracts, we endorse the continued involvement of Community Associations;
- The Service has been very successful in recruiting trained and qualified staff, to lead the development of youth work in Walsall. This success needs to be maintained alongside a strategy that will ensure that staff retention is maximised.
- The training of central youth work staff, staff in partner organisations and young people needs to continue in a rolling programme of people development.

If the service continues to develop, we should be confident that the youth service will have a very positive assessment in the JAR of 2007/08.

We were pleased to hear that the Youth Service is well placed to help guide the Children's Trust and Local Area Agreement in Walsall, especially on the development of integrated youth support services.

Our congratulations for the enormous progress that the service has made since the Ofsted inspection.

Yours sincerely

JOHN ROBERTSON

Cc Andy Driver, Principal Youth Officer, Walsall MBC
Roger Crouch, Director of Children and Learning, GOWM