

Cabinet – 19 November 2008

Brownhills Environmental Strategy

Portfolio: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Service: Regeneration Development and Delivery

Wards: Brownhills

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan: Yes

1. Summary of Report

This report details the findings of the Brownhills Environmental Strategy produced by LDA Design on behalf of Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group (whg) to help create the framework for the delivery of regeneration in Brownhills as part of the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF). Cabinet is asked to support the recommendations in the study.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet:

- (i) Approve the Brownhills Environmental Strategy as the basis for long term public realm and environmental regeneration of the area linked to Walsall Housing Group's Housing Masterplan and the Brownhills Transport Package.

3. Background

- 3.1 A Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for the borough was approved by Cabinet on 22 March 2006. On 18 October 2006 Cabinet agreed that Brownhills would form one of the first tranche of SRF priority projects alongside Bentley, Goscote, Willenhall and Moxley. Similar Framework Studies for Bentley, Goscote and Moxley have been agreed by Cabinet in April 2007, September 2007 and April 2008 respectively, and the intention to promote the regeneration of Willenhall through the preparation of a statutory Area Action Plan was agreed in January 2008.
- 3.2 The council appointed LDA Design in November 2007 to develop an environmental strategy framework for Brownhills that would complement the Brownhills Housing Masterplan already prepared by whg and the Brownhills Transport Package to provide an overall regeneration framework for Brownhills. The strategy has been completed and specifies two key objectives:

- To bring the surrounding countryside into the town by protecting, enhancing and creating green infrastructure that encourages high quality development schemes and improves accessibility of the new centre to the neighbouring residential areas, community facilities, open spaces, canal, National Cycle Network and to car-borne visitors to Brownhills.
- To reshape the town centre to take advantage of its valuable canalside setting and accommodate increased provision of modern retailing units, leisure services and housing.

3.3 The report provides a vision for Brownhills;

“Brownhills will become a distinctive Midlands canalside town attracting visitors to its many environmental attractions and to its new District Centre of multiples and niche shops, markets, cafes and bars.”

3.4 The report provides a strategy for the redevelopment/refurbishment of key development sites and environmental enhancements, which has been formed following extensive consultation with partners and the local community. A Project Reference Group (PRG), made up of ward councillors and key community representatives has been established and has been integral in leading the community involvement in the Strategy’s development.

3.5 A key outcome of the Environmental Strategy was the identification of vital linkages between environmental improvements and the following strategies to provide a comprehensive framework for this area:

- o Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP, 2005)
- o Whg’s Brownhills Housing Masterplan (prepared BDP, 2006), approved by the Housing Corporation in 2007 as part of their forward allocation pool;
- o the Brownhills Transport Package that has been submitted for consideration as a regional transport priority
- o its identification as Regeneration Corridor 15 within the Black Country Joint Core Strategy which will also aid in focussing investment into the area and;
- o the adopted Greenspace Strategy.

4. Resource Considerations

4.1 Financial

In April 2008 Cabinet supported the principle of establishing a Strategic Partnering Arrangement jointly with whg to identify a development model and developer(s) to deliver the Strategic Regeneration Framework Programme in Brownhills, Moxley and Goscote Lane Corridor.

Fundamentally the Strategic Partnering Arrangement will involve the transfer of land assets to a developer partner and those values liberated to be reinvested in the delivery of the transformational regeneration programmes in Brownhills, Moxley and Goscote Corridor, which will include some of the projects/enhancements identified in the Environmental Strategy.

It is anticipated that this process will have the ability to secure regeneration benefits over and above the traditional returns that can be achieved from the development process and represents an innovative approach to delivery. Work is on-going on identifying an appropriate delivery model in conjunction with key partners.

It is anticipated that the works identified within the Brownhills Environmental Strategy will form a key element of those works to be delivered through the Strategic Partnering approach.

The Strategy will also provide a framework to help stimulate private investment and that of partner organisations. The Brownhills Housing Masterplan has achieved Strategic Fit status with the Housing Corporation and has been accepted into the Housing Corporation Forward Allocation Pool for funding. In addition, the Housing Corporation, English Partnership and Advantage West Midlands are supporting Council and whg housing led regeneration objectives through part of the steering group to kick start phase one of the Strategic Partnering Arrangement.

It is acknowledged that there is no direct commitment to undertake any of the projects, either development sites or environmental enhancements, contained within the Strategy, however as the projects are brought forward and developed they will be reported accordingly through the necessary due finance procedures.

4.2 Legal

It is presumed that no Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will be required for the Brownhills Environmental Strategy against which applications for permissions will be judged.

4.3 Staffing

The recommendations and Strategy can be implemented using existing staffing resources. No additional staffing is required.

5. Citizen Impact

5.1 The benefits for Brownhills citizens brought by the Environmental Strategy in conjunction with the Housing Masterplan and Brownhills Transport Package will include:

- Improved and clear pedestrian circulation
- Creation of attractive public spaces and communal open space
- Creation of high quality pedestrian shopping
- Connections to existing green infrastructure
- Creation of high quality residential dwellings
- Reduction in the level of traffic and congestion along High Street

5.2 These improvements will create a significantly enhanced area and their delivery in partnership with the local community through the PRG and other agencies will lead to greater local pride and citizen involvement.

6. Community Safety

- 6.1 New buildings and pedestrian links will offer the opportunity to incorporate Secured by Design standards to ensure that crime is designed out of new developments/projects.
- 6.2 Current under-used public green spaces and communal areas are being subjected to vandalism and related anti-social activity including littering. The Strategy brings forward proposals to redevelop/refurbish a number of under-used sites, so that a new positive public use can be found to complement the upcoming whg residential developments and other planned key regeneration projects.

7. Environmental Impact

- 7.1 The Strategy proposes a vision and strategic objectives for protecting, enhancing and creating a network of green infrastructure, and outlines a range of ideas for development and for environmental enhancement schemes of green spaces and streetscape within the study area.
- 7.2 The Strategy encourages an expectation for high quality design for new buildings and the public realm, whilst making the most of the surrounding natural assets and bringing aspects of these into the centre. The Strategy seeks to transform the environment of the area by redeveloping vacant and under-used sites, improving open and public spaces and encouraging high quality dwellings and retail buildings. New developments will be delivered in accordance with relevant Supplementary Planning Documents including 'Designing Walsall' (Urban Design).

8. Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Performance Management Issues

The delivery of the SRF projects is a priority within the 2008/09 Regeneration Service Plan.

The provision of the right type of new housing and affordable housing will contribute to National Indicators; 'Net additional homes provided' (NI154) and 'Number of affordable homes delivered' (NI155).

8.2 Risk Management Issues

The principle risks are:

Risk 1 – The community is not continually engaged and not kept informed of progress and thus they become despondent or frustrated, and there is a resistance to change

(Risk Level Low)

The Brownhills community has been engaged in the SRF work from the outset and has informed the proposals within the Environmental Strategy and Housing Masterplan. This will be overseen by the PRG and continue through the

implementation phases, as well as in the development and implementation of the Transport Package.

Risk 2 – Failure to attract sufficient resources to fund implementation

(Risk Level Medium)

The Strategy will play a vital role in delivering the regeneration of Brownhills through the Strategic Partnering Arrangement, allocating S106 funding from planned high profile regeneration schemes and securing funding from other external sources.

Risk 3 – Implementation of key regeneration schemes within the area is delayed

(Risk Level Medium)

The risk of delay is likely to be reduced through working closely with external partners and stakeholders (i.e. whg and Tesco) and keeping the community fully informed about the partners' intentions.

Through the Strategic Partnering Arrangement the council and whg are proposing to procure a developer partner(s) to deliver a package of projects which will prove more attractive to a developer than developing individual sites.

There is clear evidence of a downturn in the housing market with impact upon local house building rates. However, the process of redevelopment of a number of key Brownhills housing sites is a medium term (post 2009) proposal and consultants DTZ, who have been appointed to advise upon viability issues, have stressed that this project will be substantially 'protected' from the current negative trends. DTZ also advise that the 'packaging' of sites and development of a 10-15 year programme will further protect against local 'downturns' in the housing market.

In addition based on the longevity of the Strategic Partnering Arrangement and the strategy the implementation of environmental enhancements should not be unduly delayed by the possible use of Compulsory Purchase Orders in Goscote and Moxley.

9. Equality Implications

The Strategy will bring benefits to the whole Brownhills community and the redevelopment of sites, the enhancements to the local environment and the building of new housing will present opportunities to engage with many sectors of the community and ensure issues of equality and accessibility are taken into account.

10. Consultation

- 10.1 A Brownhills Project Reference Group (PRG) was formed in 2007 through the Brownhills and Aldridge North Local Neighbourhood Partnership from representation from the local community, key stakeholders, and ward members. The role of the Brownhills PRG is as an overall project steering group, who helped appoint the consultancy team and assisted officers in developing and consulting upon the proposals within the Strategy.

- 10.2 The role of the Brownhills PRG will be important in the delivery agenda and continuing to represent local interests.
- 10.3 Consultation events for the Environmental Strategy were held in February, March and May 2008. These successfully gained local opinion on the vision and environmental projects included in the Strategy. Local residents have, and will continue to have, the opportunity to become involved in the regeneration of the Study Area by influencing decision making of the environmental schemes outlined in the Strategy.
- 10.4 Consultation events for the Brownhills Housing Masterplan (BDP, 2006) were held in December 2005 and March 2006. These successfully considered all options for refurbishment and redevelopment of the various whg housing areas, with notable support for significant change in the area.
- 10.5 Given the momentum of external regeneration plans for Brownhills (i.e. whg, Tesco) the Council will ensure that the local residents are continually engaged and can make a contribution to the future of their area. This is important to fulfil the wider regeneration benefits of community pride and capacity building.

Background papers

1. Walsall Unitary Development Plan 2005
2. Brownhills Environmental Strategy August 2008
3. Walsall Housing Group Brownhills Housing Masterplan (BDP, 2006)
4. District Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework – Cabinet report 22 March 2006
5. Strategic Regeneration Framework Delivery Priorities – Cabinet report 18 October 2006
6. Strategic Regeneration Framework: Strategic Partnering Arrangement – Cabinet report 16 April 2008

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