

POSITION STATEMENT: STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE WEST MIDLANDS METROPLITAN AREA

Background

At the beginning of the Millennium spatial planning policies in the West Midlands Metropolitan Area were reassessed in the light of the decentralisation of population and investment from the urban areas to surrounding shire districts. In addition to these economic and social concerns, environmental concerns were also emerging such as degradation in urban areas and pressures elsewhere. These development patterns were also leading to greater car reliance and longer journeys resulting in congestion, air pollution and limiting the scope for reducing carbon emissions.

A long term *Urban Renaissance* strategy was put in place through the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), 2004 and updated in 2008. In short this sought to develop *urban areas in such a way that they can increasingly meet their own economic and social needs in order to counter the unsustainable movement of people and jobs facilitated by previous strategies*. This approach has been independently examined on three separate occasions, most recently via the RSS Phase II Revision Examination in Public, and has been reaffirmed as the most appropriate way forward.

As these unsustainable trends had evolved over time, it follows that the new policy approach requires time to bed down and as such the strategy was considered to be a long term one. Monitoring suggests that the *Urban Renaissance* is beginning to take effect and that population, investment and jobs have grown; albeit the recent recession has had an adverse impact and worklessness remains at unacceptably high levels.

The Secretary of State has declared his intention to abolish RSSs through the Localism Bill. Until this is done, however, it remains part of the statutory development plan and decisions should be taken in accordance with it. Its 'relative weight', however, remains an ongoing matter of legal debate.

The need for a Position Statement

In the light of this uncertainty and changes to the planning system that are being proposed through the Bill, the opportunity has been taken to prepare a position statement on behalf of the seven Metropolitan Authorities and Integrated Transport Authority / Centro. The purpose of this is to:

- Demonstrate categorically to partners and stakeholders that all authorities remain committed to the *Urban Renaissance* principles and are continuing to plan for growth through the progression of their own development plan documents and accompanying strategies.
- Demonstrate an early commitment to fulfilling the duty to cooperate, which is contained within the draft Bill. This requires ongoing constructive and active

engagement on the preparation of development plan documents and other activities relating to the sustainable development and use of land, in particular in connection with strategic infrastructure.

- Provide a coherent strategic spatial context for finalising the third West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP3), which covers the administrative areas of the seven Metropolitan Authorities. Major transport investment proposals are shown on the plan where possible¹.

This statement has no formal status. It is a summary position of current policy and is subject to change to reflect any new priorities that emerge at the local level or when new legislation is enacted or Government guidance or policy is published.

Priorities for Spatial Development

Birmingham

Growth is focussed within the Eastern Corridor, the City Centre, identified Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods², (including Longbridge) and the Aston, Newtown and Lozells area. This coincides with growth proposals in the Black Country to the west and Solihull to the east. The Big City Plan outlines specific areas in the City Centre where resources will be focussed along with details of individual projects, schemes and infrastructure.

Black Country

The majority of growth is directed towards an identified Growth Network, which comprises the strategic centres of Brierley Hill, Walsall, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and 16 Regeneration Corridors. The Growth Network coincides with growth proposals in Birmingham to the south east.

Coventry

Employment led growth to be focussed in the City Centre and the Strategic Regeneration Areas of Canley, Swanswell and the Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm New Deal for Communities Area. Unless already committed Green Belt and greenfield sites to be protected from development.

¹ **Committed Schemes:** A41 Expressway, A4123 Burnt Tree Island, Birmingham New Street Gateway, Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Network, Selly Oak new road, Red Routes Package One, West Midlands Urban Traffic Control., Birmingham Airport/. NEC Integrated Public Transport Access (ANITA). **Supported Pool:** Birmingham City Centre Midland Metro Extension. **Pre Qualification Pool:**A38 Aston Expressway Tame Valley Viaduct, A45 Corridor Enhancements: Westbound Bridge, Chester road access Improvements, Coventry to Nuneaton rail enhancements, Darlaston Strategic Development Area.

² Greater Icknield, Southern Gateway / Highgate, Bordesley Park, Stechford, Meadway, Shard End, Druids Heath, Kings Norton 3 Estates, Longbridge

Solihull

Focus housing growth and new employment opportunities in or near North Solihull including Green Belt adjustments to facilitate local regeneration and growth ambitions with additional development in the urban west and its town centres, especially in areas well served by public transport, and small scale development to meet local needs in rural settlements. The Meriden Gap will be maintained and economic assets such as Birmingham Airport, the National Exhibition Centre and the two Regional Investment Sites will be sustained and further developed to drive the growth of the sub regional economy.

Key Strategic Priorities

Although the West Midlands RSS remains part of the statutory development plan, the opportunity has been taken to provide clarity by reiterating support for key cross boundary principles and policies. These are summarised below and shown on the attached plan as appropriate.

Green Belt

- Strategic adjustments to Green Belt boundaries are not supported as these are considered to encourage selective out migration of population from urban areas and run counter to regeneration objectives.

Growth and Regeneration

- Regeneration led growth and investment focussed on bringing forward previously developed land and making the best use of existing infrastructure and resources within the identified Regeneration Zones.³

Employment Land Supply

- Provision for a continuing supply of employment land in each plan area sufficient to meet development needs for the next five years.
- Support for the development at key nodes in the identified High Technology Corridors⁴ to counter structural changes in the manufacturing sector and to fully exploit agglomeration effects. These are:
 - The Central Technology Belt (Birmingham City Centre – Worcestershire A38 Corridor)
 - Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire
 - Wolverhampton to Telford

³ East Birmingham / North Solihull, North Black Country / South Staffordshire, West Birmingham / South Black Country

⁴ These are shown diagrammatically and do not denote corridor based ribbon development or Green Belt land release for development. It is nodes within these corridors such as research and educational institutions and key sites that will be identified for development

- Regional Investment Sites⁵ are large, high quality sites with good access to the strategic highway network and have been identified to support growth and diversification of the local economy; their benefits in terms of job creation transgress local authority boundaries. Their retention, implementation, appropriate expansion is supported as is the identification of further sites to meet identified shortfalls.
- Support the identification of a Regional Logistics Site, for which a need has been identified, to support the economic growth and diversification of the Black Country.

Strategic Centres

- The strategic centres of Birmingham, Brierley Hill, Coventry, Solihull, Sutton Coldfield, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton should be the focus for new major comparison retail development and large scale leisure and office developments. Improved accessibility to these centres is a priority.
- Other important centres should be the subject of local policies to meet more specific needs.

Transport

- Implementaion of Rapid Transit Network and the Major Schemes as identified in the draft LTP3 to support the *Urban Renaissance*.
- Support for the runway extension of Birmingham Airport and improved access to the Airport and the National Exhibition Centre from all parts of the Metropolitan Area.
- Support for strategic Park and Ride provision at appropriate locations to relieve congestion in the Metropolitan Area subject to impacts on the strategic highway network and other environmental impacts.

Green Infrastructure

- Support for cross boundary identification and co-ordination of Green Infrastructure Networks

⁵ Ansty, Birmingham Business Park, Blythe Valley Park, Hilton Cross, Wolverhampton Business Park, i54 Wobaston Road, Longbridge, East Aston

