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Date 15 01 2008

Ref. 2008 1501



Government Report endorses Black Country Plans for long term regeneration

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has today published the long awaited Phase One Revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. This supports future long term plans for the transformation of the Black Country and will pave the way for new homes, more jobs, better shopping and, above all, a better environment for over 1 million people who live in the sub region.

Some four years ago, the Leaders of the four Black Country Local Authorities - Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley - made an historic decision to work together 'Four as One' to shape a better future for the Black Country. This was enabled through the establishment of the Black Country Consortium, a public/private partnership of the four local authorities working with local communities, businesses and Government agencies. In turn, this led to the commissioning of a groundbreaking joint study (known as the Black Country Study) by the Black Country Consortium working jointly with the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the Regional Planning Body to prepare a Vision and strategy for future growth and competitiveness of the Black Country.

It is the outcome of this Study, as set out as a Phase One Revision to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS), that Government has finally endorsed today. This means that the future Black Country will see growth focused on four strategic centres and along public transport corridors, leading to a greater choice of homes, more jobs, stronger business opportunities all supported by better public transport and radical improvements in our living environment. This Strategy will guide future housing growth and the economic regeneration of the Black Country in a way which will enable the sub-region to adapt to the challenges of climate change by bringing people, jobs, shops and leisure closer together.

The future of the Black Country will therefore be a rich mix of historic and new communities with access to all Black Country Centres for shopping, leisure and work. Existing strategic centres - Wolverhampton City Centre, Walsall and West Bromwich Town Centres - will be transformed and expanded. They will be the focus for location of new jobs, particularly in services, retail and leisure, in the Black Country.

Today's announcement by the Government is an historic one for the Black Country, and indeed the wider West Midlands Region, as Brierley Hill will now be formally recognised as a new strategic centre – the fourth strategic centre serving Black Country communities and

economy. This will enable plans to go ahead for more shops, leisure facilities, offices and housing all to be built in such a way to link Merry Hill, the Waterfront and Brierley Hill High Street together as one Centre focused on the canal environment and a proposed new Metro link.

The existing town centre of Dudley is destined for an exciting new role as both a regional tourism destination and a focus for new homes making the most of its historic and cultural heritage.

It is also intended that new jobs, particularly in manufacturing and logistics, will be provided across the Black Country by improvements in land, buildings and transport focused on four extensive 'employment land corridors'.

Critically, a network of quality public transport routes will be developed, building on the existing rail and Metro routes together with new approaches to bus transport, linking people with jobs and the Black Country network of Centres. These routes will be the focus for the provision of new homes and enhanced residential areas to create a much greater variety of choice of homes and living environments for Black Country people of today and tomorrow. New homes will also be built in and around Black Country centres. Crucially, transformation of the environment will drive the future Black Country particularly using the Black Country heritage of canals and nature reserves (the positive legacy of the industrial heyday).

The report has been welcomed by West Midlands Regional Assembly and the Black Country Consortium.

Councillor Rex Roberts, Chair of West Midlands Regional Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership was particularly pleased that the Government report reflected all the hard work undertaken by the Consortium working in partnership with the Assembly.

He said: *"This report is great news for the Region. It supports our aspirations for regenerating the Black Country and confirms that we're moving in the right direction. A successful Black Country is essential for the West Midlands future prosperity - ultimately, the conclusions will be critical for delivering a major environmental and economic transformation."*

Councillor David Caunt, Leader of Dudley Council and Chair of the Black Country Consortium said: *"We see this report as a significant breakthrough for the renaissance of the Black Country, as confirmation that Government are supporting our ambitious plans on which we have worked so hard together through our Black Country partnership over the last four years. Our objectives to be home to more people with better job opportunities and better incomes, living in a 'green' environment are acknowledged. Government is supporting our radical proposals to accommodate growth through the creation of new places for living with more attractive environments with better access to public transport and greenspace – the Black Country as an Urban Park."*

We are delighted that the report supports our Black Country vision of growth based on our Black Country city and town centres operating as a network for the benefit of all Black Country citizens. Particularly exciting is the Government's recognition of the strategic importance of Brierley Hill as a key centre for growth in the Black Country."

Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium said: *"This is a vote of confidence in the Black Country and gives us a real lever for our future aspirations. This report*

gives confidence to developers and the private sector about the long-term future and economic performance of the Black Country.”

“The Black Country Consortium particularly welcomes the proposals for introducing a wider and more explicit environment policy for the Black Country including the development of a ‘green infrastructure strategy’ on which discussions with Natural England and other environmental agencies are already taking place as part of the development of an overall Landscape Action Plan”.

For further information, visit www.blackcountryconsortium.co.uk
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For press enquiries, please contact: Tina Corfield, Black Country Study Director, Black Country Consortium on 07824 415247 or email tina_corfield@blackcountryconsortium.co.uk

Or Tim Williams, Senior Advisor, West Midlands Regional Assembly on 0121 678 1050 or email t.williams@wmra.gov.uk

Note

The Government’s report is the Phase One Revision to the existing West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which sets out the planning framework for the whole West Midlands Region and today becomes part of the statutory development plan for the Black Country. The policies and proposals set out therein will now be further developed in the Joint Core Strategy currently being developed by the four Black Country local authorities.