

## Chapter 3

# The Spatial Strategy for the Development of the West Midlands

### A Fundamental Change of Direction

- 3.1 The RPG process has provided the opportunity to fundamentally reassess the nature of the West Midlands and the different circumstances, threats and opportunities that each place within it faces. In doing so the continued decentralisation of population and investment from the Major Urban Areas (MUAs) and the need to create balanced and stable communities across the Region have been identified as key issues. Sustainable communities: building for the future (a national plan of action) and the Regional plan (Sustainable communities in the West Midlands) mark a step change in the Government's approach to sustainable communities through, among other things, setting in place lasting solutions to reverse decline and regenerate deprived areas.
- 3.2 An important factor in the trend of decentralisation from the MUAs has been the availability of development land in the settlements close to them. This has contributed to the loss of investment, abandonment and environmental degradation in the MUAs and increased development and environmental pressures in other parts of the Region. The dispersal of population and activities under-uses the social and physical resources of the MUAs and contributes to unsustainable development patterns that lead people to make more and longer journeys, more often than not by the private car.
- 3.3 At the same time some rural areas have suffered from insufficient economic activity and suitable housing development to support a balanced population. This has resulted in people either leaving or needing to travel greater distances to access services and job opportunities.
- 3.4 In this context four major challenges are identified for the Region:
- a) **Urban Renaissance** – developing the MUAs in such a way that they can increasingly meet their own economic and social needs in order to counter the unsustainable outward movement of people and jobs facilitated by previous strategies;
  - b) **Rural Renaissance** – addressing more effectively the major changes which are challenging the traditional roles of rural areas and the countryside;
  - c) **Diversifying and modernising the Region's economy** – ensuring that opportunities for growth are linked to meeting needs and that they help reduce social exclusion; and
  - d) **Modernising the transport infrastructure of the West Midlands** – supporting the sustainable development of the Region.
- 3.5 It will not be enough to tackle these challenges in isolation of each other. They must be addressed simultaneously and as different aspects of the same issues. Compared with historical trends this will require a significant redistribution of new development, investment and action, particularly to support the development of the Region's transport networks, to bring forward appropriate development opportunities, and to improve the quality of the environment within the MUAs.
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## The Spatial Strategy

- 3.6** The Spatial Strategy can be broadly summarised as enabling all parts of the Region to sustainably meet their own needs, in a mutually supportive way. Protecting and enhancing the Region's environmental assets, and where appropriate making economic use of them, together with the prudent use of natural resources, is a core element of this and will be particularly important in guiding the nature and location of development and improvements at sub-regional and local levels.
- 3.7** To achieve sustainable communities different responses are required dependent on circumstances around the Region. However, as places have functional inter-relationships with each other, for example sharing housing markets or relying on each other to provide leisure, shopping or employment opportunities, these different responses should be complementary to each other.
- 3.8** In the MUAs of Birmingham/Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire conurbation more development opportunities will be created to retain and attract people and investment primarily by:
- a) supporting the market renewal of residential areas in Birmingham/Sandwell and North Staffordshire currently suffering from low demand;
  - b) tackling deprivation and creating employment opportunities in the five urban regeneration zones which cover parts of all the MUAs;
  - c) protecting and enhancing the quality of urban environments;
  - d) creating a balanced network of vital and vibrant town and city centres as the strategic focus for major retail, leisure and office developments;
  - e) resisting peripheral expansion for housing but, in certain circumstances, allowing Regionally important employment where this supports the urban renaissance; and
  - f) improving the quality of transport networks to reduce social exclusion, improve economic performance and facilitate a more sustainable pattern of development.
- 3.9** In other areas new development will be focused on the Region's other large settlements and in particular the five sub-regional foci of Hereford, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Telford and Worcester, with:
- a) new development primarily meeting locally generated needs; at a level to support balanced, sustainable communities;
  - b) the proportion of housing development to meet demand arising from the MUAs significantly reduced;
  - c) housing needs being satisfied in the sub-regional foci rather than by the peripheral expansion of the other large settlements;
  - d) rural renaissance initiatives concentrated in the rural regeneration zone in the west of the Region;
  - e) a balanced network of vital and vibrant town and city centres as the strategic focus for major retail, leisure and office developments, acting as service centres for their rural hinterlands; and
  - f) transport networks improved to reduce social exclusion and improve access to services and opportunities by serving movements between and within towns and cities, towns and their rural hinterlands, and within the rural areas.
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- 3.10** Providing sufficient and suitable job opportunities is an important aspect of balanced and sustainable communities. The Spatial Strategy takes advantage of the many opportunities for economic activities within the Region. The Region's town and city centres, the six regeneration zones and three high technology corridors will provide the spatial focus for economic growth and diversification. These will provide investment and employment opportunities and through transport improvements be made more accessible to those in most need.

## **A Role for Each Place in the Region**

- 3.11** The key to the Spatial Strategy is achieving an urban renaissance in the four MUAs of Birmingham/Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire conurbation. Nonetheless, the ultimate aim of the Spatial Strategy is a Region made up of a dynamic network of places, all important in their own right and with distinct characteristics, but with reinforcing economic, cultural and social functions. An important part of this is the development of a balanced network of town and city centres (PA11) that will act as the focus for major investment in retail, leisure and office developments. Broadly speaking this will mean:
- a) each of the MUAs developing enhanced economic and social roles, and building on their roles as service centres for cultural activities and on their historic heritage:
    - Birmingham – strengthening its role as the Regional capital with emerging world city status;
    - the Black Country – continuing its economic, physical and environmental renewal focused around improved infrastructure and the regeneration of town and city centres (including Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton) to create modern and sustainable communities;
    - Coventry – continuing to build upon its reputation as a forward-looking city which, along with Solihull and Warwickshire, can help create an important growth engine for the Region with links to the growing parts of the South East and East Midlands regions; and
    - North Staffordshire – building on its traditional strengths of ceramics and engineering but realising its potential as an accessible location with good links to the East Midlands and the more prosperous parts of the North West region;
  - b) the major shire towns and cities beyond the MUAs continuing to act as a focus for new investment to support wider regeneration and help meet the economic, social and cultural needs of surrounding rural areas:
    - building upon their traditional strengths of historic heritage and high quality environment, particularly in the cathedral cities of Worcester, Hereford and Lichfield and important county towns such as Shrewsbury, Stafford and Warwick/Leamington; and
    - supporting the continued development of towns such as Telford and Rugby with the potential and infrastructure to attract new investment; and
  - c) other parts of the Region, particularly other main towns and villages, all building on their locational strengths, environmental qualities, regeneration opportunities and the linkages between them and with their local hinterlands to deliver improved local services and develop their own distinctive roles and character.
- 3.12** For the Region to develop in this way, it is also vital that it develops as a “connected” Region with economic, social and cultural linkages supported by improvements in accessibility and mobility. This is a key theme embodied within this strategy.
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- 3.13** Future reviews of this guidance will need to further refine policies and approaches so that they are more specific to the circumstances of the Region as a whole and to particular sub-areas within it in order to prioritise and target action most effectively. In doing so it will also need to better define the functional interactions between places within and, where appropriate, outside of the West Midlands.

## Spatial Strategy Objectives

- 3.14** The following strategic objectives provide a context for the policies in the topic Chapters:
- a) to make the MUAs of the West Midlands increasingly attractive places where people want to live, work and invest;
  - b) to secure the regeneration of the rural areas of the Region;
  - c) to create a joined-up multi-centred Regional structure where all areas/centres have distinct roles to play;
  - d) to retain the Green Belt, but to allow an adjustment of boundaries where this is necessary to support urban regeneration;
  - e) to support the cities and towns of the Region to meet their local and sub-regional development needs;
  - f) to support the diversification and modernisation of the Region's economy while ensuring that opportunities for growth are linked to meeting needs and reducing social exclusion;
  - g) to ensure the quality of the environment is conserved and enhanced across all parts of the Region;
  - h) to improve significantly the Region's transport systems;
  - i) to promote the development of a network of strategic centres across the Region; and
  - j) to promote Birmingham as a world city

## Objectives for the Black Country

- 3.14A** In addition, given the importance of the regeneration of the Black Country to the RSS, the following objectives provide the context for the Black Country policies in Chapters 4, 7, 8 & 9.
- a) to reverse out-migration
    - accommodating within the Black Country all of the generated household growth from 2011
    - meeting at least the levels of housing provision identified in Policy CF3 table 1;
  - b) to raise income levels
    - raising demand and household incomes (average earnings, GDP per head and reducing unemployment) to the UK average by 2033;
  - c) to create an inclusive and cohesive society within the Black Country
    - removing barriers to opportunity
    - changing the socio economic mix by increasing the proportion of social grades A and B to match the national profile by 2033 or earlier;
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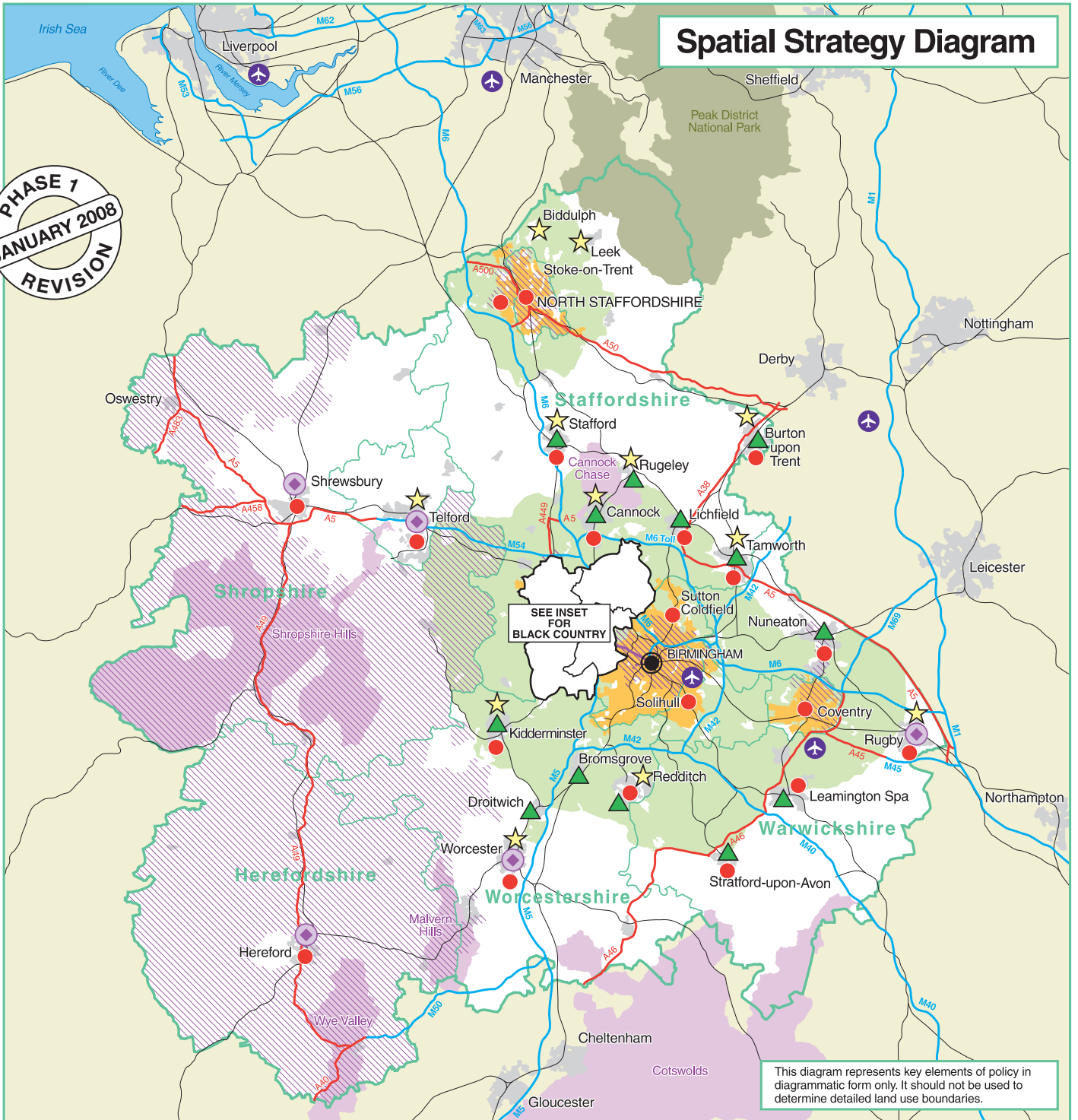
- d) to transform the Black Country Environment
  - protecting and enhancing the sub-region's environmental and heritage assets and biodiversity
  - implementing the Black Country as Urban Park concept.

### **Delivering and Monitoring the Spatial Strategy**

- 3.15** The Spatial Strategy will be delivered by the implementation of the policies in this guidance and their effective integration and co-ordination with other relevant strategies, action plans and investment strategies such as those for transport, the economy, education, housing, health, training and the environment. This will require a high level of co-operation between the Region's public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders. The RPB should seek to broaden involvement in its working groups and new and innovative fora and delivery vehicles may also be required to complement local strategic partnerships, low demand pathfinder partnership boards, the Regional Housing Board and other existing mechanisms.
- 3.16** While it is not anticipated that the Spatial Strategy will require a fundamental review in the short to medium term it is expected to evolve in response to monitoring, lessons learnt, the changing external environment and new opportunities.

**PHASE 1**  
**JANUARY 2008**  
**REVISION**

# Spatial Strategy Diagram



This diagram represents key elements of policy in diagrammatic form only. It should not be used to determine detailed land use boundaries.

### Settlements

- Major Urban Area - Main focus for development and investment  
BIRMINGHAM  
BLACK COUNTRY  
COVENTRY  
NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE  
SOLIHULL
- Sub-Regional foci for development beyond MUAs
- Other large settlement

### Regeneration

- Regeneration Zone included in Agenda for Action
- Local Regeneration Area outside of Regeneration Zones
- Regional Centre
- Strategic Centre
- Growth Corridors
- Employment Land Investment Corridors

### Strategic Links

- Motorway
- Core Trunk Road
- Railway
- Midland Metro Line 1
- Metro Extensions (Brierley Hill & Edgbaston)
- Other high volume corridors with potential for enhanced public transport
- Airport

### Environment

- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- National Park
- Green Belt
- Built-up Area
- Strategic Authority Boundary

### BLACK COUNTRY

