West Bromwich Area Action Plan – Changes to Preferred Options

1. Introduction

1.1 The West Bromwich Area Action Plan forms part of Sandwell’s Local Development Framework. The Plan concentrates on developing a strategy to capture the growth required to make this a strategic town centre within the Black Country Sub-Region, as well as looking at the wider area to support the housing needs for the town. The strategy and vision for West Bromwich highlights the regeneration required to attract further investment into the town, make best use of the strategic highway network and public transport links and provide social infrastructure to support new good quality housing.

1.2 The Preferred Options document, consulted on in June 2008 set out proposals which were to deliver this transformational change in the town and the wider area. These included major retail schemes, new civic buildings and office developments within the Town Centre. In addition there were a number of residential allocations put forward within, and on sites on the outskirts of the town. The proposals are reflective of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy which has been developed in tandem with the Area Action Plan.

1.3 A key issue for an Area Action Plan is the delivery of the various schemes to ensure that the transformational change set out can be achieved within the timeframe of the Plan. In this respect, it is important that proposals put forward are supported and achievable. The AAP had been changed to accommodate some of the comments made during the Preferred Options consultation stage with the anticipated Publication due in June 2010. However, issues arose prior to this date which necessitated the delay of the Plan until they could be resolved. In addition to this, it was felt appropriate to await the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review since many of the proposals were reliant on funding which was doubtful to be available in later years.

1.4 Given the changes that have been made to the Area Action Plan, following the announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review and the other issues which had arisen, it is felt necessary to re-consult on these changes to the Preferred Options to ensure that there are no major objections to the proposals before progressing onto the next stage. A decision was therefore made to highlight the most significant changes to the proposals for consultation. The full Area Action Plan will be Published later in 2011 for consultation prior to Submission to the Secretary of State.
2. **Background**

2.1 In recent years, West Bromwich centre has been strengthened through a number of investment opportunities arising in the retail, office and education sectors. These have come forward on the back of policy objectives and strategies of the Council and Civic Partnership providing a sound basis on which to bring these developments forward.

2.2 The West Bromwich Town Centre Masterplan produced in 1998 initially identified the broad areas for development which would help shape the Town and provide for growth. This Masterplan served as a review of the Unitary Development Plan at that time, and formed the strategy to be taken forward into the new Unitary Development Plan. Adopted in 2004, this identified the key areas where regeneration was needed to help support the Town Centre and assist in its future growth.

*Black Country Joint Core Strategy*

2.3 The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) has been produced in conjunction with the other three Black Country Boroughs to recognise that there is a shared vision for transformation across the sub-region. It provides the overarching policies for all of the Black Country Borough’s, providing the spatial strategy up to 2026 to address a number of issues including Housing, Economy and Employment, Centres, Transportation and Accessibility, Environmental Infrastructure and Waste and Minerals. Following Examination, the Core Strategy has been found to be sound and therefore, it is envisaged that the JCS will be taken through the relevant processes in order for it to be adopted early in 2011.

2.4 The Area Action plan has been produced in tandem with the Core Strategy to reflect the fact that West Bromwich is one of the Black Country’s strategic centres and therefore it is vital that the aspirations and objectives of the Core Strategy are transferred down to the local level. West Bromwich sits within Regeneration Corridor 12 of the Core Strategy which aims to achieve sustained economic growth through increasing employment and housing opportunities supported by improvements to infrastructure and quality of the built form.

*Area Action Plan*

2.5 The West Bromwich Area Action Plan has been prepared up to Preferred Options stage. Consultation commenced in 2006 with the production of the Issues and Options Report which highlighted a number of key topic areas the Plan wished to address in order to provide a strategic overview and direction to acknowledge, and further progress, the significant investment and development that had already been identified to locate in the Town. Following comments received
from this consultation, and having full regard to National and Regional Planning Policies, the Preferred Options document was prepared.

2.6 There are a number of the proposals contained within the Area Action Plan which have been subject to negotiations over a long period of time and because of this, many have reached the point where approvals have been given for development and they have commenced construction on site. Their allocations in previous statutory documents such as the Adopted Unitary Development Plan has enabled development to be forthcoming within a sound policy context, however their inclusion within the Preferred Options Document, and any subsequent AAP will provide additional policy support for the ongoing developments and assist in co-ordinating the Strategy and Vision for the area further.

2.7 The main objectives of the Area Action Plan are;

- To encourage sustained economic growth
- To improve the quality of the public realm and built environment
- To improve the attractiveness of West Bromwich as an area to live
- Improve accessibility and movement to and within the area

2.8 In order to encourage further economic growth in the area, it will be important to improve the retail offer of West Bromwich, by both quality and choice. There will need to be an increase in the leisure opportunities within the town which is currently lacking, as well as attracting new businesses to locate within the town to ensure continued employment opportunities.

2.9 New development in West Bromwich will undoubtedly bring new challenges. Firstly, there will be a requirement to ensure that any new development enhances and conserves the historic character which already exists whilst encouraging a high standard of architectural design and quality. A balance will need to be created between pedestrians and vehicles and creating spaces for people to enjoy, which links the town with the wider area and vital services. West Bromwich will also be improved by raising the profile and prominence of the Town through providing landmarks, reinforcing key gateways and transforming the perception of the town by creating a new image and giving it identity.

2.10 In tandem with new development within the town, there will be a need to ensure that the existing public realm in the town reflects the public realm that comes forward as part of the new schemes in terms of quality and type. Therefore, it will be necessary to capitalise on any match funding available to ensure a seamless approach is taken wherever possible.
2.11 The Area Action Plan sets out to create a place where people wish to live. Proposals have been put forward which provide for new housing within the town and further afield. The Plan will ensure that the range, type and tenure of housing provided meets the needs of the existing and future population. The provision of affordable housing will be a priority, but also ensuring that the range of accommodation provided across the board is also reflective of the types of households likely to want to live in the area. In addition to the housing to be provided, there will also need to be the supporting services such as health and education, community facilities and leisure provision.

2.12 The fourth objective of the Area Action Plan is to ensure that movement and access to the existing and proposed development within and around the town can be achieved, producing a clear hierarchy of streets which prioritise pedestrian movement and activity. Making the links between pedestrians and public transport will also be key in making West Bromwich a place to live, work and visit. The future viability and vitality of the Town will also require consideration to be given to enabling car borne traffic to access the areas of the Town, although there will be a high emphasis on pedestrian priority in the core.

2.13 The delivery of the proposals within the Area Action Plan is reliant on investment from the private sector. However, in terms of ensuring that the proposals combined can assist in delivering the transformational change within the town set out in the Vision it will be imperative that they are underpinned by the development of a successful transport strategy. This will enable the growth of the town to materialise without detriment to the other objectives of the Plan, that is, to provide a quality shopping and working environment, good accessibility and movement and sustainable living environments.

2.14 Transportation proposals have been designed to ensure that the cumulative impacts of development do not impinge on the successful operation of the town centre function. It is imperative that a clear strategy is developed that assists in the large scale developments coming forward over time, with clear management of vehicular traffic which needs to come into the town, but avoiding the over-dominance of unnecessary road usage. The phasing of the strategy is particularly important given the range of developments coming forward over the plan period, and the need to re-adjust the priority of each of the schemes.

3. Changes to the Preferred Option Proposal Sites

3.1 Since the preparation of the Preferred Options Document, a number of changes have been made to the proposed allocations within the Plan. The reasons for these changes to the allocations are detailed below.
Deletion of sites due to the Health and Safety Consultation Zones

3.2 The Preferred Options document was published for consultation in June 2008 where a range of statutory and non statutory consultees were given the opportunity to comment on the Plan objectives, aims, policies and proposals in terms of the effects it may have on delivery of their services. During this consultation period, there was no representation received from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the plan proposals.

3.3 In 2010, discussions took place on progressing the marketing of one of the proposal sites for use as an Extra Care Scheme. At this time, the Health and Safety Executive raised concerns about the close proximity of the site to the Consultation Zones for premises with Hazardous Installations, and stated that they would object to the scheme in principle. Whilst this obviously caused problems with the allocation of this particular site, it also raised additional concerns about other allocations for residential use in the surrounding area.

3.4 The Local Authority agreed to work with the Health and Safety Executive on finding a way forward. In this respect, Sandwell undertook an exercise to review all of the HSE consultation zones within the Borough, which resulted in the revocation of at least two within the vicinity due to change of ownership or the site now being vacant. A zone around one of the major businesses in the area has been retained due to the fact that the company has declared its intention to remain in situ for some time to come. This also has implications for one of the proposal sites which will have to be removed as a potential development site.

3.5 However, it was agreed that a zone around another major employer in the area, Tennant’s, could be reviewed given the fact that the operations of that company, and the requirements for certain substances, had changed. The Local Authority, the HSE and the company in question worked together to identify a more realistic boundary for the consultation zone based upon the current and future business operations of the company. Whilst the zones around the premises have reduced, it still resulted in the loss of two of the original proposal sites at Phoenix Street and Ryders Green Road as they still fall well within the area considered to be of concern should a major incident take place. The deletion of these two sites will result in a loss of approximately 670 dwellings from the AAP housing figures.

Amendments to site boundaries at Oldbury Road/Brandon Way

3.6 In addition to the deletion of sites due to the Health and Safety Executive concerns, there are two sites at Oldbury Road and Brandon
Way whose boundaries have been amended to take into account the HSE consultation zone around the Tennant’s site. The reduction in size of each of the sites will result in the loss of approximately 420 dwellings from the projected housing figure. These changes are shown on Fig 1.

Inclusion of additional site for employment use

3.7 Currently, the area of employment land in the Borough is protected by Policy E2 (Business Zone) in the adopted Unitary Development Plan which safeguards industrial land for B1 (B&C), B2 and B8 use. The Core Strategy aims to promote areas of potential high quality employment land for further growth where appropriate, and to retain those areas which perform more in terms of local employment land, where access to High Quality Strategic locations is not necessary. There is a large area of land to the south of Kelvin Way which performs such a role and it is important that this is safeguarded for future local employment functions.

3.8 When the Core Strategy is adopted, the Business Zone allocation of the UDP will be superseded by other policies. Therefore, in order to ensure that there is sufficient local employment land provided in this area to support the aims of the Core Strategy, a site of just over 60 ha has been included in the AAP for retention for employment use. It will not necessarily be a change of use, but will ensure that any future employment generating uses can be accommodated close to West Bromwich and make best use of its Strategic Highway network and links. This allocation is shown on Fig 2.

Change of allocation to accommodate new Leisure Facility

3.9 A Sports Facilities Strategic Analysis was undertaken in 2008 for Sandwell, looking at both the current and future demand for leisure facilities in the Borough and how this fitted with the current provision. The report highlighted the need for a swimming pool in West Bromwich which is currently absent from the town, as well as looking at the poor quality of facilities in Tipton. The Analysis also indicated that there is an increasing demand for fitness suites and sports halls which were underprovided to meet future demand.

3.10 A decision was made to find an appropriate site in the West Bromwich area which could accommodate a six lane swimming pool and a 100 station fitness suite. An exercise was undertaken to identify any site within the town which matched the criteria for such a facility. Many sites were discounted due to their size, location or other constraints. However, a site at Bromford Lane, just outside the core of the town, was considered appropriate for further examination and consultation on its suitability for a swimming pool.
3.11 The site in Bromford Lane had been allocated for residential use in the Preferred Options document with an estimated capacity for at least 70 dwellings. The new allocation will assist in providing a suitable site for the leisure facility which is close to the town centre and public transport services, and which will complement the range of other redevelopments going on in the area. The site is shown on Fig 3.

Change to boundary of Town Square West allocation

3.12 The Preferred Options Area Action Plan for West Bromwich identified a number of sites in the town centre which contributes to its regeneration agenda. These range from major developments such as Tesco and the College, to a number of smaller allocations that also assist in completing this transformation. One such site is that at Town Square West within the Primary Shopping Area which lies adjacent to the new Tesco Retail development and opposite the Public building. This allocation is for a retail and office led mixed use scheme which would complete the Town Square with the boundary including retail properties and offices at New Street and Cronhills Linkway and a small number of shops within the pedestrianised area of High Street to the front of the Public.

3.13 Changes made elsewhere in this document regarding the transport strategy necessitates the junction of New Street/High Street to be modified to better accommodate pedestrians and public transport over the car and to make the area more pedestrian friendly. Since the publication of the Preferred Options document, concern has been expressed regarding road safety issues regarding the misuse of the service yard in between the High Street shops and the Bus Station. In addition to this, further consideration has been given to how the street scene would benefit the other developments being proposed in this high profile location with the result that it is intended to extend the boundary of this site to accommodate the shops and businesses to the south side of the High Street which back onto the Bus Station.

3.14 Incorporation of this block of shops would enable comprehensive development to come forward on one of the gateway locations, offering the opportunity to include a landmark building at this end of the High Street, acting as a focal point. Development at this location of a large scale would require public realm improvements to be included to create space between this and the Public building to ensure the Town Square feel is provided, as well as improving the pedestrian linkages between this area, the bus station and the Tesco development and to contribute to improved views, to and through the area. The extension of the site boundary is shown shaded on Fig 3.
Changes to the Transport Strategy.

3.15 The transport strategy to support the growth envisaged in this plan has been reviewed in the light of:

- Changes to site allocations and delivery timescales outlined above.
- Reductions in forecast traffic generation resulting from changes to committed developments such as Eastern Gateway.
- The availability of Central Government funding streams following the 2010 Comprehensive spending Review (CSR).

3.16 As a result there has been a change of emphasis in the early years of the plan period away from the provision of large scale infrastructure improvements towards concentrating on interventions that are low-cost, high impact.

Short Term Proposals (up to 2016).

3.17 The proposed underpass along the A41 Expressway at All Saints Way is under construction and the re-aligned northern section of the Ringway is due on site in January 2011 (see Fig 4).

3.18 The successful implementation of the Area Wide Travel Plan will mitigate some of the impact of new development in the period up to 2016. In support of this it is proposed to implement the proposed cycle and pedestrian route improvements at

- Dartmouth Street/Sandwell Road pedestrian route.
- Lodge Road pedestrian route.
- Spon Lane Corridor cycle route.
- Lyng Spine cycle route.
- Albion Road/Oak Lane Corridor cycle route.
- Greets Green Road/Woods Lane Corridor cycle route.

3.19 In addition, proposals to implement a town centre 20mph zone, variable message signage system and improved signage for delivery vehicles will be implemented in the shorter term (see Fig 4);

3.20 The Southern Distributor proposal was previously proposed to be constructed in three phases with phase 1 identified for early construction. Following the CSR it is clear that major scheme funding for this project is unlikely to be available until much later in the plan period (after 2016/17) with funding for later phases unlikely to be available until well beyond that date. In order to avoid uncertainty for existing land owners and future developers in the areas through which the route passed, this proposal has now been removed from the plan.

3.21 There will however remain localised congestion spots resulting from new development, particularly on the Ringway, High Street and Spon
Lane. Improvements in these areas, in some cases in conjunction with improvements to public realm, will remain a priority (see Fig. 4). Where these improvements lie on bus routes, the needs of bus services will be prioritised to support the Area Wide Travel Plan.

Medium to Long Term Proposals.

3.22 The levels of growth planned beyond 2016 will require larger scale investment in the town’s transport infrastructure. It will be necessary to address general congestion on the A41 and at Junction 1 of the M5.

3.23 The priorities for major investment during this period will be the proposed South West Bypass linking A4182 Kelvin Way with the A41 at Swan Village and improvements to Junction 1 in association with the Highways Agency.

3.24 The former will complete a route around the south of the town which will enable traffic travelling in the North West to South East corridor to avoid the main northern gateway to the town centre and, crucially, Junction 1 of the M5 thus providing some relief to this heavily congested junction. Previously two alternative routes were under consideration; one skirting the edge of Greets Green Recreation Ground and the other following the line of the canal through industrial sites being considered for residential redevelopment. These sites have now been removed from the Plan (see para 3.5 above). Therefore only the former alternative will be retained in the Plan. This proposal may also require further improvements to the A4182 as shown on Figure 5.

3.25 The Black Country Core Strategy identifies requirements for improvements at Junctions 9 and 10 of the M6 and Junctions 1 and 2 of the M5. This requirement has subsequently been carried forward into the draft West Midlands Local Transport Plan 3 which comes into affect from April 2011. The final nature of the improvements at Junction 1 has yet to be determined but LTP3 identifies the proposal as a priority for the period 2016-26.

3.26 Junction improvements at Carters Green on the A41 and at Oldbury Road/Albion Road remain as proposals in the longer term subject to funding availability and progress with longer term developments in their vicinity.

3.27 The location and quantity of car parking remains a problem, particularly in the south of the town. The plan identifies three potential sites for new multi-storey car parks. Access to these sites was to have been from the proposed Southern Distributor. However, with the removal of that proposal, the access requirements will be addressed as part of the programme of junction improvements outlined above (See para 3.21 above)
3.28 Proposals to introduce a trip-based tariff against new developments to assist in funding new transport infrastructure will not now form part of the Area Action Plan as the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy announced by Central Government will perform the same function.

4. **The Next Steps**

4.1 As outlined above, there has been a number of issues which have prevented the Area Action Plan being progressed to the Publication and Submission stage. It was anticipated that it would align with the programme for the Joint Core Strategy, to ensure that the spatial elements of the JCS were addressed at the local level in West Bromwich, with economic growth and good quality residential environments being delivered through the local polices and proposals set out in Area Action Plan. The original timescale allowed this to happen in a logical and consecutive manner.

4.2 However, it was necessary to delay the preparation of the Plan to ensure that these issues were addressed. During this time, it has emerged that some of the changes necessary are too significant to go direct to Publication and would benefit from further consultation prior to that stage being reached. Therefore, it is intended that the changes to the Preferred Options as set out above be taken through a period of consultation from 24\textsuperscript{th} January 2011 for six weeks until 7\textsuperscript{th} March 2011. This will give stakeholders and consultees an opportunity to consider whether the changes made since the Preferred Options document will affect them and any initial concerns can be resolved prior to Submission.

4.3 Following this consultation period, the Area Action Plan will be amended to finalise the policies and proposals to be put forward, taking into consideration the changes outlined above and any comments received from this consultation. The plan is expected to be Published and Submitted during the Summer of 2011.