

BIRCHILLS STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: BASELINE REPORT

June 2010





August 2009

For all matters regarding this project please contact Jonathan Brown by calling:
0161 200 5500
or e-mailing: jb@urbed.coop
or posting: URBED, 10 Little Lever Street, Manchester, M1 1HR



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SQW Report - Socio Economic Analysis
DTZ Report - Property Market Analysis
JMP Report - Transport Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This report comprises spatial and design analysis for the Birchills Strategic Regeneration Framework. The report considers:

- Strategic & Planning Context
- Historic Development
- Land Use & Community Facilities
- Urban Form & Townscape
- Heritage Value
- Greenspace
- Consultation
- Area Analysis

It is accompanied by a further 3 reports from the consultancy team as follows:

- DTZ Commercial and Property Market Analysis
- CLES Employment, Skills and Enterprise Analysis
- JMP Transportation Analysis

An executive summary is also provided which summarizes the key issues and opportunities. The purpose of the baseline report is to provide an evidence base on which to build a robust regeneration strategy for Birchills.

URBED, DTZ, CLES, and JMP were appointed by Walsall Council and its partners including Walsall Housing Group (WHG) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in April 2010 to prepare a Strategic Regeneration Framework for the Birchills area.

The 10-15 year vision will outline how Birchills should change to create a more sustainable place to live and work. Key focus areas for the Framework are:

- Provision of new high quality, appropriate housing
- Improvement to existing housing condition and efficiency
- Improving green spaces, in particular Reedswood Park
- Attracting and retaining high quality industry
- Improving access and connections
- Investment in community uses
- Improving the environment and public realm
- Enhancing historic character and heritage value
- Improving education, training and skills development

The Birchills Regeneration Area is one of the ten areas identified in the Walsall Strategic Regeneration Framework. It forms part of the second tranche of the ten priorities approved by the Council Cabinet in October 2006.

WMBC's Review of Birchills

Birchills is a large, mixed residential area just north-west of Walsall town centre, stretching west across to the M6 just north of Junction 10. Its socio-economic profile presents some of the highest levels of deprivation in the Borough, and nationally.

Birchills suffers an imbalanced housing market with issues of overcrowding and low quality housing. There is a crucial need to broaden tenure choice and to promote opportunities for affordable housing and sustainable communities, establishing ways to improve the environment and improve access to local amenities and services.

Birchills compares favourably with other areas in terms of community cohesion and ability to influence decisions. Its location adjacent to Walsall town centre is also advantageous.

Birchills is predominantly residential but does contain several employment areas. Historically locals would have worked in traditional Black Country industries. With their decline, unemployment has increased and there is a critical need to ensure access to employment opportunities are maximised.

Partners see Birchills as a distinct neighbourhood regeneration opportunity. It has a high level of owner occupation in older terraced housing predominantly in the Pakistani Muslim community. Much of this stock has condition and energy efficiency issues and represents an inappropriate typology for the area's demographic, which is approximately 30% ethnic minority population.

On the positive side, there is a well-developed and engaged community structure with organisations such as the Pakistani Muslim Welfare Association (PMWA), Reedswood Local Agenda 21 Group and the Burrowes Street Tenant Management Office (TMO).

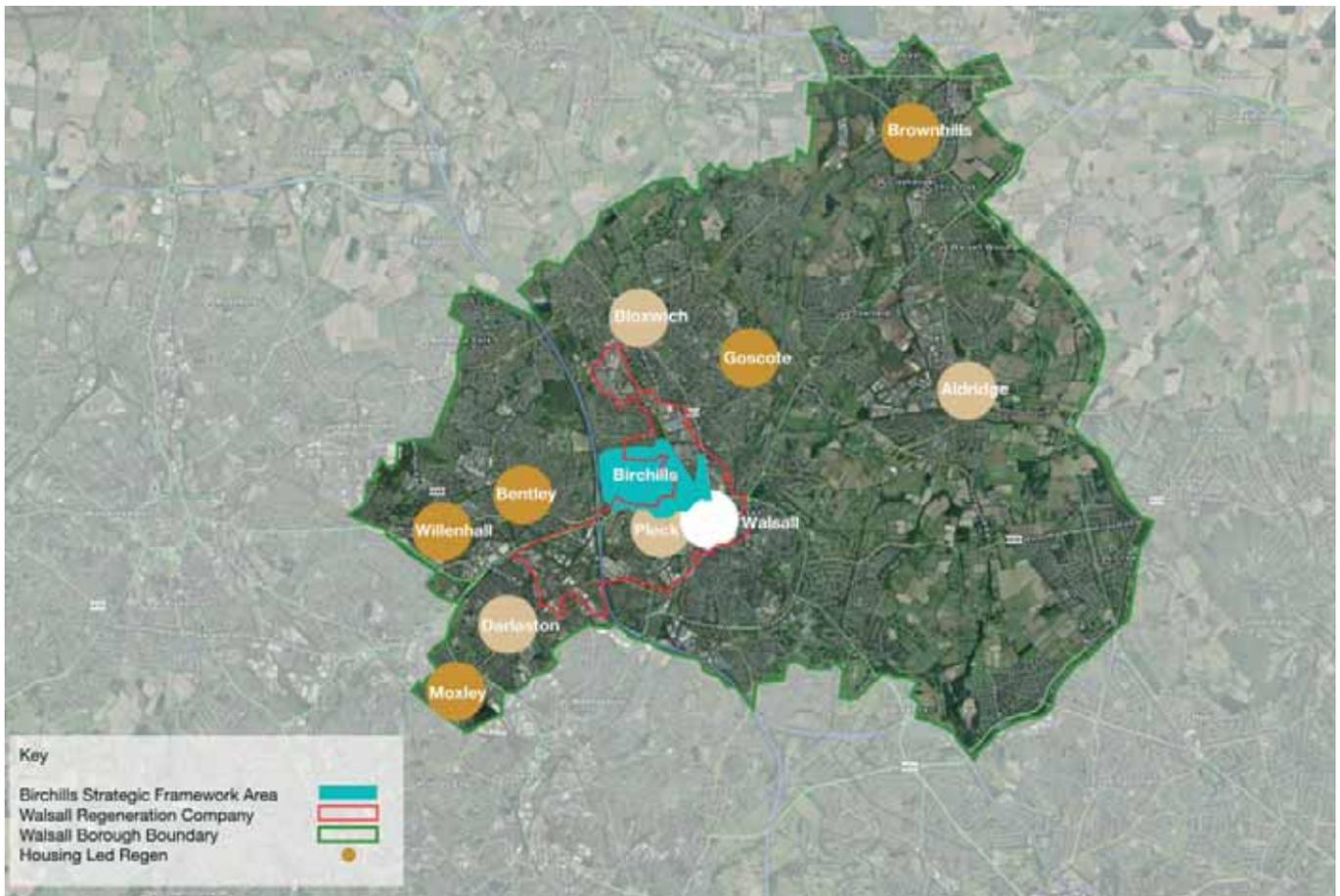
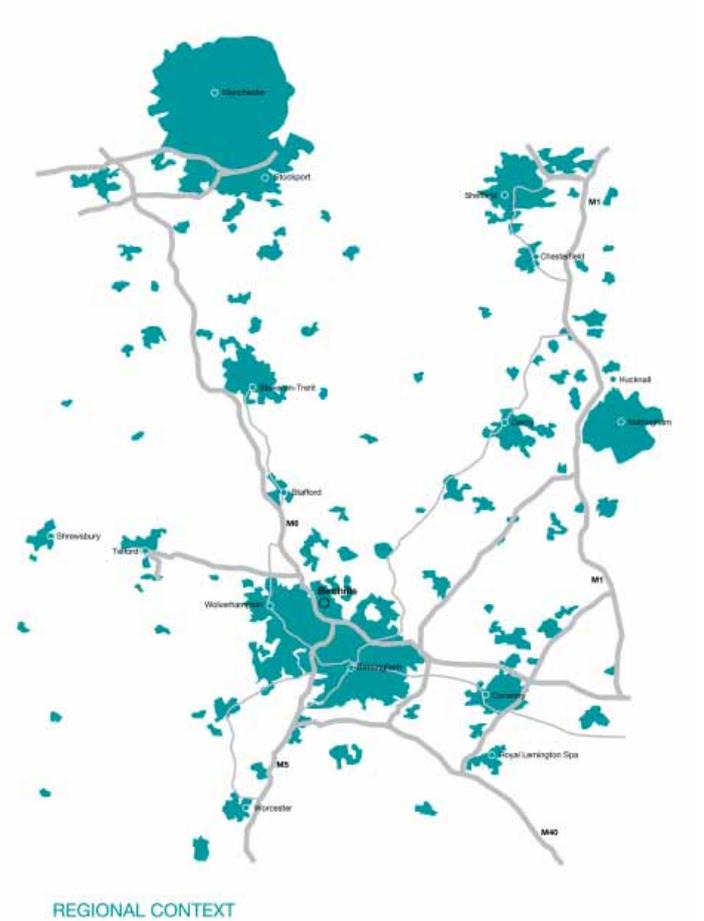
There are also significant physical regeneration opportunities such as the Caparo site, Firms Limited/Birch Street, the former Reedswood Golf Course and land around Hollyhedge Lane. Some of this land is council owned.

The proximity to the town centre presents unique opportunities, not least with Gigaport. Skills and learning deprivation is a crucial issue in Birchills, making the opening of the brand new Walsall College complex a key advantage.

PROJECT PLAN.

The work programme sets out 4 stages to the project as set out in the adjacent table:

Baseline Analysis and Issues	May – July 10	Areas Walkabouts Baseline Analysis Stakeholder Meetings Roundtable Workshop Public Consultation on Issues Baseline Report/ Thinkpiece
Option Development	August – October 10	Developing Options Stakeholder Option workshop Public Consultation on Options Options Report
Draft SRF	October – November 10	Draft SRF Public Consultation on Draft SRF
Final SRF	November – December 10	Issue Final Draft Report Comment and Review Period Final Report



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The aims of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy for the Black Country are to reverse out migration, raise income levels, create an inclusive and cohesive society and transform its environment.

Birchills is located within the Birmingham city region and the Black Country Regeneration Area. Specifically it is located in the employment land investment corridor and the Black Country growth corridor. These are both a focus for regeneration activity. The exact boundary of the employment land investment corridor will be defined through the Black Country Joint Core Strategy.

This important document will identify land suitable for employment purposes to meet the portfolio requirements, as well as land that can be transferred to housing to meet the areas requirement.

WALSALL REGENERATION COMPANY

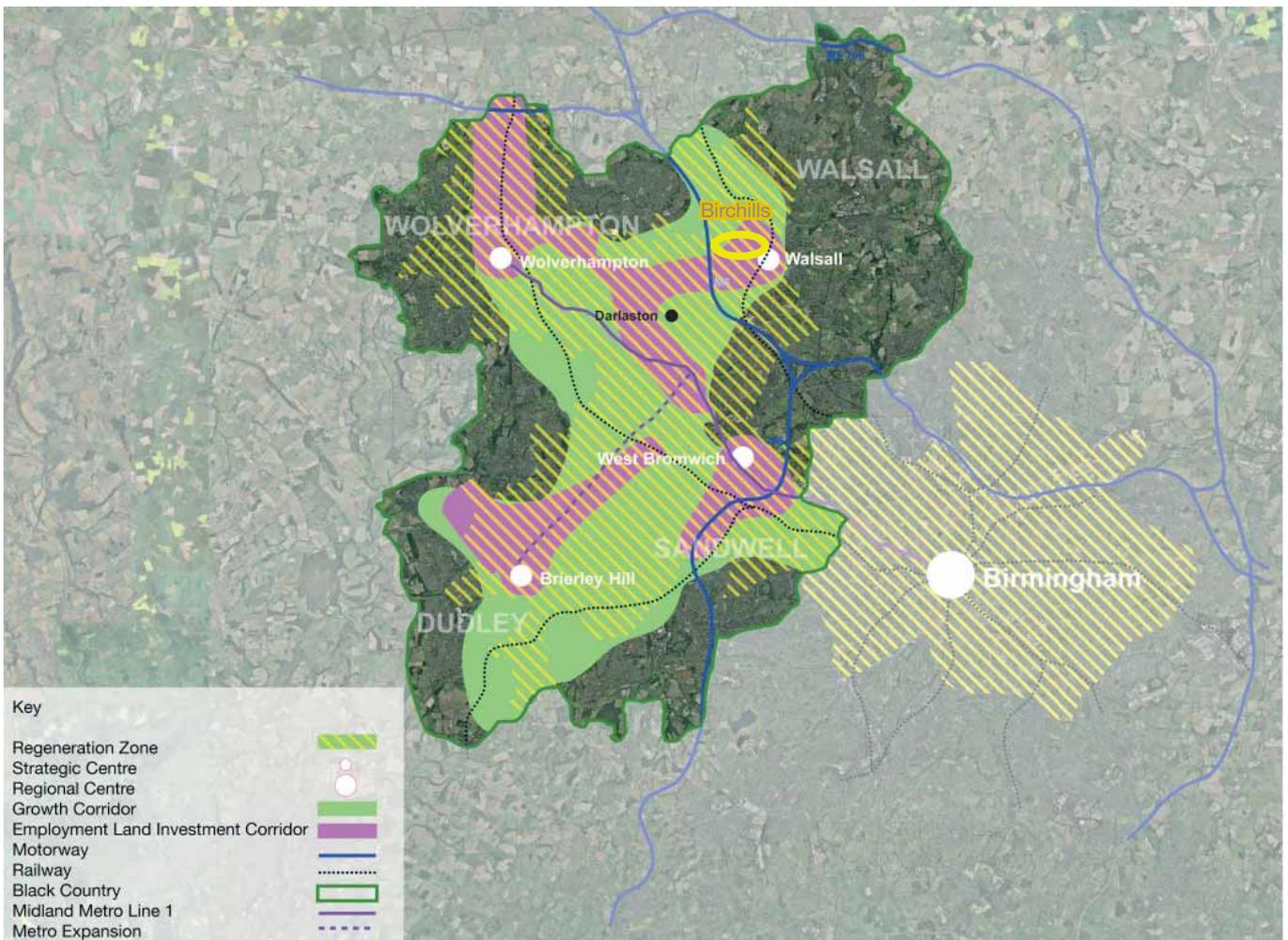
Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC) was established in March 2004 to help deliver regeneration activity and economically reposition Walsall and contribute to the wider regeneration of the Black Country and its role in the city region.

The designated area of WRC includes the town centre and neighbouring areas, canalside communities to the north and Darlaston Strategic Development Area, straddling the M6, to the south west.

Advantage West Midlands, English Partnerships and Walsall Council, are the founding partners of WRC and are working successfully with the private sector, other public sector organisations and community stakeholders to deliver a co-ordinated programme of transformational regeneration. WRC is focused on attracting a total of more than £750 million of private and public sector investment within a decade, creating more than 5,500 jobs, over 1,500 new homes and reclaiming in excess of 70 hectares of land.

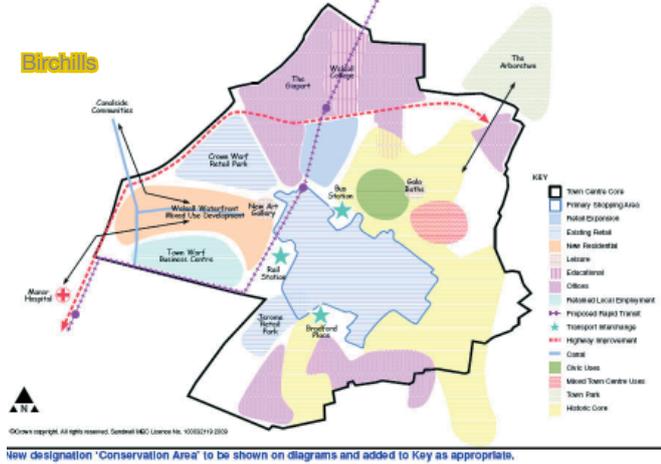
Transformational projects that WRC is leading on include:

- Walsall Gigaport - Potentially the most significant of the strategic transformational projects within the WRC portfolio, Walsall Gigaport could over time create up to 3,200 jobs, while retaining and attracting new commercial enterprises to the town. The granting in October 2008 of outline planning consent for Walsall Gigaport is a genuine milestone. It paves the way for the introduction of a 'next generation' technology platform that will act as a magnet for attracting new and emerging industries focusing on a select number of key sectors that are best suited to exploit the advantages offered by fibre optics.
- Walsall First - Building work on the £65 million new Walsall College is on target to be completed in Spring next year and this educational 'centre of excellence,' is due to open for learning in September 2009.
- Birchills/Canalside Communities - WRC's drive to shape new high quality residential environments alongside the canal complements the Gigaport's vision of a thriving 'office corridor' linked via a 'next generation' fibre optic network, offering a significant opportunity to spread the benefits throughout adjacent neighbourhoods.
- Darlaston Strategic Development Area - A major strategic location of more than 54 developable acres, Darlaston SDA represents one of the West Midlands' prime regeneration opportunities. Darlaston SDA has the potential to create between 2,500 and 4,500 jobs with 21st century skills
- Walsall Regeneration Company, together with its partners, is also investigating innovative approaches to 21st century public realm, seeing economic drivers as being the lynchpin to its success and sustainability.



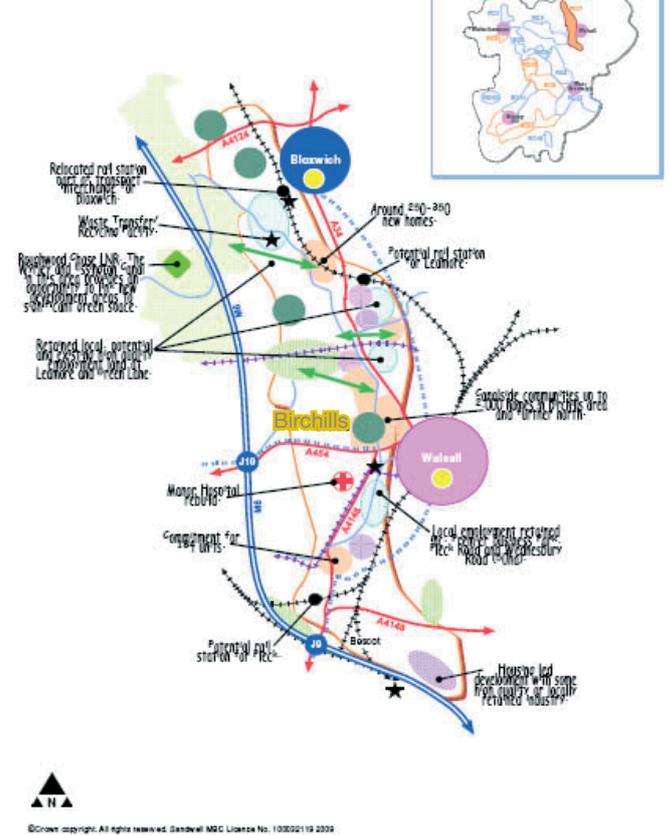
The Black Country Context - Core Strategy area (above), Walsall Town Centre (below left), Regeneration Corridor 7 (below right)

Walsall Strategic Centre



Black Country Joint Core Strategy

Regeneration Corridor 7 - Bloxwich - Birchills - Bescot



At Junction 10 and 9 M6 add words Potential Highway Improvement Brierley Hill and Walsall Strategic Centre symbols to be overlain with Major New Retail Scheme symbol, in accordance with Strategic Centre diagrams.

WALSALL STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Regeneration Framework approved by the Council in March 2006 is a 10-15 year view of development in Walsall's district centres. These are shown on the small plan opposite. The priority projects to date have been in the areas of Brownhills, Moxley, Bentley, Goscote Lane, Willenhall and Darlaston.

The Regeneration Framework builds on and complements the statutory planning framework (the Unitary Development Plan and future Local Development Framework) by focusing on projects and delivery to deliver sustainable social, economic and environmental regeneration. Strategic objectives for each of the centres are set out in the framework. Work commissioned by Walsall Council since (including the SRF for Birchills) is intended to develop these regeneration strategies in greater detail.

- Aldridge
- Bentley
- Birchills
- Brownhills
- Bloxwich
- Darlaston
- Goscote
- Moxley
- Pleck
- Willenhall

BENTLEY LOCAL CENTRE REGENERATION

Following extensive community consultation between July 2006 and March 2007 the Bentley Regeneration Framework study was produced. The framework provides a guide to the regeneration of Bentley local centre and the surrounding area. A vision for change has been endorsed by the Bentley community, the Council and its stakeholder partners.

BROWNHILLS REGENERATION

The Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) identifies several projects for Brownhills:

- food and retail
- traffic improvements
- public transport and pedestrian access

A housing Masterplan has identified three canal side mixed tenure housing schemes. The local Project Reference Group in partnership with the council and key partners Walsall Housing Group (WHG) commissioned LDA Design consultants to develop an Environmental Strategy for the area that 'builds upon' the work of the housing Masterplan.



GOSCOTE

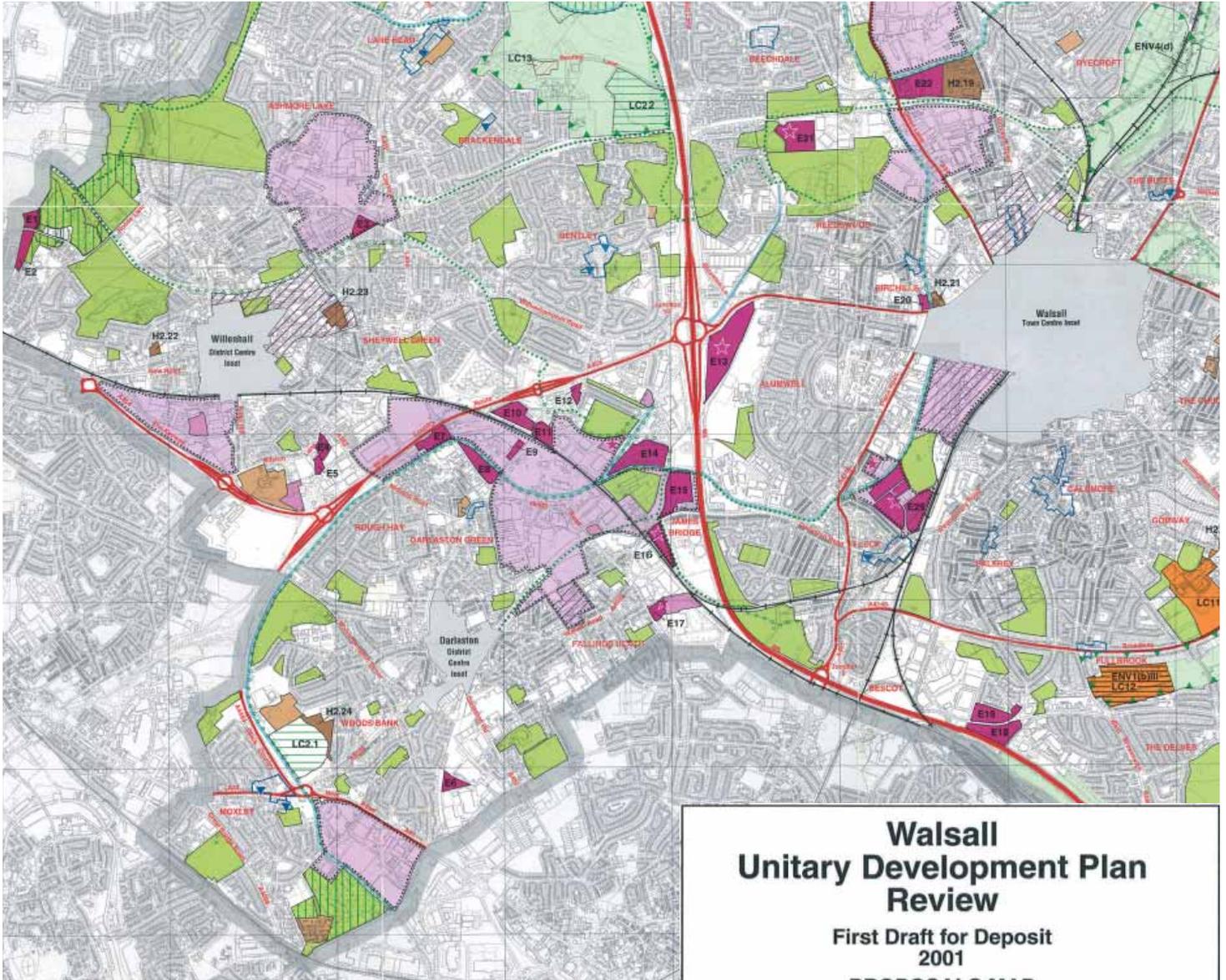
Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group (WHG) appointed Entec UK Ltd, in September 2006, to develop a Regeneration Framework Strategy for approximately 630 acres known as the Goscote Lane Corridor.

MOXLEY

The council and Walsall Housing Group (WHG), on behalf of the Moxley Project Reference Group (PRG) commissioned consultants DTZ to produce a Regeneration Framework for Moxley to help co-ordinate the physical and environmental regeneration of the area for the next 10-15 years. This has focused on providing new quality housing and associated community facilities.

WILLENHALL

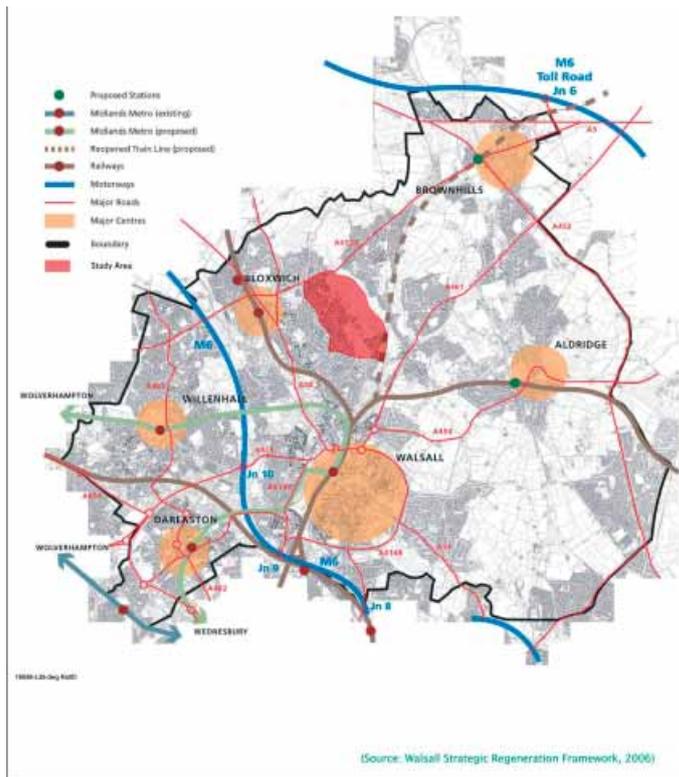
Willenhall has avoided the extensive redevelopment that has affected many other settlements in the conurbation. It is widely regarded as one of the most intact and unaltered small town centres in the Black Country. While mainly



Walsall Unitary Development Plan Review

First Draft for Deposit
2001

PROPOSALS MAP



KEY

- Borough Boundary
 - Town & District Centre Inset Plans
- #### ENVIRONMENT & AMENITY
- Green Belt
Proposal ENV1
 - Additions to Green Belt
Proposal ENV1(a)
 - Deletions from Green Belt
Proposal ENV1(b)
 - Existing Developed Sites in the Green Belt
Policy ENV4
 - Open Land
Proposal ENV7
 - Great Bar Hall & Estate and St Margaret's Hospital
Policy ENV9
 - Forest of Mercia boundary
Policy ENV16
- #### HABITAT AND SPECIES PROTECTION
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
Policy ENV20
 - Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
Policy ENV20
 - Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
Policy ENV20
 - Proposed Local Nature Reserve
Proposal ENV21(a)
- #### JOBS AND PROSPERITY
- Employment Land with Planning permission
(for information only - Table 4.2)
 - Employment Land - New Proposals
Proposal JP1
 - Best Quality Sites
Policy JP6
 - Core Employment Areas
Policy JP5
 - Industrial Regeneration Areas
(for information only - Paragraph 4.1)
- #### STRENGTHENING OUR CENTRES
- Local Centres
Policy S5
 - Local Centre development/ investment opportunities
Policy S5 (d)
- #### HOUSING
- Housing land with planning permission
(For information only - Table 6.2)
 - Land Allocated for New Housing Development
Proposal H2
- #### TRANSPORT
- Strategic Highway Network
Policy T4(a)
 - Safeguarded Rail Network
Proposal T3
- #### LEISURE & COMMUNITY
- Urban Open Space
Policy LC1
 - Proposed Urban Open Space
Policy LC2
 - Greenways (complete or under construction)
Proposal LCS
 - Greenways (proposed)
Proposal LCS
 - Canals
Policy LC10
 - Potential for canal-side activities
Policy LC10(a)
 - Education
Policies LC11 & LC12
 - Cemetery extension
Proposal LC13
- #### MINERALS
- Minerals Safeguarding Areas
Proposal M1

comprising nineteenth and twentieth century buildings, there are some earlier survivals and the irregular street pattern reflects the town's medieval origins. Much of the town centre is a designated conservation area and a £2.1 million bid for Heritage Lottery funding is being prepared with the support of to fund enhancements to local buildings.

GOSCOTE

Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group (WHG) appointed Entec UK Ltd, in September 2006, to develop a Regeneration Framework Strategy for approximately 630 acres known as the Goscote Lane Corridor.

DARLASTON

A similar team to that involved in Birchills, led by URBED, advised on the SRF for Darlaston in 2009/10. Actions proposed focus in particular on the town centre, whose historic environment and business vitality has been constrained by insensitive 'big box' retail development. The study also contained plans to make more use of the landmark Town Hall building, with a multi purpose facility known as 'The Forge', alongside support for recreation and employment areas.

PLANNING CONTEXT - UPDATED UDP, 2005

The current development plan is the Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP), adopted in 2005 and updated for the LDF. The emerging development plan is at an advanced stage of preparation but the UDP remains in force at present.

A particularly relevant policy for Birchills in the UDP is Policy JP5 (Jobs and Prosperity), Core Employment Areas.

This policy covers a large area of land around Green Lane, including the Caparo site. These areas will normally be safeguarded for core employment uses. Negotiations are taking place with a developer where a departure from this policy has been granted for the Caparo site, in the context of WRC's Canalside Communities regeneration vision.

Other relevant land use policies covering Birchills include:

- Policy H2.19 (Housing), Depot Site Allocation for Housing at Bloxwich Road. The 5.14 hectare site is classified as Previously Developed, with capacity for 160 homes.
- Allocation E20 under policies JP5 & 7, Hollyhedge Lane
- Allocation E21 4.34 hectares - classed as Best Quality.
- Allocation E22, Employment Site at Green Lane/Cable Drive, 1.98 hectares.

- Policy LC 1 (Leisure and Community) Urban Open Space which protects various green spaces in the area such as Reedswood Park, the Golf Course and Sydenham public open space.
- Proposal LC5 Greenways network - this protects existing and proposed routes along the canals and former railways.
- Policy LC9 relating to the Canal network as an important cultural, economic and ecological resource.
- Policy S5 Local Centres, which applies to Birchills and Stafford Street.
- Policy H1 Renewal of Existing Residential Areas, which encourages improvements to poor housing.

BLACK COUNTRY JOINT CORE STRATEGY

Emerging planning policy for Walsall is contained within the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country (March 2008). This was submitted to the Secretary of State early in 2010. It is currently going through Examination in Public.

As part of the evidence base GVA Grimley reported that the required development path for the Black Country economy is based on restructuring towards service sector office based activities and the comparative advantage that the location has in relation to logistics. The GVA assessment also highlighted the cautious approach to the release of employment land and stated that Walsall will have a deficit in employment land by 2006. The approach to the robust protection of Core Employment Areas in Walsall (such as that in the study area) is consistent with this advice.

The spatial objectives of the Joint Core Strategy which will underpin change comprise:

- Restructuring the sub-regional economy by providing sufficient high quality employment land within regeneration corridors
- Modelling sustainable communities on redundant employment sites
- Ensuring a network of vibrant and attractive town, district and local centres
- A first class transport network

The Joint Core Strategy will provide further definition to the regeneration corridors outlined in the now abolished RSS. In relation to the Birchills study area this currently proposes safeguarding the core employment land around Green Lane and promoting new residential development on the Council Depot site.

Site No	Site Name	Information
1	E20 Hollyhedge Lane Phase 1	This 1.02 hectare canalside site has been granted planning permission subject to a S106 for 122 units. The proposed scheme includes retention and refurbishment of the characterful Orange Tree public house.
2	Hollyhedge Lane Phase 2	<p>This is a 2.08 hectare site. There is the potential for a residential scheme which would require comprehensive land assembly of the dairy, scrap yard and other adjacent holdings and would also require relocation of the Afro Caribbean Community Association to alternative premises.</p> <p>The inclusion of a number of adjacent pre-1914 dwellings, identified as being unsustainable through the Birchills Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment work, would make a more comprehensive plot.</p> <p>It is thought that the dairy is planning to relocate elsewhere in the Borough. The former primary school housing the Afro Caribbean Community Association is a Victorian building with some local heritage character.</p>
3	Caparo Site	<p>A 6.67 hectare site, granted outline planning permission for 310 units. Extensive design and access work has taken place to underpin the application; however, all matters except access remain reserved.</p> <p>Consultation with elected members and the Project Reference Group (PRG) has shown a strong desire to integrate development here with the opportunities along the canal and the adjacent former Golf Course overlooking Reedswood Park.</p>
4	Former Reedswood Golf Course	<p>A 5.26 hectares site in the pre-application stages of development. There are plans to redevelop the former Reedswood golf course to facilitate up to approximately 180 dwellings of mixed tenure.</p> <p>Off-site contributions and creative solutions to accessing the site will be required, and the contributions will deliver improvements to the adjacent Reedswood Park. Residential development on this site would form part of the Walsall Regeneration Company's (WRC) Canalside Communities project.</p> <p>As noted for Site 3, the PRG would like to see strong integration in the layouts and design treatment applied to Sites 3 and 4.</p>
5	Birch Street	<p>5.08 hectares / 199 units. This is a draft scheme that has been the subject of public consultation and design and access analysis. This was with a view to working up to a planning application for the former Metal Casements site and part of the Sydenham open space.</p> <p>However, a considerable amount of reclamation would be required through the infilling of a limestone mine to bring forward the site.</p>
6	Smiths Flourmill and Thomas Street	<p>This site contains Smiths Flourmill, a 138 unit residential scheme (apartments) recently completed. An adjacent scrap yard may be developed to a similar format when market conditions improve.</p> <p>Outline planning permission was recently granted for approximately 103 residential units for the land to the north of Thomas Street (a 0.59 hectare site).</p> <p>The future of the Council-owned playing field within the area is yet to be determined, but is likely to be required by the primary school currently being upgraded. Discussions are taking place with the adjacent Mosque over access to the land for overspill parking during busy times.</p>
7	E21 Reedswood	<p>This site is allocated for employment use (as defined in Policies JP5 and JP7 of the UDP) and is also a best quality site (Policy JP6).</p> <p>It is a site of 4.34 hectares and in an excellent location one mile from junction 10 of the M6.</p>
8	E22 Employment Site at Green Lane/Cable Drive	1.28 hectares, Previously Developed.
9	H 2.19	Depot Site Allocation for Housing at Bloxwich Road. The 5.14 hectare site is classified as Previously Developed, with capacity for 160 homes.