

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY?

Walsall Council have commissioned URBED and partners to prepare a plan called a **Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for the area around Birchills**. It looks at scenarios for the **future development of the area** to make sure it can achieve more of its potential. This 10 to 15 year vision will draw together an agreed plan to attract investment in better housing, public space and various measures to improve the quality of life in Birchills.



KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

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

- Development of empty and derelict sites (e.g. Caparo)
- 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 and employment
- 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

WHO ARE WE?

URBED (Urbanism, Environment, Design) are a regeneration co-operative based in Manchester. We have teamed up with economists CLES, commercial advisors DTZ, transport specialists JMP and ‘Stock Condition’ Surveyors RLB to create a vision for Birchills. URBED take pride in supporting communities in the urban design process and have experience working across diverse locations with many different people.

The following boards suggest possible scenarios for Birchills. We would like your views so we can develop a preferred option plan - please fill in a questionnaire or just have a chat with us. For people who missed the live event, copies of these boards and an online questionnaire can be found at our website: www.urbed.coop

VISION AIMS

- High Quality housing and facilities to revive derelict industrial sites
- Investment in existing buildings and spaces to improve environmental quality
- Stronger, more skilled local communities and businesses

URBED started this study in May 2010. Since then we have:

- Undertaken detailed research in the area
- Met traders, housing providers, community workers and residents
- Held a stakeholder roundtable workshop
- Produced a thorough ‘Baseline Report’
- Developed outline options for the future



PLEASE COMPLETE A QUESTIONNAIRE AND LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS.

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The exhibition boards, questionnaire and other documents will be available to view on www.urbed.coop and the Council website at <http://www.walsall.gov.uk/index/regeneration.htm>



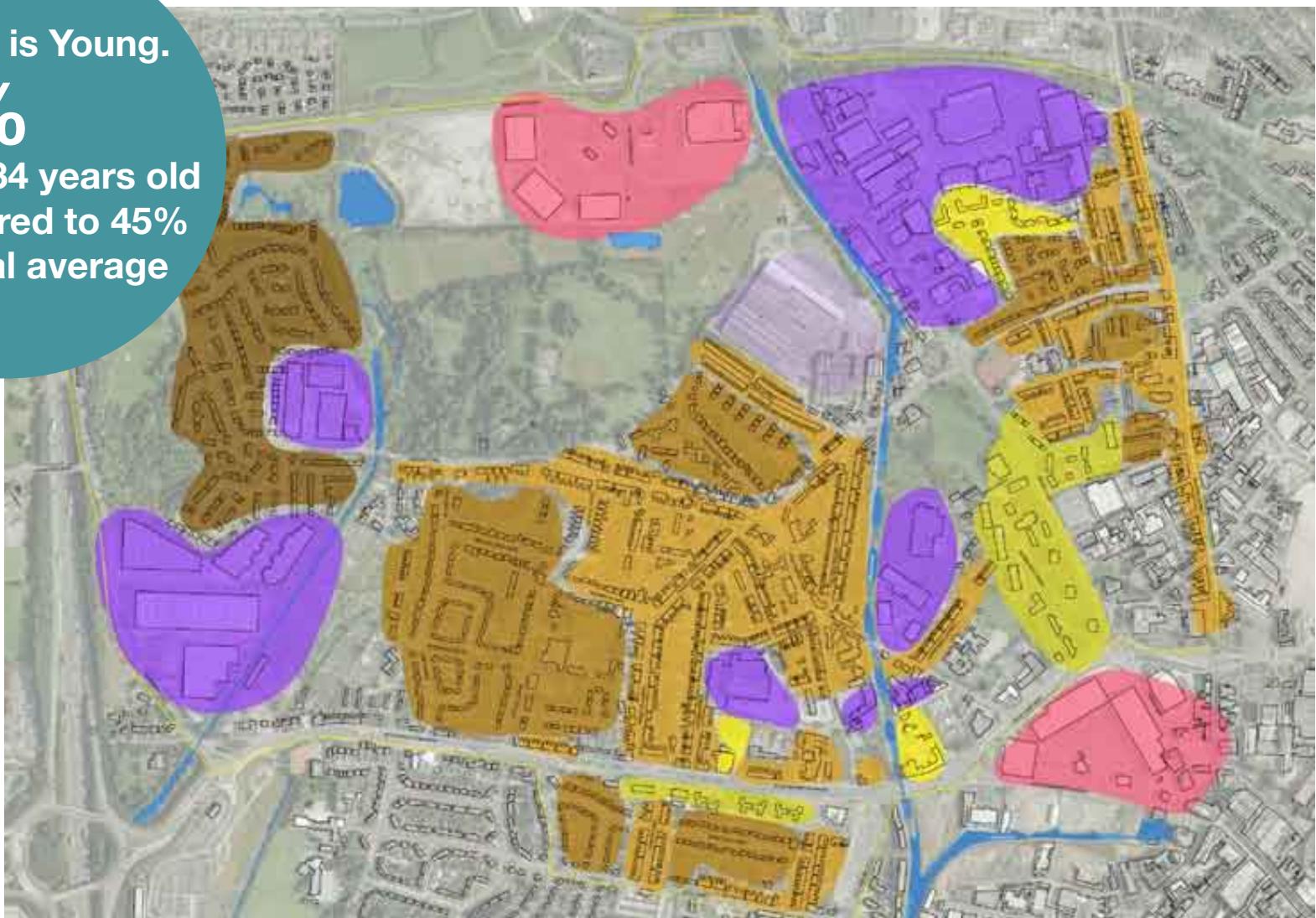
BASELINE SUMMARY

As part of the first stage of our work we analysed the area and consulted with local residents and businesses to produce a ‘diagnosis’ for Birchills based along the following five areas:

1. THE PEOPLE....

- Population c.8,000 rising until 2006 - may be levelling out.
- Young - 58% under 34 compared to 45% national average.
- Diverse - 35% Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) - “people feel safe; sense of belonging; ethnic & religious differences respected”
- Larger ethnic groups very stable (+6 years in the area), smallest groups most likely at address less than 2 years
- Health is poor in comparison with Borough; mental health, respiratory and circulatory diseases are the main factors
- Under representation of 35 - 49 age households in the area
- Smaller proportion of residents in work; also lower proportions are self-employed & part-time.
- Barriers faced by residents include lack of basic skills; confidence issues; language & literacy; poor health.

Birchills is Young.
58%
under 34 years old
compared to 45%
national average



Mosaic of character and uses

2. THE ECONOMY....

- Smaller proportion of residents in work than Borough average; also lower proportions are self-employed & part-time.
- Barriers faced by residents include lack of basic skills; confidence issues; language & literacy as well as poor health.
- Skills have improved but gap still widening - less qualified workforce means skilled jobs filled by in-commuters.
- 40% may have no formal qualifications - twice Walsall average (20%), three times national average (13%)
- Business start up & long-term survival an issue
- Productivity gap (relating to skills and enterprise)

Barriers faced
include lack
of basic skills;
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Four Broad Townscape Areas

3. THE HOUSING MARKET....

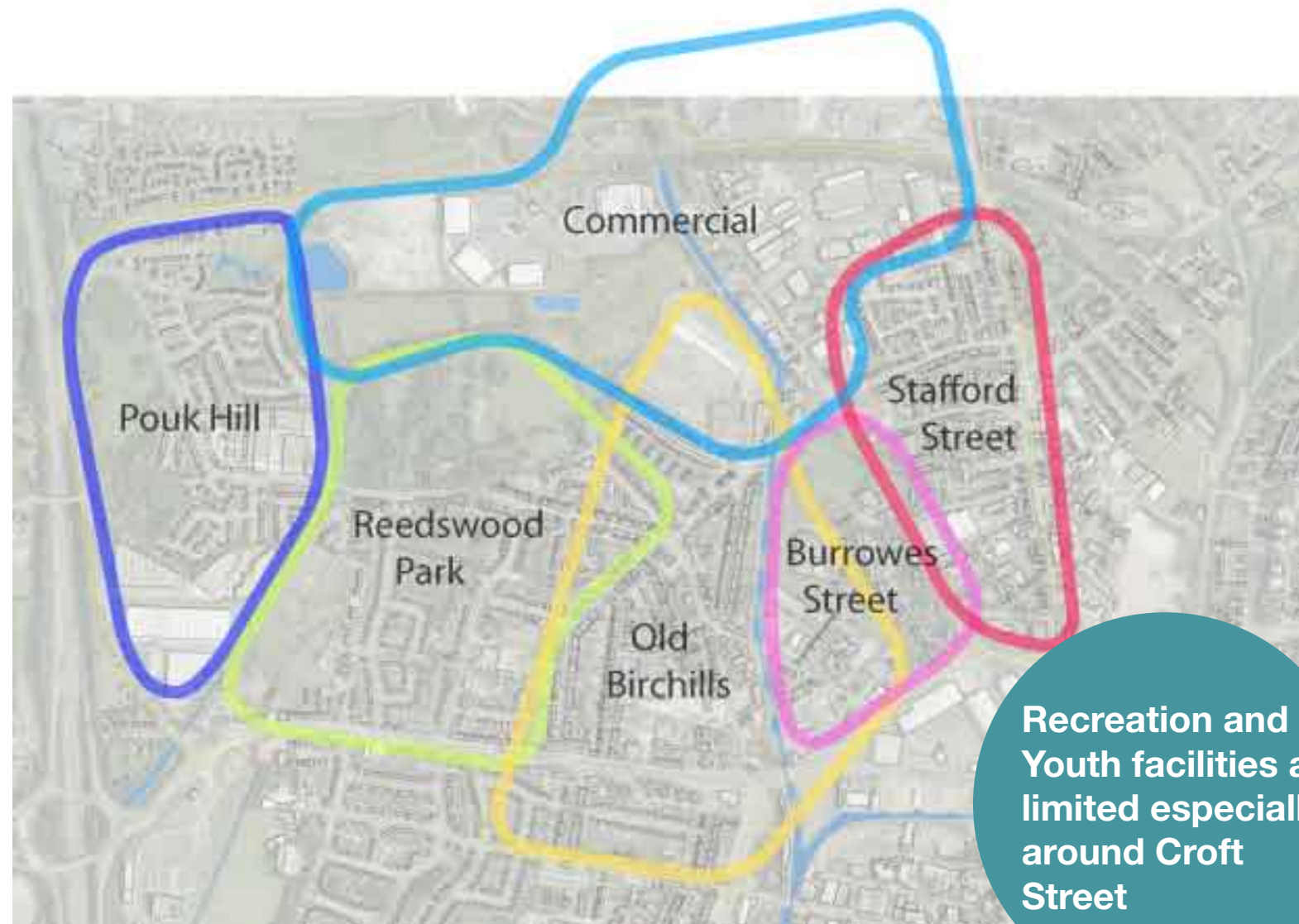
- Range of house types, tenures and ages.
- Modern estates around Pouk Hill, aka ‘Reedswood’, wide ‘M6 corridor’ catchment’, little relationship with Birchills.
- Inner urban ‘Birchills’ - both transient AND stable?
- High degree of families who are privately renting - is this their preference?
- Renting in smaller stock & with high overcrowding
- ‘Frail elderly’ a high ranking but hidden needs group
- This section of the population is set to grow; changing household formation patterns in the South Asian community
- Potential for both overcrowding of some homes and under-occupation of others.

4. THE PLACE....

- Our area bridges Central Walsall and the M6
- Birchills is made up of a mosaic of characters and uses
- That said, four broad ‘Townscape Areas’ can be identified.
- Pargeter Street is a significant boundary point from Urban to Sub-Urban
- Open space ranges from good to poor
- Recreation facilities are limited especially around Croft Street.

5. ACCESSIBILITY...

- 43% residents do not own a car, equal to 43% who own 1 car only.
- The area has good pedestrian/cycle links, however in places the surface quality degrades and crossing can be dangerous such as Wolverhampton Road.
- Stafford Street’s businesses and character are blighted by traffic infrastructure.
- Strong public transport links with regular bus services and Walsall station in close proximity.
- Good highway network with easy access to the M6 providing links to the North, Midlands and London.
- Birchills is very accessible to work and services. Opportunities exist for improving pedestrian and cycling links through better crossing of key roads and better access to off street routes, including the canal and Ash Track.
- Improving the environment and aesthetic qualities would make these routes more attractive and safer to use.
- Opportunities exist at Bentley Lane / Old Birchills and Birchill Street / Hollyhedge Lane to improve the streetscape and support the wider regeneration of the area.



Six local sub-areas

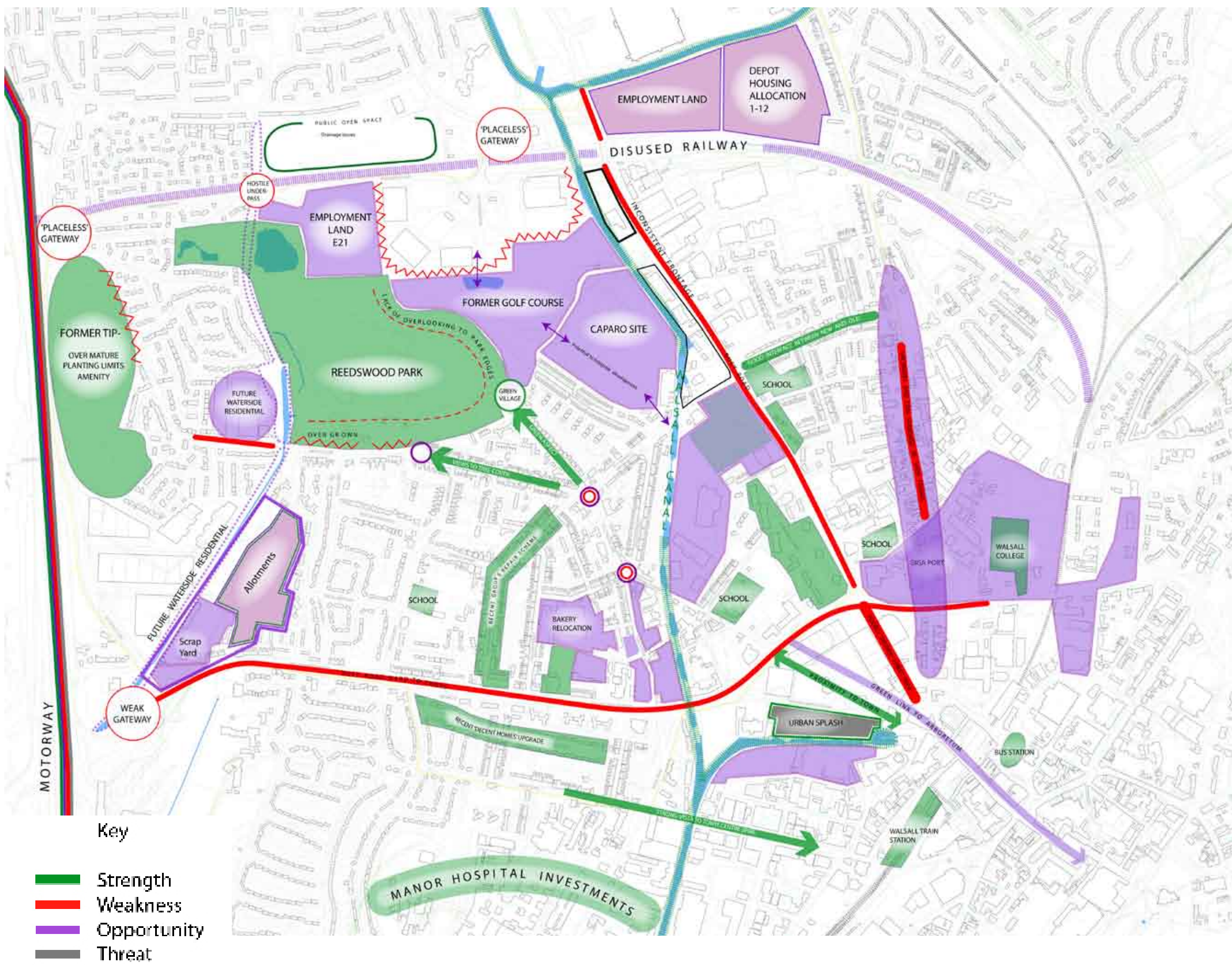
Recreation and
Youth facilities are
limited especially
around Croft
Street



Open Spaces

Open spaces are
mixed in quality
and unevenly
distributed

DIAGNOSIS MAP



Birchills provides good education services

with **8** Schools

Reedswood park

'Premier' green space

25ha

Birchills has a great heritage value

with **11** listed buildings

Birchills has Strong Communities

STRENGTHS

- Reedswood Park
- Good connectivity to the surrounding area
- Walsall College and good schools
- Canal
- Great sense of community

WEAKNESSES

- Weak gateways into the area
- High vacancy rates along Stafford Street
- Run-down shop frontages
- Poor signage

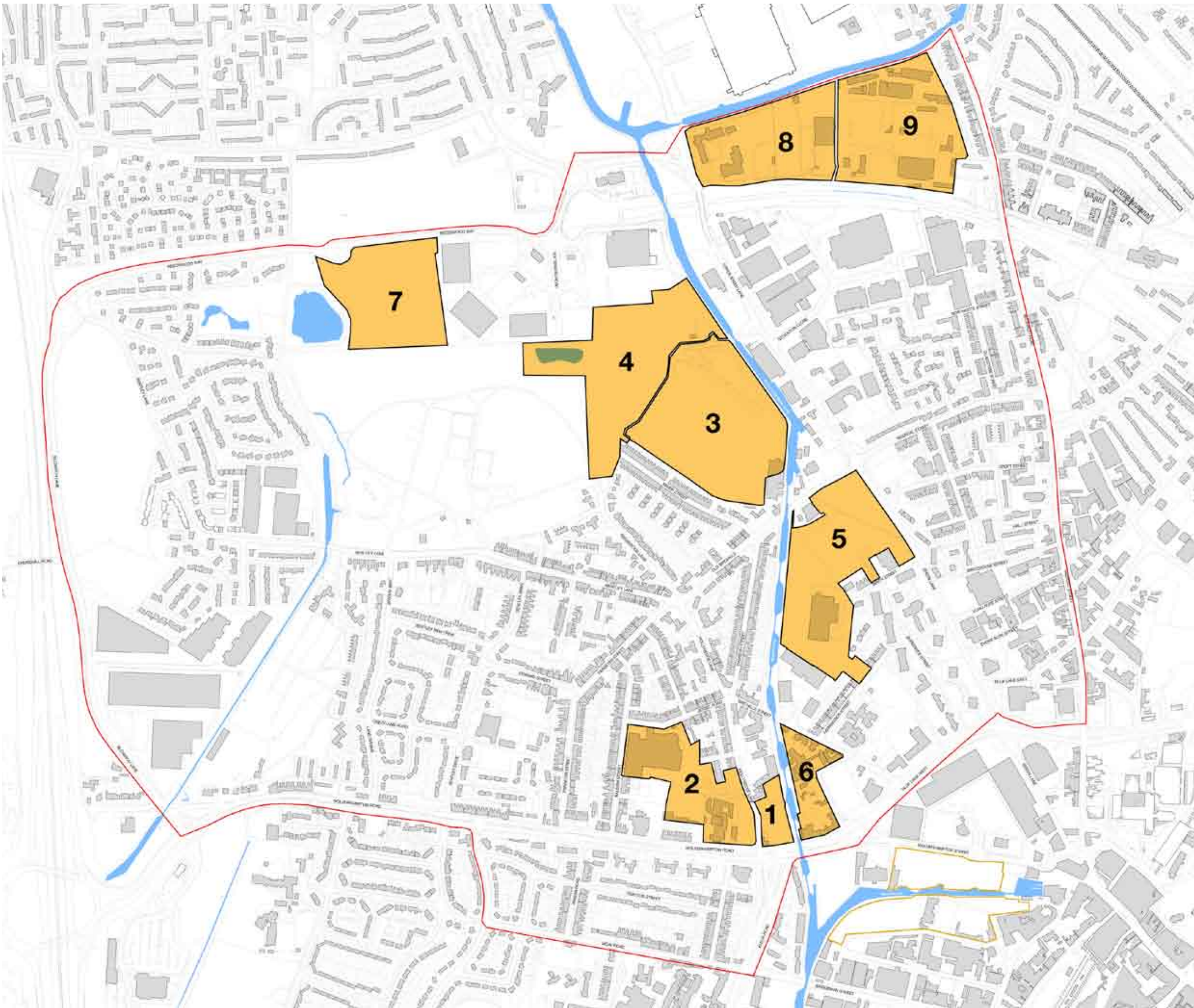
OPPORTUNITIES

- Several potential development sites
- The canal link
- Disused railway- Green link or metro
- Improved linkages across the area
- Potential for short, medium and long term improvements to housing

THREATS

- Development sites left vacant
- Problems with dereliction and vandalism
- Lack of supply for manufacturing employment
- Tight financial climate

KEY SITES OF CHANGE



- **1. Hollyhedge Lane Phase 1** - this site has been granted planning permission for 122 residential homes. This includes the retention and refurbishment of the Orange Tree Public House.
- **2. Hollyhedge Lane Phase 2** - potential residential development if the relocation of other uses on the site took place.
- **3. Caparo site** - this has been granted outline planning permission for up to 310 homes.
- **4. Former Powerstation / Golf Course** - could be developed for around 180 homes.
- **5. Birch Street** - potential site for residential development however extensive site remediation would have to take place to make the area useable, open space could be retained
- **6. Smiths Flourmill and Thomas Street** - this area has a recently completed residential scheme of 135 apartments and there is the potential for a further 103 apartments.
- **7. Reedswood** - this site is allocated for employment use due to its excellent location to the M6
- **8. Green Lane** - Homeserve are considering expansion for employment
- **9. Former Depot** - the old depot site has been allocated for housing with a capacity to house 160 dwellings. The planning application is currently under consideration.

SCENARIO 1: MINIMAL DEVELOPMENT



MINIMUM CHANGE

This scenario is about what could happen with minimal development by allowing the **Caparo & Depot site to be developed for new housing** and the “light touch” benefits that could result.



Pros

- One of the largest unused sites in Birchills will be redeveloped, improving the image of this area.
- High probability of new housing being delivered in the near future.
- The canal will be better overlooked by new housing, making this route safer to walk and cycle.
- New housing would bring more people to live in the area and increase local spending power.
- Provides wider housing choice and may retain Birchills families that would otherwise leave.
- Makes some positive impact on the gateways and routes from the north and south west (Junction 10).
- Opens up access to / and environmental setting of the Wyrley and Essington Canal.

Cons

- Limited community benefits from development of the Caparo site as the Council does not own it.
- Minimal “transformational” impact on the wider area.
- Without junction/street improvements in the surrounding area, current traffic congestion may not be eased.
- Limited opportunity for integration to the future of the former Reedswood Golf Course site next door.
- Could be difficult to create quality environment along the canal with impact of neighbouring industrial occupiers.
- Employment opportunities are limited.
- Restricted access to the Caparo site makes access to Reedswood Park difficult.

SCENARIO 2: MODERATE DEVELOPMENT



MEDIUM CHANGE

This scenario is about what could happen if the pace of development increases by building on Scenario 1 by allowing **the former Golf Course site to be developed for new housing** and the further benefits that could result.

In Addition:



Pros

- Developing the former golf-course for housing may bring a substantial amount of money to pay for transformational projects in the area (known as a Capital Receipt).
- The former Golf Course / Power Station site and Caparo represent a significant area of unused/ underused land in Birchills. Planning the two areas together can help “bring the park to the canal” and unify the area.
- Developed or occupied employment site on Reedswood Way when market conditions allow.
- Reedswood Park as well as the canal will become better overlooked by new housing and thus make this environment a safer and more used space to walk and cycle.
- Improvements to Reedswood Park possible.
- Further new housing would bring more people to live in the area and increase local spending power.
- Provides wider housing choice and may retain Birchills families that would otherwise leave.
- Makes significant positive impact on the gateways and routes from the north.
- Opens up access to / and environmental setting of the Reedswood Park and the Wyrley and Essington Canal.
- Depending on the level of “Capital Receipt” a ‘Second Waterfront’ on Bentley Lane is opened up with new housing overlooking a landscaped section of former canal alongside Reedswood Park.
- Additional funds could be secured for improved public realm elsewhere in Birchills - such as street trees and better access to green space.

Cons

- Extensive site remediation required to address ground conditions on the former Reedswood Golf Course - this will reduce land value and windfall capital receipt.
- There will be a loss of natural habitat and decrease in green space.
- Former Golf Course site would benefit from additional access from the retail park to the north and the Caparo site to the south east, to take traffic load off Reedswood Lane.

SCENARIO 3: MAXIMISE DEVELOPMENT



MAXIMUM CHANGE

This scenario is about what could happen if development can be accelerated and builds upon Scenarios 1 and 2 by allowing the **Birch Street site to be developed for new housing** and also takes in other opportunity sites around the area.

In Addition:



Pros

- Developing the Birch Street site for housing could bring a larger amount of money to pay for transformational projects in the area (what is known as a capital receipt)
- Much of the Birch Street open space could be retained and improved.
- Upper Green Lane gains a street frontage and is completely transformed.
- The former Golf Course and Caparo site together represent a significant development of unused/underused land in Birchills.
- The commercial gateway around Junction 10 of the motorway is improved, bringing new employment opportunities.
- Reedswood Park as well as the canal will be much better overlooked by new housing and thus make this environment a safer space to walk and cycle.
- Improvements to Reedswood Park possible.
- Further new housing would bring more people to live in the area and increase local spending power.
- Provides wider housing choice and may retain Birchills families that would otherwise leave.
- Makes significant positive impact on the gateways and routes from the north.
- Opens up access and environmental setting of the Reedswood Park and the Wyrley and Essington Canal as well as the overgrown Walsall canal arm
- Further additional funds could be secured for improved public realm elsewhere in Birchills - such as street trees and better access to green space.

Cons

- Major ground works required for Birch Street site will reduce the funds raised from the sale of this land, possibly making development viability marginal.
- Loss of natural habitat and decrease in green space will require mitigation.
- Most ambitious plan and thus involves less certainty and more risk.

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

NEW “VILLAGE SQUARE” - 5 WAYS



A possible way of revitalising the ‘5-ways’ junction into a new village square, where Birchills Street meets Hollyhedge Lane. A reconfigured junction would prioritise the safety of pedestrians and cyclists by slowing traffic and improving public realm quality. Existing shop frontages could be given a facelift, new street trees introduced and gap sites developed for new housing. Empty shops should be brought back into use, helped by easier parking and a nicer environment.



Existing >

TRAFFIC FREE CYCLE/PEDESTRIAN ROUTES - THE LOOP

The former railway loop line that runs around the north of Birchills could be opened and surfaced to provide a green, traffic-free and pleasant pedestrian/cycle route to central Walsall. The loop links housing and employment sites as well as parks and community facilities. The route follows the the proposed light rail (metro) extension which is a long standing transport aspiration. However the current economic climate raises concerns over funding and timescales. A cycle / pedestrian route could be a lower cost use in the mean time.



< Existing



CROSS-COMMUNITY EVENTS - REEDSWOOD PARK FESTIVAL



Reedswood Park is a special asset to Birchills and provides space for recreation of all ages. A programme of events throughout the year that brought together the communities around Birchills could be explored. Improved visibility and access as well as a new park pavilion could also be an option in improving the current facilities available. Somewhere to sit and shelter, buy a snack/drink, meet friends or organise a park or community event for Birchills. If money was generated from the sale of sites the council would work with the Friends of Reedswood Park and other community members to explore funding improvements. Ideas might include better sports and youth facilities, a pensioner’s playground or focal point ‘pavilion’.



Existing >

LET US KNOW YOUR IDEAS!

STOCK CONDITION SURVEY

You may have seen people carrying out housing condition surveys - please be assured the early results do not show a need for any housing demolitions. The aim is to draw together an agreed plan with the Council and community to attract investment in better housing, public space and various measures to improve local quality of life.

In the current financial climate, Walsall Council does not have a large pot of money available.

But, in a co-ordinated approach with local community groups, we believe a strong plan can unlock resources and improve the chances of significant investment around the area. By getting involved you may be able to help Birchills achieve greater success.

ECO “RETRO-FIT”

WARMER HOMES, LOWER BILLS

As you may be aware the need to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions are as much local issues as global ones. As gas and oil supplies peak, energy prices are expected to rise, affecting the electricity, gas and water bills we all pay. Therefore it is important we start to plan for a future that is not so reliant on limited resources, as well as protecting ourselves from increased bills, and most importantly protecting the one environment we have to share.

Birchills is being explored as a location to pioneer low-carbon (‘retro-fit’) techniques on the existing housing stock. Interventions such as increased thermal insulation, solar thermal hot water and photovoltaic cells on roofs to generate sustainable electricity could be installed to help transform Birchills into a **low carbon community**. Even older homes can be made as warm and energy efficient as new buildings.

The benefits are not just in reducing carbon emissions but also in reducing energy bills for consumers now and in the future. Depending on specification, fuel bills can be cut by at least 20% and potentially much more. Warmer homes offer much more comfort and health benefits.

How much interest is there in this locally?

SKILLS & TRAINING

New housing and employment opportunities will contribute to a more prosperous Birchills in the future. Local residents will need the skills to take advantage. Walsall College is on the doorstep, with a brand new building offering a range of entry and higher level courses for all.

What else could be done to help generate opportunity?



^ Miner Street terrace housing



^ Hollyhedge Lane terrace housing



^ Three Sisters - completed tower block refurbishment in Manchester by the developer Urban Splash



^ A retro-fitted Victorian semi-detached in Manchester - external wall insulation, new roof insulation and solar thermal hot water tube. For more detail see (<http://superhome.urbed.coop/>)



^ The recently completed Walsall College is situated on the south eastern edge of the Birchills study area and is within easy walking and cycling distance to Birchills.