

# BIRCHILLS REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT



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Walsall Council



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**Burrowes  
Street TMO**

**watmos**  
COMMUNITY HOMES



Centre for Local  
Economic Strategies

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# BIRCHILLS REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT**

# BIRCHILLS:

This Strategic Regeneration Framework sets out a vision and strategy for the regeneration of the Birchills neighbourhood in Walsall. Birchills has been identified as a priority on the borough-wide regeneration framework, as an area with a particular concentration of housing, economic and environmental problems.

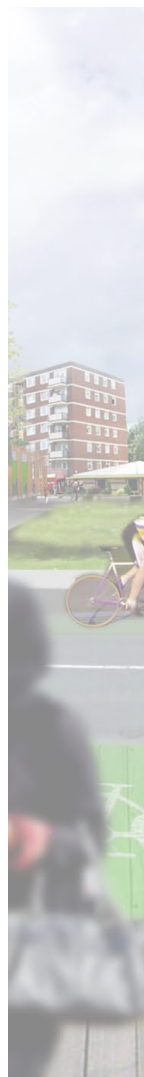
A team led by URBED have been working for the last 9 months to understand the issues affecting the area, to talk to local people, to set a path for its future regeneration and to identify what needs to be done to achieve this. The report has been written at a time of severe cuts in public expenditure and the team has been very aware that the strategy cannot rely on large scale public sector grant. At the same time the Coalition Government has published its Localism Bill setting out its aspiration to devolve power to local communities. This report therefore sets out a vision for community-led regeneration that we believe to be a model for the Localism agenda.

## Baseline Evidence

Birchills is a neighbourhood of Walsall and includes a complete cross section of the types of neighbourhoods in the town. To the east is the Burrowes Street Estate, built as council housing and now managed by its tenants. In the heart of the area along Hollyhedge Lane and Bentley Lane the area is characterised by Victorian terraced housing and a community of Pakistani origin. To the west are more suburban housing areas, including new aspirational estates attracted by the junction of the M6. At the heart of the neighbourhood is Walsall's first and still one of its finest public parks.

The area to the east was characterised by industry until recently. The area was dominated by the power station that closed in 1982 and over the years other industrial sites have closed and been cleared. This industrial restructuring creates both problems and opportunities for the area. It has left a community with high levels of worklessness and skills that are increasingly out of step with the modern Walsall economy. It has also impacted on the older housing stock that has suffered from inadequate maintenance and a transient element to the population. On the other hand it creates a series of potential development sites along the historic canal that could transform the image of the area and create opportunities for substantial new housing.

Despite its problems the baseline work done by the URBED team does not suggest that this is a neighbourhood in steep decline. It is sustained by a strong, diverse community with a history of community action and cooperation. As the stock condition survey undertaken as part of the study shows, the housing stock is also not in serious decline. There are problems, particularly with energy efficiency, but only one of the properties surveyed had major defects.



# Strategic Regeneration Framework

This is one of five SRFs prepared in Walsall and is intended to guide investment and planning decisions in the future



## Regeneration Strategy

The regeneration strategy set out in the report seeks to address these issues. It describes a series of projects that will, when taken together, aid the regeneration of the area. However the report recognises that it is also important to understand how these projects will be funded to avoid raising expectations. At the heart of the strategy is therefore an acceptance of the need for substantial housebuilding on former industrial sites. This new housing will contribute to the strategy by increasing the range of housing in the area, bringing in new people and allowing the existing community to trade up without having to move away and improving the environment. The housing also has the potential to generate the funding to pay for the

other projects in the strategy. Thus it can do through capital receipts for land in public ownership, Section 106 contributions from developers and in the future from the proposed New Homes Bonus that is intended to tie funding to the level of new housebuilding. These funding sources will provide limited finance, but it is sufficient in our view to fund the strategy set out in the report.

The other part of the strategy is that the regeneration of the area, and the reinvestment of these funds should be locally controlled. We proposed building on the existing community structures, such as the nationally recognised Burrowes Street TMO to create a community-controlled regeneration project. This would be democratically controlled and would be responsible for implementing the strategy.





## Vision

Birchills will be a community controlled, sustainable urban neighbourhood where people aspire to live, with a mixed and confident population; able to access employment, to feel safe and to be able to draw upon a range of high-quality local services.

## A quality safe environment

A programme of works to improve the streets, public spaces and parks of the thereby changing Birchill's image

### Themes & Projects

The Vision is developed into three themes; a quality safe environment, a mixed sustainable neighbourhood and a thriving working community. Under each of these we develop a series of projects that complements each theme.

Environmental works will not transform the area on their own, but they were the most popular projects in the consultations and have an important role to play in making the area feel safer and more attractive. This will have knock on effects in terms of community confidence and the attraction of the area to new businesses and residents. The proposed projects are:

- **Village squares:** Environmental improvements and shop front works to two junctions to turn them into village squares at the heart of the Birchills community.
- **Reedswood Park:** Improvements to the park, including parking for the sports pitches and a new pavillion.
- **Open space improvements:** Including the Sydenham green area and a fund for smaller projects across the area.
- **High Streets:** Improvements to parking, pedestrian areas and shop fronts on Green Lane and Stafford Street.
- **Links:** Improved links for pedestrian and cyclists along the former railway, Bentley Lane and the canals.



## A mixed sustainable neighbourhood

Improving the choice of housing locally and the energy efficiency of the existing stock

As we have described, new housing has the potential to generate the resources needed for the other projects. It is however also valuable in its own right by diversifying housing supply and the local community. It is important that it is integrated with the existing community and linked to improvements to the existing stock. There is potential for around 1,100 new homes in the area. The proposed projects are:

- **Green New Deal:** A national pilot scheme to invest in the energy efficiency of existing housing stock.
- **Caparo Site:** A private scheme of around 300 homes that already has outline planning consent.
- **Norfolk Street:** The development of the council depot for canalside housing (264 homes).
- **Former Golf Course:** Development of parkside housing of around 180 homes.
- **Other housing sites:** Policy would allow housing on sites on Birch Street, Hollyhedge Lane, Thomas Street, Bentley Lane and the Tannery Pub Site

## A thriving working community

A programme of works to support and diversify the local business base and the capacity of local people to access employment

While economic support for people and business is important, there is already a good range of services in Walsall (see CLES baseline report) and it will be difficult to protect these services, let alone expand them in Birchills. The plan is therefore to link programmes to the other initiatives in the area, particularly the Green New Deal to create employment and enterprise opportunities.

- **Youth provision:** A locally controlled budget to make provision for local youth
- **Employment and enterprise support:** A programme to target training and business support on the opportunities of the Green New Deal.
- **New Employment sites:** The protection of sites for employment including the Reedswood Employment Site and the Wolverhampton Road scrap yard.
- **Business relocation:** Assistance with the relocation of Metafin to allow expansion and avoid conflict with new housing
- **Business support:** A package of support for businesses on Stafford Street and Birchills Village

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