

DARLASTON STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: ROUND TABLE WORKSHOP

2nd July 2009, Darlaston Town Hall





July 2009

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Round Table Workshop at Darlaston Town Hall

INTRODUCTION

On the evening of Thursday 2nd July 2009 a Round Table workshop was held in Darlaston Town Hall with over 40 attendees. The purpose of the event was to bring together interested parties who are involved or have vested interests in the management and future development of Darlaston, to list current key issues as well as scope out its future prospects.

The event took place between 6.30 and 8.30pm at Darlaston's Town Hall. The evening was split into two sessions, after a brief introduction from David Rudlin (Director URBED) a presentation was given that outlined the initial findings from the consultant team. (This presentation is now available from Robert Andrews, Regeneration Officer, Walsall Council) After which the attendees split into tables, each facilitated by a member of the consultant team. The first round table discussion focussed upon identifying the key physical, and socio-economic issues that Darlaston currently faces. This was followed in the second session by what key projects Darlaston may need to deliver to help sustain economic, social and physical regeneration over the next 20 years.

What follows is a summary of the main issues and challenges raised by the evenings discussions. These will help form a base, from which we will develop strategic regeneration options for Darlaston. We will follow this by consulting with the public in September.

Programme:

6.15-6.30	Sign in and Refreshments
6.30-6.50	Introduction and Baseline Presentation
6.50-7.20	Round Table Session 1: Likes, Dislikes + Issues
7.20-7.35	Refreshments
7.35-7.45	Sustainable Neighbourhoods Presentation
7.45-8.15	Round Table Session 2: Ideas + Opportunities
8.15-8.30	Feedback and Summary

Round Table Attendees

Robert Andrews	Development Team
Kally Bhatti	Innovation Centre
Nick Bird	Walsall Regeneration Company
John Bonhomme	Asda Darlaston
Sandra Borland	Walsall Tenants and Residents Federation/Darlaston Community Association
Dennis Borland	Chairman of Darlaston Business Park - Darlaston DCA
Jason Brown	Property Services
David Brown	
Rose Burley	Bruce George Asst
Alison Butcher	BSF Project Director
Rob Cooper	Darlaston Market
Matt Crowton	Transport planner
Ashley Daker	Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Darlaston Business Park Rep
Danny Edwards	Economic Development (Enterprise Development and Business Support)
John Elliot	Community Transport Walsall
Sharon Felton	Darlaston All Active
Chris Gregory	Business Development
Ali Hayward	Walsall Housing Group
Tina Hellings	Making People Happy Ltd (Innovation Works)
Graham Hood	Head of Green Spaces
Sue Lippitt	Black Country Chamber (consultant)
Janet Madeley	District Youth Worker
Cllr Bill Madeley	Bentley and Darlaston North Ward member
John Myatt	Transport Strategy
Paul Nicholson	Development Team - Manager
David Owen	Rubery Owen (Various)
Yvonne Perry	Grace Academy
Wendy Powell	Accord Housing
Colin Robinson	Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance (WLLA)
John Roseblade	Pollution Control manager
Wesley Sedman	Centro
Ginnette Smith	Rowley View Nursery
Terence Somerfield	Midwest Lemforder Ltd
Mike Tichford	Assistant Director Regeneration
Mike Wheeler	Salisbury Primary School – Head Teacher
Ben Williscroft	Conservation/Built Heritage
Cllr Sohal	Bentley and Darlaston North



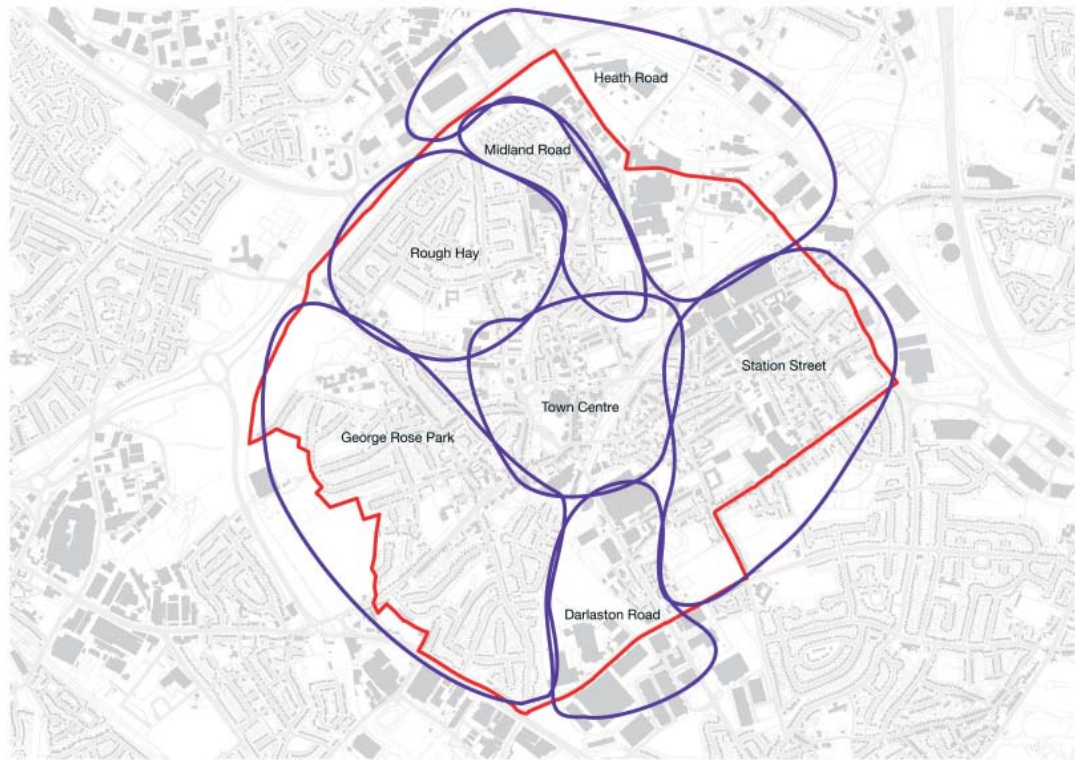
The SRF Study Area

KEY ISSUES

Session 1

Physical Issues:

- The symptoms of decline in Darlaston are similar to other areas across the Black Country.
- The rate of housing development has been impeded as much of the former industrial land is contaminated. This limits its potential for housing due to excessive remediation costs. The value for which the houses would sell for would not cover this outlay.
- Greater footfall in the town centre is needed; even with the market so closely located to the store, it is still a struggle to get people to move from the ASDA to the market, or the shops along King Street.
- Pinfold Street is a very poor gateway to the town and does little to celebrate or announce the sense of arrival to the town centre.
- In particular the Pinfold Street frontages are seen as a serious blight and are in need of improvement to help the town project a positive image.
- Wednesbury town centre has been improved and one of the participants thought the plans for Willenhall were impressive.
- The conversion of the older historic buildings for residential, commercial and community use was seen as important.
- The view was strongly expressed that the town centre needs to look 'loved' – dealing with basic housekeeping such as keeping the streets clean and the street furniture in good condition.
- The town centre and wider areas suffers from being hidden from anyone entering or passing through Darlaston. Points of interest such as the Town Hall and Victoria Park are almost secret and consequently missed by most passing through or even visiting the centre. This is exacerbated by the absence of any clear maps or legible and consistent signage.
- The embryonic Darlaston in the 19th Century, where the streets and buildings formed a well defined neighbourhood is certainly missing from the current centre which is being let down by several leftover or cleared sites and disconnected or traffic dominated streets.



Suggested Character Areas

- Despite the open space plan showing large amounts of green space, useable and quality green space provision for Darlaston is deemed second lowest in the borough.
- There were concerns around the further loss of green space in relation to George Rose Park and the Academy.
- There is still a lack of safe and legible pedestrian and cycle routes for children and families to take through Darlaston without resorting to the car.
- Darlaston suffers from consistent heavy traffic, both cars and heavy goods vehicles. A contradiction in current transport planning was highlighted in the design of new highway infrastructure for the SDA, that to attract further employment and thus investment to the Darlaston area meant increasing road capacity, a feature that will only promote further road use if not thought through carefully.
- Junction 10 of the M6 motorway is considered a congestion hot spot.
- Poor connectivity at both wider and local scale. Such as between Darlaston and neighbouring district centres as well as between the district centre of Darlaston and its surrounding neighbourhoods.
- The pedestrianised King Street, is thought to have sped up the town centre's demise due to lack of passing trade.
- The orientation of the ASDA store is considered to be wrong for the benefit of the town centre and certainly does not help provide additional activity on King Street.
- The seven character areas are disjointed, even though they are all within walking distance of one another, but also hard for non locals to navigate between.
- Around Darlaston Green there is very little in the way of community facilities or recreational space and generally looks very tired, especially when it is the only recognised local centre.
- It was made clear that currently people do not actually want to live in the town centre of Darlaston.
- Moxley, Bentley and the town centre, are all pockets of Darlaston and need to work together.

Service/Delivery Issues:

- The leisure offer is very weak in Darlaston, all the pubs and clubs are closing down. The swimming pool is the main attraction but needs complementing with additional facilities, especially since the loss of the multi-purpose centre opposite the swimming pool.
- Darlaston has very few youth facilities, with the exception of the Bills Street facility. The main problem is that this is mainly used by the community that is predominantly

Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?

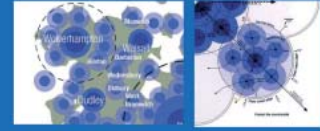
It was once very clear.....



Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?

A Town?
A Neighbourhood?
A Suburb?



Slides from the evening's presentation

based in the west of the SRA, leaving the remainder of the SRA drastically under provided for.

- A new lottery funded youth facility at Sparkbrook in Birmingham was cited as good practice.
- There was also a reported lack of services and meeting places for the elderly.
- The recreation ground on Hall Street was mentioned several times as a much needed sports facility and youth attraction, with its all-weather pitches and floodlighting. Despite this the facility remains dormant, overgrown and partly vandalised due to lack of funds for maintenance as well as a lack of confidence that it will not become misused.
- Public transport is provided for by bus which is relatively frequent during the day, unfortunately, like the rest of the Black Country, services dry up after 6pm in the evening. This lack of night time public transport affects the accessibility of services such as adult education or entertainment offered in places like Walsall. Centro are planning to modernize the network and are undergoing network reviews and consultation next summer.
- A longer term rail link from Walsall to Wolverhampton has been proposed.

Social and Economic Issues:

- Business rates are considered too high and there is priority to secure existing and additional business on the high street.
- The town needs a good health and education reputation, and the new academy will be a real positive move in

regards to this. "talking to our young people", they are all for the academy, which will help in the changing styles of education.

- Most sixth formers go to Wolverhampton or Walsall College, easy reach of Darlaston. Walsall College is trying to get more into the community. Darlaston turnout is excellent at Walsall college.
- A major problem is people move out of Darlaston when they are trained. The neighbourhood is not a location of choice.
- ASDA receive a lot of applications for jobs, the quality of many candidates though are poor illustrating a lack of skills and education in the local area.
- Darlaston is seen by a surveyed group of youths in the area as offering nothing for them, regardless of the presence and success of the town centre's library and swimming pool. They see nothing to hold them to Darlaston in the near future in terms of employment or living, representing an apparent limited access to wider employment opportunities.
- There is an issue with the loss of spending power and its impact on the town centre, the strategy should outline ways of wealth creation.
- It was mentioned that Darlaston was quite unique in Walsall, as it experienced pretty much an overnight collapse in manufacturing in the 1980s and is still feeling the effects of this downturn.
- Waste management/recycling was seen as a growth industry in the area, but has a low employment density. Some of these industries are low value, and 'bad neighbours', but they need to go somewhere.

Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?

For the town centre...



Attractions
Access
Amenity
Action

Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?

For the town centre...



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For the town centre...

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- The metal base engineering industries still remain, as they clearly have a competitive advantage. It is these businesses that can innovate, adapt and create value in the local economy. Upskilling is required to support this advanced manufacturing sector.
- ASDA needs a successful town to survive, it was thought that there is plenty of room in the town centre for specialist shopping to complement the offer at ASDA.
- Housing choice and quality has not been available forcing people to move out the area, breaking up former strong communities.

SESSION 2:

Opportunities for Darlaston in 20 years time:

- One participant thought Darlaston was now a neighbourhood living in a town's body.
- A vision of a super neighbourhood with a heart was proposed with the town centre fully occupied and lots of community activity.
- The strategy should focus on key housing sites and deliver aspirational housing to bring those people with an affinity to the area back into Darlaston.
- It was thought that Darlaston was not a suburb as it has no clear association with a peer town. Clearly it had been a town but there were question marks over this function now.
- The reputation of the town centre needs changing.
- A strategy to boost the town centre would be to relocate a public sector office function/service into the town, this could create a few hundred jobs and capture associated spending power, activity and employment. This could also catalyse further investment.
- Increasing scope for homeworking should be recognized. The good road accessibility of Darlaston makes this an attractive option for those who need to be well connected.
- The potential for creative industries should be explored.
- A general public realm/animation programme and events and festivals are required to enliven the centre's streets.

Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?



For the wider town...

Liveability
Wealth Creation
Distinctiveness
Belonging
Governance



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Slides from the evening's presentation

- Smarter housing choice is needed.
- Longer term business/enterprise development (and digital infrastructure) in the SDA is a priority.
- Better connections to adjoining neighbourhoods and services is essential.
- The green spaces in the area provide an attractive setting to the town and their profile should be raised. These spaces should be made more useable by different groups of the community.
- The town centre could be made to appeal to more young people by offering cheaper space and rents.
- There should be an out reach centre for Walsall College in the town centre.
- Improving adult education is important.
- A good market adds character and identity to towns.
- Modernising the business environment: It was considered that there was an opportunity to capture

businesses that are relocating from Willenhall as a result of the housing-led strategy being implemented there.

- High quality, aspirational housing in to Darlaston, to help attract skilled workers and managers as well as aiming towards a more mixed community.
- Addressing the skills and worklessness challenge.
- A commercially competitive and attractive town centre.
- Leisure and education are important aspects. There is a need for attractive bars and restaurants, to socialise at lunchtime and evening. Potentially nightclubs. Leisure also brings in jobs opportunities – diversify offer and increase the possibility of retaining Darlaston students to stay in the area.
- Walsall has the College and the Art Gallery, Darlaston needs to capitalise on this.
- A quality environment is needed – litter, lighting, pavements.

Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?



For the wider town...



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Opportunities....

What sort of place is Darlaston?

Questions: In 20 years time...

Who will live in Darlaston?
Where will they work?
What will they feel about the town?
What image will outsiders have of the town?
What will the town centre be like?

What do we need to do to achieve this?
Start listing projects

- In 20 years time Darlaston will need to connect with Walsall, in same way that Moseley does with Birmingham now.
- Darlaston needs an identity that residents, businesses and visitors can recognise.
- Many years ago, there used to be a Wednesbury and Darlaston business group, one has just been set up in Castle Vale, this could be expanded into other areas.
- A realistic regeneration programme that clearly outlines year on year, key projects. People need to have confidence that something is happening and has been thought out.
- The town centre: its not just about re-orientating the ASDA store, we need to encourage businesses around it to do something too. Here a town centre manager would help. This person would be important in getting ASDA, town centre businesses, college, industrial area businesses all talking. This would be an important way of spreading investment and opportunities.
- We must ensure that the town centre, the academy and employment areas are well connected, making the most of Darlaston. Benefits will flow from this. It's important that these areas are well connected in all aspects; to improve the function and promote identity of the town.
- The town needs to be relevant to people who live here now, especially younger people.
- Attracting new families.
- Attracting higher socioeconomic groups.
- Diversity – ages, wealth profiles, ethnicity.
- “A vibrant and cosmopolitan community”.
- Consolidate and improved employment sites along the Black Country Route will add new jobs and income.
- Knowledge economy and Information technology should not be missed.
- In addition advanced manufacturing will play an important role.
- More quality and wider range of retailing.



King Street in 1890 with Electric Trams and lots of activity



King Street in 2009 with a lot less activity

Potential Projects

The majority of Darlaston's children have no desire to stay in Darlaston.

Therefore in order to reverse this trend and build a mixed community that is made up of new residents as well as existing residents born in Darlaston, several projects were cited:

- Academy presence in the town centre
- Science Park/Advanced Engineering Park
- Leisure and cultural facilities
- Heritage trail/quarter
- A distinctive new building in the town centre
- Renaissance of the market
- Better retail offer
- Modern offices in the town centre
- An adult education facility
- Evening childcare facility
- Regular consultations with the community
- Social enterprises - Community Transport
- Town centre manager
- All-age educational access at a local level – Improving access at the neighbourhood level and connecting into a wider network of educational programmes.
- A network of accessible green spaces – which serves the local community as well as uniting neighbouring centres.
- A sense of direction – New signs and maps. Points of interest such as parks, play spaces, historic landmarks clearly signed and mapped for residents and visitors.
- A train station – Fundamental – refitting the goods line that runs to the north of the SRA from east to west for passenger rail.
- A train-tram – A spur from the metro line connecting Darlaston to the major centres of Wolverhampton, Walsall and Birmingham.
- Cottage industries – Promoting the return of this type of industry and employment as well as integrating them into the neighbourhood without impacting or compromising the amenity of the area.
- Youth related facilities targeted at a local level. A mixture of attractions that meet the varied demand of children.
- Social Enterprises – enabling local members of the community to be engaged with all aspects of the SRA.

SUMMARY

To summarise, the key issues were:

Physical

- Former industrial land tends to be highly contaminated which limits potential for new housing on some sites at present due to viability.
- Poor gateways into Darlaston project a negative impression, such as Pinfold Street.
- Traffic congestion in the town centre detracts from shopping environment. In addition, bus corridors such as Stafford Road also suffer from excessive use.
- Unsafe routes and crossings for pedestrians and cyclists deter alternative modes of travel in a place that should be easily walkable.
- Hidden assets are not used to full potential, such as the Town Hall, the canal and Victoria Park.
- Green spaces suffer from misuse and poor connectivity to neighbourhoods.
- Litter, such as flytipping along canal edge and on untended sites, gives a poor impression.
- Dominance of ASDA store and lack of connection to King Street means the smaller shops are struggling to survive.
- The town centre is tired and lacks identity with several poorly defined spaces.

Service Delivery

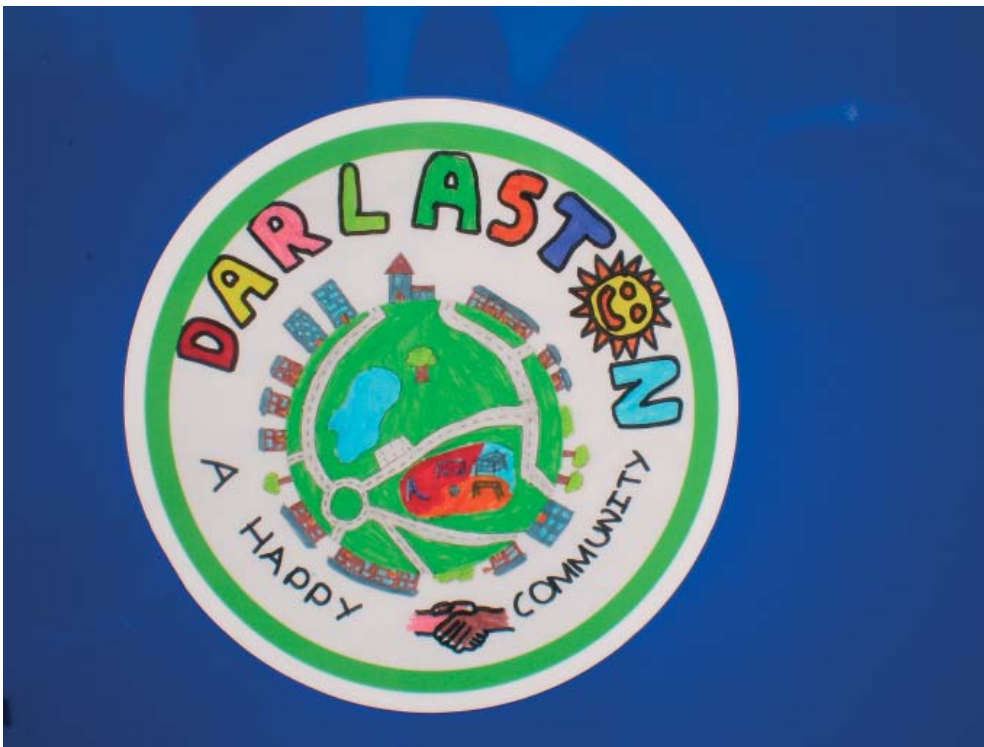
- Serious lack of youth facilities.
- Leisure offer is also poor, especially since the loss of the multi-purpose centre.
- Public transport is in need of upgrades - particularly increased evening bus services and better designed bus stops and newer buses.
- Further diversity of public transport needed - tram or train to improve connections and catchment to and from Darlaston.
- Cycle network missing.

Social Economic Issues

- Use the Academy as a driver for change, increasing learning and education.
- Address worklessness through upskilling and training.
- Business rates considered to be too high
- Educational offer in need of improvements, in particular adult education and locally based resources.
- Waste management and recycling services are a growing industry and are in need of being accommodated with more consideration to avoid compromising the future development of Darlaston.
- Metal base engineering industries need to innovate, adapt and create value in the local economy.
- A wider choice of shops on offer is needed in the town centre, as well as protecting those that remain now.
- Re-engage with youth of the area.

Opportunities

- A vision for a super neighbourhood was raised that would mean a **renewed** town centre, fully occupied range of shops with lots of community activity in between.
- Increase choice and quality of **housing** to attract former residents and new people to Darlaston.
- Possible relocation of **public sector office** in the town centre to increase potential customers for local shops.
- Increasing scope for homeworking.
- Making the most of the **Academy's** presence in the town.
- Potential for **creative industries** to be introduced to the area by developing a working relationship with the steel fabricators existing in Darlaston.
- **Public realm** animation programme of events to enliven and enrich the Darlaston's streets and public spaces.
- Safer and better defined **routes** between adjoining neighbourhoods.
- **Green spaces** provide an attractive setting for the town but their profile should be raised as well as protected.
- An improved **market** to add character and identity.
- **Heritage/cultural trail** - celebrating Darlaston's past success and promoting future possibilities.
- Modernised **business environments** attracting inward investment - possible synergy with the Strategic Development Area.
- Increased **leisure offer** - Bars and restaurants to allow social activity both day and night as well as further facilities to promote healthy lifestyles.
- A **town centre manager** to facilitate contact between the key stakeholders in the centre and improve communication.
- More **youth facilities** as well as locating in areas that are under provided for.
- **Knowledge economy** and information technology.



NEXT STEPS

We are holding 3 public consultations on Friday 10th, Saturday 11th and Monday 13th July 2009, at Rough Hay Community Centre, Darlaston Town Hall and Salisbury Primary school respectively.

After the consultation has finished the feedback will be analysed and all comments noted. We will be back in September to consult on options for change. Look out for updates on Facebook, coming soon!

The final Strategic Framework plan will then be prepared and approved by Darlaston PRG at the end of 2009 and then endorsed by WHG and the Council thereafter. The Strategic Regeneration Framework will help to inform planning and development in Darlaston to the year 2025 and beyond.

