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# **Black Country Joint Core Strategy**

## **Stage 2: Infrastructure and Deliverability Study**

### **Technical Note 1: Progress with the BCJCS**

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### Technical Note 1: Progress with the BCJCS

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# 1 Progress with the Joint Core Strategy

## 1.1 Overview of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy

### 1.1.1 Introduction

The Black Country Authorities are currently preparing their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) which will be used to guide future planning decisions. The LDFs are comprised of Local Development Documents in which the Black Country Joint Core Strategy (BCJCS) will be the key document for each of the Black Country Local Authorities. The BCJCS is intended to build on the work that has been undertaken for the Black Country Study which focused on how to transform the sub-region.

The Strategy will be a spatial planning document setting out the vision, objectives and the detailed spatial strategy for future development in the Black Country up to 2026. It will also draw attention to the methods in which land use, social, economic and environmental issues can be tackled within the area.

**Figure 1: The Black Country Boroughs<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Source: Black Country History website: [www.blackcountryhistory.org/whereis.html](http://www.blackcountryhistory.org/whereis.html)

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### 1.1.2 Structure of the Strategy

The Black Country Consortium has identified the issues that will be covered in the Strategy. Although they will not be site specific, the Strategy will focus on the following<sup>2</sup>:

- *“The location and type of future housing developments*
- *Where jobs should be located*
- *How people can move around the Black Country*
- *The location and size of new shopping, leisure and cultural facilities*
- *Protection and improvement of the natural and built environment*
- *How to address the needs of the Black Country’s diverse communities”*

### 1.1.3 Development of the Strategy

Following development of the Preferred Options for the BCJCS, a public consultation period was held for six weeks between Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March and Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2008. The Black Country Authorities having considered the consultation responses have now developed a structure upon which the BCJCS will be progressed. The BCJCS has a planned submission to the Secretary of State for February 2010 with a Public Inquiry scheduled for June 2010. Adoption of the Strategy is currently anticipated to be in March 2011.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1.4 Consultation and Key Stakeholders

A number of key stakeholders have been involved in the consultation phases on the BCJCS including representatives from public, private and voluntary organisations. Some of the stakeholders that have been involved in the consultation process include:

- Advantage West Midlands
- Black Country school improvement programme
- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)
- Environmental Agency
- Government Office for the West Midlands
- Wildlife Trust
- West Midlands Regional Assembly

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council website: <http://blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk>

<sup>3</sup> Milestone dates for the progression of the BCJCS have been confirmed by members of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

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## 1.2 The Black Country Study

The following information has been sourced from *'The Black Country Study: The Future of the Black Country'*, published by the Black Country Consortium in May 2006.

### 1.2.1 Introduction

The Black Country Study has been produced by the Black Country Consortium to guide the strategic future of the Black Country. A key role for the study is to help produce the necessary LDFs. From the plans drawn up to help improve the sub-region, it will help stimulate growth in the surrounding areas. With 40% of the City Region's population living in the Black Country, the success of the LDFs will be a significant factor in the success of the City Region as a whole.

### 1.2.2 The Black Country and Current Issues

Today the Black Country is one of the few sub-regions experiencing population decline despite the high levels of growth between 1950 and 1970. It is believed the main reason for this is due to an increasing desire to live in peripheral areas rather than highly urbanised sites; the option of a better environment and quality of life is a common option amongst high earners.

The Black Country economy has been under-performing for the past 30 years and has a £2.6billion output gap compared to the rest of the UK. It is believed this is due to low employment rates, low skills and low business rates. This is also linked to the fact that there are 100,000 less jobs in the Black Country than there were in the 1970's. There are fewer people of working age in the Black Country than the national average.

After the creation of the Merry Hill centre outside of the Black Country region all major shopping districts have been subject to decline. The lack of significant quality retail in the main centres leads higher income groups out of the sub-region.

A large amount of poor quality housing still exists with the Black Country area having been built to accommodate those workers in the manufacturing and mining industries. There was an increase by 37% in housing stock between 1950 and 1970; however this housing now creates problems such as overcrowding in smaller homes and an acute shortage of larger homes.

A network of historic road, rail and canal routes is attributed to the industrial revolution and has been central to the formation of the towns and communities of today. The area does have extensive green space with some spaces being disused land and inaccessible to the public. This could be described as 'urban heritage' and sites could yet be developed to their full potential.

Climate change is becoming a growing issue for all parts of the country. The Black Country Study and the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase One Revision will attempt to reduce long distance commuting and maximise the potential for walking and cycling. Other measure to help the campaign against climate change is to improve businesses use of energy, promote better energy efficiency by domestic users and improve energy efficient requirements of the building regulations.

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### 1.2.3 The Future of the Black Country

Change is needed in the Black Country to ensure its future growth and prosperity. If current trends in the Black Country continue, there may be reduced prosperity and well-being of people in the sub-region, the wider region and UK as a whole. This section briefly considers the effects on the Black Country if a 'business as usual' approach is taken to the development of the sub-region.

Not taking steps to ensure the Black Country provides a thriving community for people to work in, visit and live will inevitably have an impact on its growth. Some of the areas of concern raised by the Black Country Study include:

- Falling employment;
- A widening income gap;
- Further outward migration;
- A reduction in the number of households; and
- A failing city region economy.

15,000 fewer jobs by 2031 in the Black Country have been predicted by baseline forecasts if the right conditions for the economy to grow and employment opportunities are not created. Job losses in the manufacturing industry are expected to reach 66,000 by 2030. As job creation in the services sector will not be sufficient enough to counter these losses, more needs to be done to ensure a strong workforce, new employment sites and a high quality environment to attract people to the sub-region. Relative incomes have also been predicted to fall from 81% of the UK average today to 76% by 2030 according to forecasts undertaken by Oxford Economic Forecasting:

*“The Black Country is key to the success of the City Region. The Black Country’s £2.6 billion output gap is the principle component of the city region’s output gap. If current trends continue, GVA per head in the Black Country will fall from 84% of the UK average to nearer 80% by 2030.”*

The Black Country Study considers a Key Growth Programme in order to combat some of the issues highlighted for the sub-region above; this includes the following mechanisms:

- **Accelerating growth of the knowledge economy** – in order to move towards a high skilled, well-paid knowledge economy and increase competitiveness with the rest of the UK.
- **Expanding the four strategic town and city centres** – to provide employment, social, shopping and leisure facilities to attract people and business to the sub-region. The four strategic centres for the Black Country are Brierley Hill, West Bromwich, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

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- **Building quality housing** – improved housing conditions and new housing initiatives will improve the attractiveness of the Black Country and provide people with greater choice of where to live. The gross figure for new dwellings in the Black Country between 2001 – 2026 is 106,700 (pre economic down-turn).
  - **Creating a workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** – to increase the skill-level and knowledge of the Black Country workforce through necessary training and advice. A further 100,000 skilled workers and 60,00 people with qualifications of degree standard or greater are required in the Black Country by 2031.
  - **Creating prosperous, diverse and harmonious communities** – through removing existing barriers to the labour market and structural inequalities in Black Country communities. This will also be supported through improved housing and a high-skilled work force.
  - **Transforming the urban environment** – to be more attractive through the creation of sustainable communities and reducing impacts on the environment from emissions such as Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).
  - **Developing an integrated transport network** – to link the four strategic centres with the wider region and UK. This is imperative for the economic growth of the sub-region as it will provide opportunities for attracting inward investment. An integrated transport network also will provide more sustainable opportunities for travel and make journeys to work easier.