

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND
ADULT EDUCATION – 5th MARCH 2008**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

PROGRESS REPORT ON REGENERATION OF STOURBRIDGE

PURPOSE

1. To update the Select Committee on progress to date in relation to the regeneration of Stourbridge

BACKGROUND

Strategic Context

2. The Council's Economic Regeneration aims are to: -
3. **Optimise the opportunity for local people to obtain local jobs through:**
 - building the capacity of local residents to access local jobs;
 - delivering training programmes for local unemployed people;
 - providing job brokerage facilities;
 - providing employment related support and advice to potential/existing trainees; and
 - developing sustainable communities.
4. **Support new and existing businesses through:**
 - creating new jobs;
 - increasing inward investment;
 - safeguarding existing jobs;
 - proactively communicating with local businesses; and
 - providing sites/premises for new employment opportunities.
5. **Strengthen and diversify the local economic base through:**
 - developing the skills base through quality training;
 - stimulating an enterprise culture and encouraging business innovation;
 - developing the Visitor Economy; and
 - creating a safe, attractive and healthy environment for residents, businesses and visitors.

6. **Improve the economic infrastructure through:**
 - maximising the potential of the major development sites;
 - improving transportation infrastructure and increasing choices in mode of travel;
 - delivering and caring for high quality landscape and urban design;
 - regenerating the Borough's 4 town centres and 15 local centres; and
 - developing and maintaining a positive image.

7. **Champion the interests and assets of Dudley Borough**, securing resources and improving its position regionally, nationally and internationally through:
 - creating and maintaining close working relationships with international, national and regional public and private sector funders;
 - marketing widely opportunities for future development and improvements in the Borough; and
 - celebrating Economic Regeneration successes to a wide audience.

8. The Council's Economic Regeneration aims are clearly linked to the Council's Community Strategy and Council Plan priorities and a range of regional and sub-regional strategies that influence and impact on local issues. They include:

9. **The Community Strategy** - Economic regeneration delivers the jobs theme of the existing Community Strategy, developed by the Dudley Community Partnership (DCP), and will be a key driver for "creating a prosperous and attractive Borough". The DCP established themed partnerships to deliver the priorities set out in the Community Plan. The Economic Development and Regeneration Partnership (EDRP) was established to deliver their Economic Regeneration agenda.

10. **The Council Plan** - Economic Regeneration delivered the Richer Borough Theme of the original Council Plan and delivers the Regeneration Matters agenda of the current Council Plan. Economic Regeneration also underpins and supports key activities delivered through all the other themes of the current Council Plan (environment matters, safety matters, learning matters, caring matters and quality matters).

11. **The Economic Strategy** - The Council's Economic Strategy sets out a 15-20 year vision and focus for economic regeneration activities in the Borough. It recognises the changing national, regional, sub-regional and local strategies and policies which impact on the local economy including the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy, the Black Country Study which provides a 30 year vision of improving the social, physical and environment for the sub-region, the Arc of Opportunity Regeneration Zone Implementation Plan (2007-10) for West Birmingham and the South Black Country and Dudley's Neighbourhood Management Strategy.

12. The Economic Strategy makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the priorities contained within the Dudley Community Strategy, particularly the "Creating a Prosperous Borough" theme, and the Council Plan, principally the Regeneration Matters theme, and supports other themes such as Environment Matters and Safety Matters.
13. The Economic Strategy brings together, not only the economic regeneration activities delivered by the Council, but also those delivered by a number of partner organisations and these are clearly set out within the Strategy's action plan. The Strategy is produced with the input of a significant number of staff across all Directorates in the Council. It is also subject to wide ranging consultation, both internally and externally, and is formally approved through the Cabinet and full Council. Implementation of the Strategy is monitored by the Economic Development & Regeneration Partnership and scrutinised by this Select Committee.
14. **Directorate and Service Plans** - Economic Regeneration features as a key component of the Directorate of the Urban Environment's Strategic Plan. Each of the service areas within the Economic Regeneration Division produces an annual Service Plan setting out the clear priorities for their respective Sections.
15. **The West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES): Connecting to Success** was launched in December 2007 by Advantage West Midlands and sets out what the West Midlands region needs to do to improve its economic performance. The Strategy sets an ambitious vision for the West Midlands, this being:

"To be a global centre where people and business choose to connect"

The Strategy focuses on 3 main themes – Business, People and Place - which comprise a number of strategic objectives:

- Business - objectives include seizing market opportunities, improving competitiveness and harnessing knowledge
 - Place - objectives include increasing Birmingham's competitiveness, improving infrastructure and sustainable communities
 - People – objectives include sustainable living, raising ambitions and aspirations and achieving full potential and opportunities for all
 - plus the need to provide a powerful voice for the West Midlands.
16. In order to deliver sustainable economic development and growth, the targeting and prioritisation of resources to deliver the strategy is aligned closely with the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. The WMES therefore targets its spatial interventions on three primary areas, which are areas of multiple market failure including the Regeneration Zones, concentrations of knowledge assets including the High Technology Corridors and Birmingham as the major economic driver within the West Midlands economy

17. A Delivery Framework accompanies the Strategy and provides further details on how the strategy will be delivered.
18. **West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)** - published originally as Regional Planning Guidance 11 (RPG11) in 2004, sets out the Government's vision for the metropolitan area and the shires. Its vision is for: "an economically successful, outward looking and adaptable region which is rich in culture and environment, where all people, working together, are able to meet their aspirations and needs without prejudicing the quality of life for future generations." This is now being reviewed via a three phase process. The RSS Phase 1 Revision was issued by the Secretary of State on the 15th January 2008, and confirmed the roles of Brierley Hill as the fourth strategic centre in the Black Country, and Dudley town centre as a new focus for tourism, culture and living
19. **The Local Transport Plan (LTP)** - recognises the synergy between economic development, regeneration, housing and transport and the LTP strategies are closely aligned to the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies. It is vital that if the vision for economic growth is to be sustained, the infrastructure is geared to support the regional aspirations and investment targeted to support regeneration. The shared vision for the LTP is:
 - a thriving and sustainable community where people want to live and where business can develop and grow;
 - town, city and local centres that are attractive and vibrant;
 - clean air and less congested traffic conditions;
 - a safer community; and
 - equal opportunities for everyone to gain access to services.
20. **West Midlands Regional Visitor Economy Strategy (2004)** - presents a coherent framework for tourism in the West Midlands. A key feature of the strategy is the need to create successful, sustainable destinations. It identifies the need to focus on key destinations and visitor gateways. This strategy identifies the Black Country as an emerging destination which requires regeneration investment. The Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy was developed in 2004 and provides a framework for tourism development. The Strategy identifies the need for a Black Country Partnership to build on the existing Black Country Tourism initiative. It also identifies the need to invest in the 5 key destinations of the Black Country including Dudley Town Centre and Brierley Hill/ Merry Hill.
21. A review of the delivery structure created in the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy was undertaken in late 2006 which proposed alterations to the organisations responsible for delivering the visitor economy strategy. A refresh of the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy was undertaken in 2007 identifying priorities for regional investment. Four key themes have emerged: Conference & Exhibitions, Festivals and Events, Food and Drink and Culture. An Action Plan for the region is now being developed in which Tourism West Midlands will identify the work programme for the coming three years. Sub-regional partnerships will also be asked to identify ways in which activity relating to these priorities can be delivered by its partners.

22. A piece of work is currently being undertaken to take forward the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy and more generally tourism in the Black Country for which the outcomes are due to report shortly
23. **City Regions** - The government sees the City Regions as being motors for national progress challenging how they can take their economic and social development to a new level. The Council is actively involved in the City Region in the West Midlands through involvement with our regional partners. The City Region's aims include:-
- delivering jobs and investment and a new strategic global growth opportunity as a key driver for the wider "Midlands" to add to the UK's wealth creation potential; and
 - delivering a new high quality urban environment and quality of life of international standing which encourages diversity, knowledge, creative and vibrant communities. This builds upon the city centre regeneration projects which have been seen across the conurbation but extend this quality into local communities.
24. **Black Country Study** – The Council, along with the Black Country Consortium and its partners, is taking an active role in the Black Country Study, which aims to articulate the Consortium's aspirations as set out in its vision "Looking Forward: The Black Country in 2033". The study is a dynamic project to develop the long-term renaissance of the Black Country and will be critical in shaping the future regeneration of Dudley Borough. The four key objectives of the study are to:
- reverse the trend of people leaving the Black Country;
 - raise income levels;
 - accommodate a more balanced population (achieving parity with the national social grade profile); and
 - create high quality, sustainable environments.
25. The Consortium is leading efforts with partners to prepare a comprehensive Delivery Plan at present. This will highlight the key projects to be undertaken by the private sector, local authorities, Centro, AWM, English Partnerships and other delivery bodies. A detailed 5 year programme and an indicative 10 year programme are now being prepared towards an overall 25 year transformational development strategy
26. **The Regeneration Zone Implementation Plan (ZIP) 2007-10** - The Arc of Opportunity is the largest of the West Midlands Regeneration Zones covering an area stretching in an arc from the western edge of Birmingham city through Sandwell and across areas of central Dudley to Lye. The key aim of the Zone is to link regeneration activity with the areas of greatest need and ensure that resources and policies are coordinated to the best effect. The Black Country Consortium is currently preparing a review of the ZIP.
27. **Joint Core Strategy** – Every local authority has to produce a Core Strategy for their Local Development Framework which will set the strategic spatial policy context for the Borough. The 4 Black Country Boroughs are to adopt a

pioneering approach by working together to produce a Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country building on work on the Black Country Study. The Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country will be out to consultation at the preferred options stage in March 2008 with a view to finalising this into a document to submit to the Government Office in the autumn.

Current regeneration initiatives in Stourbridge and recent achievements

28. Stourbridge is a crossroads market town that serves both the south west of the West Midlands conurbation and the north east of Worcestershire. The town centre has had a mixed fortune in recent years. Shop units with street frontages enjoy low vacancies but those in the centres have a relatively high vacancy rate. Generally good town centre accessibility is hindered by the ring road and there is a need for public realm improvements. Stourbridge is a compact manageable shopping centre, with a strong catchment population that needs to be attracted. The ring road acts as a deterrent to pedestrians and is also difficult to negotiate for car users seeking to get onto the town centre exits off the ring road. The speed and scale of the current three lane one-way system is a particular deterrent for the elderly, especially for accessing the car parks
29. The main problems in the town relate to traffic management. The links from the bus and rail station to the town and from the surrounding areas are predominantly through underpasses, however, the recent construction of the pedestrian crossing at Hagley Road has significantly improved access between the town centre and the bus and rail station. The ring-road acts as a barrier to movement of pedestrians from the surrounding residential areas, and the access to the multi-storey car parks off the ring road can be difficult due to the three lane one-way system
30. The High Street is used for both parking and vehicle movement, and has narrow pavements impeding pedestrian movement
31. Tesco have submitted 2 planning applications for a major store on the eastern edge of the town centre in recent years, on land known as the Angel Triangle. Whereas the regenerative benefits of this proposal are recognised, the first application was refused in November 2001. A second application was also refused and was the subject of a planning appeal, however, this appeal has now been formally withdrawn by Tesco.
32. The Ryemarket centre has shown a decline in footfall following year on year increases for several years and the centre is struggling to identify a new, more localised role. The Crown Centre has high vacancy and is considered to be poorly integrated with the rest of the town centre. The adjacent car park is not easy to use and is poorly lit.
33. **Stourbridge Area Action Plan.** Members will be aware that the Council's Planning Policy activity is focussed through the Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS currently includes the preparation of an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Stourbridge which will be a comprehensive plan to guide the location, design and layout of new development, and will be supported by a detailed implementation programme. The timescale for this work is as follows:

- Commencement – March 2008
- Consultation on options – January 2009
- Consultation on preferred option – September 2009
- Submission to Secretary of State – August 2010
- Independent Examination - May 2011
- Adoption – February 2012

34. However, in response to concern expressed by Members, residents and local stakeholders in Stourbridge in respect of short term impacts of the proposed regeneration activities underway in the town centre, associated transportation issues and the long lead in time to the adoption of the AAP, Officers carried out a consultation exercise in the town between September and November 2006, titled “Stourbridge Matters”. The purpose of this exercise was to seek the views of Members, residents and local stakeholders on their perceptions of the existing town centre environment and opportunities for future enhancements and to collate information in relation to transportation and accessibility issues within and adjacent to the town centre. Whereas this exercise was carried out separately to the AAP, the results obtained provided useful information to support the evidence base for the development of the AAP. Furthermore, this exercise supported the strategic aims of the Council Plan and Community Strategy, respectively, by focussing on the regeneration of the town centre. A copy of the key findings of this work is appended to this report.
35. Furthermore, the AAP will build on earlier masterplan preparatory work carried out by urban design and planning consultants David Lock Associates which was commissioned in early 2005 but which was not taken to completion due to changes in the planning system leading to the introduction of the new LDS process
36. **Crown Centre.** A planning application has been submitted by Modus Developments for the redevelopment of the Crown Centre which proposes:
- Increased supermarket floorspace with a new occupier (Tesco)
 - 4 new A1 retail units
 - a new market hall
 - 72 residential apartments (54 x 1 bed & 18 x 2 bed)
 - associated car parking & servicing areas

Key elements of the proposals include:

- Improved pedestrian routes through the centre and strengthened links with the town centre
- Improved accessibility through the provision of ramps and steps, new lifts, easier steps and staircases, improved lighting and signage.
- Replacement of the currently unpopular multi-storey car park with new parking on level decks with improved ramp arrangement and direct pedestrian access to the heart of the shopping centre and to the markets.
- Placing of the markets on the ‘desire line’ route between the ring road bus stops and the town centre in order to encourage passing footfall and to maximise the opportunity for the use of public transport.

- The creation of a varied skyline and to respect existing long distance views of St Thomas's church.
37. **Angel Triangle.** Opportunities now exist for the progression of development on this land, and officers are liaising with landowners in order to bring forward development.
38. **Town centre residential developments.** There has been considerable interest in residential development in and around the town centre with planning permission being granted for the following developments:
- Worcester Street -18 apartments
 - Webb Court (retirement apartments)
 - Former gas works site - 116 apartments
 - Corbett Hospital – 83 houses and apartments
 - Enville Street - 44 sheltered housing units
 - Market Street - 16 flats
39. **Partnership Working.** In order to address transportation issues in the town centre, a working group of Stourbridge Area Committee (the Stourbridge Town Centre Traffic Management Working Group) has been convened to address traffic management issues in the town centre, particularly the conflict between cars and pedestrians on the High Street.
40. In addition, given the impact, both during construction and after completion of the redevelopment of the Crown Centre, on Council services and town centre stakeholders, an officer project group has been convened to identify these impacts and, wherever possible, seek appropriate mitigation. In the event of planning permission being granted for this redevelopment and with the prospect of work starting, it is proposed to convert this group into a liaison group between the Council, the developer and other agencies, using the model that has proven successful in Brierley Hill and Halesowen.
41. **Environmental improvements.** In recent years the Council has made significant investment in the physical fabric of the town centre. These improvements include:
- Reconfiguration and widening of the Enville Street approach to the town centre
 - New surface level pedestrian crossing at the Hagley Road/St John's Road/New Road junction
 - Refurbishment of Foster Street subway
 - New decorative lighting columns with hanging baskets in High Street and Foster Street
 - New litter bins and bollards throughout the town centre
 - Restoration of the town clock
 - New convenient and secure cycle stands
 - Dark blue and gold colour scheme adopted for all street furniture, inspired by the town's coat of arms

42. In addition, the following subway improvements are currently being planned:
- Court Street, Worcester Street and St John's Road Subway – works proposed in 2008/09 to strengthen and improve the vehicle side parapet and to replace footpath side fencing to ramps and steps.
 - Lower High Street, Bradleys Road and High Street Subway; these will be subject to an ongoing refurbishment of the approaches for pedestrians and the central area. Maintenance to the structure is due in Spring 2008 and this will be followed by a landscaping and redecoration process.
43. Proposals to revitalise the northern gateway into Stourbridge town centre are currently being developed. The project will create an attractive and welcoming first impression to visitors accessing the town centre from the north and improve links with the canalside area. There are three key elements to the project, for which a public consultation exercise is planned for March 2008;
- emphasising the crossing over the River Stour from which the town derives its name
 - upgrading Lower High Street subway to provide a safe and attractive entrance into the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists
 - creating a pocket park on the underused tarmac area at the bottom of Lower High Street to provide much needed seating for students and the wider public
44. A strong public/private sector partnership has been developing Stourbridge's floral display over the last three years and the town achieved a Silver Gilt Award in the prestigious Heart of England in Bloom competition in 2007 for the second year running
45. **Town Centre Management.** To support the increased activities for economic regeneration projects and proposed developments in the four principal town centres the Department has recently been restructured to meet increasing demands.
46. Two new Regeneration Officers have been appointed to assist with the development of town centre Masterplans, project implementation strategies and the project management of major schemes and developments as stated within this report. Regeneration Officers also assist with external funding applications and management of steering groups for major projects.
47. Since April 2006 there have been 4 Town Centre Managers in post covering the 4 principal town centres. Each Town Centre Manager is working with internal and external partners to deliver environmental enhancement and crime reduction schemes for each town centre and assisting with change management issues that are associated with major improvement and development schemes. Town centre managers are responsible for staging events which promote the town centres and increase footfalls. They also bring forward various environmental projects which without their intervention would probably never happen.

48. A series of high profile events were held in 2007/8 including the borough's official St. George's Celebration, Stourbridge Carnival, children's entertainment throughout the school holidays, a Harvest Festival and a sci-fi themed Christmas Lights Switch-on.

FINANCE

49. There are significant financial implications arising for the Council as a result of the various initiatives and programmes described above. A considerable amount of external funding has already been approved, or is being sought, with matching Council or other resources being applied where affordable.
50. Each individual strategy or development programme should be financially justifiable, and following project appraisal will be reported to Cabinet recommending inclusion in the Council's capital programme or revenue budget where appropriate.

LAW

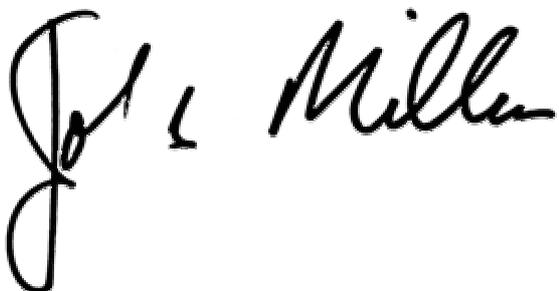
51. The matters contained in the report cover a range of the Council's statutory powers, but generally rely on Section 2 of the Local government Act 2000, which enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic social or environmental wellbeing of its area.

EQUAL IMPACT

52. This work has been conducted in full accordance with the Councils equality and diversity policies and should in no way have any prejudicial impact on different racial groups, disabled people, both genders and/or other relevant groups. The needs of children and young people are considered in any planning and implementation activities.

RECOMMENDATION

53. It is recommended that the Committee note the significant progress made in regenerating Stourbridge Town Centre and comment accordingly



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Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-

Draft Phase One Revision, The Black Country Study, Examination in Public, 9th to 18th January 2007, Report of the Panel (March 2007)

<http://www.blackcountryconsortium.co.uk/page.asp?PageRef=88>

Economic Strategy for Dudley Borough 2007/08

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/business/regeneration/economic-strategy--intelligence>

Dudley Borough Community Strategy 2005-2020

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=2301>

Dudley Council Plan 2007

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=1630>