



Planning Statement

October 2005



Wolverhampton City Council

Advantage West Midlands

WatermanBurrowCrocker
In association with
FaulksPerryCulley&Rech

futurefoundations

WALSALL, WOLVERHAMPTON,
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE
REGENERATION ZONE

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PLANNING STATEMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement provides appropriate information to support the outline planning application (OPA) for the proposed Bilston Urban Village (BUV). It is intended to be read in conjunction with other supporting documents including the Design and Access Statement, Environmental Statement, Transport Assessment and Illustrative Masterplan which combine to form the OPA package. BUV accords with national, regional and city policy objectives and will deliver a development which provides a major component of Wolverhampton's urban regeneration. It will result in the sustainable redevelopment of a substantial inner city brownfield site which has lain derelict for many years.
- 1.2 Bilston Urban Village will contribute significantly to the objectives recently highlighted by the Black Country Study (BCS) helping to make the area a desirable location where people chose to live, work and invest. It will provide the opportunity for the creation of aspirational housing, thus beginning the process of residential change.
- 1.3 As a result of the provision of high quality mixed use development and new employment facilities well related to aspirational housing, the urban village can deliver high value added activity, promoting higher skill and income levels. A quality environment supporting quality workspace will help to attract knowledge based industries. There is an acknowledged shortfall in this type of accommodation in the locality.
- 1.4 The OPA encompasses the totality of the BUV, with all matters reserved except for access. In addition, a full application is submitted for Plot A (immediately south of the Black Country Way) in order to enable reclamation, remediation and infrastructure works to commence as soon as possible, and to facilitate the necessary diversion of Dudley Street.
- 1.5 The application site is primarily in the ownership of Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) although delivery of the High Street link involves a number of smaller individual ownerships (Appendix 1).
- 1.6 The Statement provides a compelling case for WCC to approve the applications by identifying the cascade of policy support found in the Wolverhampton U.D.P, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS 11) and central Government guidance contained in a range of PPG's and PPS's. BUV constitutes a sustainable development in an intrinsically sustainable location.

2.0 SITE LOCATION, CONTEXT AND PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 The location and context of Bilston Urban Village is shown on Figure 1. The site is less than 1km south of Bilston High Street, which forms the heart of the community, and some 4km from Wolverhampton City Centre. It already benefits from excellent public transport links, being adjacent to the Midland Metro Line / and the Black Country Route (A463).
- 2.2 The site currently consists of approximately 43 hectares of largely derelict land, the legacy of Bilston's heritage as a centre for coal mining and iron manufacturing. The upheaval associated with these industrial processes has resulted in a disrupted artificial landform with significant areas of fill material. The Bilston Brook, which once ran through the midst of the site, is buried beneath this fill in a deep culvert. Partial restoration occurred on parts of the site in the late 20th century, but a sense of neglect and decay still pervades the area.
- 2.3 For many years this atmosphere was exacerbated by a large scrapyards in the eastern sector of the site. As a precursor to the remediation process, this has now been secured by compulsory purchase and reclamation has commenced.
- 2.4 To enhance the overall reclamation proposals, the site also encompasses the existing outdoor sports field and sports hall at Bilston High School. The current sports field is compromised by its awkward shape and landform which limits flexibility and usage. The sports hall is isolated, of poor quality, and fails to provide facilities that meet present day expectations.
- 2.5 Despite its predominantly derelict status, the site is extremely well related to Bilston. The High Street (together with its famous market) lies just to the north of the Black Country Way, and the northern edge of the site is defined by Bilston High School and a large Morrisons supermarket.
- 2.6 The southern perimeter of the site is defined by the Bradley Arm of the Birmingham Canal, which has tremendous potential as a leisure and amenity focus, although at present it is degraded by the proximity to dereliction. An isolated area of traditional housing at Carder Crescent lies just to the north of the canal, separated from the High Street by the derelict site.
- 2.7 The neighbourhoods of Highfields and Bradley lie to the south of the canal, and comprise a mix of residential and employment areas situated on either side of Highfields Road.

Ladymoor Pool is a significant landscape and amenity feature adjacent to the south western site boundary.

- 2.8 The Midland Metro line defines the eastern site boundary, with the residential area of Loxdale just beyond it. To the west, Coseley Road and Broad Lane form the boundary, with the residential area of Broadmoor Road projecting into the site area.

Planning History

- 2.9 In 1998 English Partnerships and Wolverhampton City Council commissioned a conceptual masterplan to initiate the design of BUV. Following public consultation, the principles of the masterplan were endorsed by the City Council's Policy and Resources Sub Committee in December 1998. An outline planning application based upon the original conceptual scheme was submitted by AWM in August 2001. A resolution to grant consent was passed on May 28 2002, subject to a number of planning conditions and legal agreements.

- 2.10 Following the resolution to grant, the applicants commenced the complex process of detailed site investigation in order to understand the true nature of the reclamation task. This included work such as the capping and grouting of in excess of 100 historic mineshafts. In parallel with this constraints analysis, the conceptual masterplan was refined and adjusted in order to maximise the benefits which could be delivered by the site, in accordance with the latest guidance on sustainability that was emerging from central government. The requirement for a new leisure centre to address the needs of Bilston was confirmed and the detailed specification refined. This resulted in changes to the original red line boundary and the incorporation of the existing school sports hall.

- 2.11 Furthermore, the importance of a direct and positive connection to Bilston High Street was recognised as a very important element in securing the wider regeneration objectives for the heart of Bilston, ensuring maximum accessibility and integration. This entailed the creation of a boulevard link between the High Street and the core of the urban village, thus extending the site north of the Black Country Route.

- 2.12 The principle of the urban village is confirmed by its specific inclusion within the emerging UDP (April 2003) under Policy S1 : Strategic Regeneration Areas, identifying BUV as an area which would be subject to major change. The key components of the masterplan are stated to be :-

- The creation of a new park at the heart of the development incorporating a significant area of open water.

- A mixture of land uses, predominantly for housing and employment.
- A network of new pedestrian and cycle links across the site and the improvement of existing links, particularly from Bradley to Bilston Town Centre.
- The development of quality public transport through the site with links to the Metro and the bus station.
- Residential development of a consistently high quality and at urban densities, incorporating the latest techniques in, for example, energy efficiency, and taking account of orientation, views across the site and easy access to facilities.

2.13 The principle aims are stated to be :-

- To transform a largely degraded environment area into a form of development of high quality and which encompasses the principles of sustainable development.
- To support economic activity within the adjacent Bilston Town Centre.
- To ensure that the benefits of the Urban Village are available to the widest number of people.

2.14 A public inquiry opened on 30 November 2004 to consider the objections that had been made to the UDP at both deposit stages and to those which had not been withdrawn on an unconditional basis. No objections were made to the substantive policies and proposals affecting the urban village. The weight attached to the relevant emerging policies which were considered by Planning Committee in May 2002 is now much greater.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The Bilston Urban Village proposal is to develop a mixed scheme comprising leisure and community uses, residential and employment provision, set within a substantial framework of usable "green infrastructure".

3.2 The evolution of the masterplan (Figure 2) has been overseen by the project partners (AWM, WCC and Future Foundations) assisted by Waterman Civils and the masterplanners FPCR. GVA Grimley have provided advice on viability and deliverability. Pre application discussions have occurred with the appropriate departments and officers at WCC.

3.3 The masterplan has been informed by an iterative design and evaluation process, responding to emerging information in order to minimise adverse environmental impacts

whilst maximising social, economic and sustainability benefits. The submitted masterplan consequently is prepared in accordance with the latest government guidance on urban design in order to ensure the creation of an attractive and sustainable development which promotes the highest standards of design and maintenance.

3.4 Acknowledging government concerns regarding the increasing importance of sustainable communities and the potential for climate change, a key principle is to create a largely self sufficient walkable neighbourhood, with close integration between the historic heart of Bilston and the core of the urban village.

3.5 As a consequence, the urban village is defined and given structure by a strong logical framework of green infrastructure (Figure 3) corridors which accommodate pedestrian, cycle and public transport links. A Central Spine Boulevard following the corridor of the former Bilston Brook sits between Bilston High Street and the Bradley Canal Arm providing the horizontal framework. The new High Street Link Boulevard is paralleled by a succession of supporting vertical inter connections. The potential for a new metro station on the eastern boundary provides a strategic transport connection, reinforced by a high quality bus loop system serving the whole urban village.

3.6 In pursuance of sustainable development objectives, the proposed mix of uses will ensure a balanced development in harmony with Bilston, integrating leisure and community uses with homes and jobs. The quantum of development is broken down as follows :-

- **Bilston Leisure Centre (1.52 ha)**

5,600 sq mts leisure facilities in close proximity to Bilston Town Centre and Bilston High School. Together with the proposed community facilities, this will form part of the gateway link from Bilston Town Centre to the proposed development, and will also have a strong connection to the proposed shared use sports pitch facilities.

- **Community Facilities (1.05 ha)**

4,500 sq mts local health care centre in close proximity to Bilston Town Centre, together with other appropriate community uses.

- **Housing – up to 1040 dwellings (18 ha)**

A mix of house types from apartments and town houses to detached and semi – detached, with 30% affordable housing. A net density of 55 / hectare will be achieved in accordance with PPG3.

- **Employment (3.48 ha plus mixed use)**
 16,900 m² (B1, (a), (b), (c), employment, start-up workshops and offices. Located in two key gateway areas of the proposed development which will provide easy access and benefit from the existing transport routes of the Metro Line and Black Country Route.
- **Formal Sport Provision (3.05ha)**
 The existing Bilston High School sportsground will be reconfigured and enhanced with upgraded pitches, upgraded tennis courts, and a new play area. It will be re-orientated to provide a connection between the School, the Leisure Centre and the Community Facilities.
- **Neighbourhood Park (7.98ha)**
 The Central Spine and Neighbourhood Park will provide informal recreation such as seating areas and grass areas to play informal games, or performance areas for local outdoor events, and will be available to the wider community.
- **Children’s Equipped Play Area and Casual Informal Play Space and Greenways**
 A central play area within the Neighbourhood Park will be designed to meet recognised standards and in response to Wolverhampton City Council’s management requirements.
- **Allotments (0.50 ha)**
 These will form part of the Neighbourhood Park and will provide opportunities for local residents to grow their own produce. The allotments will also have educational uses for the nearby Bilston High School.
- **Retail Facilities**
 2,260 sq mts retail facilities. 1,160 sq mts will be located along the High Street Link within Bilston Town Centre replacing premises lost to the creation of the High Street Link. The remaining 1,100 sq mts will have a central location within the proposed urban village, providing surveillance and active frontage along the Neighbourhood Park. The intention is to improve links to the existing facilities within Bilston Town Centre rather than to recreate a new local centre that would detract from the existing High Street. It will serve only local “top up” needs.
- **Nature Reserve and Habitat Creation**
 Existing areas of wildlife interest including the newt pond and trees adjacent to the canal corridor can be retained and enhanced as the basis of the green infrastructure

framework with improved public access. New habitat / wildlife areas will be included within the neighbourhood park to create a diverse landscape and provide educational opportunities for Bilston High School.

- **Bilston High School**

Improved access points and links to new pedestrian and cycle footpaths will be created, with a strong direct connection to the adjacent leisure and health facilities. Changes in land form will improve surveillance of the playing fields and provide opportunities for new school buildings. An integrated community core will be created.

3.7 The Assessment Plan (Figure 4) provides the framework for the mixed use development plots, and identifies critical criteria for the Environmental Statement such as maximum building heights and development densities. It is this drawing which will be attached to the planning permission by way of condition.

3.8 The timing of development and the exact phasing will be influenced by the sequencing of reclamation and in part will then depend upon the prevailing strength of the market. However, the Phasing Plan (Figure 5) gives a broad indication of the anticipated approach.

3.9 The residential component of the urban village will provide in the order of 1,000 units, offering a variety of types ranging from one bedroom apartments to five bedroomed family homes. High density multi-storey accommodation will be focused along the Central Spine Boulevard providing optimum access to public transport and the High Street Link Boulevard. Densities will tend to reduce towards the outer edges of the development, providing an appropriate transition in relation to established residential areas. 25% will be affordable, comprising a mix of social rented, shared equity and affordable market price units.

3.10 As stated earlier, accessibility and the creation of a walkable neighbourhood have been key objectives of the overall masterplan. It is essential to provide people with a genuine choice of transport modes, with public transport, foot and cycle being the obvious first option. Principle routes can be summarised as follows :

- **HIGH STREET LINK BOULEVARD**

A safe, overlooked pedestrian route connecting Bilston High Street directly to the Neighbourhood Park at the core of the urban village. This boulevard will be flanked by the Leisure Centre and Health Facilities, giving it a strong community focus.

- **CENTRAL SPINE BOULEVARD**

The principle east-west movement corridor connecting the Brook Street Gateway through to the Coseley Road roundabout and down to Highfields Road. This will provide the primary public transport 'loop' connecting through to the High Street and town centre. A segregated cycle/pedestrian route will follow the open space corridor.

- **BRADLEY CANAL ARM TOWPATH**

This has the potential to be transformed as a result of the urban village into an important southern east-west pedestrian/cycle corridor with high amenity value, overlooked by residential development, following the example provided (in part) by Ambleside Close.

- **DUDLEY STREET, BANKFIELD ROAD AND NORTHCOTT ROAD**

These existing north-south connections will be enhanced within green infrastructure corridors connecting to the Central Spine Boulevard. In addition, a further pedestrian/cycle route will be established due west of Carder Crescent, served by a potential new canal footbridge connecting to Highfields.

3.11 A full Transport Assessment has been prepared in support of this planning application.

3.12 A Design and Access Statement also supports the planning application, and this sets out the primary approaches adopted in order to ensure high quality design as achieved and that an enduring "sense of place" is created. In summary, this addresses the following components, drawn from the latest guidance produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) :-

- **Response to Context** (the relationship of the development to its site and setting relative to Bilston, the existing settlement pattern, and the surrounding townscape).
- **Urban Structure** (the quantum of development, the mix of uses and their layout, with specific attention paid to accessibility. The framework of streets and spaces and their connectivity).
- **Urban grain** (the pattern, density, scale, height and appearance of the proposal, focusing on local distinctiveness and the combined effect of building arrangements in relation to streets and spaces).

4.0 COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY

4.1 This element of the Planning Statement addresses the cascade of relevant planning policy from central government down to city level, and then reviews the BUV proposals set against the resulting tests.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

PPSI : Delivering Sustainable Communities (2005)

4.2 This sets out the government's overriding objectives for sustainable development. Paragraph 5 states that planning should promote sustainable and inclusive urban development by :

- making suitable land available for development in line with economic, social and environmental objectives to improve people's quality of life;
- contributing to sustainable economic development;
- protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside, and existing communities;
- ensuring high quality development through good and inclusive design, and the efficient use of resources; and
- ensuring that development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community.

4.3 BUV has, from the outset, been driven by the need to regenerate the existing communities that surround the large derelict site. Once completed, it will help to re-integrate the neighbourhoods of Bradley, Highfields and Loxdale with Bilston itself. BUV will deliver a genuinely mixed use sustainable development on a redundant brownfield site which has excellent locational characteristics. The Illustrative Masterplan combines with the Design and Access Statement to demonstrate how design of the highest quality can be provided in a practical and implementable fashion. The site is in close proximity to the city centre and offers good access to jobs and services by quality public transport.

4.4 Sustainable design is a key objective throughout the urban village. This high profile project could serve as an exemplar scheme, and will be guided by the emerging

Common Minimum Standards (CMS) promoted by the Office of Government Commerce. The objective is to deliver sustainable excellence in construction throughout the urban village development process.

- 4.5 Excellence in Design is equally important, together with the commitment to involve stakeholders in the design process from the outset. Extensive community consultation has already been a key feature of the evolving design proposals, influencing the final masterplan.

PPG3 : HOUSING (2000)

- 4.6 PPG3 promotes high density mixed use development on brownfield land with good access to public transport. Particular importance is placed upon the need for green and attractive living environments.
- 4.7 The Illustrative Masterplan meets these objectives, providing a strong practical framework of green infrastructure which is safe, supervised and usable. High density development focuses on the principle public transport and pedestrian access routes.

PPS6 : PLANNING FOR TOWN CENTRES (2005)

- 4.8 PPS6 recognises the crucial relationship between high quality mixed use development and successful inner city living. A principle objective of the Illustrative Masterplan has been to reinforce the importance of Bilston High Street by providing direct positive linkage. Although the High Street is currently the vibrant heart of the town, there is evidence of some decline, particularly towards the western end, which lacks the civic stature found to the east. The proposed High Street Link Boulevard will provide the catalyst to redevelop a particularly run down component of the High Street, creating a new commercial and retail route which attracts a high footfall towards the High Street.

PPS9 : BIODIVERSITY AND GEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION (2005)

- 4.9 PPS9 seeks to conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England's wildlife. Inevitably, large brownfield sites have a tendency to produce disturbed environments which then encourage unusual habitats and species. However, they are often successional and unstable, and would usually be replaced in time.
- 4.10 The reclamation process required to remove contamination and provide an appropriate platform for the urban village will remove the majority of the sites successional communities. However, the Masterplan compensates for this disruption by establishing a permanent generous green infrastructure framework where the delivery of biodiversity will be a key objective. In particular a sustainable drainage strategy will provide a wetland spine of shallow ditches, pools and a large central lake within the

Neighbourhood Park. There will be strong connectivity established to the Bradley Canal Arm and Ladymoor Pool.

PPG13 : TRANSPORT (2001)

- 4.11 PPG13 focuses on the need to promote sustainable transport choices, easy accessibility to jobs, shopping and leisure facilities by public transport, cycling and walking, and to reduce car dependency. BUV is excellently placed to meet these aspirations in view of its close proximity to Bilston High Street and the adjacent Metro providing access to both Wolverhampton and Birmingham. The Masterplan capitalises on these opportunities.

PPG15 (PLANNING AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, 1994), AND 16 (ARCHAEOLOGY AND PLANNING, 1990)

- 4.12 These PPGs combine to protect the historic environment and archaeological remains. Unfortunately, the legacy of heavy and extractive industries which dominates the site results in there being little opportunity for significant surviving heritage resources.

PPG 17 : PLANNING FOR OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION (2002)

- 4.13 This promotes the importance of open space in its broadest sense in improving the quality of life and healthy living, and achieving viable urban renaissance. The green infrastructure network proposed by the Masterplan provides an excellent basis for healthy multi-use activity across the urban village, encouraging walking and cycling. Extensive liaison with relevant City Council officers and Bilston High School has resulted in a strongly focussed Community Sports facility being integrated with both the existing High School and the new proposed Leisure Centre. This significantly enhances the existing disjointed and isolated playing field, connecting the new facilities to the Neighbourhood Park and Central Green Spine Boulevard in a single resource which is readily supervised and managed on a joint use basis.

WEST MIDLANDS REGION SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS11)

- 4.14 Bilston Urban Village is entirely in accordance with one of the key elements of the spatial strategy, namely the 'step change' which is aimed at stemming out-migration from the Major Urban Areas (MUA's) through urban renaissance and renewal in places like Bilston.
- 4.15 Significant environmental improvements, the provision of quality housing, improved job opportunities and better local services are prerequisites to attract new investment and people and to raise the quality of life of existing residents. All these components are part of Bilston Urban Village.

4.16 In particular Policy PA1: "Prosperity for All", stresses the importance of focussing employment growth on areas of high unemployment and disadvantage and on brownfield sites to help provide new employment opportunities within or close to the areas of need. Bilston Urban Village is located within the North Black Country and South Staffordshire Regeneration Zone (RZ), one of the five urban RZ's in the region, where regeneration and investment activity is being focused.

4.17 Policy UR1 – Implementing Urban Renaissance seeks opportunities for increasing overall housing densities where appropriate; raising the quality of urban design in existing and new development; identifying areas for large scale change where existing stock is no longer sustainable; ensuring appropriate levels of quality open space are provided; developing integrated renewal strategies for the most deprived communities; facilitating the provision of high quality health, education and other services, and the provision of mixed tenure neighbourhoods, incorporating affordable social and market housing. The masterplan accords completely with these important objectives.

WOLVERHAMPTON UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN (REVISED DEPOSIT, MARCH 2004)

4.18 As has been stated earlier, the principal of BUUV is established within Policy S1: Strategic Regeneration Areas. The Masterplan has evolved in the light of the design criteria established at paragraphs 2.6.4 and 2.6.7 of the UDP, and consciously respects the Design policies listed below :

- DSI : Design Quality
- DS2 : Design Statement
- DS3 : Urban Structure
- DS4 : Urban Grain
- DS5 : Public Realm
- DS6 : Townscape and Landscape
- DS7 : Scale – Height
- DS8 : Massing
- DS9 : Appearance
- DS10 : Community Safety
- DS11 : Access for People with Disabilities

4.19 The City has already commenced work on its Local Development Framework, publishing its Local Development Scheme in March 2005. Whilst this does not go into specific

allocations such as BUV, it does reiterate the key government objectives for sustainable development, as follows :-

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- Effective protection of the environment;
- The prudent use of natural resources; and
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

4.20 BUV scores highly in relation each of these principles. The applicants are committed to the delivery of an exemplar scheme for sustainable urban living which will serve as a catalyst for the ongoing renaissance of Bilston and Wolverhampton. Outline Planning Permission should therefore be granted for BUV, together with detailed consent for the first phase of reclamation to facilitate an early start in 2006.