

4.0 SOCIO ECONOMIC ISSUES

4.1 Introduction

4.1 The proposed development has potential to make a significant impact on the social and economic structure of the City. This section establishes the current issues and identifies how they may be affected by the proposed development.

4.2 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Location

4.2.1 Bilston is located within the south eastern corner of Wolverhampton. The town, like Wolverhampton has a strong manufacturing base that has been in decline over the last twenty years.

Communications

4.2.2 Bilston has good communications within the West Midlands Region. The City is located immediately to the south of the M54 whilst the Black Country Route provides good links to the M6. The Midlands Metro Line has improved public transport links into the centre of the conurbation.

Population

4.2.3 Wolverhampton has a population of approximately 250,000 with a workforce of approximately 100,000. Wolverhampton remains a centre for manufacturing with approximately a third of those employed falling within this sector. Bilston Town has a population of over 24,000.

Employment

4.2.4 Wolverhampton suffers from higher unemployment and greater inequality than other areas both within the region and nationally. Research by Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce, Training & Enterprise suggests that Wolverhampton will continue to under perform in terms of job creation. This is in part due to the lack of suitable sites for inward investment, the high level of unemployed without qualifications and the high number of residents who consider themselves to lack good or high level core skills.

Affordable Housing

- 4.2.5 Affordable housing is the term used for subsidised and market housing designed for those whose incomes generally deny them an opportunity to purchase houses on the open market. The Wolverhampton housing stock includes a high proportion of social housing, compared to other urban areas. Of the 103,000 dwellings in the City, 29,000 are owned and managed by the local authority and 5,000 by Housing Associations. Together, this amounts to 33% of the total stock.
- 4.2.6 Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) estimated Wolverhamptons affordable housing needs to be in the region of 4,400 dwellings over the period 1991 to 2011, 46% of the overall housing allocation. However, in order to more effectively assess the housing requirements of its residents, the Council commissioned an up to date 'Housing Needs Study', to project housing need over the period 2002-2007.
- 4.2.7 The Housing Needs Study recommended that, in general, in order to create sustainable communities, a mix of 70% market and 30% affordable housing will be sought on housing renewal sites. This requirement could be reassessed as a result of subsequent reviewing and updating of the housing needs survey commissioned by the City Council, and may therefore be subject to revision.

Educational Facilities

- 4.2.8 A desk based assessment has shown that there are four pre school childcare facilities within 1.3 miles of the development site and eleven schools, which include nine schools catering for infant and/or juniors and two high schools. There is also a Careers Guidance service and two libraries within a mile of the site.
- 4.2.9 Wolverhampton City Council have produced a document called 'School Organisation Plan 2003/2008'. This report is reviewed annually and assesses school places in the City as well as determining present and future accommodation needs. The report highlights the proposed Bilston Urban Village development and states that the increase in housing may necessitate an expansion of the education provision in the area.

4.2.10 The report concludes that there is a need for primary school places in the area which could be provided by a new primary school within the urban village development or adjacent to the site for example within the Bilston High School site, or alternatively, the capacity of existing schools could be adjusted. The Council will look to Bilston High School to accommodate any requirement for secondary school places arising from the development.

4.2.11 A detailed capacity study of schools in the local area will be carried out by Wolverhampton City Council, to ascertain whether a new primary school should be included within Bilston Urban Village and to establish the best way of developing Bilston High School so that future increases in secondary education provision can be offered within the existing site.

Community & Leisure Facilities

4.2.12 With regard to community & leisure facilities in the area, a total of fifty four different services exist. There are a number of charitable organisations within Bilston including two counselling services, two hostels and three housing association offices. Clubs and associations and community and day centres are well provided with a total of nineteen different organisations within 1.2 miles of the site. The elderly and disabled are catered for with three residential care homes, a home care centre and resource centre and a disabled equipment supplier.

4.2.13 A fire station is located on Prosser Street, and Police Station located in Mount Pleasant. Nine different religious organisations are located within a mile of the Bilston site which cover a range of denominations and there are three social services offices in the area. Gym and leisure centres are located at Prouds Lane and slightly further away on Darlaston Way and there are seven different health centres or surgery's in the area. Other leisure destinations within Bilston include The Trumpet - with daily live jazz , Robin 2 - a live music venue, and Mecca Bingo.

Leisure Centre - Sequential Testing (Summary – Refer to Appendix 4.1 for Sequential Test)

4.2.14 A sequential test was carried out to assist the Council in determining the revised outline application by assessing the leisure component of the scheme in the context of the key considerations set out in Planning Policy Statement 6 (planning for town centres).

4.2.15 PPS6 requires locations for proposed leisure uses to be assessed sequentially:

- first locations in existing centres;
- then edge of centre locations
- then out of centre sites

Bilston Urban Village can be described as “edge of centre” as defined in Annexe A of PPS6, being within 300 metres of the Bilston town centre boundary.

4.2.16 **Key Considerations**

need (need is already established - the proposed leisure centre does not represent a new facility - refer to level of useage of existing centre and its catchment area)

scale (the scale is appropriate to the position of Bilston in the town centre hierarchy- upper limit can be set by condition)

sequential test (having assessed suitable sites or buildings for conversion, there are no alternative sites in Bilston town centre; Bilston Urban Village is an edge of centre location well-connected to the centre and is the next preferred location therefore meeting the sequential test)

impacts (this is a replacement facility - no adverse impact on any existing leisure uses in Bilston)

accessibility (gateway improvements, proposed metro stop, enhanced public transport)

other factors (physical regeneration, economic growth, social inclusion)

4.2.17 **Conclusion** - The site is suitable, viable and available.

The proposed leisure use in that location is fully in accordance with the Government’s key objectives in PPS6 (planning for growth and development of existing centres; promoting and enhancing existing centres) and the relevant policies of the draft UDP (accessible by a choice of means of transport and compatible with nearby uses).

Retail Facilities

4.2.18 Bilston Town Centre currently provides a mix of local shops, banks and market facilities. The Bilston Town Regeneration Strategy (November 2001) highlights the key issues for the retail development of the town.

4.3 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS & EFFECTS

Employment

- 4.3.1 The proposed development envisages approximately 16,900 m² of new industrial and commercial floorspace, This will generate employment figures within the region of 952 gross (718 net) jobs. 74 full time equivalent jobs will be created in construction with on-site training work experience and wage subsidised employment. The project will also link into the Bilston Sustainability Project through the procurement of the canalside improvements and community training opportunities.
- 4.3.2 Further indirect jobs will be created by the development both within the new village and within the existing Town Centre.

Housing

- 4.3.3 The proposed development envisages a development of approximately 1040 dwellings. At an average of 2.4 persons per household, the residential development would accommodate an additional 2,496 people.
- 4.3.4 At a mix of 70% market and 30% affordable housing, this would mean 312 new affordable housing dwellings within the village.
- 4.3.5 The location of affordable housing within Bilston Urban Village will be in close proximity to the Local Centre, community facilities, footways, cycleway and bus stop provision. Groups of not more than 15 units will be distributed around the scheme. These will be integrated throughout the development and not isolated or zoned away from other residential areas; this will be subject to final agreement between the City Council, the developer and any Registered Social Landlord

Educational facilities

- 4.3.6 Bilston High School will form an integral part of Bilston Urban Village. The proposals will re-orientate the main pedestrian entrance to the south of the school, which will link to new pedestrian and cycle footpaths. The existing playing fields will be improved, and will form part of the proposed neighbourhood park, as a shared use facility.

4.3.7 The school will have a strong link to the two proposed developments fronting onto the Black Country Route - the Leisure Centre and Community facilities. Pedestrian footpaths will be created between these facilities, which will also link across the Black Country Route to Bilston Town Centre.

4.3.8 Access will be improved from The Urban Village to the surrounding facilities with better pedestrian links and cycleways from Broadmoor Road and across the canal from Bradley to the south via a new pedestrian bridge. Bus routes will pass through the village towards the town centre and the metro line is also within walking distance of the village to provide travel further afield.

Accessibility and facilities

4.3.9 Access to the existing services within Bilston will be improved via bus routes, cycle ways and pedestrian links.

4.3.10 Existing provision for sport and leisure is poor within the area and additional community facilities will therefore be included within the Bilston Urban Village Development.

4.3.11 A new leisure centre is proposed towards the north of the site, off the Black Country Route and this will include swimming pools, dance studios and a sports hall. This will be located opposite to a PCT Health Centre. Between these two buildings, an important pedestrian link will be created which will improve access to the town centre. This will encourage new residents to visit the town centre. Sports facilities will also be improved with the upgrading of the existing sports pitches by Bilston High School off Prosser Street.

4.3.12 Children will especially be catered for with the provision of a centrally located play area with play equipment, and ball games area.

4.3.13 Allotments are to be located adjacent to the playing fields, and a small local centre will be provided within the centre of the site. The facilities within this centre are not as yet defined.

- 4.3.14 It is intended that the new development will integrate with the existing local community of Bilston by encouraging the increased use of existing facilities and providing new services for new and existing residents.

Retail Facilities

- 4.3.15 Bilston Urban Village will provide new retail facilities within the proposed High street Link. This will improve the facilities within the existing run down western end of the high street, and improve pedestrian and cycle links to the Town Centre. Within the Urban Village, local facilities will be provided in a central location.

4.4 Conclusion

The proposed development forms part of the balance of new housing and employment growth set out in Wolverhampton City Council UDP. No adverse socio-economic impacts are predicted, and the proposed development is an important component in the current and proposed future growth of the local economy. The proposed development will significantly improve leisure and community facilities and will revitalise the Bilston Area, serving as a vital catalyst in the long term regeneration of the local area.