

## Chapter 4

# Urban Renaissance

### Introduction

- 4.1 The four Major Urban Areas (MUAs) of Birmingham/Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire conurbation contain over half the Region's population and are the main focus for urban renaissance. Of the local authorities covering the MUAs only Birmingham, Solihull and Dudley did not experience a net loss of population between 1991 and 2001. Many of the people leaving are the most economically active. However, it is critical for the Spatial Strategy that all of the Region's urban areas once again become vital, attractive places for people of a wide range of circumstances and lifestyles.

### Creating High Quality Living and Working Environments

- 4.2 Past urban regeneration activity has tended to focus on the "worst areas" but has failed to change people's perception of them. It has also failed to provide urban areas which are attractive to a broad range of people's expectations and lifestyles. This guidance takes a more comprehensive approach, targeting radical change on selected areas, but aiming to raise the overall quality across the MUAs.
- 4.3 Fundamental to urban renaissance is the creation and marketing of sustainable urban communities in which people will choose to live, work and invest. This will be achieved within the MUAs through the creation of:
- a variety of high quality, healthy, affordable and sustainable living and working environments (QE3, QE4);
  - a sufficient number and variety of jobs to meet employment needs, along with associated education and training opportunities (PA1);
  - modern urban transport networks, with an emphasis on public transport provision (T1); and
  - rejuvenated city, town, and local centres to serve communities with high quality services, to promote identity and social cohesion and to drive economic change (PA11).
- 4.4 The RPB will identify demonstration projects in each MUA to illustrate the achievement of very high quality residential environments, particularly with regard to:
- combining high density with high quality living environments;
  - creating more attractive and sustainable urban and suburban communities through evolutionary development to raise capacity and provide the scale and demand for better local service provision; and
  - illustrating that clearance and redevelopment in some areas may be the best option to achieve regeneration.
- 4.5 Urban renaissance will require an integrated approach to improving the urban environment, housing choice, access to jobs, transport efficiency, the distinctiveness of centres, and service delivery. To tackle these issues holistically requires integrating land-use decisions with other activities (such as education, health, community safety, leisure and environmental services) and joint working with others, including residential and business communities. The
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sustainable regeneration of the MUAs will be a Regional priority and that will be the focus for resources, but the principles should be applied to any redevelopment of urban areas.

### **POLICY UR1: Implementing Urban Renaissance – the MUAs**

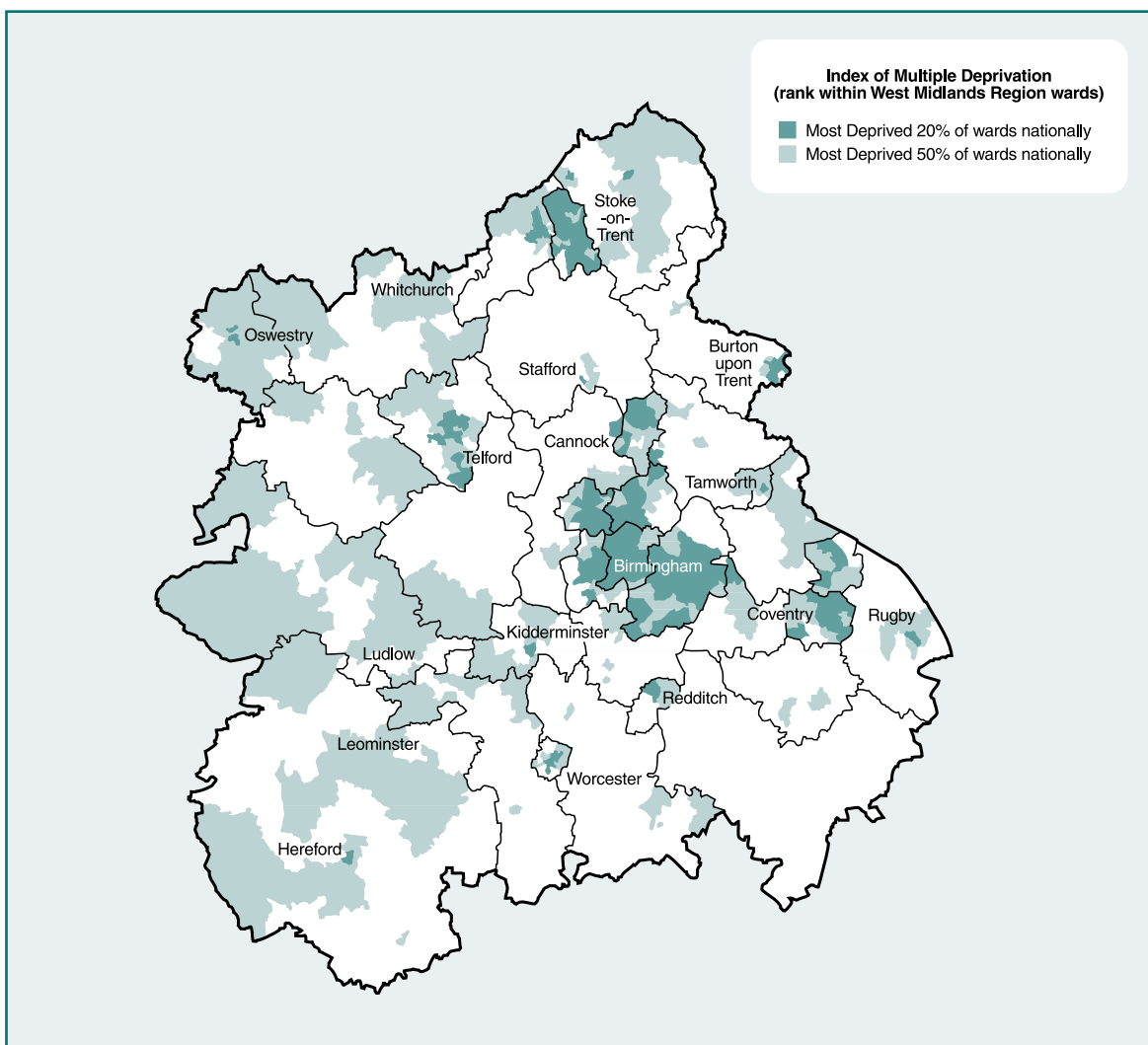
- A. Throughout the MUAs, local authorities, Regional agencies and partnerships should work together to:
- i) restructure land use and transport networks to create employment growth, new residential environments, improved environmental quality, integrate transport and join up centres;
  - ii) undertake environmental improvements (QE Areas of Enhancement diagram) including greening programmes (QE4) and conservation of the historic environment (QE5);
  - iii) maximise the use of the existing housing and business stock where economically and socially viable;
  - iv) raise the quality of urban design, architecture and public art and spaces (QE3,4);
  - v) rejuvenate urban centres to act as a focus for regeneration; and
  - vi) increase accessibility particularly for those currently disadvantaged in accessing jobs (T1).
- B. These objectives should be achieved using techniques such as:
- i) establishing local urban renaissance visions through effective participation of residents, businesses and other stakeholders;
  - ii) introducing neighbourhood management techniques;
  - iii) establishing innovative forms of delivery partnerships and mechanisms; and
  - iv) sharing best practice through demonstration projects.
- C. Targeted action should be taken in areas of greatest need and areas of opportunity to create growth and new choices. Partnership working should be prioritised towards:
- i) developing integrated renewal strategies for the most deprived communities;
  - ii) housing market improvements combined with improved services, such as health and education in the market renewal areas and housing renewal areas (CF 1);
  - iii) concentrated action within the urban regeneration zones, including business support, skills training, access improvements, land assembly and environmental improvement (PA2, QE3,4);
  - iv) developing strategies to provide for employment growth and creation of new residential environments in areas of opportunity; and
  - v) identification of the complementary roles and identities of centres within the MUAs as catalysts for urban renaissance (UR3).

- 4.6** Local authorities working with Local Strategic Partnerships, and where appropriate Regeneration Zone partnerships, need to develop visions for local urban renaissance. These will have a key role in integrating and co-ordinating land-use and investment decisions with the development of major services and facilities in the fields of education, health and leisure, community safety, environment and housing. Regional and sub-regional mechanisms will be established to provide opportunities for discussion of components of the visions which would benefit from wider ownership and co-ordination.

### Towns and Cities Outside the Major Urban Areas

4.7 Parts of many towns and cities which lie outside the MUAs are also experiencing decline or negative change which is affecting their potential to sustain a successful economy or to provide quality living environments. In parts of these towns, some communities also experience high unemployment and loss of services. This particularly affects the most vulnerable social groups. This situation is reflected in the current pattern of deprivation across the Region (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Pattern of Need in the West Midlands.



## POLICY UR2: Towns and Cities Outside Major Urban Areas

A. Local authorities and other agencies should seek to improve prospects in the following local regeneration areas by bringing forward local regeneration policies and programmes. Where possible access should be improved between concentrations of local deprivation and need within these towns and areas of economic opportunity, in line with policy T1. Any support for local regeneration programmes should not prejudice the need to focus resources within the MUAs.

Biddulph	Kidderminster	Rugby	Tamworth
Burton upon Trent	Leek	Rugeley	Telford
Cannock	Redditch	Stafford	Worcester

B. The changing pattern of deprivation will continue to be monitored and the above list of local regeneration areas kept under review.

- 4.8 To implement this policy, local authorities should work with local, Regional and national agencies, the community/voluntary sectors and business partners to develop regeneration strategies to promote urban renaissance. The local regeneration areas identified are based on those areas that contain at least one of the most deprived 20% of wards nationally (see Figure 3).

### Creating Jobs

- 4.9 To be successful, urban renaissance must create the conditions for employment growth in addition to improving the residential environment. This means making adequate land, in appropriate locations, available for expanding local businesses and inward investment, supported by appropriate marketing.
- 4.10 The Regeneration Zones identified in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) have a particular role in this and will be used to link the wealth created by regeneration to people in the most deprived communities. The five urban regeneration zones cover most of the Region's weakest housing markets and all the wards are within the 20% most deprived in the country.
- 4.11 Evidence shows that the existing supply of employment land in the MUAs does not cater for the whole needs of industry. The approach to employment land taken in this guidance is broadly one of providing a portfolio of sites. As well as identifying new, appropriately located sites, existing sites should be reassessed for their suitability and reuse for alternative purposes considered. This approach is set out in detail in the Prosperity for All Chapter and policy PA6 in particular. Given the long lead-in time to bring forward often complex urban sites, priority should be given to investment in the MUAs.
- 4.12 Supporting and diversifying the economic base should be underpinned by a co-ordinated cross-sector package of measures linking physical, economic and social regeneration. These should address local circumstances and might combine business support, the reorganisation of land and premises, training, skills development (including basic literacy and numeracy) and improving accessibility. Business Renewal Areas, Business Improvement Districts and Business Neighbourhood Management and use of local planning agreements to promote local employment might be appropriate vehicles for this.

## Creating Modern Transport Networks

- 4.13** The Region's transport infrastructure needs substantial improvement to facilitate economic and social regeneration. Congestion constrains existing businesses, discourages inward investment and reduces people's quality of life. The Regional Transport Strategy is set out in full in the Transport and Accessibility Chapter.
- 4.14** This sets out how an integrated package of policies will be applied co-ordinating development plans, local transport plans and the investment programmes of transport operators and agencies. These packages should have a close relationship with regeneration action plans and local visions for urban renaissance. This will require strong partnership working between all concerned.

## Enhancing the Role of City, Town and District Centres

- 4.15** Revitalising city and town centres is an essential element of attracting people back into urban areas. This is not just because of the services they can provide but also because they play a key role in providing people with a sense of place. The Black Country and the North Staffordshire conurbation were formed by the merging of towns. People still strongly identify with their local town, although they may participate in activity across a wider area. This sense of identity and belonging needs to be nurtured and celebrated.
- 4.16** The study of the functional inter-relationships in the West Midlands<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated a strong polycentric or multi-centred pattern both within and outside the MUAs. While all centres have a function to serve their local communities, many centres have distinctive roles that serve a sub-regional, Regional or even national function. The retail function is only one element and centres may have other significant roles, for example, in tourism, financial services or leisure. There is great potential to expand existing roles and develop new roles, for instance in cultural regeneration.
- 4.17** Flagship schemes and cultural projects can be a catalyst for regeneration (PA10, QE5). Developments such as the National Indoor Arena and Brindley Place in Birmingham, Victoria Hall and the Regent Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent, the Phoenix Project in Coventry, the Walsall Art Gallery, and The Public arts facility in West Bromwich contribute to creating distinctive roles for different places, helping to raise their profile, enhancing the sense of place and being a source of local pride. There should be a close two-way relationship with the Regional Cultural Strategy in bringing forward schemes and programmes that have a spatial dimension.

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<sup>1</sup> A Polycentric Framework of the West Midlands, ECOTEC 2001.

### **POLICY UR3: Enhancing the role of City, Town and District Centres**

City, town and district centres and in particular those centres identified in the network of town and city centres in PA11, should be enhanced to play a leading role in urban renaissance programmes in order to provide services for local communities, a sense of identity and as drivers of economic growth. This will be achieved through:

- i) maintaining and enhancing the pattern of urban centres according to their function and role in the Region;
- ii) developing strategies to maintain and enhance the underpinning role of all urban centres to serve their local communities in terms of retail provision, access to services and cultural/leisure activities;
- iii) developing strategies to promote a sense of identity and local distinctiveness;
- iv) identifying and creating opportunities for development, particularly for business, retail, leisure, tourism, cultural, educational and other services which are accessible to all;
- v) adopting strategies to encourage more people to live in or close to centres through the reuse of sites, development of mixed-use schemes, the conversion of property and initiatives such as “living over the shop”;
- vi) ensuring the highest standards of design are adopted, building on the existing character and identity of centres; and
- vii) enhancing urban centres as the primary nodes of the public transport network.

- 4.18** Local authorities, the RPB, and others including the business community, should work together to develop appropriate complementary roles between centres in order to reduce the areas of wasteful competition between them so that the overall performance of the Region’s centres exceeds the sum of its individual centres. Town centres are also covered in policies PA11-12 in the Prosperity for All Chapter.

## **Community Regeneration**

- 4.19** Evidence from many studies of urban regeneration demonstrate that one of the key ingredients for achieving success in regeneration and making it sustainable is the involvement of communities at all stages in the process from defining the problem, creating the vision, devising the actions, to implementing the proposed changes and maintaining the environment.

### **POLICY UR4: Social Infrastructure**

A. Service providers should work with local authorities and community organisations, in partnerships and through Local Strategic Partnerships, to demonstrate how their activities contribute to the delivery of urban renaissance consistent with the Spatial Strategy. Local authorities should facilitate the co-ordination of land use and investment decisions of providers with improved service delivery to:

- i) ensure that new social infrastructure is developed in or on the edge of an appropriate level of existing centre and is accessible by all modes by potential users;
- ii) co-ordinate decisions on schools investment and the provision of new facilities with residential renewal;
- iii) provide a range of educational facilities and services across all tiers to promote urban renaissance;

#### **POLICY UR4: Social Infrastructure – continued**

- iv) facilitate the modernisation of local health services, informed by partnership working with Primary Care Trusts on local delivery plans and addressing inequalities in health;
  - v) provide support for a range of business development and education and training services, targeted at linking local people and businesses to economic opportunities, including Education Action Zones;
  - vi) promote the provision of other facilities necessary for local communities and maximise the potential of existing community buildings and other facilities wherever there is the potential for mixed use;
  - vii) concentrate development and investment in areas where there is the greatest need;
  - viii) support the creation of new quality residential environments in areas of opportunity; and
  - ix) encourage the creation of safer neighbourhoods.
- B. Local authorities should take account of the impact of proposed developments on the health of local communities based on an assessment carried out in liaison with Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts.
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