

DARLASTON STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: FINAL REPORT



APRIL 2010



Walsall Council





V7 26/04/2010

For all matters regarding this project please contact the
Strategic Regeneration Framework Team at Walsall Council

Regeneration Directorate
Walsall Council
2nd Floor, Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall WS1 1DG

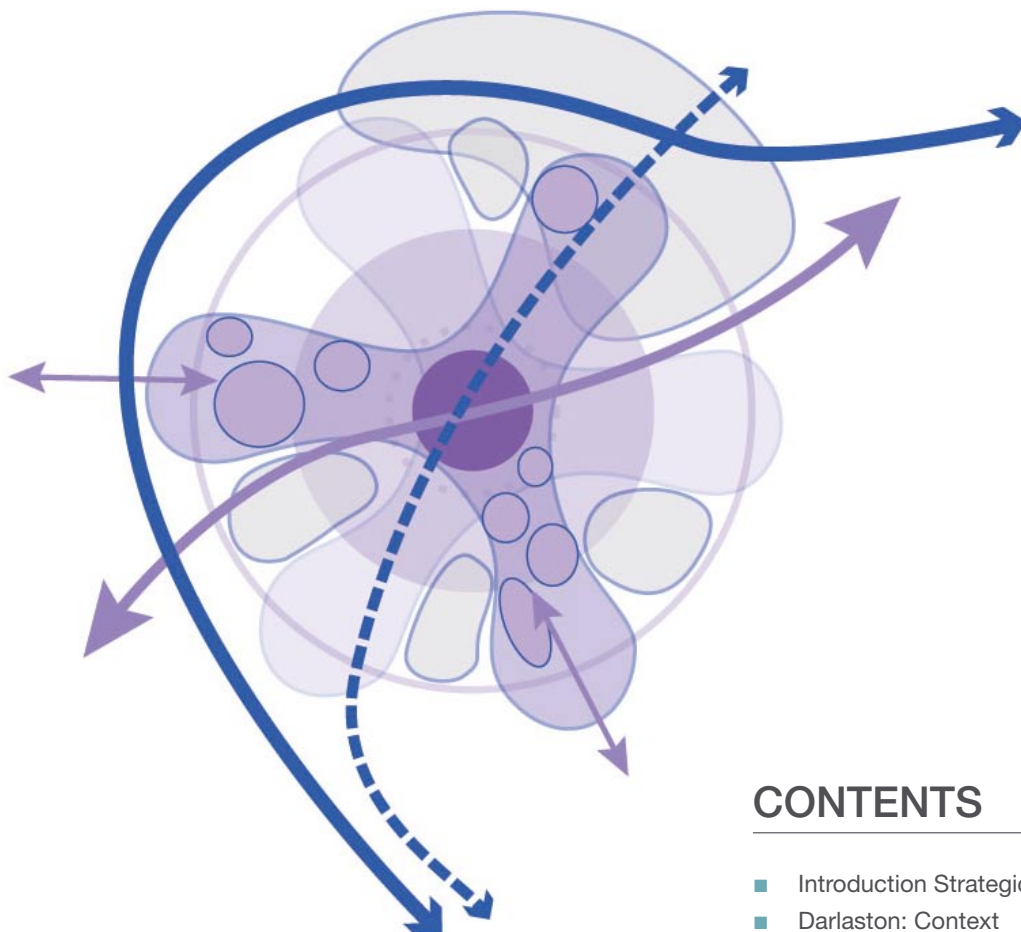
Tel: 01922 650000

This report was produced by URBED (urbanism environment
design) for Walsall Council and WHG

URBED
10 Little Lever Street
Manchester
M1 1HR

Tel: 0161 200 5500
Email: info@urbed.coop

DARLASTON STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: FINAL REPORT



CONTENTS

■ Introduction Strategic Regeneration Framework	1
■ Darlaston: Context	3
■ Darlaston: As it was...	4
■ Darlaston: As it is...	6
■ Darlaston: As it could be...	8
■ Darlaston: As it is seen	11
■ Vision: Themes & Strategy	13
■ Sites & Allocations	19

Projects:

■ Economic Initiatives	20
■ Environment and Transport	22
■ Development Projects	24

Priority Projects

■ 1: King Street and the Bull Stake	27
■ 2: Town Hall Yard & The Forge	31
■ 3: The Leys	35
■ 4: St. Lawrence Way	39
■ Implementation and Delivery	43

DARLASTON:



Strategic Regeneration Framework

In 2006 Walsall Council published a **Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF)** for the Borough. This identified five key sub areas each of which was to be subject to a detailed Strategic Regeneration Framework. Darlaston was one of these five areas and this is it's SRF.



The Darlaston Strategic Regeneration Framework has been prepared by a team led by URBED (Urbanism, Environment and Design) together with DTZ (commercial advice), SQW (economic research) and JMP (transport and highways). The purpose of the study has been to translate the brief set by the borough wider SRF into a detailed vision and set of policies for the **Darlaston Regeneration Area** (see map to the left). This will be used to guide regeneration work and investment as well as being a non-statutory part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework.

The work has included research into the economy of the town, its employment base, workforce, population, housing market, environment and transport links. This baseline work was used as the basis for an initial consultation with stakeholders and local people to understand the issues facing the town. This in turn fed into the development of three options which were the basis for further consultation. Following an options appraisal, a preferred option was developed as described in this report. This is the subject of a separate delivery report.

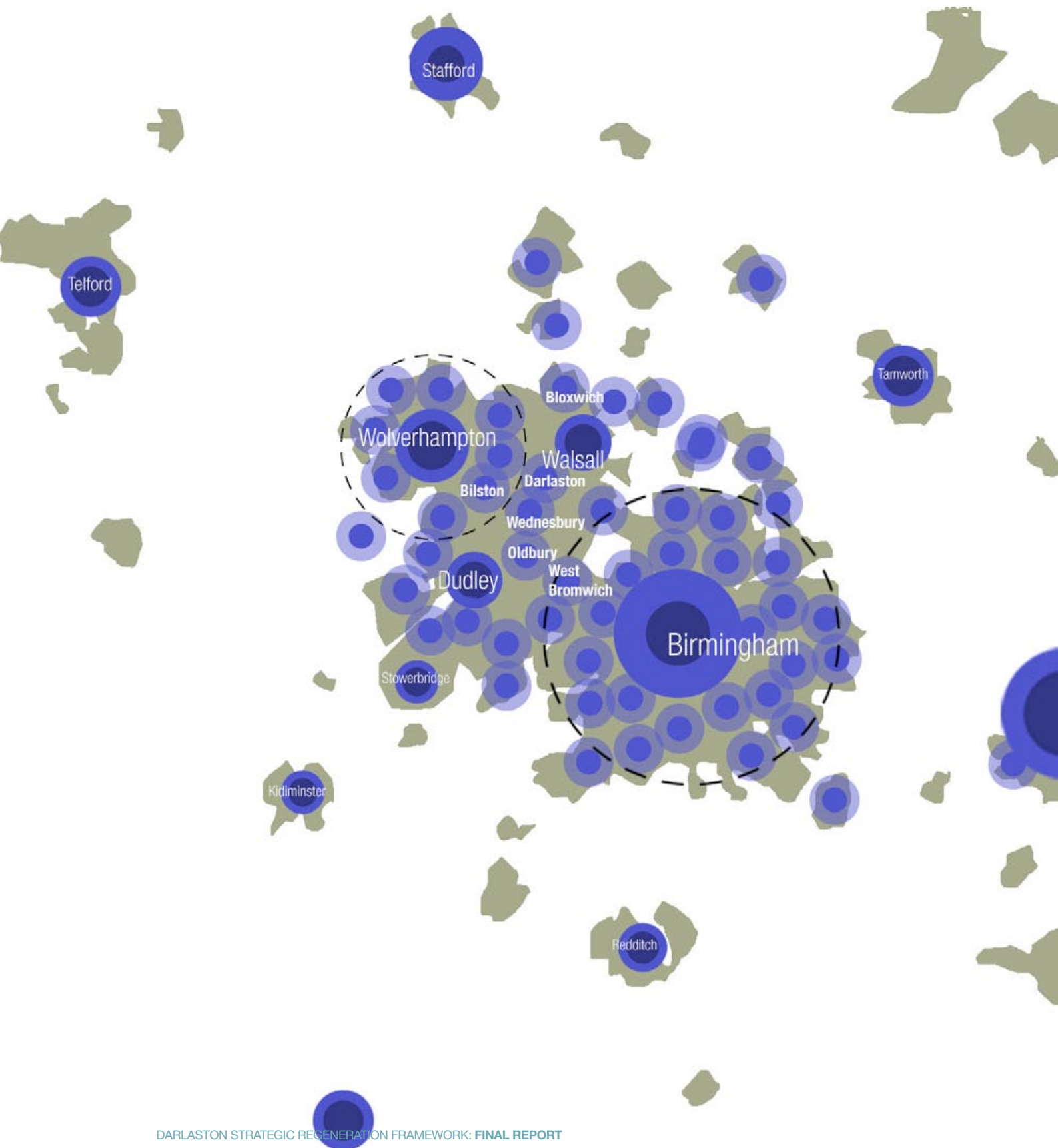
This report summarises this work, the discussions that we have had and the conclusions that we have reached. On the basis of this we set out a vision and strategy for Darlaston and the implications of this for the allocation of sites within the town, environmental and transport improvements and development projects. This report should be read in conjunction with the following detailed reports available from (www.urbed.coop):

Business Audit (June 2009)	URBED
Walkabout Report (June 2009)	URBED
Public Consultation 1 Report (July 2009)	URBED
Roundtable Workshop Report (July 2009)	URBED
Economic Baseline (July 2009)	SQW
Residential and Commercial Market Baseline (Aug 2009)	DTZ
Transport and accessibility (Aug 2009)	JMP
Baseline Report (Aug 2009)	URBED
Baseline Executive Summary (Aug 2009)	URBED
Options and Public Consultation Report (Oct 2009)	URBED
Preferred option Report (Jan 2010)	URBED
Preferred Option Consultation Report (March 2010)	URBED

This report describes all of this work, the discussions that we have had and the conclusions that we have reached.

We are grateful for all of the assistance that we have been given in undertaking this work and particularly for the help and guidance of the Darlaston Project Reference Group.

DARLASTON:



Context

Darlaston is a town of 25,000 in the heart of the Black Country which in turn is part of the West Midlands Conurbation. In developing a strategy for Darlaston it is important to understand the unique nature of this conurbation.

The Black Country was once one of the most industrialised regions in the world based on the South Staffordshire Coal Field and its rich iron ore deposits. The Black Country developed a diverse economy of independent towns that do not see themselves as satellites of Birmingham (unlike the towns around Manchester). With today's more mobile population these towns are all in competition with each other.

The heavy industry and coal mining that formed the foundation of the Black Country economy disappeared in the 1980s but the area's economy proved resilient and developed specialisms in precision engineering, particularly geared to the Midlands car industry. This however is now also in decline, symbolised by the closure of Longbridge. While engineering and manufacturing will remain important to the Black Country the area, which is home to 1 million people and 500,000 jobs, needs to diversify again if it is to prosper.

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is based on an Urban Renaissance agenda that supports the indigenous economic base of the Black Country while focusing on livability, housing and spreading the wealth created in Birmingham.

The central issue has been the extent to which Darlaston can rely on new jobs in the SDA and allow other employment sites to be developed for housing

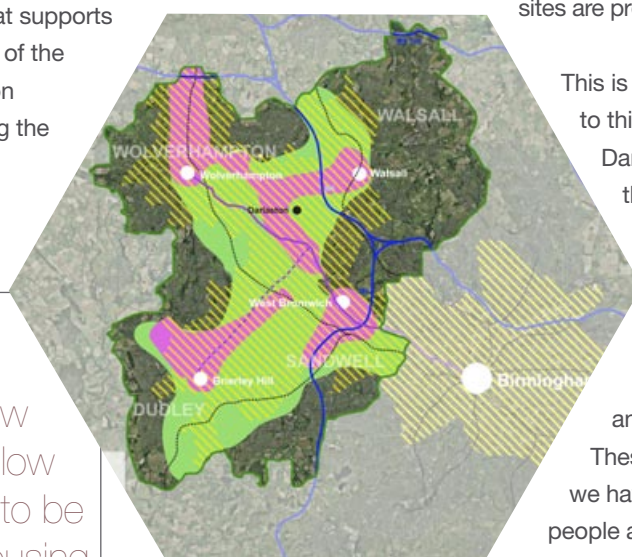
This in turn is reflected in the Walsall Strategic Regeneration Framework which seeks to diversify Walsall's offer by promoting quality housing, regenerating town and district centres and retaining and attracting young people. In Darlaston the SRF translates these into three main priorities:

- Regenerating the town centre
- Rationalising underused industrial land - allowing poorer sites to go to housing
- Promoting aspirational and affordable housing.

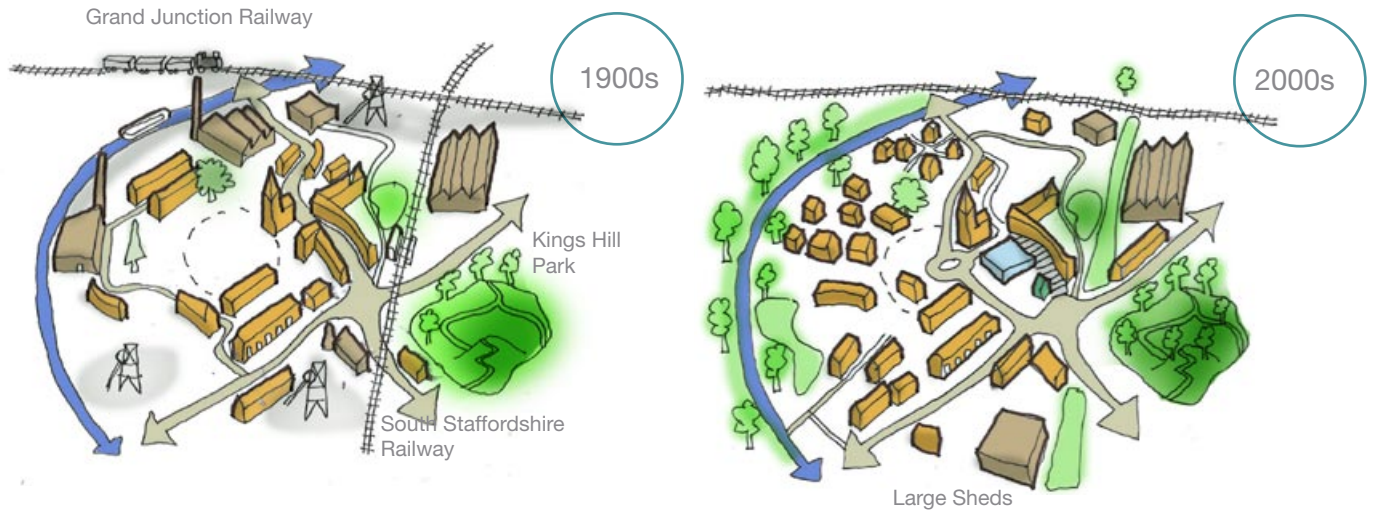
This is informed by the **Walsall Housing Strategy** and planning policy through the **Joint Core Strategy (JCS)**. The JCS applies the policies of the WMRSS at the Black Country level (Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton) including the provision of 63,000 new dwellings across the area by 2026, twice the historic housebuilding rate. The JCS also seeks to restructure the economy of the Black Country by promoting services, offices and logistics alongside the manufacturing base, concentrating business on high-quality employment land, allowing low-quality land to be developed for housing as part of a sustainable communities agenda. This SRF sets out a vision at a site specific level of how this development might take place.

The high-quality employment land is located in a series of regeneration corridors and key sites such as the **Darlaston Strategic Development Area (SDA)** on Junction 9 of the M6. This together with the **Walsall Gigaport** and **Waterfront** is being promoted by the **Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC)**. Together these sites are projected to create 7,500 jobs.

This is the issue that has been central to this study; the extent to which Darlaston can rely on new jobs in the SDA to the north and allow other employment sites in the town to be developed for housing. What effect will this have on local people, on the character of the town and on the security of its future? These are the key questions that we have been debating with local people and stakeholders as part of this study.



Regeneration Zone
Growth Corridor
Employment Land Investment Corridor



As it was...

Darlaston has a long and proud history as an independent Black Country Town and economic powerhouse. The question for this study is how in the future Darlaston can fit into the complex urban structure of the Black Country and what role it can carve out for itself.

Darlaston was not mentioned in the Domesday Book but took its name from the manor house of the Darlaston Family who lived there from the 12th century. Its location at the heart of the South Staffordshire Coal Field meant that it industrialised very early. The early cottage industries making nails grew and became factories. This matured in the early 19th century into an industrial base manufacturing nuts and bolts and precision engineering such as locks, guns, clocks etc...

In 1851 there were 35 bolt makers in Darlaston. One of the largest was to grow into the international company GKN and another became the Rubery Owen engineering company

Industry grew rapidly with the arrival of the canals in the late 18th century and by 1840 Darlaston was a town of 6,000 people generally living in pretty poor, but owner-occupied housing. At the end of the century the local paper described Darlaston as 'by far the unhealthiest town in the Black Country'. The Town Hall was opened in 1888 and seven years later it became an Urban District Council. By 1901 the population exceeded 15,000 people.

In 1851 there were 35 bolt makers in Darlaston. One of the largest by the end of the century had grown into F. W. Cotterills in Atlas Works. After the First World War this was acquired by Guest, Keen & Nettlefolds growing into the international company GKN, sadly no longer based in Darlaston. Another factory founded by John Turner Rubery in 1884 grew into Rubery Owen which manufactured a variety of components (including the chassis for URBED's bus). Their factory, the largest in Darlaston, closing down in 1981.

Like many small industrial towns, Darlaston has struggled with an identity crisis. It once had its own council, locally owned industry, local paper, two railway stations and a thriving town centre. Its population lived and worked locally. Today the situation is much less certain now that Darlaston has been absorbed into Walsall and lost many of the symbols of an independent town. It is surrounded by competing towns, many larger, better connected and more attractive and as a result is losing population.

The question for Darlaston is how it fits into this complex picture - whether it can reinvent itself as an independent town or whether it needs a new vision for its future.



DARLASTON:

3.5%

The fall in the town's population since 2001 (compared to a 3.3% increase in the population of the Black Country)

1,100

The number of jobs lost in manufacturing between 2003 and 2007.

400

Number of jobs gained in distribution over the same period

£253M

GVA of the Darlaston Regeneration area in 2006 (down 6% since 2003)

7,200

Number of jobs in the DRA in 2007

8%

proportion of people in Darlaston with NVQ4+ qualifications, compared to 23% for England

7,500

Projected new jobs in the Darlaston SDA, Gigaport and Waterfront

1/2

GCSE attainment rates in Darlaston compared to the Walsall average

750

Number employed by the towns biggest employer (ASDA)

83%

Growth in high tech manufacturing jobs 2003-2007 (up to 300) Motor trade related manufacturing fell by 89% over the same period.



As it is...

If current trends continue unchecked Darlaston faces an uncertain future in which it will lose people and jobs and gradually its identity as a town.

Darlaston is a town that was built on nails, then nuts and bolts, locks and guns and more recently car components and precision engineering. Unlike the industrial towns of the north this manufacturing base was not wiped out by the restructurings and recessions of the 70s and 80s. It is however now struggling in the face of the off-shoring of manufacturing and the problems in the car industry. The area lost 1,100 traditional manufacturing jobs (36%) between 2003 and 2007. It has some success in growing jobs in distribution and high tech manufacturing but still had a net loss of 900 jobs.

These figures predate the recession and matters will have got substantially worse in the last 18 months. Some of these problems will ease as we come out of recession, however there is a deeper issue and Darlaston is subject to international trends beyond its control that are likely to see the long-term restructuring of its economic base.

The town need to rise to this challenge, to diversify and become more flexible. This has far reaching implications for the people of Darlaston. At present claimant counts average 25%, 10% above

the regional average. The population is falling, unlike the rest of the region, as people move away. This is leaving high proportions of people over 50 (skilled but not in the right areas) and young people (NEETS with very low skills) – a workforce ill suited to the changing labour market. There will remain jobs in manufacturing (currently 28% of the workforce) but they are likely to need more skills. Distribution jobs and new employment in the SDA will take up some of the slack, while other people will travel out of the town to work. The workforce needs to respond to this changing jobs market, otherwise new jobs will be taken by people from outside the area.

Prognosis

If left unchecked these trends don't paint a particularly attractive future for Darlaston. Gone are the days when the town could rely on a strong and stable local employment base and loyal population (a captive audience) to support the town centre and local facilities. In the future

Darlaston is subject to international trends beyond its control that are likely to see the long-term restructuring of its economic base

Darlaston will need to compete for business and people and will need to make itself attractive if it is to stand comparison with other Black Country towns. Part of this is about a strong town centre and positive image, part is about a skilled and flexible workforce, part is about an environment conducive to enterprise and innovation and part is about being a good place to live.

Together these things can generate a virtuous circle where people and business can be attracted to the town and want to stay when they succeed. This in turn makes the town's workforce more attractive to employers and generates a strong customer base for the town centre making it possible to attract the investment it needs.

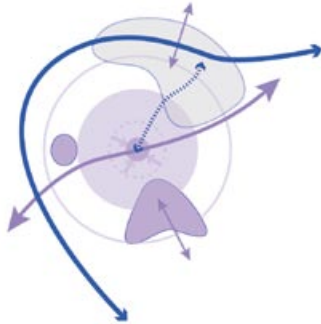
DARLASTON:

As it could be...

As part of the project we developed a series of options for the future of Darlaston. These were based on alternative visions for the town's future and the implications of these visions on the use of individual sites.

The first of the three options was based on the prognosis described on the previous page which essentially will see Darlaston gradually become a suburb. The second option by contrast seeks to draw a line in the sand by resisting further loss of industrial land. The third option is a halfway house which accepts the further decline of traditional industry but seeks to regrow jobs in the town centre and new business.



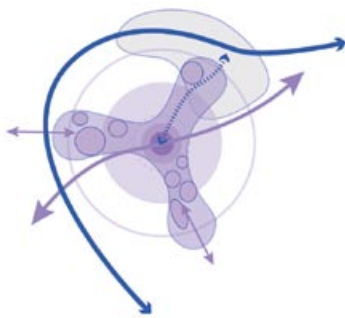


Suburb:

This option is what will happen if current trends are allowed to continue. It would mean accepting trend of de-industrialisation allowing manufacturing sites to be developed for housing as they become vacant and accepting that the town centre will be dominated by ASDA. People will increasingly travel out of Darlaston to work in the SDA, Walsall and further afield.

Pros: It will bring more money and people into the area, changing its image. It will also remove derelict industrial sites which might otherwise be protected for future economic uses that are actually quite unlikely.

Cons: Contrary to the towns self image. The skills set of local people make it difficult for them to compete for jobs elsewhere. The transport connections are poor and its difficult to get to other jobs - Only 5% of people currently commute to Birmingham which is only 12 miles away

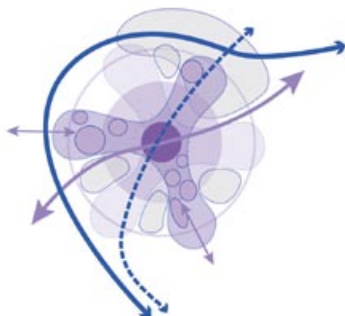


Neighbourhood:

This option seeks to stem the tide of deindustrialisation by protecting the remaining manufacturing sites and retaining the character of the town as a mix of industry and housing. The solution to the town centre is to allow the retailing to consolidate and to replace with housing.

Pros: This is popular with local people and very much part of the character of the town. It is a good fit with the town's skill base and the jobs are conveniently located for local people to access.

Cons: Deindustrialisation is part of a wider trend that Darlaston cannot control so it may not be able to prevent the lost of industry. In any case industry is becoming more efficient and reducing staffing levels so the existing level of industry may not be enough to sustain the workforce.



Town:

This option is based on allowing industry, particularly to the south of the town to go over to housing but to plan to replace these jobs with new ones. This to be done through an enterprise development strategy and new accommodation along the canal and the revival of the town centre.

Pros: This option works more directly with economic trends by focusing on sectors with growth potential. The town centre elements are popular with local people. This option starts to change the image of the town.

Cons: The scale of enterprise development may be relatively insignificant compared to the loss of manufacturing. There is little tradition of local enterprise development and the skill base is poorly suited to this.

DARLASTON:



The final consultations show broad support for the proposals in this report and a strong desire to see the regeneration of the town.



As it is seen

Throughout the study we have maintained a dialogue with the main stakeholders in Darlaston through the Project Reference Group. In addition to this we have held three drop-in consultations for the wider community.

As part of the study we have undertaken three rounds of consultation. The starting point was a walking workshop on 4th June 2009 in which the members of the Project Reference Group and the URBED team walked the town centre and visited the rest of the town by coach. We organised a Roundtable workshop in the Town Hall on 2nd July 2009 which brought together 40 attendees to discuss the future vision for the town.

The first drop-in session took place in July 2009 where we asked people about the main issues facing the town and what they would like to see happen. This fed into the development of three options which were the subject of a second drop-in session on the URBED Bus on 3rd October. The results in turn fed into a preferred option which was consulted on, again in the bus on 6th March 2009.

Over this time we have spoken to around 300 people about Darlaston and its future. The final consultations show broad support for the proposals in this report and a strong desire to see the regeneration of the town.

Walking Workshop 4th June 2009: This highlighted the extent to which the town centre is struggling because of ASDA and local unemployment. This is a symbol of the problem's Darlaston faces and radical action is needed. Elsewhere the main issues were the poor quality of many open spaces, the underuse of many industrial sites and the stability of the residential neighbourhoods.

Round Table Workshop 2nd July 2009: This generated a long list of issues that Darlaston needs to address including its visibility, image, congestion and the poor quality of the town centre. It was however decided that it could be revived as a town rather than become a suburb of Walsall.

Drop in session 10th -13th July 2009: This took place in three locations across the town and highlighted Darlaston's community spirit as well as its problems with anti social behaviour and crime. There were calls for more youth and community facilities, better open spaces, new jobs and radical improvements to the town centre.

Options consultation 3rd October 2009: This was based on an exhibition of the URBED bus and people were asked their views on the three options for Darlaston described on the previous page. Option 1 - Suburb, was disapproved of, with around three in four people against it. Option 2 - Neighbourhood, was strongly approved of, with only one in four against. Option 3 - Town, was very strongly approved of, with nine in ten people in favour.

Preferred Option Consultation 6th March 2009: This included the proposed vision for the town and detailed plans for the town centre. These were again strongly supported with the only real concerns being raised about the development of the Leys area as described later in this report.

VISION:



Themes & strategy

On the basis of our discussions we have suggested the 15 year vision for Darlaston below. This has been developed into five strategic themes as set out on the following pages.

Much of our work on Darlaston has been concerned with detailed issues relating to the allocation of particular sites or the resolution of problems. Important as this is, the role of the SRF should be to step back from these day to day concerns and paint a vision for the town in 15 years time. From this we need to develop a series of policy themes and from these a list of projects that are designed to realise the vision over the years ahead.

In developing this 15 year vision we have had to face some very real issues in Darlaston. The consultations have shown that there is overwhelming support for it to remain a proud and independent town with local manufacturing employment and a strong town centre. This however means reversing the trend of the last two decades and we would be wrong to propose a vision that is unrealistic.

The options process laid out a range of possibilities from reinforcing its role as a town to the acceptance that it become a suburban centre. The preferred option is that it remains a strong independent town however this needs to be tempered with reality. We have come to the view that many of the vacant industrial sites


will never be reused for manufacturing and therefore the best thing for the town would be to allow them to go for housing (this is why site allocations have been such a focus for the study). However the strategy says 'thus far and no further' and proposes that the main remaining employment sites be protected through the planning system.

This strategy will however only work if there is a strategy to revive the economic base of the town. There are at least four aspects to this; supporting existing employers, training the workforce to make it more attractive to incoming companies, creating new jobs in the SDA and promoting enterprise to grow new small companies. This all feeds into the first two strategic themes which are about Darlaston as a good place for business and a skilled and confident workforce.

This is quite compatible with building housing and attracting of new people to live in the town, even if they do work elsewhere. This will increase local spending power and make Darlaston more attractive to business. This in turn feeds into connectivity because in the modern age towns need to be accessible so that employers can draw on a wide workforce and people can find work across the region. This is a way of making the town less reliant on its local economy.

The final theme relates to the town centre which brings together all of these strands. The town centre is the Darlaston's shopfront and is the image that it projects to the outside world. It is the focus for the community and a major source of employment. Get the town centre right and much of the strategy will follow which is why the projects focus in particular on this theme.

All of this feeds into the following suggested vision for Darlaston:



A real town with a real town centre and a broad mix of jobs and people – lots of eggs and lots of baskets! A place that people are proud of and where they want to stay.

A good place for business...

Protecting what the town has, growing and attracting new business thereby diversifying the town's economic base.



Darlaston has been a very good place for business in the past. As a small town it has produced some very significant companies because of its location, the supply of raw materials the availability of premises and its skilled workforce. These advantages don't however last for ever and as the economy changes, the things Darlaston is good at are no longer the things that companies value. While it is therefore vital to protect what the town still has, it is also important to be flexible and to diversify the towns economic base so that it can grow its economy and supply of jobs without becoming over-reliant on one sector.

In this respect we should not reinvent the wheel and there are a range of strong initiatives through Business Link and WRC. These are crucial to the success of this SRF and should include the following initiatives:

- **Protecting existing employment:** Protect viable industrial sites from the pressures of housing development. This is detailed on pages 20 and 21 which identifies industrial sites to be protected in line with the Employment Land Review.
- **Support existing employers:** There is an ongoing need to work with local employers through Business Link and to provide whatever assistance is possible through investment, premises and skills.
- **Links to the SDA:** The strategic employment area around Junction 9 is outside the boundary of this study but it is crucial as means of diversifying Darlaston's economy and creating new jobs – 2,800 new jobs are projected in growth areas such as recycling and distribution.
- **Enterprise development:** Darlaston has a low rate of business formation and, while it will never be the major source of new jobs it is vital to invigorate the economy. This will require suitable premises and business support.
- **Premises:** There is a need for a ladder of premises to allow businesses to grow and contract. The need is probably for smaller units and where sub-dividable space is available, such as the Central Trading Estate, it is well occupied.
- **Exploit the employment potential of the town centre:** The town centre should not be overlooked a source of employment. ASDA is the town's biggest employer and the centre has the potential to attract new jobs in retail, leisure and services.



A skilled and confident workforce

Creating, within a generation, a skilled and flexible workforce, able to compete in the jobs market and attract employers.

Darlaston's greatest asset was once its workforce. The town was known for its skilled workers nurtured through the apprentice system in the large engineering firms. This competitive advantage can however be lost in a generation as the apprentice system disappears and the skills requirements of employers change. As we have said, the main issues in the Darlaston workforce are skilled older men who find they are no longer required and unskilled young men who have left college without qualifications. The strategy for Darlaston must be to turn this situation around again within a generation.

This is also an area where it is important not to reinvent the wheel but to use the SRF to support existing activities. The JET Centre in the town centre is very well regarded and is exactly the sort of initiative required to deal with the problems of the current workforce while the school and college address the needs of the future workforce.

- **Reskilling the workforce:** The strategy should support the use of the Deprived Neighbourhoods Fund and Working Neighbourhoods Fund through the JET centre and other initiatives to work intensively with the existing workforce. There is scope in particular to target the new jobs in the SDA and the Gigaport by working with employers.

- **Qualifications:** The development of the Academy is a sensible response to the poor educational attainment of the local community. The hope is that the Grace Academy can start to turn this situation around and create the foundations for a qualified and flexible workforce.
- **Further Education:** There is an important role for the Walsall College in working with school leavers and adults in Darlaston. There would be value in the college developing an outpost in Darlaston to make its services more accessible.



A good place to live

Encouraging a range of housing - affordable and aspirational together with the facilities of a thriving town.

There has not been universal acceptance of the idea of new housing in our consultations. New housing estates have tended to be seen as poor quality, to have squeezed out factories and to house people who have no connection to the town. There is some truth in this, but it is true that housing development is better than leaving a site vacant where there is no prospect of reuse for industry. The policy context encourages the redevelopment of unused industrial land to develop sustainable communities and this is what we should be seeking to achieve in Darlaston.

If this is to be accepted the new housing needs to be integrated into the town and to provide a mix of accommodation serving both the existing community and incomers. The latter may work outside the town, but if they can be encouraged to use the town centre, to send their children to the Grace Academy and support local initiatives then they will be a positive factor in the town's regeneration. To this end this framework resists further significant housing development on peripheral employment land, and focuses housing development within a reasonable distance of the centre. In the longer term a more mixed population will make the workforce more attractive to employers and mean that there are more people potentially interested in setting up small businesses. To this end the strategy should include the following elements:

- **A balanced community:** New housing should include a mix of housing types and tenures so that it integrates into the existing community. There is a particular need for new family housing as well as housing for an ageing population.
- **Social housing:** Walsall Housing Group (whg) and the other social housing providers have made huge improvements to the social housing stock in terms of Decent Homes. The next step will be to address the external environment of estates like Rough Hay.
- **Quality:** Too many new estates have been designed as cul-de-sacs into a former factory site and developed with the poor end of the housebuilder's standard housetypes. The next round of sites should be the focus of efforts to masterplan the sites so that they are better integrated into the town and to improve the quality of design.
- **Environment:** As part of this it is important that environmental standards for new housing are improved through the West Midlands Low Carbon Housing Market Framework and Darlaston could become an exemplar for the rest of Walsall.
- **Amenity:** This is part of a liveability agenda to make Darlaston a good place to live and to bring up kids. This relates to the quality of the town centre, the schools and the open space in the town.



A strong town centre

The town centre should be the focus for initiatives to improve the town because of its visibility and potential to support economic growth.

The town centre is central to this strategy. The quality appearance and vitality of the town centre creates the image of Darlaston. This image will determine whether people will want to live in the town or businesses locate there. At present the town centre attracts large numbers of people, but most use little other than the ASDA. The trick is to use this footfall to revive King Street and the Bull Stake to put the heart back into the town and to help it to diversify its economic base as a place for leisure, living and working as well as shopping.

- **Vitality:** There is a need for a substantial environmental scheme to bring life back to King Street and the Bull Stake. This is about environmental improvements and also traffic management.
- **Attractions:** There is a need for a magnet on King Street to attract people from the Asda car park. This increased footfall will help the existing shops.
- **Diversity:** There is scope to widen the use of the town centre by introducing opportunities for eating and drinking, reviving the market as well as community uses in the town hall.
- **Walk in trade:** Increase the numbers of people living within a short walk of the town centre as a way of enhancing the number of potential customers.

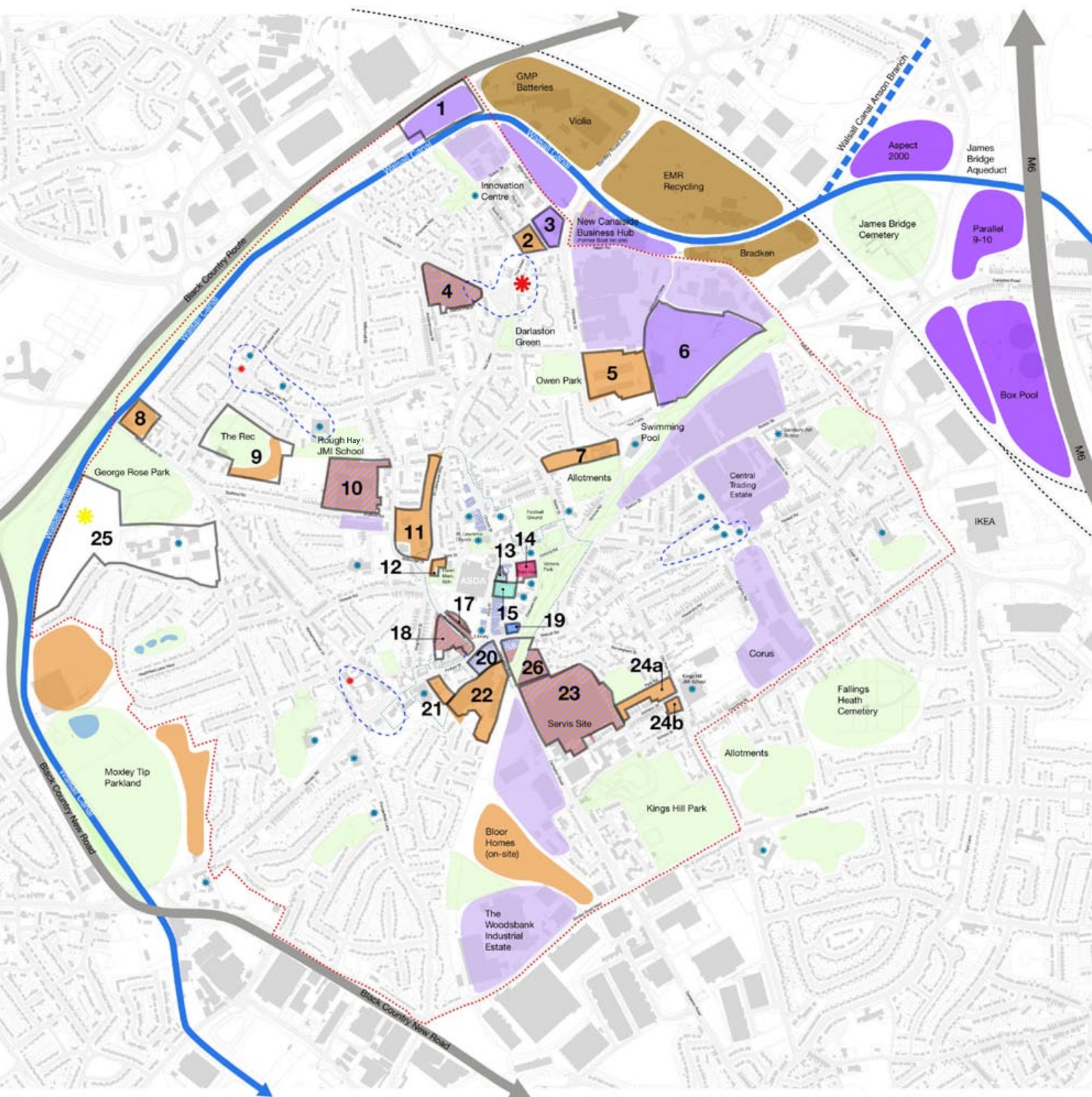
An easy place to get around

Investing in better connections – walking, cycling and public transport



Towns like Darlaston once thrived because their population weren't very mobile and were a captive market. This is no longer the case as car ownership means that people can easily get to competing centres. The only way to address this is to make the centre easy to get to by car and public transport. This will also make the town a base for people to live and a good location for employers because they have access to a large workforce.

- **Links to the SDA:** There is potential for much better walking and cycling links to the SDA where many of the new jobs will be created.
- **Public transport:** Bus services are not bad but there is scope to improve the quality and speed of the service and the bus facilities in the town centre.
- **Traffic:** There is scope to reduce the dominance of traffic on Pinfold Street/Walsall Road while retaining accessibility and the availability of town centre parking.
- **The Midlands Metro:** Support the long terms aspirations of connecting Darlaston to the Midlands Metro system and reopening the railway to passenger services.



Legend

Areas of change

Land Use / Development

- New employment opportunities
- Employment improvement areas
- New residential opportunities
- Mixed use opportunities
- New modern retail development
- New office development
- Town Hall 'Multipurpose' Community hub

- District Centre
- Study area boundary
- Community facilities
- New canalside business hub & Visitor staging post
- Retail parades
- Darlaston Green local centre
- New Grace Academy
- Improved community cluster

Strategic Development Area

- Strategic employment sites
- Waste recycling cluster

Landscape / Movement

- Walsall Canal Corridor
- Railway
- Major Road

Sites & Possible uses

The three options described on pages 8 and 9 had different implications for the use and allocation of sites throughout the town. These have been reviewed in the light of the preferred option and the vision and themes outlined above to produce the agreed allocations plan to the left (see Preferred Options Report for a full description of these sites).

These are suggested policy designations and, following adoption of this report, would become a material consideration in dealing with planning applications. They are not however sites that we would propose the public sector actively promoting through public funding or facilitation. The sites within the SDA fall outside our study boundary.

1. Willenhall Road: 1.7ha, currently vacant and allocated for employment. It is proposed that this remain as an employment site (indeed it has planning permission for 6,800m² of warehouses 535m² of offices

2. Booth Street: 0.4ha site used as a warehouse leased by Premier Aftercare but with no planning designation. It is proposed that this become a residential site (14 dwellings) to complement Darlaston Green.

3. Perry Street: 0.6ha site currently largely vacant. It is proposed that it be promoted for employment and D1 and D2 uses as part of the new employment hub around Bentley Road South.

4. Victoria Centre: 1.2ha site next to Darlaston Green. This is currently a good employment site occupied by a number of employers including Premier Gates. It is not however allocated and if the key employer were to leave there would be value in developing it for a mix of residential uses (around 45 dwellings).

5. Richard Street: Former Wincanton site (1.9ha) now vacant and with consent for 90 dwellings.

6. The Flatts, South of Heath Road: Manheim car storage, auctions and car breakage (5ha) A big site allocated as Core Employment Land (JP5) but with low employment density. It will however be opened up by the new road and is allocated as a core employment site so should remain in employment use.

7. Former Multi-purpose centre, Victoria Road: Vacant Walsall Council premises (0.8ha) to be allocated for residential (around 30 dwellings) while protecting the adjacent allotments.

8. Wolverhampton Street: Partially vacant warehouses (1.5ha) with no planning designation. Proposed residential site to create a gateway to the town (60 units)

9. Hall Street Recreation Ground: See Projects

10. Alma Industrial Estate: Partially vacant 2ha site with no planning designation. This is proposed as a mixed-use development of housing (up to 80 units) and employment.

11&12. The Leys and New Street: See projects

13,15-17 Town Hall Yard: See projects

14. Town Hall, Victoria Road: See projects

17 & 18. St. Lawrence Way: See projects

19. Picturedrome Way: Car park with potential for three storey office development of up to 1,300m². This is an opportunity for a public sector user to locate in Darlaston.

20. Pinfold Street/Darlaston Road: See projects

21/22. Pinfold Street/ Alma Works: 2.5ha industrial and commercial site. Proposed to be allowed to go for residential development to support the town centre (100 units).

23. Servis Site, Darlaston Road: 5ha vacant factory site with no planning designation and a residential planning consent. Capacity for 160-200 residential units and would also be suitable for elderly persons housing, or a mixed use development compatible with the district centre.

24 Johnson Street: 0.65ha vacant site owned by Walsall Council and adjacent vacant telephone exchange with consent for a 54 bed care unit. Proposed for residential use (30 units)

25. Darlaston Academy: Proposal for a 1500 place Academy involving the redevelopment of the existing school, development on part of George Rose Park and investment of £300,000 in the quality of the remainder of the park. This is a committed project.

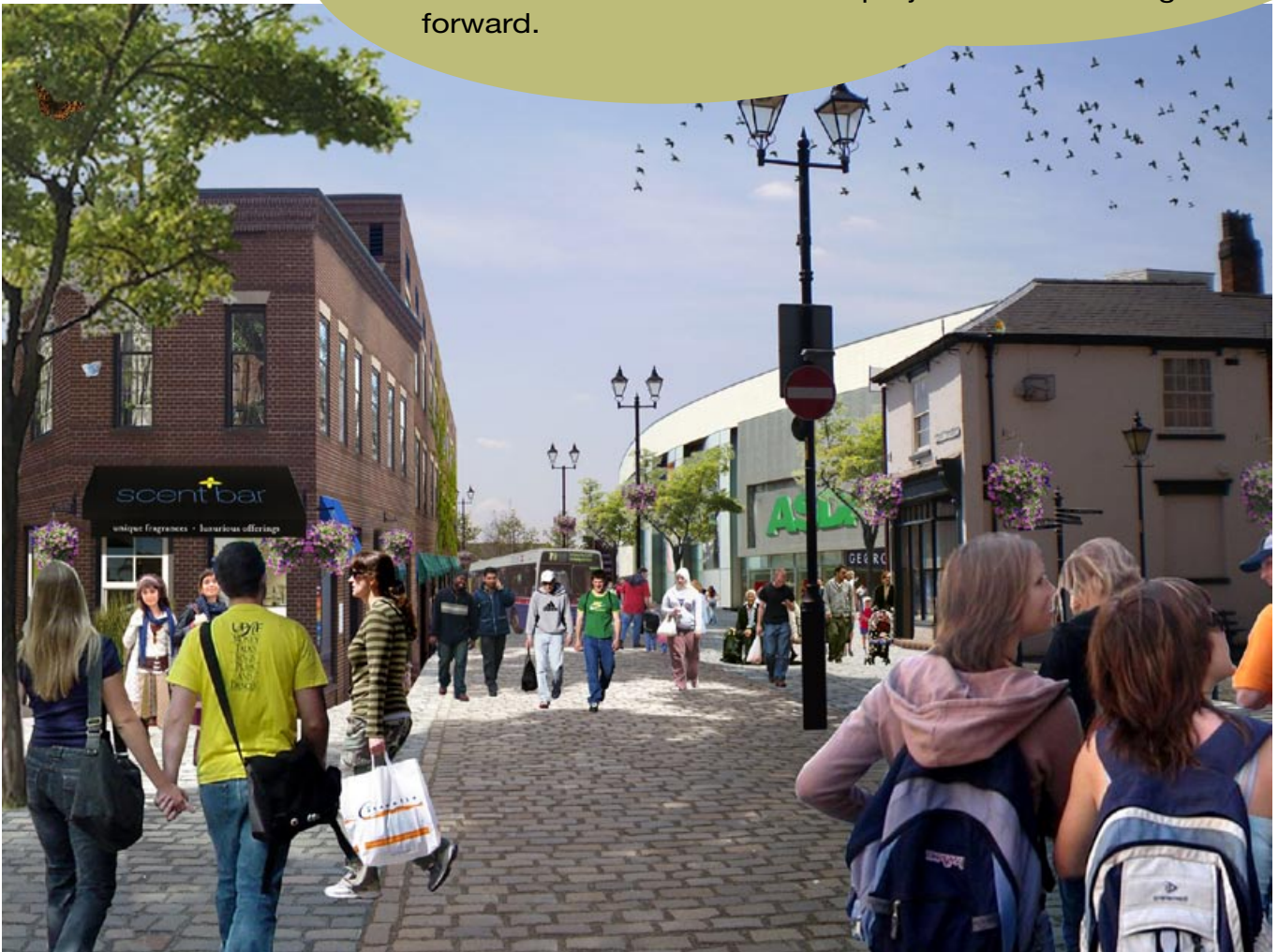
26. Site at c/o Darlaston Rd - Walsall Rd: Mixed use scheme linking development of the Servis site with the remainder of the district centre

Projects:

In addition to the land allocations described in the previous section we are proposing three types of project that the public sector partners should actively promote. These are:

1. Economic initiatives
2. Environmental improvement and transport schemes
3. Development projects

We are aware that there is limited scope for new public funding to be available for new projects in the Darlaston area. As far as possible the projects are therefore designed to make use of existing funding programmes or to generate funding through capital receipts and developer contributions. This will clearly impact the timescale within which certain projects can be brought forward.



1.

Economic initiatives: Measures to generate employment and economic activity and address the skills of the workforce

2.

Environmental improvement and transport schemes: Improvements to the public realm, buildings and landscape areas together with transport initiatives.

3.

Development projects: Where the Council, the WRC and whg actively promote development with partners.



1. Economic initiatives

There is a need to put in place a programme to reposition the Darlaston economy over a generation so that it is better placed to meet future challenges and opportunities. The programme of business and economy interventions will need to be aligned with the Walsall SRF and the Joint Core Strategy, as well as the activities and programmes of AWM and other regional and sub-regional partners.

Five economic initiatives have been identified as important to the future prosperity of Darlaston. However, in most cases the mechanisms to address these issues already exist. The key challenge is to shape and target these existing instruments to address the specific issues facing Darlaston, rather than to invent new ones.

1.1 Existing Businesses Support

Advice and support to existing local businesses is currently routed through Business Link. There is potential to increase the take-up of business support services by providing a local service outlet in Darlaston. This could be via a High Street shop (equivalent to the JET facility) or in the SDA. On balance the better location would be the Boat Pub site as proposed by WRC. This Business Hub could include meeting rooms, conference facilities, counselling and support, secretarial support and perhaps workspace.

1.2 Enterprise development

It is also important to encourage new business formation and self-employment. Advice to would-be

entrepreneurs is also a function of Business Link. The provision of a Business Hub (as suggested above) would provide companion services for start-ups. Managed workspace and incubation facilities could also be included on the Boat Pub site. It will also be important for a locally available portfolio of grow-on space to be available to businesses that succeed in capitalising on early stage growth potential.

1.3 Attracting inward investment

The main opportunity is the Strategic Development Area (SDA) which is projected to create 2,800 jobs. Marketing this site is the responsibility of AWM, WRC and the council, supported nationally by UKTI. The challenge is to ensure that a proportion of these jobs benefit local residents. This will require ongoing work from local agencies, training providers and the JET centre.

1.4 Educational achievement

The success of the Academy will be a vital component of the SRF for Darlaston. There is also an ongoing job

to be done to raise the aspirations of students. A higher proportion of 16-18 year olds need to go on to college or university. Those not staying in education need training in technical and vocational skills that will equip them to be competitive in the job market. Walsall College is vital in this respect and there is a need for stronger links between the College and Darlaston

1.5 Workforce Training and Support

Ensuring that the workforce has the skills and qualifications expected by employers is vital to the long term prospects of any economy. The Regional Skills Action Plan sets clear skills goals for the region in line with the 2020 Leitch Review targets. This promotes a new way of working with a larger role for business. The Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance (WLLA) has responsibility for the 'Increasing Skills Levels' action plan. At a local level there are Neighbourhood Employment and Skills Plans (NESP) operating in several Darlaston wards. Specific actions are being targeted at area's working age population who are not in education, employment or training (the so-called NEETs). As part of this WLLA has run a Bite Size campaign with 700 free taster courses for adults living or working in the borough. Further interventions of this kind would be beneficial, especially as the proportion of NEETs has grown significantly as a result of the 2007-2009 recession.

Legend

Areas of change

- 1 King Street/Bullstake
- 2 Shop front improvements
- 3 Green corridors
- 4 Park Improvements
- 5 Rapid Transit and Trains

Land Use / Development

- Park improvements
- Public realm improvements
- New and improved linkages
- Enhance/Improve junction/entrance
- Rapid Transit Station
- Rapid Transit/Cycle Route
- Property and shop front improvements
- New tree planting and management
- Strategic route improvements
- Public Art landmark location

Landscape / Movement

- Walsall Canal Corridor
- Railway
- Major Road

Projects:



Linear Park with overlooking housing - Freiburg, Germany

1.

Economic initiatives: Measures to generate employment and economic activity and address the skills of the workforce

2.

Environmental improvement and transport schemes: Improvements to the public realm, buildings and landscape areas together with transport initiatives.

3.

Development projects: Where the Council, the WRC and whg actively promote development with partners.



2. Environment and Transport

There is always a huge amount that needs to be done to improve the environment of a town like Darlaston and capital environmental improvement works can be difficult to fund. However the improvements to King Street and the Bull Stake in the town centre are crucial. The following projects are also priorities when funding permits.

2.1. King Street/Bullstake: We have consulted on the idea of reopening King Street to buses so that people arriving by bus are dropped off on the high street. There has been some nervousness about this but an acceptance that drastic action is needed. The plan therefore proposes a public realm scheme to reinstate the street and to create a series of bus stops along the blank gable of the ASDA together with a revitalised market square. At the Bull Stake the intention is to resurface the street and widen pavements to create the feeling that traffic is intruding on a town centre pedestrian environment. This would have the effect of reinstating this space as the heart of the town and is quite compatible with the levels of traffic that use the street. This would also assist the shops on Pinfold Street.

2.2. Shopfront improvements: There is a need for improvements to a number of shopping parades. The most prominent of these is the Pinfold Street parade although there are also proposals for shop front/local centre improvements in Darlaston Green and Walsall Road. This could all be covered by a shop front improvement grant scheme with a 50% contribution to the costs of improvements. Halton Council run a scheme of about this scale that has been successful in renewing a run down section of high street.



Smartbus Station - Dundee

2.3. Green corridors: Improvements to the footpath and cycle routes along the canal and the Darlaston Linear Park along the former railway line. Parts of the linear park are relatively easy to achieve, however other sections have been incorporated into factory premises and will not be possible to implement immediately. We are therefore suggesting improved footpaths in the short, with the full linear park as a long-term aspiration funded by S106 contributions.

2.4: Park improvements: George Rose Park, Kings Hill Park, and the Yorke Crescent pocket park all suffer from under-investment in maintenance. There is a need to cut back vegetation, improve paths and facilities in a rolling programme of improvements guided by the Council's Green Space Strategy.

2.5. Trams, Trains and buses: The main project is the relocation of the main town centre bus stops to King Street to better integrate bus services into the town centre. The reopening of the Wolverhampton, Walsall Line to passenger services and the creation of a station at James Bridge are longer term projects. The former railway line through the centre is reserved as a line for a future extension to the Midlands Metro. This would be a huge benefit to Darlaston and its town centre and the masterplan should preserve this possibility even if it is beyond the scope of this study to take it any further.

PRIORITY: The key transformational project is King Street/Bull Stake linked to the shop front improvements. This is described in more detail in Priority Project 1 on page 27.

Projects:



1.

Economic initiatives: Measures to generate employment and economic activity and address the skills of the workforce

2.

Environmental improvement and transport schemes: Improvements to the public realm, buildings and landscape areas together with transport initiatives.

3.

Development projects: Where the Council, the WRC and whg actively promote development with partners.



3. Development Projects

The majority of the proposals shown on the map on Page 18 will be brought forward by the market as the economy recovers. However there are certain projects where the public sector needs to make things happen. There is not likely to be significant public investment available to Darlaston so we need to target interventions. With the right lever, quite small interventions can have a big effect. The key levers in Darlaston we believe are:

3.1. ASDA: It is proposed that the planning authority accept ASDA's aspirations for a decked car park and mezzanine level within the store on condition that the entrance is reconfigured to face King Street. This should include a new door in the south east corner of the store plus a glazed arcade between the car park and the store. This could incorporate new facilities for the market. S106 contributions would contribute towards the funding of the King Street works.

3.2. The Forge (Site 14): The development of the Town Hall as a much more active community venue. The main thing needed to facilitate this is a professional kitchen to allow it to cater for banquets and weddings plus active management to ensure that the building is fully used and becomes the heart of community life.

3.3. Town Hall Yard (Sites 13,15,16): An anchor retail development on King Street to attract people from ASDA. There are various value retailers who like being near to an ASDA and the scheme is designed to create large footprint units that would

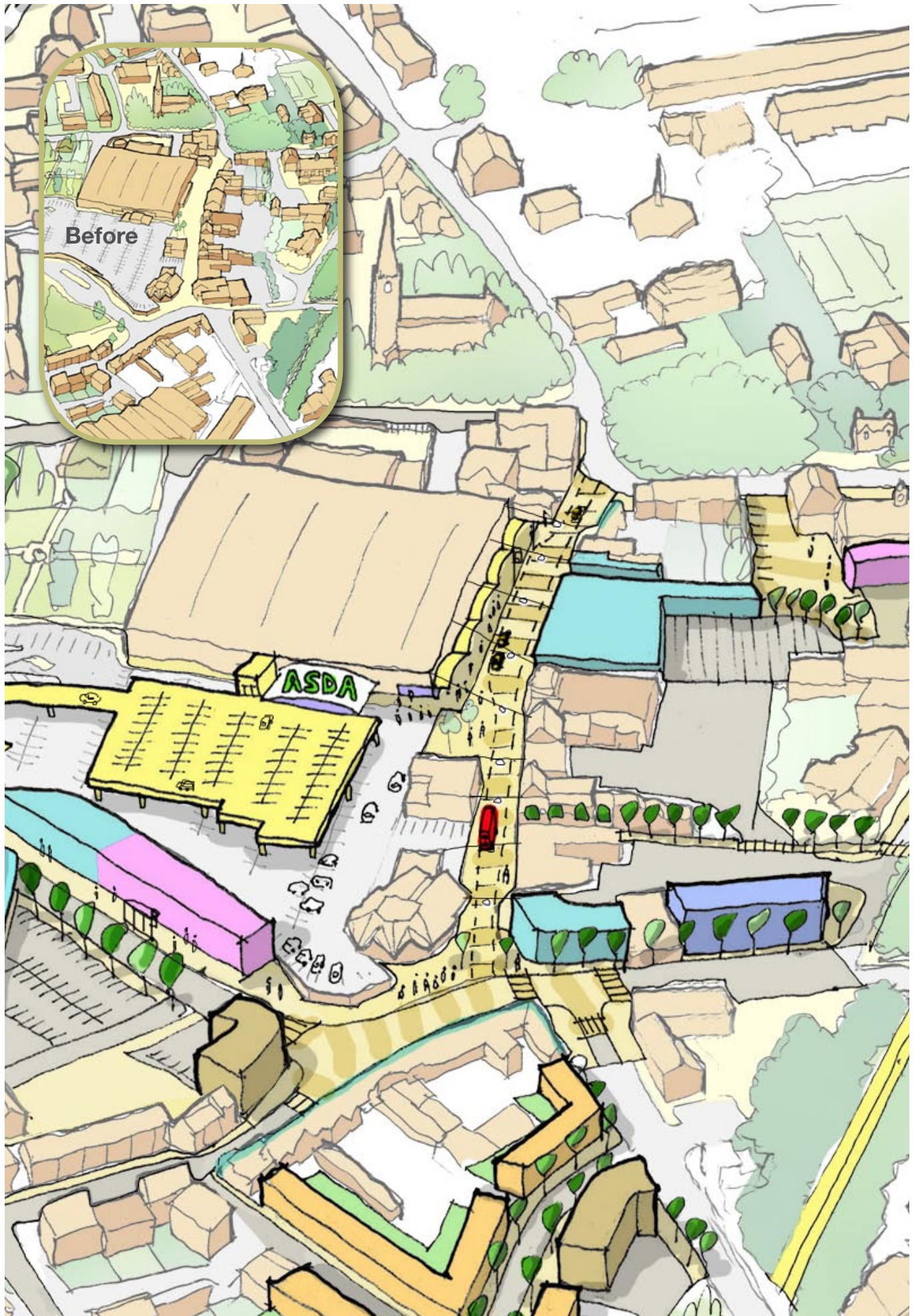
be attractive to these stores. Adjacent to these units the existing alley is turned into an arcade to provide some smaller units to relocate local shops and to lead people through to the town hall. There is scope to turn the car park in this location into a yard including a beer garden for the pub.

3.4. St. Lawrence Way (Site 18): We have explored a potential housing scheme on this site. However the preferred option shows a budget supermarket which would increase the attraction of the town centre. The land is owned by whg who could use the land receipt to invest social housing.

3.5. The Leys: The assembly of a residential opportunity on the edge of the town centre. This includes the acquisition of a series of underused sites and the creation of a development brief including the roundabout and the edge of the memorial gardens. This site covers 1ha and will yield 60 units. Council would assemble the site liaise with the land owners and appoint a development partner.

3.6. Hall Street Recreation Ground (Site 9): There is a need to sort out this facility which has fallen into disrepair. Capital spending is required to repair the damage done to the facilities together with a new management regime, possibly in conjunction with the Academy or the Council's leisure services department. This could be funded by enabling residential development (up to 20 units) to provide capital and to provide surveillance over the space.

PRIORITY: The key transformational project is the Town Hall Yard scheme which is linked with the Forge in Priority Project 2 on page 29. St. Lawrence Way and The Leys are also key projects described as Priority projects 3 and 4 below.



After

Priority Project 1

King Street Bullstake

The most important project is the improvement of King Street and the Bull Stake. This will be symbolic of the regeneration of the town and will help bring the failing high street back to life.

It is clear that King Street is in steep decline and all of our consultations suggest that radical action is required. The ASDA store when it was redeveloped turned its back on the street and it now fails to generate enough footfall for the shops to prosper (or to justify pedestrianisation).

The starting point is the ASDA and their plans to expand the store with a mezzanine and decked car park. As part of this we have suggested moving the store entrance onto King Street. While it is unlikely that ASDA will completely reconfigure the store it would be possible to create a new entrance in the south east corner of the store ideally with the cafe relocated into this position. There is also scope to create a glazed arcade between the store and the proposed decked car park linking the car park and the existing store entrance to King Street. Both movers will help reorientate the store and should be linked to a revamped market with 10 to 12 stalls on King Street. This will form part of ongoing pre-application discussions between Walsall Council and ASDA.

On King Street itself we have explored a number of options including reopening it to traffic, reopening to buses and retaining as a pedestrianised space. While it is clear that there is some concern about allowing buses onto the street, it is accepted that radical action is required. Our preferred solution is therefore to allow buses onto the street one way from the north. This would allow the blank wall of the ASDA to be developed as a series of bus stops. The advantage of this is that people arriving in Darlaston by bus are dropped on King Street which will increase visibility and footfall.

At the bottom end of King Street the junction with Pinfold Street, Darlaston Road and Walsall Road is currently dominated by traffic despite traffic volumes being relatively low. The street is effectively a dual carriageway between King Street and St. Lawrence way making it difficult to cross



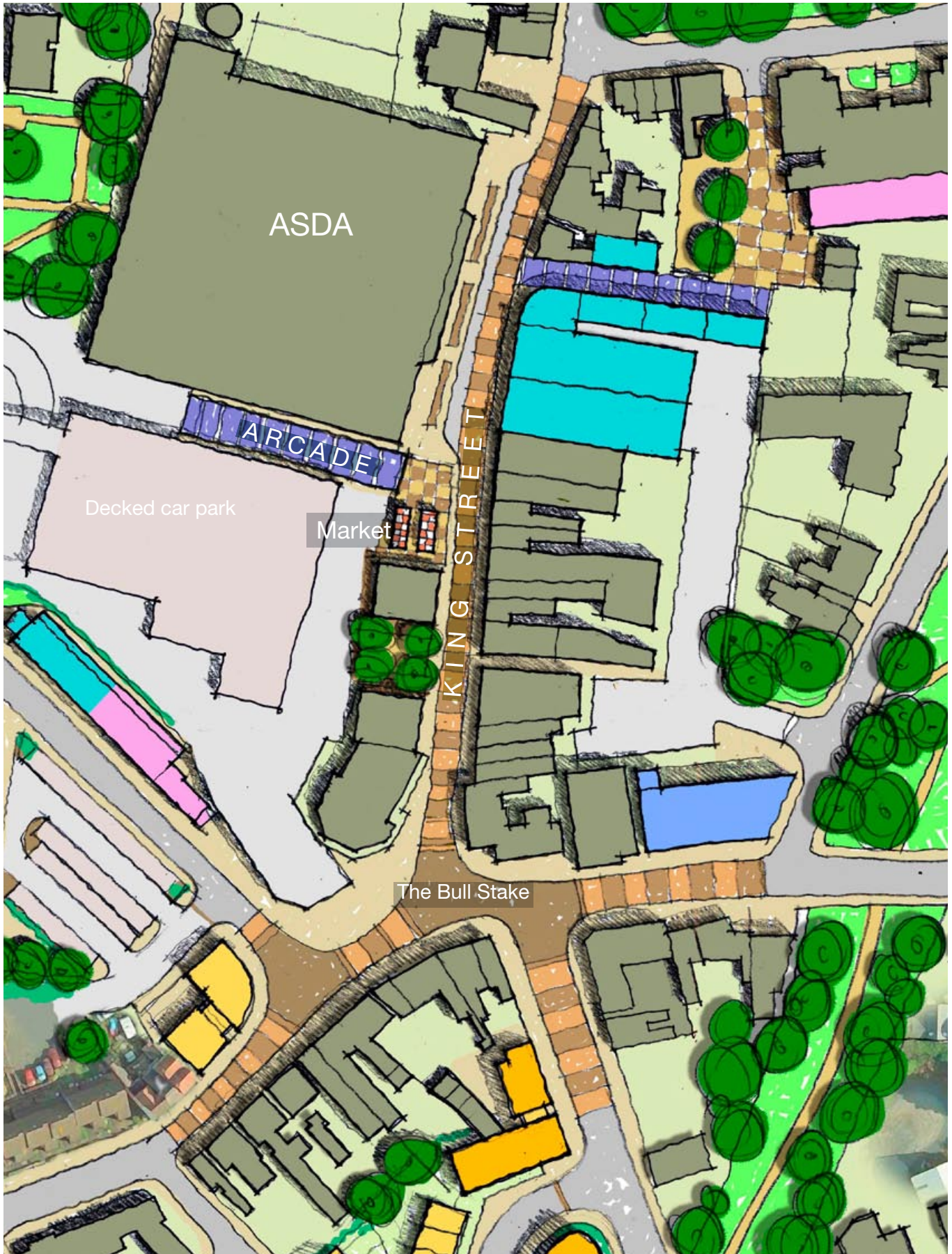
The former Bullstake today



Ashford in Kent - High quality road infrastructure

and leaving a very narrow pavement for the shops on the southern side of Pinfold Street, which is one of the reasons that they have struggled. The proposal is to change the feel of the highway at this point. We have not proposed a shared space solution but instead retained pavements and kerb lines. However the carriageway has been narrowed and the surfacing changed to setts or a textured treatment. Vehicles will feel that they are entering a town centre and slow down accordingly.

Tied to these environmental works we are proposing a shop front improvement scheme focusing initially on the Pinfold Street parade (No.'s 1 -16) before being extended to Darlaston Green and Walsall Road. Pinfold Street is a prominent parade of shop including a former public house. There are 15 units of which six are vacant (one due to fire damage) with a mixture of storage uses and 43 flats on



Priority Project 1

King Street

- | | |
|--|--|
| Housing | Community uses |
| Apartments | Offices |
| Retailing | |

Scale 1:1250 @ A4

the upper floors. The ground floor units are occupied by independent local businesses, mostly owner occupied but with some short or informal lease agreement and a couple of units on longer term leases.

The shopfront improvement scheme would be implemented with the King Street / Bullstake scheme to encourage investment in these properties. We have considered the alternative of acquisition and comprehensive redevelopment but the costs would be prohibitive. The shopfront scheme would make up to £20,000 available per shop as a 50% contribution to improvements. A reasonable allowance for a typical property in fair condition would be £40,000 (£4,000 for a shop front, £1,000 for windows, £10,000 for render / cladding, and £20,000 for works to the roof). On this basis the cost of the potential grant scheme across the 15 units would be £300,000.

During the course of the study a couple of shop units have become vacant on King Street and the units on Pinfold Street have been struggling for some time. We have not made specific proposals for these units but rather sought to create an environment in which they will be relet. If we can increase the number of people on King Street and around the Bull Stake the shops will do better and the levels of vacancy will come down.

There are however things that can be done to help this process. One is the temporary use of shop windows such as the farmers market advert below. This has been implemented by some town centre managers by applying vinyl to the outside of the window. The shop owner is asked permission but they are assumed to have given it if they don't respond and the vinyl is in any case easily removed. We have also proposed a shopfront improvement scheme to encourage existing shopkeepers to invest in their premises.

Costs

The costs of the improvements to King Street and the Bull Stake are estimated at around £725,000. This would include the new surfacing, street furniture, the traffic works and bus stops. In addition to this we are suggesting a grant fund of £300,000 for shop front improvements as part of a rolling programme initially focusing on Pinfold Street before being extended to other shopping areas.

Funding

This is the key project in Darlaston and should be a priority for funding. The first option is an application to the Urban Challenge Fund that can be used in addition to the Local Transport Plan to promote walking, cycling and public transport. There is also scope for contribution from ASDA as part of their S106 package for the extension to the store.

Implementation

The most difficult element of this scheme is the funding. Once this is in place the implementation will be managed by Walsall Council who are experienced in commissioning and managing this type of work.

Timing and Priority

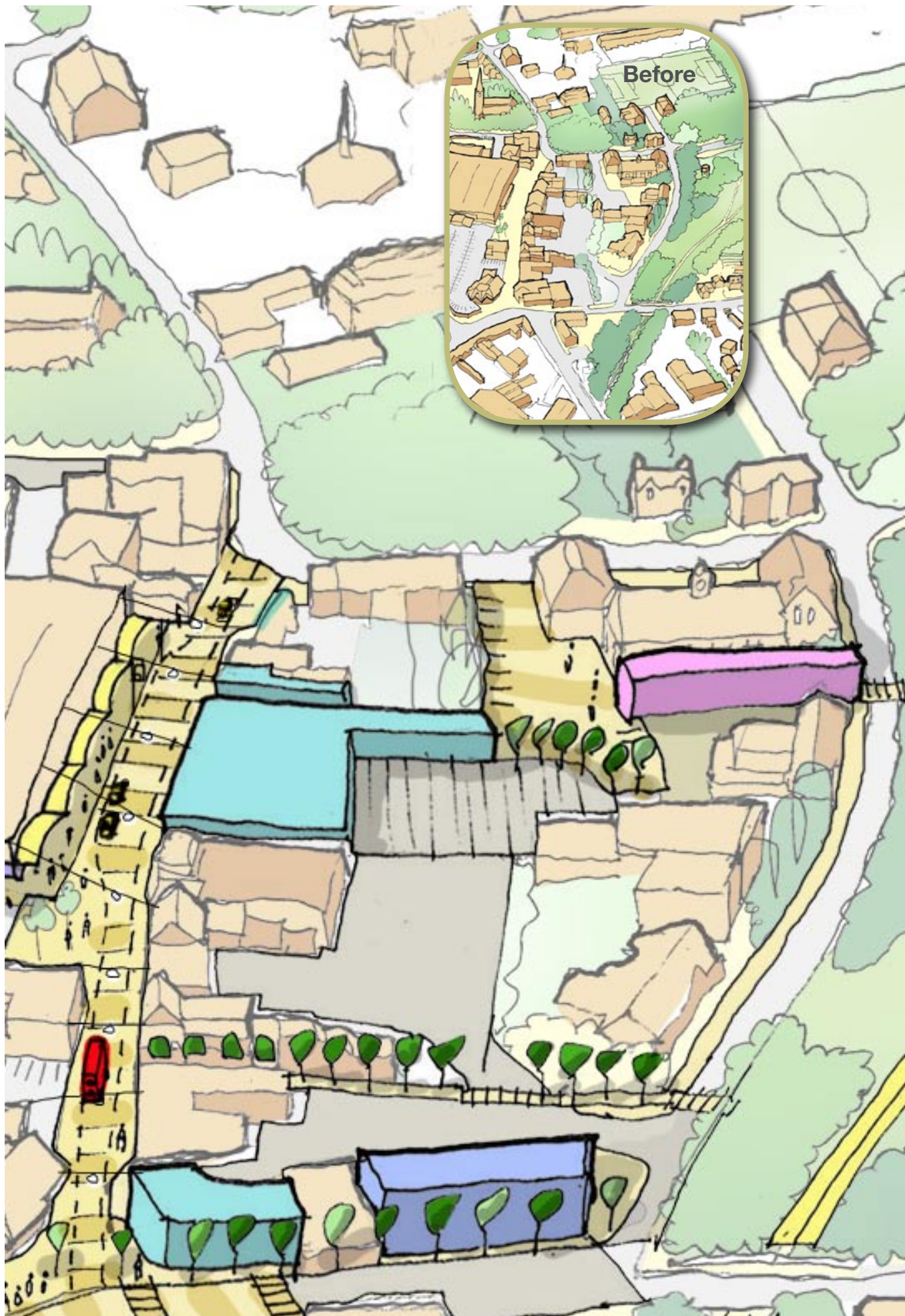
This is a high priority project and must be tied in with the expansion to the ASDA. If this is not done an opportunity will have been missed and there is a danger that King Street will decline further to the point where it cannot be revived.



Shared space in Brighton



Creative temporary use of empty shops - advertising Farmers Market in Swindon



After

Priority Project 2

Town Hall Yard & The Forge

If King Street is to be revived, there is a need to create a magnet that can draw customers from the ASDA car park. There is the opportunity to do this in a way that links to the Town Hall and its reinstatement at the heart of the town's civic and community life.

In the northern part of King Street there is an opportunity to create a magnet. The current shop units on King Street are generally too small to appeal to national retailers. The Boots is the only national chain with a presence on the street. The area to the north of the Boots unit is the remnants of the 1970s precinct, most of which was demolished to build the current ASDA store.

Specifically, the site includes 10-43 King Street, the area immediately behind it including the service yard. The shopping parade is owned by Colman Amalgamated Properties and used to boast some popular High Street trading names, but two units are now vacant and the remainder are tenanted with local retailers, reflecting the unpopularity of this format with major retailers.

Behind the Parade are the Accord Housing Association properties at Castle Court and Regent Court, which accommodate 8, one bedroom flats that are in low to medium demand. They are unpopular as the residents compete for parking with shoppers and the general environment is poor.

The plan shows a development with a potential footprint south of the existing alleyway of around 1,850m² most of which we envisage would be taken up by a large format discount comparison retailer such as Wilkinsons or Home Bargains. These retailers would require store of at least 1,500m² in order to offer sufficient product lines to compete with ASDA. The remaining circa 350m² of space could be available for smaller units to accommodate some of the incumbent retailers, depending upon demand, or form part of the main anchor store.



Current pedestrian link between King Street and Town Hall Yard is poorly defined and lacks the quality and character that the Town Hall area possesses.



Levenshulme Antique Village, Manchester - Creative reuse of former town hall



A mix of new and old, shopping centre, Groningen, Holland



Priority Project 2

Town Hall Yard

 Housing	 Community uses
 Apartments	 Offices
 Retailing	

Scale 1:1250 @ A4

The large format retail development would anchor the upper end of King Street attracting customers from the ASDA car park and thereby increasing footfall. The initial proposals included housing on the upper floors of the scheme. However in an attempt to make it as attractive as possible to the market we have excluded these apartments from the final scheme.

The existing alleyway leads through to the car park behind the Town Hall. While this car parking helps to support the town centre the space is underused and unattractive. The illustrated scheme therefore proposes a new arcade lined with smaller retail units or kiosks to create space for local retailers, though the final configuration could well differ. For example the same effect could be achieved with the anchor store having a glazed frontage to the passageway / arcade. The arcade would lead through to a new public space that we have called Town Hall Yard. This would retain some parking together with environmental improvements and a beer garden for the pub. This is the type of space found off many historic high streets and would increase the breadth of its appeal.

The Town Hall is a central part of Darlaston's history and has been under-used since the town council was amalgamated with Walsall. The building has been extensively refurbished in the last few years but is not well used. There is a list of outstanding works required by the building, but its main shortcoming is a professional kitchen. With this the building could be used for wedding receptions and other events. Similar facilities in other towns (such as the Civic Halls in Bury and particularly the Longfield Suite in Prestwich) are used every afternoon and evening and break-even in terms of running costs. To achieve this they do however need a full time and entrepreneurial manager. Our suggestion is that a manager is recruited for the town hall with funding for the first two years followed by a taper on the basis of a business plan showing the facility to become self-funding.

Costs

The retail scheme would be a private development of around £3 Million facilitated by the council. The unviable elements of the scheme including the kiosks and the public realm improvements to Town Hall Yard mean that it is only just viable. There may need to be some flexibility on these elements to ensure that the scheme is attractive to the market.

The £60,000 capital costs for the Town Hall are subject to an internal funding bid. The revenue costs would be around £50,000 for the first year with a taper after that running for three years until the space is self-funding.

Funding

The retail scheme would be privately funded while the Town Hall costs would come from Walsall's capital programme.

Implementation

Walsall Council would have an enabling role working with Colman Amalgamated Properties and Accord Housing Association to prepare a development brief for a prospective developer. The main part of the site is in just two ownerships and the scheme could be undertaken by the developer either under a purchase by agreement, or a joint venture.

Timing and Priority

This is a high priority project that should ideally be linked to the improvements to King Street so that the town centre can be relaunched. Work on the brief should therefore start immediately.



Other possible uses for the Town Hall - Weddings and Banquets



The Longford Suite in Prestwich



Priority Project 3

The Leys

The Leys is an opportunity on the edge of the town centre to introduce more housing and to improve the appearance of the approaches to the town. By taking out the current roundabout and rationalising the current uses there is scope to create a site for 43 new houses and 17 apartments

The Leys is reputedly the original clearing in the forest where Darlaston was founded as a town. This western approach to the town centre is however currently an unappealing gateway. It is dominated by a large roundabout, built in the late 1960s in the days before the Black Country Way diverted traffic around the town. This land to the north of this includes a collection of community buildings each with its own car park. To the south of the car park the Memorial Gardens has been cut off from the town by the ASDA and feels a slightly neglected space. There is also a road verge along St. Lawrence Way which is 20m wide and with scope for housing to create a frontage onto the road.

A key consideration for the site is the requirements of the four active occupiers, three of which are freeholders, and one a long leaseholder. Occupying the area to the north of Bilston Street is the Frying Pan Public House and car park, the freehold to which is owned by Marstons. At the south east of the site is the Leys Hall and a Salvation Army Citadel, and both are users that own their respective freeholds. Walsall Council is the freeholder of the land that the Darlaston Ex-Servicemen's Club occupies, at the south west of the site, under a long



The Leys as it currently appears with its numerous car parks and overgrown verges



3 storey town houses, Amsterdam



Elderly persons apartments in Hulme, Manchester



Priority Project 3

The Leys

 Housing	 Community uses
 Apartments	 Offices
 Retailing	

Scale 1:1250 @ A4

leasehold running through to 2034, and also controls the land fronting on to St Lawrence Way, north of the Frying Pan Public House.

The masterplan initially looked at the possibility of relocating the community uses and removing the roundabout to create a significant housing site on the edge of the town centre. However following consultation it became clear that this would be difficult. On this basis it is suggested that Walsall Council should consult with Marstons, the Old Hall People's Partnership (which manages The Leys Hall), the Leys charity - Darlaston Relief Sickness Fund, (which owns the freehold to the Leys Hall site), and the Salvation Army as to their future aspirations on the site and development needs. At this stage, the masterplan has been redesigned to work around these uses. The masterplan shows around 43 family houses on the site together with 18 apartments however if they did become available the amount of housing could be increased to around seventy dwellings.

The plan shows housing wrapped around a communal car park for the three community buildings. The apartments include a block on New Street overlooking the Memorial Gardens. This is designed to create some enclosure and overlooking for the gardens and could provide elderly person units.

Costs

The delivery of the site would depend on the development configuration. The current plan shows a series of small development plots based around the existing uses and would be most suitable for a development by a housing association. If a larger single site could be created the site could be marketable to a private developer. However the development of replacement community buildings would probably require financial support

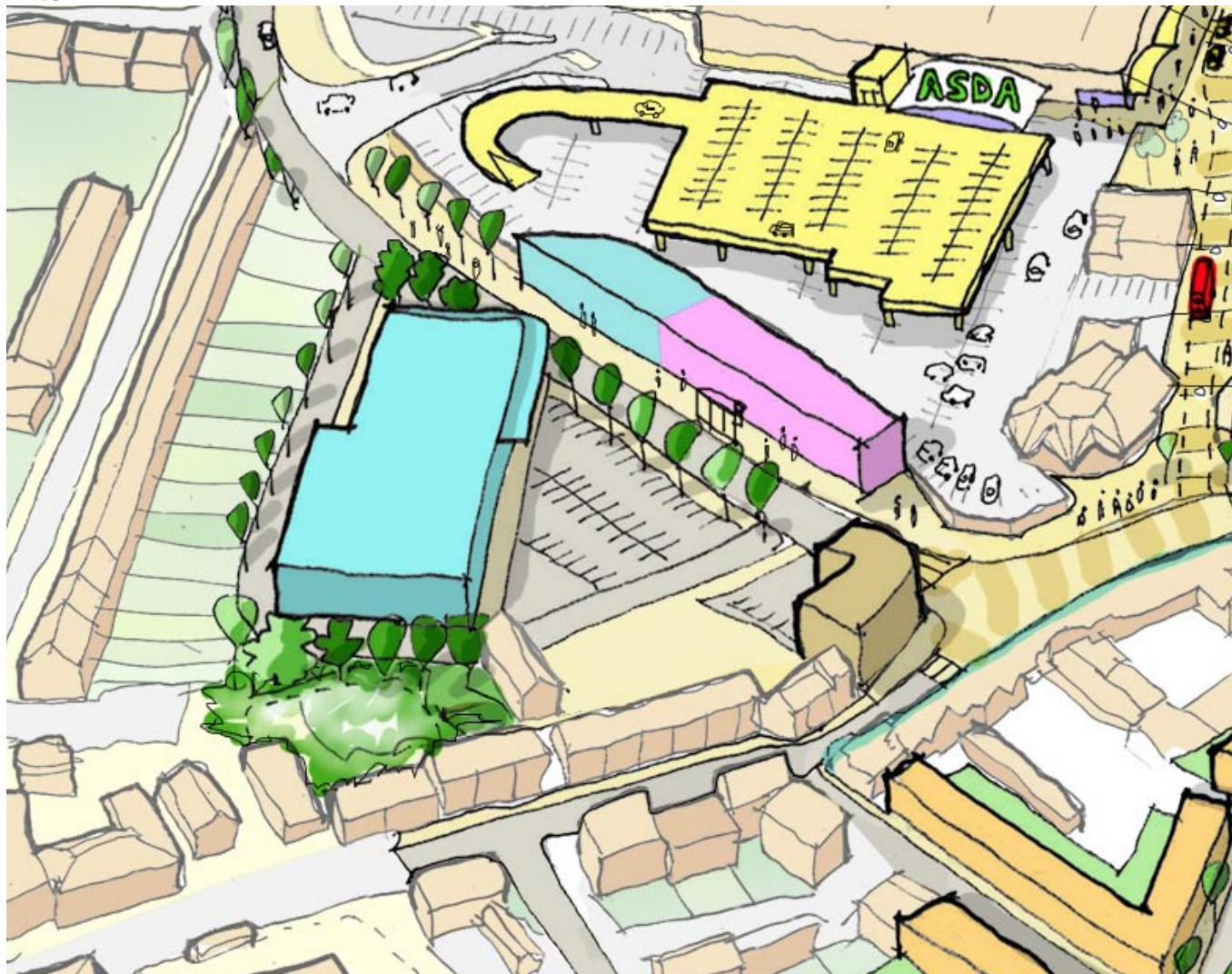
Timing and Priority

The scheme is not on the critical path for the regeneration of the town centre and should be seen as a medium-term priority.



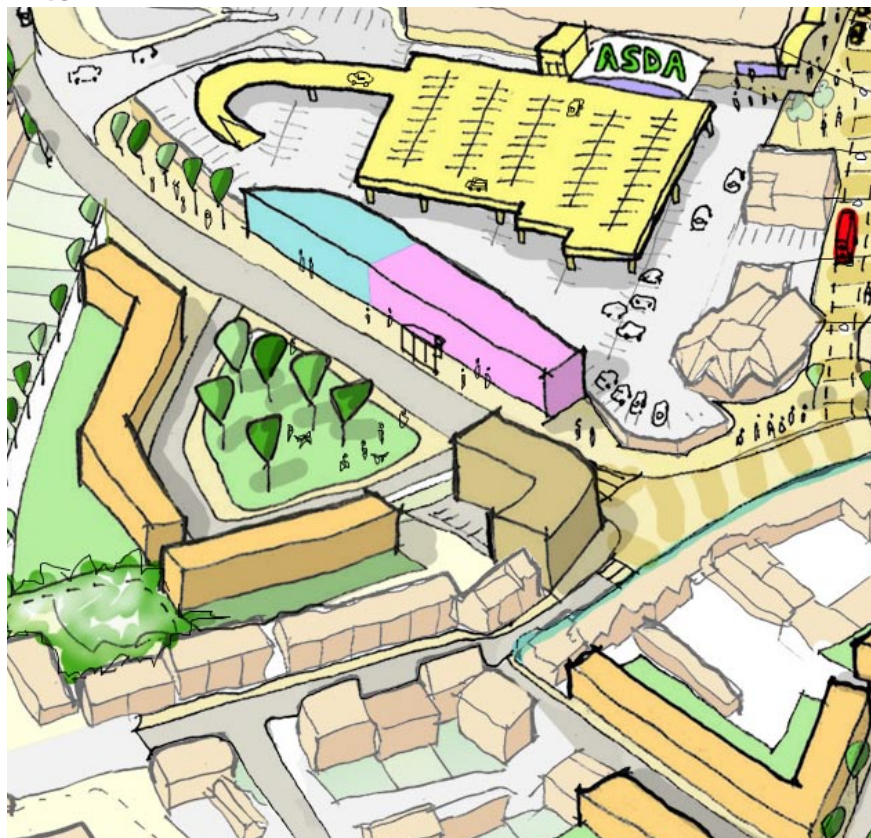
Modern semi-detached houses, Germany

After



Above: Development option with a budget retail unit, Right: a residential option for the site.

After



Before



Priority Project 4

St. Lawrence Way

The St. Lawrence Way site has been looked at either as a housing scheme or to accommodate a budget supermarket. The latter is the preferred option because it can play an important role in reinforcing the centre.

St. Lawrence Way is the site of two former council tower blocks that were demolished around 2003. Since that time the site has remained vacant and is in the ownership of the Walsall Housing Group (WHG). To the south of the site is Wesley's Fold an over 55s housing scheme owned by Accord Housing Association. To the rear of this is a former graveyard linked to the Wesleyan chapel that gives the site its name.

Our initial response to the site was to see it as a potential housing opportunity to be developed by the two housing associations with a private partner. This remains a good use for the site and would help to increase the residential population within easy reach of the town centre.

However we have also explored a potential scheme to accommodate a value retailer. The site is just about large enough to accommodate one of the medium size stores such as Aldi, Netto or Lidl and there is likely to be demand from operators who like to be located near to an ASDA. This will increase the attraction of the centre. It will be particularly important in generating activity and footfall on Pinfield Street and the Bull Stake.

The supermarket would be around 1,000m² (net) 1,500m² (Gross) and the layout shown is a standard design from one of the main retailers. The scheme shows around 60 car parking spaces which is the minimum that the retailers would require. Service access is to the rear from St. Lawrence Way. This should be a quality scheme with an attractive landscape treatment to the store curtilage and tree planting along St. Lawrence Way.



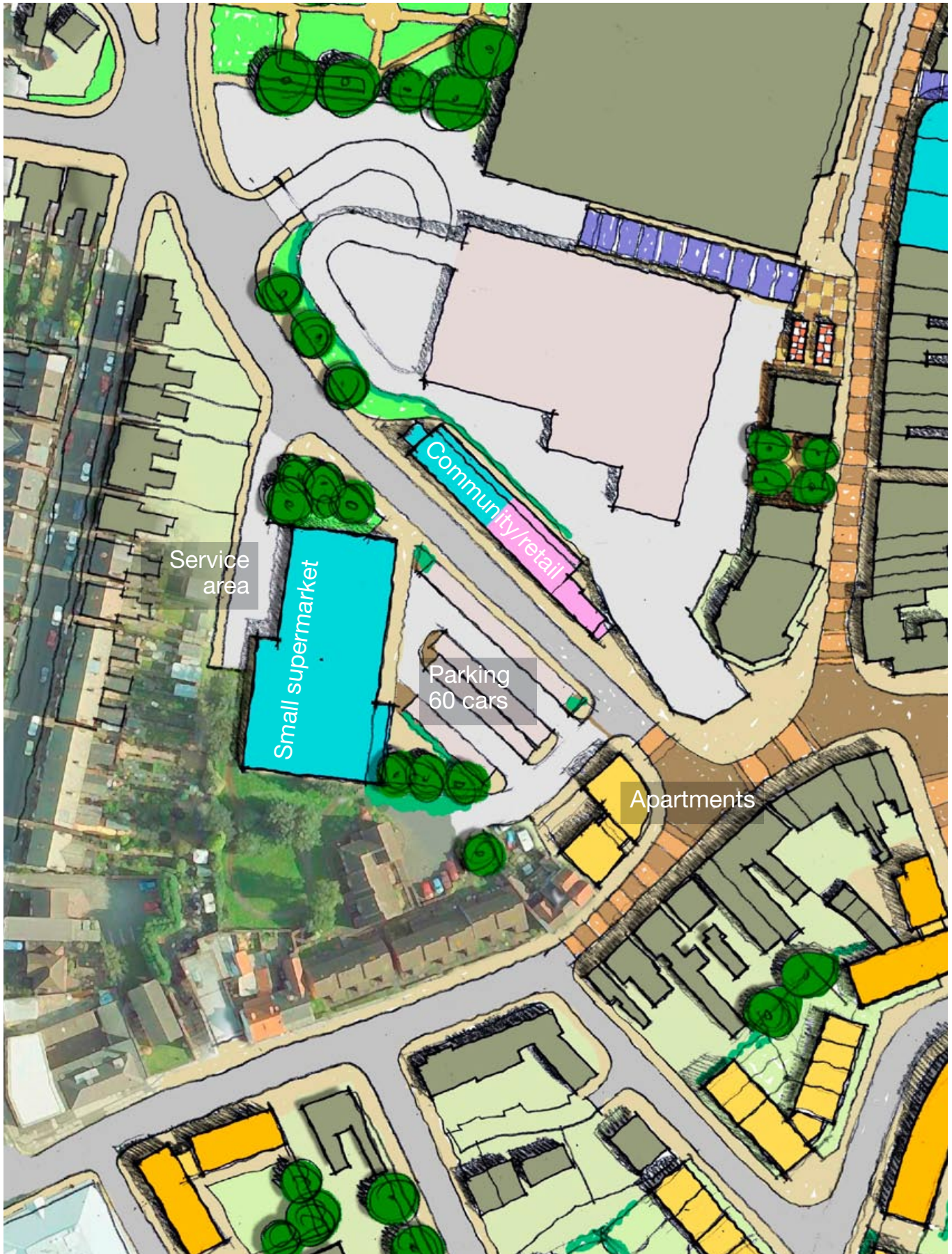
Lawrence Way: High traffic with a large proportion of road surface makes navigating on foot difficult.



Coventry: a new Lidl store on New Binley Road



Middlesborough: the Aldi store forms part of an urban block



Priority Project 4

St. Lawrence Way

- | | |
|---|---|
| Housing | Community uses |
| Apartments | Offices |
| Retailing | |

Scale 1:1250 @ A4



The cleared WHG site opposite the existing bus stop for Darlaston, known as St. Lawrence Way

The site includes an opportunity on the corner of Pinfold Street and St. Lawrence Way for a small apartment scheme. This would accommodate nine units at three storeys and could potentially be brought forward for development by Accord.

There is also potential for the development of the bus station. This will be surplus to requirements with the transfer of some bus stops to King Street and others to on-street facilities on St. Lawrence Way. This site could be developed as retailing/leisure space or alternatively be used to relocate community facilities from the Leys. The ground floor could accommodate up to 700m² of floor space and could be used for a range of uses - shop units, a bar/pub public facilities (such as the JET) or community uses such as those that could relocate from the Leys. This would have the advantage of masking the decked car park to the ASDA. There is potential for the upper floors of this building to be residential, developed with one of the social landlords similar to the housing around the ASDA in Walsall. This would accommodate 14 units on 2 floors creating a three storey building in total.

Costs

The retail scheme would be a private development following the sale of the site to an operator/developer. The bus station development costs will depend on the uses.

Funding

The retail scheme would be privately funded. The bus station scheme would either be developed as a community facility linked to the development

of the Leys, or through one of the social housing providers. The former would be funded by the developer appointed on the Leys site and would be netted off the land value.

Implementation

The site should be subject to a planning brief prepared by the council and allowing for either residential or retail use. The scheme would subsequently be progressed as a sale by whg if they choose to go down this route.

The bus station site is more complex and depends on the completion of the works to King Street. The land is owned by the council and following agreement with Centro would become available for development. The council should develop a brief for the site at that time.

Timing and Priority

This scheme is not on the critical path for the town centre and can be brought forward as the market allows. The bus station is a longer-term prospect dependent on the completion of King Street.



Using trees to create pedestrian/cycle friendly routes



Delivery

This Strategic Regeneration Framework has been created to guide the regeneration of Darlaston over the next 15 years. It has therefore been designed to be radical and transformational in order to counter the powerful trends that have led to the decline of Darlaston and its town centre over recent decades. However this ambition needs to be tempered by what is possible with the resources that are likely to be available in the next few years. While Darlaston is one of the HCA's priorities within Walsall, our assumption has been that there is unlikely to be significant levels of public subsidy available to implement this programme.

We have therefore taken a pragmatic approach. The vision has been broken down into five themes and these in turn have been used to suggest a series of projects to transform the town's economic base, workforce, livability and its town centre.

Planning

A large number of these proposals relate to the use of sites within the town as described on pages 18 and 19 (and in more detail in the Preferred Option Report). These proposals link into the statutory planning process through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the Employment Land Review and will be reflected in the Joint Core Strategy. The town centre masterplan shows indicative layouts for the Servis and Alma Works sites. However these and other suggested site allocations should be brought forward by the market and require no further input from the public sector other than through the planning system.

Capacity Building

Think Walsall is a range of initiatives designed to maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits of development and procurement within Walsall for its residents and businesses.

Part of the Council's Regeneration Services, *Think Walsall* works with partner agencies to secure work and apprentice opportunities for residents, maximise supply chain and subcontracting opportunities for local businesses as a result of development and other inward investment.

It will be expected that all major development will contribute towards these aims in some form. *Think Walsall* can provide support and co-ordination with training providers, labour market and development; as well as local supply chain information.

Public funding

Pages 20-25 of this report list projects which require action by the public sector. These include 16 projects under three headings, Economic Initiatives, Environmental Improvements and Development Projects. These 16 projects are described in more detail in the Delivery Report that has been provided to the Council as a separate unpublished appendix because it includes commercially sensitive information. The 16 projects amount to a total investment of just under £19 Million.

Most of the proposals under the economic theme relate to initiatives that are already underway including the development of the business centre proposed under Project 1.1. We have estimated the costs of this at £3.5 Million to be progressed by WRC. Discounting this project the public sector contribution required to fund this strategy is £1.8 Million.

The largest element of this is the improvements to King Street and the Bull Stake that we have costed at £725,000. This we have suggested is the basis of an application to the Urban Challenge Fund which is designed to support projects to promote walking, cycling and public transport.

The second largest element at £650,000 is the funding for improvements to the town's two main parks. Here there are proposals to provide funding from the council's capital programme and the development of the Grace Academy in the case of George Rose Park.

This leaves £425,000 to be funded. There are a number of options to fund this amount:

- S106 contributions from town centre developments, particularly the ASDA scheme.
- Contributions from the council's capital programme (such as for the Town Hall)
- Other public subsidy, such as from the HCA single conversation given the relatively modest sum required and the level of leverage.

Implementation

Just as important as public funding is the capacity and expertise of the public sector to implement the strategy. What is required is a clear decision-making structure, a dedicated staff resource that can focus on implementing the projects and access to revenue resources to cover ongoing work.

In many areas this has been established as a separate body through initiatives such as SRB, NDC or indeed the URCs such as WRC. However this is not necessary and there are many examples of in-house teams being just as successful. Salford council's in-house team for Salford Quays, for example achieved far more than the adjacent Trafford Development Corporation.

In Walsall the decision making structure for regeneration projects is already in place through the Project Reference Groups. In Darlaston the PRG should continue in this role and should oversee a small officer team to take forward the implementation of this strategy. The initial tasks of this team will be:

- Commissioning design work for King Street and the Bull Stake and preparing funding bids.

- Prepare publicity material and draft contracts for the shop front improvement schemes and make contact with the shop owners and occupiers.
- Liaise with Green Space Services regarding the improvements to the parks and green corridors.
- Organise the works to the Town Hall (the Forge) and secure a revenue budget to manage the building.
- Appointing an agent to act in the Town Hall Yard scheme to liaise with the site owners, agree terms, prepare a development brief and put the scheme to the market.
- Prepare a brief for the St. Lawrence Way site.
- Commence discussions with the site owners on the Leys and prepare a development brief for the site, including proposals for the highway works.
- Enter into discussions with the community association with regard to the Recreation Ground, prepare a brief for the housing and through the appointed agents put the scheme to the market.

In addition to staff time, a number of these actions will require revenue funding. This includes the costs of a design team for the public realm improvements on King Street and the Bull Stake and the costs of an agent to work with the council on Town Hall Yard and the Recreation Ground. These costs have been factored into the capital costs described above (we have generally made provision for 15% fees). However there will need to be provision for up-front fee expenditure to secure the funding as described in the separate Delivery Report appendix.



For all matters regarding this project please contact the
Strategic Regeneration Framework Team at Walsall Council

Regeneration Directorate
Walsall Council
2nd Floor, Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall WS1 1DG

Tel: 01922 650000

This report was produced by URBED (urbanism environment
design) for Walsall Council and WHG

URBED
10 Little Lever Street
Manchester
M1 1HR

Tel: 0161 200 5500
Email: info@urbed.coop

