BIRMINGHAM
Local Centres Strategy

JULY 2006

Birmingham City Council

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1   Birmingham has many local centres. Some are large, with a diverse range of shops, businesses, entertainment, cultural and leisure facilities. Others are simply small groups of local shops and services. But all play an important role, in meeting the day to day needs of local people.

1.2   The City Council has recognised the importance of Birmingham's extensive network of local centres for very many years and working to improve the quality of this network is an established policy objective. This is reflected for example in the Council Plan, the Community Strategy, the Unitary Development Plan and the Economic Strategy and it is central to the 'vibrant urban villages' concept.   National policy (for example Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres) also emphasises the need for local authorities to take positive steps to improve the quality of their centres.

1.3   In 2001 the Council adopted a Local Centres Strategy with the objective of providing greater co-ordination to the wide range of activities which are being undertaken in local centres. This was followed by the approval of a Local Centres Regeneration Programme which established a capital programme for improvements to local centres, and priorities for action.

1.4   Since 2001 there has been much activity in delivering the Strategy and the Regeneration Programme. There has also been a range of further research on the social and economic context within which centres function, and important policy developments in related areas, - for example the localisation process. These developments are reviewed briefly in the appendices.

1.5   In the light of this research and of experience in operating the Strategy it is now appropriate to undertake a review of the original Strategy. The revised Strategy, set out in draft form in the following pages, seeks to build on the themes established, but to provide a greater degree of precision and clarity. In so doing it also aims to reflect the outcome of the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of Local Centres which was completed in April 2005.

1.6   The purpose of this strategy continues to be to provide an overall context for the Council's work in relation to local centres. This will continue to be expressed in more detail through a range of other plans and strategies in relation to particular centres or particular issues - for example through the development plan process.

1.7   Finally, it should be noted that as a city-wide strategy, it is neither desirable nor possible for the Local Centres Strategy to provide detailed guidance on specific approaches to be followed in particular local centres. This is more properly and effectively achieved at a more local level.

2.1 There are four main reasons for the priority which the Council attaches to local centres. These are:

■ **Social Inclusion:** Centres enable essential services, such as food shopping, post offices etc to be provided in accessible locations close to where people live. They can also provide a source of local employment and a place where people can meet. In this way they help ensure that such services are available to everyone, regardless of age, car ownership, disability etc.

■ **Sustainability:** Centres reduce the need for people to travel long distances to gain access to shops or other local businesses meeting day to day needs and can encourage wealth to be recycled within the local economy.

■ **Neighbourhood Renewal:** In many parts of Birmingham, centres have come to provide a sense of identity to local areas. The quality of the centre is an important component in perceptions of the quality of the wider neighbourhood, and makes an important contribution to the achievement of 'vibrant urban villages'.

■ **Economic Growth:** Centres are fundamental to the City's Economy, both for the activity, wealth and employment they produce and for attracting residents and investment to the City.

2.2 In the light of this the Council's overall objective towards local centres is:

"To promote the development and maintenance of a network of thriving, attractive and distinctive local centres throughout Birmingham, in order to provide accessible local shopping and service activities, and local employment opportunities in all parts of the City, and to provide a focus for local community life".

3 BIRMINGHAM'S NETWORK OF CENTRES

The Existing Network

3.1   Table 3.1 sets out the existing network of centres within Birmingham, divided into categories, broadly reflecting the role and function of the centres. The distribution of these centres across the City is shown on Map 3.1.

Table 3.1: The Existing Network of Centres

1	Regional Centre	Birmingham City Centre	
2	Sub-regional Centre	Sutton Coldfield Town Centre	
3	District Centres	Acocks Green Alum Rock Road (Saltley) Coventry Road (Small Heath) Edgbaston (Five Ways) Erdington Fox and Goose Harborne Kings Heath Mere Green	Northfield New Oscott Perry Barr/Birchfield Selly Oak Sheldon Soho Road, Handsworth Stirchley Swan, Yardley
4	Large Neighbourhood Centres	Balsall Heath Castle Vale Cotteridge Dudley Road Hall Green Hawthorn Road Kingstanding Circle Lozells Road Ladypool Road	Maypole Meadway Moseley Queslett Scott Arms Sparkhill Springfield Weoley Castle Wylde Greenn
5	Small Neighbourhood Centres	Boldmere Bordesley Green College Road Frankley Glebe Farm Hay Mills Highfield Road Kingsbury Road/Tyburn Road Kings Norton Ivy Bush Lea Village Newtown North Yardley Olton Boulevard Pelham Quinton	Rednal Rookery Road Shard End Short Heath Slade Road Sparkbrook Stechford The Radleys Timberley Tyseley Villa Road Walmley Ward End West Heath Witton Yardley Wood

Map 3.1: Birmingham's Network of Centres

★ Mere Green

☆ Sutton Coldfield

Queslett
☆ Kingstanding Circle
★ New Oscott ★ Boldmere
☆ Scott Arms
★ Walmley
☆ Hawthorn Road
★ College Road ☆ Wylde Green

★ Short Heath
★ Erdington

Perry Barr/
Birchfield Slade Road Castle Vale
★ Kingsbury Road ☆
\Tyburn Road
★ Rookery Road ★ Witton

Soho Road,
Handsworth ☆ Lozells Road ⊢Timberley
★ Villa Road
★ Newtown Ward End ★ Shard End
★ ★ Fox & Goose
☆ Dudley Road Alum Rock ★ Pelham ★ Glebe Farm
Road (Saltley) ★ Stechford ★ Lea Village
★ Birmingham ★ Bordesley Green
City Centre ☆ Meadway
Edgbaston Coventry Road
★ (Five Ways) ★ (Small Heath)
Ivy Bush ★ North Yardley
☆ Sparkbrook Hay Mills ★ The Radleys
★ Harborne ★ Swan Yardley
Balsall Heath
☆ ☆ Sparkhill
Ladypool ☆ ★ Tyseley
Road Springfield ★ Sheldon
★ Selly Oak ☆ ☆ Acock's Green
Moseley Olton Boulevard
☆ Weoley Castle ☆ Hall Green
★ King's Heath
★ Stirchley ★ Highfield Road

★ Northfield ★ Cotteridge ★ Yardley Wood

★ King's Norton ☆ Maypole
Green
★ Frankley
★ Rednal West Heath

City Boundary

Motorways

Network of Centres
★ Regional Centre (1)
☆ Sub Regional Centre (1)
★ District Centre (17)
☆ Large Local Centre (18)
★ Small Local Centre (32)

Scale 1:110,000

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright.
Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Birmingham City Council. Licence No.100021326, 2005.

3.2 The categorisation in the table is based on the typology of centres contained in the Government's current planning policy guidance for centres (PPS6). It should be treated as provisional at this stage, since the City Council is required to include a defined network and hierarchy of centres in its Development Plan, and this will be subject to extensive public consultation and potential revision over the next few years.

3.3 The categories used are as follows:

1) Regional Centre
Very large centre, embracing a wide range of activities and serving a regional catchment. Birmingham City Centre is identified as the regional centre in both the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy.

2) Sub-Regional Centre
Major centres, providing an extensive range of facilities and services for a more than local population. Sutton Coldfield is the only other centre in Birmingham identified as one of the regional network of centres in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

3) District Centre
A major group of shops, including at least one supermarket or superstore and a range of non-retail and public services.

4) Large Neighbourhood
A significant group of more local shops and services, Centre including one or more smaller supermarkets.

5) Small Neighbourhood
A smaller group of local shops and services, meeting Centre more local needs.

3.4 This categorisation is intended to be helpful in providing a broad definition of the different roles which centres perform. However, it is also important to remember that all centres are unique, and that this local individuality cannot be reflected in any overall classification. The categorisation set out here should not therefore be treated as a rigid hierarchy, and it should not be

assumed that one category of centre is more important or worthy of support than another. The guiding principle is to work towards the creation of a network of attractive centres capable of meeting all needs across the city.

3.5 Centres have been classified on the basis of information relating to their turnover and size, taking into account current development proposals and the presence of key facilities, such as supermarkets. The information on which the categorisation is based is drawn from the 2004 Local Facilities Survey.

3.6 Policy towards the City Centre is set out elsewhere, and so this Strategy focuses on the 68 centres in Categories 2 to 5 (although it should be remembered that the City Centre itself performs a 'local centre' role for those who live within it).

3.7 It is also important to recognise that in addition to the 'named' centres included here, there are a large number - perhaps 250 - of even smaller 'centres' and shopping parades across the City. When considered from a city-wide perspective, these 'centres' are individually of limited significance. However, from a local perspective they can be very important, and collectively their well being also needs to be acknowledged.

The Health of Existing Centres

3.8 The health of centres is important in assessing the priority that should be given to measures to improve them. Table 2.2 categorises the network of centres according to their health. Measures used to assess health were turnover change 1994 - 2004, changes in occupied shop number 1994 - 2004, and vacancy levels at 2004.

Centres have been classified into three broad categories - Strong, Stable and Weak. Inevitably this assessment represents a 'snapshot' of the situation at a particular time (2004) and does not take account of susequent events such as the 2005 tornado. A number of the centres classified as weak are already the subject of investment/ development proposals which should alter their

status. It should also be noted that this assessment reflects the economic performance of centres, and does not take into account factors such as environmental quality.

Table 3.2: Centre Health

1	Strong	Boldmere Castle Vale Hawthorn Road Mere Green Northfield Olton Boulevard Perry Barr	Queslett Rednal Scott Arms Sheldon Walmley Weoley Castle Wylde Green
2	Stable	Acocks Green Alum Rock Road (Saltley) Balsall Heath Coventry Road (Small Heath) Dudley Road Edgbaston (Five Ways) Erdington Fox and Goose Glebe Farm Hall Green Harborne Highfield Road Kings Heath Kingsbury Road/Tyburn Road Kings Norton Kingstanding Circle Ladypool Road	Moseley New Oscott Newtown North Yardley Pelham Quinton Shard End Soho Road Handsworth Sparkhill Springfield Stechford Sutton Coldfield The Radleys Timberley Tyseley Ward End West Heath
3	Weak	Bordesley Green College Road Cotteridge Frankley Hay Mills Ivy Bush Lea Village Lozells Road Maypole Meadway	Rookery Road Selly Oak Short Heath Slade Road Sparkbrook Stirchley Swan Yardley Villa Road Witton Yardley Wood

3.9   There is a relationship between deprivation and the performance of local centres. This Strategy puts forward approaches which are aimed at strengthening the performance of centres and this will be important in promoting sustainable neighbourhood renewal. However, centre enhancement needs to be integrated with wider initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of deprived areas, in particular proposals for housing renewal. As such strategies for these areas also need to recognise the significant role which local centres can play.

Accessibility: Gaps in the Network of Centres

3.10   The network of local centres within Birmingham results from historic patterns of development. Centres change and evolve over time, but this process does not necessarily 'keep up' with wider processes of demographic and social change. This means that it should not be assumed that the existing network of centres is ideal in terms of meeting all needs across the city - there is the potential for there to be 'gaps' in the network. It is also important to ensure that the network of centres is managed to reflect changes in the distribution of population and economic activity across the city. This will need to be taken into account as the Growth Agenda proposals evolve.

3.11   The first step in assessing this is to identify an acceptable standard of accessibility to key local retail and service facilities, the most important of which is food shopping. Research undertaken in the Birmingham Local Centres Study, based on experience in other urban contexts and 'typical' shopping patterns in Birmingham suggest the following standards:

■ All households to be within 5 minutes off-peak drive of a large foodstore or facilities offering a comparable choice of food sales.

■ All households to be within 10 minutes off-peak public transport journey time of a large foodstore or facilities offering a comparable choice of food sales.

■ All households to be within 500m of local convenience shopping.

These standards are accepted as an appropriate basis on which to plan for local retail and service provision.

3.12   The Birmingham Local Centres Study then analysed existing retail provision within Birmingham to identify whether any gaps in provision exist. The conclusion is that there are a number of gap areas and these are shown on Map 3.2. It should be noted that major areas of open space are excluded from these areas, but that they do include smaller areas of open space and some areas in industrial use as well as residential areas.

3.13   Initiatives are already underway to address a number of these gaps. The current position is summarised below. It should be noted that a number of these areas co-incide with areas which may be subject to change and redevelopment as part of the emerging 'growth agenda' proposals, and it will be important to ensure that the need for local shops and services is taken into account in any specific proposals which may subsequently be produced for these areas.

Sutton Coldfield: This has been an area of population growth and the local centres in the area are generally healthy. The issue is one of a shortage of food shopping provision, particularly following the closure of the only supermarket in Sutton Coldfield Town Centre. The solution lies in seeking to strengthen provision within the existing centres, and in particular Sutton Coldfield Town Centre, in an area which has generally high levels of car ownership.

Erdington/Witton: There are a number of local centres within or near to this area. The problem is that, with the exception of Erdington, they offer relatively limited choice. The situation should be partly addressed by a proposal for a new large foodstore adjoining Witton Centre – which will also help strengthen what is currently a weak centre. Strengthened provision in other centres serving the area (Erdington, College Road and Hawthorn Road) would also assist.

Handsworth/Dudley Road: Proposed new developments in Smethwick (within Sandwell MBC), on Dudley Road, and at the former Brookfield Precinct, complementing the continued success of Soho Road, should address issues in this area.

Saltley/Ward End /Fox and Goose: The implementation of proposals within the Fox and Goose Local Action Plan will address issues in the eastern half of this area. There may still be a need for improvements in Saltley/Nechells. There may be an opportunity to address this through proposals being developed for Aston/Newtown as part of the Urban Living Housing Renewal Pathfinder Area, which could include consideration of the development of a 'new' local centre in the Nechells area.

South of the Cole Valley: The problem in this area relates to the limited scale and poor quality of the local centres serving it. Measures to improve the quality of the centres would help - and in this respect proposals are already being developed at Shard End - but there is also a need to significantly address the range and choice of local services in this area, perhaps by looking to expand one of the existing centres. The Meadway appears to offer the greatest potential in this respect. Addressing this should be a priority in connection with the development of proposals to improve housing within this part of the city.

Balsall Heath/Ladypool Road/Stratford Road: Proposals for a new foodstore at Bristol Street will help address issues in this area, but this will need to be complemented by continued efforts to improve the local centres in the area, which play an important part in meeting the needs of the area's large Asian communities.

Quinton: Proposals for a new supermarket at Ridgacre Lane will help resolve issues in this area - but there may still be a need to consider the need for improvements to provision in and around Bartley Green.

Kings Norton/West Heath: This is a large area with poor existing access to local centres offering a reasonable choice of goods and services. The

proposals being developed for the Three Estates New Deal for Communities Area are likely to include a proposal for a new centre including a supermarket, and there is a commitment to improve the existing 'neighbourhood' centre at Longbridge, also including a larger supermarket. These proposals will go a long way towards addressing issues in this area.
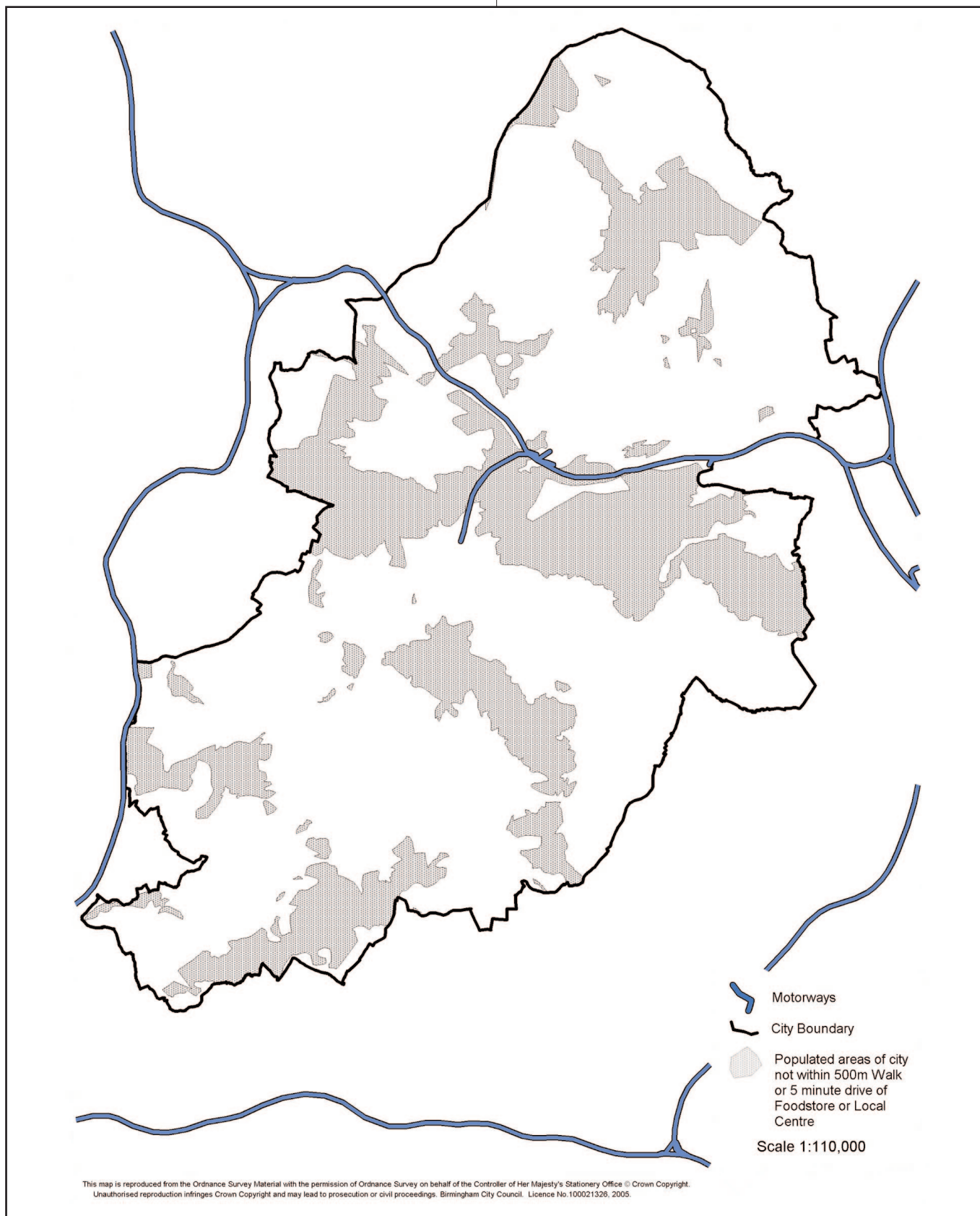
Summary

(i) The network of local centres for the purposes of the Strategy is as set out in Table 3.1. However, the local importance of smaller shopping parades is also recognised.

(ii) An assessment of the current health of centres is set out in Table 3.2, and this will be used as an input in determining priorities. The relationship between centre health and levels of deprivation is also recognised and will also be taken into account.

(iii) The following accessibility standards are adopted as a basis for assessing the adequacy of service and shopping provision at a local level:

- All households to be within 5 minutes off peak drive time of a large foodstore or facilities offering a comparable choice of food sales.

- All households to be within 10 minute off-peak public transport journey time of a large foodstore or facilities offering a comparable choice of food sales.

- All households to be within 500m of local convenience shopping.

Map 3.2 Gaps in Local Centres

Motorways

City Boundary

Populated areas of city not within 500m Walk or 5 minute drive of Foodstore or Local Centre

Scale 1:110,000

(iv) Based on this standard, the following 'gap areas' are recognised, as shown on Map 3.2:

- Sutton Coldfield

- Erdington/Witton

- Handsworth/Dudley Road

- Saltley/Ward End/Fox and Goose

- South of the Cole Valley

- Horton Square/Balsall Heath/Ladypool Road/ Stratford Road

- Quinton

- Kings Norton/West Heath

(v) The following measures will be taken to address these gaps:

- Seek to improve food shopping provision in centres in and around Sutton Coldfield, including Sutton Coldfield Town Centre.

- Implementation of the proposed new foodstore at Witton, and strengthening of other local centres serving the Witton/Erdington area.

- Implementation of new foodstores at Dudley Road and Brookfield Precinct, and continued measures to improve the local centres in the Handsworth/Dudley Road area.

- Implementation of proposals contained in the Fox and Goose Local Action Plan and consideration of the potential to create a new, small centre in the Nechells area, as part of the Aston/Newtown Area Investment Plan developed under the Urban Living Programme.

- Consideration of the potential to expand/ upgrade one of the existing centres in the South of the Cole Valley area, possibly the Meadway integrated with proposals for housing renewal in this area.

- Implementation of a new foodstore at Bristol Street, and continued measures to improve local centres in the Balsall Heath/Stratford Road areas.

- Implementation of new a foodstore at Ridgacre Lane.

- Development of a new local centre within the Kings Norton Three Estates New Deal for Communities Area, and an improved neighbourhood centre at Longbridge, in line with the existing planning permission.

4 FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Introduction

4.1   One of the most important lessons from past experience of local centre regeneration is that solutions for individual centres can only be effectively developed at the local level, with the support of local businesses and local communities, within the context of an overall view of the role of centres within the wider hierarchy. A city-wide strategy cannot therefore be prescriptive about the approaches to be adopted for individual centres. However it is possible to draw on recent research and past experience to identify some key factors which are important in almost all cases, and which should be addressed whenever local centre regeneration initiatives are being developed. There are summarised below:

A Clear Vision for the Centre

4.2   The starting point should be a clear understanding of the current role and function of the centre. This needs to be based on a robust information base. The 2004 Local Facilities Survey provides a sound starting point for this, giving information on turnover levels, size of catchment, amount and type of floorspace, numbers of shops and service uses, vacancy levels etc. This information may need to be updated, and may also usefully be supplemented by for example a survey of local traders/businesses, or on street surveys of existing users of the centre. In addition to providing information in relation to the current role of the centre, such surveys can be helpful in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the centre, and in highlighting issues requiring attention.

4.3   This should lead to the development of a realistic 'vision' for the future role of the centre. This needs to be deliverable in market terms, and should start from the status of the centre as identified in this strategy and, if appropriate, the Development Plan. It should also take account of the existing roles of other centres within the area.

4.4   The 2001 Local Centres Strategy advocated that Centre Action Plans should be prepared as a basis for programmes for improving centres and

that these should be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It remains desirable that the vision for the centre and the actions flowing from it should be set out in some form of Centre Plan, particularly for centres identified as priorities for improvement. Where appropriate this should be prepared within the development planning system. However under the new development planning arrangements the precise status to be given to such plans will need to be determined on an individual basis, in the light of their particular emphasis and content, and in some cases if may be preferable to prepare plans outside the formal development plan process.

Local Partnership

4.5   If a centre vision is to be soundly-based, and capable of being achieved, it needs to be understood and shared by all those with an interest in the future of the centre, including local traders, businesses and landowners, local communities, the local elected members who represent them, District Committees/Partnerships, the City Council and other relevant public bodies.

4.6   It will therefore be essential to ensure the involvement of all these groups in the development of programmes of action within centres. In the case of larger centres it may be possible for this to take place through the formation of formal centre partnerships - while in the case of smaller centres less formal arrangements are likely to be more appropriate. In all cases, the involvement of local elected members will be essential.

Key Functions

4.7   Whatever the vision for a particular centre, it will be important to identify and to work to achieve a mix of uses within the centre appropriate to the vision. This will need to focus particularly on the key 'anchor' activities which are central to the functioning of the centre and which act as the main draw in terms of attracting people and other activities. There are a wide range of possibilities here, but in most cases this is likely to include essential local services, such as a supermarket and

other essential food shops, a post office, a pharmacy and a bank, or at least facilities for accessing cash. It is important that these key anchor activities are well-integrated with the centre, and this principle should be followed when new developments - particularly large supermarkets - are considered through the planning process. The introduction of other attractions, such as farmers, markets should also be considered

4.8   While it is retail and commercial uses that will form the heart of a local centre, there is also potential for centres to act as a focus or hub for employment and housing, and the opportunity should be taken to encourage this where it arises.

4.9   It may also be appropriate to consider the need for planning control policies to regulate the growth and location of particular types of use within a centre - for example hot food take-aways.

Property Issues

4.10   There are many factors which influence the ability to attract and retain the desired mix of activities within a centre. Not all of these are readily capable of being influenced - for example trends towards reduced branch networks in the financial services sector. However one important factor is the availability within a centre of premises which meet the operational requirements of retailers and other businesses.

4.11   In this respect, there is often a mismatch between the type of property available within a centre, which is frequently dominated by relatively small traditional shops, and the aspirations of modern retailers, in particular the national multiples, which are for larger more efficient units. This mismatch is at its most extreme in the case of supermarket operators. The result can be difficulty in attracting and retaining key 'anchor' uses, and problems of high levels of vacancy in the traditional shops. It may also restrict the potential for local businesses to expand and in some cases may force successful businesses to relocate out of the centres.

4.12   Where this situation exists it will be appropriate to consider the potential for more radical change within the centre, perhaps involving the redevelopment of outmoded commercial areas with new premises more suited to modern retail and business needs. This option will only be possible in circumstances where commercially viable redevelopment options can be identified and appropriate sites assembled. In such circumstances the City Council should be prepared to use its compulsory purchase powers to facilitate site assembly. There may also be an opportunity for the Council to make use of its existing land ownerships to promote such an outcome, and the potential for this should be explored as part of the process of developing an Action Plan for the centre.

Car Parking

4.13   Accessibility is a key feature of any successful centre. This is true of all modes of transport - but surveys consistently show that provision of plentiful, well-signposted, secure car parking is a particular concern for communities and businesses within centres.

4.14   In view of this an audit of existing on and off street parking provision should be undertaken as part of any local centre regeneration initiative, and where this shows that there are deficiencies, it should be a priority to develop measures to address this.

4.15   The simple solution of providing additional car parking will often not be feasible, because of a lack of suitable sites. However other options may be possible, such as:

■ Encouraging retailers with private car parks to make them available for more general public car parking;

■ Better management of existing on and off street parking areas;

■ Measures to improve security in existing car parks and on pedestrian routes to and from car parks;

■ Ensuring that when new retail developments are permitted, parking provision is available to serve the centre as a whole and not just the new development.

■ Reviewing charging regimes to ensure that they balance the needs of the centre against the desire to recover car park costs.

Provision for parking for people with disabilities, and cycle parking should also be considered.

4.16   Many local centres are located on radial roads which form part of the Strategic Highway Network. There can be a particular tension in such centres between the need to provide adequate parking for the centre, and the need to ensure a reasonably free flow of traffic. When traffic management measures, such as red routes, are proposed in such centres it is essential that these proposals take account of the need to ensure that adequate local car parking is retained.

Public Transport Accessibility

4.17   Most local centres enjoy good access by public transport, and in particular by bus. This is important given that 38% of households in Birmingham did not have access to a car in 2001, and so it will also be important to review public transport accessibility. This should seek to take advantage of the potential of accessibility planning, utilising the 'accession' model, to provide a more detailed analysis.

4.18   Since most local centres are not well-related to railway stations, the key issue here is access by bus. In addition to issues such as the frequency and comprehensiveness of services, account will also need to be taken of the location of bus stopping points and the safety and convenience of pedestrian routes from bus stops to the centre. In addition consideration should be given to the need for, and appropriate location of, taxi ranks.

Safety Issues

4.19   Surveys indicate that probably the biggest disincentive to visits to local centres, other than inadequate car parking, is fears over security and personal safety. The need to consider measures to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, and to make centres feel safer to those who use them, should therefore also be a priority.

4.20   This is an area where there is a particular need to understand the factors which are generating the problems at a local level, and to work towards solutions which respond to local circumstances. Various measures have been used effectively, including:

■ The introduction of CCTV cameras.

■ Street wardens and more visible policing.

■ Alcohol free zones.

■ Measures to improve the design and layout of centres to remove unsafe areas.

■ Removal of particular facilities or features which attract anti social activity.

4.21   It should be noted that a number of these measures involve on-going revenue costs, and so it will be essential to identify sources of funding to cover this when packages of proposals are put forward.

4.22   In some cases there may be a need to respond to the perception that an area is unsafe, when in reality levels of crime and anti-social behaviour are not significant. In these circumstances local management and promotion, and measures to improve confidence may be required.

The Quality of the Environment

4.23 Upgrading the quality of the environment within a centre can have significant benefits in terms of encouraging more visits, attracting investment, and simply making the centre a better place for those who rely on it and use it regularly. An audit of the existing environment should therefore be undertaken as a basis for identifying any need for improvements.

4.24 The range of issues which can be included here is very wide from what are essentially maintenance issues (litter, the state of footways etc) through to the availability of facilities (public toilets, seating areas etc) and matters of design (the amount and quality of soft landscaping, the quality of street furniture, and public art). It should be recognised that this is an area where relatively small scale improvements can have a disproportionately large effect - but there may also be occasions where large scale change is required in order to secure a genuine transformation.

4.25 This is another area where certain initiatives may lead to additional on-going revenue costs, and it is essential that this is recognised when environmental enhancement packages are developed, and appropriate provision made. Whenever possible the aim should be to avoid increased revenue costs or even achieve savings.

Marketing and Promotion

4.26 Large retailers and major centres invest considerable resources in marketing and promotion. In contrast there is a little or no marketing of local centres.

4.27 While major marketing will be neither affordable nor appropriate for local centres, there is potential for lower key promotional activity. At the simplest level this could include the installation of clear signposting, the development of attractive gateway features, or the production of a directory of local shops and services. Other possibilities could involve the promotion of local events, festivals or niche markets. The potential to develop initiatives of this type possibly jointly

between centres should be given greater consideration.

Centre Management

4.28 Centre Management provides a mechanism for bringing a number of the issues identified in the previous sections together, by enabling a co-ordinated approach to be taken to the day to day management of a centre. This could encompass a wide range of concerns, including safety and security, environmental quality, general maintenance and service issues, marketing and publicity, and general co-ordination of the various bodies with responsibility for delivering services. Centre Management involves a long term commitment to a centre, rather than the short-term delivery of a series of initiatives, and it also requires the identification of a single person or organisation with the responsibility and authority to undertake this co-ordinating role.

4.29 Where centre management has been introduced it has tended to involve the appointment of a centre manager. This makes it a relatively expensive option which is only likely to be sustainable for larger local centres, where there is potential for this to be funded in the long term through contributions from local traders and businesses. It is also likely to be most effective where a strong local traders/local business association is established, something a centre manager can help to foster. In the few instances where centre management has been introduced such as Erdington, and more recently Sparkbook and Washwood Heath, it is generally acknowledged to have been very successful, and to have had a positive impact in generating a wide range of improvements. There is therefore a need to continue to encourage the wider uptake of this approach.

4.30 This could be achieved in two complementary ways. The first approach would be to encourage the appointment of additional centre managers. This may be appropriate for some of the larger local centres, or possibly for groups of smaller centres within an area. Ultimately it should be the objective for this to be funded through

contributions from local traders and businesses, perhaps through a Business Improvement District type mechanism. However initially it is likely to be necessary for public resources to be identified in order to set such initiatives in motion, and the City Council should therefore seek to identify resources to promote centre management initiatives in the larger local centres which currently do not benefit from this approach. Sutton Coldfield, Kings Heath, Northfield and Coventry Road, Small Heath should be the initial priorities. However any opportunities to promote centre management through specific funding streams, such as Local Enterprise Growth Initiative, should also be taken.

4.31   A second approach would be to seek to pursue some aspects of centre management through the District Committees. A number of the public services which are important in local centres - for example street cleaning - are already being devolved to Districts. There is potential for Districts to take on a co-ordinating role in relation to the delivery of these services, and to build on this in relation to some of the broader management issues and this should be encouraged. In some cases Districts may wish to support the introduction of more formal centre management arrangements, and this is also encouraged.

Summary

(i) Regeneration initiatives for individual centres will be based on a clear vision of the future role of the centre. This will be based on an assessment of the centre's current status, and should be realistic in market terms. It will also take account of the status of the centre as identified in this Strategy and the Development Plan.

(ii) This 'vision' will be developed in partnership with local traders, businesses and landowners, and the local community and so will the development of any subsequent local action plans. Local elected members will always be included in this process.

(iii) Action plans to improve local centres will normally incorporate the following:

- An assessment of the functions required within the centre to enable it to fulfil its role.

- A review of the property available within the centre and its suitability to meet current demands. This should include a review of any City Council landholdings.

- An audit of existing car parking provision, and any required measures to improve car parking.

- An audit of existing public transport accessibility and any necessary improvements.

- An assessment of community safety issues and any potential actions to improve safety.

- An audit of the environment of the centre and the need for any improvements.

(iv) The value of centre management is recognised and the extension of centre management will be encouraged. In the long term it is considered that this should be funded via contributions from local traders and businesses, but the need for public resources to initiate the process is recognised. The Council will therefore seek to identify resources for this purpose, the initial priorities being Sutton Coldfield, and the larger District Centres (Northfield, Kings Heath and Coventry Road, Small Heath).

(v) There is a potential for District Committees to take on a greater role in co-ordinating public services within local centres generally, including the provision of centre management and this is encouraged.

Introduction

5.1   Table 3.2 indicates that several local centres are currently performing weakly. In a few of these cases, centres have very high levels of vacant property, a situation which has sometimes persisted for many years. In these cases, high vacancy levels may be an indicator of a more fundamental change in the role of the centre, possibly resulting from a past decline in local population, or a reduction in the centre's catchment area. In such circumstances, there may be no realistic prospect of the centre regaining its former status, and if this is not recognised and appropriate action taken, problems of decline, vacant and poorly maintained property etc are likely to persist.

5.2   Table 5.1 lists those centres which have experienced persistent problems of high vacancy over the period to 2004.

Table 5.1: Centres with persistently high vacancy levels

Stirchley	Ivy Bush
Sparkbrook	Rookery Road
Lozells Road	Villa Road
Frankley	Witton
Selly Oak	Hay Mills

5.3   Radical proposals for change in some of these centres is already planned (eg Stirchley). The potential need for similar measures in relation to others should also be recognised and addressing this should be a priority. It should be emphasised that the objective here is not to discourage or remove succesful local businesses, but to create a centre with a sustainable level of shops and service activities and to ovecome the blighting effect generated by long-term vacant and underused property.

Responses to Decline

5.4   The approaches set out in the previous section are likely to be applicable to declining centres as much as to centres which are in a more stable or healthy condition. The responses set out below are therefore additions rather than substitutes for those measures. In general, it is likely that more radical steps will be needed to resolve problems of decline. As always there will be a need for involvement from the local community, local businesses and local elected members in charting a particular way forward for any individual centre. It should also be recognised that centres cannot be seen in isolation from the communities which surround them. Measures to improve centres should therefore continue to be developed in harmony with any wider renewal or regeneration proposals in the area. Proposals for major housing renewal will be particularly important in this respect.

(a) Recognising Commercial Reality

5.5   The need to identify a 'vision' of the future role of a centre has already been emphasised. In the case of centres in decline, it is particularly important that this vision should be based on a realistic assessment of the commercial attractiveness of the centre as a future location for retail and business activity. There is often a natural reluctance to recognise that a centre's role has changed and become less significant than in the past, but where this has happened, measures to rejuvenate the centre are only likely to be successful if the commercial reality of the situation is acknowledged.

5.6   In addressing this issue, it should also be noted that a fundamental change in a centre's role is not necessarily the only reason for decline. The important point is that there should be a clear and realistic assessment of future commercial prospects before interventions to address decline are developed.

(b) Down-sizing

5.7 Where a centre's role has reduced, it is almost inevitable that there will be an over-supply of retail floorspace. In these circumstances it will be necessary to reduce the amount of floorspace to a level which is more in balance with future demand. Given sufficient time, this is likely to happen simply through the operation of market forces. However, experience indicates that this can sometimes take very many years, and that it can happen in a way which fragments and weakens the centre as a whole.

5.8 To overcome this, it may be appropriate to identify a 'core' area within the centre in conjunction with local businesses and to seek to concentrate retail/commercial activity within that core, the objective being to create a smaller but more effective centre. The implementation of this type of approach can partly be through the planning control system, through which changes in the use of property can be controlled. However, this is essentially re-active and is a slow and haphazard process. A more positive approach would be for the City Council to seek to acquire surplus retail property, through compulsory purchase if necessary, in order to bring about a more rapid reduction in the size of the centre. The potential to adopt this approach should be considered in appropriate circumstances.

(c) Diversification

5.9 Encouraging a diversity of uses within centres is likely to be beneficial in most circumstances. In cases where there is insufficient demand to support all the existing retail/ commercial floorspace, it will be necessary to consider whether there are alternative uses which could be promoted in their place. Realistic options here will depend on local circumstances, but could include the following:

■ Leisure uses, such as restaurants

■ Employment uses, such as offices

■ Residential uses

■ Opportunities to redress local land use deficiencies (e.g. a need for a health centre).

5.10 In some cases, alternative uses may be possible within existing vacant property (eg restaurants). In other cases, it may be necessary to promote redevelopment schemes. This is likely to require positive action from the City Council to identify potential redevelopment sites and possibly to assist in assembling them, including making use of compulsory purchase powers if necessary.

(d) Redevelopment

5.11 There may be a few occasions where the decline of a centre is associated with fundamental problems in its design or layout. In these cases, complete redevelopment may be the only realistic option. Examples of this approach, which have proved successful, are One Stop at Perry Barr and Castle Vale.

5.12 A variation on this approach may be to attract to the centre a major new 'anchor' activity which will draw in more visitors, the obvious possibility being a large supermarket. However, this option will only be possible if a development opportunity attractive to a supermarket operator can be identified and any such proposal can be shown to be consistent with wider planning policies. These will, for example, be concerned to ensure that there is no significant adverse impact on the health of other competing centres in the area. It will also be critical to ensure that such proposals are genuinely integrated with the centre, so that they function as part of it.

(e) Changing Perceptions

5.13 One of the key objectives will be to change perceptions of a centre in decline so that more people are encouraged to visit it, or to visit more frequently. In addition to the approaches set out above, this could include a range of other actions, such as:

■ Significantly improving the environment.

■ Addressing safety and security issues.

■ Improving accessibility.

■ Increasing user and trader confidence through promotion and marketing.

5.14 These approaches may well be required alongside other more radical actions, and in some cases they may be sufficient in themselves to reverse the decline of a centre. However, this is only likely to be the case where action is possible on a sufficient scale to produce a genuine and lasting transformation in perceptions.

Summary

(i) It is recognised that a small number of Birmingham's centres are in decline and have persistently high levels of vacant property. These centres are listed in Table 5.1. Addressing the problems of these centres will be a priority.

(ii) It is essential that measures to address the problems of declining centres are based on a realistic view of the future commercial prospects of the centre.

(iii) More radical intervention will be necessary to deal satisfactorily with the problems of declining centres. This could include:

■ Reducing the size of the centre.

■ Diversification away from retail activity.

■ Complete redevelopment.

■ Partial redevelopment to provide an opportunity for a new 'anchor' activity.

■ Measures to change perceptions.

(iv) The City Council will be prepared to take a pro-active approach to delivering change, including the assembly of redevelopment sites, using compulsory purchase powers if necessary.

6 RESOURCES

Introduction

6.1   The availability of resources is inevitably a significant factor in determining the progress that can be made in improving the City's network of local centres. Given the number of centres within Birmingham, and the range of issues which need to be addressed, there will never be sufficient resources to do everything at once, and so it will continue to be necessary to establish priorities.

6.2   Resources are likely to be a constraint in a number of respects:

Σ Staffing: The establishment of local partnerships and the development and implementation of local action plans can all be intensive in terms of requirements of staff time. Staff availability is therefore an influence on the rate of progress that can be made. The use of consultants can sometimes be a way of overcoming this, but the costs involved in this mean that it is unlikely to be realistic unless it can be funded through a specific regeneration programme such as New Deal for Communities.

Σ Capital Funding: Many improvements to local centres (for example in terms of access, the quality of the environment or safety issues) require capital resources to deliver. The availability of capital funding is therefore a significant factor in determining how much progress is possible.

Σ Revenue Funding: Certain initiatives – such as centre management – require revenue funding, and so in these specific cases the availability of revenue funding is also important. Capital investments can produce either revenue savings or costs. For example, the installation of CCTV systems, or additional landscaping schemes can increase revenue costs. While revenue funding is not usually required for the initial introduction of such schemes, it is essential for their long-term maintenance.

Capital Funding

6.3   Capital funding for investment in local centres has come from a variety of sources in the past. Two of the most important have been the Council's own capital programme and specific regeneration programmes, such as SRB, ERDF and NRF. These have often been used in combination to secure a 'cocktail' of funding for a particular centre, and it is likely that this approach will need to continue.

6.4   In 2001, the Local Centres Regeneration Programme was established as a focus for the Council's own capital expenditure on local centres, and as a basis for providing the 'matched funding' which is usually necessary to secure resources from elsewhere. It is important that this programme is maintained, both to provide match funding to enable extended funds to be drawn down, and to ensure that funding is available to support expenditure in all parts of the city, given that regeneration programmes are usually limited to particular areas.

6.5   Specific regeneration programmes and the potential to 'lever' resources from other public sector sources inevitably varies over time. There will therefore also be a continuing need to adopt a pro-active approach to the identification of opportunities to secure capital funding for local centres from sources such as these. It should also be recognised that geographically defined sources of funding may not match the City Council's priority areas and in such circumstances a flexible and opportunistic approach may be needed in order to maximise external funds potentially available to benefit the City.

6.6   There is also some potential to secure funding from the private sector and this is considered below.

Revenue Funding

6.7 The issue of revenue funding for local centres has not previously been explicitly addressed. The Local Centres Programme deals only with capital expenditure. However, as already noted, there are two areas where the need for revenue funding should be recognised.

6.8 The first of these is to take account of the on-going revenue costs of capital investment. Initiatives such as the introduction of CCTV generate on-going costs in terms of maintaining the system once it is installed. Similarly, additional street furniture, paving and landscaping will also generate additional maintenance costs. It is essential that there is certainty that any such additional costs can be met before such initiatives are undertaken.

6.9 Secondly, there are certain initiatives which depend upon revenue funding, the most prominent being centre management. The benefits of this approach have been clearly demonstrated and there is potential for it to be funded from the private sector in the longer term, but without some input of public resources at the outset, progress is unlikely to be made. The City Council will therefore need to consider the possibility of identifying resources to fund centre-management initiatives, perhaps for a short term period, in one or more of the larger local centres. The intention would then be that the longer term funding would be picked up locally.

The Private Sector

6.10 Direct investment by the private sector within centres is obviously one way in which private funding can contribute to the delivery of the objectives of this strategy. Arising from this, there is potential to generate funding for wider enhancement measures through the negotiation of S106 agreements, providing that a 'planning' justification for any such requirements exists. This type of funding will only be available in centres where development opportunities exist, and will only be significant where these opportunities are on a substantial scale. However, in these

circumstances S106 agreements can make an important contribution (including to future maintenance funding) and it is important that maximum advantage is taken of their potential.

Retailers/Local Businesses

6.11 Improving local centres is aimed at delivering benefits to the community as a whole, but within this, centre enhancements can be expected to deliver particular benefits to the traders and local businesses that operate from within the centre. Where this is the case, it is not unreasonable to expect traders to make a contribution towards the cost of initiatives which specifically benefit them. Examples would include shop front improvement schemes, promotional events, such as festive lights, and the on-going costs of initiatives such as CCTV or centre management.

6.12 As a general principle therefore, contributions from local businesses should be sought when such initiatives are considered. This might be through a one-off contribution for a particular activity. However, in the longer term, there may also be an opportunity to develop a more permanent arrangement, for example, through a Business Improvement District-type arrangement, and this should be encouraged.

Summary

(i) Staffing and financial resources will continue to be insufficient to address all of the issues within local centres at once, so it will continue to be necessary to establish priorities. This will be done through the Local Centres Regeneration Programme

(ii) The City Council will continue to provide capital funding for local centres through the Local Centres Regeneration Programme and this will be used to construct a broader programme drawing in funding from other sources as appropriate.

(iii) The revenue implications of capital investment schemes will be fully addressed before such schemes are implemented.

(iv) Consideration will be given to the identification of resources to fund centre-management initiatives on a short term basis in respect of one or more of the larger local centres.

(v) Maximum advantage will be taken of the potential of S106 agreements to fund wider centre enhancements when new developments are proposed, providing that a planning justification for this exists.

(vi) As a general principle, financial contributions will be sought from local traders/businesses when initiatives are proposed which will directly benefit them. Encouragement will also be given to the establishment of Business Improvement District-type arrangements as a means of providing more permanent funding for local centres.

7.1   As noted in the previous section, there is a continuing need to prioritise actions. This section seeks to identify the key priorities which should apply over the next 3 to 4 years. These priorities will need to be taken forward in a variety of ways, including :

■ The development process, including decisions on planning applications and future reviews of the Unitary Development Plan under the new development planning system.

■ Pro-active management of the City Council's land ownerships within and adjoining centres.

■ Specific regeneration initiatives undertaken through the Local Centres Regeneration Programme.

■ The development of the emerging Growth Agenda.

■ The development and implementation of transport priorities.

■ Capital funding allocations.

■ Securing support for the strategy from external organisations, such as the Primary Care Trusts, the Police, Advantage West Midlands, retailers and local traders.

7.2   Local centres have been identified as important by a number of District Committees and this is reflected in some District Community Strategies. There is the potential for complementary action to take place at the District level in support of local centre regeneration and for this to play a significant role. Priorities for District-level action are also identified.

City-Wide Priorities

7.3   The following are identified as the key strategic priorities at the City-wide level:

(i) To pursue measures to address the gaps in provision identified on Map 3.2 and described in para 3.13.

(ii) To pursue measures to reduce the number of centres experiencing very high levels of vacancy, as set out in Table 5.1.

(iii) To continue to provide capital funding for local centres through the Local Centres Regeneration Programme and to review the priorities it establishes in line with the following criteria, each of which should be given equal weight:

■ The need to address the gap areas identified in this Strategy;

■ The health of the centre, and in particular the need to address the problems of declining centres;

■ The needs of the area, and in particular the extent to which the area experiences high levels of deprivation;

■ The potential of the centre to attract new investment/development;

■ The strength of local partnerships and traders/ retailers association and the potential to generate private sector contributions to support long term regeneration.

(iv) To continue to take a pro-active approach to the identification of other sources of funding to support local centre initiatives.

(v) To support the principle of centre management and to seek to establish it in the larger local centres not currently benefiting from it (Sutton Coldfield, Northfield, Kings Heath and Coventry Road, Small Heath).

District Level Priorities

7.4   The following are identified as priorities at the District level:

(i) To review the need for action to improve local centres through the District Community Planning process.

(ii) To consider ways of improving the co-ordination and delivery of public services within local centres and to work to establish local centre partnerships in suitable cases.

(iii) To identify important smaller centres and local shopping parades and any requirements for improvements.

(iv) To identify any localised areas with inadequate access to local shops and services.

Introduction

8.1   There is a clear need for the impact of this Strategy to be monitored and kept under review. This needs to happen at both the City-wide level, and at the level of individual centres where improvement initiatives are being promoted.

City-wide Monitoring

8.2   There are problems in monitoring the performance of local centres because of the lack of published data at a local level on vacancies, shop numbers, turnover etc. This means that the only way in which this data can be collected is through purpose designed surveys. In view of the number of centres in Birmingham this is a substantial task. The Council has undertaken comprehensive surveys at regular intervals in the past - 1984, 1994 and 2004 - and such surveys should be repeated at similar intervals in the future, in order to provide a comprehensive overall picture of the status of local centres within the City, but it is unlikely to be feasible to undertake them more frequently.

8.3   While this form of monitoring is important, it is not capable of providing a basis for more frequent review. More regular monitoring, preferably annual, of key indicators should therefore be undertaken. This will include:

■ Vacancy levels.

■ New development, completions and commitments.

■ Shop numbers.

8.4   In addition to this progress on the delivery of the Local Centres Regeneration Programme will also be monitored again on an annual basis, and the broader economic/market context affecting local centres will also be kept under review.

Centre Level Monitoring

8.5   There is also a need to measure the impact of specific regeneration programmes on individual centres. In the past monitoring has taken place to satisfy the needs of particular spending programmes (and this will need to continue) but this has not been undertaken on a consistent basis.

8.6   The availability of consistent data is again a problem in monitoring at the local level. In the absence of published data this is likely to require local survey work, and it will be important to ensure that the costs (including staff time) associated with carrying out such surveys are proportional to the scale of the programme. There can also be difficulties in interpreting data at a local level, in terms of disentangling the impact of a particular local initiative from wider social and economic changes (e.g changes in vacancy levels may result from specific local factors, or from broader changes in retail expenditure levels and the wider economy).

8.7   Despite these difficulties it is important to assess the impact of local centre programmes to the extent that this can reasonably be achieved, since this provides the only means of assessing the effectiveness of different types of intervention. The following simple approach should therefore be followed:

■ Each local centre regeneration programme should have clearly stated objectives, and a clear indication of the impact which the programme is intended to achieve, including the identification of relevant indicators against which progress can be assessed.

■ Before the implementation of the programme begins baseline data in relation to these indicators should be collected.

■ About a year after the completion of the programme, this baseline data should be updated, and a brief report should be produced identifying changes, the reasons for these and assessing the impact of the programme.

8.8 The appropriate indicators to be used will depend on the nature of the programme, local circumstance, and also data availability, and so it is not possible to be prescriptive about this. However the following should be considered:

- Vacancy levels.

- Diversity of uses (i.e. how many properties are in use for different functions).

- Retailer representation (i.e. the range and type of shops available).

- Pedestrian flows.

- Parking turnover.

- Number and quality of car parking spaces.

- Public transport accessibility (number of bus services, location of stopping points etc).

- Crime levels.

- Environmental quality.

- Private sector investment.

- Local traders' perceptions.

- Local community perceptions.

- Employment.

Summary

(i) Regular city-wide surveys of local centre performance will continue to be undertaken.

(ii) More frequent surveys, preferably annual, of certain key indicators, will be undertaken, and there will also be regular review of progress on the delivery of the Local Centres Regeneration Programme.

(iii) There should also be consistent monitoring of the impact of individual local centre programmes in line with the approach set out in para 8.8, and the cost of this should be allowed for at the outset.

REVIEW OF 2001 LOCAL CENTRES STRATEGY

Introduction

A1.1   The 2001 Local Centres Strategy identifies a series of six themes as the focus for future activity. This appendix briefly reviews the progress which has been made in relation to each of these themes.

Preparation of Local Action Plans

A1.2   The Strategy recognises that local centres are individual and distinctive places, and advocates the preparation of Local Action Plans as a means of identifying solutions, tailored to particular local circumstances. It indicates that these plans should be prepared in partnership with the local community, local businesses and Ward Committees. It also seeks to broaden the scope of such plans to include a wider range of social and economic as well as land use issues, but recognises the need for them to continue to be produced as Supplementary Planning Guidance, within the context of the statutory development planning system.

A1.3   Considerable progress has been made in preparing Local Action Plans. Plans are in place for the following centres:

- Balsall Heath
- Dudley Road
- Erdington
- Fox and Goose
- Maypole
- Moseley
- Northfield
- Selly Oak
- Soho Road
- Stirchley
- Swan and Yew Tree
- Walmley

and plans are in preparation for a number of others:

- Frankley
- Kings Heath

Feasibility studies have been undertaken for several other Centres, including Hawthorn Road, Lea Village and Weoley Castle.

A1.4   These plans have been produced as Supplementary Planning Guidance. However, changes to the development planning system introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 mean that this will normally no longer be possible. Under the new system if plans identify sites for development, they will need to be produced as Development Plan Documents, (and will be subject to Public Inquiry procedures). This is a relatively complex process, which is unlikely to be appropriate in every case. So, while the principle that intervention in local centres should be plan-led remains, there will need to be greater flexibility over the process to be followed in individual cases.

Building on Success

A1.5   The Strategy identifies that many of Birmingham's centres are successful places, and have the potential to attract more activity, but notes that this potential is often being constrained as a result of capacity or infrastructure constraints. It identified the need for public intervention to release this untapped potential.

A1.6   The Strategy specifically identifies Northfield as a centre falling into this category. In this instance, the main constraint resulted from the impact of traffic, which will shortly be addressed through the construction of the Northfield Relief Road. New investment has already been attracted to this centre in the form of a new Sainsbury's Supermarket, and the completion of the Relief Road will provide further opportunities.

A1.7   Addressing issues such as this is clearly important in promoting successful centres - but the range of 'factors for success' is wider than simply questions of infrastructure capacity. This is addressed in the revised Strategy.

Managing Decline

A1.8   The existing Strategy also recognises that some centres have suffered from persistent, deep-seated decline. In these cases it advocates positive action to address this, if necessary through conversion/redevelopment of surplus retail units to other uses.

A1.9   Stirchley was identified as an example of a centre within this category. There are now opportunities to re-invigorate this centre as a result of proposed investment by Tesco. Soho Road is another example of a centre which has seen its fortunes transformed, as a result of a package of environmental and business support measures. However, it is clear that simply attracting new development to a centre does not necessarily deal with problems of vacant and obsolescent property (as for example in the case of Coventry Road, Small Heath) and it will not always be a practical solution in any event. The problems of decline remain in a small, but persistent number of centres, and more radical measures to address this may need to be developed.

Filling in Gaps in the Network of Centres

A1.10   The original Strategy identifies a need to review the existing network of centres within Birmingham to identify any gaps in existing provision. It particularly suggests that it may be appropriate to:

- Identify a 'standard' of accessibility by different means of transport to convenience shopping facilities or to other local services.

- Review existing provision to identify if, and where gaps exist.

- Identify strategies to overcome any deficiencies.

It is recognised that further research would be required to deliver this.

A1.11   This further research was carried out during 2002-03 by C B Richard Ellis, and the results are contained in the Birmingham Local Centres Study. The results are incorporated in the revised Strategy.

Centre Management

A1.12   The existing Strategy notes the success of town centre management in the context of the City Centre, and advocates that the principles of this approach should be extended to local centres.

A1.13   Town Centre management initiatives have been undertaken in relation to some large local centres, notably Sutton Coldfield, Northfield and Erdington. It is also now being extended to Washwood Heath and Sparkbrook. The most well established of these is Erdington where it is generally recognised that the initiative has had considerable success. This success is closely related to the formation of a broadly-based town centre partnership.

A1.14   There is no real doubt as to the value of the town centre management approach. However, questions remain in relation to how it can be funded on a sustainable basis, and the potential to extend it more widely than the larger local centres.

Local Centre Action Programme

A1.15   The Strategy identified a need for the City Council to establish a capital programme for investment in local centre improvements. This would provide a basis on which additional funding could be levered from other sources, including the private sector. In advocating this, the Strategy also recognised that whatever level of funding is provided, it would be insufficient to meet the needs of all centres at once, and so it would be necessary to establish priorities.

A1.16   The Local Centres Regeneration Programme was subsequently approved in November 2001. To date £5.5 million has been spent under this programme. This includes £3.3 million levered from external sources, such as ERDF and SRB.

A1.17   Under this programme centres were prioritised into four categories:

Category 1
Centres with resources committed but more investment needed.

Category 2
Centres where preparatory work had been undertaken, but more investment was required within three years.

Category 3
Centres where preparatory work was now required.

Category 4
Centres to be considered in the longer term.

A1.18   In terms of implementing this programme, plans and funding are now in place for all centres in Category 1 and some in Category 2, preparatory work is underway in relation to some centres in Category 3, but plans and funding are in place in relation to only one centre in this category, and there has been little progress in relation to Category 4.

A1.19   It will be appropriate to review the Regeneration Programme, in the light of this revised Strategy.

2 APPENDIX

Introduction

A2.1   Since the adoption of the Local Centres Strategy, a significant amount of research has taken place, and there have been a number of new or revised policy initiatives which have a bearing on local centres. The most important of these are briefly summarised below.

The Birmingham Local Centres Study

A2.2   This study was commissioned by the City Council and carried out by CB Richard Ellis in 2002-03 to take forward issues identified in the Local Centres Strategy. The Study reviewed the current economic and market trends affecting centres, sought to identify 'standards' of accessibility to existing facilities, in particular convenience shopping, and reviewed the existing distribution of facilities within Birmingham to identify any 'gap' areas. It then suggested approaches to address these gaps, and provided general advice on measures to strengthen local centres. A feature of the study was its use of case studies of a selection of Birmingham Centres, alongside national data in order to inform its conclusion, which have been fed into the revised Local Centres Strategy.

The North West Centres Study

A2.3   This study has the full title 'Unlocking the Potential of Local Centres Across the Smethwick and North West Birmingham Areas'. It was commissioned by the Smethwick Regeneration Partnership, funded by AWM and carried out by DTZ Pieda. Like the Birmingham Local Centres Study, it reviews the economic trends influencing the fortunes of local centres generally, but then focuses in more detail on the centres in the North West Birmingham and Smethwick area, providing detailed, costed proposals for the regeneration of these centres. Its general conclusions have been fed into the revised Local Centres Strategy, and its proposals for North West Birmingham will be taken

forward through the preparation of a Development Plan Document for that area.

Local Facilities Survey

A2.4   In 2004 the City Council undertook a major household survey to identify shopping patterns across the City. This updates previous surveys undertaken in 1994 and 1984. These surveys enable the changes in the strength and status of centres to be charted over time and the extent of catchment areas to be assessed. The survey also provides information on a range of other factors, such as mode of travel to centres, frequency of trips, and perceptions of centres. The information provided by this survey has been used to inform the revised Strategy and will also be available for use in relation to detailed work on individual centres, and to support future monitoring of activities within centres.

Local Centres Scrutiny Review

A2.5   Undertaken during 2004/05, this review looked in detail at the Council's work in relation to local centres over the past few years and proposed recommendations for improvements, including revisions to the Local Centres Strategy.   The Review was approved by the City Council in April 2005, and has been a significant input into this revised Strategy. The Post Office Closure Scrutiny Review which responded to proposals by the Post Office for the closure of a significant number of post offices in the City, also made proposals in relation to local centres.

Localisation and District Plans

A2.6   The development of the localisation agenda since the adoption of the existing Strategy in 2001 has provided another dimension to local centres work. A number of Ward Committees chose to use Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocations to fund local centres initiatives, examples being Erdington where it has funded the town centre management initiative, and Weoley Castle, where it has funded environmental enhancements. Following the

creation of District Committees in 2004, many Districts have identified improvements to their local centres as a priority in their District Plans. The potential for local initiatives created by the new arrangements is very welcome, and needs to be reflected in the revised Strategy.

The Council Plan 2005

A2.7   The importance of local centres has been reflected in successive versions of the Council Plan, and this continues to be the case. The Review of the Local Centres Strategy is identified as a specific objective.

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres

A2.8   Published in March 2005, PPS6 sets out national planning policy towards town centres. Its approach aims to promote the role of centres and it seeks to encourage local planning authorities to take a more pro-active role in supporting centres. Specifically, it requires local authorities through their development plans to:

■ Identify a network and hierarchy of centres in their area, and define the boundaries for these centres.

■ Assess the need for new floorspace for retail, leisure and other town centre uses.

■ Identify sites and locations to accommodate the planned level of growth, in line with the 'sequential approach' which states that preference should first be given to in-centre sites, then to edge-of-centre sites, and only then to out-of-centre sites.

These requirements will need to be taken forward in due course through a review of the relevant sections of the Council's Development Plan, but it is important that the Local Centres Strategy is consistent with the overall approach.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDS)

A2.9   BIDS provide a mechanism whereby, after a favourable vote, businesses within a defined area can agree to pay an additional business rate to be used to fund additional services within the area. Examples might include the provision of street wardens, or a town centre manager. Birmingham's first BID is on Broad Street in the City Centre, but the concept also has potential to be applied to local centres, and this is being considered in realtion to Erdington and Kings Heath. However, experience suggests that a significant amount of work is usually necessary to create local partnerships and commitment before a BID vote is likely to be successful.

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

A2.10   This Act introduced a number of changes to the planning system, and introduced measures aimed at speeding up the compulsory purchase process. So far as planning is concerned, the most significant changes have been in relation to the development planning process.

The previous requirement for a single Unitary Development Plan, which in Birmingham was supplemented by more detailed Supplementary Planning Guidance, will gradually be replaced by a new multi-plan system comprising Development Plan Documents (which will form part of the Development Plan and be subject to a Public Inquiry), and Supplementary Planning Documents (which will not form part of the Development Plan and will not be subject to a public inquiry). This has implications for the status that we choose to give to Local Centre Action Plans in the future.

The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

A2.11   The Council's statutory planning policies towards local centres are contained in the Birmingham UDP 2005. The plan does not fully take into account the new national planning policies towards town centres contained in PPS6 (see Para A2.8) and so the relevant sections will

need to be revised to bring them into line with these policies. This review will take place under the new development planning system introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (see Para A2.10).

Birmingham Housing Strategy

A2.12   The Housing Strategy sets out the priorities for improving housing and housing services within the context of social, economic and demographic change. The Housing Strategy has five priority themes:

- ■ Improving the quality of housing management services and tackling anti-social behaviour

- ■ Providing housing support facilities to vulnerable households to prevent homelessness and enable people to live independently

- ■ Achieving Government targets for all social housing to meet the decent home standard and for all vulnerable households living in the private sector to have the opportunity to live in a decent home by 2010.

- ■ Responding to the changing demand for housing through housing market renewal

- ■ Increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Quality local centres are especially relevant to the theme of changing demand. There is a need to improve the quality of all aspects of neighbourhoods, including housing and local centres.

Community Strategy

A2.13   Birmingham's Community Strategy provides an over-arching context for improvements to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the City and for the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. The Strategy has recently been revised, and covers the period 2005 – 2010. The Strategy has three key themes:

- ■ Improving and modernising the city and public services.

- ■ Making Birmingham more attractive and reversing population decline.

- ■ Reducing inequalities and increasing opportunity in all parts of the City.

The Community Strategy recognises that there is a continuing need to support the development of local centres.

Economic Strategy

A2.14   The City's Economic Strategy was revised in 2005. It aims to build on Birmingham's recent economic renaissance, by securing a strong and sustainable economy to benefit everyone. Within this overall objective, it puts forward a range of strategic objectives, supported by more specific key actions. Amongst these is a commitment "to create long-term viability of local centres through a programme of works for the upgrading of the public realm, redevelopment of derelict sites and improvement and refurbishment of property in private, City Council and other public sector ownership". Within this context the revised Local Centres Strategy needs to give proper priority to the economic and employment benefits which successful local centres can provide.

The Revised Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order

A2.15   The Use Classes Order sets out a categorisation of land uses for the purposes of planning control – planning permission normally being required for a property to change from one use to another. The revised Use Classes Order introduced changes to these categories, introducing new separate classes for public houses and for take-away restaurants. These changes have implications for detailed policy approaches within centres.

Regional Economic Strategy

A2.16   The Regional Economic Strategy, produced by Advantage West Midlands, aim to promote the creation of wealth through enterprise, and to provide access to opportunity for all. It recognises the potential of rejuvenated local centres to offer their communities high quality services and promote social cohesion. It also notes the role of centres as a focus for growth and the potential benefits of policy mechanisms such as Business Improvement Districts.

3 APPENDIX

REVIEW OF SOCIAL/ECONOMIC CONTEXT

A3.1   Shopping, and in particular food shopping has traditionally been the key activity for local centres. Retailing in the UK is a highly dynamic industry, which seeks to respond rapidly to changing consumer preferences. Developments within the retail industry are therefore of fundamental importance to the future health of local centres.

A3.2   This is also true of the leisure, entertainment and service sectors, which are also increasingly important in many local centres.

A3.3   The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the key economic and market trends. In so doing they draw upon the research referred to in Appendix 2.

A3.4   There are a number of trends which are likely to be unfavourable to local centres in the next few years:

■ The growth in retail sales can be expected to slow. Retail sales growth fuels expansion in the retail sector and has been at exceptionally high levels until the recent slowdown. While the medium to long-term trend is still for growth, this is likely to be at more modest levels than in the recent past. Since most recent sales growth occurs in the comparison sector, this may have relatively little impact on smaller local centres, which depend primarily on convenience retailing.

■ The number of independent retailers is likely to continue to decline in the face of competition from the national multiple retailers. This is a national trend which has been continuing for 20-30 years and shows no sign of coming to an end. It has a direct impact on local centres, where independent retailers usually occupy a larger proportion of shop units than in large town or city centres.

■ Multiple retailers are likely to continue to seek larger premises in order to enable them to trade more efficiently. This creates an increasing mismatch between the demands of retailers and the type of property available in many local centres. The result can be a drop in demand for small shop units and a rise in vacancies.

■ Partly arising from this, there is likely to be a continued polarisation of comparison retail sales to larger centres, with a wider choice of shop unit sizes and broader catchment areas.

■ E-commerce is likely to grow with greater rapidity. After a slow start, e-commerce is becoming increasingly important particularly in the service sectors (banking, insurance, travel etc) and certain retail sectors (music and books etc). Most predictions are for this growth to continue at an increasing rate, and this is likely to limit the potential for growth in High Street sales.

■ The major food retailers are likely to continue to press for new larger or extended superstores and to seek to expand the range of goods and services which they provide. This will be a continuing challenge for more traditional High Street convenience retailing.

■ There is likely to be a continued decline in the national Post Office network. The UK has one of the densest network of post offices in Europe and proposals to reduce the network have already been put forward in Birmingham.

■ There are likely to be continued reductions in bank and building society branch networks, as banks respond to the increasing use of the internet for financial services.

■ There are likely to be continuing reductions in the overall number of public houses, with demand focussing on large themed bars, rather than small neighbourhood pubs.

■ The effects of extended opening hours for licensed premises and of deregulation in other areas (such as pharmacies and newspaper distribution) remains uncertain.

A3.5   There are, however, some more positive trends:

- The planning regime is now at its most restrictive towards new out-of-centre retail and leisure developments. This is beginning to force retailers to reconsider in-centre locations, providing that the right size and quality of retail unit can be provided.

- Value-oriented comparison retailing has become a growth area. This may provide opportunities for the larger local centres.

- Most of the large foodstore operators have developed a range of formats, including smaller 'niche' stores. The development of such stores may be a growth area and may be appropriate to certain local centres.

- The discount food retailers continue to seek expansion. Because their stores are smaller in size, there is potential for them to be more readily accommodated in local centres than larger formats.

- The trend towards eating out is likely to continue, and there is therefore likely to be continuing demand for restaurants and take-aways.

- The diversity of the City's population means that there is also likely to be continuing demand for shops aimed at meeting the needs of particular minority ethnic communities, a market which is not met by the national multiples.

A3.6   These trends need to be set in the context of survey data which continues to show that people attach great importance to their local centres, and to the continued availability of local facilities. The problem appears to be that despite this concern, the actual use of these facilities has declined, with inevitable consequences for their continued economic viability.

A3.7   Finally, three broader issues which may have implications for the role and use of local centres should be noted:

- For the past 30 years Birmingham's population has been in decline. This process has now been halted, and there is now the potential for a future increase in population. The benefits of population growth can be seen in the City Centre where it has led to a significant expansion in foodstore provision. Similar effects could be expected elsewhere if real population growth at a local level is achieved through the emerging 'Growth Agenda'.

- Per capita expenditure levels in Birmingham are below national average levels. This reflects the high levels of unemployment and low levels of economic activity which have affected, and continue to affect, certain parts of the City. Continued strengthening of the City's economy and the implementation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy aim to reduce this gap. If these approaches are successful spending power will increase and the benefits of this should feed through to local centres, particularly in areas which have experienced the highest levels of deprivation.

- There are likely to be continued changes in the delivery of public services in the local government and health sectors. Localisation is currently one of the themes underpinning this process, and this may create opportunities to focus certain forms of investment in certain local centres (eg. primary health care facilities), providing that appropriate sites can be identified.

CONTACT

Martin Eade
Team Leader
Planning Strategy
Alpha Tower
Suffolk Street Queensway
Birmingham
B1 1TU

Tel : 0121 303 3430
E-mail : martin.eade@birmingham.gov.uk

Most Birmingham City Council publications can be made available in alternative formats or languages.

If you have difficulty reading this document please call us on (0121) 303 3030 to ask if a full or summary version can be made available in large print, another format or another language.

If you have hearing difficulties please call us via Typetalk 18001 0121 303 3030 or e-mail us at: info@devdir@birmingham .gov.uk

BIRMINGHAM
Local Centres Strategy

JULY 2006

Birmingham City Council