

1. Content and Main Objectives of the SAD and AAP

1.1 Introduction

By law, all local plans must be subject to sustainability appraisal (SA) before they are formally approved. A SA is an assessment of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan. The main purpose of this is to identify any potentially significant negative effects of the plan before it is finalised, so that where possible, the plan can be modified to prevent, reduce or offset such effects. A SA can also identify potential beneficial effects, and opportunities for development to contribute positively towards sustainable development.

This report is about the sustainability appraisal (SA) of the Walsall Site Allocation Document (SAD), and the Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP), which are due to be published by Walsall Council for a final round of public consultation in March 2016. This chapter provides an overview of the content and objectives of the SAD and AAP. The rest of the report explains how the SA has been carried out, the evidence used in the appraisal, the outcomes of the appraisal, and how it has influenced the content of the published plans, including the alternative options considered and the reasons for the choices made.

There is a legal requirement to carry out a sustainability appraisal of all local plans such as the SAD and AAP.¹ It is also a requirement under separate legislation to carry out another type of assessment called a **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**. This comes from a European Union Directive.² The requirements for SA, SEA, EqIA and HIA have been integrated into a single assessment framework, to avoid unnecessary duplication, given the overlaps in the range of issues that each type of assessment is expected to cover.

Chapter 2 explains the relationship between the SA and these other assessments in further detail (see Section 2.2), and **Appendix P** summarises how the requirements of the SEA Regulations have been met within the SA work undertaken to date. Chapters 6 - 8 of the SA Report summarise the potential effects of the SAD and AAP on the environment, equality and health identified at each key stage of the SA, and how potential harmful effects have been mitigated through the choice of Options and plan content.

¹ Section 19 of Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

² The “Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Directive” (SEA Directive) 2001/42/EC which has been transposed into UK legislation through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (SI 2004 No. 1633) (SEA Regulations)

1.2 Reasons for Preparing the SAD and AAP

The main reasons for preparing the SAD and AAP are to provide locally specific guidance setting out how the key requirements of the BCCS will be delivered in Walsall, and to update the site allocations identified in the Walsall UDP some of which are now out-of-date. In particular, the plans will:

- Review the site allocations on the UDP Proposals Map and Walsall Town Centre Inset Map, in the light of the spatial strategy established in the BCCS;
- Provide greater certainty for investors and ensure delivery of the BCCS spatial strategy, as indicated in the BCCS Inspectors' Report (October 2010);
- Identify an adequate supply of specific, developable sites for housing development, sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing and to meet the targets set by the BCCS, as required by current national planning policy guidance (NPPF paragraph 47);
- Allocate sufficient sites for gypsies, travellers and travelling show-people, based on the requirements identified in the BCCS and the most recent assessments of future local needs in Walsall;
- Identify and allocate sites for employment development, in order to maintain the Borough's economic base and encourage new investment, as recent technical work on employment land and employment needs has identified a serious shortage of readily available vacant employment land in Walsall;
- Provide a strategy for investment in Walsall Town Centre - the Town Centre is the most important economic focus in the Borough and the place that should be most able to attract new investment. The BCCS evidence base has raised concerns that it will lose market share if it is unable to compete with other centres and out-of-centre developments elsewhere;
- Identify the most appropriate locations for investment and development in the Town Centre so that these can be targeted and effectively co-ordinated with

necessary infrastructure improvements, including environmental and management improvements; and

- Quantify the requirements for delivery of any new infrastructure needed in Walsall to support the levels of development and growth proposed in the BCCS, to inform the development of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regime, which will contribute towards the cost of infrastructure that cannot be provided through planning obligations or other funding mechanisms.

The SAD and AAP will be part of the Local Plan for Walsall along with the BCCS and any remaining saved policies from the Walsall UDP 2005. They will also help to deliver other plans and strategies prepared by the Council and its partners, such as those identified in Chapter 3 above.

1.3 Scope and Content of the SAD and AAP

The SAD and AAP are plans for future land use and development in Walsall. Both plans will form part of the Local Plan (statutory development plan) for Walsall Borough once they are formally approved ('adopted') by the Council.

Figures 1 and 2 show the areas covered by the SAD and AAP. The two plans will cover the whole of Walsall Borough, with the exception of the five District Centres (Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall). There are 'saved' policies and Inset Maps for the District Centres in the Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP), adopted in April 2005. These may be reviewed at a later date as and when resources permit.

The SAD and AAP have built on the framework for land use and development already established through the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS), adopted in February 2011. The BCCS covers the whole of the Black Country, including the adjoining authorities of Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton as well as Walsall, and provides a strategic planning framework for development in the area up to 2026.

The BCCS identifies broad locations for development in Walsall, and identifies Walsall Town Centre as the strategic centre for Walsall (see Figures 3 and 4). However, it does not allocate land for development. The main role of the SAD and AAP is therefore to deliver the BCCS

strategy in Walsall, by allocating sufficient land for housing, industry, shopping, offices and other development to meet the requirements identified in the BCCS. The AAP will also provide a detailed strategy and framework for the regeneration of the strategic centre.

Both plans will therefore include the following elements:

- **Policies Map** - showing sites proposed for protection/ safeguarding, and sites proposed for new development; and
- **Site Allocation Policies** – identifying specific requirements for new development proposed on or near to the sites identified on the Policies Maps.

The preparation of the SAD and AAP has involved reviewing many of the existing ‘saved’ policies in the Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in April 2005, for example, the site allocations shown on the UDP Proposals Map, some of which are now out-of-date. Where appropriate, the plans will also help to deliver other plans and strategies prepared by the Council and its partners. Chapter 3 below explains the relationship of the SAD and AAP to the BCCS and to other land use plans in more detail.

As the SAD and AAP have been prepared in parallel, the appraisals for each plan have been carried out at the same time, allowing inter-related and cross-boundary effects on sustainability to be identified and evaluated. The appraisals have been carried out by Council officers, but at certain key stages in the SA process the outcomes of the appraisal and the emerging reports have been reviewed by specialist consultants Ursus Consulting Ltd, who were appointed as the Council’s SA advisors in 2011.

Figure 1: Walsall Site Allocations Document (SAD) – Area Covered by Plan

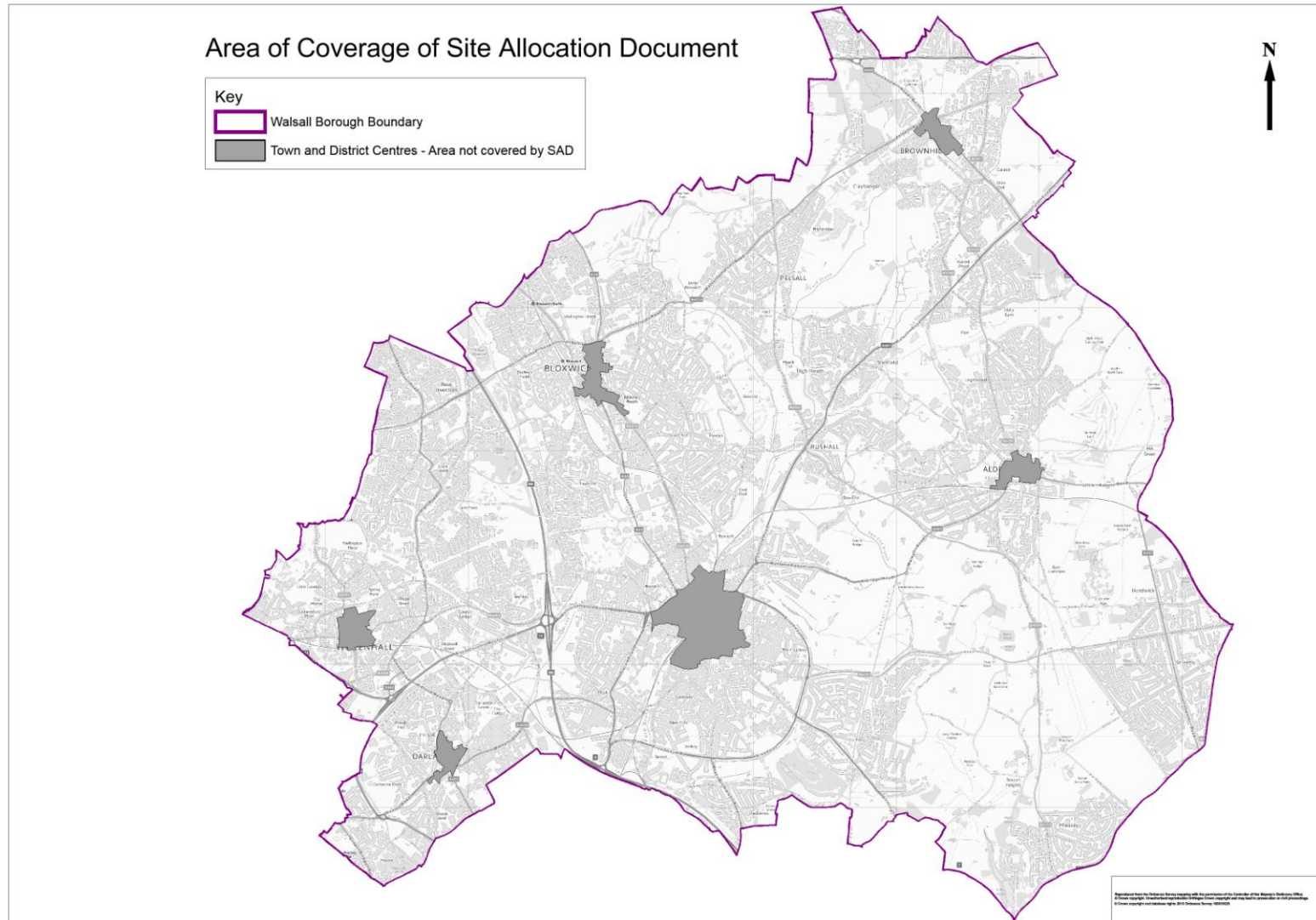


Figure 2: Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) – Area Covered by Plan

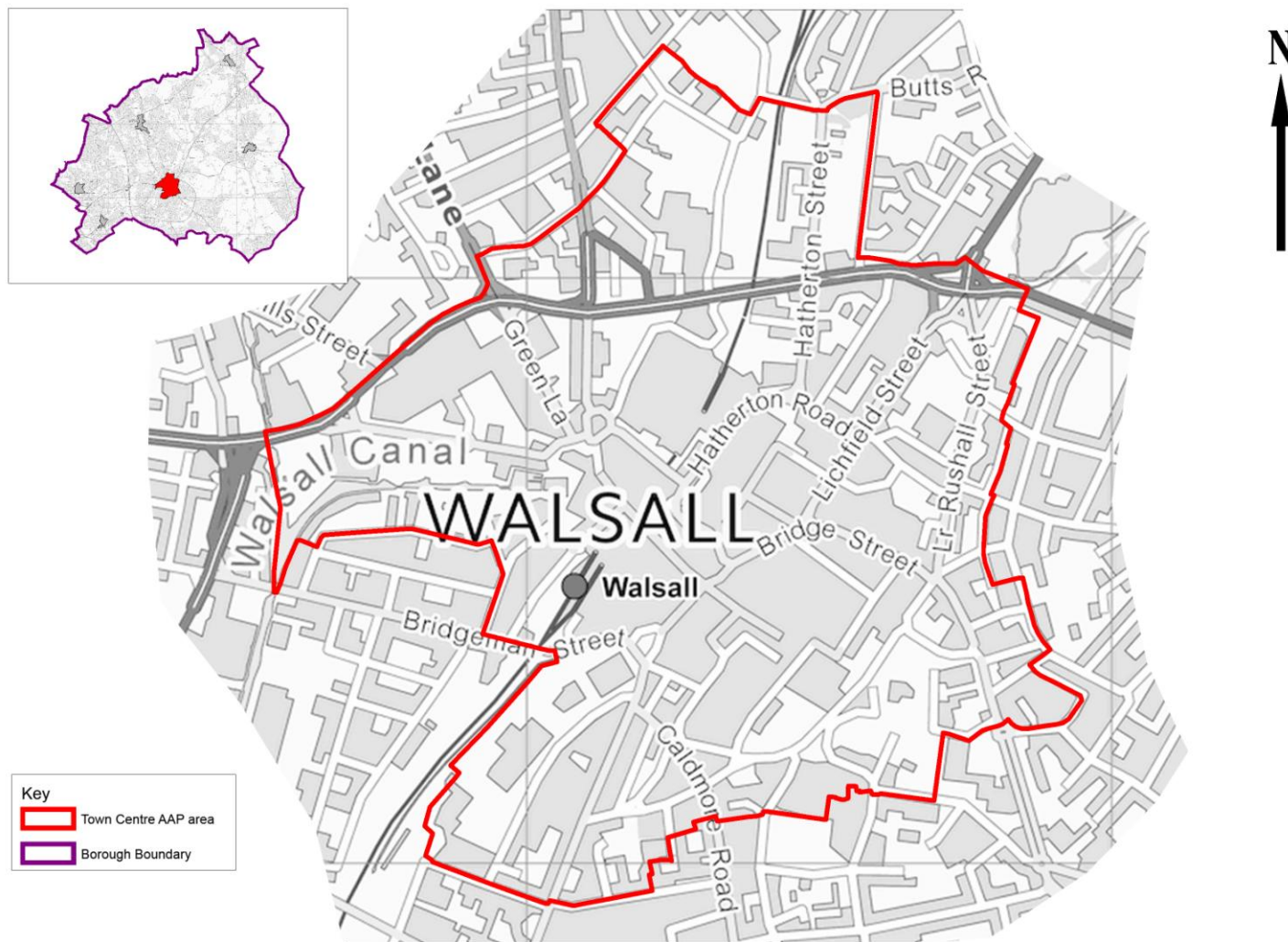


Figure 3: Black Country Core Strategy 2011 – Spatial Strategy

Black Country Joint Core Strategy - Key Diagram

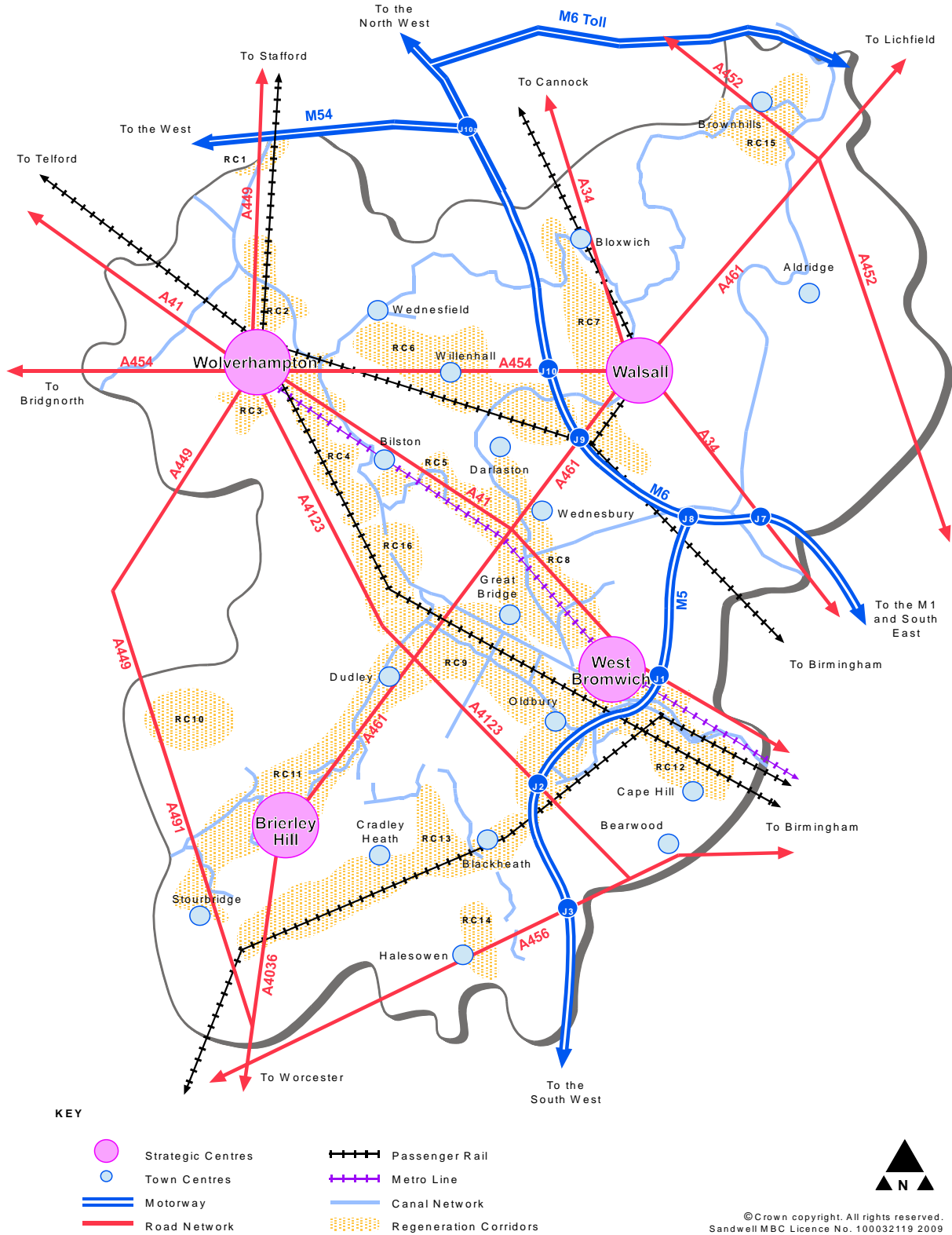
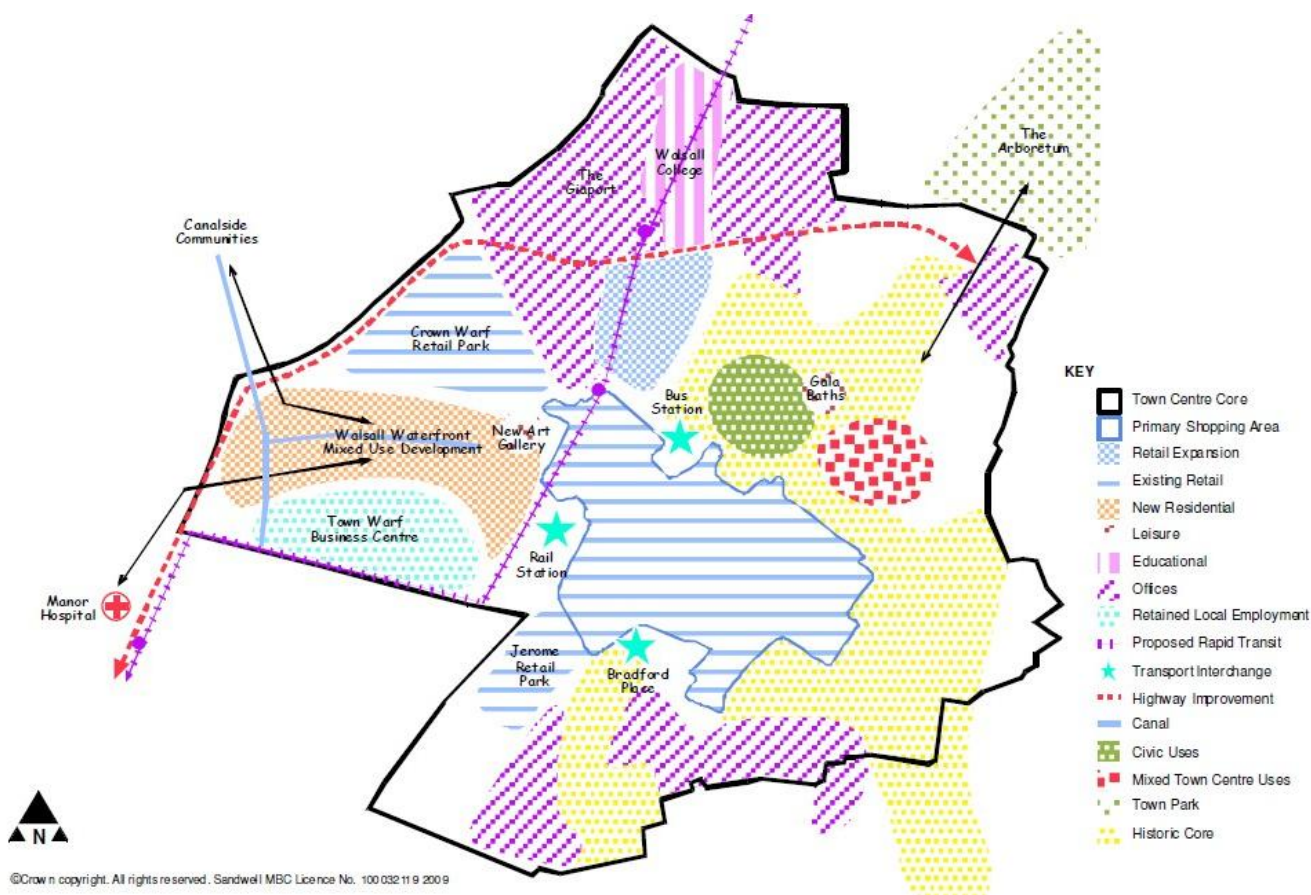


Figure 4: Black Country Core Strategy 2011 – Walsall Town Centre Key Diagram



1.4 SAD and AAP Objectives

The Council has identified ten objectives for each plan. The SAD objectives are based on the BCCS Spatial Objectives (see Chapter 3), but are more locally specific, reflecting the Council’s aspirations for Walsall Borough. The AAP objectives have been developed out of the objectives for the Strategic Centre identified in the BCCS, the objectives of the Council’s Corporate Plan, and the Council’s aspirations for the regeneration of the Town Centre.

The Objectives for each plan have been reviewed and refined at each key stage in plan preparation, to take into account comments received during public consultation on the Issues and Options (2013) and Preferred Options (2015) on the issues that each plan should address, and new information that has become available as the plans have progressed.

The SAD and AAP Objectives included in the published plans (following final review and updating in January 2016) are summarised in Table 1 below. The changes to the SAD and AAP Objectives in 2013 and 2015 are identified in **Appendices F and G** of this report. Changes following the Issues & Options consultation in 2013 are identified in **blue text**, and changes following the Preferred Options consultation in 2015 are identified in **purple text**.

Table 1: SAD and AAP Objectives (January 2015)

SAD Objectives
1. To provide a regeneration strategy for Walsall that promotes sustainable growth within the existing urban areas whilst protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
2. To deliver sustainable communities through the development of new housing on vacant, derelict, and under-used land (including redundant employment land), as well as the regeneration of existing housing areas to provide a range of homes that meet the needs of all members of the community.
3. To allocate high quality employment land in the best locations, allowing existing businesses to expand and attracting new businesses whilst retaining local quality employment land in long-term use to enable existing businesses to stay in Walsall.
4. To encourage and direct investment of a suitable scale to Walsall's local centres meeting the needs of local communities.
5. To provide a high quality environment across Walsall, and with links to surrounding areas, to enhance biodiversity and help to address climate change by defining integrated environmental networks, protecting the natural environment, promoting green infrastructure and improving access to areas of open space.
6. To protect and enhance the built environment through the protection of heritage assets and the promotion of good design that addresses the character of the Walsall and helps provides safe and secure communities.
7. To improve accessibility in Walsall through the delivery of a first class transport network providing convenient and inclusive links within the borough and to surrounding areas, as well as supporting sustainable development.
8. To support and promote the provision of community services in accessible locations where they can serve all communities across Walsall.
9. To safeguard permitted waste management facilities and identify opportunities for new waste treatment, transfer and disposal facilities in employment areas and in other suitable and accessible locations, where operations will not have unacceptable harmful effects on health, the environment, amenity, or infrastructure.
10. To identify and safeguard mineral resources of local and national importance and mineral production and distribution infrastructure, and identify suitable sites and areas for production of secondary and recycled aggregates and mineral extraction, where operations will not have unacceptable harmful effects on health, the environment, amenity, or infrastructure.

AAP Objectives
1. Establish and allocate a series of high quality, ambitious and deliverable proposals for Walsall Town Centre that will enable Walsall to maximise its economic potential creating a thriving and prosperous centre that creates job opportunities for the residents of the Borough
2. Enhance and maximise Walsall’s competitiveness for investment, both in its role as a sub-regional centre and in respect of competing with out-of-centre developments
3. Increase the choice, quality and diversity of the town centre retail offer in order to meet the needs of all sectors of the population. To secure a mix of occupiers in the town centre through the provision of units of sufficient size and quality in suitable locations to meet the requirements of modern retailers
4. Diversify and strengthen the economic base, promote new ways of working and deliver a strong office market that provides high standard office accommodation in suitable locations to meet the needs of existing businesses and to attract new businesses to the area, accompanied by training and conference facilities
5. Strengthen the current cultural offer through increasing the mix of uses within the town centre such as a cinema, performance venues and community facilities (e.g. weddings and banqueting facilities), complemented by leisure uses such as restaurants, cafes and bars in order to provide an attractive centre for visitors both day and night
6. Support businesses to increase employment opportunities, skills and aspirations through high quality jobs in a variety of sectors, supported by good links with education and training providers in the town centre
7. Improve accessibility to and within the centre for all sectors of the community, through the provision of integrated transport and enhanced cycling and pedestrian links
8. Conserve heritage assets and seek opportunities for their enhancement whilst delivering high quality sustainable design that is well integrated, secure and encourages greater activity in the town centre with innovative and high quality design and architecture at the core.
9. Promote the sustainability of the centre by delivering environmental infrastructure and improvements that will deliver a range of benefits
10. Transform the experience and perception of Walsall town centre for those who shop, work, visit, invest and live in Walsall through measures such as improved public realm, civic spaces, quality of place, new homes, pedestrian access and security alongside the active promotion of the centre and organisation of community events

The SAD and AAP Objectives have been ‘tested’ against the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives (SA Objectives) on which the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (SA Framework) is based (see Chapter 2). Although most of the objectives are compatible with each other, some areas of conflict have been identified. Where possible, the SAD and AAP Objectives

have been modified to reduce conflicts, but it is not possible to remove them completely. The outcomes of the objectives testing are summarised in Chapter 5.

1.5 Limitations of the SAD and AAP

An important issue the Council has had to bear in mind when carrying out the SA of the SAD and AAP is the limited role of local plans in addressing existing economic, social and environmental problems. Other policies, plans, and programmes (PPPs) do not always recognise this. For example, earlier versions of the Walsall Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), an assessment of local health and social care needs, included objectives for planning to control hot food takeaways and off licences. However, the current rules governing changes of use of shop units do not allow planning authorities to control this.

There is also a tension between national policy objectives to promote sustainable development and prevent harmful effects on health and the environment, and government aspirations to reduce regulation. Incremental changes to planning legislation have reduced, and are likely to further erode, the extent to which local plans can address these issues. The government's stated intention to significantly increase housing delivery may also conflict with 'sustainable development' objectives if this results in significant harmful effects on the environment that are difficult to prevent or mitigate, or if the new housing delivered will not benefit those in need.

There is also a limit to which a local plan can influence the effects of development that may already lawfully be carried out on a particular site. For example, it cannot override existing planning permissions. Existing planning permissions may allow a wide range of potentially harmful industrial processes, or mineral extraction. The SAD and AAP can only influence changes to existing development or new development on these sites.

As the SAD and AAP have to work within the existing national and local planning policy framework, it will not be possible for them – or indeed for any other future land use plans for Walsall – to fully resolve these tensions, or solve all of the social, economic and environmental problems facing Walsall Borough.