

Housing Delivery Test Action Plan: August 2024 Update

Actions agreed by Corporate Management Team

The council is already undertaking or reviewing the potential for a number of actions that will assist in increasing housing delivery. These are set out below. They are listed in the order of the main service area that is likely to lead them, however some of the actions will require involvement and agreement at a council-wide level. More details on each are set out below the table. An indication of the potential housing numbers that might be delivered from each is shown to help prioritise.

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
ACTION 1 Walsall Borough Local Plan	Walsall 906/year	Planning Policy with colleagues from other Black Country authorities	<p>Already under way but awaiting confirmation of new local plan system legislated for by previous government.</p> <p>Current expected adoption date is early 2027.</p> <p>A revised draft of the NPPF was published for consultation by the government on 30 July</p>	<p>Need to explore options for increasing housing supply, including greater densities and possible use of green belt.</p> <p>The revised NPPF proposes to amend national policy in respect of the use of green belt to meet housing need. Alongside the NPPF consultation, the proposed revised standard method would increase the housing need that Walsall and its neighbours are expected to meet.</p>

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
<p>ACTION 2 Seek to 'export' housing need through duty to co-operate</p>	<p>Shropshire Local Plan proposes 1,500 additional homes to meet the needs of the Black Country. Work on-going with other neighbouring authorities.</p> <p>South Staffordshire draft local plan proposed 4,000 homes to meet the needs of the Black Country, but the latest version of the plan proposes to omit these</p>	<p>Planning Policy with colleagues from other Black Country authorities</p>	<p>Already under way. Walsall officers have presented evidence to the examination of the Shropshire Local Plan which is currently under way. A report was taken to planning committee on 25 July 2024 to approve a response to the South Staffordshire Local Plan.</p> <p>Black Country and South Staffordshire councils are expecting to submit their plans by June 2025 for adoption by start 2026. These will inform the contributions to meet Walsall's needs</p>	<p>The end of the Black Country Plan means that Walsall now has to respond directly to local plans in preparation by other authorities. This involves substantial officer resources. There is also scope to improve the council's delegation arrangements.</p>

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
ACTION 3 – Examine sites in SHLAA that are suitable for housing to identify reasons why they have not come forward for development	SHLAA provides the database of potential housing sites to be explored through the other workstreams. Lapsed planning permissions currently account for 812 dwellings	Planning Policy	SHLAA update published July 2024. Further work to be carried out through site assessments for WBLP in autumn 2024.	
ACTION 4 – Expedite determination of planning applications for residential development.	Aim should be to approve sufficient new homes to meet annual need as set out in local plan	Development Management	Ongoing. Prioritise determination of major planning applications for housing to determine within 13 weeks. Agree planning performance agreements with applicants	

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
ACTION 5 - Consider options and the potential for borough wide housing delivery over the longer term e.g. local housing company (Council or joint venture owned), direct delivery, etc.	Aim should be to deliver sufficient homes, when added to those delivered by the market and other grant-funded developments, to meet annual need as set out in local plan	Development Team	Housing Delivery Options report produced in July 2021 to consider the options available to facilitate delivery.	<p>The report noted that a single borough wide approach was not considered appropriate. It was recommended that sites should be considered on an individual basis to identify the best route to delivery and the options are therefore considered accordingly in the development of proposals.</p> <p>Reconsider in view of new government's priorities</p>
ACTION 6 – Acquire or bring forward smaller housing schemes on derelict or untidy sites including those where planning permission for housing has been granted previously	Several hundred? Potential sites to be drawn from SHLAA	To be determined Potential funding from Towns Fund	Subject to launch of Town Deal work	Reconsider in view of new government's priorities

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
ACTION 7 - Site assembly to deliver housing in Willenhall	Approx. 200	Development Team	Under way. The Willenhall Framework Plan has been produced and the Phase 1 project is subject to a CPO public inquiry which will commence on 19 August 2024.	
ACTION 8 – Study to explore potential for additional housing at opportunity sites	Approx. 200	Development Team	Under way – work ongoing that focuses on the route to delivery for the Station Quarter and Walsall Gateway housing opportunities.	
ACTION 9 – Expedite disposal of surplus council land where suitable for housing development	Several hundred?	Corporate Landlord	Under way	
ACTION 10 – Pursue funding to help bring other sites forward	Unknown	Development and Housing Strategy Teams	Under way	
ACTION 11 - Support economic growth and protection/ creation of jobs	None directly	All teams in Economy, Environment and Communities	Ongoing	

Action	Potential Housing Numbers	Lead Team	Timetable	Discussion Points
ACTION 12 – Produce developer contributions and update affordable housing supplementary planning documents	No additional dwellings but should help to gain faster approvals for sites already identified	Development management and planning policy teams	By February 2025	

ACTION 1 – Progress Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP)

It is a legal and Government policy requirement to have strategic planning policies and an up to date local plan. The local plan sets out the amount of land needed for homes, employment and other uses, allocates sites for them, and provides a framework to attract investment and determine planning applications.

The current adopted local plan comprises the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS) adopted in 2011, the Walsall Site Allocation Document (SAD) and Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) adopted in 2019 and 'saved' policies of the Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in 2005. The BCCS, SAD and AAP only identify requirements to 2026, so the land supply they provide for is being used up.

Once adopted, the BCCS and SAD will be replaced by the WBLP, which is expected to cover the period to 2042. The WBLP will be expected to identify sufficient land to accommodate the housing need required over that period in accordance with the standard method, currently 906 homes per year. These homes should be accommodated within the borough, unless agreement has been reached to 'export' some of the needs to neighbouring local authorities through their local plans making additional provision.

The WBLP is by far the most significant action that can be taken, in view of the additional housing land supply that it will seek to identify. As noted earlier, the current BCCS and SAD only provide sufficient housing land to meet our needs to 2026. The BCCS proposed that some housing development would take place on surplus former employment land, with growth in office employment (which requires less land to provide the same number of jobs as in factories and warehouses) compensating for the loss of industrial land. However, even before the effects of Covid, this change to office employment was failing to occur. Some of the existing office stock has been converted to residential use, sometimes as permitted development. For example, two of the largest sources of new homes in 2019-20 were through the conversion of Tameway Tower and Regina court in Walsall Town Centre. It will therefore be necessary to retain more land in industrial use and even add to the supply if we are to secure sufficient employment for our residents. Without jobs, people will not be able to afford to buy or rent housing in any case.

In Walsall, the BCCS estimated that approximately 2,500 homes could be provided on currently occupied employment land that was likely to become surplus or unsuitable for retention over the plan period. This would only provide sufficient land for approximately 3 years of housing need in any case. As well as now being needed to meet employment needs, the industrial occupiers have also been found to be more resilient than expected. The majority of occupiers have remained and many have invested to upgrade their premises.

Even if it was desired to redevelop poor quality industrial sites for housing, many older industrial areas are in a multitude of ownerships which makes the task of acquiring land to enable comprehensive redevelopment very difficult if not impossible. There would also be the need to find suitable alternative premises for occupiers who remained in business. Modern industrial premises tend to have a lower employment

density because automation means that fewer jobs are needed, so more land would be required if the same number of jobs are to be retained.

Walsall is also significantly constrained by large areas of green belt. The previous government revised national planning policy to state that local authorities no longer had to meet their local housing need if this involved allocating land in the green belt, but an announcement is expected imminently from the current government to reverse this expectation.

ACTION 2 – Seek to ‘export’ housing need through duty to co-operate

Walsall has worked with the other Black Country authorities as well as authorities in the wider Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBBCHMA) to ‘export’ housing and some employment land need to neighbouring areas. The Shropshire Local Plan, which is currently under examination, proposes to provide land for 1,500 homes in addition to the number required for its own needs to contribute to the needs of the Black Country. The South Staffordshire Local Plan initially proposed to provide an additional 4,000 homes to meet the needs of the Black Country, however this offer has been dropped in the light of the revised NPPF published in December 2023. The latest draft of the South Staffordshire local plan still proposes to allocate employment land in addition to that required to meet local need, which will contribute to the needs of the Black Country.

The proposed further revisions to the NPPF and standard method for calculating local housing need published for consultation in July 2024 may require local plans that have not yet been submitted for examination to be further revised to increase their provision for housing.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, passed by the previous government, proposed to abolish the duty to co-operate and replace it with an ‘alignment’ test to be set out in national policy rather than legislation. It is unclear what the intentions of the new government are in relation to cross-boundary planning, including in respect of local plans that are already in preparation.

ACTION 3 – Examine sites in SHLAA that are suitable for housing but not explored under other actions to identify reasons why they have not come forward for development.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is one of the evidence documents that supports the local plan. National planning policy expects the SHLAA to be updated at least once per year. The SHLAA contains details of sites that have been examined for their potential suitability for housing. These includes sites that already have planning permission or which are allocated in existing local plans, as well as other sites where housing could be supported under current planning policies. The SHLAA also identifies sites that are not suitable or developable for housing, either for policy reasons (such as land in the Green Belt) or physical unsuitability (such as land that is heavily contaminated or affected by adjoining uses).

It provides a key database that lists sites that could be allocated in the local plan, as well as sites that are already suitable for housing where development could be brought forward earlier in advance of the adoption of the plan.

ACTION 4 – Expedite determination of planning applications for residential development.

The Council already has a good performance record in the determination of planning applications, and work has taken place recently as part of the PROUD programme to examine the scope for further improvements.

Further actions that have been introduced or examined include:

- Potential to use Planning Performance Agreements for major schemes, encourage increased use of pre-application advice to inform applications so that the right information is provided from the outset to speed delivery of the permissions.
- Review resources to support the service i.e. legal services in preparation of Section 106 Agreements and potential for template S106 Agreements.
- Updated Supplementary Planning Documents to provide greater clarity to developers on triggers and level of obligations and process of reviewing viability.
- Publish consultation response on the web so developers can review earlier.

ACTION 5 - Consider options and the potential for borough wide housing delivery over the longer term e.g. local housing company (Council or joint venture owned), direct delivery, etc.

The Council has recently commissioned Arcadis to produce this study and work is now underway. The study will consider the range of delivery options that could be applied specifically within Walsall. Political and financial approval would be required if action was proposed to implement any options arising from this work.

It should be noted that neighbouring authorities have already explored potential delivery mechanisms. In Sandwell this includes the construction of council housing whilst Wolverhampton has a council-owned housing company.

ACTION 6 – Acquire or bring forward smaller housing schemes on derelict or untidy sites including those where planning permission for housing has been granted previously

Towns Fund money is being explored to pursue this in and around Walsall Town Centre and Bloxwich district centre.

The SHLAA indicates that several hundred homes could be provided through this source. There are many sites where planning permission has been granted for housing in the past where the permission has lapsed, or where construction has commenced but then stalled. The reasons for this may be varied but are likely to include financial

difficulties experienced by the developer and/or unrealistic expectations of land value. Some sites were granted planning permission prior to the 2008-9 crash. In addition other sites remain derelict with no associated plans for development resulting in a negative impact within their locality.

Given the financial difficulties involved with such sites, it is likely that the council would have to give careful consideration to the risks involved, and consider pursuing compulsory purchase orders in some cases.

ACTION 7 - Site assembly to deliver housing in Willenhall

The council has authorised a compulsory purchase order to assemble land for housing and is exploring the potential for housing on other sites in and around Willenhall District Centre. Most are already allocated for housing, have planning permission, are vacant or are no longer suitable or required for employment uses. There is potential for additional housing in the district centre, for example using upper floors of shops.

ACTION 8– Studies to explore the potential for additional housing at opportunity sites

The potential for additional housing through the development of opportunity sites will be assessed. For example, a study of land and premises in Station Street is currently underway. This work considers the potential to deliver new housing in a sustainable town centre location with easy access to retail and leisure facilities and in close proximity to Walsall railway station.

ACTION 9 – Expedite disposal of surplus council land where suitable for housing development

The council owns a number of pieces of surplus land and buildings which it is in the process of disposing of. Some have already had planning permission. There may be potential to expedite their disposal. However, in some cases the land may have potential to be used for other purposes for which there is a need, for example to allow school expansions that will serve new housing development or replace unsuitable premises elsewhere.

Some areas of open space have been submitted in response to the call for sites for the Black Country Plan, to be considered for allocation for housing or employment.

ACTION 10 – Pursue funding to help bring sites forward

There is the potential to pursue housing development on brownfield sites elsewhere. The council is

- working with the WMCA to maximise remediation funding that can be brought into Walsall to help deliver difficult and costly brownfield sites;
- supporting the private sector to access funding where necessary; and

- working with Homes England and housing association partners to maximise take up of Homes England's Affordable Homes Programme 2021 - 2026

ACTION 11 - Support economic growth and protection/ creation of jobs

The provision and retention of secure and adequately paid jobs is critical to the delivery of housing, especially open market homes. Without paid work, residents will be unable to pay mortgages or rents.

Allocating and safeguarding through the local plan a sufficient supply of land for employment uses, to allow companies to remain in business, locate in the area and expand, is therefore intrinsic to the delivery of housing. As well as the preparation of the local plan by the planning policy team, the work of other council teams is also important, including enabling the delivery of new employment sites, the determination of planning applications, and assistance given to support businesses, and train, recruit and retain their workforce.