

STATEMENT BY GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS

MATTER 6 - BRIERLEY HILL / MERRY HILL AND DUDLEY

1. Government policy, as set out in PPS6 depends for its implementation on a proactive, plan-led approach to the development of town centres through regional and local planning. The designation of new centres and the reclassification of centres should be carried out through the plan-making process.

2. In the context of PPS6 the Government Office for the West Midlands in a letter dated 17 May 2005, issued advice to the Regional Planning Body, when it embarked on the Phase 1 Revision, emphasising the need for clear evidence to support any case for Brierley Hill / Merry Hill to become a centre.

3. This was based on the view that there was a need to establish the status, role and future of Brierley Hill / Merry Hill both in relation to the future planning and development of the centre itself but also in its relationship with other centres, through the Regional Spatial Strategy. Furthermore, it was regarded as a priority that the matter should be addressed and consequently that it should be considered in the Phase 1 Revision in order to reduce uncertainty and provide the strategic basis for the preparation of a joint Core Strategy for the Black Country. It remains the view that the designation as a centre should be undertaken through the Phase 1 Revision. This follows advice given in PPS6.

4. It is also considered that the draft policy PA11A strikes the right balance between providing a clear strategic framework and avoiding unnecessary or inappropriate detail in accordance with advice given in paragraph 1.15 of PPS11.

5. With regard to the consideration of the designation of the centre in relation to PPS6 paragraph 2.53 it is considered that the principle needs to be agreed at regional level specifically because (i) Merry Hill is already the second largest shopping centre in the region and (ii) policy is seeking to establish the position of the centre within the strategic network of centres established in Policy PA11 of the RSS.

6. Policy PA11A rightly refers to monitoring and managing the future growth of Brierley Hill / Merry Hill through the proposed joint Core Strategy, following a plan, monitor, manage approach. There is a need at this stage to set parameters within the Revision of the RSS to manage and guide the joint Core Strategy in order to address concerns that, unless development is managed, levels of growth would be drawn to Brierley Hill / Merry Hill to the detriment of the other three strategic centres in the Black Country and

surrounding centres. The parameters should include floorspace targets for the growth of the strategic centres, including Brierley Hill / Merry Hill and thresholds beyond which developments should not take place unless certain stated criteria are met. This gives clear guidance for subsequent Development Plan Documents, an implementation framework and provides the targets and milestones for monitoring.

7. The designation of the centre is the first stage in the process. It recognises the existence of the centre and the role it plays. Following paragraph 2.54 of PPS6 it identifies the centre and consequently places it in the strategic network. This effectively brings it into the planning framework enabling the plan-led approach to be adopted.

8. Through the preparation and implementation of the joint Core Strategy and the Area Action Plan for Brierley Hill/ Merry Hill the future development of the town centre can be properly managed to ensure that it does fulfil its role in accordance with the provisions of PPS6. The draft policy could however be more explicit in specifying the particular town centre uses which would be expected to be developed.

9. Considerable evidence has been gathered to support Policy PA11A which is now proposed, in terms of the roles which both Brierley Hill / Merry Hill and Dudley play at present, their ability to serve the needs of the Black Country and those of the proposed strategy and to help deliver the strategy.

10. The proposed policy complements the existing Policy PA11 in the RSS and it is important that this is recognised. The future role of Brierley Hill / Merry Hill and the other three strategic centres in the Black Country therefore will be considered not only in terms of the strategy for that sub-region but also in relation to the overall network of strategic centres within the region.

GOWM
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