



RTPI

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RTPI Black Country
Place-making
Collaborative Working Group

Pilot Project

Final Report
November 2009

This CWG pilot project has been planned, facilitated and evaluated by Julie Morgan on behalf of MADE, the West Midlands Regional Architecture Centre. This pilot was funded by RTPI.

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1.0 Collaborative working groups – the benefits

1.1 The benefits of membership of collaborative working groups (CWG)'s have been identified in the document *RTPI Collaborative Working Groups – an introduction and self-help guide* as providing opportunities to;

1. develop problem solving, communication & leadership skills
2. enhance professional confidence
3. deepen understanding of the planning system
4. facilitate positive discussion
5. broaden understanding of key issues...to improve external working relationships
6. offer professional development opportunities and contribute towards CPD obligations.

2.0 RTPI Black Country place-making CWG

2.1 The RTPI West Midlands Region has a strong core of active RTPI members on the Regional Activities committee. In 2003 a sub-committee group was established focussing on urban design. This Urban Design Group merged with the existing pilot Black Country Urban Design Working Group to evolve into the RTPI West Midlands Urban Design Forum (UDF) in 2006.

2.2 This Urban Design Forum has been hugely successful to date in enabling urban designers in the region to network and exchange information – primarily by providing a regional database of contacts and holding quarterly events. However, due to the changing scale of the group and range of attendees, the structure and scope of this group evolved from being a practical discussion of workplace issues within a small geographical area into a network of members with a more thematic based topical agenda.

2.3 The Black Country sub-region includes the local authority areas covered by Wolverhampton City Council, Walsall Council, Sandwell MBC and Dudley MBC. Within each of these authorities marked differences are evident as to where urban designers fit into the organisations, for example;

- the number of urban designers employed
- their range of experience
- the Department within which they are employed
- levels of seniority and influence

2.4 A collaborative working group (CWG) would assist in bringing together all of these experiences, and wide range of knowledge, to help develop a practical approach to implementing quality design whilst addressing the Black Country sub-regional identity. Such a mechanism would also provide support for urban designers working with fewer resources targeted at urban design specifically, whilst enabling the larger established teams of urban designers to tap into a free, external sounding board.

2.5 In 2008 MADE* was approached by several local authority Officers expressing an interest in re-establishing a practical small working group for the Black Country (similar to the former Black Country Urban Design Working Group). Funding was secured from the RTPI to set up a pilot CWG between April and September 2009.

3.0 Objectives of CWG

3.1 The main objective of this CWG is;

'to promote better sub-regional urban design standards in the Black Country via establishing improved mechanisms of joint working and facilitated information exchange'.

4.0 Expected outcomes

- 4.1 At the end of this CWG pilot the group members were expected to have;
1. developed strategic thinking and performance in partnership with other local authority officers in the Black Country
 2. developed their communication skills
 3. helped to promote a wider understanding of different experiences and approaches to neighbouring local authorities
 4. contributed towards addressing the culture change of sub-regional working promoted by the Regional Spatial Strategy by participating positively
 5. provided a wider professional knowledge exchange for dealing with wider operational problems
 6. discussed local authority planning policy development and strategically driven perspectives within a safe environment
 7. promoted good practice and a wider professional understanding between all those working in different areas of the planning system.

5.0 CWG invited members

- 5.1 From the outset it was critical to establish a collaborative working group that would be balanced with a broad range of experiences to draw from. Members were sought via letter of invitation sent to of each local authority within the Black Country at Director level requesting their participation and nominating Officers to participate in the process.
- 5.2 A rigorous process of selection followed to ensure that a good mix of Officers from each authority were able to participate, with at least 2 from each authority. The mix of professional experience and positions within the authorities was balanced to ensure that the group benefitted from different perspectives and opinions.
- 5.3 The four officers selected were either Principal Officers or Managers with Urban Design specialisms.
- 5.4 The four Officers selected were working within Development Management. Three of these Officers have urban design qualifications in addition to their planning qualifications.
- 5.5 Wolverhampton Council do not have a separate Urban Design Team, and during the course of this pilot CWG Walsall Council undertook some
- 5.6 organisational restructuring, moving an Urban Designer into the Regeneration Team.
- 5.7 One of the Policy Planning Officers sitting on the Joint Core Strategy Core Environment Group was selected to join the CWG. A Local Authority Corporate Team was also invited to join to provide a strategic view from the Corporate Team level.

- 5.8 Individuals from the Core Strategy Environmental Focus Group, and an independent Planning Consultant, were both invited to attend the CWG meetings at various stages.
- 5.9 A Planning Consultant, appointed as an independent critical friend to the Black Country Joint Core Strategy Task Group, advised the Task Group on policy soundness in drafting policy. Email input to the CWG was given as they were unable to attend the meeting on 21st July 2009.

6.0 Meeting format and structure

- 6.1 In the first instance all of the CWG members were invited to an initial lunchtime meeting at Walsall MBC, who had kindly offered to host the first meeting. This meeting was held between 12 – 2pm.
- 6.2 In response to member requests, all subsequent RTPI Black Country CWG meetings were held in the form of ‘breakfast seminars’ at Development House, Sandwell MBC between 09:30 and 11:30; dates and frequency of meetings were agreed with members. This arrangement was agreed as being most convenient and central to members, and Sandwell MBC agreed to arrange booking of the conference room.
- 6.3 All CWG meetings were 2 hours long. There were 5 CWG meetings facilitated by Julie Morgan for MADE, and 2 additional CWG meetings put into member’s diaries to encourage the continuation of the CWG group after funding had expired.
- 6.4 Meetings were facilitated in a semi-informal round table discussion, structured around the action points from the last meeting and issues to be addressed. Everyone was encouraged to participate in each discussion.
- 6.5 A set of ‘rules of engagement’ for this CWG pilot were established at the first meeting;
- *Chatham House* rules would apply to the meetings and records of the minutes would be carefully managed
 - Personal comments would not be tolerated
 - it was requested that action points should be undertaken by the next meeting to ensure continuity and flow of engagement
 - group member attendance at every meeting would be essential to ensure successful working group outcomes.

7.0 Evidence of knowledge exchange

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	Joint Core Strategy (Statement of Intent stage)	There was a marked difference in awareness across the local authorities of the contact person involved in the preparation of the Joint Core Strategy, or how to get involved in policy preparation. In particular the group members were all concerned about the lack of urban design influence and input they had been able to exert so far in the process.	<p>Raising awareness of the levels of engagement within other authorities in the process appeared to enhance the importance of getting involved and exploring opportunities for input into the Joint Core Strategy.</p> <p>Identifying the imminent deadline at the end of June / July 2009 for draft design quality policies to be prepared by the Joint Core Strategy Task Group</p>	Cemented the CWG's collective objective to work together on draft design policies for the JCS
20 April 2009	Leadership from the top	Is there an over reliance on urban design guidance, instead of an emphasis on more strategic policies capable of reinforcing and delivering quality places adopted at a corporate level?	Does the Black Country have any relevant sub-regional or corporate policies for promoting design quality? i.e. Black Country Consortium policies, Constitution or corporate policy, or LSP policy?	Find out how are these being used or influenced by Officers within each authority, and are there lessons to be shared in your approach?
20 April 2009	Design awareness within Senior Management and Elected Members	Are there any tools that you use or techniques that you have applied to try and influence these people or raise the priority of design issues within your authority? Are there any methods of best practice that you are able to share?	Dudley MBC referred to the 'Better Dudley' in-house initiative for up-skilling senior managers across the authority in a multi-disciplinary approach to context and place-making including education, health, police etc.	Design quality could be promoted within this initiative, and at similar initiatives in other authorities.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	Design awareness within Senior Management and Elected Members	Skills in relating urban design objectives into the wider corporate agenda to raise awareness of the need for better quality design at an authority-wide level.	The strategic value of quality design for the authority, including the implications of better designed environments in helping to reduce obesity and improving the economy (jobs provision) need to be demonstrated as political and authority-wide objectives.	Research your own authorities Corporate plans and objectives to identify gaps and linkages to design quality and bring these to the next meeting. Are there opportunities that you could all tap into?
20 April 2009	Design Champions	Design Champions need to be able to articulate that design is important, why and how to achieve it. A lack of skills and training or lack of interest/priority of the issue could be a barriers.	A severe lack of budgets for training is another barrier for performance improvement for all authorities. Members often have a private (political) agenda rather than solely long term vision for the benefit of public gain.	CABE training for elected members in the Black Country could start to address member skills gaps such as the need for strategic thinking, understanding the importance of design and better articulating design issues. Group members suggest a 'design from the bottom up approach' with case studies, visits/tours of case studies for Members to go around the Black Country, a visit to Wakefield to explore how things have been done there on a comparative level, and/or a Sub-Regional Award to celebrate the best of the Black Country. Addressing the skills gap is seen as key.
20 April 2009	Impact of the 'credit crunch' many proposals are pushing to renegotiate their s.106 agreements & contributions.	Negotiation and design skills are in increased demand to address the additional revisions proposed. Sharing experiences identified a similar experience across the Black Country – and a need for a common and collaborative approach.	Consider how these themes could be pulled together to create a Black Country statement to show a joint approach to design quality and how this could fit within each authority's corporate/adopted policy approaches?	Refer to CABE's paper on Toxic Assets by Richard Simmons responding to the credit crunch situation and the need to uphold design quality aspirations. Consider preparing a joint Black Country statement to show a joint approach to design quality in response to the credit crunch.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	HCA Single Conversation	Keeping abreast of new developments and organisational changes in communication between local authorities and regional level HCA.	The new integrated approach introduced by the Homes & Communities Agency is to engage with local authorities at corporate level to exchange information.	To find out who is responsible within your own authority for the single conversation and make contact with said officer to start to build up knowledge exchange and information capacity.
20 April 2009	Opportunities to use LA land ownership advantages to secure high quality procurement at point of disposal.	Knowledge exchange. Exploring the role and relationships between the local authorities and URC's.	Wolverhampton MBC expressed that overarching corporate policies were already in place. Highlight gaps, opportunities and best practice to learn from and deepen understanding of linkages elsewhere. Especially relevant as Dudley MBC has an emerging URC so that each authority has coverage, and some more established than others.	To explore protocols between URC's and your own local authority and any corporate policies that set out design requirements on disposal of land assets. Identify any best practice to share.
20 April 2009	JCS Regeneration corridors	These will need design guidance in place to bring forward high quality places	Joined-up approaches towards delivering them are needed as some corridors fall across local authority boundaries. Resources were identified as a barrier to achieving this successfully.	Group members may consider exploring together which national guidance /urban design principles would be relevant and applicable to windfall sites coming forward within the Black Country to promote a joined up response within the sub-region, to ensure consistently high design aspirations. Exploring this issue further could result in assisting all authorities.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	A significant gap in up-to-date adopted planning policy due to the introduction of the LDF system,	Resources are stretched in terms of increased amounts of negotiation required and application of national policy to local situations. A change of culture from development management to development management has also helped to shift the emphasis from refusing planning applications to negotiating for acceptable proposals. These two changes mean that caseloads are more time intensive and applications often rely on the design skills and awareness of individual officers.	A lack of resources, confidence in addressing design issues (especially within development management) and skills were identified as key barriers to overcome.	Training for development management officers is seen as beneficial, although other methods of working could be explored?
20 April 2009	Appropriate level to insert broad strategic policies that refer to design quality	Joint working on the Core Strategy will provide an overarching design framework but individual authority overviews should ideally be addressed at consistent levels of planning policy.	DPD's should be shared between the authorities.	It was agreed that DPD's are the appropriate level for broad strategic design policies.
20 April 2009	Housing Quality Monitoring Indicators	Building for Life (BfL) was identified as a very time-intensive tool to use, especially where evidence is sought in addition to the scoring.	CABE Housing Audit was agreed as being appropriate although BfL could be explored as a toolkit to supplement the Housing Audit.	Worth seeking advice from CABE? Exploring other methods may also be useful for discussion next time.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	Letter from CLG, to research how much backland development/ garden land is coming forward.	Group Members felt that sharing the questionnaire responses may be useful benchmarking exercise and opportunity to shared reactions to such proposals.	Obtaining responses with a view to sharing information and discussion. Wolverhampton City Council also to share information in respect of being sampled by PINS in researching consistency of the outcome of Appeals.	Wolverhampton MBC to circulate said letter and questionnaire to other Group Members to follow up with contacting Officer dealing with this in other authorities.
20 April 2009	Engaging external speakers	To gain external experiences and ambitions for improving design quality.	Consider the messages that need conveying, by whom, and from where, to discuss and further develop ideas for targeting someone from outside the Black Country to be invited to come and speak to the Senior Team and/or Members to influence and raise ambition within Corporate Policy.	Members also suggested that a representative from Wakefield be invited to speak to corporate /senior directors in the Black Country
20 April 2009	Barriers to improving the public realm	Need stronger negotiating skills for influencing the design and maintenance of street furniture. This is difficult due to barriers such as maintenance (including replacement issues of bespoke designs), lack of investment, roles and responsibilities etc.	Consider ways of overcoming these issues that could be explored together. A joint approach to overcoming similar or shared problems.	Look up your own authority's policies for procurement within your LA Constitution and explore opportunities for an amendment to ensure design quality is considered within it alongside best value when specifying and purchasing street furniture.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
20 April 2009	Building Schools for the Future (BSF)	Wolverhampton City Council is a year ahead of the other Black Country local authorities in their involvement with the Building Schools for the Future programme. Key lessons and information to assist the other authorities in learning from their experiences may prove to be valuable.	Some authorities have found that communications with CABE enablers have been disjointed to date and suggested ways forward for a more coordinated engagement would be useful.	Group Members will all need to identify the lead officer dealing with BSF within their own authority. Investigate the position of this important issue within your authority for discussion.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
09 June 2009	Input into the core strategy policies for urban design	The JCS Environment Group has had a stab at writing a policy but really need some urban design expertise. The policies need to be strategic yet specific to the Black Country, not policies that would be relevant anywhere'. No other sub-regional Core Strategy policies currently address urban design / quality of place. Therefore no benchmarks are available for comparison.	Specifically this strategic policy will need to be able to identify and reinforce the sub-regional identity of the Black Country, emphasising how the Black Country works as a unified place. Links back to technical papers should reinforce the evidence base of the policy. Monitoring targets will also need to be set out.	The strategic policy should refer to broad principles such as creating safe places, inspirational places, and rejecting poor quality design.
09 June 2009	Tangible design quality indicators needed	Officers will need to be comfortable using the BREEAM & Building for Life (BFL) standards, criteria and assessments. The CWG may have these skills but these need to be wider within the authorities.	Design quality can be measured, for example BREEAM standards for employment / commercial developments and for residential developments. Building for Life standards at regional level within the RSS should be translated here into sub-regional design policies.	BFL – Silver standard could be set as a delivery target. Ensuring such a standard would have major resource implications attached to it for each authority.
09 June 2009	Scale is a significant issue for where and how to approach quality places in policy.	CWG discussion brought together the skills and expertise from across development management, policy and urban design specialists to consider the most appropriate approach to urban design policy for the JCS to achieve the most effective application.	The CWG agreed that a strategic Place making policy would be appropriate, referring how to create places. Below this strategic level, more detailed policies and SPD could sit tailored for more specific development management guidance. This would have increased flexibility and be more user friendly for Development Management Officers to apply. Consider major applications against the strategic Joint Core Strategy policy directly.	Put forward to the JCS Task Group the agreed structure for developing policy content appropriate to the scale of development.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
26 June 2009	BfL policies	CWG discussion brought together the skills and expertise from across development management policy and urban design specialisms to consider the most appropriate approach to urban design policy for the JCS to achieve the most effective application.	GOWM advised not to set out development management policies and so Building for Life standards should not be within the Joint Core Strategy? This was a view put forward by Wolverhampton City and objected to by Sandwell MBC. Sandwell MBC felt that there was a strong opportunity here to provide a robust and clear aspiration for achieving Building for Life standards across the Black Country. Wolverhampton City was concerned about resource implications for the authorities of implementing, assessing, and evaluating such standards too. Reasoned justification could be an appropriate place for Building for Life standards?	BfL standards should be set out within the reasoned justification. Plus a reference to other toolkits that would be recognised. The reasoned justification must be sound and evidence based. The CABE housing Audit could provide justification for need for high design standards to be set.
26 June 2009	Sub-regional design pact	CWG discussion brought together the skills and expertise from across development management, policy and urban design specialisms.	The Group note that CABE has developed, in consultation with organisations across the sector and the Gateway, a Thames Gateway design pact. This pledge is a consultation draft until 10 October 2009. This is a useful and interesting concept tool for another sub-region and lessons could be drawn from it.	Consider whether a design pact could be a useful approach and whether any weight / tie in could be applied to ensure commitment to any such pledge.
26 June 2009	Evidence base for policies and shared information	Pooling of background technical analyses needed	Ideally an analysis of the Black Country would identify what makes it what it is. Background work on the historic environment and landscape character is completed. The first task is to collate all of this information via a series of web links into one website resource accessible to all CWG members.	Beneficial to have an independent website accessible to all CWG with centrally shared information. JM will investigate feasibility of setting up such a facility and management implications.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
26 June 2009	Development Strategy DPD	CWG discussion brought together the skills and expertise from across development management, policy and urban design specialisms.	Dudley MBC are making provision for development management policies to be set within a Development Strategy DPD. Knowledge exchange between CWG on how to translate generic design policy from guidance such as By Design without reiterating the guidance and making it bespoke to the local area.	Suggestions of how to do this should be collated and shared amongst the CWG by the end of Wed 8th July
26 June 2009	Independent policy scrutiny and links to JCS Task Group	Independent expert policy drafting skills would be useful to bring into the process for knowledge exchange with the CWG	It was suggested that an independent policy scrutineer would be useful to attend the July meeting. Consultant has had previous involvement with the Black Country Joint Core Strategy and could assist here too.	JM to invite Consultant to the next meeting.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills /competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
21 July 2009	Website opportunities (Evidence base for policies and shared information)	Range of experiences in sharing electronic information. Each Officer / authority has different experiences and use different software.	South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy is facilitated via the application of Limehouse software, and this was proposed to the CWG as an example of how sub-regional joint working is being done elsewhere in the region. Dudley MBC already have this software in place, but suggest that a key drawback is that this is an unsuitable medium for images and visual information.	JM suggested that if web pages were indeed the most suitable way forward, then an approach should be made to webmaster where the existing Black Country Joint Core Strategy (JCS) is hosted. It may be that additional web pages for the CWG (password protected if possible) could be added to this existing facility. This would also be the most cost effective option rather than a separate website, and many of the documents are already here. Contact webmaster to investigate.
21 July 2009	Design Pact	Further opportunities include using it as a tangible branding tool for Members and Champions to sign up to, and improving the skill set of Officers embracing and applying the implications of said pact. Such a model or tool should be considered to dovetail into Black Country JCS policy at detailed stages or supplementary planning document.	The Thames Gateway Design Pact is an interesting model to observe, and a similar model in the Black Country may be considered along with memorandums of understanding and / or legal agreements.	Any commitment in a pact will need to be accountable to give it teeth and weight. To consider the Design Pact model further at the appropriate stage and consider how each authority sees this being accountable.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills /competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
21 July 2009	BfL policies, resources and developing a joint Black Country approach	Need for collaborative approach to design quality between all Development, Urban Management, Policy Officers in the Black Country.	Recognition by the CWG members that development viability was often used as an excuse by applicants for not achieving high quality design standards, and that developers often play the Black Country authorities off against each other to secure the lowest quality denominator e.g. threat of taking their development elsewhere. So the conundrum is how to promote design quality whilst promoting a robust economy - without being held to ransom? This is a joint issue that needs to be addressed together as a design pact	Draft agreed detailed policy for BfL; <i>‘Applicants will be expected to demonstrate in their Design & Access Statement a commitment to achieving high quality design standards, good placemaking and sustainable development by using the Building for Life criteria’</i>
		Skilled resources for assessing BfL standards are also a key concern.	If a commitment is made to a minimum standard of BfL for all major residential schemes then additional resources will need to be in place to be able to deliver this.	The wording of this policy puts the emphasis of resources firmly on the shoulders of developers wanting to build residential developments in the Black Country. Where it is clearly demonstrated how the BfL criteria will be achieved, this will result in a less resource intensive commitment for the authorities - Planning Officers will require less skill levels to ‘assess’ each scheme.
		Need for collaborative approach to design quality between all Development, Urban Management, Policy Officers in the Black Country.	This is a unique opportunity to embrace the BfL objectives set out in the draft RSS and will provide strong linkages between the two documents. Signing up to a joint approach adds weight to persuading others in each authority to sign up to BfL standards, may add confidence, and provides a platform for design aspirations at a sub-regional level. Building for Life standards are not development management policies, but guiding principles for how to achieve quality.	A joint approach was agreed together between the authorities presented that design quality must be promoted as far as possible by this CWG to ensure a fighting chance of achieving a cultural and aspirational step change towards the transformational vision for the Black Country.

Date of CWG	Discussion topic	Relevant Skills / competencies	Knowledge or understanding developed as a result?	Action points
15 Sept 2009	Changes to the JCS policies since the last CWG meeting. Lifetime Homes policy removed (issues with viability) and BfL policy watered down.	BfL Assessor skills and resources – concerns raised again about the implications for each local authority	Policy ENV3 (formerly ENV8) raises concern for two Councils about the resource implications for assessing schemes against the BfL criteria. The other two Councils retain their views expressed in former meetings that this policy does not go far enough, especially as linked to the draft RSS. CWG Debate split evenly.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silver or Gold standards to be an aspiration (achieved within) for all major planning applications (10 or more units) in the Black Country 2. Qualified CABE BfL assessors within the four BC authorities could be shared as pooled resource. 3. It was suggested that a BC workshop could be held to bring together external stakeholders including; housebuilders, developers, housing associations, etc in a partnership consultation exercise to get views on the use of BfL direct from private sector.
15 Sept 2009	BfL vs CABE Housing Audit	Better clarity of the terminology and appropriate toolkit is required where reference is made to the CABE Housing Audit and BfL.	The CABE Housing Audit categorises developments as Very Good (equivalent to a BfL Gold Standard) and Good (equivalent of a BfL Silver standard), and the Building for Life Gold and Silver categories.	No further action point required after clarification established

7.0 Key findings of CWG pilot

Terms of Reference

- 7.2 A protocol for communications between group members outside of the structured meetings was not explicitly set out as per *rules of engagement* set out in paragraph 6.5. This eventually resulted in emails being sent in September 2009 between only some of the group members, other Officers, and not including the CWG facilitator. Confusion resulted whereby policy drafting was being moved forward as joint decisions without all of the group members being involved.
- 7.3 To ensure successful continuation of this CWG group it was strongly advised that terms of reference are set out from this point forward, including communications protocols and clarity of the group's influence and status of the group within the wider structures and organisations.

Recommended Action:

- 7.4 An initial platform for joint working has been established but this would benefit from recognition and formal adoption of a collaborative approach between the four Black Country Authorities. Formal recognition of the group should eliminate the need for terms of reference.

Knowledge Exchange

- 7.5 It was observed within the process of knowledge exchange and discussion that there was a deepening of the understanding of the issues as they were explored during the meetings, and more so where the issues were discussed over subsequent meetings.
- 7.6 In the analysis of urban design and place making issues, such as the implications of Building for Life standards for development proposals, clear development and learning in relation to these issues were seen to take place. These learning processes can be broken down into stages for illustration according to Bloom – see Appendix 1.

Recommended Action:

- 7.7 Discussion that either develops a topic or area of work or promotes learning could be captured by collecting anonymous feedback from CWG members to identify their level of understanding of the issue before and after the CWG session against Bloom's major categories of cognitive domain.

Establishing a new culture of joint working

- 7.8 Breaking down barriers between each of the Officers from different Authorities was an essential part of forming a collaborative and effective team. The group development model (Tuckman, B 1965) of *Forming – Storming – Norming – Performing* is a model that outlines all phases necessary and inevitable in order for a team to grow, face up to challenges, tackle problems, find solutions, plan work, and to deliver results. When applied to this pilot it was observed that this Collaborative Working Group reached the Norming stage of team development. See Appendix 2.

Recommended Action:

- 7.9 It is anticipated that this established pilot CWG will continue to meet and develop as a joint working group. Further efficiencies in the group dynamics could be achieved by securing further funding.

Strategic approach to design quality

- 7.10 It was identified that there is a clear need for all of the local authorities to develop design leadership at a corporate level via policies, championing by Officers at senior level and design awareness of Members. Such leadership would act as a conduit for embedding higher design aspirations and standards across all of the local authority functions.

Recommended Action:

- 7.11 Exchange knowledge and experiences within the group to further explore best practice of design leadership. Models outside of the Black Country may also be explored. A Black Country Design Pact may be one mechanism that could be developed jointly between all four of the Black Country Local Authorities to foster a culture of sub-regional design aspirations and leadership. Best practice for developing successful relationships between local authorities and Urban Regeneration Companies could be shared.

Similar experiences across the Black Country

- 7.12 A common issue was identified between all of the local authorities – similar issues and experiences are being tackled on a daily basis. There was a desire to explore best practice and exchange knowledge on practical processes and procedures for project delivery. An example was addressing barriers to improving the public realm.

Recommended Action Five:

- 7.13 The pilot CWG should establish a structured programme of thematic issues and practical problems / issues to discuss at each meeting. To maximise the effectiveness of each meeting, each Officer should brief themselves as required prior to each meeting and post-meeting information exchanges should be immediate. Summarised progress reports or feedback should be reported back to the group via email or to the subsequent meeting to enhance group knowledge.

urban design input into Joint Core Strategy

- 7.14 One of the key outcomes of this pilot was the direct input in drafting design quality policies for the Black Country Joint Core Strategy. Without this co-ordinated pilot project this early input may not have taken place. It is anticipated that this CWG will continue to be involved in the development of these policies throughout the process.
- 7.15 Aside from the group outcome, the individual members of this CWG also benefited from deepening their understanding of the issues involved. As these policy issues were discussed between the members of the group, individual experiences and specialist knowledge were shared as the issue was explored further. The critical appraisal and application of knowledge evolved throughout the discussions.

Recommended Action:

- 7.16 Officers from various departments within several local authorities with varying degrees of knowledge in urban design, all individually benefitted from a knowledge exchange in a practical group-working environment. A productive outcome i.e. draft policy for design quality to be put forward in the Joint Core Strategy, also provided learning opportunities for the individual officers taking part. CPD and other professional skills were enhanced via this collaborative working group mechanism. This CWG pilot should set a precedent for further working via this model.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The key outcomes from this pilot have been identified as;

(1) Black Country Joint Core Strategy Policy drafting

- 8.2 There was recognition that although this pilot has focused on design quality input into the Black Country Joint Core Strategy, this was due to the timing of this pilot coinciding with the need for urban design input into the Joint Core Strategy at this significant stage.
- 8.3 It is noteworthy that the draft Joint Core Strategy design quality policies could not have been developed without the input of this collaborative working group. **Formal** thanks were given to this group on behalf of the JCS Steering Group.

(2) Establishing mechanism for collaborative sub-regional working

- 8.4 The original CWG scope of exchange outlined in the very first CWG meeting provides clear parameters and opportunities for continuing the joint working of urban designers within the four Black Country authorities.
- 8.5 Feedback from this pilot by the group members include the wider value attached to the opportunities for exploring the development of joint initiatives, and keeping up to date with what neighbouring Black Country authorities are doing to promote design quality.

(3) Opportunities for Officer CPD and professional practical training

- 8.6 Wolverhampton City Council in particular expressed how valuable the Group had been in acting as a forum for exchange of design issues as Wolverhampton City is the only Black Country authority without a dedicated Urban Design postholder (or team). This group has allowed all of the authorities to come together **and be represented under the banner of 'urban design', and take forward key design issues.**
- 8.7 Other CWG member feedback at the end of the 5 pilot sessions noted the other key benefits of this pilot as being an opportunity to:
- pool urban design skills and resources,
 - learn from each other, and
 - establish benchmarking for excellence.

Appendices:

- **Appendix 1 – Bloom's Taxonomy**
- **Appendix 2 – Forming – Storing – Norming - Performing**

Appendix 1 -- Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy identified 3 learning domains;

1. Cognitive Domain

Involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. This includes the recall or recognition of specific facts, procedural patterns, and concepts that serve in the development of intellectual abilities and skills.

2. Affective Domain

This domain includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes.

3. Psychomotor Domain

The psychomotor domain includes physical movement, coordination, and use of the motor-skill areas. Development of these skills requires practice and is measured in terms of speed, precision, distance, procedures, or techniques in execution.

CWG's and the Cognitive Domain

For the purposes of CWG evaluation only the first learning domain is relevant. These categories of intellectual learning and development can be used as benchmarks for assessing the quality of understanding and learning for professional continuous development.

The journey towards a deeper understanding of concepts, theories, policies, ideas and issues can be identified via applying Bloom's stages through from knowledge to evaluation. A more in-depth and structured study for capturing learning outcomes could use this theoretical model to benchmark learning progress.

Major Categories	Definition	Key Words
1. Knowledge	Remembering previously learned material, from specific facts to complete theories, but all that is required is recall.	Defines, describes, identifies, knows, labels, lists, matches, names, recalls, recognises, reproduces, selects, states.
2. Comprehension	Understand meaning, translate material from one form to another, interpret material. predict consequences or effects.	Comprehends, converts, defends, distinguishes, estimates, explains, extends, generalizes, infers, interprets, paraphrases, predicts, rewrites, summarizes, translates.
3. Application	Use a concept in a new situation. Apply what was learned to novel situations in the work place.	Applies, changes, demonstrates, discovers, constructs, manipulates, modifies, relates, operates, predicts, prepares, solves, uses.
4. Analysis	Separate concepts into component parts to understand structure. Distinguish facts from inference.	Analyses, compares, contrasts, differentiates, discriminates, identifies, illustrates, infers, separates.
5. Synthesis	Put parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure.	Categorises, combines, compiles, composes, creates, designs, explains, modifies, organises, plans, relates, revises.
6. Evaluation	Make judgments about the value of ideas or materials against defined criteria.	Appraises, compares, concludes, contrasts, criticises, defends, describes, explains, discriminates, evaluates, interprets, justifies, relates, summarises.

Appendix 2 - Forming – Storming – Norming - Performing

Forming

In the first stages of team building, the forming of the team takes place. The team meets and learns about the opportunity and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Team members tend to behave quite independently. They may be motivated but are usually relatively uninformed of the issues and objectives of the team. Team members are usually on their best behavior but very focused on themselves. Mature team members begin to model appropriate behavior even at this early phase. Sharing the knowledge of the concept of "Teams - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing" is extremely helpful to the team.

Supervisors of the team tend to need to be directive during this phase.

The forming stage of any team is important because in this stage the members of the team get to know one another, exchange some personal information, and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the team works as an individual and how they respond to pressure.

Storming

Every group will then enter the storming stage in which different ideas compete for consideration. The team addresses issues such as what problems they are really supposed to solve, how they will function independently and together and what leadership model they will accept. Team members open up to each other and confront each other's ideas and perspectives. In some cases storming can be resolved quickly. In others, the team never leaves this stage. The maturity of some team members usually determines whether the team will ever move out of this stage. Some team members will focus on minutiae to evade real issues.

The storming stage is necessary to the growth of the team. It can be contentious, unpleasant and even painful to members of the team who are averse to conflict. Tolerance of each team member and their differences needs to be emphasized. Without tolerance and patience the team will fail. This phase can become destructive to the team and will lower motivation if allowed to get out of control.

Supervisors of the team during this phase may be more accessible but tend to still need to be directive in their guidance of decision-making and professional behavior. The groups will therefore resolve their differences and group members will be able to participate with one another more comfortably and they won't feel that they are being judged in any way and will therefore share their own opinions and views...

Norming

At some point, the team may enter the norming stage. Team members adjust their behavior to each other as they develop work habits that make teamwork seem more natural and fluid. Team members often work through this stage by agreeing on rules, values, professional behavior, shared methods, working tools and even taboos. During this phase, team members begin to trust each other. Motivation increases as the team gets more acquainted with the project.

Teams in this phase may lose their creativity if the norming behaviors become too strong and begin to stifle healthy dissent and the team begins to exhibit groupthink.

Supervisors of the team during this phase tend to be participative more than in the earlier stages. The team members can be expected to take more responsibility for making decisions and for their professional behavior.

As team members get to know each other better, their views of each other begin to change. The team feels a sense of achievement for getting so far, however some members can begin to feel threatened by the amount of responsibility they have been given. They would try to resist the pressure and revert to storming again.

Performing

Some teams will reach the performing stage. These high-performing teams are able to function as a unit as they find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively without inappropriate conflict or the need for external supervision. Team members have become interdependent. By this time they are motivated and knowledgeable. The team members are

now competent, autonomous and able to handle the decision-making process without supervision. Dissent is expected and allowed as long as it is channeled through means acceptable to the team.

Supervisors of the team during this phase are almost always participative. The team will make most of the necessary decisions. Even the most high-performing teams will revert to earlier stages in certain circumstances. Many long-standing teams will go through these cycles many times as they react to changing circumstances. For example, a change in leadership may cause the team to revert to storming as the new people challenge the existing norms and dynamics of the team.

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