



## Housing & Land Board

<b>Date</b>	17 January 2024
<b>Report Title</b>	Plan for Growth / Employment Land: Update
<b>Portfolio lead</b>	Councillor Ian Courts
<b>Accountable Employees</b>	<p>John Godfrey, Interim Executive Director for Housing, Property &amp; Regeneration, West Midlands Combined Authority Email: John.Godfrey@wmca.org.uk</p> <p>Leo Pollak, Head of Policy, West Midlands Combined Authority Email: Leo.Pollak@wmca.org.uk</p> <p>John English, Policy Advisor, West Midlands Combined Authority Email: John.English@wmca.org.uk</p>
<b>Previous reports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• December 2023- Housing &amp; Land Delivery Steering Group</li><li>• April 2023 - Housing &amp; Land Delivery Steering Group and Housing &amp; Land Delivery Board</li><li>•</li></ul>

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

Housing & Land Delivery board is asked to:

- Note** the work relating to the Employment Land agenda, specifically the activity of the working group and alignment of the WM Plan for Growth;
- Discuss** how the WMCA can add value to the agenda around employment land, align with the priorities in the Plan for Growth and consider future agenda items for the working group.

### 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the board about progress relating to the alignment of work on the Employment Land agenda and the Plan for Growth, specifically the activity of the newly establish employment land working group.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 In November 2022, the Head of Economic Development and Delivery, presented a paper to the Housing & Land Delivery Board outlining the West Midlands Plan for Growth and the potential to align workstreams with the work of the Housing & Land Delivery Board, particularly in relation to the Future Homes Strategy and work on employment land supply being undertaken by local authorities in support of local plans.
- 2.2 The Plan for Growth focuses on clusters which have the potential to bring high-value growth to the region, create jobs and develop the region's skill base in key growth sectors. More generally, the Plan for Growth also recognises the need to bring forward brownfield land for regeneration, to meet the housing needs of the region and to provide land for industrial development across a range of key sectors. As such, the work aligns with, and supports, the West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study commissioned jointly by local authorities across the region, including WMCA.
- 2.3 Since the last update to Delivery Steering Group in April, a working group has been set up to consider the employment land agenda, and how it relates to emerging local and regional strategies such as the Plan for Growth and how WMCA, working with partners, can act as an enabler to unblock any potential barriers. The group will also consider broader issues such as skills shortages and potential implications for transport planning. When published, the findings and implications of the Strategic Employment Sites Study will also be considered.

## **3.0 Current activity**

- 3.1 Since the last report to Delivery Steering Group in April 2023, the proposed working group on Employment Land has met three times. Membership consist of local authority officers who expressed interest in this area and representation from both TFWM and the Plan for Growth team.
- 3.2 The main focus of discussion for the group has been around the data and how to gain a regional picture of employment land demand and supply. Desk research conducted found that although there is a lot of data contained within individual Local Plans and other documents, the data is in different formats and is on different timescales. Some data is collected on a regional level by TFWM, but this is not a complete dataset and is focussed on constituent authorities. This hinders attempts at gaining a regional picture of the employment land situation.
- 3.3 In order to get a clearer picture of the situation across the region, a table has been sent out to members to full in which should give a clearer picture of the quantum and size of sites available across the region. This will also help inform work around the Plan for Growth agenda and specific needs of indivial clusters.
- 3.4 In addition to this work, officers from the HPR team have been fully engaged with the broader work around the WM Plan for Growth. An internal delivery unit has been established to ensure that the Plan is fully integrated with all the work WMCA undertakes and the availability of employment land is a key enabler to growth and will be an important consideration if the ambitions set out are to be fully realised.
- 3.5 The employment land group met again on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November and received updates from the skills team and TFWM on activities related to the employment land agenda. The meeting also discussed issues around data and the Strategic Employment Sites

Study. It was agreed that the group needed to outline its objectives/ outputs going forward to influence future policy making and articulate the importance of employment land. A draft of these will be brought to the next meeting for consideration.

- 3.6 Alongside the employment land work we are preparing a paper for the February DSG discussing the implications for the region of the new Compulsory Purchase reforms included in the recent Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. These reforms are intended to make the CPO process quicker simpler and more affordable, as well as to progress stalled schemes and establish more coherent development plots. While much of this work may concern better unlocking the northern route to HS2 or new affordable housing, its primary driver is to ensure new employment land can be secured for key high impact investors bringing substantial numbers of jobs and supply chain multipliers to the region.

#### **4.0 Next Steps**

- 4.1 Further meetings of the employment land working group will take place in the coming months, focusing on aligning local and regional activities around employment land, establishing where WMCA can add value to current activity. A full set of objectives/ outcomes will be produced.
- 4.2 Work with the Plan for Growth team to identify any clusters which may have potential barriers to growth relating to land use/ availability and work with partners to come up with solutions if required.
- 4.3 Through the work of the working group, identify the regional picture relating to employment land supply/demand across the region and use this intelligence to realise its growth potential.
- 4.4 Continue to ensure that the agenda around employment land is considered in broader policy development such as the emerging plans around Investment Zones/ Levelling up Zones.

#### **5.0 Financial Implications [to be confirmed]**

- 5.1 It is noted that this report provides an update on the Employment Land agenda, specifically the activity of the working group and alignment of the WM Plan for Growth.
- 5.2 Whilst the Employment Land work and the Plan for Growth has the potential to deliver interventions that may require financial commitments in the future, there are no direct financial implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. The work to date has been enabled from existing WMCA resources. As this proposal is developed further, further updates will be brought back to this Board which will include details of any emerging financial implications.

#### **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 Section 113A(1)(a) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 gives WMCA a power of competence appropriate for the purposes of carrying-out any of its functions. It is noted that the purpose of this report is to inform Delivery Steering Group about progress relating to the alignment of work on the Employment Land agenda and the Plan for Growth, specifically the activity of the newly establish

employment land working group. Although there are no immediate legal implications arising from this report, any future projects or interventions involving WMCA would need to be supported by appropriate legal advice.

## **7.0 Equalities Implications**

7.1 There are no immediate equalities implications arising from this report but individual strategies and delivery schemes will need to take into account local area, and local stakeholder, needs to ensure the schemes developed through the joint working benefit local residents, including harder to reach groups. To that effect equality impact assessments will need to be conducted to understand demographics, key inequality issues and how investment can help address key inequality gaps. Engagement and consultation with key equality stakeholders is also crucial.

## **8.0 Inclusive Growth Implications**

8.1 There are no immediate inclusive growth implications arising from this report but individual strategies and delivery schemes are expected to respond to local area, and local stakeholder, needs to ensure that projects arising benefit local residents, including harder to reach groups.

## **9.1 Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

9.1 The report covers the WMCA area.

## **10.0 Other implications**

10.1 None.