

# Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership

## Report of the Level 1 LEED Workshop

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*Held on 20 March 2014 at the Black Country Consortium  
The Deckhouse Brierley Hill, Dudley.*



**Produced on behalf of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership**



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## 1. The Purpose of this Report

This report is a note of a Level 1 workshop following the Local Environment and Economic Development (LEED) process. LEED is a toolkit designed to support Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to identify key *opportunities and threats* to *local economic plans* that stem from the *economy's dependence on the environment*. These are significant, but often given insufficient consideration in economic development planning, partly because the complexity of the evidence base makes them hard to assess. LEED was developed by Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and Defra in conjunction with four LEPs.

Level 1 of the LEED process is designed to gather local experts in the environment and the economy, in order to arrive at an interim list of opportunities and threats, via a structured process. The evidence base behind these opportunities and threats can then be further tested and refined through Levels 2 and 3 of the toolkit if required. More information on LEED can be found [here](#).

## 2. Summary of the Workshop

- The meeting was chaired by Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium, and facilitated by Esther Kieboom, an Economist and Neil Wyatt, an Environmentalist.
- Sarah Middleton, gave an overview of the LEP strategic economic plans. Priorities for the LEP are **People, Place** and **Business**. The key targets for the Black Country and their implications are:
  - **To grow the population to 1.2M**, roughly a 5% increase which means there is a need for a sustainable approach to providing new housing stock.
  - **Growing Black Country Incomes towards the UK average** which demands revitalising the economy, attracting major businesses and encouraging new startups.
  - **Changing the socio-economic mix** by providing more high-value employment.
  - **Transforming the quality of the environment** on an urban park model, in order to attract and retain both businesses and people.
- The Black Country has the largest high-value manufacturing cluster in the UK and is a national leader in the automotive, aerospace and building technology markets. A green growth plan sets out the area's ambition to support and develop enterprises in the environmental technology sector.

- Skills and training is a major priority, and we are currently seeing rapidly improving school performance, although there is a history of under-investment in training by businesses. There is a need to continually improve transport infrastructure, as major employers move towards European shift patterns.
- The Black Country LEP seeks to align all major investment into the area to the People, Place, Business model, having started in areas such as EU funding, Growing Places, City Deal and now working on the Strategic Economic Plan. The aspiration is to align wider investment (e.g. from the private sector and government agencies).
- It was observed that there is the potential over the next 20 years for significant development, bringing lots of pressure on the use of open spaces and environmental quality, but that this should be an opportunity for the environment and not a threat. For example, since 2006 Sandwell had seen major improvements to open spaces, benefiting green and blue infrastructure, and the public realm through coordinating planning gain and multiplying its impact by matching other resources.

For more detail see Black Country authority's [Joint Core Strategy](#) and the Black Country LEP's draft [Strategic Economic Plan](#).

- Delegates worked through the environmental dependencies and relationships of the economy in two groups; the first looked at priority business sectors, the second looked at place in the context of the whole economy. Subsequently, the groups looked at the emerging opportunities and threats, which were ranked and prioritised. After lunch, responses to the emerging opportunities and threats were discussed.
- The groups had productive conversations and these are captured on the attached worksheets.

### 3. Workshop Methodology

#### Aim

The aim of the workshop was to support strategic economic planning through the identification of opportunities and threats to the economy of the area, which stem from the economy's dependence on the environment. To do this we used the LEED process, which is designed to help LEPs make sense of the mass of complex environmental information and distil it into key points demanding action.



### Process

The process starts with standard economic planning. For this study we considered the current situation and the LEP's strategic growth plan. This is available from economic planning documents.

In section 2 we looked at what this means in physical terms, particularly in terms of inputs and outputs.

This put us in a position to consider how the economy relates to the environment and identify the economy's main environmental dependencies. We did this from an *ecosystem services* perspective (explained below).

Finally we were able to list opportunities and threats to the economy, and consider strategic and tactical solutions.

### Ecosystem Services

This study makes use of the Ecosystem Services Framework, which is recognised as best practice in scientific and policy terms for considering the environment/economy relationship. The Ecosystem Services Framework considers the dependence of the economy on the environment in four categories;

- Provisioning services - material such as timber, water and crops.
- Regulating services - the ways in which the environment provides order and structure, such as flood control. Regulating services are normally taken for granted until damaged.
- Cultural services – non-material dependencies, such as the dependence of tourism on the attractiveness of a destination.
- Supporting services – the natural cycles that the other services depend upon, such as the water cycle.

This approach ensures that the work is systematic and rigorous, and allows it to be compared to other work in this area.

## 4. Opportunities and Threats

The opportunities and threats listed below are presented in order of the prioritisation at the workshop. A one day workshop can only produce an interim list, due to both constrained time and the need to consult experts who were unable to attend. Some of the opportunities and threats identified also have weaker links to the environment than would be expected under the LEED process. More specific and worked through opportunities and threats are produced by Levels 2 & 3 of the toolkit.

## Opportunities



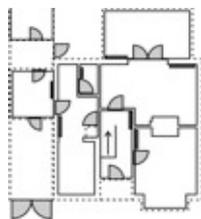
### **01: Developing and implementing expertise in land remediation**

- Working with businesses and the education sector, the Black Country has the opportunities to test and implement new approaches while facilitating the achievement of its target to remediate nearly 1000ha of land for employment land and housing development. The expertise of remediating contaminated land can also become an export product/service.



### **02: Developing a network of multi-functional spaces**

- Through careful and innovative planning and targeted investment, the Black Country's canals, rivers and green infrastructure can be improved in conjunction with sustainable transport links to improve the connectivity and quality of the landscape and make the Black Country a more attractive place to invest, work and live.



### **03: Support Building and Construction Industries.**

- The area has skills in planning, design and construction that are working together in more integrated ways. The challenges are to strengthen local supply chains and make new housing and business development more resource efficient, while developing new technologies and techniques for both new-build and retrofit.



### **04: Environmental and Heritage Tourism**

- Growth in tourism is a major opportunity for the Black Country. Our key centres and major attractions bring in visitors from beyond the region, but our environmental assets provide opportunities to create more local visitor hubs of value to locals and visitors. The Black Country Geopark is a major opportunity to strengthen the Black Country heritage 'brand'.



**05: Promoting low-carbon technologies**

- Through the Green Growth Plan we will build our expertise and capacity in new technologies that can help reduce our carbon footprint, reduce pollution and improve air and water quality. Examples include electric car charging points, solar energy, combined heat and power schemes (CHP) and waste reduction and new approaches such as the 'Peoples' Power Station'.



**06: Developing Environmental Management Businesses**

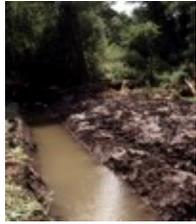
- We can strengthen the economy and improve the environment by supporting businesses that manage and utilise green infrastructure, such as biomass production and urban forestry, and developing their supply chains.



**07: Mitigate Heat Islands and increase permeability**

- Green infrastructure, including open spaces, green walls and roofs, sustainable urban drainage schemes (SUDS) and rain gardens all have a part to play in reducing the impact of extreme weather events and improving resilience.

## Threats

	<p><b>T1: Failure to Make Transformation Visible</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is essential that the work to improve the Black Country environment is both realised and recognised so that positive change is tangible for residents and visitors. Barriers include the costs of dealing with the legacies of contamination and mining being too high in relation to realised land values, incurring a huge opportunity cost to the Black Country in terms of under-utilised land and the failure to retain and attract skilled workers.</li></ul>
	<p><b>T2: Poor Connectivity and Split Communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Much of the urban landscape is laid out according to transport needs, for example the motorway, main road and railway corridors. . We must not underestimate the wider benefits of using environmental infrastructure to improve connectivity between communities, residential and employment land and into local centres.</li></ul>
	<p><b>T3: Energy Security</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We have to ensure the Black Country is robust in the face of future changes in energy supply and rising energy costs. Failure to promote and support renewable energy sources (including biomass), improve energy efficiency and reduce waste will impact on future prosperity.</li></ul>
	<p><b>T4: Poor Management and Maintenance of Environmental Infrastructure</b></p> <p>The resources for managing environmental infrastructure are often limited by failure to understand the wider economic benefits of such investment. It is essential that we learn from successes within the Black Country and elsewhere in the creative and positive use of planning gain, the setting up of new management frameworks for land management and other innovative solutions.</p>

	<p><b>T5: A Training and Skills Gap</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the Black Country is going to successfully develop as a centre for environmental technologies and transform its environment, there will be many jobs requiring environmentally related skills at all levels. We must ensure that businesses and educational institutions deliver opportunities for apprenticeships and learning to upskill local people.</li></ul>
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	<p><b>T6: Failure to Make Efficient Use of Land</b></p> <p>Although the Black Country has much under-utilised land, it is essential that strong planning frameworks are used to optimise the allocation and use of land for development to maximise its benefits and protect environmental infrastructure.</p>
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	<p><b>T7: Pressure for Growth</b></p> <p>It is essential that we do not lose sight of the importance of environmental benefits and the role of environmental transformation. Opportunities that may seem attractive in terms of short term growth may not be so advantageous in the context of our wider needs, and limit future prosperity</p>
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## 5. How would Level 2 of the toolkit take us forward?

The Level 1 workshop was a valuable and stimulating exploration of the relationship between the economy and the environment. However, this relationship is very complex, and it's realistically only possible to begin to explore it in a one-day workshop. Additionally, it is necessarily difficult to get all the relevant expertise in one room at the same time. For this reason the above list of opportunities and threats should be seen as an initial or interim assessment.

Level 2 of the toolkit is a structured process in which the views of all the relevant local partners in the areas of environment and economy are interviewed, and offer their views, and supporting evidence about what the major threats and opportunities are. This may confirm or challenge the opportunities and threats that emerged from Level 1. It is also very likely that there are additional opportunities and threats that can be identified. This grounding in the local expertise will help to provide an evidence base to influence the Strategic Economic Plan.

The Level 2 process can work up the opportunities and threats in greater detail, offer evidence to justify their identification, and make them more specific. It would also capture the views of local partners about the best approaches and solutions to them.

### 6. Next Steps

- Incorporating the key priorities and messages from this workshop into the Black Country LEP's Strategic Economic Plan.
- Development of a geographically-focused Environmental Infrastructure Implementation Plan, with a clearly articulated vision and objectives.
- Establishment of a Prioritisation Panel under the aegis of the Black Country Environmental Forum to identify and promote the most beneficial Environmental Infrastructure projects.
- Developing wider ownership of environmental infrastructure priorities among a broader range of stakeholders, especially in the construction, industrial and third sectors.
- Incorporate environmental infrastructure ideas in developing innovative approaches to spatial and regeneration planning.
- To continually review the opportunities and threats and maximise the benefits accruing to the Black Country from ongoing improvement to its green infrastructure.