

6 Assessment of Spatial Growth Options

6.1 Preface

6.1.1 The spatial strategy will dictate where new growth would be allocated in Sandwell for the Plan period to 2041.

6.1.2 Given Sandwell’s highly urbanised nature with very little vacant or unused open spaces, and the importance of the existing open and green spaces for environmental and human health, the Council is limited in the number of approaches it can take to accommodate growth.

6.1.3 Four Spatial Growth Options have been identified by SMBC, as set out in **Table 6.1**. These options consider how the overall number of homes and area of employment land (and other types of land use where applicable) could be strategically distributed, thus helping to meet some of the strategic aims of the emerging SLP.

Table 6.11: Sandwell Growth Options identified by SMBC

Option	Description of Spatial Growth Option
A – Balanced Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus most new growth within the existing residential and employment areas of Sandwell; – Continue to deliver most new development on previously developed land and sites; – Take advantage of existing and improved infrastructure capacity to maximise development on new sites – Make improvements to/allowances for the environmental, climate change, accessibility and socio-economic capacity of existing residential and employment areas; – Examine the potential for providing housing/employment development on areas of vacant and underused open spaces and undeveloped land within the urban areas; – Protect areas of designated habitat and ecological value; – Protect the historic and archaeological environment and areas with geological and landscape value.
B – Green Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Restrict new development to brownfield and previously developed sites; – Promote the use of zero- and low-carbon designs, building techniques, materials and technologies in all new development; – Only allocate housing in locations with the highest levels of sustainable transport access to residential services (retail provision, schools, healthcare facilities, fresh food, employment etc.); – Only allocate new employment land where sustainable access and good public transport links available; – Redevelop existing housing and employment areas to deliver cleaner, more energy-efficient and more intensive areas of growth; – Maximise climate change adaptation and mitigation through the creation, protection and improvement of parks, woodland and tree planting, open spaces, landscapes and habitats across the borough; – Protect open spaces and areas of habitat and ecological value within and beyond the urban areas; – Create additional public open spaces to serve new housing developments; – Protect the historic and archaeological environment and areas with geological and landscape value.
C – Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Retain, protect and enhance all types of local employment land; – Intensify the use of existing employment areas through redevelopment and redesign of existing areas and infrastructure improvements;

Option	Description of Spatial Growth Option
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore the redevelopment of retail and other commercial areas in town centres to provide additional employment sites; – Allocate employment sites on derelict/vacant open space within the urban area; – Identify and allocate areas with the potential to deliver larger employment sites via site assembly; – Locate new housing and services, facilities and infrastructure to serve existing and proposed employment areas; – Protect areas of designated habitat and ecological value; – Protect the historic environment, including areas with industrial design and archaeological interest, and areas with geological and landscape value.
D – Housing Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus new growth within the existing residential and employment areas of Sandwell; – Continue to deliver most new development on previously developed land and sites; – Examine the potential for providing housing development on areas of vacant and underused open spaces and undeveloped land within the urban areas; – Redevelop areas of existing older housing to provide higher density and energy-efficient new housing; – Reallocate areas identified for employment land provision for additional housing development; – Allocate new housing on urban sites around transport hubs/nodes and in towns and local centres, including the use of tall buildings in appropriate locations; – Increase overall housing densities to 100 dph in centres and 45 dph outside centres and meet capacity gaps in associated residential services e.g. schools, healthcare, leisure/recreation, infrastructure; – Protect areas of designated habitat and ecological value; – Protect the historic and archaeological environment and areas with geological and landscape value.

6.1.4 Each option has been assessed using the SA Framework and summary findings are presented in **Table 6.2**. Full explanations and reasonings behind each score are set out for each SA Objective in **section 6.2**.

6.1.5 It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to predict effects accurately, the sustainability impacts have been assessed at a high level and are reliant upon the current understanding of the baseline. These assessments have been based on information provided by SMBC, as well as expert judgement.

Table 6.22: Impact matrix of the four Spatial Growth Options

	SA1	SA2	SA3	SA4	SA5	SA6	SA7	SA8	SA9	SA10	SA11	SA12	SA13	SA14
Spatial Growth Option	Cultural heritage	Landscape	Biodiversity, flora, fauna and	Climate change mitigation	Climate change adaptation	Natural resources	Pollution	Waste	Transport and accessibility	Housing	Equality	Health	Economy	Education, skills and training
A	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+/-
B	-	+	++	++	++	+	+	+/-	++	+	+/-	+	+	+
C	-	-	+/-	+/-	+/-	-	-	-	+	+	+/-	-	++	+/-
D	-	-	+/-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+/-	-	-	++

6.2 Assessment

SA Objective 1 – Cultural Heritage

- 6.2.1 All spatial growth options A, B, C, and D state they will “*protect the historic and archaeological environment and areas with geological and landscape value*” which could help to conserve the historic landscape character and heritage assets of the borough. The options all aim to focus the majority of new development within the existing urban area, however as most of Sandwell’s listed buildings and heritage assets are also within the urban area, without careful consideration of development layout, scale and design this could lead to alteration of their historic settings.
- 6.2.2 In particular, Option D promotes higher density development which could increase the potential for adverse effects on the historic environment. Although, the intention to “*redevelop areas of existing older housing*” under Option D could potentially improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings and promote their re-use, helping to conserve their historic identity. Options B and C also include reference to redevelopment, which could provide opportunities to enhance the historic character of these areas.
- 6.2.3 Option C includes a focus on economic growth and seeks to ensure development has regard to areas with industrial design and archaeological interest, which could potentially help to strengthen the sense of place and local identity.
- 6.2.4 There is potential for all the options to have an impact on the setting of heritage assets as they all propose development within the urban area to a greater or lesser extent, as such the all the options could have a minor negative impact with Option D having the potential for the largest impact given the higher density development proposed. Option C could be identified as best performing as it proposes to redevelop town centre areas.

SA Objective 2 – Landscape

- 6.2.5 The landscape character of the borough is described as low or low-moderate sensitivity to development with one area of moderate-high sensitivity, open landscapes within the borough are important for maintaining separation between settlements and as such their sensitivity may be increased⁵⁴. Green Belt land is located to the north-east of the borough, over 50% of which is described as having very high ecological value⁵⁵. All the spatial growth options aim to keep new development within the existing urban area, redeveloping land or sites, utilising vacant land or under used open spaces, which would prevent Green Belt being lost. Furthermore, all options seek to protect areas with landscape value.

⁵⁴ LUC (2019) Black Country Landscape Sensitivity Assessment. Available at: https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/13883/black-country-lsa-front-end-report-final-lr_redacted.pdf [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

⁵⁵ EcoRecord (2019) An Ecological evaluation of the Black Country Green Belt. Available at: <https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/13896/an-ecological-evaluation-of-the-black-country-green-belt-final-report-2019-redacted.pdf> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

- 6.2.6 Option A would promote growth in existing residential and employment areas, encouraging new developments on previously developed land and examines the potential of utilising vacant or underused land or sites within the urban areas. Option B restricts new development to brownfield or previously developed sites and aims to protect open spaces and areas of ecological value and create additional public open spaces. Option C would redevelop and redesign existing areas and provide infrastructure improvements to intensify the use of existing employment areas. It would also allocate employment sites on derelict or vacant open space within the urban area.
- 6.2.7 Option D would focus growth within existing residential and employment areas of Sandwell utilising previously developed sites and examine the potential for housing development on vacant or underused open spaces or undeveloped land within the urban areas. However, the focus on increasing density including use of taller buildings under Option D could also lead to greater challenges in terms of development potentially altering views of, or from, sensitive and important landscape features. Options B, C and D propose redevelopment of existing housing or employment areas which could help to improve the townscape or revitalise degraded areas.
- 6.2.8 Whilst all the options aim to promote development within the existing urban area, Options A, C and D propose using underused open space within the urban area which may lead to a minor negative impact on the local landscape character. Option B restricts new development to brownfield sites and aims to protect open spaces and create new public open spaces. Consequently, it is likely that Option B would have a minor positive impact on the landscape and would be the best performing option.

SA Objective 3 – Biodiversity, Flora, Fauna and Geodiversity

- 6.2.9 Within Sandwell there are nine LNRs, forming key sections of the ecological network within the SLP area in addition to the numerous SINC and SLINC. There are no SSSIs or NNRs within the borough, but both are present in neighbouring authorities close to the Sandwell Borough boundary. Areas of geological interest include Rowley Hills, Bumble Hole & Warrens Park LNR and Sandwell Valley Country Park. Over 50% of Sandwell's Green Belt land is described as having very high ecological value⁵⁶. Some priority habitats and small areas on ancient woodland are also present in the borough. New development could place increased pressure on the biodiversity assets within and surrounding the urban area through increased development and visitor-related pressures .

⁵⁶ EcoRecord (2019) An Ecological evaluation of the Black Country Green Belt. Available at: <https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/13896/an-ecological-evaluation-of-the-black-country-green-belt-final-report-2019-redacted.pdf> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

- 6.2.10 The locations of the proposed sites within the four spatial growth options are not known so their exact impact on nearby biodiversity sites is uncertain, but the options do describe their approach to biodiversity which enables comparison. Option A aims to make improvements to or allowances for the environment in existing housing or residential sites and to protect areas with ecological and geological value and has recorded a minor positive impact on biodiversity. Option B aims to protect open spaces and areas of ecological value and create additional public open spaces within which there may be potential to increase biodiversity. Through the creation, protection and improvement of parks, woodland, open spaces and habitats, Option B would help to conserve and enhance habitats and ecological corridors within the urban area, improving resilience and adaptation to climate change.
- 6.2.11 Both Options C and D aim to protect areas of designated habitat or ecological value, but could also lead to the loss of open spaces and undeveloped land within the urban area which although would not be of significant ecological value could cumulatively reduce the amount of space and corridors available for wildlife within the urban area. Consequently, Options C and D have both recorded an uncertain impact on biodiversity overall.
- 6.2.12 All options aim to protect the environment to some extent, although Option B is likely to be the best performing with regard to biodiversity as it aims to protect existing open spaces and areas of ecological value but also intends to create new spaces and habitats which would benefit biodiversity and help with adaptation to climate change and is likely to have a major positive impact on biodiversity.

SA Objective 4 – Climate Change Mitigation

- 6.2.13 The two largest sources of emissions in Sandwell are residential buildings and on-road transport however, according to Sandwell Trends, in 2021 almost 30% of households within the borough did not own a car⁵⁷. Investments in public transport, walking and cycling provisions could help to reduce pollution and provide better access across the borough without using privately owned transportation.
- 6.2.14 Option A aims to make improvements to or allowances for climate change within existing residential and employment sites.
- 6.2.15 Option B would promote the use of zero and low-carbon designs, building techniques, materials and technologies in all new developments and redevelop existing housing and employment areas to deliver cleaner and more energy efficient growth. This could help to reduce embodied carbon. This option would further ensure that new development is located in areas with the best public transport access, helping to reduce reliance on private cars for travel. Through the creation of parks, woodland, open spaces and habitats across the borough, Option B would also help to increase GI coverage with carbon storage capacity and supporting other ecosystem services, maximising both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

⁵⁷ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2023) Sandwell Trends: Housing and Car Ownership. Available at: <https://www.sandwelltrends.info/household-characteristics/> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

- 6.2.16 Option C promotes the co-location of housing with existing and proposed employment areas, which could help to reduce the need to travel to work and encourage the use of sustainable travel options. However, as this option does not include specific reference to climate change or mitigation measures the exact impact this option would have on this SA Objective would be uncertain.
- 6.2.17 Option D would aim to redevelop areas of existing older housing to provide higher density and energy efficient new housing, centred around public transport hubs. This could include retrofitting the existing building stock in the borough, further helping to reduce emissions although this may lead to the release of embodied carbon depending on the extent to which buildings could be refurbished rather than demolished and rebuilt.
- 6.2.18 Options A and D help to promote climate change mitigation and as such have a minor positive impact. Option B is likely to be the best performing against climate change mitigation as it proposes the most modifications and technologies within new developments to help combat the effects of climate change and has been identified as producing a major positive impact on climate change mitigation.

SA Objective 5 – Climate Change adaptation

- 6.2.19 Given its mostly urban setting, Sandwell is likely to suffer from the 'urban heat island' effect which may be made worse by new development in the borough. GI and open spaces can help urban areas adapt to climate change, by providing protection from extreme weather and helping to reduce the 'urban heat island' effect. Likewise, these functions could be compromised by greater urban density and loss of GI.
- 6.2.20 Sandwell is affected by flooding along the River Tame the River Stour and by surface water flooding with all six wards having been affected by previous flooding events. The introduction of new dwellings and impermeable surfaces can exacerbate surface water flooding, but implementation of adaptive technologies can help to mitigate this.
- 6.2.21 Option A aims to make improvements to or allowances for climate change within existing residential and employment sites which would likely help adaptation to climate change. Option B would promote the use of zero and low-carbon designs, building techniques, materials and technologies in all new developments and redevelop existing housing and employment areas to deliver cleaner, more energy efficient and more intensive areas of growth. Through the creation of parks, woodland, open spaces and habitats across the borough, with potential to increase the extent and quality of GI, Option B also intends to maximise climate change adaptation and mitigation. A major positive impact could be achieved.

6.2.22 Option D would aim to redevelop areas of existing older housing to provide higher density and energy efficient new housing, with benefits to climate change adaptation and potentially reduced overall land-take compared to Options A and C, resulting in a lesser impact on flooding. Although, Options A and D would include development on existing open spaces and/or undeveloped land within the urban areas which could lead to an overall loss of GI both of these options have other adaptation measures, e.g. improving/redeveloping existing housing or employment sites, and as such a minor positive result in terms of climate change adaptation has been recorded for these options. As Option C option does not include specific reference to climate change or to climate change adaptation measures, the exact impact this option would have on climate change mitigation is uncertain.

6.2.23 Option B would be the best performing against climate change adaptation as it proposes the greatest focus on climate change adaptation and technologies within new developments, as well as conserving and enhancing GI, to help combat the effects of climate change.

SA Objective 6 – Natural Resources

6.2.24 The majority of land within Sandwell is classified as ALC 'urban', although there are small pockets of non-agricultural land and a small amount of Grade 3 and 4 land in the north east of the borough. There are no MSAs present in Sandwell.

6.2.25 All the Options A, B, C and D propose to keep new development within the existing urban area as such they would not be expected to impact BMV agricultural land within the borough. All options also promote the use of previously developed land. However, Options A, C and D also propose allocating underused or vacant open space or previously undeveloped land within the urban area for new development, with potential to lead to a minor negative impact on natural resources associated with the loss of soil resource which may have environmental or ecological value.

6.2.26 Option B only proposes to utilise brownfield and previously developed sites for development. As such Option B could be described as the best performing and would be likely to have an overall minor positive impact on natural resources.

SA Objective 7 – Pollution

6.2.27 Sandwell has a borough-wide AQMA, and for several years nitrogen dioxide concentrations have exceeded legal limits in seven monitoring stations across the borough⁵⁸. New development within the AQMA may lead to increased pollution levels from increased use of vehicles and would potentially expose residents to existing poor air quality. Soil and water pollution would depend on the nature, scale and location of the developments but there is potential for increased pollution through construction and occupation of the sites despite the intention within each option to "*protect areas of ... ecological value*".

⁵⁸ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2020) Climate change strategy 2020-2041. Available at: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/climate-change-1/climate-change/3#:~:text=In%20recognition%20of%20the%20urgency,carbon%2Dneutral%20borough%20by%202041> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

- 6.2.28 Option A aims to make improvements to the capacity of existing residential and employment areas with regard to the environment, climate change and accessibility, which may help to reduce pollution levels by promoting public transport and implementing mitigation measures.
- 6.2.29 Option B would promote the use of zero and low-carbon designs, building techniques, materials and technologies in new developments to help reduce emissions during the construction and occupation phases. This option would also allocate housing and employment sites with good sustainable and public transport access which would potentially help to reduce transport-associated emissions. It also proposes to redevelop existing housing and employment sites to deliver cleaner, more energy-efficient areas of growth which would help to minimise the generation of pollution from domestic and employment sources.
- 6.2.30 Option C would locate new housing and associated services, facilities and infrastructure to serve existing and proposed employment areas, which may help to reduce the need to travel, particularly commuting by private vehicle, and so reduce potential transport-associated emissions. Option D aims to provide high density and energy-efficient housing by redeveloping areas of existing older housing. This could include retrofitting the existing building stock in the borough, further helping to reduce emissions.
- 6.2.31 Despite the provisions within Options A, C and D to minimise the generation of pollution, overall, these developments would still introduce new development within an AQMA and lead to an increase in traffic to some extent. A minor negative impact on pollution could arise. Option B provides the most initiatives to help reduce pollution both in the construction and occupation of developments and locating new developments near to sustainable transport links which may reduce commuting by private vehicle and so congestion levels and emissions within Sandwell. Therefore, Option B is likely to be the best performing option in terms of pollution and on balance could potentially have a minor positive impact on pollution overall depending on the nature and design of new developments.

SA Objective 8 – Waste

- 6.2.32 It is expected that any new development either housing or employment would create additional waste, potentially in both quantity and range of waste types produced. There is not sufficient information available to accurately predict the effect that each spatial growth option would have in terms of minimising waste generation, promoting the sustainable management of waste, or encouraging recycling and re-use of waste.
- 6.2.33 Option A would locate new development in areas where existing infrastructure has capacity or where capacity has been improved to accommodate the new development which is expected to include utilities and waste infrastructure as such Option A would likely have a minor positive impact on waste.

- 6.2.34 Option B emphasises the use of sustainable construction including building techniques and materials and would ensure all development uses previously developed and brownfield land. These principles would be likely to help minimise waste from the construction phase and promote re-use of materials where possible. As the exact use of sustainable construction methods are unknown at this time, the impact this option would have on waste is uncertain.
- 6.2.35 Option C would locate new housing and services, facilities and infrastructure to serve existing and proposed development sites. However, the focus on employment growth under Option C also means that this option could lead to a larger amount or greater range of waste types depending on the specific employment uses. This is likely to produce a minor negative impact as waste quantities may be increased.
- 6.2.36 Option D would promote higher densities of development and include the use of tall buildings. Higher densities of development could place increased demand on local waste management systems due to larger quantities and more diverse waste being generated in smaller areas, potentially leading to sanitation problems if a careful design is not implemented⁵⁹. Therefore, this option could potentially have a minor negative impact on waste.
- 6.2.37 Option A appears to be the best performing option with regard to waste as it proposes to locate development in areas with existing infrastructure capacity or where capacity has been improved to support development.

SA Objective 9 – Transport and Accessibility

- 6.2.38 Sandwell is well served by a dense network of public transport providing links regionally and nationally. Accessible public transport links are key to sustainable development and as transport is an enabler of economic activity, employment sites within or close to existing urban settings would potentially have access to a greater transport network to utilise and promotion of public transport or active travel may be more successful.
- 6.2.39 Option A proposes to take advantage of existing and improved infrastructure to enable development on sites to be maximised. Option B aims to allocate housing in areas with high levels of sustainable transport to provide residents with sustainable access to services and to allocate employment land where good public transport links are available. Option C aims to redevelop retail and other commercial areas in town centres to provide employment sites, allocate employment sites on derelict or vacant open space within the urban area and to locate housing and services close to existing and proposed employment areas. This could potentially reduce commuting times and so possibly reliance on private vehicles as the public transport network could be utilised by commuters. Option D would focus new growth within the existing residential and employment areas and around transport hubs so residents could utilise existing transport links, including public transport and active travel.

⁵⁹ London Plan Density Research: Lessons from Higher Density Development. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/project_2_3_lessons_from_higher_density_development.pdf [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

6.2.40 All the options propose to site new development in locations where the existing public transport network can be utilised, with a likely minor positive impact on transport and accessibility for Options A, C and D. Of the four options, Option B is identified as the best performing to its focus on growth only where public transport links are best which would likely encourage more residents to choose more sustainable travel options and a major positive impact on transport and accessibility was identified for this option.

SA Objective 10 – Housing

6.2.41 Within Sandwell there has been an identified need for 29,773 homes over the Plan period to 2041. Whilst the spatial growth options describe housing locations they do not quantify housing numbers for each option and so the extent to which they could contribute towards meeting the housing need in the borough is unknown. At this scale of assessment, it is also uncertain what the likely contribution of each growth option to meeting the different needs of the population on housing mix, provision of extra care housing, accessible housing and affordable homes would be.

6.2.42 Option A proposes to focus most new growth within the existing residential and employment areas on previously developed land and utilising existing and improved infrastructure capacity to maximise developments. Option B aims to restrict development to brownfield sites, promote low carbon designs and technologies in new development and redevelop existing housing and employment areas to deliver more energy-efficient and intensive areas of growth. Option C proposes to locate new housing and services to serve existing and proposed employment areas. Option D aims to focus new growth within the existing residential and employment areas near existing transport hubs, utilising vacant and underused open spaces and undeveloped land within the urban areas. Options D would also redevelop areas of existing older housing to provide higher density and energy-efficient housing and resolve any capacity gaps in residential services.

6.2.43 All the options propose new housing development but focused on different areas of Sandwell, leading to a minor positive impact on housing provision. Option D is likely to be the best performing with regard to housing as it has the largest focus on housing, and by increasing density may provide for the largest amount of housing growth.

SA Objective 11 – Equality

6.2.44 Deprivation is high across the SLP area, with 36 LSOAs in Sandwell ranked among the 10% most deprived in England⁶⁰. Options A, B, C and D propose growth in urban areas which could potentially help facilitate social inclusion increasing accessibility to key services and employment opportunities, however, increasing housing density in deprived areas could also lead to exacerbation of existing inequalities. In particular, Option D emphasises the use of increased housing densities and taller buildings, which may lead to greater pressure on existing services and open spaces with adverse implications for quality of life, and more dense living situations may potentially lead to higher crime rates.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) The English Indices of Deprivation 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

- 6.2.45 Option A proposes to focus new development in existing housing and employment areas delivering most new development on previously developed land and taking advantage of existing and improved infrastructure capacity to maximise development. Option B restricts new development to brownfield sites, allocating housing and employment land in areas with good sustainable and public transport links to services including schools, jobs, healthcare and food stores. Option C proposes to intensify existing employment areas through redevelopment and redesign and locating new housing and services to serve employment sites. Option D aims to deliver new housing in previously developed and potentially underused open space and redevelop existing older houses to provide higher density housing; this could help to promote regeneration and enhance deprived areas, but also lead to challenges associated with higher density living as outlined above.
- 6.2.46 On balance, mixed effects could occur as a result of Options B, C and D with an uncertain impact recorded, whereas Option A is more likely to lead to a minor positive impact overall.
- 6.2.47 Option A is likely to be the best performing option with regard to equality, because it balances housing, employment and utilising existing and improved infrastructure.

SA Objective 12 – Health

- 6.2.48 Residents in Sandwell have generally good access to health facilities with 73 healthcare centres⁶¹ and Sandwell General Hospital located in the borough, and the majority of the urban area has good pedestrian and public transport access to healthcare.
- 6.2.49 All the spatial growth options seek to take advantage of existing facilities by directing the majority of new development to the existing urban areas where healthcare provisions are most concentrated. Options B and D aim to locate new developments close to transport links to enable residents to access services using public transport; Option B would ensure housing is only developed in areas with the highest accessibility to healthcare, whereas Option D would focus growth around transport hubs and seek to fill healthcare capacity gaps. However, Options A, C and D all involve the potential of allocating vacant or under used open space for development, losing the potential to use these areas for open spaces and green links, and the associated benefits this could bring for human health and wellbeing. A minor negative impact is identified for these three options, although Option D would perform better than Options A and C.
- 6.2.50 Option B could be identified as the best performing overall as it allocates housing near transport links to residential services including healthcare and does not consider use of previously undeveloped open space within the urban areas, instead ensuring the protection of existing open spaces and creation of new open spaces for the public. A minor positive impact is identified overall for Option B.

SA Objective 13 – Economy

- 6.2.51 In Sandwell, the highest density of employment locations can be found in the centre and north of the borough and along key transport routes.

⁶¹ According to Black Country Accessibility Modelling (2021) data

- 6.2.52 Option A aims to focus most new growth within the existing residential and employment areas, where sustainable transport options would be the best. Similarly, Option B proposes to locate new employment land near to good sustainable and public transport links, ensuring good sustainable access to workplaces. Both Options A and B would be likely to result in a minor positive impact on the economy.
- 6.2.53 Option C focuses on economic growth, aiming to retain, enhance and promote all types of employment land, intensify the use of employment land through redevelopment and redesign and locate new housing and services to serve employment sites. A major positive impact would be likely.
- 6.2.54 Option D aims to deliver growth in existing residential and employment areas, and reallocate areas identified as employment land for additional housing development which could compromise employment land targets and lead to a minor negative impact on the economy.
- 6.2.55 Option C is identified as the best performing with regard to the economy.

SA Objective 14 – Education, Skills and Training

- 6.2.56 The extent to which all spatial options would facilitate good access to education for new residents is almost entirely dependent on the specific location of the development, which is uncertain given the broad locations set out in the spatial growth options. Access to education, skills and training are generally best within urban centres. All the options, A, B, C and D propose the majority of growth within the existing urban areas, which would likely enable good access to education facilities.
- 6.2.57 Option B aims to only locate new residential development in areas with the highest levels of sustainable access to services, including schools, a minor positive impact is recorded for this option. Whilst Option D promotes the highest housing densities it also aims to improve capacity in associated residential services including education facilities, and focus development around sustainable transport hubs producing a major positive impact for this SA Objective. The overall effect of Options A and C on access to education is uncertain, as although they remain largely urban-focused they may lead to over-capacity issues in some locations.
- 6.2.58 Overall, Option D would likely be best performing with regard to education, skills and training owing to the provision of sustainable access to schools and addressing capacity gaps.

6.3 Conclusion

- 6.3.1 It is difficult to determine an overall best performing spatial option as the performance of each option varies depending on the SA Objective in question. Generally, options which perform better against economic needs put the most pressure on environmental or social resources and vice versa.

- 6.3.2 Overall, it appears Option B performs best against the largest number of SA Objectives; it reduces the impacts on the environment whilst providing residential and employment growth. However, it is not clear exactly what level of growth this option would support as the quantities of housing or employment development that could be attained under this option are not known. As such, it may be a refinement of this option provides the best option overall.

6.4 Selection and Rejection

- 6.4.1 Reflecting on the SA findings and SMBC's objectives for the emerging SLP, the Council consider that:

6.4.2 *"No single option would have no adverse environmental or sustainability impact; however, it is clear from the summary assessment that two options (Housing-led and Employment-led) would not support the balanced and sustainable mix of development and environmental and social benefits required to deliver transformational change in Sandwell. It is apparent that the most appropriate and deliverable strategy for housing, employment and environmental protection and improvement in Sandwell, which will also confirm our ambitions to improve the health and wellbeing of residents, would be a combination of options A and B.*

6.4.3 *This will deliver what we are referring to as the Balanced Green Growth option for the delivery of development in Sandwell. It will allow us to provide a significant quantum of housing and additional employment opportunities in the borough while at the same time promoting a bold strategy supporting the delivery of climate change adaptation and mitigation, environmental protection and enhancement, the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and the delivery of green and blue infrastructure. This in turn will support the Council's wider aims and objectives in improving the health (physical and mental), wellbeing and life chances of people in Sandwell".*