

BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL - A VISION FOR THE REGENERATION OF BIRMINGHAM

COUNCILLOR KEN HARDEMAN - CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

- Thank you
- I make no apology for beginning on a political note - I am after all a politician!
For the first time in 20 years Birmingham City Council is now controlled by a Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition, - A “Progressive Partnership” with a shared agenda, in which I hope to play a key role as Cabinet member for Regeneration.

What I would like to attempt to do is outline any vision for the Regeneration of this great City, touch on global concerns and highlighting the need to strive to achieve a more sustainable city - where the quality of the environment is of particular concern. - in order to bring benefit to all the people of Birmingham. I want to explain the new administration’s strategic vision and aims and to highlight these with a few examples of some of the key projects that I want to see progressed.

Before I turn to Council priorities can I first congratulate MEBC work in particular around resource consumption – notably the industrial symbiosis project and work around green technologies; particularly the supply chain. I will to return to the interlinked issues of climate change, energy and resources in a minute.

To begin with I need to outline my priorities which are 2 fold - to prepare the City for the future by equipping Birmingham as an international City with the capacity to drive growth in the West Midlands Region and secondly to close the prosperity gaps across the City by increasing the number of Birmingham residents in work especially those that have been excluded in the past. Priorities which I hope we all can share.

Initially however, I think I must give some credit to what has gone before. Increasingly Birmingham is perceived as an economically successful international business and conference City. A City still strong in manufacturing and technology. A multi-cultural City with a vibrant and diverse arts and cultural scene. A City that welcomes business and leisure visitors. Birmingham has also recently embarked on the next phase of the renaissance with a commitment and determination increasingly recognised by developers and investors alike. It is my job to ensure that this momentum is maintained and allowed to flourish.

So how is this new administration going to be different? What are going to be our strategic objectives and how will this be achieved?

First and foremost I can assure you we will begin by challenging current practice - just because something has been done for the past 20 years this does not necessarily mean it is correct. Vibrant Urban Villages has become the 'goal' for the regeneration of the City - a worthy aspiration and one I do not wish to challenge. However we consider that it is necessary to re-focus regeneration as a truly City wide activity, reinvigorating economic, commercial and social activity and improving environmental quality in some of our neglected suburban areas throughout the City. We will continue to seek new

funding opportunities for the regeneration of our most disadvantaged areas but we will also bring about a re-appraisal of our efforts to allow a wider and more equitable distribution of much needed regeneration investment throughout Birmingham.

There are many areas in Birmingham “at risk” which have been ignored in the past which by directing modest investment could be saved from the spiral of decline and I want to ensure that our investment is able to achieve maximum value for money and to be cost effective. I want to refocus our efforts to ensure we do not merely waste precious resources - we need to be much more cost effective and selective in our investment strategy.

Also I want to help promote a more sustainable City - a City of mixed use communities where people have greater choice as to where they work, shop and visit, and where good affordable public transport is available as an alternative to the car should they wish to use it. We have to continue to conserve and improve the quality of the environment to help ensure the City remains attractive as a place to invest in and live.

Over recent years the Council has made a series of clear, explicit and public commitments on sustainability. For example a Sustainability Forum was established to help provide a focus for the City Council and other to discuss issues of common interest – I have to thank MEBC for its continued support of the Forum. In 2000 with the support of the Sustainability Forum and others a Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan was developed and we have also signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change.

There remains much to do. The recent EC funded PRESUD (Peer Review of Sustainable Urban Development) review of the City Council, although yet to be considered in detail, has shown that while we have a great deal to be proud of in our approach and enthusiasm towards embedding sustainability into our approaches, we need to achieve greater progress.

The Deputy Leader of the Council has overall responsibility for the sustainability portfolio and I am determined that the City council takes a strong stance on the delivery aspects of sustainability through my responsibilities for regeneration.

Birmingham is aiming to be a World Class City. To strive for a status as a World Class City, Core City UK, European City and a City at the heart of a thriving West Midlands region, we need to ensure that becoming sustainable is an essential aim.

We are making progress on environmental matters that are helping guide regeneration activities. For example we have established good monitoring work to tackle air pollution caused by traffic and we will be setting quantifiable targets for air quality.

Regarding noise we are leading on Noise on behalf of local government in Europe through our Chairing of the European Commission's working group on Environmental Noise. Birmingham is pioneering achievement in this field and is leading on the exchange of good practice and knowledge with other European cities and states.

We all know that energy and resource consumption is a key issue. We have demonstrated a commitment to addressing energy management and climate

change and for example we feel we have made some progress in introducing systems for energy management into an increasing number of Council buildings. We also now have a Sustainable Energy Manager in place to drive forward our plans for energy in the City and earlier this year we did some work with The Carbon Trust to develop ideas around Carbon Management.

As many of you probably already know we have an excellent sustainability flagship project at the Alexander Stadium and I hope further schemes will be carried out within the City. We now have plans to establish a CHP focused Energy Supply Company in the redevelopment of Broad Street - feasibility work has already commenced - and if implemented will it is estimated save 4000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year. We also have similar ideas in Eastside. The Council is also working, for example, with its partners in the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and I expect the City's revised Community Strategy will again highlight concerns regarding climate change, the need to reduce CO2 emissions and need to increase the proportion of the energy used in Birmingham from renewable sources. The Chancellor's Pre-Budget Statement last week re-emphasised these concerns as I expect will Government during its Presidency of the European Union and as G8 chair next year. I also envisage the soon to be published Regional Sustainable Development Framework, and recently launched West Midlands Energy Strategy will also help provide further impetus and guidance.

Tackling waste is also a key concern with refuse collection and street cleaning is a particular priority. We need to build on our work with the private and voluntary sectors and strive to become a leading council on sustainable waste management in the UK. I am pleased to hear that MEBC is now working with the

Deputy Leader, through the recently established Sustainability Action Team, to explore proposals to help improve recycling rates.

A vision of a more sustainable city will only be achieved by a true partnership approach towards regeneration. We have themed our approach to partnership working “Team Birmingham” because although partnerships had certainly been formed in the past we consider these were very selective. It is our view that the City Council in the past wished to control too much. The establishment of “Team Birmingham” will allow all organisations and people the opportunity to contribute to taking the City forward. The first step in this is to recognise that the City Council is not the City. The role of the City Council could be described as the first amongst equals. The City Council has the ability to lead issues that affect the City but it should, not and will not, try to control everything that happens in the City. The City Council will develop a culture of co-operation with the Citizens of Birmingham and other organisations, and indeed the business and development community, such as MEBC and our other stakeholders. We will become more responsive and receptive to ideas that come from outside the central corporate structure. The “Birmingham Brand” and the repositioning of the City for business purposes will be one of our top priorities but you need to tell us what is currently wrong and suggest changes - we need to listen to you!

The development Directorate under David Pywell of the City Council has now been established to meet this objective of co-ordinating regeneration activity - no longer do decisions take place in Departmental Silos there is a truly joined up approach Named officer “Project Champions” are now identified for each key projects as a “one-stop shop” to ensure a co-ordinated approach is achieved.

In terms of design quality we have all seen how quality architecture breeds further quality with the likes of Brindleyplace and you may not be aware that we now have a “Design Champion” in place - with the appointment of Philip Singleton - it is his job to “raise the bar” in terms of design quality - we have a responsibility to deliver quality which we take seriously but so should you - we will not stint in our aim to achieve a quality product in Birmingham.

So having outlined our vision and the process to achieve that vision what are our specific aims?

In terms of manufacturing - there is still a recognition that we need to continue the process of diversification - to promote higher value products and, to promote research and development rather than the high volume end of the market. In order to meet the needs of modern employment we need to encourage a life long learning agenda - to equip individuals with the skills and expertise for the ever-changing labour market. We need to continue to encourage inward investment in Birmingham - recognising however that more new jobs in the City will be created by indigenous growth we must help establish a high quality of life so that new business can become established and a culture where new young entrepreneurs wish to establish their business.

One of our great challenges is transportation. Although regional access is good the further expansion of Birmingham international Airport is essential but perhaps more critically investment at New Street and Digbeth Coach Stations - surely two of the worst marketing features of Birmingham is vital - I will describe what we have in mind for both later - I can assure you we are on the case!

As our City grows both physically and functionally over a much wider area another essential component to continue to attract new activities will be some form of rapid transport system. Birmingham is currently Western Europe's largest City without an underground railway and we have recently commissioned a tunnelling feasibility study which will report by Christmas. Rather than merely extending the Midland Metro from Snow Hill to Five Ways - at surface level through our already busy streets we want to make sure that a 'piecemeal solution' is not introduced when a more strategic opportunity may be more beneficial in the longer term.

So my message is, Birmingham is well and truly open for "business" and to quote Mike Whitby the new Leader of the City Council - this City will be "run like a company with an ethical soul".

I would like to conclude my talk with a few examples of our new approach and our focus on mixed use development. I must inevitably start in the City Centre.

We have all seen the successful transformation of the western part of the City centre with Brindleyplace, the International Convention Centre, the National Indoor Arena all helping to stimulate new private investment elsewhere along the Broad Street corridor and down into Edgbaston. Our challenge now is to utilise that regeneration model of strategic intervention, creative use of Council land holdings and use of CPO powers to revitalise other parts of the City Centre. Undoubtedly Eastside is the next big opportunity with its emphasis on learning, creativity, technology and heritage it provides the scope to complement rather than compete with the west of the City Centre, and become an exemplar for sustainable development. Planned changes to the Bus Mall at Moor Street and Masshouse will shortly be announced creating a much safer

environment for bus users and pedestrians which will enhance access to key development opportunities.

As I am sure you are aware an exciting and innovative design for a new central library for Birmingham was commissioned by the previous administration with the intention of it's development off Park Street in Eastside. We have recently called for a thorough business review of this project prior to its confirmation and in the interim we hope to create a new City Centre Park on the land earmarked for the library.

Elsewhere in Eastside plans are moving for the final phase of the Birmingham Alliances Martineau Galleries development adjacent to Bull Street and Priory Queensway. This mixed use, but retail led scheme due for completion in 2008/9 will further confirm Birmingham as the premier retail destination outside Central London. Following competitive tendering Countryside Homes have also recently secured the City Park Gate site at Moor Street and construction of this largely residential based I expect will be a further example of good practice in sustainable construction.

Elsewhere in the City Centre in conjunction with the library project review we are also examining the development potential of the whole of Paradise Circus. It is encouraging to learn that Argent the successful developer at Brindleyplace have recently secured an interest in land at Paradise Circus.

As I said earlier perhaps our greatest challenge in the City centre are on 2 principle gateways - New Street Station and Digbeth Coach Station:

Despite valiant efforts to secure an appropriate design for a new coach station at Great Charles Street this proved impossible and National Express Group are currently promising to design a truly "World Class" coach station at Digbeth. I am excited by what I have heard to date of their intentions and their early thoughts do indeed reflect their aspirations. As to New Street Station which amazingly is currently operating at twice its design capacity, the City Council can take some pride in helping to shape it's future direction. After Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority announced a passenger capacity enhancement scheme which would have solved the passenger numbers problems but not the gateway, connectivity nor image problems the City Council has led a Steering Group of public and private experts to identify a way forward. Resources totalling up to £350 million have now been earmarked to develop a truly transformational scheme - and yes before you ask although this one is designed by Will Alsop no, it does not look like a cloud!

We hope that if this station design / commercial work proceeds as planned that work could start in 2006 and be completed by 2011 to coincide with the planned 50% increase in passenger numbers.

Beyond the City Centre the Central Technology A38 corridor Belt in partnership with the Advantage West Midlands is set to deliver significant new public and private investment in new high tech employment opportunities. This will include the redevelopment of the likes of the Matthew Boulton College site, Pebble Mill, the new University Hospital as well as parts of the Longbridge site.

The NW Pathfinder initiative - a joint project with Sandwell Council to promote the market renewal of NW Birmingham from the edge of the City Centre through to Soho and Handsworth is set to benefit from £1 billion of new

investment over the next 15 years. Although inevitably this will have a strong housing bias - the intended programme involves the holistic regeneration.

Although I said earlier that we are to review our investment priorities local centres enhancement - will remain a priority. We have seen the dramatic improvements that have been achieved in the likes of Soho Road as a result of initial pump priming by the public sector. I expect this approach to continue but we will not ignore those centres which have traditionally been left out such as Acocks Green and Sutton - important Centres for their community but which are in need of a bit of “tender loving care”!

Finally I would like to draw your attention to what is perhaps the biggest regeneration challenge for Birmingham - the existing Council Housing areas. There are still over 70,000 Council owned properties. Over half do not meet the decent homes criteria. We have seen that significant improvements can be achieved as witnessed by the transformation of the Castle Vale Estate and by the on-going work by the Optima Housing Association on the Lee bank Estates. Here the involvement of the private sector with various public sector agencies has achieved significant and holistic regeneration benefits in terms of health, economic prosperity, environment, educational achievement as well as housing!

I believe that such models can be applied elsewhere if we are to achieve truly sustainable mixed-use communities. We have a great opportunity to be bold, to do some truly strategic re-planning of the City and to maximise the strategic development potential of our assets.

So to conclude, the new coalition administration will adopt a more business like approach towards regeneration. Much has certainly been achieved in Birmingham but much remains to be done. Partnership working is our key - 'Team Birmingham' is our by-word – and with perseverance we can together help achieve a more sustainable and environmentally friendly City to be proud.

- THE END -

Speech, Cllr Hardeman