



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

22ND October 2019

WMCA deal unlocks biggest brownfield housing site in region

A huge swathe of former industrial land in Sandwell is to be brought back to life after lying derelict for decades.

The equivalent of more than 32 football pitches at Friar Park in Sandwell will be transformed into a 750-home community following the purchase of an old sewage works by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The former works, which has been bought from Midlands Land Portfolio Limited (MLPL), the property development arm of Severn Trent Plc, covers just under half the overall 26.4 hectare site. The rest of the site is owned by Sandwell Council. MLPL were represented by their Development Partner, Northern Trust, in negotiating and finalising the disposal.

The deal, a joint venture between the WMCA and the council, unlocks the biggest brownfield housing site in the region, helping to reduce pressure on the Green Belt.

The WMCA will fund a major clean-up of the land, which has been home to a hospital and iron foundry in the past, and then work with the council on an ambitious masterplan for the site before bringing on board development partners.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street said: "This site has lain derelict for more than 30 years and attempts to redevelop it have stalled time and again.

"So this deal and our intervention is tremendous news and another excellent example of how the WMCA is using its powers and resources to transform derelict industrial land into vibrant new communities.

"Such intervention not only helps protect our Green Belt but also provides good quality homes and decent jobs for local people."

The purchase of the land from MLPL is a major boost for the WMCA's brownfield first policy as the region looks to deliver its goal of an additional 215,000 homes by 2031. Sandwell Council alone needs to see 13,420 homes built by 2026 to hit its own targets.

The deal is the latest example of one of the key objectives the WMCA was set up to do – intervene where the housing market was not delivering and negotiate to unlock stalled sites.

The authority has a multimillion pound war chest to transform brownfield sites into new housing and commercial developments to drive economic growth that all communities can feel and benefit from.

The Friar Park deal will see the combined authority and Sandwell Council working together to secure new homes that are of a high design quality, energy efficient and affordable. There will also be provision for homes built from modular construction techniques.

The scheme will also include on-site apprenticeships and training for local people so they can learn the construction skills needed to build the new homes.

Cllr Mike Bird, WMCA portfolio holder for housing and land and leader of Walsall Council, added: "The WMCA has set aside hundreds of millions of pounds to help get stalled developments like this one off the ground.

"Sitting back is not the answer. We have to act and intervene to make things happen and I'm delighted that we are doing so in spades.

"Friar Park is the biggest residential, brownfield site we have unlocked so far and a flagship example of the nation-leading work of this region in the regeneration of derelict industrial land.

"It is a significant boost for our brownfield first policy which I am passionately committed to as we seek to meet future housing demand while protecting our environment.

"We will now work with Sandwell Council to bring forward a scheme that all can be proud of and will start creating new homes and jobs from next year."

Julie Rossiter, head of property development for Severn Trent explains "This is a great example of public and private sectors working together for the communities they serve and we're really pleased to be using our redundant land assets to provide much needed homes to the region"

ENDS

For more information contact the WMCA Media Office on 0121 214 7073 or email media@wmca.org.uk

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Notes to Editors:

The West Midlands Combined Authority was created on 17th June 2016. It comprises:

Constituent members:

Birmingham City Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.

Non-constituent authorities with reduced voting rights:

Cannock Chase District Council; Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council; Redditch Borough Council; Tamworth Borough Council; Telford and Wrekin Council; North

Warwickshire Borough Council; Rugby Borough Council; Stratford-on-Avon District Council; Shropshire Council; Warwickshire County Council.

LEPs

LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They determine local economic priorities and lead on economic growth and job creation within their areas. They are:

Black Country LEP

Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP

Observer organisations awaiting membership

Herefordshire Council

The Marches LEP