

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

**SHIRLEY TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT
'A New Heart for Shirley'**

Carried out for :



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NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

OF ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

SHIRLEY TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

'A New Heart for Shirley'

Carried out for: Shirley Advance

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A NEW HEART FOR SHIRLEY TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

A planning application has been prepared to obtain permission for a proposal to create "A New Heart for Shirley", a town centre development which will form a new hub for retail activities in Shirley whilst at the same time giving the local community an enhanced focus for Shirley which links commercial activities with a host of recreational activities in Shirley Park. Due to the nature of the development proposed, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) has requested that an Environmental Impact Assessment of the project be carried out. The purpose of this assessment is to look at the environmental effects of the proposal and report findings in an Environmental Statement. Such documents are usually quite long and prone to be excessively technical.

The purpose of this Non Technical Summary is, therefore, to provide a simple summary of the findings in non-technical terms to make it easy for "the man in the street" to get a quick understanding of the environmental issues raised. Obviously, any detailed query arising should be referred back to the main Environmental Statement and the technical documents on which it relies.

THE PROPOSAL

The application site is shown on Plan 1 and includes some 4.7 hectares of land which lies mainly to the rear of Stratford Road in Shirley and the rear of Haslucks Green Road. This land includes the old Territorial Army site, the existing shoppers car park and proposed extension, the north eastern margins of Shirley Park and some properties fronting both the Stratford Road and Haslucks Green Road. A further 2.2 hectares of land (mainly consisting of parts of the existing A34 and Haslucks Green Road) has also been included within the planning application boundary to allow for the implementation of improvements to the highway network.

The proposed development consists of a large underground car park, a medium sized foodstore, a range of other retail outlets, some residential apartments and pedestrian features including a square and a new footpath skirting the margins of Shirley Park. The proposal also covers a range of highway improvements, most significantly a traffic island as a replacement for the existing Stratford Road / Haslucks Green Road junction. The development is illustrated in Plan 2.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The development described above is substantial and will have a number of environmental effects. In particular, it was requested by SMBC that the Environmental Impact Assessment consider the following environmental issues :

- Traffic
- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Ecology
- Retail Impact
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Drainage and Flooding
- Contaminated Land

These issues have, therefore, been summarised below.

Traffic

A detailed traffic assessment has been carried out (by Mott Macdonald) to assess the traffic implications of this development. The A34 is a major regional road connecting Birmingham City Centre and wider areas to the north with the southern suburbs of Hall Green and Shirley, and wider areas to the south including the M42. The junction of the A34 Stratford Road with Haslucks Green Road and Olton Road immediately to the north of the site is a large traffic-signal controlled junction. It has a high volume of traffic and is known to currently experience problems of capacity at certain times of the day.

A wide range of traffic related issues have been assessed including congestion, road safety, pedestrian and cycle access, traffic noise and fumes. The assessment has

compared the existing situation with what would happen when the development is in use and has concluded that :

- The proposed development will only lead to a significant increase in traffic in the immediate vicinity of the site and in particular at the A34 Stratford Road / Haslucks Green Road junction.
- The highway improvement scheme proposed for this junction will ensure that the additional traffic can be appropriately accommodated.
- The highway improvement scheme includes pedestrian crossing facilities which are lacking in the existing junction arrangements.
- The proposed changes to the highway network and the increased traffic from the development will not have a significant effect on the air pollution in the area.
- The assessment of traffic noise indicates that the increase in noise levels due to the increase in traffic from the development is below that normally perceptible to the human ear.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The application site constitutes a significant element in the local landscape. The development proposed will change the landscape qualities of the area and give rise to a change in the views experienced by different people in and passing through the area (the latter is called the visual impact). An assessment was carried out of both the landscape character and the visual impact.

The findings of the assessment were that the development would deliver an overall improvement in the final landscape quality of the area and, in particular, the viewpoints looking onto the built development will be significantly improved. The one viewpoint where this does not hold true is the rear view of 8 houses on Haslucks Green Road. These residents would see the rear of the new foodstore (at the moment they overlook vacant land – it is not possible to say what view they would experience if the land was developed for another purpose).

The other significant impact in landscape and visual terms is the treatment to the boundary of Shirley Park. The assessment concludes that, although the magnitude of change is high, the overall benefits will outweigh this. The proposed mitigation will cause the development to fit in with the existing landscape and provide a pleasing

physical and visual buffer between the park and the retail, residential and community facilities.

Ecology

The proposed development will involve the permanent loss of 4.3% of Shirley Park. It was therefore considered important to assess the ecological value of the whole open space area in order to get a comprehensive picture

The ecological survey found that while the park is an important local ecological resource it does not contain rare habitats, plants or animals and the loss described above would not constitute a significant loss of wildlife. Some mitigation measures are proposed within the soft landscaping on the application site which help support wildlife (eg birds). In addition, the developers have agreed to provide specific funds to SMBC to spend on improving the park. The ecological assessment shows that there is significant scope to improve the ecological value of Shirley Park and includes suggestions of how this may be achieved.

Retail Impact

The retail assessment looked at existing shopping provision over the wider area, considered the relationship between the existing local shopping centres and assessed prevailing trends / shopping patterns. The findings were similar to the situation which SMBC found when preparing their plan for the area (the Unitary Development Plan (UDP)); that Shirley Town Centre was "losing out" compared to other centres. This prompted SMBC to include policies in the UDP to promote growth in Shirley Town Centre to halt this decline.

The assessment found that the proposed development is consistent with the development plan strategy and all aspects of retail planning policy. It also found that the development would bring significant benefits to Shirley by enabling local people to meet a wider range of their shopping needs in an accessible, socially inclusive town centre location, rather than travelling to more distant and out of centre trading locations. Also it would be fully integrated with the existing shops and generate considerable benefits through linked trip spending. This is, therefore, seen as an opportunity for Shirley to secure its long term health in the face of increasing competition elsewhere.

Noise

Obviously the new development will generate some noise when up and running. This has been specifically assessed. Existing noise levels have been measured on site (including night time when it is quieter) and these will be used to provide a specification for equipment to be used in the development (for example air conditioning units). This will ensure that the cumulative effect of having such equipment working will not cause an unacceptable increase above background noise levels. A specific area of potential concern was identified as the service yards. In these locations it is felt necessary to limit delivery hours, erect acoustic barriers (and in the case of the foodstore use a quiet vehicle turntable – to avoid reversing bleeper noise) in addition to other control measures to ensure that operational noise does not cause a problem to local residents.

Air Quality

Any development is liable to generate some emissions to air (for example the boiler on heating systems, even in domestic properties, vents to the atmosphere). The potential emissions from the proposed shops and residencies were assessed in relation to government standards and existing local air quality measurements. It was found that the proposed development would not have a significant effect on air quality.

Drainage And Flooding

A review of the data held by the Environment Agency shows that the development is not at risk from flooding.

One of the consequences of building on land is that the hard surfaces created shed rainwater very quickly. If this is not controlled it can increase the likelihood of flooding downstream. This issue has been assessed for the proposed development and design features have been incorporated so that the rate at which rainwater can be shed from the site will not be quicker than at present and so will not give rise to any increased risk of flooding.

Contaminated Land

One of the consequences of building on what the government call "Brownfield Sites" (ie sites that have been used before) is that those previous activities may have polluted the ground. It is, therefore, good practice to examine the site beforehand to determine if any contamination has occurred. This enables the design and construction of the new development to be carried out in a manner which ensures that any such contamination will not cause harm to people or the environment.

An investigation of the land has revealed a degree of contamination in the site. These sources of contamination are generally near surface and will be removed (most will go off-site as part of the excavated material to construct the underground car park). Notwithstanding this, gas control measures will be included in the foundations of all buildings. In this manner it is expected to protect people and the environment.

Construction

Whilst the preceding sections have addressed the environmental impacts arising from the development once built it is important not to overlook the construction process. Although this process is only temporary, the development proposed is substantial and will take some time to build properly (it is conservatively estimated the whole process could take up to 24 months). Each area of the Environmental Statement has separately considered the issue of construction impacts.

The findings of those assessments indicate a strong need to control all environmental aspects of the construction process to ensure that it does not cause unacceptable impacts. This issue is recognised as a routine matter by the Local Planning Authority (SMBC) who will impose conditions to control this issue, born out of their experiences elsewhere in the borough (eg the Touchwood Centre).

CONCLUSIONS

Any development the size of the one proposed will have a range of environmental impacts, some bad and some good. In this case the long term benefits of the development itself, in addition to the funding it can provide for improvements to Shirley Park and the substantial improvement to the Stratford Road / Haslucks Green Road junction would appear to outweigh any negative effects.

PLANS

Plan 1	Application Site
Plan 2	Proposed Development