

**SOLIHULL**  
**TOWN CENTRE**  
**MASTERPLAN**



# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan aims to provide a framework for future investment and development which maximises the opportunities for Solihull, capitalises on its existing assets, and sets out a clear vision for Solihull 2036; as a thriving, vibrant and visionary town. It is predicted that UK Central could create an additional 100,000 jobs with a town centre range of between 4,000 and 16,000 jobs, and increase the region's revenue up to £19.5 billion annually by 2040. The masterplan outlines how bold measures need to be taken to capitalise on the potential of the town centre; guaranteeing its resilience and ensuring that it can meet future challenges through 'managed' growth, whilst retaining the character which makes Solihull so popular.

## 1.1 UNDERSTANDING SOLIHULL TODAY

The masterplan is underpinned by a strong evidence base which brings together; detailed physical analysis of the town centre; a baseline socioeconomic assessment and market report; and feedback from stakeholder engagement.

The evidence base draws out the current strengths of the town centre including the high quality character and rich heritage of Solihull, its existing market reputation and its use as a visitor destination because of its strong middle and upper market retail offering. This is weighed against its weaknesses, in particular the effect of large scale infrastructure on placemaking and the pedestrian experience and the national trends for decreasing footfall and increased retail vacancies which are also being reflected locally and have the potential to change the character and usage of the town centre.

## 1.2 CREATING A SHARED VISION

Achieving local buy-in to the framework and principles identified in the masterplan is a fundamental requirement of the whole process. In response a public consultation was held in a series of venues within the town centre; it gave the local community an opportunity to get involved in shaping the vision for the town and confirmed key objectives. Key outcomes of the consultation included:

- A large number of people recognised the importance of maintaining the inherent character of Solihull;
- Renovation of Mell Square is welcomed
- Support for improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity;
- 68% agreed that residential uses should be encouraged within the town centre
- 86% agreed that a more diverse evening and leisure offer is required; and
- 68% thought that there was opportunity for commercial development, particularly in the existing business area.

Key elements drawn from the evidence base together with the outcomes of the stakeholder and public consultation, have driven the formation of the Solihull 2036 Vision:

This vision is underpinned by three key elements that set out our ambition for Solihull:

- **THRIVING** – “A prosperous and desirable town centre with a strong retail and growing commercial core and residential offer, alongside outstanding connectivity.”
- **VIBRANT** – “A network of integrated spaces offering unique experiences through a constantly evolving offer and a variety of reasons to return.”
- **VISIONARY** – “A demonstrator of new trends and opportunities, championing sustainability in all aspects of design and accessibility and a commitment to invest in innovation and growth.”

These elements are the drivers of the concepts that have emerged through the Masterplan and support the emerging activities proposed in the document.

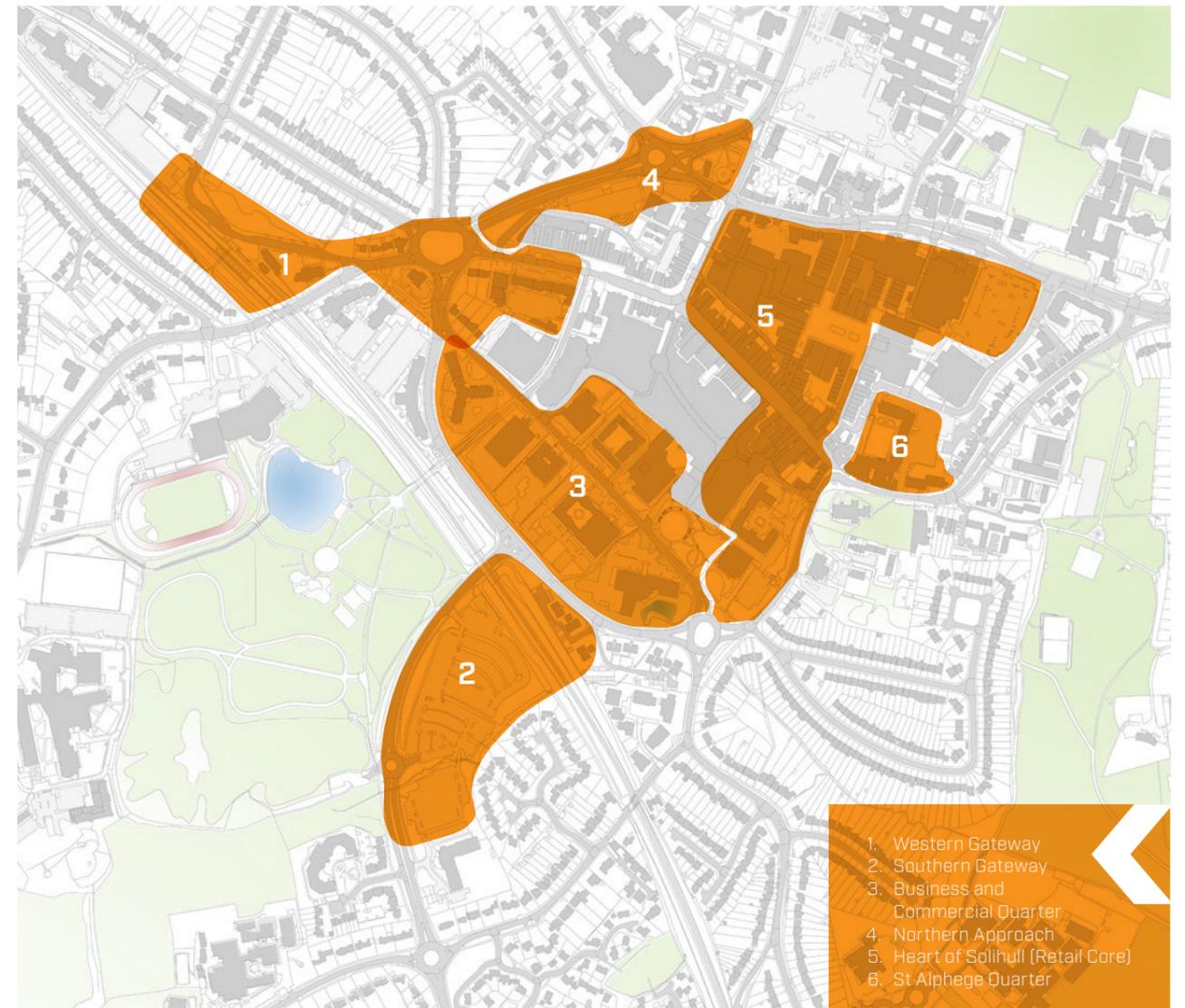


Figure 1.1 Plan identifying the six areas of change incorporating key areas for intervention.

**SOLIHULL** A THRIVING, PREMIER TOWN CENTRE AND A VIBRANT DESTINATION AT THE FOREFRONT OF VISIONARY DESIGN, SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION.

### 1.3 DEVELOPING MASTERPLAN CONCEPTS

By gaining a clear understanding of the fundamental issues, opportunities and ambitions for Solihull, three main themes emerged which hold the key to achieving the Solihull 2036 Vision:

- **Connectivity** – The overall connection concept is focussed on the need to reconnect Solihull Town Centre with its currently disjointed areas into one cohesive, integrated centre. It seeks to create a network which integrates the town centres various retail, commercial, civic, residential, and cultural precincts;
- **Work/Life Balance** – Diversification is a central aim of the living and working concept helping to inform future market and land use considerations. Central to this concept is the introduction of more residential uses and further office uses into the town centre to inject new vitality through a mixture of activities, economic relationships, times of use and built form; and
- **The Solihull Experience** – The Solihull Town Centre user experience is a crucial component of creating an appealing environment to live, work and enjoy. This concept seeks to enhance the town's evening and leisure offer, upgrade the quality of the streets and public spaces and promoting high quality development; encouraging people to play an active role in streets and confirming Solihull as a prime destination.

Both in combination and as distinctive agendas, these strategies set out a broad framework for future growth and development, which can then form the basis for future development projects and interventions.

### 1.4 IDENTIFYING AREAS OF CHANGE

The masterplan identifies six areas of change (see figure 1.1) within Solihull Town Centre which provide opportunities to identify practical interventions which can deliver the three emerging concepts.

It is not the intention of the areas of change to be prescriptive in a way that suppresses future creativity or the ability of the town centre to respond to external influences. However, it is important to explore a number of the spatial relationships that are likely to be generated through examination of a particular approach. The definition of the physical boundaries have been derived through the spatial and

market analysis of Solihull as well as an appreciation of existing ambition for change that has emerged through discussions with key stakeholders.

Within each of the areas of change, the masterplan identified a number of development sites through which Solihull might accommodate significant additional growth and improvements to the connectivity of the town centre. The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan broadly follows the sites identified in earlier work, but also includes a number of new sites which could provide further opportunities to respond to the emerging concepts in the longer term.

### 1.5 SOLIHULL TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

The following points relate to the plan opposite (figure 1.2) and summarise the key interventions proposed by the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan.

- 1 Redevelopment of Solihull Station to create a modern Integrated Transport Hub, to include upgrades to the public realm and green space surrounding the station and create a high quality gateway into the town centre
- 2 Traffic management interventions and enhancements to the public realm around Blossomfield Road Roundabout, including improvements to the pedestrian and cycle connectivity between the town centre and the station
- 3 Grade A town centre office development to provide an attractive new gateway to the town centres commercial and business quarter
- 4 High quality new residential development to provide an attractive frontage onto Lode Lane incorporating enhancements to the public realm
- 5 Redevelopment of Mell Square to create a truly diverse mixed use space. Offering the optimal balance of residential, leisure and commercial use tied together by a high quality public realm scheme, to create an attractive, vibrant, and modern destination in the heart of the town centre
- 6 Primly located medium density family housing providing attractive frontage onto New Road
- 7 Brand-new civic building with high quality public spaces, new retail and leisure uses to connect the site with the existing town centre, and a new residential neighbourhood providing modern, sustainable homes in a town centre setting, to attract a new demographic of residential population, adding vibrancy to the scheme.
- 8 New mixed use building comprising of retail units and high quality office accommodation
- 9 An attractive new north-south pedestrian and cycle link between the southern gateway of the town including the Monkspath Hall Road site, and the commercial quarter and heart of the town centre
- 10 New office development fronting onto Princes Way, creating an active frontage along Princes way and a high quality gateway into the town centre.
- 11 New multi storey carpark
- 12 Prime development site on a key gateway with size, setting and location to offer flexibility for a wide range of development uses including residential, commercial, leisure or education.

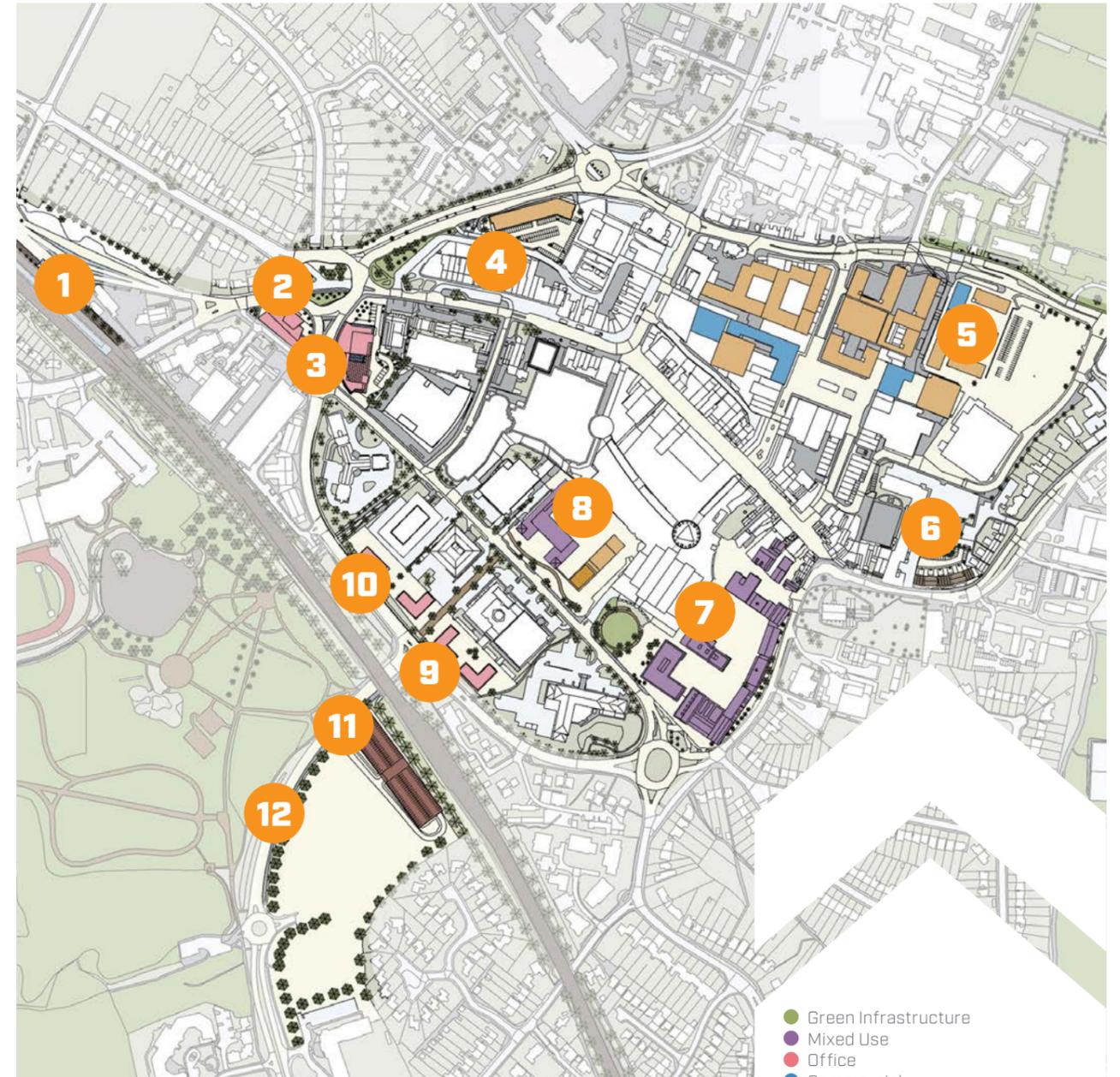


Figure 1.2 Solihull Town Centre key masterplan objectives

# 2 INTRODUCTION

Solihull is already a successful and popular town, and has consistently been named as one of the best places to live within the United Kingdom. With its excellent shopping, cultural facilities, buoyant employment (presently around 12,500 jobs) and attractive setting; Solihull has a lot to offer to residents, businesses and visitors.

That said, national trends in retail have shown that many places are suffering declines in footfall and increased retail vacancies which are transforming High Streets up and down the country and although it is a successful thriving town, Solihull has not been immune to these trends which have been accelerated during the Covid-19 crisis. To maintain the current character of the town and plan for sustainable, inclusive growth it is important to establish now the identity of the town and the crystallise aspirations for the future uses of the town centre, including identifying the interventions that will need to be made if Solihull is to remain a retail and leisure destination.

UK Central is a prime investment location, which is the West Midlands' principal economic gateway and strongest performing economy, centred around Solihull. Incorporating the town centre, Birmingham Airport, Jaguar Land Rover and the National Exhibition Centre, UK Central is also the site of the new High Speed Rail Interchange Station. In June 2013, Solihull Council, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, and Arup published the UK Central Masterplan, showcasing the development potential of the area up to 2040. The masterplan outlines how bold measures need to be taken to capitalise on the potential of the already successful gateway site. It is predicted that UK Central could create an additional 100,000 jobs with a town centre range of between 4,000 and 16,000 jobs, and increase the region's revenue up to £19.5 billion annually by 2040.

It provides significant opportunities to maintain and enhance Solihull's existing economic base on a scale of national significance; positioning the town as part of the engine room of the West Midlands. In order to ensure managed growth and the retention of the character which makes Solihull so popular, the Town Centre Masterplan will provide a framework for future development, which aims to balance the sometimes conflicting needs for growth and infrastructure investment, with quality of place.

## 2.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document presents the supporting evidence and final Solihull Town Centre Masterplan, which builds upon previous visioning work, established through the Town Centre Study [GVA Grimley, 2009] it draws together principles and objectives defined in existing and emerging strategies and policies including the emerging Surface Access Strategy, Climate Change Prospectus, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and The Council Plan.

The masterplan aims to provide a framework for future investment and development which maximises the opportunities for Solihull, capitalises on its existing assets, and sets out a clear vision for Solihull 2036; as a thriving, vibrant and visionary town. The masterplan is underpinned by a baseline assessment of the socioeconomic condition of the town centre and market analysis, which reviews the current and potential office, retail, leisure and residential markets within Solihull Town Centre.

The original masterplan was drafted in 2016, and has been updated over the spring/summer 2020 to incorporate strategic decisions, local, regional and national policy and trends; and intervening property development.

## 2.2 EXTENT OF THE STUDY

The Town Centre Masterplan study area (Figure 2.1) covers the immediate town centre which is bounded by the B4102 Warwick Road to the north, the railway line to the south, Church Hill Road / New Road to the east and Solihull Train station and Lode Lane to the west. This area encompasses Solihull's retail and commercial core.

In addition, two further areas of influence have been identified, one to the north and one to the south. The northern area of influence, beyond the B4102 includes Solihull Hospital, Solihull School and a number of existing commercial buildings. The area to the south includes Tudor Grange Park and Solihull College. These areas, whilst not forming part of the town centre core, are important components of the town and it is important that the masterplan ensures that these important assets are integrated and well connected with the town centre.



Figure 2.1 Extent of the Solihull town centre masterplan study area and associated area of influence.

**THRIVING** "A PROSPEROUS AND DESIRABLE TOWN CENTRE WITH A STRONG RETAIL AND GROWING COMMERCIAL CORE AND RESIDENTIAL OFFER, ALONGSIDE OUTSTANDING CONNECTIVITY."

# 3 SOLIHULL TODAY

This section analyses the various urban components of Solihull Town Centre including; heritage, public realm, land use, activities and movement. It aims to provide a foundation which informs and underpins development of the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan.

## 3.1 HERITAGE

Patterns of development over time as recorded in the historical mapping show a number of fixed points (St Alphege Church) and considerable change in the development of the Town Centre over the last two hundred years. Dating back to the 12th Century, Solihull originated as a small, successful market town, which flourished until the 14th Century when it suffered ongoing decline due to poor harvests and competition from other towns. Solihull continued as a quiet village until the 18th Century, when the introduction of turnpike roads and more importantly the railway in the mid-19th Century stimulated new growth. This improved transport network helped to establish Solihull as a successful commuter town, providing an attractive place to live for wealthy professionals working in Birmingham.

Figure 3.1 opposite illustrates the evolution of the town from a traditional village high street to a significant town; demonstrating visually, how the development of the town's movement networks over time have influenced land use arrangement and created physical barriers for pedestrians and cyclists:



### Solihull 1789

This image illustrates how the extent of the settlement is largely contained along the High Street and Warwick Road, demonstrating the traditional linear character of its market town origins. The High Street terminates at Malvern Park where St Alphege church forms the eastern edge of town.



### Solihull 1945

This mapping illustrates how the introduction of the railway in the mid-19th Century now forms the southern edge of town, with Solihull Train station located just to the west of the town centre and connected via Station Road. The arrival of the railway caused a significant change in the town's character as it opened access for commuters to Birmingham which commenced a period of suburbanisation. Due to the station location, settlement and activity in the town centre has over time shown a gradual shift away from St Alphege Church and further west. New settlement has expanded into Malvern Park, which has also merged with Brueton Park creating a linear green space on the eastern fringe of the town centre.



### Solihull 1999

Solihull again underwent considerable change over the last 50 years, evolving from a wealthy suburban neighbourhood into a commercial centre. This evolution comes as a result of Solihull's

accessible location at the centre of the national motorway and rail network, and its close proximity to Birmingham International Airport. It was over this 50 year period that Solihull's population grew substantially, advancing the town from Solihull Rural District to Solihull Metropolitan Borough created in 1974. This image illustrates the impact of the introduction of Lode Lane to the west of the town centre and also the conversion of the Lode Lane and Blossomfield Road junctions into roundabouts. Land to the south of the railway becomes Tudor Grange Park with the town expanding south into the countryside. Interestingly, a large area in the heart of the centre is now void due to the construction of the new Touchwood Shopping Centre. In addition, a large area of housing has been removed to the south of Warwick Road and replaced with Mell Square shopping centre, which retains the historic street pattern. The final image shows the development of a number of large scale blocks located to the north and south of the town centre, which are poorly integrated and further fragment the previously tight urban grain.



### Solihull 2013 to today

Lastly, the latest mapping shows Solihull as it is today, following the development of Touchwood which forms the new heart of the town centre.

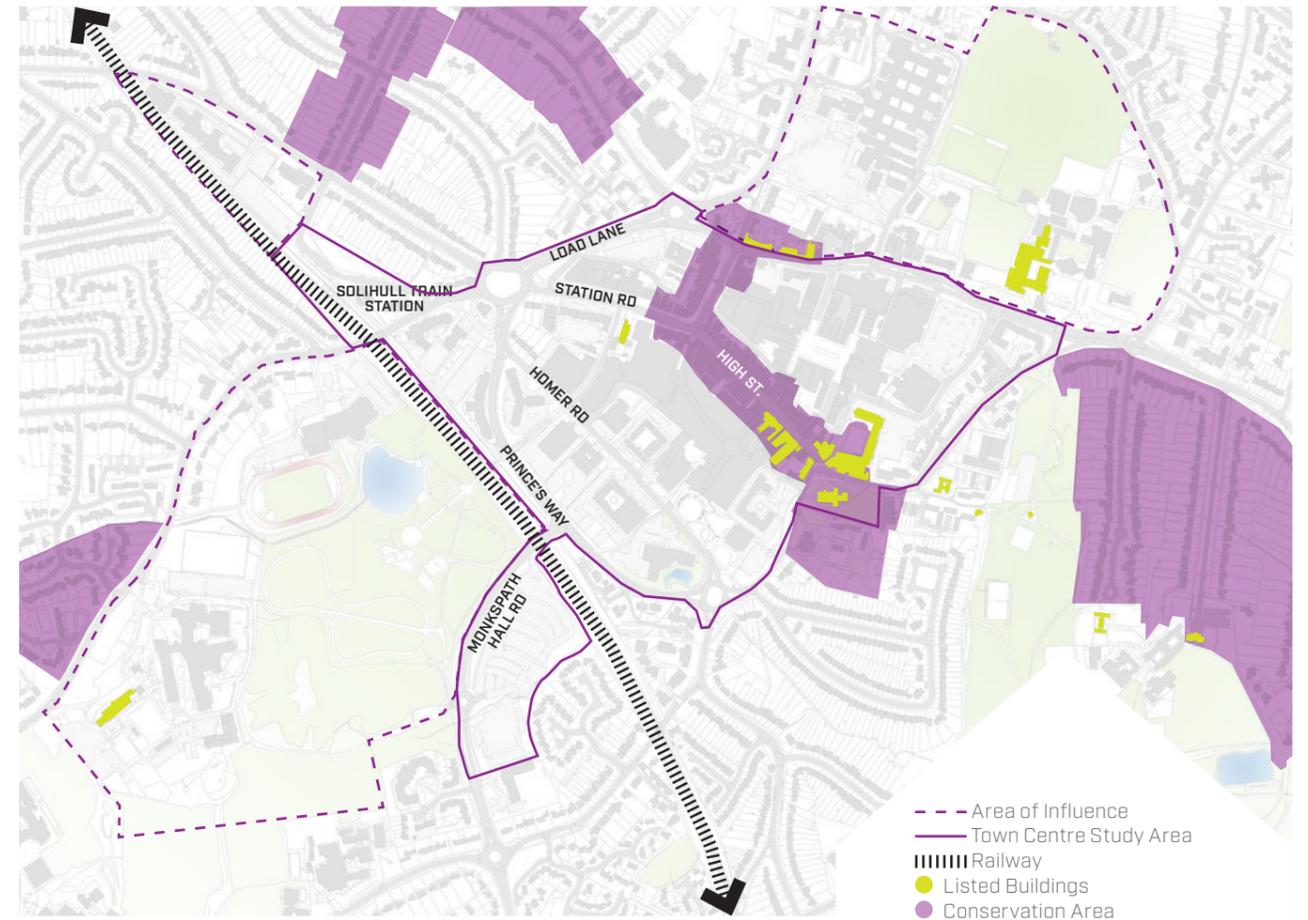


Figure 3.1: Solihull Town Centre Heritage and Conservation Plan

## 3.2 SOLIHULL CONSERVATION AREA

Solihull Conservation Area is located at the heart of the town centre and roughly follows the High Street and Poplar Road as indicated in Figure 3.1. The conservation area contains all of the listed buildings within the study area which create the historic character associated with Solihull. These include:

- The Church of Saint Alphege (Grade I Listed);
- War Memorial to the front of the Church of Saint Alphege (Grade II Listed);
- A cluster of 15 listed buildings along the eastern end of the High Street (Grade II and Grade II\* Listed);
- The Roman Catholic Church of Saint Augustine of Canterbury, located on the corner of Herbert Road / Station Road (Grade II Listed); and
- A cluster of 5 listed buildings located to the north of the Warwick Road/Poplar Road junction (Grade II Listed).

Other notable listed buildings just outside of the study include: parts of Solihull School (Chatwin Building and Bradford House, Grade II Listed) which front onto Warwick Road, just north of the study area; and The old Grammar School (Grade II\* Listed) located at the Park Road/New Road Junction.

### 3.3 GATEWAYS AND KEY FRONTAGES

Gateways and frontages are instrumental in helping to determine the character of a place and the ability to navigate through it. They signify the key arrival points into a town and provide key landmarks which aid wayfinding and emphasise the hierarchy of a place.

Perhaps surprising for a town of such quality and heritage, Solihull's main gateways are currently characterised by large scale infrastructure such as the Lode Lane/ Prince's Way roundabout, Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout and Church Hill Road / Prince's Way roundabout which dominate in scale compared to the surrounding context. This presents a missed opportunity in terms of creating a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town. Key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists include Solihull Train station and the underpass which connects Tudor Grange Park and Prince's Way. These areas fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull, particularly in terms of the station, which feels extremely remote from the town, and is relatively poor in terms of environmental quality.

There is a marked contrast between the quality of frontages within the internal town centre (such as the High Street) and the outward facing town centre viewed from the surrounding ring roads. Frontages associated with the main High Street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafés and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town. Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and quite often do not overlook the street; this is particularly evident along Prince's Way which is characterised by tall vegetation and backs of existing office buildings. This has the resulting effect of creating an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull, creating a negative perception which is at odds with the town centre core.

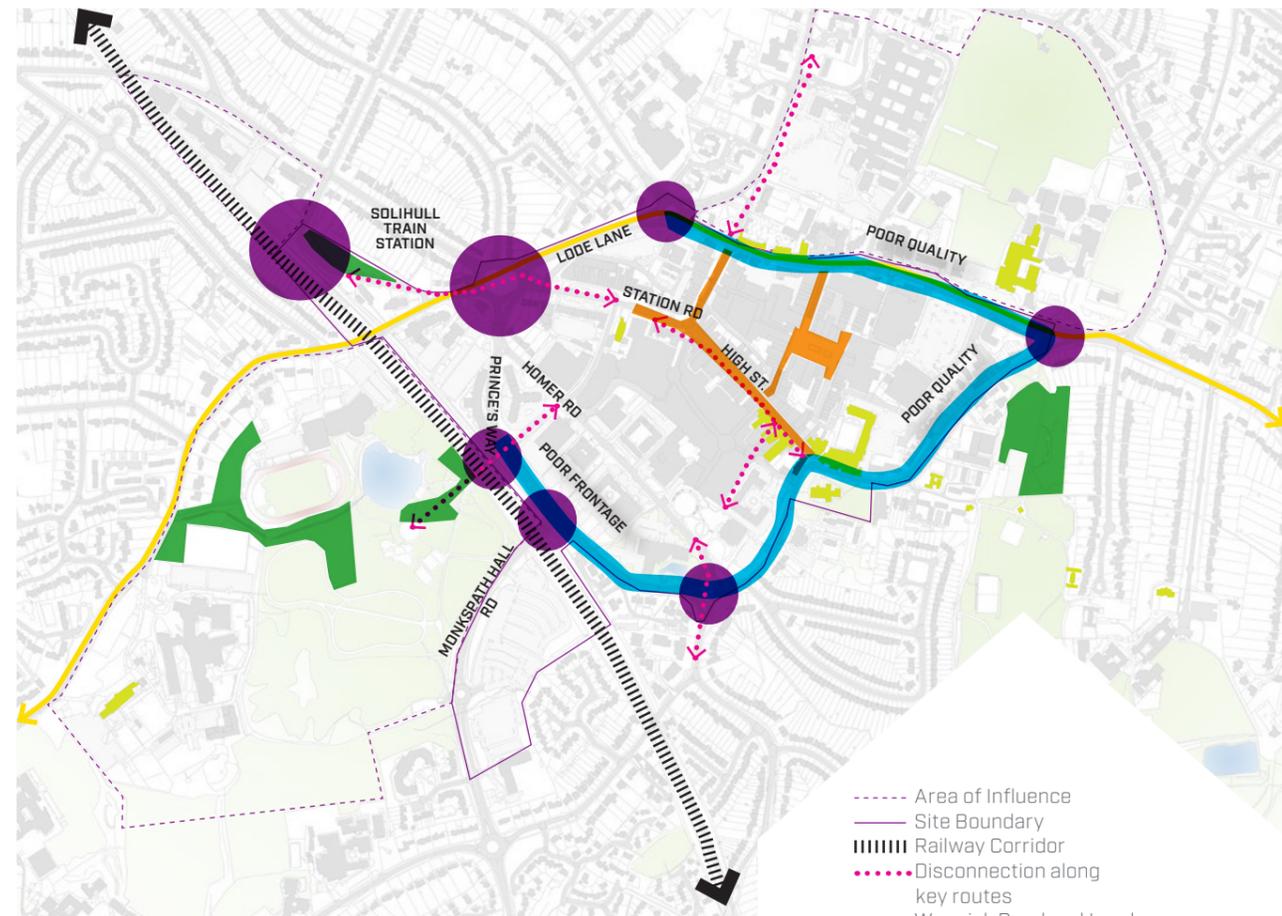


Figure 3.2: Solihull Town Centre Spatial Appreciation Plan

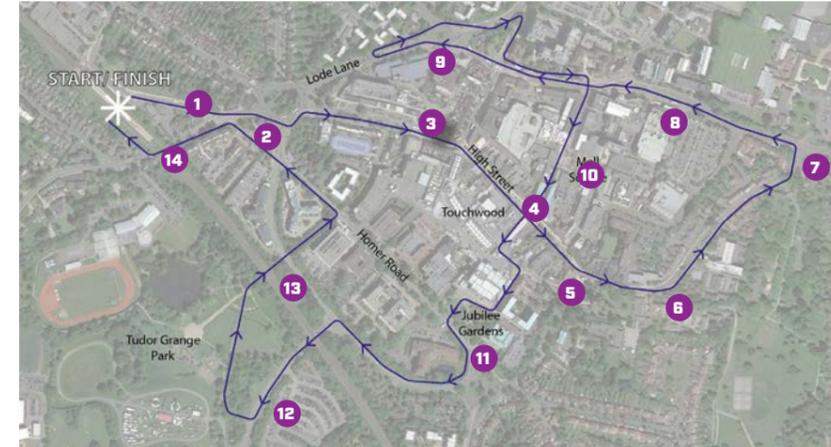


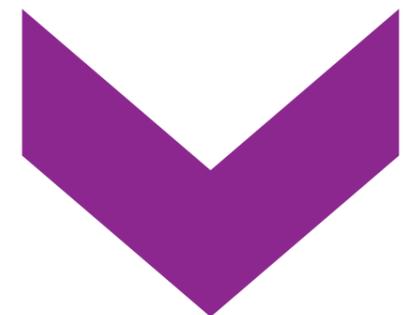
Figure 3.3: Solihull Town Centre photographic survey plan

### 3.4 PUBLIC REALM AND OPEN SPACE

#### Public Realm

Solihull Town Centre provides a variety of public spaces, which support a range of different functions. Some like the eastern entrance to Touchwood (Manor Walk) accommodate quieter, more reflective uses; whilst others such as Mell Square and Theatre Square are more geared towards activity and public events.

- Mell Square is the main public square within the town and is a large formally arranged rectangular space, which incorporates street trees, planters, lighting, bollards, benches and litter bins. Whilst the space experiences a large volume of footfall, the layout and relatively poor quality of the public realm mean it is currently underutilised and is not representative of Solihull's high quality town centre. In addition, the large volume of street furniture and trees combined with the layout means that the potential uses of the space are restricted despite its large size. Reacting to the changing nature of the retail and leisure environment, the owners of Mell Square recently introduced a new food and beverage concept 'Taste Collective', including four pop-up style, street food kiosks and a covered outdoor pergola style seating area, where people can meet up and socialise throughout the day. Already a high footfall area, this will change the nature of the square and support further investment into the surrounding public realm.
- Theatre Square provides spaces for seating and events adjacent to the library. Whilst well maintained and overlooked by the library café, this space is relatively underutilised, perhaps due to the shade cast by surrounding buildings and the characterless facades defining the north of the space, which is as a result of the space fronting onto the back walls of Touchwood Shopping Centre. The space provides opportunities to introduce other complementary uses such as an outdoor gallery, which could introduce colour and draw people into the space.
- Manor Walk Square successfully contrasts modern stainless steel street furniture with a formal layout and heritage style planting (clipped box hedges) and provides a more reflective space than Solihull's other public spaces. Whilst successful the space could be improved through increased seating provision.
- The High Street is pedestrianised and was formerly the main retail spine through the town centre. Over time however, the retail emphasis has shifted as a consequence of Touchwood Shopping Centre. The positive feel of the High Street is due largely to the vibrant and high quality uses located to either side, which offer a positive café culture and attractive heritage architecture. Whilst the High Street does benefit from a wide range of street furniture, the often contrasting styles (stainless steel, cast iron and wood) and sheer volume of elements give the public realm a rather cluttered feel. In addition, the dated and low quality concrete pavers do little to respond to the historical buildings and conservation area.





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### Open Space

Solihull Town Centre benefits from being in close proximity to two large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park; and Malvern and Brueton Park;

- Tudor Grange Park – Located adjacent to the southern edge of the town centre, this Green Flag Park incorporates a children’s play area, skate park, outdoor gym, cycle track and pitch and putt course. Situated adjacent to the Leisure Centre and Solihull College, the main access to the park from the town centre is via the underpass to Prince’s Way.
- Malvern and Brueton Park – Located to the east of the town centre is designated as a Green Flag Park and incorporates ornamental and sensory gardens, tennis courts, children’s play area, picnic area and walking trails. The park is also a designated nature reserve, characterised by mature woodland.

By improving accessibility to these parks and encouraging people to use them, they offer the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and make Solihull Town Centre a more attractive place to live and work.

Despite the close proximity of these large green open spaces, there is very little soft landscaping within the town centre itself and access to the parks is at present poorly signposted and visually disconnected.

Within the town centre itself there are a number of smaller green spaces including:

- Jubilee Gardens – Located to the northern edge of Homer Road (adjacent to Solihull Registry Office), this south facing space has the potential to become a popular and well used destination for workers and shoppers. However, the park is relatively underutilised and lacks suitable facilities such as seating, bins and shelter for people to access and use the space through varying weather conditions and changing times of day. In order to improve this space, new user friendly facilities could be introduced and improvements made to the relationship between the park and the buildings immediately surrounding it. Links could also be improved between the park and; Theatre Square, the Hotel, Tudor Grange Park, and the Council Offices.
- The setting of St Alphege Church provides an attractive green edge to the town centre and complements the historic nature of the High Street.
- At the eastern edge of the Lode Lane/Station Road roundabout is an area of green space consisting of mature trees and vegetation which provides a green buffer between the town centre and the roundabout. Situated at a key gateway into the town centre, this space provides little function and has the potential to be greatly improved as an urban park or be consolidated into the surrounding urban fabric to complement nearby land uses and create frontage onto Lode Lane.

BY IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY TO THESE PARKS AND ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO USE THEM, THEY OFFER THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF RESIDENTS

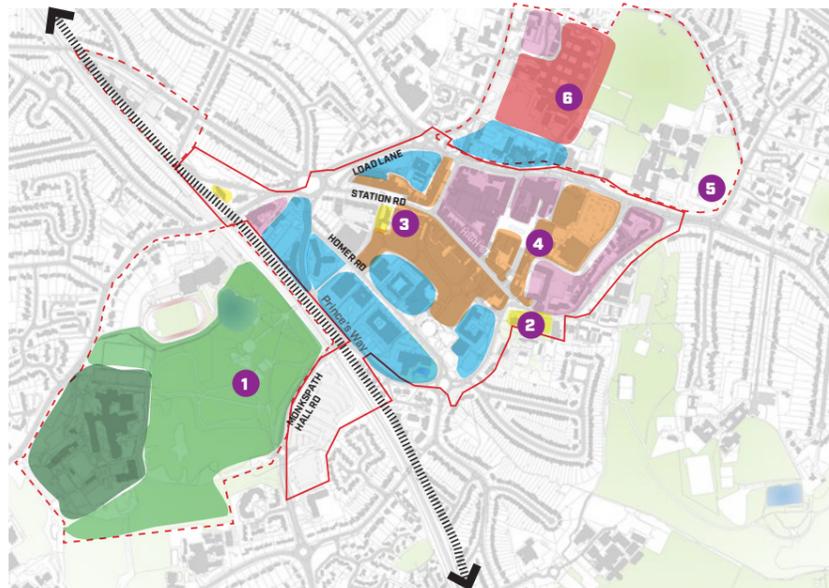


Figure 3.4: Solihull Town Centre Existing Land Use Plan

### 3.5 USE AND ACTIVITIES

The historic development patterns described within Section 3 have ultimately shaped the town centre land use characteristics. This is presently dominated by large single use areas, which have little interaction between uses and form obvious character areas; these are illustrated within Figure 3.4. Whilst this provides positives in reducing potential conflicts between differing land uses, it fails to recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses can provide, which can include greater promotion of walking and cycling, enhanced vitality and development of an area's unique identity.

At present, land uses are generally divided as follows:

- The retail core at the centre of the town, to both sides of the High Street, and extending north towards the B4102. This area encompasses the existing Touchwood Shopping Centre, Mell Square and the High street.
- The commercial area centred along Homer Road that includes National Grid's Metering Head Quarters, Solihull Immigration Centre, Solihull Police Station, Paragon House and The Crowne Plaza Hotel.
- A commercial area located along the Lode Lane/Warwick Road junction which includes the Premier Inn Hotel, The Courtyard, plus a number of smaller scale offices.
- A number of civic uses are located throughout the town centre including St Augustine's Catholic Church which provides an attractive frontage onto Station Road and St Alphege Church which provides a striking terminus to the High Street, and is a key landmark within Solihull. As previously stated within Section 3.3, Solihull Train station is located on the periphery of the town centre to the west of Lode Lane, which makes it feel isolated from the town due to the existing infrastructure.
- There are currently very few residential areas within the town centre as they are generally located on the periphery of the town. A relatively modest residential area is located along New Road and is mainly formed of terraced housing with the exception of a number of apartments located off George Road and Deehurst Court sheltered apartments at the New Road/Warwick Road junction.

1. Tudor Grange Park
  2. St Alphege Church
  3. St Augustines Church
  4. Mell Square
  5. Solihull School
  6. Solihull Hospital
- - - Area of Influence
  - Site Boundary
  - ||||| Railway Corridor
  - Residential Area
  - Mixed Retail/ Commercial Core
  - Cultural
  - Commercial (including hotel)
  - Greenspace
  - Solihull Hospital
  - Solihull College

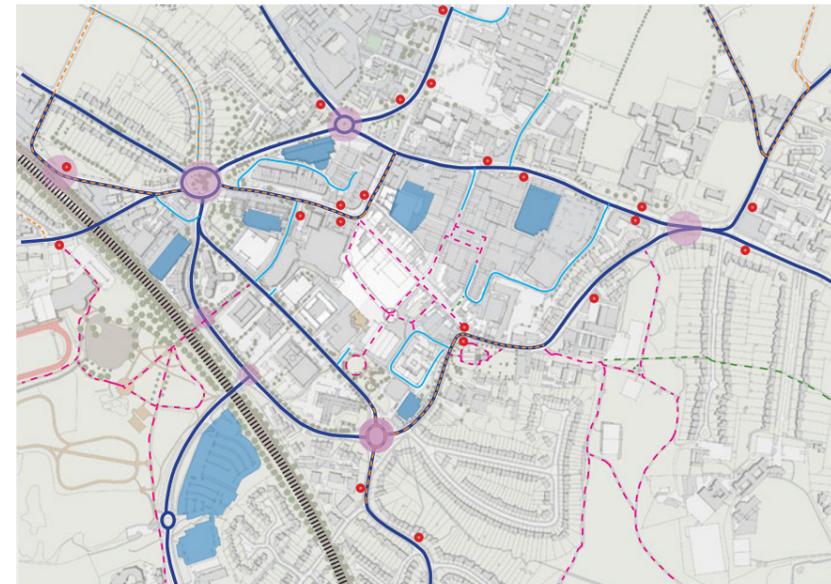


Figure 3.5: Solihull Town Centre Movement and Access Analysis Plan

### 3.6 MOVEMENT

There is no doubt that Solihull is currently dominated by the car; with 77% of people arriving by car or other light vehicle despite the town centre being the most accessible place in the Borough (Solihull Cordon, January 2018). In addition 42% of commuters into the town centre are travelling less than 5km and walking and cycling combined account for just 7% of the current number of trips being generated.

Solihull's town centre is defined and bounded by an inner ring road formed from Lode Lane, Warwick Road, New Road and Prince's Way. Created originally to alleviate traffic congestion within the centre, the ring road also acts as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement, effectively disconnecting the town centre with its surrounding areas.

The same is also true of Solihull Train station, which is currently disconnected from the town centre by the ring road and requires people to cross a number of busy roads and major junctions; further compounded by a lack of signage, poor legibility and lack of clear sightlines to the town centre. At present, Solihull suffers from relatively low usage of the train station compared to other modes, despite its frequent services to Birmingham and London.

The main bus interchange is located opposite the station entrance on Station Approach, and provides connections to the town centre and beyond. Whilst the public realm is functional with improvement works undertaken in 2018 to widen narrow footways and improve the approach aesthetically, the space and current layout has led to conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. Overall, the current station environment fails to provide a sense of arrival or facilitate seamless movement of travellers between various modes of transport.

Despite the majority of the town centre being just five minutes' walk (400m) from the centre of the High Street the town centre currently has a disconnected and staggered network of pedestrian and cycle routes into and out of the town. This is particularly evident in the poor connections that exist between the north and the south of the town, largely due to the sloping gradient and terracing of buildings. This has led to routes into the town centre often being stopped short at the outer edges, severed by buildings, rail lines and major roads. The few routes that do exist, such as the pedestrian route between the Solihull Immigration Office and the Crowne Plaza Hotel are often poor quality, not overlooked and feel unsafe.

In comparison, east-west connections for pedestrians are relatively good, largely due to the pedestrianized High Street and Mell Square, which provide a safe vehicle free environment. Furthermore the internal connections provided by Touchwood, are high quality, sheltered from the weather and well integrated with other routes.

Provision for cyclists within the town centre is relatively poor, with current cycle routes disconnected, sporadic and mainly limited to main roads, away from key desire lines. In particular, cyclists are prevented from using the main pedestrianised routes such as the High Street, forcing them onto the more hostile main roads, and reducing the incentive to cycle. In addition, there is also a distinct lack of cycle parking throughout the town and at key destinations, particularly Solihull Train station.

As Solihull continues to grow over time, there is a risk that new development could potentially increase the number of cars and therefore exacerbate congestion. Therefore it is imperative that the masterplan provides opportunities to increase accessibility for sustainable travel and improve the environment to encourage greater pedestrian, cycle and public transport use.

PROVIDES  
POSITIVES  
IN REDUCING  
POTENTIAL  
CONFLICTS  
BETWEEN  
DIFFERING  
LAND USES



### 3.7 KEY OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

The table below provides a summary of the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats outlined within section 3.

#### STRENGTHS

A high quality town rich in heritage.

Frontages associated with the main High Street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafés and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town.

Solihull town centre benefits from being in close proximity to two large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park; and Malvern and Brueton Park.

Existing market reputation and high quality of living

#### WEAKNESSES

Lack of outward frontage resulting in an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull.

Solihull's main gateways are currently characterised by large scale infrastructure.

Key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull.

The train station feels remote from the centre, and has a relatively poor environmental quality.

Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and do not overlook the street.

There is very little greenspace within the town centre core and access to parks is at present poorly signposted.

The town is characterised by large single use areas, which have little interaction.

Limited residential offer in the town centre.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

Train station has the opportunity to create a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town.

Build on it's reputation as an affluent town.

Build on Solihull Town Centre's existing variety of public spaces, which support a range of different functions.

Improve accessibility to surrounding parks to encourage people to use them.

Increase the residential offer in the town centre.

Recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses provide.

Support the wider Borough ambitions outlined by UK Central.

#### THREATS

Market considerations for demand and viability.

Environmentally and socially responsive to a changing demographic; elderly, youth and young families – from an environmental and social perspective.

Responding to the competitive nature of similar towns in the wider context.

Responding to climate change and the push for sustainability.

# 4 VISION

The creation of a clear vision will help communicate the values and ideas which will drive the future development of Solihull Town Centre. It will also continue to inform the development of aims and objectives for the town centre which respond to current and anticipated needs. The vision presented within this section encapsulates a deliverable set of aspirations for Solihull Town Centre which has been based upon its current success and takes into account stakeholder collaboration and wider economic drivers such as UK Central.

This vision is underpinned by three key elements that set out our ambition for Solihull:

## THRIVING

“A prosperous and desirable town centre with a strong retail and growing commercial core and residential offer, alongside outstanding connectivity.”

## VIBRANT

“A network of integrated spaces offering unique experiences through a constantly evolving offer and a variety of reasons to return.”

## VISIONARY

“A demonstrator of new trends and opportunities, championing sustainability in all aspects of design and accessibility and a commitment to invest in innovation and growth.”

These elements are the drivers of the concepts that have emerged through the Masterplan and support the emerging activities proposed in the document.

**SOLIHULL** A THRIVING,  
PREMIER TOWN  
CENTRE AND A  
VIBRANT DESTINATION  
AT THE FOREFRONT  
OF VISIONARY DESIGN,  
SUSTAINABILITY  
AND INNOVATION.

# 5 MASTERPLAN CONCEPTS

This section explores the overarching concepts that emerged from the data collection, analysis and engagement conducted in the early stages of the masterplan studies. By gaining a clear understanding of the fundamental issues, opportunities and ambitions for Solihull, three main themes emerged which hold the key to achieving the Solihull 2036 Vision:

## Connections ■ Living and Working ■ Experience.

Both in combination and as distinctive agendas, these concepts set out a broad framework for future growth and development, which can then form the basis for future development projects and interventions.

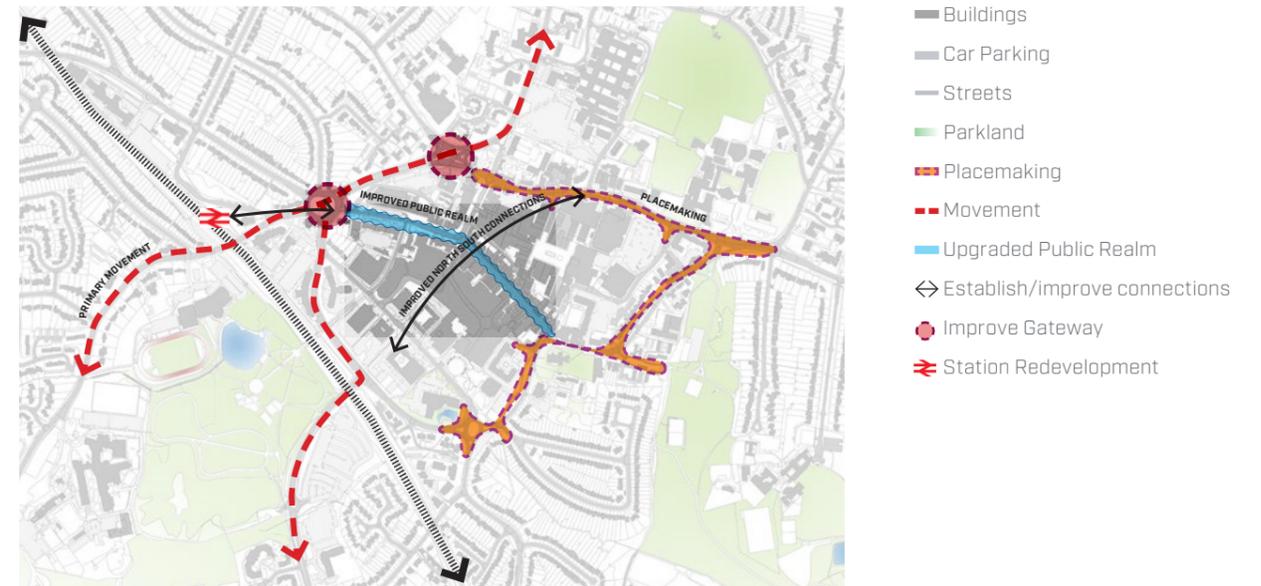


Figure 5.1: Conceptual connections strategy for Solihull Town Centre

### Connections

The overall connection concept is focussed on the need to reconnect Solihull Town Centre with its currently disjointed areas – areas which are covered in the analysis undertaken in section 3 – into one cohesive, integrated centre. It seeks to create a network which integrates the town centre's various retail, commercial, civic, residential, and cultural precincts. The connection concept is underpinned by the following ambitions for the Town Centre:

- Deliver a train station which serves as a strong gateway and arrival point into the town centre. The station forms part of the wider town centre influence area with strong links to the centre's major destinations;
- Maximise opportunities for sustainable travel through improved transport infrastructure that helps to reduce congestion in the town centre. Vehicular movement around the town centre will be focused along the western edge at Lode Lane and Prince's Way, reducing vehicle movement in the east along Church Hill Road and New Road;
- Complement the public realm experience which as a result of softening the northern and eastern edges of the town centre will open Warwick and Church Hill Roads to opportunities for placemaking, green infrastructure, improved permeability, and improved public realm;

CREATE A NETWORK WHICH INTEGRATES THE TOWN CENTRE'S VARIOUS RETAIL, COMMERCIAL, CIVIC, RESIDENTIAL, AND CULTURAL PRECINCTS

- Improve access between the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods. Reducing the road barriers surrounding the town centre will improve connections with the residential neighbourhoods and parklands beyond. It will also better enable and encourage residents, visitors, and workers to choose more sustainable means of travel into town.
- Key locations surrounding the town centre will benefit from improved pedestrian, cycle and bus connections including Solihull Hospital, Solihull School, Tudor Grange Leisure Centre, Solihull Train station.
- Better integrate key destinations within the town centre by upgrading key connections such as the High Street, Blossomfield roundabout and Lode Lane roundabout; and
- Set out proposals for the management of town centre car parking to ensure that this supports accessibility to the town centre and economic activity.

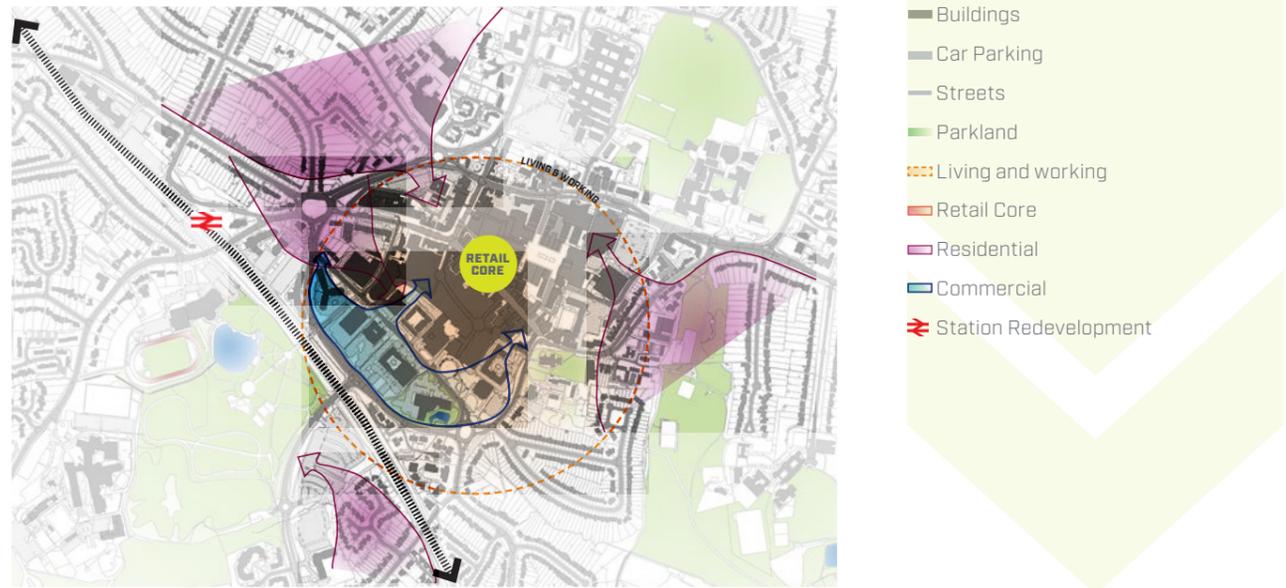


Figure 5.2: Concept of the future living and working strategy for Solihull Town Centre

### Living and Working

Diversification is a central aim of the living and working concept for Solihull Town Centre, helping to inform future market and land use considerations. Central to this concept is the introduction of more residential uses and further office uses into the town centre to inject new vitality through a mixture of activities, economic relationships, times of use and built form. The living and working concept will:

- Strengthen the centre's retail core to reinforce Solihull as a unique town and retail destination;
- Encourage residential uses into the town centre, particularly in areas around the eastern and western periphery of the retail core. This will create a mixed use residential and commercial environment which will encourage activity in the town centre beyond retail trading hours and help open the market to evening economy and leisure opportunities; and
- Promote the development of high quality new office development with positive frontages onto key routes. This will consolidate and build upon the existing office offer, and provide opportunities to improve north-south connections.

Whilst COVID-19 has led forced us to take huge steps forward into the world of home working and much of the workforce has embraced the change, office will continue to provide a clear and vital purpose in the post COVID work environment, "to provide inspiring destinations that strengthens cultural connection, learning, bonding with customers and colleagues, and supports innovation"

**THRIVING** "A PROSPEROUS AND DESIRABLE TOWN CENTRE WITH A STRONG RETAIL AND GROWING COMMERCIAL CORE AND RESIDENTIAL OFFER, ALONGSIDE OUTSTANDING CONNECTIVITY."

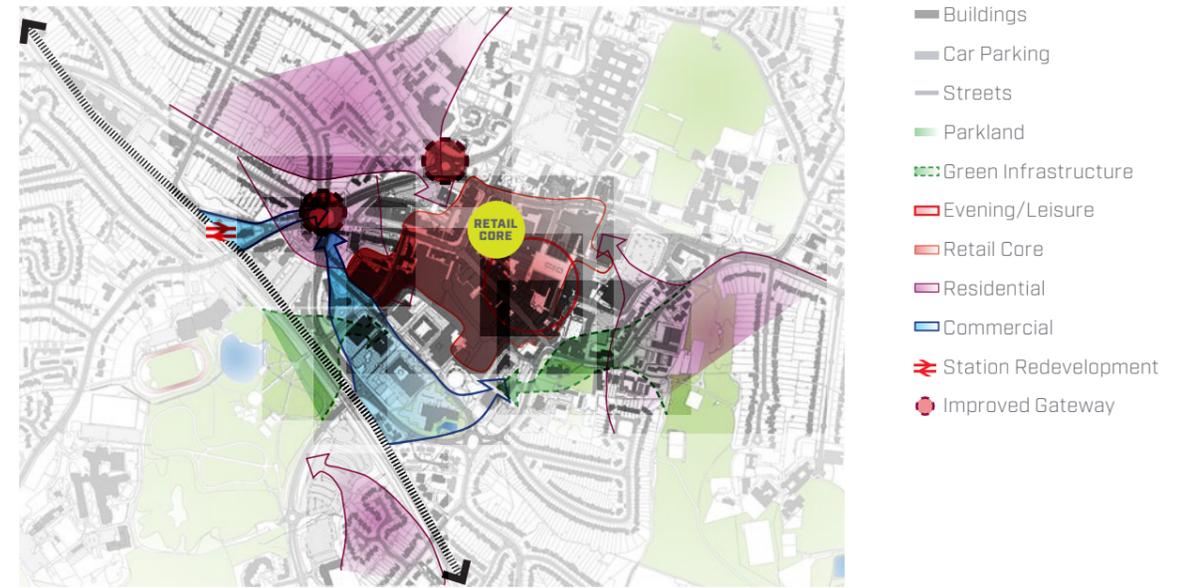


Figure 5.3: Plan illustrating the experience strategy Solihull Town Centre

### Experience

"Millennials would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things, and this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on high streets"

The Solihull Town Centre user experience is a crucial component of creating an appealing environment to live, work and enjoy. The experience concept will aim to:

- Reinforce the retail appeal of Solihull by maintaining a retail core focused around Touchwood Shopping Centre, Mell Square and the High Street which will include widening the retail offer;
- Provide new opportunities to enhance the town centre's evening and leisure, arts and culture offer which can be focused around the High Street and Mell Square and Eastgate;
- Promote high quality and sustainable urban design which Solihull can be proud of;
- Create a town centre where people can choose to live, work and spend their leisure time, encouraging people to play an active role in streets. In turn this will encourage activity in the town centre beyond retail trading hours and strengthen the market for evening and leisure opportunities;
- Build upon the town's existing assets including its heritage, to create a distinctive place to shop, work and live;
- Encourage green infrastructure into the town centre tracing from Tudor Grange Park and Malvern Park and Brueton Park; and
- Upgrade key areas of public realm with high movement and activity within the town centre such as the High Street, Blossomfield roundabout and Lode Lane roundabout.

**VIBRANT** "A NETWORK OF INTEGRATED SPACES OFFERING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES THROUGH A CONSTANTLY EVOLVING OFFER AND A VARIETY OF REASONS TO RETURN."

# 6 THE SOLIHULL TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

## 6.1. EVOLUTION OF THE MASTERPLAN

The masterplanning design process undertaken in 2016 evolved through a comprehensive understanding of Solihull's physical setting in the context of wider market, stakeholder and

economic drivers. In order to gain an initial understanding of the potential scale of change that could occur over the masterplan period, three levels of intervention were produced that tested

different quantum's of development and land use in order to understand the potential impact of car parking and public transport connectivity, and in response to different market scenarios.

This updated edition of the masterplan responds to a number of decisions and developments that have occurred locally over the intervening 3 years. It also considers changes to socioeconomic and market conditions locally and nationally, new and emerging regional and national best practice and policy relating to the future of town centres; and newly adopted council policy and plans. For example:

- The decision not to relocate the station onto Monkspath Hall Road and to pursue the redevelopment of an integrated transport Hub at the current station site
- Completion of a new Aldi Store on the site of the Magistrates Court on Homer Road, in the Business and Commercial Quarter
- The decision not to progress with the planned Touchwood II extension and the impact for the planned redevelopment of the Council House
- Progress on development of Homer Road Gateway site
- The impact of COVID on market conditions
- The Grimsey Report, Future High Street Fund, and industry insight into the future of the workplace
- Climate Change prospectus, #WM2041, & the Climate Change Emergency Statement of Intent.

**VISIONARY** “A DEMONSTRATOR OF NEW TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES, CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY AND A COMMITMENT TO INVEST IN INNOVATION AND GROWTH.”



Figure 6.1: Solihull Town Centre Illustrative Masterplan



Figure 6.2: Solihull Town Centre Illustrative Masterplan

### Solihull Town Centre Masterplan 2020

The preferred framework and illustrative masterplan detailed in this section has been developed in response to the understanding of place, key spatial, transport and property considerations that have been debated throughout its evolution and as a consequential outcome of the overarching messages derived from both stakeholder engagement and public consultation. The framework incorporates a description of the individual masterplan layers supported with a series of high level 3D studies that portray the type of place envisaged and the key principles for future development. It responds to the key objectives that were defined in the initial information and analysis stages of the masterplan design process and shows how the areas of change could be developed over the next 20 years. Figure 6.1 – 6.2 overlays the illustrative masterplan onto an existing aerial view of the town centre and demonstrates how areas of development and public realm intervention will come together as a holistic strategy.

The following sections provide a breakdown of the individual development parameters that will inform more detailed design studies. The material includes the principal components that come together to achieve the illustrative masterplan such as land use, scale, movement and frontages

## 6.2 LAND USE

The plan opposite (Figure 6.3) indicatively illustrates the potential land use response to the framework concepts and areas of change described within Sections 5 and 6 of the document. The strategy's central aim looks to diversify Solihull Town Centre through the introduction of new residential and commercial uses to attract more people throughout the day and meet changing demands. The masterplan looks to create a broader mixture of land uses, across different areas of the town centre, which blend together and create a positive and distinct identity whilst ensuring that the existing character of Solihull is preserved and strengthened. Each site will be evaluated individually and evidence produced on the potential development use, taking into account the demand profile for the sector uses in the town centre.

New high quality office development could front along Prince's Way strengthening Solihull as a place for business and investment and enabling greater permeability between the Southern Gateway, Tudor Grange Park and the town centre.

Through the introduction of new residential uses in the heart of the town centre, the masterplan looks to support existing commercial and leisure uses, whilst also providing additional activity and vibrancy outside normal shopping hours. Residential development could also support objectives of the Climate Change prospectus and the emerging Surface Access Strategy, with many residents able to walk, cycle or use public transport to their work place and other parts of the town centre, reducing reliance on the car.

The schedule below confirms the development capacity and potential number of dwellings that could be achieved in the preferred land use framework:

- 1,178 New Homes
- 50,000sqm. office floor space
- 40,000 sqm. Retail, Leisure and active ground floor space.

“FOR GENERATIONS OUR URBAN AREAS HAVE BEEN DESIGNED EXCLUSIVELY AROUND THE CAR. BUT CAR DEPENDENCE IS NO LONGER BUILT INEXTRICABLY INTO THE FABRIC OF TOWNS AND CITIES, AND BOLD MOVES ARE BEING TAKEN TO MAKE HIGH STREETS MORE WALKABLE AND CYCLE FRIENDLY”



Figure 6.3: Solihull Town Centre Illustrative Masterplan

- Green Infrastructure
- Mixed Use
- Office
- Commercial
- Civic
- Car Parking/ Private Open Space
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential Apartments
- Train Station
- Urban Realm
- Plot Areas
- Public Realm Upgrades
- Multi-Storey Car Park

## 6.3 MOVEMENT

The masterplan has evolved around strengthening connectivity by providing improved routes for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport that are high quality, legible and safe. An important consideration has been the need to support the masterplan aims in respect of strengthening the 'place' element of the transport network in Solihull town centre, including those areas where the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users are to be prioritised. This includes High Street, Station Road and Warwick Road in particular.

The masterplan has evolved around strengthening connectivity by providing improved routes for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport that are high quality, legible and safe. To support the Masterplan, a Town Centre Multi Modal Access Strategy is currently under development. The Access Strategy will seek to enhance future accessibility to, from and within the Town Centre.

As well as supporting the Masterplan, The Access Strategy has the following objectives:

- Identify the scale of the transport 'problem', overall approach to mitigate it and areas focus on;
- Provide a more accurate, relevant and iterative estimate of travel demand to Solihull Town Centre;
- Identify the potential propensity for active travel and public transport within close proximity to the town centre;
- Provide an aspirational vision for movement and place within Solihull Town Centre; and
- Inform SMBC in readiness for the Local Plan review.

The Strategy will support the Masterplan by developing interventions to provide alternative solutions to ease congestion and enhance connectivity within the town centre area for both residents and visitors. An analysis of transport movements within the town centre (in the AM peak) has shown that 36% of journeys are less than two miles and 66% of journeys are less than 5 miles. As part of the Access Strategy, interventions will be developed to encourage short distance journeys to be undertaken by public transport, cycling and/or walking.

Interventions to be considered as part of the Access Strategy include

- High quality segregated cycle routes on the key arterial corridors connecting into the Town Centre
- Improved pedestrian provision including public realm improvements
- Reducing severance for pedestrians and cycle users
- Bus Lanes/Bus priority
- Highway efficiency improvements – traffic signalling, use of technology
- Improved connectivity between Solihull Railway Station and Town Centre

Whilst the Access Strategy is under development, progress has already been made with the Town Centre Approach scheme which officially opened in September 2018. This scheme included the following:

- Widening of the footway along Station Approach between the station entrance and Blossomfield Road to provide a two way shared cycle and pedestrian facility;
- Re-alignment and improvement of the Toucan crossing along Blossomfield Road.
- New street lighting with LED bulbs to brighten the route into the town centre

This scheme has improved the quality of the pedestrian link between the railway station and the town centre and is a first step in addressing some of the existing and potential development accessibility issues identified in the earlier Masterplan stakeholder workshops, and as part of work undertaken to develop Solihull Connected.

To be truly transformative, the standard of future schemes needs to reflect this best practice in terms of design, materials and signage and should support the ambition to create a balanced investment in multi-modal transport infrastructure and behaviour change which recognises the roles of public transport and active travel modes (walking and cycling) as well as the car. It will be imperative that high quality cycling and walking provision is provided to encourage and enable more active travel journeys are undertaken within the town centre.



### 6.3.1 HIGHWAY INTERVENTIONS

Options development and initial appraisal work is underway at several locations in the town centre which have been identified as locations which experience significant levels of congestion at peak times and have poor provision for walking and cycling. A traffic model is being developed to enable the testing of options / combinations of options to ensure that any schemes put forward meet the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, whilst maintaining access for traffic.

Specific locations where further option development work is being undertaken are as follows:

- Blossomfield Road / Streetsbrook Road / Princes Way junction. Insofar as possible, the aim here is to maintain or improve highways capacity whilst improving the quality and continuity of walk and cycle access between the railway station and High Street and Homer Road areas, including potential development sites.
- Lode Lane / Warwick Road junction – This is already a large junction which is not controlled by traffic signals. This makes crossing the road difficult for cyclists and pedestrians. The lack of control also makes it difficult to manage the town centre highway network in a holistic manner.
- B4102 Warwick Road / New Road / Hampton Lane junction. During peak periods the junction acts as a significant delay point on the town centre arterial road network as well as being a significant barrier to walking and cycling (because of its relatively wide geometry and limited space for pedestrians and cyclists). During school drop off times at Solihull School, the junction becomes particularly problematic and can result in blocking back to the B4102/George Road junction as well as significant queue lengths along New Road.
- A41 Solihull Bypass / Hampton Lane / Yew Tree Lane junction. This is in effect two junctions in close proximity linked together with the A41 as the dominant through route. Due to safety issues, some right turn movements at this junction are segregated which adds to the delay due to increased signal cycle times.
- A41 Solihull Bypass / Lode Lane Junction. This is a key access point into Solihull town centre and sits on a major public transport corridor linking the town centre, Solihull Hospital and major employers such as Jaguar Land Rover.

This list is not exhaustive and the traffic model will be used to help inform where further investigation and options development work should take place.

Consideration is also being given to the following:

- Development of a local highway signage strategy (including carparks) to develop options to better manage the flow of traffic around the town centre.
- A review of the operation of the existing Solihull town centre traffic control centre and traffic signal equipment and any improvements that can be made to it to provide a robust and innovative traffic management tool. The aim being to control and manage existing congestion and accommodate future development and growth in the town centre.

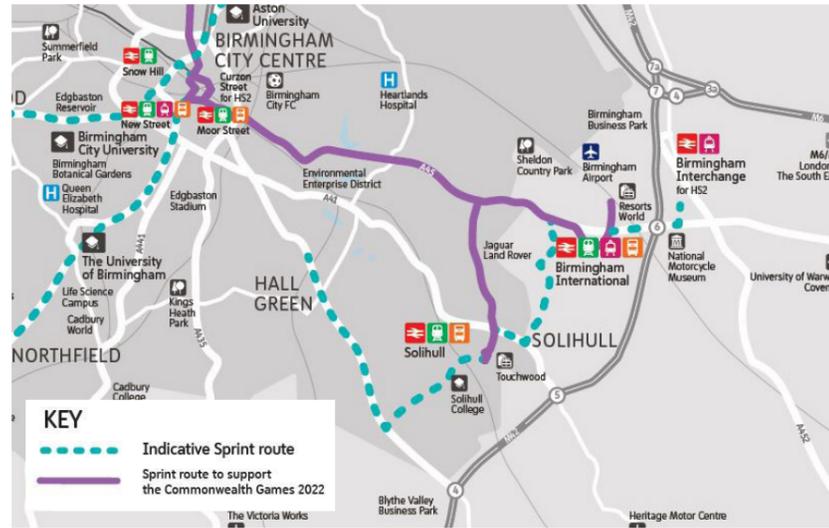
### 6.3.2 CYCLING AND WALKING

To enable more short distance journeys to be undertaken on foot or by bike within the town centre, it's imperative that cycling and walking provision is of a high standard. It is important that local residents and visitors believe that travelling by active modes is safe, attractive and convenient. To recognise the importance of active travel, the councils Cycling and Walking Strategy outlines a clear ambition to increase the amount of cycling and walking journeys across the borough. The Strategy states the need for a high standard of cycling infrastructure including the implementation of segregated cycle routes connecting residential areas to key employment sites.

As part of the Cycling and Walking Strategy, a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) has been developed. The Solihull LCWIP has developed a long term Cycling Network Plan and a number of Core Walking Zones (CWZs). The Cycling Network Plan includes a number of arterial corridors connecting to the Town Centre.

The LCWIP will support the Access Strategy by providing recommendations on the level of provision required for cycle users and pedestrians within the town centre. The LCWIP has identified a number of priority cycle routes connecting to the Town Centre which will be included in the Access Strategy with a view of implementation in the coming years. Solihull Town Centre was included as a CWZ within the LCWIP. The Town Centre CWZ has identified a package of interventions required to improve the pedestrian environment within the town centre.

PEOPLE  
WANT  
TO VISIT,  
LIVE  
AND  
WORK



Sprint network map



Figure 6.4: Solihull Town Centre Gateways and Frontages

### 6.3.4 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The following Sprint (bus rapid transit routes) will serve Solihull town centre and Solihull Station interchange:

- Birmingham Airport and Solihull to Birmingham City Centre (A45); and
- Hall Green to UK Central (A34 Stratford Road)

The first route is planned for delivery in advance of the Commonwealth Games in 2022. Both routes will maintain access to the existing town centre and the emerging Masterplan developments.

### 6.3.5 CAR PARKING

A Car Parking Strategy is being developed, to ensure that Solihull continues to be served by an appropriate level of parking provision. The strategy considers the impacts that new development will have upon existing parking provision, both in terms of supply and demand, whilst also taking into account the potential for change in how people access and use the town centre (as a result of changes to travel behaviour that may be generated through the non-motorised user interventions highlighted above, and the on-going change in services and facilities provided within such centres).

### 6.4 GATEWAYS AND FRONTAGES

The framework level gateway and frontages strategy (Figure 6.4), looks to mark the town's key gateways including Lode Lane/Blossomfield Road roundabout, Prince's Way / Church Hill Road roundabout, Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout and New Road / Warwick Road junction, through the creation of new landmark buildings. It is envisaged that these buildings will be of a larger scale and have notable architectural character which gives them a unique style and identity. It is important that new development in Solihull supports the creation of well – designed streets and understands that they play a key part in delivering sustainable places where people want to visit, live and work. Providing active and attractive frontage onto key routes will encourage a vibrant and active street life, while buildings of varying scales will create character and define important spaces / routes.

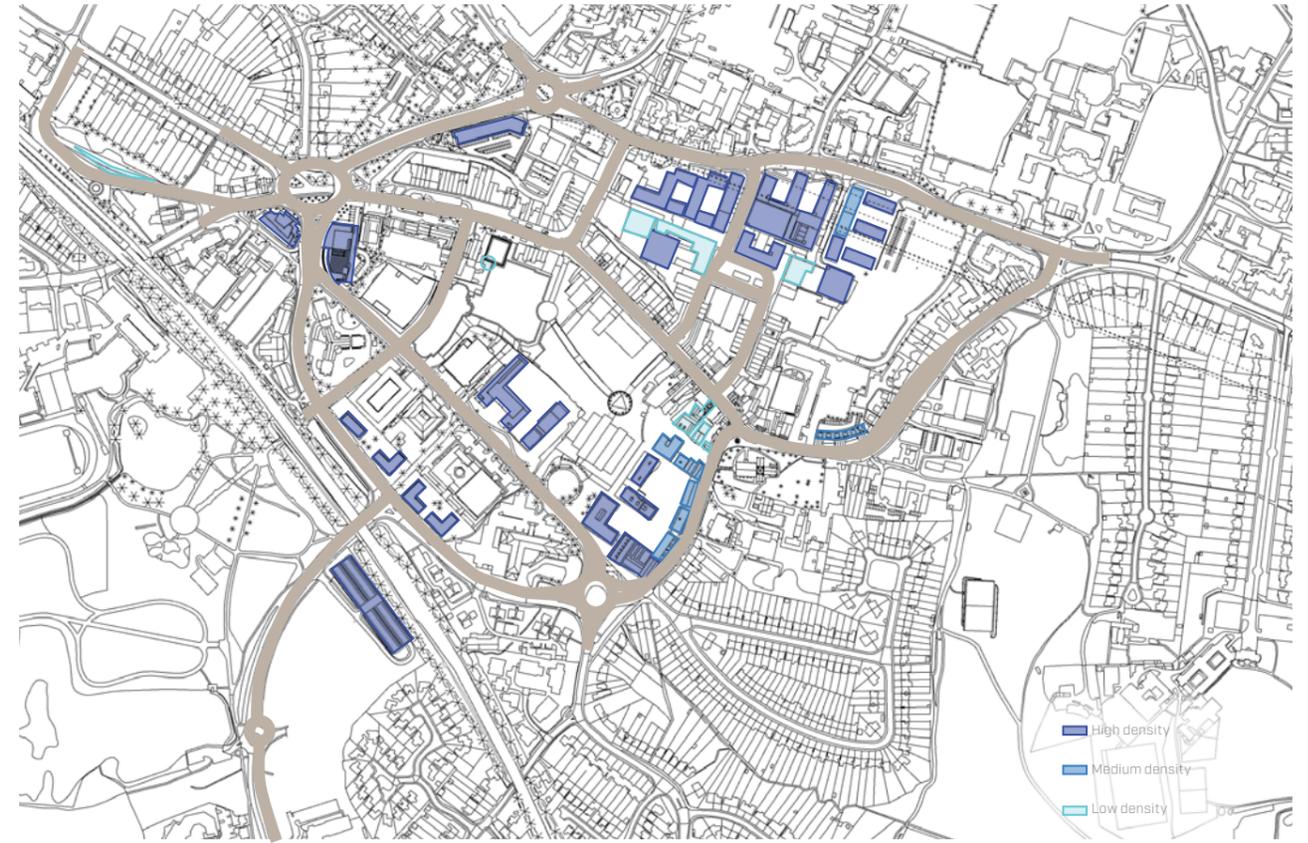


Figure 6.5: Solihull Town Centre Building density/heights

### 6.5 BUILDING HEIGHTS

The modest scale of existing development in the town centre is reflected in the building heights framework plan (Figure 6.5). The scale of proposed buildings looks to respond to this context, with larger buildings fronting onto principal routes and key gateways to reflect street hierarchy and improve legibility. This will be particularly true along Prince's Way, Lode Lane and Warwick Road, which are primary routes and require buildings of a more significant presence to balance out the scale of the street.

In contrast, it is envisaged that building heights in sensitive areas like St Alphege Quarter will be of a lower order to ensure that existing character is maintained and that the prominence of St Alphege Church is preserved.

Solihull Town Centre is impacted by the Civil Aviation Authorities Obstruction Zone regulations, limiting the height of new buildings. All new development will need to adhere to the requirements of these regulations, however within these parameters the masterplan does not seek to be prescriptive about building heights in areas of change or on opportunity sites. The scale and massing of proposed development will be dealt with through the planning process and will be subject to contextual analysis and quality of design considerations.



## 6.6 STRATEGIC MARKET COMMENTARY

The following section provides insight into the sociodemographic conditions, and current market for office, retail/leisure and residential development in Solihull Town Centre. It has been produced to provide local context which informs land use proposals for key development sites in the town centre.

### 6.6.1 OVERVIEW

Solihull is consistently identified as one of the strongest performing town centre locations within the West Midlands sub-region. The Touchwood shopping centre anchors a range of national retail chains alongside local retailers and a food and drink offer and, alongside Mell Square, contributes to a vibrant town centre. In the face of long term pressures, Solihull has been relatively successful in retaining key retailers and maintaining an attractive retail offer. Alongside this, the town centre as developed its role as a focus for professional service and other office based activities.

Nationally, town centres have experienced significant pressure as a result of a series of collapses and closures on the high street. Within this environment, investment to sustain existing centres is coming under increasing pressure. These changes reflect long-term structural changes in consumer behaviour and the way in which people use the town centre and shopping trends in particular. Many of these trends have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, with new patterns of working potentially forcing businesses to review the need for workspace.

While Solihull has experienced significant challenges – particularly over 2020 – it remains well placed to act as a focus for renewal as the economy recovers over the medium term. This reflects the fact the fundamental characteristics of the town centre remain strong. It continues to provide a mixed and high quality shopping experience, anchored by high quality tenants and operators; The BID and the Council work collaboratively in support of a long term vision; and the catchment continues to comprise settled households with high disposable incomes and a highly qualified labour market.

### 6.6.2 POLICY CONTEXT

The masterplan has been developed having full regard to policy objectives at the national, regional and local levels, reflecting key strategic themes:

- **Vibrant town centres** – the creation of the High Street Task Force recognises the key role that town centres play as a focus for activity, community and identity at the local level, and it has been charged with overseeing the delivery of a routemap to transformation – ensuring that the high street continues to lie at the heart of vibrant town centres over years to come. The Grimsey Review outlines a framework that highlights the importance of ensuring that town centres lie at the heart of recovery from COVID-19. These principles underpin the GBSLEP Towns and Local Centres Framework, which highlights the importance of targeted intervention to sustaining vibrant town centres. The Masterplan has been prepared in full alignment with this framework, promoting change in support of growth.
- **Enhanced productivity** – seeking to create strong foundations for growth, the Industrial Strategy and Local Industrial Strategy recognise the key importance of enhancing productivity through investment in ideas, people, infrastructure, the business environment and places. The role of place in creating an environment that attracts investment and talent – at a UK and local level – is recognised within the masterplan. Building upon the established strength of Solihull town centre, its wider catchment and strategic linkages, the Masterplan will promote measures that create the conditions to attract investment and generate growth.
- **Regional growth drivers** – Solihull lies at the heart of the Midlands Engine for Growth as a key economic driver, building upon established assets and the huge potential of transformational schemes – including HS2 and UK:Central. The masterplan for the town centre represents a core element of the wider UK:Central infrastructure plan, recognising its importance in creating the conditions for strategic investment. In particular, it is envisaged that these initiatives will extend the catchment of the town centre, generating future requirements for homes, services and jobs. The proposals for the town centre respond directly to this requirement.
- **Local growth objectives** – at a local level, revitalising town centre environments forms a key strand of the Council Plan for the period to 2025, with the masterplan recognised as a core foundation for a strategic plan led approach. This underpins the inclusive vision for the Borough, where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all.

SOLIHULL IS  
CONSISTENTLY  
IDENTIFIED AS ONE  
OF THE STRONGEST  
PERFORMING TOWN  
CENTRE LOCATIONS  
WITHIN THE WEST  
MIDLANDS SUB-REGION

### 6.6.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASELINE

Key socio-economic indicators have been assessed at the Solihull level and for Solihull town centre. The assessment confirms the clear strength of the Borough and the town centre. This offers potential long-term resilience against the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which will continue to impact on activity and investment over the short to medium term.

#### Solihull level

Within Solihull, rapid output growth of 37.3% from 2014 to 2019 has significantly outpaced growth in the WMCA and the UK comparator areas (14.7% and 9.1% respectively). Considering the specific sectors where this economic activity has been concentrated, Solihull demonstrates established strengths in relation to key office based sectors including telecoms, computing and IT services and business support services, alongside manufacturing and logistics. Additionally, there are a diverse range of sectors where strong employment growth has been witnessed and is expected to continue, including professional services and recreation. Whilst analysis suggests that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on GVA will have been relatively severe at the local level, economic forecasts suggest that Solihull is potentially well placed to recover over the medium to longer term.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, key indicators suggest that the area has benefited from high rates of economic activity and employment. The strength of the labour market in Solihull was married with an increase of workplace and resident earnings which has outpaced the national average, providing residents with relatively high disposable incomes. Moreover, qualification levels in Solihull set the area ahead of regional and national trends. However, further analysis has revealed an uneven geographical distribution of these skills levels in Solihull.

With respect to the housing market in Solihull, growth of house prices from 2014 to 2019 was slower in Solihull than regionally or nationally. Despite this, the housing affordability ratio for Solihull in 2019 was only marginally lower than the national average (7.83 versus 8.13), and significantly higher than for the wider WMCA region. There is limited affordable housing in and around the town centre.

In addition to this, the population of Solihull performs strongly in terms of health outcomes, physical activity rates, educational attainment and social mobility.

#### Town Centre level

At the Solihull Town Centre level, the growth in the number of local businesses has outpaced the trends within the wider Solihull area and nationally. Whilst the composition of the business base in terms of the size of business in Solihull Town Centre broadly mirrors wider comparator areas, there are specific sectors which have a greater representation of businesses in Solihull than in comparator areas. These include information and communications, property, professional, scientific and technical, education, and health sectors.

The rate of population growth in Solihull Town Centre over the period 2014 to 2018 was broadly similar to the wider Solihull area, although it is noted that the majority of the population lives adjacent to the masterplan area within established and relatively affluent residential neighbourhoods. The housing stock within Solihull town centre contains a greater proportion of high value properties than in the wider Solihull area or nationally, suggesting there could be issues associated with affordability in the town centre. Although population growth for the wider Solihull area was outpaced regionally and nationally, population projections indicate that the anticipated population growth of 12.7% by 2040 in Solihull will be higher than for the WMCA area and England as a whole, with growth expected across all age groups.

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Solihull overall ranked 206 out of 324 and is therefore deprivation of the area is considered relatively low. All LSOAs within Solihull town centre rank within the least 20% deprived LSOAs nationally. However, the centre does not rank as favourably in terms of the barriers to housing and services domain, with deprivation also becoming worse in the education, skills and training and health domain since 2015.

“ULTIMATELY, FLEXIBILITY WILL BE THE NEW REQUIREMENT FOR THE OFFICE SECTOR, WITH OCCUPIERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES DEMANDING COMFORTABLE, ACCESSIBLE SPACES THAT CAN BE EASILY ADAPTED AS REQUIRED. THIS ISN'T ANYTHING NEW, BUT WHERE THESE SPACES ARE LOCATED AND HOW THEY ARE DESIGNED IS WORTH THINKING ABOUT”

## 6.6.4 MARKET CONDITIONS

### Overview

Based on local data, there are approximately 600 commercial premises within Solihull town centre. Overall, shops account for around 40% of commercial premises within the town centre area, reflecting the traditional status of retail as a high value activity. Office premises accounted for around 35%. While a number of other activities make important contributions, the leisure and hospitality sector remains relatively underrepresented within the town centre, accounting for 7% of premises.

### Retail

Solihull is consistently identified as one of the strongest performing town centre locations within the West Midlands sub-region. The Centre is anchored by Touchwood and Mell Square, acting as a focus for national retailers. The high street remains part of the retail core, providing a link from St Alphege to the station. Overall, Solihull town centre remains a major shopping destination with a strong retail offer – underpinned by the presence of key anchors. It responds to a wide range of requirements, but benefits from a relatively affluent catchment population. Prior to COVID-19, footfall remained strong – supported by a range of demand drivers – while access by private and public transport enhances convenience for visitors and workers alike.

In spite of these strengths, the town centre still experiences a number of visible long term vacancies, suggesting the key areas enjoy lower footfall and activity. In addition, the hospitality and leisure offer is relatively limited. The quality of the public realm has declined over time and the centre no longer offers a very high quality experience outside of the main centres. It also suffers from visible rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour. The impact of COVID-19 will continue to be significant for the retail sector over the medium term. It is envisaged that increased flexibility will be key to enable adaptation within the retail sector, with further emphasis on promoting a high quality experience.

### Office

“Ultimately, flexibility will be the new requirement for the office sector, with occupiers and their employees demanding comfortable, accessible spaces that can be easily adapted as required. This isn't anything new, but where these spaces are located and how they are designed is worth thinking about”

The office market in Solihull is outperforming many indicators across a ten-year average. Whilst this is a positive sign, the lack of development over the past four to five years has severely constrained the market. This is evident in the low vacancy rates of 5.6% and rising rents. In response, the Council is playing an integral role in promoting new development within the town centre through the Westgate development. It is envisaged that this will play a key role in reinforcing key economic sectors within the town centre.

### Residential

The residential market is showing signs of recovery in the short term, in part as a result of the stamp duty holiday imposed by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, over the longer term activity may slow as the availability of mortgages, particularly to first-time buyers and those with limited financial power, becomes more constrained.

Within masterplan area, there is a limited supply of housing. Across the wider B91 1 postcode sector, the market is dominated by established neighbourhoods comprising detached dwellings which surround the town centre. New residential development within the town centre has been relatively limited over the last five years, comprising mainly higher value, aspirational homes.

Demand for residential provision in and around the town centre remains strong, reflecting the transport links, quality of schools, amenity and access to services. Affordability remains a significant barrier for many prospective residents, reflecting the limited choice of accommodation within the centre. It is recognised that increasing the density and diversity of the resident population could play a key role in supporting a more vibrant and sustainable town centre offer over the longer term.

## 6.7 PLANNING REFORM 2020

In June 2020, the Government announced that it will look to streamline the planning process as part of its objective to 'kickstart' the economy post Covid-19. The reforms to legislation within England are stated to be the most radical since the Second World War. One of the initiatives includes greater flexibility to enable the 'repurposing' of commercial premises. This would include a 'permitted change' from retail (A1) to other commercial uses including: cafes and restaurants (A3) and offices (B1a). The effect of the proposed legislation would mean there would no longer be a requirement for a formal planning application to facilitate changes of use. The new legislation will empower the property market with greater agility to respond to changes in demand, which could encourage a wider range of uses thereby contributing to vibrancy and vitality in the Town Centre. It also presents a number of challenges for ensuring that growth and development occurs in a joined up and cohesive way with a constant consideration of the impact of individual development sites on the look, feel and purpose of the town centre as a whole. Whilst the planning reform poses challenges for using planning policies to control the mix of uses in the town centre, this masterplan will ensure that those looking to invest and develop in the town centre are clear about the vision and ambition for future growth

## 6.8 AREAS OF CHANGE

THIS SECTION IDENTIFIES SIX AREAS OF CHANGE WITHIN SOLIHULL TOWN CENTRE WHICH PROVIDE PRACTICAL INTERVENTIONS IN ORDER TO DELIVER THE EMERGING CONCEPTS OUTLINED WITHIN THE PREVIOUS SECTION.



The framework concepts define an overarching direction for the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan; a strategy for change that can be flexible over time in order to accommodate changes in the market as well as social and economic trends. It is important to maintain this flexibility whilst at the same time demonstrating how intervention in a specific part of town will link to the wider area and can have potential cross-cutting benefits such as improvements in the perception branding of Solihull and general health and wellbeing, leading to a more sustainable place.

It is important to recognise that the level of intervention envisaged as part of the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan will be delivered over a broad timeline. Areas are likely to overlap and will influence one another as well as forming part of an evolution of the overall town centre offer, as highlighted in the Vision section of this document

It is not the intention of the areas of change to be prescriptive in a way that suppresses future creativity or the ability of the town centre to respond to external influences. However, it is important to explore a number of the spatial relationships that are likely to be generated through examination of a particular approach. The definition of the physical boundaries have been derived through the spatial and market analysis of Solihull as well as an appreciation of existing ambition for change that has emerged through discussions with key stakeholders.

Section 6.8.1 – 6.8.6 provide details of each area of change which set out the key opportunities and influences associated with each area. The association with the three emerging concepts is confirmed and the ideas are reinforced through a series of precedent images and best practice examples.

### Development Sites

The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan builds upon the previous work carried out as part of the Solihull Town Centre Study. The study identified a number of opportunity sites through which Solihull might accommodate significant additional growth and improvements to the connectivity of the town centre. The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan broadly follows the sites identified in earlier work, but also includes a number of new sites which could provide further opportunities to respond to the emerging concepts in the longer term. Sections 6.8.1 – 6.8.6 provide a breakdown of the individual development sites within each area of change. They have been defined in order to help inform developing transport studies and give an early indication of potential future capacity. It should be noted that the boundaries of the sites are not definitive at this stage, and it is envisaged that they may evolve as sites are subject to further feasibility and viability work.

Each section includes a brief overview of the opportunity site and its location followed by a high level indication of the potential capacity of new development calculated under its preferred end use.



Figure 6.6 Solihull Town Centre Masterplan – Model View

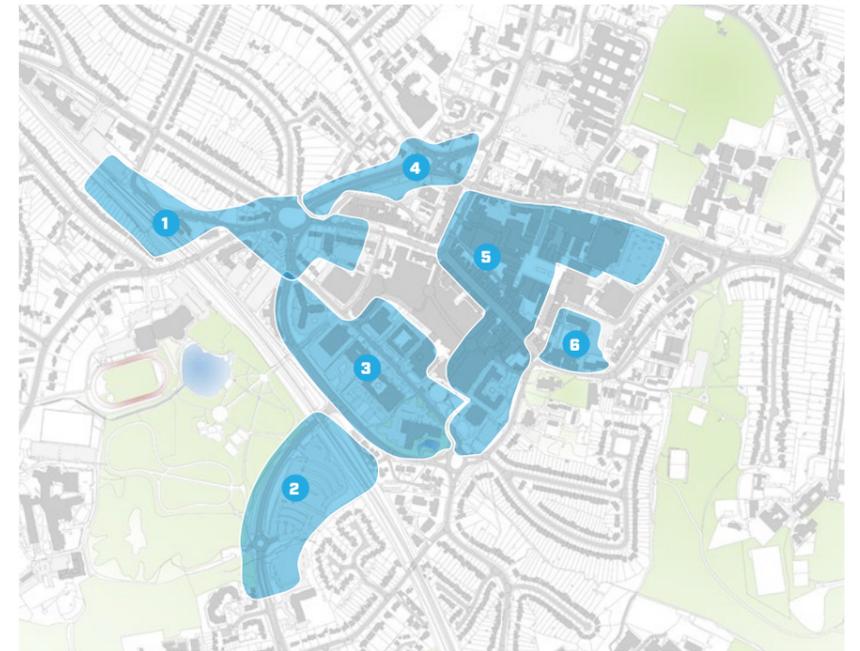


Figure 6.7 Plan identifying the seven areas of change incorporating key areas for intervention.

1. Western Gateway
2. Southern Gateway
3. Business and Commercial Quarter
4. Northern Approach
5. Heart of Solihull (Retail Core)
6. St Alphege Quarter

6.8.1 AREA OF CHANGE:

# WESTERN GATEWAY

## THE OPPORTUNITY

The western arrival into the town is currently dominated by roads and a lack of frontages around the Solihull Methodist Church and Westgate site, with the train station physically and psychologically disconnected from the town centre. Reconfiguration of key frontages and movement patterns here would provide opportunities to enhance key pedestrian and cycle connections from Solihull Train station into the town centre, and also potentially improve journey times for buses by reprioritising and supporting sustainable travel.

Supported by new land mark development on the Westgate site fronting onto the street and an improved public realm, with reprioritisation of the road for pedestrians and cyclists, the Blossomfield Road roundabout could be transformed into a key visual gateway; which represents an important arrival point into Solihull Town Centre.

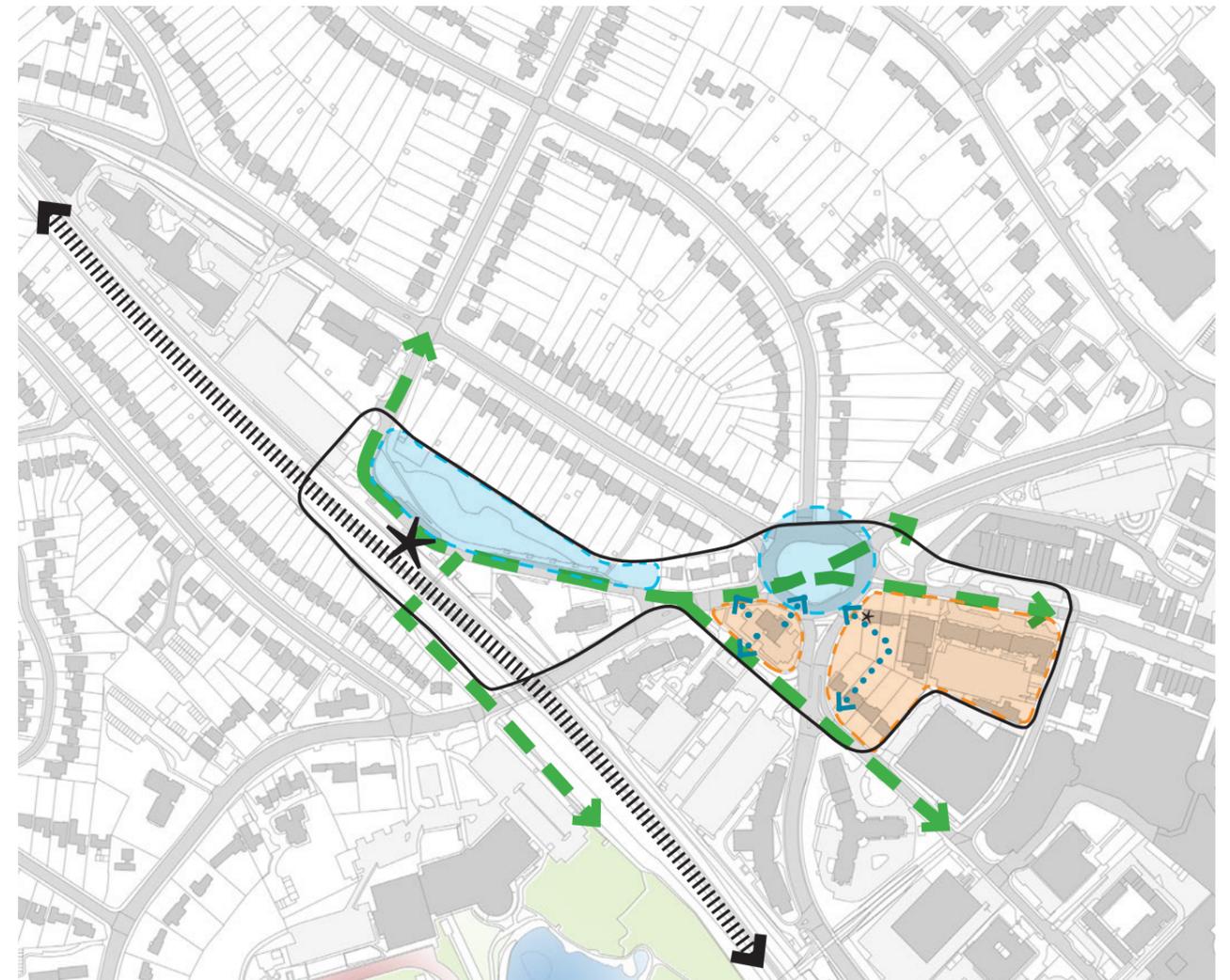
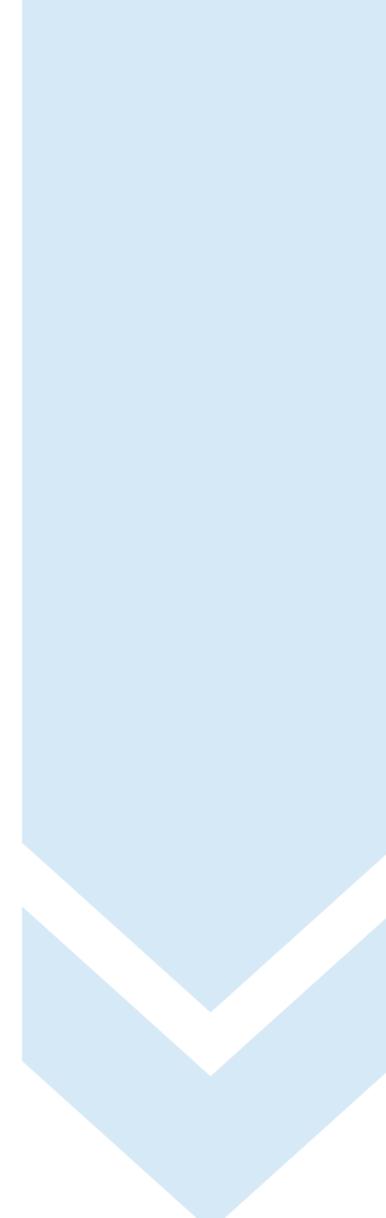


Figure 6.8: Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS		
CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
<p>Improve pedestrian and cycle connections into and out of the town centre</p> <p>Enhance connection to Solihull College and Tudor Grange Park.</p> <p>Encourage greater use of sustainable travel.</p>	<p>Longer term opportunities to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.</p>	<p>Strengthen and enhance the key gateway into the town.</p> <p>Promotion of high quality and sustainable new development.</p> <p>Upgrade key route into town improve legibility and wayfinding.</p>



Figure 6.9: Location plan

- ▬▬▬ Railway Line
- ✱ Potential for landmark building
- ➔ Potential frontage
- ➔➔ Connections (Improved connections)
- ▭ Living & Working (Potential living and working)
- ▭ Experience (Improved urban experience and placemaking)

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: SOLIHULL TRAIN STATION

### THE VISION

The creation of a multi-modal Integrated Transport Hub that gives the Western Gateway a new sense of place, with a landmark building providing a gateway into the town centre that reflects the reputation and quality of the town centre, whilst complementing its surroundings. A new Transport Hub will facilitate the forecast economic growth of the town centre, and support the transformation of the connectivity between the station and the heart of the Town Centre.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

The Station Masterplan provides an opportunity to re-examine the current role of the station as a key entrance point to the town and the commercial opportunities this brings. While the primary role of the station will remain the safe, fast and efficient movement of passengers from one mode to another, and improve connectivity to the town, it also acts as the arrival point for many into the town and so the vision and ambition of the town should be reflected in the scheme design and quality of delivery.

Redevelopment of the station is likely to involve a new larger station building replacing the existing building, in its current location. Improvements would be made to platforms, stairwells, subway, and waiting areas to deliver the highest quality of passenger experience, with modern facilities, provision of customer information and comfortable convenience and waiting facilities, which meets the highest levels of safety and environmental standards.

The highway and public open space adjacent to the new station building will be reconfigured to enable quick, safe and seamless interchange between multiple modes of transport, including cars, taxis, buses and sprint. Development provides the opportunity to pedestrianise the lower end of Station Approach to create a high-quality civic space, providing Solihull with a true gateway; partially bridging the perceived gap between the station and the town centre. The green space would be reallocated around the site in smaller scale plots, rather than necessarily creating a large public square.

There are commercial opportunities at the station that can be realised to support growth, but must be balanced with the development potential of the town centre. The development of a quality retail, food and beverage offer within the station building will initially serve interchange users, but has the potential to be developed further in the future to serve the surrounding employment and residential uses, without having a detrimental impact on the footfall and demand in the town centre, and improving the visitor experience.

There are also opportunities for residential development, which can support an increased town centre population in a sustainable location, and commercial office development opportunities which can provide a potentially different product and service a different market compared to the town centre office market. These development opportunities will support the delivery of a high quality, and well maintained station environment, which will be important in providing an arrival experience that matches the vision and ambition for Solihull. These opportunities will be scaled to ensure they do not interfere with the primary role of the station as a transport interchange, or impact on the demand and development potential of the town centre.



Figure 6.10: Model View - Solihull Train Station



Figure 6.11: Model View - Solihull Train Station

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: WESTGATE

### THE VISION

The vision is to optimise the potential development of a prime site within Solihull's commercial district by providing a landmark Grade A+ speculative office development. By providing a development containing larger floor plates, which through occupier demand, could attract a major organisation into Solihull, and which emphasises the scale and prominence of the development. The scheme includes enhancements to the public realm, improvements to pedestrian connectivity and provides an attractive setting for new development.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

Located on Blossomfield Road roundabout, the Westgate site is situated on a prominent gateway into the town centre and provides opportunity to create an impressive new arrival point into Solihull's business and commercial quarter. It is envisaged that high quality new town centre offices could be developed complementing the proposed offer at The Hub of UK Central, home to Birmingham Airport, the National Exhibition Centre and Jaguar Land Rover as well as the new High Speed Rail Interchange. It is envisaged that enhancements would be made to the public realm and around Lode Lane/Blossomfield Road roundabout to improve pedestrian connectivity and provide an attractive setting for new development.

Development of the Westgate site has the potential to deliver:

- Approx. 10,100sqm of Grade A office development
- Collaborative workspaces for community use with café facilities and meeting rooms that will help businesses to innovate and work together
- External landscaping and Public Realm areas around the building, with hard landscaping that helps to connect the buildings grounding to its wider context and soft landscaping that includes green walls, raised beds and parklets to create a streetscape atmosphere with all year interest
- Surface level parking including disabled, visitor and electric charging spaces.
- Development that is designed in accordance with British Council for Offices BCO guidelines, achieves, BREEAM New Construction 2018 'Excellent', and Well Building Silver standard



Figure 6.12: Model View - Homer Road Triangle



Figure 6.13: Illustrative View - Homer Road Triangle

# SOUTHERN GATEWAY

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Cut off from the town by busy roads and the rail line embankment, the south of the town centre feels disconnected from its surroundings, in particular Tudor Grange Park and the business and commercial quarter. Large swathes of surface car parking leave large voids in the urban structure at a key arrival point into the town. Prince's Way is characterised by tall vegetation and backs of existing office buildings which has the resulting effect of creating an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull, creating a negative perception which is at odds with the town centre core.

There is an opportunity to breathe new life into the Southern Gateway by promoting development that introduces a new active use and brings with it a new group of town centre users. A key feature of any development should be the introduction of new pedestrian and cycling routes linking the north and the south of the town, with attractive public realm, open spaces, active frontages that provide an attractive and impressive entrance to the town centre through the southern gateway.

### ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS

CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
Improved cycle and pedestrian connections into the town from the south, across Princes Way and the railway line	Opportunity to introduce new residential accommodation or commercial development, or a mix of both.	Positive frontage onto Tudor Grange Park. Linking the town centre with public parks.



Figure 6.14: Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

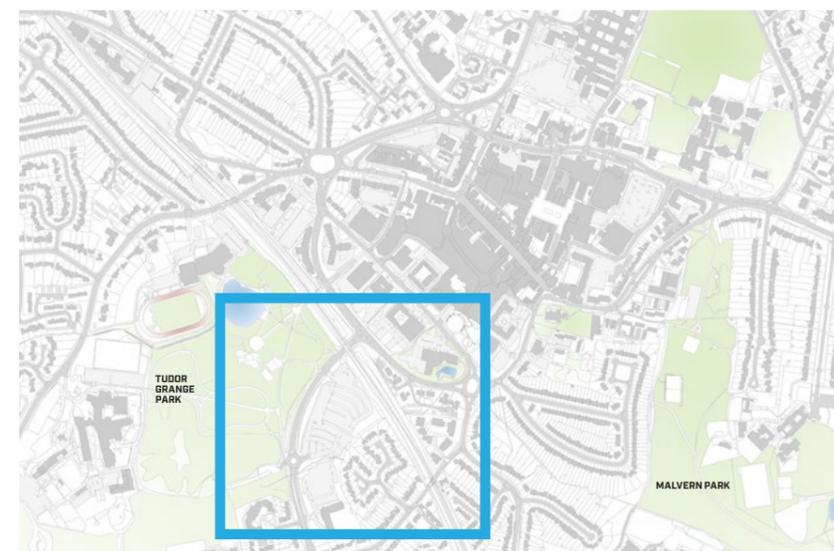


Figure 6.15: Location plan

- ▬▬▬ Railway Line
- \* Potential for landmark building
- Potential frontage
- Connections (Improved connections)
- ▭ Potential development and carpark
- Experience (Improved urban experience and placemaking)



Figure 6.16: Model View - Indicative Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: MONKSPATH HALL ROAD

### THE VISION

The introduction of a vibrant, active use on a key town centre site, that creates an attractive gateway and contributes towards creating a vibrant town centre economy that meets the needs of the growing town centre resident population.

The size, location and layout of the site means that it is a truly flexible space that could accommodate a wide variety of uses including residential, commercial, leisure or education. The site has the capacity to accommodate the development of a multi-story carpark as an early phase of works, which will mitigate the loss of car parking from Monkspath Hall Road Car Park and the Mell Square car park allowing redevelopment of these sites for future growth within the town.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

The Masterplan does not identify a preferred use for this site. The size, location and setting of the site mean that it is flexible and suitable to house a variety of uses, including mixed use. Any development on this site should look to include, active frontage along Monkspath Hall Road, and improved connections between the southern gateway and the other areas of the town centre to the north.



Figure 6.17: Illustrative View - Monkspath Hall Road Car Park

CREATING  
A VIBRANT  
TOWN CENTRE  
ECONOMY  
THAT MEETS  
THE NEEDS OF  
THE GROWING  
TOWN CENTRE  
RESIDENT  
POPULATION

# BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL QUARTER

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Challenges facing the business and commercial quarter are the poor quality of existing north – south connections, inadequate cycle provision, weak urban form and the lack of frontage along Prince’s Road.

Through expansion of the current commercial offer and the potential integration of new urban living, there are opportunities to promote Solihull as a place to do business, whilst addressing some of the key urban design issues facing the town. Potential enhancement of Homer Road and north-south connections could provide opportunities to promote walking and cycling, and also introduce green infrastructure into the town linking with Tudor Grange Park. The introduction of landmark buildings could improve the southern aspect of the town along Princes Way by redefining frontage.

Prince’s Way and Homer Road are presently characterized by a high concentration of large, single occupier, buildings. A number of well-known names including Npower, National Grid, Paragon Financial Services, and HM Immigration Office, occupy these buildings and consequently lend the area a particular quality. In particular, the area between Prince’s Way and Homer Road, is defined by large buildings, set back from the road with extensive surface parking areas. These qualities have been important in establishing Solihull Town Centre as an important location within the wider office market outside of Birmingham.

There is an opportunity in the business and commercial quarter to create office accommodation that meets modern working preferences. Much of the existing office stock in the town centre doesn’t provide the focus around ‘collaboration, meeting and knowledge sharing’ that employers and employees are likely to seek in their post COVID working environments.

ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS		
CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
<p>Improve north-south connections through the town centre</p> <p>Enhance provision for cyclists to encourage sustainable travel.</p> <p>Create a more permeable town centre.</p>	<p>Strengthen support and extend Solihull’s business and commercial offer.</p> <p>Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.</p>	<p>Introduction of green infrastructure linking the town centre with public parks.</p> <p>Improving the look and feel of the north-south connections.</p> <p>Enhance the Southern Gateway into town centre through high quality new development.</p>

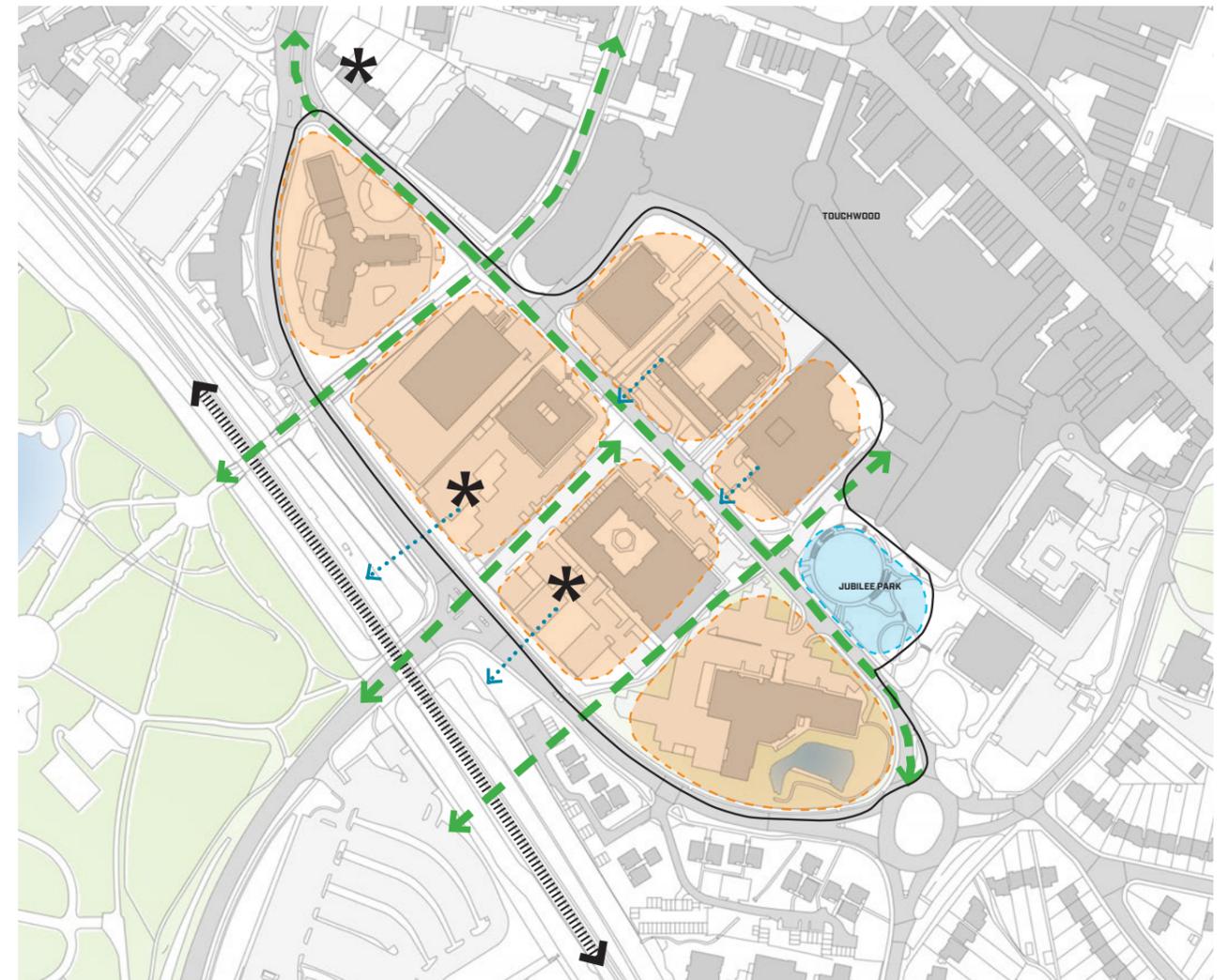


Figure 6.18: Broad design principles and precedent image examples.



Figure 6.19: Location plan



## DEVELOPMENT SITE: HOMER ROAD CIVIC BUILDINGS

### THE VISION

Replacement of existing large scale, low quality civic buildings with high quality office accommodation and new urban living opportunities to create a vibrant mixed use area that supports the living and working concept, and helps to diversify the town centre economy. As part of the development, new public realm and open space will be created that improves connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists moving between Touchwood, Homer Road, and Princes Way.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

Situated between Homer Road and Touchwood Shopping Centre this development site includes the police station and the Core building, and potential capacity is based on these two sites combined. A key objective of the Masterplan is to promote appropriate sites for residential development with a view to increasing the resident population of the town centre, in order to diversify the town centre economy, particularly the "evening economy". There is continued market interest in apartment building in Solihull town centre, with the location appealing both to young professionals and "downsizing" couples. The site occupies a location in good proximity to town centre amenities, and appeals as a residential development location.

The site has the potential to accommodate:

- Circa 200,000 sq ft office floorspace
- Circa 65 residential units
- 200,000 sqft. active ground floor use



Figure 6.20: Model View - Indicative Homer Road Civic Buildings



Figure 6.21: Illustrative View - Homer Road Civic Buildings



## DEVELOPMENT SITE: PRINCES WAY

### THE VISION

The reconfiguration of space to the rear of existing offices to create new office developments that provides an impressive new frontage onto Princes Way which is an important arterial route in the town centre. At the heart of the design of the site would be an attractive new pedestrian and cycle boulevard connecting north to south that radically improves the permeability of the town and creates an attractive new streetscape.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

This site is located to the rear of existing office buildings on Homer Road, currently utilised for parking. A higher density form of office development is envisaged, with a frontage on to Princes Way and the capacity to accommodate Circa 100,000sqft high quality office development. Clearly, the current uses on the site all remain viable, and occupy land out of the control of Solihull Council, such that the redevelopment of this area as envisaged should be seen as a long term aspiration, and is unlikely to be promoted ahead of other office development sites detailed in the masterplan with shorter term delivery prospects, such as Westgate.



Figure 6.22: Model View - Prince's Way



Figure 6.23: Illustrative View - Prince's Way

# NORTHERN APPROACH

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Heavily dominated by traffic and large scale highway infrastructure, the Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout currently acts as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement. The distinct lack of direct frontage onto the street and relatively poor quality of surrounding buildings mean that this key arrival point into the town fails to match the attractiveness of the heart of the town centre.

Improvements to this area have the potential to enhance connectivity along the northern edge of the town with opportunities to create improved crossing facilities and greater provision for cyclists. A new landmark development fronting onto the roundabout could improve the attractiveness of this important arrival point and deliver attractive new urban living with associated parking provision. This new residential offer will have particular appeal to the retirement market and young professionals. A greater representation of these demographic groups will support the diversification of the evening economy in the town centre, as such groups appreciate and seek an increasingly broad range of good quality and convenient leisure and entertainment options.

### ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS

CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
Enhanced connectivity across Warwick Road Improved pedestrian and cycle facilities	Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living potentially alongside new car parking facilities.	Enhance the northern arrival point unto the town through high quality new development.



Figure 6.24: Broad design principles and precedent image examples.



Figure 6.25: Location plan

- ▬▬▬ Railway Line
- \* Potential for landmark building
- - - - - Potential frontage
- - - - - Connections (Improved connections)
- - - - - Living & Working (Potential living and working)
- - - - - Experience (Improved urban experience and placemaking)



Figure 6.26: Model View – Lode Lane Car Park Redevelopment

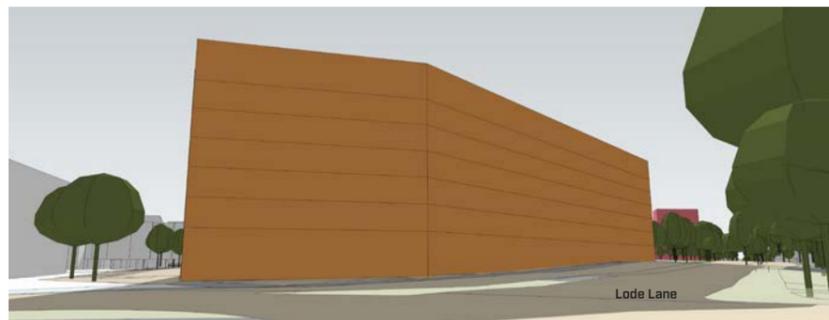
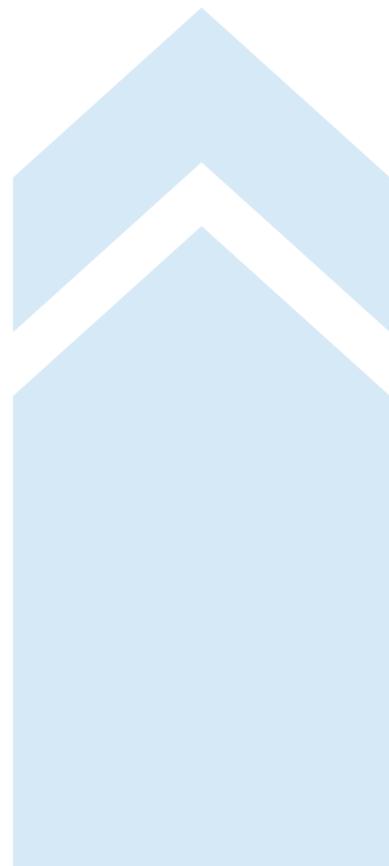


Figure 6.27: Model View – Lode Lane Car Park Redevelopment



## DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY: LODE LANE CAR PARK

### THE VISION

The creation of an attractive, high quality new residential development that will increase the resident population of the town centre helping to diversify the town centre economy and particularly the evening economy. The development would provide an exciting new frontage onto this key junction and transform the public realm and surrounding green space to deliver a striking new streetscape at this important gateway into the town centre.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

The Lode Lane site is situated adjacent a major arterial route and junction and currently contains an underutilised Multi Storey Car Park which provides 486 car parking spaces. The site also provides vehicular access to the existing adjacent uses including the Premier Inn Hotel. The car park is currently utilised by the hotel to provide guest parking. Interest in Lode Lane as a residential site is demonstrated by the recent completion of the Telephone Exchange development.

There is potential to redevelop this site to provide high quality new residential development, whilst retaining existing access to adjacent building uses including the Premier Inn Hotel, to accommodate circa 120 new apartments and 153 parking spaces

# HEART OF SOLIHULL

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Solihull benefits from a popular and successful retail core centred on Touchwood Shopping Centre, High Street and Mell Square. The masterplan will seek to re-establish the High Street as a key component of Solihull's retail heart.

Currently there is a distinct lack of quality evening offer and some of the existing public realm is tired and fails to reflect the ambitions of the town. The introduction of new mixed use development providing a greater variety of food and beverage uses, would boost Solihull's evening economy, which could be further supported through the development of new higher density residential uses. There are also opportunities to enhance pedestrian and cycle connections through the town, using new development to reinforce and positively reflect main routes, particularly around St Alphege Church. Furthermore, an upgraded public realm along the High Street and at Mell Square will more appropriately reflect the historic character and quality of the town centre, and provide the opportunity to create a high quality destination space for residents, visitors and workers.

A strong emphasis will be placed on enhancing the existing retail core, by encouraging renewal through enhancing connectivity and encouraging mixed uses such as residential and leisure development. Any new notable retail development, aside from that already in the planning process, would be envisaged from reconfiguration of the existing underused sites.

Elements within the north east of the town centre are underutilised and fail to provide an attractive frontage along Warwick Road. In addition, the existing building formats hinder permeability and there is a lack of positive frontage onto many pedestrian routes. There is an exciting opportunity to further diversify the town and support the wider town centre's envisaged new evening uses through the creation of a new residential quarter in the Heart of Solihull. We envisage the quarter may have particular appeal to the retirement market and young professionals. A greater representation of these demographic groups will support the diversification of the evening economy in the town centre, as such groups appreciate and seek an increasingly broad range of good quality and convenient leisure and entertainment options. This would provide new opportunities to consolidate and reconfigure existing car parking provision, and enable increased permeability from Mell Square through to the eastern edge of the town.

New development would also provide opportunities to improve frontage onto Warwick Road, enhancing the edge of the town and adding further vibrancy and variety into the town centre. Enhanced crossings across Warwick Road could improve pedestrian connectivity with the north of the town, whilst an upgraded public realm will assist in creating an attractive, outward facing Solihull.

### ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS

CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
<p>Improve provision for cyclists.</p> <p>Enhance connections through the town centre through additional wayfinding measures and a clear route hierarchy.</p>	<p>Increase the diversity of uses within the town centre.</p> <p>Grow Solihull's evening economy.</p> <p>Introduce further sustainable urban living to support the town centre</p>	<p>Strengthen the identity and historic character of the town.</p> <p>Create a vibrant and attractive destination.</p> <p>Enhance streets and public realm and develop a clear hierarchy of routes to aid legibility.</p>



Figure 6.28: Broad design principles

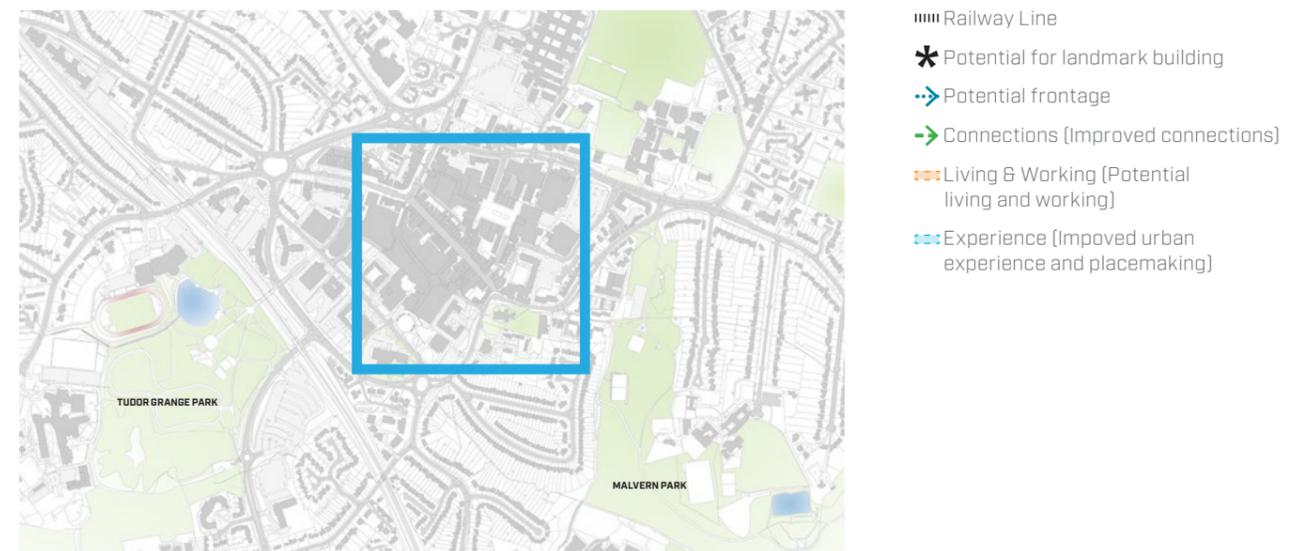


Figure 6.29: Location plan

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: MELL SQUARE

### THE VISION

Creation of a vibrant mixed use destination at the heart of the town centre attracting visitors morning noon and night. Home to high quality retailers, restaurateurs, and independent businesses, set within the context of stunning high quality multi-functional public realm. An exceptional new residential offer will breathe new life into the area, drawing a new resident population, who will be drawn to and support the employment opportunities on the door step, the thriving leisure arts and culture offer, and bustling evening economy.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

Mell Square is located in the heart of the town centre, bounded to the north by the busy Warwick Road, the pedestrianised high street to the south, Drury Lane to the east and Poplar Road to the West. At the centre of the site is Mell Square itself, a hard landscaped pedestrianised space with a food and beverage venue in the middle. Current use of the site is predominantly retail, with a number of national high street names present. Development here is likely to seek to enhance the current retail offer by encouraging renewal, by bringing in new complementary uses to the area such as residential and more varied leisure offer, and is most likely to occur through the reconfiguration of existing underutilised sites.

The House of Fraser Building and Mell Square Car Park form the north eastern boundary of the site fronting Warwick Road, this prominent area of the site has the long term potential to accommodate large scale redevelopment for high density urban living. Providing attractive new frontage onto Warwick Road, new residential development will present an opportunity to enhance the existing public realm and tie in with future Mell Square proposals to improve pedestrian connectivity.

There are opportunities to bring forward the site in stages to align with when sites become available, however it will be important to ensure that the overall development has a common character and links together, and seeks to:

- Create a retail loop linking with Touchwood, High Street and Eastgate site, to complete the shopping experience;
- Create a legible and attractive environment for visitors from the scale and massing of buildings, to the detailing of the landscaping, street furniture and signage.
- improve frontage onto Warwick Road, enhancing the appearance of the edge of the town and improving permeability for pedestrians and cyclists
- Reduce traffic flow in order to prioritise pedestrians;
- Redesign the existing retail, leisure, food and beverage offer
- Increase the residential offer within the site (circa 500 new homes); and
- Redesign the public spaces to establish Mell Square as flexible space that is better utilised by visitors day to day, whilst also being capable of hosting a variety of public events that will add to the vibrancy of the site.

The success of Mell Square is vital to the success of the town centre as a whole. Definitive proposals or capacities for the site are not yet known, and over the coming months the council will be exploring the potential of the site in more detail, considering local, regional and national trends and drawing on best practice, to identify the preferred approach to development of this key site.



Figure 6.30: Illustrative View – Mell Square

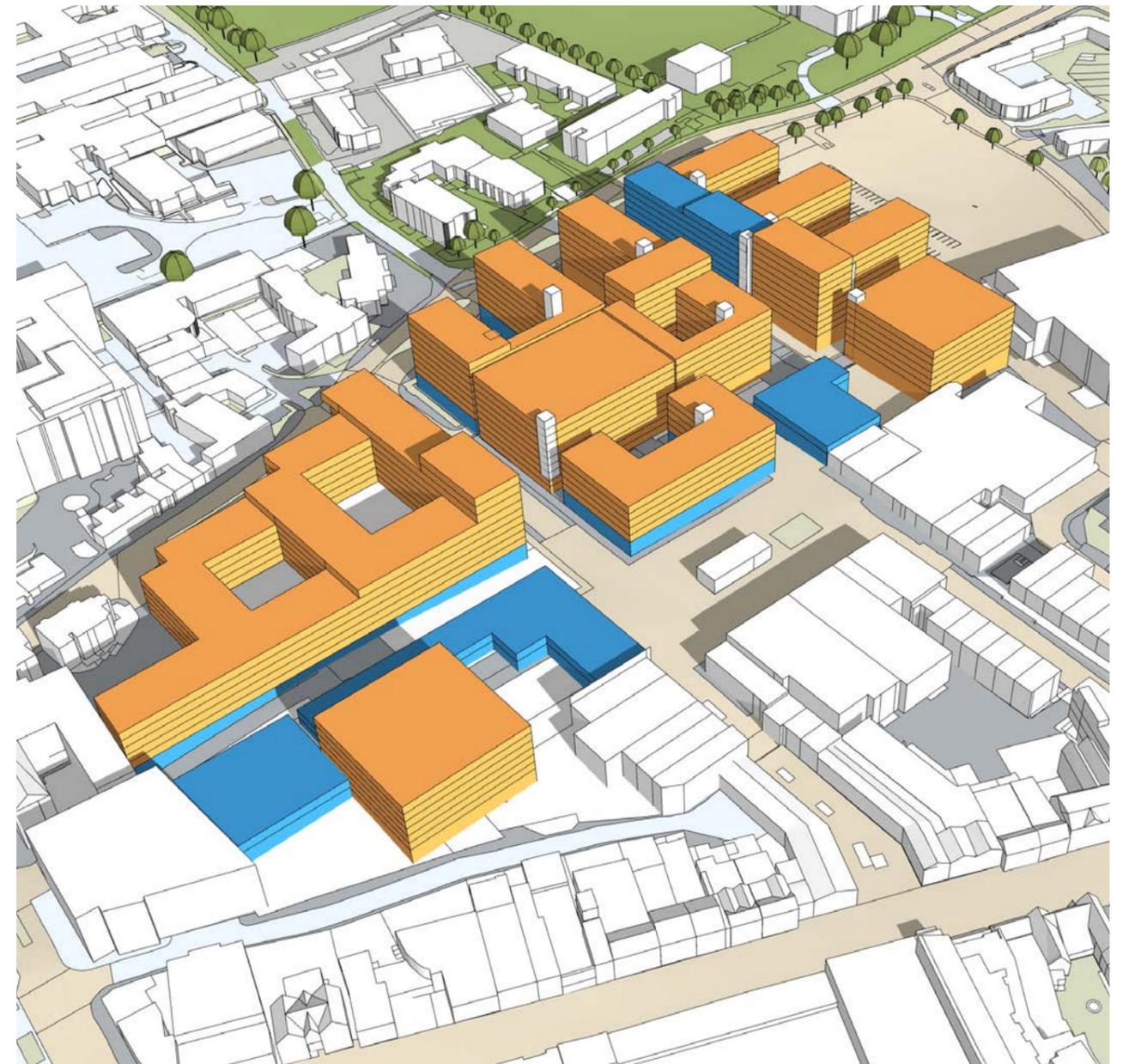


Figure 6.31: Model View – Indicative Mell Square

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: EASTGATE

### THE VISION

Creation of a distinctive place, to house a mix of uses and create a vibrant and new quarter within the town. The site will be able to accommodate re-provisioned council offices, within a sustainable and high-quality spatial design that fits in with wider town centre development strategies. This will be an inclusive, safe and accessible development that supports health and wellbeing, and contributes towards stimulating town centre wide economic development. A development that connects seamlessly with the wider town centre through the provision of high-quality linkages, spaces, paths and other transport movements.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

Located in a prime town centre location adjacent to the Touchwood Shopping Centre, extending from Homer Road to the south up to and including the High Street at the northern end and Church Hill Road to the east, the site provides an exciting opportunity to provide a vibrant and new mixed-use destination that supports the living and working concept in a sustainable mixed-use development.

The site will include a brand-new civic building with high quality public spaces, new retail and leisure, arts and culture uses to connect the site with the existing town centre, and a new residential neighbourhood providing modern, sustainable homes in a town centre setting, to attract a new demographic of residential population, adding vibrancy to the scheme.

The draft masterplan for Eastgate includes:

- Civic Office Building – approximately 13,500 m<sup>2</sup> (c.145,000 ft<sup>2</sup>)
- Residential – up to 469 units
- Retail & Leisure – circa 2,043 m<sup>2</sup> (22,000 ft<sup>2</sup>) including a 650 m<sup>2</sup> (7,000 ft<sup>2</sup>) gym
- High Quality Public Spaces and permeable connectivity to the wider town centre

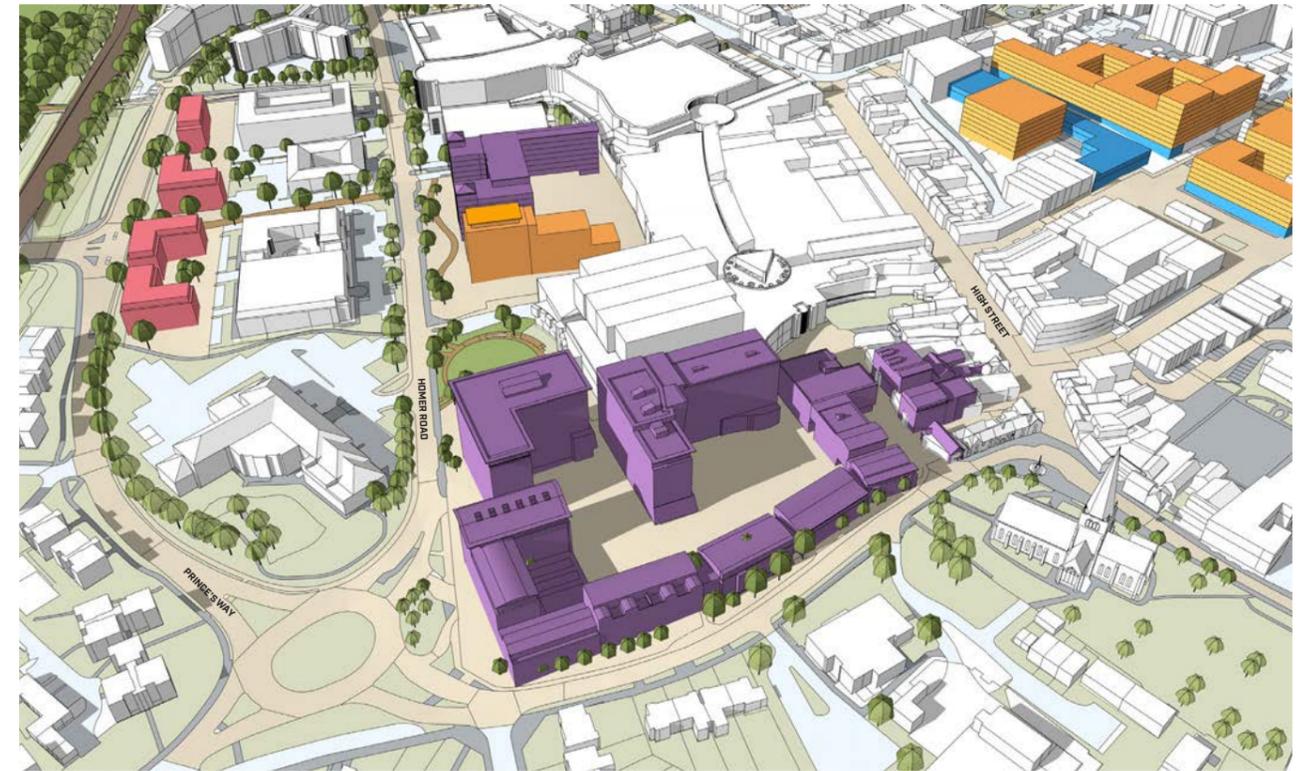


Figure 6.32: Model View – Council Offices

# ST ALPHEGE QUARTER

## THE OPPORTUNITY

St Alphege Church is a key landmark and provides an attractive conclusion to the eastern end of the High Street. The quality of the surrounding historic buildings is representative of Solihull's attractive heritage character, however the relatively tired public realm, and heavy traffic disappoint. In addition, the popular and attractive Malvern and Brueton Park is located just a short distance to the east; however the park is not promoted and the connection is not obvious for visitors to follow. Opportunities to provide attractive and sensitive new residential development here could improve frontages onto New Road and further diversify the town centre. Improvements in the public realm could prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, whilst also supporting the areas historic character. In addition, improved wayfinding and the introduction of new green infrastructure could actively link the town centre with Malvern and Brueton Park.

### ASSOCIATION WITH FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS

CONNECTIONS	LIVING AND WORKING	EXPERIENCE
<p>Improved provision on for cyclists.</p> <p>Enhanced pedestrian connections along New Road.</p> <p>Improved connectivity to Malvern and Brueton Park.</p>	<p>Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.</p>	<p>Creation of positive frontage onto St Alphege Church.</p> <p>Linking the town centre with public parks.</p> <p>Strengthens the identity and historic character of the town.</p>



Figure 6.33: Broad design principles and precedent image examples.



Figure 6.34: Location plan

- ▬▬▬ Railway Line
- \* Potential for landmark building
- Potential frontage
- Connections (Improved connections)
- ▭ Living & Working (Potential living and working)
- ▭ Experience (Improved urban experience and placemaking)

## DEVELOPMENT SITE: THE JOB CENTRE

### THE VISION

Delivery of a new residential development fronting onto New Road providing an attractive entrance to the High Street, complemented by enhancements to the public realm in the area around St Alphege church known as The Square. Churchyard enhancements that encourage the public to use and enjoy the space; provision for informal 'staying' activities through the provision of seating and outdoor dining, and the creation of a self-enforcing 20 mph zone. This would provide an attractive environment linking this development site with the High Street, Eastgate and Malvern and Brueton parks.

### DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

It is envisaged that medium density family housing could be developed on this site which sits sensitively within the existing context and provides similar typologies to those that already exist along New Road. The potential capacity and preferred use for the site are set out below:

- Up to 11 new homes;
- Accommodated on buildings up to two storeys in height; and
- Up to 28 on plot car parking spaces to serve the development.



Figure 6.35: Model View – The Job Centre Site showing indicative 3 storey town house redevelopment.



Figure 6.36: Illustrative View – The Job Centre Site Plan view.

## 6.9 SWOT REVIEW

The table below demonstrates how the interventions within the Areas of Change can respond and react to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified within Section 3.

STRENGTH	AREA OF CHANGE RESPONSE	WEAKNESSES	AREA OF CHANGE RESPONSE
A high quality town rich in heritage.	St Alphege Quarter will look to strengthen the historic character of the town by improving the setting of St Alphege Church and the frontages onto New Road.	Lack of outward frontage resulting in an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving in Solihull.	Areas of change with frontages along the edges of the town provide opportunities to create new attractive frontage and an outward facing town centre.
Frontages associated with the main high street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafes and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town.	The Heart of Solihull looks to enhance the public realm, encourage mixed uses and improve connectivity to further strengthen the High Street. Further food and beverages uses associated with Mell Square will added to existing positive frontages and provide attractive built form.	Solihull's main gateways are currently characters by large scale infrastructure.	Four key areas of Change are focused around the existing junctions and look to create new attractive frontage and improved pedestrian and cycle connections. New landmark buildings could be used to further strengthen Solihull's identity and aid legibility.
Solihull town centre benefits from being in close proximity to tow large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park and Malvern and Brueton Park	The Southern Gateway aims to improve north south connections and will provide positive frontage onto Tudor Grange Park.	Key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull. / Sustainable transport strategy	Improvements to Solihull Station will improve arrival points for visitors / users and better reflect Solihull's character. In addition the Areas of Change will look to improve connectivity and experience for pedestrians and cyclists.
Existing market reputations and high quality of living.		The train station feels remote from the centre, and has a relatively poor environmental quality.	The improved connections in the short term will enhance routes from the station to the town centre
	St Alphege Quarters will improve connectivity and pedestrian / cycle experience between the High Street and Malvern and Brueton Park	Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and do not overlook the street.	Many areas of change include frontages along the edges of the town. This provides opportunities to create new attractive frontage which overlook the street.
	It is envisaged that the Areas of Change will together sustain Solihull's enviable reputation and the introduction of new town city living will provide new high quality residential uses at the heart of the town.	There is very little green space within the town centre core and access to parks is at point poorly signposted.	The Southern Gateway and St Alphege Quarter will provide opportunities to provide improvements signage to the parks
		The town is characterized by large single use areas which have little interaction.	The areas of change will introduce new mixed uses into the town centre (offices, residential and leisure) adding further vibrancy broadening the current offer
		Limited residential offer in the town centre.	There are opportunities to add new urban living into all Areas of Change with particular emphases on the Southern Gateway and Solihull Living areas



OPPORTUNITY	AREA OF CHANGE RESPONSE	THREATS	AREA OF CHANGE RESPONSE
Train station has the opportunity to create a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town.	Improvements to Solihull Train Station will improve arrival points for visitors / users and better reflect Solihull's character. It will also provide opportunity to plan for the future and encourage further usage of the train station.	Market considerations for demand and viability.	The areas of change are inherently flexible providing a framework for future changes. This flexibility will allow sites to come forward at different times which can respond to market demand yet still conform to and support the overall vision for Solihull.
Build on its reputation as an affluent town.	Further diversifying the town centre offer by introducing new leisure, office and residential uses will build on Solihull's existing positive reputation and encourage greater use of the town centre.	Environmentally and socially responding to a changing demographic: elderly, youth and young families.	The Heart of Solihull will increase leisure uses within the town centre to create a destination for families and young professionals. The introduction of new urban living within the town centre will provide attractive new housing within easy reach of the town centre which could be an attractive proposition for the older generation as well as young professionals.
Build on Solihull's Town Centre's existing variety of public spaces which support a range of different functions.	New development within the Areas of Change provides opportunities to create new public spaces and improve existing ones. The Heart of Solihull in particular looks to provide a reconfigured Mell Square which as the potential to become a high quality public space and destination for events	Responding to the competitive nature of similar towns in wider context.	The Heart of Solihull looks to encourage a greater diversity of uses within the town centre and support the independent retail base strengthening Solihull's identity. A number of areas of Change including the Heart of Solihull provide opportunities to introduce new urban living to support the growing commercial and leisure uses.
Improve accessibility to surrounding parks to encourage people to use them.	The Southern Gateway and St Alphege Quarter will provide opportunities to provide improved signage and connections to the parks	Responding to climate change and the push for sustainability.	The Areas of Change look to promote improved pedestrian and cycle connections to encourage greater sustainable travel reducing dependence on the car. This is of particular importance at the Western Gateway Business and Commercial Quarter and Southern Gateway. In addition improvement to the train station will encourage people to travel to Solihull by train.
Increase the residential offer in the town centre.	There are opportunities to add new urban living into all Areas of Change with particular emphasis on the Southern Gateway (6.10) and Solihull Living (6.14) areas.		
Recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses provide.	The introduction of new urban living into the town centre will help support emerging food and beverage and comment uses (Mell Square) and provide new opportunities for sustainable working and living reducing the need to use the car.		
Support the wider Borough ambitions outlined by UK Central.	The redevelopment of the train station will help support the UK Central ambition of creating a principle gateway between the National Rail Network and Solihull Town Centre.		

# 7 KEY STRATEGIES

## 7.1 LANDSCAPE AND PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY

The scale of change envisaged in the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan provides a unique opportunity to capitalise on these benefits and rectify existing issues, through the implementation of key public realm interventions. The plan opposite (Figure 7.1) illustrates where these interventions should be focussed and the table below sets out the type of space envisaged.

### 1 NEW STATION APPROACH

The redesigned station remains the key arrival point into Solihull and the design quality of its surrounding spaces will reflect its importance as a meeting point whilst responding to pedestrian, cyclist and public transport needs. Improved crossing facilities, wider pavements and a clear palette of materials and street furniture to simplify the Station Approach streetscape. The existing public greenspace will provide areas for seating & planting and in the long term can be used by residents as a local amenity green space.

### 2 BLOSSOMFIELD ROAD ROUNDABOUT

The public realm around the junction should seek to aid pedestrian & cycle movement, making the route into the town centre clear and distinctive through the use of materials, tree planting & signage.

### 3 LODE LANE JUNCTION

The public realm around the junction should seek to aid pedestrian & cycle movement, making the route into the town centre clear and distinctive through the use of materials, tree planting & signage.

### 4 HIGH STREET

The High Street will have a clear identity that is distinctive to Solihull. It will be enhanced with quality materials, clearly defined street furniture and public art with references to the heritage of Solihull

### 5 MELL SQUARE

A safe and vibrant 'urban village' which provides a multi-function open square. The square will incorporate new public art, green infrastructure, lighting and street furniture.

### 6 CHURCH SQUARE/ NEW ROAD

An integral historical element of the town centre, public realm reflects the historical qualities the area both in the use of materials and street furniture. Seating is positioned to enjoy views of the Church & street trees are used to provide green links with Malvern and Brueton Park.

### 7 CIVIC SQUARES

New civic squares to support active frontages, provide spaces for outdoor performance, activities, displays, highlighting civic pride and create placemaking. This would be reflected by street furniture & hard & soft landscaping. The squares would offer clear & improved links to the High Street & the East/ St Alphege Church.

### 8 JUBILEE GARDENS:

Jubilee Gardens will provide appropriate seating and create clear, direct routes across Homer Road. This will incorporate enhancement to this section of Homer Road to prioritise pedestrians and aid legibility.

### 9 THEATRE SQUARE:

Improved shelter to encourage outdoor performance and displays. This could involve new seating in sunnier parts of the square, improved access from the cafe and elements of play could be introduced into the public realm.

### 10 MONKSPATH HALL ROAD:

A new North - South link between the town centre and the new accommodation provides a clear & legible route for pedestrians and cyclists, encompassing small seating areas & clear signage.

These range from individual spaces, local green spaces, urban squares, and tree lined boulevards. Good urban design and green infrastructure adds value to a town by increasing the economic viability of development and by delivering social and environmental benefits:

“GREEN SPACE HAS NEVER BEEN MORE VALUED AND SHOULD BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ANY TOWN CENTRE PLAN AND DESIGN BRIEF”  
(GRIMSEY 2020)



Figure 7.1: Solihull Town Centre Masterplan – Landscape and Public Realm Strategy

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Producing high returns on investments (good rental returns and enhanced capital values)
- Responding to occupier demands;
- Helping to deliver more lettable area;
- Attracting more visitors and users of the town centre;
- Reducing management, maintenance, energy and security costs;
- Contributing to more contented and productive workforces;
- Supporting the 'life giving' mixed-use elements in developments;
- Differentiating places and raising their prestige; and
- Attracting investment.
- Placemaking

## SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Creating well connected, inclusive and accessible new places;
- Delivering missed-use environments with a broad range of facilities and amenities;
- Delivering development sensitive to its context;
- Enhancing the sense of safety and security;
- Boosting civic pride and enhancing civic image;
- Revitalising urban heritage;
- Improving people's health and well being; and
- Street trees can help reduce the impact of the urban heat island effect and help improve air quality.

## DESIGN OBJECTIVES

The approach to the public realm and open space strategy is based upon the findings of the site appreciation analysis presented in section 3, and the Solihull Public Realm Framework (Phil Jones Associates, Feb 2014) which set out the following overarching design objectives:

- **Legible** – Improve legibility within the town centre by providing clear, signage and ensuring that streets and spaces have a clear hierarchy. The use of gateways and key nodes will be used to aid wayfinding and ensure that places have a clear identity;
- **Distinctive** – It will be important to create features which are distinctively Solihull, to ensure that the character of the town is preserved and to set the town apart from its competitors. This could include unique, unusual elements of street furniture / public art or even the layout of a space so that it can accommodate distinctive events;
- **Flexible** – The design of streets and spaces should be inherently flexible so that they can accommodate a variety of uses and respond to changing needs over time;
- **Attractive** – The public realm should be attractive both in the day and at night and respond positively to the surrounding uses. It should ensure that it reflects and enhances the historic character of Solihull and provides places for people to sit and enjoy their surroundings;
- **Functional** – Spaces and street furniture should also be functional both in terms of accessibility, usability, comfort and maintenance;
- **Future Proof** – The detailed design of the public realm will need to be mindful of the robustness of materials furniture that are chosen and ensure that elements can be easily replaced when required;
- **Inclusive** – The town centre is for everyone and therefore the design of the public realm must be inclusive both in terms of accessibility and also usability; and
- **Safe** – New development and the design of the public realm will need to ensure that the town centre feels safe and usable at all times of the day. The design of the streetscape will need to ensure that cyclists and pedestrians are prioritised and protected from vehicles, and also that streets and public spaces are active, well-lit and overlooked.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS

A number of key areas have been identified for public realm enhancement based upon the preferred masterplan. As these areas come forward for development, further studies will need to be undertaken to develop detailed design proposals, however the overall design objectives should remain an integral part of this process.

### MELL SQUARE

The streets and spaces within Mell Square should be comprehensively decluttered, and provide a main square which is lighter, greener, more attractive and multi-functional. The guiding principles behind the redevelopment of the square will look to create a safe and vibrant 'urban village' which ensures high quality design, improved access and signage and provides a safer, more secure feel. It is envisaged that this will include a flexible open square which can be used for a variety of events during the day and evening. In addition, new public art, lighting, street furniture and seating could be based around a central café to create a focus for activity.

### HIGH STREET

As the principal route at the heart of the town centre, the High Street should be enhanced to reflect its status, with materials and street furniture of a suitably high quality to make the proposed street hierarchy clear. The streetscape could be improved by decluttering and framing views towards St Alphege Church, and by identifying clear areas for seating and market stalls which work together reducing potential conflict. In addition, there are opportunities to introduce public art and references to the heritage of Solihull to create a clear identity that is distinctly Solihull.

### HOMER ROAD CIVIC BUILDINGS

Attractive public realm to create a meaningful and useful space for office workers and residents to relax, socialise, eat and meet, and that support the active ground floor use in the area

## CHURCH SQUARE / EASTGATE

The public realm around St Alphege Church is regarded as an integral historic element of the town centre and it is therefore essential that any alterations to it must take the historical and cultural significance of the town centre conservation area and church into consideration. Future public realm enhancements should reflect the historic qualities of the area both in the use of materials and street furniture and also in the envisaged function. The new public realm around the Eastgate site should be sensitive to the neighbouring conservation area, and help to create a distinct place, that is safe, accessible and supports health and wellbeing.

## STATION APPROACH

Quality of the public realm around the existing station has been improved recently in the form of improved crossing facilities, wider pavements and a clear palette of materials and street furniture which declutter and simplify the streetscape. There are further opportunities to enhance the existing public green space opposite the station, introducing areas for seating as well as landscaping. This could also improve the waiting environment for bus passengers and recognise that in the short and medium term, the station is an important arrival point into the town. In the longer term the green space would be reconfigured as part of the development of the Integrated Transport Hub.

## LODE LANE / BLOSSOMFIELD ROAD JUNCTION

The scale and detailing of the roundabout Lode Lane / Blossomfield Road create significant barriers to movement. Improvement or modification to the roundabout is likely to be linked to proposals for Station Approach and should consider options to how the roundabout could be reduced in scale without loss of capacity, and the introduction of simple measures to widen and emphasise the continuity of the pedestrian route. As a key gateway into the town, the public realm around the junction should seek to aid pedestrian and cycle movement, making the route into the town centre clear and distinctive through the use of materials, tree planting and signage.

## JUBILEE GARDENS

In order to take advantage of its location at the heart of the business and commercial quarter, Jubilee Gardens should look to provide greater seating opportunities and create clear, direct routes across Homer Road to the development to the south. This could include enhancement to this section of Homer Road to improve pedestrian priority and aid legibility of the north south connections into the town centre.

## MONKSPATH HALL ROAD (NORTH-SOUTH LINK)

Over time it is envisaged that a new north south link will be created between the town centre and the Southern Gateway. It will provide a legible and distinct route for pedestrians and cyclists encompassing small seating areas, clear signage and should be fronted onto by new development to ensure that the route is safe and overlooked.

**VISIONARY** – “A DEMONSTRATOR OF NEW TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES, CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY AND A COMMITMENT TO INVEST IN INNOVATION AND CLEAN GROWTH.”

## 7.2 SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The borough has an ambitious growth agenda, and Solihull town centre plays an important role in this agenda. It is vital that whilst striving to deliver the ambitions of the masterplan that we plan carefully to ensure that the potential negative impacts from growth are minimised and opportunities for delivering sustainable growth are maximised.

In October 2019 the Council unanimously agreed a Statement of Intent to protect the environment, committing to minimise the environmental impact of its own activities and to contribute to the improvement of the wider environment, through delivery of its Climate Change Prospectus. In the statement of Intent the council commits to a number of targets, most significantly:

- Aiming to become net carbon zero, as a Council, by 2030.
- Supporting the Combined Authority in its plan for a West Midlands target of net-zero emissions by 2041

The Council's Climate Change Prospectus articulates Solihull's low carbon vision – ensuring that through managed growth we are at the forefront of the UK's transition to a low carbon economy. There are six important elements to the council's vision, and a number of ways the Town Centre Masterplan can help to achieve it:

VISION	MASTERPLAN RESPONSE
A prosperous Borough with thriving, sustainable, low carbon economy which enables green growth, capitalising on the growing market for low carbon goods and services and attracting national and international investment.	The town centre is the economic and social hub of the borough, and development here should be an exemplar for the rest of the borough, demonstrating the adoption of cutting edge technology and practices and the most up to date thinking. Development in the town centre should seek to create a more resilient environment to the impact of a changing climate.
A smart low carbon borough with increased decentralise energy and low carbon generation with smart grids and smart meters to help control the supply and demand of energy	Solihull town centre will be the location of the boroughs first low carbon district heating network and lead the way for further networks to be delivered in areas of significant development and regeneration across the borough
A resource efficient Borough where natural resources are used efficiently. Where the emphasis is on moving waste treatment up the hierarchy – promoting waste reduction, recycling and circular production	The masterplan promotes high quality sustainable construction standards which includes issue of waste minimisation.
An Accessible Borough with a rebalanced mode share that is less dependent on the car, here road space is used more effectively and streets are created for people and public transport	Redevelopment of Solihull train station, and delivery of highways and infrastructure interventions that encourage people to travel to the town centre by bike, foot and public transport.
A naturally healthy borough where nature is maintained and enhanced and the benefit of nature provided to society, our economic prosperity and our well-being is recognised, valued and taken into account in decision making	Introduction of more high quality bio diverse rich green space with into the town centre, and improvement in the connectivity of the town centre to surrounding parks and greenspaces such as Malvern park and Tudor grange park.
An engaged borough where all members of the community, from residents to schools and business are encouraged and enabled to play their part in creating a sustainable future.	The town centre is a place where residents and visitors from all over the borough come together, and it is an opportunity to provide examples of how people can make changes or behave differently to play their part in creating a sustainable future.

The Town Centre Masterplan and the development proposals set out within it should not jeopardise the council's ability to meet its targets and objectives, and should seek to make a positive contribution to realising net zero. This means that Development where the Council has a major influence should demonstrate how the objectives and principles expressed in the Green Prospectus and other relevant corporate strategies and targets are being supported.

### DISTRICT HEAT NETWORK

Solihull wants to establish district heating networks to support its transition to a low carbon economy and increase the amount of low and zero carbon energy used to heat and power buildings. Areas of regeneration and new development present a key opportunity for district heating and for this reason, Solihull has planning policy to support the creation and expansion of heat networks across the borough. Solihull Town centre has been identified as a key location for a heat network.

Heat networks provide efficient, low carbon and affordable heat to buildings and are at the heart of the Government's strategy for decarbonising heating in the UK. Heat networks can support Building Regulations Part L compliance and replace or remove the requirement for some aspects of infrastructure investment, for example hot water pipe connections for heat supply may displace the need for gas infrastructure. A network might also supply power for public realm, electric vehicle charging and landlord-based demands and thereby displace some electrical investment costs.

Detailed technical work has defined the network opportunity with the Town Centre and a business case is being developed from which an investment decision will soon be made. The network aims to be live for heat connections by 2021.

The network is being designed in close collaboration with the Town Centre masterplan. The network is designed to facilitate network expansion over time and the initial phase of network development is futureproofed to allow additional heat supply. New developments will be encouraged to consider network connection in consultation with the Council or its appointed heat network operator. A suite of documents will be available to aid developers and their design team.

### 7.3 SAFETY AND SECURITY STRATEGY

Good streets and spaces not only look good but also make the people using them feel safe. Feeling safe and secure in a social public space can play a large role in an individual's ability to function and feel good in that locality. In order to achieve this, the layout of new development and design of the public realm must ensure that:

- Streets and spaces are overlooked by the fronts of buildings so that there are 'eyes on the street' and people in the public realm feel safe;
- There is a mix of uses, so that spaces are active throughout different times of the day;
- Views along streets and through spaces unfold as pedestrians walk along, so that people can see what lies ahead of them;
- Where appropriate, vehicle speeds are kept low to provide a safer place for pedestrians and cyclists
- Streets and spaces are free of clutter that makes access difficult;
- Changes in level are carefully designed to provide access for all – e.g. steps and ramps integrated with one another; and
- Good management and maintenance of green spaces is obvious to users, helping to give a feeling of safety.

### INTEGRATION OF COUNTER TERRORISM MEASURES

The UK currently faces a significant threat from international terrorism. Whilst there have been attacks against well protected targets around the world, experience shows that crowded places remain an attractive target for terrorists who have demonstrated that they are likely to target places which are easily accessible, regularly available and which offer the prospect for an impact beyond the loss of life alone (for example, serious disruption or a particular economic/political impact), such as a town centre environment.

As developments within the town centre masterplan come forward, a key challenge will be blending counter – terrorism protective security measures with urban design principles. Although there will need to be an overarching approach, it should be recognised that each site is different and there is no "one size fits all" solution. Different sites will present unique challenges and considerations that will result in bespoke solutions. Care should be taken to avoid an over-sensitivity to risk, which can result in bland and standardised places and design should instead find imaginative ways to integrate safety measures into the public realm which are appropriate to the risk.

Typical measures that help to deter, detect and delay a terrorist attack are provided within the document Protecting Crowded Places (HM Government, 2014) and are grouped into five key counter-terrorism design principles:

- Better blast resistance – in the form of building materials and barriers;
- Better building management facilities – with regards to communication systems, entrance arrangements and building systems;
- Search and screening – providing sufficient space at the entrances of buildings / spaces to enable screening of people and vehicles should it be required;
- Better traffic management and hostile vehicle mitigation measures – to reduce vehicle speeds and protect against unauthorised vehicle entry – a review of the access strategy to the Town Centre will also be required to control permitted access in a secure and robust way; and
- Better oversight – in the form of clear lines of sight around a building, uncluttered street, CCTV and security guarding to provide formal oversight, managed access points and ensuring buildings are overlooked.

"Designing-in" counterterrorism protective security measures from the outset will benefit those involved throughout the development process, from concept design through to planning approval, as well as those who will use and visit the places and buildings. These benefits will best be achieved through collaborative working and broad engagement with all parts of the community.



FEELING SAFE AND SECURE IN A SOCIAL PUBLIC SPACE CAN PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO FUNCTION AND FEEL GOOD

## 7.4 PARKING STRATEGY

The masterplan sets development proposals for nine sites across the town centre, and potential packages of walk, cycle, public transport and highways concept interventions have been identified in support of these, as set out in the access and movement section and to be developed further through the Access Strategy and Walking and Cycling Strategy.

Currently there is sufficient capacity in the town for parking demand on typical weekdays, weekends and also on peak days, however, delivery of the masterplan proposals in full would lead to a net reduction in parking capacity in the town centre.

If Solihull town centre is to move towards a position where less parking is provided the next policy decisions arise between how the parking provided is allocated. In particular the availability and location of short stay parking for those coming to the town to shop or do business is of importance.

If parking capacity is to be retained at its current level, or increased, then thought will need to be given to how the development sites proposed can provide additional car parking spaces, or whether alternative locations exist for intensified parking arrangements.

The following steps will be taken to develop a parking strategy that responds to the masterplan

1. Discussion with key stakeholders on the parking strategy options which could support the masterplan, specifically in terms of the quantity and the proximity to the town centre of parking capacity;
2. Calculate the expected loss in capacity, including PNR, arising from the preferred masterplan; the capacity known to be replaced and the additional demand arising from the developments allocated to each site;
3. Consider what parking policy choices may be implemented, including pricing to effect a reduction in parking demand (this should take into account the overarching policies emerging in the Access Strategy and Walking and Cycling Strategy, in respect of encouraging use of walk, cycle and public transport modes particularly for journeys to work);
4. Forecast parking demand for the preferred masterplan broken down by type of user (e.g. long stay commuter);
5. Establish whether there is a shortfall between the overall supply provided and the demand at a town wide level (disaggregating demand by user-type);
6. Examine options to provide the capacity required and identifying potential locations for this capacity along with management regimes, compatible with the town centre Masterplan and the Access Strategy policies. Options to be examined include:
  - a. Performance Pricing: Which is based on adjusting the tariff paid to park based on expected demand to achieve the "ideal" 85-90% occupancy at all times. At times and locations where demand has historically been high, the price to park is increased, whereas where there is high availability, the price is reduced.
  - b. Re-Prioritisation: A direct policy to reduce use of central area parking for long stay and ensure that this space is available for short stay users.
  - c. Under provision of long-stay parking capacity for commuters could help to underpin the promotion of walk, cycle and public transport modes for the journey to work, having a direct impact on vehicular traffic levels in peak hours and the consequent positive impacts on the environment associated with that.
  - d. Maintaining capacity through the provision of long stay car parks more remote from the town centre (depending on availability/cost of land) may also support modal change in that accessing the town centre could involve a longer less convenient walk and in not reducing parking capacity it encourages choice rather than forcing it.
  - e. Park & Ride. It is important to note that few Park & Ride sites in the UK return a financial surplus and many have been closed or had their service curtailed in the last few years. Given the potential improvements to walk, cycle and public transport set out in Solihull Connected and this report, there appears limited scope or need to promote a dedicated Park& Ride within the context of Solihull. It should not be discarded as a potential solution, but its financial implications must be fully understood.
  - f. Parking Provision by New Developments: Retaining sufficient capacity for parking may be established by planning consent for new developments, potentially in combination with re-allocation for more general use of parking associated with existing development through agreement or formal acquisition.

## 7.5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2019-22

The focus of the Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board is to create conditions for communities to thrive where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all.

Health and wellbeing are largely determined by living conditions and wider social, economic and environmental factors. Many conditions such as obesity, heart disease, stress and mental health have been linked to the environments in which people live and work. For this reason, the Masterplan and the vision it sets for Solihull Town Centre and the growth and development that it promotes has the potential to make a real difference to people's health and wellbeing.

The Health and Well Being Strategy 2019-22 identifies four priority areas where the biggest differences can be made. The table below set out those four priorities and considers how the Masterplan can support the aims and ambitions of the Strategy.

<p><b>PRIORITY ONE:</b> Maternity, childhood and adolescence: A healthy start in life</p>	<p>The intention of this priority is to support parents, families and communities to make sure that all babies have the best possible start in life.</p> <p>The masterplan supports this priority by promoting development in the town centre that provides a safe space for families. Spaces that are attractive, accessible, secure, and can accommodate the facilities and services that new parents, families and young children need.</p>
<p><b>PRIORITY TWO:</b> Adulthood and Work: Promoting health and wellbeing</p>	<p>Physical activity is known to have many benefits to people's physical and mental health, and increasing physical activity at all ages is a key local priority. The Masterplan promotes this in various ways, by making it easier for people and therefore encouraging people, to access the town centre using sustainable modes such as by foot and by bike, and by improving the links and connections with the surrounding greenspaces such as Brueton and Malvern Park.</p> <p>We know that housing and homelessness have a serious impact on people's health and wellbeing, and the Masterplan proposes the development of over 1,100 new high quality new homes, in a sustainable location, but importantly new homes that are affordable and attainable and accessible to all.</p> <p>Priority two recognises that the long-term routes to improving healthy life expectancy are through refocusing what we mean by a successful economy so that well-being and the factors that influence this such as the environment, jobs and skills and access to services are a key part of successful growth. Having a good job is good for people's health, and the quality of the job and the working environment is key. The Masterplan identifies the capacity to deliver over 50,000sqm of new office development, which has the potential to provide 1,000's of new jobs. The Masterplan promotes development that provide modern working environments, in one of the most accessible locations in the borough, surrounded by a wealth of amenities employees expect, and public realm and open space that will contribute to creating a positive working environment.</p>
<p><b>AGEING AND LATER LIFE:</b> Ageing well and improving health and care services for older people</p>	<p>This priority promotes independence in later life, supporting people to live at home safely and independently and where possible remain at home for longer. The Masterplan identifies the capacity to deliver 1,100 new homes in the town centre. These new homes would be more affordable making the developments inclusive, attainable and attractive to a diverse population. Residential development will create a new resident community in the town centre that would benefit from the health services, retail, leisure, and cultural facilities the town centre has to offer.</p> <p>The masterplan also promotes the importance of high quality, safe and secure public realm and open spaces, and excellent connectivity into and around town, which would help to make the town centre an attractive location for older generations to locate and remain living independently for longer.</p>
<p><b>ALL AGE: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS INTENT:</b> Enable people to increase their social wellbeing and improve social connectedness</p>	<p>It is well known that community networks have an impact on health and wellbeing and community spaces, commissioning of truly holistic services and ensuring there are safe places for people to spend time are vital. The Masterplan promotes development of the town centre into a place that is accessible to all, with mixed use areas where people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and interests can come together to use the space in different but complementary ways.</p> <p>Public realm improvements, the creation of open and shared spaces, events spaces, flexible spaces, and physical development that can accommodate a range of uses including health and community use will ensure the town centre is a place that promotes and enables social connectedness.</p>

A Fair treatment Assessment (FTA) has been completed to ensure that the masterplan which is approved does not intentionally or unintentionally cause unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation of town centre users. It will ensure that where possible the masterplan advances equality of opportunity between users of the town centre who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and fosters good relations between users who share a characteristic and those who do not.

The FTA identifies a number of positive impacts on different groups of people as a result of the Masterplan proposals, as well as potential negative impacts that need to be avoided. Fair Treatment Assessments will need to be carried out for each of the projects and interventions identified in the masterplan as they are progressed and brought forward for development.

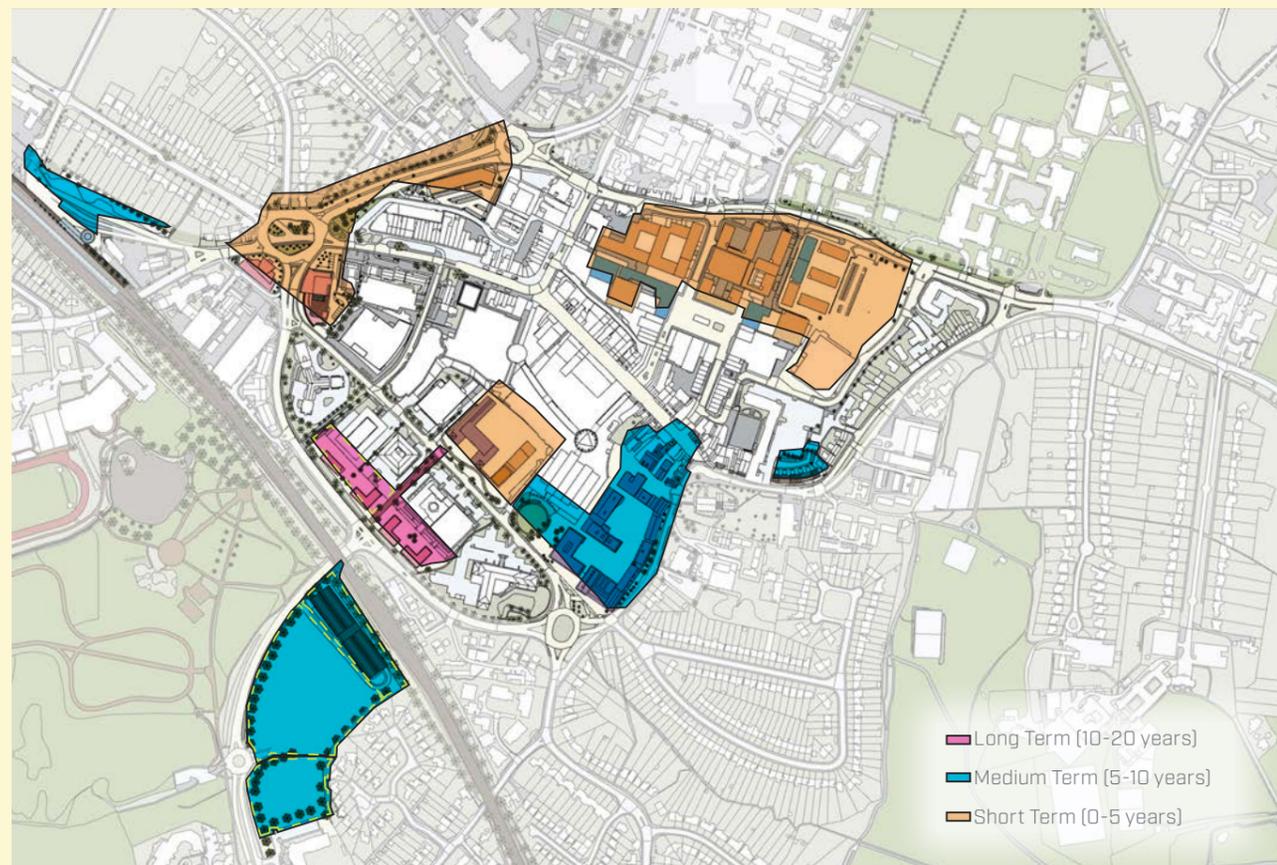


Figure 8.1: Solihull Town Centre Masterplan - phasing Plan

## 8. PHASING

The scale of the changes envisaged for Solihull Town Centre Masterplan will inevitably take some time to realise. The phasing plan (Figure 8.1) and associated commentary describe an approach that has been informed by land ownership, predicted longevity of existing uses and market conditions. It is anticipated that the masterplan could be brought forward in the following way:

Short Term (0-5 years)

Medium Term (5-10 years)

Long Term (10+ years)

## 9 CONCLUSION

Solihull Town Centre is a thriving, vibrant and attractive place, the civic heart and crucially important to economic and social well-being. Aspirations for managed growth as one of the UK Central centres, provides opportunities to secure Solihull's place in the face of regional competition and to be a visionary leader for the future. Such growth will bring issues, opportunities and challenges and will need to be carefully managed to ensure that the growth is positive. The masterplan provides a flexible framework that will enable future development and investment to respond and react to changing conditions. It will also ensure that as sites are developed independently, over different time periods, there will remain an overarching framework which ensures that overall the town centre is developed in a cohesive and integrated way.

**SOLIHULL** – A THRIVING,  
PREMIER TOWN CENTRE AND  
A VIBRANT DESTINATION AT THE  
FOREFRONT OF VISIONARY DESIGN,  
SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION!

### KEY FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

A key objective of the masterplan has been to develop a framework that will form the foundation of a sustainable town centre that is an excellent place to live, work and play. Its successful implementation will require sustained and co-ordinated commitment from not just SMBC but also partner agencies, key stakeholders and the local community. A summary of the principal masterplan components is provided in the illustrative plan opposite (Figure 9.1). This plan embeds the following overarching place making principles:



Figure 9.1: Model View – Solihull Town Centre



## CONNECTIONS

- Promote pedestrian and cycle connections throughout the town centre, and into the surrounding neighbourhoods by enhancing, extending and linking routes.
- Emphasis on creation of a hierarchy of pedestrian friendly, pedestrian priority and genuine shared surface streets/routes
- Easily accessible public transport through improved links between the major transport hubs and the wider area.

## SAFETY

- Careful consideration to the layout and orientation of buildings to provide natural surveillance to public routes and spaces.
- Equally the public realm layout should avoid nooks and crannies, and have clear lines of sight. Narrow streets should have furniture lines to enable this.
- Use of active ground floors at key nodes and along key routes.
- Management and maintenance should be kept to a high standard to encourage respectfulness, civic pride and to deal with vandalism. Appropriate use of CCTV to enhance safety without infringing on privacy.
- Suitable lighting along key routes and public spaces – specifically the use of white light.

## VIEWS AND LEGIBILITY

- Visual connection between key routes and new public realm.
- Selected glimpses into semi-private courtyards Gateway features/buildings at key locations Clear street hierarchy to assist legibility/wayfinding
- Wayfinding strategy to form part of the town wide plan

## PUBLIC REALM

- Creation of significant new public spaces such as the refurbished Mell Square and Theatre Square, but also in the form of amenity green space.
- Attractive new pedestrian routes taking advantage of the adjacent parkland setting.
- Enhancement and refurbishment of existing footpaths and towpaths

## INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Promotion of sustainable living through environmentally friendly buildings and landscape where possible.
- Utilisation of sustainable technologies and thinking, current at the time of development.
- Promotion of sustainable transport, including convenient access to public transport and provision of local amenities within walking distance.

## COMMUNITY

- Mix of residential types and building uses located around usable public realm, semi-private courtyards and private garden spaces.
- Opportunities for living, working and recreation Location of a variety of play opportunities close to and integrated into main pedestrian routes.
- Interpretative signage interventions to be developed through a curatorial project in partnership with community stakeholders.



Figure 9.2 Solihull Town Centre key masterplan objectives

## SUMMARY OF KEY INTERVENTIONS

- 1 Redevelopment of Solihull Station to create a modern Integrated Transport Hub, to include upgrades to the public realm and green space surrounding the station and create a high quality gateway into the town centre
- 2 Traffic management interventions and enhancements to the public realm around Blossomfield Road Roundabout, including improvements to the pedestrian and cycle connectivity between the town centre and the station
- 3 Grade A town centre office development to provide an attractive new gateway to the town centres commercial and business quarter
- 4 High quality new residential development to provide an attractive frontage onto Lode Lane incorporating enhancements to the public realm
- 5 Redevelopment of Mell Square to create a truly diverse mixed use space. Offering the optimal balance of residential, leisure and commercial use tied together by a high quality public realm scheme, to create an attractive, vibrant, and modern destination in the heart of the town centre
- 6 Primly located medium density family housing providing attractive frontage onto New Road
- 7 Brand-new civic building with high quality public spaces, new retail and leisure uses to connect the site with the existing town centre, and a new residential neighbourhood providing modern, sustainable homes in a town centre setting, to attract a new demographic of residential population, adding vibrancy to the scheme.
- 8 New mixed use building comprising of retail units and high quality office accommodation
- 9 An attractive new north-south pedestrian and cycle link between the southern gateway of the town including the Monkspath Hall Road site, and the commercial quarter and heart of the town centre
- 10 New office development fronting onto Princes Way, creating an active frontage along Princes way and a high quality gateway into the town centre.
- 11 New multi storey carpark
- 12 Prime development site on a key gateway with size, setting and location to offer flexibility for a wide range of development uses including residential, commercial, leisure or education.



## **NEXT STEPS**

The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan was created through an extensive process of consultation with both stakeholders and the public, with emphasis placed on delivering an aspirational place which retains the inherent character of Solihull but can meet the needs of the future community. The goal is to attract investment and improve the quality of life for the people who will, one day, live and work there and positively contribute to the cities economics, cultural and social well-being and providing long term job prospects and brighter futures for everyone.

SMBC is currently in the process of carrying out a local plan review for which the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan will form part of the evidence base.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF FURTHER WORK**

1. It is recommended that the Solihull Parking Allocation Model be used to support the emerging masterplan in terms of a supporting parking strategy which establishes the quantum, location, cost and management of car parking in the town centre;
2. Investigate the impact of the masterplan using the traffic model and develop a mitigation strategy and comprehensive car parking strategy.
3. Produce a delivery plan that considers in more detail the phasing of the development proposed in the Masterplan and identifies appropriate development approaches.

UKC Central  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
Manor Square  
Solihull  
B91 3QB

[www.investinukcentral.com](http://www.investinukcentral.com)

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