



Planning Report on Potential Sites for New Leisure Centre for Lichfield City

Prepared for

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Cushman & Wakefield (CW) is instructed by Max Associates to advise on the approach to identifying a potential site to accommodate a new leisure centre for Lichfield City. This report specifically focusses on planning matters and should be read in conjunction with the main report to Lichfield District Council (LDC) produced by Max Associates.
- 1.2 The leisure centre is a replacement of the facility at The Friary High School. It is understood that the proposed facility will accommodate as a minimum a 25-metre teaching pool, changing village, café, 100 station gym, 2 studios, 4 court hall, soft play together with car parking and associated site infrastructure and landscaping. As a minimum the development requires a site of at least one hectare.
- 1.3 As the proposal is a direct replacement for the former leisure centre, the location for the new facility has been restricted to Lichfield City, as opposed to the wider District administrative area.
- 1.4 Section two identifies the relevant planning policy at national and local level (together with relevant evidence base documents) against which the sequential approach to identifying potential sites should be undertaken. Section three contains a planning assessment of each of the eight sites identified, which highlights the planning merits and risks for each site. Section four sets out our conclusions and recommendations.

2 Planning Policy Assessment

2.1 Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant Development Plan is the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy (LPS), the Local Plan Allocations Document (LPAD) and the Lichfield City Neighbourhood Plan (LCNP). Material considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).

2.2 The LPS was adopted in 2015 and guides development within the District until 2029. It sets out strategic and development management policies for the district.

2.3 Relevant strategic policies include the following:

- Core Policy 8 relates to centres and focusses leisure uses within Lichfield City Centre. The scale of development should be proportionate to the centre.
- Core Policy 9 supports the growth of sustainable tourism focussed in Lichfield City.
- Core Policy 10 encourages healthy and safe lifestyles by facilitating access to a range of high quality and well-maintained open spaces, playing pitches, sport, recreation, play facilities which are relevant to, and meet the needs of local communities.

In relation to new leisure development it states:

“New facilities and assets will be designed to minimise opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour, to maximise accessibility and to be integrated with surrounding communities and existing infrastructure, including green infrastructure.”

In relation to the loss of recreational space it states:

“The loss of existing recreational open spaces (both extent and quality) will be resisted where it can be shown there is an existing or future need unless it can be clearly demonstrated that alternative spaces of an equivalent or a higher standard are being provided in a location which is equivalent or better, improves access and results in no loss of amenity or environmental quality or quantity. Where such spaces, routes and/ or facilities are lost any replacement must be made available prior to the loss of the original facility.”

- Core Policy 11 relates to participation in sport and physical activity and encourages protection and enhancement of existing sport facilities, and other assets.

The policy explicitly supports the proposed development and states:

“The provision of a leisure facility to serve Lichfield City and its hinterland in an appropriate and sustainable location incorporating a new sports hall (of a size to accommodate 6 badminton courts), swimming pool and learner pool will be allocated through the Local Plan: Allocations document. Alternatively, improvements to existing leisure facilities in Lichfield City equivalent to 6 additional badminton courts and a minimum 25m 4 lane swimming pool and learner pool will be supported.”

- Core Policy 14 relates to built and historic environment and requires the protection and improvement of the built environment having special regard to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

- 2.4 Relevant Development Management policies include the following:
- Policy HSC1 sets open space standards for the district and states that “*all open space, sport and recreation facilities identified in the Open Space Assessment.*”
 - Policy HSC2 sets playing pitch and sports facility standards and reiterates the requirements of Core Policy 10 in relation to loss and replacement.
- 2.5 The LPAD was adopted in 2019 and establishes land use allocations to meet the strategic policies set out within the LPS.
- 2.6 The LCNP was made in 2018. It is intended to guide development and provide guidance to any interested parties wishing to submit planning applications for development within the designated Neighbourhood Area.
- 2.7 The Lichfield City Centre Masterplan was adopted in 2020 and sets out the development aspirations for the City Centre. A number of key opportunity sites are identified (including the Birmingham Road Gateway Site) and the aspirations for these sites are explained with a delivery strategy providing detail on how the development aspirations will be delivered.
- 2.8 The NPPF and NPPG set out the Government’s planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Chapter 2 sets establishes the principles of Sustainable Development; Chapter 7 sets out policies to ensure the vitality of town centres; Chapter 8 sets out policies to promote healthy and safe communities; Chapter 11 sets out policies for making effective use of land; Chapter 13 sets out policies for protecting Green Belt land; Chapter 14 sets out policies for meeting the challenges of flood risk; Chapter 15 sets out policies for conserving and enhancing the natural environment; Chapter 16 sets out policies for conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Identifying Appropriate Sites

- 2.9 The Local Plan strategy sets out how a new leisure centre for Lichfield City will be provided. Core Policy 11 states that this will either be through the Local Plan Site Allocation document, or through extensions to existing facilities. No site allocation was made for a new leisure centre. It is understood that the extension of existing facilities in the city is not possible. Accordingly, an alternative suitable location needs to be identified.
- 2.10 The urban area of Lichfield City is tightly constrained with by Green Belt to the north, west and south with opportunities for further growth being to the north east. The north and west of the city is the Forest of Mercia.
- 2.11 This assessment has discounted sites within the Green Belt, as the proposed development constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Accordingly, permission would only be granted in Very Special Circumstances (VSC). If alternative sites exist outside of the Green Belt, it is not considered a VSC case could be justified and planning permission would not be granted.
- 2.12 Therefore, this assessment has considered sites allocated for development and sites that could potentially accommodate development. The latter comprise undeveloped sites within the City’s urban area.

- 2.13 The Plan allocates four Strategic Development Areas (SDA) sites in Lichfield (East of Lichfield, South of Lichfield, Dean Slade and Cricket Lane). These sites have planning permission and are not considered to be available. Accordingly, they have been discounted from this assessment.
- 2.14 The Plan allocates five mixed use sites within Lichfield City (L1, L22, L26, L27, L29). Four of the sites are privately owned. One site has been discounted because it is too small (Site L1). Two sites are currently under development and have been discounted because they are not available (Sites L22 & L27). It is understood that the fourth site has complex landowner challenges in the heart of the city centre shopping area forming part of the secondary retail frontage (L29). Accordingly, this site has been discounted. The fifth site, the Birmingham Road Site (L26), is in the majority ownership of Lichfield District Council and is considered as part of this assessment.
- 2.15 The City has four neighbourhood shopping centres (Boley Park, Darwin Park, Netherstowe and Dimbles Lane). None of the centres can accommodate a new leisure centre given their size and so have been discounted from this assessment.
- 2.16 The Plan allocates 23 sites for residential development. Only four of the allocated sites are large enough to be able to incorporate the proposed development into any housing proposal (L2, L5, L14 and L24). However, all three are already under construction or near completion and are therefore discounted from this assessment.
- 2.17 Existing employment sites have been discounted as they are not available. Employment allocations within SDA's (as referred to above) have been discounted.
- 2.18 Undeveloped sites within the City, which comprise Public Open Space (POS) have been considered as part of this assessment and include the following:
- Beacon Park
 - Darnford Park
 - Leamonsley Brook
 - Saddlers Wood
 - Shortbutts Park
 - Stowe Fields
 - Stychbrook Park

3 Site Planning Assessments

3.1 A planning assessment of each of the sites has been undertaken and these are attached at appendix 1. The table below highlights the key planning policy constraints affecting each site. Conclusions and recommendations are set out in the next section.

Site / Key Planning Constraints	Green Belt	Heritage and Conservation	Environmental	Design
Beacon Park	Yes	No	Loss of Open Space/Playing Fields Ecological Impact	Local policies Plan
Birmingham Road	No	Conservation Area Adjacent listed buildings and views of the Cathedral	TPO	Local policies Plan City Centre Masterplan guidance
Darnford Park	No	No	Loss of Open Space (Amenity Green Space scores above 40%) Ecological Impact	Local policies Plan
Leamonsley Brook	Yes	No	Loss of Open Space/Playing Pitches Ecological Impact	Local policies Plan
Saddlers Wood	No	No	Loss of Open Space/Playing Pitches (Amenity Green Space scores above 40%) Ecological Impact	Local policies Plan
Shortbutts Park	No	No	Loss of Open Space/Playing	Local policies Plan

			Pitches (Amenity Green Space scores above 40%) Ecological Impact	
Stowe Fields	No	Conservation Area Setting of Grade I Listed Building	Flood Zone 3 Loss of Open Space Ecological Impacts	Local policies Plan
Stychbrook Park	No	No	Loss of Open Space/Playing Pitches (Amenity Green Space scores below 40%) Ecological Impacts	Local policies Plan

4 Conclusions and Recommendation

- 4.1 Eight sites have been identified in the urban area of Lichfield by the consultant team through analysis including consideration of planning and environmental constraints. Cushman & Wakefield has undertaken a planning review of each of the sites, which has identified the planning risks associated with each of the sites.
- 4.2 **Beacon Park** and **Leamonsley Brook** are both situated within the Green Belt. The proposed development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Planning permission would only be granted for the proposal if a 'Very Special Circumstances' case was accepted by the LPA. Such a case would need to demonstrate that there were no alternative sites capable of accommodating the proposed development. As this exercise has demonstrated that there are potential alternative sites, we do not consider a Very Special Circumstances case can be made and we do not consider planning permission would be granted for the proposed development on either of these sites. Accordingly, we recommend both sites are discounted.
- 4.3 **Stowe Fields** is located within a Conservation Area and within the setting of a Grade I Listed building (the highest level of significance). Any harm to the cathedral would require clear and convincing justification. The site lies within flood risk zone 3, which requires a sequential flood risk assessment. As this exercise has demonstrated that there are potential alternative sites in lower flood risk zones, we do not consider the site would pass the sequential flood risk test. We do not consider planning permission would be granted for the proposed development on this site by virtue of its heritage and flood risk constraints alone. Accordingly, we recommend the site is discounted.
- 4.4 The remaining four sites – **Darnford Park**, **Saddlers Wood**, **Shortbutts Park** and **Stychbrook Park** – are not constrained by Green Belt, Conservation Areas or Flood Risk. All four are public open space sites providing a range of facilities including amenity open space, playing fields and equipped play facilities. The impact of the proposed development on each site would be significant given the scale of the proposed development compared to the size of the sites. The impact will be greater when the value of the open space is greater. The Council's Open Space Strategy 2016 evaluates all open space in the district. Of the four sites only Stychbrook Park scores below 40% suggesting the impact of the proposed development is likely to be less
- 4.5 The four sites vary in size with Saddler's Wood and Shortbutts Park being the smallest. Neither Darnford Park nor Shortbutts Park have existing vehicular access. Darnford Park and Saddlers Wood have extensive tree cover and the proposed development would likely require the removal of a significant number of trees.
- 4.6 Overall, we consider that of the four open space sites, **Stychbrook Park** is the most site suitable in planning terms to accommodate the proposed development. The site is capable of providing an adequate vehicular access, the impact from loss of open space is lower and the Arboricultural constraints are also lower.
- 4.7 As a note of caution, the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy has yet to be published and, therefore, the value of the site is not yet known. The adopted Local Plan sets the requirements for development proposals resulting in the loss of open space and playing pitches. The value of the playing pitches needs to be understood in order to inform acceptable proposal. The 2016 Open Space Strategy identifies potential to significantly improve playing facilities at Stychbrook Park.
- 4.8 The Birmingham Road site is one of the key development opportunity sites within Lichfield City Centre. The adopted Local Plan allocates the site for a mix of uses comprising retail and residential

specifically. The Lichfield City Masterplan identifies the site as 'Birmingham Road Gateway' and sets development aspirations for the site including a new bus station and a replacement multi-storey car park. Uses suggested including commercial uses, a cinema, hotel, cafes and restaurants, residential and office uses. The Masterplan is supported by a Delivery Strategy to help ensure the masterplan proposals are viable and deliverable.

- 4.9 The adopted Local Plan identifies Lichfield City Centre as the location to focus leisure uses. Accordingly, the city centre is an appropriate location for the proposed development in principle.
- 4.10 The Birmingham Gateway site is large enough to accommodate the proposed development as part of a mixed-use development. However, the development of a new leisure centre is not wholly in accordance with the City Centre Masterplan and LCNP, which include the provision of key facilities for the City with the overall development establishing the main entry point to the City Centre from the Railway Station and the south. The location of heritage assets close to the site and views from the Railway Station to Lichfield Cathedral constrain the development capacity of the site. Therefore, introducing a new leisure centre into the site is likely to significantly change the overall development mix of the site and could have a significant negative impact on the scheme's overall viability.
- 4.11 The delivery of the Birmingham Road site is a priority for the Council established through the Local Plan and City Centre Masterplan. If the inclusion of the proposed leisure centre places the delivery of the site at risk, then we recommend the Birmingham Road site is discounted.

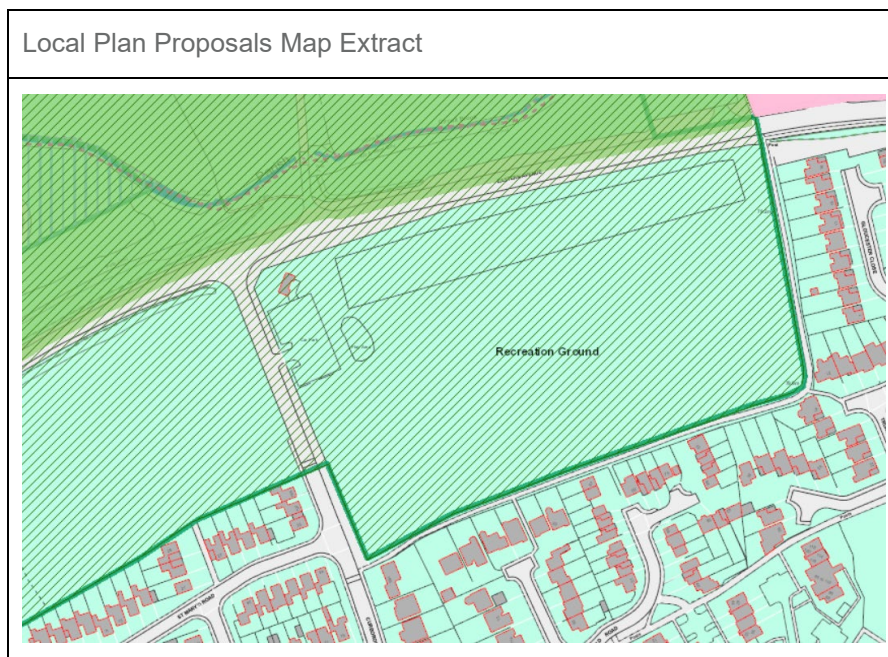
Recommended Site

- 4.12 We recommend Lichfield District Council seeks expert advice to understand if the Birmingham Road development proposals would be viable and deliverable if they included a new Leisure Centre.
- 4.13 If it is concluded that a Leisure Centre would undermine the delivery of the Birmingham Road site proposals, we consider Stychbrook Park to be the most appropriate in planning terms and Recommend that this site is taken forward as the preferred site.

Appendix 1 – Site Planning Assessments

Site Description:

Stychbrook Park is located on the northern edge of Lichfield City. The site extends to 8.58 acres (3.47 Ha).



Planning History

Planning Application Number	Date of Submission	Summary of Application	Decision
07/01040/FUL	10/10/07	Proposed storage container	Withdrawn

Development Plan Policy

Stychbrook Park is an area of open space, with two football pitches, a small gravel car park and a redundant changing block. The site is located away from the town centre and adjoins with the A5192 Eastern Avenue, one of the main roads around Lichfield.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Stychbrook Park was identified in the 2016 open space assessment as providing an important leisure resource for the local community.

Flood Zone: This site lies in flood zone 1 – the lowest risk of flooding.

Analysis

Stychbrook Park is an area of public open space sites providing a range of facilities including amenity open space, playing fields and an equipped play facility. The Council's Open Space Strategy 2016 evaluates all open space in the district and Stychbrook Park scores below 40%, which is the lowest of all sites considered in this assessment.

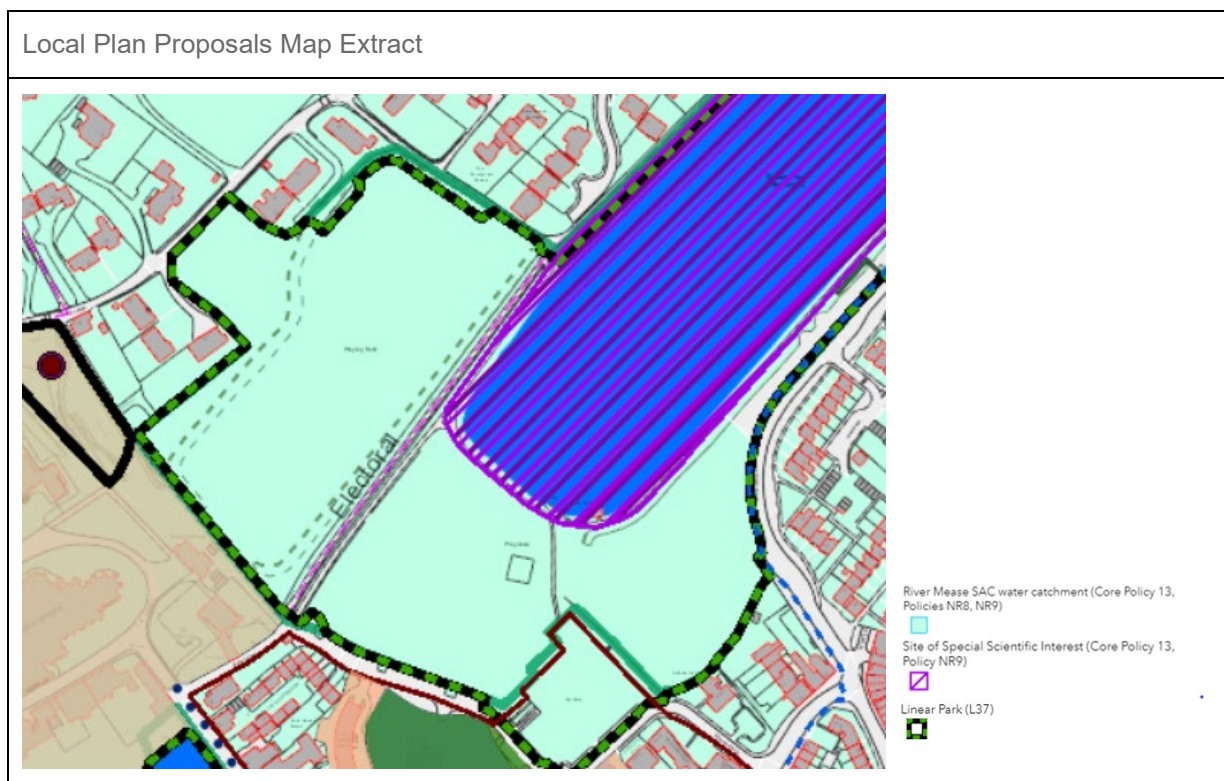
The impact of the proposed development on the site would be significant given the scale of the Stychbrook Park and appropriate mitigation would be necessary informed by qualitative and quantitative impacts and requirements. The open space strategy identifies an opportunity to significantly improve play space at Stychbrook Park. The proposed development would also create ecological and environmental impacts, such as noise, which would also need to be taken into consideration. However, there are comparatively few trees on the site compared to the alternative options and it is possible to locate a development away from sensitive receptors such as existing houses.

The park has an existing vehicle access and car parking and is capable of providing an adequate vehicular access for the proposed development. Furthermore, the park is the closest site to the existing leisure centre being replaced and has strong access routes to the site, as well as access to public transport.

Recommendation – Take site forward as potential option

Site Description:

Stowe Fields is located in the heart of Lichfield City Centre on Cross Keys, to the east of the Lichfield Cathedral and adjoining Stowe Pool. The site extends to approximately 2.93 acres (1.18 Ha).



Planning History

Planning Application Number	Date of Submission	Summary of Application	Decision
05/00161/COU	16 th February 2005	Proposed temporary car park (120 spaces)	Application Withdrawn

Development Plan Policy

Stowe Fields is an area of open space, with a small children’s play area to the east and Stowe Pool to the north. Stowe Pool is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the site is located within the Lichfield City Conservation Area and within the setting of Lichfield Cathedral, a Grade I Listed Building. In addition, the site is located within flood zone 3 – a high risk zone.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Core Policy 14 - relates to the built and historic environment and requires the protection and improvement of the built environment having special regard to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Stowe Fields falls within the Lichfield City Conservation Area. The Character Area appraisal identifies the principle character of Stowe Fields is derived from its natural environment, openness and the views it provides. Spectacular views of the city can be seen from a variety of points within this character area. Stowe Pool is characterised by its openness and is one of the places in the city which provides views of most of the major landmarks including the Cathedral, St Mary's Church, St Michael's Church and St Chad's Church.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Policy NR5 – supports the retention and protection of geological, archaeological and historical locations.

Flood Risk – The site lies in Flood Risk Zone 3. National Planning Policy (NPPF) states that *“Only where there are no reasonably available sites in Flood Zones 1 or 2 should the suitability of sites in Flood Zone 3 be considered”*.

Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Stowe Fields was identified as providing an important leisure resource within close proximity to the city centre. Overall Stowe Fields were ranked as the 4th highest scoring open space within Lichfield with a score of 72%.

Lichfield City Centre Masterplan 2020: Identifies Stowe Pool and Fields as an area of public realm and open space that should be maintained and enhanced.

Analysis

Stowe Fields is located within a Conservation Area and within the setting of a Grade I Listed building (the highest level of significance). Any harm to the cathedral would require clear and convincing justification.

Stowe Fields is identified as an important area of open space in the city. The development of a Leisure Centre on this site would result in the loss of almost all the open space. The loss of open space is a significant planning risk.

The site lies within flood risk zone 3, which requires a sequential flood risk assessment. As this exercise has demonstrated that there are potential alternative sites in lower flood risk zones, we do not consider the site would pass the sequential flood risk test.

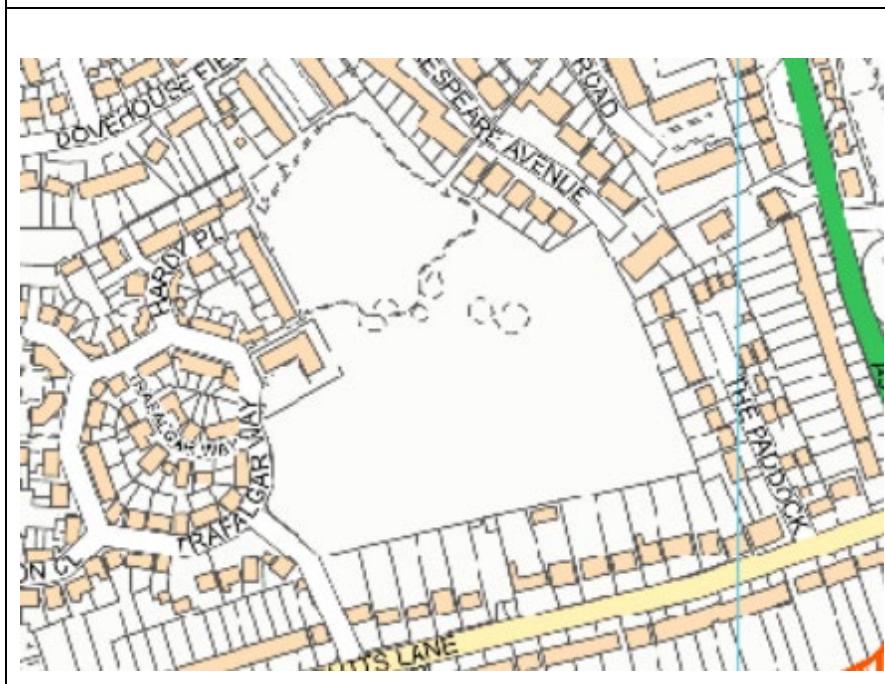
We do not consider planning permission would be granted for the proposed development on this site by virtue of its heritage and flood risk constraints alone. Accordingly, we recommend the site is discounted.

Recommendation – Discount option

Site Description:

Shortbutts Park is located off Shortbutts Lane in a residential area to the South of Lichfield City Centre. The park extends to 8.45 acres (3.41 Ha).

Local Plan Proposals Map Extract



Planning History

There are no previous planning applications or appeals on this site.

Development Plan Policy

Shortbutts Park is a public open space surrounded by residential development. It has one adult football pitch and one junior football pitch, a play area with play equipment and a new exercise station focussed on improving mobility and rehabilitation training. The site is located away from the town centre but adjoins with Birmingham Road.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

SITE NAME: Shortbutts Park

Lichfield Leisure Centre Site Appraisal

Planning Appraisal

June 2020



Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Shortbutts Park was identified as a good quality open space.

Flood Zone: This site lies in flood zone 1 – the lowest risk of flooding.

Analysis

Shortbutts Park is an area of public open space sites providing a range of facilities including amenity open space, playing fields and an equipped play facility. The Council's Open Space Strategy 2016 evaluates all open space in the district and Stychbrook Park scores above 40% recognising the good quality of the open space.

The impact of the proposed development on the site would be significant given the scale of the Shortbutts Park and appropriate mitigation would be necessary informed by qualitative and quantitative impacts and requirements.

The proposed development would also create ecological and environmental impacts, such as noise, which would also need to be taken into consideration. In particular, the loss of trees and the location of sensitive receptors (housing) surrounding the park.

The park does not have an existing vehicle access and car parking and it is not clear if it is possible to provide an adequate vehicular access for the proposed development.

Recommendation – Discount the site

Site Description:

Saddlers Wood is located off Roman Way in a residential area to the East of Lichfield City Centre.

Local Plan Proposals Map Extract



Planning History

There are no previous planning applications or appeals on this site.

Development Plan Policy

Saddlers Wood is a public open space located within a residential area providing informal open space for residents to play and walk. Saddlers Wood has a basketball court, a small play area with play equipment and a mini football pitch with goal posts. The site is located away from the city centre but adjoins with Roman Way, leading to Birmingham Road

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

SITE NAME: Saddlers Wood

Lichfield Leisure Centre Site Appraisal

Planning Appraisal

June 2020



Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Saddlers Wood provides an important leisure resource for the local community. The assessment identified that the site was suitable in its current form but could be improved by making it more accessible to those less mobile and by incorporating a pedestrian crossing over Roman Way.

Flood Zone: This site lies in flood zone 1 – the lowest risk of flooding.

Analysis

Saddlers Wood is an area of public open space sites providing a range of facilities including amenity open space, playing fields and an equipped play facility. The Council's Open Space Strategy 2016 evaluates all open space in the district and Stychbrook Park scores above 40%. Qualitative improvements are recommended to improve accessibility.

The impact of the proposed development on the site would be significant given the scale of the Saddlers Wood. Indeed, the scale of the proposed development would result in the loss of over half the site which is not wooded. The level of mitigation required from such an impact would be significant and would need to be informed by qualitative and quantitative impacts and requirements.

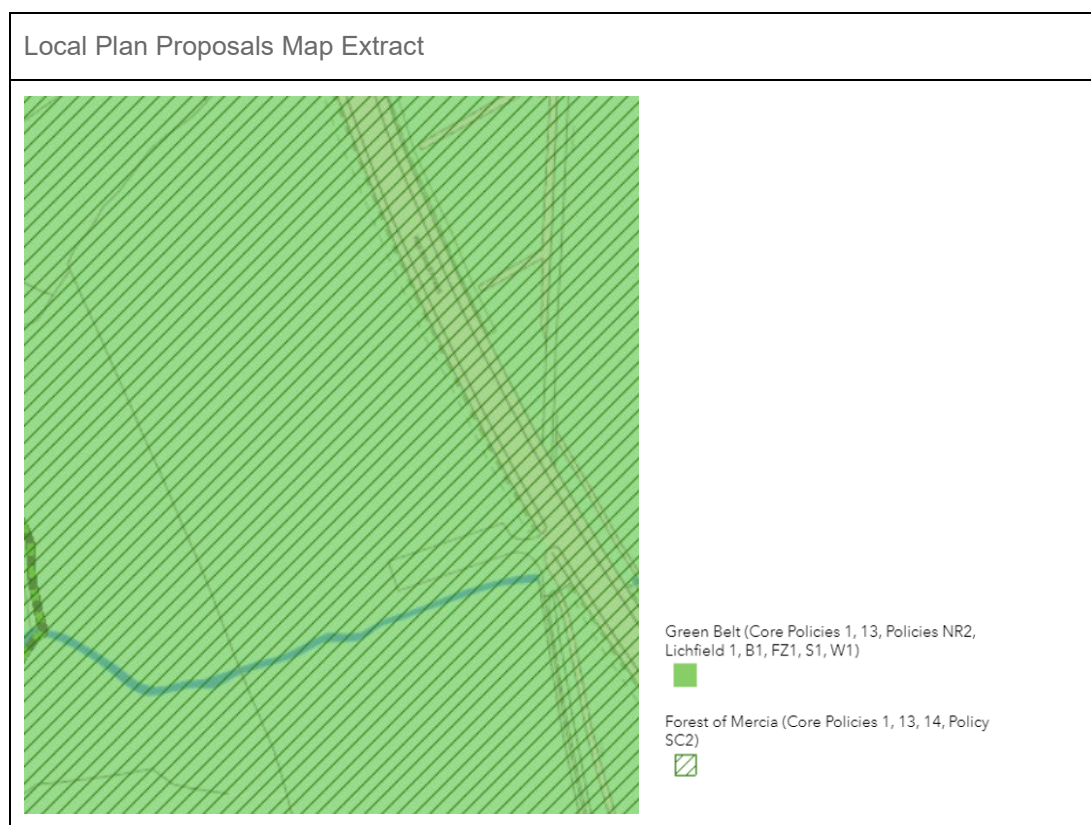
The proposed development would create ecological and environmental impacts, such as noise, which would need to be taken into consideration. Given the size of the open space it is likely the development would be, in part, close to sensitive receptors such as existing houses.

The park has an existing vehicle access and is potentially capable of providing an adequate vehicular access for the proposed development.

Recommendation – Discount Site

Site Description:

The site is located to the west of Lichfield City Centre and is accessed directly off the A51 Western Bypass. The site extends to approximately 5.30 acres (2.14 Ha).



Planning History

There are no relevant planning applications or appeals on the park.

Development Plan Policy

Leamonsley Brook is an area of open space situated within the Green Belt, which consists of two football pitches and a small gravel car park. The site is located off the A51 Western Bypass. The site has pedestrian and cycle paths leading to the site, and is in very close proximity to Beacon Park, the main open space area in Lichfield.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Core Policy 13 – establishes the importance of development proposals maintaining natural resources.

Core Policy 14 - relates to built and historic environment and requires the protection and improvement of the built environment having special regard to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

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SITE NAME: Leamonsley Brook

Lichfield Leisure Centre Site Appraisal

Planning Appraisal

May 2020



Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR2 - requires the Green Belt to retain its character and openness in line with national guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The construction of new buildings constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. A leisure centre does not qualify as an exception and, therefore, Very Special Circumstances will need to be demonstrated.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Policy NR5 – supports the retention and protection of geological, archaeological and historical locations.

Flood Risk: This park is located within flood zone 1 – the lowest zone of risk.

Analysis

Leamonsley Brook is situated within the Green Belt. The development of a new leisure centre in the park constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Planning permission would only be granted for the proposal if a 'Very Special Circumstances' case was accepted by the LPA. Such a case would need to demonstrate that there were no alternative sites capable of accommodating the proposed development.

As there are potential alternative sites, we do not consider a Very Special Circumstances case can be made and we do not consider planning permission would be granted for the proposed development on either of these sites. Accordingly, on this matter alone, we recommend the park is discounted.

In addition, the loss of playing pitches resulting from the development of a leisure centre is a significant planning risk.

Recommendation – Discount option

SITE NAME: Birmingham Road

Lichfield Leisure Centre Site Appraisal

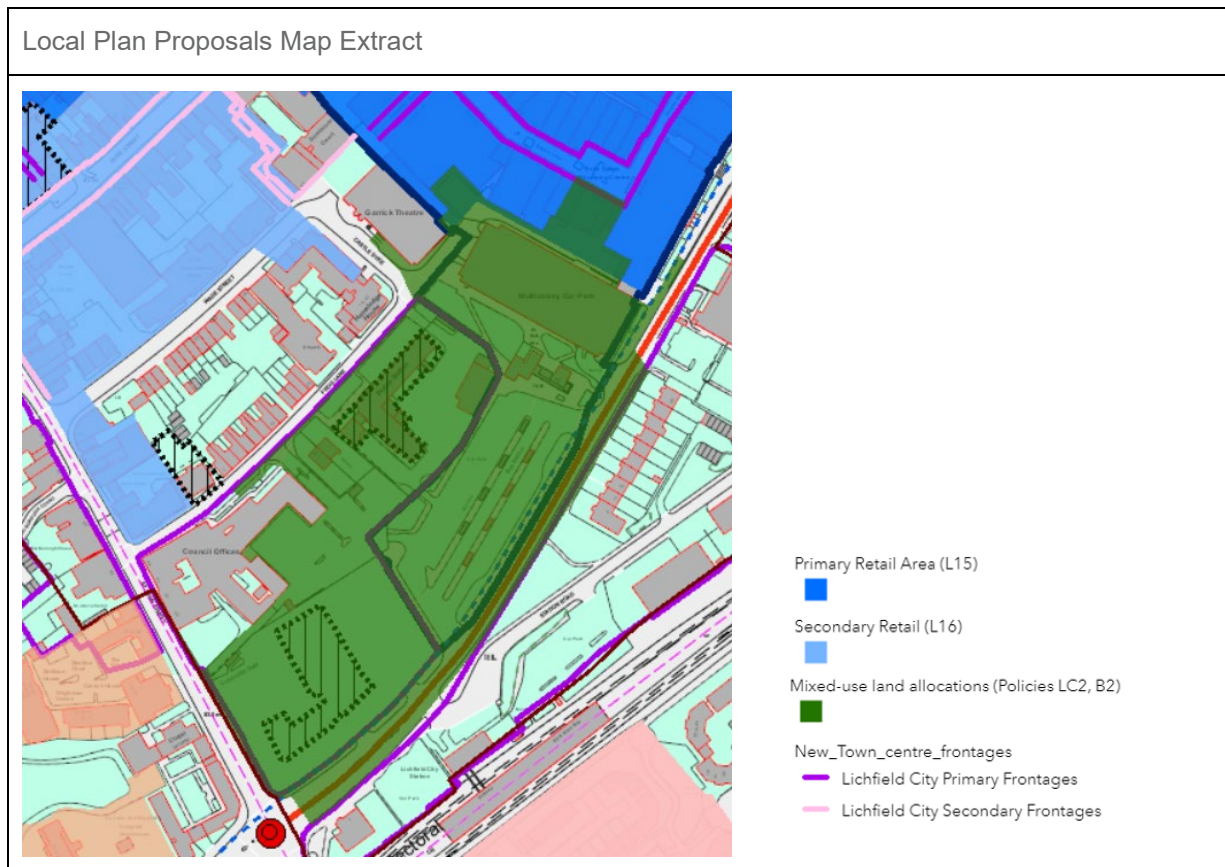
Planning Appraisal

June 2020



Site Description:

The Birmingham Road site is located at the junction of the A5127 Birmingham Road and St John Street in Lichfield City centre. The site consists approximately 5.68 acres (2.30 Ha).



Planning History

The site has a detailed planning history, which is summarised in the schedule attached.

Development Plan Policy

The Birmingham Road site is a key development opportunity site located within the city centre. The site is allocated for mixed-use development within the adopted Local Plan.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

The Birmingham Road site is located within the Lichfield City Conservation Area. The Character Appraisal of the area (13) identifies the principle character of the area to be commercial. It notes that “In between the larger buildings views of Lichfield Cathedral and St Mary’s Church spires can be glimpsed. These glimpsed views are an important part of the character as they provide a visual link to the historic core of the city.”

Core Policy 14 - relates to the built and historic environment and requires the protection and improvement of the built environment having special regard to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Core Policy 8 - encourages significant development to be focused within Lichfield CityCentre. It prioritises leisure uses to central sites to boost the local economy.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Policy NR5 – supports the retention and protection of geological, archaeological and historical locations.

Policy Lichfield 1 - Identifies Lichfield as a strategic centre that offers a variety of services enabling all to live, work and visit.

Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield City Centre Masterplan 2020: Identifies the Birmingham Road Site as the main development site within the city centre proposing a scheme which incorporates a mix of leisure, residential and commercial uses.

Analysis

The Birmingham Road site is one of the key development opportunity sites within Lichfield City Centre. The adopted Local Plan allocates the site for a mix of uses comprising retail and residential specifically. The Lichfield City Masterplan identifies the site as 'Birmingham Road Gateway' and sets development aspirations for the site including a new bus station and a replacement multi-storey car park. Uses suggested including commercial uses, a cinema, hotel, cafes and restaurants, residential and office uses. The Masterplan is supported by a Delivery Strategy to help ensure the masterplan proposals are viable and deliverable.

The adopted Local Plan identifies Lichfield City Centre as the location to focus leisure uses. Accordingly, the city centre is an appropriate location for the proposed development in principle.

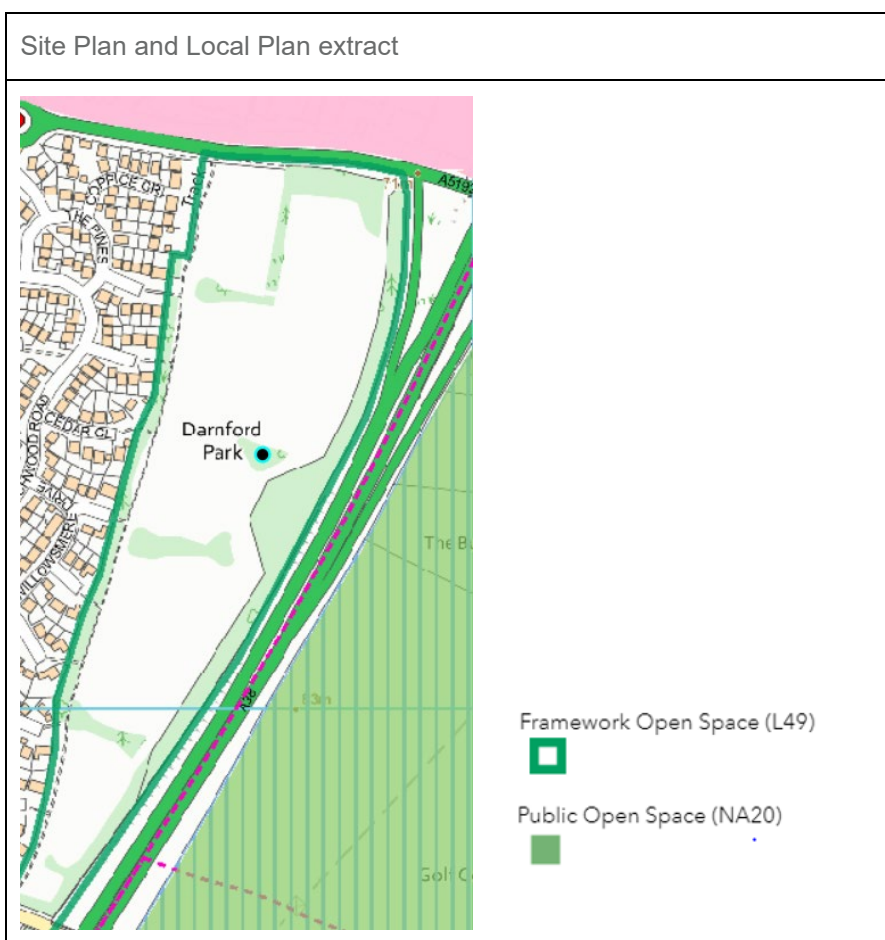
The Birmingham Gateway site is large enough to accommodate the proposed development as part of a mixed-use development. However, the development of a new leisure centre is not wholly in accordance with the City Centre Masterplan and LCNP, which include the provision of key facilities for the City with the overall development establishing the main entry point to the City Centre from the Railway Station and the south. The location of heritage assets close to the site and views from the Railway Station to Lichfield Cathedral constrain the development capacity of the site. Therefore, introducing a new leisure centre into the site is likely to significantly change the overall development mix of the site and could have a significant negative impact on the scheme's overall viability.

The delivery of the Birmingham Road site is a priority for the Council established through the Local Plan and City Centre Masterplan. If the inclusion of the proposed leisure centre places the delivery of the site at risk, then we recommend the Birmingham Road site is discounted

Recommendation – Take site forward as potential option

Site Description:

Darnford Park is located on the eastern edge of Lichfield, adjacent to the A38 Link Road. Darnford Park extends to approximately 46.95 acres (18.99 Ha).



Planning History

Planning Application Number	Date of Submission	Summary of Application	Decision
17/00041/FULM	23/12/16	Creation of canal, locks, basin, tunnel under A51, environmental mounds, viewing areas, and all associated engineering operations and earthworks.	Approved

This planning application was for a small area at the South of the site, for the restoration of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal.

Development Plan Policy

Darnford Park is an area of public open space, split into five smaller sections by swathes of trees. The site is located on the edge of the urban area and backs on to the A38. The site is located within a residential area and has no vehicular access.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Darnford Park was identified in the 2016 open space assessment as providing an important leisure resource for the local community.

Flood Zone: This site lies in flood zone 1 – the lowest risk of flooding.

Analysis

Darnford Park is an area of public open space providing a range of facilities including amenity open space and an equipped play facility. The Council's Open Space Strategy 2016 evaluates all open space in the district and Darnford Park scores above 40%.

The impact of the proposed development on the site would be significant given the shape of the Stychbrook Park and appropriate mitigation would be necessary informed by qualitative and quantitative impacts and requirements.

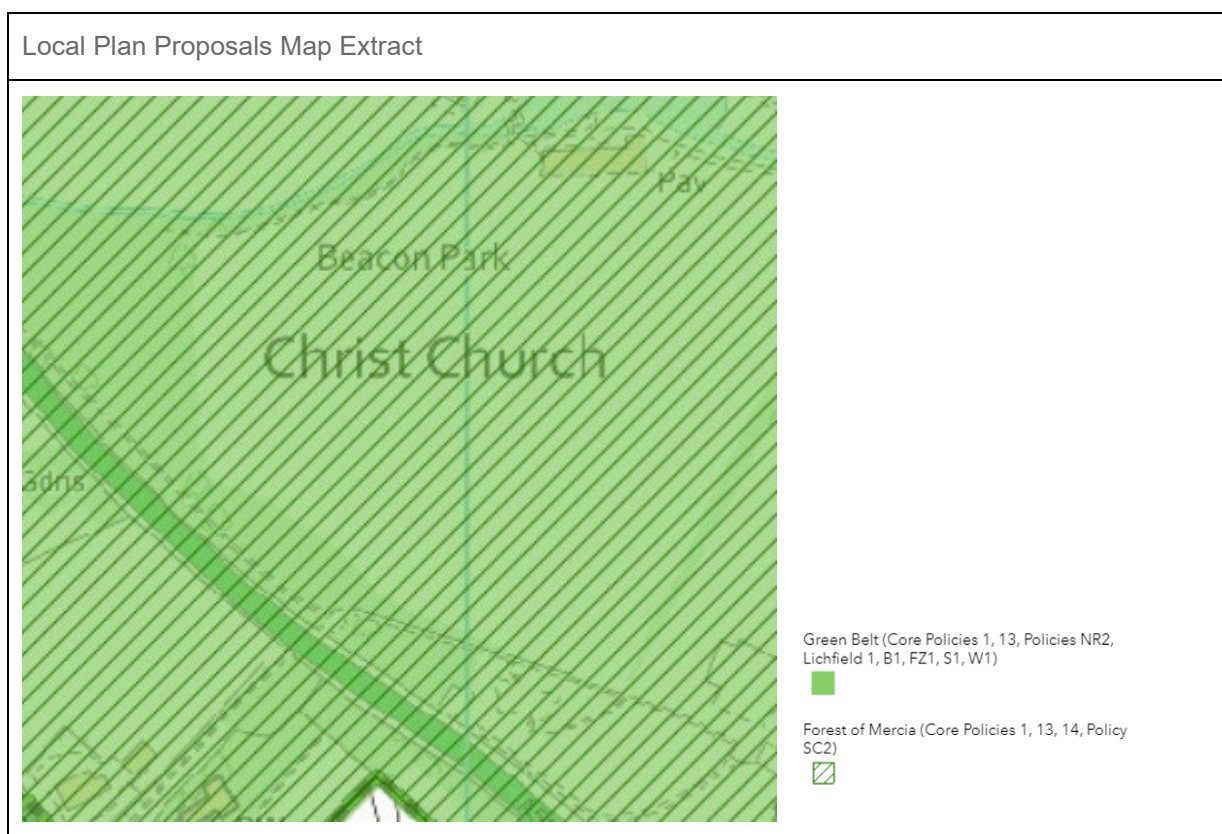
The proposed development would create ecological and environmental impacts, such as noise, which would also need to be taken into consideration. There are a significant number of trees on the site and the proposed development would require the removal of a substantial number given how the park is divided by swathes of woodland. The shape of the park also means that the development would, in part, be located close to sensitive receptors such as existing houses.

The park does not have an existing vehicle access and it is not clear whether an adequate vehicular access for the proposed development could be provided.

Recommendation – Discount Site

Site Description:

Beacon Park is located to the North West of Lichfield City Centre and is the main park in the city. Beacon Park extends to over 70 acres of land.



Planning History

There are no relevant planning applications or appeals on the park.

Development Plan Policy

Beacon Park is an area of open space situated within the Green Belt. Throughout the park there are several play facilities available including tennis courts, a children's play area, a golf course and football pitches. It is a historic park and was opened in 1859 in conjunction with the former museum building. The park is also situated within close proximity to Lichfield Cathedral.

Key policies are summarised below:

Core Policy 1 – establishes the requirement for sustainable development with a prioritisation of land that has previously been developed. It requires all new development to mitigate or minimise the pressure on the natural, built and historic environment.

Core Policy 14 - relates to built and historic environment and requires the protection and improvement of the built environment having special regard to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Policy BE1 (High Quality Development) - requires all development to consider the surrounding natural and built environment.

Policy NR2 - requires the Green Belt to retain its character and openness in line with national guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The construction of new buildings constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. A leisure centre does not qualify as an exception and, therefore, Very Special Circumstances will need to be demonstrated.

Policy NR3 - confirms development will only be permitted where it protects, enhances, restores and implements appropriate conservation management of the biodiversity and/or geodiversity value.

Policy NR5 – supports the retention and protection of geological, archaeological and historical locations.

Policy Lichfield 1 – Identifies Beacon Park as a key heritage asset, which should be maintained in order to enhance and protect Lichfield's heritage.

Other Relevant Documents

Lichfield Open Space Assessment 2016: Beacon Park is identified as being a flagship park providing high quality open space within the community. Throughout the study, Beacon Park scored as the one of the highest quality parks within the local area, scoring 96%, with a significant supply of play equipment sports pitches and open space. Furthermore, the park had been awarded the Green Flag award for six years in a row at the time of the open space assessment.

Lichfield City Centre Masterplan 2020: Identifies Beacon Park as a key site for open space within Lichfield. The masterplan recommends the park should be protected and where necessary enhanced to provide further landscaping and civic space.

Flood Risk: This park is located within flood zone 1 – the lowest zone of risk.

Analysis

Beacon Park is situated within the Green Belt. The development of a new leisure centre in the park constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Planning permission would only be granted for the proposal if a 'Very Special Circumstances' case was accepted by the LPA. Such a case would need to demonstrate that there were no alternative sites capable of accommodating the proposed development.

As there are potential alternative sites, we do not consider a Very Special Circumstances case can be made and we do not consider planning permission would be granted for the proposed development on either of these sites. Accordingly, on this matter alone, we recommend the park is discounted.

In addition, the loss of open space and playing pitches resulting from the development of a leisure centre is a significant planning risk. Beacon Park is an historic park and recognised as a flagship park for the city. Policy encourages the protection and enhancement of the park and the City Masterplan also reflects this objective.

Recommendation – Discount option