

Agenda Cabinet

**Wednesday, 7 February 2024 at 3.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

1 Apologies for Absence (Pages 5 - 6)

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest (Pages 7 - 8)

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

3 Minutes (Pages 9 - 32)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2024 as a correct record.

4 Additional Items of Business

To determine whether there are any additional items of business to be considered as a matter of urgency.

**5 Improvement Plan Progress - Grant Thornton
Follow-up Report 2023 (Pages 33 - 96)**

Leader

To consider the Improvement Plan Progress – Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023.



6	Recommendations from Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board on the Budget 2024/25 (Pages 97 - 100)	Finance and Resources
	To consider the recommendations of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in relation to the Draft Budget 2024/2025.	
7	Draft Budget 2024/25 (Pages 101 - 452)	Finance and Resources
	To consider the Council's proposed budget for 2024/2025 and make a recommendation to the full Council.	
8	Award of contract to Phoenix Software LTD for the provision of Microsoft E5 licenses (Pages 453 - 460)	Finance and Resources
	To consider the award of contract to Phoenix Software LTD for the provision of Microsoft E5 licenses.	
9	Schools Funding 2024-25 (Pages 461 - 472)	Children, Young People and Education
	To consider Schools Funding 2024-25.	
10	Social Housing Decency Funding Grant (Pages 473 - 482)	Housing and Built Environment
	To Consider the Social Housing Decency Funding Grant.	
11	New Archives Centre for the Borough (Pages 483 - 634)	Leisure and Tourism
	To consider the New Archives Centre for the Borough.	
12	Implementation of Boroughwide Public Spaces Protection Orders (Pages 635 - 700)	Public Health and Communities
	To consider the Implementation of Boroughwide Public Spaces Protection Orders.	

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------------|
| 13 | City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Update and Local Transport Capital Program
(Pages 701 - 716) | Regeneration
and WMCA |
| | To consider the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Update and Local Transport Capital Program. | |
| 14 | Designation of Nature Conservation Sites (Pages 717 - 744) | Regeneration
and WMCA |
| | To consider the Designation of Nature Conservation Sites. | |
| 15 | A4123 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor - Initial Scheme Approval (Pages 745 - 788) | Regeneration
and WMCA |
| | To consider approval for the in principle scheme for the A4123 Cycle, Walk and Bus Corridor. | |

Shokat Lal
Chief Executive
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution
Councillor Carmichael (Chair)
Councillors Hackett, Hartwell, Hughes, Khatun, Millard, Padda, Piper and Rollins

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

Information about meetings in Sandwell



If you are attending the meeting and require assistance to access the venue, please contact Democratic Services (democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk).



If the fire alarm sounds, please follow the instructions of the officers present and leave the building by the nearest exit.



Only people invited to speak at a meeting may do so. Everyone at the meeting is expected to be respectful and listen to the discussion.



Agendas with reports with exempt information should be treated as private and confidential. It is your responsibility to ensure that any such reports are kept secure. After the meeting confidential papers should be disposed of in a secure way.



This meeting may be recorded and broadcast on the Internet. If this is the case, it will be confirmed at the meeting and further information will be provided.



You are allowed to use devices for the purposes of recording or reporting during the public session of the meeting. When using your devices they must not disrupt the meeting – please ensure they are set to silent.



Members who cannot attend the meeting should submit apologies by contacting Democratic Services (democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)



All agenda, reports, minutes for Sandwell Council's meetings, councillor details and more are available from our [website](#)

The Cabinet

Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence from members of the Cabinet.



This page is intentionally left blank

The Cabinet

Declarations of Interests

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.



This page is intentionally left blank

Minutes of Cabinet

**Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 3.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Piper (Chair);
Councillors Hackett, Hartwell, Hughes, Khatun, Padda, and
Rollins.

In attendance: Councillors Lewis, Moore and Taylor.

Also Present: Shokat Lal (Chief Executive); James McLaughlin (Assistant
Chief Executive); Brenden Arnold (Interim Section 151
Officer); Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration & Growth);
Mike Jones (Assistant Director - Legal and Assurance);
Matthew Huggins (Assistant Director - Green Spaces, Green
Services, Events); Elizabeth Stephens (Senior Environmental
Health Officer); Matthew More (Communications and
Corporate Affairs Manager); Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic
and Member Services Manager) and Connor Robinson
(Democratic Services Officer).

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carmichael
and Millard.

2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.



3/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

4/24 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

5/24 **Sandwell Residential Education Centres: Charges for the period 1 August 2024-31 July 2025**

The item considering the Sandwell Residential Education Centres: Charges for the period 1 August 2024-31 July 2025 had been withdrawn and would be addressed through a wider corporate report addressing fees and charges that would be progressed as part of the overall budget decision-making process.

6/24 **Review of Information Rights Policy**

Approval was sought for the Review of Information Rights Policy. In February 2022, the Cabinet had approved the Information Rights Policy which was the public facing policy setting out how the Council complied with requests for information (Data Subject Access Requests and requests under Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations), and corporate compliance with the publication scheme.

Over the last several months the Council had reviewed the policy through consultation with members of the Information Governance Board and key stakeholders in the Governance Team and ICT.



In a response to a question from the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that staff across the Council would be updated on the Information Rights Policy and this would be done through internal communications and team briefings. Members of the Information Governance Board would also be asked to share the policy with their colleagues and update their management teams accordingly. The policy would be available on the Council's internet pages. The policy would remain subject to continuous review, alongside training and development courses on information rights and the Council would continue to focus on ongoing improvement and transformation work to embed excellence in information governance practice.

Reason for Decision

The Council had statutory obligations to comply with requests for information via Subject Access Requests, Freedom of Information Act requests and Environmental Information Regulations.

Having a public policy that sets out how the Council complied with those obligations, assists members of the public to exercise those rights and offered assurance that the Council was meeting its duties.

The policy had been in place since January 2022 and an update was required to ensure it reflected current practices and emergent sector best practice.

Key changes to the Information Right's Policy were:

- i) Updates in relation to changes in practices within the council;
- ii) Process in relation to other individual rights had been included.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative option would be to not have a public policy or to retain the existing policy, neither of which would be satisfactory. Whilst the existing policy had provided the relevant information, there were updates that were required to offer the assurance to members of the public that the Council was meeting its statutory obligations.



Resolved:-

- (1) that the updated Information Rights Policy as set out in [Appendix 1](#) is approved;
- (2) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, the Assistant Director for Legal and Assurance is authorised to make administrative amendments to these policies as required.

7/24

Performance Management Framework - Q2 Monitoring

Consideration was given to the Performance Management Framework – Q2 Monitoring report. The Council had approved a Corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) on 12 April 2022, to address the recommendations of the Governance Value for Money Review by Grant Thornton and as a key element of the Council's Improvement Plan. The corporate PMF had since been further refined and built into business processes. In June 2023, Cabinet had approved a revised Corporate Plan with a revised set of Corporate Performance Indicators.

In a response to a question from the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources confirmed that the PMF was a vital tool in the Council's focus on becoming brilliant at the basics. An effective performance management framework facilitated increased accountability, learning and improvement. It also provided early warning signals and facilitated decision-making. Since it was first approved, the corporate PMF had been further refined and built into business processes. The corporate PMF included measures under all strategic objectives in the Corporate Plan to monitor progress in key areas. The PMF also included elements that measured the Council's use of its resources to ensure delivery of the strategic objectives. The performance against the indicators and an update on the delivery of Corporate Plan actions was reported to Leadership Team, Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board and Cabinet on a quarterly basis.



This would allow Senior Managers and Members to understand how effectively its plans were being implemented and whether the strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan were being achieved, as well as better understand the impact of its work on local people and, where necessary, target actions and resources. The PMF also helped the organisation to think about performance issues alongside other key corporate functions such as Strategic Risk Management.

Reason for Decision

An effective performance management framework would facilitate increased accountability, learning and improvement. It also provided early warning signals and facilitated decision-making.

On a quarterly basis, the Council gathered and analysed a wide range of data and information to understand how effectively its plans were being implemented and whether the strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan were being achieved.

Alternative Options Considered

There were no alternative options.

Resolved that Cabinet note progress on the further development of the Corporate Performance Management Framework and approve the Q2 monitoring reports.

8/24

Child Friendly Sandwell

Approval was sought for the preparation and submission of an expression of interest and application for Sandwell to become a UNICEF Child Friendly Borough.

A child friendly borough was one that respected and promoted the rights of children and young people and provided them with opportunities to participate in its social, cultural, political and economic life. The development of a child friendly borough involved engaging with children and young people as active citizens, ensuring their safety and well-being and creating inclusive and accessible spaces and services for them.



A child friendly borough was not only beneficial for children and young people, but also for the whole community, as it fostered social cohesion, diversity, sustainability and innovation.

Delivering a child friendly borough would support the Council to deliver its commitment to equality and diversity and key elements of both the Corporate Plan and the Improvement Plan. It would also represent the Council living its values, being ambitious, inclusive, customer focused and accountable.

Whilst the Cabinet were minded to approve the recommendations approval was also sought to include a statement within the Strong Resilient Communities Strategic Outcome of the Council's Corporate Plan to incorporate a Child Friendly Sandwell.

Reason for Decision

A child friendly city was a city, town, community or any system of local governance committed to improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction by realising their rights as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which was the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and had helped transform children's lives.

Delivering a child friendly borough would support the Council to deliver its commitments to equality and diversity and key elements of both the Corporate Plan and the Improvement Plan. It would also represent the Council living its values, being ambitious, inclusive, customer focused and accountable.

From the results of the boroughwide representative Budget Consultation run in 2023, we know that the most important area of Council business to residents are the services delivered to Children and Young People.



Alternative Options Considered

Appendix A set out the alternative option which would be to create a bespoke model by developing a homegrown Sandwell Child Friendly Borough framework. Given that developing and implementing a Council own model would incur similar costs to the UNICEF framework, without any of the training and mentoring support offered by UNICEF, it was felt that the UNICEF route would be better value for money.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the preparation and submission of an expression of interest and application for Sandwell to become a UNICEF Child Friendly Borough;
- (2) that a Member Working Group is established comprising of members of the Cabinet, scrutiny and the opposition, to oversee both the submission and each of the phases within the application process of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities programme;
- (3) that lead officers from the following service areas be appointed to sit on the Child Friendly Sandwell Officer Steering Group, to manage both the expression of interest and the application processes for a Child Friendly Sandwell:-
 - Communications
 - Community Partnerships
 - Finance
 - Legal and Governance
 - Housing
 - Regeneration
 - Public Health
 - Borough Economy
 - Strategic Partnership Business Managers
- (4) that the following statement is inserted into the Strong Resilient Communities Strategic Outcome of the Council's Corporate Plan:-



“We will work as One Council to lead the way for Sandwell to become a UNICEF Accredited Child Friendly Borough”

9/24

Determination of Admission Arrangements for Sandwell's Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2025/26

Approval was sought for the Admission Arrangements for Sandwell's Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2025/26.

The School Admissions Code 2021 published in September 2021 required the Local Authority (as the admissions authority for community and voluntary controlled schools), to formally agree admission arrangements for those schools every year, even if the arrangements had not changed from previous years. Admission authorities must determine admission arrangements for entry in September 2025 by 28 February 2024.

School Admissions Code 2021 also required the local authority to consult governing bodies of community and voluntary controlled schools where it proposed either to increase or keep the same Published Admission Number (PAN).

Reason for Decision

The Local Authority must abide by the requirements of School Admissions Code 2021 and associated Regulations and determine admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools each year. The proposed arrangements to apply for the 2025/26 academic year had fulfilled the Council's obligation to consult, as some proposed changes had been made to the Policy since the last consultation was undertaken in October/November 2017. The proposed arrangements were in line with the requirements of the Admissions Code.



Alternative Options Considered

There was no alternative option open to the local authority in relation to its responsibilities for agreeing and publishing oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary controlled schools. The Local Authority must abide with the requirements of the Admissions Code. Further, determining the admission arrangements enabled the admission authority, the Local Authority, to meet its duty to provide sufficient school places and to allocate school places within a reasonable distance.

Resolved that in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021 and School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 (“Regulations”) the Director of Children’s Services and Education be authorised to publish the Local Authority’s Admission Arrangements for 2025/26 academic year for places in all community and voluntary controlled schools as set out in [Appendix 1](#).

10/24 Housing & Asset Management Procurement Approvals

Approval was sought for the Housing and Asset Management Procurement. Approval had previously been given to award contracts for the procurement and contract award of Internal Improvement Works and External Improvement Works.

As part of the procurement review and rationalisation of contracts in Housing and Asset Management, opportunities had been identified to amalgamate spend from the following contracts, into a single procurement exercise under a HIP Contract:

- Internal Improvement Programme
- External Improvement Programme
- Windows & Doors
- Composite Fire Doors
- Soil Stack Programme
- Kitchen & Bathroom Replacement
- Roof Replacement



The benefits to amalgamating the contracts were noted as:

- Improved Social Value outcomes from amalgamated spend
- Improved efficiency with one Contract to manage
- Consistency in our approach to Contract Management
- Consistent Key Performance Indicators that drive required outcomes
- Create the opportunity to drive improved value and returns from the Contract

The four year term would be split on a 3+1 year term, meaning that the Council had the option to break the Contract at the end of Year 3, after assessing the requirements of the Authority, changes in legislation for Decency and also the external market pressures.

Reason for Decision

As part of the procurement review and rationalisation of contracts in Housing and Asset Management, opportunities had been identified to amalgamate spend from contracts, into a single procurement exercise under a HIP Contract.

Option 3, had been identified as the best value to the Council, it improved control of the programme, cost and quality and also gave the opportunity to increase the number of properties that could be delivered with the same value of grant funding available, therefore having a positive impact on the lives of more residents of Sandwell.

Alternative Options Considered

Following a review of the delivery and cost model, an Options Appraisal had been conducted with three options considered:
Option 1 - Appointment of a Principal Contractor through a full procurement process.

Option 2 - Appointment of a Principal Contractor through an existing framework.

Option 3 – Sandwell MBC to act as Principal Contractor to deliver the works through a number of approved supply chain partners.



Resolved:-

- (1) that the Interim Director of Housing be authorised to continue procurement for the HIP Programme based on previous Cabinet Approval with increased funding to a total value of £100million;
- (2) that the Interim Director of Housing be authorised to commence the procurement process for the Domestic Gas Appliance contract;
- (3) that approval be given to the alterations to the delivery model for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 2.1, for Sandwell MBC to act as Principal Contractor and procure a range of providers for energy efficiency works;
- (4) that the Interim Director of Housing be authorised to award contracts as set out in Resolutions (1) to (3) above to the successful bidders, following a compliant procurement process that meets Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Sandwell Corporate Procurement Procedures.

11/24

Allocation of Village Green Status and Park Designation - Goldicroft Playing Fields

Approval was sought for the Allocation of Village Green Status and Park Designation at Goldicroft Playing Fields.

The green spaces service had assessed the Village Green Status and Park request and had confirmed that they were satisfied that the green space could be designated as a Village Green and as a Neighbourhood Level Park.

Planning policy officers had been consulted and had confirmed there were no objections for this registration to take place.



Reason for Decision

The Friends of Goldicroft Park had made a request to the Council to consider voluntary registration under the Commons Act (Section 15.1).

Goldicroft Playing Fields was a well-used green space by the local community, with an active Friends Group in formal partnership with the Council under the Friends Group's Partnership Agreement.

The Friends Group had developed this space further as a community resource, with community days, informal sport activities, and conservation activities.

Alternative Options Considered

Do nothing – the green space would remain a green space open to the community, but would not be designated as a Village Green.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given for the site currently designated as Goldicroft Playing Fields to be amended to a Neighbourhood Level Park;
- (2) that the Assistant Director of Borough Economy be authorised to complete voluntarily self-registration under section 15(1) of the Commons Act for Goldicroft Park to be designated as a Village Green.

(Councillor Hughes declared that he had been lobbied by local residents on the proposal and did not participate in the decision making.)

12/24

Smoke Control Area and associated enforcement procedure

Approval was sought for determining the commencement date of Sandwell's new boroughwide Smoke Control Area and associated enforcement procedure.



The Council had already committed to the creation of a boroughwide smoke control area following a unanimous decision by Council members in November 2022. In February 2023 the 'Borough of Sandwell Smoke Control Order 2022' was formally declared.

On 2 August 2023 Thérèse Coffey the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) revoked Sandwell's 52 existing smoke control orders and confirmed the creation of Sandwell's new boroughwide smoke control order. There was an expectation from Defra that as a local authority with a Smoke Control Order, the Council would enforce the Order.

Defra had confirmed in writing to Sandwell's Air Quality team on 9 November 2023, that they were not aware of any other local authority with smoke control areas that would not be implementing the new financial penalty notice enforcement regime. They also reiterated that it 'was important that local authorities use these new powers in order to reduce harmful emissions of PM2.5 from solid fuel burning'.

Reason for Decision

Sandwell Council had committed to the creation of a boroughwide smoke control area following a unanimous decision by Council members in November 2022. In February 2023 the 'Borough of Sandwell Smoke Control Order 2022' was formally declared. The Order established the provision to serve civil financial penalty notices for breach of the Order.

Alternative Options Considered

Sandwell Council had undertaken a formal public consultation and committed to the introduction of a boroughwide smoke control area by declaring the 'Borough of Sandwell Smoke Control Order (SCO) 2022'.

Defra had been awaiting confirmation of the date that the SCO would come into force. The only alternative options were:

- setting an alternative date for the SCO to come into operation – legally this could not be before 3 February 2024;



- not using Council powers to serve civil financial penalty notices on those breaching the Order. The decision to recommend the option of using civil FPNs had been determined using an options appraisal;
- setting an alternative financial penalty regime for breaches of the smoke control area. For example, creating an incremental penalty scheme where fines increase incrementally with subsequent offences.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to 'The Borough of Sandwell Smoke Control Order 2022' coming into operation on 1 July 2024;
- (2) that the introduction of an enforcement procedure that includes education, engagement and support, with the option to serve civil financial penalty notices for persistent breaches of the rules, reflecting amendments to the Clean Air Act 1993 brought about by the Environment Act 2021 as set out in [Appendix 2](#) be approved.

13/24

Wednesbury Conservation Area Appraisal, Management Plan and boundary review

Approval was sought for the Wednesbury Conservation Area Appraisal, Management Plan and boundary review. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act placed a duty on local planning authorities to draw up proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to reappraise them. Local authorities were expected to ensure that an area justified designation as a conservation area because of its special architectural or historic interest, so that the concept of conservation was not devalued through the designation of areas that lacked special interest.



Reason for Decision

Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans were a recognised way of putting in place additional planning guidance and a material consideration in determining planning applications, providing a greater level of protection for heritage. The documents should assist both applicants, when making relevant planning applications and the Council in determining them.

The designation of adjacent areas that had been identified as meriting inclusion would promote the conservation of the character and appearance of the area through greater protection for historic features and buildings and resisting inappropriate change/redevelopment.

Alternative Options Considered

The Council could choose not to adopt the Conservation Area Appraisals or Management Plans. Any relevant planning application would continue to be assessed against existing planning policies (including the existing Wednesbury Conservation Area Appraisal). However, this would not allow the Council to provide additional protection to the proposed extension areas nor give enhanced practical guidance or greater clarity to the approach that should be employed applicants and decision makers.

Resolved that approval be given to Wednesbury's Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan contained at [Appendix A](#), and that the conservation area's boundaries are extended in accordance with the recommendations contained in the appraisal.

14/24

Dudley Local Plan - proposed response to draft local plan consultation

Approval was sought for the Council's response to the draft Dudley Local Plan consultation. The key issue was the impact on the wider housing and employment land supply of Dudley's decision to remove certain sites from consideration.



Dudley was proposing a reduction in the supply of land for housing in its local plan compared to that proposed in the Black Country Plan. This was a result of their intention to not allocate land that was in Green Belt.

The Black Country Plan proposed that a total of 1,117 net additional homes would be provided in Dudley over the period 2020-39 in the Green Belt. The Dudley local plan proposed 10,876 homes over the period 2023-41 (not including any in the Green Belt). Housing need in Dudley over this period was 11,954 homes (664 homes per year).

The plan stated that this would result in a shortfall of 1,078 homes. If the Green Belt sites identified for housing in the Black Country Plan were brought forward, this would meet their shortfall and create a surplus of 39 homes. This would therefore negate the need to export the shortfall of 1,078 homes to other authorities in the wider area under the Duty to Co-operate.

Until the outcome of the consultation was known Dudley were asked to look to allocate those sites that were previously found suitable and available in the Green Belt to meet their housing need in full.

Reason for Decision

Following the decisions of the four Black Country local authorities to cease work on the Black Country Plan (BCP), each authority was now beginning work on their own local plans.

Sandwell Council was currently consulting on their draft Local Plan and had identified a shortfall of 18,606 homes and 143ha of employment land. The Council was therefore reliant on neighbouring authorities to contribute to meeting our needs through the allocation of land in their respective local plans, that was additional to that required to meet their local needs.



Alternative Options Considered

If Sandwell did not respond to the consultation this would mean that future discussions on assistance with housing shortfalls may be hindered and the Council would not be able to speak at the Examination in Public to address any issues with Dudley's Local Plan.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to Sandwell's response on the draft local plan consultation for submission to Dudley MBC as set out in [Appendix 1](#);
- (2) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, the Director of Regeneration and Growth be authorised to amend the responses as necessary.

15/24

Social Value in Sandwell Policy

Approval was sought to the Social Value in Sandwell Policy. In November 2023, the Council approved the Sandwell Business Growth Plan and the economic priority of 'Social Value in Sandwell' making a commitment to develop a Social Value Policy along with a framework of support for commissioners, Sandwell's anchor organisations and contractors to employ and buy locally through embedding good social value practice within all contracts.

The emphasis of the Social Value in Sandwell Policy was to encourage the retainment of wealth within the local economy to ensure economic growth that was inclusive and benefits Sandwell communities. The Social Value in Sandwell Policy was the first step in enshrining the council's commitment into the Council's procurement practices and applied to all commissioners and planning officers within the Council.



Reason for Decision

The existing Social Value Policy (2010-2013) for Sandwell was not fit for purpose in that it did not reflect contemporary best practice and did not align with the Social Value in Sandwell priority as set out in the Sandwell Business Growth Plan, approved by Cabinet on 15 November 2023. The policy currently only applied to services and goods contracts, however, the Social Value in Sandwell Policy proposed to go further and include works contracts.

The current tendering evaluation weighting of 5-30% on Social Value for services and goods contracts was not ambitious enough, considering the contact values of services, goods and works the Council as an anchor organisation commissioned, the planning applications it determined and the investment it levers into the borough. Increasing the minimum weighting to 10% with a maximum of 30% demonstrates the Council's commitment to maximising Social Value outcomes that could be derived due to the Council's influence as an anchor organisation.

Alternative Options Considered

The Council did not adopt the Social Value in Sandwell Policy and retained the existing weightings and thresholds.

The Council considered alternative weightings and thresholds within a Social Value in Sandwell Policy.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the Social Value in Sandwell Policy that will apply to all Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council commissioners, all expenditure made on behalf of the council, for all services, goods and works contracts, and planning officers determining planning applications that are over 10 residential units or exceed 10,000 sqm;
- (2) approval be given for a tendering evaluation quality weighting of 10-30% on Social Value for all services, goods and works contracts;



(3) that in connection with Resolution (2) above, the Council be recommended to approve an update to the existing Contract Procedure Rules to reflect a 10-30% on Social Value for all services, goods and works contracts;

(4) that the Head of Procurement be authorised to determine if and how the Social Value in Sandwell Policy is applied to contracts to ensure proportionality against Social Value weightings and contract value thresholds.

16/24

Sandwell Local Development Scheme 2023

Approval was sought for the Sandwell Local Development Scheme 2023. The Local Development Scheme was the Council's three-year project plan that identified which local plan documents would be produced by the Council, in what order and by when. Any new documents would be subject to Cabinet and Full Council approval at the relevant stages.

Reason for Decision

The Council needed to review its planning documents at regular intervals to assess whether some or all of them need updating. The Local Development Scheme provided information on the timetabling of several existing approved planning documents that needed to be reviewed.

Local Planning Authorities were required to prepare their Local Development Scheme and make it available to the public; there was no longer a requirement to submit or report on them to the Secretary of State.

Alternative Options Considered

Preparation of a Local Development Scheme was a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. As such, there was no alternative to its preparation.



Resolved:-

- (1) that approval is given to the update of the Sandwell Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2022;
- (2) that the Director for Regeneration and Growth is authorised to make minor changes to the Local Development Scheme that may be required prior to making it available to the public, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA.

17/24

Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor - Initial scheme approval

Approval was sought for the initial Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor scheme. The Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transportation Package formed part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Programme approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board on 14 January 2022. The Sandwell elements of this programme had been approved by Cabinet in July 2022. Once detailed design was completed and the Outline Business Case had been assessed by WMCA, further approvals would be necessary to enable the scheme to proceed to Full Business Case and delivery.

Reason for Decision

The project was at the stage where specific approvals were required to enable it to progress through the WMCA Single Assurance Framework Process, be consulted on with the public and stakeholders, and then be taken to the next stages of design and business case preparation.

The proposed scheme would involve construction on land that sat outside of the boundary of the public highway and, in some cases, not in the ownership of the Council. The precise extent of this land would depend on the detailed design of the proposals. However, in order to safeguard the land from development which might



otherwise prevent the proposals from being implemented, it was proposed to impose highway improvement lines using powers conferred on the Council through the Town & Country Planning Act, 1990.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative option was to not deliver a highway improvement scheme at this location using the allocated City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement for this project and for this funding to be used for an alternative project which may not necessarily be in Sandwell. There was therefore a risk of losing significant investment for transport infrastructure improvements in Sandwell.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval in principle is given to the proposed sustainable transport and highway improvements that make up the Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transportation Package as shown on Drawing no. 5216493-ATK-HI-ZZ-DR-D-0113 (attached at [Appendix A](#));
- (2) that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA be authorised to approve the carrying out of public consultation in connection with Resolution (1) above;
- (3) that any objections received in connection with Resolution (2) above be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA at a future Decision Making Session;
- (4) that the Director Regeneration & Growth is authorised to approve the submission an Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority;



- (5) that approval is given for the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways to authorise the Assistant Director-Legal & Assurance in conjunction with Assistant Director-Highways to enter into an agreement with Birmingham City Council under section 8 of the Highways Act 1980;
- (6) that approval is given for the land coloured red on Drawing No. SBIGCIMPLINE-001 (attached at [Appendix B](#)) as land comprised within the sites of highways which it is proposed should be constructed, improved or altered for the purposes of Schedule 13, paragraph 15 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

18/24

Single Use Plastics Policy

Approval was sought for the Single Use Plastics Policy.

The policy provided the framework to assess, reduce and monitor our use of plastics. Reducing the amount of waste within Council offices would help reduce disposal costs. Reducing plastic waste could lead to fewer carbon dioxide emissions, a safer environment for wildlife and better human health. Implementation of the Single Use Plastics Policy would also contribute towards Council commitments laid out in the Climate Change Strategy.

The Council needed to lead by example to work with communities and businesses in helping them reduce their use of plastics, increase recycling rates and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Reason for Decision

The adoption of the Policy would ensure the Council were compliant with the Government Single Use Plastics Ban which came into force on 1 October 2023.

The Single Use Plastics Ban only addressed some Single Use Plastics and many others such as packaging, drinks bottles or plastic lined coffee cups were not included.



The policy enabled the Council to exceed the minimum requirements of the ban and take a positive lead in reducing the harmful impact of single use plastics across the borough.

Alternative Options Considered

Rejecting the policy would increase the risk of sites not being compliant with the Single Use Plastic ban and limit compliance with the Climate Change Strategy and the Council's ability to show leadership on this issue.

Aspects of the policy outside the Single Use Plastics Ban could be removed, limiting compliance with the Climate Change Strategy.

Resolved that approval be given to adopt the Single Use Plastic Policy as provided in [Appendix 1](#) in order to meet and exceed our requirements under the Government's Single Use Plastics Ban.

Meeting ended at 4.09pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



This page is intentionally left blank

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Improvement Plan Progress – Grant Thornton Follow-up Report 2023
Cabinet Member:	Leader of the Council Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
Director:	Chief Executive Shokat Lal
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Strategic Lead – Service Improvement Kate Ashley Kate1_ashley@sandwell.gov.uk Lead Officer – Service Improvement Dawn Webster Dawn_webster@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. That Cabinet receive Grant Thornton’s Value for Money Governance Review Follow Up Review Report of December 2023.
- 1.2. That Cabinet note that the Council’s response to the recommendations in Grant Thornton’s report will be incorporated into the refresh of the Improvement Plan in 2024.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Grant Thornton conducted a Value for Money Review of the council’s governance arrangements in Autumn 2021. Their report was received by Cabinet on 15 December 2021 and Council on 18 January 2022. Their report made three statutory recommendations, which the council are legally required to respond to and address. These were incorporated into the council’s Improvement Plan approved in June 2022.



- 2.2 As part of the council’s assurance framework for the Improvement Plan, Grant Thornton reviewed progress in a follow-up review in Autumn 2022. At that point, Grant Thornton retained the three statutory recommendations and made four new key recommendations and improvement recommendations against the Key Lines of Enquiry of the Value for Money Governance Review. These recommendations were built into the refreshed Improvement Plan approved by Cabinet in March 2023.
- 2.3 Grant Thornton have conducted a further follow-up review in Autumn 2023 to determine the council’s progress in addressing the statutory recommendations made in 2021, as well as the key and improvement recommendations of their 2022 follow-up review. This external perspective is a key source of evidence of the council’s improvement journey under government intervention.
- 2.4 The Improvement Plan is a ‘live’ document and is updated on a quarterly basis to reflect progress and incorporate new activities. The recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their 2023 follow-up review will be incorporated into the Improvement Plan to ensure that the council’s improvement journey continues to address the key issues arising.

3. How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Sandwell Council’s Improvement Plan focuses on the governance arrangements of the council and areas of improvement across the organisation. The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure that the council is able to deliver on the aims and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The deliverables set out in this Improvement Plan will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the council operates and is able to make effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents and experiences of service users. Therefore, this impacts on the council’s ability to deliver all the objectives in the Corporate Plan.</p>
---	---



4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Governance Review – Background and Scope

4.1.1 Grant Thornton's Value for Money Governance Review was conducted in the Autumn of 2021. The scope of the review covered seventeen key lines of enquiry, split into two categories:

- Services and Management; and
- Meetings, Complaints and Relationships.

4.1.2 In their original report, Grant Thornton made a series of 45 recommendations, made up of:

- 3 Statutory Recommendations
- 5 Key Recommendations
- 37 Improvement Recommendations

4.1.3 These recommendations, along with those from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and CIPFA's Financial Management Review, were incorporated into the council's single overarching Improvement Plan.

4.1.4 At the time of publishing the original report in late November 2021, Grant Thornton had not completed their investigation into the line of enquiry relating to the 'Governance and Legal Support to Director of Public Health'. This line of enquiry was concluded in Autumn 2022, and Grant Thornton reissued their full report in December 2022 to include four additional improvement recommendations to the council.

4.1.5 In their first follow-up review in Autumn 2022, Grant Thornton recognised the significant progress made on a number of their original recommendations. At this point, the statutory recommendations remained in place with a further four Key Recommendations and 25 improvement recommendations. In some cases, these recommendations built on those made in 2022 and recognising the progress made on the council's improvement journey to date. The council's response to these 29 new recommendations and the four additional recommendations from the updated 2021 report (a total of 33 recommendations in 2022) was reported to Cabinet in March 2023. The actions required to address the recommendations were incorporated into the refresh of the Improvement Plan at the same time.



4.1.6 The follow-up review of December 2023 considered progress against the three statutory recommendations and the 33 key and improvement recommendations made in 2022. The scope of Grant Thornton's review included 13 of the 18 original key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) – five KLOEs had been considered concluded in 2022 and therefore were not reported in the follow-up review of Autumn 2023.

4.2 Key Findings and Recommendations

4.2.1 From their follow-up review in Autumn 2023 (Appendix 1), Grant Thornton have determined that they are “*satisfied that the Council has made appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations, and these can now be lifted*”.

4.2.2 With regards to the 13 KLOEs reviewed at this point, Grant Thornton found “*no evidence of any significant weaknesses for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages risk*”.

4.2.3 In their December 2023 report, Grant Thornton have made four key recommendations. Context for these recommendations are included in Grant Thornton's report, and are set out here for ease of reference:

1. The Council must ensure that the changes in train relating to transformation are concluded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural and behavioural changes become successfully embedded and result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required, so that the Council remains financially sustainable in the medium-term. This includes ensuring that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken on asset disposals that ensure associated savings targets in the MTFP are realised.
2. The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer experience, and this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and having appropriate data available to measure all customer related KPIs.



3. The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, place based working with SCT and the effective management of SCT's operational and financial challenges, industrial action in the waste service, putting a clear plan in place for the subsidy to SLT being eliminated, financial statement production and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.
4. The Council will need to manage the risks associated with the Senior Management restructure, including organisational change fatigued and resistance, the loss of corporate memory and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of the new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

4.2.4 Grant Thornton's findings and the lifting of the Statutory Recommendations represents a significant milestone in the council's improvement journey towards ending government intervention, and is further evidence that the council continues to improve over time.

4.2.5 The key recommendations and the further 26 improvement recommendations made by Grant Thornton in their 2023 report will be integral to reframing the council's improvement journey to ensure it continues to focus on key issues and that improvements made remain sustainable. These recommendations will be incorporated into the refresh of the Improvement Plan and will provide further direction for the next stage of the council's improvement journey.

4.3 Risk Management

4.1.1 The Improvement Plan Risk Register underpins the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22) and is currently rated as an overall Amber risk. The risk register is reported monthly to Leadership Team and quarterly to Cabinet and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.



4.1.2 Within the Improvement Plan Risk Register, a number of risks identified Grant Thornton’s follow up report as part of the assurance as to the likelihood of those risks materialising. The Risk Register will be reviewed as part of the regular programme management of the Improvement Plan, and the impact of the follow-up report on risk scores will be reported to Cabinet as part of the next quarterly update.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 The Governance Review was undertaken as part of the external auditor’s role to provide assurance on the council’s arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, and therefore the report is a public document. The council must also provide a management response that sets out how it intends to act upon the recommendations made in the report. There are no alternative options to consider.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Resources to deliver the Improvement Plan have been allocated from within existing commitments in the majority of cases. Where one-off funding is required to deliver improvements, this will either be funded from the Improvement and Capacity Fund or from earmarked reserves created from 2021/22 underspend position. Allocation of this funding was approved by Council with the Improvement Plan on 7 June 2022.</p> <p>Where funding is required for longer-term change, this will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.</p> <p>There are no land or building implications associated with the Improvement Plan as a whole.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The Governance Review was conducted under Sections 20 and 21 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, and the council is legally required to demonstrate that action is being or will be taken to address issues raised in the report.</p>



	<p>On 22 March 2022, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued Directions under Section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the 1999 Act) in order to ensure that the council can comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act. Failure to comply with these Directions may lead to further intervention measures for the council.</p> <p>The delivery of the Improvement Plan and achievement of the desired outcomes will meet the remainder of the Directions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the changes made through the Improvement Plan will enable the council to effectively deliver its strategic priorities and ensure it is delivering value for money for Sandwell.</p>
Risk:	<p>If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the government Direction, or the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act. This could lead to further government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.</p> <p>A risk register is being maintained for the duration of the Improvement Plan which will underpin the council's strategic risk relating to the council's Improvement Plan (59a 02/22). This is reported monthly to Leadership Team, quarterly to Cabinet, and will be regularly reported to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.</p>
Equality:	<p>The successful delivery of the Improvement Plan will require the development and review of many of the council's policies and procedures. These changes will be built in consideration of the impact on equalities</p>



	throughout the development and will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate.
Health and Wellbeing:	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. These priorities focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way. Therefore, any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to deliver services that will improve the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.
Social Value:	Within the Improvement Plan, the council is committed to developing its Social Value Policy in conjunction with the refresh of the Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules. Through strengthening our asks of contractors through this Social Value Policy and linking them to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council will be able to maximise its social value return.
Climate Change:	The underpinning objective of the Improvement Plan is to ensure the council is able to achieve the strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. Green in everything we do is one of the Fairer Sandwell principles running throughout the Corporate Plan. Any improvements to the council's governance structures will strengthen the council's ability to embed this principle and further the climate change agenda.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no Corporate Parenting implications of this report.

7. Appendices

1. Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report, December 2023

8. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Improvement Plan](#)
- Approval of Sandwell Council Improvement Plan [Report to Council 7 June 2022](#)



- Reports to the Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing and Communities:
 - June 2022 Reports
 - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, June 2022](#)
 - December 2022 Reports:
 - [Sandwell Council Report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022](#)
 - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: second report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, December 2022 \(published March 2023\)](#)
 - [Ministerial response to second letter \(March 2023\)](#)
 - June 2023
 - [Sandwell Council Commissioners: third report to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, June 2023 \(published July 2023\)](#)
 - [Ministerial response to third letter \(July 2023\)](#)
- Improvement Plan Progress Reports:
 - To Council:
 - [12 December 2023](#)
 - [13 June 2023](#)
 - [13 December 2022](#)
 - To Cabinet:
 - [December 2023](#)
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [December 2022](#) including LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Nov 2022
 - [September 2022](#)
 - To Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [January 2023 \(External Review Reports\)](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)



- [June 2022](#)
- To Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board
 - [September 2023](#)
 - [June 2023](#)
 - [March 2023](#)
 - [November 2022](#)
 - [September 2022](#)

- External Review Reports
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review Follow-up Report 2022](#)
 - [Grant Thornton Value for Money Governance Review December 2021 – reissued October 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report 2022](#)
 - [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report February 2022](#)
 - [CIPFA Financial Management Report January 2022](#)





Page 43

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Value for Money Governance Review – follow up

Year ended 31 March 2023

15 December 2023



Contents

Page 44



Your key Grant Thornton
team members are:

Mark Stocks
Audit Partner

T: 0121 232 5437

E: mark.c.stocks@uk.gt.com

Guy Clifton
Director

020 7728 2903

E: guy.clifton@uk.gt.com

Section	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Key Findings	6
3. Detailed Findings	15
Appendix	
A. The scope of the auditor's work on value for money arrangements	49
B. Improvement Recommendations	50

The contents of this report relate only to those matters which came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed for the purpose of completing our work under the NAO Code and related guidance. Our audit is not designed to test all arrangements in respect of value for money. However, where, as part of our testing, we identify significant weaknesses, we will report these to you. In consequence, our work cannot be relied upon to disclose all irregularities, or to include all possible improvements in arrangements that a more extensive special examination might identify. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

Grant Thornton UK LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales: No.OC307742. Registered office: 30 Finsbury Square, London, EC2A 1AG. A list of members is available from our registered office. Grant Thornton UK LLP is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Grant Thornton UK LLP is a member firm of Grant Thornton International Ltd (GTIL). GTIL and the member firms are not a worldwide partnership. Services are delivered by the member firms. GTIL and its member firms are not agents of, and do not obligate, one another and are not liable for one another's acts or omissions.

Introduction

Context, background and scope of the review (Cont'd)

Our approach

Our work in relation to this review was undertaken between September and November 2023.

Stage 1 – Review of key documents

We submitted an information request for key documents and then undertook a desk top review to reach an initial conclusion on the nature of further work required.

Stage 2 – Further Analysis and Clarifications

We then undertook interviews with key stakeholders in relation to each recommendation to clarify issues identified during stage one and to undertake more detailed analysis. A total of 27 stakeholders have been met during this follow up review.

Our approach is designed to assess:

- Governance arrangements in place in relation to our scope;
- Council performance against these arrangements; and
- Identify any significant weaknesses and risks.

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the assistance provided by council officers, council members, and external stakeholders with whom we have engaged during the course of our review.

Additional VfM Code Work

We have identified governance arrangements as an audit risk. This requires additional work to inform our auditor's judgement on VfM.

The work has been undertaken in line with the requirements of the Code and associated auditor guidance. This review helps us discharge our responsibilities under the Code and will include the reporting of any significant weaknesses in arrangements and other points for improvement identified during the review.

Any fee variation is subject to approval from Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) which is responsible for appointing auditors and setting audit fees for relevant authorities that have chosen to opt into its national scheme of auditor appointments.



Key findings

Context, background and scope of the review

Context to our VfM approach

Sections 20 and 21 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) require auditors to be satisfied that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This is known as the Value for Money (VfM) conclusion.

Our VfM work is carried out in line with the Code of Audit Practice (the Code) which is prepared by the National Audit Office (NAO) under the Act, and its supporting statutory guidance: Auditor Guidance Note 3 (AGN 03).

A revised Code came into force on 1 April 2020, after being approved by Parliament. The Code requires auditors to structure their VfM commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services;
- Governance: how the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Financial sustainability: how the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services.

Background to this review

On the 3 December 2021 we published our report setting out the findings of our review of the Council's governance arrangements, which formed part of our 2020/21 VfM audit.

Our report set out significant weaknesses in the Council's governance arrangements, and was presented to full Council on 18 January 2022, along with the Council's Improvement Plan which set out the Council's response to our recommendations. The Grant Thornton report and the Improvement Plan were approved by the Council at this meeting. On the same day the then Local Government Minister at the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) announced the government was mindful to intervene in the Council because of the findings set out in our governance report.

The Council commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to undertake a review of the Council's financial management and governance arrangements using the CIPFA Financial Management Model. CIPFA reported their findings and recommendations in January 2022. In addition, the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge review for the Council, reporting its findings and recommendations in February 2022.

On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for DLUHC issued statutory directions under section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999. These directions appointed two Commissioners who will oversee all functions associated with the governance and scrutiny of strategic decision making by the Council. The directions will be in force until March 2024, unless the Secretary of State considers it appropriate to amend or revoke them at an earlier date. These directions are in addition to the ones that led to the creation of Sandwell Children's Trust.

The Council expanded its Improvement Plan developed in response to our December 2021 governance report to incorporate its response to the findings of the CIPFA and LGA reviews. Both the Commissioners and the Council provide updates on progress on delivering the Implementation Plan to the Secretary of State for DLUHC every six months.

On 2 December 2022 we published our follow up report, which related to our 2021/22 VfM audit. This considered the progress made by the Council against the recommendations set out in our 2021 report. The 2022 report noted significant progress being made by the Council in many areas, but also included new key and improvement recommendations.

This 2023 follow up review, which relates to our 2022/23 VfM audit, considers what further progress has been made by the Council on our most recent recommendations. This does not represent a review of the Council's Improvement Plan which, as already noted, draws on a wider set of actions than those relating to the recommendations set out in our reports.

This further review, along with other VfM related activity including a high-level review of Oracle Fusion implementation, has been undertaken in order for us to consider whether there are any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. Our overall VfM conclusions for 2022/23 will be set out in a separate Auditor's Annual Report.

Overview

Introduction

A range of different recommendations can be raised by a council's auditors as follows:

- **Statutory Recommendations:** written recommendations to the Council under section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the Council to discuss and respond publicly to the report.
- **Key Recommendations:** the NAO Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses as part of their arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the Council. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.
- **Improvement Recommendations:** these recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the Council, but are not a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements.

Further detail on the scope of auditor's work on VfM arrangements can be found at Appendix A.

Our December 2021 report included the following:

- 3 statutory recommendations,
- 5 key recommendations, and
- 37 improvement recommendations.

A further 3 improvement recommendations were added when this report was published in October 2022 incorporating KLOE A8.

Our December 2022 report included:

- 4 key recommendations, and
- 25 improvement recommendations.

This report also retained the three statutory recommendations made in our December 2021 report.

Key Lines of Enquiry

The scope of our original 2021 review covered 17 Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs):

SERVICES & MANAGEMENT	
A1	The Children's Trust
A2	Sandwell Leisure Trust
A3	Providence Place
A4	Special Educational Needs Transport
A5	Sandwell Land and Property Company
A6	MADE festival
A7	Waste service
A8	Governance and legal support re DPH
A9	Lion Farm
A10	Introduction of new ERP system (Oracle)

MEETINGS, COMPLAINTS & RELATIONSHIPS	
B1	Chief Officers
B2	Senior Leadership
B3	Complaints
B4	Officers and members relationships
B5	Standards Committee
B6	Audit Committee
B7	Financial Reporting

As part of the 2022 follow up review we also considered how the Council engaged with residents and community stakeholders (KLOE B8).

Our findings in relation to KLOE A8 were not included in our December 2021 report, instead they were included in an update to this original report published on 17 October 2022. As a result, our follow up review in 2022 did not consider progress against KLOE A8 recommendations, and these have been considered as part of this 2023 follow up review.

In this section we summarise our key findings on the Council's progress. Our detailed findings relating to each Key Line of Enquiry are set out in a separate section. The following KLOEs were judged in our 2022 report to have appropriate arrangements in place with no improvement recommendations, and so are not reported as part of this follow up: KLOEs, A5, A6, A9, B1 and B3.

Key Findings

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

Page 50

Statutory Recommendation 1: It is imperative that senior officers and senior members take effective corporate grip of long-standing service issues highlighted by the findings in this report: (including SLT, SCT, the waste service, the ERP system, and Lion Farm) and prioritise corporate effort in managing the issues identified, and embed the solutions into the Council.

Key Findings

Our 2022 report noted that the Council had demonstrated a greater corporate grip over improvement, performance and decision making.

This progress has continued over the following twelve months and includes:

- Refreshing the Improvement Plan to reflect further external reviews and align it to the refreshed Corporate Plan.
- The Performance Management Framework has been rationalised to reduce the number of metrics to allow better focus and alignment to strategic priorities.
- Conclusion of the final phase of a widespread review of the Council's governance arrangements and constitution.
- Members have demonstrated their ability to take difficult decisions, such in relation to garden waste and the decision relating to the former Brandhall golf course site.
- Demonstrating agile and decisive decision making to not proceed with the LATC and instead extend the contract with SLT
- Introduction of a Transformation Strategy and Transformation Programme Board, and a Programme Management Office is being created and a programme management framework has been designed to ensure consistency of practice in project management and project governance across the Council.
- Evidence of greater rigour to financial planning and the identification of savings.
- The direction of travel with key partners, such as with Serco and SLT, remains positive.

Corporate grip has continued to improve on some of the service and management issues identified in our original report, including Oracle Fusion, and managing the risk of industrial action in the waste service. There has been less progress in some areas. In particular, there has been slow progress in improving the financial statement process and the finance team continues to rely on interim appointments.

Also, the Council needs to place greater emphasis is required working with SCT on area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership, continue to monitor the social worker vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates, and that SCT realises the planned Invest to Save savings targets which will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget returning the invest to save payments to the Council .

In addition, there needs to be continued focus on transformation activity to support Medium-Term Financial Planning. The scale of the savings required over the medium-term, alongside plans to provide better value services and enhancing the customer journey, means that the Council's new approach to corporate transformation is critical to the financial sustainability of the Council over the medium-term, and its ability to deliver high quality services. The Council must ensure that these recent changes are concluded and become embedded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural changes planned, successfully result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required.

Good progress has been made in relation to customer journey with a particular focus on the Council "front door". The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer journey so that this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics and should ensure that appropriate data is available to measure all customer related KPIs.

Statutory Recommendation 2: The Council must ensure that the learning in relation to commercial decisions, procurement and contract management highlighted in this report are understood through the organisation.

Key Findings

The Council now incorporates lessons learnt in its annual business planning process and has been effective in sharing the lessons from the SEND Transport procurement. The contract management of major contracts with Serco, SLT and SCT is now more effective and lessons have been learned in relation to the initial Oracle Fusion decision being made with no full business case.

Key Findings

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

Statutory Recommendation 2 Key Findings (cont'd)

The Council has demonstrated greater awareness and responsiveness to identifying and responding to contract management weaknesses, such as those recently identified in housing services.

The development and implementation of a commercial strategy forms part of the Improvement Plan. The Council acknowledges that it needs to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including plans to adopt a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate, and changes to the way some services are managed such as leisure. Progress on an overarching commercial strategy has not progressed and from our stakeholder meetings there appears to be confusion over what the term commercial means. The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council's transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions. Given the difficulties that other councils have encountered with their commercial strategies, where for some it has led to significant financial distress, the Council should be proportionate in setting its commercial strategy and should not expose the Council to significant risk.

Statutory Recommendation 3: Senior leadership, both officers and members, must demonstrate that they can continue to work together effectively, that they operate in line with the Council's values, codes, policies and procedures, and that there is zero tolerance to inappropriate behaviours. This includes changing the organisational culture in relation to complaints so that they restore balance and proportionality.

Key Findings

The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.

The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

The introduction of the One Team Framework provides clarity on how the Council should deliver its organisational values and behaviours to support its ongoing improvement journey.

The Current Position

The themes set out our December 2021 report illustrated how the Council's then behaviours and legacy issues were impacting on good governance and decision making. This report noted that the Council's leadership had started to make some necessary changes and that "green shoots" were in place to deliver the widespread transformation and changes required.

Our December 2022 report noted the Improvement Plan had been key for creating and maintaining a focus on the required improvements, and the Council had made significant progress on many of the recommendations made in our 2021 report, supported by the creation of additional capacity in some key areas. The Council had put in place the foundations to deliver the sustainable improvements that were needed, and significant improvements were already being made.

Those foundations have been built on over the past twelve months and the Council remains on a positive improvement trajectory. The Council will need to demonstrate bold and charismatic leadership to manage its next phase of improvement, with the planned Senior Management restructure presenting some significant opportunities as well as risks to be managed.

The Council has plans to bring in strategic leadership capacity, reduce the number of Directorates and to delayer the number of Director roles to reduce silos and hierarchies, improve joint working and decision making across service lines. It is hopeful that in making these changes that it will accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Council's improvement plan.

These plans appear reasonable. However, we note that this type of change brings risk. These include the use interim Directors during the transition period to the new structure, possible change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and difficulties in retaining key staff during this period of change.

Key Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary update of the Council's progress in relation to the key findings and statutory and key recommendations in our December 2021 and December 2022 reports.

The Current Position (Cont'd)

The management of these issues and the successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure

The Council's new transformation arrangements will be essential for identifying and realising savings and improving customer value and service quality. The success of the Council's transformation plans are integral to its medium-term financial sustainability. Of equal importance is the embedding of the cultural and behavioural change set out in the One Team Framework.

The Council has made good progress on the customer journey and now needs to expand its focus from first customer contact (the "front door") to measure the full customer experience. The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, place-based working with SCT, industrial action in the waste service, financial statement production, and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.

We note that the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still require significant improvement. As at 6 December 2023 we had not been provided with the draft financial statements. The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production. If the 2021/22 accounts are not made available for audit by 31 December 2023 or are of poor quality we will need to consider the further use of our statutory powers.

The Council retains a challenging agenda of delivering business as usual alongside improvement and transformation and it must maintain the pace of change so that progress does not plateau or fall backwards. The external environment remains challenging for all councils, including uncertainty on the level of future government funding, a potential change in national government with a general expected sometime during 2024, alongside the impact of the ongoing cost of living crisis on businesses and communities.

Members and the senior leadership have responded to government intervention in a commendable way, and the Council is now more responsive and has a much better understanding of what good looks like. Intervention may conclude at the end of March 2024, which would require the Commissioners to make this recommendation to government, and the Minister to agree. It is therefore imperative that the arrangements now in place ensure continued improvement should intervention cease, and the Commissioners depart their roles.

With changes planned to senior management during 2024, and potential changes to Cabinet during the year ahead, the Council must provide confidence to the Commissioners and to the government that their improvement plans for the coming twelve to eighteen months will be delivered.

Conclusions and recommendations

We are satisfied that the Council has made appropriate progress against the three statutory recommendations, and these can now be lifted.

We found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in relation to 13 of the 18 KLOES that we have reviewed. There therefore remain some matters that represent significant weakness for ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and we have made four key recommendations, which are set out on the following page. This is followed by our summary findings for each KLOE.

Our detailed findings are set out in the next section of the report. We have identified various improvement recommendations throughout the report, which are summarised at Appendix B.

Key recommendations

Page 53
Improvement recommendations are made throughout this report, and these are summarised at Appendix B. Our key recommendations are summarised below.

#	Key Recommendation
1.	The Council must ensure that the changes in train relating to transformation are concluded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural and behavioural changes become successfully embedded and result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required, so that the Council remains financially sustainable in the medium-term. This includes ensuring that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken on asset disposals that ensure associated savings targets in the MTFP are realised.
2.	The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer experience, and this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and having appropriate data available to measure all customer related KPIs.
3.	The Council should retain corporate focus and attention on key service and operational risks, in particular the implementation of Oracle Fusion, placed based working with SCT and the effective management of SCT's operational and financial challenges, industrial action in the waste service, putting a clear plan in pace for the subsidy to SLT being eliminated, financial statement production, and reducing reliance on the level of interim appointments in the finance team.
4.	The Council will need to manage the risks associated with the Senior Management restructure, including organisational change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

Management responses to these and the improvement recommendations are included in a separate Council report.

KLOEs: Summary Findings

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
A1: The Children's Trust	The Council is now much more effective in its approach to and relationships with the Trust, including more effective contract management. The recent Ofsted inspection of adoption services demonstrates a continued positive direction of travel. However, there remain some significant challenges in relation to SCT's ability to deliver planned savings and manage its finances within the contract sum, and for both the Council and SCT in wider system and partnership working.
A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust	The Council now has improved governance arrangements in place, and should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is in line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.
A3: Providence Place	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. A recommendation was made in relation to the asset management strategy and system whilst good progress has been made, the Council needs to fully implement to realise the planned benefits.
A4: SEND Transport	Our 2022 report noted that this matter has now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There was one improvement recommendation for the Council to ensure that the lessons learned are shared across other council services so that this learning becomes embedded across the organisation. Our 2023 review has confirmed that appropriate arrangements are now in place, with one improvement recommendation made.
A5: SLaP	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
A6: MADE Festival	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
A7: Waste Service	Our 2023 review found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in arrangements. The relationships between the Council and Serco remain on an upward trajectory, with how they jointly responded to the industrial action a recent positive example. The Council has taken steps to work more effectively with Serco on areas such as collection policies, and Serco has demonstrated a more effective approach to the annual service delivery planning process. The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council, and the Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.
A8: Governance and legal support to DPH	Our 2022 report did not follow up on this KLOE due to it being reported in October 2022. Our 2023 review found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements. The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.

KLOEs: Summary Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
A9: Lion Farm	Our 2022 report noted that the Council had taken all possible actions to resolve this matter and has a clear way forward. There were no recommendations to follow up in our 2023 review.
A10: Introduction of new ERP System	The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring-fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks. However, there have been further delays and associated increased costs resulting in the decision to phase the go live dates. The risks associated with poor and ineffective implementation remain significant.
B1: Chief Officers	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
B2: Senior Leadership	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. A new Chief Executive has been appointed and has made a positive impact. The impact of the senior management restructure, including the introduction of interim Directors, is a prelude of the instability and uncertainty resulting from the significant changes planned. The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.
B3: Complaints	Our 2022 report noted that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place. There were no recommendations to follow up as part of our 2023 review.
B4: Office and Member Relationships	The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees. The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

KLOEs: Summary Findings (Cont'd)

This section provides a summary of the key findings on each KLOE.

KLOE	Summary Findings
B5: Standards Committee	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and made one improvement recommendation. Our 2023 review identified one improvement recommendation confirmed that appropriate arrangements continue to be in place and no improvement recommendations are made.
B6: Audit Committee	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, and made one improvement recommendation. Our 2023 review has confirmed that appropriate arrangements remain in place and no improvement recommendations have been made.
B7: Financial Reporting	The CIPFA follow up Financial Management review identified improvement across various areas of financial management, but significant progress remains for the finance team to become fully effective. In particular, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still requires significant improvement.
B8: Engagement with Residents and Community Groups	Our 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. Our 2023 review identified appropriate arrangements remain in place, and the Council should continue to build on the progress that has been made in engaging with residents so that it continues to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

Detailed Findings

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Governance Review

The Council instigated a review of its governance arrangements following issues identified by our 2021 VfM governance review, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review and the CIPFA Financial Management review. Our 2022 report provided an update on the first two phases of this review.

The third and final phase was concluded with a report to full Council on 13 December 2022, with changes agreed to the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, Financial Regulations and Procedure Rules, Remaining Articles, and Responsibility for Functions.

Going forward an annual review of the Constitution will take place.

Phase 3 included an amendment to the key decision threshold which has increased the threshold for delegated decisions, with the virement threshold now £500k for chief officers, between £500k and £1m relevant Cabinet members and over £1m Cabinet. Any delegated decisions still require a report and decision notice. All significant spending decisions, determined as impacting on two or more wards, remains a decision for full Cabinet. We have been advised that this has reduced the number of decisions going to Cabinet, allowing more effective conducting of Cabinet business.

Training on changes to the constitution has been undertaken with officers and members. This has included updates on procurement, contract management and financial regulations.

The Council is also progressing improvements to the workflow of report drafting and approval, using the Modern.Gov system, to ensure that decision making is timely and draft reports receive appropriate reviews.

A change to the approach for electing the Mayor has been agreed. Previously this was decided by the controlling administration, and will now be based on the longest serving councillor, with the deputy mayor being the next longest serving councillor.

The Council has now concluded a comprehensive review of the constitution and governance arrangements with plans in place for an annual review.

Improvement Plan

The Council developed an improvement plan in response to our original VfM Governance review which, as already noted, has been expanded to incorporate the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review and the CIPFA Financial Management review.

The Improvement Plan was also developed in line with the Secretary of State for DLUHC's Statutory Direction

This single Improvement Plan was agreed by full Council on 7 June 2022 and structured around the following six themes:

- Organisational Culture
- Corporate Oversight
- Strategic Direction
- Decision Making
- Procurement and Commercial
- Partnership and Relationships

Each theme has a clear set of deliverables, milestones and responsibilities which will be used to track our progress against expected timescales.

Grant Thornton, CIPFA and the LGA undertook follow up reviews during Autumn 2022. The Improvement Plan was updated to reflect the findings of these follow up reviews in January 2023 and was reported to Cabinet in 2023 as phase 2 of the Plan, which incorporated the recently concluded work on corporate values and behaviours

An Improvement Plan Monitoring Tool has been developed to include both a risk rating for each main action within the Improvement Plan and a progress status rating for all actions, and these form part of the quarterly reporting approach.

The Improvement Plan is monitored monthly, and updates are provided to the Leadership Team and Cabinet on a quarterly basis. An annual report on progress is produced, most recently in May 2023.

The Improvement Plan is intended to be a live document updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. Changes to the Improvement Plan are tracked through programme management mechanism.

The Cabinet approved a revised Corporate Plan and a new Young People's Corporate Plan on 7 June 2023. The Council reviewed and updated the Improvement Plan ensure alignment with the updated Corporate Plan.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

The Improvement Plan (Cont'd)

The first theme of the Improvement Plan is organisational culture and during Autumn 2022 a series of listening sessions were undertaken with staff, with over 500 engaging via attendance at events or the completion of surveys. Feedback was consolidated during November and December 2022, to support the development of the Council's One Team Framework, which sets out the values and behaviours expected. This was approved by Cabinet on 15 March 2023 and the agreed values were:

- We are one team: united and working together with the shared purpose of achieving great results.
- We are customer focused: caring about providing the best possible public service.
- We are inclusive: treating each other with respect and knowing our diversity is our strength.
- We are ambitious: striving for excellence, always looking to get better and making sure everyone can take pride in our borough.
- We are accountable: delivering what we say we will.

The One Team Framework aims to provide clarity on how the Council should deliver its organisational values and ensure that values and behaviours form an integral part of the Council's People/Workforce Strategy. The Framework sets out the expected behaviours from everyone and from leaders, with an ambition that everyone will behave as leaders.

A network of culture champions has been established to support the launch of the Framework and its ongoing delivery. The Chief Executive met over 400 managers as part of launch across eight staff engagement sessions.

The introducing of clear expectations on values and behaviours is a positive step taken by the Council, and will be critical to support its ongoing improvement journey. Embedding cultural and behavioural change is not straight forward and takes considerable time, focus and effort. [The Council has not yet concluded introducing a "golden thread" that aligns corporate plans to individual's annual performance reviews, and this approach should be progressed to include the behaviours set out in the One Team Framework, so that expected values and behaviours can be monitored and measured \(Improvement Recommendation\).](#)

Medium-Term Financial Planning

The Council has continued the "star chamber" approach to support budget setting, which took place during Summer 2023. This exercise resulted in a basket of savings options being put forward to Cabinet for approval and to consult on further, prior to making formal decisions on the budget in February 2024. These initial savings options amounted to £18m in 2024/25.

For the first time, the Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team held an away day during September 2023 to discuss the MTFP and options for savings and discussed key financial principles, such as council tax levels. We have been advised that members of Cabinet have responded very favourably to the away day and how it has improved their understanding of the financial challenges facing the Council and the options available to manage these challenges. Further budget workshops were taking place at the time of our review.

The Cabinet approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27, and the associated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), at its meeting on 15 November 2023, reflecting an estimate of the Council's financial position as at October 2023, and noting that the figures will change as further updating takes place. The Council has commenced a resident engagement exercise through the summer of 2023 and this, together with the Consultation and Engagement Plan forms the Council's proposed approach to consulting during the 2024/25 budget setting process. This was underway at the time of our review. The MTFS and MTFP will be further updated for the meetings of the Executive, Budget Scrutiny and Full Council in January and February 2024.

A new business planning approach has been introduced for 2024-27 which aims to better align service and financial planning to the Corporate Plan and MTFS, drive consistency and continuous improvement across the Council including incorporating lessons learnt, better integrate performance metrics and resident feedback, and embed One Council Values and Behaviours. Business planning workshops were taking place in November and December 2023 to support the budget setting process.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Medium-Term Financial Planning (cont'd)

The senior leadership team have demonstrated a much greater grip of medium-term financial planning, but there remains further work to do in order to fully understand and agree the principles that underpin the MTFs, for example the approach to reserve levels. The senior leadership team should make time to agree clear objectives for financial planning, and the financial, organisational and behavioural actions required to achieve these objectives (Improvement Recommendation).

The position of the MTFP as at October 2023 forecast funding gaps, which represent savings requirements, of 3.8% of the revised net revenue budget in 2024/25 rising to 10.3% of the revised net revenue budget in 2026/27.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£m	£m	£m
Current net budget	317.103	317.103	317.103
Budget pressures and adjustments	28.272	49.723	66.727
Revised net budget	345.375	366.826	383.83
Funding	-332.412	-338.158	-344.476
Net deficit before savings	12.963	28.668	39.354
Savings required as % of net budget	3.8	7.8	10.3

These are significant savings targets to identify and deliver, in the context of existing budgetary pressures, and will inevitably require difficult political decision to be made. The majority of the £13m saving required to balance the 2024/25 budget will need to be recurring in nature.

The importance of the Council's transformation programme, alongside its improvement plan, will be critical to ensuring these medium-term financial challenges are effectively managed. The Council's approach to transformation is discussed in the section that follows.

Corporate Transformation

The Council is developing a transformational approach to delivering savings, and a Transformation Strategy has been produced – called Creating a Council for the Future - with the objective of providing better value services and enhancing the customer journey.

The transformation strategy is a blend of key directorate projects and some critical corporate cross-cutting projects. The corporate projects include Oracle Fusion implementation and a review of business support services, a digital strategy, and a customer journey programme. Key directorate projects include SEND, leisure review, waste review, housing repairs, and asset and estate rationalisation. The Council's new values and behaviours are integral to the transformation strategy.

A corporate PMO framework was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team in August 2023. Local Partnerships supported the Council in the framework's development, including sharing best practice adopted by other councils. The framework has been designed to ensure consistency of practice in project management and project governance across the Council.

A corporate transformation board has been established to oversee all transformation projects and monitor the transformation project pipeline, with the Director of Finance as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). There are plans to establish sub-programme boards relating to the key transformation themes (corporate, people, assets and place), that will report to the corporate transformation board. Transformation activity will form part of the business planning and performance management workshops that were being undertaken at the time of our review. Quarterly reporting to Cabinet and the Leadership Team is planned.

The Council established a Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO), following slippage to the original timescale, in September 2023. This includes a corporate transformation office to support transformation activity and project assurance across the Council, and new roles have been created which were being recruited to at the time of our review. The Council is further considering how it could augment the skills and capacity of the PMO by the use of external consultants.

The Council has purchased licences to Verto, a project management software system, which at the time of our review had been through user testing and was in the process of being rolled out to those in the Council involved in project management. Verto is expected to support the PMO Framework by providing a standard approach to project management and reporting. The Council's learning and development team are putting in place a training programme for users of Verto, with the go live date for its use planned for April 2024.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Corporate Transformation (cont'd)

The PMO has introduced a project threshold tool, which assesses the value, risk, capacity and complexity of a project to determine the level of PMO support and governance required across four levels (intense, high, medium or low). All projects, regardless of this level, will be reported on Verto.

The Council has made positive steps to introduce a clear structure, resources, governance arrangements, and related processes to manage its transformation activity, which at the time of our review had not fully concluded.

The scale of the savings required over the medium-term, alongside plans to provide better value services and enhancing the customer journey, means that this new approach to corporate transformation is critical to the financial sustainability of the Council and its ability to deliver high quality services. **The Council must ensure that these changes are concluded and become embedded so that the transformation strategy, transformation business cases, and associated cultural changes planned, successfully result in identifying and realising the organisational changes and savings required (Key Recommendation).**

There is currently no over-arching framework on the use and appointment of external consultants, with services independently making such appointments. **As part of the new transformation arrangements the Council should ensure there is corporate oversight of the use of external consultants, including how such commissions align to the Council's transformation strategy (Improvement Recommendation).**

Performance Management Framework

On 12 April 2022 the Council approved a Corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF) to monitor delivery of the Corporate Plan. Our previous report set out the structure of the PMF. On a quarterly basis, the Council gathers and analyses a wide range of data and information to understand how effectively its plans are being implemented and whether the strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan are being achieved.

As already noted, the Cabinet approved a revised Corporate Plan on 7 June 2023, and the PMF was reviewed and updated to align to the new Corporate Plan. There were 244 measures in the corporate performance indicator set, and these were revised to 208. The intention is that by having a smaller, more aligned, and focused number of corporate performance indicators, reporting of the PMF will better highlight performance matters in the key areas of strategic importance and what action is being taken, or needs to be taken, in response.

The new corporate performance indicator set will be reported quarterly to the Leadership Team and Cabinet in a corporate performance report alongside the quarterly Corporate Plan monitoring reports. Each directorate business plan contains a set of Corporate Plan commitments and each directorate business plan has also been realigned to support the revised Corporate Plan.

A new role of corporate performance manager has been created and filled. There is now much greater organisational and leadership focus and understanding of service and financial performance and associated risks. The rationalisation of the corporate performance indicator set should help improved this focus as the PMF continues to embed across the organisation.

Commercial Strategy

The development and implementation of a commercial strategy forms part of the Improvement Plan. The Council acknowledges that it needs to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including plans to adopt a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate, and changes to the way some services are managed such as leisure.

The Council commissioned C.Co to draft a commercial strategy, which has resulted in a narrow focus, covering three specific service areas where commercial income opportunities may exist. Progress on an overarching commercial strategy has not progressed and from our stakeholder meetings there appears to be confusion over what the term commercial means.

Other councils that have developed a commercial strategy have often first worked to agree a generally accepted definition of commercial, recognising the term can have different interpretations. For example, for some commercial means being business-line in relation to all council activity, however mundane, such as the efficient conducting of meetings, whilst for others it has a more specific meaning such as being entrepreneurial with a focus on commercial investments and/or trading activity. It is important that the Council has a shared understanding of what commercial means for Sandwell.

The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council's transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions (Improvement Recommendation).

Given the difficulties that other councils have encountered with their commercial strategies, where for some it has led to significant financial distress, the Council should be proportionate in setting its commercial strategy and should not expose the Council to significant risk.

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Page 33

Customer Journey

A customer journey programme board was established in early 2023, supported by the corporate transformation office. The board provides updates to Cabinet on customer performance and progress on customer journey activity, alongside PMF updates on customer focussed metrics which are reported quarterly.

During 2023 the Council refreshed its website to make it more user friendly, including usability on mobile devices and the provision of more up-to-date content. Enhancements to the website include:

- My Sandwell: for residents and businesses to register a My Sandwell account. This account can be used to council tax, benefits, business rates or housing balances, make payments, request services, report problems and track any enquiries made to the Council, together with information on key Council services.
- Citizen Space: a new consultation hub where residents can subscribe to news on Council consultations and other engagement activity, and a section called “we asked, you said, we did” which provides updates on the outcomes of how consultation and engagement activity informed Council decisions.

Members use the My Councillor portal as their case management system to manage queries and complaints from residents. There is target to respond to complaints in 10 days and performance remains variable. The Council’s complaints team have undertaken work on the timeliness and quality of responsiveness and the information governance team are working with services where performance and responsiveness to complaints need to improve.

The Leadership Team and informal Cabinet have developed customer standards reporting on service areas such as call waiting times and responsiveness to complaints, and for those service where there is a high volume of customer engagement such as responsiveness to fly tipping, pot-hole repairs, benefits claims, homeless triage and general repairs. The 2023/24 quarter one report covered 13 KPIs and of these the performance was rated red for seven, amber for three, green for two, and for one (housing applications) there was no data available.

Whilst good progress has been made to improve how the Council engages with its residents and businesses and improves the customer journey and experience, these key customer standards metrics indicate that there is more work required by the Council to improve its performance in relation the customer journey.

The Council should place renewed focus on its efforts to improve the full customer journey so that this is demonstrated by improved customer metrics, and should ensure that appropriate data is available to measure all customer related KPIs (Key Recommendation).

The Council is considering further improvements to the customer journey, including introducing a new telephony system and rationalising customer contact centres. We note that customer journey related performance metrics currently focus on the Council’s “front door” - the responsiveness to an initial customer contact - and the Council should consider enhancing these metrics to measure its performance through full customer journeys including the customer experience and satisfaction (Improvement Recommendation).

Asset Management Strategy

The Corporate Asset management strategy (CAMS) was approved by Cabinet in November 2022. The strategy acknowledges that the Council is committed to maintaining an effective and efficient property portfolio which supports the delivery of services to residents, provides value for money, reduces environmental impact and maximises opportunities to generate value.

Workstreams have been established to oversee delivery of the strategy on groupings that include community centres, office rationalisation, commercial estate, climate change, corporate landlord, and regeneration.

The strategy is underpinned by the disposal of surplus assets and the associated savings and, as at October 2023, the £1.6m savings target for 2022/23 is expected to be achieved. This includes the disposal of Providence Place to the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities. There are further savings targets of £2.5m in both 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The Council acknowledges the need to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines, including adopting a Corporate Landlord Model for the management of its property estate. As part of this a Property Transformation programme is being developed to develop further options for asset disposals.

The savings plan relating to assets is dependent on the Council taking decisions on assets identified for disposal, and at the time of our review there was a savings target variance of £1.86m for 2024/25 and £2.05m for 2025/26. The Council should ensure that the Property Transformation Programme leads to decisions being taken to realise the balance of these planned savings and appropriate ambition is taken on asset disposal plans (Key Recommendation).

Progress on 2022 Key Recommendations (Cont'd)

Before setting out our findings on each KLOE we set out our findings on key corporate actions taken by the Council since our previous review.

Asset Management System

At the time of our review the implementation and roll out of the Council's new corporate asset management information system (Techforge), which will replace the Atrium system, was in final project closedown stage.

Phase 1 is due to go live in December 2023. Phase 2 of the asset management system implementation includes consideration of modules relating to capital accounting, and a fixed asset register, to support accounts production. An initial meeting is due to place in January 2024 to agree workstreams, leads and timescales for this phase.

The new system should provide a single, dedicated database for asset information, system linkage to Oracle Fusion and improved creation and monitoring of capital accounting reporting. The Council plans to identify workstreams, leads and timescales in January 2024. It is unclear if there is a definitive go live for phase 2.

The Council must ensure that the new asset management system is fully implemented and planned benefits are realised and both phases are operational for 1 April 2024. (Improvement Recommendation).



KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

Background

The Service Delivery Contract (SDC) between the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) went live on 1 April 2018. The total contract period was for 10 years with an option to exercise a break after 5 years of operation.

Our December 2022 report recommended the Council:

- Will need to ensure that SCT accelerates its progress on its improvement trajectory so that the position does not plateau, including sharing good practice on case work across various SCT social work teams.
- Will need to continue to closely monitor the implementation of the early help strategy to ensure planned objectives and outcomes are realised.
- Must continue to work with SCT to mitigate and reduce the level of vacancies and use of agency staff, and take steps to ensure the associated KPI does not lead to contract failure.
- Should continue to monitor the progress of SCT against the invest to save activities to ensure that SCT is able to generate the savings and efficiencies required for the contract sum to be reduced.

KEY FINDINGS

Ofsted inspections

Our previous report noted that the July 2022 Ofsted inspection report on children's services rated services as 'require improvement to be good', an improvement on the previous inspection which rated services as inadequate. At that time Ofsted reported that the pace and trajectory of improvement had increased over the year preceding the inspection, and we noted that children's services in Sandwell have been rated inadequate for over a decade, so this inspection reflected a positive direction of travel.

In February 2023 Ofsted published their report on the voluntary adoption agency managed by SCT, with the inspection having taken place in December 2022. The overall rating was 'good', compared to the previous inspection in January 2019, which rated the service 'requires improvement to be good'. We note that the most recent Ofsted inspection on fostering services, from 2021, also provided a rating of 'good', following a 'requires improvement to be good' from the previous inspection in 2019.

In July 2023 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook an area inspection of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which was reported in September 2023..

The Council, SCT and NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Sandwell.

These area inspections do not provide an overall rating, and the report noted a number of areas of positive progress, but the overall conclusion was that the local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and the local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements set out in the report. The areas for improvement identified were:

- strengthening of multi-agency working across the partnership,
- develop co-production so that children and young people play a key role in developing improvement strategies and plans, and
- there should be an increase in the number and range of short break opportunities to support the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategy

The early years strategy, developed by the Council working with SCT and other key stakeholders from the public and third sectors, had been launched in March 2022. It was recognised that it would take up to 18 months to embed across the early help system.

A year on event for all partners in the system was held in March 2023 and it is recognised by the Council and SCT that there is work still to be undertaken across the partnership before all partners fully recognise their responsibilities in relation to the strategy. Our work identified that some tensions have emerged between the Council and the SCT on system leadership responsibility for driving effective system working.

The early intervention and prevention strategy is critical to all key partners including the Council and SCT, including a strong inter-dependency with the early help invest to save savings target of the Trust, which is discussed later in this section.

Considering the outcome of the recent Ofsted and CQC area SEND review and the multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategy challenges, it is clear that there is greater emphasis required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.

KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

Workforce challenges

The Strategic Partnership Board (SPB), at its meeting on 22 September 2023 noted that about one of the Trust's 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were within contract tolerance, with the exception being the vacancy rate of social workers which in March 2023 was a 42%. Sickness rates had dropped to the lowest they have been since the Trust was established and stood at 7%. The vacancy rate across SCT as a whole was 20-29%.

The recruitment rate was not at a net gain and the Trust continues to find it difficult to stabilise teams, and an ongoing strategy was in place to slow the rate of leavers, but this had not stopped people wanting and choosing to leave. The Trust reported that ongoing workforce pressures are a symptom of a national crisis relating to the recruitment and retention of social workers, with a stated view that this issue can only be solved at a national level.

In February 2023, the government published a new strategy to transform children's social care: Stable Homes, Built on Love. This strategy included the government's response to the MacAlister Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The strategy recognised the national challenges facing social worker recruitment and retention. At the time of this VfM review, the government had not published its response to its consultation on the child and family social worker workforce, which is due to set out plans for national rules on the use of agency social workers, with the intention that these rules will help mitigate children's social care workforce challenges nationally.

Notwithstanding this national context, the Council's Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 12 July 2023 to increase the contract sum to SCT in relation to the Sandwell Deal. The Sandwell Deal is expected to provide an incentive for children's social workers to apply to roles in Sandwell and sets out career pathways and associated support to help manage retention. Incentives include market supplements and retention payments for all case holding social workers. The additional contract sum comprised a maximum of £260k to pay market supplements, the cost of retention payments of a maximum of £310k in 2023/24 rising to £1.1m in 2025/26, and a maximum of £556k to recruit overseas social workers in 2023/24. This was to be funded from the Council's Social Care Earmarked Reserve. This decision followed an options appraisal that included consideration of a regional benchmarking exercise undertaken in March 2023 which identified that without these recruitment and retention policies Sandwell would be in the lowest quartile of the 14 local authorities / children's trusts that were benchmarked.

At the Operational Partnership Board (OPB) meeting on 5 December 2023 it was reported that the social worker vacancy rate had been on a reducing trend during 2023/4 and stood at 23% at October 2023.

The report further noted that for first time in many years, the vacancy rate KPI had been met, however some of the permanent staff were non-qualified social workers.

The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.

Invest to Save

The contract between the Council and SCT allows SCT to make invest to save proposals to increase the contract sum in the short term, to be paid back to the Council via a reduction in a future contract sum. SCT has submitted two invest to save proposals which the Council approved in September 2021.

These related to Early Help and Strategic Commissioning and a total £287.5k investment in 2021/22 and 2022/23 with this amount being returned to the council by SCT in 2023/24 and 2024/25 by a reduction in the contract sum.

These two invest to save areas are monitored via the Operational Partnership Board (OPB) and SPB, with the later chaired by Council's Chief Executive. The Council and SCT finance directors have regular informal discussions including on financial and operational challenges, and monitor the impact of invest to save investments.

The Strategic Commissioning Invest to Save savings target for 2023/24 is £269k. This focuses on strengthening and developing an evidenced based commissioning programme to improve value for money. At the meeting of SPB on 22 September 2023 it was reported £21k savings had been confirmed by the end of July 2023 with plans in place to realise the balance of the savings target.

The Early Help Invest to Save savings target for 2023/24 is £229k. This focuses on fewer referrals into the Trust which in turn will lead to a reduction in children in need and children in care. £20k savings had been confirmed by the end of July 2023, with plans in place for the realisation of the balance of the savings target. The challenges, already noted, in relation to the multi-agency early help and intervention strategy will impact on this invest to save target if the planned system changes do not become effectively embedded.

In summary, progress to date across both Invest to Saves indicates £41k had been delivered by the end of July 2023. Other actions taken are expected to deliver a total of £225k of savings during 2023/24, due to the timing of the savings being implemented not resulting in a full year effect until 2024/25. This leaves a further £273k of savings to be delivered during 2023/24.

Realising these planned savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the contract sum increases relating to the invest to save can be paid back to the Council.

KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider actions undertaken by the Council to secure improvement in children's social care outcomes.

Page 66

Contract sum and financial performance

The contract sum agreed between the Council and SCT for 2022/23 was £70.4m, an increase on the prior year of £2.4m or 4%. The original budget set for the Trust for 2022/23 was £68.527m, so the contract sum agreed was intended to create an in-year surplus of £1.9m. The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 incorporated the planned surplus to be off-set against the cumulative over-spend from previous financial years.

The forecast 2022/23 outturn was an overspend of £1.9m compared to the annual budget for the Trust and breakeven position when compared to the contract sum received. The cumulative deficit including prior year deficits was forecast to be £7.3m as at 31 March 2023. This was against a MTFP forecast position of £5.3m, because the forecast surplus during 2022/23 was not realised. The Trusts latest MTFP indicates that the deficit will be fully repaid by 2027/28.

The budget for 2022/23 incorporated the impact of the Trust's Cost Savings Action Plan which required the Trust to achieve savings of £2.3m in year. The Trust had fully identified and commenced actions that were expected to deliver £1.8k of savings. The remaining £538k related primarily to the stepping down of high-cost placements and the increase in internal foster carers. The Trust had developed a further cost saving plan which has identified specific actions designed to deliver fully against the shortfall in the delivery of the original plan by the end of the year.

The contract sum agreed for 2023/24 totalled £74.5m and the SCT revenue budget assumed a year end surplus of £742k. The contract sum is an increase of £2.5m of 3.5% and reflected the ongoing impact of inflation. As at September 2023 the forecast outturn was an overspend of £797k, resulting in a £1.539m variance to budget. The reasons given for this variance include:

- Continued pressure within the placement market due to a high demand for places and the impact of inflation.
- Higher than anticipated increase to Regional Fostering Framework prices for 2023/24.
- Continued pressures within the social worker labour market and the consequent over reliance on high costs agency staff.
- Complexity and co-ordination associated with delivering the savings programme and associated transformation of services.

SCT has implemented a Budget Accountability Framework with accountability to the Trust's Finance and Infrastructure Committee where there is scrutiny and challenge on a quarterly basis. The Trust Board provides direction and oversight with regard to the overall financial position of the Trust.

At the time of our review the Council and SCT had commenced discussions on the 2024/25 contract sum, but these discussions had not been concluded. The Council has also begun considering the options for investing capital expenditure in the construction or acquisition of assets to be used as a residential children's home, in discussion with SCT, as part of broader plans to reduce placement costs.

The KPIs used to monitor the performance of SCT were being reviewed at the time of our audit, but had not been approved. It is anticipated new KPIs will be in place from January 2024.

Conclusions and recommendations

Following the 2022 Ofsted inspection Sandwell entered a period of 'transition from intervention', but the current statutory direction will remain in place until DfE is assured of the long-term trajectory of sustainable improvement.

Senior stakeholders from the Council and SCT are generally positive about working relationships and the governance arrangements in place, and the Council is now much more effective in its approach to and relationships with the Trust, including more effective contract management. The recent Ofsted inspection of adoption services demonstrates a continued positive direction of travel.

However, there remain some significant challenges in relation to SCT's ability to deliver planned savings and manage its finances within the contract sum, and for both the Council and SCT in wider system and partnership working.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- Greater emphasis is required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.
- The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.
- Realising the planned Invest to Save savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the invest to save payments can be repaid to the Council.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Background

Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) was formed by the Council in 2004 due to underperformance of the in-house leisure service. SLT was contracted via a Management and Funding Agreement (MFA) for a 30-year period: 2004 to 2034. SLT operate all council leisure facilities, other than West Bromwich Leisure Centre, which is operated by Places Leisure under a separate agreement.

At the time of our 2022 review the Council was progressing the establishment of a local authority trading company (LATC) to take over responsibility for leisure provision delivered by SLT.

Our December 2022 report recommended that the Council will need to:

- ensure a business case is produced for the new leisure LATC so that there is a clear financial case for the commercial viability of the new arms' length company.
- be clear how it effectively discharges its role whilst allowing the company the freedoms and flexibilities to operate and to deliver the planned financial and service benefits
- effectively manage the transition of the Aquatics Centre so that it is operational to the planned timescale and that there is a clear business case which sets out how the centre will be managed to become commercially viable and provide financial returns to the Council as part of the leisure LATC arrangements.

KEY FINDINGS

Local Authority Trading Company

At their meeting 9 February 2022, Cabinet resolved to not approve SLT's business plan and to serve notice of termination; this notice was served for SLT's operation of the leisure centres to cease on 1 May 2023. At their meeting 22 June 2022, Cabinet resolved to progress the establishment of a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) to operate the Council's leisure facilities.

The Chief Operating Officer of the proposed LATC started in role in January 2023, and LiveWell Leisure Limited, the LATC, was incorporated on 6 February 2023 as a company limited by guarantee, with the Council as the sole member. At that time the new LATC was due to commence operations on 1 May 2023.

Business planning was undertaken in relation to the LATC, with the Council engaging Continuum and Prominent Leisure Services to support this work. This included costing the transfer of the Aquatics centre to the LATC and the impact of the closure of the Langley and Smethwick leisure centres.

The Council also progressed due diligence and planning for the overall transfer of service delivery from SLT to the new LATC, including the TUPE of staff from SLT to the LATCO, and contract novation.

Recognising that leisure centres are large consumers of energy, and in the context of UK wide increases in utility costs, the Council decided to pause their plans to better understand the impact of these increased costs. It was established that in 2021 – pre-energy cost increases – that SLT had entered longer-term energy supply contracts, which insulated them from the increases in energy tariffs: gas to September 2026 and electricity to March 2027.

A legal options appraisal was undertaken that identified that the SLT energy tariffs could not be novated to the LATC without significant risk. The cost pressure of losing the fixed tariffs for the nine centres in the SLT portfolio (reducing to seven centres during 2023) was estimated in January 2023 as £3.42m over the next two years. It was also recognised that utility tariff stability is beneficial over the coming three years, given market instability and the scale of Sandwell's leisure estate.

Based on the cost pressure identified, and an improved relationship with SLT, the termination notice with SLT was extended for the period covered by SLT's fixed tariffs; an extension of 3 years and 11 months from 1 May 2023 to the end of March 2027.

A Deed of Variation (DoV) to the MFA with SLT has been agreed to formalise the change in governance arrangements. A key change in the DoV is that any operating surplus achieved by SLT will be retained by the Council rather than SLT. The Council obtained counsel opinion in relation to the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the replacement to EU State Aid regulations) and, based on this advice, Council officers determined that no subsidy or economic advantage would accrue from the extension to their contract with SLT.

Regular briefings took place with informal Cabinet prior to Cabinet taking the decision to extend arrangements with SLT. Progress continues to be reported, most recently at to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities (SNAC) Scrutiny Board on 12 Sept 2023 and to Cabinet on 13 October 2023.

SLT amended its Articles of Association that coincided with the DoV. This has resulted in a change to the requirements of the composition of the SLT Board. Previously there was a requirement for a member of the Council to be a board member which has been removed.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Relationships with SLT

Our 2021 report noted that relationships between the Council and SLT had broken down. Since our 2022 review there have been changes to some key roles at both SLT and the Council. This includes the departure of the SLT Chief Executive, some changes to the SLT Trustees including a new acting Chair, and the Chief Operating Officer appointed for the LATC has been seconded to the role of Chief Executive at SLT from 1 May 2023 for the duration of the extended contract period. The Council's lead officer responsible for leisure services has also seen a change in personnel.

Senior representatives of the Council and SLT have had their first joint strategy day, which took place in August 2023, and are demonstrating much more effective collaborative working and mutual understanding, for example SLT's understanding of Council funding pressures, and the Council's understanding of SLT's charitable regulations and challenges with their leisure estate.

The Council and SLT are promoting a culture of open dialogue, no surprises, and honest conversations, which if successfully embedded will be a step change from previous relationships.

A shared goal of service transformation has been agreed, which has provided an opportunity to reset the relationship. Stakeholders from the Council and SLT have advised that the culture of the relationship is now one of partnership with more informal contact beyond the formal governance related meetings, with much more effective engagement and, from SLT's perspective, greater clarity on Council lines of responsibility and it will be important that there is now continuity in these Council roles.

SLT Finances

The management funding agreement for SLT has been agreed for 2023/24 of £3.4m. This was based on financial modelling undertaken as part of the annual business planning process and the planning for the new LATC. This included benchmarking, which identified that Sandwell spends more on leisure per capita than neighbouring councils, which is considered to relate to the number of leisure facilities in operation in Sandwell, compared to other councils.

The agreed 2023/24 management fee, whilst lower than the original sum proposed by SLT, is an increase compared to 2022/23 and reflects additional costs relating to the launch of Sandwell Aquatics Centre. The Council's business planning modelled a number of scenarios based on risk and ambition. The £3.4m agreed represented the low-risk scenario, with the medium-risk scenario modelling costs of £2.5m.

We have been advised that SLT is operating marginally under forecast budget in 2023/24, and at the time of this review SLT were agreeing restructure proposals to improve the organisation's commercial experience, alongside ongoing technology and system enhancements, and operational changes, including a review of the leisure estate. To support plans for meeting user number and income targets and improving cash flow.

The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions. Furthermore, the Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council.

Governance arrangements

There are monthly contract meetings, quarterly finance meetings, and quarterly operational performance meetings between the Council and SLT. The governance framework has been updated:

- Quarterly Leisure Contract Review Board the strategy forum for the services which will agree the strategic development of the service, based on requirements of Cabinet and SLT Board.
- The Quarterly Finance Reconciliation to review the SLT accounts and commentary from the previous quarter, identify any substantial variances to budget and – in partnership with the Monthly Contract Management Meeting – propose corrective action.
- The Quarterly Property / Estates Update to review property and estates issues including compliance works, planned preventative maintenance, significant defects and energy consumption.
- The Monthly Contract Management the principal forum to support the effective and efficient operation of the service.

The Council has continued to improve its contract management of SLT and the interim CEO of SLT has introduced greater rigour in relation to performance management alongside a greater commercial focus.

KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the contract with SLT and to understand the impact of recent industrial action.

Sandwell Aquatics Centre

Following the hosting of the Commonwealth Games during the Summer of 2022, the Council became responsible for adapting the Aquatics Centre before it was due to be transferred to the new LATC when it would become open to public use. This formed part of the Commonwealth Games legacy arrangements

Following the hosting of the Commonwealth Games during the Summer of 2022, the Council became responsible for adapting the Aquatics Centre before it was due to be transferred to the new LATC when it would become open to public use. This formed part of the Commonwealth Games legacy arrangements.

Due to the decision to not proceed with the LATC, the aquatics centre was transferred to SLT. The centre opened to the public on 23 July 2023, a week after the centres in Langley and Smethwick closed, providing users of these centres the opportunity to use the new aquatics centre. The Council are considering plans for the disposal or alternative use of the two former leisure centres.

The aquatics centre, at the time of conducting this review, had 4,600 gym members, more 2,000 learn to swim programme members, and 15,500 weekly attendances, which has exceeded forecast KPIs.

The launch outcome demonstrates effective arrangements being in place for project and transition management and pre-sales and marketing activity.

Whilst the aquatics centre is a community resource, its facilities mean that it can be used for national events, for example it is due to host the British Diving Championships in 2024.

Notwithstanding membership and activity following the launch, the current business plan for the aquatics centre forecasts operational losses for its first ten years of operation, of approximately £1m per annum, with some forecast fluctuations over each of these ten years. **The Council must ensure that SLT sets out a clear and deliverable plan to eliminate this deficit.**

Conclusion and recommendations

The Council has demonstrated that it was able to pause and review a key decision in light of changed circumstances. It demonstrated agility in changing its decision to introduce the LATC by extending its contact with SLT, with value for money being a key driver.

Relationships between the Council and SLT have significantly improved, leading to much greater mutual understanding and respect. These relationships, and the new leadership of SLT provide optimism that leisure services in Sandwell are now on an improved footing, which was reflected in the successful opening of the aquatics centre.

The Council must ensure that the more commercial approach of SLT is further developed and there is a clear plan in place so that SLT requires no subsidy, and that the aquatics centre trading losses are eliminated.

. We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.
- The Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council, including a clear and deliverable plan for eliminating operational losses at the aquatics centre.

KLOE A3: Providence Place

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the potential loss to the Council arising from the proposed sale of Providence Place.

Background

The original review considered issues arising from the proposed sale of Providence Place.

In our December 2022 report we concluded that this matter has now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place.

This report identified the following improvement recommendation:

- The Council will need to conclude the finalisation of its asset management strategy and asset management database to better manage its asset portfolio including asset disposals.

KEY FINDINGS

Providence Place has now been disposed of to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities.

The asset management strategy and asset management system are discussed in the Key Recommendations section of this report

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.



KLOE A4: SEND Transport

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the circumstances relating to the recent procurement of SEND Transport and the Council's current approach to concluding the procurement.

Background

The Council's Special Education Needs and Disabilities Passenger Transport (SEND Transport) contract expired at the end of August 2021 and the decision on the new contract award was deferred by the Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 16 June 2021. The contract was retendered, going live on 1 September 2022.

Our December 2022 report concluded that this matter had now been actioned and resolved with improved governance arrangements in place, and made the following recommendation:

- The Council must ensure that the lessons learned from the SEND Transport procurement are shared across other council services so that this learning becomes embedded across the organisation.

KEY FINDINGS

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned sessions have been held with Directors and Assistant Directors on the original SEND Transport procurement. These sessions involved key staff from project management, finance, procurement, travel assistance, legal and internal audit teams involved in the initial 2021 and re-run procurement in 2022. In addition lessons learned have been shared with all officers involved in procurement activity, including frequently asked questions.

At the time of our review the Council was preparing for the next SEND Transport procurement, using the governance arrangements put in place for the 2022 procurement and adopting the lessons learned from the 2021 procurement, such as adopting realistic procurement timescales, and has a procurement business partner allocated from the outset, along with a project manager.

Procurement and Contract Management

At the time of our review the Council was reviewing the structures relating to central procurement and contract management resource, as part of the introduction of the Programme Management Office, to replace procurement business partners with category managers, creating a single procurement function to support directorates and a corporate procurement board. A compliance manager is being proposed to monitor procurement activity below £100k which is the responsibility of Directorates. The next SEND Transport procurement has been identified as a pilot for the approach to high value procurements.

Training has been provided to over 170 officers involved in contract management, following the review and updates to the Council's constitution, and contract management procedures and templates are available on the Council's intranet. At the time of our review a new procurement strategy had been drafted by an external consultant pending review by officers, and a review of procurement and commissioning functions was planned as part of the Council's transformation strategy.

Oracle Fusion provides an opportunity for greater standardisation, monitoring, reporting and approval of procurement activity when the procurement module goes live in April 2024. The procurement pipeline is currently maintained on a spreadsheet, and at the time of this review services had been asked to provide details of all planned procurements over the next three years, with the pipeline to be transferred to Oracle Fusion. The pipeline should support the Council's resource prioritisation decisions, to be considered by a new procurement board which is due to be introduced in January 2024.

SEND Transport finances

The SEND Transport budget overpent by £3.836m during 2022/23 and is forecast to overspend by c £2m in 2023/24. This has been explained as a result of demand pressures and complexity of need. [The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage significant and ongoing budgetary pressures.](#)

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made one improvement recommendation:

- The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage ongoing significant and ongoing budgetary pressures.

KLOE A7: Waste service

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the performance of the waste service, the Council's management of the contract with Serco, and understand the impact of recent industrial relations issues.

Background

The waste and street cleansing contract was awarded to Serco in November 2010 for a period of 25 years.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council must work with Serco to urgently finalise all associated plans and schedules which remain outstanding.
- The Council should confirm with Serco if there will be changes to the waste and recycling or garden waste collection policies.
- The Council should resolve the delays and formally agree replacement timescales for the waste fleet and the financing of replacement costs and supplier lead in times with SERCO. Clarity should be sought over the use of previous capital payments in relation to the Council's accounts.
- The Council should take steps to demonstrate to Serco how the fleet maintenance service provides value for money.

KEY FINDINGS

Finalising plans

Serco's Service Delivery Plan (SDP) for 2023/24 was approved by the Waste Partnership Board in June 2023. The Council have advised that the quality of the plan was much improved on the prior year and the process was more straightforward, with the approval taking place to timescale. Serco have advised that planning for the 2024/25 SDP has already commenced.

Changes to collection policies

In November 2022 Cabinet agreed to introduce a subscription-based service for garden waste collection. A contract change notice was issued to Serco and the new approach was implemented within 4 months of the decision being made. Approximately 40,000 residents have subscribed, with a cost to each household of £35, which is below the national median for councils charging for this service nationally, generating additional income to the Council of £1.4m. The Council will review increases to this charge as part of each year's budget setting approach and is reviewing payment options for residents.

The Council is working with Serco to change the recycling methodology from co-mingled to dual stream recycling, which reduced processing costs. At the same time the Council has established a working group to consider alternate weekly collections (AWC). Should this decision be taken savings have been forecast to be between £4m and £5.4m.

Vehicle replacement

Serco have managed the fleet replacement in three phases, based on the ages of vehicles. The second phase has been progressed, with 19 new vehicles due to arrive for service by January 2024.

Serco, with the Council's agreement, have paused the third phase of vehicle replacement pending the outcome of the AWC and dual waste decision, which could have an impact on the specification and number of vehicles required.

Approximately 40 of the Serco fleet will be electric vehicles following phase 2 and the Council, using climate change related funding, is installing electric vehicle charging infrastructure into the depot used by Serco.

Serco will be required to return the fleet to the Council following the conclusion of the 25-year contract. The Council's financial modelling for the repayment of the cost of the waste fleet includes assumptions on fleet renewal. The model had not been updated to reflect changes to the timing of the fleet renewal, impacting on the associated accounting treatment. The Council's assumptions have now been updated to reflect the current Serco fleet replacement plans and the accounting issue has been resolved.

Waterfall Lane Workshop

The Council has commissioned a review of its fleet which will include maintenance work undertaken at the Waterfall Lane Workshop, which maintains the Council and Serco vehicles. This was delayed by industrial action, and part of its purpose is to confirm to Serco the value for money of the Council's maintenance of the Serco fleet. The Fleet Vehicle Steering Group with Serco will consider the reviews findings in early 2024. Maintenance charges are impacted by the age of vehicles, and charges should reflect the ongoing cycle of Serco fleet replacement. **The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.**

KLOE A7: Waste service (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the performance of the waste service, the Council's management of the contract with Serco, and understand the impact of recent industrial relations issues.

Industrial Relations

The Serco workforce are members of three trade unions, and those who were members the GMB union undertook strike action between 5 and 30 June 2023, before Serco reached a pay settlement with their workforce. GMB members represent 46% of the Serco workforce in Sandwell. The impact of the industrial action was as follows:

- From 5 June to 20 June Serco were able to maintain refuse and garden waste collections effectively. Residents experienced delays, with refuse typically running a day behind, but collections were not missed.
- From 20 June Serco were unable to issue vehicles from the Shidas Lane Depot due to a picket blockade, which left at around 1pm each day, leaving most of the crews with only 1-2 hours of their shifts remaining. From 20 June to 28 June only garden waste and targeted clearance of high-rise accumulations were undertaken, and street cleansing was also impacted for the first time.
- Following the police clearance of the blockade on 28 June, collections increased 29 June to 1 July with continued collection of garden waste and communal bins, plus some collection of household refuse.
- Will the full workforce returned, refuse, food and garden waste collections were undertaken 3 July to 7 July including the clearance of the refuse backlog. Recycling and bulky waste collections remained stood-down to allow crews to focus on clearance of the backlog of refuse. The backlog of refuse was largely cleared by 9 July.
- From Monday 10 July a full normal service resumed with all commodities being collected.

Both the Council and Serco have commented on the effectiveness of their joint response to this strike, including emergency response bronze group daily meetings, communications to residents, and liaising with the police so that the picket line was legally compliant. This included working to prioritise high risk areas for collection, such as high-rise flats. Garden waste collection continued through the period of the industrial action.

For most of the strike Serco vehicles were able to access the depot and other sites, but for a ten days the depot was blockaded by union activity. This was deemed aggravated trespass and, whilst challenging for the Council and Serco, was resolved by the police who created a silver tactical command group and applied resources to secure access after the Council had confirmed legal title to the entrance.

The Council, Serco and police undertook a debrief following the conclusion of the strike, to share any lessons learned. **The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.**

Other Findings

The governance and contract management arrangements reported as part of our 2022 review remain in place, other a decision taken that the Enforcement Liaison Group is no longer required to meet.

The Serco contract for 2022/23 was valued at £31.79m, and this increased by £2.98m for 2023/24 due to inflationary pressures. This increase reduced to £1.09m due to performance penalties imposed on Serco, with the balance of the increase being mitigated by earmarked reserves corporately and at service level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The relationships between the Council and Serco remain on an upward trajectory, with how they jointly responded to the industrial action a recent positive example. The Council has taken steps to work more effectively with Serco on areas such as collection policies, and Serco has demonstrated a more effective approach to the annual service delivery planning process.

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.
- The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.

KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to the DPH

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's governance and decision-making arrangements relating to the alleged harassment of the Director of Public Health (DPH) by an external blogger, and the governance arrangements relating to the introduction of a local contact tracing service and changes to shielding arrangement during Summer 2020.

Introduction

Our findings relating to this KLOE were uncoupled from our 2021 report and were reported separately in October 2022. This meant KLOE A8 did not form part of our 2022 follow up review.

Unlike the other KLOEs, KLOE A8 had a particular focus on the governance arrangements relating to one director of the Council.

Our improvement recommendations in relation to this KLOE were:

- Should the Council find itself in a similar scenario in the future, it would be prudent to obtain external legal advice on the specific circumstances under consideration, before any final decision on an indemnity is made.
- The Council should make various changes to its management arrangements relating to its social media policy and the arrangements for monitoring and managing social media activity, introduce a policy for working with local MPs, and confirm arrangements relating to media interviews.
- To review the Emergency Plan to ensure that change following the demise of PHE are reflects and ensure all relevant COVID-19 communications from local MPs and DHSC should be promptly forwarded to the DPH should it be evident that the DPH has not received them directly.
- Ensure decisions made to introduce new services, or materially changing existing services, are properly reflected in the minutes of the body responsible for making such decisions.
- Any future lessons learned reviews undertaken by the Council should be undertaken in a collaborative and transparent way with the key stakeholders concerned.
- The Council should review its processes and decision-making arrangements following a change in government guidance or policy to ensure that local updates are made in a timely manner.

KEY FINDINGS

The officer in the role of DPH at the time of our original review left the Council in December 2022. However, our recommendations related to the organisation and did not relate to this specific individual. We set out our findings below on progress made by the Council on these recommendations.

Social Media, Media and Local MPs

The Council's social media policy was reviewed, updated and re-published in August 2023. The policy is now jointly managed by the Council's Communications and HR teams. The revised policy:

- Provides greater clarity and guidance on social media for personal and professional use, including recommend Council employees keep their personal and professional use of social media separate. The policy also advises Council employees not to use their personal social media accounts to share professional advice or opinions.
- Now contains content on cyberbullying, what actions people need to take if they experience this, the support the Council will provide in such circumstances, and signposts to additional external guidance.
- Provides clear expectations for Council employees and councillors on appropriate social media use, in particular in relation to leaking information to outside persons for the purpose of criticising, abusing or professionally undermining officers on social media platforms.
- Is clear that failure to observe the standards of conduct set out in the policy may result in disciplinary action.

The revised policy was communicated to all staff and is available on the Council's intranet. We have been advised there has been one breach of the new policy and that arrangements were in place to identify and manage the incident.

Members use of social media continues to form part of the Members Code of Conduct. The social media policy for members was revised and updated by the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee on 22 March 2022 with minor changes. Social media training has been provided, with 25 members attending training in December 2022.

KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to the DPH

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's governance and decision-making arrangements relating to the alleged harassment of the Director of Public Health (DPH) by an external blogger, and the governance arrangements relating to the introduction of a local contact tracing service and changes to shielding arrangement during Summer 2020.

Social Media, Media and Local MPs (Cont'd)

Arrangements in relation to media interviews have been strengthened, with the role of the Council's communications team re-emphasised, which has brought greater control to the Council's management of requests from media for interviews, and the communications team being made aware of all interview requests.

A policy for working with local MPs forms part of the Council's improvement plan, but **has not yet been introduced** and we have been advised forms part of the plans to refresh the Council's overall communications strategy. Council Directors offer briefings to local MPs and interactions with MPs are discussed by the Council's leadership team. Overall, relationships with local MPs are managed by the Council's Chief Executive who has quarterly meetings with MPs. [A protocol for working with MPs was an improvement recommendation in our previous report and the Council should conclude its plans to introduce this protocol, and associated guidance.](#)

Emergency Plan and COVID-19 Communications

The schedule of contacts used by the Local Resilience Forum has been updated to include those relating to the UK Health Security Agency following the demise of Public Health England. The Council's Emergency Plan is due to be updated in 2024 as part of its regular review cycle, and this will include updating the names of government agencies and departments in the Plan.

The DPH role is currently held on an interim basis and the Council is recruiting to a permanent role. The job description for the new permanent DPH has been reviewed and updated to make clear that, whilst the DPH will have a key role within the Council's corporate resilience, emergency planning and business continuity arrangements, and will perform duties allocated to the post in Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plan or allocated to by the Chief Executive. The expectation of the Chief Executive is the DPH will not have autonomy in their external communications including with local MPs.

Approach to providing legal support to officers

The Council recognises that it has a duty of care for its staff, including where they may be subject to harassment via social media or cyberbullying. The Council has advised that they have considered potential cases since our last review and, whilst the officers concerned did not request legal support, the Monitoring Officer judged that the threshold for defamation was not met. The Monitoring Officer will continue this role, where other incidents occur.

Governance relating to new or changed services

The Council has advised us that the scenario identified in our previous report has not occurred again. At the time of our review business planning workshops were taking place and we have been advised that these will consider responsibilities for ensuring that decisions relating to new or materially changed services are properly reflected in the minutes of the body responsible for making such decisions.

Lessons learned reviews

The Council has advised us that no lessons learned reviews have been undertaken that are of a similar nature to the one considered in our previous report, but should this be the case the Chief Executive will ensure that it will be undertaken in a collaborative and transparent way with the key stakeholders concerned.

More generally, the Council has introduced a lessons learnt template as part of its service and business planning process. This has been designed as a tool that can help to document the knowledge obtained from a piece of work or project. The template includes guidance on when lessons learnt reviews should be undertaken, and how lessons can be learnt and shared.

Changes in government policy

The Council has advised us that the scrutiny of decision making, and the decision-making thresholds in place, should ensure that any future changes in government policy or government guidance in the context of emergency or major incident response, will ensure that local updates are made in a timely manner. The Council has also confirmed that appropriate processes are in place in relation to business continuity planning, emergency planning, and working with the Local Resilience Forum.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.

KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP System

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the introduction of Oracle Fusion and understanding implementation delays and their impact.

Background

The Council is replacing its main Enterprise and Resource Planning (ERP) system. The current ERP is Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) which is being replaced by Oracle Fusion. There have been significant delays to the implementation and go live date for the introduction of the new system.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council must ensure that all expected benefits are defined, and that governance arrangements, including assigning accountabilities, are in place to ensure benefits are realised.
- The Council must ensure that the central transformation team is appropriately resourced and integrates all transformation and change activity being undertaken across the Council.
- The Council must ensure that the ERP System implementation programme becomes aligned to other improvement and change initiatives being undertaken or planned by the Council, so that synergies and economies in delivery can be identified and duplication removed.

KEY FINDINGS

System Implementation

We have undertaken a separate high-level review of Oracle Fusion implementation as part of our 2022/23 VfM work. This scope of this review included data migration, go live planning, security, training, system and user acceptance testing, business readiness and governance structures budgets and resource plans. The findings from this work will be reported separately, and are summarised here.

The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks.

Due to delays in finalising the design specifications of HR and payroll the Oracle Fusion Steering Committee has taken the decision to split the programme into two phases in order to ensure there is sufficient time to perform the build and system testing stages:

The two phases comprise:

- Phase 1 includes finance, procurement and core HR functionality to support finance processes. This is due to go live from April 2024.
- Phase 2 includes payroll, HR, expenses, absence, time and labour modules. This is due to go live by the end of June 2024.

The phased approach will lead to increased costs due to the additional resources required to deliver phase 2 and these need to be accurately reflected in the project budget and monitored. However, the phased approach increases the likelihood of the Council successfully implementing phase 1 by April 2024 and priority should be focussed on delivering this phase to avoid further delays.

The Council has introduced a more robust and appropriate governance arrangements which has provided improved connections between the Programme Board, process workstreams and cross-cutting groups such as data migration. The Steering Board receives fortnightly reports on workstream progress, risks and issues to actively challenge the Council's implementation partner, project management and workstream leads.

This separate review has made a number of recommendations:

- The Council needs to extend the licences and associated support for both Oracle EBS and Fusion as they are due to expire in April 2024 and October 2024 respectively. The timing of extensions needs to be based on accurate user forecasts. Future cost savings could be made if a rebalancing clause is introduced into the Oracle contract.
- The Council currently has no capability to manage user roles and identify segregation of duty breaches. The Council should acquire a risk and compliance tool to monitor the appropriateness of security privileges rather than the current use of spreadsheets. A review to identify segregation of duty conflicts should be factored into the overall project timescale. Oracle Risk Cloud or a similar monitoring tool should be implemented before the go live date
- The Steering Committee should challenge any change that affects the overall cost, resources and timelines for phase 1 go live.
- The Steering Committee should continue to evaluate the progress of designing and testing custom reports across each functional areas to ensure progress remains on track.

KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP System (Cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's management of the introduction of Oracle Fusion and understanding implementation delays and their impact.

System Implementation support (Cont'd)

- The Council should review the mix of training sessions to be delivered to ensure that key user and professional user training is not over reliant on the user performing their own learning through on-line modules and self-study. The timing of the training should be brought forward to allow sufficient time before go live.
- While efforts are being made to meet the phased go live dates, the programme needs to outline the contingency plans in the event further slippage occurs. It is critical that the Steering Committee monitors missed milestones and challenge the likelihood of recovery time.

Given high the high-profile issues experienced by other councils, such as Birmingham City Council, in relation to their Oracle Fusion implementation, the Council must ensure that it responds effectively to these recommendations set out in our separate Oracle implementation report.

Oracle Fusion Benefits

Strategic objectives have been agreed and initial work has been undertaken to define high level benefit targets, which have been reported to the Programme Board. Benefits were reviewed and updated at the end of the design stage to ensure they were measurable. Change and learning and development leads continue to work with working group leads and service users to finalise the planned non-financial benefits.

Financial benefits are being defined separately via a Heads of Service working group. At the time of our review initial assumptions had been made on the key changes that will trigger financial benefits. Whilst the Council's base budget assumes £250k of savings resulting from the implementation of Oracle Fusion, further work is required to fully define financial benefits and incorporate them in the Council's MTFP. The Council plans to conclude this for phase 1 by the end of January 2024, and for phase 2 by the end of March 2024.

The Council's investment in Oracle Fusion provides a significant opportunity to transform organisational design, streamline business processes, remove duplication, improve productivity and generate efficiencies and savings. Oracle implementation must be used to realise clearly financial and non-financial benefits and it remains critical for the Council to conclude its work in defining these, and that those selected are measurable and can be effectively tracked.

Alignment with Corporate Transformation

Key officers on the Oracle Programme Board also sit on the Council's Transformation Board, with both boards considering interdependencies between their respective areas of responsibility. As already discussed, the Council is introducing a new project management system which plans to take account of the changes that will take place as a result of implementing Oracle Fusion.

At the time of our review the Council was considering new governance arrangements to ensure that all ICT investments have more effective corporate oversight, with the introduction of an ICT approval panel. This should also ensure a better alignment between ICT investments and the Council's transformation activity.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Council has continued to pay careful attention to the Oracle Fusion implementation, undertaking revisions to timescales and resources where required. Specialist external resources have been scaled up during the year to fill identified roles alongside ring-fencing Council staff to assist with implementation tasks.

However, there have been further delays and associated increased costs resulting in the decision to phase the go live dates.

The risks associated with poor and ineffective implementation remain significant. The Council must ensure that:

- It responds effectively to the recommendations set out in our separate Oracle Fusion implementation report before the go live date.
- Work on defining financial and non-financial benefits, and that benefits identified and agreed are measurable, and can be effectively tracked and the transformational opportunities of the new system are fully realised.

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Background

Our original review considered the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

This report further noted that the success of the appointment of the new permanent Chief Executive remains critical for the Council if it is to successfully continue on its improvement journey.

KEY FINDINGS

Senior Management Restructure

The new Chief Executive started in role in January 2023, and following a review of the Council's senior leadership, which was supported by West Midlands Employers, proposed a restructuring of senior management, which was approved by the Chief Officers Terms and Conditions Committee on 11 October 2023, and approved unanimously by full Council on 24 October 2023. The proposals will:

- Reduce the number of Director posts from eight to three with the creation of three new Executive Director posts: for People, Place, and Finance and Transformation.
- Designate the post of Assistant Director (Law and Governance) as the Council's Monitoring Officer and Deputy Electoral Registration Officer (both currently held by the post of Director of Law and Governance) with this new role reporting to the new post of Executive Director of Finance and Transformation.
- Designate the new post of Executive Director of Finance and Transformation as the Section 151 Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO).

The posts of Director of Public Health, Director of Children and Education and Director of Adult Social Care will retain their statutory designation.

The five Director roles to be deleted are Finance, Housing, Law and Governance, Borough Economy, and Regeneration and Growth.

The rationale for the restructure is positive, which includes bringing in strategic leadership capacity, reducing the number of Directorates and delayering the number of Director roles to reduce silos and hierarchies, improve joint working and decision making across service lines to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Council's improvement plan.

At the time of our review the consultation process with officers affected by the restructure had concluded, and the Council was advertising the new Executive Director roles. Appointments of the new Executive Directors are expected to be made in early February 2024. There are expectations that, following the embedding of the planned senior leadership changes, the new Executive Directors will review the management layers in their directorates.

Two of the five Directors (Finance and Housing) impacted by the change had already left the Council with interims currently in these roles, with the other three either being made redundant or having an opportunity to apply for an alternate role. The changes now in train will undoubtedly lead to a period of uncertainty and instability for the Council, and could impact over the short-term on the pace of change.

We have been advised that the officer taking over the Council's Monitoring Officer role will be invited to attend meetings of the Senior Management Team and fortnightly statutory officer meetings will be introduced, comprising the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, along with the Assistant Chief Executive. **The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis.**

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Senior Management Restructure (cont'd)

The table below summarises the senior management arrangements in place at the time of our previous review, compared to the time of our current review, and in advance of the conclusion of the senior management restructure. Whilst the Council now has a permanent Chief Executive in role, and has a new Assistant Chief Executive, the table highlights changes that have taken place during 2023 to wider senior management roles, resulting in an increase in interim roles during the period the restructure is taking place.

Role	As at Nov 2022		As at Nov 2023		Comments
	Permanent / Interim	Leaving Date	Start Date	Permanent / Interim	
Managing Director / Chief Executive	Interim	Still Lead Commissioner	06/02/2023	Permanent	
Assistant Chief Executive	n/a	n/a	25/09/2023	Permanent	New role created in April 2023
Director - Adult Social Care	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	
Director - Public Health	Permanent	28/02/2023	01/03/2023	Interim	
Director - Law & Governance / Monitoring Officer	Permanent	31/12/2023	n/a	n/a	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Finance	Permanent	31/08/2023	11/09/2023	Interim	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Deputy Director of Finance	Permanent	15/09/2023	18/09/2023	Interim	Officer acting up and additional support from interim.
Director - Business Strategy and Change	Permanent	24/01/2023	n/a	n/a	Assistant CEX role created to take on some of the responsibilities of this director post; Transformation and ICT remain with Director - Finance
Director - Housing	Permanent	06/09/2023	07/09/2023	Interim	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Borough Economy	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Regeneration & Growth	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	Post to be made redundant as part of restructure
Director - Children's Services	Permanent	n/a	n/a	Permanent	
Assistant Director - Legal & Assurance, Deputy Monitoring Officer	Permanent	n/a	25/09/2023	Permanent	Acting Up as Monitoring Officer

KLOE B2: Senior leadership

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the background to senior leadership changes and the impact of interim officers in place.

Senior Management Restructure (cont'd)

The introduction of new senior officers not previously in roles at the Council, including those in interim roles, can be helpful by introducing new perspectives. Senior stakeholders commented during our review on the positive impacts of the new appointments, in particular the new Chief Executive, and the improvements introduced by those new to role. This has included identifying and introducing improvements to procurement arrangements in housing services, and a more effective engagement of members in the financial planning process.

Nonetheless, the changes to senior management, including the introduction of interim Directors, is a prelude of the instability and uncertainty resulting from the significant changes planned by the senior management restructure. The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue and resistance, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The success of the appointment of the new Executive Directors and the Council's ability to manage this period of change and uncertainty will be critical for the Council if it is to successfully continue on its improvement journey.

We have made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council will need to manage the risk of change fatigue, the loss of corporate memory, and the retention of key staff during this period of change. The successful appointment of new Executive Directors will be critical for the Council's ongoing improvement journey and the Council will need to ensure it maintains the pace of improvement and returns to a stable state following the conclusion of the restructure (key recommendation).
- The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis. (Improvement recommendation)



KLOE B4a: Officer and member relationships

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

Page 8 of 81

Background

Our original review considered the relationships between senior officers and senior members and whether they were appropriate in supporting good governance.

Our December 2022 report made the following improvement recommendations:

- The Council should consider creating a “golden thread” throughout the organisation, linking the Corporate Plan and other Plan objectives, through to the objectives set for each individual member of staff, as part of the Council’s annual performance appraisal process.
- The Council’s Leadership Team must agree medium-term financial objectives and principles to provide a framework for financial planning discussions and ensure that there is a whole organization view of the scale of the financial challenges facing the Council in the medium term and how these are going to be addressed.
- The Council should ensure that capacity is in place to resolve KPI data gaps.
- The Council needs to build on the progress being made on member development and conclude the 2022/23 programme including the review of member PDPs and take further steps to finalise arrangements on succession planning for members in SRA roles.
- It remains important for the Council to utilise financial benchmarking tools and data to support the service and financial planning process, in particular to help identify opportunities for efficiencies, savings and service improvements.

KEY FINDINGS

Due to the nature of the recommendations arising from our 2022 review we have structured the key findings from our follow up review as follows:

- KLOE 4a: Member and officer relationships
- KLOE Bb: Performance management and other matters

Member and officer relationships

The LGA’s corporate peer challenge progress review, undertaken in October 2022, and reported to Cabinet on 7 December 2022 found:

- Much greater stability can now be seen in the council, both politically and managerially.

- The Leader received glowing endorsements during LGA discussions with stakeholders both internally and externally. People particularly highlighted her inclusive and supportive approach. She is seen to be a Leader for Sandwell who is engaged in all the right places – internally, locally, sub-regionally and nationally.
- Cabinet and Leadership Team are working increasingly well at both a bilateral and collective level. At the heart of this sits a ‘no surprises’ principle. Cabinet members outlined to us that they now feel much better appraised of emerging issues and senior officers indicated a greater confidence in drawing elected members’ attention to challenging issues.
- Cabinet is forming well and demonstrated a strong sense of ‘team’, appropriately balancing the respecting of individuals’ areas of responsibility with ensuring collective understanding, responsibility and decision-making.
- The managerial Leadership Team has settled following its’ completion but now has to become central to a ‘One Council, One Team’ approach and driving key organisational-wide agendas. These include improving customer service and establishing the desired organisational culture.
- External partners within the sub-region are seeing the council now being much better engaged.

During our review senior stakeholders echoed these LGA findings, including advising that they experience a much greater level of stability in relationships, with a focus of political discussions on the present and future rather than on past issues.

The Council continues to proactively engage in regional bodies, such as the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) including being a member of the WMCA Race and Equalities Task Force and the Council Leader is the WMCA lead for community cohesion.

The new Chief Executive has invested significant time in developing relationships with the Cabinet and wider members, and has a mantra for the organisation that the Council is member-led, officer-driven and customer-focussed. The weekly joint leadership meeting between the Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team is considered to be working effectively. Senior members have gained experience in their roles, have a clear sense of their priorities, have gained confidence in how to appropriately challenge officers, and a healthy respect is emerging between senior officers and members, with officers respecting manifesto priorities. These improvements will need to be sustained.

KLOE B4a: Officer and member relationships (cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

Member and officer relationships (cont'd)

The Cabinet has demonstrated its ability to take tough decisions, such as the introduction of charging for garden waste (see KLOE A7) and on the Brandhall site decision (which is discussed below).

There had been a low response rate to the member-officer relationship survey launched in April 2023. A wide range of channels was used to communicate survey to members, however, the low response has explained as being due to the timing of the survey, which was during the pre-May election period.

There continues to be a mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees. *This maturity of relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles.*

Brandhall Scrutiny Call In

The Cabinet at their meeting on 20th July 2022 approved plans for the building of a primary school, 190 homes and a public park on the site of the former Brandhall Golf Course. This decision was subject to a call-in notification, in line with the Local Government Act 2000, which was considered by the Budget and Corporate Management Scrutiny Board on 8 August 2022. Cabinet considered the Scrutiny Board's recommendation at its meeting on 17 August 2022, which resulted in officers being requested to update their report which led to the original decision. A further report and associated options were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 November 2022. Cabinet was required to consider amending the original decision, or not, before adopting a final decision. Cabinet agreed to implement their decision as determined on 20 July 2022. Call-in powers provide a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the executive needs to be revisited (or possibly changed). It provides a key check and balance in the leader and cabinet system of governance. Whilst this power should not be one used as part of the day-to-day approach to scrutiny, the Council had not had an effective track record of using scrutiny call in powers at the time of our original 2021 review.

The Brandall golf course site provides a recent example of the Council effectively managing this key scrutiny mechanism. This also provides an example of Cabinet being able to take difficult decisions. More generally, we have been advised that the Council's scrutiny function now has a greater involvement in pre-decision scrutiny.

Member development and behaviour

Following the May 2023 local elections, approximately a third (21) of members were new to the Council, and all have been offered participation in the induction programme. The member development programme has continued during 2023 and is regarded as being far more comprehensive and effective than prior member training programmes, which is reflected in the results of a member survey, with 98% of respondents stating the effectiveness of the training had been good or very good. Training has been provided on the code of conduct, decision making and Council procedure rules, public speaking skills and overview and scrutiny. The programme included a showcase day with senior officers, providing training on the code of conduct, scrutiny, licencing, planning, finance and equalities and diversity.

There is no evidence of factional infighting within political groups, and those who were not re-elected in May 2023 have not subsequently made their presence felt on the affairs of the Council. Key stakeholders described the Council as having moved to a more "normal" state of politics that would be expected in local government. Member behaviours continue on a positive trajectory, and there is evidence of zero tolerance of bad behaviours being effectively enforced.

Consideration is now being given to succession planning for members in senior roles, such as the introduction of a second (non-statutory) deputy leader, and ensuring they have had appropriate training, including shadowing opportunities. The Leader is exploring a skills audit to inform those with Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) roles. A shadow Cabinet, comprising members of the opposition, is being introduced that will shadow the portfolios of the Cabinet, and provide an additional level of scrutiny and challenge, with a protocol developed to set out clear expectations on how this arrangement will work. Cabinet has introduced a fortnightly drop-in session for other members to attend. These are all positive steps being taken and demonstrate an increasing maturity of the Council's political leadership. *Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded.*

KLOE B4b: Performance management and other matters

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider whether relationships between senior officers and senior members are appropriate in supporting good governance.

Page 83

Member Development and Behaviour (Cont'd)

Personal Development Plans (PDPs) were due to be created for all members to ensure their development is bespoke to their individual needs. Some progress has been made, but take up has been lower than anticipated (at c 30%) with member capacity considered the primary reason for this. **The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles**

Financial benchmarking

Financial benchmarking has been used to support the 2024/25 budget setting process, including the use of LGA Inform as part of the Cabinet and Leadership Team away days, and there is evidence of an increased appetite from Cabinet, services and directorates to access and use financial benchmarking to better inform decision making, alongside recognition of the learning opportunities from other councils.

This is a positive direction of travel, and the Council should continue to champion, invest in and utilise financial benchmarking in its service and business planning.

Performance Management and KPIs

The Performance Management Framework has been discussed in the Key Recommendations section of this report, which set out progress being made.

The Council is considering investment in a performance management system, to move away from the current spreadsheet-based approach, and improve recording and reporting of performance. **The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.**

Medium term financial planning

This has been discussed in the Key Recommendations section of the report.

KLOE 4 Overall conclusions and recommendations

The Cabinet and Leadership Team are continuing to work well both collectively and via their individual Director and Portfolio Lead roles. There continues to be a more mature engagement between the Leader, Cabinet, Committee Chairs and senior officers, supporting good planning and work programming across different Council committees and a greater level of professionalism in how business is conducted by these committees.

The Leadership Team has continued to demonstrate a corporate approach to managing key issues and challenges but on medium-term financial planning and transformation there still remains work to do. The Cabinet is increasingly demonstrating its ability to take hard decisions, and will need to continue to do this, given financial and other challenges ahead.

Whilst positive progress continues to be made, the Council remains on an improvement journey, and we have identified the following improvement recommendations:

- This maturity of senior officer and member relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach to must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles
- Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded.
- The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles.
- The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.

KLOE B5: Standards Committee

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the appropriateness of the work undertaken by the Standards Committee.

Background

Our original review considered the appropriateness of the work undertaken by the Ethical Standards and Development Committee. Our December 2022 report noted that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

We recommended that the Council must ensure that the new arrangements now in place are used effectively to monitor and take prompt action whenever inappropriate behaviour is identified.

KEY FINDINGS

Complaints

At the Standards Committee meeting on 24 October 2023 eight complaints were reported. Seven were complaints from members of the public and one was anonymous. Of these, six were determined as no breach of the Code of Conduct or the complaint did not relate to the Code, one was withdrawn and one was still being reviewed. One of the eight related to a breach of the Code that related to not declaring an interest, which was resolved locally and resulted in training for the relevant councillor.

The Standards Committee has not had to convene its sub-committee to consider standards of member behaviour, and it is notable that the complaints have not been received from officers or members. This indicates an ongoing improvement in member-to-member and member-to-officer relationships. The current level of complaints does not indicate any underlying issues that need to be resolved.

Other Findings

The Member Code of Conduct is reviewed annually and the next review is due by the end of the 2023/24 municipal year. We have been advised that other councils (Telford and Nottingham) have adopted/adapted the Council's Code, which reflects positively on the Council's approach.

The member development programme continues with a review and lessons learned being incorporated from the previous programme, and the LGA Mentoring Programme for members is ongoing.

The Standards Committee oversees the member development programme, member induction programme and code of conduct issues. It has an established work programme that also includes gifts and hospitality, member DBS checks and member personal safety.

The Chair of the Committee remains committed to a process of continuous improvement and has demonstrated positive commitment to their role and ensuring the effective operation of the workings of the committee.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

KLOE B6: Audit Committee

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the actions undertaken by the Audit Committee during 2021 in relation to the review into the Wragge report.

Background

Our original review considered the long-standing issues relating to the Wragge and Cox reports.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks

The report noted that a final decision needs to be made by the Leader before this matter can be considered formally closed.

KEY FINDINGS

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, at its meeting on 5 June 2023 considered a letter from the Leader to the Committee Chair (dated 23 March 2023) setting out a response to the Committee's resolution made at its meeting of 17 March 2022.

The Leader's letter included decisions taken to improve the Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and associated culture change. This has included establishing an Equality Commission and a new Equalities Team, approval of a new Equality Policy, adoption of the LGA Equality Framework, the implementation of a new EDI Strategy, updated guidance on equality impact assessments and the delivery of various EDI events and initiatives to raise EDI awareness and celebrate the Council's and community's diversity.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has agreed that this matter is now formally closed.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.



KLOE B7: Financial reporting

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's response to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 audit findings report.

Background

Our original review considered the Council's responses to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 Audit Findings Report (AFR) and further issues identified by our governance review.

Our December 2022 report recommended:

- The Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements require significant improvement. We note that there are a number of legacy issues from prior years that are undermining the quality of the financial statements. We consider that this needs to be an area of priority for the Council. Until these matters are resolved there will remain some uncertainty over the Council's financial position
- The Council must successfully implement the new corporate asset management system, to timescale, ensure all key finance roles have permanent appointments, and prioritise the training and development of the Finance Team so that the role and behaviour changes planned become embedded.

KEY FINDINGS

CIPFA Financial Management Reviews

During 2021 CIPFA undertook a review of the Council's financial management performance, using the CIPFA Five Star FM Model. This model considered various aspects of financial management such as delivering accountability, supporting performance and enabling transformation. These were then rated across a number of management dimensions (leadership, people, process and stakeholders). CIPFA provide an overall star rating between one and five, with five being the highest. The original review, which reported in January 2022, gave an overall rating of 2 for the Council and the Council incorporated CIPFA's recommendations into the Council's Improvement Plan when this was developed later that year.

The Council asked CIPFA to undertake a follow up review, to consider progress against the recommendations made in their initial review. This was reported in December 2022, and CIPFA noted improvement in most areas, with the overall rating increased to 3. Positive progress included that finance is seen as a key function and priority, an improved MTFs and budgetary processes, and greater coherence on a programme for financial reform.

CIPFA also noted areas for improvement including the need for:

- Greater leadership depth in finance
- Strong and robust savings plans.
- Greater stability in finance staff, less reliance on interims, and protection of corporate knowledge
- Improved financial acumen across the wider Council and wider training be provided
- Cross-authority alignment of risk
- Oracle Fusion to drive streamlining of process.
- An improved ability to provide information in a timely and satisfactory manner to external auditors.

The Council has incorporated the recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review into the Improvement Plan. **The Council should ensure that these CIPFA recommendations are fully implemented.**

Financial statements

Our most recent Audit Findings Report, from August 2023, provided an update on the 2020/21 accounts, and the resolution of material errors and other accounting issues that had contributed to the delay in the opinion on these accounts. The 2020/21 accounts were signed off on 31 August 2023.

There remain significant delays in the Council providing appropriate draft accounts for the periods 2021/22 and 2022/23 and there is significant risk that, should the Government confirm 31 March 2024 as the backstop deadline for opinions to be signed for all backlog accounts up to and including 2022/23, that Grant Thornton will need to issue qualified or disclaimed opinions for one or both these years.

Whilst an interim financial accountant is now in role to support the accounts process, we have still not seen evidence of improvement in the overall capacity and capability of the Council's finance team in relation to the production of draft accounts.

KLOE B7: Financial reporting (cont'd)

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider the Council's response to recommendations raised in our 2019/20 audit findings report.

Financial Statements (cont'd)

Whilst we note that further actions have been taken over the past twelve months to address our concerns, and the finance team have most recently been prioritising their focus on the 2024/25 budget, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still require significant improvement. As at 6 December 2023 we had not been provided with the draft financial statements or working papers for the 2021/22 financial statements. This remains an area of priority for the Council, including managing the recruitment challenges that have been experienced. Until these matters are resolved there will remain some uncertainty over the Council's financial position. **The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production.** If the 2021/22 accounts are not made available for audit by 31 December 2023, or are of poor quality we will need to consider the further use of our statutory powers.

Financial systems and finance team

The Director of Finance left the Council in September 2023 and has been replaced by an interim whilst the recruitment of a permanent replacement takes place. The Deputy S151 Officer also left the Council in September 2023.

Whilst the former Director of Finance advised us that their restructure of the finance team was concluded, as noted above, we have still not seen an improvement on the Council's production of its financial statements. In general, we note that there still appear to be a large number of interims in the finance team, including the current S151 officer. This reduces the overall effectiveness and corporate memory of the finance team and should be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

The Interim Director of Finance is considering the structure and resourcing of the finance department, and as part of this they **should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation, including implementing the recommendations of the CIPFA follow up Financial Management review.**

As already discussed in the section of this report on KLOE A3, a new asset management system (Techforge) is being implemented with phase 1 to go live in December 2023 and will be used alongside Oracle Fusion when this is in place.

Phase 2 of the asset management system implementation includes consideration of modules relating to capital accounting, and a fixed asset register, to support accounts production. An initial meeting is due to place in January 2024 to agree workstreams, leads and timescales for this phase.

The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.

Oracle Fusion provides an opportunity for the Council to improve its arrangements for budget monitoring, rationalising the structure of its chart of accounts to align to the planned new directorate structure, creating a more effective monitoring of planned savings, and having a "single version of the truth" on the Council's financial position.

We have set out improvement recommendations in relation to Oracle Fusion in section KLOE A10 of this report.

Conclusions and recommendations

The CIPFA follow up Financial Management review identified improvement across various areas of financial management, but significant progress remains for the finance team to become fully effective. In particular, the Council's procedures for the production of its financial statements still requires significant improvement.

We have made the following recommendations:

- The Council should ensure that all recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review are fully implemented.
- The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production.
- The Interim Director of Finance should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation.
- The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.

KLOE B8: Engagement with residents and community stakeholders

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider how the Council engages with residents and community stakeholders.

Background

Whilst not a key line of enquiry for our original 2021 review we agreed with the Council's management as part of our 2022 review to consider how the Council engages with residents and community groups to supplement our understanding of the Council's improvement journey.

Our December 2022 report concluded that we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The report made the following recommendation:

- The Council needs to ensure that it continues to engage with residents and that this engagement supports greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

Resident engagement

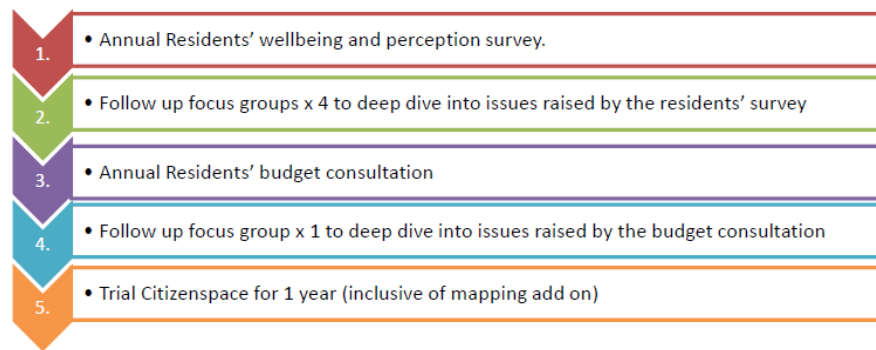
The Council undertook its first residents' survey in 1988 but had only occasionally repeated this exercise, the last time being in 2017 to support development of Vision 2030. Regular consultation on budgetary plans had not been conducted with residents since 2010 although annual consultation is carried out with non-domestic rate payers. Such major surveys are a critical element of an effective performance management framework and when undertaken regularly provide vital trend information.

Recognising the benefits of resident engagement during 2022 the Council commissioned Enventure, a market research agency, to conduct a borough-wide residents' survey to support evidence-based policy, service delivery and performance management, and also a separate budget consultation exercise. The Leadership Team at its meeting of 22 November 2022 considered the findings and felt that the results of the residents survey and budget consultation had a constructive impact on the Council.

The Leadership Team recognised that positive feedback boosted staff morale, and provided learning opportunities and a direction of how the Council could improve. The findings from both exercises provided a foundation of 2023/24 business planning.

The Leadership Team committed to building on this approach and approved proposals for a corporate approach to consultation and engagement.

The Council established a corporate consultation and engagement working group with cross directorate representation to develop a council-wide approach to resident consultation and engagement. This group mapped existing customer research, intelligence and engagement from across the Council and undertook research into best practice from other councils. The following framework was developed and approved by the Leadership Team:



Citizen Space has been introduced to the Council's website, a new consultation hub where residents can subscribe to news on Council consultations and other engagement activity, and a section called "we asked, you said, we did" which provides updates on the outcomes of how consultation and engagement activity informed Council decisions.

Between April and September 2023 2,628 individual survey responses were completed, across 47 surveys relating to nine directorates. The highest responses were from residents on the areas that have universal impact, such as traffic enforcement, litter and safety. The Council is starting to use the Citizen Space to collect feedback on customer satisfaction, and the Council is using the data to consider how services can be improved.

The Council produced a State of the Borough report in August 2023, as part of the wider discussions and consultation to refresh Vision 2030 (which was produced in 2017). This included insights from the most recent budget consultation and children and young people SHAPE survey.

KLOE B8: Engagement with residents and community stakeholders

The purpose of this KLOE was to consider how the Council engages with residents and community stakeholders.

Resident engagement (cont'd)

The Council commissioned MEL Research to undertake a Resident Wellbeing and Perception Survey during Autumn 2023. The key findings were:

- Overall satisfaction with the Council was 65%, with 19% being dissatisfied. The Local Government Association (LGA) benchmark is 60% satisfaction, so the Council was performing above this national benchmark. In 2022, resident satisfaction was 66%, so there has been a slight decline over the last year.
- 67% of respondents to the survey said that they trust the Council. The LGA national benchmark as 56%. There was no change to the 2022 survey which also resulted in the level of trust in the council being 67%.

The Council now recognises the importance of regular resident engagement, has introduced a framework and other arrangements that demonstrates its commitment, and is using the findings to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.

Wider community engagement

The Council has held two cost of living summits with key public sector partners, business ambassadors, and representatives from faith and community groups, to discuss how people of Sandwell can be supported. This is an example of the Council now taking a lead locally on national issues affecting their communities and partners.

Conclusion

Overall, we found no evidence of any significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for ensuring that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.

The Council should continue to build on the progress that has been made in engaging with residents so that it continues to support greater corporate focus on service quality and customer outcomes.



Appendices

Appendix A: The scope of the auditor's work on value for money arrangements

Page 91

Revised approach to value for money work for 2020/21 onwards

- On 1 April 2020, the National Audit Office introduced a new Code of Audit Practice which comes into effect from audit year 2020/21. The Code introduced a revised approach to the audit of value for money.
- There are three main changes arising from the NAO's new approach:
 - A new set of key criteria, covering financial sustainability, governance and improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness
 - More extensive reporting, with a requirement on the auditor to produce a commentary on arrangements across all of the key criteria
 - Auditors undertaking sufficient analysis on the local authority's value for money arrangements to arrive at far more sophisticated judgements on performance, as well as key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit.
- The Code requires auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under the three specified reporting criteria.



Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the body delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.



Financial Sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the body can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3-5 years)



Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the body makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the body makes decisions based on appropriate information

Potential types of recommendations

A range of different recommendations could be made following the completion of work on the body's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, which are as follows:



Statutory recommendation

Written recommendations to the body under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. A recommendation under schedule 7 requires the body to discuss and respond publicly to the report.



Key recommendation

The Code of Audit Practice requires that where auditors identify significant weaknesses in arrangements to secure value for money they should make recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the body. We have defined these recommendations as 'key recommendations'.



Improvement recommendation

These recommendations, if implemented should improve the arrangements in place at the body, but are not made as a result of identifying significant weaknesses in the body's arrangements

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations

This summarises our improvement recommendations relating to our 2022 key recommendations.

Improvement recommendations		Page #
	Improvement Plan	
1	The Council has not yet concluded introducing a “golden thread” that aligns corporate plans to individual’s annual performance reviews, and this approach should be progressed to include the behaviours set out in the One Team Framework, so that expected values and behaviours can be monitored and measured.	17
	Medium-Term Financial Planning	
2	The senior leadership team should make time to agree clear objectives for financial planning, and the financial, organisational and behavioural actions required to achieve these objectives.	18
	Corporate Transformation	
3	As part of the new transformation arrangements the Council should ensure there is corporate oversight of the use of external consultants, including how such commissions align to the Council’s transformation strategy.	19
	Commercial Strategy	
4	The Council should consider developing an agreed definition of commercial as a way of revitalising the progress of the commercial strategy. Once the strategy has been adopted it will need to align the Council’s transformation strategy and MTFP assumptions.	19
	Customer Journey	
5	The Council should consider enhancing customer journey metrics to measure its performance through full customer journeys including the customer experience and satisfaction.	20
	Asset Management Strategy and Database	
6	Ensure that appropriate decisions are taken on proposed asset disposals to ensure the savings targets are realised.	21

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

Page # 93

	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE A1: Sandwell Children's Trust	
7	Greater emphasis is required by the Council and SCT on progressing area partnership working, including greater clarity on system leadership.	24
8	The Council should continue to monitor the vacancy rate tolerance, and use of agency staff at the Trust, in particular the impact and effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal in improving recruitment and retention rates.	24
9	Realising the planned Invest to Save savings will be critical to the Trust meeting its planned revenue budget and the invest to save payments being repaid to the Council.	24
	KLOE A2: Sandwell Leisure Trust	
10	The Council should continue to monitor SLT's operational and financial performance to ensure that SLT meets its 2023/24 contractual targets and planned changes and efficiencies result in agreeing a management funding agreement for 2024/25 that is line with the Council's MTFP assumptions.	27
11	The Council should ensure that SLT builds on its more commercial approach and sets out a plan for the timeframe when the Trust's financial position requires no subsidy from the Council, including a clear and deliverable plan for eliminating the forecast losses at the aquatics centre.	27
	KLOE A4: SEND Transport	
12	The next SEND Transport procurement should consider how services can be commissioned to manage ongoing significant and ongoing budgetary pressures,	29
	KLOE A7: Waste Service	
13	The Council should ensure that it concludes the fleet review and Serco confirm that they are content with the value for money of the fleet maintenance undertaken by the Council.	31
14	The Council must work with Serco to ensure that the risk of future industrial action is effectively mitigated.	31

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

Page #94

	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE A8: Governance and Legal Support to DPH	
15	The Council should conclude its plans to introduce a policy for working with local MPs and associated guidance.	33
	KLOE A10: Introduction of new ERP system	
16	The Council should ensure it responds effectively to the recommendations set out in our separate Oracle Fusion implementation report before the go live date.	35
17	The Council should continue its work on defining financial and non-financial benefits, and that benefits identified and agreed are measurable, and can be effectively tracked and the transformational opportunities of the new system are fully realised.	35
	KLOE B2: Senior Leadership	
18	The Chief Executive should ensure that the Monitoring Officer continues to be a standing member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team on a permanent basis	38
	KLOE B4a: Officer and Member Relationships	
19	This maturity of senior officer and member relationships will need to continue, with further difficult decisions inevitably being required, and this approach to must be sustained following future changes to those in senior officer or senior member roles	41
20	Whilst pathways are being put in place for succession planning, further work is required to conclude these plans, including the provision of appropriate training and development so that these changes become fully embedded	41

Appendix B: Improvement recommendations (cont'd)

This appendix summarises our improvement recommendations by KLOE.

Page #	Improvement recommendations	Page #
	KLOE B4b: Performance management and other matters	
21	The Council should conclude the member PDP roll out, and in particular ensure these are in place for members who are in positions of special responsibility or are aspiring to hold such roles.	41
22	The Council should develop a business case for a performance management system, to appropriately consider this investment.	41
	KLOE B7: Financial reporting	
23	The Council should ensure that all recommendations from CIPFA's follow up review are fully implemented.	45
24	The Council should take urgent steps to resolve the issues relating to delays in providing and the quality of financial statements production	45
25	The Interim Director of Finance should review finance team capacity, capability and training needs to ensure they meet the needs of the organisation	45
26	The Council must ensure a successful implementation of phase 2 of the new asset management system, including effective alignment with Oracle Fusion, so that the benefits planned to support accounts production are realised.	45



© 2023 Grant Thornton UK LLP. All rights reserved.

'Grant Thornton' refers to the brand under which the Grant Thornton member firms provide assurance, tax and advisory services to their clients and/or refers to one or more member firms, as the context requires.

Grant Thornton UK LLP is a member firm of Grant Thornton International Ltd (GTIL). GTIL and the member firms are not a worldwide partnership. GTIL and each member firm is a separate legal entity. Services are delivered by the member firms. GTIL does not provide services to clients. GTIL and its member firms are not agents of, and do not obligate, one another and are not liable for one another's acts or omissions.

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Recommendations from Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board on the Budget 2024/25
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources Councillor Piper
Director:	Assistant Chief Executive James McLaughlin
Key Decision:	No
Contact Officer:	Suky Suthi-Nagra Democratic and Members' Services Manager Suky_suthinagra@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board is assured that there is a clear plan, underpinned by data, for the Council's Budget 2024/25.
- 1.2 That the Cabinet and the Executive team review the proposals for Borough Economy again to ensure the assumptions upon which they are based are robust and take account of the missed income targets from 2023/24.
- 1.3 That the Cabinet and Executive team review:-
 - (a) Council, the Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme, Public Health and Sandwell Children's Trust contracts and agreements to ensure they are fit for purpose, take a whole-council approach to meeting the Council's strategic objectives and represent value for money;
 - (b) contract monitoring management processes to ensure they are robust and ensure value for money.



- 1.4 That the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board consider reports within the next three months on detailed proposals to achieve savings in:-
- (a) Children's External Educational and Care Placements; and
 - (b) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport.
- 1.5 That the following topics be included on the work programme of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-
- (a) the customer journey;
 - (b) the effect on performance and sickness levels of reduced budgets;
 - (c) funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 1.6 That, in connection with 1.2 and 1.3 above, a further report be submitted to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, within 2 months' time, on the decision of Cabinet.







2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board considered the draft Budget 2024/25 proposals at its meeting on 15 January 2024. Cabinet Members, Directors and Assistant Directors attended to present the proposals to the Board and to answer questions from members.
- 2.2 The Board subsequently held a workshop to discuss potential recommendations to the Cabinet on the draft budget proposals, which are to be considered and finalised at the Board's meeting on 1 February 2024. Should there be any update to report from that meeting, it shall be done verbally at the meeting of Cabinet on 7 February 2024.
- 2.3 The Board stated that it was assured that there was a clear plan, underpinned by data, for the Council's Budget 2024/25.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

3.1 Effective scrutiny of the Council’s budget supports all objectives of the Corporate Plan:

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board’s involvement in the budget setting process strengthens decision making and increases transparency.

4.2 In addition to the recommendations to Cabinet, the Board also identified areas that it wished to include in its work programme. These were:-

- Detailed proposals to achieve savings in:-
 - Children’s External Educational and Care Placements;
 - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport.
- the customer journey;
- the effect on performance and sickness levels of reduced budgets;
- funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, Cabinet is requested to respond to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Management Board within two months, setting out any approved recommendations, and how they will be implemented.

6 Implications

Resources:	In considering and approving the proposals, Cabinet would need to consider the impacts of re-reviewing any particular aspect of the proposals against the requirement to set a budget by 11 March.
Legal and Governance:	In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, Cabinet is requested to respond to the recommendations of the scrutiny board within two months, setting out any approved recommendations, and how they will be implemented.
Risk:	There are no risk implications associated with this report.
Equality:	No Equality Impact Assessment is required in relation to this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	No health and wellbeing implications associated with this report.
Social Value	No social value implications are raised in this report.
Climate Change	There are no implications for climate change arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting	No corporate parenting implications associated with this report.

7. Appendices

None.

8. Background Papers

None.



Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Draft Budget 2024/25
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources Cllr Bob Piper
Director:	Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer Brendan Arnold
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Claire Spencer and Ramesh Prashar (Deputy Section 151 Officers) Claire_spencer@sandwell.gov.uk Ramesh_prashar@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Draft Budget 2024/25 including all appendices and it be forwarded to Full Council on 20th February 2024 for consideration and approval with the following specific recommendations:-

- I. That it be noted that the Council Tax Base was agreed at Full Council on 12th December 2023.
- II. That it be noted that the Council Tax Support Scheme was approved at Full Council on 12th December 2023.
- III. That it be noted that Housing Rents and Service Charges were uplifted by Full Council on 12th December 2023
- IV. That the report of the Section 151 Officer, included at paragraphs 2.4.1 to 2.4.20, as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and adequacy of proposed financial reserves be noted
- V. That it be recommended that Council approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix A which incorporates the following

recommendations:

- a. Approve the MTFS and embedded MTFP as an estimate of the Council's current financial position at January 2024.
 - b. Approve the Guiding Principles as framework for financial planning for the period of the MTFS.
 - c. Approve the Capital Planning Principles to guide the preparation of the Capital Programme in the years ahead.
 - d. Note the planned development of the Transformation Programme to date and through 2024/25 and endorse the extension of the transformational approach to other services of the Council.
 - e. Note the Budget Timetable set out in this report.
 - f. Approve the submission to DLUHC of a proposal to employ flexible use of capital receipts in financial year 2024/25 and to delegate the amendment and final approval of this proposal to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Interim Director of Finance together with the Assistant Chief Executive.
 - g. Approve the onward submission of the Winter 2024 update of the MTFS to the next meeting of Full Council.
 - h. Approve the adjustments to fees and charges as set out in Annex 12.
 - i. Approve the savings proposals set out at Annex 5.
- VI. It be recommended that an increase of 2.99% in the level of general council tax for 2024/25 be approved;
- VII. It be recommended that an increase of 2.00% in the level of Adult Social Care precept for 2024/25 be approved;
- VIII. That it be recommended Council approve the General Fund Budget net budget of £333.008m at Appendix B, including the proposed total increase of Council Tax for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough

2



Council of 4.99%, in accordance with the Council Tax Referendum Principles as set by Government for 2024/25.

- IX. That the Council Tax amounts by Band at Appendix C be noted pending final notifications of precept amounts by the Office of the Policy and Crime Commissioner and the Fire Authority with formal ratification to be presented as part of the Council Tax Resolution on 20th February 2024.
- X. That it be recommended that Council approve the report at Appendix D on the Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools funding which incorporates the following recommendations such that Council:
- a. adopt the minimum transition option for calculating schools funding in 2024/25
 - b. approve the Growth Funding at £1.60m in 2024/25
 - c. approve the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund in 2024/25
 - d. approve the transfer of £0.512m funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the attendance service
 - e. approve the CSSB, De-delegated and Education Function proposals as set out in Annex A (with the exception of Schools in Financial Difficulty).
 - f. adopt the allocation by block per paragraph 5 of that Appendix; and
 - g. note the details of the Schools Funding Settlement.
- XI. That it be recommended that Council approve the General Fund Capital Programme at Appendix E;
- XII. That it be recommended that Council approve the Housing Revenue Account and HRA Capital Programme at Appendix F including:



- a. Noting that Full Council on 12th December 2023 approved recommendations of the report entitled 'The review of council tenants rents and housing related property charges' as outlined in paragraph 8 of Appendix F and Annex 1.
 - b. Approve the HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as set out in Table 2.
 - c. Note the HRA estimated working balances in 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 15 of Appendix F.
 - d. Approve the investment principles for the HRA Capital programme as set out in paragraph 19 of Appendix F.
 - e. Approve the HRA Capital Programme control totals as set out in Table 3 of Appendix F
 - f. Approve the HRA Treasury Management Strategy as set out in paragraph 4 of Appendix F.
 - g. Approve the 30 year HRA Business Plan as set out in Annex 2 of Appendix F.
- XIII. That it be recommended that Council approve the Capital Strategy and Capital Financing Strategy at Appendix G and H of this report.
- XIV. That it be recommended that Council approve the Investment Strategy set out at Appendix I.
- XV. That it be recommended that Council approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement at Appendix J including:
- a. The Borrowing and Investment Strategy for 2024/25
 - b. The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2024/25
 - c. The Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/27, summarised at Annex 6
 - d. Expected new net borrowing of £40.4m in 2024/25



XVI. That Cabinet endorse the Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework at Appendix K and recommend to Council that:

- a. Approval be given for the Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework for 2024/25 comprising the policies set out at Annexes 1 to 9 of the Appendix K
- b. Approval be granted for the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy (Annex 2), Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy (Annex 3), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Policy (Annex 8), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Hardship Relief Policy (Annex 7) and War Pension Policy (Annex 9) as set out Appendix K; and
- c. Authority be given to the Director of Finance – Section 151 Office in conjunction with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, and in consultation with the monitoring officer to make necessary changes to the policies during 2024/25 due to the Cost of Living Crisis.

XVII. Delegate to the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer any further financial adjustments, corrections or amendments to this suite of reports necessary in forming the final preparation of these papers for Full Council on 20 February.

XVIII. Approve that the Section 151 Officer be given delegated authority to make transfers to or from reserves during the financial year to ensure that adequate reserves are maintained and adjusted when spend from earmarked reserves is required.

XIX. Approve that the Section 151 Officer be given delegated authority to adjust the funding sources applied to the Capital Programme during the year to maximise flexibility in use of capital resources and minimise borrowing costs where possible.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

Introduction or Background

2.1 The Council is legally required in each year to set a balanced budget for the financial year which must be approved before 11th March.

5



- 2.2 To ensure that the budget being presented to Cabinet and Council is balanced and robust, the process usually starts in the early Summer of the previous year with senior officers considering financial performance during the current year plus reflecting on likely pressures on expenditure and income, and potential mitigations, for the upcoming and future financial years. This ensure that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy reflects a reasonable assessment of the Council’s finances over the period of the Strategy.
- 2.3 This early engagement ensures that sufficient time is given to the importance of the budget setting process and also any planning for require change to ensure that the Council remains on a sound financial footing in the medium term.
- 2.4 The Local Government Finance Act 1972 requires the Council to set a balanced, risk assessed budget each year and approve a Council Tax precept by 11th March. The following paragraphs (*see italics*) comprise the Section 25 Report (Local Government Act 2003) made by the Section 151 Officer in respect of the 2024/25 Draft Budget.

Section 25 - Report of the Section 151 Officer as to the Robustness of the Estimates Made for the Purposes of the Budget Calculations and the Adequacy of the Proposed Financial Reserves.

Summary and Background

- 2.4.1 *Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Authority’s Chief Financial Officer (presently the Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer) is required to report to Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the Council’s Budget calculations and the adequacy of the General Fund balances and reserves. The Council must have regard to this report, which is set out below, when making decisions in respect of the Budget.*
- 2.4.2 *In expressing the opinion, the Section 151 Officer has considered the financial management and control frameworks that are in place, the budget assumptions, the financial risks facing the council and the level of reserves.*



2.4.3 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 concentrates primarily on the uncertainties within the forthcoming budget year, however longer-term uncertainties and increasing pressures on the Council's finances also inform consideration of the adequacy of the level of reserves for the medium term.

Financial Controls

2.4.4 The Section 151 Officer has responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal control is maintained to provide an assessment of the current position across the whole General Fund and identifying areas for improvement where appropriate.

2.4.5 The Code of Practice for Financial Management (the FM Code) was introduced by CIPFA in November 2019. The Code clarifies how Chief Finance Officers should satisfy their statutory responsibility for good financial administration as required in section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Council has had two external reviews by CIPFA assessing performance against the Code and the second of these reported in early 2023 showing that the Council's rating had been upgraded from two to three stars out of a possible five. Further progress in this area is expected and further review work by CIPFA is envisaged.

2.4.6 The Internal Audit function of the Council provides an independent assurance to the Section 151 Officer on the quality of the internal control environment within the Council. The 2023 Annual Internal Audit report presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in July 2023 gave an opinion of 'Reasonable Assurance' for Budgetary Control, and 'Substantial Assurance' for Treasury Management. These are important considerations in forming this Section 25 report.

2.4.7 The implementation of the new Oracle Fusion system - which is expected in the early summer of 2024 (July) is expected to afford budget holders better access to financial information and in time will further improve the quality of the Financial control environment generally.

Financial year 2023/24 and Budgetary Control

2.4.8 The latest forecast at Period 9 in 2023/24 suggests that a minor underspend of up to £3m may come to hand when outturn is declared for that year. This position will not be confirmed until late May 2024 when the



Provisional Outturn figures are expected to become available. In response to earlier forecasts that predicted a minor overspend the Leadership Team has set in place Value for Money Panels which have enhanced consideration of VFM in the Council generally and are felt to have made some contribution to the position now described in the latest forecast.

2.4.9 There is evidence to suggest that the Council has responded positively to the challenges presented by the earlier reporting of a potential overspend and therefore the budget monitoring process is capable at operational and corporate level of managing the Council's commitments within the required parameters.

2.4.10 Within 2023/24, the Council has succeeded in delivering the majority of savings included in the 2023/24 Budget, which bodes well for the continued development of successful delivery of future savings, including the 2024/25 financial year.

Medium Term Financial Planning

2.4.11 The Council has completed successfully a Medium Term Financial Planning process for both the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. In doing so, it has for the first time set down a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) over 5 years and has successfully forecast the estimated budget shortfall for 2024/25. In responding to this shortfall and delivering proposals for a balanced budget the Council has consulted on a wide suite of potential budget savings and has identified around £12m of savings (largely recurring) together with a package of short term measures designed to suppress short term financial pressures. Overall, this package of benefits amounts to £18.988m which is sufficient to balance the 2024/25 Budget and which makes a significant contribution to the goal of eliminating financial shortfalls in the medium term.

2.4.12 In forming the MTFS and the associated suite of reports appended to the Draft Budget 2024/25 the Council has demonstrated a significant capability to frame and form both strategic and operational initiatives to manage the strategic position.

2.4.13 It is noted that the Council continues to show financial shortfalls in its MTFS from 2025/26 onwards. In order to deal with this position, the Council has taken and continues to take significant steps to adopt a

8



transformational approach to service delivery. This will include modernisation of structure, form and process and the adoption of new technology into Council operations. Transformation approaches are already in place for Oracle Fusion and are in various stages of development for Adult Social Care, Housing, Property and Customer Services. Further developments are planned.

Council Tax

2.4.14 A further key component in balancing the Budget has been the recommendation for the agreement by Council of an increase in Council Tax (2.99%) and Adult Social Care Precept (2%) to an overall increase of 4.99%. It is of the utmost importance that this stream of funding is agreed in order to (a) protect the strategic wellbeing of the Council in future years and (b) to suppress the need for additional savings in those years.

On Amendments to the Draft Budget 2024/25

2.4.15 Should Amendments to the Budget be set before Council that impair the prospect that the Budget and Council Tax for 2024/25 can be set lawfully by (a) implying an imbalance or other aspect which the Section 151 Officer determines as resulting in a loss or (b) deems to be otherwise unlawful, Council will not be able to set a lawful Budget as is required by statute. Under these circumstances, should they arise, Council would (a) need to re-consider the adjustment that has resulted in the position reached or (b) present alternative proposals that in the view of the Statutory Officer (s) deal with the observed impediment.

Reserves

2.4.16 Arising from the statutory responsibilities of the Section 151 Officer - and present circumstances - it will not be suitable for any replacement saving to draw further from the limited pool of Reserves held by the Council. Whilst the level of Reserves is significant, the majority are earmarked to provide specific resources to assist, deliver or protect services to the Borough through (a) successful project/service delivery, (b) risk management, (c) capital investment or (d) other specific purposes.

2.4.17 The Section 151 Officer considers the level of Reserves held within the Council to be sufficient at this time. That said, the Council needs to be cautious in its deployment of any windfalls monies they may come to hand



unexpectedly and to set these aside to provide for future financial challenges.

Sandwell Children's Trust

2.4.18 The Council uses the services of Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) to deliver a tranche of key services to Children in the Borough. The Trust, a Teckal Company Limited by Guarantee, is an important and valued partner of the Council. In the Draft Budget for 2024/25 the Council is recommended to agree a Contract Sum of £80.8m for the Trust in that year. Attention is drawn to the fact that the Trust is operating with an accumulated deficit which is expected to increase beyond £10m by 31 March 2024. The Trust and the Council have resolved to secure the services of a leading consultancy to assist in forming a Medium Term Financial Plan to identify options for addressing this imbalance over the remaining 4 years of the contract. For the avoidance of doubt the Council presently regards the Trust as a 'going concern' and has issued a letter to the Trust in this regard.

Budget Assumptions and background

2.4.19 The Section 151 Officer is satisfied that the Draft Budget 2024/25 has been based on the best available information and has used reasonable assumptions and approaches that are commonly used across the Local Government sector.

2.4.20 In addition, a number of key processes have been in place and the Section 151 Officer is generally satisfied that:

- i. Existing and future expenditure pressures have been suitably estimated using suitable techniques and by reference to evidence and relevant professional advice and informed opinion.*
- ii. The senior members of the Finance Team and/or the Section 151 Officer have provided advice to both the Leadership Team, Cabinet and Scrutiny throughout the process.*

3. How does this Budget deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

3.1 The strategic direction for the Council is set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025 (Big Plans for a Great Place). The plan was refreshed in



2023 to reflect the current and future needs of the borough as it continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the progress made on the Council's improvement journey under Government intervention.

- 3.2 Sandwell as a Borough faces significant challenges. It is the 12th most deprived borough in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and Sandwell's level of fuel poverty is the fifth highest in UK. The level of average pay within the Borough is lower than in both the West Midlands region and England as a whole and the city's unemployment rate is higher than average compared to a group of similar local authority areas, whilst healthy life expectancy is lower than the national average.
- 3.3 There are, however, many strengths of Sandwell's local economy that provide a foundation for economic sustainability that will improve quality of life and make the borough a more sustainable, greener place. Well placed in a central location in the UK's transport network adjacent to the country's second city, Sandwell has a diverse and young population with pockets of highly innovative businesses and a high level of entrepreneurial activity. Across the Borough, our £2.5bn regeneration pipeline will boost connectivity and economic growth – this includes the recently opened Sandwell Aquatic Centre, showcased in the Commonwealth Games 2022, and the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital.
- 3.4 The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's role as a partner, enabler and leader in Sandwell, and the importance of partnership working to the delivery of the Plan. This approach is equally important to delivery of the MTFs and incorporates elements such as: responding to national and regional policy for local government; leading on innovative approaches to working differently; acting as a civic leader, in collaboration with local residents, communities and partners (public, private, and voluntary and community sectors); working with residents and communities to find solutions to challenges faced in local neighbourhoods; being an effective partner in the West Midlands Combined Authority; being at the forefront of working with Government through the Levelling Up Partnership and leading the local Anchor Network.
- 3.5 To address the challenges faced by Sandwell and maximise the opportunities available to the Borough, the Corporate Plan sets out the six strategic outcomes for the Council:

- The Best Start in life for Children and Young People

11



- People Live Well and Age Well
- Strong, Resilient Communities
- Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods
- A Connected and Accessible Sandwell
- A Strong and Inclusive Economy

- 3.6 In order to achieve these outcomes, it is fundamental that the Council has a strong and sustainable financial position, with resources and assets that are aligned with our strategic outcomes, and that it works in genuine partnership with local residents, communities and partners. Central to the achievement of the Plan, our One Council, One Team approach will focus on the way in which the Council and its employees work, both within the organisation and collaboratively more widely, in order to improve services and make the biggest possible positive impact on people’s lives.
- 3.7 The Corporate Plan clearly sets out the need for financial resilience in order to achieve its objectives. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) reflects the principles, outcomes and priorities set out for Sandwell as contained in the Corporate Plan. The MTFS complements the Corporate Plan by defining the financial framework within which the strategic outcomes will be delivered. It ensures through appropriate resource allocation that it supports delivery of the Plan, alongside the fundamental aims of delivering a balanced budget and enabling the Council to fulfil its statutory duties.
- 3.8 Delivery of the Corporate Plan is monitored regularly through the Council’s Performance Management Framework. As part of the Council’s continuing improvement journey, work continues to further develop and align the monitoring and reporting of performance, financial and transformation programme management information to ensure corporate oversight and the successful delivery of the MTFS.

4. Context and Key Issues

Financial Context: The Provisional Finance Settlement

- 4.1 The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on 18th December 2023. Unusually, on 24th January Government announced that some additional resources would be made available to Local Government in the Final Finance Settlement; at the time of writing these details have yet to come to hand. Accordingly, an update will be provided



to Cabinet at its meeting on 7 February. This announcement will not otherwise change the contents of the Provisional Finance Settlement as described below.

- i) The Council Tax referendum limit will be 2.99% for local authorities, with social care authorities allowed an additional 2% Adult Social Care precept.
- ii) Local Government Funding Reform – the Fair Funding Review and reset of Business Rates growth will not be implemented in 2024/25.
- iii) The Social Care Grant has increased by £692m to £4.5bn nationally.
 - o The increase for this Council equated to £7.02m.
- iv) Adult Social Care Discharged Fund increased by £200m to £500m nationally
 - o Sandwell MBC received an increase £2.15m to take total grant to £5.38m
- v) Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund totalling £1.05bn for 2024/25
 - o Sandwell MBC saw an increase of £3.76m with grant now totalling £8.08m
- vi) No change to the Better Care Fund
- vii) Services Grant continuing to see reductions from £822m in 2022/23 to £464m in 2023/24 to £77m in 2024/25. The decrease in these grants are being used to fund other increases within the overall settlement. Sandwell MBC saw reduction of £3.47m with final grant amount totalling £0.65m

Medium Term Financial Strategy

4.2 The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy was last approved in November 2023 following a significant review.

4.3 Appendix A of this report gives a detailed update to the MTFs with a high-level summary of the Council's financial position. Shown in the following table.



Table A: Summary MTFS (January 2024 update)

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening Net Base Budget	317.103	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338
Budget pressures and technical adjustments	48.812	18.958	15.266	14.118	13.899
Changes in government funding within services	(13.919)	-	-	-	-
Adjusted Net Budget	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338	414.237
Funding	(333.008)	(340.530)	(350.942)	(361.725)	(372.894)
Net Deficit before savings	18.988	30.424	35.278	38.613	41.343
Savings Proposals	(11.988)	(17.924)	(19.570)	(19.570)	(19.570)
Other short term reductions	(7.000)	-	-	-	-
Net Budget (Surplus)/ Shortfall	-	12.500	15.708	19.043	21.773

4.4 The Draft Budget also includes a number of assumptions about income and expenditure changes. These are summarised below and further detail appears on the MTFS (Appendix A: Annex 7)

- i) Inflation has been provided where contractual and unavoidable
- ii) Provision for 2024/25 pay award: a 4% increase is provided for
- iii) Pension contributions have been set in line with the current triennial valuation (updated for 2022 revaluation)
- iv) Business Rates income based on current trends
- v) 4.99% increase in Council Tax, made up of 2.99% 'core' increase and 2% Adult Social Care precept (compared to 2.99% in the draft budget)
- vi) Continual review of spend pressures and growth items

4.5 Budget pressures and growth items have been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team and only included where unavoidable or to meet corporate or statutory objectives.

4.6 Fees and Charges have been increased in general by 5%, except for those that are set by statute or in other limited exceptional circumstances.



However, further specific increases are proposed in some areas where the Council's charges are either not covering costs or where charges are significantly below benchmarks have been applied. A summary of the Council's Fees and Charges are included in the MTFS at (Appendix A - Annex 12).

- 4.7 Inflation, although currently 3.9% (November 2023) remains above the Government 2% target following its peak at 11.1% in October 2022. Inflation levels remained above 10% until April 2023 and have seen steady falls since that date. The Bank of England expects inflation to continue to slow and be back to normal 2% levels by the end of 2025. It is important for the Council's fees and charges to keep pace cumulatively with inflation, but the Council is mindful of the impact of the cost of living and has moderated increases for the majority of its services for 2024/25.
- 4.8 Savings proposals, including the impact of the fees and charges increases detailed above, are included at Appendix A – (Annex 5). The details of the Council's Consultation process through the Summer of 2023 are also set out in the MTFS.
- 4.9 As part of the budget process, and included in the Draft Budget, the Council has also to agree the Contract Sum payable to Sandwell's Children's Trust for the next financial year. This is a dialogue process which begins in the Autumn so that the Council and Trust can agree the assumptions on which the Contract Sum shall be based. The contract sum agreed for 2024/25 is £80.80m which reflects the amount sought by the Trust.
- 4.10 At the time of writing the report the Public Health Grant allocations for 2024/25 had not been announced. The budget proposals assume that the grant remains at the same level as 2023/24.

Dedicated Schools Grant

- 4.11 As part of the budget process the Council also allocates the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to schools in consultation with the Schools Forum. The Government has announced the gross 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), for all Sandwell schools in the sum of £466.2m. This represents an increase of 9.64% from the corresponding amount in 2023/24. This is before recoupment for Academies and Free Schools which will be calculated later and therefore the amount available for

15



distribution by the Council will be lower than this headline figure. The significant increase in Early Year's Block is due mainly to the expanded Early Years entitlements. Any grant amount unspent will probably be recouped back by government. A summary of the 2024/25 DSG by block is shown below:

Table B: Schools Funding 2024/25

DSG Block	Allocation prior to Adjustments	Adjustments	Allocation after adjustments
	£m	£m	£m
Schools Block	349.852	(3.276)	346.576
Central School Services	2.381	0	2.381
High Needs	75.436	(4.490)	70.946
Early Years	38.535	0	38.535
Total	466.204	(7.766)	458.438

4.12 Appendix D to this report details the process and principles adopted for movements between the budget blocks.

Council Tax proposals

4.13 The Draft Budget 2024/25 assumed a 2.99% increase in core Council Tax, and this has been adopted as a general planning assumption across Local Government.

4.14 The Autumn Statement and Provisional Finance Settlement confirmed a referendum limit of 2.99% for core Council Tax and allowed 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept. This means that the Council can raise Council Tax by a total of 4.99% in 2024/25.

4.15 Each 1% increase in Council Tax raises approximately £1.3m in additional Council Tax income and also ensures that the Council Tax Base is maximised for future years. This is an important consideration because if



this opportunity is not taken, further cuts to key services will be needed to balance the budget in future years.

- 4.16 75% of chargeable properties in Sandwell are in Council Tax Bands A and B (42% Band A and 33% Band B). The impact of a 4.99% increase on the Council's element of the Council Tax is shown below:

Table C: Council Tax increases exemplifier

4.99% Increase	Band A	Band B
2023/24 Council Tax (Sandwell MBC element only)	£1,103.01	£1,286.85
2024/25 Proposed Council Tax (Sandwell MBC element only)	£1,158.05	£1,351.06
Increase per year	£55.04	£64.21
Increase per week	£1.06	£1.23

- 4.17 The Council is continuing to experience demand and inflationary pressures in Adult Social Care and spend pressures of over £14m have already been included in the budget for 2024/25. Approving a further 2% for the ASC Precept will not only contribute towards funding these additional costs but will help to ensure sustainability of the care sector over the next 12 months and into the future, particularly in light of the ongoing impact of inflation and cost of living.

- 4.18 As the billing authority, the Council also bills and collects the precepts for the Police and Fire authorities. At the time of writing the report proposed increases from these preceptors have not been set. The Council Tax Resolution, which formally sets the whole council tax amounts by Band and by preceptor, will be presented to Council on 20th February

- 4.19 Based on a 4.99% increase and a Council tax base of 78,217.27 the Council Tax precept for 2024/25 will be £135,869,698 and is reflected in the budget summary shown at Appendix B. Legislation requires Council Tax bills to be shown to one decimal place so the Council's increase will be shown as 5% on the face of the bill although the underlying increase will be 4.99% as described.



Reserves Position

4.20 The Council has two types of reserves:

- Earmarked Reserves which are for specific future projects, commitments or risks, both revenue and capital
- Unearmarked Reserves are held to ensure the Council can manage unexpected financial challenges.

4.21 The level of Unearmarked Reserves at 31 March 2022 was £16.6m based on the unaudited financial statements for 2021/22 and estimated to be £17.4m as at 31 March 2024.

4.22 Table D below summarises the Council's level of Earmarked Reserves as at the end of March 2023 and the projected balances at the end of March 2024 and 2025.

Table D: Earmarked Reserves

	31 March 2023 £m	31 March 2024 £m	31 March 2025 £m
General Reserves	27.612	23.605	23.149
Grants	37.790	28.492	28.492
Risk	30.267	32.912	32.912
Capital	16.861	10.980	10.980
Schools	13.659	15.341	15.341
Total	126.189	111.330	110.874

4.23 The key points of briefing on reserves are as follows:

- i) The Council has adequate reserves at the present time and this position is expected to continue in the medium term.
- ii) The Council holds reserves to offset specific strategic and operational risks. Therefore, these resources are not available to support operating expenditure, other than in conditions of financial crisis. These conditions do not pertain in the Council at this time.



4.24 The Council's reserves policy in the current MTFS is for General Fund Unearmarked Reserves to be maintained at a minimum of 5% of net expenditure. It is important to note that this policy means that the level of reserve required may fluctuate as net expenditure changes due to inflationary and demand pressures on Council services.

Transformation

4.25 In considering responses to the financial challenges that lie ahead the Council is very much aware that there is a need to modernise and transform the way that services are delivered to both external and internal customers. As part of this transformational agenda the Council has already established a Programme Management Office to form, guide and support the process of developing a suite of transformation programmes in the organisation and is in the final stages of confirming the governance arrangements that will support these initiatives at a strategic and operational level. To this end a Corporate Transformation Board has been established to which a suite of Service Programme Boards will be accountable. This provides assurance that the Directorates within the Council will be held to account for delivery of transformational outcomes and related targets by the Corporate Transformation Board on behalf of the Leadership team and Cabinet.

4.26 At the present date the following service programme boards and transformational programmes are already operating or are expected to begin operations within the next 3 months.

- a. Oracle Fusion: a programme led from Finance & Human Resources to replace the Council's outdated version of Oracle with a state of the art cloud based system. This will introduce to the organisation major improvements in Human Resources Management, Finance Management, Procurement, Executive Reporting and Payroll and will set in place a platform which will be capable of further exploitation.
- b. Property Transformation: this programme is focussed on the implementation of the Corporate Landlord Model for the management of property assets and the organisation of office space.



- c. Housing Transformation: led from the Housing Directorate this programme will embrace a suite of workstreams to improve service operating standards, modernise operating procedures and to develop new software systems to improve delivery and management information.
- d. Adult Social Care: a major programme is to be launched shortly to acquire an implementation partner to assist the Council in developing more insightful management information and to use this to improve efficiency in service delivery.
- e. Customer Services: led from the Corporate area but with input from across the Council this programme is planned to bring a more consistent approach to service delivery channels, to devise more efficient delivery structures and allow improvements in technology to enhance the customer experience in Sandwell.

4.27 Other programmes will be developed on the basis of need and opportunity in the period ahead.

Housing Revenue Account

4.28 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a ring-fenced account for the Council's housing stock and is shown separately to the General Fund. Income comes from rent and service charges and expenditure relates to the management and maintenance of the stock. The HRA also has a Capital Programme for major repairs, refurbishment and new build housing.

4.29 A meeting of the Full Council on 12th December 2023 approved the increase in housing rental charges and housing service charges of 7.7% and the financial implications of these increases are reflected in the HRA base budget for 2024/25. Government announced that from 2020/21 rents can revert to the previous policy and be increased by CPI (at September of the previous year) plus 1%. This allows for a more optimistic forecast of the resources available to the HRA and continues the ability to reduce the level of debt (see below). CPI at September 2023 was 6.7% thus allowing for a 7.7% increase in rents from April 2024.

4.30 Appendix F of this report includes further detail of the HRA and Table 2 to that Appendix shows a balanced budget position for 2024/25.



4.31 The proposed HRA Capital Programme for 2024/25 of £58.945m includes £28.945m for new build and £30.000m for improvements to existing stock holdings. Details of these proposals and their financing are included in Appendix F.

Feedback on Budget Consultation, Scrutiny Committees and Equality Impact Assessments.

4.32 When making budgetary decisions, the Council has a duty to consult with those who are liable to pay council tax or non-domestic rates, as well as those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority. The Council is also required to take into account their statutory public sector equality duty under the Equality Act (2010) and consider any relevant Equality Impact Assessments when formulating and agreeing proposals.

4.33 A public engagement exercise on the Council's budget was conducted in Summer 2023 seeking residents' views on how the Council should reduce spend in order to deliver a balanced budget. A further consultation exercise was conducted in Autumn 2023 on a basket of savings options which, if adopted for 2024/25, will impact residents and businesses in the Borough.

4.34 The feedback and results of Equality Impact Assessments are included at Appendix A, Annex 3 to this report.

Capital Programme

4.35 The Capital Programme for the General Fund is shown at Appendix E, along with the sources of finance. The total Capital Programme for 2024/25 is recommended to be set at £144.476m for General Fund. This is to be funded by a combination of grants, earmarked reserves and revenue contributions.

4.36 Prudential borrowing levels are budgeted to be £21.504m for the General Fund. The impact on the Council's Capital Financing Requirement and Prudential Indicators are reflected in Appendix J, which also includes the Council's Policy for Minimum Revenue Provision which describes how the General Fund is charged for prudential borrowing amounts.



- 4.37 This programme includes an indicative amount of £10m for the Schools Programme as the Basic Need Allocations have not yet been confirmed by Government. A separate report will be brought to Cabinet with more detail on proposed schemes once allocations have been announced.
- 4.38 The Capital Strategy and Capital Financing Strategy, which sets out how all Capital expenditure will be managed and financed, are attached at Appendices G and H.

Treasury Management Strategy

- 4.39 The Council is required to set a Treasury Management Strategy and Investment Strategy each year. These set out how the Council manages its cash balances and how the financing of its Capital Programme through borrowing will be managed.
- 4.40 Based on the proposed capital investment programme it is currently anticipated that net new borrowing of £40.4m will take place during 2024/25. The Council's operational cash balances (i.e. working capital) will be maintained at £20m.
- 4.41 Included within this document is the policy for the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision which determines how historic prudential borrowing is to be charged to the Council's General Fund.
- 4.42 Also, as part of the Treasury Management Strategy, the Council is required to set Prudential Indicators which establish borrowing limits regarding affordability and capital investment plans, and a policy for investment counterparty selection criteria which ensures that the Council will only invest with approved counterparties meeting strict conditions. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement including the relevant indicators and policies is attached at Appendix J for Cabinet approval and recommendation to Council.

Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework

- 4.43 There is a comprehensive policy framework within Revenues and Benefits which require annual review and adoption including:
- i) Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
 - ii) Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
 - iii) Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy



- iv) Flood Relief Policy
- v) Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- vi) Local Welfare Provision Policy
- vii) Non-Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
- viii) Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
- ix) The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy

4.44 Appendix K to this report incorporates all the relevant policies for adoption and highlights any changes.

5. Alternative Options

Cabinet could request that alternative savings options be proposed and agreed, although there is limited time to do this and still be able to carry out the appropriate consultation on alternative savings. Cabinet could also consider an alternative Council Tax increase, subject to adhering to the Referendum Principles, or alternative increases in Fees and Charges. The consequences of adopting a lower Council Tax increase would entail that additional savings would be required and saving targets made larger in future years.

6. Implications

Resources:	Resource implications are contained within the main body of the report.
Legal and Governance:	<p>Cabinet in making a decision and recommendation to Full Council in relation to budget and council tax proposals must take account of the following considerations.</p> <p>The Council is required under Part 1, Chapter III of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) to set a council tax for the forthcoming year and its budget estimates. The decision must be made before 11 March of the preceding year (i.e. by midnight on 10 March). Sections 31A and 31B of the 1992 Act require the Council to calculate its “council tax requirement”. This is reflected and set out in the recommendations and this report. The report sets out the duty to have regard to the assessments of</p>



	<p>the s.151 Chief Finance Officer under s.25 of the Local Government Act 2003.</p> <p>The Council is under a duty to agree a lawfully balanced budget. The Council’s prospective expenditure must not be likely to exceed its resources available to meet that expenditure. The proposals set out in this report meet this obligation. Any amending or substituted proposals must also achieve a balanced budget. The proposed Council Tax is under the statutory threshold which would require the City Council to hold a referendum of local electors to approve the increase.</p> <p>Under s.114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council’s S151 Chief Finance Officer is required to report to all of the authority’s councillors if there is, or is likely to be, unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget (i.e. the council is unable to set or maintain a balanced budget). Failure to set a legal budget by 11 March would activate this duty. It may also lead to further intervention from the Secretary of State under s.15 of the Local Government Act 1999.</p> <p>Members are subject to the Council’s duty to set a balanced budget, and at common law owe a fiduciary duty to taxpayers to do so. Members must receive and take into account the advice of officers, particularly the section 151 officer, when considering and deciding the Council’s budget. As the decision makers, members must have due regard to the Council’s equalities duties when setting the budget.</p>
Risk:	This information is contained within the main body of this report.
Equality:	The Council’s public sector equality duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires it to have due regard to the achievement of its equalities duties when discharging its duties.



	<p>It is important to note that the any recommendations endorsed by Cabinet and recommended to Full Council are the approval of the Council’s council tax for 2024/25 and the budget (or “financial envelope”) and its council tax and not final decisions in respect of service provision or savings proposals. This means that equalities assessments in respect of savings proposals are only formative at this stage and full and final assessments will need to be made when final decisions are made by the Cabinet or officers, taking account evidence and analysis at that time of their impact on protected groups.</p> <p>It remains open to future decision makers to amend or stop budget proposals being implemented having regard to the Council’s equalities at this later stage but noting that compensating savings will need to be made from other services or expenditure to ensure a balanced budget in the forthcoming year and / or to protect the adequacy of the Council’s reserves.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
Social Value	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
Climate Change:	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
Corporate Parenting:	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.

7. Appendices

- A. MTFS Update (Winter 2024)
- B. General Fund Budget Summary
- C. Council Tax Summary
- D. DSG and Schools Funding
- E. General Fund Detailed Capital Programme
- F. Housing Revenue Account (including HRA Capital and 30 Year HRA Business Plan)
- G. Capital Strategy
- H. Capital Financing Strategy

25



- I. Investment Strategy
- J. Treasury Management Strategy
- K. Revenue and Benefits Policy Framework 2024/25

8. Background Papers

- a. Medium Term Financial Strategy Autumn 2023 Update – Cabinet 15th November 2023
- b. Review of Council Tenants Rents and Housing Related Property Charges – Cabinet 6th Dec 23
- c. Q2 Budget Monitoring 2023/24 – Cabinet 6th December 2023



Medium Term Financial Strategy

2024/25 to 2028/29

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



Finance Directorate

Winter 2024

Prepared: February 2024

Version: MTFS Winter 2024 FINAL FOR COUNCIL

Contents

Section Heading	Paragraph No.
Introduction	-
The MTFS – Form and Purpose	1
Background & Context	6
Strategic Goals	8
Key Points of Briefing	9
The Guiding Principles	19
The Financial Challenges, Governance & Decision Making	20
Consultation & Engagement	22
Equality Impact Assessments	31
The National Financial Background	36
The Pandemic & Ongoing Societal Changes	40
General Budget Planning Assumptions	42
Council Tax	43
NNDR	45
The Capital Programme	47
The Capital Planning Principles	48
Reserves	50
Fees and Charges	51
Debt Service in the General Fund	52
The Finance Settlement 2024/25: Key Points	53
Other Planning Assumptions	55
Budget Savings	56
Delivery of Savings in 2023/24	57
Flexible Use of Capital Receipts	58
Property	59
The Medium Term Financial Plan	60
The MTFS & MTFP: Governance & Reporting	62
Risk Assessment & Management	63
Summary	64
Recommendations	65
<u>List of Annexes</u>	
1 The Role of Commissioners	
2 The Budget Timetable for 2024/25 Budget	
3 The Engagement Exercise of Summer & Autumn 2023	
4 Formal Consultation on Potential Changes to Discretionary Services	
5 Savings to balance the 2024/25 Budget	
6 General Budget Planning Assumptions	
7 The Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29	
8 MTFP Change Log	
9 Risks to the MTFP & Mitigation	
10 Transformation Strategy	
11 Flexible Use of Capital Receipts	
12 Fees and Charges	

Introduction

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a key document in the Council's financial planning cycle. This document sets out the strategic financial approach that the Council will adopt in supporting delivery and completion of the Improvement Plan and the portfolio of other strategies and plans that support delivery of the services in the Borough. The MTFS seeks to explain how the Council will distribute its resources in this endeavour over the next five years. In order to deliver the Corporate Plan the Council will need to operate carefully within specific quantitative financial targets. These targets manifest themselves as budget limits, within which the Council must deliver its services over the period of the MTFS. There will be no room for overspends on the future journey and the Council needs to refresh its approach to operate with highly disciplined financial management arrangements. By doing so, the Council will be able to minimise the risk of the financial perils which have engulfed some local authorities in the recent past and demonstrate a level of financial stability and good management that the community in Sandwell is entitled to expect.

Brendan Arnold FCPFA
Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer

26 January 2024

The MTFS - Form and Purpose

1. The purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is to set down the approaches that will be used by the Council in assembling, organising and deploying its financial resources to (i) deliver the objectives set down in the Improvement Plan presented to Full Council on 7 June 2022, and updated in December 2022, June 2023 and subsequently.
2. The MTFS contains a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which sets out the planning assumptions and financial limits formed by the relevant funding constraints presently assumed. These will be updated quarterly moving forward. This is the second presentation of a quarterly update to frame the development of the 2024/25 Budget at Full Council on 20 February 2024. This update reflects the impact of the Provisional Finance Settlement for 2024/25 and the adjusted MTFP appears at Annex 7. Accordingly, this version of the MTFS contains sufficient information to construct the framework within which the Council's Budget for 2024/25 is capable of being set.
3. It should be noted that development of the Council's MTFS is a key recommendation of the VFM Governance Review undertaken by Grant Thornton in 2021 and forms a notable action within the Council's Improvement Plan. Accordingly, the suitable development and use of the MTFS has been identified by Commissioners as one of the key considerations in advising the Secretary of State of progress made by the Council on its journey to improvement. More generally, it is important to note that like all Councils, the Council is *required under statute* to set a balanced Budget for 2024/25 during March 2024.
4. The MTFS sets out (i) a set of Guiding Principles which are presented for agreement by Cabinet and Council in seeking to obtain sustainable financial balance in the medium term and (ii) the design and operation of specific programmes and other initiatives that will provide savings and cost reductions sufficient to be considered in balancing the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024.
5. It follows that this document is to be seen as a dynamic part of the Council's financial operations in the future and is of critical importance on the Council's ongoing improvement journey.

Background & Context

6. On 22 March 2022 a process of Intervention was initiated by the Secretary of State in response to the issuance by the External Auditor of their report following the Value for Money Governance Review containing statutory recommendations.
7. In seeking to address the recommendations from the External Auditor's report as well as those resulting from the CIPFA Financial Management Review and a Local Government Association Peer Challenge, the Council has – with the oversight of the Commissioners – adopted an Improvement Plan which is closely monitored by the Leadership Team, the Cabinet, Scrutiny function and Full Council. Although Intervention was not driven from a financial perspective as part of this process the Council needs to be able to assure that its financial affairs can be managed in a sustainable way.

Strategic Goals

8. The MTFS has the following strategic goals:
 - a. To provide a framework within which the Council is able to achieve a series of balanced budgets in the medium term to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Improvement Plan, demonstrating sustainable improvement.
 - b. By so doing to reach for and assure both financial stability and sustainability and to deliver these in the short, medium and long terms.
 - c. To enable successive budgets to be balanced using a set of Guiding Principles that are commonly adopted across the Local Government Sector and to apply these rigorously; and
 - d. To provide a budget and risk structure within which the Corporate Plan and Improvement Plan can be completed to meet the needs of stakeholders.

Key Points of Briefing

9. The MTFS and accompanying MTFP - following an extensive and detailed review including receipt of the Provisional Finance Settlement - is suggesting that the previously forecast Budget shortfall in the region of £13m in 2024/25 was substantially correct. Looking backwards, this figure has changed in the course of financial year 2023/24, reflecting the usual and expected refinement and testing of initial planning assumptions.
10. The movement between the Budget in 2023/24 and the Draft Budget 2024/25 are shown in Annex 8 and include the following changes.
 - a. Additional savings identified.
 - b. Downward adjustment and stress testing of anticipated savings following a review of the underlying assumptions.
 - c. The challenging and adjustment of cost pressures previously admitted to the MTFP.
 - d. The impact of the Provisional Finance Settlement 2024/25 received on the 18 December 2023.
11. From the analysis presented it is clear that it remains the case that the Council must select ongoing savings amounting to £11.988m to balance 2024/25 Budget and a further £7m of temporary cost reductions to deal with short term pressures; the overall total is £18.988m as shown in Table 1.
12. In any local authority the overall suite of savings selected to ensure that the MTFP is balanced in the medium term will reflect a blend of (a) savings gathered from efficiencies and adoption of best practice (b) the adjustment of service levels (sometimes suspension or cessation of previous service levels) and (c) transformational savings. The Council has explored will continue to explore all of these dimensions as it considers the means of balancing the Budget in 2024/25 and, subsequently, in the years following.

13. As part of this process the Council has already taken steps to deliver a *transformational* approach to delivering savings and will seek to widen and strengthen its response in this direction in both the short and medium terms. To this end a transformation programme to implement *Oracle Fusion* - a corporate Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system - is already underway and set to go live in the early Summer of 2024. In addition, a Transformation Strategy has been prepared, and a Corporate Transformation Board has been established to guide and control the use of transformational approaches in the years ahead. These materials are attached to this report at Annex 10. It should be clear that the benefits of the transformational endeavours described are to develop better value for service users and to enhance the customer journey.
14. As part of these ambitions the Council acknowledges the need to organise many of its activities along more commercial lines including adopting the Corporate Landlord Model (itself a transformational programme) for management of its property estate. As part of this emergent Property Transformation programme the Council acknowledges a need to further develop its proposals for significant asset disposals and to bring these to decision at pace. Equipping these approaches with policies around flexible working, team building and to develop a One Team approach to service delivery are already underway and will be further developed.
15. Additional opportunities in the application of transformational approaches exist in Housing, Adult Social Care, Customer Services and elsewhere (with regard to the delivery of transactional services generally); work is underway to inform development of clear business cases in these areas during 2024/25 and 2025/26. In addition to programmes that are service focussed, a range of other projects has been assembled. The Transformation Strategy appears at Annex 10.
16. The Council has commenced a resident engagement exercise through the Summer and Autumn of 2023 and this - together with the Consultation and Engagement Plan (See Annexes 3 & 4) - forms the Council's approach to meeting its responsibilities in this area as part of setting the Budget for 2024/25. The savings of c. £12m for which approval is sought to balance the 2024/25 Budget are shown in Annex 5.
17. A Budget Timetable for the 2024/25 Budget process is also presented and appears at Annex 2. In line with the highest standards of transparent governance this timetable includes specific challenge and review on 15 January 2024 by the Council's Overview & Scrutiny function through the Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board as part of the consultation process.
18. The MTFs (and MTFP) will be further updated for subsequent meetings of Cabinet, the Scrutiny function and Full Council in the course of financial year 2024/25.

The Guiding Principles

19. In undertaking its financial operations over the period of the MTFs the Council is asked to adopt the following Guiding Principles ('The Principles'). The Principles are based on sound management and professional practice. They are presented as *Guiding* Principles because there may be occasions where – after careful consideration - the exigencies of strategic or operational management may necessitate from time to time a departure from the Principles.

No.	Guiding Principles
1	Fees & Charges will be reviewed annually and adjusted for inflation, comparability and competitiveness.
2	As a compassionate Council, in setting charges, the impact on vulnerable groups will be considered carefully and equalities impact assessments prepared where needed.
3	Service level spend will be benchmarked regularly with a suitable peer group and proposals to align with the benchmark will be brought forward.
4	The Council will seek to adopt incrementally a policy of Digital First in service delivery generally but as a compassionate Council will be mindful of the risks of <i>digital exclusion</i> in doing so.
5	A rolling programme of Service Reviews launched as part of the Star Chamber process will continue from time to time within the timeframe of the MTFS and will be used to ensure that operating models, organisational design and cost footprints are subject to regular review and adjustment across the Council.
6	Service developments, savings and investment will be brought forward on the basis of business cases that must demonstrate feasibility, deliverability, and appropriate financial pay back and other investment appraisal techniques.
7	The Council will consult with residents and other stakeholders in the Borough in forming budget options.
8	Where business cases are prepared for decision a proactive approach will operate encompassing review in depth prior to such presentation; this will include rigorous application of investment appraisal techniques, peer review and use of the Scrutiny function to achieve searching review and challenge before business cases are adopted.
9	The Council will welcome approaches from regional and other partners for joint working and joint management initiatives.
10	The Council will seek to reach and maintain Unearmarked Reserves at a level of at least 5% of Net Expenditure (i.e. £16.65m based on estimated net expenditure in 2024/25 of £333m).
11	Given the financial position of the Council and the need to maintain key statutory services the Council will seek to maximise receipts from Council Tax and optimise receipts from fees and charges and other income over the period of the MTFS.
12	Growth in service budgets must be funded from (a) grants or other contributions, (b) realistic estimates of commercial income or fees and charges or (c) revenue savings. Following the setting of the 2024/25 Budget there will be a general planning assumption that no other growth will be adopted into the Budget within the period of the MTFS unless under the most pressing circumstances.
13	Council will develop moving forward enhanced means of assessing and managing risks at both strategic and operational levels and these will be used to inform the annual Budget process.
14	The Council will seek to make Value for Money decisions and be mindful of its obligations to obtain best value for the 'public purse' generally.
15	The Council will consider invest to save proposals in preparing the MTFS generally.
16	In making decisions to buy goods and services the Council will be mindful of powers to seek social value in procurement and reduce the carbon impact of decisions to assist with Net Zero.
17	In forming its budget plans the Council will specifically consider and take action to meet existing savings targets and reduce the cost of property holding where the continued holding of property is not justified by the need; in doing so the Council will seek to reduce overheads and channel resources to frontline services.
18	The Council – as a general guideline – will seek to constrain its Debt Service Costs (including MRP) within 7% of its Net Revenue Budget. In 2024/25 the figure is predicted to be 6%.

Financial Challenges: Governance & Decision Making

20. A full Budget Timetable appears at Annex 2 to this report. It must be noted that - following the Intervention already referred to - the Commissioners will in support of Cabinet - consider and receive the materials referred to below and will guide and advise the Council in fulfilment of their supporting role as part of the overall Improvement journey.
21. In summary, the following arrangements apply for decision making to set the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024.
 - a. The Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board held a Budget Enquiry and Review meeting to consider the Draft Budget proposals on 15 January 2024.
 - b. Cabinet to receive the recommendations from the Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting on 7 February 2024; and
 - c. Full Council to consider the setting of the 2024/25 Budget on 20 February 2024 following a decision of Cabinet to recommend the Draft Budget to Full Council.

Consultation & Engagement

22. The views of Sandwell's residents, businesses and communities are integral to the development of a MTFs that reflects the priorities of the Borough. A two phased approach to engagement and consultation has been devised to support the development of the 2024/25 Budget and the MTFP. This has been designed to align to the Council's Consultation Principles:
23. Consultation lies at the heart of effective public policy development and service to the public. It should be a first thought and not an afterthought.
24. Consultation should never be used to communicate decisions already taken, and the outcome of consultation should never be pre-determined.
25. Consultation should be inclusive. Whenever possible, it should involve all parties/groups, including our children and young people, who can contribute to or are affected by the outcome of the consultation.
26. Phase One consisted of a face-to-face public engagement exercise with a representative sample of residents in Summer 2023. Building on the budget consultation activity conducted in 2022, this survey offered the opportunity for residents to provide input on their local priorities and preferences for delivering further council savings going into the budget setting process for 2024/25. The results of this helped inform the development of options for future savings. Details on the methodology used and responses are included at Annex 4. At the same time, the Council also conducted the SHAPE survey with primary and secondary school age children across the Borough. This survey captured the experiences of children and young people in Sandwell and what matters to them.

27. Phase Two commenced following approval from Cabinet on 15 November 2023. From 15 November 2023. This phase involved consultation with residents, businesses and communities on a basket of savings proposals set out in the Cabinet report to address the projected shortfall at that time. These savings options were shared with focus groups which represented residents and communities across Sandwell, and their views sought on whether the Council should adopt these options and what impact they could have. The timing of this consultation period was scheduled to feed into the meetings of Cabinet and Full Council in February 2024 that will be asked to take decisions on the Budget for 2024/25.

The focus groups were held as follows:

Focus Group	Date	In person / online	Number of Participants
Residents	21 and 27 November 2023	Online (at preference of participants)	9
Children and Young People (SHAPE Forum)	30 November	In person	7
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations	7 December 2023	In Person	9
Business Ambassadors	11 January 2024	In Person	13

28. The detailed methodology and responses to the focus groups can be found in Annex 4.

29. An online survey was also conducted during this period, open for responses from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. Upon close of the survey, the council had received 416 responses in total. A breakdown of the demographic profile of respondents can be found in Annex 4.

30. Whilst the number of participants in the focus groups and online survey do not represent a statistically representative sample of Sandwell's, the comments made by the different groups provide a useful insight into the views of different communities across the borough. The following points are a summary of the consistent themes which arose in the focus groups and online survey:

- Residents and representatives of the business community who participated in this exercise were largely unaware of budget challenge facing the Council, but accepted savings needed to be made.
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations were more aware than residents of the Council's financial position, and also recognised savings are required.
- Selling or renting out assets was supported as good way to make savings, as per the previous budget consultation activities. Communities expressed a preference for being more involved in determining the future of locally important or culturally significant assets.
- There was support for reducing the number of leisure centres in the borough, as long as easy access to centres was retained
- Increases in charges for businesses and development or where there is choice in using the service were supported, more so than increases in charges for services to vulnerable people
- Respondents would like to see events covering their costs rather than being subsidised

- by the council, as well as sponsorship by local businesses being explored
- There was strong support for improving efficiency of support services, use of Council fleet and focus on prevention and early intervention across all focus groups
- Green spaces in Sandwell are popular and valued – residents would like to see improvements in grounds maintenance, especially in parks and street cleansing
- Concerns shared that changes to waste management approaches will see an increase in littering, anti-social behaviour and fly tipping
- Support for savings from promoting independence and transformation of adult social care, providing care needs were met
- Respondents were keen that cuts across the board did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes
- There is a need to communicate more with residents on what changes will be made and the impact on residents.

Equality Impact Assessments

31. Where savings proposals related to a change of approach to service delivery in 2024/25, Service Leads have completed an Equality Impact Assessment screening assessment for each saving proposal to determine whether a full Equality Impact Assessment was required. The Equality Impact Assessment enables Service Leads to fully understand the risks and implications of removal, reduction, or a change in delivery. This has been undertaken in parallel to the consultation process.
32. A large proportion of savings for 2024/25 will be achieved through reduction in budgets that are no longer required to deliver services or increasing income targets in line with current levels achieved or based on reliable forecasts. Therefore, these proposals did not require a full Equality Impact Assessment.
33. Where a full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, a small number of savings proposals have been identified as having a potentially negative impact on some protected groups. Where groups will be potentially negatively impacted, actions have been identified to mitigate the impact on residents and service users. These actions are documented in the Equality Impact Assessments and will be reviewed by services through existing governance processes.
34. There are a number of savings that may have an impact on the Council's staffing structures which will be subject to the Council's policies and procedures. As far as possible, these savings will be achieved through deletion of vacant posts. Until the consultation process is complete, the actual savings level or staffing impact cannot be confirmed. However, the savings proposals are still considered to be a prudent assessment of overall savings opportunities.
35. The outcome of the Equality Impact Assessments, alongside the findings of the consultation process, have been assessed and used to prepare final recommendations that are presented to Cabinet in February for approval.

The National Financial Background

36. The National economy is being driven by international economic events not least the impact of the war in Ukraine, ongoing issues with international supply chains and the ongoing impact of the Pandemic. One of the key issues that has emerged is the emergence of high levels of inflation in energy, food and other products and commodities which has caused very significant inflationary pressures in wholesale and retail markets across a range of goods and services; naturally these pressures have also related to increases in labour costs. The resulting inflationary pressure has not been seen in the

UK economy since the very high levels experienced during the late 1970's and early 1980's.

37. In recent years Local Government has received a much higher proportion of funding from local rather than national sources as has historically been the case. It follows that Government has inherited a position where it no longer has the appropriate levers or – following the support afforded to communities and businesses through and following the Pandemic and energy crisis – the resources to meet the inflationary pressure in the cost of service delivery.
38. The result is that much of the financial pressure has been left for local councils to manage and this has resulted and will continue to entail a need for largescale savings across the Local Government sector. That said, the savings currently required in this Council are currently forecast to be at the lower end of the savings envelope faced by some other local authorities.
39. On the back of these developments a 'cost of living' crisis has been described. This is something of which the Council is keenly aware. Accordingly, the Council will be invited subsequently in this budget approval process to maintain the Council Tax Support Scheme in Sandwell for 2024/25 without any downward adjustment to the level of support provided. There also needs to be an awareness that in the UK economy where inflation has been seen to rise beyond 6% per annum in the recent past, levels of Council Tax met by residents are likely to be have become less costly in real terms in recent years.

The Pandemic and ongoing Societal Changes

40. The ongoing impact of the Pandemic has resulted in a number of behavioural changes at a societal level which result in additional costs for local authority budgets. Examples nationally have included - but are not confined to - higher waste collection costs, pressure on the collection of commercial rents, changes in the demand for office accommodation associated with the emergence of 'working from home' as a 'new normal' and a consequential adverse impact on car parking income..
41. Although some of these effects are estimated to recover towards former levels in the medium term (particularly commercial rental income and car parking revenues) the evident financial pressures are expected to continue into the medium term. This is the case in Sandwell as for other councils.

General Budget Planning Assumptions

42. The following paragraphs set out a suite of headline planning assumptions which inform the construction of the MTFP; greater detail is presented in Annex 6.

Council Tax

43. As a response to the inflationary pressures in the economy the Government has in the Provisional Finance Settlement 2024/25 set the referendum threshold for Council Tax increases to an overall total of 2.99% and an additional Adult Social Care Precept of 2% for upper tier councils such as Sandwell.
44. The increase in Council Tax will be a decision of Council in each year moving forward but to do other than maximise potential increases would imperil the Council's ability to sustain statutory services at a reasonable level.

National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR)

45. The Government has for some years been considering reform of the NNDR system amid concerns from the business sector that the Rate imposes an unwarranted burden on the commercial sector. To this point no firm proposals have been brought forward by Government and so the MTFP uses the existing methodology to forecast the yield in the forward period of the Plan.
46. In addition, for Sandwell, the proposed Devolution Deal negotiated between the West Midlands Combined Authority and Government envisages maintenance of the existing NNDR pooling arrangements in the West Midlands to which the Council presently belongs for a further 10 years. These arrangements are expected to be to the advantage of the Council.

The Capital Programme

47. Services have undertaken a detailed review of the Capital Programme previously agreed by Council in February 2023 and this has been supplemented by new schemes requested by services. The overall level of programming requested to meet service priorities - where these require support from the Council - have been accommodated within the available revenue funding available. Further information appears in the Capital Programme reports (Appendices E, G and H to the Draft Budget report 2024/25).

The Capital Planning Principles

48. As previously agreed by Council in preparing the Capital Programme for 2024/25 (and looking forward generally within the period of this MTFS) the following *Capital Planning Principles* have been used in forming the Capital Programme which will be presented to Full Council for approval. In future, proposals that do not fall within these 'Capital Principles' will not – except in conditions of compelling exigency - be included within the Draft Capital Programme for the General Fund or the Housing Revenue Account.
 - a. Items of programming that relate to essential health and safety works and deliver compliance to the regulations within in the Council's property estate.
 - b. Items of programming that have a measurable beneficial impact on the carbon footprint of the Council and the Borough and which have affordable cost implications.
 - c. Essential investment in Information & Communications Technology (both hardware and software) to ensure that the Council has fit for purpose and secure tools and infrastructure to support operations generally and transformational programmes where there are suitable business cases to support such investment.
 - d. Items where - following provision of external grant support (principally from Government, Government Agencies or the West Midlands Combined Authority) - specific resources are provided to the Council by to complete or partially complete certain specified schemes that support the Council's objectives or wider regional ambitions such that match funding is required. Such match funding must be affordable to the Council and decisions made must demonstrate the Council's duty to achieve VFM in the decisions made.

- e. Any schemes that can be shown to be wholly funded from external resources (e.g. Government Grants, external contributions) without implying additional cost burdens for the Council.
 - f. Where proposals are estimated to return a measurable revenue saving; for example, leasing of the Council's commercial property portfolio which may require modest upfront capital investment and which then return a beneficial income stream to the revenue budget.
 - g. Schemes for which there may be a perception of compelling need but where such schemes are wholly dependent on Council funding. In these cases, a rigorous business case must be prepared which demonstrates that additional cost pressures can be assuaged by alternative savings or removal of capital programming. This approach will ensure that the Council seeks to enhance the approaches already in play in forming the Council's Capital Programme in the years ahead.
49. For the avoidance of doubt, on grounds of affordability there will be no other new borrowing for capital purposes in the General Fund during the period of the MTFs.

Reserves

50. In previous years the Council has sometimes used significant contributions from Reserves to support service delivery. In taking this approach the Council – as has happened in certain other local authorities – may face the future prospect of compromising its ability to manage strategic risks at some future point. Accordingly, unless in case of grave exigency, or in respect of use of reserves that has been previously planned, the Draft Budget 2024/25 has reduced to less than £0.5m the call on reserves to achieve balance in that year.

Fees & Charges

51. In line with Guiding Principle (1) the Council's portfolio of Fees and Charges has been updated using a figure of 5% unless charges are specified by Government or there are other relevant constraints. In a small number of cases charges have been raised beyond this adjustment factor. The detail appears at Annex 12 to this report.

Debt Service in the General Fund

52. The Council's General Fund holds a current debt portfolio of £123m for which the annual debt service costs are currently estimated at c. £15m per annum which represents less than 4.7% of the Net Budget in 2023/24. In 2024/25 the forecast figure is c. 6%. The fact that this percentage is relatively modest compared with similar authorities is a significant factor in the budget shortfall in Sandwell being lower compared with such authorities. The position with regard to the Housing Revenue Account is discussed within the separate HRA Budget Report 2024/25 which appears at Appendix F to the report setting the Draft Budget 2024/25.

The Finance Settlement 2024/25: Key Points

53. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 was received on 18 December 2023 and will become Final in late January or early February 2024. The

Council's forecasts with regard to the content of the Settlement proved to be remarkably accurate.

54. The key points of briefing in relation to the Settlement and matters arising are:

- a. New Homes Bonus: Government has been considering reform or phasing out of New Homes Bonus for some years but for 2024/25 has resolved to continue the existing methodology for a further year. The amount received is £0.776m compared to £0.111m in the current year which reflects the construction activity in the Borough presently.
- b. Controls on use of packaging and waste volumes – the Government is planning to establish a system where the producers of packaging waste are charged a levy related to the waste volumes that result such that the proceeds - net of regulatory costs - are passed on to local Councils. The Government has deferred implementation until 2025/26.
- c. Planning Fees – as announced in the Autumn Statement Government has re-set planning fees which is expected to provide a benefit of £250,000 to the Council in 2024/25.
- d. Council Tax: Government has confirmed is that the referendum limit for Council Tax will increase by 2.99% in 2024/25 and as is standard across the Local Government sector this is the present planning assumption throughout the term of the MTFP.
- e. The Collection Fund in respect of Council Tax is currently estimated to be in deficit at end of 2023/24 and a charge to the General Fund of £0.5m has been included in the current MTFP to account for this.
- f. The Adult Social Care Precept – contrary of expectations within the sector – has once again been made available to Councils at the level of 2% in 2024/25.
- g. The NNDR Pool - it has been clarified that the Council will continue to be a member of the West Midlands Business Rates Pool in 2024/25 and for the 9 years following under the auspices of the Devolution Deal negotiated by the WMCA.
- h. Social Care Grants saw increases locally and nationally with the Social Care Grant increasing to £42.8m for Sandwell, being an increase of £7.0m (nationally allocation of £4.5bn being a £692m increase); the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund increasing by £2.1m to £5.4m (national increase of £200m to take total allocation to £500m); and the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund increasing by £3.8m resulting in Sandwell's grant being £8.1m for 2024/25 (the national allocation was £1.05bn).

Other Planning Assumptions

55. Further planning assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Plan appear at Annex 6.

Budget Savings

56. The Council has assembled a list of savings opportunities to the value of £18m and has undertaken consultation and engagement on these; as a result of this process savings of c. £12m are recommended for implementation and these are set out in Annex 5 of the MTFS.

Delivery of Savings in 2023/24

57. A review of savings has been undertaken to assess whether the targeted savings were delivered in 2022/23 and 2023/24 as planned. Should this not have been the case, the additional cost this implies would remain within the forward years of the MTFP as a pressure. At the present time there is evidence to suggest that the great majority of savings for 2023/24 are set to be delivered by the end of the year or are capable of delivery in the near future.

Flexible Use of Capital Receipts

58. The Council will wish to make use of the facility - if offered by Government - to use capital receipts to fund revenue expenditure incurred to further business change and transformation. For this reason, a draft plan has been produced and included at Annex 11 to this report, following which – after further amendment - the plan will be shared with the Government Department (DLUHC) as required in recent guidance from Government.

Property

59. The holding and management of property assets is a significant activity for the Council and as previously described in this report work is proceeding on a number of strands to form a transformation programme in this service area. The principal components are considered to be:
- a. Operation of the Corporate Landlord model which is expected to drive efficiency by unified management of all property assets within the Council; this to release revenue savings in the cost of management of these assets and also to reduce significantly the property holding costs in the revenue budget.
 - b. The Council holds some 4,000 property assets including buildings and parcels of land of various kinds. This includes a number of properties for which the Council has no economic use and which drive a cost stream including maintenance, security, business rates and others which can only be assuaged through the disposal of the surplus property. This is complicit with the need to deliver savings targets already agreed by Council in setting the budget for the current financial year (2023/24) and for which delivery needs to continue.

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

60. The Council's MTFP (MTFS Autumn 2023/24), is shown in Table 1. The MTFP is the product of (i) detailed technical analysis (ii) detailed discussion with the Directorates and their respective management teams regarding the pressures identified and (iii) further engagement to assist the Directorates to identify savings to bridge the Budget shortfall identified.

61. The full detail of the MTFP is shown in Annex 7 and the movements between the original figures and those now presented are shown in Annex 8.

Table 1: Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening Net Budget	317.103	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338
Budget pressures and technical adjustments	48.812	18.958	15.266	14.118	13.899
Changes in government funding within services	(13.919)	-	-	-	-
Revised Net Budget	351.996	370.954	386.220	400.338	414.237
Funding	(333.008)	(340.530)	(350.942)	(361.725)	(372.894)
Net Deficit before savings	18.988	30.424	35.278	38.613	41.343
Savings Proposals	(11.988)	(17.924)	(19.570)	(19.570)	(19.570)
Other short term reductions	(7.000)	-	-	-	-
Net Budget (Surplus)/ Deficit	-	12.500	15.708	19.043	21.773

The MTFs & MTFP: Governance & Reporting

62. The MTFP will continue to be updated on a rolling basis from this point forward and will be reported periodically to Cabinet, Scrutiny Management Boards, Full Council, and the Commissioners. This will enable stakeholders to receive regular briefing on observed changes to the forecasts that are from time to time observed.

Risk Assessment & Management

63. The Council has a need to develop structured arrangements to manage risk with regard to strategic and operational dimensions of its operations. The principal risks associated with maintenance of the Council's services within the financial constraints identified in the MTFs and associated MTFP together with headline mitigations are set out in Annex 9.

Summary

64. This document has set out the MTFs and the embedded MTFP and the acceptance and application of these documents can be summarised as follows:

- a. The Council has identified a set of Guiding Principles which will assist in shaping responses to future revenue budget shortfalls.
- b. The Council is aware of the challenging financial pressures that bear on the 2024/25 Budget and beyond and has understood the issues that this presents.
- c. The Council has taken effective action to identify a portfolio of potential savings opportunities in the order of £18m which may be considered in order to balance the 2024/25 Budget shortfall of which £11.988m ongoing savings are recommended to be taken to balance the Draft Budget 2024/25 together with temporary short term reductions of £7m.
- d. It will be key across the years of the MTFs for the Council to maximise funding streams including Council Tax and this should continue – as in previous years – to inform planning assumptions in the MTFs and MTFP.

- e. MTFP Planning assumptions will continue to be refined and reviewed on an ongoing basis; accordingly, the figures contained in this report will continue to change in the Medium term as the forecasts are updated.
- f. The Council has also identified *Capital Planning Principles* to inform capital planning moving forward and has acknowledged a need to review its capital programme methodology in the period ahead.

Recommendations

65. It is recommended that Cabinet.

- a. Approve the MTFS and embedded MTFP as an estimate of the Council's current financial position at January 2024.
- b. Approve the Guiding Principles as framework for financial planning for the period of the MTFS.
- c. Approve the Capital Planning Principles to guide the preparation of the Capital Programme in the years ahead.
- d. Note the planned development of the Transformation Programme to date and through 2024/25 and endorses the extension of the transformational approach to other services of the Council.
- e. Note the Budget Timetable set out in this report.
- f. Approve the submission to DLUHC of a proposal to use flexible use of capital receipts in financial year 2024/25 and to delegate the amendment and final approval of this proposal to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Interim Director of Finance together with the Assistant Chief Executive.
- g. Approve the onward submission of the Winter 2024 update of the MTFS to the next meeting of Full Council.
- h. Approve the adjustments to fee and charges as set out in Annex 12.
- i. Approve the savings proposals set out at Annex 5.

The Role of Commissioners

On 22 March 2022 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an [intervention package](#) and a set of [Directions](#) to ensure Sandwell Council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. These Directions were in-part influenced by the Grant Thornton report following their [Value for Money Governance Review of December 2021](#). The Directions remain in force until 22 March 2024 unless amended by the Secretary of State.

In response to the Directions, the council developed a single [Improvement Plan](#) that combined the actions to address not only the Grant Thornton Review, but also the findings of the [CIPFA Financial Management Review \(January 2022\)](#) and the [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge \(February 2022\)](#). Robust programme management and assurance arrangements are in place to manage the delivery of the Improvement Plan and ensure that it remains a live document. A [revised Improvement Plan](#) was approved by Cabinet in March 2023 to incorporate recommendations from follow-up reviews by [Grant Thornton](#) and the [LGA](#). An [Annual Report](#) was approved by Cabinet in June 2023, setting out the council's improvement journey over the preceding 12 months and the priorities for further improvement during the intervention period.

The Directions of the Secretary of State (March 2022) enable the Commissioners to exercise the following functions:

1. All functions associated with the governance and scrutiny of strategic decision making by the Authority.
2. All functions relating to the appointment and dismissal of persons to positions the holders of which are to be designated as statutory officers, and the designation of those persons as statutory officers, to include:
 - a. The functions of designating a person as a statutory officer and removing a person from a statutory office.
 - b. The functions under section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 of:
 - i. appointing and determining the terms and conditions of employment of an officer of the Authority, insofar as those functions are exercised for the purpose of appointing a person as an officer of the Authority principally in order for that person to be designated as a statutory officer; and
 - ii. dismissing any person who has been designated as a statutory officer from his or her position as an officer of the Authority

The Commissioners submit a report to the Secretary of State every six months on Sandwell Council's progress in addressing the issues that led to government intervention. In their [letter of June 2023](#), the Commissioners noted that they had seen "*significant progress on the single improvement plan*" since their last report, and that "*substantial progress has also been achieved on nearly all*" of the priorities highlighted in their previous report. In the same letter, the Commissioners stated that they believed the council needed to give particular focus to the following four areas:

1. Developing the strategic capacity of the organisation.
2. Further work on implementation of the culture and values work.
3. A comprehensive transformation programme linked to delivering the Council's MTFs.
4. The 2020/21 accounts approved by auditors and a clear timetable for the approval of the 2021/22 accounts.

The Budget Timetable for 2024/25 Budget

Timeline	Activity	Status
August '23	Budget Consultation feedback received; Star Chambers conducted	Completed
Early October '23	Business case development and review	Completed
15 November '23	Autumn 2023 MTFS report to Cabinet and commencement of next phase consultation	Completed
Nov 2023 –Jan '24	Consultation period on savings opportunities to include residents, businesses and communities.	Completed
January 2024	Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to consider Draft Budget 2024/25	<i>Completed</i>
February 2024	Cabinet to receive recommendations from B&CSMB and to approve Draft Budget 2024/25 for submission to Full Council	<i>Cabinet scheduled for 7 February and Full Council for 20 February 2024.</i>

The Engagement Exercise of Summer 2023: Evaluation

Sandwell Council Budget Survey report

Key Findings Report July 2023



Research objectives and method



In June and early July 2023 M·E·L Research interviewed a randomly selected sample of 1,100 Sandwell residents.

Following last year's budget consultation, in which residents stated that rationalising buildings and assets would be the preferred method to achieve required savings, Sandwell Council set itself savings targets and examined ways to reduce running costs.

This survey offered the opportunity for residents to provide input on their local priorities, and preferences for delivering further council savings going into the budget setting process for 2024/25.



A stratified random locational sampling approach was used. In each ward, Census Output Areas (COAs) were ranked by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). COAs were then selected at random as sampling points. The number of sampling points selected was proportional to the interviewing target for each ward. All addresses for each COA sampling point were made available to interviewers, with a target of 10 interviews set per sampling point.

At ward level quotas were set by age and gender to ensure that the sample reflected the characteristics of the borough's population. Quotas were set using Census 2021 data.

Spatial Analysis

The sample size of this research does not allow robust analysis at ward level. In order to analyse the data at a more statistically robust geographies, wards have been grouped into towns. These towns, as defined by the table on the right, will be used throughout the analysis.

Page 149

Towns and Wards in Sandwell



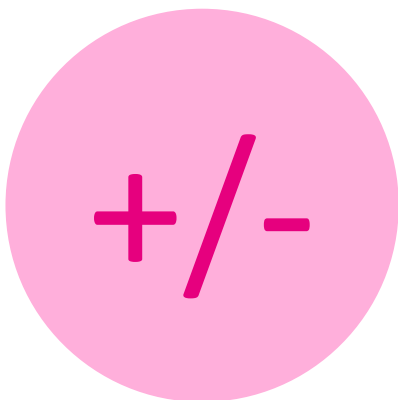
Contains Ordnance Survey data. © Crown copyright and database right 2018.

Town	Ward
Oldbury	Bristnall
	Langley
	Old Warley
	Oldbury
Rowley Regis	Blackheath
	Cradley Heath and Old Hill
	Tividale
Smethwick	Rowley
	Abbey
	Smethwick
	Soho and Victoria
Tipton	St Pauls
	Great Bridge
	Tipton Green
	Princes End
Wednesbury	Friar Park
	Wednesbury North
	Wednesbury South
West Bromwich	West Bromwich Central
	Hateley Heath
	Greets Green and Lyng
	Newton
	Great Barr with Yew Tree
	Charlemont with Grove Vale

Data weighting and confidence level



In total 1100 interviews were completed. While the application of quotas at ward level ensured a diverse mix of residents were interviewed, the final dataset was weighted. This weighting eliminated the effect of differential response rates by geography and between demographic groups so that the resulting data is fully representative of the borough. The final data has been weighted by ward, age and gender, using 2021 Census population data.



The sample size of 1,100 means that this dataset has a maximum confidence level of +/- 2.95 at the borough level (at a 95% level of confidence). This means that we can say with 95% confidence that the responses reported will be no more than 2.95 percentage-points different than if all residents of the borough were interviewed.

Sub-group analysis i.e., comparing responses from particular resident groups or from specific locations within the borough will have higher confidence intervals.

Note on analysis of priorities

Page 151

- A number of questions within the research design asked respondents to rank priority issues or to place possible council strategies in rank order. In our analysis we have shown the top three choices selected, plus a mean score across the rankings given.
- For the latter the first choice has been given the highest score. So from a list of 5 choices the first choice has a score of 5, the second a score of 4 and so on, with a mean score calculated for each issue/proposal.
- The higher the mean score the greater the public support for that option.
- Please note that because for certain strategic themes a different number of options were presented to respondents (between 4-6) the mean a scores per question/topic should not be compared.



Budget priorities



Contextual information given to respondents

In last year's budget consultation residents said their preferred way for us to achieve the required savings was to rationalise our buildings and assets, we have taken this on board and set a target saving in 2023/24 to look at ways we can reduce the running costs of the buildings that we currently operate from. This includes sharing our space with partners to generate more income and looking at running services from fewer buildings, especially where we have multiple buildings close together.

The Council is facing similar pressure to residents from inflation and rising costs. The cost of living crisis is also creating more demand for some council services. This means that difficult decisions need to be made when the Council sets its budget.

We have identified and delivering savings of over £30m in the last two years and our current Medium Term Financial Plan shows that further savings of around £8m will be needed for next year.

The Council spends around £318m on our day-to-day services, such as refuse collections, street cleansing, providing libraries and leisure centres and our adult and children's social care services. We must meet all our legal requirements but can make choices in how we deliver some of these services.

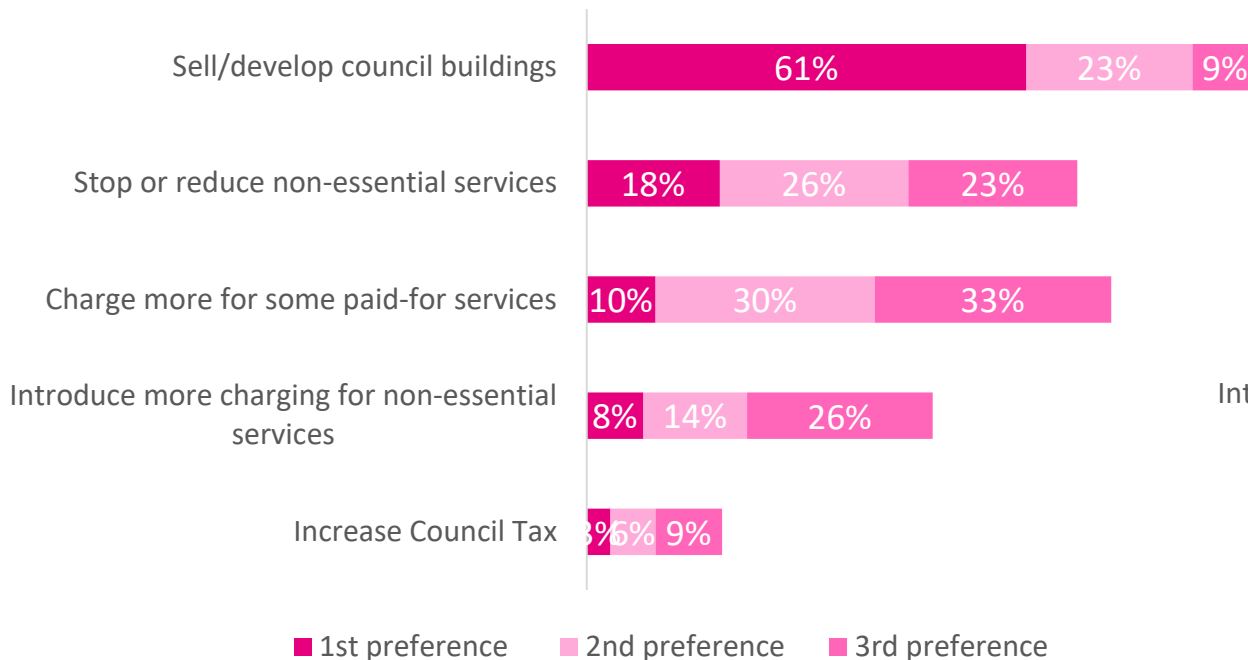


Preferred approach for delivering the Council savings needed

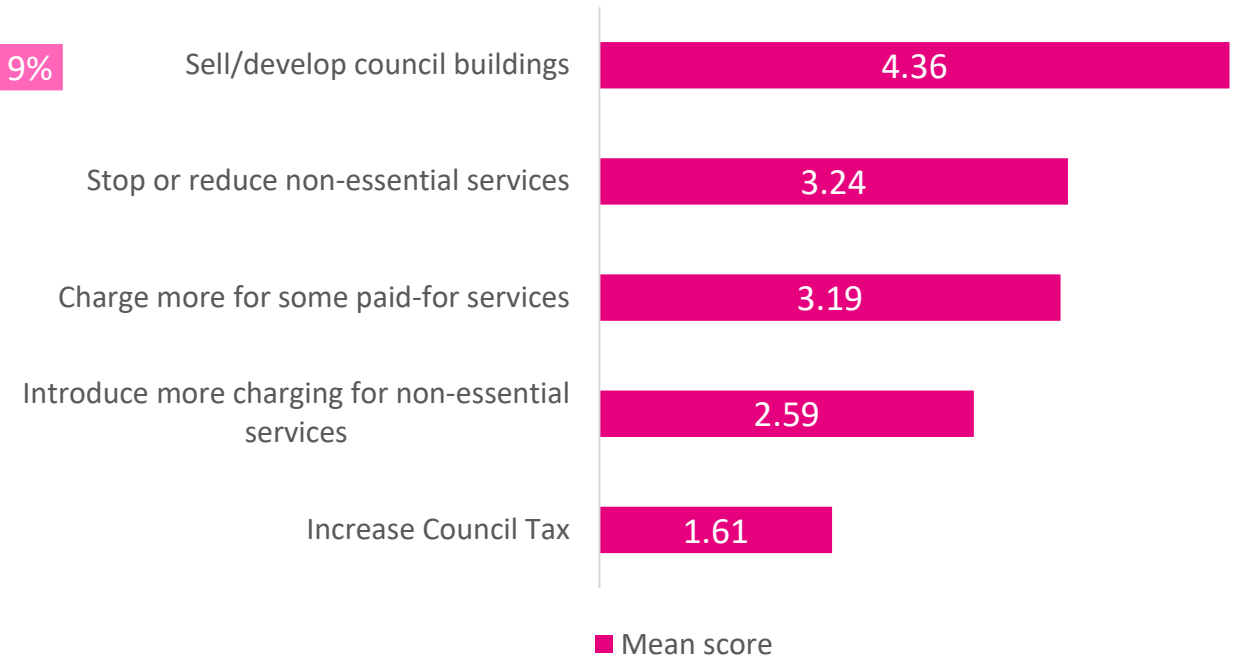
Selling or developing council buildings is the most preferred method of achieving Council savings goals rather than making changes to services or their cost at point of use. Increasing Council Tax, the option that would most directly affect residents financially is the least commonly favoured option.

Page 154

Top 3 choices



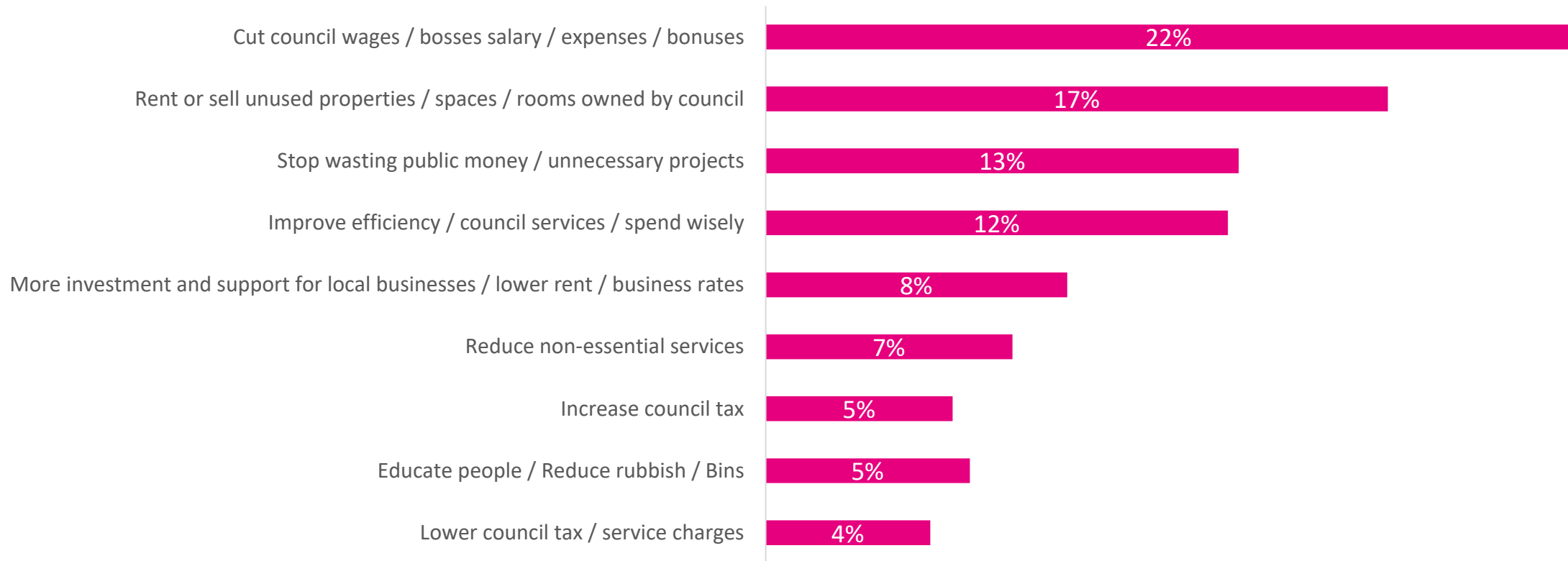
Mean score of choices



Suggested approaches for delivering the Council savings needed

Of the 120 residents who provided alternative suggestions as to how budget savings can be achieved, 22% suggested cutting wages of council workers, including reducing bonuses and expenses. 17% proposed renting or selling unused properties and spaces which go unused by the council and 13% suggested the council should be more stringent when deciding which projects to fund.

Page 155



Q1b. Are there any other things that you think the Council can do to make savings?
Unweighted sample base: 120

Responses given by 3% or less of the sample not shown

All residents were presented with the Council's six strategic outcomes and were asked to consider how important these are to them...

Our Strategic Outcomes



THE BEST START IN LIFE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



PEOPLE LIVE WELL AND AGE WELL



STRONG RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



QUALITY HOMES IN THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS



A STRONG AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY



A CONNECTED AND ACCESSIBLE SANDWELL



ONE COUNCIL ONE TEAM

Priorities when considering strategic outcomes

The best start in life for Children and Young People (Theme 1) is the strategic priority most commonly selected as important by residents (34%), followed by strong, resilient communities. Theme 1 is significantly more likely to be chosen by those aged 18 – 34 (44%), those who are struggling financially (35%) and women (38%). The best start in life is however less likely to be a top priority for those 55 -74 (26%) and 75+ (12%). These older age groups are significantly more likely to select Theme 2, People Living and Aging well as a top priority (26% and 48% respectively).



Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 1: The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People** – this theme is most likely to be selected by those aged 18-34 (44%), females (38%), and residents who are economically active (38%) This could be a reflection of these demographics being the most likely to be those who have young families. There is evidence of this within the explanations residents gave for their choices (examples in the next slide). Residents living in Tipton are significant less likely to prioritise Theme 1 (25% cf. 34%), along with older residents (55-74: 26%; 75+: 12%).
- **Theme 2: People Living Well and Aging Well** – This theme appears to be a more prominent priority in Wednesbury (26%) and among those who are economically inactive (perhaps as a result of being retired – 24%) and understandably, those aged 55-74 (26%) and 75+ (48%). Young people (18-34: 11%; 35-54: 12%) are less likely to prioritise spending in this area, along with those who are financially struggling (14%). Those who prioritised this theme, cited relevance to them as an ageing person as their primary reason for doing so, along with there being an ageing population in their area.

"I'm from that age group"
Theme 2

"I HAVE A CHILD AND SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO HELP GET A GOOD START IN LIFE"
Theme 1

"I have children my own and it's good for our area"
Theme 1

"They should look after the younger generation and for this community too"
Theme 1

"Older generation needs some help and support"
Theme 2

"A lot of cut backs older people need company and somewhere to go and beat loneliness for their own mental health"
Theme 2

"It's good for the health of this community"
Theme 2

"They need a good start especially if they are coming from a different background"
Theme 1

"Young people are the future of this country"
Theme 1

"People are not living well because of the cost of living crisis"
Theme 2

“We have some safety issues, so they should concentrate more for safety and security in this area”
Theme 3

Page 160

“All are important but safety is more I don't want to be scared in my area”
Theme 3

“There are poor condition of homes currently and need new improved homes”
Theme 4

“Affordable housing is important for this borough”
Theme 4

“The streets were clean and safe years ago they are not anymore and people get mugged”
Theme 3

“They need to spend on the safety and security of this area”
Theme 3

“Safe place leads to safe place for kids, infrastructures will follow”
Theme 3

“We never have had quality homes”
Theme 4

“We need affordable and quality housing services”
Theme 4

“Everything starts at home and having a good home”
Theme 4

“Safe and clean living environment is very important for everyone”
Theme 3

“It's important to feel happy safe and comfortable where we live”
Theme 3

Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – A safe, clean and green place to live** – This theme is significantly more likely to be selected as a priority by residents in Tipton (31%) and Smethwick (29%), more so than the overall and the other towns. Those in Rowley Regis are significantly less likely to prioritise Theme 3, (16%). Amongst tenure types, there is little significant variation in the priority given to this theme. The theme is also prioritised by a similar proportion of each age cohort.
- **Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods** – Theme 4 is the lowest priority theme for residents of Sandwell (7% selected this). Residents in Wednesbury are more likely to consider Quality Homes and Neighbourhoods a priority than residents of other areas (9%), though not significantly so. Residents in Oldbury are the least likely to indicate that Theme 4 is the most important to them.

Residents' priorities for Sandwell: detailed analysis

- **Theme 5: A Connected and Accessible Sandwell – good quality public transport and road networks. Good internet connectivity for residents and businesses** – There is no significant variation between towns in the proportion of residents who prioritise this theme, with between 6% and 8% selecting it as the most important to them. Selection of this theme was done consistently by age.
- **Theme 6: A strong and Inclusive Economy– spending money locally to grow the local economy -** Residents aged 35 -54 are significantly more likely than the survey average (16% cf. 11%) to value a strong and inclusive economy. Male residents are significantly more likely than women (14% cf. 9%) to rate a strong and inclusive as important to them. Perhaps surprisingly, those who are concerned about the cost of living crisis are significantly less likely to consider the economy as the most important theme, as mentioned, prioritising instead giving children and young people the best start in life.

“We need a good network routes”
Theme 5

“Good quality public transport will enable people to get around without congestion and associated air pollution”
Theme 5

“The way the economy is at the moment something needs to be done”
Theme 6

“Continuous growth if we haven't got that how are we going to live”
Theme 6

“It will benefit everyone locally”
Theme 6

“Good road network is very important for a better economy”
Theme 5

“It means we are able to our of Sandwell for work and education more easily”
Theme 5

“Mainly because the community will be a better place”
Theme 5

“We can build a strong economy it's going to help children”
Theme 6

“Money will stay in this area and can use for the local community”
Theme 6

“Encourages people to invest and look after property”
Theme 6

“We need a better condition of roads and a bigger network of buses”
Theme 5

Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people

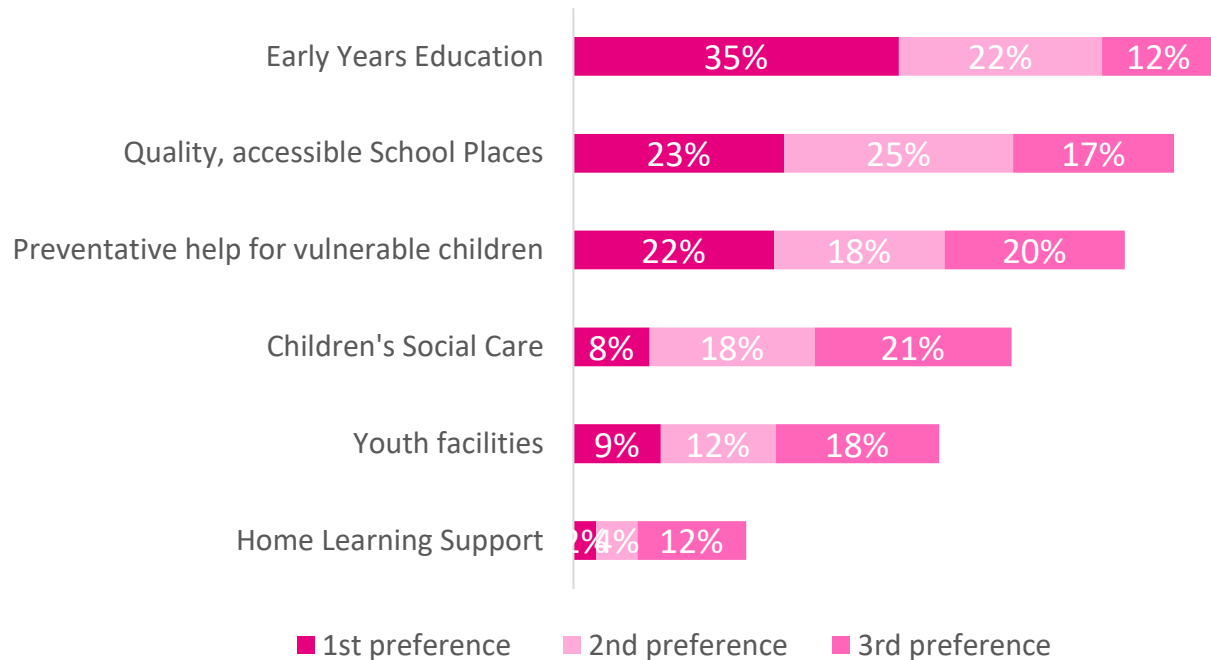


Priorities within Theme 1: the best start in life for children and young people

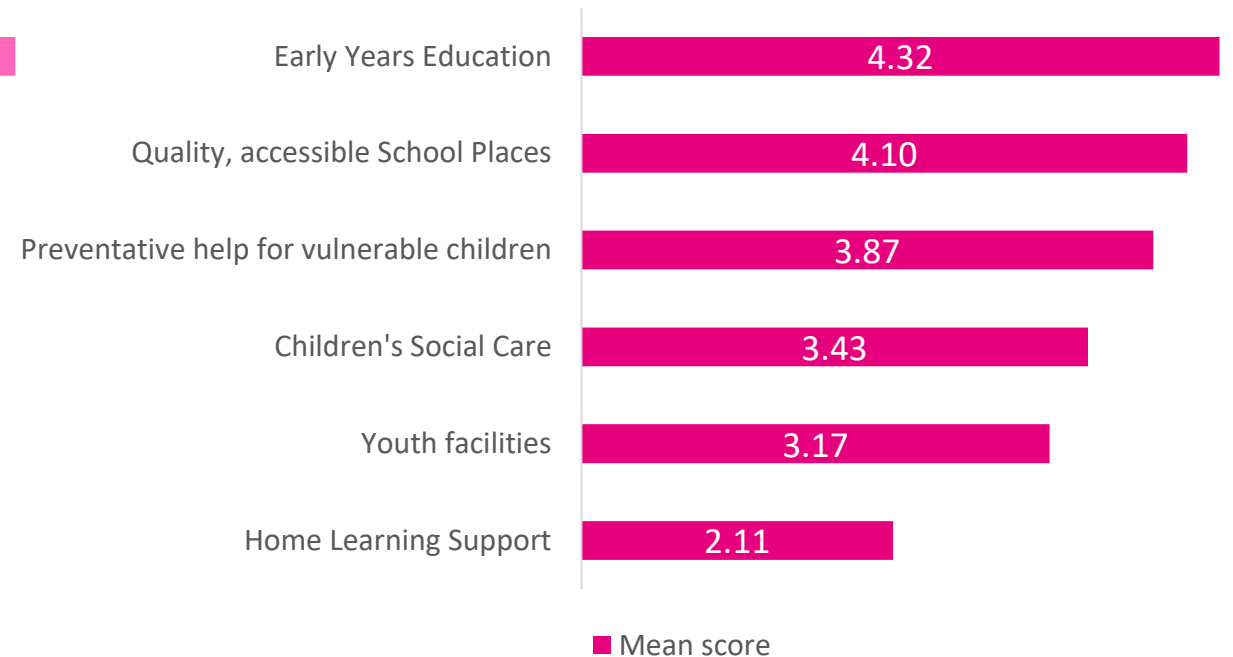
All residents were asked for their top priorities within each strategic theme, regardless of which theme they considered to be most important. Within Theme 1, early years education (4.32), quality and accessible school places (4.10) and preventative help for vulnerable children (3.87) are the service areas most commonly favoured. Home learning support was least commonly chosen as a priority by residents.

Page 165

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people – notable variations in opinion

Looking specifically at those who earlier selected Theme 1 as most important, this group are even more likely than the total sample to rank early years education as their 1st priority (41% cf. 35%), Otherwise, the Theme 1 priorities among this sub-group of residents is similar to the overall sample, with home learning support least commonly prioritised along with youth facilities.



Those aged **18 to 34** are significantly more likely than the total sample to select early years education as their top priority (44% cf. 35%). This age group are also more likely than the overall to prioritise home learning support, though this is still their lowest priority.



Early years education is consistently the first choice in residents living in all five towns. However, beneath this there is slightly stronger support for quality and accessible school places being the top priority within Smethwick and Tipton.

Theme 2: people live well and age well

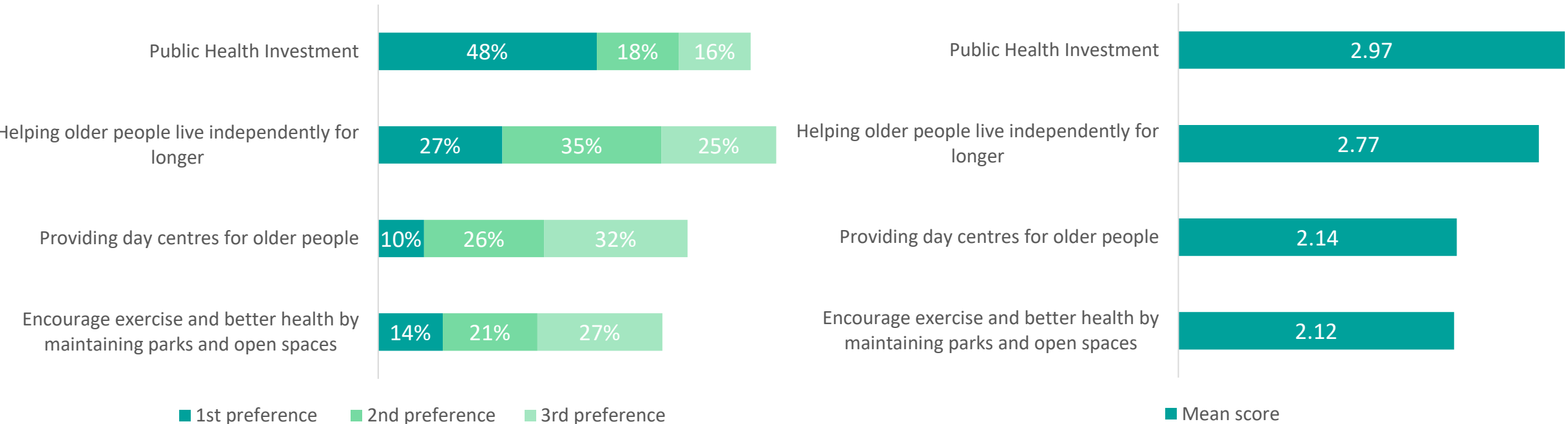


Priorities within Theme 2: people live well and age well

When asked for their priorities within Theme 2, residents most commonly chose Public Health Investment in their top 3, followed by helping older people to live independently for longer and providing day centres for elderly people. Public Health Investment is almost twice as likely to be chosen as a top priority than helping older people live independently for longer (48% and 27% respectively). Encouraging exercise and better health via parks and open spaces is the lowest priority for residents, with only 14% considering this the top priority.

Top 3 choices

Mean score of choices



Theme 2: People Live Well and Age Well – notable variations in opinion

While public health investment has the most support overall within this Theme, among residents who consider **helping residents to live and age well as the most important theme**, the top priority based on mean is 'helping older people to live independently' (2.95). 35% of this group consider this as the top priority, significantly higher than the overall population (27%).



Younger residents are significantly more likely than older residents to prioritise public health investment (18 – 34: 3.27; 75+: 2.57). Older residents are more likely to support budget spending on helping older people to live independently ahead of public health investment. Men and women prioritise the options similarly, with the exception of men being significantly less likely than women to prioritise providing day centres for elderly people (men: 2.09, women: 2.20).



Residents in **Smethwick** have slightly different priorities to the overall, considering encouraging exercise as a higher priority than providing day centres (2.39 compared to 2.12 in the overall).

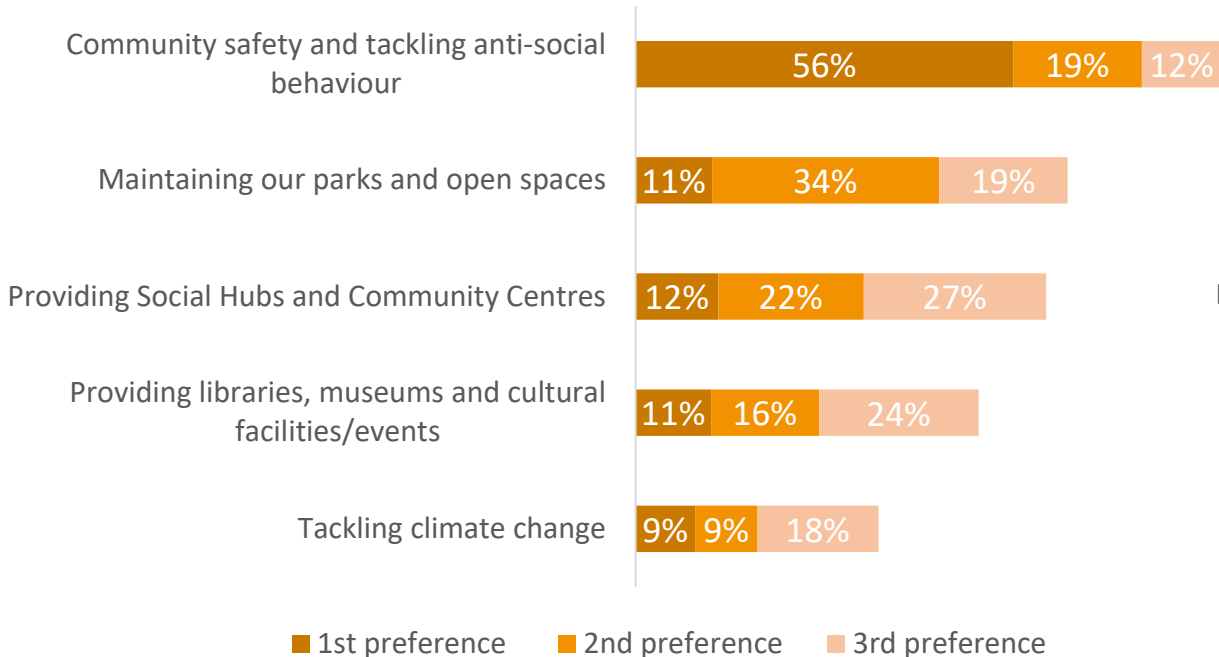
Theme 3: strong, resilient communities



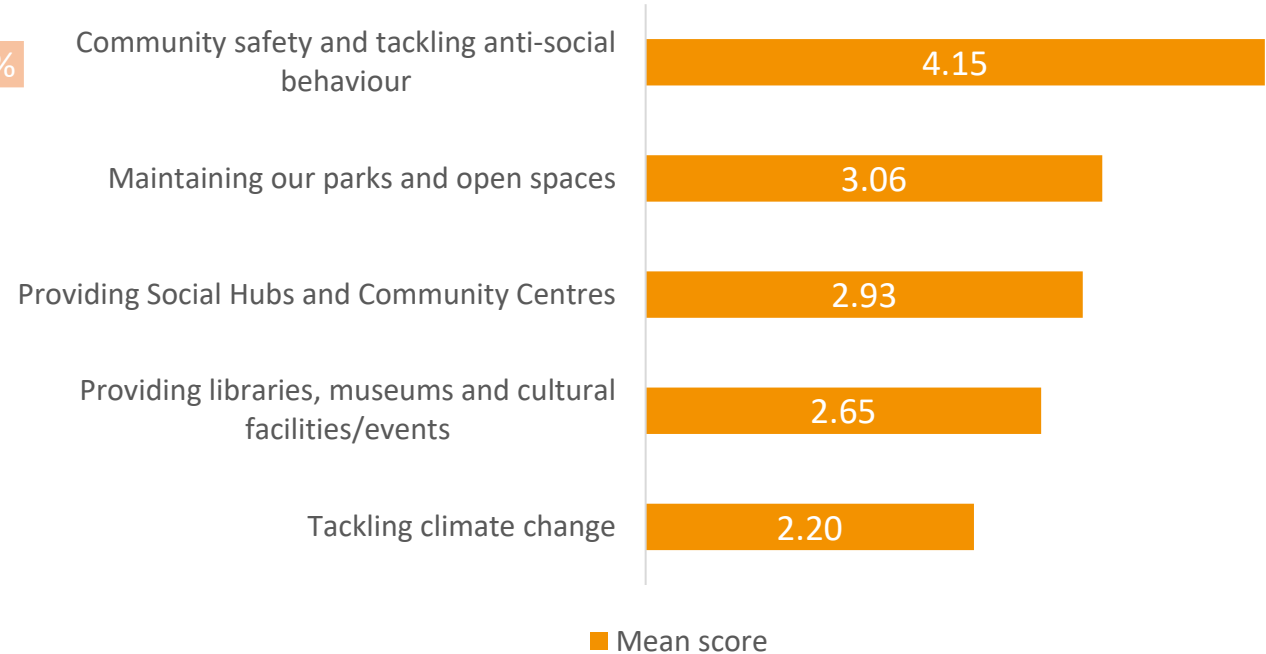
Priorities within Theme 3: strong, resilient communities

When considering detailed choices within Theme 3, community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour is most likely to be considered a top priority by residents (4.15). Over half chose (56%) this as their first choice, providing a clear message that this is a priority issue. In the context of this Theme, maintenance of parks and open spaces is a priority, whereas this did not seem to be the case in the context of improving public health (see slide 22).

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – notable variations in opinion

Among residents who **selected Theme 3 as most important to them** community safety is the key priority, with 69% of this group selecting this as their top priority compared to 56% of all residents. Residents who consider Theme 3 as most important rank the options in the same order as the total sample.



Ranking of priorities is largely consistent across different demographic groups, mirroring the overall results, with community safety and tackling ASB the top priority and tackling climate change the lowest priority. **Residents aged 35 and above** are likely to feel more strongly that community safety should be a priority with approximately 60% of each of these cohorts selecting this as the top priority compared with 49% of those **aged 18 – 35**.



Whilst community safety is consistently the top priority across towns in Sandwell, there is some spatial variation in the lower order priorities. **Oldbury, Wednesbury and Tipton** residents consider Providing Social Hubs and Community Centres as a higher priority than the survey average (with this the second highest scoring priority by mean for these areas, above maintaining parks). Whilst **Smethwick** residents chose a ranking of priorities that was consistent with those chosen by all residents, they are more likely to consider community hubs the lowest priority (23% cf. 14%).

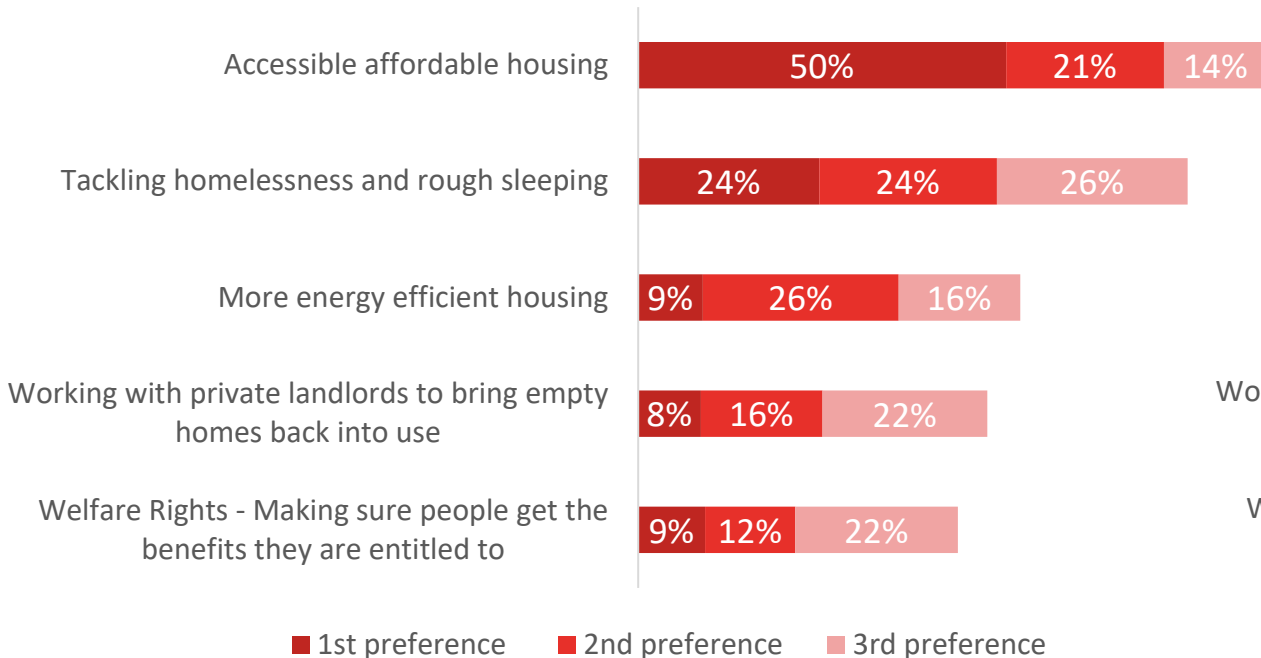
Theme 4: quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods



Priorities within Theme 4: quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

Within Theme 4 accessible affordable housing is the top priority for Sandwell residents, with approximately 85% considering this a top 3 choice, and 50% considering this the ultimate priority. Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is also important to residents, though to a lesser extent than affordable housing. Welfare rights are much less of a priority. More energy efficient housing and working with private landlords on empty homes are considered to be of relatively similar importance to residents.

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods - – notable variations in opinion



The priorities of residents who earlier **selected Theme 4 as the most important** mirror those chosen among the overall population. Among this group affordable housing is the top priority, even more so than among all residents (64% selected this as their first choice cf. 50%).



The ranking of priorities within Theme 4 is largely consistent across demographic groups, with accessible affording housing a priority for all. **Those aged 18 to 34** are likely to feel more strongly that accessible affordable housing is the ultimate priority (57% cf. 50%).



Residents in **Oldbury** are less likely to rank more energy efficient housing as a priority, with this being considered a priority by a lower proportion of residents in this area than working with private landlords and welfare rights. Residents in **Rowley Regis** are more likely to consider homelessness and rough sleeping a top priority compared to the total sample (31% cf. 24%).

Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell

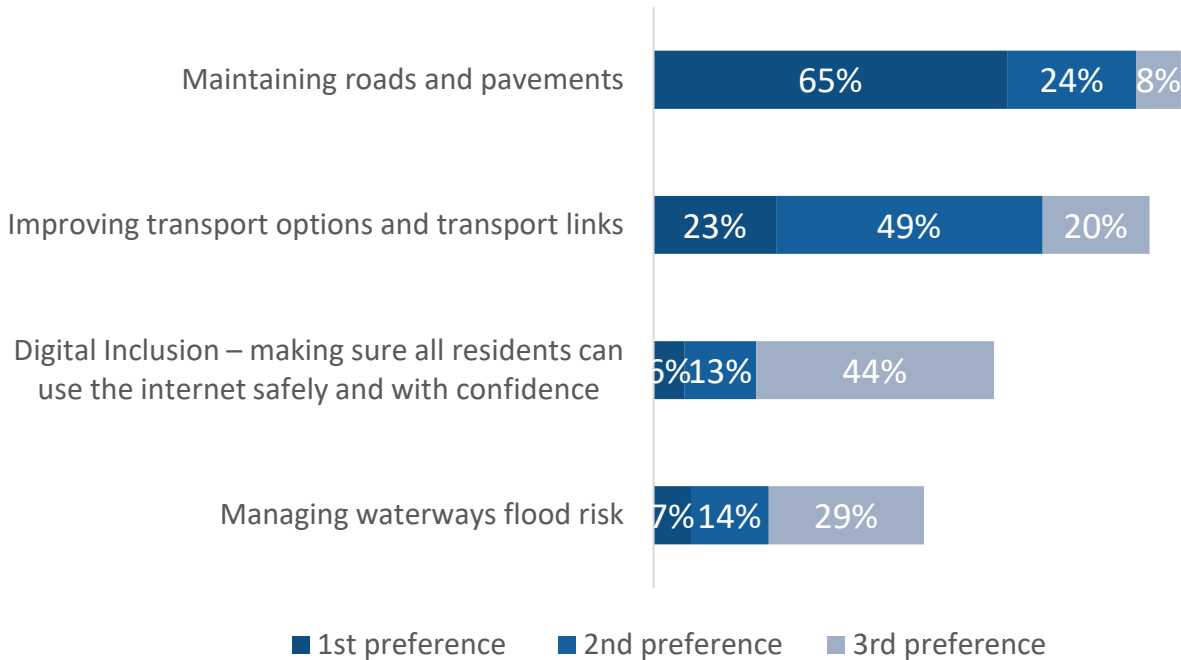


Priorities within Theme 5: a connected and accessible Sandwell

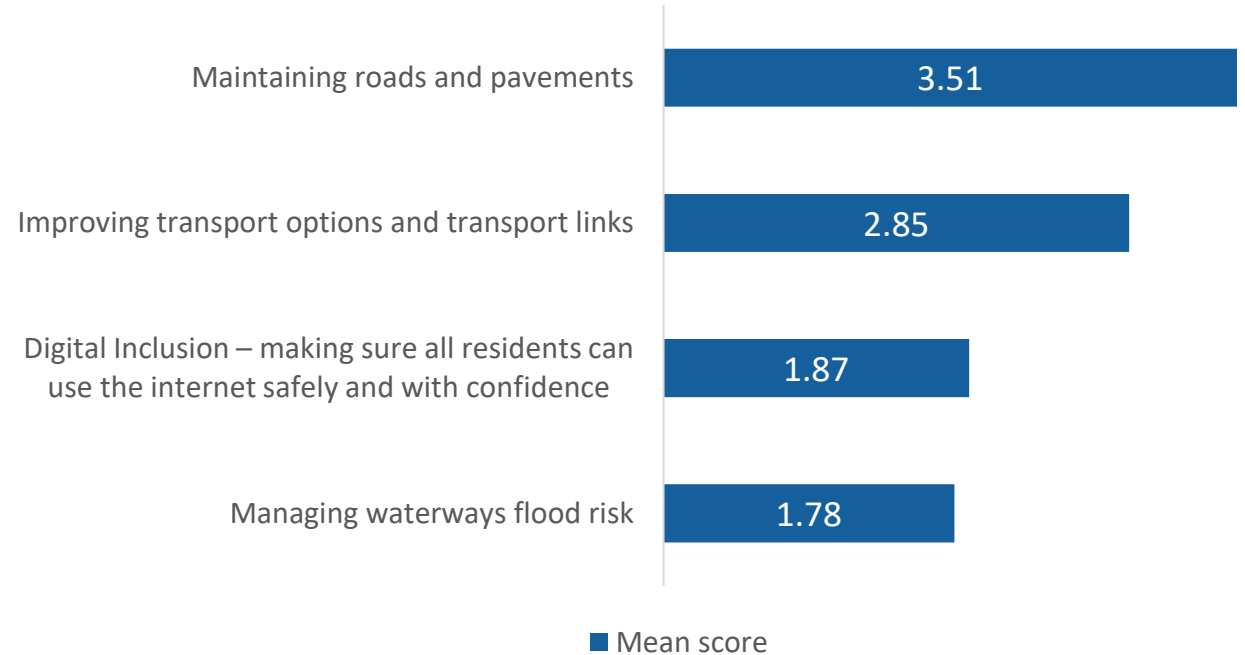
Within Theme 5 maintenance of roads and pavements is the dominant priority, with nearly two-thirds (65%) choosing this as their highest priority. Improving transport links is the second highest priority, with nearly half of residents (49%) choosing this as their second priority. Managing waterways flood risk is least commonly considered a priority within this Theme.

Page 177

Top 3 choices



Mean score of choices



Theme 5: A Connected and Accessible Sandwell – notable variations in opinion



Residents who earlier **selected Theme 5 as the most important** chose maintaining roads and pavements as the top priority (43%), albeit to a significantly lesser extent than the all residents (65%). Those suggesting a connected and accessible Sandwell is the key strategic priority for them, are equally likely to consider improvement of transport options and links as their ultimate priority (44%) alongside the maintenance of roads and pavements.



Residents' **aged 75+** are less likely to consider digital inclusion a priority, with 51% of these residents ranking it as the lowest priority, the highest proportion of any age cohort to do so.



Improved transport options are most commonly chosen as a top priority by residents of **Wednesbury** (57%) and **Smethwick** (54%). Residents in **Tipton**, consider managing waterway flood risk as a top priority more often than those in other areas (15% cf. 7%), suggesting that this may need to be considered more in relation to this town, despite being the lowest ranked priority overall.

Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy

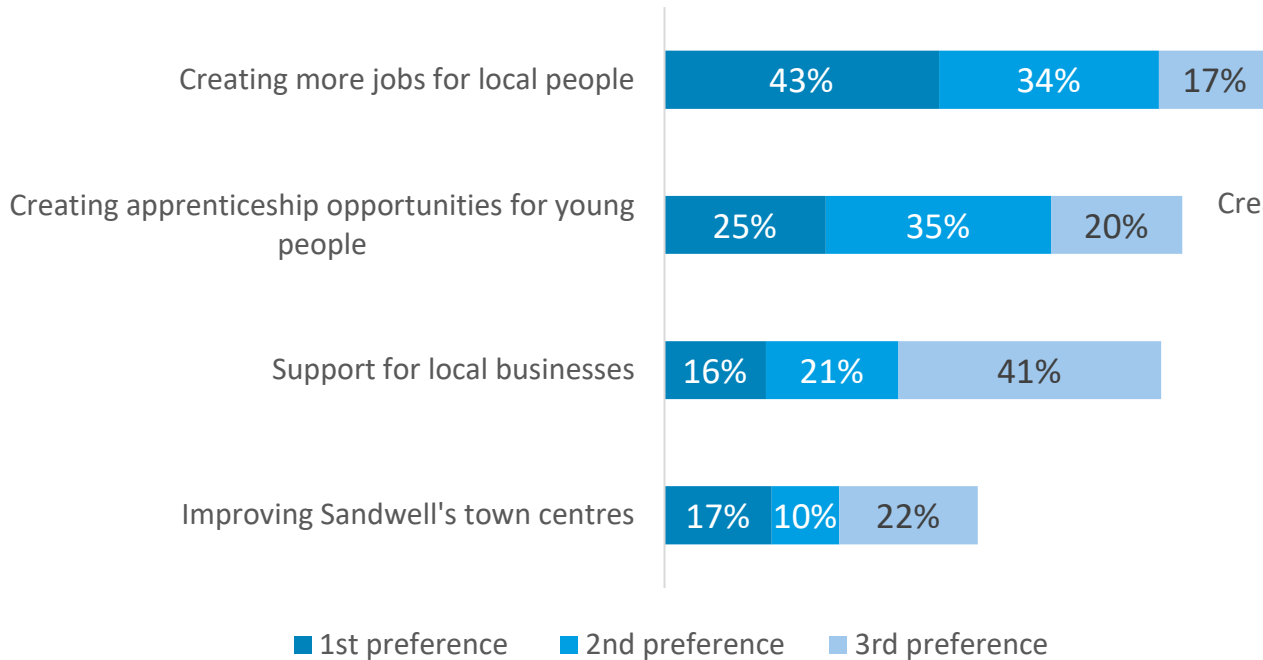


Priorities within Theme 6: a strong and inclusive economy

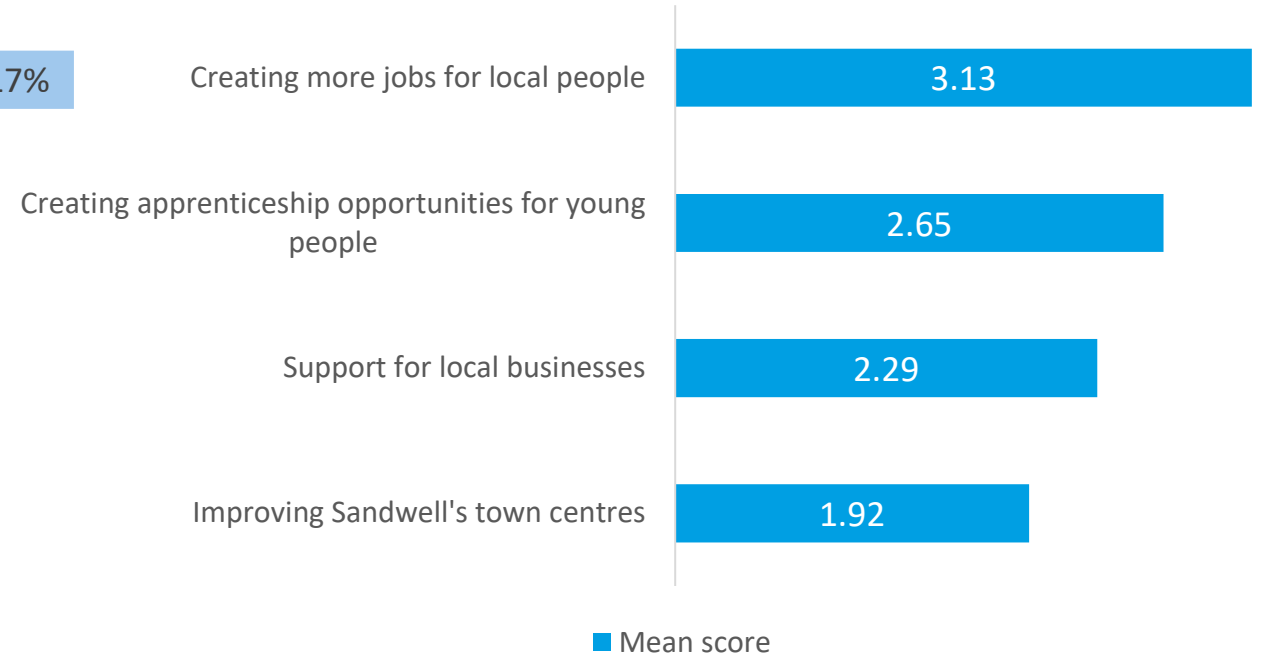
Within this Theme creating jobs for local people is the highest priority for Sandwell residents, with two in five (43%) selecting this as their top priority and a further third ranking this second. Improving Sandwell's town centre is the lowest priority in this question context of improving the local economy.

Page 180

Top 3 choices

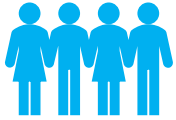


Mean score of choices



Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy – notable variations in opinion

Residents who earlier said that **Theme 6 was the most important to them** most commonly prioritise job creation followed by creating apprenticeship opportunities.



Residents aged between 55 -74 are significantly more likely to prioritise the improvement of Sandwell’s town centres with 24% considering this their top priority (cf. 17%). This age group are significantly less likely to consider creating jobs as their top priority (34% cf. 43%). This pattern is reversed amongst **those aged 18 – 34** who are significantly more likely to prioritise job creation (47%) at the expense of improving town centres (12%).



By area, **Tipton** is most likely to advocate for supporting local businesses (2.38), significantly more so than the average and **Wednesbury** (1.87) and **Oldbury** (1.62). Across all areas, creating more jobs is consistently a top priority, indicating a desire for this to be area of focus.

Alternative energy

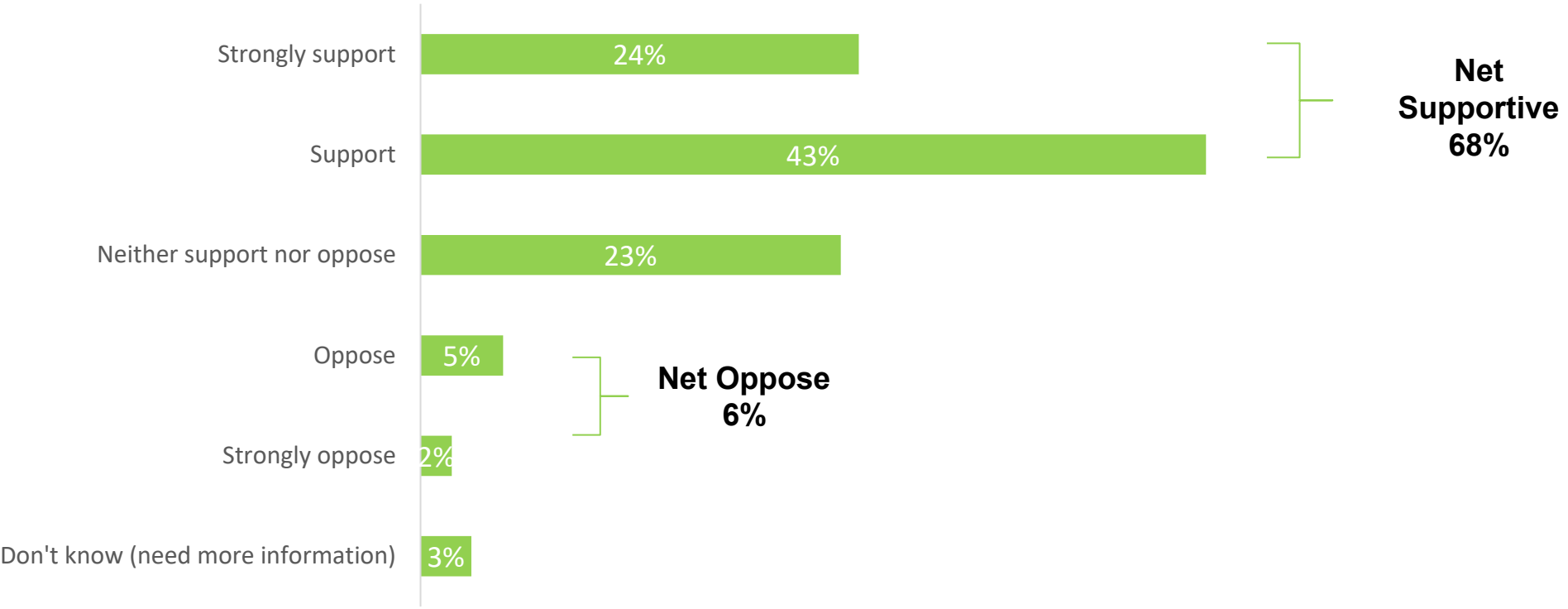


Support for renewable energy generation...

Two-thirds (68%) of residents actively support Sandwell Council exploring renewable energy generation opportunities, with a quarter (24%), strongly supporting such measures. Opposition is low with only 6% stating they are opposed. Please note that the question wording mentioned both energy security and tackling climate change as the rationale for this approach.

Page 183

Support for renewable energy



Q10. How supportive are you of the Council looking at opportunities to generate more renewable energy i.e. solar, to help tackle climate change and build greater energy security for its communities?
Unweighted sample base: 1100

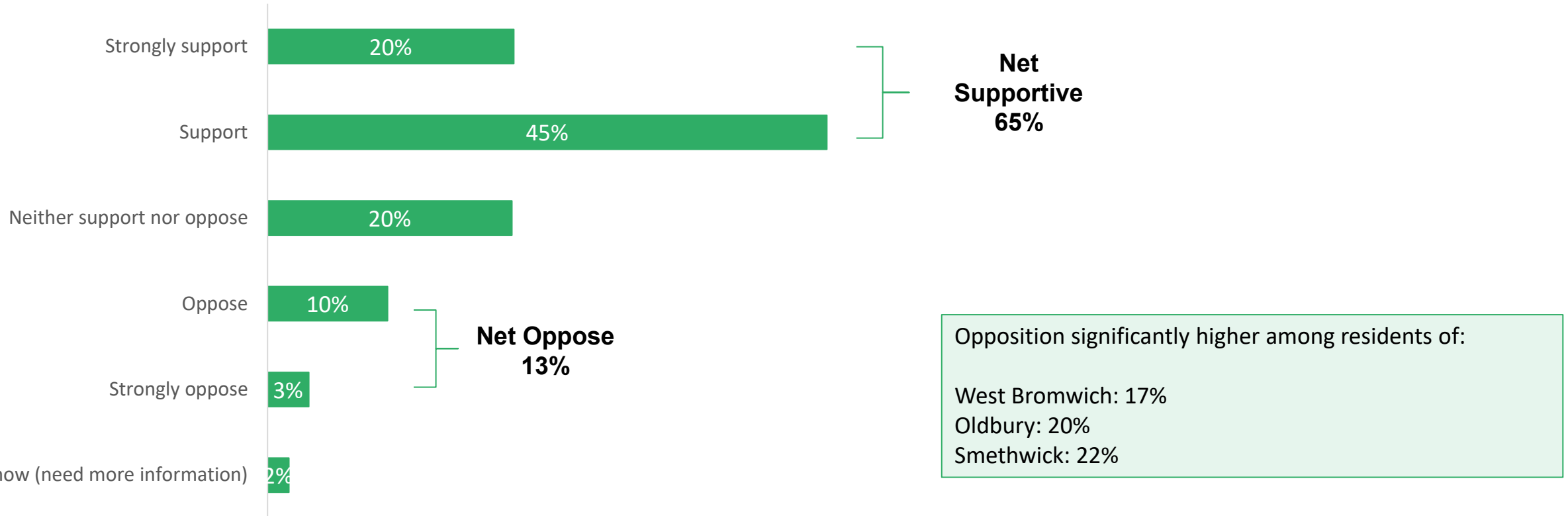
Rewilding



Residents' support for rewilding

Support for rewilding some areas of Sandwell's parks and open spaces is expressed by two-thirds of residents (65%), including one in five (20%) who strongly supporting this approach. In total 13% oppose rewilding in Sandwell's parks and open spaces.

Page 185



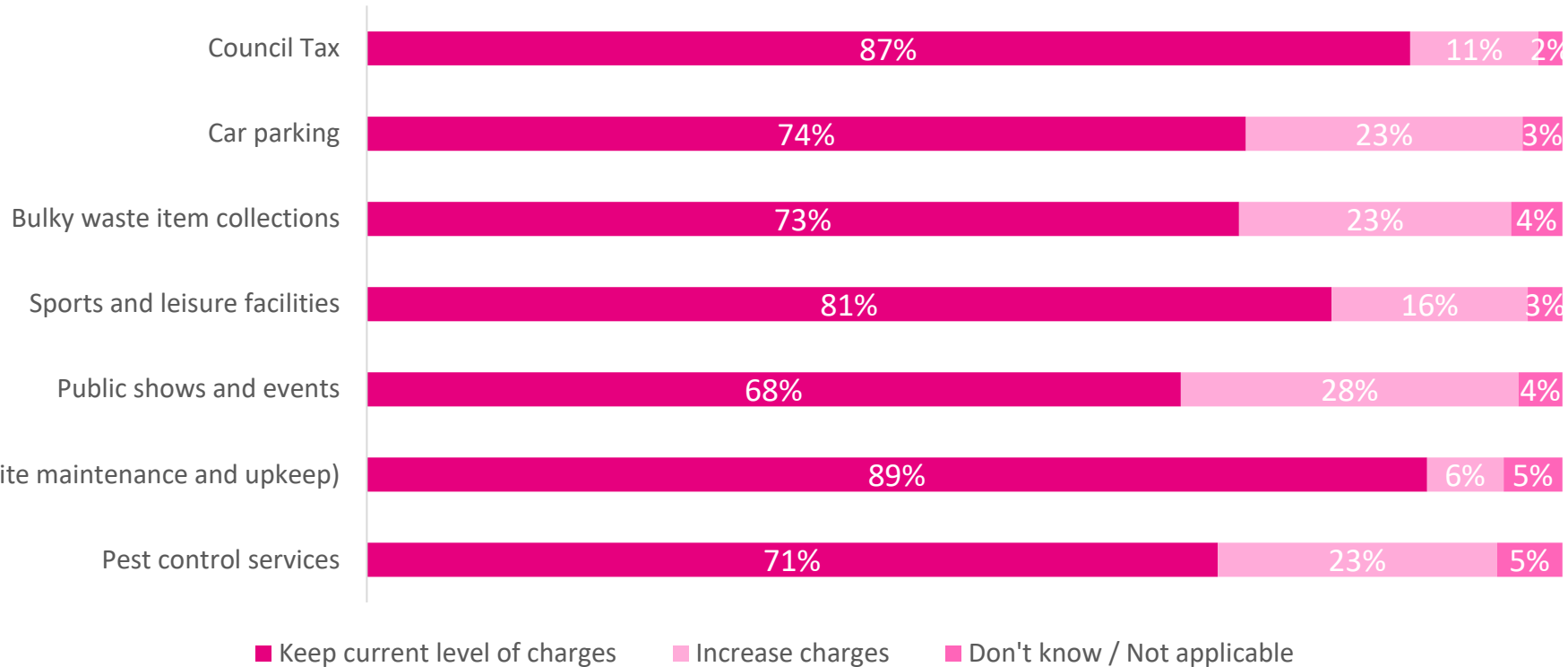
Service Changes



Paying more for Council services

Page 187

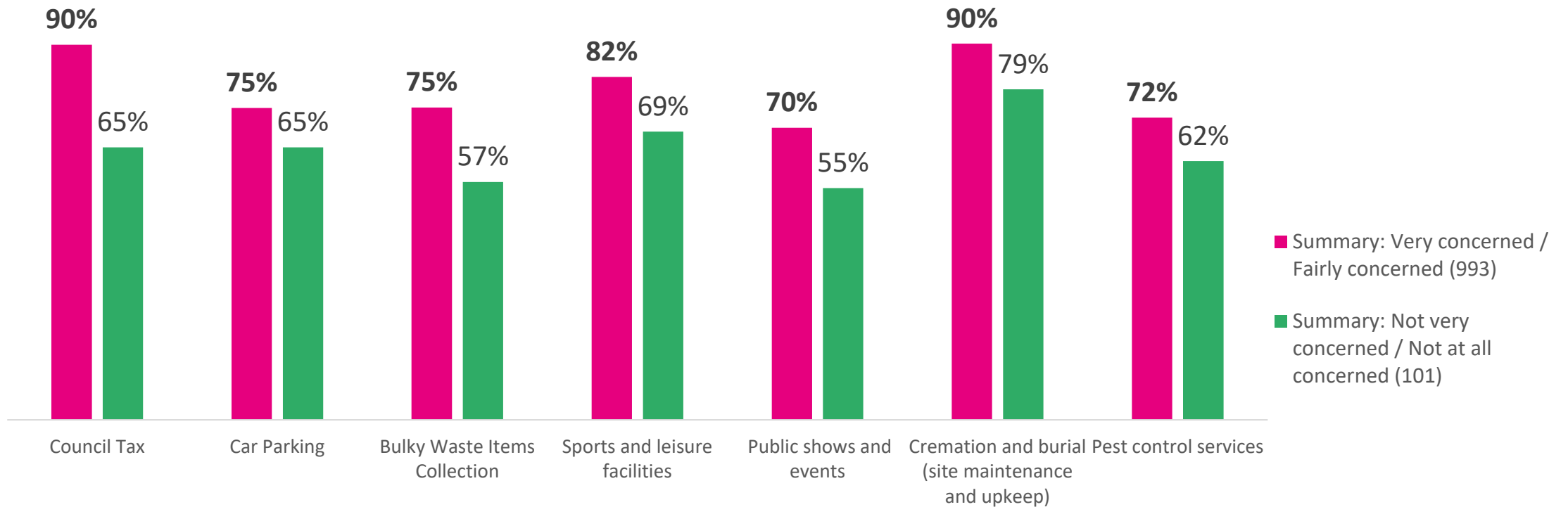
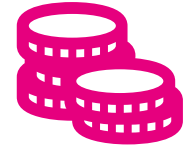
Generally speaking, the majority of residents would prefer not to see changes to service related charges, with more than two-thirds stating that current charges should stay the same for each service. The most acceptable increases to service charges would be for public shows and events (28%) and for use of pest control services (23%), although even for these a majority remain opposed.



Views on charging for services based on current financial circumstances

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the current cost of living crisis, those who are **fairly or very concerned about their financial situation are more likely to oppose the increase of service charges.**

Page 188



Summary: Q12. Taking into consideration the financial challenge the Council is facing, and in order to set a balanced budget and limit any reductions to services, which of the below would you be prepared to pay more for?
Base Sizes in Chart Legend

Views on Council Tax increases

Page 189

87%
Keep the Same

11%
Increase Charges

2%
Don't Know / Not
Applicable

Support for keeping the same higher among:

- Social Renters – 93%
- Private Renters – 91%
- Females – 90%
- Fairly / very concerned about cost of Living – 90%

Support for an increase is higher among:

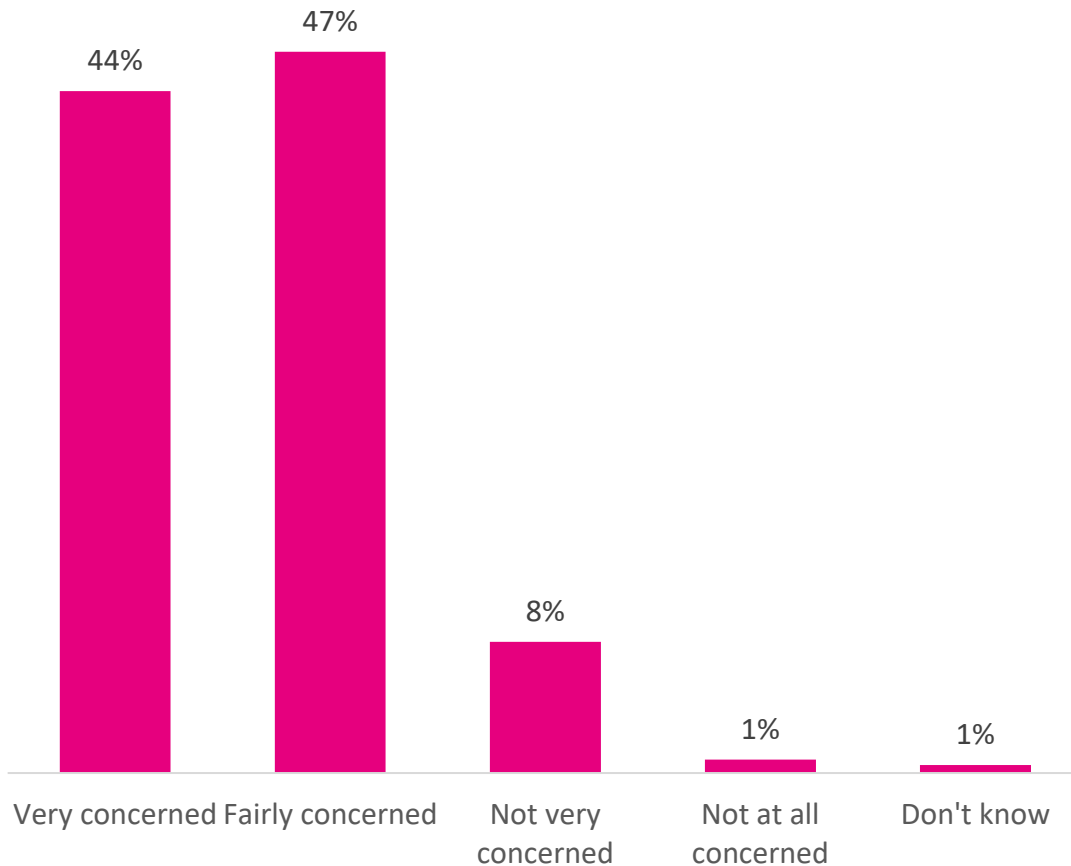
- Those not very concerned about the cost-of-living crisis – 33%
- Those aged 75+ - 19%
- Homeowner - 17%
- Male – 15%

- Council Tax is the thing that residents most emphatically want to stay the same (87%).
- Younger cohorts are less supportive of increases in Council Tax charges than those aged 75+. Residents who are aged 75 and over are significantly more likely than the average to be willing to accept council tax increases (17%).

Financial Security

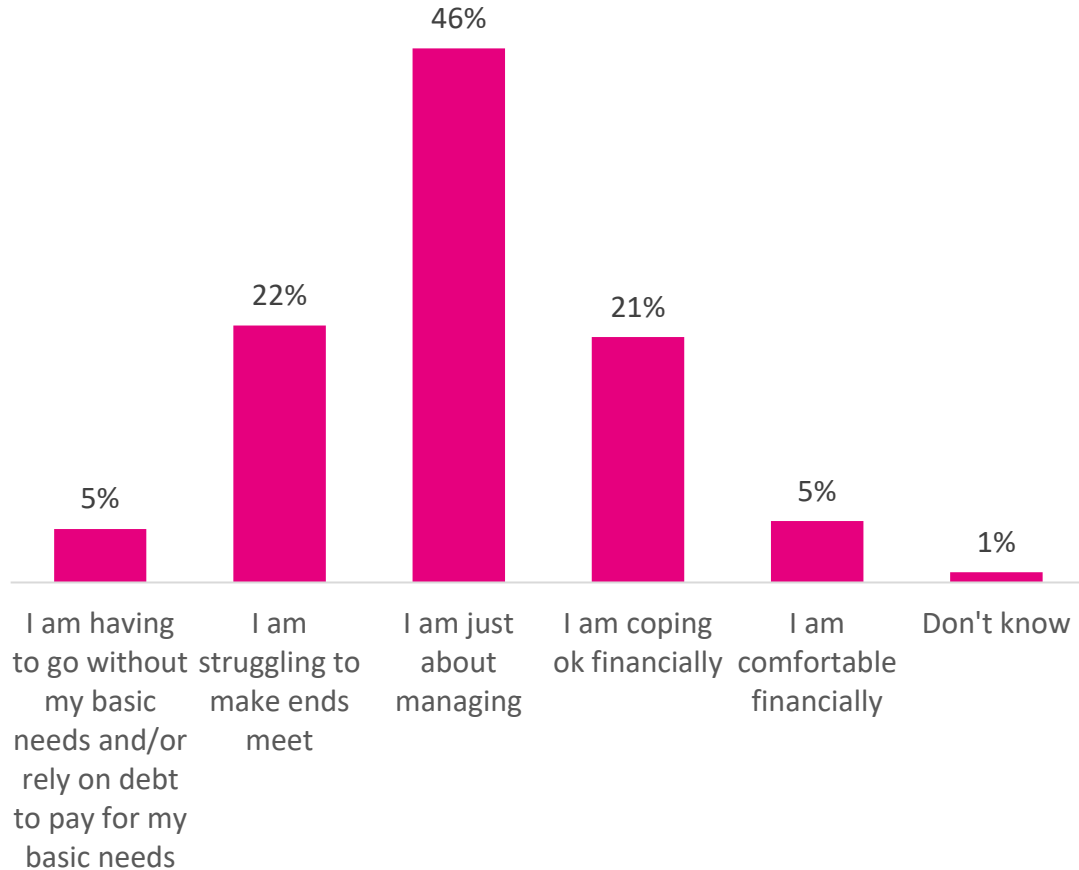


Concerns about the cost of living



- To put residents' views on how Sandwell Council sets its budget in 2024/25 into context, two questions were asked regarding personal financial circumstances.
- Nine in ten residents in Sandwell are at least fairly concerned about the current cost of living. Within this, two in five residents (44%) give the most extreme response of 'very concerned'. This demonstrates that the council's choices will have to be made when there is a heightened sensitivity to impacts upon household budgets.
- Concern about the cost of living is prevalent in all age groups, although older residents more commonly state that they are not very or not at all concerned about the current cost of living (75+: 18%; 55 -74: 13%).

Residents' financial security



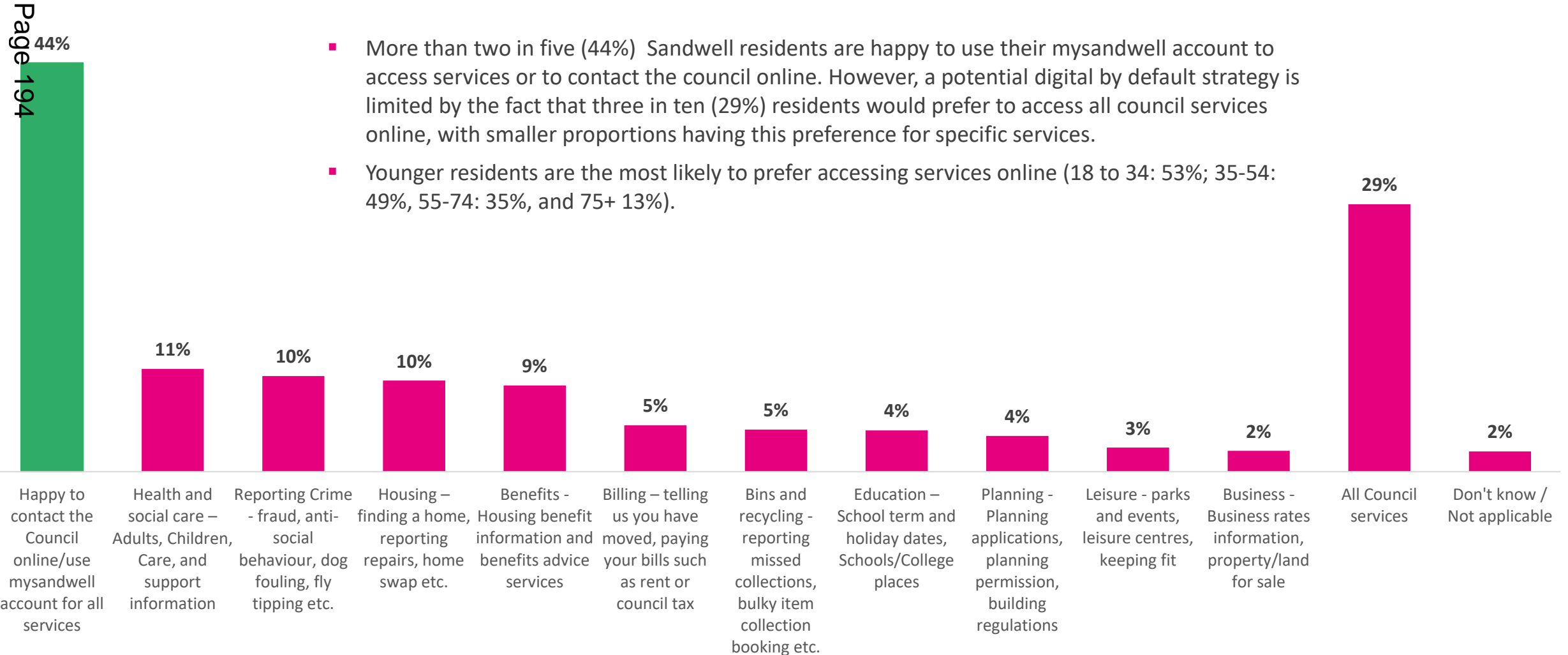
- Approximately one quarter of Sandwell residents say that they are currently struggling to make ends meet (22%) or are having to go without basic needs (5%).
- This level of financial vulnerability has potential implications not only for the potential of the council to leverage extra revenue from Council Tax and service related charges, but also on future service demand.
- Regarding the strategic themes discussed in this report, residents who are going without or struggling are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 1 – providing the best start in life for children and young people (42% chose this).

Contact Preferences



Preferred methods for accessing services

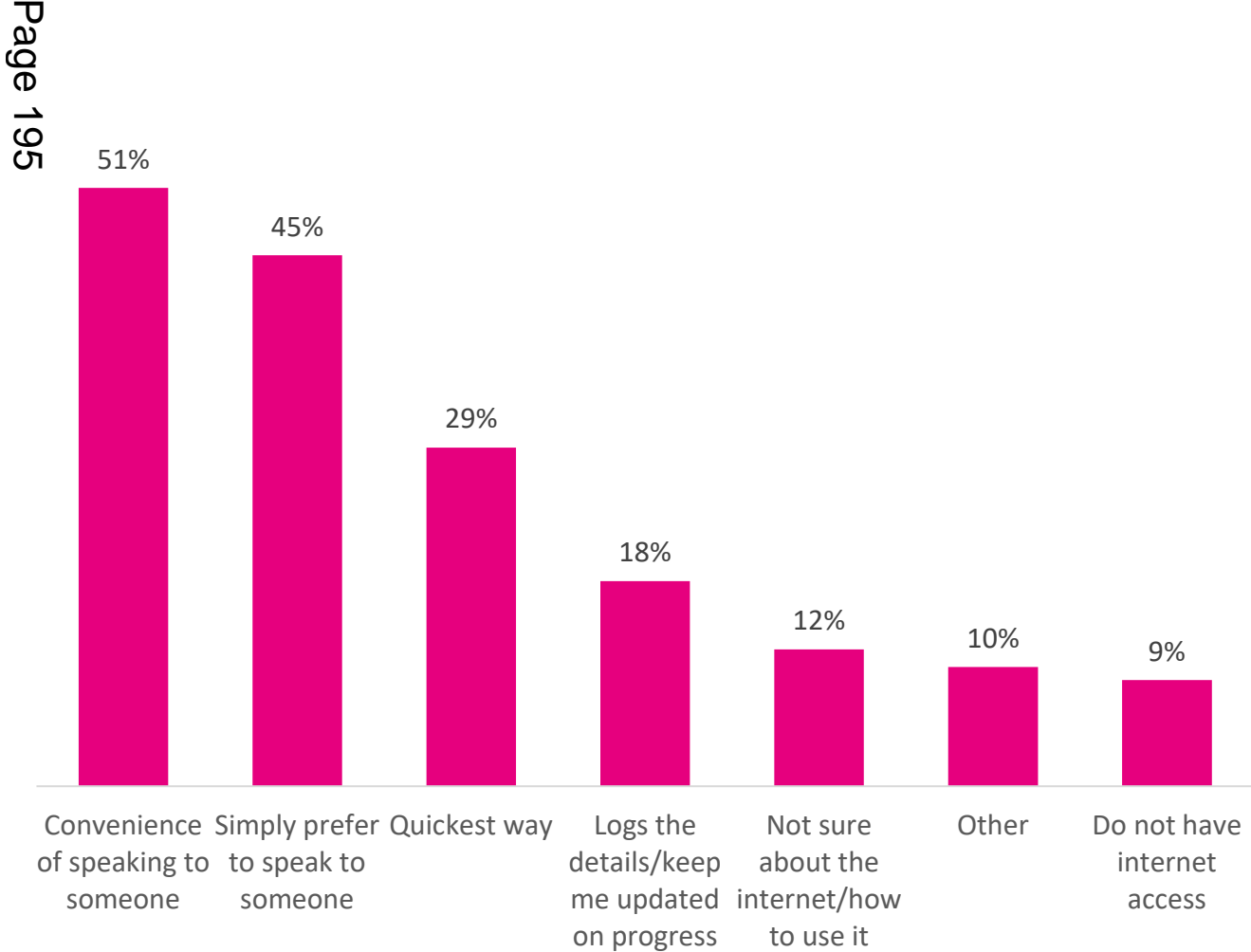
Are there any services that you would prefer to access in-person or on the telephone, rather than online/using mysandwell account?



- More than two in five (44%) Sandwell residents are happy to use their mysandwell account to access services or to contact the council online. However, a potential digital by default strategy is limited by the fact that three in ten (29%) residents would prefer to access all council services online, with smaller proportions having this preference for specific services.
- Younger residents are the most likely to prefer accessing services online (18 to 34: 53%; 35-54: 49%, 55-74: 35%, and 75+ 13%).

For those who would prefer to contact by telephone or in-person...

Why would you prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone?



- Residents who prefer to contact by telephone or speak to someone face to face, most frequently cite the convenience of speaking to someone (51%) and simply preferring to speak to someone as the reason why they prefer to do so (45%). On the basis of these responses, it is service quality, ease and speed that drive these preferences much more so than a lack of digital skills (12%) or internet access (9%).



Diversity and inclusion issues



Variations in response by ethnic origin

Page 197

Within the budget survey residents were asked to state their ethnic origin. Looking at the responses given by those who are White, those who have a Mixed ethnic origin, those who are Asian/Asian British and those who are Black/Black British there is no consistent variation in the responses given/the priorities chosen.

- The order of strategic properties chosen is largely consistent among each ethnic group. Whilst Theme 1 remains the top priority for Asian/Asian British residents, this group are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities – A safe, clean and green place to live (34% cf. 23%), and as a result significantly less likely to prioritise Theme 2: People Living Well and Aging Well (9% cf. 18%).
- Black/Black British residents are significantly more likely to prioritise Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods (15% cf. 7%). This shows that there is some variation in priorities in different communities, which the council must be sensitive to when making budgeting choices.
- Non-white residents are significantly more likely to oppose Council Tax increases. This may be related to their higher concern about the current cost of living crisis. That 95% of Asian / Asian British and 94% of Black British residents' feel fairly or very concerned about the cost-of-living crisis suggest that financial resilience may be lower among these communities.

Formal Consultation Undertaken for Potential Changes to Discretionary Services

Summary of Responses

Purpose

This report sets out the methodology used to capture the views of residents and representatives of communities across Sandwell on the savings options put forward by the Council to address the anticipated budget shortfall of £13m (as at 15 November 2023). The report also sets out the results of the consultation activity, with a summary of key headline views from across all focus groups before setting out the detailed responses from each group.

Methodology

A basket of savings options totalling £18m for 2024/25 was set out in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy Autumn 2023 Update as reported to Cabinet on 15 November 2023. These savings options were shared with focus groups which represented residents and communities across Sandwell, and their views sought on whether the Council should adopt these options and what impact they could have.

The focus groups were held as follows:

Focus Group	Date	In person / online	Number of Participants
Residents	21 and 27 November 2023	Online (at preference of participants)	9
Children and Young People (SHAPE Forum)	30 November	In person	7
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations	7 December 2023	In Person	9
Business Ambassadors	11 January 2024	In Person	13

An online survey was also conducted during this period, open for responses from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. At close of the survey, the Council had received 416 responses.

Key Headlines

Whilst the number of participants in the focus groups and online survey do not represent a statistically representative sample of Sandwell's, the comments made by the different groups provide a useful insight into the views of different communities across the borough. The following points are a summary of the consistent themes which arose in the focus groups and online survey:

- Residents and representatives of the business community who participated in this exercise were largely unaware of budget challenge facing the Council, but accepted savings needed to be made.

- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations were more aware than residents of the Council’s financial position, and also recognised savings are required.
- Selling or renting out assets was supported as good way to make savings, as per the previous budget consultation activities. Communities expressed a preference for being more involved in determining the future of locally important or culturally significant assets.
- There was support for reducing the number of leisure centres in the borough, as long as easy access to centres was retained
- Increases in charges for businesses and development or where there is choice in using the service were supported, more so than increases in charges for services to vulnerable people
- Respondents would like to see events covering their costs rather than being subsidised by the council, as well as sponsorship by local businesses being explored
- There was strong support for improving efficiency of support services, use of Council fleet and focus on prevention and early intervention across all focus groups
- Green spaces in Sandwell are popular and valued – residents would like to see improvements in grounds maintenance, especially in parks and street cleansing
- Concerns shared that changes to waste management approaches will see an increase in littering, anti-social behaviour and fly tipping
- Support for savings from promoting independence and transformation of adult social care, providing care needs were met
- Respondents were keen that cuts across the board did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes
- There is a need to communicate more with residents on what changes will be made and the impact on residents.

Residents

Two focus groups were conducted in November 2023 – participants were invited from the respondents to the Budget Consultation Survey conducted in Summer 2023. Participants were contacted by email and phone to boost recruitment, and an incentive was offered for participating in the focus group. The events were conducted online at the request of the participants to encourage attendance. In total nine residents participated - six female residents and three male residents of varied ages, ethnic origins and employment status. Residents were from Tipton, Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis. No residents from Oldbury attended the focus groups.

Key messages

- Residents were largely unaware of the budget challenge facing the council, and whilst as one resident admitted, everyone would prefer no changes in services, it was recognised that there would need to be changes to make the required savings.
- Reflecting the budget survey findings (May 2023), residents in the focus groups agreed that selling assets was a good way to make savings, if there are other council buildings that can be used in the area, this included selling older leisure centres with the provision of newer centres in the borough.
- There were discussions however, as to whether it would be better to rent out unused buildings for a more sustained income. Here, residents were typically thinking of more medium and longer term income, rather than the need to make savings for the 2024/25 budget.
- Residents in the group were most open to changes in charges where a service was seen as “optional” such as marriage registration or attending events; or where a service

suggested a higher level of income for example planning costs or private rented sector fees.

- For the medium and longer term, the council may also wish to consider (if it hasn't done so already) aspects of commercialisation it can undertake through The General Power of Competence, enshrined in the 2011 Localism Act.
- Participants were also more receptive to increased charges for businesses including building regulation fees and development and commercial property rates, as businesses are seen as more able to accommodate price increases.
- In order to further save costs, residents in the groups suggested that the council outsource (e.g. via sponsorship) high-cost events to local business to make savings – using the example of firework displays to exemplify this.

However, some saving measures were rejected completely, including changes to waste collection or services that vulnerable people may depend upon.

- Suggestions to change the frequency of bin collections were rejected on a whole by residents. Most often due to concerns about increased anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping, and pests as a result of decreased cleanliness that residents predict will stem from reduced waste collection.
- Whilst residents agreed that the council could make savings by reducing reliance on Sandwell's adult social care infrastructure and promoting independence, whether this by more closely assessing needs or increased digitalization; making sure cuts did not adversely affect residents who may be vulnerable, elderly or on low incomes was a priority for all.
- Many agreed savings or agreed costs were accepted by residents provided that services were maintained at concessionary rates for the elderly or those with low incomes.
- Increased charges for services such as meals on wheels or birth and death registrations, that are seen by residents as essential or unavoidable, were vehemently rejected.
- A consistent trend was a clear need to communicate with residents what changes will be made, what impact these are likely to have on residents and how these will help make the budget savings needed; as some felt that they were brought into the conversation "too late".

Online Survey

An online survey was hosted on Sandwell Consultation Hub from 20 November 2023 to 2 January 2024. It was promoted via residents' newsletters, internal staff newsletters, on front page of website and on social media. The survey asked respondents if they were responding as a resident or on behalf of a business or voluntary/community sector organisation operating within Sandwell.

The total responses to the survey numbered 416: 93.8% residents; 1.2% VCS organisations; 4.8% 'other'

The demographic profile of respondents was as follows:

- Gender: 51.7% female; 37.9% male; 10.3% prefer not to say.
- Age: Responses were received from all age groups between 20-24 and 90+; most responses from 50-54 group (14.7%), followed by 55-59 (13.2%), 60-64 (11.1%) and 35-39 (9.9%). Just under 10% of respondents preferred not to say. In total, the 50-64 age group represented 38.9% of responses, compared to 17.9% of Sandwell's population being in this age group at the 2021 Census.

- Ethnic Group: Highest proportion of responses were from respondents who identified themselves as White British at 70.2%, followed by 14.7% 'prefer not to say'. In total, only 15% of respondents identified themselves as belonging to a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic group; this is significantly below the borough's demographic profile at the 2021 Census of 49.7% of the population.
- Geographic spread: the highest response rate was from the Oldbury (7.2%), West Bromwich Central (6.73%) and Rowley (6.5%) wards. At a town level, most respondents came from Rowley Regis (18.9%), followed by West Bromwich (17.5%) and Oldbury (14.9%); Wednesbury had the lowest proportion of respondents to the survey at 9.7%.

Summary of results:

- Top five savings options that respondents were most in favour of:
 - Reducing cost of Christmas Lights events programme (98.3%)
 - Making better use of the council's vehicle fleet / being smarter in how we procure ICT contracts (both 90.4%)
 - Smarter internal HR and business management processes / making cash handling more efficient (both 82.5%)
 - Increasing Building Regulation Fees (73.6%)
 - Maximising use of external grants and contributions (70.7%)
- Top five savings options that respondents did not support:
 - Reducing cost of Green Spaces Services – 67.3% of respondents to this question did not support this savings option; comments focused on improving performance in this area
 - Increases to charges over 5% for Garden Waste Subscription (56.3%) or Meals on Wheels (54.6%). Comments focused on ensuring valued services were maintained for vulnerable residents
 - School Crossing Patrols – 55.1% of respondents did not support changes to how the service was funded/delivered, with 35.3% in favour.
 - Closure of Shop Mobility – 51% of respondents to this question did not support the proposal; 35.3% of respondents were in favour.
 - Reviewing the approach to waste management services (47.6%)

Respondents were invited to submit comments on the savings proposals. Many respondents requested further information on the impact that the proposal would have on the resident/service user. From an analysis of the comments made, the following themes are apparent:

- Residents suggested that income generating events should breakeven
- Income could be generated by increasing categories of fines and related enforcement
- Green Spaces are popular, and residents want to see improvements in maintenance rather than cuts
- Increased use of technology to improve efficiencies in Adult Social Care was supported, and there was recognition that the transition from Child to Adult Services needs reviewing. There was strong support for ensuring that care needs continue to be met throughout.
- Improving contract monitoring to ensure compliance and enforcing contract penalties

Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

A focus group of representatives from voluntary and community organisations operating in Sandwell was held in early December 2023. Participants were invited from 18 organisations ranging from borough-wide to operating in specific localities and from a range of disciplines. Representatives of nine organisations attended the focus group; the following points are a summary of the comments made on the savings options:

- Participants recognised that savings need to be made.
- Highlighted a general concern about the unintentional impact of reducing services on vulnerable people and the increased demand on VCS organisations to provide support, e.g. increasing charges for meals on wheels may lead to already-vulnerable people skipping meals
- There was a challenge to the council on how deliverable/achievable savings proposals are (e.g. transitions from children's services to adult social care)
- Strong support for the council's focus to be on prevention and early intervention. Therefore, VCS organisations challenged whether the reduction or removal of support to vulnerable young people and their families would save money in the long run.
- Reminder to the council that facilities in Sandwell should be for all residents, especially those who cannot afford to travel to facilities (e.g. parks, Christmas lights events) in other boroughs/cities

Children and Young People

The SHAPE Youth Forum is part of Sandwell's child's voice initiative, the SHAPE Programme. It is a valuable tool to involve young people in continuing development of the borough of Sandwell. Members provide a voice for young people across Sandwell and have been consistently used as a consultative body for various initiatives concerning young people. At the meeting of the SHAPE Forum on 30 November 2023, members were invited to identify whether they supported the savings options or not, and comments on impact of the options from their perspective. Some seven young people of ages 14-19 and from a range of ethnicities attended the session.

Overall, SHAPE Forum members who attended showed support for proposals including:

- Generating income through increasing fees and charges or being more 'commercial' in our approach to cost recovery
- Reducing cost of discretionary services
- Reviewing delivery models for some services, including Appointeeship Unit, Customer contact centres, community sports plans, better use of council's fleet, part-night street lighting, support to families with NRPF.

Participants in this session wanted to see improvements in grounds maintenance in parks and street cleansing before making savings from these areas and waste management services. This comment is in line with the results from the SHAPE Survey 2023 which showed that litter was the key issue that children and young people wanted the council to improve.

The SHAPE Survey 2023, conducted across primary and secondary schools, identified that, as well as school work and exams, the key issues affecting children and young people were vaping, gangs and youth violence, knife crime, drugs, and prospects after GCSEs. The survey also asked if they were in charge of Sandwell Council for a day, what problem would

they solve; respondents from both primary and secondary schools identified cost of living, littering, crime and bullying as key areas that they would address.

Business Community

The Business Ambassadors are a collective of business people in the Sandwell area with the aim of supporting the Sandwell Business Community. The Ambassadors are independent of the council, but do receive a small level of council funding for marketing and communications. At the meeting of the Business Ambassadors on 11 January 2024, representatives of 13 businesses received a briefing on the council's financial position and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including savings proposals to address the anticipated budget gap for 2024/25.

The Business Ambassadors welcomed the briefing to gain a deeper understanding of the council's financial position and plans, which provided context for the decisions required by the council. Discussion of the group focused on the following points:

- Proportion of the council's budget allocated to staff costs
- Productivity of staff who are able to work at home
- Opportunities to use savings to invest in front-line services, such as in adult social care services, or to work in collaboration with other partners to provide a holistic approach to service delivery
- The proportion of council income generated through business rates, and what this was spent on

Overall, the view from the group was that Sandwell Council have 'managed the budget well'. However, as per the findings from other groups consulted on the 2024/25 budget, it is clear that this group would benefit from further communications on the council's budget position and how the funding generated from council tax and business rates contributes to the overall delivery of council services.

Proposed Savings to Balance the 2024/25 Budget

Summary – Directorate Totals	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Organisational/Corporate/Transformational	-8,349	-3,049	-4,249	-4,249	-4,249
Children & Education	-2,099	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140
Adult Social Care	-4,358	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763
Borough Economy	-2,101	-2,987	-3,237	-3,237	-3,237
Regeneration, Growth & General Fund Housing	-1,296	-2,390	-2,390	-2,390	-2,390
Finance, Law, ACE & Public Health	-785	-1,595	-1,791	-1,791	-1,791
Total	-18,988	-17,924	-19,570	-19,570	-19,570

Detailed list of savings by Directorate:

Theme	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Maximising Income & Commercial Opportunities	-1,099	-2,299	-3,499	-3,499	-3,499
Smarter Support Services	0	-500	-500	-500	-500
Sustainable Delivery Models	-250	-250	-250	-250	-250
Funded Vacancy Freeze	-7,000	-	-	-	-
Total: Council Wide	-8,349	-3,049	-4,249	-4,249	-4,249

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
System review of SEND Transport – outline scoping paper under development with PWC. Mitigations captured in a service report. Service transformation will require Council Policy change.	-700	-700	-700	-700	-700
Central Services Budget – Legacy Human Rights cases, Long Service Awards, Vacant Post	-317	-317	-317	-317	-317
Learning and Advisory Support (SIAs) – re-direct of DSG funding	-47	-47	-47	-47	-47
Early Years and Childcare – income from workforce development activities	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Planning Performance and Business Support Services – reduction in head count through vacancy/retirement	-58	-88	-88	-88	-88
Data Team – increase income from Academies to cover costs	-25	-25	-25	-25	-25
School Benefits – removal of vacant post and reduction in supplies and services budget	-49	-49	-49	-49	-49

Attendance and Safeguarding – increase Penalty Notice Income	-34	-34	-34	-34	-34
Youth Service – reduce vacant posts; relocate Tipton Youth Club to Coneygree	-43	-43	-43	-43	-43
SRES – increase commercial activity to generate surplus income (commercialisation opportunity under development)	-24	-24	-24	-24	-24
Play and Holiday Activity Fund – reduction of grants	-70	-70	-70	-70	-70
No Recourse to Public Funds	-58	-58	-58	-58	-58
Connexions – removal of vacant post	-51	-68	-68	-68	-68
Employment and Skills – removal of vacant post, reduce Supplies and Services, further reduce VCS grant	-90	-90	-90	-90	-90
Connexions	0	17	17	17	17
Employment & Skills	-12	-23	-23	-23	-23
Efficiencies and Value for Money Initiatives across Children’s Services	-461	-461	-461	-461	-461
Total: Children & Education	-2,099	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140	-2,140

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of the transition between Children and Adult Social Care	-50	-50	-50	-50	-50
Reduction in high cost services through Transformation Programme (in development)	-1,000	-2,000	-2,000	-2,000	-2,000
Assistive technology and reablement	-200	-500	-500	-500	-500
Review the in-house Day Services Transport in conjunction with Children’s Services	-145	-250	-250	-250	-250
Meals on Wheels - Increase charge by 20% (£4.02 to £4.82)	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32
Shared Lives – expansion or outsourcing of our current service offer, focus on alternative to residential and respite provision for younger adults with a LD.	-86	-86	-86	-86	-86
Savings identified from project efficiencies	-132	-132	-132	-132	-132
Increase Better Care Fund funding to cover 2023/24 pay award	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800	-1,800
Mobilisation and delivery of strategic commissioning and transformation plan	-913	-913	-913	-913	-913
Total: Adult Social Care	-4,358	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763	-5,763

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of Pest Control delivery model	-50	-100	-100	-100	-100
Reducing cost of discretionary services: Green Spaces, Parks, Grounds Maintenance, Events and Sandwell Valley	-736	-736	-736	-736	-736
Leisure Facilities – review of facilities provision	0	-536	-536	-536	-536

Community Sports – reduce Community Sports Plan	-135	-135	-135	-135	-135
Waste Management – increase Green Waste Subscription Fee	0	-200	-400	-400	-400
Libraries – vacant posts, supplies and services	-256	-256	-256	-256	-256
Visitor Services and Events	-140	-140	-140	-140	-140
Highways Street Lighting - Part night lighting	-40	-140	-140	-140	-140
Highways - School Crossing Patrols	-198	-198	-198	-198	-198
Highways - Christmas Lights	-0	0	-50	-50	-50
Highways - Reallocation of eligible Revenue cost to Streetworks Permit charges to offset a reduction in Permit Charges otherwise required by Regulations	-40	-40	-40	-40	-40
Public Protection - Removal of grant budget	-15	-15	-15	-15	-15
Public Protection - Use of Domestic Abuse grant funding (% of administration costs funded from New Burdens Funding)	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Public Protection - Use of Domestic Abuse grant funding (services built into New Burdens Funding)	-75	-75	-75	-75	-75
Public Protection - Reduce Community Safety post to 0.5	-18	-18	-18	-18	-18
Public Protection - Reduce Regulatory Compliance office capacity	-23	-23	-23	-23	-23
Remove surplus budget held in Directorate Management cost centre	-240	-240	-240	-240	-240
Reduce posts in Green Spaces	-60	-60	-60	-60	-60
Reduction in Arts café budget	-15	-15	-15	-15	-15
Total: Borough Economy	-2,101	-2,987	-3,237	-3,237	-3,237

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Rationalisation Strategy	0	-840	-840	-840	-840
Aquatic Centre Utilities Budget	-360	-360	-360	-360	-360
Wednesbury Heritage Action Zone Project	-50	-50	-50	-50	-50
Funding of Business Growth Team through contributions from grants	-54	-54	-54	-54	-54
Development and Commercial Property Rates – Budget no longer required	-28	-28	-28	-28	-28
Planning Fees - 35%/25% increase in Fees (<i>subject to parliamentary approval</i>)	-250	-250	-250	-250	-250
Planning Fees - Pre App Fees 10% Increase	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3
Building Regulation Fees - 5% Increase	-27	-27	-27	-27	-27
Deletion of Land Charges Assistant Post (vacant)	-14	-14	-14	-14	-14
Reduction in Dangerous Structures Budget	-100	-100	-100	-100	-100
Climate Change Budget – funding from Public Health Grant	-67	-67	-67	-67	-67
Reduction in Court House premises budgets no longer required	-138	-138	-138	-138	-138

Reduction in supplies and services budgets in Planning and Policy	-10	-10	-10	-10	-10
Reduction in supplies and services budgets in Regeneration directorate management budgets	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9
Total Regeneration & Growth	-1,110	-1,950	-1,950	-1,950	-1,950

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Purchase of properties for use as temporary accommodation to reduce subsidy loss	0	-250	-250	-250	-250
Executive Support – removal of post	-33	-33	-33	-33	-33
Increase in Private Rented Sector Fee Budget (income from enforcement)	-20	-20	-20	-20	-20
Closure of Shop Mobility	-53	-106	-106	-106	-106
Floating Support – remove General Fund funding, continue with Disabled Facilities Grant	-80	-31	-31	-31	-31
Total: Housing	-186	-440	-440	-440	-440

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of Appointeeship Unit	-100	-200	-200	-200	-200
Cashless Strategy	0	-190	-190	-190	-190
ICT - Enterprise Services savings relating to hardware contract savings	-70	-70	-70	-70	-70
ICT – Alternative provision on GDPR and Cyber Security training (Meta Compliance)	-10	-10	-10	-10	-10
Finance - Review of Audit, Risk, Insurance and Fraud Services	-11	-11	-11	-11	-11
Reduction of supplies and services budgets and deletion of vacant posts	-124	-124	-124	-124	-124
Total: Finance	-315	-605	-605	-605	-605

Proposal	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Registration Services - 7% increase in fees and charges over the next two years and inclusion of additional Met Hospital (Registrations)	-119	-246	-246	-246	-246
Organisational design within Law and Governance	-112	-112	-112	-112	-112
Deletion of a post within Law and Governance	-40	-40	-40	-40	-40
Reduction in supplies and services budgets across Law and Governance	-28	-28	-28	-28	-28
Total: Law & Governance	-299	-426	-426	-426	-426

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Review of contact centre model	0	-313	-313	-313	-313
Human Resources – streamlined services	0	-35	-134	-134	-134
Human Resources - Oracle Fusion - streamlining Transactional Services	0	-35	-142	-142	-142
Human Resources - Bring first aid training in-house	0	-10	-10	-10	-10
Strategy and Performance - Deletion of post within Adult Social Care Performance Analysis & Intelligence	-35	-35	-35	-35	-35
Strategy and Performance - Citizenspace - additional funding from Public Health grant	-10	-10	0	0	0
Deletion of Digital Transformation Officer post	-35	-35	-35	-35	-35
Deletion of HR Consultant post	-25	-25	-25	-25	-25
Reduction of supplies and services budgets in Service Improvement	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2
Total: Assistant Chief Executive	-107	-500	-696	-696	-696

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Increase use of Public Health grant to fund entire Public Health directorate costs	-64	-64	-64	-64	-64
Total Public Health	-64	-64	-64	-64	-64

Grand Total	-18,988	-17,924	-19,570	-19,570	-19,570
--------------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------

General Budget Planning Assumptions

The key points of briefing in relation to the Provisional Finance Settlement and the implications arising are:

- a. New Homes Bonus – The Government has been considering reform or phasing out of New Homes Bonus and currently the grant is calculated on a one-off annual basis. It is assumed that the Council will receive a commensurate sum in 2024/25 only due to uncertainty.
- b. Collection Fund – the working assumption is that Council Tax is assumed to increase by 2.99% throughout each year of the MTFP, the maximum permitted under current Government guidance for core tax increases. The Collection Fund is currently estimated to be in deficit at the end of the current financial year and therefore £0.5m has been included in the MTFP as a charge to account for the Council's share of that deficit.
- c. NNDR Income – the assumption is that Sandwell will continue to retain 99% of its business rates (with 1% being provided for West Midlands Fire). From 2024/25 it has been agreed that the Council will be part of the new Devolution Deal which is effectively a continuation of the current retention arrangements. At this time, it is considered unlikely that there will be a reset of the business rates baseline and therefore future income in the MTFP is a continuation of current baseline levels with no growth assumptions due to the current economic climate.
- d. Social Care Grants saw increases locally and nationally with the Social Care Grant increasing to £42.8m for Sandwell, being an increase of £7.0m (nationally allocation of £4.5bn being a £692m increase); the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund increasing by £2.1m to £5.4m (national increase of £200m to take total allocation to £500m); and the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability Improvement Fund increasing by £3.8m resulting in Sandwell's grant being £8.1m for 2024/25 (the national allocation was £1.05bn). No further increases have been included in future years within the MTFP.

Other Assumptions:

- e. Controls on use of packaging and waste volumes – the Government is planning to establish a system where the producers of packaging waste are charged a levy related to the waste volumes that result such that the proceeds - net of regulatory costs - are passed on to local Councils. Government has confirmed that implementation will be deferred until 2025/26.
- e. Inflation is only provided on key contracts (e.g. SERCO waste management, Sandwell Children's Trust and utilities). Other inflationary pressures are to be managed within existing service budgets.
- f. Pay inflation is provided for at an estimated level, with year 1 of the MTFP taking into account an adjustment for the difference between budgeted and actual pay awards in the current year (i.e. 2023/24). Future estimated pay awards are currently calculated on a 4% increase in 2024/25 and 4% thereafter as core CPI inflation is brought back to target levels.
- g. In financial year 2024/25 Council Tax is recommended to increase by 2.99% and the Adult Social Care Precept by 2% to an overall total of 4.99%. Throughout the MTFP Council Tax has been modelled with an increase of 3% per annum.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 – Winter 2024

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Opening Net Budget	317.103	333.008	353.030	366.650	380.768
Pay Inflation	9.601	6.336	6.590	6.736	7.006
Technical Adjustments (debt financing & investment income)	2.636	1.964	-0.500	1.100	0.600
Other Technical Adjustments	-8.480	-1.784	0.010	0.008	0.009
Total Pay and Technical Adjustments	3.757	6.516	6.100	7.844	7.615
Other Service Pressures:					
Growth	4.969	0.709	0.158	-	-
Demographic Changes	3.662	3.262	3.262	2.447	2.446
Inflationary Increases	18.021	10.320	6.746	3.827	3.838
Unachieved saving	0.490	-	-	-	-
Loss of Funding	0.189	-0.189	-	-	-
Changes in recharges	0.621	-	-	-	-
SEND Transport	12.500	-1.000	-1.000	-	-
Budget corrections	4.603	-0.660	-	-	-
Total Service Pressures	45.055	12.442	9.166	6.274	6.284
Revised Net Budget Subtotal (1)	365.915	351.966	368.296	380.768	394.667
Changes in Government funding within services	-13.919	-	-	-	-
Agreed Savings Proposals	-18.988	1.064	-1.646	-	-
Revised Net Budget Subtotal (2)	333.008	353.030	366.650	380.768	394.667
Funded by:					
Non Ringfenced Government Grants	-1.424	-	-	-	-
Retained Business Rates (including Section 31 and top-up grant)	-194.607	-198.499	-202.470	-206.520	-210.651
Council Tax Income	-135.870	-142.031	-148.472	-155.205	-162.243
Collection Fund (Surplus)/ Deficit	-1.107	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	-333.008	-340.530	-350.942	-361.725	-372.894
Net Budget -Surplus/ Deficit	-	12.500	15.708	19.043	21.773

The MTFP Change Log

Movement of Savings Target from June 2023 MTFP Report

	2024/25 £m
Shortfall reported in June 2023	8.859
Changes in Council Net Expenditure:	
Reduction in Pressures:	(5.892)
Removal of assumed increase in ASC Service Grant pending autumn statement announcements and provisional local government finance settlement	10.009
Total Changes in net expenditure	4.117
Changes in Funding:	
Revised council tax base generating additional council tax income	(0.513)
Estimated Council Tax Deficit to be charged to the General Fund	0.500
Total Changes in Funding	(0.013)
Total Changes	4.104
Shortfall reported in November 2023	12.963
Changes in Council Net Expenditure:	
New/ Increased Pressures	14.393
Reduction in existing pressures after review	(1.374)
Business Change Contingency Reserve	2.500
Increase in Government grants to services (provisional financial settlement) net of conditional spend requirements	(10.780)
Changes in Treasury Management costs/ income to fund Prudential Borrowing	2.336
Other technical adjustments	(0.456)
Net increases in council net expenditure	6.619
Changes in Funding:	
Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement – reduction in non-ringfenced grants	2.803
Income from 2% Adult Social Care Precept	(3.397)
Total Changes in Funding	(0.594)
Net Shortfall	18.988
Savings Proposals (Annex 6)	(18.988)
Net (Surplus)/ Deficit	0

Risks: Principal Risks to the MTFS & Headline Mitigation

Risks	Headline Mitigation
Failure to constrain expenditures within relevant budget targets.	The Council's financial reporting arrangements including the chart of accounts, budget management approaches, and forecasting are under review. This will be completed in financial years 2023/24 & 2024/25.
Failure to prepare for balancing the 2024/25 Budget shortfall.	The preparation of this MTFS at this point in the financial year, the generation of savings options, the planned launch of consultation and engagement and the promulgation of the Budget Timetable incorporating two meetings of Full Council to take decisions on savings.
Failure to increase Reserves.	The Council has a medium term intention to maintain essential reserves at a level to maximise assurance that strategic exigencies can be met within the term of the MTFS. Accordingly, there are presently no plans to employ significant reserves to balance the 2024/25 Budget shortfall.
Failure to assure Commissioners that sufficient progress has been made in building a robust MTFS	The preparation and endorsement of this MTFS and MTFP by the Statutory Officers, Leadership Team and Cabinet, together with the development of a robust approach to consultation and review by the Scrutiny function is relevant here.
Failure to deliver savings.	The Council has reviewed savings delivery in 2023/24 and is enhancing monitoring for the Leadership Team, Cabinet and the Scrutiny function.
Failure to arrange cover for expected cost increases	The Council has set in place a process whereby the MTFP is updated quarterly, and the thoroughness of review and analysis will be enhanced on each occasion as additional information becomes available and insight gained. In addition, the Council will adjust its fees and charges annually in the future to ensure that the net cost of services is moderated where it is equitable to do.
Inability to Fund the Capital Programme arising from continued rises in interest rates and higher cost of borrowing.	Capital Principles to set down a clear and affordable framework for capital planning have been recommended to Cabinet. Further work to develop an affordable Capital Programme will be undertaken for inclusion in the Draft Budget to be received by Full Council in February 2024.

Transformational Strategy

CREATING A COUNCIL FOR THE **FUTURE**



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council



Purpose and Vision

We are fortunate to work in a Council that has an ambitious and determined vision to create a modern and agile organisation, that is laid out in clear terms in the Strategic Outcomes of our plan. At the heart of the Plan, and front and centre of everything we do is to ensure we improve our Borough by investing in what matters for the positive benefit of the residents of Sandwell.

In such uncertain and turbulent times, we should be proud of the enormous amount that has already been achieved in the last two years. The Council now feels stable, safe and has a clearer appreciation of what it needs to achieve, building on the foundations of our Improvement Plan. And with that clarity also comes an understanding that there is still much more to be done, not only to invest in the vital services that our residents need, but to also make the Council sustainable and relevant for the future. We must challenge ourselves to ensure everything we do has real measurable impact, because to deliver everything we want to do affordably and effectively we will need to have a clear focus on how and why we do things and how we work together with each other and in partnership with the community to codesign services for the future. We will need to do more of the things that matter and reduce or stop the things that do not.

We must not forget that these are not easy times for our residents and thousands of them are living with poverty and hardship, but together we have a real opportunity to address these challenges and deliver the outcomes that will make a real difference.



Where We Are Now

Page 216
To achieve the impact that we want needs a step change in how we do business. We face critical funding and growth pressures and the way that our budgets are currently constructed means that our planned level of future expenditure leaves significant challenges to deliver savings in the later years of the MTFs that can only be met through transformation. It should be clear that whilst the Council was not put into statutory intervention because of its financial position at the time, it is likely that without a plan for transformation and a steadying of the finances it is highly likely that we would have been.

We cannot afford to reduce the pace of the change needed as delivery of some savings will take time to embed. We also cannot meet this challenge through incremental and marginal savings – often described as ‘salami slicing’ - to all areas of expenditure. Instead, there needs to be a clear focus on the services we provide now and want to provide in the future, taking a standard approach to managing our projects and programmes of change. We need a fresh look at the contribution that everything we do has to the outcomes that we want to achieve as part of our vision. Rather than a threat or a burden, we need to treat this as an opportunity to ‘reset’ ourselves and re-imagine our Council for the future.

The transformation needs to be challenging but achievable and capable of being delivered in the timescales we say it can. Without this level of commitment and focus on evidence to show impact, we cannot be certain of moving out of intervention.



Customer
focused



One
Team



Accountable



Ambitious

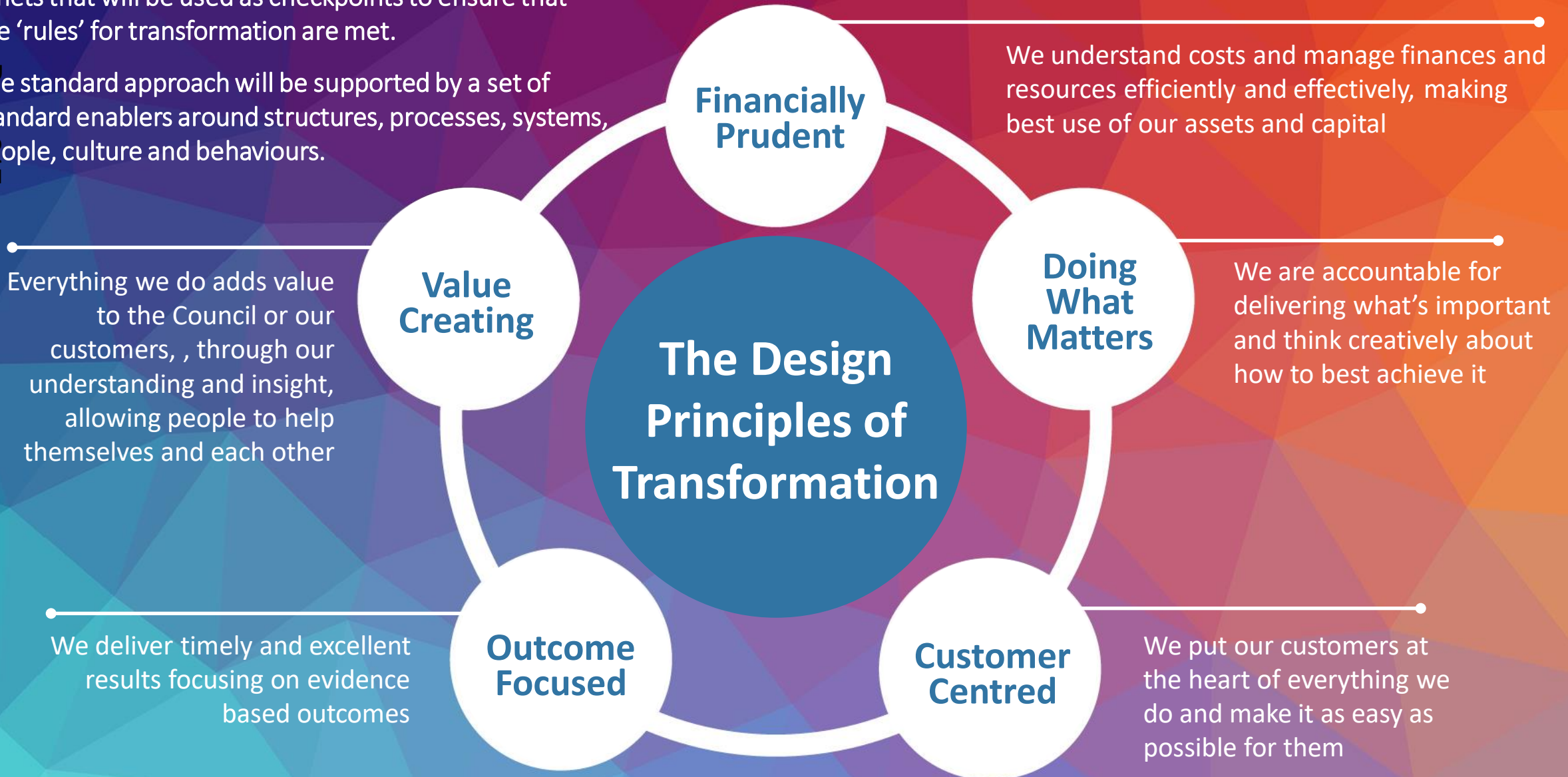


Inclusive

The Design Principles for Transformation are the guiding tenets that will be used as checkpoints to ensure that the 'rules' for transformation are met.

The standard approach will be supported by a set of standard enablers around structures, processes, systems, people, culture and behaviours.

Page 217



Everything we do adds value to the Council or our customers, through our understanding and insight, allowing people to help themselves and each other

We deliver timely and excellent results focusing on evidence based outcomes

We understand costs and manage finances and resources efficiently and effectively, making best use of our assets and capital

We are accountable for delivering what's important and think creatively about how to best achieve it

We put our customers at the heart of everything we do and make it as easy as possible for them

Transformation Fundamentals – The Brilliant Basics

The starting point for our transformation is a blend of key Directorate projects prioritised to deliver in the next year and some critical cross cutting projects.

Page 218

Key Directorate projects include...

SEND Service Transformation
SEN Transport

Transitions

Community Hubs, Enforcement
Leisure Review, Waste Review

Housing Repairs Transformation
Housing Asset Mgt System

Major contracts & commissioning review

Asset & Estate Rationalisation Strategy,
Neighbourhood Working

Governance & Decision Making

Key Corporate projects include...

A **business support** project is underway which aims to provide a single professional service with consistent standards, staff training and career prospects; gaining greater efficiencies by utilising new technology and applying lean business processes across the organisation.

Ensuring the best customer experience is a critical element of our improvement journey and our **customer journey** programme will ensure we deliver on this so we add maximum value to our customer in everything we do, making it as easy as possible for them to interact with us.

Developing a comprehensive **digital strategy** means embedding the new tools currently under development, such as Oracle Fusion, which will allow for improved processes and more self-service. It also means ensuring all our other systems are optimised to allow us to work intelligently and seamlessly across the organisation for the benefit of our customers.

Ongoing Transformation – Sustainability

Page 219

The key to the delivery of a sustainable transformation programme to ensure that we can link everything we do to the outcomes we want to achieve. As part of this we will have a Framework that ensures a clear link between...

Purpose

Inputs

Outputs

Outcomes

Impact

It is a way to show the direct relationship between *what we do* and the *difference we make*.

Projects that are considered to form part of the programme will be tested against the design principles and then assessed to ensure they have positive impact, either on our customers, or our finances, or both. They will also be looked at in terms of risk – and issues such as capacity to deliver addressed.



What it will mean for staff

Page 220
To deliver this kind of transformation there will need to be positive leadership at all levels of the Council. This means having a mindset that is open to the possibilities of thinking what the Council can be in the future. They will uphold the agreements of the transformation and help their staff to deliver the change, providing the opportunities, the moral conviction and the learning.

The transformation cannot be seen as a distraction from current priority programme of delivery. On the contrary, it must be recognised as the critical enabler for our future success. We will continue to invest in and develop our people as we know they are our greatest asset and continue to work hard to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our workforce, so they represent our community.

We value our people and want to see them thrive. Whilst this transformation means we will see a change in what people do and how they do it and this may mean that we stop, reduce or re-think how we do many things, equally there will be new things to do and new opportunities. We will also look at how we are structured in terms of our hierarchies and spans of control, and how each person contributes to our outcomes, ensuring synergies with performance management.



As we change, grow and develop, we will invest in staff – in their learning and development - to help them achieve new things for the maximum impact of Sandwell and for themselves.

THE TIMELINE FOR CHANGE

2023/2024

**Brilliant
Basics**

2024/2028

**Sustainable
Transformation**

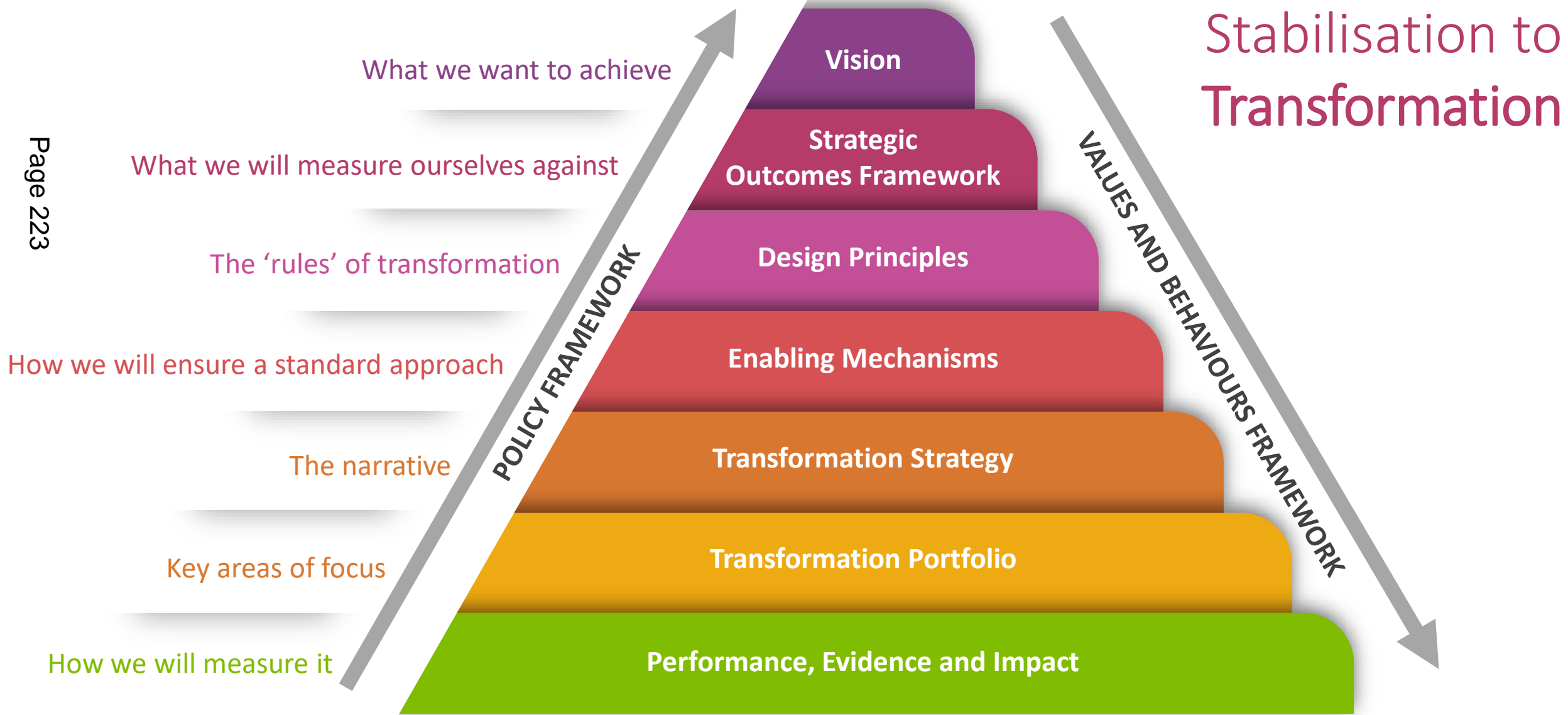
Beyond

**Continuous
Improvement**

To make such a fundamental shift in how we do business is a long-term commitment, not an overnight fix, with a new model that may emerge from the work that will not only be around process and structure, but also culture and behaviours. That is not to say there will not be short- and medium-term changes in how we do business, focused around our Brilliant Basics programme - and we will take every opportunity that arises, as long as it aligns to our long-term vision and strategic outcomes.

Our Brilliant Basics programme will commence immediately – in fact the majority of projects are already in hand. So, this is our focus for 2023/24. And whilst work will also commence on the longer-term sustainable transformation programme, this will be our focus from 2024 onwards. As we move forward, there will of course be new challenges and opportunities and our programme will adjust to reflect that, as well as continuing to improve everything else we do. We will ensure we measure, manage, test and learn from all projects as we go along, ensuring we focus our efforts on what works.

How will this be delivered in practice

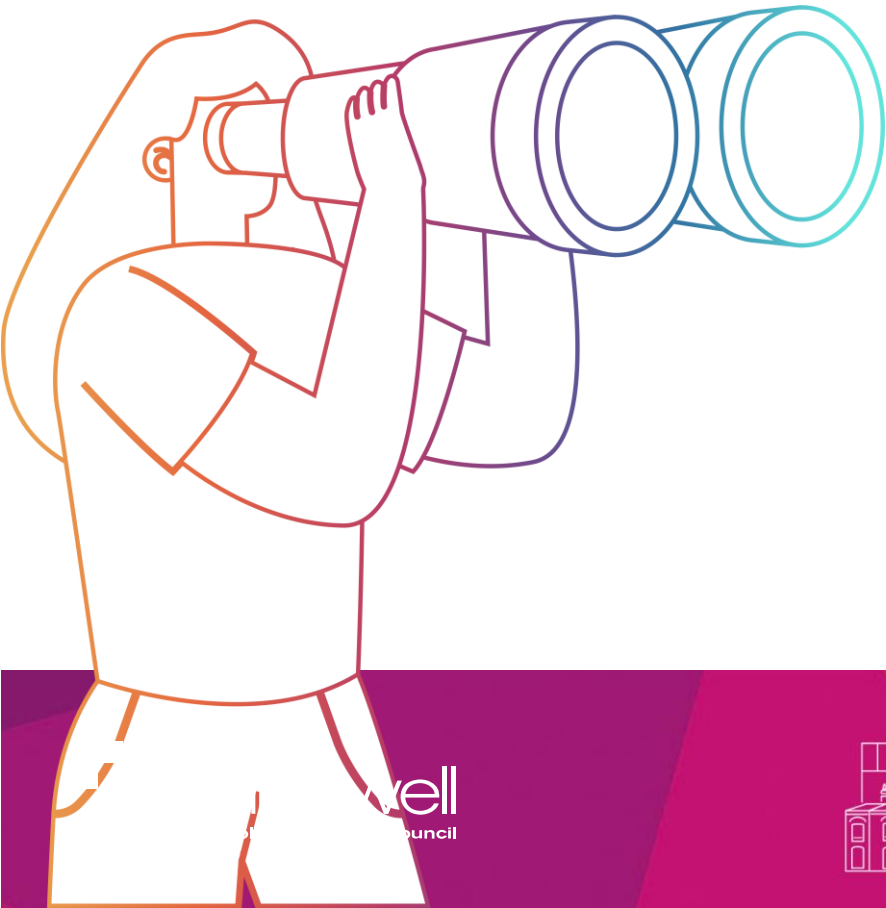


Alignment to the Vision

Page 224

Our Vision is

‘to create a modern, outstanding council,
one where our organisational structure,
business systems, process and people and
cultural working practices are fully aligned
to deliver our strategic outcomes’.



Strategic Outcomes Framework

Page 22
Our Strategic Outcomes are the basis on which we deliver our services:

- The best start in life for children and young people
- People live well and age well
- Strong, resilient communities
- Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
- A strong and inclusive economy
- A connected and accessible Sandwell
- One Council, One Team

The development of a Strategic Outcomes Framework ensures a coherent linkage between purpose, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. It is a way to show the direct relationship between what we do and the difference we make.



Design Principles

These are the 'rules' we will apply to ensure all change is aligned to the Transformation Vision.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

We put our customers at the heart of everything we do and make it as easy as possible for them

Customer Centred

Everything we do adds value to the Council or our customers, through our understanding and insight, allowing people to help themselves and each other

Value Creating

We deliver timely and excellent results focusing on evidence-based outcomes

Outcome Focused

We understand costs and manage finances and resources efficiently and effectively, making best use of our assets and capital

Financially Prudent

We are accountable for delivering what's important and think creatively about how to best achieve it

Doing What Matters

TRANSFORMATION VISION

To create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.



The enabling mechanisms

Design Principles

Customer Centred

Value Creating

Outcome Focussed

Financially Prudent

Doing what matters

The best start in life for children and young people

People live well and age well

Strong, resilient communities

Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

A strong and inclusive economy

A connected and accessible Sandwell

One Council, One Team

Structures

Systems

Processes

People

Culture & Behaviours

The Enabling Mechanisms

Vision

To create a modern, outstanding council, one where our organisational structure, business systems, process and people and cultural working practices are fully aligned to deliver our strategic outcomes.

Understanding the Enabling Mechanisms

Mechanism	Structures	Systems	Processes	People	Culture & Behaviours
-----------	------------	---------	-----------	--------	----------------------

Governance

PMO & Gateways

Approach

Spans of Control and contribution to outcomes	Digital Blueprint and improved self service	Redesign Toolkit and methodology	Workforce Strategy and succession planning	Behaviour framework and Organisation Development approach
---	---	----------------------------------	--	---

Overview

Structures ensure there are the right people in the right place	Systems ensure the right technology is there to deliver on the programme	Processes ensure the right work is being done in the most efficient way	People ensures that we have a sufficient capacity of people with the right skills and capabilities	Culture cuts across all themes and without it none of the other enablers will deliver
---	--	---	--	---



The Strategic Outcome-led Transformation Portfolio



Assessing the Significance

Page 231

The council has adopted a system that uses a number of inputs to consider the level of support and assurance required. A PM Threshold Tool has been created and based on the inputs the project will be identified as level 1, 2, 3 or 4 – this can then be the basis of a discussion with the PMO in terms of resourcing and requirements. This is illustrated below:

Thresholds	Tiering		Menu of PMO Support	Scoring
Value	1	Intense	Full range of support including project management	1
Complexity	2	High	Project officer support working alongside service on delivery	1
Risk	3	Medium	Oversight of the project giving advice and guidance	1
Capacity	4	Reporting	Templates and tools available for services to use	1



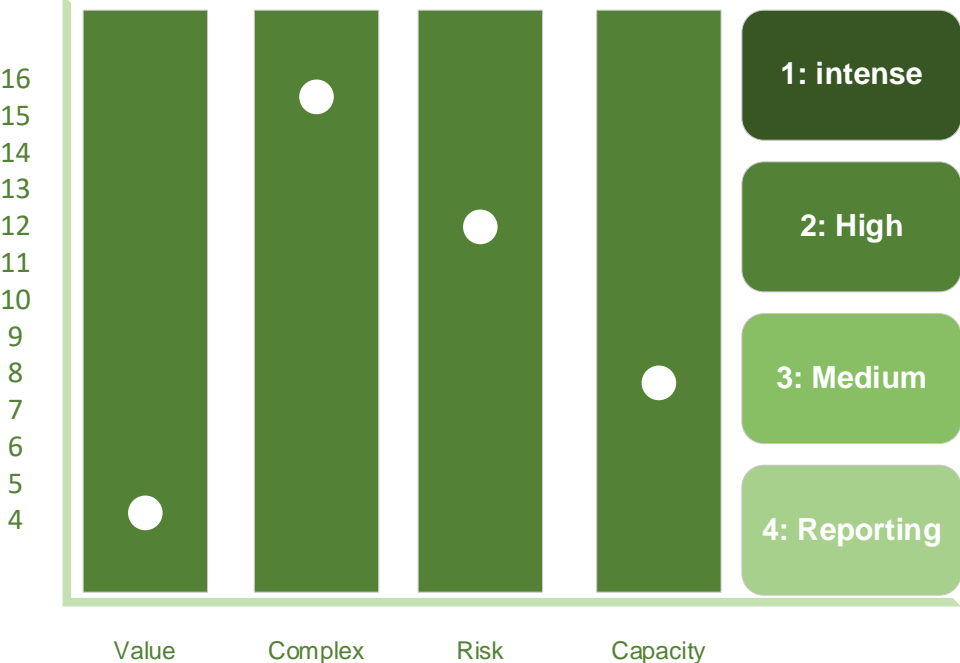
Assessing the Significance

The threshold inputs cover the following:

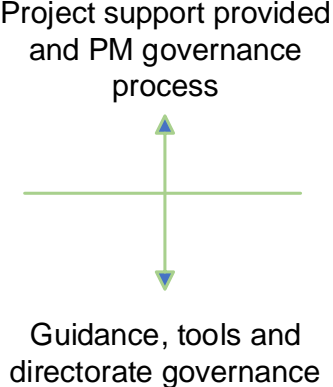
- Value and status
- Complexity
- Risk
- Capacity

The scoring will result in an overall rating.

This is illustrated as follows:



Total overall score:



A PHASED APPROACH

2023/2024

Brilliant Basics

Brilliant Basics:

- Portfolio Structure
- Design Principles and Strategic Framework
- Existing Transformation aligned to Outcome-led Portfolio
- Strategic Outcome Mapping and Service Planning

2024/2028

Sustainable Transformation

Sustainable Transformation:

- Outcome-led Portfolio
- Long-Term Planning

Beyond

Continuous Improvement

The best start in life for children and young people

People live well and age well

Strong, resilient communities

Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

A strong and inclusive economy

A connected and accessible Sandwell

One Council, One Team

Brilliant Basics Portfolio

SEND Service Transformation
SEN Transport

Transitions

Community Hubs, Enforcement
Leisure Review, Waste Review

Housing Repairs Transformation
Housing Asset Management System

Major Contracts and Commissioning Review
Asset and Estate Rationalisation Strategy

Customer Journey, Digital Blueprint
Neighbourhood Working

Oracle Fusion, Business Support,
Governance and Decision-Making

Informing Sustainable Transformation and Outcome-led Decision Making

Page 235

Strategic Outcome	What this means	Activity	VfM	Service Plan Actions
The best start in life for children and young people	Remove barriers to education & learning, prioritise consistent support to families, check in with all children			
People live well and age well	Offer healthy choices for health & social care, respectful treatment in safe, clean environments			
Strong, resilient communities	Offer safe, non-threatening places, encourage outdoor activities			
Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods	Provide fair & efficient assessments to provide homes to those in need			
A strong and inclusive economy	Incentivise local businesses and recruit & train locally based staff			
A connected and accessible Sandwell	Maximise location, transport network, promote alternative transport in schools			
One Council, One Team	Streamline processes, staff training & support & encouragement			

EFFECTIVE

Is what we are doing contributing to the outcomes? First pass

EFFICIENT

Are we delivering the best outcomes for the resources being input? Second pass

ECONOMIC

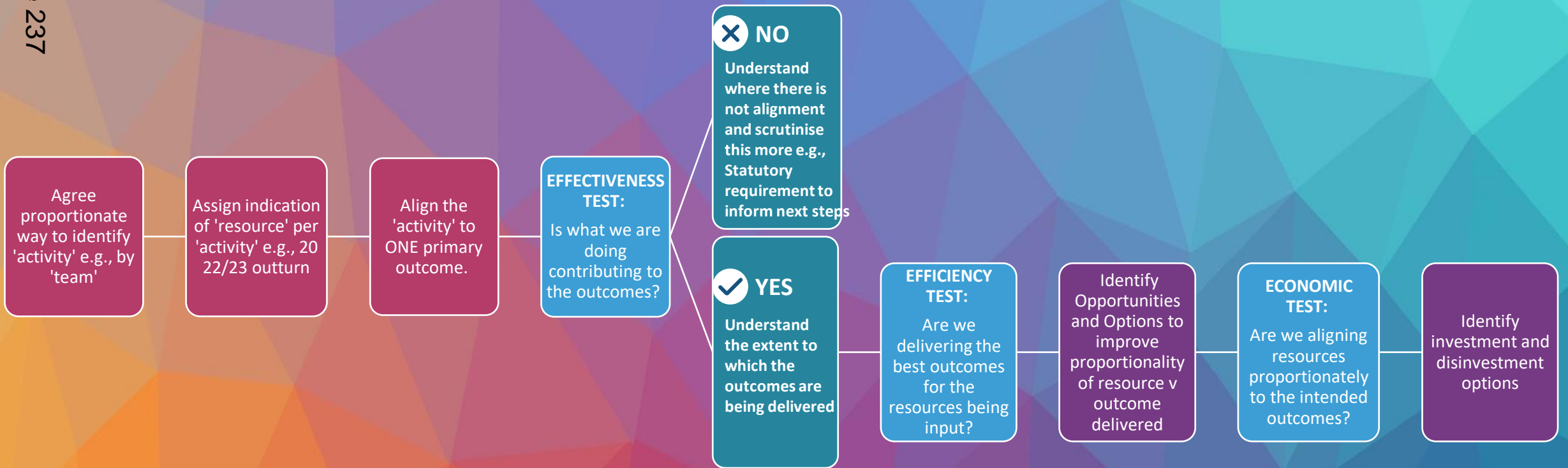
Are we aligning resources proportionately to intended outcomes? Strategic Pass

Applying Value for Money tests to Sustainable Transformation

<p>EFFECTIVE</p> <p>Is what we are doing contributing to the outcomes? First pass</p>	<p>EFFICIENT</p> <p>Are we delivering the best outcomes for the resources being input? Second pass</p>	<p>ECONOMIC</p> <p>Are we aligning resources proportionately to intended outcomes? Strategic Pass</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service and activity identification. ▪ Collaborative alignment to the interpretations of the Strategic Outcomes. ▪ Gap Analysis. ▪ Opportunity Identification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding of Impact (e.g., KPIs, customer feedback). ▪ Benchmarking. ▪ Cost vs benefit analysis. ▪ Opportunity Identification. ▪ Opportunity Quantification (BAU/ Transformation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritisation of cost & impact. ▪ Benchmarking. ▪ Opportunity Identification. ▪ Opportunity Quantification (BAU/ Transformation). ▪ Collaboration with SLT. ▪ Transformation Portfolio. ▪ Service Plan inputs.



The Approach





Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

WE ARE SANDWELL!



Flexible Use of Capital Receipts

Background

1. In the 2022/23 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement the following was announced:

Extension of the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund transformation projects

2. We are also announcing a 3-year extension from 2022-23 onwards of the existing flexibility for councils to use capital receipts to fund transformation projects that produce long-term savings or reduce the costs of service delivery. We will provide further details on the extension in due course.
3. On 4 April 2022, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed this extension and published Guidance and a Direction. The Direction and Guidance were subject to a revision published on 2 August 2022 which included clarifications on the exclusion of receipts generated from the sale of assets to group companies.
4. The Council has previously not looked to make use of this flexibility, however with an increased number of transformational projects underway and being developed to improve service delivery and efficiency, this strategy has been developed to enable potential use of this flexibility to fund eligible expenditure. The Medium Term Financial Strategy Update Autumn 2023 that was taken to Cabinet on 15th November 2023 referred to the Council's intention to now make use of this flexibility.
5. An initial draft of 2023/24 projects that could be funded from capital receipts was submitted to DLUHC in December 2023 and this builds on that to include potential areas for 2024/25.

Objectives and Purpose

6. This Strategy is intended to enable the Council to potentially take advantage of the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund transformation costs if appropriate.
7. The Strategy will form part of the delivery of the Council's revised Corporate Plan (June 2023 Cabinet) assisting in the 'making the most of resources' strand of the One Council One Team strategic outcome. It will also support several areas within the Corporate Oversight theme of the Corporate Improvement Plan.
 - a. The objectives of this Strategy are to:
 - Identify projects that are considered to be eligible, and which could be funded by this method;
 - Identify actual and potential capital receipts that could be utilised to fund transformation projects;
 - In subsequent years, report on the progress of projects approved in previous years.

Projects Considered Eligible for Funding from use of Flexible Capital Receipts

8. A summary of projects identified included in this Strategy as being potentially eligible for capital receipts funding is summarised below, with a description of the project, project objectives, and potential planned use of receipts.

Project	Description	Service Transformation / Savings	Saving Type	Planned Use of Receipts	
				2023/24 £000	2025/25 £000
Implementation of Oracle Fusion	Oracle Fusion system implemented across finance, HR, payroll, projects	More efficient payroll, HR, and finance services with targeted savings of at least £500k from 2025/26	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	2,700	1,000
Financial Accounting Process Redesign	Improvements in working practices and working papers for financial accounts. Finance element of asset system implemented	Standard processes and working papers in place to enable year end accounts to be produced efficiently and to appropriate external audit standards	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	430	
Transactional Finance Redesigns	Working with an external partner to review and redesign how cash payments are streamlined, the management of appointee/deputyships and business support	Savings being identified relating to the following areas Cashless strategy £190k Brokerage /Appointeeship £200k	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	340	
Implementation of an Asset Rationalisation Strategy	The adoption of a corporate landlord model with all building assets being managed centrally combined with an active disposals programme of surplus assets	Improved efficiencies and consistency in managing buildings with targeted savings of £1.6m	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	32	
Adult Social Care Transformation – digital / assistive technology	Engagement of an external strategic partner to redesign how residents access services alongside partner organisations and improve workforce recruitment and retention. Investment in digital and assistive technology to improve independence	The reduction in direct care costs due to improvements in support from digital technology have targeted savings of £200k rising to £500k from 2025/26	Driving a digital approach to the delivery of more efficient public services and how the public interacts with authorities	95	1,000
Visitor Services Business Plan Review	Review of the Sandwell Valley business planning documents with an external partner to identify risks to delivery and test financial assumptions	Delivery of additional visitor services income to improve the financial sustainability of the visitor services offering	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in income	30	
Grounds Maintenance	Overall review of Grounds Maintenance	Delivery of service efficiency savings in this area	Investment in service reform feasibility work	15	
Waste Collection Review	Review of waste collection services including garden waste collection	Delivery of additional income related to garden waste collection and service efficiencies in waste collection service	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more	50	

			efficiently and bring in income		
Vehicle Fleet Review	Review to identify rationalisation and/or alternative delivery options of fleet vehicles used in waste collection	Review to identify rationalisation and/or alternative delivery options of fleet vehicles used in waste collection	Investment in service reform feasibility work	25	
Contract Management Improvements	Review of contract management arrangements	Delivery of corporate contract management training to 170 staff, standard templates, and guidance	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery	20	
Various commercialisation projects	Corporate transformation project support to services on commercialisation	Reviewing service delivery models to identify commercial opportunities and deliver additional income or maximise existing income streams	Setting up commercial or alternative delivery models to deliver services more efficiently and bring in income	70	
Staff Exit Costs	Costs of restructures to deliver savings/service changes	Realisation of ongoing savings from reduced staffing costs	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	1,000	
Adult Social Care - STAR	Change to Adult Social Care STAR service	Reduced Service costs realised in 23/24 financial year	Funding the cost of service reconfiguration, restructuring or rationalisation where this leads to ongoing efficiency savings or service transformation	18	
Customer Service Transformation	Review of customer journey and current contact centre model	Increased efficiency of customer interactions and improved use of new technology with savings realised from 25/26	Improving systems and processes to provide more efficient and consistent service delivery		1,000
Total				4,825	3,000

Fees and Charges

The general approach has been to increase fees & charges by 5% (unless otherwise directed/constrained by Government or regulation) or where there are compelling reasons for increasing beyond these factors as set out below.

Directorate	Service	2024/25 % Fee Increase	Rationale for Increase
Adult Social Care	Community Meals (excluding Meals on Wheels), Community Alarms	7%	In line with inflation
Adult Social Care	Community Meals	20%	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Children's Services	Sandwell Residential Education Service	5%-8%	Standard increases, with the exception of high season charges at Ingestre Hall, Edmond Hall and Frank Chapman Centres, where the aim of higher increases is to drive occupancy in mid and low seasons, aiming to have centres occupied for as much of the school year as possible, increasing attendance and positive outcomes for Sandwell children
Children's Services	Adult and Family Learning Course Fees	9% (where fees currently charged)	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Children's Services	Youth Services	10%-100%	Aiming to reduce subsidy and move closer to achieving cost recovery
Borough Economy	Community Facilities, Green Services, Green Spaces, Visitor Services, Events	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Museums and Arts (excluding fees on next slide)	5%-7%	In line with inflation
Borough Economy	Pest Control (excluding missed appointments) and Transit Sites	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Bulky Waste Collections (excluding Fridge/Freezers)	11%+	To bring fees closer into alignment with local authority neighbours
Borough Economy	Allotments	12%	Fees not increased for over 10 years
Borough Economy	Libraries	7%-43%	Cost recovery. Larger increases relate to photocopying, printing and postage, and are due to increased costs of materials and postage

Borough Economy	Highways Act Permits, Licences, Traffic Orders and Inspections	10%	Benchmarked with other West Midlands local authorities and increased accordingly
Borough Economy	Off Street Car Parking	5% -33%	Revised car parking charges agreed by Cabinet on 21 June 2023 (following original report on 20 th July 2022)
Borough Economy	Car Parking Waivers, Parking Permits, Event Parking and Regulation Charges	15%	To encourage use of sustainable transport methods, to offset increased costs, and to bring into line with other local authority charges
Borough Economy	Museums - Adult Tours, Handling Collections and Living History Events at Oak House Museum, and Use of Large Room at Haden Hill House,	10%-43%	Aiming to recover costs, and to bring room hire charges into line with Libraries
Borough Economy	Environmental Protection – Fixed Penalty Notices	50%-233%	Increased to upper limit set by DEFRA to discourage antisocial behaviour
Borough Economy	Scrap Metal Licences and Mobile Trading Consents	5%	Standard increase
Borough Economy	Animal Licences, Skin Piercing Premises Licences, Food Safety Inspections/Certificates, Sex Establishment Licences	8%-14%	Cost recovery
Borough Economy	Pest Control – Missed Appointments	44%	Fee aligned with advisory visit fee, as cost incurred by the Council is the same in either circumstance
Housing	Community Facilities, Mobility Service, Garages	5%	Standard increase
Housing	Private Sector Housing	7%	In line with inflation
Law and Governance	Legal Services	5%	Standard increase
Law and Governance	Registration Services	7%	In line with inflation
Public Health	Landfill Location Checks / Contaminated Land	5%	Standard increase
Regeneration and Growth	Building Control, Property Searches, Land Charges, Markets (excluding West Bromwich Indoor Market)	5%	Standard increase
Regeneration and Growth	Facilities Management	10%	Cost recovery (taking into account significantly increased utility costs over previous two years)
Regeneration and Growth	Planning Pre-Application Fees	10%	Cost recovery (taking account of significantly increased staff costs)
Regeneration and Growth	Planning Fees	25%+	Statutory fees (set by Government)

SANDWELL MBC - GENERAL FUND BUDGET SUMMARY

	Current	Draft	Forecast Draft Budgets			2028/29 £000
	Budget 2023/24 £000	Budget 2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	
Service Directorates						
Corporate Management	(183.0)	(147.8)	(133.6)	(118.8)	(103.5)	(87.5)
Finance	19,500.0	22,361.5	23,596.3	24,533.2	25,507.5	26,520.8
Legal & Governance	7,303.0	7,705.7	8,293.5	8,822.4	9,338.1	9,874.4
Adult Social Care	85,831.0	86,448.1	96,515.5	102,447.5	106,914.6	111,459.5
Children's Services	91,455.0	108,203.8	111,083.7	112,829.3	115,104.7	117,411.2
Public Health	64.0	-	190.4	388.4	594.3	808.5
Regeneration & Growth	11,389.0	10,387.2	11,159.0	12,111.2	12,757.5	13,429.6
Housing & Assets	2,303.0	3,017.8	2,910.8	3,262.4	3,602.8	3,956.8
Assistant Chief Executive	7,550.0	8,490.7	9,230.5	9,627.1	10,243.4	10,884.4
Borough Economy	69,875.0	73,479.4	77,926.0	81,451.4	84,404.5	87,395.7
Council Wide	-	-	(1,700.0)	(2,900.0)	(2,900.0)	(2,900.0)
Total Service Directorate	295,087.0	319,946.4	339,072.1	352,454.1	365,463.9	378,753.4
Capital Charges	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)	(26,461.0)
Central Items	9,462.0	10,493.0	10,778.0	11,061.0	11,061.0	11,061.0
Contingency	8,812.0	2,324.1	2,584.1	2,594.1	2,602.3	2,610.8
Total Council Service Costs	286,900.0	306,302.5	325,973.2	339,648.2	352,666.2	365,964.2
External Interest Payments	15,000.0	20,136.0	22,100.0	20,600.0	21,700.0	22,300.0
Interest and Dividend Receipts	(7,500.0)	(10,000.0)	(10,000.0)	(9,000.0)	(9,000.0)	(9,000.0)
Contribution to/ (from) Earmarked Reserves	2,315.0	2,044.2	-	-	-	-
Revenue Contributions to Capital Expenditure	6,282.0	-	-	-	-	-
Contribution to/ (from) General Balances	521.0	-	-	-	-	-
Net Cost of Borough Services	303,518.0	318,482.7	338,073.2	351,248.2	365,366.2	379,264.2
West Midlands Integrated Transport Levy	13,977.0	14,396.0	14,828.0	15,273.0	15,273.0	15,273.0
West Midlands Magistrates Courts	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0	41.0
Environment Agency (Flood Defence Levy)	88.0	88.0	88.0	88.0	88.0	88.0
Net Borough Expenditure	317,624.0	333,007.7	353,030.2	366,650.2	380,768.2	394,666.2
Funding						
Non-Ringfenced Grants						
New Homes Bonus	(111.0)	(776.0)	-	-	-	-
Services Grant	(3,953.0)	(648.0)	-	-	-	-
Non-Domestic Rates						
Retained Business Rates	(109,560.0)	(114,106.0)	(116,388.0)	(118,716.0)	(121,090.0)	(123,512.0)
Section 31 Grants	(38,188.0)	(38,123.0)	(38,885.0)	(39,663.0)	(40,456.0)	(41,265.0)
Top-up Grant	(38,701.0)	(42,378.0)	(43,226.0)	(44,091.0)	(44,973.0)	(45,872.0)
Collection Fund (Surplus)/ Deficits						
Non-Domestic Rates	(52.0)	(1,607.0)	-	-	-	-
Council Tax	(50.0)	500.0	-	-	-	-
Amounts Raised from Council Tax	(127,009.0)	(135,869.7)	(142,031.0)	(148,472.0)	(155,205.0)	(162,243.0)
Projected (Surplus)/ Deficit	-	-	12,500.2	15,708.2	19,044.2	21,774.2

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL TAX
2024/25

Band	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council			Fire	Police	Total
	Core Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Sandwell Total			
A	£ 990.33	£ 167.72	£ 1,158.05			
B	£ 1,155.39	£ 195.67	£ 1,351.06			
C	£ 1,320.44	£ 223.63	£ 1,544.07			
D	£ 1,485.50	£ 251.58	£ 1,737.08	to be advised - will be included for Full Council	to be advised - will be included for Full Council	to be advised - will be included for Full Council
E	£ 1,815.61	£ 307.49	£ 2,123.10			
F	£ 2,145.73	£ 363.39	£ 2,509.12			
G	£ 2,475.83	£ 419.30	£ 2,895.13			
H	£ 2,971.00	£ 503.16	£ 3,474.16			
NOTE: The Council Tax levels shown above apply to properties with 2 or more adults. Single person households will pay 25% less than this.						
2024/25	Increase					
2024/25	Band D Amount		£ 1,737.08			
2023/24	Band D Amount		£ 1,654.52			
2024/25	£ Increase		£ 82.56			
2024/25	% Increase		4.99%			
Amount to be Raised			135,869,698			

DSG and Schools Funding 2024/25Recommendations

1. In respect of the 2024/2025 schools funding formula for Sandwell schools, consider the outcome of the consultation proposals following review by the Schools Forum, as shown in Annex A as follows and that approval be given to:
 - (a) adopting the minimum transition option for calculating schools funding in 2024/25
 - (b) setting the Growth Funding at £1.60m
 - (c) The introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund in 2024/25
 - (d) the transfer of £0.512m funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the attendance service
 - (e) the CSSB, De-delegated and Education Function proposals as set out in Annex A (with the exception of Schools in Financial Difficulty).
 - (f) Adopt the allocation by block per paragraph 5 of this Appendix; and
 - (g) That Cabinet note the details of the Schools Funding Settlement.

Schools Funding Settlement

2. The Schools Revenue Funding 2024/25 Operational Guide requires the Council to engage in open and transparent consultation with maintained schools and academies in their area, as well as with their school's forum about any changes to the local funding formula, including the principles adopted and any movement of funds between blocks.
3. The Council is responsible for making the final decisions on the formula and for ensuring there is sufficient time to gain political approval before the funding is distributed to schools - deadline 28 February 2024.
4. The contents of this report were considered by Schools Forum at their meeting of 11th December 2023.
5. As part of the budget process the Council also allocates the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to schools in consultation with the Schools Forum. The government has announced the gross 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), for all Sandwell schools in the sum of £466.2m. This represents an increase of 9.64% from corresponding amount in 2023/24. This is before recoupment for Academies and Free Schools which will be calculated later and therefore the amount available for distribution by the Council will be lower than this headline figure. The significant increase in Early Year's Block is due mainly to the expanded Early Years entitlements. Any grant amount unspent will probably be recouped back by government. A summary of the 2024/25 DSG by block is shown below:

DSG Block	Allocation prior to Adjustments	Adjustments	Allocation after adjustments
	£m	£m	£m
Schools Block	349.852	(3.276)	346.576
Central School Services	2.381	0	2.381
High Needs	75.436	(4.490)	70.946
Early Years	38.535	0	38.535
Total	466.204	(7.766)	458.438

Context and Key Issues

6. There have been a few changes announced by the DfE/ESFA in the Summer 2023 on the way schools will be funded from 2024/25 and these are summarised below.
7. In 2024/25, each local authority will continue to be required to bring their own formulae closer to the schools direct National Funding Formula (NFF). There is an expectation that the full move to the NFF will be completed by 2027/28.
8. The Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) is being rolled into the schools NFF from 2024/25. To ensure schools do not lose funding as a result of this change, additional funding has been added to each school's MFG baseline. The amount added reflects the number of pupils included in the school's MFG baseline.
9. Split sites funding is now mandatory and is calculated using the DfE formula.
10. The Minimum Funding Guarantee will continue in 2024/25 to be between +0.0% and +0.5% without the need for a disapplication request to the DfE.
11. The basic structure of the high needs NFF for 2024/25 is not changing.
12. Local authorities will continue to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block to other blocks of the DSG, with Schools Forum approval. A disapplication request is required for transfers above 0.5%, or for any amount without Schools Forum approval. The authority will once again be requesting a movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block.

Background/Context

13. There were 7 proposals/questions asked in the schools funding consultation 2024/25 (5 to academies). Questions asked and responses to each are detailed in Annex A.

- a. Question 1: At the request of Schools Forum three modelling options were pulled together in order to demonstrate what a school's funding could potentially be if they chose to move 10% closer to the NFF, 20% closer and if they chose to move directly to the NFF.
- b. It was stressed that the funding that was modelled in each option was to be a guide only and did not represent the actual amount each school would get. This was due to the following large number of assumptions made which were not known at the time of the consultation:
- The data used in the modelling is from the October 2022 census data and the final funding model will be based upon and updated with the latest October 2023 census.
 - The Mainstream Schools Grant (MSAG) was a separate grant in 2023/24 but will be rolled into the 2024/25 schools block.
 - An assumption at this stage that Growth Fund will make use of the brought forward balances and so will be set at £1.60m (see Question 2)
 - An assumption at this stage that £0.512m will be transferred from the Schools Block to Central Schools Services Block (see question 3)
 - The final DSG will not be announced until December 2023
- c. It was important that schools noted the context of the question and provide their views on how quickly they would wish to move towards the National Funding Formula: There were 3 possible answers/options given:
- Option 1: Minimum Transition
 - Option 2: Accelerated Transition
 - Option 3: Move directly to the NFF.
- d. Question 2: Schools and School Forums were asked how much growth fund they would like to see top sliced from their DSG with 2 response options being the full £1.9m or making use of the brought forward thereby reducing this to £1.6m.
- e. Growth fund has been part of the school's consultation for a number of years and is used to support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need, additional classes need, infant class size regulation and to meet the costs necessary for new schools.
- f. Question 3: Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund.
- g. Question 4: Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block to the value of £0.512m in order that the attendance and safeguarding service could provide services to both the maintained and academy sector.
- h. Question 5: Schools were asked if they supported the proposals outlined in the Central Schools Services Block which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).
- i. Question 6: Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the De-delegated proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).

- j. Question 7: Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the Education Functions proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Annex A).

Alternative Options

14. The consultation with schools resulted in the option to move their funding closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF) by 10% as a minimum. The primary sector predominantly chose to move to the NFF at this slower pace. The secondary sector preference however was to move directly to the NFF in 2024/25.
15. There is an alternative option whereby cabinet can overrule schools' overall preferences and approve the move where funding, in 2024/25, immediately mirrors the NFF.
16. Moving to the NFF in 2024/25 will mean Sandwell schools will be funded consistently as part of the Governments plan for fair funding for all at a much faster pace. However, and as can be seen at Annex A below, majority of Sandwell's schools are not in favour of this option. In addition, it will result in more turbulence (the number of gainers and losers) within the system.

Implications

Resources:	This report will affect the funding received by individual schools in 2024/25. The schools block of the DSG is £349.852m and all of this will be distributed to schools via the Schools Funding Formula.
Legal and Governance:	The Authority must adhere to the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2022
Risk:	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.</p> <p>As set out in paragraph 4.1 the LA has undertaken its duty to ensure all schools and interested stakeholders have been consulted on around the changes to their funding allocations from previous years. The recommendation by School Forum members to adopt option 1 will see schools moving another 10% closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p>Despite the Government providing additional funding schools will continue to experience budget pressures from rising costs and inflation. There are an increased number of small and Primary schools who will find it difficult to set balanced budgets as we move to the NFF. The council do not have the power to mitigate these risks as this sits with the Governing Body. The LA closely monitors school budgets through submission of budget plans and termly monitoring reports.</p>
Equality:	The DfE has undertaken an equalities impact assessment of the national funding formula for schools and high needs. The analysis is also based on the assumption that local authorities will fund their schools in accordance with the national funding formula.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals in this report have no impact on health and wellbeing
Social Value:	Sandwell is committed to providing a first-class education for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, and to level up opportunity so that all children can realise their potential, preparing them for a fulfilling and successful adult life.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications
Corporate Parenting:	There are no Corporate Parenting implications

Annex

Annex A - Consultation Questions and Responses

Background Papers

Schools Operational Guide 2024/25

Responses

The table below compares responses from the previous 4 years:

	Primary	%	Secondary	%	TOTAL	%
2020-21	56/94	60%	9/18	50%	65/112	58%
2021-22	60/95	63%	10/20	50%	70/115	61%
2022-23	43/94	46%	10/20	50%	53/114	46%
2023-24	55/94	59%	6/20	30%	61/114	54%
2024-25	55/94	59%	10/20	50%	65/114	57%

Question 1

Please indicate the option you prefer to use for calculating schools funding for 2024/25? There were 3 possible responses which were:

- OPTION 1 - Minimum transition
- OPTION 2 - Accelerated transition
- OPTION 3 – National Funding Factor (NFF) values

Q1: Overall Responses	Total	%
OPTION 1 - Minimum Transition	51	78%
OPTION 2 - Accelerated Transition	5	8%
OPTION 3 - National Funding Formula Factor	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q1: Detailed Responses	Total
Minimum Transition	51
Primary	47
Secondary	4
Accelerated Transition	5
Primary	4
Secondary	1
National Funding Formula Factor Values	9
Primary	4
Secondary	5
Grand Total	65

Question 2

Do you agree to the use of the Brought Forward of £0.282m to set the Pupil Number Growth Fund?
There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q2: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Utilise the Brought Forward	56	86%
NO – Do NOT use the Brought Forward	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q2: Detailed Responses	Total
YES - Utilise the B/F	56
Primary	47
Secondary	9
NO – Do not utilise B/F	9
Primary	8
Secondary	1
Grand Total	65

Question 3

Do you agree to the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund (FRF)? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q3: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Agree with the introduction of a FRF	44	68%
NO – Do NOT agreed with the introduction of a FRF	21	32%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q3: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – introduce a FRF	44
Primary	38
Secondary	6
NO – Do NOT agree with a FRF	22
Primary	18
Secondary	4
Grand Total	66

Question 4

Do you agree to the top slice of £512,000 from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the Attendance Team? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q4: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57	88%
NO – Do NOT agree to £512k top slice	8	12%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q4: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57
Primary	47
Secondary	10
NO – do NOT agree to £512k top slice	8
Primary	7
Secondary	1
Grand Total	65

Question 5

Do you agree with the indicative allocation of the CSSB?

Q5: Responses	YES	NO
CSSB1 – Statutory & Regulatory /Welfare and Asset Man	57	8
CSSB2 Admissions Service	57	8
CSSB3 Historical Commitment Pensions Administration	57	8
CSSB4 Schools Forum	57	8

Question 6 and 7

Please indicate YES / NO if you agree with the De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals?
There were 2 possible responses which were either Yes or No to each of the proposals.

De-Delegation

Q6: Responses	YES	NO
DD1 Health & Safety Licences	43	8
DD2 EVOLVE	50	1
DD3 Union Facilities Time	33	18
DD4 School Improvement	44	7
DD5 Schools in Financial Difficulty	31	20

Education Functions proposals

Q7: Responses	YES	NO
EF1 Education Benefits Team	45	6
EF2 Children's Clothing Support Allowance	32	19

General Fund Capital Programme

2023/24 to 2027/28

Summary General Fund - 5 Year Approved Capital Programme						
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	329	763	-	-	-	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	-	-	-	3,807
Regeneration & Growth	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Grand Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707
Grand Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

Summary General Fund - Pipeline Capital Project Requests

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	0	563	-	-	-	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	-	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	-	-	-	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	-	17,225
Housing	0	-	-	-	-	-
Law & Governance	0	1,625	-	-	-	1,625
Regeneration & Growth	0	2,998	4,732	-	-	7,730
Grand Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	-	25,896	42,183	32,963	-	101,042
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	-	9,183	8,021	7,856	-	25,060
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	-	35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102

Summary General Fund - 5 Year Approved Capital Programme & Pipeline Capital Project Requests

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	TOTAL
Service	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	329	1,326	0	0	0	1,655
Borough Economy	25,661	40,374	63,621	48,218	8,334	186,208
Finance	9,305	3,644	1,200	1,200	1,200	16,549
Children's Services	7,732	20,455	18,135	10,935	10,000	67,257
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	5,235	0	0	0	5,432
Regeneration & Growth	26,553	59,726	15,797	2,100	2,100	106,276
Grand Total	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005
Financing	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Total Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	119,412	88,437	54,302	21,339	332,655
Total Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	21,504	13,016	10,851	2,995	74,343
Total Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Total RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707
Grand Total	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005

SMBC 5 YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME - GENERAL FUND							
Approved Capital Programme							
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	£000	Funding Source
Adult Social Care							
ASC Capital Grant - Harvest View	0	763	-	-	-	763	Grant
ASC System Development	260	-	-	-	-	260	Grant
Contaminated Land Grant	8	-	-	-	-	8	Grant
Swift Impress System	61	-	-	-	-	61	Prudential
Adult Social Care Total	329	763	-	-	-	1,092	
Borough Economy							
Environmental Improvements to Neighbourhoods	17	-	-	-	-	17	Prudential
Forge Mill Farm	2	-	-	-	-	2	Prudential
Lightwoods Park	16	-	-	-	-	16	Prudential
Lightwoods Park HLF	379	-	-	-	-	379	Grant
Manor House - Phase 2	12	-	-	-	-	12	Prudential
Manor House Conservation Plan	241	-	-	-	-	241	Prudential
Oakhouse Barns Resoration Project	10	-	-	-	-	10	Prudential
Oakhouse Barns Resoration Project	125	-	-	-	-	125	Grant
Total Birchley Island	2,685	-	-	-	-	2,685	Grant
Total Birchley Island	0	3,190	-	-	-	3,190	Prudential
Total Local Network Improvement Plan (LNIP)	2,756	2,809	1,798	1,798	1,798	10,959	Grant
Total Main Programme (Council Resources) (Excl Birchley Island)	8,077	2,131	295	295	295	11,093	Prudential
Total Highways Maintenance & Structures	5,481	4,741	4,741	4,741	4,741	24,445	Grant
Total Self Financing Schemes (Excl TT)	3,330	1,211	-	-	-	4,541	Grant
Vehicles	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	7,500	Prudential
LUF - Haden Hill Leisure Centre	640	3,410	15,950	-	-	20,000	Grant
LUF - Haden Hill Leisure Centre	0	-	2,000	-	-	2,000	Prudential
WMCA - PMF Play & Education Barn Project	190	360	-	-	-	550	Grant
WMCA - The Railer / Cracker improvement Projects	0	500	-	-	-	500	Grant
West Smethwick Park HLF	200	-	-	-	-	200	Grant
Borough Economy Total	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465	
Finance							
ICT - End User Computing	2,823	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	7,623	Prudential
Oracle Fusion ERP System	6,482	1,195	-	-	-	7,677	Prudential
Public Realm	0	33	-	-	-	33	Grant
Finance Total	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333	
Children's Services							
BSF - ICT Element	80	-	-	-	-	80	Prudential
Orchard Building Works (Primrose)	37	-	-	-	-	37	Grant
PLAY Pathfinder	6	-	-	-	-	6	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital	1,300	-	-	-	-	1,300	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital - PRU's	80	-	-	-	-	80	Grant
Devolved Formula Capital - School Contribution	1,200	-	-	-	-	1,200	Grant
Provisional Grant Allocation	0	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	40,000	Grant
Youth Centre Queens Way	5	-	-	-	-	5	Grant
Schools Capital Programme Schemes:							
Brades Lodge	344	1,000	-	-	-	1,344	Grant
Bristnall Hall Academy	10	-	-	-	-	10	Grant
Connor Education Centre	40	-	-	-	-	40	Grant
ESFA Shireland Primary Free school	61	-	-	-	-	61	Grant
Feasibility Work Expansion of Secondary	300	-	-	-	-	300	Grant
Great Bridge Primary	19	-	-	-	-	19	Grant
Health Futures UTC	1,476	1,300	-	-	-	2,776	Grant
New Oldbury Primary - Lightwoods	174	-	-	-	-	174	Grant
Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy (OSCA)	401	-	-	-	-	401	Grant
Priority Primary Expansion	15	-	-	-	-	15	Grant
Q3 Langley Phase 3	4	-	-	-	-	4	Grant
School Condition - LifeCycle property maintenance	1,877	-	-	-	-	1,877	Grant
School Kitchen Repairs	3	-	-	-	-	3	Grant
Shenstone (Evolve)	200	-	-	-	-	200	Grant
West Bromwich Collegiate Academy - Phase 2	100	-	-	-	-	100	Grant
Children's Services Total	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032	
Housing							
Charlemont Community Centre	37	-	-	-	-	37	Prudential
DFG	4,500	12,761	4,800	4,800	4,800	31,661	Grant
Empty Properties	100	585	-	-	-	685	Prudential
HMRA Ringfenced Receipts - Vulnerable Homeowners	373	-	-	-	-	373	Prudential
Housing Stock Condition Survey	0	29	-	-	-	29	Prudential
Self Service Customer Portal	115	-	-	-	-	115	Prudential
The Public	0	341	-	-	-	341	Prudential
Vulnerable Homeowners Improvements (Kick Start)	386	-	-	-	-	386	Prudential
Warm Homes Healthy People	1	-	-	-	-	1	Grant
Housing Total	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628	

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget	Revised Base Budget		Funding Source
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Law & Governance							
New Cemetery - West Bromwich	20	3,560	-	-	-	3,580	RCCO
Case Management System	50	50	-	-	-	100	Prudential
Rowley Cemetery	127	-	-	-	-	127	RCCO
Law & Governance Total	197	3,610	-	-	-	3,807	
Regeneration & Growth							
Access Fund	334	300	300	300	300	1,534	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Blackheath Library - Fit Out Costs	56	-	-	-	-	56	Prudential
Brindley II	21	-	-	-	-	21	Prudential
BSF - Schools for the Future	73	-	-	-	-	73	Grant
Childrens Trust Accommodation Works	145	-	-	-	-	145	Grant
Coroners Court Refurbishment - Jack Judge House	434	-	-	-	-	434	Prudential
King Street, Wednesbury Health Centre	1,467	-	-	-	-	1,467	Prudential
Mobile Working	0	41	-	-	-	41	Grant
PMA - The Central Sixth Form Building Works	500	-	-	-	-	500	Prudential
PMA Capitalisation	855	800	800	800	800	4,055	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Property Refurbishment - WPV Sandwell Council House	911	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	4,911	Prudential / Capital Receipts
Property Refurbishment - WPV Sandwell Council House	1,017	-	-	-	-	1,017	Prudential
PSDS Heat Pump Technology	247	-	-	-	-	247	Grant
Regeneration Reserve	1,109	-	-	-	-	1,109	Grant
Sandwell Aquatics Centre	4,514	468	-	-	-	4,982	Grant
Section 106 Schemes	204	2,615	-	-	-	2,819	Grant
UK Shared Property Fund	582	-	-	-	-	582	Grant
LUF - ASB & Crime in Wednesbury	0	400	-	-	-	400	Grant
LUF - Friar Park Urban Village	0	11,500	-	-	-	11,500	Grant
LUF - Greenspace Improvements	0	1,600	-	-	-	1,600	Grant
LUF - Millennium Centre	0	2,000	-	-	-	2,000	Grant
LUF - Public Realm Wednesbury Town Centre	0	4,500	-	-	-	4,500	Grant
Towns Fund:							
Rowley Regis - Blackheath Bus Exchange	27	2,688	1,020	-	-	3,735	Grant
Rowley Regis - Britannia Park Community Hub	793	1,203	-	-	-	1,996	Grant
Rowley Regis - Canal and River Trust	324	188	-	-	-	512	Grant
Rowley Regis - Connected	116	878	494	-	-	1,488	Grant
Rowley Regis - Satellite Education Hub	500	4,016	4,016	-	-	8,532	Grant
Smethwick - Connected	2,242	1,000	-	-	-	3,242	Grant
Smethwick - Midlands Met Learning Campus	2,600	8,711	-	-	-	11,311	Grant
Smethwick - Rolfe Street Regeneration	862	818	255	-	-	1,935	Grant
Smethwick - Grove Lane Regeneration	35	2,611	1,698	-	-	4,344	Grant
Smethwick - Ron Davis Centre Expansion	15	-	-	-	-	15	Grant
West Brom - Connected	291	421	314	-	-	1,026	Grant
West Brom - Retail Diversification Programme	1,828	4,795	1,168	-	-	7,791	Grant
West Brom - Sandwell MEC	2,005	-	-	-	-	2,005	Grant
West Brom - Town Hall Quarter	2,093	4,155	-	-	-	6,248	Grant
West Brom - Urban Greening	353	20	-	-	-	373	Grant
Regeneration & Growth Total	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546	
Total Capital Approved Programme	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903	
Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707	RCCO
Total Capital Approved Programme Funding	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903	

Pipeline Capital Project Requests Not Yet Included Within the Approved Capital Programme

Pipeline Capital Project Requests	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	Funding Source
	Revised Budget	Revised Budget	Revised Budget	Base Budget	Base Budget		
General Fund	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Existing Projects:							
Additions Resources Required:							
Oracle Fusion Project - Additional		1,216	-	-	-	1,216	Prudential
Towns Fund - MMLC - Net Zero Building - Additional		-	2,724	-	-	2,724	Grant
West Bromwich Cemetery - Additional		1,625	-	-	-	1,625	Prudential
Highways Additional		1,902	-	-	-	1,902	Prudential
New Projects:							
Grant Funding Only							
CRSTS - Smethwick to Birmingham Growth Corridor		6,333	6,333	6,333	-	18,999	Grant
CRSTS - A461 WCB Corridor		4,167	4,167	4,167	-	12,501	Grant
CRSTS - A4123 WCB Corridor		400	400	400	-	1,200	Grant
CRSTS - Wednesbury to Brierly Hill Sustainable Access Measures		2,667	2,667	2,667	-	8,001	Grant
CRSTS - BC LC WIP		533	533	533	-	1,599	Grant
CRSTS - ULEV Black Country		800	800	800	-	2,400	Grant
Play Zones - West Smethwick Park		350	-	-	-	350	Grant
New Special School - Tipton - Feasibility		100	-	-	-	100	Grant
Grant & SMBC Funding							
Oak House Restoration		1,000	-	-	-	1,000	Grant
Oak House Restoration		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential
New Archive Centre		-	17,000	-	-	17,000	Grant
New Archive Centre		-	3,000	-	-	3,000	Prudential
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - Phase 3		1,496	1,559	-	-	3,055	Grant
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - Phase 3		-	449	-	-	449	Prudential
Causeway Green Primary School - Construction Phase		6,500	6,000	-	-	12,500	Grant
Causeway Green Primary School - Construction Phase		-	1,200	-	-	1,200	Prudential
LUF Round 3 - Grove Lane		-	-	18,063	-	18,063	Grant
LUF Round 3 - Grove Lane		-	-	2,007	-	2,007	Prudential
SCT - Residential Facility		800	-	-	-	800	Grant
SCT - Residential Facility		755	935	935	-	2,625	Prudential
Play Zones		750	-	-	-	750	Grant
Play Zones		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential
SMBC Funding Only							
Forge Mill Farm Shop, Toilet and Entrance		245	-	-	-	245	Prudential
Libraries: Self-Service Kiosks Phase 2		45	-	-	-	45	Prudential
Sandwell Valley Master Plan		505	2,437	4,914	-	7,856	Prudential
User Owned Fleet Replacement		263	-	-	-	263	Prudential
Fountain Court Kitchen		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
Changing Places Facility - Stoney Lane		125	-	-	-	125	Prudential
Call Handling Terminals		28	-	-	-	28	Prudential
Digital Transformation		282	-	-	-	282	Prudential
Lap Tops		68	-	-	-	68	Prudential
PMA - Langley Library - Roof, Window & Other works		25	-	-	-	25	Prudential
PMA - Plas Gwynant - Roof works		50	-	-	-	50	Prudential
PMA - 160 Beeches Road - Roof works		250	-	-	-	250	Prudential
PMA - Wednesbury Town Hall - Roof works		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
PMA - Brickhouse CC - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Fountain Court - Heating Replacement		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Fountain Court - Lighting Replacement		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Frank Chapman Centre - Fire Alarm		15	-	-	-	15	Prudential
PMA - Great Bridge Library - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Hadley Stadium - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Ingestre Hall - Re-wiring & Distribution Boards		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Ingestre Hall - Asbestos Removal		150	-	-	-	150	Prudential
PMA - King George V - Fire Alarm		12	-	-	-	12	Prudential
PMA - Langley Library - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Bromwich Hall - Fire Alarm		50	-	-	-	50	Prudential
PMA - Plas Gwynant - Boiler House Re-furbishment		200	-	-	-	200	Prudential
PMA - Sandwell Community PRU (Bridge Centre) - Fire Alarm		35	-	-	-	35	Prudential
PMA - Sandwell Community PRU (tidale Site) - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Tipton Sports Academy - Fire Alarm		5	-	-	-	5	Prudential
PMA - Victoria Park Skill Centre - Boiler Replacement		140	-	-	-	140	Prudential
PMA - West Bromwich Sure Start - Fire Alarm		10	-	-	-	10	Prudential
PMA - Wood Street Careers Centre - Boiler & Plant Replacement		60	-	-	-	60	Prudential
Allotment Site Fencing		62	-	-	-	62	Prudential
Adult Social Care		563	-	-	-	563	
Borough Economy		20,522	37,337	39,884	-	97,743	
Finance		1,216	-	-	-	1,216	
Children's Services		8,155	8,135	935	-	17,225	
Housing		-	-	-	-	-	
Law & Governance		1,625	-	-	-	1,625	
Regeneration & Growth		2,998	4,732	-	-	7,730	
TOTAL - Pipeline Capital Project Requests		35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102	

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total	
Service / Scheme	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	Revised Base Budget £000	£000	Funding Source
Pipeline Capital Project Requests - Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes		25,896	42,183	32,963	-	101,042	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes		9,183	8,021	7,856	-	25,060	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes		-	-	-	-	-	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes		-	-	-	-	-	RCCO
Total - Pipeline Capital Project Requests Funding		35,079	50,204	40,819	-	126,102	
Approved Programme & Pipeline Capital Project Requests - Financing							
Grant Funded Schemes	49,165	119,412	88,437	54,302	21,339	332,655	Grant
Prudential Funded Schemes	25,977	21,504	13,016	10,851	2,995	74,343	Prudential
Capital Receipts Funded Schemes	-	-	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300	Capital Receipts
RCCO Funded Schemes	147	3,560	-	-	-	3,707	RCCO
FUNDING GRAND TOTAL	75,289	144,476	103,553	67,253	26,434	417,005	

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Draft Budget 2024/25
– including HRA 30 Year Business Plan

Contents	Paragraph Number
Recommendations	1
Introduction	2
Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Property Charges	7
Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2024/25	10
HRA Reserves	14
Draft HRA Capital Programme	17
Establish Housing Transformation Programme	21
HRA Treasury Management Strategy	26
30 Year Business Plan	27
Report to Cabinet on 6 th December 2023 entitled 'The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges'	Annex 1
30 Year HRA Business Plan	Annex 2

Recommendations

- 1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - i. Note that Full Council on 12th December 2023 approved recommendations of the report entitled 'The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges', as outlined in paragraph 8 and Annex 1 of this report.
 - ii. Approve the HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as set out in Table 2 of this report.
 - iii. Note the HRA estimated working balances in 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 15 of this report.
 - iv. Approve the investment principles for the HRA Capital programme as set out in paragraph 19 of this report.
 - v. Approve the HRA Capital Programme control totals as set out in Table 3 of this report.
 - vi. Approve the HRA Treasury Management Strategy as set out in paragraph 4 of this report.
 - vii. Approve the 30 Year HRA Business Plan as set out in Annex 2.

Introduction

2. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is the budget operated by the Council which contains the income and expenditure of services connected with the Council's Housing Landlord role. The main source of income into the HRA is the rental income from the properties let by the Council. These rents are calculated by reference to a Government formula which provides a target rent for the Council's properties to charge.
3. Since April 2012 the HRA has been operating in a system known as Self Financing for local authorities which operate an HRA. Self-Financing changed the way the Council's housing stock is funded by ending the previous subsidy-based regime. In principle, it gives more local accountability and responsibility for the operation of the Council's housing stock.
4. The key elements of Self Financing are:

- i. The Government calculated a level of debt based on a 30-year assessment on expenditure, which was transferred to the authority to compensate the Government for the ending of the subsidy scheme. For Sandwell, this resulted in a loan settlement of £504million, which involved taking on additional debt of over £25million).
 - ii. Councils have full responsibility for the maintenance and development of the housing stock and also the servicing of the debt.
 - iii. A sum for depreciation of the stock is required to be included in the accounts.
- 5 The setting of rents is achieved using Government guidelines. From 2020/21 the Government proposed that rents would increase by CPI + 1% for the next 5 years until 2024/25. This proposal offers stability and certainty to the HRA to fund investment in existing stock as well as building more homes for the future.
- 6 This report looks to provide information on the Draft HRA Budget for 2024/25 and forward financial forecast through to 2028/29 together with the Draft Housing Capital Programme control totals. It also provides an update on the 30-year Business Plan.

Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Property Charges

- 7 The Government announced that from 2020/21 rents can revert to the previous policy and be increased by CPI (at September of the previous year) plus 1%. This allows for a more optimistic forecast of the resources available to the HRA and continues the ability to reduce the level of debt, CPI at September 2023 was 6.7% thus allowing for a 7.7% increase in rents from April 2024.
8. Full Council on 12 December 2023 agreed to authorise the Interim Director of Housing to adjust Council rents and housing related charges with effect from 1 April 2024 as follows:
- i. That the housing rental charges is increased by 7.7% which is the consumer price index 6.7% (September 2023) plus 1%, which is equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
 - ii. That the housing service charges increase by the consumer price index (CPI)+ 1%, equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
 - iii. That housing service charge is implemented on properties not currently being charged but are receiving the service in line with similar properties receiving the service provision, including heating, water and laundry facility following consultation with residents.
 - iv. That subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 7.7%.
 - v. That properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 7.7% rental increase and a 7.7% increase in service charges to match the council's rent and service charge increase.
 - vi. That the leaseholder annual management fee be increased by 7.7%, CPI + 1% in 2024/25 from £115.66 to £124.57.
 - vii. That the Director of Housing be authorised to implement adjustments to council rents and housing related charges as set out in this report with effect from 1 April 2024; and

viii. That the Director of Housing be authorised to introduce associated service charges in respect of Building Safety Regulation requirements for Leasehold properties.

- 9 The rents and housing related charges for 2024/25 have therefore been increased in line with the recommendations approved by Full Council on 12th December 2023 (report attached as Annex 1). For 2025/26 to 2026/28 the treasury assumptions on CPI plus 1% has been used and then only CPI. These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Council Tenant Rents and Housing Related Increases

2024/25	Treasury Assumptions for CPI plus 1%		Treasury Assumptions for CPI
	2025/26	2026/28	2028/29 Onwards (CPI only)
7.7%	3.5%	3.0%	2%

Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 to 2028/29

10. The Council own over 28,300 properties for rent (974 of which are within the PFI scheme at Harvills Hawthorn, and are managed externally) and the freehold on over 1,252 leasehold flats across the borough in addition to over 2,700 garages (that we manage) and other buildings. These properties are managed through our own Housing Services.
11. Table 2 sets out the Draft HRA budget for 2024/25 and the forecast for the following 4 years. The budget for 2025/26 to 2028/29 is balanced subject to housing transformation savings being scoped and delivered in the Repairs & Maintenance and Supervision & Management budgets.

Table 2: Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget 2024/25 to 2028/29

Housing Revenue Account	Estimated Budget 2024/25 £'000	Estimated Budget 2025/26 £'000	Estimated Budget 2026/27 £'000	Estimated Budget 2027/28 £'000	Estimated Budget 2028/29 £'000
Repairs and maintenance	47,741	50,132	52,642	57,907	63,698
Supervision and management	48,499	50,831	53,399	58,739	64,613
Rents, rates, taxes and other charges	1,319	1,387	1,458	1,531	1,607
Special services	7,441	8,014	9,609	10,569	11,626
HRA - Provision for bad debts	882	926	972	1,021	1,022
Depreciation Charges	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369
Interest payable and similar charges	26,500	27,400	28,300	29,200	29,201
Savings required		(3,696)	(6,999)	(16,545)	(25,468)
Contribution to/from reserve	358	0	0		
Total Expenditure	151,109	153,363	157,750	160,791	164,668
Dwelling Rents	(138,868)	(141,016)	(145,246)	(148,152)	(151,856)
Dwelling Rents	(19)	(20)	(21)	(21)	(21)
Charges for Services and Facilities	(4,215)	(4,293)	(4,422)	(4,510)	(4,623)
Contributions towards expenditure	(2,294)	(2,320)	(2,348)	(2,395)	(2,455)
Government Grants	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)	(5,713)
Total Income	(151,109)	(153,363)	(157,750)	(160,791)	(164,668)

Note – Budget at Outturn Prices

12. The Draft HRA budget for 2024/25 includes specific investment in respect of the following:
 - i. £47.7m in delivering repairs and maintenance.
 - ii. Contribution of £18.3m to the Major Repairs Reserve to fund the Decent Home Capital Programme.
 - iii. Provision to borrow £11m to fund the new build programme.
13. The introduction in 2012 of Housing Revenue Account Self-Financing has allowed decision making at a local level to drive planning for investment in housing stock and set spending priorities in line with local demand. The council will continue to consider:
 - i. Analysing our stock and the services we provide so that we can base our future plans on a robust and sustainable basis. To this end stock conditions surveys are being procured to bring our data up to date and to ensure that 20% of our stock is looked at every year on a rolling basis.
 - ii. Working up a range of plans for potential future investment in new homes which better match the needs of our communities.
 - iii. Thinking through how the new future for Council housing can help the borough to deliver our overall objectives.

HRA Reserves

14. The HRA working balance must continue to be managed so that it provides the flexibility to manage unexpected demands and pressures without destabilising the Council's overall financial position. The level of the Working Balance should provide a reasonable allowance for unquantifiable risks or one-off exceptional items of expenditure that are not covered within existing budgets.
15. The Working Balance can be used to correct inflation assumptions, increase capital spend, repay debt early or to fund new HRA capital projects. The estimated level of reserves in 2024/25 is £41.2m.
16. The Section 151 Officer has taken account the level of risk when advising on the level of balances that should be retained in the HRA.

Draft HRA Capital Programme

17. In line with regulatory standards it is essential to ensure that the stock is suitably maintained. The Capital Programme is a key input into the 30-year Business Plan, and both are reviewed annually. Modelling the resources available over a 30-year period demonstrates that the demands of the current and proposed programme can be fully met throughout the 30-year planning period.
18. The requirements placed on Landlords are changing significantly post Grenfell and the tragic death of Awaab Ishak with new standards being introduced for all Social Housing and more specifically around High Risk Residential Buildings such as Tower

Blocks. These details of these requirements are still evolving and secondary legislation is being introduced in the coming months so it is important that we retain the flexibility and financial capacity within the HRA to adjust our capital programmes as they emerge to ensure our stock is compliant to all regulatory standards.

19. Therefore, to ensure that the Capital Programme can be delivered within available resources for both new build and to invest in the current stock, investment principles have been established:
 - i. Prudential Borrowing to be prioritised for maximising delivery of New Build schemes (i.e. do not borrow to invest in current stock because there is no additional income to cover the debt charge). This will provide sufficient match funding to utilise the 1-4-1 receipts.
 - ii. The level of capital programming will not exceed the capital funding resources available in any year. These resources will include, RTB receipts (relevant portion), Major Repairs Reserve, Prudential Borrowing and Revenue Contributions.
 - iii. The level of reserves applied will be constrained in any one year in the interests of maintaining strategic resources in the medium term.
20. Accordingly, the control totals for the Draft Capital Programme is outlined in Table 3 which meet the criteria outlined in paragraph 18.

Table 3: HRA Capital Programme – Control Totals

Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme	Estimated Budget 2024/25	Estimated Budget 2025/26	Estimated Budget 2026/27	Estimated Budget 2027/28	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
New Build	28,945	27,857	25,541	21,086	103,429
Housing Improvements	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	120,000
Total Expenditure	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	223,429
Funding Source					
Grants	12,287	11,306	7,000	3,966	34,559
RTB (141) Receipts	5,658	5,551	7,541	6,120	24,870
MRR	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	73,476
Capital Receipts	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	16,000
Borrowing	18,631	18,631	18,631	18,631	74,524
Total Funding	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	223,429

Establish Housing Transformation Programme

21. There are a number of significant changes required within the Housing Directorate to ensure that it can continue to deliver the landlord services to meet the needs of tenants, leaseholders and regulatory requirements. To ensure that the changes are delivered in a structured, cost effective and well governed way we have established a Housing Transformation Programme with the Housing Transformation Board as its Steering Group and Corporate Oversight provided by The Corporate Transformation Board. The deliverables are spread amongst a number of workstreams listed below

22. The systems used by Housing either need updating or in some instances do not currently exist and need to be procured and implemented. The current systems are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the regulator.
23. As well as the data from the Stock Condition Surveys, there is a need for an exercise to establish what data sets are required to be able to evidence compliance and performance and an analysis of existing data quality to ensure that reporting is accurate and transparent.
24. A lot of the processes used within Housing are manual and involve updating spreadsheet trackers or a manual intervention to transfer data from one system to another. These are all points of failure that need to be replaced with automated processes as part of the system and data implementation work.
25. The Regulator of Social Housing has been given the powers to set minimum competency levels for anyone working in Social Housing. These standards will be announced soon and so we will need to have a structured learning and development workstream to establish current competency levels with our own staff and those employed by our supply chain and a training plan to ensure that we are only using competent staff to deliver landlord services.

Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy

26. Please refer to the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy report appended as part of the overall report.

30 Year HRA Business Plan

27. As with the budget and Capital Programme the 30-year financial forecast is reviewed annually and amended where appropriate and this is set out in Annex 2
28. The Business Plan demonstrates that the HRA is sustainable over a 30-year term.
29. When budget proposals are made to the Council, the Section 151 Officer will take these issues into consideration in their advice on the level of balances that should be retained within the HRA.

Report to Cabinet

6 December 2023

Subject:	The review of council tenant rents and housing related property charges
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing Councillor Laura Rollins
Director:	Dean Epton Interim Director of Housing
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Nigel Collumbell Assistant Director of Housing

1 Recommendations

That Full Council be recommended to authorise the Interim Director of Housing to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 1 April 2024 as follows:


- 1.1 That the housing rental charges is increased by 7.7% which is the consumer price index 6.7% (September 2023) plus 1%, which is equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
- 1.2 That the housing service charges increase by the consumer price index (CPI)+ 1%, equivalent to a 7.7% increase.
- 1.3 That housing service charge is implemented on properties not currently being charged but are receiving the service in line with similar properties receiving the service provision, including heating, water and laundry facility following consultation with residents.
- 1.4 That subject to consultation with the residents of the site, to increase rent at the traveller's pitch in Hills View, Tipton by 7.7%.
- 1.5 That rental charges for garage sites be increased by 7.7% in line with other council fees and charges agreed by Cabinet and Council.
- 1.6 That properties managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement receive a 7.7% rental increase and a 7.7% increase in service charges to match the council's rent and service charge increase.
- 1.7 That properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account (including service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking) receive a 7.7% increase in rental charges and service charges equivalent to CPI plus 1%.

- 1.8 That the leaseholder annual management fee be increased by 7.7%, CPI + 1% in 2024/25 from £115.66 to £124.57.
- 1.9 That the Director of Housing be authorised to implement adjustments to council rents and housing related charges as set out in this report with effect from 1 April 2024; and
- 1.10 That the Director of Housing be authorised to introduce associated service charges in respect of Building Safety Regulation requirements for Leasehold properties.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Each year council tenants, leaseholders and other residents are notified of the rent and other related housing charges to be set from the following April. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to implement these charges for the new financial year 2024/25.
- 2.2 The council has to achieve the right balance between supporting tenants to mitigate the continued cost of living pressures and protecting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to ensure we can continue to provide affordable social housing for our residents.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>Rental income is a key component of the financial wellbeing of the Housing Revenue Account. Funds support the council’s ambition to build more new and affordable council homes.</p>
	<p>Rental income contributes to the maintenance and repairs of existing housing stock to become a decent standard and meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022.</p>



A strong and inclusive economy

Funds from rental and housing related charges will maintain / increase the capacity to build more affordable housing.

Implementing a rental increase below the rate of inflation has a significant impact on our ability to deliver on new build schemes and maintain the quality of our existing housing stock.

The requirements of the Building Safety Act will put pressures on the HRA. The significant of this will be identified when the stock condition surveys are complete.

We will have fewer financial resources to deliver proposals within the 30year business plan. Every 1% 'lost' from rental income equates to a reduction in next year's rental income, estimated at £1.34m in year 1 (due to a 53-week rent year) and £39.57m over 30 years, based on 52/53 week rent year cycles).

4 Context and Key Issues

Background

- 4.1 In line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, Sandwell Council reduced housing rents by 1% per year for four years, between 2016/2017 and 2019/20.
- 4.2 In 2019, the government set a rent policy for social housing that would permit rents to increase by up to CPI+1% per annum and made clear its intention to leave this policy in place until 2025.
- 4.3 From 2020 Sandwell Council has had control over its own rent setting in line with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Rents Standard, and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing.
- 4.4 In 2023, CPI was 10.1%, which would have permitted social landlords to increase rents by 11.1% (CPI+1%). However, the government amended the rent policy for 2023/2024 and imposed a rent cap of 7% for social housing. Sandwell made the decision to set rent at 5% to help support residents during the exceptional time of inflationary pressures and cost of living. Due to the rising supplier costs, other stock owned local authorities and social landlords took the decision to increase rents by the maximum 7%.
- 4.5 There is a recognition that the council needs to maintain the existing housing stock to a good standard and cover operational costs and to achieve the right balance between protecting our tenants, protecting tax payers (by limiting the welfare costs

associated with housing rents) and ensuring the council can deliver on its commitments to build new social homes.

- 4.6 For 2024/25, the government have not announced a rent cap, therefore the council are permitted to increase rents by CPI+1% in line with the Rent Standard and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing issued annually in April.

Rents

- 4.7 The Council applies two types of rents on its housing stock; Social Housing Rents (Formula) and Affordable Rent.

4.7.1 Formula rents take account various attributes such as post code area, type of property, local earnings and number of bedrooms; this ensures similar rents are charged for similar properties. The rents for new tenants letting existing stock are set using formula rent and it is proposed that this policy continues.

4.7.2 Affordable Rents are set at 80% of the market rent, inclusive of service charges. Affordable rent is charged on new builds under the affordable homes programme and any additional stock such as buy backs from previous Right to Buy or private acquisitions, or appropriated stock from the general fund. The proposal is to increase affordable rents by 7.7% in line with other rental increases.

- 4.7.3 Rents are charged for the following council properties and buildings:
- Council tenant properties
 - Properties managed by Riverside under the PFI
 - Travellers Pitch – Travellers at Hillside View, Tipton
 - There are a small number of properties that sit outside of the HRA and their income contributes to the General Fund

4.7.4 Appendix 1 sets out the proposed typical rent levels at 53 weeks for the main property types and sizes

4.7.5 It is estimated that 70% of our customers are full or partial benefits. This represents a mix of customers on Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

Table 1 shows that 30% of our customers pay their rent in full.

Table 1 Customers in Receipt of Housing related benefits for Rents and Service Charges

Overall Summary	No. Customers	% Customers
Total properties	26,616	
Customers on full benefits (UC/HB)	12,112	45.5%
Customers on partial benefits	6,532	24.5%
Customers that pay full rent	7,972	30.0%

4.8 Customers who pay all of their rent and those on partial housing benefits will be impacted by a rental increase, however 45.5% of our customers who receive full benefits will be unaffected.

4.9 To demonstrate the impact a 7.7% rental increase would have, Table 2 below shows the financial impact for customers living in a 3-bedroom property in receipt of housing benefits for 20%, 50% or 70% of their rent.

For example, a customer living in a 3-bed house in receipt of 70% benefits would see a rental increase of £2.24 per week (example 3 below). Please see Appendix 2 for full details of all property types.

Table 2

Example 1 - Customers on 20% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 80% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£6.32	£5.18	£5.57	£5.98	£5.96

Example 2 - Customers on 50% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pay 50% rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£3.95	£3.24	£3.48	£3.74	£3.72

Example 3 - Customers on 70% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 30% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£2.37	£1.94	£2.09	£2.24	£2.23

Example 4 - Customers not in receipt of any benefits Impact of a 7.7% increase in rents (customers paying full rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Grand Total
3	£7.90	£6.48	£6.96	£7.48	£7.45

4.10 The Income and Money Advice Service have implemented positive initiatives to support tenants that contribute towards their rental payment. The Welfare Rights Team assist the residents of Sandwell to claim the benefits that they are entitled to through benefit maximisation, representing clients where claims have failed.

- 4.11 The Housing Income and Money Advice Services actively promote and signpost customers to services provided through the partnership work with agencies such as; Citizens Advice Sandwell, SCVO, Think Sandwell Employment and Skills Team, Connexions Sandwell and proactive promotion of these services.
- 4.12 Additional funds have been sought through the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) to purchase furniture and white goods. Where customers are not eligible to be supported via the LWP, the HRA Hardship Fund will be utilised where customers are eligible for support. The current hardship fund available is £100k.
- 4.13 Proactive use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) by applying to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) to use funds from the HRA to off-set any shortfalls from the DHP fund for 2024/25. Sandwell's overall limit for 2023/24 is £1.786m.
- 4.14 The Council needs to get the right balance between protecting its tenants from rental increases and minimising lost income in order to achieve comments within the 30-year business plan.
- 4.15 The rental income is vital to the financial well-being of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Rental income offsets operational costs and financial charges, and the surplus is used to invest in capital improvements to the housing stock. This includes delivering the major works programme on our high-rise accommodation to meet the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022 and provisions to fund the council's affordable homes new build scheme.
- 4.16 The additional income generated from a 7.7% increase of £11.93million will contribute to the upkeep of our existing stock as well as enabling us to build more high-quality housing to meet the needs of our residents. A rental increase lower than CPI+1% would have a detrimental impact on the council's ability to maintain and improve and increase our social housing stock.
- 4.17 As at 31 March 2023 there are 974 properties in Wednesbury currently managed by Riverside under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement. It is proposed that PFI property rents are increased by 7.7% and service charges are increased by CPI+1%. This is in line with properties managed by the council.
- 4.18 There are a small number of properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account and their rental income contributes to the council's general fund finances. This includes service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking. It is proposed that rent and service charges on these properties are increased by CPI+1% from April 2024. These properties are heavily discounted.

Service Charges

- 4.19 A decision was made to freeze service charges for council tenants during 2021/22. This was following the COVID pandemic as there was an interruption to some services provided.
- 4.20 Service charges were increase by CPI+1% in 2022/23 which was a 4.1% increase

- 4.21 Service charges were increased by CPI+1% in 2023/24 which was a 11.1% increase.
- 4.22 Analysis undertaken by Savills has highlighted a low level of service charge income in Sandwell (based on 2020/21 outturn) when benchmarking against other authorities.
- 4.23 The service charge freeze from previous years has had a detrimental impact on Sandwell's lower comparable service charges.
- 4.24 Service charges are outside of the government's legislative changes. The principle continues to be to recover the cost of service provision.
- 4.25 Service charges are charged to tenants living in flatted accommodation, and other properties having communal areas which require services such as:
- Cleaning - for internal and external cleaning of high and low-rise flatted accommodation
 - Security - for CCTV, Concierge and Door Entry
 - Aerials - for a digital aerial service
 - Heating, water and laundry services - relating specifically to some blocks, an estimated charge is set to recover costs but there may be retrospective adjustments between years to reflect actual costs
- 4.26 Service charges are annually reviewed, traditionally they have only been uplifted annually by inflation. The income generated from service charges contributes significantly to the HRA; however, the costs of service provision is subsidised by rental income as some charges do not cover actual costs.
- 4.27 A commitment was made in the Rent Review Cabinet Report in December 2021 to review all services charges to ensure charges applied cover the full cost of service delivery. This work has been completed; the review has identified a small number of properties are not being charged for the provision of services for heating and water where there is no independent metering for the property, and laundry facilities in a limited number of low and high-rise blocks. Consultation has commenced with residents and it is proposed that charges are implemented to these properties from 2023/24.
- 4.28 Cleaning charges relate to internal cleaning within blocks and other shared facilities, and the external cleaning of paths and gardens. There are higher costs associated with high rise blocks as they will receive more frequent inspections and cleaning.
- 4.29 Security charges are applicable in low and high-rise blocks. Most properties receive a secure door entry service with a fob key and intercom / buzzer link. Full provision includes CCTV at the entrance and around the block, a door entry service with a direct link to the 24/7 CCTV control room at Roway Lane. The block expansion project will increase this facility and ensure all residents in high-rise blocks benefit from the safety and security provided by a monitored CCTV system.

- 4.30 Aerial service charge relates to a digital aerial service provided to 10,163 properties. There is a contract to maintain and repair this service. The service charge contributes to a replacement fund for when these are renewed or replaced.
- 4.31 Other service charges for specific schemes include furniture costs, warden services and lifts. It is proposed that these charges increase by CPI+1% in line with other service charges.
- 4.32 Leaseholders are also charged service charges, in addition to services mentioned above there is a recharge for the management and administration functions.
- 4.33 The proposal is to increase service charges by CPI+1%. Appendix 3 shows how this will impact current charges. Customers who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will largely not be affected by this increase.
- 4.34 In response to the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022, additional services will be introduced to discharge new duties which can be recovered through the introduction of new service charges.

Garages

- 4.35 Garages are within the council's general fund property portfolio. As of October 2023, 62% of garages were rented by private home owners or by tenants with more than one garage.
- 4.36 Increased revenue from garage rental would support the general fund. Garages rented by customers that are not tenants or leaseholders will be charged a higher rate as VAT is applied as a requirement of His Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC).
- 4.37 A large proportion of garage tenants use this facility as a much cheaper alternative to storage costs. It is recommended that the weekly garage rental is increased in line with the council's fees and charges approved annual by Cabinet.

Leaseholder Management fee

- 4.38 Leaseholders are charged a management fee to cover the resource costs of running the service. This includes employee costs, training, ICT costs, management of the billing process, repairs statements, printing and postage. The charge is currently £115.66 per annum.
- 4.39 It is proposed that the leaseholder annual fee be increase by CPI+1% in 2024/25 to £124.57. The council's leaseholder charges are significantly lower than neighbouring authorities; as a comparable, Dudley MBC increased their management fee from £140.00 per annum in 2022/23 to £230.00 per annum from 2023/24 following a review of the service provision to leaseholders.
- 4.40 A full review of the leasehold management fee will be undertaken during the next 12-18 months.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 It has been recommended from April 2024 to increase rents by 7.7% for tenants within the Riverside managed PFI estate of Wednesbury. The council does have the discretion to set PFI rent. It would be unfair and inconsistent for customers in council properties if PFI tenants did not receive the same increase.
- 5.2 Increasing rents below the rate of inflation creates financial pressures for the council to deliver key services. The provision of good quality Housing and Neighbourhoods are key to improving lives and life chances for our residents. Reducing the level of income to the HRA will seriously impact our 30-year business plans and less funding for maintenance of our own stock and funding for new homes.
- 5.3 An alternative would be to increase rents by a lower percentage. The budgetary pressures from this would significantly impact our ability to deliver key services and may result in reduced services where costs can't be met through operational budgets. The challenges presented through the Consumer Regulation Act and the Building Safety Act put financial pressures on the HRA to reshape our services to meet the requirements. Appendix 4 shows the rental impact on budgets.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Rent income is a key component of the HRA finances. As a ringfenced account, all costs must be met from this revenue source. This includes all day to day running costs and any financing costs associated with capital investment.</p> <p>In order to continue the investment in the Housing stock, rent increases are inevitably required. With increases in CPI and Building Cost Indices (BCI) and the current energy crises more pressure is being put on HRA finances to continue to deliver services to tenants and continue improvements to the stock to ensure high quality homes and services are provided to tenants.</p>
	<p>Government policy allows an increase of up to CPI plus 1%, current inflation figure is 6.7% Applying rent increases lower than the CPI+1% is a risk to the Council as this results in a significant income loss to the HRA of £1.34m for every 1% reduction.</p>

<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Local housing authorities are required by s.74 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) unless the Secretary of State has consented to their not doing so. The HRA identifies major elements of housing revenue expenditure, such as maintenance, administration and contributions to capital costs, and how they are funded by rents and other income.</p> <p>S.24 of the Housing Act 1985 gives local authorities the power to make reasonable charges for the tenancy or occupation of dwellings. Rent setting must be seen in the context of the statutory duty to set a balanced HRA budget.</p> <p>The Council is required to review from time to time that the rents and service charges that it charges for the tenancy or occupation of its dwellings are fair and reasonable. The review of rents is now subject to further restrictions arising from the provisions of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. In October 2017, the Government confirmed details for future social rents and from 2020/21, providers are able to increase rents up to a limit of CPI plus 1% each year. This policy is designed to provide more certainty over rent levels.</p> <p>The Council may amend the rent for its tenants by giving at least 28-days notice. The notice period arises from s.102 (1)(b) of the Housing Act 1985 and in the terms of the Council's standard tenancy agreement.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate any risks identified up to acceptable levels once a decision is made what increases are to be applied.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>Appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate any risks identified up to acceptable levels once a decision is made what increases are to be applied.</p>

Health and Wellbeing:	There are no direct implications from this report but rent and service charge income will continue to be used to protect residents such as through the funding of support for the anti-social behaviour service, cleaning of estates, fire protection and building safety measures and CCTV.
Social Value:	There is not direct impact resulting from this report.
Climate Change:	The requirement to retro-fit properties to achieve net zero targets for our housing stock will require significant investment which the HRA currently doesn't have capacity to deliver. Any rent increases below the current levels of inflation will increase further the budget pressures on the HRA in future years putting at risk our ability to deliver on these targets.
Corporate Parenting:	The Council has a duty under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, to ensure that children leaving care and entering adulthood are not isolated and are able to participate social an economically in society. The Council provides training flats for care leavers aged 16 to 18 and access to social housing register as a care leaver of Sandwell Children's Trust aged 25 or below. Apprentice opportunities are being successfully explored within Housing and the Income Management Team have successfully appointed the first care leaver into an apprentice role.

7. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Impact of Rental Increase on Average Weekly Rents
- Appendix 2 – Impact of Rental Increase to Customers on Partial Housing Benefits
- Appendix 3 – Rental from Service charges and Impact on weekly charges
- Appendix 4 – Rental Increase and the Impact on Budgets

8. Background Papers

None.

Appendix 1 – Impact of rental increase on average weekly rents - varying property types and size

Average of Rent - 7.7% Increase

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£73.61	£64.18	£68.75	£0.00	£67.41
1	£87.95	£74.78	£81.20	£85.77	£81.82
2	£109.04	£82.40	£90.07	£97.88	£91.32
3	£110.50	£90.61	£97.42	£104.58	£104.17
4	£125.89	£0.00	£0.00	£118.20	£118.22
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£137.33	£137.33
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£128.14	£128.14
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£287.47	£287.47
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£136.05	£136.05
Average	£90.66	£80.95	£84.73	£103.82	£94.71

Impact of 7.7% increase on weekly Rent

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£5.26	£4.59	£4.92	£0.00	£4.82
1	£6.29	£5.35	£5.81	£6.13	£5.85
2	£7.80	£5.89	£6.44	£7.00	£6.53
3	£7.90	£6.48	£6.96	£7.48	£7.45
4	£9.00	£0.00	£0.00	£8.45	£8.45
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.82	£9.82
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.16	£9.16
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£20.55	£20.55
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£9.73	£9.73
Average	£6.48	£5.79	£6.06	£7.42	£6.77

Appendix 2 – Impact of Rental Increases for Customers on Partial Benefits

Impact of a 7.7% Increase

Example 1 - Customers on 20% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 80% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£4.21	£3.67	£3.93	£0.00	£3.86
1	£5.03	£4.28	£4.64	£4.91	£4.68
2	£6.24	£4.71	£5.15	£5.60	£5.22
3	£6.32	£5.18	£5.57	£5.98	£5.96
4	£7.20	£0.00	£0.00	£6.76	£6.76
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.85	£7.85
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.33	£7.33
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£16.44	£16.44
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.78	£7.78
Average	£5.19	£4.63	£4.85	£5.94	£5.42

Example 2 - Customers on 50% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pay 50% rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£2.63	£2.29	£2.46	£0.00	£2.41
1	£3.14	£2.67	£2.90	£3.07	£2.92
2	£3.90	£2.95	£3.22	£3.50	£3.26
3	£3.95	£3.24	£3.48	£3.74	£3.72
4	£4.50	£0.00	£0.00	£4.23	£4.23
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.91	£4.91
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.58	£4.58
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£10.28	£10.28
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4.86	£4.86
Average	£3.24	£2.89	£3.03	£3.71	£3.39

Example 3 - Customers on 70% Housing Benefits - Impact of a 7.7% increase in rent (pays 30% of rent)

Bedrooms	Bungalow	Flat High Rise	Flat Low Rise/Medium Rise	House	Average
0	£1.58	£1.38	£1.47	£0.00	£1.45
1	£1.89	£1.60	£1.74	£1.84	£1.75
2	£2.34	£1.77	£1.93	£2.10	£1.96
3	£2.37	£1.94	£2.09	£2.24	£2.23
4	£2.70	£0.00	£0.00	£2.54	£2.54
5	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.95	£2.95
6	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.75	£2.75
7	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£6.17	£6.17
8	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.92	£2.92
Average	£1.94	£1.74	£1.82	£2.23	£2.03

Appendix 3 - Services Charges – Income and Charges

Page 281

Income from Service Charges – Impact of Increases

Charge Description	Annual Income 2022/23	Current Income Est. (IE +11.1% Incr. Apr23)	Additional Income			
			5% Increase	7% Increase	7.7% Increase	9% Increase
Communal Cleaning	£1,290,532	£1,433,781	£71,689.07	£100,365	£110,401	£129,040
Security - CCTV/Concierge/Door entry	£1,159,765	£1,288,498	£64,424.92	£90,195	£99,214	£115,965
Aerial	£233,197	£259,082	£12,954	£18,136	£19,949	£23,317
Heating	£86,063	£95,616	£4,781	£6,693	£7,362	£8,605
Gap Service	£46,675	£51,856	£2,593	£3,630	£3,993	£4,667
Furniture	£71,043	£78,929	£3,946	£5,525	£6,078	£7,104
Willow Gardens	£95,950	£106,600	£5,330	£7,462	£8,208	£9,594
Communal Facility	£15,623	£17,357	£868	£1,215	£1,336	£1,562
Water (Walker Grange)	£9,179	£10,198	£510	£714	£785	£918
Lift Maintenance	£7,999	£8,887	£444	£622	£684	£800
Warden	£1,724	£1,915	£96	£134	£147	£172
Grounds Maintenance	£2,061	£2,290	£115	£160	£176	£206
Total	£3,019,811	£3,355,010	£167,751	£234,851	£258,336	£301,951

Average Weekly Charges – Impact of increases on weekly charges

Page 282

Average Charges	Details	Charges 2023/24	5% Increase	5% Inc. Difference	7% Increase	7% Inc. Difference	7.7% Increase	7.7% Inc. Difference	9% Increase	9% Inc. Difference
Cleaning	High rise flats	£5.36	£5.63	£0.27	£5.74	£0.38	£5.77	£0.41	£5.84	£0.48
Cleaning	Low/med rise flats	£4.83	£5.07	£0.24	£5.17	£0.34	£5.20	£0.37	£5.26	£0.43
Cleaning	Supported Accommodation	£10.33	£10.85	£0.52	£11.05	£0.72	£11.13	£0.80	£11.26	£0.93
Communal cleaning	Medium rise	£0.73	£0.77	£0.04	£0.78	£0.05	£0.79	£0.06	£0.80	£0.07
Aerial	Charge	£0.49	£0.51	£0.02	£0.52	£0.03	£0.53	£0.04	£0.53	£0.04
Furniture		£10.18	£10.69	£0.51	£10.89	£0.71	£10.96	£0.78	£11.10	£0.92
Lift	Scribbans Place	£7.94	£8.34	£0.40	£8.50	£0.56	£8.55	£0.61	£8.65	£0.71
Water	Walker Grange	£4.07	£4.27	£0.20	£4.35	£0.28	£4.38	£0.31	£4.44	£0.37
Security - CCTV		£4.27	£4.48	£0.21	£4.57	£0.30	£4.60	£0.33	£4.65	£0.38
Security - Concierge & CCTV		£9.91	£10.41	£0.50	£10.60	£0.69	£10.67	£0.76	£10.80	£0.89
Security - Door entry and CCTV		£6.23	£6.54	£0.31	£6.67	£0.44	£6.71	£0.48	£6.79	£0.56
Security - security door		£1.97	£2.07	£0.10	£2.11	£0.14	£2.12	£0.15	£2.15	£0.18
Warden	Walker Grange	£0.94	£0.99	£0.05	£1.01	£0.07	£1.01	£0.07	£1.02	£0.08
<u>Willow Gardens</u>										
Furniture		£3.14	£3.30	£0.16	£3.36	£0.22	£3.38	£0.24	£3.42	£0.28

Guttering		£0.16	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01	£0.17	£0.01
Management Fee		£8.55	£8.98	£0.43	£9.15	£0.60	£9.21	£0.66	£9.32	£0.77
Oven / Hob		£1.99	£2.09	£0.10	£2.13	£0.14	£2.14	£0.15	£2.17	£0.18
Utilities (communal)		£9.18	£9.64	£0.46	£9.82	£0.64	£9.89	£0.71	£10.01	£0.83
Windows		£0.78	£0.82	£0.04	£0.83	£0.05	£0.84	£0.06	£0.85	£0.07
Grounds		£3.71	£3.90	£0.19	£3.97	£0.26	£4.00	£0.29	£4.04	£0.33
Cleaning		£9.93	£10.43	£0.50	£10.63	£0.70	£10.69	£0.76	£10.82	£0.89
Cleaning materials		£0.89	£0.93	£0.04	£0.95	£0.06	£0.96	£0.07	£0.97	£0.08
Lift		£0.50	£0.53	£0.03	£0.54	£0.04	£0.54	£0.04	£0.55	£0.05
<u>Other service charges</u>										
Gap	Gap	£33.24	£34.90	£1.66	£35.57	£2.33	£35.80	£2.56	£36.23	£2.99
Grounds	Parkside/ Scribbans Place	£1.20	£1.26	£0.06	£1.28	£0.08	£1.29	£0.09	£1.31	£0.11
Grounds	Norma Close	£0.62	£0.65	£0.03	£0.66	£0.04	£0.67	£0.05	£0.68	£0.06
Heating	Selby House	£6.89	£7.23	£0.34	£7.37	£0.48	£7.42	£0.53	£7.51	£0.62
Heating	Selby House	£7.34	£7.71	£0.37	£7.85	£0.51	£7.91	£0.57	£8.00	£0.66
Leaseholder charges	Per annum	£115.66	£121.44	£5.78	£123.76	£8.10	£124.57	£8.91	£126.07	£10.41

Appendix 4 – Budgeted Rental Income and Impact of Increasing rents

	Annual Income 2024/25 (53 weeks)	Additional Annual Income PA (53 weeks)
Rental Income 52 weeks (2024/24 full year forecast)	£122,086,330	
6% Increase (53 weeks)	£131,900,193	£9,813,863
7% Increase (53 weeks)	£133,144,534	£11,058,204
7.7% Increase (53 weeks)	£134,015,573	£11,929,243
8% Increase (53 weeks)	£134,388,876	£12,302,546
9% Increase (53 weeks)	£135,633,217	£13,546,887



Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review

FINAL

Report v1
9 January 2024



HRA Business Plan Review

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Background	1
1.2. Factors the Sector is Facing	1
1.3. Approach.....	2
2. Business plan model	3
2.1. Introduction	3
2.2. Overview of methodology and assumptions	3
2.3. HRA Business Plan projections	6
3. Sensitivity Modelling	9
3.1. Sensitivity Modelling	9
4. Summary	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 1 Key Assumptions	12
Appendix 2 Financial Tables	13

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC, the Council) have appointed Savills to support officers in the production of the annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan model.

This builds upon the work that officers have undertaken in previous years in establishing a refreshed HRA Business Plan. However, to add value, SMBC have now adopted the Savills HRA Business Plan platform for ease of operation and scenario testing. SMBC, like many authorities, need to adopt a new approach to setting out the financial capacity and capability of the HRA to deliver on its objectives towards refurbishment, investment, and new supply. Consideration of a new approach is also consistent with the requirement for the publication of Prudential Indicators specific to the HRA following their reintroduction alongside the abolition of the debt cap.

Savills have therefore worked with officers to update the HRA Business Plan that was produced in 2022.23, in respect of projected rent increases, uplifts to repair costs, and costs of new build schemes that are currently being and scheduled to be undertaken. Officers have also provided both the short-term investments levels in the stock but longer-term estimates are purely averages of these in the absence of the ongoing stock condition survey results.

This plan is based on the draft 2024.25 budget and the following four years that form the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Given that the results of the stock condition survey will be delivered in the coming months, this plan will be refreshed to take account of this but also any other national or local policy changes.

1.2. Factors the Sector is Facing

When considering the HRA business plan and its current resources, we must be mindful of the current and future challenges that the social housing sector faces.

The following areas are not exclusive, but are the key ones that will impact upon both staffing and financial resources.

Building Safety

Since the tragic consequences of Grenfell Tower, steps have been made by Government to ensure that building and fire safety is at the forefront of social housing investment and delivery. This has increased the amount of reporting that is required and where the point of responsibility over how and what data is held. For SMBC this has meant implementing new fire safety measures, which not only adds to capital investment but requires ongoing monitoring and maintenance. Recovery for these costs is also difficult from leaseholders due to current lease arrangements. Furthermore additional revenue resource is required in relation to ensuring compliance.

Enhanced Regulation and Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act has introduced enhanced powers for the Regulator for Social Housing to monitor compliance with a refreshed set of consumer standards, and has also introduced statutory collections and reporting for Tenant Satisfaction Measures. For all local authorities with stock, Sandwell will in future be subject to an inspection by the Regulator which will provide a grading as to the compliance the Council is achieving against these standards.

1.3. Approach

This report sets out the work we have undertaken as follows:

1. The results of the latest HRA business plan model in the light of market conditions, policy initiatives and other factors.
2. Outputs from financial modelling and sensitivity testing (where appropriate) to establish alternative an alternative delivery scenario for the business plan.

2. Business plan model

2.1. Introduction

Our latest version of the HRA Business Plan model has been provided and populated in liaison with officers and forms the basis of this report.

It will continue to have revisits in respect of updates to the asset management strategy and any other amendments as further details become available from those included within this plan.

2.2. Overview of methodology and assumptions

Overall

The plan is based on the following overarching principles:

- Balanced to the 5 years (revenue) medium term financial strategy and then assumptions as to the following 25 years of projections
- Core inflation projected at 2.0% beyond 2022²⁸ thereafter with exceptions as detailed below:
- Rents increasing at CPI per annum only – a prudent assumption given recent interventions and the absence of a long-term national social rent policy
- Service charges increase in line with rents.
- Depreciation at fixed stock levels.
- Repairs increase by CPI only with adjustments to reflect
 - Stock losses through right to buy
 - Newly arising repair liabilities from new developments
 - An increase to reflect liabilities for when the PFI contract ceases in 2030.
- Management Costs increase in line with CPI with no adjustments for right to buy sales, new developments of PFI related properties. The PFI contract ceases at the end of 2030³¹ and both the government grant and contract liabilities have been excluded from the plan thereafter.
- Maintenance of the existing tenanted stock (subject to Inflation and Right to Buy sales) is modelled at a total of £900million over the 30 years from 2024²⁵.
- Provision of £103.429million new build programmes (with subsidy contributions of c£54.650million) delivering 378 homes.
- The inclusion of 34 loans directly attributable to the HRA, that are at fixed interest rates for varying periods.

The overall methodology within the plan is also founded on net rental income servicing the operational expenditure, interest charges, and where required, additional borrowing to finance investment to the stock and loan refinancing when existing loan facilities mature.

The following paragraphs provide more detail on the key elements of the plan.

Rents

The rents contained within the modelling are consistent with the current social rent policy where the increase applied to April 2024 is restricted to 7.7% (September CPI of 6.7% + 1%).

Rent levels, as an average for 2024.25, will be £93.74 per week on a 52 week basis and £130.55 for the 751 tenancies on affordable rents.

The rent policy moving forward will be consulted on by government during 2024 in respect of providing more certainty of rent increases for April 2025 and beyond. At this stage we have made the prudent assumption that rents increase as per the medium-term financial strategy for April 2025 to 2028 and beyond this will increase by CPI only.

Void rates of c1.5% and Bad Debt provision of c0.66% have been modelled throughout the plan.

Other Income

As stated the annual Government grant for the PFI scheme will conclude in 2030.31. All other income, including service charges will increase by CPI only period the medium-term financial strategy.

Management

We have made comparisons with other metropolitan (non-London) authorities for financial year 2021.22. In summary:

- SMBC Cost Per Unit 2024.25: £2,043 (Net £1,606 after service charges and other income)
- Average for peer group 2021.22: £1,320 (Net £1,033)
- Average for regional group 2021.22: £1,213 (Net £879)
- Average National position 2021.22: £1,888 (Net £1,211)

This demonstrates that SMBC's budgets for 2024.25 are higher than average benchmarks for 3 years ago. Obviously part of this will be due to inflation but also factors such as:

- PFI contractual payment
- TMO payments

In order for the medium term financial strategy to balance in each year amendments have been made to the overall management budget in respect of the savings required.

Repairs

We have made comparisons with other metropolitan (non-London) authorities for financial year 2021.22. In summary:

- SMBC Cost Per Unit 2024.25: £1,703
- Average for peer group 2021.22: £1,165
- Average for regional group 2021.22: £1,137
- Average National position 2021.22: £1,234

This demonstrates that SMBC's budgets for 2024.25 are higher than average benchmarks from 3 years ago. However the sector has since large inflationary increases with regards to repairs and also the impact of compliance, building safety and dis-repair claims is likely show that SMBC's will be more in line with average costs once our national database has been updated.

In order for the medium term financial strategy to balance in each year amendments have been made to the overall management budget in respect of the savings required.

Right to Buy sales volumes

The level of sales is modelled at 150 per annum which accounts for a stock loss of 16% over the plan period. It might be expected that SMBC will see further reductions in sale volumes on account of instability with house prices but also the availability and affordability of mortgages for prospective purchasers, but the approach taken is prudent. We have made adjustments to both rents, repairs and future investment expenditure to reflect these stock losses.

The HRA is modelled to benefit from the receipts from right to buy sales and also those ring-fenced for new delivery. This approach, will also be subject to annual review in respect of considering alternative uses.

Capital Works to Existing Properties

As already commented upon the early years capital investment in existing stock is based on the medium-term financial plan. Beyond this an average programme of £30million per annum has been modelled with allowances for inflation, stock losses but also new developments. This equates to an

average investment of c£32,136 per property over 30 years. This is lower than levels we have recently seen for other local authorities and therefore this level of investment must be viewed with caution. In addition it would not be normal to have a 'flat' annual investment expenditure.

SMBC are awaiting the results of the recently commissioned stock condition survey and this will form the basis for updating this plan.

Interest Rates

The opening debt (HRA Capital Financing Requirement or HRACFR) is estimated at £558.584million (excluding the PFI liability). It is currently financed by 34 fixed loans totalling £327.8million with varying interest rates and maturity dates. The average interest rate for these loans is c5.0%. Internal borrowing between the Council's General Fund and HRA is utilised to fund the £173.7million difference and with a lower level of interest is charged, offset by interest receivable on reserve balances. This position may well change as the Council annually reviews its treasury management strategy.

A long-term rate of 3.5% has been assumed for future borrowing and refinancing post 5 years, but rates of 5.0% reducing to 3.75% during the first 5 years of the plan have been modelled for new borrowing and refinancing of existing loans.

2.3. HRA Business Plan projections

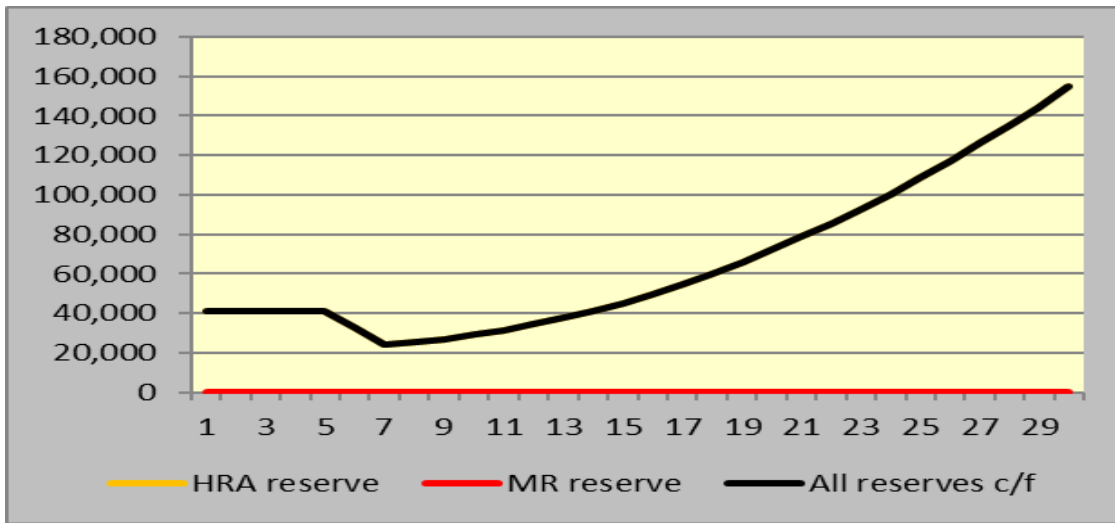
As a starting position for financial forecasting an agreed set of assumptions relating to inflation and interest rates and other cost and income adjustments are factored in. SMBC currently do not set a minimum reserve balance.

Various methodologies can be applied for arriving at a minimum balance such as:

- Equivalent to a period of gross expenditure with 1.5 months typically set as a basis
- A percentage of turnover is also adopted at other local authorities where limits are set at 10%
- Finally a straightforward allowance per unit is used.

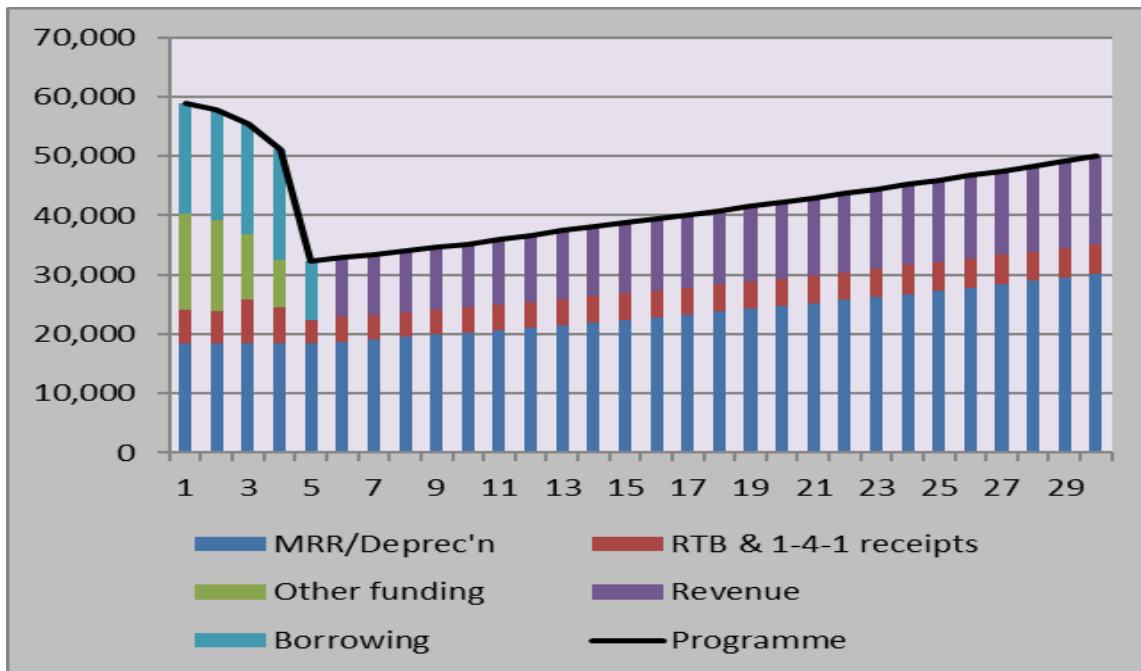
Therefore, SMBC should consider its minimum reserve levels moving forward, but we have adopted the 10% of turnover for the purposes of this plan. Year 1 of the plan relates to 2024.25.

Chart 2.1 – Projected HRA balances



The above graph demonstrates that from year 5 of the plan the reserves reduce, on account of funding the capital programme. Beyond this the HRA produces sufficient surpluses to continue to contribute towards capital expenditure and to begin to accrue reserves to the point of holding c£155million by year 30.

Chart 2.2 – Projected capital expenditure and financing



Capital expenditure is fully funded throughout the 30 years, demonstrated by the horizontal black line. There is a significant increase in projected expenditure in the early years to meet the requirements of the new build programme.

In order to part finance this, additional borrowing is required, which in turn results in additional interest charges.

Inflation has been included within the above projections, with the exception of years 1 to 4.

Chart 2.3 – Projected Capital Expenditure (By Category)

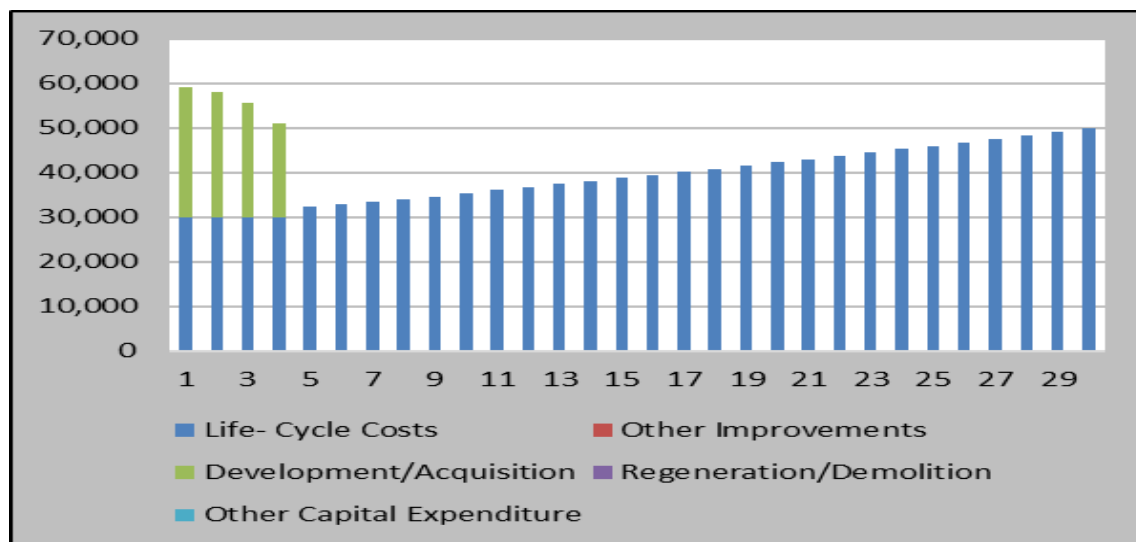
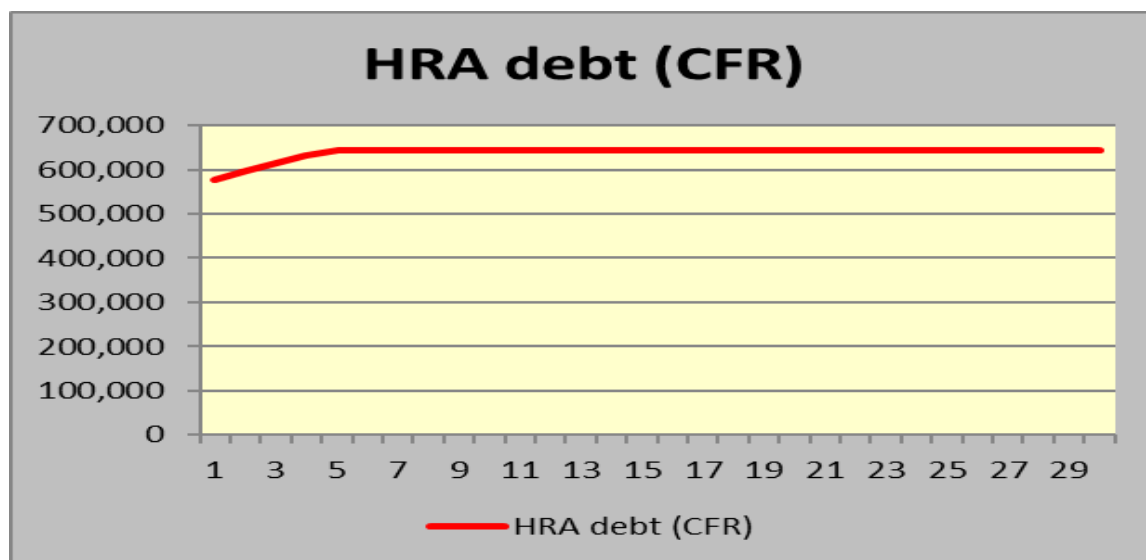


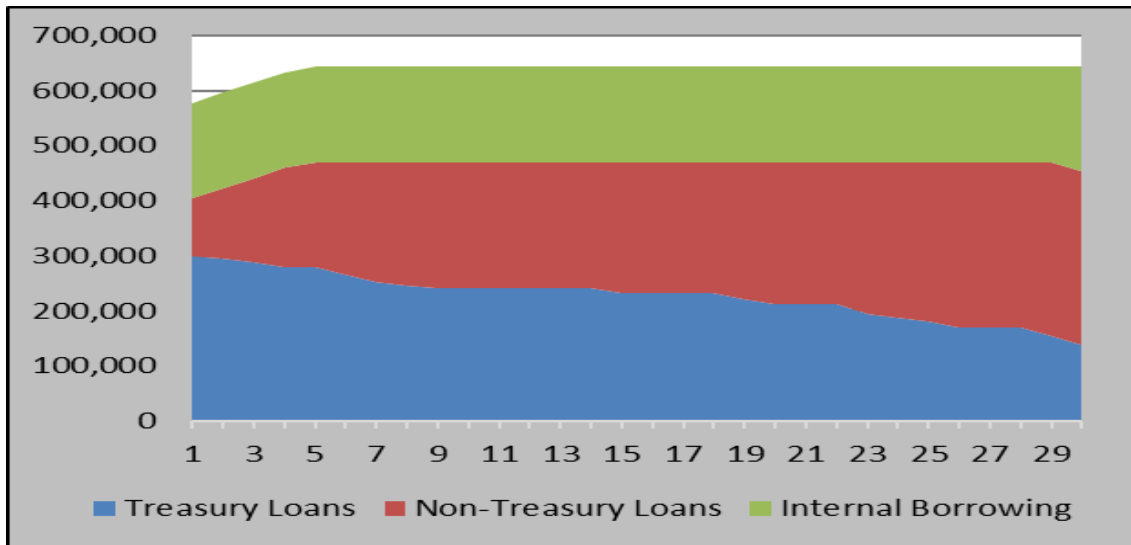
Chart 2.4 – Projected debt profile (HRACFR)



Borrowing is projected to initially peaks in year 4 at £643.0million from an opening position of £558.6million and remains at this level throughout the remainder of the plan.

All of the existing loan facilities that mature during the period of the plan are refinanced (as non-treasury loans) as demonstrated in the chart below.

Chart 2.5 – Projected Debt Analysis (HRACFR)



The blue shaded areas represent the existing loan portfolio that was allocated to the HRA in 2012 and any borrowing since then, whereas the red area represents a new pool of loans that are effectively a revolver type facility at an interest rate projected across all years at 3.5%, with the exception of higher rates in the earlier years.

3. Sensitivity Modelling

3.1. Sensitivity Modelling

We have modelled a range of scenarios that demonstrate the impact to the plan, which can be considered more externally influenced, as per the table below.

Table 3.1 -Sensitivity Table

Sensitivity £'m	HRA Bal Yr 30	Debt Yr 30
BASE	155	643
Inflation +0.5% pa	227	643
Inflation -0.5% pa	90	643
Interest -0.25% pa	183	643
Rents CPI +1% all years	977	643
Rent Freeze (Yr 2 – 2025.26)	25	713
Capital Expenditure +5%	103	645
Capital Expenditure +30%	25	953
Repairs Expenditure +5%	66	662
Right to Buys (Reduced by 50%)	283	645
Voids +0.5% Bad Debts +1%	83	647

The plan shows a varied impact to both positive and negative sensitivities. Areas of concern will more in respect of reserve balances and residual debt that the HRA has at year 30, although there is no statutory requirement for repayment, and the reduction in borrowing headroom.

4. Summary

1. The HRA business plan forecast as set out in our modelling for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough shows the current projected financial position.
2. The projections show that reserve balances begin to accrue whilst debt levels remain static. Whilst there is currently no requirement to repay debt, the accumulated reserves demonstrate the potential to do so.
3. The plan provides an initial basis on which to consider the investment plans, ahead of the results of the stock condition survey.
4. The Council can affect future operating surpluses above those modelled through effective cost management and this would increase borrowing capacity. Similarly, increases in inflation and in particular in rent inflation would add significantly to future capacity.
5. This report should provide a basis for the Council to inform its future approach to establishing a decision making framework for its HRA investment and development strategies, and also inform the work to be undertaken to adopt Prudential Indicators for the HRA. However, this needs to be considered in the context of Sandwell's treasury management strategy.

Simon Smith

Savills

January 2024

Appendix 1 Key Assumptions

	Assumption	Notes
Dwelling Rent	7.7% Increase 2024.25 then as per the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) then CPI only thereafter	
Void rates / Bad Debt Provision	1.5% / 0.66%	
Service Charges	As per rents beyond the MTFS	
Other Income	PFI contract ceasing in 2030.31 results in loss of grant	
Major Works Leaseholder Contributions	Linked to Capital Programme	
Repairs and Maintenance Costs	CPI only increases Beyond MTFP with adjustments for right to buys, new build and PFI contract	Efficiency savings modelled to balance to MTFS
Management Costs	CPI only increases beyond MTFP. Cessation of the PFI contract in 2030.31	Efficiency savings modelled to balance to MTFS
Interest rate on borrowings	Based on Existing actual rates c5.0% then long-term average of 3.5% (internal borrowing 4.5%)	
Depreciation	Straight Line Basis over life of Assets	

Capital Strategy
2023/24 to 2027/28

Introduction

1. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Capital Strategy considers the Council's long-term aspirations, corporate objectives, affordability criteria and available resources to guide capital investment decisions over the next five years. Capital expenditure relates to long-term investment in assets and differs completely from the Council's revenue budget as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council receives capital grants and external funding contributions, and can raise capital finances either by selling property and other assets that are no longer needed, or by borrowing funds to support long-term investment in assets.
2. The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in local authorities sets out the requirement that authorities should have in place a Capital Strategy and governance procedures for the setting and revising of the strategy and prudential indicators.
3. The Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that all matters required to be taken into account are reported to the decision-making body for consideration and for establishing procedures to monitor performance. Under the Prudential Code guide, a Capital Strategy needs to demonstrate that the local authority takes capital expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.
4. This version of the Capital Strategy details the forecast outturn position for 2023/24 and the currently approved Capital Programme covering the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. It also summarises future proposed, but currently unapproved, capital schemes, anticipated to commence over the same period.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28.

Current Capital Programme – General Fund

6. The current projected Capital Programme for the General Fund (GF) is shown below in summary, with the full detailed programme included as Appendix E. It includes all projects that have proceeded to approval stage, either via delegated powers or full Cabinet and Council recommendation approvals. It also includes estimates for capital grants for 2023/24 and beyond where there is an expectation that grant funding will continue, such as Highways Maintenance and School Maintenance Grants. The profiling of expenditure between financial years is as per the latest forecast, which was presented within the Council's 2023/24 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report.

Table 1 – Approved Capital Programme (GF), with Latest Forecast Profiled Expenditure

Service Area	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	329	763	0	0	0	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	0	0	0	3,807
Regeneration	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

7. As shown in Table 1, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total approved capital expenditure is £291m for the General Fund. Reprofile of expenditure between financial years is likely to continue to take place, particularly following completion of the 2023/24 capital closedown procedure when final figures are established, which may result in further reprofiling of budgets from 2023/24 into 2024/25 and beyond. Reprofile of budgets takes place when expenditure in any year is more or less than the allocated budget for the year, in which case the remaining project budget is redistributed across the remaining project period, in accordance with the estimated profile of expenditure. This is standard practice across local authority capital programmes.
8. The Council may also receive additional grant notifications throughout the financial year or if bids are submitted for additional grant funding as the year progresses. These changes will be reported as part of the quarterly reporting of Capital budget monitoring.

Future General Fund Schemes

9. The main objective for the introduction of the Capital Strategy requirement was in response to the major expansion of local authority investment activity into the purchase of non-financial investments, particularly property. The Capital Strategy, therefore, requires local authorities to assess investments over the long-term as opposed to the three years that planning was previously conducted over.
10. Table 1 summarises the current approved capital programme for the 5 years to 2027/28. The projects included within this programme have progressed through the governance process and are deemed to have been assessed fully to ascertain the outcomes of the project against criterion of risk and reward.
11. In order to comply with the requirement to consider capital expenditure over a medium to long-term period and to determine the financial sustainability of the authority, focusing on the affordability of the capital programme, the Council has compiled a planned programme of capital schemes that have been agreed in principal by Cabinet but have yet to complete the full due diligence process. These are described as “pipeline schemes” and are summarized in Table 2 below and detailed in Appendix E.

Table 2 – Capital Programme (Pipeline Schemes)

Service Area	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	0	563	0	0	0	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	0	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	0	0	0	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	0	17,225
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law & Governance	0	1,625	0	0	0	1,625
Regeneration	0	2,998	4,732	0	0	7,730
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

12. As shown above, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total capital expenditure on pipeline schemes yet to be approved is expected to be in the region of £126m for the General Fund. The total scheme costs detailed in Table 2 are initial estimates only and these are likely to change as more work is undertaken to develop robust business cases on an individual project basis including full options appraisal and detailed costings.

Capital Investment Plans

13. This Capital Strategy sits alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and feeds into the annual revenue budget as part of an integrated revenue and capital financial strategy. The ongoing implications for the revenue budget strategy are fully considered before any capital funding decisions are confirmed.

14. Sandwell Council has a range of ambitious, affordable capital investment plans designed to achieve the objectives set out in the corporate plan and 2030 Vision.

15. There are currently over 100 General Fund schemes that are included within the 5 year programme covering a wide range of developments. The main areas of investment include the following:

Towns Fund (Regeneration & Growth)

16. There are currently 15 active projects within the Towns Fund programme totaling £55m. These cover the areas of Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich. The major schemes relate to:
- Rowley Regis - Satellite Education Hub (£8.5m)
 - Smethwick - Midland Met Learning Campus (£11.3m)
 - West Bromwich – Retail Diversification Programme (£7.8m)
 - West Bromwich – Town Hall Quarter (£6.2m)

Levelling Up Partnership (Regeneration & Growth)

17. There are currently 5 projects due to start in 2024/25 totaling £20m, with the main scheme relating to the development of the Friar Park Urban Village (£11.5m).

Levelling Up Fund (Borough Economy)

18. £22m has recently been included within the programme for the development of Haden Hill Leisure Centre.

Oracle Fusion (Finance)

19. The programme includes £7.7m for the introduction of a new ERP system to transform Finance and HR support.

Highways (Borough Economy)

20. The programme includes a variety of schemes aimed at maintaining and developing the Council's Highways network. This totals £56.9m and includes the development of Birchley Island (£5.9m).

Schools (Children's Services)

21. There is a budget provision of around £50m for investment in schools over the next 5 years.

Disabled Facilities Grants (Housing & Assets)

22. £31.7m is included within the programme to provide grants to help private homeowners to adopt their properties to accommodate disabled needs.

West Bromwich Cemetery (Law & Governance)

23. The construction of a new cemetery in West Bromwich is due to be completed in 2024/25 at a cost of £3.6m.

Key (Pipeline) Projects

24. The largest value projects proposed to be added into the programme are as follows. These schemes have been agreed in principal but have yet to complete the full due diligence process:

- LUF Round 3 – Grove Lane (Regeneration and Growth): £20m
- New Archive Centre (Borough Economy): £20m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – Smethwick to Birmingham Growth Corridor (Borough Economy): £19m
- Causeway Green Primary School (Children's Services): £14m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – A461 WCB Corridor (Borough Economy): £13m
- City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements – Wednesbury to Brierly Hill Sustainable Access Measures (Borough Economy): £8m
- Sandwell Valley Master Plan (Borough Economy): £8m

Sandwell 2030 Vision

25. A continuous review of the capital programme is essential to ensure that resources are aligned to the corporate plan and 2030 Vision at all times. The 10 ambitions which make up the Sandwell 2030 Vision are listed in the table below:-

Table 3 – Sandwell 2030 Vision - Ambitions

Ambition 1	Raising Aspirations & Resilience
Ambition 2	Healthier for longer & safer
Ambition 3	Young People have skills for the future
Ambition 4	Raising the quality of Schools
Ambition 5	Lowering Crime & ASB
Ambition 6	Excellent public transport to the region & beyond
Ambition 7	Major new housing along major transport routes & employment sites
Ambition 8	Create environments in the 6 towns where people choose to live
Ambition 9	Hosting industries of the future
Ambition 10	National reputation for getting things done

26. The following sections detail how capital investment at a service level is being targeted to meet these ambitions.

Housing – Ambitions 1,2,5 & 7

27. One in 20 new council houses built in England in 2018 were built in Sandwell, and the Council plans to continue to deliver good quality, affordable housing for the people of Sandwell over

the next 5 year period using grant funding from Homes England as well as other sources of funding. The capital investment in existing stock provides the opportunity to raise standards of design, quality and sustainability across the Borough Housing and improve the quality of the neighbourhood.

28. The Council is also working on a number of energy efficiency upgrades to heating systems and boilers across council properties in order to help reduce fuel poverty across Sandwell. The HRA business plan includes £3 million annually for these improvements and a further £3 million annually for disabled adaptations to council homes.
29. This investment sits alongside a major programme of refurbishment in council housing stock. The investment recognises Sandwell's responsibility to invest in housing assets within the Borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives - this will continue to create mixed and sustainable communities and help residents maintain their independence for longer.

Schools – Ambitions 3 & 4

Primary Schools

30. Sandwell has 95 primary schools located across its 6 towns. 29 of these primary schools are now academies with 1 maintained and 1 foundation trust school scheduled to convert in this academic year. Like many parts of the country Sandwell has seen huge increases in its birth rate with Reception cohorts growing significantly. Additionally, the Council has seen increased in-year migration which has affected all primary year groups, with a levelling off experienced since School Capacity 2019, and most secondary year groups.
31. The total Reception capacity in 2010 was 4,246 with an overall primary capacity of 29,336. However, with Sandwell's pupil numbers in the primary sector increasing quickly and significantly, the total Reception capacity increased to 5,070 in September 2017 and has since reduced to the current figure of 4,950 for September 2023. This offers an overall primary capacity of 35,056 and a projected Reception surplus of 10.26%.
32. The projected overall primary surplus for September 2023 will be 4.66%. Although the cohort starting Reception in September 2017 saw the highest numbers since the mid-1970s, previous expansions meant that only an additional 3 temporary bulge expansions were required in Sandwell with one additional permanent form of entry introduced for Smethwick in 2018. A two forms of entry primary free school opened in September 2019 which has provided 420 additional places across the town of Smethwick, a town that had continued to attract considerable demand in all year groups.
33. No additional primary provision is anticipated to be required in Reception for the foreseeable future.
34. The Published Admission Numbers at 2 primary schools in Smethwick have this year been reduced by a form of entry at each school (60 places in total), and a third school in West Bromwich will reduce by a form of entry (30 places) with effect from September 2025 in response to the reducing demand for Reception places.

Secondary Schools

35. There are 22 secondary schools in Sandwell made up of 1 Voluntary Aided School, 2 Foundation Trust Schools, 18 Academies and 1 University Technology College (11-18 years). The overall secondary capacity is 24,294 and a projected year 7 surplus of 5.75%. The projected overall secondary surplus for September 2023 will be 3.40%.
36. It is projected that secondary numbers will increase by 969 across all year groups between 2023 and 2027 as larger cohorts move up from the primary sector and inward migration

continues to occur at similar levels. Based on the planned capacity for Year 7 in 2024 of 5,176, the borough wide PAN will be just sufficient to meet demand in 2024 with limited surplus.

37. Both Windsor Olympus Academy and Shireland CBSO Academy finally opened in September 2023 delivering 900, and 750 new places respectively. It has been projected that there will be a need for an additional 60 Year 7 places in Sandwell's secondary sector for the 2024/25 academic year to address local demand pressures in the Rowley Regis and Tipton areas, and in-year applications. The projections may need to revise if inward migration continues to increase at current levels.

Special Schools

38. During 2023 the Local Authority has started a major review for SEND provision, the 'Inclusion Transformation Programme' which, in part, is due to a continuing significant increase in the number of children and young people with a confirmed Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP). Over the past 2 years the total number of EHCPs has risen from 2,503 to 3,400 as at end June 2023. Such an increase has created significant pressure on the availability of suitable specialist places.
39. Two new schools, High Point Academy and Elm Tree Primary Academy have opened in the last 3 years to help with demand.
40. The Authority is supporting the expansion of The Brades Lodge to provide new places, and to further ease pressure on places, proposals are being considered to establish a new special school following an unsuccessful bid to the DfE to secure a new all through SEMH school through the Special Free School Programme.
41. There is an ongoing commitment to continue with locally based solutions such as expansion of well-established Focus Provision Units to complement mainstream special school provision.

Adult Social Care & Health – Ambition 2

42. The capital resources available to Adult Social care will be used in three main areas:
- The completion of a new £14m Social Care & Health Centre in Rowley Regis.
 - To support the ongoing development of the social care business system; and
 - To fund a range of ICT related expenditure to support mobile working, an integral element in the adult social care customer journey.

Transport – Ambitions 6,8 & 10

43. In a recent survey considering the importance of a "Connected and Accessible Sandwell", residents identified "Maintaining Roads and Pavements" as the most valued service (72% to 78% agreed) followed by "Improving Transport Options and Transport Links" (47% to 53% agreed). Capital investment in the delivery of Highway Maintenance, Highway Network Improvement and Road Safety Programmes, and Traffic Management related services, continue to generate significantly higher levels of public satisfaction than the Council's benchmarking peers.
44. The Council has approved a capital programme of maintenance work for 2023/24 and 2024/25, in line with Highway Infrastructure policy, that supplements the external capital grants from the Department for Transport (DfT) with additional capital resource. In addition to the DfT capital allocation of £5.4M, The Council has approved £3.6m of capital funding for 2023/24 and a further £4.9m in 2024/25.

45. In summer 2024 Highway Services will be reviewing the condition of Sandwell's highway infrastructure to identify capital budget requirements for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
46. Capital investments in Road Safety strategies, initiatives and programmes of work are maintaining a 22 year trend in the reduction of road casualties and continue to prioritise vulnerable groups identified within the Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030. Capital investment in traffic management and road improvement schemes support the related sustainable benefits of encouraging active travel and modal shift, improving air quality and addressing climate change.
47. The Council is leading the delivery of the Birchley Island transport scheme at Junction 2 of the M5 in Oldbury along with developing a bid for a future improvement at M5 Junction 1.
48. The Council is a partner in Wednesbury- Brierley Hill West Midlands Metro Corridor (£450million investment) which is the largest light rail project in Europe and is coming to Wednesbury in 2024 creating a strategic link to Dudley and through West Bromwich to Birmingham.
49. The Council is also committed to enabling people to get around in a healthy and sustainable way which supports its health and wellbeing and its climate change strategies. The Council aims to make sure that all public transport options available locally are as green as possible, and will lobby for clean green buses for the borough as well as delivering bus priority measures on the West Midlands Core Bus Network. The Council is bringing forward a programme of schemes to develop the West Midlands Cycle Network in Sandwell along with more local cycling facilities and improvements for pedestrians. These will be predominantly segregated links that are part of the highway network.
50. The Council will also continue to make use of its extensive canal network as a means for cycling and walking and invest in green infrastructure as part of the successful delivery of the Local Transport Plan.
51. In addition, partnership work with the Canal and River Trust will enable the Council to make the best use of the borough's waterways.

Parks and Green Spaces – Ambitions 2 & 8

52. Sandwell has 543 green spaces, covering around 24% of the borough. Green spaces include 1,200 hectares of unrestricted green space including 32 parks and gardens, 22 green corridors, 211 amenity green spaces, 10 nature reserves, and 69 play areas. The Council is proud to have 14 green flag sites and will maintain this standard, as well as improving the quality and value of all its green spaces.
53. The Council approved a new green spaces strategy in June 2022, with a set of objective for three years to improve the quality and value scores for its green spaces. The Council has now completed 202 green space improvement plans, and will be bringing to Cabinet in March 24 a safer green spaces strategy, an allotments review and strategy. The Council has also implemented education and volunteering programmes in its green spaces. The Council's revised trees strategy and planting plan was approved by Cabinet in February 23, and set out how the Council plans to meet its commitment to plant 15,000 new trees by 2030 and to manage and protect its tree stock.
54. The Council has benefited from several capital investment projects, including:
 - The completion of £5.2m of National Lottery Heritage Fund and Sandwell Council funding for heritage and landscape improvements and a new Pavilion at West Smethwick Park.
 - The start of a £2.2m Town's Fund and Sandwell Council funding for heritage and landscape improvements, and new facilities at Britannia Park due to be completed in 2024.

- A smaller capital investment into Black Patch Park from the Levelling Up Fund of £86,000 to develop a master plan and improvements.
- A new Sandwell Valley Urban Bike Track, with £600,000 from Sport England, Birmingham Council, and Sandwell Council funding due to be completed in Summer 2023.

55. Sandwell Valley is a jewel in Sandwell's Crown and is currently seeing developments in Forge Mill Farm and at Sandwell Valley Visitor Centre. The Council is currently finalising a Master Plan for Sandwell Valley to become a sub-regional visitor destination, which is due for presentation and consideration in March 2024.

Leisure Facilities – Ambitions 1,2,9 & 10

56. The Council has developed an estate of modern leisure facilities within the borough. 2023 saw the opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre as a community venue following the post-Commonwealth Games legacy works. Over the last 10 years the Council has now opened new leisure centres in Smethwick, Tipton, Oldbury, West Bromwich, and Wednesbury.
57. In 2023 the Council secured £20m funding from LUF2 to replace the ageing Haden Hill Leisure Centre. Subject to sign-off by LUF and Sport England, the centre will close in 2024 for a rebuild / refurbishment – to re-open in 2026.
58. With the opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre, Langley and Smethwick Swimming Centres closed. The long-term future of some of the older leisure sites will need to be considered as part of the Capital Strategy to 2028.

Climate Change – Ambition 8

59. Sandwell Council is now actively pursuing capital investments to deliver its climate change agenda, including Heat Networks, Heat Pump Technology and Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points.

Revenue Implications of Capital Investment

60. The council takes into consideration the ongoing revenue implications of capital investment and has a consolidated revenue and capital budget setting process. The Cabinet receives all reports and information about the council's revenue and capital strategies and expenditure plans. The merging of the two processes allows the council to fully consider the implications on revenue of any capital schemes (whether savings or increased costs) and also places it in a position to consider the impact of the Prudential Framework in the future.
61. The cost of borrowing over the medium term expressed through the Minimum Revenue Provision is fully incorporated into the revenue budget setting process to ensure prudence and affordability.
62. The appraisal forms submitted when requesting a scheme to be included within the capital programme highlights both the financing of borrowing costs that the council may need to incur in pursuing the scheme together with the ongoing revenue costs of 'running' the asset once it is operational. The inclusion of these costs allows decisions to be taken with full consideration of the impact on the revenue position of the council. The Council has a robust process in place to test and consider all capital investment proposals with the underlying requirement that all decisions taken are affordable.

Allocating Resources to Capital Projects - The Capital Appraisal Process

- 63. The Council has a comprehensive project appraisal process, based on HM Treasury's best practice principles, as a means of assessing the merits and identifying the risks of individual capital schemes and the evaluation and comparison of such schemes for selection in times of limited resources. The appraisal process considers available external funding, any funding required by the Council and the resulting revenue implications of any such Council funding.
- 64. Project appraisals are the basis for formal monitoring and reporting on any capital schemes which are approved.
- 65. The level of appraisal and the route of approval that each scheme will follow is summarised in table 3 below:

Table 3 – Capital Appraisals - Approval Process

Total Project Costs	Short Appraisal	Full Appraisal	Capital Asset Management Board Approval	S151 Approval	Cabinet Member Approval	Cabinet Approval
----------------------------	------------------------	-----------------------	--	----------------------	--------------------------------	-------------------------

Under
£0.100m

71. These reports are also presented to the Budget and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management board for consideration.
72. Project Officers are consulted monthly to ensure capital forecast expenditure is accurate. Expenditure is monitored and analysed to ensure it is in accordance with the nature of the project and can be applied to the relevant asset register.
73. Re-profiling of capital resources into future years is reflected where necessary.
74. Capital grant claims are completed in accordance with grant terms and conditions to ensure all expenditure is financed.
75. Regular Capital Asset Management Board meetings are held to ensure that the capital programme is managed effectively.
76. Capital receipts are analysed monthly to ensure that all projects are financed correctly.

PFI

77. The Council has previously pursued the use of Public Private Partnerships and Private Finance Initiatives as a means of funding the investment identified through the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme. The council will continue to consider future opportunities as they arise but is no longer actively pursuing this funding option.

Commercial Activity

78. The Council currently holds commercial properties that generate significant revenue income to the authority. At present, the authority is not actively pursuing new investment in commercial assets for the sole purpose of providing income streams to aid the future funding of services. However, any new schemes will be evaluated to ensure that Members are fully informed of the risks and rewards of such investments

Asset Management

79. Sandwell Council is committed to proactive management of its assets, as reflected in the rolling programme of investment in buildings and ICT infrastructure. A 5-year programme of refurbishment of Sandwell Council House is now complete and will now secure this key asset for the longer-term but, alongside this investment, the Council will continue to rationalize its office accommodation to reduce ongoing costs to the council as it reaps the benefits of new, more agile ways of working.
80. The next year will see the Council's biggest ever investment in its ICT infrastructure as the Council implements a major upgrade to Oracle e-business suite; delivers technology modernization programme; and continues to roll out an expanding digital offer.

Knowledge and Skills

81. Sandwell Council has built up a significant pool of internal expertise and has a well-earned reputation for delivering projects on time and within budget. However, the Council will also buy in additional capacity and expertise as required.

Delivering the Strategy

82. The Capital Programme is revised annually as part of the budget setting process, and approved by Cabinet and Council. Any significant in-year variations to the programme require Cabinet approval.

83. Performance of the Capital Programme is part of the monthly financial monitoring process.

Review

84. The Capital Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose and enables the Council to make the investments necessary to deliver its strategic aims.

Capital Financing Strategy
2023/24 to 2027/28

Introduction

1. The Capital Financing Strategy is intended to give a high-level overview of how capital expenditure within Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes will be funded.
2. The total approved Capital Programme for the General Fund is as shown in Table 1 below and for the Housing Revenue Account is as shown in Table 4 below.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Capital Financing Strategy.

Sources of Capital Funding

4. There are several sources of funding that the Council can use to finance its Capital Programme. The Current Programme is primarily funded from the following sources:
 - Capital Receipts
 - Prudential Borrowing
 - Revenue Contributions
 - Capital Grants

Capital Receipts

5. Capital Receipts come from the sale of the Council's assets. If the disposal is Housing Revenue Account land or property, then the whole receipt is not available to support the capital programme as a percentage must be paid over to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC). Where the sale of an asset leads to the requirement to repay grant, the capital receipt will be utilised for this purpose. Once this liability has been established and provided for, capital receipts will be available to support the capital programme as a corporate resource. Where the asset has been funded from prudential borrowing a review will be undertaken to determine whether the most cost-effective option is to utilise the receipt to repay debt, considering the balance sheet position of the authority.

HRA Right to Buy Receipts

6. In most cases there will be no ring fencing of capital receipts to specific projects. One exception to this is the retained Right to Buy (RTB) receipts held by the Council under the agreement signed in June 2012 and amended in June 2013. Under this agreement any retained RTB receipts, which are not used for the specific purpose of providing replacement affordable housing, must be returned to DLUHC.

Prudential Borrowing

7. The Council will investigate opportunities to resource capital projects using prudential borrowing where plans are sustainable, affordable, and prudent. Full appraisal will take place to ensure that, where appropriate, sufficient revenue returns are generated to cover the cost of borrowing.
8. Where it is considered that prudential borrowing is the appropriate method of funding, but it requires additional revenue financing, the cost will be built into the revenue budget planning process.

9. The term Prudential Borrowing above does not automatically lead to external borrowing as the Council may be able to use cash it holds in reserves and as working capital which is usually termed internal borrowing. The decision to borrow externally or to use existing cash will be made at an operational level when the relevant cash outflows take place, but over the course of a financial year as a whole, borrowing should be in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.
10. The revenue implications of Prudential Borrowing are interest costs, if external borrowing takes place, and minimum revenue provision (MRP), which is a charge to the General Fund even if the Council does not borrow externally and chooses instead to use existing cash resources.

Revenue Contributions

11. Subject to affordability, an element of the revenue budget can be set aside to fund the Capital Programme (Direct Revenue Financing). However, with increasing General Fund revenue pressures these opportunities are reducing.

Capital Grants: Government Grants

12. Capital resources from the Government can be split into two categories:
 - i). *Non-ring fenced* - resources which are delivered through grant that can be utilised on any project (albeit that there may be an expectation of use for a specific purpose). This now encompasses the vast majority of Government funding and the Council will initially allocate these resources to a general pool from which prioritised schemes can be financed.
 - ii). *Ring-fenced* - resources which are ring fenced to particular areas and therefore have restricted uses, specified by the funder.

Non-Government Contributions

13. Where there is a requirement to make an application to an external agency to receive external funding, and when appropriate to commit Council resources as matched funding to any bid for external resources, a business case should first be presented for consideration to the Capital Asset Management Board. The business case must demonstrate how the project aligns to Council's priorities and how matched funding and any revenue consequences can be managed within the context of the capital and revenue budget.

Current Capital Programme

General Fund

14. As per the Capital Strategy (Appendix G), the current projected Capital Programme for the General Fund is shown below in summary, with the full detailed programme included as Appendix E. The profiling of expenditure between financial years is as per the latest forecast, which was presented within the Council's 2023/24 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report.

Table 1 – Approved Capital Programme (General Fund), with Latest Forecast Profiled Expenditure

Service Area (General Fund)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	329	763	0	0	0	1,092
Borough Economy	25,661	19,852	26,284	8,334	8,334	88,465
Finance	9,305	2,428	1,200	1,200	1,200	15,333
Children's Services	7,732	12,300	10,000	10,000	10,000	50,032
Housing	5,512	13,716	4,800	4,800	4,800	33,628
Law & Governance	197	3,610	0	0	0	3,807
Regeneration	26,553	56,728	11,065	2,100	2,100	98,546
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

15. It is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 2 – Capital Financing (General Fund)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	49,165	93,516	46,254	21,339	21,339	231,613
Capital Receipts	0	0	2,100	2,100	2,100	6,300
Revenue Contributions	147	3,560	0	0	0	3,707
Prudential Borrowing	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total	75,289	109,397	53,349	26,434	26,434	290,903

16. As shown in Table 2, the main source of funding for the existing General Fund programme is Capital grants, which accounts for 80% of the programme funding required.
17. The second most significant funding source is borrowing, which accounts for 17% of funding required. Borrowing is required to fund all programmed expenditure that is not being funded from external funding (largely capital grants), capital receipts or revenue contributions.
18. The Council has a limited amount of capital receipts to fund the current capital programme. Capital receipts generation is dependent on the sale of assets. A prudent estimate of the value of capital receipts that may be available in future years has been included within Table 2. The corresponding values are subject to change, and will be revised as the Council's asset management strategy progresses. At present, capital receipts account for 2% of the funding of the existing programme, with a further 1% of funding coming from revenue contributions.
19. The resulting revenue impact of the prudential borrowing required to fund the existing General Fund Capital Programme is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Revenue Impact of Prudential Borrowing Required for Existing Programme

Revenue Implications	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total Over 5 Years (£000)
Prudential Borrowing Required	25,977	12,321	4,995	2,995	2,995	49,283
Total Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and	2,079	3,065	3,442	3,661	3,880	16,127

Interest Costs) of Prudential Borrowing						
---	--	--	--	--	--	--

20. All borrowing costs in 2024/25 are included within 2024/25 revenue budgets and borrowing costs in future years are incorporated into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as per Appendix A.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

21. The current projected capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account is shown below in Table 4.

Table 4 – Approved Capital Programme (HRA)

Service Area (HRA)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
New Build	36,708	28,945	27,857	25,541	21,086	140,137
Housing Improvements	56,129	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	176,129
Total	92,837	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	316,266

22. As shown in Table 4, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total approved capital expenditure is expected to be in the region of £316m, and it is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 5 – Capital Financing (HRA)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	2,190	12,287	11,306	7,000	3,966	36,749
RTB (141) Receipts	6,000	5,658	5,551	7,541	6,120	30,870
MRR	17,490	18,369	18,369	18,369	18,369	90,966
Reserves	4,200	0	0	0	0	4,200
Revenue Contributions	5,875	0	0	0	0	5,875
Capital Receipts	0	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	16,000
Borrowing	57,082	18,631	18,631	18,631	18,631	131,606
Total	92,837	58,945	57,857	55,541	51,086	316,266

23. The major sources of financing for the HRA Capital Programme are prudential borrowing and the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR).

Future General Fund (Pipeline) Schemes

24. As per the General Fund Capital Strategy (Appendix G), a summary of proposed pipeline schemes is as follows:

Table 6 – Capital Programme (Pipeline Schemes)

Service Area (General Fund)	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Adult Social Care	0	563	0	0	0	563
Borough Economy	0	20,522	37,337	39,884	0	97,743
Finance	0	1,216	0	0	0	1,216
Children's Services	0	8,155	8,135	935	0	17,225
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Law & Governance	0	1,625	0	0	0	1,625
Regeneration	0	2,998	4,732	0	0	7,730
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

25. As shown in Table 6, in the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, total capital expenditure on pipeline schemes yet to be approved is expected to be in the region of £126m for the General Fund, and it is currently proposed that this expenditure will be financed as follows:

Table 7 – Capital Financing (Pipeline Schemes)

Funding Source	2023/24 (£000)	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total (£000)
Grants	0	25,896	42,183	32,963	0	101,042
Prudential Borrowing	0	9,183	8,021	7,856	0	25,060
Capital Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revenue Contributions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	35,079	50,204	40,819	0	126,102

26. As shown in Table 7, the major sources of financing for the pipeline schemes are Capital grants (80%) and prudential borrowing (20%). No other sources of funding are likely to be available to fund these schemes. A small proportion of grant funding for the pipeline schemes has already been secured, but the majority of external funding contributions required are prospective at this time and are subject to confirmation.
27. The resulting revenue impact of the borrowing forecast to be required is shown in Table 8 below. Taking a prudent approach, estimates assume that all borrowing would be external borrowing.

Table 8 – Revenue Impact of Prudential Borrowing Required to Fund Pipeline Schemes

Revenue Implications	2024/25 (£000)	2025/26 (£000)	2026/27 (£000)	2027/28 (£000)	Total Over 4 Years (£000)
Prudential Borrowing Required	9,183	8,021	7,856	0	25,060
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2024/25 Prudential Borrowing	735	735	735	735	2,940
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2025/26 Prudential Borrowing	0	606	606	606	1,818
Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of 2026/27 Prudential Borrowing	0	0	573	573	1,146
Total Annual Revenue Impact (MRP and Interest Costs) of Prudential Borrowing	735	1,341	1,914	1,914	5,904

28. The additional revenue budget required to fund the borrowing costs from 2024/25 is considered to be affordable, taking into consideration all other revenue budget pressures forecast, and the corresponding additional revenue budget required has been incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as per Appendix A.

General Fund Total Programme

29. The existing programme, together with the pipeline schemes, gives a total programme value of £417m for the General Fund, which is scheduled in principle to be funded as follows:
- £333m is to be funded from Capital Grants (80%)
 - £74m from Borrowing (18%)
 - £6m from Capital Receipts (1%)
 - £4m from Revenue Contributions (1%)

Affordability of Borrowing

30. The revenue costs associated with the prudential borrowing required to fund the General Fund Capital Programme represented as a percentage of the Council's net revenue budget are as follows:
- 2023/24 – 4.7%
 - 2024/25 – 6.0%
 - 2025/26 – 6.3%
 - 2026/27 – 5.6%
 - 2027/28 – 5.7%
31. These percentages are well within expected tolerances and provide further assurance that the prudential borrowing required to fund the programme is at an appropriate level.

Next Steps

32. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy sets out medium and long term cash flow planning to ensure that the Council can meet its capital expenditure plans.

Investment Strategy 2024/25

Introduction

1. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Investment Strategy sits alongside the Capital Strategy and the Capital Financing Strategy and considers the non-treasury investments (industrial units and various commercial premises) that the Council holds in addition to cash investments which are discussed as part of the Treasury Management Strategy.
2. In general, non-treasury investments are held (a) to enhance and facilitate regeneration policy initiatives and (b) where this is so to ensure assets are held on a VFM basis such that suitable inflow of commercial rentals are received for the letting of such premises.

Context and Background

3. In October 2019, HM Treasury increased Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates by 1% on the back of concerns that councils were borrowing from the PWLB in order to invest in commercial investments (retail, offices, industrial parks, land etc) purely for a yield on that investment. This does not form part of this Council's operations in the past nor looking forward.
4. The 1% increase was reversed in November 2020 following the end of a consultation, and implemented new restrictions on borrowing to ensure that councils are not acquiring assets (land or buildings) primarily for yield. The Council should not have any proposals to invest primarily for yield in its Capital Programme as this would impair access to flows of capital funding from PWLB.
5. There are no proposals within the Capital Programme for acquiring new assets for yield and this is in line with relevant guidance.
6. The portfolio of investment assets was last valued at approximately £77m (source: Draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22) and for the period 2019/20 to 2021/22 has generated an average gross revenue yield of 4.6% and average net revenue yield of 3.9% per annum.

Equity Investments

7. The Council holds an equity investment in Birmingham Airport; this is a historic and long term investment undertaken with the 7 West Midlands District Councils to oversee the development of Birmingham Airport which is a major regional asset for the West Midlands conurbation. Accordingly, this investment is held as a long term policy initiative the driver of which is regenerative in character.

8. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council own 5.6% of the total Ordinary share allocation with a nominal value of 1 penny per share; this equates to a nominal value of £182,000 (i.e. the initial cost of investment). Sandwell MBC, along with the other councils in the West Midlands holds 49% of the issued Ordinary share capital for the Airport.
9. The Council also holds 11.5% of the preference shares issued to the councils at a nominal value 1 pence per share. This equates to £1.766m for Sandwell MBC.
10. The total nominal value of the share holdings in Birmingham Airport are approximately £1.95m and represents the amount of expenditure the Council incurred in purchasing this equity investment.
11. The Council is required to hold the shares at Fair Value (i.e. open market valuation basis) and independent experts are appointed through Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to conduct an annual valuation on behalf of all the councils investing in Birmingham Airport.
12. As at the end of 2019/20 the fair value of these shares equated to £17.32m which, although significantly more than the original cash cost to the Council, was a large decrease in value from the previous year's estimate of £28.41m. This reflected the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on air travel on share prices in UK airports. During 2020/21 and 2021/22 the valuation remained stable as the economy began the slow recovery post pandemic. However, as air travel restrictions were fully lifted and there has been a general return to air travel (275% increase in 2022 compared to 2021), the last formal valuation as at March 2023 has seen the fair value of Sandwell's holdings increase to £32.55m.
13. The valuation is an estimate taking into consideration market conditions and the financial status of Birmingham Airport and is required for financial reporting in accordance with financial reporting standards and is not intended to identify the amount that might be realised from a disposal of shares.

Strategy

14. In the future, the Council is clear that it will not be seeking to invest in properties for yield but will only do so where the major driver is to achieve regeneration goals and where the ownership of additional commercial assets is a by-product of such endeavour. This strategy will ensure that the Council can maintain access to PWLB borrowing in future to support capital investment across the whole Council asset base, including investment in the Housing Revenue Account.
15. As with infrastructure assets (which fall outside of this Investment Strategy) the Council will undertake a periodic and cyclical review to ensure that the policy drivers which led to the original acquisition are still current and that the commercial returns represent VFM for the Council.

Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Policy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy
2024/25

Introduction

1. This Treasury Management Strategy Statement provides a comprehensive view of the Council's treasury position and its projected Treasury and Prudential Indicators having taken into consideration the proposed capital programmes for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.
2. The statutory indicators and limits are explained and included throughout this document and are summarised at Annex 6.
3. Annexes included within this Strategy:

Annex 1	Glossary
Annex 2	Economic Background
Annex 3	Credit and Counterparty Risk Management
Annex 4	Approved Countries for Investment
Annex 5	Treasury Management Role of the Section 151 Officer
Annex 6	Summary of Treasury and Prudential Indicators

Recommendations

4. Cabinet are requested to approve the Treasury Strategy Statement for onward submission to Full Council for adoption including:
 - i) The Borrowing and Investment Strategy for 2024/25
 - ii) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2024/25
 - iii) The Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/27 summarised at Annex 6
 - iv) Expected new net borrowing of £40.4m in 2024/25

Background

5. The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the Treasury Management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low risk counterparties or instruments commensurate with the Council's low risk appetite, prioritising adequate liquidity and security of capital funds before considering investment return.
6. The second main function of the Treasury Management service is the funding of the Council's capital programme. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or value for money objectives.

7. The contribution the Treasury Management function makes to the Council is of critical importance, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.
8. CIPFA defines Treasury Management as:

“The management of the local authority’s borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”

Reporting Requirements

Capital Strategy

9. The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a capital strategy report which will provide the following:
 - i) a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and Treasury Management activity contribute to the provision of services
 - ii) an overview of how the associated risk is managed
 - iii) the implications for future financial sustainability
10. The aim of the capital strategy is to ensure that all elected members fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.
11. The capital strategy is included as a separate document within the budget report.

Treasury Management Reporting

12. Full council is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main treasury reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals:
 - i). Prudential and Treasury Indicators and Treasury Strategy (this report) – The first, and most important report is forward looking and covers:
 - a. The capital plans (including prudential indicators)
 - b. A minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time)
 - c. The Treasury Management Strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised), including treasury indicators
 - d. An Annual Investment Strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).

- ii). A Mid-Year Treasury Management report – This is primarily a progress report and will update members on the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision.
- iii). An Annual Treasury report – This is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25

13. The strategy for 2024/25 covers two main areas:

Capital Issues

- i). The capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators;
- ii). The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy.

Treasury Management Issues

- i) The current treasury position;
- ii) Treasury indicators which will limit the treasury risk and activities of the council;
- iii) Prospects for interest rates;
- iv) The borrowing strategy;
- v) Policy on borrowing in advance of need;
- vi) Debt rescheduling;
- vii) The investment strategy;
- viii) Creditworthiness policy; and
- ix) Policy on use of external service providers.

14. These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, DLUHC Investment Guidance, DLUHC MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

Training

15. The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that Elected Members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in Treasury Management. This especially applies to members responsible for scrutiny.
16. Furthermore, the Code states that they expect “all organisations to have a formal and comprehensive knowledge and skills or training policy for the effective acquisition and retention of Treasury Management knowledge and skills for those responsible for management, delivery, governance and decision making.
17. The scale and nature of this will depend on the size and complexity of the organisation’s Treasury Management needs. Organisations should consider how to assess whether Treasury Management staff and board/ council members have the required knowledge and skills to undertake their roles and whether they have been able to maintain those skills and keep them up to date.
18. As a minimum, authorities should carry out the following to monitor and review knowledge and skills:

- Record attendance at training and ensure action is taken where poor attendance is identified.
 - Prepare tailored learning plans for Treasury Management officers and board/council members.
 - Require Treasury Management officers and board/council members to undertake self-assessment against the required competencies (as set out in the schedule that may be adopted by the organisation).
 - Have regular communication with officers and board/council members, encouraging them to highlight training needs on an ongoing basis.”
19. It is anticipated that formal training will be provided to the cabinet during 2024/25 to ensure compliance with the Code’s requirements.
20. The training needs of Treasury Management officers are periodically reviewed with officers attending training sessions and economic/strategy updates throughout the year as and when they are provided by the councils treasury consultants.
21. A formal record of the training received by officers central to the Treasury function and members will be maintained by the Head of Technical Finance, Capital and Strategy.

Treasury Management Advisors

22. The council uses Link Group, Treasury Solutions as its external Treasury Management advisors. The council understands that responsibility for Treasury Management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisers.
23. The Council also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of Treasury Management services in order to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

The Capital Prudential Indicators 2024/25 – 2026/27

24. The council’s capital expenditure plans are the key driver of Treasury Management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in prudential indicators, which are designed to assist member’s overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

Capital Expenditure and Financing

25. This prudential indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle. Members are being asked to approve the capital expenditure forecasts as part of the 2024/25 Budget framework:

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total Indicator	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

26. The table below summarises how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources. Any shortfall of resources results in a funding borrowing need.

Financing of capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital receipts	1.677	6.000	9.658	11.651	13.641
Capital grants and Contributions	45.105	51.355	131.699	99.743	61.302
Major Repairs Reserve	16.834	17.490	18.089	18.000	17.950
Revenue Contributions	6.010	10.222	3.560	-	-
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
<i>Non-HRA amounts</i>	<i>19.265</i>	<i>25.977</i>	<i>21.504</i>	<i>13.016</i>	<i>10.851</i>
<i>HRA amounts</i>	<i>31.833</i>	<i>57.082</i>	<i>18.911</i>	<i>19.000</i>	<i>19.050</i>

27. Other long-term liabilities - The above financing need excludes other long-term liabilities, such as PFI and leasing arrangements that already include borrowing instruments.

The Council's Borrowing Need (the Capital Financing Requirement)

28. The second prudential indicator is the council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the council's indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any unfinanced capital expenditure as shown above will increase the CFR.
29. The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the minimum revenue provision (MRP) is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the borrowing need in line with each asset's life and so charges the General Fund budget with a notional amount which represents the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.
30. The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities such as PFI schemes and finance leases. Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the council's borrowing requirement, these types of scheme include a borrowing facility and so the council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes. The council currently has

£65.477m of such schemes within the CFR as at 31 March 2023 and is forecast to reduce to £61.569m by 31 March 2024.

31. The council is asked to approve the CFR projections below:

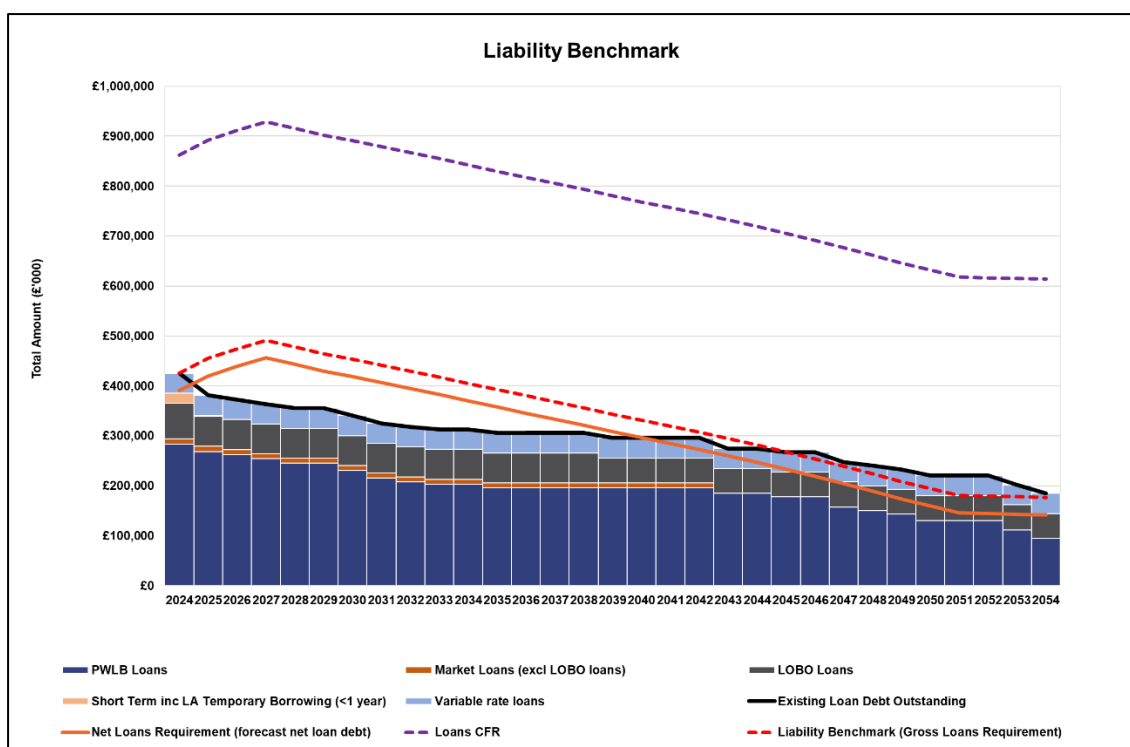
£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital Financing Requirement					
Non-HRA	334.348	350.655	357.949	355.941	350.686
Housing	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Total CFR	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Movement in CFR represented by					
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Less MRP/VRP	(6.593)	(7.151)	(11.477)	(12.211)	(12.881)
Other financing movements (i.e. PFI)	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

The revenue implications of increases in the CFR due to the additional financing requirement are included in the budget proposals for General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

Liability Benchmark

32. The council is required to estimate and measure the Liability Benchmark for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum.
33. There are four components to the Liability Benchmark: -
1. Existing loan debt outstanding: the council's existing loans that are expected to still be outstanding in future years.
 2. Loans CFR: this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.
 3. Net loans requirement: this will show the Authority's gross loan debt less Treasury Management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on its approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.
 4. Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement): this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.



Core funds and expected investment balances

34. Whilst not a formal Treasury or Prudential Indicator, it is prudent to be mindful of the cash resources available to the Council for investment purposes. This ensures that there are sufficient resources to meet expenditure needs and also to manage the Council's under-borrowing position and debt refinancing risk. The application of resources (capital receipts, reserves etc.) to either finance capital expenditure or other budget decisions to support the revenue budget will have an ongoing impact on investments unless resources are supplemented each year from new sources (asset sales etc.). Detailed below are estimates of the year-end balances for each resource and anticipated day-to-day cash flow balances.

Year End Resources £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Fund balances / reserves	243.072	243.072	228.072	218.072
Capital receipts	16.000	14.000	12.000	10.000
Grants unapplied	46.000	44.000	43.000	42.000
Provisions	17.000	17.000	18.000	18.000
Other	-	-	-	-
Total core funds	322.072	318.072	301.072	288.072
Working capital*	21.748	14.271	19.060	19.179
Under/over borrowing	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)
Expected investments	35.000	35.000	35.000	35.000

* Working capital balances shown are estimated year-end; these may be lower or higher mid-year

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement

35. Regulation 27 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003 ('the 2003 Regulations') requires local authorities to 'charge to a revenue account a minimum revenue provision (MRP) for that year'. The minimum revenue provision is an annual amount set aside from the General Fund to meet the cost of capital expenditure that has not been financed from available resources, namely: grants, developer contributions (e.g. s.106 and community infrastructure levy) revenue contributions, earmarked reserves or capital receipts.
36. MRP is sometimes referred to as the mechanism for setting aside monies to repay external borrowing. In fact, the requirement for MRP set aside applies even if the capital expenditure is being financed from the Council's own cash resources and no new external borrowing or other credit arrangement has been entered into.
37. Regulation 28 of the 2003 Regulations requires full Council to approve a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement setting out the policy for making MRP and the amount of MRP to be calculated which the Council considers to be prudent. This statement is designed to meet that requirement.
38. In setting a prudent level of MRP local authorities must "have regard" to guidance issued from time to time by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The latest version of this guidance (version four) was issued by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (as it then was) in February 2018.
39. In setting a level which the Council considers to be prudent, the Guidance states that the broad aim is to ensure that debt is repaid over a period reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits to the Council.
40. The Guidance sets out four "possible" options for calculating MRP, as set out below,

<u>Option</u>	<u>Calculation Method</u>	<u>Applies to</u>
1: Regulatory Method	Formulae set out in 2003 Regulations (later revoked)	Expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008
2: CFR Method	4% of Capital Financing Requirement	Expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008
3: Asset Life Method	Amortises MRP over the expected lift of the asset	Expenditure incurred after 1 April 2008
4: Depreciation Method	Charge MRP on the same basis as depreciation	Expenditure incurred after 1 April 2008

41. Two main variants of Option 3 are set out in the 2018 Guidance: (i) the equal instalment method and (ii) the annuity method. The annuity method weights the MRP charge towards the later part of the asset's expected useful life and is increasingly becoming the most common MRP option for local authorities.
42. The 2018 Guidance also includes specific recommendations for setting MRP in respect of finance leases, investment properties and revenue expenditure which is statutorily defines

as capital expenditure under the 2003 Regulations (also referred to as revenue expenditure funded by capital under statute or REFCUS). Examples of REFCUS include capitalised redundancy costs, loans or grants to third parties for capital purposes, and the purchase of shares in limited companies.

43. Other approaches are not ruled out however they must meet the statutory duty to make prudent MRP provision each financial year.
44. Looking forward, DLUHC is consulting on changes to the current guidance and statutory requirement for MRP. To date however no definitive announcement has been made. Members will be kept abreast of these changes, and any implications for the Council locally, as and when they take place.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement for 2024/25

45. Having regard to the current 2018 Guidance on MRP issued by DLUHC and the “options” outlined in that Guidance (the MRP Guidance), the Council is recommended to approve the following MRP Statement to take effect from 1 April 2024, on the basis that this represents “a prudent provision” in line with Regulation 28.

<u>MRP Stream</u>	<u>Policy</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Capital Expenditure incurred before 1 st April 2008	MRP will be calculated on the remaining un-financed balance at 1 April 2024 using an amortisation basis over 25 years from 2024/25 through to 2048/49 inclusive. (25 years remaining) The discount rate to be applied will be the 25 year PWLB annuity rate as at 1 April 2024.	Utilising an amortisation basis for MRP ensures that the full balance is repaid in 25 years whereas Options 1 and 2 never repay the debt as they both work on a reducing balance method. This is a deviation from Options 1 and 2 of the guidance.
All General Fund operational capital expenditure after 1 st April 2008	MRP will be calculated on an amortised basis using the expected asset lives of the assets (Option 3 asset life), subject to a maximum useful asset life of 50 years. The balance for the purpose of the MRP calculation will be remaining un-financed balance as at 1 April 2024 and amortised over the remaining life of the asset. The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year of expenditure.	The use of the annuity method complies with Option 3 as set out in para 35(b) of the MRP Guidance. The MRP Guidance does not suggest with discount rate(s) to use. By specifying the PWLB new loan annuity rate at 1 April of year of expenditure provides a clearly evidenced trail to the discount rate to be used.

<u>MRP Stream</u>	<u>Policy</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Expenditure capitalised by virtue of a capitalisation direction under section 16(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2003	<p>MRP on any expenditure capitalised by way of a direction will be charged over 20 years using the asset-life method annuity approach.</p> <p>The balance for the purpose of the MRP calculation will be remaining un-financed balance as at 1 April 2024 and amortised over the remaining balance of the 20 year period.</p> <p>The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year of expenditure.</p>	<p>The 20 year life is the period specified in para 47 of the MRP Guidance.</p> <p>The use of the annuity method complies with Option 3 as set out in para 35(b) of the MRP Guidance.</p>
MRP for service concession contracts	The amount of MRP charge will be equal to the amount by which the balance sheet liability is written down by the unitary charge (i.e. the principal element of the unitary charge)	This complies with para 43 of the MRP Guidance.
Loans to third parties	<p>MRP will be calculated on an annuity basis over the expected useful life for which the loan is to be used and adjusted by any loan principal repayments by the third party. Any residual balance will be charged to the General Fund Revenue Account, subject to the amount not being less than nil (i.e. a credit to the revenue account).</p> <p>The discount rate to be applied will be the PWLB annuity rate applicable on 1 April in the year the loan was issued.</p>	<p>This approach complies with Option 3 of the MRP Guidance and the useful life is that set out in para 47 of the MRP Guidance.</p> <p>At the time of writing the application of loan repayments from the third party can be applied to reduce the CFR and therefore the outstanding unfinanced capital expenditure which is used for MRP calculations but is subject to review as part of the consultation and therefore has potential to be changed.</p>

Asset Lives used for MRP calculations will be determined by the Council's capital team (using RICS registered valuers where appropriate) and will be consistent with the depreciation policies set out in the Council's annual Statement of Accounts. If no life can

be reasonably attributed to an asset, such as freehold land, the estimated useful life will be taken to be a maximum of 50 years. This complies with para 42 of the MRP Guidance.

MRP commencement – MRP should normally begin in the financial year following the one in which the expenditure was incurred. However, in accordance with the statutory MRP Guidance, commencement of MRP may be deferred until the financial year following the one in which the asset becomes operational. This approach complies with para 41 of the MRP Guidance.

The above MRP Policy statement is considered to represent a prudent charge to the General Fund for the provision of repayment of unfinanced capital expenditure and will ensure that all unfinanced capital expenditure is funded through the MRP charge in line with the life expectancies of the assets underpinning the CFR balance.

There is no requirement on the HRA to make an MRP charge, but there is a requirement for a charge to be made for depreciation.

West Midlands Combined Authority: Collective Investment Fund

46. The agreed Combined Authority Devolution Deal proposes the establishment of a Collective Investment Fund to support investment in the region. It is possible that some of this investment may be delivered by individual districts and funded from prudential borrowing.
47. MRP on investments in Equities will be made on an annuity profile over 20 years, as recommended by Government guidance.

Borrowing

48. The capital expenditure plans set out in Section 2 provide details of the service activity of the council. The Treasury Management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this service activity and the council's capital strategy. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the annual investment strategy.

Portfolio Position at 31 December 2023

49. The overall Treasury Management portfolio as at 31 March 2023 and for the position as 31 December 2023 are shown below for both borrowing and investments:

Treasury Portfolio	31 March 2023		31 December 2023	
	Balance £m	Interest Rate	Balance £m	Interest Rate
Treasury Investments				
Specified Investments:				
Bank/ Building Society (Fixed Rate)	10.000	4.34%	5.000	5.62%
Bank/ Building Society (Variable Rate)	0.620	1.00%	15.671	3.25%
Money Market Funds (Variable Rate)	19.834	4.16%	70.502	5.34%
Total Specified	30.454	4.16%	91.173	5.00%
Total Investments	30.454	4.16%	91.173	5.00%
Treasury External Borrowings				
Other Local Authorities	41.498	3.02%	16.498	5.37%
PWLB	295.482	5.07%	290.904	5.02%
LOBO	82.000	4.08%	72.000	4.01%
Market	10.000	4.50%	15.000	4.62%
Temporary Loans	39.933	3.16%	41.306	4.79%
Interest Free	1.895	0.00%	1.895	0.00%
Total External Debt	470.808	4.52%	437.603	4.81%
Net Debt Position	440.354		346.430	

Treasury External Borrowings (Non HRA / HRA apportionment)	31 March 2023		31 December 2023	
	Balance £m	Interest Rate	Balance £m	Interest Rate
Non-HRA	143.006	3.65%	122.752	4.65%
HRA	327.802	4.91%	314.851	4.87%
Total External Debt	470.808	4.52%	437.603	4.81%

50. The council's forward projections for borrowing are summarised below. The table shows the actual external debt, against the underlying capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement – CFR), highlighting any over or under borrowing.

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
External Debt					
Debt at 1 April	475.588	470.808	553.867	594.282	626.298
Expected change in Debt	(4.780)	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Other long-term liabilities (OLTL) at 1 April - PFI	68.525	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Expected change in OLTL	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Actual gross debt at 31 March	536.285	615.436	651.695	679.274	702.420
The Capital Financing Requirement	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Over/ (Under) Borrowing	(315.971)	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)

51. Within the range of prudential indicators, there are several key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt, does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue purposes or speculative purposes.
52. The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) confirms that the Council complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This view considers current commitments, existing plans, and the proposals in this budget report. For example, actual gross debt at 31st March 2025 (£651.7m) is expected to be less than both the CFR for the previous year (£924.3m) and the CFR at 31st March 2027 (£974.7m).

Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity

The Operational Boundary

53. The Operational Boundary is the limit beyond which external debt would not normally be expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

Operational Boundary £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	553.867	594.282	626.298	656.199
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Total	619.344	655.851	683.711	709.175

The Authorised Limit

54. The Authorised Limit for external debt is a key prudential indicator, which represents control over the maximum level of debt. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited and this limit needs to be set or revised by the full council. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term.
55. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.
56. The council is recommended to approve the following Authorised Limit:

Authorised Limit £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	901.718	931.842	952.343	967.780
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	85.477	81.569	77.413	72.976
Total	987.195	1,013.411	1,029.756	1,040.756

Prospects for Interest Rates

57. The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Authority to formulate a view on interest rates. Link provided the following forecasts on 07 November 2023. These are forecasts for Bank Rate, average earnings and PWLB certainty rates, gilt yields plus 80 basis points (0.80%)

Link Group Interest Rate View		07.11.23											
	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.40	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.50	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.00	4.00	4.00
50 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80

Additional notes by Link on this forecast table: --

58. Our central forecast for interest rates was previously updated on 25 September and reflected a view that the MPC would be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least H2 2024. We expect rate cuts to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move, and that there is a likelihood of the overall economy enduring at least a mild recession over the coming months, although most recent GDP releases have surprised with their on-going robustness.
59. Naturally, timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.
60. In the upcoming months, our forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.
61. On the positive side, consumers are still anticipated to be sitting on some excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing somewhat better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. However, as noted previously, most of those excess savings are held by more affluent households whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy and rent/mortgage payments.

PWLB Rates

62. Gilt yield curve movements have broadened. The short part of the curve has not moved far but the longer-end continues to reflect inflation concerns. At the time of writing there is 60 basis points difference between the 5 and 50 year parts of the curve.

The balance of risks to the UK economy

63. The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is to the downside mostly due to:

- i) Labour and supply shortages depressing economic activity
- ii) Perception that the Bank of England has increased Bank Rate too fast and too far which would subsequently bring about a deeper and longer UK recession
- iii) UK/ EU trade arrangements having a major impact on trade flows due to complications or lack of co-operation in fixing and remaining significant issues.

64. However, the possible upside risks to current forecasts could be:

- i) A view that the Bank of England increases have been too timid and inflationary pressures remain for a longer period.
- ii) A weakening of the pound due to a lack of confidence in the UK Governments fiscal policies.

Borrowing and Investment Advice

65. The long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate has increased from 2.75% to 3% and reflects Capital Economics' research that suggests AI and general improvements in productivity will be supportive of a higher neutral interest rate. As all PWLB certainty rates are currently significantly above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context. Overall, better value can generally be obtained at the shorter end of the curve and short-dated fixed LA to LA monies should be considered. Temporary borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come but may prove the best option whilst the market continues to wait for inflation, and therein gilt yields, to drop back later in 2024. Target borrowing rates are set two years forward (as rates are expected to fall back) and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out below:

PWLB debt	Current borrowing rate as at 6 Nov 23 p.m.	Target borrowing rate (from Q3 2025)	Target borrowing rate previous (end of Q3 2025)
5 years	5.02%	3.80%	3.90%
10 years	5.15%	3.80%	3.80%
25 years	5.61%	4.20%	4.10%
50 years	5.38%	4.00%	3.90%

66. The suggested budgeted earnings rates for investments up to about three months' duration in each financial year are rounded to the nearest 10bps and set out below. You will note that investment earnings have been revised somewhat higher for all years from 2025/26 as Bank Rate remains higher for longer.

Average earnings in each year	Now	Previously
2023/24 (residual)	5.30%	5.30%
2024/25	4.70%	4.70%
2025/26	3.20%	3.00%
2026/27	3.00%	2.80%
2027/28	3.25%	3.05%
Years 6 to 10	3.25%	3.05%
Years 10+	3.25%	3.05%

Borrowing Strategy

67. The Council is currently maintaining an under-borrowed position. This means that the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy
68. Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2024/25 treasury operations. The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances:
- i) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a sharp FALL in borrowing rates, then borrowing will be postponed.
 - ii) If it was felt that there was a significant risk of a much sharper RISE in borrowing rates than that currently forecast, fixed rate funding will be drawn whilst interest rates are lower than they are projected to be in the next few years
69. Any decisions will be reported to the appropriate decision making body at the next available opportunity.
70. Despite the above, it is highly likely that there will be a requirement to take loan debt during 2024/25 to cover capital financing needs and cash flow requirements. Therefore the strategy in this instance would be to acquire short dated borrowing due to the borrowing rates expected to be temporarily elevated in the short term. As borrowing rates decrease, and as these loans mature, they would be replaced with longer dated debt at more affordable levels.

Policy on Borrowing In Advance of Need

71. The council will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Levels of short-term cash based investments are generally low and expected to remain so during 2024/25. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Finance Requirement estimates and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the council can ensure the security of such funds.
72. Borrowing in advance will be made within the constraints that it will be limited to no more than 20% of the expected increase in borrowing need (CFR) over a three-year planning period.
73. Risks associated with any borrowing in advance activity will be subject to prior appraisal and subsequent reporting through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

Debt Rescheduling

74. Rescheduling of current borrowing in our debt portfolio is unlikely to occur as there is still a large difference between premature redemption rates and new borrowing rates.
75. If rescheduling was done, it will be reported to the council at the earliest meeting following its action.

New Financial Institutions (as a source of borrowing or types of borrowing)

76. Currently the PWLB Certainty Rate is set at gilts + 80 basis points for both HRA and non-HRA borrowing however, consideration may still need to be given to sourcing funding from the following sources for the following reasons:
 - i) Local authorities (primarily shorter dated maturities out to 3 years or so – still cheaper than the certainty rate).
 - ii) Financial institutions (primarily insurance companies and pension funds but also some banks, out of forward dates where the objective is to avoid “cost of carry” or to achieve refinancing certainty over the next few years)
77. Our advisors will keep us informed as to the relative merits of each of these alternative funding sources.

Annual Investment Strategy

Investment policy – management of risk

78. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments, (as managed by the Treasury Management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets, are covered in the Investment Strategy, (a separate report).
79. The council’s investment policy has regard to the following: -
 - i) DLUHC’s Guidance on Local Government Investments (“the Guidance”)

- ii) CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 (“the Code”)
 - iii) CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021
80. The Council’s investment priorities will be security first, portfolio liquidity second and then yield (return). The council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the council’s risk appetite.
81. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to maintain a degree of liquidity to cover cash flow needs but to also consider “laddering” investments for periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, whilst investment rates remain elevated, as well as wider range fund options.
82. The above guidance from the DLUHC and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. This council has adopted a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means: -
- i). Minimum acceptable credit criteria are applied to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.
 - ii). Other information: ratings will not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution; it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To achieve this consideration the council will engage with its advisors to maintain a monitor on market pricing such as “credit default swaps” and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.
 - iii). Other information sources used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.
 - iv) This Council has defined the list of types of investment instruments that the Treasury Management team are authorised to use. There are two lists in Annex 3 under the categories of ‘specified’ and ‘non-specified’ investments.
 - Specified investments are those with a high level of credit quality and subject to a maturity limit of one year or have less than a year left to run to maturity, if originally they were classified as being non-specified investments solely due to the maturity period exceeding one year.
 - Non-specified investments are those with less high credit quality, may be for periods in excess of one year, and/or are more complex instruments which require greater consideration by members and officers before being authorised for use.
 - Non-specified investments limit. The council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure to non-specified investments as being 30% of the total investment portfolio.

- Lending limits, (amounts and maturity), for each counterparty will be set through applying the matrix table in paragraph 89.
- Transaction limits are set for each type of investment in paragraph 89.
- This council will set a limit for the amount of its investments which are invested for longer than 365 days, (see paragraph 102).
- Investments will only be placed with counterparties from countries with a specified minimum sovereign rating, (see paragraph 93).
- This council has engaged external advisors, (see paragraph 22), to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and yield, given the risk appetite of this authority in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.
- All investments will be denominated in sterling.
- As a result of the change in accounting standards under IFRS 9, this authority will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the General Fund. (In November 2018, the MHCLG, concluded a consultation for a temporary override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by announcing a statutory override to delay implementation of IFRS 9 for five years ending 31 March 2023 which has subsequently been extended for a further two years to 31 March 2025.
- If considering 'Property Funds' or other 'Diversified Income Funds' in the future, the Council may look to use externally appointed fund managers.

83. However, this Council will also pursue value for money in Treasury Management and will monitor the yield from investment income against appropriate benchmarks for investment performance, (see paragraph 104). Regular monitoring of investment performance will be carried out during the year.

Creditworthiness policy

84. This Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by the Link Group. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays: -

- i) "watches" and "outlooks" from credit rating agencies;
- ii) CDS spreads that may give early warning of changes in credit ratings;
- iii) sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

85. This modelling approach combines credit ratings, and any assigned Watches and Outlooks, in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads. The end-product of this is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Authority to determine the suggested duration for investments. The Authority will, therefore, use counterparties within the following durational bands:

Yellow	5 years*
Dark pink	5 years for Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25
Light pink	5 years for Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.5
Purple	2 years
Blue	1 year (only applies to nationalised or semi nationalised UK Banks)
Orange	1 year
Red	6 months
Green	100 days
No colour	not to be used

86. The Link creditworthiness service uses a wider array of information other than just primary ratings. Furthermore, by using a risk weighted scoring system, it does not give undue preponderance to just one agency's ratings.
87. Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the council uses will be a short-term rating (Fitch or equivalents) of F1 and a long-term rating of A-. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one rating agency are marginally lower than these ratings but may still be used. In these instances, consideration will be given to the whole range of ratings available, or other topical market information, to support their use.
88. All credit ratings will be monitored weekly as a minimum. However, the council is alerted to changes to ratings of all three agencies through its use of the Link creditworthiness service as and when they occur so adjustments to the counterparty list would be made at each event.
- if a downgrade results in the counterparty / investment scheme no longer meeting the council's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.
 - in addition to the use of credit ratings the council will be advised of information in movements in Credit Default Swap spreads against the iTraxx European Senior Financials benchmark and other market data on a daily basis via its Passport website, provided exclusively to it by Link. Extreme market movements may result in downgrade of an institution or removal from the council's lending list.
89. Sole reliance will not be placed on the use of this external service. In addition, this council will also use market data and market information, as well as information on any external support for banks to help support its decision-making process.

Y	Pi1	Pi2	P	B	O	R	G	N/C
1	1.25	1.5	2	3	4	5	6	7
Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 2yrs	Up to 1yr	Up to 1yr	Up to 6mths	Up to 100days	No Colour

	Colour (and long-term rating where applicable)	Institution Financial Limit	Time Limit
Banks/ Building Societies *	Yellow	£20m	5 yrs
Banks/ Building Societies	Purple	£20m	2 yrs
Banks/ Building Societies	Orange	£20m	1 yr
Banks – part nationalised	Blue	£20m	1 yr
Banks/ Building Societies	Red	£15m	6 mths
Banks/ Building Societies	Green	£10m	100 days
Banks/ Building Societies	No Colour	Not to be used	
Limit 3 category – Authority’s banker (where “No Colour”)	n/a	£5m	1 day
DMADF	UK sovereign rating	unlimited	6 months
Local authorities	n/a	£10m	5 yrs
Housing associations	Colour bands	£5m	As per colour band
	Fund rating**	Institution Financial Limit	Time Limit
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	£20m	liquid
Money Market Funds LVNAV	AAA	£20m	liquid
Money Market Funds VNAV	AAA	£10m	liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25	Dark Pink / AAA	£10m	liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.50	Light Pink / AAA	£10m	liquid

* *The yellow colour category is for UK Government debt, or its equivalent, money market funds and collateralised deposits where the collateral is UK Government debt.*

** *“Fund ratings” are different to individual counterparty ratings, coming under either specific “MMF” or “Band Fund” rating criteria.*

90. In addition to the above counterparty selection criteria where credit ratings have been issued, the council will also include a number of other non-rated organisations where investments may be placed for service or strategic purposes. These will be classified as Non-Specified investments and details of those counterparties are included in Annex 3 to this report.
91. Creditworthiness - Significant levels of downgrades to Short and Long-Term credit ratings have not materialised since the crisis in March 2020. In the main, where they did change, any alterations were limited to Outlooks. Nonetheless, when setting minimum sovereign debt ratings this Council will not set a minimum for the UK.

92. CDS prices - Although bank CDS prices, (these are market indicators of credit risk), spiked upwards during the days of the Truss/Kwarteng government, they have returned to more average levels since then. However, sentiment can easily shift, so it will remain important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances. Link monitor CDS prices as part of their creditworthiness service to local authorities and the Council has access to this information via its Link-provided Passport portal.

Limits

93. Due care will be taken to consider the exposure of the council's total investment portfolio to non-specified investments, countries, groups and sectors.
- i) Non-specified Treasury Management investment limit. The council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure of Treasury Management investments to non-specified Treasury Management investments as being 30% of the total Treasury Management investment portfolio.
 - ii) Country limit. The council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from the UK and from countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AA- from Fitch (*or equivalent*). The list of countries that qualify using this credit criteria are shown in Annex 4. This list will be added to, or deducted from, by officers should ratings change in accordance with this policy.

Other limits. In addition: -

- no more than £10m will be placed with any non-UK country at any time;
- limits in place above will apply to a group of companies/institutions;
- sector limits will be monitored regularly for appropriateness.

Investment Strategy

In-house funds

94. Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e. rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. The current shape of the yield curve suggests that is the case at present, but there is the prospect of Bank Rate having peaking in the second half of 2023 and possibly reducing as early as the second half of 2024 so an agile investment strategy would be appropriate to optimise returns.
95. Accordingly, while most cash balances are required in order to manage the ups and downs of cash flow, where cash sums can be identified that could be invested for longer periods, the value to be obtained from longer-term investments will be carefully assessed.

Investment returns expectations

96. The current forecast shown in paragraph 57 includes a forecast for Bank Rate to have peaked at 5.25% in Q4 2023.

97. The suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows:

Average earnings in each year	
2023/24 (residual)	5.30%
2024/25	4.70%
2025/26	3.20%
2026/27	3.00%
2027/28	3.25%
Years 6 to 10	3.25%
Years 10+	3.25%

98. As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts.
99. For its cash flow generated balances, the council will seek to utilise its business reserve instant access and notice accounts, money market funds and short-dated deposits, (overnight to 100 days), in order to benefit from the compounding of interest.

WM Combined Authority

100. The council will be prepared to lend to the Combined Authority. Such lending may be as part of arrangements agreed with the Combined Authority and other constituent authorities.

Investment treasury indicator and limit

101. These are the total principal funds invested for greater than 365 days. These limits are set with regard to the council's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment and are based on the availability of funds after each year-end.
102. The council is asked to approve the treasury indicator and limit:

Upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 365 days			
£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Principal sums invested for longer than 365 days	15.000	15.000	15.000

103. As at 31 December 2023 no treasury investments were for periods greater than 365 days.

Investment Performance

104. This council will use an investment benchmark to assess the investment performance of its investment portfolio of the 7 day compounded SONIA.

End of year investment report

105. At the end of the financial year, the council will report on its investment activity as part of its Annual Treasury Report.

Money Market Funds

106. A large proportion of the council's funds are currently managed on a discretionary/pooled basis by the following institutions:
- Aberdeen Standard Liquidity Fund (Lux) – Sterling Fund (Class 1)
 - Aviva Investors Sterling Liquidity Fund (Class 3)
 - BlackRock Institutional Sterling Liquidity Fund (Heritage)
 - BNP Paribas Insticash Sterling (Institutional)
 - CCLA – The Public Sector Deposit Fund (Class 4)
 - Federated Short-Term Sterling Prime Fund (Class 3)
 - Fidelity Institutional Liquidity Sterling Fund (Class A)
 - Invesco Sterling Liquidity Portfolio (Institutional)
 - Goldman Sachs Sterling Liquid Reserves (Institutional)
107. The Council fully appreciates the importance of monitoring the activity and resultant performance of its appointed external fund managers. In order to aid this assessment, the council is provided with a suite of regular reporting from its managers via both the Institutional Cash Distributions (ICD) Portal and the fund managers themselves.

The Capital Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2024/25 – 2026/27

108. The council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of Treasury Management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

Affordability Prudential Indicators

109. The previous sections cover the overall capital and control of borrowing prudential indicators, but within this framework prudential indicators are required to assess the affordability of the capital investment plans. These provide an indication of the impact of the capital investment plans on the councils overall finances. The council is asked to approve the following indicators:

Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

110. This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing and other long-term obligation costs net of earnings from investment income) against the net revenue stream (council tax, business rates and HRA rent/ service charge income)

%	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	2.7%	2.4%	3.1%	3.3%	3.3%
HRA	17.6%	20.6%	18.5%	18.9%	18.9%
Total	7.0%	7.5%	7.7%	7.9%	8.0%

111. The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in this budget report.

HRA Ratios

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
HRA CFR £m	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Number of HRA dwellings	28,139	28,006	28,030	27,989	27,889
CFR per dwelling £	18,405	20,481	21,088	21,739	22,374
HRA debt charges £m	20.451	25.695	26.500	27.400	28.300
Number of HRA dwellings	28,139	28,006	28,030	27,989	27,889
Debt cost per dwelling £	727	917	945	979	1,015

Maturity Structure of Borrowing

112. Maturity structure of borrowing. These gross limits are set to reduce the council's exposure to large fixed rate sums falling due to refinancing and are required for upper and lower limits.
113. The council is asked to approve the following treasury indicators and limits:

Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2024/25		
	Lower	Upper
Under 12 months	0%	40%
12 months to 2 years	0%	30%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%
5 years to 10 years	0%	25%
10 years to 20 years	0%	30%
20 years to 30 years	0%	40%
30 years to 40 years	0%	50%
40 years to 50 years	0%	70%
50 years plus	0%	90%

114. The limits for under 12 months and up to 2 years have been increased from 2023/24 limits to allow for short term fixed rate debt to be taken during this current period of high interest borrowing rates. This will allow the Council to refinance for longer periods (subject to interest rates having fallen to acceptable levels) at the time of maturity.

Glossary

The following list is to assist members in the terminology and acronyms referred to within this report.

Authorised Limit	-	This is the statutory borrowing limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. Central Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.
Capital Financing Requirement	CFR	Amounts of historic capital spend funded through borrowing that has yet to be charged to revenue through either a Minimum/ Voluntary Revenue Provision or by set aside of capital receipts.
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy	CIPFA	Accountancy body dedicated to public financial management and is responsible for setting of accounting standards for local authorities.
Investment Counterparty	-	The organisations responsible for repaying the councils investment upon maturity and for making interest payments
Credit Default Swap	CDS	A specific kind of counterparty agreement which allows the transfer of third party credit risk from one party to the other. One party in the swap is a lender and faces credit risk from a third party, and the counterparty in the credit default swap agrees to insure this risk in exchange for regular periodic payments (essentially an insurance premium). If the third party defaults, the party providing insurance will have to purchase from the insured party the defaulted asset. In turn, the insurer pays the insured the remaining interest on the debt, as well as the principal.
Credit Rating	-	This is a scoring system that rating agencies issue organisations with, to determine how credit worthy they are with AAA being the highest rating.
Internal Borrowing	-	Amounts of Capital Financing Requirement that have not been funded by actual external borrowing (e.g. PWLB) but through temporary use of cash resources thereby reducing investment income potential offset by savings in external debt interest.

Lenders Option Borrowers Option	LOBO	A form of loan which has a clause where the lender can invoke a change in interest rate at fixed points (lenders option). The borrower (i.e. the council) can then choose to exercise their option and repay the loan without penalty if it is determined that the change in rate is not in the council's interest (borrowers option).
Minimum Revenue Provision	MRP	A statutory charge to the General Fund to set funds aside for repayment of capital expenditure not yet funded from revenue or capital resources (i.e. historic expenditure funded by borrowing)
Monetary Policy Committee	MPC	Interest rates are set by the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee. The MPC sets an interest rate it judges will enable the inflation target to be met. Their primary target (as set by the Government) is to keep inflation at or around 2%.
Money Market Fund	MMF	A pooled investment vehicle (typically AAA rated) for placement of liquid investments. It is managed by external fund managers and is usually instant access.
Operational Boundary	-	The expected level of external debt the council is expected to hold each year.
Other Long Term Liabilities	OLTL	Outstanding amounts of finance relating to finance leases or PFI contracts.
Public Works Loans Board	PWLB	Branch of HM Treasury responsible for lending to local authorities.
Sterling Overnight Index Average	SONIA	Interest rate based on actual transactions and reflects the average of the interest rates that banks pay to borrow sterling overnight from other financial institutions and other institutional investors.
Working Capital		Cash and other liquid assets needed to finance the everyday running of a business such as the payment of salaries and purchases.
Yield		The annual rate of return on an investment, expressed as a percentage.

Economic Background

The first half of 2023/24 saw:

- Interest rates rise by a further 100bps, taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.
- Short, medium and long-dated gilts remain elevated as inflation continually surprised to the upside.
- CPI inflation falling from 8.7% in April to 6.7% in September, its lowest rate since February 2022, but still the highest in the G7.
- Core CPI inflation declining to 6.1% in September from 7.1% in April and May, a then 31 years high.
- A cooling in labour market conditions, but no evidence yet that it has led to an easing in wage growth (as the 3myy growth of average earnings rose by 7.8% for the period June to August, excluding bonuses).

The registering of 0% GDP for Q3 suggests that underlying growth has lost momentum since earlier in the year. Some of the weakness in July was due to there being almost twice as many working days lost to strikes in July (281,000) than in June (160,000). But with output falling in 10 out of the 17 sectors, there is an air of underlying weakness.

The fall in the composite Purchasing Managers Index from 48.6 in August to 46.7 in September left it at its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns reduced activity in January 2021. At face value, it is consistent with the 0% q/q rise in real GDP in the period July to September, being followed by a contraction in the next couple of quarters.

The 0.4% m/m rebound in retail sales volumes in August is not as good as it looks as it partly reflected a pickup in sales after the unusually wet weather in July. Sales volumes in August were 0.2% below their level in May, suggesting much of the resilience in retail activity in the first half of the year has faded.

As the growing drag from higher interest rates intensifies over the next six months, we think the economy will continue to lose momentum and soon fall into a mild recession. Strong labour demand, fast wage growth and government handouts have all supported household incomes over the past year. And with CPI inflation past its peak and expected to decline further, the economy has got through the cost-of-living crisis without recession. But even though the worst of the falls in real household disposable incomes are behind us, the phasing out of financial support packages provided by the government during the energy crisis means real incomes are unlikely to grow strongly. Higher interest rates will soon bite harder too. We expect the Bank of England to keep interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024. Mortgage rates are likely to stay above 5.0% for around a year.

The tightness of the labour market continued to ease, with employment in the three months to July falling by 207,000. The further decline in the number of job vacancies from 1.017m in July to 0.989m in August suggests that the labour market has loosened a bit further since July. That is the first time it has fallen below 1m since July 2021. At 3.0% in July, and likely to have fallen to 2.9% in August, the job vacancy rate is getting closer to 2.5%, which would be consistent with slower wage growth. Meanwhile, the 48,000 decline in the supply of workers in the three months to July offset some of the loosening in the tightness of the labour market. That was due to a 63,000 increase in inactivity in the three months to July as more people left the labour market due to long term sickness or to enter education. The supply of labour is still 0.3% below its pre-pandemic February 2020 level.

But the cooling in labour market conditions still has not fed through to an easing in wage growth. The headline 3my rate rose 7.8% for the period June to August, which meant UK wage growth remains much faster than in the US and in the Euro-zone. Moreover, while the Bank of England's closely watched measure of regular annual average total pay growth for the private sector was 7.1% in June to August 2023, for the public sector this was 12.5% and is the highest total pay annual growth rate since comparable records began in 2001. However, this is affected by the NHS and civil service one-off non-consolidated payments made in June, July and August 2023. The Bank of England's prediction was for private sector wage growth to fall to 6.9% in September.

CPI inflation declined from 6.8% in July to 6.7% in August and September, the lowest rate since February 2022. The biggest positive surprise was the drop in core CPI inflation, which declined from 6.9% to 6.1%. That reverses all the rise since March.

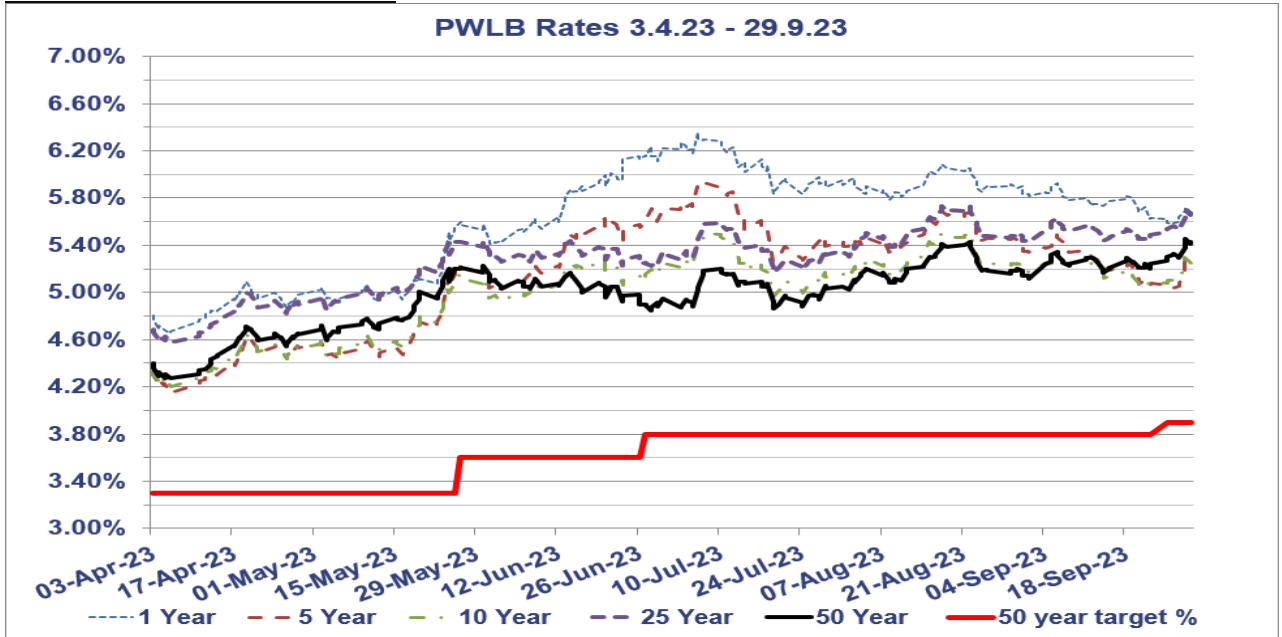
In its latest monetary policy meeting on 06 November, the Bank of England left interest rates unchanged at 5.25%. The vote to keep rates on hold was a split vote, 6-3. It is clear that some members of the MPC are still concerned about the stickiness of inflation.

Like the US Fed, the Bank of England wants the markets to believe in the higher for longer narrative. In terms of messaging, the Bank once again said that "further tightening in monetary policy would be required if there were evidence of more persistent inflationary pressures", citing the rise in global bond yields and the upside risks to inflation from "energy prices given events in the Middle East". So, like the Fed, the Bank is keeping the door open to the possibility of further rate hikes. However, it also repeated the phrase that policy will be "sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long" and that the "MPC's projections indicate that monetary policy is likely to need to be restrictive for an extended period of time". Indeed, Governor Bailey was at pains in his press conference to drum home to markets that the Bank means business in squeezing inflation out of the economy.

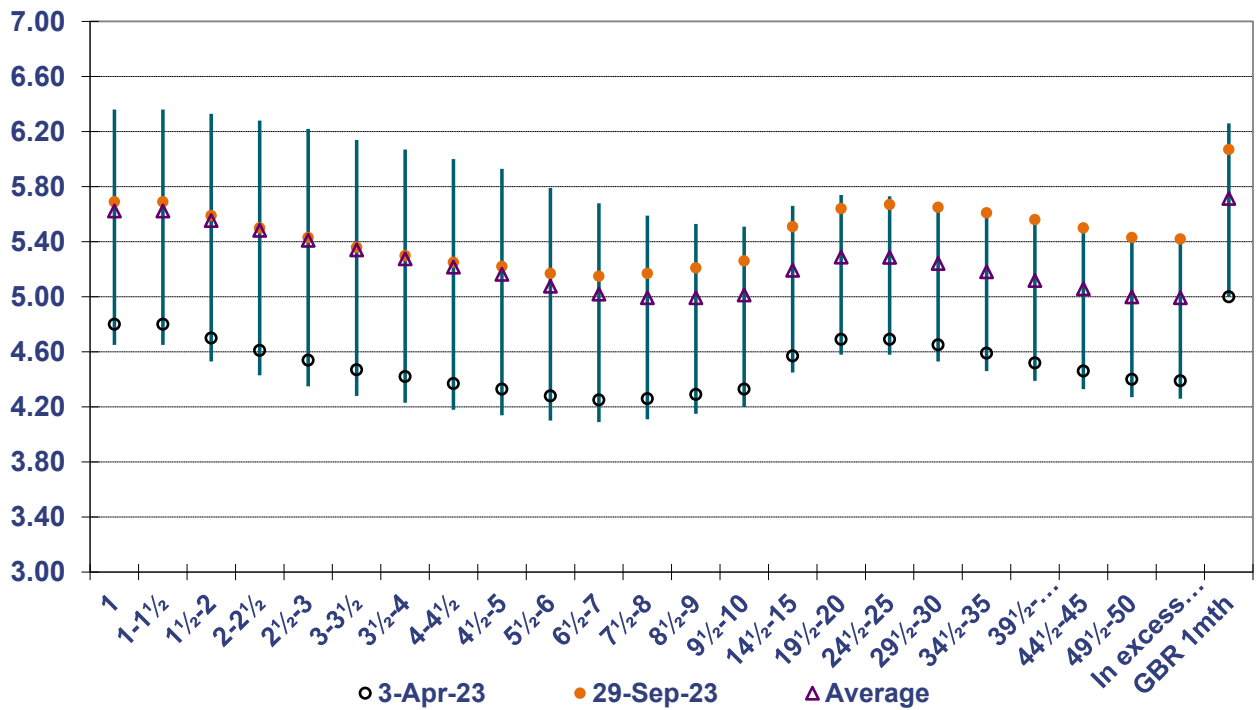
This narrative makes sense as the Bank of England does not want the markets to decide that a peak in rates will be soon followed by rate cuts, which would loosen financial conditions and undermine its attempts to quash inflation. The language also gives the Bank of England the flexibility to respond to new developments. A rebound in services inflation, another surge in wage growth and/or a further leap in oil prices could conceivably force it to raise rates in the future.

In the table below, the rise in gilt yields across the curve as a whole in 2023/24, and therein PWLB rates, is clear to see.

PWLB RATES 01.04.23 - 29.09.23



PWLB Certainty Rate Variations 3.4.23 to 29.9.23



HIGH/LOW/AVERAGE PWLB RATES FOR 01.04.23 – 29.09.23

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
Low	4.65%	4.14%	4.20%	4.58%	4.27%
Date	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	06/04/2023	05/04/2023
High	6.36%	5.93%	5.51%	5.73%	5.45%
Date	06/07/2023	07/07/2023	22/08/2023	17/08/2023	28/09/2023
Average	5.62%	5.16%	5.01%	5.29%	5.00%
Spread	1.71%	1.79%	1.31%	1.15%	1.18%

The peak in medium to longer dated rates has generally arisen in August and September and has been primarily driven by continuing high UK inflation, concerns that gilt issuance may be too much for the market to absorb comfortably, and unfavourable movements in US Treasuries.

The S&P 500 and FTSE 100 have struggled to make much ground through 2023.

CENTRAL BANK CONCERNS

Currently, the Fed has pushed up US rates to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%, whilst the MPC followed by raising Bank Rate to 5.25%. EZ rates have also increased to 4% with further tightening a possibility.

Ultimately, however, from a UK perspective it will not only be inflation data but also employment data that will mostly impact the decision-making process, although any softening in the interest rate outlook in the US may also have an effect (just as, conversely, greater tightening may also).

Treasury Management Practice (TMP1) – Credit and Counterparty Risk Management

Specified Investments: All such investments will be sterling denominated, with maturities up to a maximum of 1 year, meeting the minimum 'high' quality criteria where applicable. (Non-specified investments which would be specified investments apart from originally being for a period longer than 12 months, will be classified as being specified once the remaining period to maturity falls to under twelve months.)

Non-Specified Investments: These are any investments which do not meet the specified investment criteria. A maximum of 30% will be held in aggregate in non-specified investment.

A variety of investment instruments will be used, subject to the credit quality of the institution, and depending on the type of investment made, it will fall into one of the above categories.

The criteria, time limits and monetary limits applying to 'high' rated institutions or investment vehicles that could be classified as either Specified Investments or Non-Specified Investments (i.e. where maturities are more than 12 month) are detailed in the table below:

	Minimum credit criteria / colour band	Max % of total investments / £ limit per institution	Max. maturity period **
DMADF – UK Government	Yellow	100%	6 months (max. is set by the DMO *)
UK Gilts	Yellow	£10m	5 years
UK Treasury Bills	Yellow	£10m	364 days (max. is set by the DMO*)
Bonds issued by multilateral development banks	Yellow	20% / £10m	5 years
Money Market Funds CNAV	AAA	100%/ £20m	Liquid
Money Market Funds LNAV	AAA	100%/ £20m	Liquid
Money Market Funds VNAV	AAA	50%/ £10m	Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.25	AAA	50% / £10m	Liquid
Ultra-Short Dated Bond Funds with a credit score of 1.5	AAA	50% / £10m	Liquid
Local Authorities	Yellow	100%/ £10m	5 years

	Minimum credit criteria / colour band	Max % of total investments / £ limit per institution	Max. maturity period **
Term Deposits with Housing Associations	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
Term Deposits with Banks and Building Societies	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
CDs or Corporate Bonds with Banks and Building Societies	Blue Orange Red Green No Colour	75% / £10m	12 months 12 months 6 months 100 days Not for use
Gilt Funds	UK sovereign rating	£10m	

* DMO is the Debt Management Office of HM Treasury

** maturities within 12 months would be deemed Specified Investments. All other periods would be classified as Non-Specified Investments.

The table below lists counterparties and limits for non-rated institutions that would be deemed Non-Specified Investments regardless of time until maturity.

Non-Specified Investment Category	Limit
The council's own banker if it fails to meet the basic credit criteria. In this instance balances will be minimized as far as is possible.	£15m
Building Schools for the Future Local Education Partnership. Whilst this is not a usual investment counterparty, the council is likely to invest a small amount as part of the wider Building Schools for the Future project.	£1m
Sandwell Inspired Partnership Services. Whilst this is not a usual investment counterparty, the council is likely to invest a small amount for the organisation to be use as working capital in its infancy.	£1.5m
Bond funds this Authority will seek further advice on the appropriateness and associated risks with investments in these categories.	£10m

Property funds the use of these instruments can be deemed to be capital expenditure and as such will be an application (spending) of capital resources. This council will seek guidance on the status of any fund it may consider using.	£10m
--	------

Accounting treatment of investments. The accounting treatment may differ from the underlying cash transactions arising from investment decisions made by this council. To ensure that the council is protected from any adverse revenue implications, which may arise from these differences, we will review the accounting implications of new transactions before they are undertaken.

Approved Countries for Investment

This list is based on those countries which have sovereign ratings of AA- or higher as at 19 December 2023, (we show the lowest rating from Fitch, Moody's and S&P) and also, (except - at the time of writing - for Hong Kong and Luxembourg), have banks operating in sterling markets which have credit ratings of green or above in the Link creditworthiness service.

Based on lowest available rating

AAA

- Australia
- Denmark
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Singapore
- Sweden
- Switzerland

AA+

- Canada
- Finland
- U.S.A.

AA

- Abu Dhabi (UAE)

AA-

- Belgium
- France
- Qatar
- U.K.

Although this list includes all countries that have a credit rating above the approved minimum rating, ethical considerations will also be taken into account before a country is included in the final approved list.

The Treasury Management role of the Section 151 Officer

The S151 officer is responsible for:

- recommending clauses, Treasury Management policy/practices for approval, reviewing the same regularly, and monitoring compliance;
- submitting regular Treasury Management policy reports;
- submitting budgets and budget variations;
- receiving and reviewing management information reports;
- reviewing the performance of the Treasury Management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of Treasury Management resources and skills, and the effective division of responsibilities within the Treasury Management function;
- ensuring the adequacy of internal audit, and liaising with external audit;
- recommending the appointment of external service providers.

Summary of Treasury and Prudential Indicators

Prudential Indicator - Capital Expenditure and Financing:

Capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	65.681	75.289	144.476	103.553	67.253
HRA	55.043	92.837	58.945	57.857	55.541
Total	120.724	168.126	203.421	161.410	122.794

Financing of capital expenditure £m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital receipts	1.677	6.000	9.658	11.651	13.641
Capital grants and Contributions	45.105	51.355	131.699	99.743	61.302
Major Repairs Reserve	16.834	17.490	18.089	18.000	17.950
Revenue Contributions	6.010	10.222	3.560	-	-
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
<i>Non-HRA amounts</i>	<i>19.265</i>	<i>25.977</i>	<i>21.504</i>	<i>13.016</i>	<i>10.851</i>
<i>HRA amounts</i>	<i>31.833</i>	<i>57.082</i>	<i>18.911</i>	<i>19.000</i>	<i>19.050</i>

Prudential Indicator - Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) Projections:

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Capital Financing Requirement					
Non-HRA	334.348	350.655	357.949	355.941	350.686
Housing	517.908	573.601	591.089	608.465	623.985
Total CFR	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Movement in CFR represented by					
Net financing need for the year	51.098	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Less MRP/VRP	(6.593)	(7.151)	(11.477)	(12.211)	(12.881)
Other financing movements (i.e. PFI)	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Movement in CFR	41.457	72.000	24.782	15.368	10.265

Prudential Indicator – Gross debt projections compared to CFR:

£m	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
External Debt					
Debt at 1 April	475.588	470.808	553.867	594.282	626.298
Expected change in Debt	(4.780)	83.059	40.415	32.016	29.901
Other long-term liabilities (OLTL) at 1 April - PFI	68.525	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Expected change in OLTL	(3.048)	(3.908)	(4.156)	(4.437)	(6.755)
Actual gross debt at 31 March	536.285	615.436	651.695	679.274	702.420
The Capital Financing Requirement	852.256	924.256	949.038	964.406	974.671
Over/ (Under) Borrowing	(315.971)	(308.820)	(297.343)	(285.132)	(272.251)

Treasury Indicators - Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit:

Operational Boundary £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	553.867	594.282	626.298	656.199
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	65.477	61.569	57.413	52.976
Total	619.344	655.851	683.711	709.175

Authorised Limit £m	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Debt	901.718	931.842	952.343	967.780
Other long-term liabilities (PFI)	85.477	81.569	77.413	72.976
Total	987.195	1,013.411	1,029.756	1,040.756

Treasury Indicator - Investment limits for periods greater than 365 days:

Upper limit for principal sums invested for longer than 365 days			
£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Principal sums invested for longer than 365 days	15.000	15.000	15.000

Note: current treasury amounts invested for periods greater than 365 days is nil

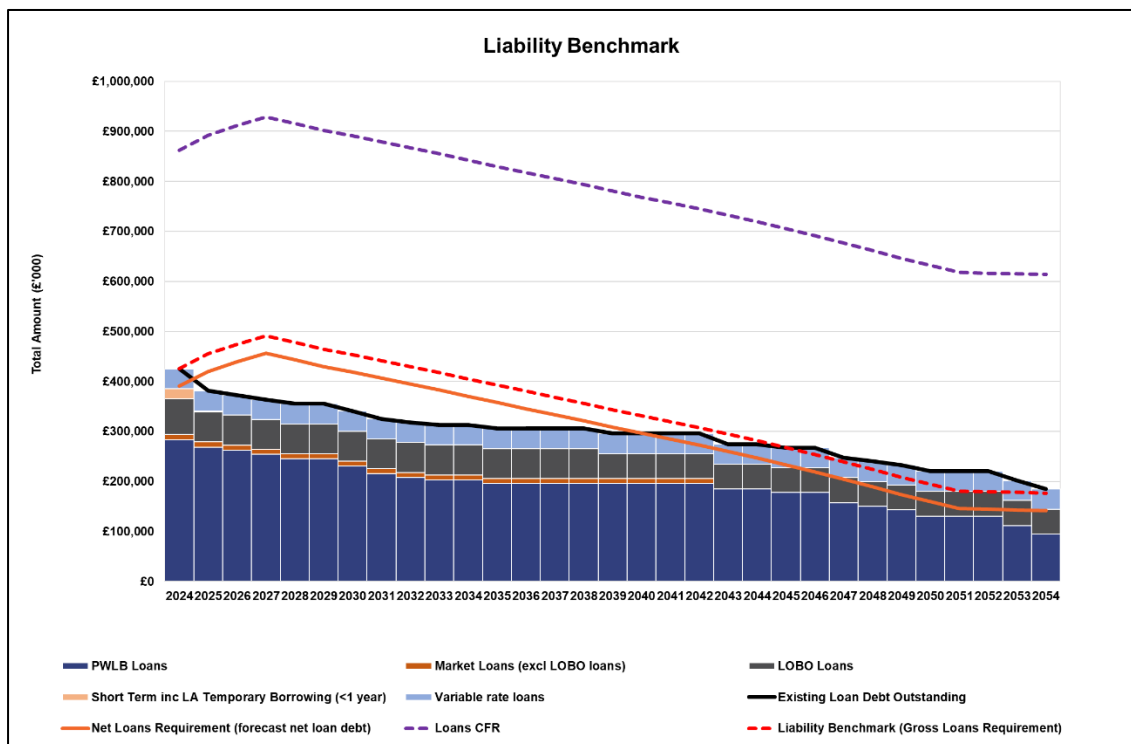
Prudential Indicator - Ratios of financing costs to net revenue stream:

%	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Non-HRA	2.7%	2.4%	3.1%	3.3%	3.3%
HRA	17.6%	20.6%	18.5%	18.9%	18.9%
Total	7.0%	7.5%	7.7%	7.9%	8.0%

Treasury Indicator - Maturity structure for fixed rate debt:

Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2024/25		
	Lower	Upper
Under 12 months	0%	40%
12 months to 2 years	0%	30%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%
5 years to 10 years	0%	25%
10 years to 20 years	0%	30%
20 years to 30 years	0%	40%
30 years to 40 years	0%	50%
40 years to 50 years	0%	70%
50 years plus	0%	90%

Prudential Indicator - Liability Benchmark



Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework

2024/25

Recommendations

1. For the reasons set out in the report it is recommended that Cabinet endorse and recommend to Full Council that -
 - i) approval be given for the Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework for 2024-25 comprising the policies set out at Annexes 1 to 9 of this report;
 - ii) approval be granted for the Council Tax Award of Discount Policy (Annex 2), Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy (Annex 3), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Policy (Annex 8), Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Hardship Relief Policy (Annex 7) and War Pension Policy (Annex 9) as set out in Annex 2; and
 - iii) Authority be given to the Director of Finance – Section 151 Officer in conjunction with Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and in consultation with the Monitoring Officer to make necessary changes to the policies during 2024-25 due to the Cost of Living Crisis.

Context and Key Issues

2. The existing Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework includes:
 - i) Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
 - ii) Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
 - iii) Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
 - iv) Flood Relief Policy
 - v) Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
 - vi) Local Welfare Provision Policy
 - vii) Non-Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
 - viii) Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
 - ix) The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy
3. The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy includes a statement covering the introduction of changes effective from 1st April 2024. This is based on regulation amendments to charge an additional 100% for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 1 year or more (currently this is 2 years). The Council previously used its discretion to agree to these changes at a cabinet meeting in February 2023 and the new charges will come into effect from 1st April 2024.
4. The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy also includes details of new legislation detailing the way in which second homes may be charged. These changes relate to properties which are left empty, is not deemed someone's sole or main residence when empty and the owner has multiple properties. At present these properties are charged 100% Council Tax from the day they become empty but the new legislation provides Councils with discretion to charge an additional 100%. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which introduces this legislation contains a clause requiring the authority to make the determination at least one year before the start of the year to which it relates. If the decision is

taken to introduce these changes they will therefore not be effective until 1st April 2025. The table below summarises the changes:

	Current Charge	Charge as of 01 April 2024	Charge as of 01 April 2025	Notes
Empty & Unfurnished	100%	100%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty & Furnished	100%	100%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 1 & 2 years	100%	200%	N/A	Changes in legislation will allow us to apply the premium after 1 year and not wait until it has been empty for 2 years
Empty Homes Premium – between 2 & 4 years	200%	200%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 5 & 9 years	300%	300%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Empty Homes Premium – between 10 years plus	400%	400%	N/A	No changes to be considered
Second Home Premium – from day 1 (empty properties where the owner has more than one property and is either furnished or unfurnished)	N/A	N/A	200%	This premium although recently passed in Parliament cannot be adopted by Authorities until our intention to implement has been publicly advertised for a 12 month period, and therefore, can only be considered in Sandwell from 01 April 2025 at the earliest

- The new Housing Benefit War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy 2024/25 details Sandwell's decision to disregard all the war pension income when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit assessment. Sandwell has 11 Housing Benefit claimants who receive this additional disregard.

6. For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is asked to recommend that Full Council re-affirm its previous decision to approve the disregard of War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s pensions in full as income above the statutory £10.00 per week disregard in the calculation of Housing Benefit entitlement and in full as income in relation to the means tested assessment of Council Tax Reduction Scheme discount through a War Pension Policy as set out in Annex 9 to this report.
7. Prior to the introduction of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, a statutory £10.00 per week disregard operated for War Disability and War Widows pensions through means tested social security benefits including Housing Benefit. Any amount above the £10.00 per week disregard of pension income was counted as income, reducing the amount of benefit received.
8. S.134(8) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 permitted administering local authorities to disregard up to 100% of war pensions above the £10.00 per week disregard. This had to be agreed by Full Council with any cost of this disregard being borne by the relevant local authority. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) through a resolution of Full Council agreed to disregard war pensions in full above the weekly disregard during the 1990's.
9. From April 2004, Government agreed to subsidise 75% of the discretionary disregard Councils made if the amount did not exceed 0.2% of the total Housing Benefit subsidy received. This means that local authorities now only pay for 25% of the discretionary disregard. From April 2005, War Pension and War Widow(er)s Pension schemes were closed to applicants who were injured or became a widow(er) after this date – these were replaced by the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. Payments from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme were given a full statutory disregard in means tested benefits, including Housing Benefit.
10. A number of local authorities have been asked to provide evidence that they had passed resolutions disregarding War Pensions and War Widow(er) Pensions by their external auditors. Many local authorities no longer retain original documentation confirming the disregard. Sandwell MBC has similarly been asked to provide the documentation confirming the passage of resolutions disregarding War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s Pensions. Whilst a search has been undertaken the resolution has yet to be retrieved from historic records.
11. This report therefore seeks a decision of Full Council to re-affirm the discretionary disregards for War Pensions and War Widow(er)'s Pensions in order to safeguard the finances of war pensioners and war widow(er)s.”
12. The Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy details changes following the introduction of new regulations relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). These changes effective from December 2023 will result in licenced HMO's being re-assessed by the Valuation Office Agency. Where tenants are affected by these changes as rooms are individually banded, we will consider supporting with Section 13a, 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable. Legislation does not dictate the circumstances in which reductions apply and therefore the Council must use discretion in deciding whether to use these powers.
13. The Local Welfare Provision Policy for 2024-25 is subject to funding being available to provide the support

14. The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy for 2024/25 was in a separate report and has been approved by Cabinet and full Council in December 2023.

15. There have been no changes to any of the other policy intentions.

Alternative Options

16. The Council is required to set out its application of areas of the legislation which allow local application of rules. The policy framework achieves this.

Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Taxpayers for Discretionary Rate Relief granted. The Council cannot refuse any applications, which comply with its Discretionary Rate Relief policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Taxpayers of any relief granted under the provisions of s.49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The cost of any relief granted under s.13A (Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy) is borne by the local Council Taxpayers.</p> <p>The cost of Discretionary Housing Payments in excess of the Government Contribution is borne by the local Council Taxpayers, unless we are able to claim part of this from the Housing Revenue Account. The Council Tax Award of Discounts Policy generates additional income for the council through Council Tax collection.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The policy on s.49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 Hardship Relief complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council’s powers with regard to awarding relief.</p> <p>The Council cannot refuse any applications which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The policy on Discretionary Rate Relief, complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council’s powers with regard to awarding Discretionary Rate Relief to businesses. The Council cannot refuse any applications for Discretionary Rate Relief, which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The policy on Discretionary Housing Payments complies with appropriate legislation.</p> <p>The s.13A Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy complies with appropriate legislation. The Council cannot refuse any applications for relief, which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy complies with appropriate legislation to allow the Council to set locally prescribed levels of discounts for empty domestic properties.</p>

Risk:	Risk assessments, where required, have been previously undertaken. As these policies have been in place for several years no significant risks have been identified or have occurred.
Equality:	Equality impact assessments (EIA) have previously been completed on all of the policies.
Health and Wellbeing:	Several of the policies provide additional financial support to some of our most vulnerable residents.
Social Value:	Sandwell's Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework is operating well and providing crucial support to vulnerable, low income households.
Climate Change:	No impact.
Corporate Parenting:	No impact

Annexes

Annex 1	Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
Annex 2	Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
Annex 3	Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
Annex 4	Flood Relief Policy
Annex 5	Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
Annex 6	Local Welfare Provision Policy
Annex 7	Non-Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
Annex 8	Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
Annex 9	The Housing Benefit War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy 2024/25

Background Papers

None

Corporate Debt Recovery Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. This document details the Council's policies on the billing, collection and recovery of monies due to the Council. Sums due to the Council can be a mixture of statutory and non-statutory charges. The methods for billing and recovery of the statutory debts are tightly prescribed by statute.
2. This Policy sets out the general principles to be applied in relation to debt management across all services provided by the Council.
3. It is essential that all monies due are collected effectively by the Council and that debts owed are kept to a minimum. This is because the Council has both a legal duty and a responsibility to its citizens to ensure that income due is paid promptly.
4. The management of income is a key business area for the Council. The Council collects income from many streams; some of this activity is governed by legislation while others by sound principles of financial management. The key to economic, efficient, and effective income management is the creation and maintenance of a clear framework that sets out the approach, principles, and strategy within which all activities will be conducted.
5. This policy also recognises that collection of debt should be fair to everyone, especially those on limited incomes who struggle to pay or those who have not paid because of an oversight. It is also recognised that some people deliberately avoid their payment obligations by delaying their payments or choosing not to make payment and proportionate measures will be deployed to develop a culture of payment while encouraging those in need of help to get in touch with the Council at an early stage.
6. Where a person or organisation makes contact to discuss payment difficulties their circumstances will be considered fairly and objectively with a view to agreeing a reasonable payment arrangement, minimising recovery action, and avoiding potential additional costs. Where people or organisations fail to make contact or maintain their payment obligations, recovery action will continue in the wider public interest.
7. Underpinning this policy are effective income management processes critical to the delivery of overall Council objectives, as every pound of income that is not collected or takes extra effort to collect, ultimately leads to additional financial pressures on the Councils budget.
8. This policy applies to the collection of:
 - Council Tax & Non-Domestic Rates Policy (**Appendix 1**)
 - Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy (**Appendix 2**)
 - Sundry Debt (Council Services) Policy (**Appendix 3**)
 - Bankruptcy Policy (**Appendix 4**)
 - Write-Offs Policy (**Appendix 5**)

9. This policy intends to:

- Recover all money outstanding in respect of debts owed to the Council.
- Protect the Council's finances for the good of all residents within the Sandwell area.
- Ensure that enforcement action is taken to recover debts.
- Facilitate a coordinated approach to managing multiple debts owed to the Council.
- Ensure that the Council engages with debtors when enforcing debts to take the appropriate action considering the individual circumstances of the debtor.
- Identify, where appropriate, support which may be required to those owing money to the Council;
- Giving specific considerations to vulnerable customers where appropriate.
- Apply best practice to debt collection.
- Minimise the risk of bad debts.

General Principles

10. All directorates will work together to ensure the most appropriate arrangement for recovery of debts is achieved. In cases of multiple debts, a lead officer may be appointed. The lead officer will be responsible for liaising with relevant service areas. To assist Sandwell Council is working towards a Single View of debt across all recovery areas.
11. In all cases the Council will work with the debtor taking account of their individual circumstances in order to arrive at an arrangement that is reasonable to both them and the Council.
12. A flexible approach will be adopted to ensure regular payments. This reduces the risk of further action and unnecessary additional costs becoming payable, it also maintains collection.
13. Where necessary when working with debtors the Council will provide additional support with the aim of maximising their income by: -
- Providing welfare advice to ensure the debtor is receiving any benefits, reductions, and discounts they are entitled to.
 - Promoting and referring debtors to agencies who can offer personal budgeting support / debt advice/ affordable credit.

Principles of recovery action

14. The Council will ensure that: -

- Any recovery action taken will be proportionate

Proportionality allows for a balance to be struck between the potential loss of income due to the Council and the costs of compliance.

- The approach taken will be consistent

15. Consistency means taking a similar approach in similar circumstances to achieve similar objectives. The Council aims to achieve this in the advice given, the use of its powers and the recovery procedures used. At the same time, the Council recognises the need to treat everyone as individuals and therefore will aim to take account of many variables such as the social circumstances of the individual, the payment history, and their ability to pay.

- The actions taken will be transparent
16. Transparency is important in maintaining public confidence in the Council. It means that helping people to understand what is expected of them, to meet their payment obligations and what they should expect from the Council. It also means clearly explaining the reasons for taking any recovery action and the next steps that the Council may take if payment is not made.
 17. The Council will also work with the voluntary sector and advice agencies, where we collectively:
 - Acknowledge that there is a distinction between can't and won't pay
 18. The policy will ensure fairness in that every debtor has an obligation to repay their debt owed so that future services do not suffer. Those who pay promptly should not subsidise those who are not prepared to pay what they owe.
 - Recognise that advice and early intervention is a key element from the perspective of all partners.
 19. The policy will ensure that the Council and its partner organisations will treat all debtors fairly and, where possible they will promote free debt advice services. Where appropriate, payment agreements will be put in place to assist debtors in adverse financial circumstances. The decision to agree a repayment timetable will be influenced by the willingness of the debtor to take advantage of the debt advice at an early stage.
 - Acknowledge that financial capability and vulnerability are sometimes underlying issues around non-payment.
 20. The policy will seek to promote financial inclusion and early intervention by recognising that debtors may have underlying problems with money management or may not be receiving all the financial assistance to which they are entitled.
 21. In all cases consideration will be given to the value of the outstanding debt and the cost of recovering that debt and where the Council believes it is uneconomical to pursue recovery the debt may be recommended for write off.

Policy aims and objectives

22. The key aims are to:
 - Ensure the Council provides bills promptly and remind people quickly if they do not pay.
 - Offer efficient and flexible payment methods
 - Encourage people to make early contact to avoid the build-up of debt
 - Inform people of their entitlement to benefits, discounts and exemptions to ensure maximum take-up and that net bills/liabilities are issued
 - Inform people of the general availability of income related benefits such as Universal Credit, Pension Credits, Housing and Council Tax Reduction

- Take positive action to prevent arrears from occurring in the first place, maximising income, and entitlement at an early stage
- Take recovery action against deliberate non-payers or those who delay payment without genuine reason while always working to identify and assist those who genuinely can't pay or are finding it difficult to pay
- Where people have fallen or are likely to fall into arrears, a commitment to work with them and their representatives to set reasonable and realistic payment levels that they can maintain, ensuring that payment arrangements reflect the ability to pay as well as the level of debt owed
- Work in a co-ordinated approach with multiple debts owed to the Council. Priority will be given to debts where non-payment could lead directly to the loss of a person's home in the case of non-payment of housing rent. Other debts owed to the Council may, depending on the circumstances, be treated to as a lower priority until payment of the priority debt owed to the Council is made
- Work in partnership with recognised advice agencies to advise people who need help and guidance to repay debts where they can get independent advice from to assist with wider financial problems

Principles of enforcement action

23. Where a debt remains outstanding for a service provision and there is no statutory obligation to provide the service, consideration will be given to terminate the service until such time that the debt is brought up to date.
24. Costs incurred are the responsibility of the customer, the aim of the policy is to minimise such costs wherever possible.
25. Payment orders made by a Court will take priority over any informal payment arrangement
26. We will utilise all methods of recovery available.
27. Enforcement agents and debt collection agencies instructed by the Council will be required to work within agreed guidelines, legislation and Codes of Practice always.

Policy review

28. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments, feedback and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

29. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Vulnerable customers

30. We understand that there are members of our community that may be considered vulnerable, therefore require additional support. Being vulnerable does not mean that you will not have to pay anything that you are legally obliged to pay.

Where we identify someone as being vulnerable, consideration should be given to:

- Longer period to pay
 - Holding off enforcement action for an agreed period
 - Assisting with the taxpayer to claim the right benefits, reductions, discounts or any other entitlement
 - Referring a taxpayer to our Welfare Rights team if appropriate and sources of independent advice services
 - Agreed temporary payment arrangement with lower repayments with a review date
31. We are aware that a taxpayer's vulnerability status may be temporary or permanent in nature but will vary widely. In order to aide us in identifying a vulnerable person we have a list below, identifying some characteristics of a vulnerable person. However, each case must be taken on its own merit:

- Disabled Person
- People experiencing serious illness, including mental illness
- People aged under 18
- Elderly people
- People in late stages of pregnancy

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Council Tax and Business Rates Policy

Introduction

1. This document explains the Revenues Service approach to administering the billing, collection and recovery of Council Tax as laid down by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Local Government Finance Act 1988 and all other supporting legislation. The document details information about the billing and recovery processes. The intention is to explain the processes clearly to show the transparent nature of the work, rather than give a detailed analysis of the legislation involved.

The Billing Process

2. The Council recognises that providing a correct bill in an efficient way maximises the likelihood of helping customers pay on time, and it strives to issue accurate bills to customers as promptly as possible, and to offer helpful advice face-to-face, in writing, by e-mail, over the phone and through advice on the website.
3. All available discounts, exemptions, valuation band changes, and Council Tax reduction will be granted in appropriate cases at the earliest possible time to ensure the amount owed is correct. Customers will be given the maximum number of instalments that are available so that payment can be spread over the longest period within the year.
4. Discounts, exemptions and reliefs will be reviewed periodically engaging external contractors and utilising third party data where appropriate and lawful, however it remains a customer responsibility to inform the Council within 21 days of any changes in their circumstances that may affect their entitlement to any reduction in their charges.
5. Clear information regarding reductions, reliefs, including benefit, is widely available through leaflets that are provided with annual bills and through the website. Officers are trained to advise customers about the range of benefits, discounts, and exemptions available and how to make claims.
6. Where there is a joint occupation or ownership, for example joint tenants or owners, or partnerships like husband and wife, both are expected to pay the charge. All bills and other correspondence will be addressed to all the liable persons for the charge. The law says that each person will be liable both for their own share of the charge and for the whole charge (called "jointly and severally liable"), so if necessary action for recovery of the debt will be taken against any or all of the liable persons.
7. If a taxpayer disputes the basis of why or what they have been charged in relation to Council Tax, the Council will advise them of their appeal rights by initially writing to the Council or alternatively by seeking redress at the Valuation Tribunal for Wales.
8. Council Tax and Business Rates is charged for financial years beginning on 1st April and ending on 31st March the following year. Taxpayers who receive an annual bill during March will normally receive ten monthly instalments payable between April and January inclusive, but the Council also welcome taxpayers to pay over 12 months. As the financial year progresses, less months are available, so the number of instalments reduces. Between 1st May and 31st December, the number of instalments allowed for the year's charge is the number of whole months less one. New bills created from January will usually be given one instalment payable within 14 days from the date of the bill.

The Recovery Process

9. The Council only must prove recovery documents are issued in time and in line with regulations; it is not necessary to prove customers have received them.
10. As Council Tax and Business Rates are statutory charges it is very important that taxpayers give it a high priority when looking at their finances. If monthly instalments are paid late, or not at all, the Council will take action to recover the overdue amounts by sending documents that explain the consequences of delaying or not making payment. Taxpayers are actively encouraged to contact the Council without delay if they experience difficulties in paying their bill.
11. The Council has a planned annual recovery and enforcement timetable that sets out the dates for the issue of all recovery documents like reminders, final notices, and summonses. It also details magistrates' court hearing dates and targets for transmitting accounts for further recovery action using Enforcement Agents. The enforcement taken will be:

Reminders and Final Notice Stage:

12. Apart from any accounts issued near the end of a financial year, all bills include a monthly instalment scheme. It is a taxpayer's responsibility to make sure that instalments are paid on time. If taxpayers do not pay, or if they make occasional or irregular payments that are not received on or by the due date, they will be considered overdue. If this happens, recovery action will be taken, initially in the form of a 1st Reminder Notice.
13. Legislation allows for reminders to be sent immediately after an instalment is due, but the Council will usually allow taxpayers 12 days after a payment has become overdue before issuing a 1st reminder.
14. If an overdue instalment is subject to a 1st Reminder Notice, a taxpayer is required to make payment in full of the overdue instalment within 7 days. If payment is made as required, future instalments can then be paid as shown on the bill.
15. If the overdue instalment is paid, but a future instalment is not paid on time a 2nd Reminder Notice will be issued. If payment is made as required, future instalments can then be paid as shown on the bill. The second reminder states clearly that no further reminder notices will be sent if future instalments are not paid on time.
16. If payment is not made within 7 days following the issue of a of a 1st or 2nd reminder notice, after a further seven days a Final Notice will be sent for the full amount outstanding for the year.
17. Additionally, a Final Notice will also be issued if part or all of an instalment is overdue for a third time. This requires the full annual charge that is outstanding, rather than just the overdue instalment, to be paid in full within seven days. If payment is not made as required a summons will be sent for the full amount outstanding for the year together with associated costs of £79 for the issue of the summons.
18. Dependent on how promptly taxpayers pay, no more than two reminders and one final notice will be issued in a financial year before a summons is issued. Where the right to pay by instalments is lost due to consistent late payment, or no payment, this will only be forfeited for the current financial year; the right to pay by instalments will be reinstated when subsequent years' charges become due
19. Reminder and Final Notices confirm the full range of payment methods available and include information to encourage taxpayers to get in touch with the Council to discuss payment difficulties. The Council will, where appropriate, re-instate a taxpayer's instalment scheme where the taxpayer has agreed to bring the account up to date and switch to payment by direct debit for payment of future payments.

20. The Council will normally only offer to re-instate instalments once in any financial year following the issue of a final reminder. The Council recognises the offer to re-instate instalment may help a taxpayers meet financial obligations, but at the same time, the taxpayers previous payment history will be considered to ensure habitual late payers are not continually given the opportunity to delay payment.

Summons Stage:

21. In the event of late or non-payment as explained above, the Council will issue a Summons at the Magistrates' Court, giving at least fourteen days' notice of the hearing date. The summons will confirm the charge outstanding together with court costs that are added to the amount payable in recognition of the extra work needed to secure payment. The additional costs charged for a summons are currently £79 for Council Tax and £112 for Business Rates.
22. The summons will confirm the date and time of the Magistrates Court hearing at which the Council's officer will need to satisfy the Magistrate that the customer is the liable person, does owe the amount outstanding, and that the Council has sent the correct documents to the customers' current or last known address.
23. Taxpayers who pay the full amount confirmed on the summons, including the additional £79 costs or £112 costs for ratepayers before the hearing date do not have to attend court, however any payment arrangement made following the issue of a summons which extends payment beyond the liability order court hearing date will be made on the basis that the application for a liability order will continue and will include the initial £79 court costs for Council Tax or £112 court costs for Business Rates and additional costs of .50p for the issue of a Liability Order (i.e. a total of £79.50 costs for Council Tax or £112.50 for Business Rates).
24. Attendance at the Magistrates Court is not compulsory, and usually the majority of customers summonsed do not attend. A taxpayer can dispute the charge or speak to the Court. The Court will give an audience to anyone who wishes to appear, however, unless the taxpayer has a valid defence then the Court is obliged to grant a Liability Order.

Liability Order stage

25. Following the issue of a Liability Order, the Council will write to the taxpayer or ratepayer to secure full payment or to make a suitable payment agreement. The notification will also provide details of potential consequences of enforcement action (and additional enforcement (Bailiff) costs) if the taxpayer does not make payment or fails to make a payment agreement. For Council Tax matters, the Council will also request to a taxpayer complete a 'statutory request for information', with details of their employment details, and if appropriate, information about any benefit that is received. Taxpayers are required to complete and return the statutory request within 14 days.
26. The Council will enter into a payment agreement with a taxpayer or ratepayer using the first principle that the outstanding balance must be paid in full prior to the end of the financial year, although in cases where there is no ongoing liability, payment agreements may be extended beyond the end of the financial year, depending on the circumstances of the case.
27. Following the issue of a Liability and in the event of the taxpayer not returning the 'statutory request for information' or failing to make a payment agreement, the recovery action to be taken will be dependent on the circumstances of each individual case and with due regard to the most effective way for the Council to collect :
28. Attachment of Earnings – Attachments require an employer of the taxpayer (for Council Tax only) to deduct a set percentage of the earnings and send them directly to the Council to pay the outstanding

Liability Order. The amount of money deducted depends on how much is earned and whether the person is paid weekly or monthly. The deductions are governed by Council Tax regulations.

29. Attachment from Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance – Attachments require the Department of Work and Pensions to make deductions from the taxpayer's benefit. The level of deduction is fixed by the Government but does increase annually.
30. Attachment of Members Allowances – The Council may make an attachment of the allowances of an elected member.
31. Taking Control of Goods & Use of Enforcement Agents – Enforcement Agents contracted by the Council may be used where no attachment is possible or suitable. The Enforcement Agents will always be required to comply with the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2014.
32. Initially, if a debt has been passed to an enforcement agent a fixed fee of £75 for each liability order will be incurred. This is known as the compliance stage and taxpayers are encouraged to make early contact with the Enforcement Team within 10 days to pay the amounts due in full or set up a realistic repayment plan.
33. If taxpayers fail to engage or set up a repayment plan at the compliance stage, the liability order(s) will be passed to the Enforcement Agent for a visit to be undertaken. If the Enforcement Agent is required to visit there is a fixed fee of £235 plus 7.5% for any balance due above £1,500.
34. The enforcement agent will normally ask taxpayers for payment in full, however the enforcement agent will normally also enter into a Controlled Goods Agreement which also provides taxpayers with an opportunity to pay.
35. If possessions are subject to a Controlled Goods Agreement these goods cannot be disposed or sold without the enforcement agents consent.
36. If taxpayers refuse to sign a Controlled Goods Agreement the enforcement agent can take goods to the value of the debt whilst at the property. There are additional costs of £110 plus 7.5% for any balance due above £1,500 if goods must be removed and sold.
37. If the enforcement agent decides the value of the goods is insufficient to pay the amount outstanding and there is no prospective of making payment agreement, or the taxpayer cannot be traced the enforcement agent will normally return the Liability Order to the Council which ends the enforcement agent action.
38. If enforcement agent action proves unsuccessful, the Council will then consider whether to take further recovery action, dependent on the specific personal and financial circumstances of each individual case and with due regard to the most effective way for the Council to collect:
39. Charging Order – For taxpayers owing £1,000 or more, the Council may apply to the County Court for an Order that places a charge on the taxpayer's property and the court, in certain circumstances, empowering the sale of the property if the taxpayer does not pay. The obtaining of a charging order does not prompt automatic payment of the amount outstanding; providing there is sufficient equity in the property value following the repayment of any outstanding mortgage or other existing registered charges, it secures payment of the debt when the property is sold. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the taxpayer to a pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement.
40. Bankruptcy – For taxpayers owing £5,000 or more, the Council may also consider taking bankruptcy action. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the taxpayer to a

pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement. Bankruptcy will be considered, only as a last resort, in line with the policy in Appendix 4.

Write Offs

41. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or taken, prompt write off of such debts is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 2 - Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy

Introduction

42. This policy document sets out Sandwell MBC's commitment to the recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayment in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 and the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained State Pension Age) Regulations 2006
43. It is essential that Sandwell MBC demonstrates that it carries out recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayments efficiently and effectively.
44. By doing so the Council:
- Reduces losses to Public Funds
 - Provides revenue for the Council
 - Helps reduce the loss from overpayments
 - Deters fraud and error
 - Demonstrates commitment to accuracy and provision of a quality service to customers.

General Principle

45. Overpayments are established through a review of benefit entitlement, where the original decision is superseded or in rare instances the correction of an accidental error. They are amounts of benefit that have been paid to which there is no entitlement.

Prevention of overpayments

46. We will endeavour to minimise the level of overpayments by:
- Paying Housing Benefit promptly;
 - Continuously reviewing and improving our systems and working practices;
 - Actively encouraging customers to promptly report changes in circumstances.

Identification

47. Accurate and prompt identification of overpayments is important to ensure we maximise the successful recovery of the overpayment and reduce the number of complaints and appeals.
48. To help identify overpayments the council will:
- Establish the cause of the overpayment and whether it is recoverable and from whom it should be recovered.
 - Calculate underlying entitlement in all cases
 - Ensure that every overpayment has been classified correctly,
 - Notify the customer of the overpayment in accordance with current legislation
 - Determine the best method of recovery.

- Not commence recovery until the individual has had the right to dispute the decision (in accordance with the timescales set out in the legislation).
- Offer help and advice to customers wishing to dispute the decision to recover the overpayment.
- In the event of being unable to recover an overpayment, promptly submit the debt for 'write-off'.

Recoverability

49. If the overpayment was caused by misrepresentation or failure to disclose information, then the overpayment must be recovered from the person who misrepresented or failed to disclose that information.
50. If the overpayment was caused by official error it must be recovered from the person who at the time of receiving the payments, could reasonably have been expected to know that they were being overpaid.
51. An overpayment can be recovered from:
- The claimant
 - The partner, if they were members of the same household at the time of the overpayment was created
 - The person to whom the overpayment was paid
52. If a deceased person has an outstanding overpayment recovery can be sought from their estate.

Recovery from on-going Benefit

53. Where the claimant is still entitled to Housing Benefit the overpayment should be recovered from their on-going entitlement.
54. The maximum deductions are provided by the government on an annual basis
55. Where the claimant's Housing Benefit includes an earnings disregard, a disregard for Charitable / Voluntary payments or a War Pension disregard, the Housing Benefit Regulations allow 50% of the statutory disregard to be added to the claw-back rate. (It does not include the additional earnings disregard)
56. However, a customer can request any alternative method of recovery and each request would be considered on its own merits.
57. Where there is no on-going Benefit entitlement
58. If there is no on-going benefit entitlement the overpayment will be recovered via an Invoice after 31 days of an overpayment being created. This allows the customer to request a revision, appeal or make a new claim for Housing Benefit.
59. The invoice will request a first payment within 14 days from the date of the invoice. If the total overpayment is less than £60.00 the invoice will request the overpayment to be paid in one instalment. If the overpayment is over £60.00 that the overpayment will be split over 12 monthly instalments.
60. If the debtor is unable to pay in full or the instalment amounts, it is possible to make alternative arrangement which will be covered in a later paragraph.

Methods of Payment

61. It is essential to provide flexible and convenient methods of payment. At present the Council can accept payment by the following means:

- Direct Debit
- Online using our online payment system
- Credit / Debit card
- Payment Line
- Standing order
- Cheque
- Cash

Non-Payment

62. If the customer fails to make a payment following an arrangement a reminder will be issued 20 days from the date of the original Invoice.

63. A final demand will be issued if still no payment is received after 40 days from the original invoice. The final demand will request a full payment of the Housing Benefit Overpayment within 7 days.

Arrangements

64. If the customer cannot pay the overpayment invoice or meet the instalment amounts in full, they are encouraged to contact the council immediately as it may be possible to make a payment arrangement.

65. Each request will be considered on its own merits evaluating the amount due, and the customers personal and financial circumstances. It may be necessary to issue an Income and Expenditure form to obtain a clear picture of the customer's financial circumstances. The aim is to agree a realistic arrangement to collect the unpaid invoice within a reasonable time.

66. Once an arrangement is agreed between Sandwell MBC and the customer, a new invoice will be issued to the customer.

Further recovery action

67. Where the customer fails to make a payment on their arrangement or no payments are received against the outstanding invoice, further recovery action will be taken.

68. The type of action that may be taken is as follows:

- *Recovery from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Benefits.* Deductions from certain DWP Benefits will be considered
- *Recovery from Landlord payments.* Where the overpayment is recoverable from the landlord the overpayment can be deducted from their next Housing Benefit payment.
- *Council Rent account that are in credit.* If the customer is a Council tenant and has a outstanding overpayment and their rent account is in credit. The credit can be used to reduce or clear the outstanding overpayment.

- *Direct Earnings Attachment.* The Council can ask an employer to deduct any Housing Benefit Overpayment of an employee direct from their earnings.
- *Debt collecting Agency.* The Council will forward any outstanding overpayment of Housing Benefit to an agreed debt collecting agency where that customer has failed to engage, and all the above alternatives are not an option.

Change of Address “Gone Aways”

69. If correspondence is returned undelivered and marked “Gone away” or similar and a forwarding address is not already known every effort is made to find a new address for the customer.
70. The Council will make all legally allowable checks on different records and systems to trace the customer to continue the recovery action.

Unrecoverable Overpayment

71. In certain circumstances the Council can decide not to recover an overpayment. Examples include:

- The customer is deceased and has left no estate to recover the overpayment from
- The customer has gone away, and the Council has been unable to trace them
- Where the overpayment is uneconomical to pursue

Write Offs

72. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or, prompt write off of such debts is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 3 - Sundry Debt (Council Services) Policy

Introduction

73. The Council charges and collects income from a diverse range of activities, customers and range of public bodies and private businesses. Sundry debt does not include Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Rent or Housing Benefit Overpayments.
74. The value of invoices raised can range significantly from a few pounds to several hundred thousand of pounds and therefore, taken together, the value of all these sundry debts is considerable.
75. It is essential that the Council recovers all collectable debt owed to it and the purpose of this policy aims to:
- Maximise the collection of the Councils income
 - Ensure that, where possible, payment up front is received ensuring whenever possible that collection of the fee or charge involved takes place prior to the service being provided so that credit is only given when essential to do so
 - Ensure clear terms and conditions of payment appear within documentation
 - Ensure invoicing and recovery procedures are carried out on an accurate and timely basis, encouraging debtors to pay promptly, and making collection and recovery activity more efficient by prioritising collection of larger debts
 - Minimise the time taken to raise invoices to within 10 days of the provision of service(s)
 - Minimise the time taken to collect charges or to effect recovery
 - Minimise the time taken to resolve invoice disputes
 - End the ongoing delivery of a non-statutory service to a customer in non-payment cases, but only where it is possible to do so.
 - Minimise the level of debt owed to the Council and its provision for bad debts
 - Minimise the incidence of debt that cannot be collected
 - Raise corporate awareness and responsibility of the importance of prompt debt recovery across all services
76. The charge must, depending on legislation, always cover the cost of providing goods or service and the costs of collection, unless the Council has taken a policy decision to subsidise the service.
77. The charge must be invoiced in an efficient and cost-effective way, ensuring that the frequency of invoices is minimised for services that are delivery on a regular and planned basis.
78. The debt will remain the responsibility of the Service in which it was raised, and recovery action will be taken by the General Debt Recovery Team. It is the responsibility of the services to assist the General Debt Recovery Team in collecting debts, ensuring that information and assistance is provided to ensure debts are collected quickly.

Corporate Responsibilities

79. All officers involved in the issuing and recovery of sundry debt invoices must ensure that:
- The Corporate Debt Recovery Policy is adhered to (specifically Appendix 3 – Sundry Debts)
 - The aims of the policy are adhered to
 - The parts of this policy that apply to their Service areas are correctly followed
 - Specific attention is paid to prohibit the practise of not resolving invoice disputes within a reasonable period
 - Budget Managers are fully aware of their responsibilities

- Relevant systems and procedures are in place
 - Officers involved in the debt collection process are appropriately trained and are aware of their corporate responsibility
80. The Director of Finance (Section 151), Revenues & Benefits Service Manager with Internal Audit support will provide assurance that this Policy is adhered to and is effective.

Raising an Invoice

81. A commercial approach should be adopted where fees and charges are obtained in advance or at the time of service provision. Where goods or services provided need to be paid for after this, then the Council offers credit facilities wherever it is considered prudent to do so.
82. Prompt invoicing is essential to efficient debt collection; the longer the period, the less likely is prompt settlement. Invoices must therefore be raised within 10 days of the service being delivered or due. By raising an invoice, the originating service agrees approval to take appropriate recovery action through the General Debt Recovery Team, including court action when necessary, is granted at the time the debt is raised.
83. Invoices must not be raised for amounts of less than £40, excluding VAT, unless the invoice relates to collection of peppercorn rents, licenses or leases in connection with occupation of Council land and property. This is in line with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
84. For payment of amounts of £40 or less services are required to request payment up front where it is reasonable and practical to do so.
85. The service responsible for raising the invoice must ensure that the evidence of the service provided is fully validated and that the invoice is accurate and contains sufficient detail for both billing and recovery purposes. Services must ensure that all invoice information is fully completed, including:
- Customer's full name(s)
 - Customer's full address(es), including postcode(s)
 - Customer's contact telephone number(s)
 - Customer's e-mail address
 - Name of contact officer in cases of query over the service provided
 - Date of supply of service
 - Purchase order number (where applicable)
 - Full description of the service/goods supplied
 - For each type of supply – the unit price or rate, quantity or extent of goods and services
 - Amount due
 - VAT amount and rate of VAT charged
 - Total due
 - For each type of supply – the unit price or rate, quantity or extent of goods and services, VAT amount and rate of VAT charged
86. The content (narrative) on the invoice should be concise but of sufficient clarity to ensure that the customer fully understands the bill.
87. All invoices must be raised to a correctly named legal entity. In the event of non-payment, legal action cannot be taken against a non-legal entity. Legal entities are:

- Individuals - This is usually someone living at a residential address. When a request is received for a service, the person's full name (title, forename(s) and surname) must be obtained and stated. Initials are not sufficient. If the request is on behalf of more than one person then the full name of each person must be obtained and stated. The full correct postal address, including postcode, must be stated.
- Sole Traders - Where an individual is trading in his or her own name the full name of the individual as well as the business name must be obtained e.g. Mr John Smith, trading as Fast Removals. Evidence of the name of the business could be in the form of a request for services on a business letterhead. The individual's full postal address must also be requested.
- Partnerships - "LLP" must be added where applicable, otherwise the full names of one, two or more partners must be stated, followed by "trading as" (as above). If LLP is applicable the full correct business address, including postcode, must be stated, otherwise the full correct postal address(es), including postcode of the partner(s) should be stated.
- Limited companies - the name must include "Ltd" or "Plc". Invoices can be addressed to either the current registered office or to a place of business of the company. Evidence of their Limited Company Status and registered office must be obtained by requiring confirmation of the service request on their official letterhead
- Charities limited by guarantee - Companies which are charitable and also limited by guarantee can be exempted from using the term "Ltd" so, for example: "Oxfam" is a correct name. Evidence of their charitable status must be obtained by requiring confirmation of the service request on their official letterhead.
- Clubs run by a committee - the full name(s) and address(es) of the treasurer and / or the secretary, or the trustees must be stated.
- Trustees – the full name(s) and address(es) of the trustee(s) and the full name of the trust must be stated.
- Executors or Personal Representatives – must be addressed e.g. "Mr Peter Smith! Executor of James Brown Deceased or "Personal representatives of James Brown Deceased". The full postal address(es) of the executors/personal representatives must be stated.

88. An invoice should not be raised where:

- A purchase order or written agreement has not been received
- It cannot be proven that the goods and/or services have been supplied
- If the debt is already bad or doubtful

Payment Terms

89. The Council will collect monies owing to it fully and promptly in line with the Immediate payment terms as outlined on the invoice. The standard terms apply to all sundry debtor accounts raised by the Council and should not be deviated from unless with the prior approval of the Director of Finance (Section 151).
90. All requests from customers to enter into payment agreements must be referred to the Corporate Debt team regardless of the amount owed. The Corporate Debt team will set up and monitor all payment agreements.
91. Payment terms beyond the 30-day period will only be granted where a customer is not able to settle the debt in full in one payment.

92. The General Debt Recovery Team will withdraw payment terms if a debtor fails to maintain a payment agreement.

Accounting Arrangements

93. Services will receive the credit when an invoice is first raised.

94. Where debts cannot be recovered and the debt is written off, the original debt will be debited from directorate bad debt provision by way of a write off. All write offs will be considered in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules and in accordance with the policy guidance in Appendix 5 to this policy.

95. All relevant information relating to an invoice (otherwise known as a proof of debt) should be kept until at least six years after it is first issued. If at the end of that six-year period the bill still remains unpaid but payments are being made, the supporting documentation should be retained until final settlement or write off of the debt.

96. Appropriate accounting arrangements will be put in place to ensure that the Council reclaims VAT from HMRC on a bad debt if:

- Goods/Services have been supplied and VAT has been accounted for and paid to HMRC (as output tax), but no payment (or only a part payment has been received, and
- The amount has, or is, about to be written off in the accounts, and
- Six months have elapsed from the later of the supply date and the time when payment was due, and
- The reclaim of VAT is made within three years and six months of the date the payment was due and payable or the date of supply.

97. Refunds for overpayments must be submitted by the Accounts Receivable Control Team to process and reconcile the refund request to control account and journals relating to the ledger code. Refunds will only be processed where there are no other debts outstanding and due from that customer.

98. All credit values of £1 or under will be transferred to the Councils Central Fund after the expiry of one financial year plus the current financial year. The same process will also be followed for any credit balances where General Debt/ Recovery/Accounts Receivable Control Team is unable to trace the debtor.

Dispute Resolutions

99. Where a customer disputes an invoice with the service, the service must notify the General Debt Recovery Debt team immediately to prevent the recovery process continuing. Equally, where a customer contacts the debt team rather than the service to dispute the invoice, the matter will be referred to the service responsible for raising the invoice and recovery will be held. Full notes and reasons for the dispute must be added to the customer's account.

100. To ensure the efficiency of debt collection and good customer service, all disputes must be resolved by the service responsible for raising the invoice within 20 working days of the dispute being raised. The General Debt Recovery Team must be notified of the outcome of the dispute.

101. A dispute is not resolved unless it meets one of the following conditions:

- Customer is correct and gets a full credit
- Customer is partly correct, gets a partial credit and accepts revisions
- Customer is not correct and accepts the charge

- Customer is not correct but does not accept the decision of the service and the service is prepared to support the commencement or continuation of recovery proceedings.
102. Where disputes are not resolved within 20 working days of the dispute being raised, outstanding disputes will be escalated to senior service manager within the service area initiating the invoice.
 103. Following a case referral to a senior service manager, if the service does not resolve the dispute or provide a viable reasons within a further 5 working days as to why the dispute cannot be resolved the disputed debt will be escalated to the relevant chief officer for review and resolution.
 104. For all unresolved disputes exceeding 35 working days, the General Debt Recovery team will raise a credit note to remove the debt from the system and reverse the income from the service. The service responsible for raising the invoice will be notified when this happens. It will then be the responsibility of the service for the re-raising of the invoice once the dispute is resolved, if appropriate.

Accounts subject to Recovery

105. Following the issue of invoices, unless there are payment agreement in place, reminders will be sent for all invoices unpaid or partly unpaid after 7 days past the invoice due date, i.e. day 37 after the invoice is raised.
106. If an invoice is still unpaid after a further 14 days of the invoice reminder being raised (i.e. day 51 after the invoice is raised), a further letter will be sent that explains to the customer the potential action of a referral to a debt collection agency or legal action through the County Council that may be considered by the Council
107. If, after a further 14 days, after the issue of the letter referred to in 7.2, an invoice is still unpaid (i.e. day 65 after the invoice in raised) the General Debt Recovery Ream will attempt to make telephone contact with the customer in an effort to resolve the matter. Where appropriate, payment agreements will be offered. If telephone contact cannot be made or contact is made but the customer does not wish to engage with the Council to resolve the matter, the General Debt Recovery Team will consider the most appropriate recovery route. Each case will be treated on its own merits, but the following guidance will normally be adhered to:
 108. Single or multiple debts up to £500 may be referred to the Councils contracted debt collection agents to collect the amount overdue if all previous attempts to secure payment have been unsuccessful. No additional fees will be added to the original debt.
 109. Single or multiple debts over £500 will be considered for action through the County Court if the originating service can provide the necessary supporting information to aid a successful prosecution.
 110. Consideration will be given not to take further recovery but only in cases where it is reasonable, economic and in the interests of Council Taxpayers to do so. In any case being considered for write off, the write off guidance in appendix 5 will be followed.
 111. In appropriate cases where County Court action is considered appropriate, any failure of services to provide supporting information to aid a successful prosecution will result in the General Debt Recovery Team raising a credit note to cancel the charge and the loss of income will be met by the service who raised the original invoice.
 112. For debts of £5,000 or more, the Council may also consider taking bankruptcy action through the courts if sufficient assets exist to meet the outstanding amount owing to the Council. Before such action is taken, the Council will always send a final letter inviting the customer to a pre-arranged meeting to make a payment agreement. Bankruptcy will be considered in line with the policy in Appendix 4.

113. In some instances, despite a County Court Judgement being obtained and enforcement action being taken, such action may, in some cases, fail to produce a payment towards some or all the debt due. In these circumstances, further action is limited and in these cases the invoice will be considered for write off in accordance with the write off guidance in appendix 5.

Credit Notes

114. There is a clear distinction between raising a credit note and writing off a debt.

115. A credit note to cancel or reduce a charge must only be issued to

- Correct a factual inaccuracy or administrative error in the raising of the original invoice
- Cancel an invoice where a dispute has not been resolved within 28 days
- Adjust the amount of debt due
- Cancel an invoice where the service is unable to provide sufficient documentary evidence to support the recovery of an outstanding invoice.

116. All credit notes must be supported by evidence that validates the reason for reducing or cancelling the invoice.

117. When raising credit notes, services must ensure that all information is fully completed, in the same way as invoices are raised, including:

- It must reflect an agreed reduction in value and be issued within one month of the agreement.
- Description of supply
- Rate and amount of VAT charged
- Total charge
- In addition, the invoice number and date of the original VAT invoice should be shown on the credit note.

Corporate Reporting and Monitoring

118. All Chief Officers will be issued with a monthly report to show debt levels outstanding within their portfolios. The reporting systems will show the breakdown of aged debt levels including a comprehensive breakdown of the invoices raised these within their services which remain outstanding.

119. In the interests of transparency and accountability, a half yearly report will also be presented to the chief officer's team showing debt levels across the organisation together with a full breakdown of aged debt levels within each portfolio.

Write Offs

120. The Council recognises that where a debt is deemed to be irrecoverable, especially after all recovery options have been considered and/or taken, prompt write off of such debts, including reclaiming of VAT from HMRC (where applicable) is appropriate and good practice in certain circumstances and in line with the policy in Appendix 5.

Appendix 4 - Bankruptcy Policy

Introduction

121. The Council is committed to using the most effective recovery methods available and this policy will ensure that the Council's very occasional use of bankruptcy is consistent and complies with all relevant legislation and best practice.
122. Council Tax and Business Rate regulations allow for debts over £5,000 to be considered for bankruptcy providing that Liability Orders have been obtained. For Sundry debts and Housing Benefit overpayments, bankruptcy proceedings may be taken against debtors who owe more than £5,000 where a County Court Judgement has been granted in respect of the debt.
123. The Council also recognises that serious nature of bankruptcy which may result in an insolvent person's property being vested in a trustee – someone who realises and distributes payment among the creditors in final settlement of their claims. The serious nature of this action cannot be underestimated as the consequences could result in a person losing their home and possessions, and be liable to pay a charge and statutory fees/costs associated with bankruptcy amounting to several thousand pounds
124. Given that the Council is not a preferential creditor for the purposes of bankruptcy there is no guarantee of a dividend being paid. The Council will only consider using bankruptcy as a last resort and final option and will take a cautious and diligent approach in deciding if bankruptcy is reasonable action to take.
125. Bankruptcy action takes place in the debtors local County Court with bankruptcy jurisdiction unless the debtor resides in London, in which case the action takes place in the High Court or the Central London High Court.
126. The Recovery Team will manage the administration of bankruptcy cases and proceedings in respect of Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry Debt and Housing Benefit overpayments, with the assistance from Legal Officers in appropriate cases.

When bankruptcy Action may be taken

127. The Recovery Team may consider using bankruptcy proceedings in the following circumstances:
 - Where the debt exceeds £5,000 and the debtor appears to have sufficient assets or equity to ensure the debt is recoverable by the Official Receiver of the Insolvency Service or the Trustee in Bankruptcy.
 - Where the debtor is not prepared to make a payment agreement to clear the debt within a reasonable and acceptable timescale.
 - Where other methods of recovery are considered inappropriate or have failed and bankruptcy action, as a last resort, appears to be a fair and proportionate course of action.

Recording Information and Decisions

128. When the Council consider bankruptcy proceedings, a log of events will be maintained on the customer's account throughout the process to ensure that bankruptcy remains the most appropriate course of action.

129. Prior to commencing bankruptcy proceedings enquiries will be made of the Revenues and Benefit records to:
- Establish a debt history and whether any previous debts have been collected within a reasonable period by other means.
 - Ensure that all known benefits, discounts, and exemptions have been granted based on the information held
 - Establish whether, based on any information held, the debtor may be vulnerable or unable to deal with their day to day financial affairs or have had previous debts written off.
130. Contact will also be made with relevant portfolio to ascertain if the debtor is known to them and therefore may be vulnerable. If the debtor is currently receiving any care service further enquiries will be made with the key worker to establish if the debtor may be vulnerable by way of, for example, age, mental illness, serious learning difficulties or where it is known that the debtor is unable to deal with their own affairs. Should it be apparent the debtor has such difficulties then consideration will be given to whether the help of other agencies should be sought, and to the appropriateness of pursuing an alternative course of action, including the potential to write off in line with the policy in appendix 5.
131. If records held and enquiries with relevant Directorates do not indicate that the debtor may be vulnerable then enquiries will be made with a credit reference agency and the Land Registry to establish information about the debtor's financial standing and ownership of property and assets.
132. In the event that vulnerability is identified then details of the perceived vulnerability will be recorded. Further enquiries will then be made with the relevant support services within the Council together with possible referral to other advice agencies and to determine an alternative method of recovery.

Statutory Demand

133. Where a decision is taken to commence bankruptcy proceedings a formal 'statutory demand' for payment will be issued by the Council to the debtor and the service of the statutory demand upon the debtor is the first formal stage in bankruptcy proceedings.
134. Guidance on service requirements are set out in the Insolvency Proceedings Court Practice Direction. A letter will also be issued with the statutory demand setting out the intentions of the Council and what the debtor needs to do to comply with it.
135. The debtor will still have the opportunity to contact the Council, even at this stage and, depending on information supplied, it may still be possible to a short-term repayment arrangement. The debtor also has the right to apply to the County Court to have the Statutory Demand set aside.

Bankruptcy Petition

136. The Council may present a Creditors Bankruptcy Petition to the County Court within four months of service of the Statutory Demand Notice if the debtor has not complied with it, or if alternative payment arrangements cannot be agreed following the service of the Statutory Demand.
137. Prior to presentation of the Petition, further enquiries will be made all relevant Directorates to establish whether the debtor has become known to them during the recent process in which case the action will be reconsidered.
138. The Council is required to serve the Petition upon the debtor and guidance for service requirements are set out in the Insolvency Proceedings Court Practice Direction.

139. At this stage, the debtor is required to pay the debt in full before the hearing of the Petition at Court otherwise the Court will be asked to make a Bankruptcy Order. The Council will always support a short adjournment of the court proceedings if the debtor provides the court with evidence that they will be able to pay in full within a very short period.
140. If, between the Petition being presented to the Court and the hearing of the Petition, it becomes known that the debtor does not have the capacity to deal with the matter, then full consideration will be given to seeking an adjournment of the proceedings to enable both the debtor and the Council to obtain further advice.

Making of a Bankruptcy Order

141. If the Court awards a Bankruptcy Order, the Official Receiver of the Insolvency Service is immediately appointed Trustee in Bankruptcy.

Appendix 5 - Write Off Policy

Introduction

142. The Council recognises that where a debt is irrecoverable, prompt and regular write off of such debts is important so that the Council can budget for bad debts. An integral part of debt recovery is the effective management of bad debts to ensure that resources are applied efficiently to the collection of monies outstanding which can reasonably be expected to be collected.
143. The Council will seek to minimise the cost of write offs to the local taxpayers by taking all necessary and appropriate recovery action to recover what is due. All debts will be subject to the full collection, recovery and legal procedures and considerations as outlined in this Corporate Debt Recovery Policy.
144. Write offs will be carried out in accordance with the Councils Financial Procedure Rules, and only in cases where
- The demand or invoice has been raised correctly and is due and owing; **and**
 - There is a justified reason why the debt should no longer be pursued.
145. The Director of Finance has delegated authority to write off debts up to £24,999. All debts considered for write off in excess £25,000 will be referred to Cabinet member for Finance and Resources for approval.
146. Debts will normally only be considered for write off where the account is 'closed' and there are no reoccurring debts. Only in exceptional circumstances will amounts on 'live' and ongoing accruing debts be considered for write off. All such cases must demonstrate that further recovery will not achieve collection of the debt.
147. The Council will record all write off decisions.

Reasons for Write Off

148. Is it not possible to list every possible scenario which could make a debt suitable for write off, however the following reasons capture the main reasons why debts become irrecoverable:
149. Absconded / No Trace The debtor has left the address listed on the invoice/bill and all reasonable attempts, including using trace agents, to find the debtor have failed.
150. Deceased The debtor has passed away and there is evidence of in-sufficient or no funds in the deceased persons estate to pay the amount outstanding
151. Debt 'out of time' Debts over 6 years old and where a Liability Order has not been granted (Council Tax and Business Rates), or no contact has been made and no payments have been received (in accordance with the Limitation Act 1980 as amended).

Small Debts and debts

152. Uneconomical to pursue When all recovery processes have been tried or considered and where the cost of proceeding to recover would be cost prohibitive to the Council and to its taxpayers.
153. Debts subject to a Debt Relief Order Where debts owed to the Council are subject to and included in a Debt Relief Order and cannot be recovered.

154. Bankruptcy The debtor is declared bankrupt and sums due before the date of bankruptcy cannot be recovered.
155. Companies in Liquidation/ The Company is a Limited Company registered with Wound Up / Dissolved Companies House and no longer exists and there is Struck Off no means of recovering the debt.

Conditions for re-claiming VAT on Bad Debts

156. The Council will be entitled to a refund of VAT from HMRC on any bad debts (excluding Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayments) if the conditions prescribed below are met:
- Goods and services have been supplied and VAT has been accounted for and paid to HMRC but no payment (or only a part payment – see 3.4) has been received.
 - The debt has, or is, to be written off in the accounts and transferred to a bad debt account
 - The debt must not have been assigned
 - The debt has remained unpaid (or partly unpaid) for six months or more after the later of the date payment was due or the date of the supply of the goods or services
 - The re-claim of VAT is made within three years and six months of the later of the date payment was due or the date of the supply of the goods or services.
157. The Council is required, in accordance with HMRC guidance, to retain copies of all invoices and bad debt account details for a fixed period of six years
158. VAT on bad debts will be re-claimed on the monthly VAT return, ensuring that appropriate VAT codes are debited with the appropriate amounts to reduce the amount of the write off recorded against the appropriate bad debt provision for the relevant Directorate.
159. Where the Council is re-claiming VAT on debts where part payment is received, the entitlement to bad debt relief on VAT is based on the amount outstanding for the supplies made. For a single supply, where no payment is received, the amount of VAT accounted for can be reclaimed. If a part payment of the debt is received, a refund can only be claimed on the VAT relating to the amount still unpaid.
160. HMRC advise that payments should be allocated to the earliest supply made unless the customer specifies that a payment is for a particular supply and pays for that supply in full.
161. In bad debt cases where everything except the VAT element is paid, if the customer refuses to pay the VAT element of an invoice and this is the only element outstanding, relief is limited to the VAT element of the total debt outstanding. For example, if the charge was £100 (which was paid) and £20 VAT remains outstanding, the Council is entitled to re-claim VAT of £3.33 (i.e. 1/6 of £20).
162. Any bad debt relief claimed on sales must be at the same rate of VAT as used for those sales, that is, 20% from 4 January 2011, 17.5% from 1 January 2010 to 3 January 2011 and 15% from 1 December 2008 to 31 December 2009.
163. If VAT is re-claimed on a bad debt and a payment is later received from the customer, the VAT element included in the payment must be paid over to HMRC in the tax period in which the payment is received.
164. For any technical queries on VAT treatment of invoices please refer to the Council's Tax Advisor.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Council Tax Award of Discount Policy

Contents

Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework

Recommendations

Alternative Options

Implications

Annexes

Background Papers

Corporate Debt Recovery Policy

Prevention of overpayments

Council Tax Award of Discount Policy

The level of Council Tax discounts

Empty but furnished property

Empty & unfurnished property

Uninhabitable property

Long term empty property “Empty Homes Premium”

Appeals

Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy

(Under S13a 1C of the Local Governance Finance Act 1992)

Exceptional Financial Hardship

Crisis – subsidence, fire, etc

Government Schemes

Care Leavers

Other circumstances

Period of Award

Administration

Responsible Officers

Decision making process

Changes of circumstances

Notification

The right to seek a review and appeals

Notification of review/re-determination of decision

Payment of Award

Overpayment of reduction

Fraud

Complaints

Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (DHP)

Statement of objectives

Local Welfare Provision

Considerations for an award

- The scheme is purely discretionary, a resident does not have a statutory right to an award

The LWP will consist of 2 key aspects of support:

Planned Support

Responsive/Emergency Support

Forms of Support

Eligibility

Exclusions

Benefit Sanctions

Universal Credit- Waiting period

How to request Support

Decision making process

Value of Awards

Outcome

Out of Hours Arrangements

Statement of Objectives

Criteria for using powers

Period of relief

Responsible Officers

Decision making process

Changes of circumstances

Notification

Payments

The right to seek a review

Notification of review/re-determination decision

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

Charity and non-profit organisations

RELIEF INTRODUCED BY THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

Section 69 “Localism Act Relief”

PART OCCUPIED/PART VOID SECTION 44A RELIEF (“S44A”)

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme (“SSBR”)

DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS INTRODUCED DURING 2023/24 and 2024/25

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023/24

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2024/25

Key Criteria for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief Financial Year 2023/24 and 2024/25

Who can apply

Retail Discount Exclusions

Heat Network Relief

Local Newspaper Relief

Eligibility Criteria

Exclusions

Applications

The Maximum Award

Future Reliefs in 2024/25

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

Equalities

Administration of the scheme

Legislation

Introduction

1. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 provides Local Authorities with the necessary powers to reduce Council Tax by awarding discounts where specific prescribed circumstances prevail.

Each Local Authority has the right to set the level of empty property discounts to be levied on Council Tax accounts in their area.

General principles/ regulations

2. Section 11(A) of the Local Government Act 1992, introduced by Section 75(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 gives Local Authorities the flexibility to determine what, if any, discounts should be applied to empty properties.
3. Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, introduced by Section 12 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, allowed for Local Authorities to charge an amount for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 2 years or more. The charges were further amended by the Rating (Properties in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018. This is known as an 'Empty Homes Premium' and the charges are shown in Section 3 below.
From 01 April 2024 based on the recent Levelling up and Regeneration Bill of 2022 a further amendment to this section of the Local Government Finance Act will allow for Local Authorities to charge an amount for Council Tax where properties have remained empty and unfurnished for a period of 1 year or more.
The Bill also recognises the impact that high levels of second home ownership can have in some areas and will introduce a new discretionary council tax premium on second homes of up to 100%.

Processes for services / providers

4. The purpose of this policy is to outline the level of discount that Sandwell has resolved to apply under the regulations highlighted in Section 2 above.
5. Discounts will be applied based on information received, Council Tax accounts will be updated, and revised bills issued accordingly.

The level of Council Tax discounts

Empty but furnished property

6. Properties which are unoccupied but furnished:
7. No discount is applied which means an empty furnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
8. 100% Council Tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty but furnished, regardless of any change in ownership.
9. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class B' (or 'PCLB') discount

10. From 01 April 2025 (following 12 month advanced notice)
11. Properties which are unoccupied but furnished:
12. No discount is applied which means an empty furnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
13. A second home premium will also be applied to these properties and will therefore attract an additional 100% charge
14. 200% council tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty but furnished, regardless of any change in ownership.

Empty & unfurnished property

15. Properties which are unoccupied and unfurnished:
16. No discount is applied which means an empty & unfurnished property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
17. 100% Council Tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty and unfurnished, regardless of any change in ownership.
18. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class C' (or 'PCLC') discount
19. After two years, prior to the 1st April 2024 additional premiums for long-term empty homes will apply. (See below)
20. From the 1st April 2024 these additional premiums will now apply after one year

Uninhabitable property

21. Properties which are uninhabitable:
22. No discount is applied which means uninhabitable property has a full 100% Council Tax charge levied.
23. 100% council tax is payable from the date a property becomes empty and uninhabitable, regardless of any change in ownership.
24. This 0% discount is known as a 'Prescribed Class D' (or 'PCLD') discount
25. The maximum length of this discount is one year, after which, if it is empty and unfurnished, it will change to a 0% Prescribed Class C discount (100% charge)
26. After two years, prior to the 1st April 2024 additional premiums for long-term empty homes will apply.
27. From the 1st April 2024 these additional premiums will now apply after one year.
28. Some exceptions will apply once confirmed by the government

Long term empty property - 'Empty Homes Premium'

29. Prior to 1st April 2019, properties which had been empty and unfurnished for two years or more were charged an additional 50% 'empty premium' which generated a Council Tax charge of 150%. During the period 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2024 properties which are empty and unfurnished for two years or more are charged an additional 100% 'empty premium' which generates a Council Tax charge of 200%.
- From 1st April 2024 onwards, a 100% 'premium' will apply to homes empty over 1 year, generating a Council Tax charge of 200%.
 - From 1st April 2020 onwards, a 200% 'premium' applies to homes empty for over 5 years, generating a Council Tax charge of 300%.
 - From 1st April 2021 onwards, a 300% 'premium' applies to homes empty for over 10 years, generating a Council Tax charge of 400%.

The appropriate premium shall apply in all cases 2, 5 or 10 years from the date the premises first became empty.

Some exceptions will apply to the additional charge after 12 months and these are to be confirmed by the government.

Appeals

30. Liable parties can appeal under S16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) if they disagree with either:
- the decision to treat a property as empty and hence apply empty property charges on a particular account based upon facts of that *individual case*; and/or
 - the levy of an Empty Homes Premium on a particular account based upon facts of that *individual case*
31. In the case of an individual appeal under S16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, appeals should initially be made in writing to Sandwell MBC. If still aggrieved, appeals may be made to the Valuation Tribunal Service.
32. However the principle itself of applying 0% discount on empty property and/or the levy of Empty Homes Premium charges in Sandwell is *not* open to general appeal as it is the resolution of the Council and as such can only be appealed via Judicial Review

Policy Review

33. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Equalities

34. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy
(Under S13a 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992)

Meeting Ambition 10

Contents

Exceptional Financial Hardship

Crisis – subsidence, fire etc

Government Schemes

Care Leavers

Other Circumstances

Period of Award

Administration

Responsible Officers

Decision Making process

Change of circumstances

Notification

The right to seek a review and appeals

Notification of review/re-determination of decision

Payment of Award

Overpayment of reduction

Fraud

Complaints

Policy Review

Equalities

Introduction

1. Section 13a 1C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable.
2. Legislation does not dictate the circumstances in which reductions apply and therefore the Council must use discretion in deciding whether or not to use these powers.
3. The Council is required to pay for any awards applied under this legislation out of its own funds and therefore awards must meet the underlying principal of offering value for money to tax payers.

General principles / regulations

4. Section 13a (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003) gives power to a Billing Authority (the Council) as below:
 - Where a person is liable to pay Council Tax in respect of any chargeable dwelling for any day, the Billing Authority for the area in which the dwelling is situated may reduce the amount which he is liable to pay as respects the dwelling and the day to such extent as it thinks fit.
 - The power under subsection (1) above includes power to reduce an amount to nil.
 - The power under subsection (1) may be exercised in relation to particular cases or by determining a class of case in which liability is to be reduced to an extent provided by the determination.

Process for services

4. Policy overview
5. The purpose of this policy is to outline the conditions that should be satisfied in order for Sandwell MBC to consider a reduction under section 13A (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
6. The policy is intended to enable the Council to provide a reduction to those people in need of help due to severe financial hardship and those most vulnerable residents.
7. Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits in accordance with the criteria and process laid down by the Council.

8. The features of the Sandwell's Section 13A (1c) policy are that:
- It is a discretionary reduction - There is no statutory right for any council taxpayer to receive a discretionary reduction.
 - The operation of the reduction is for the Council to determine
 - The Council may choose to vary the way in which funds are allocated according to community needs
 - If the applicant is dissatisfied with any decision taken on a claim that they have made they can ask for a review/make an appeal in line with Section 3.4 of this Policy
9. Where the scheme relates to a Government Scheme, as referenced but not limited by Section 3.2, the features of the scheme will be as defined by Government or, where local discretion is allowed, as defined by the Council for that specific instance.
10. Requests for Council Tax Discretionary reduction in liability should be made by contacting the Council to discuss your circumstances. We will issue a 'Section 13A' application form where appropriate, which should then be completed and submitted to the Revenue and Benefits Service.

Criteria for using powers

11. Each application shall include the following information:
- The amount of reduction being requested
 - The reason for the request (i.e. why is the reduction needed)
 - The period of time the reduction is required (e.g. the full financial year, part of a financial year or some of that period of time)
 - The steps that have been taken to meet or mitigate the Council tax liability (i.e. any other discounts or reductions awarded)

Section 3.2 Circumstances where reduction will be considered

Exceptional Financial Hardship

12. In accordance with Schedule 1a of the Local Government Finance Act, the Council has a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provides support, through a discount, to those deemed to be in need of financial help. The Scheme has been designed to take into account the financial and specific circumstances of individuals through the use of applicable amounts, premiums and income disregards.

13. Applications will be accepted under this part of the policy from people who have qualified for support under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but who are still experiencing severe financial hardship. Other taxpayers may also apply; however the Council would normally expect the taxpayer to apply for Council Tax Reduction in any case where there is potential entitlement.

14. As part of the process of applying for additional support, the taxpayer must supply evidence to substantiate their application including but not limited to:

- Making a separate application for assistance.
- Providing full details of their income and expenditure.
- Being able to satisfy the Council that they are not able to pay their Council Tax either in part or full.
- Accepting assistance from either the Council or third parties such as the Citizen Advice (CA) or similar organisations to enable them to manage their finances more effectively including the termination of nonessential expenditure;
- Identifying potential changes in payment methods and arrangements to assist the applicant.
- Assisting the Council to minimise liability by ensuring that all discounts, exemptions and reductions are properly granted.
- Being able to demonstrate that all reasonable steps have been taken to meet their full Council Tax liability including applications for employment or additional employment, alternative lines of credit.
- Having no access to assets that could be released and used to pay their Council Tax.
- Maximising their income through the application for other welfare benefits, cancellation of non-essential contracts and outgoings and identifying the most economical tariffs for the supply of utilities and services generally.

15. The Council will be responsible for assessing applications against this policy and an officer will consider the following factors in the decision-making process:

- Current household composition and specific circumstances including disability and/or caring responsibilities.
- Current financial circumstances.
- Determine what action(s) the applicant has taken or needs to take to alleviate the situation.
- Consider alternative means of support that may be available to the applicant by:
 - Re-profiling council tax debts and/or other debts.

- Applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment for Housing Benefit (where applicable);
 - Maximising other benefits.
 - Reducing Council Tax debt by way of any applicable reductions
 - Council Tax Support (CTR)
 - Council Tax statutory exemptions
 - Council Tax discounts
 - Council Tax reductions for disabilities
 - Determining whether in the opinion of the decision maker the spending priorities of the applicant should be re-arranged.
- Requests can be made at any time, however the reduction will generally be awarded from the date the council identifies that the conditions for the discount are met or from the 1st April of the current financial year, whichever is later.
 - Where extenuating circumstances are identified, the reduction may be backdated into a previous financial year.

Crisis – subsidence, fire etc.

16. The Council will consider requests for reduction from council tax payers who, through no fault of their own, have experienced a crisis that has made their property uninhabitable, such as a fire, subsidence, flooding caused by burst pipes etc.
17. This discount no longer relates to weather related flooding, which is now covered by a specific government scheme
18. To be considered, the resident must remain liable to pay council tax at the property. They must have no recourse to compensation/ insurance payments, nor have recourse to any statutory exemptions or discounts.
19. All such requests must be made in writing detailing the exact circumstances of why the reduction is required and specifying when the situation is expected to be resolved.
20. In order to consider applications the council may need to consult with other organisations as appropriate.

Government Schemes

21. From time to time Government may introduce a specific scheme in response to an event such as a natural disaster (e.g. flood relief schemes).
22. The Council will not consider requests from taxpayers where government guidance or policy provides for a reduction in liability in specific circumstances.

Care Leavers

- The Council will consider granting a discount of up to 100% for care leavers aged from 18 to 25.
 - The relief will be granted whether the resident care leaver is jointly liable with another person.
 - The discount will also apply to qualifying care leavers living in Houses of Multiple Occupation; however the Council would expect the landlord to evidence that they have reduced the rent for the care leaver accordingly. If not, any care leaver discount awarded may be removed from the landlord's Council Tax account
 - This award will offer help to young people whose only support is from the Council by relieving some of the initial financial pressure felt when moving into independent accommodation and having to pay Council Tax for the first time.
 - This reduction would sit alongside a number of other financial arrangements available to care leavers.
 - Applications will only be considered where the following criteria is met and evidenced:
 - Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council must have been the corporate parent of the individual until they reached the age of 18. If a young person meets the qualifying status post 18 years of age, they will also be considered for this reduction.
 - A number of care leavers will be entitled to Council Tax Reduction & this must be claimed before any discretionary reduction is applied.
 - If the care leaver moves out of Sandwell and subsequently returns, they will be entitled to a reduction for any period they are liable for Council Tax in Sandwell as long as the other conditions are satisfied.
23. The amount and period of reduction will be as follows:
 - A maximum discount of up to 100% may be awarded to any care leaver between the ages of 18 and 25 living in Sandwell.

- A discount of 25% will be awarded if the care leaver lives with another person who is not a care leaver
- A discount of 100% will be awarded if the care leaver lives alone, or lives with another person who is also a care leaver
- The reduction will only be applied after any other qualifying reliefs/ discounts have been awarded. If there is still an amount owing at this point discretionary relief will be awarded to ensure that nothing is payable.
- The reduction can be backdated to the 1 April of the financial year in which either an application for a discount is received or the council identifies that the conditions for the discount are met.
- The reduction can be backdated prior to that date if deemed appropriate.
- Where the liability started after the 1 April of that financial year, then reduction will be awarded from the date the liability started

Tenants in Houses of Multiple Occupation

24. On 01 December 2023 the Government announced changes to regulations for Houses of Multiple Occupation to ensure they are valued as a single dwelling, however, it is recognised that some tenants may have suffered financial hardship as a result of Council Tax being charged on individual rooms.
25. In cases where the property has been re-banded into multiple bands, tenants may be unaware about the change in their council tax liability and may be in arrears.
26. In such circumstances, the Council may consider using the discretionary powers under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to apply a discount to tenants' liability.
27. All such requests must be made in writing detailing the exact circumstances of why the reduction is required and the Council will make the necessary investigations into the individual's financial situation.

Other Circumstances

28. The Council may consider discretionary reduction requests based on other circumstances, however the Council must be of the opinion that the circumstances relating to the request warrant further reduction in their liability for Council Tax having regard to the effect on other Council Tax payers.
29. No reduction will be granted where any statutory exemption or discount could be granted.
30. No reduction will be granted where it would conflict with any resolution, core priority or objective of the Council.

Period of Award

31. Reduction in liability will commence from the date of application or the date when the need for financial help arose. Any reduction allowed will generally only apply in the current financial year and hence the earliest start will be 1st April of the existing financial year in which the request was received, unless good cause can be shown as to why an application was not made sooner, or there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a backdate of the reduction into a previous year.
32. The reduction will end on either the last day of the current financial year or the date on which the need for the reduction was removed, whichever date is earlier.

Administration

Responsible Officers

33. The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Director of Finance.
34. The Revenues and Benefits Service will liaise with the customer in each case to obtain sufficient evidence and information (in line with the criteria as laid out in this policy) to make a decision in their case.

Decision making process

35. The Council will decide every application for a reduction in liability where the customer has satisfied the required criteria as laid out in this policy.
36. The decision-making process will involve:
 37. Stage1: The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager making a recommendation to the Director of Finance, having considered each case on 'its merits' against the information provided by the customer.
 38. Stage 2: The Director of Finance will decide whether to apply the reduction to reduce the charge accordingly.

Changes of circumstances

39. The customer has a duty to notify the Council where a change in circumstance would affect the granting of the reduction.

Notification

40. The Council will notify a customer of any entitlement to a reduction within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
41. The Council will notify a customer of any changes to entitlement within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

The right to seek a review and appeals

42. Appeals against the Council's decision may be made in accordance with Section 16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
43. The Council Taxpayer must in the first instance write to the Council outlining the reason for their appeal. Once received the Council will reconsider its decision and notify the Council Taxpayer accordingly.
44. Where the Council Taxpayer remains aggrieved, a further appeal can then be made to the Valuation Tribunal. This further appeal should be made within 2 months of the decision of the Council not to grant any reductions. Full details can be obtained from the Councils website or from the Valuation Tribunal <http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk>

Notification of review/re-determination of decision

45. The Council will aim to notify a customer of its decision within 14 days of receiving a request for a review/re-determination.

Payment of Award

46. All awards will be made by crediting the award value to the Council Tax account to which it applies.
47. If by crediting the award, the account moves to an overall credit balance, a refund of that balance will be considered in the normal manner.

Overpayment of reduction

48. If the council becomes aware that the information contained in an application for a reduction was incorrect, or that relevant information was not declared (either intentionally or otherwise) the Council may seek to recover the value of any award made as a result of that application.
49. The award will be removed from the relevant Council Tax account and any resulting balance will be subject to the normal methods of collection and recovery applicable to such accounts.

Fraud

50. The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully entitled to them.
51. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a reduction by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.
52. Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

Complaints

53. The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the Councils website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

Policy review

54. The policy will be reviewed annually by the Revenue and Benefits Service, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

55. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
56. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Revenues and Benefits
Service Flood Relief Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Contents

Introduction

General Principles/regulations

Community Recovery Grant

Business Recovery Grant

Council Tax Discount Scheme

Business Rate Relief Scheme

Scheme Administration

Decision Making Process

Notification

Reviews and Re-determination of a decision

Overpayment of awards

Fraud

Policy Review

Equalities

Introduction

1. In a severe weather event with significant wide area impacts, local authorities may need central support to help their communities and businesses return to normal.
2. Section 13a 1c of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows the Council to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable and Sandwell's existing Discretionary Policy provides for assistance where flooding occurs in a one-off situation.
3. In December 2017 the government introduced a Flood Recovery Framework which provides local authorities in England with a core package of business and community recovery support.
4. The government will decide when this support will be made available as weather incidents with localised impact will not usually trigger a recovery support package. Funding might typically be deployed when facing severe weather which impacts multiple numbers of local authorities, such as those where nationwide storms take place.
5. This policy is provided to ensure the Council is prepared should a core scheme be activated and will allow suitable preparations to be made in respect of planning for flood events.

General Principles / regulations

6. The core package introduced through the Flood Relief Framework comprises of the following schemes:
 - Community recovery grant
 - Business recovery grant
 - Council Tax discount scheme
 - Business Rates relief scheme
7. If the government instruct the Council that a core scheme is activated any upfront funding provided will be distributed based on the initial estimated numbers of eligible households and businesses reported by the authority.

Community recovery grant

8. Scheme Overview
9. A £500 grant will be paid to the Council for each eligible household badly affected by the relevant weather event. Authorities will be expected to pass these grants directly onto eligible households.
10. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant based on the number of households estimated to be eligible.

11. Eligible Households
12. Primary residences – Households whereas a result of the relevant weather event flood water entered the habitable areas of the residence or
Flood water did not enter into the habitable areas, but the Council regards that the residence was otherwise considered unliveable for any period of time.
13. Second homes, empty homes and student accommodation are not eligible under the scheme.
14. HMO's should be considered 'one front door' except where they are separated for Council Tax purposes and blocks of flats should be treated in the same way.

Business recovery grant

15. Scheme Overview
16. A £2500 grant will be paid to the Council for each eligible business to help support recovery in the aftermath of a severe weather event. Authorities will be expected to pass these grants directly onto eligible businesses.
17. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant based on the number of businesses estimated to be eligible.
18. The scheme covers small and medium sized businesses within flooded areas. Where larger businesses have been seriously affected this should be discussed as early as possible with the Council's MHCLG Recovery Liaison Officer and DLUHC. Councils should consider any other ways in which it can help larger businesses.
19. Eligible Businesses
20. Small and medium sized businesses:
 - Directly impacted by the weather event, for instance where there was flood damage to the property, equipment, and/or stock, or;
 - Indirectly impacted by the weather event and as a result of flooding have directly suffered a loss of trade. This might apply where for instance there was flood damage to the property, equipment and or stock or the business has no/restricted access to premises, equipment or stock, restricted access to customers, suppliers and/or staff.
21. Funding should not be used to reward poor business practice or for routine expenses or costs that are recoverable elsewhere.

Council Tax discount scheme

22. Scheme Overview
23. Local authorities have discretion to reduce Council Tax liability under S13A 1C where the Flood Relief Scheme is activated following severe weather. The following discounts can be applied and will be refunded back to the Council by DLUHC:

24. 100% discount for a minimum of 3 months or while anyone is unable to return home if longer for primary residences whereas a result of the relevant weather event:
- Flood water entered into the habitable areas or;
 - Flood water did not enter the habitable areas but the local authority regards that the residence was otherwise considered unliveable for any period of time
25. And
- 100% Council Tax reduction on temporary accommodation for anyone unable to return to their home, in parallel with the discount on their primary residence where applicable.
26. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant and will typically be paid retrospectively considering actual spend at the end of the financial year.
27. Eligible Households
28. Primary residences – Households whereas a result of the relevant weather event flood water entered the habitable areas of the residence
29. Unliveable households may be determined based on the guidelines below:
- Where access to the property is severely restricted (e.g. upper floor flats with no access);
 - Key services such as sewage, drainage and electricity are severely affected;
 - The adverse weather has resulted in other significant damage to the property such that it would be, or would have been, advisable for residents to vacate the premises for any period of time, regardless of whether or not they actually vacate;
 - Flooded gardens or garages will not usually render a household eligible but there may be exceptions where it could be demonstrated that such instances mean effectively that the property is unliveable
30. Residences impacted in multiple flood events can receive repeat support where it is made available by the government in respect of separate weather events.
31. Where the scheme is activated concurrently for two separate instances of flooding within 3 months of each other, the two discount periods would run concurrently.

Business rate relief scheme

32. Scheme Overview
33. Where the Business Rates Relief Scheme is activated following severe weather the government will provide funding up to State Aid de minimus levels for eligible authorities to grant 100% rate relief of three months, or until the business is able to resume trading from the property if longer.
34. Funding will be paid to Council's via Section 31 grant and will typically be paid retrospectively in light of actual spend at the end of the financial year.
35. Eligible Businesses

- The hereditament was directly impacted by the relevant weather event, for instance flood damage to the property, equipment, and/or stock; or the business could not function due to lack of access to premises, equipment and/or stock as a result of the relevant weather event, and no alternatives were available

36. And

- Business activity undertaken at the hereditament is adversely affected as a result; and
- The rateable value of the hereditament is less than £10 million

37. Hereditaments occupied by the Billing Authority are not eligible.

38. In considering whether the business activity has been adversely affected the Council should consider the impact of the flooding in the full context of all business activities undertaken at the hereditament. Very small or insignificant impacts should not be considered for this scheme.

39. The Council could decide to offer further discretionary discounts outside of this scheme.

40. The relief should be calculated ignoring any prior year adjustments in liabilities which fall liable on the day.

41. Ratepayers that occupy more than one property may be granted relief within the scheme for each of their eligible properties.

42. Businesses impacted in multiple flood events can receive repeat support where it is made available by the government in respect of separate weather events.

43. Where a new hereditament is created as a result of a splits or merger from a hereditament which for the day immediately prior to the split or merger met the criteria for the scheme, funding will be provided to allow relief to be given for the remaining balance of the three months.

44. If the ratepayer in a hereditament changes the relief will continue to be given.

45. Hereditaments empty at the time it was flooded will not qualify for a payment via this scheme. If it becomes empty after the flood, then it will receive the normal 3 or 6 months empty property rate free period or will continue to receive the balance of the flooding relief.

46. Where a seriously damaged property is taken out of the rating list it is not liable for business rates. Once the property returns to the rating list it may be eligible for any remaining period of flood relief.

Scheme Administration

47. Responsible Officers

48. The Revenues and Benefits Service will primarily oversee the award of grant payments applicable to any of the schemes and reductions in Council Tax and Business Rates as detailed in this policy.
49. Decision making process
50. The government will determine when a severe weather event has taken place and in turn when the Flood Recovery Framework applies.
51. Where an extended recovery period is anticipated, DLUHC Recovery Liaison Officers will take over from DLUHC Government Liaison Officers to act as a single point of contact between local authorities and central government for the duration of the recovery period.
52. The Council's designated Liaison Officer should be informed of any property, infrastructure or wider impacts that may be cause for concern to aid cross-government discussions around the need for particular recovery support.
53. Decision making process
54. The Council will notify a customer of any entitlement to a grant or relief within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
55. The Council will notify a customer of any changes to entitlement within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.
56. Reviews and re-determination of a decision
57. The Council will investigate any challenges against decisions made in respect of the scheme and will aim to notify a customer of its decision within 14 days of receiving a request for a review/redetermination.
58. Payment of Awards
59. Awards payable through Community Recovery Grant or Business Recovery Grant Schemes will be made payable through the Councils electronic finance systems into customer bank accounts.
60. Awards payable through the Council Tax Discount and Business Rate Relief Schemes will be made by crediting the award value to the Council Tax or Business Rates account to which it applies.
61. Overpayment of Awards
62. If the council becomes aware that the basis of information received to pay a grant or relief was inaccurate or incorrect or that relevant information was not declared (either intentionally or otherwise) the Council may seek to recover the value of any award.
63. Awards will be removed from the relevant Council Tax or Business Rates account and any resulting balance will be subject to the normal methods of collection and recovery applicable to such accounts.

64. Fraud
65. The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully entitled to them.
66. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a relief by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.
67. Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.
68. Complaints
69. The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the Council's website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

Policy review

70. This policy will be reviewed annually by the Revenue and Benefits Service, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

71. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
72. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (DHP)

Meeting Ambition 10

Policy Statement

1. Sandwell MBC's objective is to treat every application for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) on its individual merits.

Introduction

2. Discretionary Housing Payments were introduced in July 2001 and the Local Authority is responsible for administration of the DHP scheme.
3. A DHP may be awarded where the Local Authority determines that a Housing Benefit or Universal Credit claimant requires further financial help towards their housing costs.
4. A DHP can be awarded to help cover:
 - Shortfalls between the rental liability and payment of Housing Benefit or payment of Universal Credit (Housing element)
 - One off DHP award to help towards removal costs
 - One off DHP award to help with rent deposits
 - One off DHP award for rent in advance.
5. Effective operation of the DHP scheme contributes to Sandwell Councils 2030 vision.

General principles/ regulations

6. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/1167) ensures the DHP scheme covers the introduction of Universal Credit.

Process for services

7. The purpose of this policy is to specify how Sandwell Revenues and Benefits Service will operate the scheme and to indicate some of the factors that will be considered when deciding if a DHP can be awarded. Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits and all claimants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.
8. The Revenues and Benefits Service is committed to working with the local voluntary sector, social landlords and other interested parties in the Borough to maximise entitlement to all available state benefits and this will be reflected in the administration of the DHP scheme. The Revenues and Benefits Service operates within the Council's anti-poverty strategy and is committed to the equitable operation of a DHP scheme.

Statement of objectives

9. The Revenues and Benefits Service will consider making a DHP to all claimants who meet the qualifying criteria as specified in this policy. In administering the scheme, the Revenues and Benefits Service will give consideration to the guidance produced by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Revenues and Benefits Service will treat all applications on their individual merits and will seek through the operation of this policy to:
- Alleviate poverty
 - Support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life
 - Help and encourage residents to sustain and maintain housing
 - Prevent and reduce homelessness
 - Keep families together
 - Support the vulnerable in the local community to maintain their health and wellbeing
 - Support disabled people living in significantly adapted accommodation – including any adaptations made for disabled children; and foster carers, whose housing benefit is reduced because of a bedroom being used by, or kept free for, foster children
 - Help claimants through personal crisis and difficult events
 - Assist persons within the area who qualify for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element to move or obtain premises more suitable to their requirements
 - Support people affected by welfare reform changes.
10. The Revenue and Benefit Service considers that the DHP scheme should be short-term financial assistance. It is not and should not be considered as a long-term solution for any current or future entitlement restrictions set out within the Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Legislation.

Main Features of the DHP scheme:

- The scheme is discretionary. A claimant may be entitled if Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (Housing Element) is in payment.
- The amount that can be paid out by the Local Authority in any financial year is cash-limited by the Secretary of State.
- DHP's are not a payment of Housing Benefit / Universal Credit. However, the claimant must have an entitlement to Housing Benefit / Universal Credit (Housing Element) for the weeks that a DHP is being considered for
- There is a need for financial assistance.
- The claimant must reside in Sandwell.

DHP scheme cannot cover:

11. The following elements of a claimant's rental charge or shortfall in Housing Benefit / Universal Credit (Housing Costs) that cannot be met by a DHP are:
- Ineligible charges: service charges that are not eligible for Housing Benefit/Housing Costs cannot be covered by a DHP.
 - Sanctions and reductions in benefit.
 - Suspended payments of Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Costs element
 - Shortfalls caused by Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Costs overpayment recovery.
 - Universal Credit reclaims of payments on account
 - Council Tax Reduction.

What is a shortfall

12. A shortfall between the rental liability and payment of Housing Benefit or payment of Universal Credit (Housing element) can occur due to:
- The rent determined by the Rent Officer / Local Housing Allowance being lower than the claimant's eligible rental liability
 - Under occupation charge being applied due to the size of the claimant's household
 - Reduction in Local Housing Allowance rates for under 35's
 - The 65 per cent taper being applied to a claimant Housing Benefit entitlement
 - A non-dependant deduction being made to the claimant's eligible rent
 - The Benefit Cap has been applied
 - The Family Premium being removed (From April 2016)
 - The limitation of dependant's addition being applied (from April 2017)
 - Where the claimant can demonstrate that they are unable to meet the housing costs from their available income

How to Claim a DHP

13. A claim for a DHP must be made via the online claim form on www.sandwell.gov.uk. Verification of information will normally be required.

Commencement of a DHP Award

14. The start date of an award is determined by the Revenues and Benefits Service and can be either:
- The date that the claim for a DHP is received by the Revenues and Benefits Service.
 - The date on which the need arose upon request from the customer.

Period of a DHP Award

15. In all cases, the Revenues and Benefits Service will decide the length of time for which a DHP will be awarded based on the evidence supplied and the circumstances of the claim.
- The minimum period for which the Revenues and Benefits Service will award a DHP is one week.
 - The Revenues and Benefits Service will usually award a DHP for not less than 3 months or 13 weeks where it is to meet a shortfall.
 - The Revenues and Benefits Service will not normally award a DHP for a period exceeding 12 months.
 - Where a claimant is disabled, living in specially adapted accommodation the Revenues and Benefits Services recognise that it may be appropriate to make long-term DHP awards, exceeding 12 months

Award a DHP

16. Decisions regarding an award of DHP will be reported to the Director of Finance.
17. In deciding whether to award a DHP, the Revenues and Benefits Service will consider the following:
- The shortfall between Housing Benefit/Universal Credit housing costs element and the rent liability
 - Any steps taken by the claimant to reduce their rental liability
 - The financial and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the claimant, their partner and any dependants and any other occupants of the claimant's home
 - The income and the essential expenditure of the claimant, their partner and any dependants or any other occupants of the claimant's home
 - Any savings or capital that might be held by the claimant and/or partner
 - The level of indebtedness of the claimant and/or partner
 - The nature of the claimant's and/or partner's circumstances
 - The amount allocated up to the cash limit set by the Secretary of State at the time of the application
 - Any other special circumstances brought to the attention of the Revenues and Benefits Service.
18. When calculating the claimant's and partner's income Disability Living Allowance (both care and mobility components), Attendance Allowance, Personal Independent Payments and Carers Allowance will be fully disregarded.

19. The Revenues and Benefits Service will decide how much to award based on the individual circumstances. This may be an amount below the difference between the rent liability and the Housing Benefit/Universal credit housing costs element.
20. An award of a DHP does not guarantee that a further award will be made at a later date even if the claimant's circumstances have not changed.

Change in Circumstance

21. The claimant has a duty to notify the Revenues and Benefits Service of any change in their circumstances. They must report the change as soon as possible and not later than one month from the change occurring.
22. The Revenues and Benefits Service can revise a DHP award to take account of a change in circumstances at any time whether to the advantage or disadvantage of the claimant.

Payment of DHP

23. The Revenues and Benefits Service will decide the most appropriate person to pay based upon the circumstances of each case. This could include paying:
 - The claimant
 - Their partner (if resident in the household)
 - An appointee
 - Their landlord (or an agent of the landlord)
 - Any third party to whom it might be most appropriate to make payment.
24. The Revenues and Benefits Service will pay an award of DHP by the most appropriate means available in each case. This could include payment by but is not restricted to:
 - Electronic transfer (e.g. BACS)
 - Crediting the claimant's rent account.
25. Where the DHP award is made on an ongoing basis the payment frequency will normally be aligned to the Housing Benefit/Universal Credit payment cycle.

Notification of the DHP award

26. The Revenues and Benefits Service will inform the claimant in writing of the outcome of their application upon receipt of all information. Where the application is unsuccessful, the Revenues and Benefits Service

will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain the right of review. Where the application is successful, the Revenues and Benefits Service will notify the claimant of:

- The weekly / Monthly amount of DHP that has been awarded
- The period of the award
- The requirement to report any change in circumstances

The Right to seek a review

27. DHP decisions are not Housing Benefit/Universal Credit decisions and are therefore not subject to the statutory dispute mechanism.
28. A claimant (or their appointee or agent) who disagrees with a DHP decision in relation to:
- The refusal of a DHP award
 - The Amount of the DHP award
 - Backdate decision
 - Recovery of DHP overpayment
29. may request a review of the decision. A review must be made in writing to the Revenues and Benefits Service within one calendar month of the written DHP decision being issued.
30. Upon receipt of a review, the DHP request will be re-considered by an independent officer considering any further information provided.
31. When the review has been completed notification of the decision will be made in writing. The decision will be final with no other right of appeal.
32. Where the claimant is still not satisfied, the decision may only be challenged via the judicial review process or by complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

DHP overpayment recovery

33. The Revenues and Benefits Service will seek to recover DHP's found to be overpaid. A decision letter will be issued detailing an explanation of how and the amount of the overpayment has occurred which will be included how to request a review.
34. The recovery will usually involve issuing an invoice to the claimant (or their appointee or agent).
35. The Revenues and Benefits Service will consider offsetting overpaid DHP against any future awards and will endeavour to recover all DHP overpayments to maximise the funds that are available.

36. Under no circumstances will recovery be made from any amounts of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit. It is most unlikely that recovery of any overpayment caused by a Sandwell official error will be sought

Publicity

37. The Revenues and Benefits Service will publicise the scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on the Sandwell Council website. Information about the amount spent will not normally be made available except at the end of the financial year.

Fraud

38. The Revenues and Benefits Service is committed to identifying and subsequently investigating suspected fraudulent claims to benefit and DHP. Individuals who falsely declare their circumstances in order to claim DHP will have committed a criminal offence, which may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

Reporting

39. On a monthly basis a report detailing all DHP applications received, decisions made and DHP fund available is forwarded to the Director of Finance for approval.

Policy review

40. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

41. An equality assessment has been carried out on this policy in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.
42. However, due to the discretionary nature of decision making the Revenues and Benefits Service will randomly sample decisions made to ensure consistency.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Local Welfare Provision (LWP) Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. The Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme is to assist and support vulnerable residents of Sandwell in meeting their day to day needs for subsistence or financial support or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community. This will be aligned to the Council's key principles of tackling inequality and reducing poverty.

Policy statement

Local Welfare Provision

2. LWP will enable the Local Authority to provide assistance / support to vulnerable people in hardship situations. The overall intention is to use LWP to complement the existing support that the Council and its partners give to residents.
3. When making a decision consideration will be given to the following priorities:
 - To support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life
 - Safeguard Sandwell residents in their homes
 - Help those who are trying to help themselves
 - Keep families together
 - Help provide stability to children
 - Support the vulnerable in the local community
 - Prevent homelessness for those at risk of losing their home
 - Help customers through personal crisis and difficult events
 - Support people affected by domestic violence

General Principles

Considerations for an award

- The scheme is purely discretionary; a resident does not have a statutory right to an award
- The process will be based on application being made and will be dependent upon a need and eligibility-based assessment.
- Awards will be made by way of vouchers or goods.

The LWP will consist of 2 key aspects of support:

Planned Support

4. Intended to help vulnerable people over the age of 18 (young adults aged between 16 and 18 may also be considered where they are unable to receive assistance through Section 17), live as independent a life as possible in the community. This form of support can be considered where the applicant is in receipt of benefit and is moving into independent living.
5. Planned support is also available to people if they are leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care and supervision and they expect to be discharged within 6 weeks. Examples of such accommodation:
 - hospital or another medical establishment
 - care home
 - hostel
 - staff intensive sheltered housing
 - local authority care
 - Prison or detention centre
6. *Unless there are exceptional circumstances such as someone who lives at home and receives support from their family or family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances, applications from single people living with other family members will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to assistance from other family members.*

Responsive / Emergency Support

7. To meet a need that has arisen as a consequence of an emergency, disaster, exceptional circumstances or a pressing need that is strikingly different from the pressures generally associated with managing a low income and is the only way of preventing or mitigating serious risk to health or safety to the claimant or a member of their immediate family, which cannot be met by another source.

Forms of Support

- *Planned / Responsive support* will be the direct provision of furniture subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and the need assessment. The following items may be provided:
 - Second-hand furniture
 - White goods
- Emergency Support will be the direct provision of:
 - Food Bank Vouchers
 - Pre-payment Vouchers for fuel and travel

Process for services

Eligibility

8. Consideration will be given when the person or family has a reasonable need for an item or items to support or sustain independent living, subject to the availability of the items and the budget has sufficient resources to meet the need.
9. In cases where DWP or other Government departments have a primary responsibility to residents, The Local Authority will first advocate for residents to secure entitlements.
10. Individuals may receive support if they are age 18 and over and in receipt of:
 - Income Support
 - Income based Jobseekers Allowance; or
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit Guaranteed
 - Contribution based Job Seekers Allowance*
 - Contribution based Employment and Support Allowance*
 - Universal Credit (means tested maximum award rate/where the award does not include an earnings disregard)
 - Reside in Sandwell
11. *Claims will only be considered under these circumstances where the claimant and/or their partner has no dependants or any other income / capital.

Exclusions

12. Local Welfare Provision will not be awarded for any items that a government department or Council service has a statutory responsibility to provide.
13. The following people are excluded for support in all circumstances:
 - Prisoners and people lawfully detained, including those released on temporary licence (but not those released on parole or on bail pending a court hearing)
 - Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order
14. The following people are excluded from support except in very limited circumstances:
 - Full-time students can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster
 - Someone who is a 'person from abroad' (i.e. who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of Income Support, Pension Credit, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit) they can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster
 - Customers who are subject to the Benefit Cap. As it deemed that they have an income in excess of more than £20,000
 - A customer who has savings of more than £1K

Benefit Sanctions

15. People subject to certain disallowances or sanctions to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit or Universal Credit or equivalent welfare benefits will not normally be eligible for support.
16. However because of the nature of benefit sanctions each case will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or, their immediate family or dependant which cannot be met by another source then support may be provided.

Universal Credit – Waiting period

17. People who have made a claim for Universal Credit (UC) and are waiting for their first payment will not normally be eligible for support through LWP.
18. However, because of the actual time taken for the first payment of UC to be made there may be circumstances where support through LWP is required. Each request will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that support cannot be obtained from any other source (such as payments in advance from the Department for Work and Pensions, savings or lieu of notice pay) and failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or their immediate family, support through LWP will be considered.

How to request Support

19. Applications can be made via the online claim form on www.sandwell.gov.uk. sufficient information will need to be submitted with the application to enable an assessment of eligibility and need.

Decision making process

20. Decision making for any request for support will be processed by the LWP Team in the Revenues and Benefits service area.

- Once all relevant data / information has been collected and the eligibility has been satisfied. An officer from the team will contact both successful and unsuccessful residents. If successful, the awards will be provided in line with the resident's needs.
- If unsuccessful the resident will be given the reasons for the decision and details of the appeals process. Also, what other options are available to them i.e. advice and information on other services.
- If the information is incomplete or further supporting evidence is required, an officer will contact the resident for the necessary information. Once all relevant data has been collected a decision will be made.
- Local Authority may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application. Such requests may be requested by phone or in writing.
- Local Authority reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the resident in appropriate circumstances.
- If the resident is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, the local authority will still consider the request and will take into account any other available information.

Value of Awards

21. Each case will be assessed on individual circumstances. The value of the items provided will be at the discretion of the Local Authority but will be based on standard prices for items including the cost of delivery and installation where appropriate.

22. Awards will be limited to 3 awards within any 12-month period.

Outcome

23. Once all information to support a request has been received, the referral will be processed within 14 working days.

24. The LWP Team will provide written notification of an award of support to the Resident or the officer representing the individual and the supplier of goods.

25. Written notification will include details of:

- The support to be provided
- How, when and where the award can be accessed

26. To avoid unnecessary delay, residents may be asked for alternative contacts methods such as email or telephone to speed up the outcome confirmation.

Out of Hours Arrangements

27. Local Welfare Provision will not operate outside of normal office working hours.

Review / Reconsideration

28. A resident can ask for reconsideration if they can demonstrate there has been a factual error based on the decision made, an oversight on a significant piece of evidence or where new evidence has come to light, that was not provided with the original request form. In either circumstance, the resident must provide the relevant details.

29. Such requests must be made in writing to the Revenues and Benefit Service.

30. The review will be carried out by the Revenues and Benefits Service by an independent officer. Their decision will be final with no other right of appeal.

Monitoring Arrangements

31. The central coordinating function sitting with the Revenue and Benefits service area will monitor the number and amount of awards / refusals in relation to planned and emergency support on a monthly basis to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently and in line with the Council's equality duties.

Policy review

32. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

33. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Non-Domestic Rates Hardship Relief Policy

NDR Hardship Relief Policy – Contents

Legislation

Purpose

Statement of objectives

Applications

Criteria for using powers

Period of relief

Responsible Officers

Decision making process

Requirement to Make Payments

Changes of Circumstances

Notification

Payments

The right to seek a review

Notification of review/re-determination decision

State Aid

Meeting Ambition 10

Policy statement

1. The objective of Sandwell MBC is to treat each and every application for Section 49 Hardship Relief on its individual merits.

Introduction

Legislation

2. The Council is aware of its duties and powers in accordance with section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. This Policy sets out how the Council will use its powers and the criteria that must be satisfied.
3. Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gives a Billing Authority the ability, if it so wishes, to reduce amounts due for Non-Domestic Rates.
4. An Authority may reduce or remit the amount payable, to do so it must be satisfied that:
 - (a) the ratepayer would sustain hardship if the authority did not do so.

and

- (b) it would be reasonable to do so having regard to the interests of other persons subject to its Council Tax charges.

General principles / regulations

Purpose

5. The purpose of this policy is to specify how Sandwell MBC will administer requests for relief from payment of Non-Domestic Rate and to indicate some of the factors that will be considered when deciding if relief may be granted.
6. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly.

Statement of objectives

7. Sandwell MBC will consider applications for relief from payment of Non-Domestic Rate under the provisions of Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
8. In administering applications, Sandwell MBC will ensure that each application will be given due regard on its merits in accordance to the criteria and process laid down by the Council.
9. It should be noted that the test of hardship need not be confined to financial matters; all relevant factors should be considered, including the impact on the local community.

Process for services

Applications

10. Applications will need to be made in writing by any ratepayer wishing to apply for assistance.
11. In all cases, evidence will be required from the ratepayer. Where this is requested, the authority would expect the required evidence to be provided within 14 days of the request unless otherwise stated by the authority.
12. Where no or insufficient information is provided by the ratepayer, no relief shall be granted.

Criteria for using powers

13. The Council will consider using its powers to reduce or remit Non-Domestic Rate liability for any Non-Domestic Rate payer.
14. There is a cost implication of any relief awarded which is borne locally and met from the authority's general fund. A reduction or remission of rates on the grounds of hardship should therefore be the exception rather than the rule.
15. The test of hardship will not be confined strictly to financial hardship. All relevant factors affecting the ability of a business to meet its liability for rates should be considered.
16. Each case will be considered on its own merits - however the following points should be considered for each application:
 - The interests of council taxpayers in an area may go wider than direct financial interests. For example, where the employment prospects in the area would be worsened by a company going out of business, or the amenities of an area might be reduced by, for instance, the loss of the only shop in the vicinity.
 - Where the granting of relief would have an adverse effect on the financial interests of council taxpayers, the case for a reduction or remission of rates payable may still, on balance, outweigh the costs to council tax payers.
 - The financial position of the business ratepayer. This will need to be established by the provision of audited accounts for the three years preceding the date of the application for remission / reduction (except in the case of a new business where the previous twelve months accounts should be produced).
 - The fact that a ratepayer suffers a trading loss in one year should **not** be construed as evidence that the ratepayer would suffer hardship if the rates were not remitted or reduced.
 - Any other factors put forward by the ratepayer would be considered on their specific merits.

- Consideration must be given to the amount of relief that can be granted and the effect this will have on the ability of a business to continue to trade.
 - Whether the business claiming the relief at the very least pays any employees the National Minimum Wage
 - No more than 50% of the total number of employees must be on zero-hour contracts.
 - At least 50% of employees should be living in Sandwell
17. Where a business is making a repeat application, this will only be considered if it can be shown that the circumstances surrounding the application have changed, the details of the application differ and the business has taken reasonable steps to improve its situation.
18. Where there is a national crisis/pandemic affecting a significant number of businesses and there is government funding available to assist no award will be made.

Period of relief

19. Relief will only be granted (as a maximum) to the end of a tax period in which the reduction or remission is requested.

Responsible Officers

20. Delegation of authority to reduce or remit non-domestic rates under the provisions of Section 49 has been granted to the Director of Finance for amounts up to and including £20,000. The responsibility for making decisions regarding amounts above £20,000 lies with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.
21. The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager will liaise with the customer in each case to obtain sufficient detail (in line with the criteria as laid out in this policy) to make a decision in their case.

Decision making process

22. The Council will decide every application for relief where the customer has satisfied the required criteria as laid out in this policy.
23. The decision-making process will involve:
24. Stage1: The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager makes a recommendation to the Director of Finance after considering each case on 'its merits' against the information provided by the customer.
25. Stage 2: The Director of Finance will decide whether to award a reduction or remission.

26. Stage 3: Where the reduction or remission is greater than £20,000, the Director of Finance will make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

Requirement to Make Payments

27. Ratepayers must continue to pay any amount of Non-Domestic Rates that falls due pending the outcome of the application.
28. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Changes of Circumstances

29. The customer has a duty to notify the Council where a change in circumstance would affect the granting of relief.
30. The change in circumstances must be notified to the authority within 14 days of its occurrence.
31. The Council can revise relief to take account of a change in circumstance.

Notification

32. The Council will notify a customer of its decision by letter or email within 14 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Payments

33. All awards of relief or discount will be credited against the applicant's business rates account to reduce the amount payable.

The right to seek a review

34. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, there is no right of appeal against the Council's use of discretionary powers. However, the Council will accept a customer's request for a re-determination of its decision.
35. A request for a review / re-determination must be made within four weeks of receipt of notification of the decision and must set out the reasons for the request and any supporting information.
36. The review process will involve re-consideration of the request on its merits by the Director of Finance. The Council will consider whether the customer has provided any additional information against the required criteria that will justify a change to its decision.

Notification of review / re-determination decision

37. The Council will notify a customer of its decision within **28** days of receiving a request for a review or re-determination.

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

38. State Aid guidance was withdrawn on 1 January 2021. The Brexit transition period has ended and new rules on Subsidy Control now apply. For current information and to see how this may affect your business please go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid>
39. If you believe your business will exceed the new subsidy control limits you must contact the Business Rates team using our online contact us form located at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> to ask for any relief already awarded to be removed from your account

Policy review

40. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and / or changes to legislation.

Equalities

41. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010.
42. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Revenues and Benefits Service
Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Contents

Recommendations

Alternative Options

Implications

Annexes

Background Papers

Empty but furnished property

Empty & unfurnished property

Uninhabitable property

Long term empty property – “Empty Homes Premium”

Statement of objectives

Local Welfare Provision

Considerations for an award

- The scheme is purely discretionary; a resident does not have a statutory right to an award

The LWP will consist of 2 key aspects of support

Eligibility

How to request Support

Decision making process

Value of Awards

Outcome

Out of Hours Arrangements

Statement of objectives

Criteria for using powers

Period of relief

Responsible Officers

Decision making process

Requirement to make Payments

Changes of Circumstances

Notification

Payments

The right to seek a review

Notification of review/re-determination decision

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

Charity and non-profit organisations

RELIEF INTRODUCED BY THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

Section 69 “Localism Act Relief”

PART OCCUPIED/PART VOIDE SECTION 44A RELIEF (“S44A”)

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme (“SSBR”)

DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS INTRODUCED DURING 2023/24 and 2024/25

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023/24

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2024/25

Key Criteria for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief Financial Year 2023/24 and 2024/25

Who can apply?

Retail Discount Exclusions

Heat Network Relief

Local Newspaper Relief

Eligibility Criteria

Exclusions

Applications

The Maximum Award

Future Reliefs in 2024/25

State Aid/Subsidy Controls Regulations

Equalities

Administration of the scheme

Legislation

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) allows a reduction in Non-Domestic Rates of up to 100% where certain provisions are satisfied. The decision to grant or not grant relief is a matter purely for the authority. The Revenues and Benefits Service work closely with the Voluntary Sector Funding Team to administer this policy.
The Council recognises the important role played by the Voluntary Sector in Sandwell, not only in the area of service delivery, but also as an indicator of civic engagement and the health of the social fabric of the borough.
The regulations relating to DRR can be found in Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended).
Registered charities registered friendly societies and community amateur sports clubs automatically qualify for a mandatory reduction to their rates bill of 80%. The Council can consider granting DRR to these organisation's on the remaining 20%.
DRR enables the Council to support a wide range of voluntary and community groups in Sandwell, providing a significant reduction to an organisation's running expenses.

General principles/ regulations

Policy overview

2. The purpose of this policy is to outline the conditions that should be satisfied for Sandwell MBC to consider relief under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and associated legislation.

Processes for services – reliefs available

3. The following reliefs are available in Sandwell under the banner of 'Discretionary Relief' for Business Rates:
 - Charity and Non-Profit Making Organisations 'Top Up'
 - Reliefs made available under the Localism Act 2011:
 - (i) 'Section 69' Localism Relief
 - Part Occupied/Part Void Section 44A Relief
 - Discretionary Relief Introduced April 2023:
 - (i) Supporting Small Business Relief
 - Discretionary Reliefs introduced during 2023/24 and 2024/25
4. The criteria for each of these reliefs is listed below, together with details on how to apply and any restrictions, where applicable

Charity and non- profit organisations

5. Some charities and non-profit organisation's are entitled to 80% mandatory 'Charity' rate relief. However, Local Authorities have the option to 'top up' that relief to 100%. Organisation's that meet the requirements of this policy and the relevant criteria who are eligible for the 80% mandatory rate relief, may receive a top up of 20%.

Sandwell needs a healthy Voluntary Sector, particularly local voluntary and community organisations. This supports citizens of the borough by providing:

- Local community-based services – many voluntary and community sector organisations are community based and may therefore be better able to work with harder to reach groups. This complements the Council's town and neighbourhood-based approach to service delivery
- Choice – by supporting voluntary and community sector organisations the Council hopes to provide a greater choice for local people in terms of the services they can access
- Independence – voluntary and community sector organisations are independent bodies and are often well placed to take on a campaigning or advocacy role on behalf of local people, providing an important challenge role for the Council
- Opportunities for people to participate – as volunteers as well as service users
- Specialist services – many voluntary and community sector organisations develop specialism's around the particular needs of a client group

Definition of terms

6. Voluntary organisation:

A formal organisation run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic, or social good.

7. Community group:

A community organisation is a less formally organised body run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic, or social good.

Who Can Apply?

8. The following organisations could apply for DRR 'Top Up':

- Charities (including charity shops that are ratepayers occupying premises used for charitable purposes).
- Non-profit organisations (that are not charities but the objectives of which are 'charitable', 'philanthropic' or religious, or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts' or who use the premises mainly for recreation).

9. Examples of these organisations include:

- Voluntary organisations
- Community groups
- Tenants and residents' groups
- Faith groups
- Housing Associations
- Co-operatives and social enterprises (that are set up to benefit of the public at large rather than its members)
- Sports organisations
- Mutules
- Grant making trusts.

Eligibility Criteria

10. To be eligible for DRR, organisations must occupy the property for which they are seeking DRR and must:
- be used for the purposes of delivering the organisations' objectives to benefit citizens of Sandwell
 - be based in or delivering services in Sandwell
 - be non-governmental
 - be value driven, for the social good
 - be non party political
 - not use profit that is normally reinvested into the organisation, to pay management a salary
 - reinvest at least 50% of their financial surpluses for community benefit in Sandwell. Regional and national organisations will need to reinvest at least 50% of their financial surpluses that arise from their work in Sandwell for community benefit in the borough
 - not be funded directly from taxation by any government department or agency in the provision of any function under any statutory duty

Levels of DRR

11. Organisation's that meet the requirements of this policy and criteria, in receipt of 80% mandatory rate relief, will receive a top up of 20%. All other successful applicants will receive 100% discretionary rate relief.

Effective Date of DRR Award

12. Prior to 1st April 2024 an application for the **previous** financial year had to be received and assessed by 30th September.
13. *For example:* An application for backdated relief for 2022/23 (covering the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023), is received by the Council in time for it to be assessed and approved before 30 September 2023, then DRR would be backdated to 1 April 2022, or the date of occupation if later). From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

How to apply

14. If you are advised that an application for DRR is required by the Council, it must be made using the authority's application form which is available on the Council's website <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/business-rates/charitable-relief>
15. Details of the criteria and guidance notes are also available on the Council's website <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/33/charitable-and-discretionary-relief>
16. All applications under this policy will be considered by the Director of Finance

Unsuccessful DRR Applications

17. There is no legal right of appeal against the Council's use of discretionary powers. However, the Council will accept a customer's request for a re-determination of its decision. Any further appeal must take place via judicial review.

18. If an application for DRR has been refused, applicants have the opportunity to request a re-determination. All requests must be made in writing, within one month of the Council's decision. Requests will be considered by a panel of 2 officers who were not involved in the original decision.
19. If an unsuccessful applicant decides to make a request for re-determination, they will still need to continue to pay their business rates. If the request is successful, an amended bill will be issued.

RELIEF INTRODUCED BY THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

20. This involves the following relief:

- i. Section 69 'Localism' Relief

Section 69 'Localism Act Relief'

21. Section 69 of the Localism Act 2011 amends Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The changes came into effect from 1st April 2012 and extended the existing provision relating to the granting of DRR.
22. From 01 April 2012 any ratepayer may apply for this relief. The costs of such relief are borne solely by council taxpayers of the borough, therefore it is essential that relief is only given to those ratepayers who will bring significant benefit to the area.
23. The amount of relief granted is not fixed and will be dependent on the individual circumstances of each application.
24. To be considered the ratepayer must meet all of the following criteria:
 - The ratepayer must occupy the premises
 - The ratepayer must be relocating from outside Sandwell, or where already existing within Sandwell must operate within one of Sandwell's priority sectors, namely: -
 - Diversified manufacturing: including high value-added engineering, food production, offsite construction and health products
 - Business, financial and customer services
 - Green industries; including environmental technologies, waste recycling and resource management and research investment
 - The ratepayer must provide significant investment in premises and/or capital equipment.
 - The ratepayer must provide significant new job creation and/or safeguarding of existing jobs.
 - The premises and organisation must be of significant benefit to Sandwell's residents
 - The premises and organisation must relieve the Borough of providing similar facilities.
 - The ratepayer must provide facilities to certain priority groups such as the elderly, disabled, minority groups, disadvantaged groups, or provide the residents of the borough with such services, opportunities or facilities that cannot be obtained locally or are not provided locally by another organisation
 - The ratepayer must be paying its employees at least the national minimum wage
 - Not more than 50% of the ratepayer's employees must be on zero-hour contracts
 - At least 50% of the ratepayer's employees must be living in Sandwell

and

- The ratepayer must demonstrate that Discretionary Relief will only be required short-term and that the business /operation is financially viable in the medium/long term; and
- The ratepayer must show that the organisation will comply with all legislative requirements and operate in an ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly manner at all times.

25. Enquiries relating to this relief should be directed to the Business Rates team via our online contact us form

<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates>

Community Benefit Clause

26. Any businesses benefitting from this relief must engage with the Council's Think Local Recruitment team to assist with the recruitment of any new staff.

27. Businesses benefitting from this relief must also consider apprenticeships or develop existing employees to gain recognised qualifications e.g. NVQ's,

28. The business should use www.thinksandwell.co.uk to advertise any supply opportunities resulting from the building of new premises etc.

PART OCCUPIED/PART VOID SECTION 44A RELIEF ('s44A')

General Explanation

29. If a property is only partly occupied, the Council has discretion to request that the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) apportion the property's rateable value between its occupied and unoccupied parts, provided it '...will remain so for a short time only'

30. Partially occupied rate relief (often referred to as 'Section 44A' or 's44A' Relief) is not intended to be used merely where part of a property is temporarily not used. The intention is aimed at situations where there are practical, financial or economic difficulties in occupying or vacating all of the property, or exceptional circumstances may have arisen meaning the area is incapable of occupation at that time unique to the business

31. The effect of the reduction under s44A would be to reduce the rates on the premises to the same level as would be payable if the unoccupied part formed a separate hereditament

32. If a visit to the property is required to assist in making a decision on an application, the ratepayer must allow a Council Officer accompanied access to the property by appointment during normal working hours at a time and date mutually agreed. The Council Officer may take measurements and photographs as evidence during the inspection. Full rates remain payable until the visit is concluded and a decision has been made whether or not to award the s44A Relief

33. Every application will be considered on its own merits, but the Council will have particular regard to the effect on its Collection Fund and the interests of local Council Taxpayers when considering whether it is reasonable to award the relief or not. Confirmation is required that the business claiming the relief, at the very least, pays its employees the National Minimum Wage and/or the National Living Wage, as appropriate to their age and circumstances

34. Following any inspection of the premises but before being referred to the VOA, applications will need to be approved by the Council's Section 151 Officer.
35. If awarded, relief in the Sandwell area will only normally start from the date stated on the application and will only be awarded for up to a maximum of three months (or six months for an industrial hereditament) in a financial year. In exceptional circumstances, consideration will be given to awarding relief across financial year, for example application made late in the year.
36. Consideration will also be given in exceptional circumstances to awarding relief for a retrospective period where the ratepayer can demonstrate good cause for not submitting the application earlier
37. For any application approved, details with regards to the unoccupied area will be forwarded to the VOA. The VOA must then issue a certificate confirming the rateable value of the unoccupied area in order for the s44A relief to be awarded. Once the VOA has issued a certificate, relief must be awarded in accordance with it.
38. This is a discretionary relief and full rates will remain payable on a partially occupied property if the Council chooses not to exercise its power in this respect

Decisions by the Council

39. Every application will be considered on its own merits however, in addition to the effect on the Collection Fund and local Council Taxpayer, when considering an application for Section 44A Relief, the following factors will be taken into account:
 - The circumstances leading to the partial occupation
 - Previous awards of Section 44A Relief to the same business/ organisation and the net effect on Council Taxpayers
 - The intention of the business in relation to unoccupied area(s)
 - The reasonableness of the ratepayer requesting an alteration of the rating assessment from the VOA
 - The availability of evidence that the unoccupied area(s) will be empty for a short period only
 - Full occupation being phased in over a period of time or full vacation occurring in stages over a period of time, if applicable
40. Relief will *not* normally be considered where:
 - Access is refused and/or it has not been possible to verify the application
 - Part occupation is likely to exceed a short time
 - The area is not clearly defined
 - Part occupation is seasonal or due to the nature of the business
 - The premises are partially empty due to essential maintenance or upgrading
 - The company is moving out of Sandwell
 - There have been repeated requests on an annual basis, as this is not deemed 'temporary' relief
 - There is a national crisis/pandemic affecting a significant number of businesses.
 - Government funding is available to assist

Applications for Relief under this scheme

41. Applications must be in writing. An MS Word application form is available via the following link <http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200308/business-rates/2954/partly-occupied-property-relief-section-4-4a>

42. As much information as possible must be provided to the Council as detailed on the application form in order for the request to be considered. This must include a plan(s) of the premises clearly showing the unoccupied area(s) and should include measurements where possible
43. Once an application has been received, if a visit is required an officer from the Council will contact the ratepayer to arrange a suitable date to allow accompanied access for an inspection of the premises

Amount of relief

44. Where Sandwell MBC agrees to the award of a Section 44A relief, notification will be sent to the VOA to seek a reduction in the rateable value
45. The amount of relief is calculated on a statutory basis, based on the rateable value of the empty area(s) of the property. The appropriate rateable value is provided to Sandwell MBC by the VOA England

Variation and amendment of relief under the scheme

46. The period of relief will end on the day on which any of the following occurs:
 - There is a change to the extent of the partial occupation
 - The end of the three months/ six-month relief period, or the end of the financial year, whichever is first
 - A new period of relief under a new application starts
 - The premises become fully occupied or completely unoccupied
 - The ratepayer ceases to be the person or organisation liable to pay rates in respect of the premises
 - The Council is unable to verify, following reasonable notice, that the area remains unoccupied
47. If there is a change in the rateable value, relief will be apportioned or removed as appropriate

Notification of Decision

48. The Council will notify the ratepayer of their entitlement to relief by the issue of an amended demand notice. Where an application is refused, businesses will be informed by the council of this decision in writing.

Decision Review Process

49. There is no statutory right of appeal against a decision made by the Council regarding discretionary rate relief, including Section 44A applications. However, the Council recognises that ratepayers should be entitled to have a decision reviewed if they are dissatisfied with the outcome
50. The Council will accept a written request for a review of its decision. The request should include the reasons for requesting a review and any supporting evidence
51. A request for review must be made within one calendar month of the date of refusal
52. The ratepayer will be notified of the outcome of the review in writing.
53. This review process does not affect a ratepayer's legal right to seek to challenge a decision by way of Judicial Review

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme ('SSBR')

Supporting Small Businesses Scheme ('SSBR')

Eligibility and Level of Relief

54. The Government announced at the 2022 Autumn Statement that for 2023/24 to 2025/26, SSBR is to provide support to businesses losing eligibility for some or all Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief as a result of their rateable value increasing through the 2023 revaluation.
55. The relief ensures small businesses do not have to pay more than £600 increase per year effective from 01 April 2023.
56. Charities and Community Amateur Sports clubs, who are already entitled to mandatory 80% relief, are not eligible for 2023 SSBR.
57. A change of ratepayers will not affect eligibility for the SSBR Scheme, but eligibility will be lost if the property falls vacant or becomes occupied by a charity or Community Amateur Sports Club.
58. There is no second property test for eligibility for the 2023 SSBR scheme. However, those ratepayers who during 2022/23 lost entitlement to Small Business Rate Relief (because they failed the second property test) but have, under the rules for Small Business Rate Relief, been given a 12 month period of grace before their relief ended - can continue on the 2023 SSBR scheme for the remainder of their 12 month period of grace.
59. Period of Entitlement to 2023 SSBR
60. The 2017 SSBR scheme was provided to support small and medium ratepayers who had seen large increases in their bills at the 2017 revaluation, and those ratepayers have had 6 years of support to allow them to adjust to their full 2017 bills. Therefore, for those ratepayers receiving 2017 SSB relief in 2022/23, any eligibility for 2023 SSBR will end on 31 March 2024. Relief for these ratepayers is awarded for one year only.
61. All other eligible ratepayers receiving 2023 SSBR will receive relief for either 3 years or until they reach the bill they would have paid without the scheme.

Sequence of Reliefs

62. SSBR is to be awarded after any eligibility to Transitional Relief and Small Business Rate Relief.
63. All other discretionary reliefs, including those funded by section 31 grants will be considered after the application of 2023 SSBR.

Subsidy Control

64. The 2023 SSBR is likely to amount to a subsidy. Therefore, any relief provided by local Authorities under this scheme will need to comply with the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations.

65. The local authority is seeking to provide relief that falls below the Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) thresholds, the Subsidy Control Act allows an economic actor (e.g. a holding company and its subsidiaries) to receive up to £315,000 in a three-year period (consisting of the 2023/24 year and the two previous financial years). MFA subsidies cumulate with each other and with other subsidies that fall within the category of 'Minimal or SPEI financial assistance'. BEIS COVID-19 business grants and any other subsidies claimed under the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance limit of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement should be counted under the £315,000 allowance.
66. In those cases where it is clear to the local authority that the ratepayer is likely to breach the MFA limit then the authority will automatically withhold the relief.

Applying the relief

67. Sandwell MBC has identified the businesses that are eligible for the 2023 SSBR scheme. Ratepayers eligible for the scheme starting in the 2023/24 financial year have been automatically awarded a reduction in line with the new scheme to help off-set the increase in their business rates.
68. The amount of relief awarded under Supporting Small Business Relief scheme will be recalculated in the event of a change of circumstances, including changes such as a backdated change to the rateable value or the property or the award of another relief.

DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS INTRODUCED DURING 2023/24 and 2024/25

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023/24

69. The Government announced in the Budget on 17 November 2022 that it will provide a Relief of 75% up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business for retail, hospitality and leisure properties.
70. As these measures are 2023/24 only, the Government is not changing legislation, however it will reimburse local authorities that use its discretionary powers, introduced by the Localism Act (under Section 47 of the Local government Finance Act 1988, as amended) to grant relief in line with eligible criteria. Central Government will reimburse local authorities for their share of the discretionary relief under the rates retention scheme.
71. Prior to 1st April 2024 an application for the previous financial year had to be received and assessed by 30th September.
72. *For example:* An application for backdated relief for 2022/23 (covering the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023), is received by the Council in time for it to be assessed and approved before 30 September 2023, then DRR would be backdated to 1 April 2022, or the date of occupation if later).

From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2024/25

73. The Government announced in the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023 that it would extend the Relief of 75% up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business for retail, hospitality and leisure properties. As these measures are 2024/25 only, the Government is not changing legislation, however it will reimburse local authorities that use its discretionary powers, introduced by the Localism Act (under Section 47 of the Local government Finance Act 1988, as amended) to grant relief in line with eligible criteria. Central Government will reimburse local authorities for their share of the discretionary relief under the rates retention scheme. From the 1st April 2024 the local authority is able to operate relief without restriction in respect of the financial year 2023/24 onwards.

Key Criteria for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief Financial Year 2023/24 and 2024/25

- i) 75% relief for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 or 75% relief for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025
- A cash cap of £110,000 per business subject to:
 - The Property must be occupied
 - There is no rateable value limit
 - The Property must be used wholly or mainly as:
 - a) a shop, restaurant, café, drinking establishment, cinemas or live music venue.
 - b) for assembly and leisure; or
 - c) a hotel, guest or boarding premises, or self-catering accommodation
 - The eligible ratepayer has not refused the relief. (The eligible ratepayer cannot withdraw their refusal for either all or part of the financial year).

Who can apply?

74. The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities has issued guidance outlining what they consider eligible property uses to mean, including:

- a) Shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas, and live music venues:
- Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public:
 - Shops (such as: florists, bakers, butchers, grocers, greengrocers, jewellers, stationers, off licences, chemists, newsagents, hardware stores, supermarkets, etc)
 - Charity shops
 - Opticians
 - Post offices
 - Furnishing shops/display rooms (such as: carpet shops, double glazing, garage doors)
 - Car/caravan show rooms
 - Second-hand car lots
 - Markets
 - Petrol stations
 - Garden centres
 - Art galleries (where art is for sale/hire)
 - Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public:
 - Hair and beauty services (such as: hairdressers, nail bars, beauty salons, tanning shops, etc)
 - Shoe repairs/key cutting
 - Travel agents
 - Ticket offices e.g.: for theatre
 - Dry cleaners
 - Launderettes
 - PC/TV/domestic appliance repair

- Funeral directors
 - Photo processing
 - Tool hire
 - Care hire
- Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of food and/or drink to visiting members of the public:
 - Restaurants
 - Takeaways
 - Sandwich shops
 - Coffee shops
 - Pubs
 - Bars
- Hereditaments which are being used as cinemas
- Hereditaments that are being used as live music venues:
 - Live music venues are hereditaments wholly or mainly used for the performance of live music for the purpose of entertaining an audience. Hereditaments cannot be considered a live music venue for the purpose of business rates relief where a venue is wholly or mainly used as a nightclub or a theatre, for the purposes of the Town and Country planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).
 - Hereditaments can be a live music venue even if used for other activities, but only if those other activities (i) are merely ancillary or incidental to the performance of live music (e.g. the sale/supply of alcohol to audience members) or (ii) do not affect the fact that the primary activity for the premises is the performance of live music (e.g. because those other activities are insufficiently regular or frequent, such as a polling station or a fortnightly community event)
 - There may be circumstances in which it is difficult to tell whether an activity is a performance of live music or, instead, the playing of recorded music. Although we would expect this to be clear in most circumstances, guidance on this may be found in Chapter 16 of the statutory guidance issued in April 2018 under Section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003.

b) For assembly and leisure:

- Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of sport, leisure and facilities to visiting members of the public (including for the viewing of such activities):
 - Sports grounds and clubs
 - Museums and art galleries
 - Nightclubs
 - Sport and leisure facilities
 - Stately homes and historic houses
 - Theatres
 - Tourist attractions
 - Gyms
 - Wellness centres, spas, massage parlours

- Casinos, gambling clubs and bingo halls

- Hereditaments that are being used for the assembly of visiting members of the public:

- Public halls

- Clubhouses, clubs and institutions

c) Hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation:

- Hereditaments where the non-domestic part is being used for the provision of living accommodation as a business:

- Hotels, Guest and Boarding Houses

- Holiday Homes

- Caravan parks and sites

75. This guidance is not exhaustive, and it is for Authorities to determine whether properties not listed in the guidance notes are broadly similar in nature and if so, to consider them for relief. Conversely, properties that are not broadly similar in nature to those listed should not be eligible for the discount. Ratepayers that occupy more than one property will be entitled to a discount for each of their eligible properties, subject to any cash cap applicable in year 2024/25.

Retail Discount Exclusions

76. The Government does not consider the following types of use to be retail use for the purposes of this discount:

- Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public:

- Financial services (e.g.: banks, building societies, cash points, bureaux de change, short term loan providers, betting shops)

- Medical services (e.g.: vets, dentists, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors)

- Professional services (e.g.: solicitors, accountants, insurance agents/financial advisors, employment agencies, estate agents, letting agents)

- Post office sorting offices

- Hereditaments that are not reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public

Claiming Retail Discount

77. New applicants are required to complete an online application form available at through the link at: https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200308/business_rates/4268/retail_relief

78. Further information regarding the application process can be found on the same web page

Maximum Award

79. The total amount of Government funded discount available for each property under the 2023/24 and the 2024/25 scheme is 75%, of the bill after all mandatory and discretionary reliefs have been applied but after discretionary reliefs granted under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act, for example: Hardship Relief and Discretionary Rate Relief for charity and not for profit organisations. The maximum discount awarded will not exceed the net liability.

Notification

80. Where the application is successful, a revised bill will be issued.
81. Where the application is not successful, the applicant will be notified accordingly
82. Requirement to make payment of amounts falling due
83. Ratepayers' must continue to pay any amount of business rate that fall due pending the outcome of an application. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Heat Network Relief

84. In its Final Report of the business Rates Review published in October 2021, the government announced a 100% relief for eligible low-carbon heat networks that have their own rates bill.
85. The relief is targeted at hereditaments being used wholly or mainly as a heat network which have their own rating assessment. The relief will be for those networks generating from a low carbon source.
86. Heat networks take heat or cooling from a central source(s) and deliver it to a variety of different customers such as public buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, universities and homes. By supplying multiple buildings, they avoid the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building. Heat networks have the potential to reduce bills, support local regeneration and be a cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions from heating.
87. At the Spring Statement 2022, the Chancellor announced that the heat network relief will apply from 1 April 2022 and will be delivered by Local Authorities using their discretionary relief powers. This approach has also been confirmed for the relief to be continued to be provided in the financial year 2023/24.

Eligibility

88. In order to be eligible for Heat Network Relief the hereditament must be:
 - a) wholly or mainly used for the purposes of a heat network.
 - b) The heat is over the next 12 months (based on a forecast) expected to be generated from a low carbon source (irrespective of whether that source is located on the hereditament or on a different hereditament).
89. Wholly or Mainly used for the purpose of a heat network
90. For these purposes, a heat network is a facility, such as a district heating scheme, which supplies thermal energy from a central source to consumers via a network of pipes for the purposes of space heating, space cooling or domestic hot water. Hereditaments wholly or mainly providing heat for a different purpose (such as an industrial process) are not eligible
91. The test will be applied to the hereditament as a whole and heat network relief is not available on part of a hereditament. Many small and medium scale heat networks, such as common heating systems in multi-occupied buildings or estates, do not give rise to a separate business rates bill. In these cases, the heat network forms part of the services of the properties which have a wider purpose (e.g. offices) and therefore would not be eligible for Heat Network Relief.

92. The test is on thermal energy. This means that the purposes of generating electricity does not count towards meeting the wholly or mainly test and, as a result, the government does not anticipate hereditaments comprising power stations and a heat recovery and network system to qualify.
93. The Heat is generated from a low carbon source
94. A low carbon source is a source of which at least
- a) 50% is renewable
(A renewable source is any of the sources listed in Class 1(e) of the Schedule to the Valuation for Rating (Plant and Machinery) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 540))
 - b) 50% is waste heat.
(Waste heat includes heat or coolth unavoidably generated as a by-product of another process, which would be wasted if not used for the purposes of a district heating network)
 - c) 75% is cogeneration heat (where cogeneration' means the simultaneous generation in one process of thermal energy and electrical or mechanical energy), or
 - d) 75% is a combination of the sources above

Reliefs Awarded

95. Relief is available at 100% of the chargeable amount for the hereditament for any day on which the eligibility criteria are met. Therefore, for eligible hereditaments the rates liability will fall to nil from 1 April 2023.
96. The heat network relief will be applied after mandatory reliefs but before any other discretionary reliefs.
97. The amount of heat network relief will be recalculated in the event of a change in circumstances. This could include, for example, a backdated change to the rateable value or to the hereditament. This change of circumstances could arise during the year in question or during a later year.

Subsidy control

98. The Heat Network relief is subject to the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations. Businesses eligible for relief will need to fulfil any requirements in place to ensure compliance with those obligations in advance of, during, and after claiming relief.

Claiming Heat Network Relief

99. There is no application form for this relief. To apply please use our online contact us form <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> giving full details of why you think your business should be considered for this relief and provide all information you think is relevant to support your application.

Local Newspaper Relief

100. From 1 April 2017 the Government provided funding to local authorities so that they can provide a discount worth £1,500 in year 2017/18 and 2018/19 for office space occupied by local newspapers. The Autumn budget 2018 extended this relief to financial year 2019/20.
101. In a Written Ministerial Statement 27 January 2020, the Government further extended this relief to apply in the financial years 2020/21 to 2024/25.
102. Please note that this relief will cease at the end of the 2024/25 financial year

Eligibility Criteria

103. This relief is administered under the local powers discount contained in Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- The relief is available to local newspapers only
 - The property must be occupied by a local newspaper and used wholly or mainly as offices for journalists and reporters
 - Only one discount is available per newspaper title and per property
 - Subject to subsidy limits

Exclusions

104. Exclusions to this relief are local council newspapers, online publications and local magazines

Applications

105. There is no application form for this relief. To apply please use our online contact us form <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> giving full details of why you think your business should be considered for this relief and provide all information you think is relevant to support your application.
106. For the relief to be granted, the council must make a decision within 6 months of the end of the financial year

The Maximum Award

107. The total amount of government funded relief available is £1,500 for each financial year 2017/18 to 2024/25 for one local newspaper title and property
108. The relief will be applied against the net bill after all other reliefs

Notification

109. Where the application is successful, a revised bill will be issued.
110. Where the application is not successful, the applicant will be notified accordingly.

Requirement to make a payment of amounts falling due

111. Ratepayers' must continue to pay any amount of business rate that fall due pending the outcome of an application. The Council may apply its normal recovery procedures in cases where payments are not received.

Future Reliefs in 2024/25

112. Should the government introduce further Business Rates Reliefs during 2024/25 we will implement these in accordance with any legislation and/or Government guidance issued, and we will update the guidance contained in the Discretionary Relief Policy document accordingly

Discretionary rate reliefs and state aid/subsidy control

State Aid/Subsidy Control Regulations

113. State Aid guidance was withdrawn on 1 January 2021. The Brexit transition period has ended and new rules on Subsidy Control now apply. For current information and to see how this may affect your business please go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complying-with-the-uks-international-obligations-on-subsidy-control-guidance-for-public-authorities>
114. If you believe your business will exceed the new subsidy control limits you must contact the Business Rates team via our online contact us form at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/contactusbusinessrates> to ask for any relief already awarded to be removed from your account

Policy review

115. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments, feedback and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

116. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified because of this policy.

Housing Benefit
War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard Policy

Meeting Ambition 10

Introduction

1. War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation will be paid to those persons eligible to receive it and Sandwell have decided to disregard this income when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit. This will be aligned to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Policy with key principles of tackling inequality and reducing poverty.

Policy statement

2. The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 make provision for the first £10.00 of income from War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme to be disregarded in any benefit assessment. The cost of this disregard is fully reimbursed to the Council.
3. The Social Security Administration Act 1992 gives the Council discretion to disregard any amount it chooses in addition to the statutory provision. The Council has taken advantage of this provision and fully disregarded income claimants receive from the War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Schemes.

General Principles

4. The Council will fully disregard income from War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit.
5. The 100% disregard of funds received as War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards aims to:
 - Ensure that members of the armed forces who have been disabled during service or the widows or surviving civil partner of those who died in the service of their country, should not be penalised by having their pensions or payments made in relation to their service, taken into account in the calculation of their Housing Benefit entitlement
 - Ensure income from the schemes is treated consistently when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit
 - Ensure continued alignment between treatment of these incomes under the Housing Benefit scheme set by the Department for Works and Pensions and Sandwell Council's own Council Tax Support Scheme
 - Ensure that everyone gets fair treatment and equal opportunity
 - Promote a transparent and simple assessment methodology that is easily understood
 - Provide staff with guidance for making reasonable, fair and consistent decisions

Process for services

Administration of the scheme

6. A statutory disregard of £10 is required from current payments of War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006. These payments include:
 - War disablement pension
 - War Widows/widowers pension
 - Guaranteed Income Payments (GIP's) under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFRFCS) payments
 - Service Attributable Pension (SAP) injury or illness attributable to service on or before April 1975
 - Any comparable payment paid by Government of a country outside Great Britain
 - A pension paid under the law of the Federal Republic of Germany or Austria to victims of National Socialist Persecution
7. But not pre-1973 War Widow's Special Payments which are already disregarded in full.

Legislation

8. The Regulations providing for this are:
 - The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 paragraph 40(2) and schedule 5
 - Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the age qualifying for the State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006 paragraph 33(9) and schedule 5
 - Sections 134 and 139 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 provide the Council with the discretion to modify the Housing Benefit Scheme by disregarding a further amount, or all, of specified war disablement pensions and payments. The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (War Pension Disregards) Regulations 2007 (as amended) which prescribe which pensions and payments these are.

Policy review

9. The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

Equalities

10. This policy has been produced in line with the Council's obligation to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Award of contract to Phoenix Software LTD for the provision of Microsoft E5 licenses
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bob Piper Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources
Director:	Brendan Arnold Director of Finance
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Daron Tonks – Senior Lead Officer Richard Griffiths – Principle Lead Officer

1 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Give approval to award a contract to Phoenix Software Ltd for a period to end 31 March 2027 for a Microsoft Enterprise 5 (E5) licensing agreement using the KCS framework at a total value of spend attributable to E5, over 3 years is: £4,737,892.50.
- 1.2 Approve the purchase of Server and Cloud Enrolment (SCE) agreement at an annual cost of £152,890.80 - based upon a volume of up to 300 servers and at current pricing with a total value over 3 years of £458,672.40.
- 1.3 Approve the purchase of Microsoft 365 Copilot licenses at an annual cost of £88,740.00 - based upon a volume of up to 300 users and at current pricing at a total value over 3 years of £266,220.00.



1.4 That any necessary exemptions be made to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in 1.1 – 1.3 to proceed.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 In April 2021, the council entered into a 3-year licensing agreement for Microsoft E3 products following a compliant "further Competition process" under Lot 3 of the Crown Commercial Services Framework RM 6068 – Technology Products and Associated Services. The expiry date for this contract is March 2024.

2.2 To enable the council to improve its cyber security resilience posture and retain its current Microsoft productivity tools we now wish to move to a Microsoft E5 licensing model. The threat of a Cyber-attack on Sandwell Council is constant and ever adapting. The move to E5 will significantly fortify the council against cyber-attacks, in line with the government's Cyber Security Strategy 2022-2030.

2.3 Microsoft recognise that the step up from E3 to E5 is expensive and that the product suite is extensive meaning it takes time to implement all available modules. Therefore, they offer what is known as a RAMP (Rapid Modernisation Plan) deal which is a discounted annual cost used as an incentive for organisations to move to E5.

2.4 E5 is recognised across the public sector as being the preferred level of licensing where cyber security resilience is seen as being important. Most councils across the Black Country and the West Midlands (including the WMCA) have already uplifted or are in the process of relicensing to E5.

2.5 The current E3 licensing includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, SharePoint, OneDrive, Teams plus essential, but entry level tier, cyber security protection and tooling. The higher level E5 licensing includes tools for increased protection of the council's business applications and data. The additional cyber security products include:

- Identity and Access Management - enhanced control, including the ability to detect security vulnerabilities
- Advanced Threat Protection - providing additional protection for files, emails and outlook applications, real time checks of web links



and use of machine learning to identify trends. Includes enhanced protection against phishing emails and henceforth successful ransomware attacks.

- Advanced Information/Data Governance with auto classification and labelling – includes scanning content to apply the appropriate governance protocols to data.

2.6 Whilst there are a multitude of 3rd party security vendors offering a diverse set of tools, products, and solutions to satisfy the council's cyber security requirements, having multiple security vendors will complicate operations with individual account management and integration challenges. Microsoft E5 streamlines security, enhances functionality, and leverages existing council expertise and market accessibility for additional capabilities.

2.7 It must be recognised that whilst the enhanced cyber security tools will increase the council's protection there is no guarantee of preventing a future successful attack. Attacks are increasingly sophisticated, and attackers are always "ahead of the game". Microsoft E5 security technology makes significant use of artificial intelligence which is recognised by cyber professionals as the only sure way of keeping in-step with these advances.

2.8 Moving to E5 licensing brings additional benefits and opportunities to the council. As well as improving the council's cyber security requirements, it provides:

- Corporate wide licenses for Power Bi - currently, the council licenses individual users for Power Bi (which is a powerful data analytics tool) at additional cost. Use of the platform is expanding across a multitude of service areas and continues to grow.
- Teams Phone System - enables external telephone calling through Microsoft Teams – known as PSTN. This means users can use Teams to call traditional telephone numbers and receive them all from the 1 interface. As the council needs to update its telephone system, having access to these licenses will reduce the cost of this project as Teams Phone System is the preferred technical approach



- 2.9 There are a number of additional products and licensing agreements from Microsoft which complement E5. The SCE is for annual licensing related to our Windows Server platform – necessary for hosting our business applications and critical ICT infrastructure in our datacentre. This licensing agreement runs alongside E5 for a period of 3 years.
- 2.10 Copilot is Microsoft’s artificial intelligence technology designed to provide real-time intelligent assistance, enabling users to enhance their creativity, productivity, and skills. The award for 300 licenses is the minimal quantity able to be purchased and allows for us to trial, evaluate and understand the capability and use cases. It is recognised that not every employee requires Copilot and will never be licensed for everyone. By taking the minimum quantity of 300 will allow us targeted deployment and understand where it can assist with the council’s transformation programme including customer journey and business intelligence.
- 2.11 Microsoft technology is a core element of the council’s ICT strategy and extending the use of the tooling via E5 supports our ongoing direction of travel.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>An effective approach to cyber security supports the council in achieving all of its Corporate Plan objectives as the availability of ICT business systems and electronic information is essential to the smooth operation of all council services.</p>
--	--

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At the end of March 2024 the councils Microsoft 365 enterprise licence (E3) will expire. This covers Microsoft office products in use by the whole council and also basic cyber security functionality. The council is now able to purchase enhanced cyber security functionality whilst retaining current Microsoft office products by upgrading to the E5 licence



4.2 Cyber security resilience is a de-facto necessity for any organisation reliant on ICT business applications and electronic data. The council is now wholly dependent on technology for the provision of its front-line services. The threat from successful attack has risen dramatically emanating from adverse state actors, cyber-criminals intent on causing disruption.

4.3 The failure of the council to protect itself from a successful cyber-attack would be widespread. There is now a nationwide feeling of not if an attack will occur but when. The consequences are multiple and evidenced by successful attacks which have previously occurred in Hackney, Gloucester, and Copeland. All resulted in significant business disruption and expensive recovery and clean-up costs.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 There is no truly viable option to move away from a Microsoft enterprise licencing agreement as this provides the council with its office productivity tools server suite software and is heavily integrated other software used by the council for business-as-usual processes.

5.2 One alternative option is to remain at enterprise licensing tier E3 and purchase individual products from other security vendors to satisfy our desired outcomes. However, this would increase the amount of vendor account management required and there is no guarantee that all the various products would seamlessly integrate and interoperate with one another.

5.2 A do nothing approach to enhance the council's cyber security posture is not a desirable strategy given the increased cyber security threat across the public sector. The council wishes to push forwards, proactively, with its cyber security resilience programme and fundamental to this is having the right tools and products available to identify, defend and protect itself from suffering a successful cyber-attack. Successful attacks can stop a council from providing services for multiple months, cause excessive expenditure in clean-up costs and destroy its reputation. These are in



addition to the stress and anxiety inflicted on its workforce and the severe, detrimental impact on its citizens.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>E5 Licensing</p> <p>The cost the council will pay by virtue of purchasing E5 licensing is:</p> <p>2024 / 2025 – RAMP price - £1,424,919.66 2025 / 2026 – RAMP price - £1,571,218.98 2026 / 2027 – RAMP price - £1,741,753.86</p> <p>E5 Total for 3 years: £4,737,892.50</p> <p>The licensing model is subscription based meaning the council pays for active licenses. If the council (and the Children’s Trust) increases its workforce numbers and those employees need a Microsoft license, then we would have to purchase additional licenses albeit at the agreed “discounted” price. In simple terms this increases our annual overall cost.</p> <p>SCE</p> <p>The cost the council will pay by virtue of purchasing Server Cloud Enrolment is:</p> <p>2024 / 2025 – price - £152,890.80 2025 / 2026 – price – £152,890.80 2026 / 2027 – price - £152,890.80</p> <p>SCE Total for 3 years: £458,672.40</p> <p>The cost will increase if the Council increases the number of servers within the ICT estate during the period of the agreement.</p>
--------------------------	--



	<p>Microsoft 365 Copilot</p> <p>The cost the council will pay by virtue of purchasing Microsoft 365 Copilot is:</p> <p>2024 / 2025 – price - £88,740.00 2025 / 2026 – price - £88,740.00 2026 / 2027 – price - £88,740.00</p> <p>Co-pilot Total for 3 years: £266,220.00</p> <p>Overall cost per year of all products</p> <p>2024 / 2025 – price - £1,666,550.46 2025 / 2026 – price - £1,812,849.78 2026 / 2027 – price - £1,983,384.66</p> <p>Total for 3 years: £5,462,784.90</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Legal Services and Procurement have been consulted.</p> <p>This report indicates that the host of the framework, KCS, has advised the Council that this direct award by the Council is permitted under the rules of this framework.</p> <p>In reliance of this advice, this direct award would be compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council’s Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules.</p> <p>The direct award will be subject to call-off terms and conditions made available by KCS.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>The corporate risk management strategy has been complied with to identify and assess the risks associated with the recommendations being sought in this report.</p>



	A risk assessment has been carried out and there are no significant risks associated with the recommendation
Equality:	No implications
Health and Wellbeing:	No implications
Social Value:	The Council is committed to being responsible and driving sustainable innovation – ensuring that our technology benefits everyone and helps to address society’s most pressing challenges now and in the future.
Climate Change:	Using cloud computing supports the council’s delivery of its climate change action plan. Microsoft is committed to sustainability and has pledged to be carbon negative by 2030.
Corporate Parenting:	No implications

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None



Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Schools Funding 2024-25
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children and Education, Councillor Hackett
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Finance Business Partner – Children’s Services, Elaine Taylor elaine_taylor@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That having considered the outcome of the consultation proposals following review by the Schools Forum, as shown in Appendix A, approval be given to the 2024/2025 schools funding formula for Sandwell schools, as follows:


- (a) adopting the minimum transition option for calculating schools funding in 2024/25;
- (b) setting the Growth Funding at £1.60m;
- (c) the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund in 2024/25;
- (d) the transfer of £0.512m funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block to fund the attendance service;
- (e) the Central Schools Services Block, De-delegated and Education Function proposals as set out in Appendix A (with the exception of Schools in Financial Difficulty).



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Schools Revenue Funding 2024/25 Operational Guide requires the Council to engage in open and transparent consultation with maintained schools and academies in their area, as well as with their school's forum about any changes to the local funding formula, including the principles adopted and any movement of funds between blocks.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for making the final decisions on the formula and for ensuring there is sufficient time to gain political approval before the funding is distributed to schools - deadline 28 February 2024.
- 2.3 The contents of this report were considered by Schools Forum at their meeting of 11 December 2023.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Delegated grant funding is in support of children and schools providing suitable provision within schools in the community and being able to support that readiness and long-term promotion of becoming good citizens within the community
--	---

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 There have been a few changes announced by the DfE/ESFA in the Summer 2023 on the way schools will be funded from 2024/25 and these are summarised below.
- 4.2 In 2024/25, each local authority will continue to be required to bring their own formulae closer to the schools direct National Funding Formula (NFF). There is an expectation that the full move to the NFF will be completed by 2027/28.
- 4.3 The Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) is being rolled into the schools NFF from 2024/25. To ensure schools do not lose funding as a result of this change, additional funding has been added to each



school's MFG baseline. The amount added reflects the number of pupils included in the school's MFG baseline.

- 4.4 Split sites funding is now mandatory and is calculated using the DfE formula.
- 4.5 The Minimum Funding Guarantee will continue in 2024/25 to be between +0.0% and +0.5% without the need for a disapplication request to the DfE.
- 4.6 The basic structure of the high needs NFF for 2024/25 is not changing.
- 4.7 Local authorities will continue to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block to other blocks of the DSG, with Schools Forum approval. A disapplication request is required for transfers above 0.5%, or for any amount without Schools Forum approval. The authority will once again be requesting a movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block.

4.8 Background/Context

- 4.9 There were 7 proposals/questions asked in the schools funding consultation 2024/25 (5 to academies). Questions asked and responses to each are detailed in Appendix A.
- 4.10 **Question 1:** At the request of Schools Forum three modelling options were pulled together in order to demonstrate what a school's funding could potentially be if they chose to move 10% closer to the NFF, 20% closer and if they chose to move directly to the NFF.
- 4.11 It was stressed that the funding that was modelled in each option was to be a guide only and did not represent the actual amount each school would get. This was due to the following large number of assumptions made which were not known at the time of the consultation:

- The data used in the modelling is from the October 2022 census data and the final funding model will be based upon and updated with the latest October 2023 census.



- The Mainstream Schools Grant (MSAG) was a separate grant in 2023/24 but will be rolled into the 2024/25 schools block.
- An assumption at this stage that Growth Fund will make use of the brought forward balances and so will be set at £1.60m (see Question 2)
- An assumption at this stage that £0.512m will be transferred from the Schools Block to Central Schools Services Block (see question 3)
- The final DSG will not be announced until December 2023

4.12 It was important that schools noted the context of the question and provide their views on how quickly they would wish to move towards the National Funding Formula: There were 3 possible answers/options given:

- Option 1: Minimum Transition
- Option 2: Accelerated Transition
- Option 3: Move directly to the NFF.

4.13 **Question 2:** Schools and School Forums were asked how much growth fund they would like to see top sliced from their DSG with 2 response options being the full £1.9m or making use of the brought forward thereby reducing this to £1.6m.

4.14 Growth fund has been part of the school's consultation for a number of years and is used to support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need, additional classes need, infant class size regulation and to meet the costs necessary for new schools.

4.15 **Question 3:** Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund.

4.16 **Question 4:** Schools and School Forums were asked if they would support the movement of funding from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block to the value of £0.512m in order that the attendance and safeguarding service could provide services to both the maintained and academy sector.



- 4.17 **Question 5:** Schools were asked if they supported the proposals outlined in the Central Schools Services Block which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Appendix A).
- 4.18 **Question 6:** Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the De-delegated proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Appendix A).
- 4.19 **Question 7:** Maintained Schools were asked if they supported the Education Functions proposals which were unchanged from 2023/24 (Outlined in Appendix A).

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The consultation with schools resulted in the option to move their funding closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF) by 10% as a minimum. The primary sector predominantly chose to move to the NFF at this slower pace. The secondary sector preference however was to move directly to the NFF in 2024/25.
- 5.2 There is an alternative option whereby cabinet can overrule schools' overall preferences and approve the move where funding, in 2024/25, immediately mirrors the NFF.
- 5.3 Moving to the NFF in 2024/25 will mean Sandwell schools will be funded consistently as part of the Governments plan for fair funding for all at a much faster pace. However, and as can be seen at Appendix A below, majority of Sandwell's schools are not in favour of this option. In addition, it will result in more turbulence (the number of gainers and losers) within the system.



6 Implications

Resources:	This report will affect the funding received by individual schools in 2024/25. The schools block of the DSG is £349.852m and all of this will be distributed to schools via the Schools Funding Formula.
Legal and Governance:	The Authority must adhere to the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2023 and have taken into account the DfE Schools Operational Guide 2024/25.
Risk:	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.</p> <p>As set out in paragraphs 4.9-4.19 the LA has undertaken its duty to ensure all schools and interested stakeholders have been consulted on around the changes to their funding allocations from previous years. The recommendation by School Forum members to adopt option 1 will see schools moving another 10% closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p>Despite the Government providing additional funding schools will continue to experience budget pressures from rising costs and inflation. There are an increased number of small and primary schools who will find it difficult to set balanced budgets as we move to the NFF.</p> <p>The LA helps schools to mitigate their risk of financial difficulty through the submission of school budget plans and termly monitoring reports and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) by identifying early, any schools showing financial difficulty (ii) by supporting them to manage their finances by using various tools including deployment



	<p>of Schools Resource Management Advisor (SRMA)</p> <p>(iii) where appropriate providing them with funds from the “schools in financial difficulty fund”</p> <p>(iv) if in deficit, mandate they go through a “schools in financial difficulty” process.</p>
Equality:	The DfE has undertaken an equalities impact assessment of the national funding formula for schools and high needs. The analysis is also based on the assumption that local authorities will fund their schools in accordance with the national funding formula.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals in this report have no impact on health and wellbeing
Social Value:	Sandwell is committed to providing a first-class education for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, and to level up opportunity so that all children can realise their potential, preparing them for a fulfilling and successful adult life.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications
Corporate Parenting:	There are no Corporate Parenting implications

7. Appendices

Appendix A - Consultation Questions and Responses



Responses

The table below compares responses from the previous 4 years:

	Primary	%	Secondary	%	TOTAL	%
2020-21	56/94	60%	9/18	50%	65/112	58%
2021-22	60/95	63%	10/20	50%	70/115	61%
2022-23	43/94	46%	10/20	50%	53/114	47%
2023-24	55/94	59%	6/20	30%	61/114	54%
2024-25	55/94	59%	10/20	50%	65/115	57%

Question 1

Please indicate the option you prefer to use for calculating schools funding for 2024/25? There were 3 possible responses which were:

- OPTION 1 - Minimum transition
- OPTION 2 - Accelerated transition
- OPTION 3 – National Funding Factor (NFF) values

Q1: Overall Responses	Total	%
OPTION 1 - Minimum Transition	51	78%
OPTION 2 - Accelerated Transition	5	8%
OPTION 3 - National Funding Formula Factor	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%



Q1: Detailed Responses	Total
Minimum Transition	51
Primary	47
Secondary	4
Accelerated Transition	5
Primary	4
Secondary	1
National Funding Formula Factor Values	9
Primary	4
Secondary	5
Grand Total	65

Question 2

Do you agree to the use of the Brought Forward of £0.282m to set the Pupil Number Growth Fund? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q2: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Utilise the Brought Forward	56	86%
NO – Do NOT use the Brought Forward	9	14%
Grand Total	65	100%



Q2: Detailed Responses	Total
YES - Utilise the B/F	56
Primary	47
Secondary	9
NO – Do not utilise B/F	9
Primary	8
Secondary	1
Grand Total	65

Question 3

Do you agree to the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund (FRF)? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q3: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – Agree with the introduction of a FRF	44	68%
NO – Do NOT agreed with the introduction of a FRF	21	32%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q3: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – introduce a FRF	44
Primary	38
Secondary	6
NO – Do NOT agree with a FRF	22
Primary	18
Secondary	4
Grand Total	65



Question 4

Do you agree to the top slice of £512,000 from the Schools Block to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) to fund the Attendance Team? There were 2 possible responses which were:

- YES
- NO

Q4: Overall Responses	Total	%
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57	88%
NO – Do NOT agree to £512k top slice	8	12%
Grand Total	65	100%

Q4: Detailed Responses	Total
YES – agree to £512k top slice	57
Primary	47
Secondary	10
NO – do NOT agree to £512k top slice	7
Primary	7
Secondary	0
Grand Total	65

Question 5

Do you agree with the indicative allocation of the CSSB?

Q5: Responses	YES	NO
CSSB1 – Statutory & Regulatory /Welfare and Asset Man	57	8
CSSB2 Admissions Service	57	8
CSSB3 Historical Commitment Pensions Administration	57	8
CSSB4 Schools Forum	57	8



Question 6 and 7

Please indicate YES / NO if you agree with the De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals? There were 2 possible responses which were either Yes or No to each of the proposals.

De-Delegation

Q6: Responses	YES	NO
DD1 Health & Safety Licences	43	8
DD2 EVOLVE	50	1
DD3 Union Facilities Time	33	18
DD4 School Improvement	44	7
DD5 Schools in Financial Difficulty	31	20

Education Functions proposals

Q7: Responses	YES	NO
EF1 Education Benefits Team	45	6
EF2 Children's Clothing Support Allowance	32	19



Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Social Housing Decency Funding Grant
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Laura Rollins Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment,
Director:	Dean Epton Interim Director of Housing,
Key Decision:	Yes Value of grant award – Urgent item report
Contact Officer:	Philip Deery Assistant Director Building Safety & Compliance, phil_deery@sandwell.gov.uk Sarah Ager Assistant Director Asset Management and Improvement Sraah_ager@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to draw down the offer of £2.1m of Capital Grant Funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC);
- 1.2 Approval be given to enter into the following new contracts to deliver the works as part of the grant funding:
 - Internal environmental monitoring
 - Specialist expert intervention to eradicate damp and mould
 - Replacement soil stacks
 - Installation of ventilation and heat recovery



- 1.3 That delegated authority be given to the Interim Head of Contract Procurement, in consultation with the Interim Director of Housing, Interim Section 151 Officer and Assistant Director for Legal and Assurance to make amendments and changes to the extensions and / or processes described in this report in order to give effect to the decisions at 1.2;
- 1.4 That the Interim Director of Housing, in consultation with the Interim Section 151 Officer, be authorised to prepare tendering documentation and to procure one or more contractors, in accordance with The Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council’s Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, to work on behalf of the Council, to undertake work to resolve damp and mould related issues in our Housing stock;
- 1.5 That the Interim Director of Housing be authorised to award the contracts, as referred to in 1.4, to the successful contractor(s);
- 1.6 That the Assistant Director for Legal and Assurance be authorised to enter into or execute under seal any documentation in relation to the award of the contracts;
- 1.7 That any necessary exemption be made to the Council’s Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in 1.2 and 1.4 to proceed.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Minister of State for Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DHLUC) has made capital grant funding available to support Local Authorities and / or social housing Registered Providers in the West Midlands Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Combined Authority area towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by them related to improvements in the physical decency of their properties, with a focus on serious (e.g. category 1) hazards including damp and mould.
- 2.2 There is no requirement for match funding and all work is intended to be fully funded from this grant.
- 2.3 The use of grant funding is not prescriptive and organisations can choose how to utilise funding to address damp & mould related issues. DLUHC are seeking projects that deliver additionality to existing



investment plans and innovation in the form of new work not previously identified.

2.4 A number of contracts have been awarded that will enable us to deliver the additional works that the grant can facilitate. There are some contracts that will need procuring via a suitable framework to be awarded as pragmatically as possible.

2.5 We will need to procure contracts to deliver the following areas of innovation and delivery:

2.5.1 Internal environmental monitoring

2.5.2 Specialist expert intervention to eradicate damp and mould

2.5.3 Soil stack replacement

2.5.4 Electrical ventilation and heat recovery

2.5.5 These four projects will be soft market tested through appropriate frameworks to find the optimum innovative solution to procure.

2.6 In terms of properties that will be targeted with the grant funding:

2.7 We have identified over 500 properties where residents have reported damp and mould that has subsequently been categorised as a potential category 1 hazard, ongoing internal environmental monitoring can help to mitigate against the issue reoccurring.

2.8 From the 500 plus properties referred to above we will select those that will benefit from improved ventilation and anticipate that list will continue to grow.


2.9 We have full details for our soil stack replacement requirements and we have identified that meets the criteria that can be completed in 2024 – 25.

2.10 We have yet to identify suitable properties for mould eradication but anticipate the 500+ properties referred to above would be our priority.



- 2.11 DLUHC have given WMCA a target date for delivery of 31st March 2024. Sandwell MBC have confirmed that this is not achievable. This has resulted in DLUHC giving WMCA delegated powers to administer the grant and a local agreement has been made between WMCA and Sandwell MBC. The delivery plan produced (Appendix 1) has been shared with WMCA to define how maximum grant spend would be achieved to give assurances that we have a robust plan to deliver the £2.1m.
- 2.12 Within the West Midlands Combined Authority area there are 7 organisations identified as potential recipients of the grant funding.
- 2.13 Although Manchester has sought bids from interested organisations WMCA have agreed with DLUHC that their allocation will be a direct award the 7 partners identified with each receiving an initial allocation of £2.1m.
- 2.14 We continue to determine the financial split between each measure and retain the option to be flexible in our approach dependant on the relative successful delivery of each area of intervention.
- 2.15 Locally, the overall project will be monitored through our Major Capital Works Project Board monthly meetings and once agreed by the board those reports will forwarded to WMCA.
- 2.16 WMCA have yet to confirm the reporting arrangements for DLUHC.
- 2.17 WMCA have engaged with a research partner to carry out a study of the benefits derived from this grant award and DLUHC intend to use the final report as a potential basis for future grant funding awards.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People Live Well and Age Well This grant will help tackle damp and mould in the home which can lead to residents developing health conditions and it can exacerbate symptoms for those living with certain medical conditions.</p>
---	---





Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods

This grant will support allow Sandwell MBC to continue to maintain, upgrade and invest in its housing stock as and when required, in line with the Decent Homes Standard and regulatory requirements.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell has an aging stock and as a result there have been issues related to damp and mould for many years. This issue gained a national focus following the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak, a two-year-old who died in December 2020 from a respiratory condition caused by "extensive" mould in the family home in Rochdale.
- 4.2 Since then there has been a significant increase in customer demand around damp and mould in the last 12 months.
- 4.3 We have created a virtual team to provide a focus on our response to reports of damp & mould, and as a result of the teams work we have a clearer understanding of the measure we should prioritise in Sandwell to alleviate the situation.
- 4.4 Improving ventilation – we have identified a need to provide better ventilation systems that are cost effective for residents. Surveys of our homes have identified this as a high priority but we are currently unable to meet the demand using existing resources, therefore the grant funding will enable us to deliver this improvement to homes much sooner than is currently planned.
- 4.5 We have an existing soil stack replacement project that is on hold as the budget has been expended for the current year. This project is targeting failing cast iron soil stack in our flatted accommodation. Once again, the grant funding will enable us to deliver this improvement to homes much sooner than is currently planned.
- 4.6 We have considered new technologies as a potential solution for the future, particularly the ability to monitor internal environments in the home and better inform our understanding of severe cases of damp & mould and better inform residents about the potential causes of damp &



mould. Current investment priorities prevent us from investing in this area, so the grant funding will enable us to technology to provide more detailed insight into the root cause of the damp & mould.

- 4.7 There are a number of companies who provide insurance backed mould eradication treatments. The grant funding would give us the opportunity to look to engage suitable companies in this area to assess the value this option provides when compared with our current approach to the treatment of damp & mould.
- 4.8 The timescales for delivery have been discussed with WMCA and they have confirmed that there will be flexibility beyond the initial 31st March deadline. There is a focus on the new procurement projects and an intention to utilise existing contracts where appropriate to demonstrate progress and our commitment to this funding programme. The procurement project plan in Appendix 1 shows the intention of delivery.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Sandwell does not have to draw down the grant funding offered. If we do not, it will be offered to other Local Authorities.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The £2.1m grant available does not require additional funding from Sandwell. Any additional SMBC staffing resources needed to deliver the work will be funded from the £2.1m grant.</p> <p>There is potential of additional funding should any of the other 6 partners fail to utilise the grant funding and therefore there may be a surplus in the overall grant that will need to be used. This will not require additional funding from Sandwell.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The Council has power to enter into contracts under its powers of general competence under s.1 of the Localism Act 2011 and none of the limitations to this power apply to this decision. The contracts discharge</p>



	<p>a range of statutory functions imposed or contractual obligations on the Council and the Council may be at risk of legal action if it stops the delivery of those services.</p> <p>Local authorities have numerous statutory duties as a residential landlord including requirements to undertake consultation under s.20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and Service Charges (Consultation Requirements) (England) Regulations 2003 and must design the procurement process accordingly.</p> <p>Procurement of works and services through a competitive process, compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR2015) must meet the advertising requirements such as publication of a Contract Notice. PCR2015 applies to all the Council's contracts for services valued above £213,477 and where the object of the procurement is predominantly construction above £5,336,937 (figures inclusive of VAT). An appropriate procedure as set down in PCR2015 needs to be selected. Compliance with PCR2015 will result in a lawful procurement strategy and shall meet the requirements of the Councils' Contract and Financial Regulations.</p>
Risk:	Contractors' supply chains and capacity are challenging and could present a challenge in meeting our deadlines. We will work openly with suppliers to programme the work as expediently as possible appreciating there are resource and capacity pressures within the market. The additional time flexibility from WMCA supports this approach and the ability to procure optimal contracts.
Equality:	The interventions listed will help remove damp and mould conditions that can affect vulnerable residents.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposal will significantly improve the health and wellbeing of the residents living in homes with severe damp and mould.
Social Value:	Each contract that is procured includes a Social Value Action Plan. Specific targets related to the contract are agreed to drive economic benefit, improved employment opportunities and align to the Council's Corporate Parenting strategy.



	Social Value Action Plans are monitored through the contract term to ensure outcomes are achieved.
Climate Change:	New technology will identify areas where residents can benefit from deduced heating demands in the home. All contracts have sustainability principles around energy efficiency will be embedded within the Contract Specification, bringing broader benefits to residents around energy costs and healthy living.
Corporate Parenting:	All future procurement exercises will properly consider how we can best support Corporate Parenting ensuring that outcomes are agreed, monitored, and delivered, improving the lives of people across our Borough.

7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 - Procurement Project Plan with indicative spend values.

8 Background Papers

8.1 None



Spend Category	Proposed Route to Market	Indicative Spend Value £	HIP Contract Option in Place	Timescale to Procure & Award	Resource Involved	Comments
Door replacement	Existing contract	390 doors with no completion on door contract Average cost. Front £550 per door 390 = £214,500.00 Rear £500 per door 390 = £195,000.00	Yes – May not be in place until July 2024 (Current contract in place until 2 nd May 2024)	Utilise existing contract	Contract Managers	Utilise existing door contract ongoing until May 2024. This contract is currently underspent so there is flexibility in spending
Ventilation systems	Framework	£1000 average. More with heat recovery £577,000	No	Framework 6-8 weeks generally	Head of Procurement, Contract Managers	Classify spend that specifically relates to Decency Grant rather than ongoing HIP works
Soil stack replacement	Framework	£300,000-£350,000 (Vinci price will be looked at for comparison)	Yes - May not be in place until July 2024	Framework 6-8 weeks generally	Contract Managers	Classify spend that specifically relates to Decency Grant rather than ongoing HIP works
Roof replacements	Existing contract	£6,000 per roof average WM cost comparison framework.	Yes - May not be in place until July 2024	Utilise existing contract	Contract Managers	Utilise existing contracts to carry out replacements following surveys as required
Internal environmental monitoring	Framework	£346,000 based upon £600 per property for all 577 properties	No	Mini-competition 6-8 weeks award decision	Head of Procurement,	Smart Home Tech opportunity to explore innovation

					Contract Managers, QS team.	and lessons learnt for any longer-term contracts outside of Decency Grant.
Specialist expert intervention to eradicate damp and mould	Framework	Difficult to provide indicative costs and will be on a case by case basis. £300,000 allocated for this	No	Mini-competition 6-8 weeks award decision	Head of Procurement, Contract Managers, QS team.	Identify effective services to eradicate issues over the longer term.
Admin & Ancillary Costs	N/A	£100k	N/A	N/A	TBC	Additional support costs required to deliver the programme
Total		£2,082,500.00				

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	New Archives Centre for the Borough
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member – Leisure and Tourism Cllr Charn Singh Padda
Director:	Director – Borough Economy Alice Davey
Key Decision:	Yes Boroughwide service – affects all wards
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director – Libraries, Archives, Information Services, Tourism and Community Hubs, Dawn Winter Dawn_winter@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to work with appointed subject matter expert consultant for archives and senior council officers to develop a funding strategy for the development and capital scheme to establish a new Archives Centre for the Borough at the preferred site as approved by Cabinet on 16 November 2022;
- 1.2 That the Director of Borough Economy, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Portfolio holder for Archives be authorised to progress the proposed scheme through the Council’s consideration and approval process for capital schemes with an associated business model to outline the revenue impact of the proposed scheme and submit a further report in due course.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell's Archives include the political, personal, domestic, industrial, religious, educational and social histories of Sandwell dating from 1369 through to the present day. These unique documents offer the people of Sandwell and beyond a journey through the development of the area, up to now. Their preservation ensures that future generations will be able to learn from the experiences of the past to make decisions about the present and future.
- 2.2 Currently archives storage is at capacity, and the material is housed in three separate sites, which makes managing the collection and providing access for residents difficult, it also restricts the provision of resources in relation to a public service for family and local history searches.
- 2.3 The service is a Place of Deposit for Public Records as set out under Section 4 (1) of the Public Records Act 1958. To retain this status the Borough must hold The National Archives Accreditation standard, and in 2018 we were unsuccessful in our application for this award. This was primarily due to the unsuitable storage environment, which continues to jeopardise our ability to effectively care for and conserve our collections.
- 2.4 Sandwell Archives is in the minority of archives services in not being accredited. 90% of local authority Places of Deposits in England are Accredited (about the same in Wales). Of those not accredited, the majority have made unsuccessful applications and are following a programme of rectifying activity aiming to address the issues.
- 2.5 An archives service that is not accredited may trigger a review of the Place of Deposit status. This would cause reputational damage to the Council so is identified as a red risk on the Corporate risk register.
- 2.6 Most of the storage does not meet the required standards (BS 4971) set out by The National Archives (TNA). The archives are stored in the basements of Smethwick library and West Bromwich town hall (neither of which meets the standard), and in the relatively new Dudley Archives – which does but at a cost. The current rental price of £13,000 per year is below market value, and the agreement can be terminated by either party by giving six months' notice.





2.7 A new archives centre provides several opportunities for Sandwell.



- Opportunity to develop a new and improved true heritage and Storytelling centre for Sandwell that incorporates both a new archives centre and a records management facility to preserve the corporate memory. Economies of scale would allow the authority to develop a more proactive strategy for the acquisition of historic corporate records in a timely manner.
- Providing much needed high-quality storage for Sandwell’s public art collection which is also in unsuitable storage conditions.
- The geographical area covered by the Archives is made up of several diverse communities and it is our aim to ensure that our collections represent these communities living in Sandwell. A new centre will allow us to fully address gaps in our collections by working closely with community groups and other local bodies to collect material.
- A new building would provide the opportunity to undertake a range of events and activities in a dedicated community space and allow touring exhibitions on the history of Sandwell to be more effectively displayed, and to begin to actively collect items and stories to tell the true ‘story of Sandwell’.

2.8 Significant funding will be required to realise this ambition (current estimate is c. £20 million), so a funding strategy and subsequent external funding bids will need to be prepared. Additional funding streams could also be explored. Senior officers to work with finance colleagues will set aside resource time to work out Council contribution as this may be required as first element before securing external funding.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Improving access to Archives gives more opportunities for families and children to attend for local history and storytelling</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well Improving access to Archives, local history and heritage gives greater opportunity for residents to enjoy their local community assets. It also increases the opportunity for local groups to use the facility with residents benefitting from their activities.</p>



	<p>Strong Resilient Communities A new Archives Centre enables Sandwell Council to retain its archives and public records and make them accessible to local communities and creates and sense of civic pride and pride in place.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy The project will deliver direct improvements within Smethwick neighbourhoods and make the area more attractive to live in. By delivering this ambitious project will further demonstrate Sandwell Council's ability to get things done.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell's Archives include the political, personal, domestic, industrial, religious, educational and social histories of Sandwell dating from 1369 through to the present day. These unique documents offer the people of Sandwell and beyond a journey through the development of the area, up to now. This material is available in a wide variety of formats. Their preservation ensures that future generations will be able to learn from the experiences of the past to make decisions about the present and future.
- 4.2 Funding is made available from central government to account for changes made to legislation that are estimated to have a disadvantageous financial effect on local authorities. A 'New Burdens' payment compensates local authorities for the increased activities that places of deposit may experience during the transition period. TNA agreed that this money totalling £119k awarded to Sandwell could be used for feasibility studies and project management into a new archives centre.
- 4.3 These studies delivered by specialist archivist contractors are now complete (see Appendix A, B and C) and a draft design with indicative costings has been produced for the agreed site. Officers will now work with the consultant and an archives funding specialist to develop a funding strategy and support bid(s) to external funders e.g. National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England.
- 4.4 Costs for a new centre are now estimated to be in the region of £20 million to provide a building that is able to meet the standard required for



accreditation and full public access. Such a building would be expected to have an asset life in the region of 40 years.

- 4.5 Research carried out in 2020/21, funded by TNA at a cost of £15k, identified and assessed feasibility of 6 sites (see Appendix A). Since the feasibility was carried out no further progress was made due to Covid 19 limitations. Since the production of the feasibility a further three sites were identified and assessed. (see Appendix B). The 1st and 2nd choice sites from the 2020/21 feasibility were no longer available for the archives as they had been identified for alternative uses, and two of the newly identified sites are not considered to be suitable.
- 4.6 It was, therefore, agreed by cabinet in November 2022 to explore further feasibility, design and specification for developing the third newly identified site at Smethwick Council House. There is potential to build a new Archives Centre on land at the rear of the building as well as reconfiguring the existing building to accommodate Smethwick library and the reception area of the Archives Service (Smethwick Library currently housed in poor accommodation further down the High Street). Smethwick Library could then be disposed of as part of the Council's Asset Rationalisation Strategy and this was agreed in principle by Cabinet in October 2023.
- 4.7 Utilising Smethwick Council House gives an opportunity to secure this building for the long term. It is a Grade II listed building and likely to be retained by the Council. If a refurbishment of this building were to be carried out it could run into several millions of pounds regardless of its inclusion in this scheme.
- 4.8 Not operating the Archives from suitable accommodation is incurring additional revenue costs for the service, particularly at Smethwick Library which is in poor condition and liable to flooding.



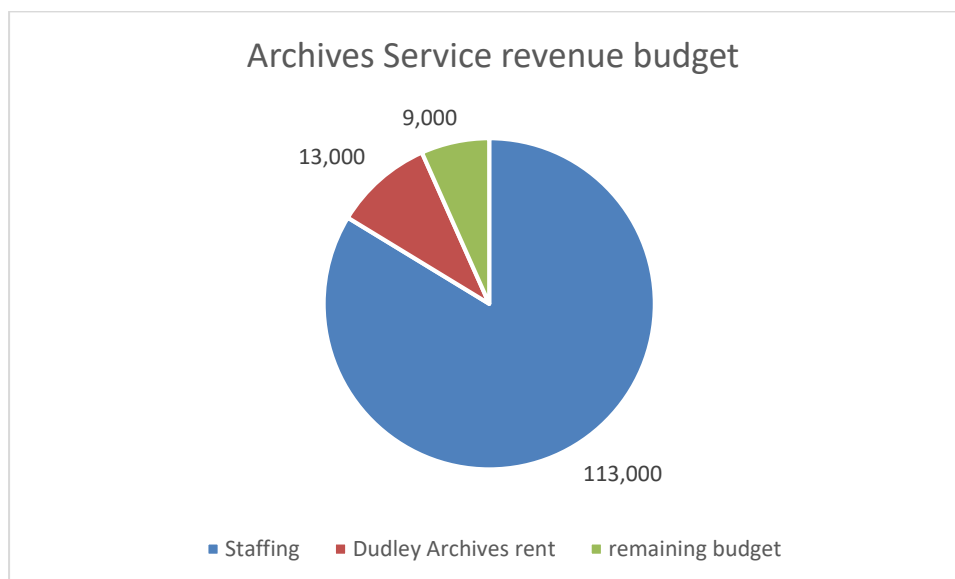
Summary of costs incurred by Sandwell MBC – since 2016

Budgetary area	Cost's incurred
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration and preservation of flood damaged archival collections. • Professional drying services. • Professional cleaning services. • Replacement of flood damaged conservation equipment and materials. • Replacement of electronic devices e.g. archival digitisation facilities, dehumidifiers and oral history equipment. 	£25,765
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to the fabric of the building e.g. repair or replacement of flooring, doors, drains and guttering. 	£2,481
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building adjustments e.g. raised parapet wall above the front fire exit. 	£1,636
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of disaster management equipment. 	£2,658
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of flood defence equipment. 	£1,039
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage of Sandwell's Public Records at Dudley Archives 	£86,000
Total Cost to Sandwell MBC	£119,579

4.9 The accommodation at West Bromwich Town Hall is currently creating difficulties and incurring costs as work to the fabric of the building is affecting the climactic stability which has led to an outbreak of mould on some of the collections. This will need to be professionally treated and cleaned at a cost of c. £10k.



4.10 The archives budget is very small - £137k per annum and we pay £13k per annum (almost 10%) to Dudley. See below for breakdown.



4.11 This shows that there is only £9k per annum to pay for conservation, digitisation, resources, etc, meaning we are unable to deliver an adequate archives service.

4.12 The attached report from Ellis Williams Architects of November 2023 (Appendix C) was funded by the New Burdens funding from TNA at a cost of £30k. It identifies and details the following: -

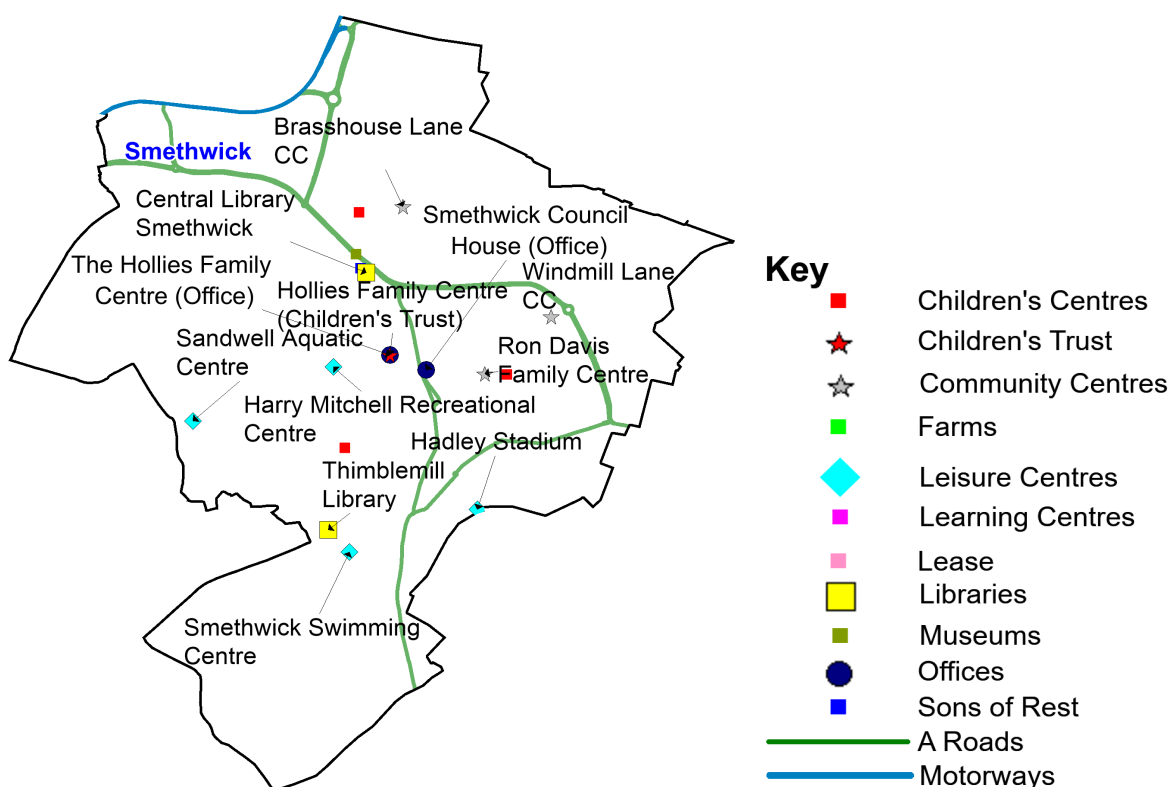
- Overview of the chosen site and its surroundings
- How a new centre could fit on the site and its relationship to the existing building
- How the centre would be visible from Victoria Park (it will be obscured at the front by the existing building)
- Indicative parking areas and access to and from the site, whilst leaving space for potential future expansion of the building if required
- An original appraisal of 4 options and how it was narrowed to 2 options (A and C).
- How the two options can be split up in terms of space with archives storage and staff areas on the ground floor and public areas on the first floor as this is more cost effective
- Artists impressions of the appearance of the building and how it might look in relation to the existing building
- No windows on the ground floor to protect the archives and how light would then come into the building



- Initial and updated costs, all benchmarked against existing projects and current construction costs
- Schedules of accommodation, benchmarked against current archive centre projects (e.g. Crewe, Cheshire) and comparing to existing accommodation in Sandwell with provision for at least 25 years expansion
- Identification of option C as the preferred choice
- Inclusion of refurbishment required to the existing Council House to accommodate the Archives reception along with a relocated Smethwick Library (agreed by cabinet 18/10/23).

4.13 The accommodation detailed in the report could be scaled down to make the costs more achievable, but this needs to take account of the fact that it may limit the lifetime of the centre as further expansion could be required.

4.14 Moving Smethwick Library into the new scheme gives an opportunity to dispose of the existing library building. Other assets in the areas could also be considered for disposal and inclusion in the new scheme. See plan below for options to consider.



5 Alternative Options

5.1 Previous attempts to identify appropriate accommodation for archives over the last 20 years have not been developed, either because the sites were not suitable or because the proposals remained unfunded. Recent options considered and rejected include:

Option	Reason for rejection
Do nothing	Sandwell could lose its place of deposit status and be required to pay another local authority to house its public records
Conversion of existing storage at Smethwick Library	Too small and costly
Rental of additional space at Dudley Archives	Not sustainable – Dudley will want the space back as their archives grow and has revenue implications as well as costs and travel for Sandwell residents with a disconnect from local services
Utilise SMBC owned industrial units	All those available are either too small or not accessible enough
Lease or purchase private sector industrial units	All those available are not accessible enough and not cost effective
Use unoccupied space at Operations and Development centre (Roway Lane)	Too small and not accessible enough
Smethwick Swimming Centre (Thimblemill Baths)	Restrictions due to layout and listed status

See also appendix A and B

6 Implications

Resources:	The cost of the project will be significant and based on the feasibility, design and specification expected to cost c. £20 million. There may be some funding available from external sources e.g Arts Council England or National Lottery Heritage Fund, but substantial capital is likely to be needed from and/or secured by Sandwell Council. To mitigate an increase in annual revenue it is planned that the new site includes the relocation of Smethwick Library (because there are financial and operational management
-------------------	--



	<p>advantages of sharing a space with a library which would be lost if the centre was in a stand-alone building). Moving the library into Smethwick Council House would bring the building back into greater use.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Sandwell Council would be able to comply with required standards and retain its place of deposit status. It would also be more likely to achieve mandatory accredited status from TNA.</p> <p>Further assessment of the legal implications will be contingent on funding sources, including any potential grant conditions, restrictions and clawback provisions will be undertaken once the project proposals are progressed. This would extend to include any arrangements for the procurement of contractors and supplies for design and construction of the facility which would need to be undertaken in accordance with relevant procurement legislation and regulations.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Doing nothing – Reputational - TNA ultimately has the sanction to remove Sandwell’s “Place of Deposit” status and store the archives elsewhere at our cost, but more immediately archives storage is now at capacity, and if a major collection were offered we would have to turn it down. Climate change means there is an increased likelihood of floods in the immediate vicinity, meaning irreplaceable records could be damaged beyond repair. This would result in the loss of a valuable service to our residents with an interest in local and family history. It also means Sandwell would not have a modern, interactive Archives and Storytelling centre.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>No issues – the building would be accessible for all.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>Improving access to archives, local history and heritage gives greater opportunity for residents to enjoy their local community assets. It also increases the opportunity for local groups to use the facilities.</p>



Social Value:	The project will help to encourage people to use their archives at a convenient time and location and will engender a sense of pride in place and heritage in general. The project will help to put Sandwell 'On the Map' as a place that values its archives and heritage.
Climate Change:	New build would meet required standards.
Corporate Parenting:	No issues

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Feasibility report 1

Appendix B – Feasibility report 2

Appendix C – Report from Ellis Williams Architects

8. Background Papers

N/A -



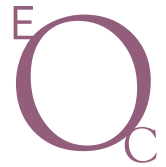
This page is intentionally left blank

Elizabeth
OXBORROW-COWAN

Consultant Archivist

An options appraisal for sites for
Sandwell Archives
January 2021

Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, Consultant Archivist
Mark Lewis, Levitt Bernstein Architects
Simon Downing, Core Five Quantity Surveyors



Contents

Executive summary	3
1. Introduction and methodology	5
2. How sites were chosen	6
3. How the sites options have been assessed	11
4. Option 1 Old Gas Showroom	19
5. Option 2 Brasshouse Lane (Albion Foundation)	24
6. Option 3 Smethwick Library	29
7. Option 4 Chances Glassworks	34
8. Option 5 Highfields (Registry Office)	39
9. Option 6 Conjectural vacant site	44
10. Summary and assessment of options	46
Appendix 1 Map of longlisted sites	48
Appendix 2 Full construction costs developed by Core Five	49



Executive summary

Five sites have been identified as a possible site for a new archive building for Sandwell Archives, from a long-list of 18 locations. They are:

- Albion Foundation (Former Cock Inn)8 Brasshouse , Lane Smethwick, B66 1BA
- Chances Glass Works Site, Palace Drive, Spon Lane South, Smethwick, B66 1NZ
- The Old Gas Showroom next to Central Library, High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8DZ
- Highfields Road (Sandwell Register Office), High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8RJ
- Smethwick Library, High Street, Smethwick, B66 3AP

In addition an imaginary 'conjectural site' was included in the analysis to provide a conceptual option.

Assessment of each site resulted in the following scorings:

	BS EN 16893 site hazard (lower score desirable)	BS EN 16893 audit (higher score desirable)	Public venue suitability (higher score desirable)	Construction cost - medium
Old Gas Showroom	22%	75%	100%	£8.6mn
Brasshouse Lane	27%	70%	82%	£7.5mn
Smethwick Library	36%	70%	69%	£8.1mn
Chances Glassworks	46%	60%	71%	£7mn
Highfields	14%	65%	82%	£9.2mn
Conjectural	N/A	80%	60%	£7.1mn

This review concludes that The Old Gas Showroom is the best option as it provides a clear site that can accommodate a bespoke archive building. It is in an accessible and high profile location, and with the library as a neighbour offers significant potential for collaboration between SMBC services as well as attracting other partners from the community, diversifying the user base and opening up opportunities for new services.



Brasshouse Lane or Smethwick Library would be attractive alternatives in easily accessible locations close to public amenities and sufficient space for new build.

1. Introduction and methodology

This report has been commissioned by Sandwell Council. Its purpose is to provide a high-level assessment of and construction cost for a variety of sites for the development of new accommodation for Sandwell Archives.

The review comprised the following stages, which took place during 2020:

- A virtual workshop with staff from the Council and the archive service to make a short-list of sites out of a possible 18 sites and agree the functional spaces required in the new building
- A consultation with Sandwell Council to agree the size of the functional spaces to create a space brief on which the site assessment and costings have been
- A visit to each of the sites
- Analysis of each site against a variety of criteria
- The development of a very high-level construction cost for each site
- A final comparative assessment to identify the leading options for future investigation.

2. How sites were chosen

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) was keen to ensure that it had looked right across the Borough for suitable sites. With this in mind SMBC developed a longlist of 18 possible sites listed in the next table. A map of marking the locations is provided in Appendix 1.

Reference number on map (Appendix 1)	Address
1	Oldbury- Langley Baths , Vicarage Road, Oldbury, B68 8HS
2	Oldbury- Crosswells Road , 63 Crosswells Road, Oldbury, B68 8HH
3	Oldbury- Portway Lifestyle Centre , Newbury Lane, Oldbury, B69 1HE
4	Smethwick- Chances Glass Works Site , Palace Drive, Spon Lane South, Smethwick, B66 1NZ
5	Smethwick- Former Rolfe Street Swimming Baths site , Smethwick, B66 2AN
6	Smethwick- Smethwick Library , High Street, Smethwick, B66 3AP
7	Smethwick- Thimblemill Baths , Bearwood, Smethwick, B67 5AR
8	Tipton- Tipton Library , Unity Walk, Owen St, Tipton, DY4 8QL
9	Wednesbury- Wednesbury Art Gallery , Holyhead Rd, Wednesbury, WS10 7DF
10	Wednesbury- 37 Mounts Road , WS10 0BZ
11	Rowley Regis- Haden Hill House , Halesowen Rd, Cradley Heath, B64 7JU
12	Rowley Regis- Land next to Reddall Hill Community Centre , Cradley Heath, B64 5JG
13	Rowley Regis- Harvest Road , Rowley Regis, B65 8EL
14	West Bromwich- Manor House , Hall Green Road, West Bromwich, B71 2EA
15	West Bromwich- Sandwell College , 1 Spon Lane, West Bromwich, B70 6AW
16	West Bromwich- Gas Showroom next to Central Library, High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8DZ
17	West Bromwich- Highfields Road (Sandwell Register Office) , High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8RJ
18	West Bromwich- Vacant sites (including Evans Halshaw site , 47-63 Carters Green, West Bromwich, B70 9QP) and Lyng phase 2 , Lyng Lane, West Bromwich, B70 7RH



This longlist covered all six towns in the borough, provided a mix of refurbishment and new build options and offered a wide range of scenarios such as possible regeneration sites, high street locations, neighbouring with library services and adding to historical buildings.

Two workshops were undertaken with 10 knowledgeable SMBC staff¹. The first workshop identified the critical success factors for the future archives service. These were:

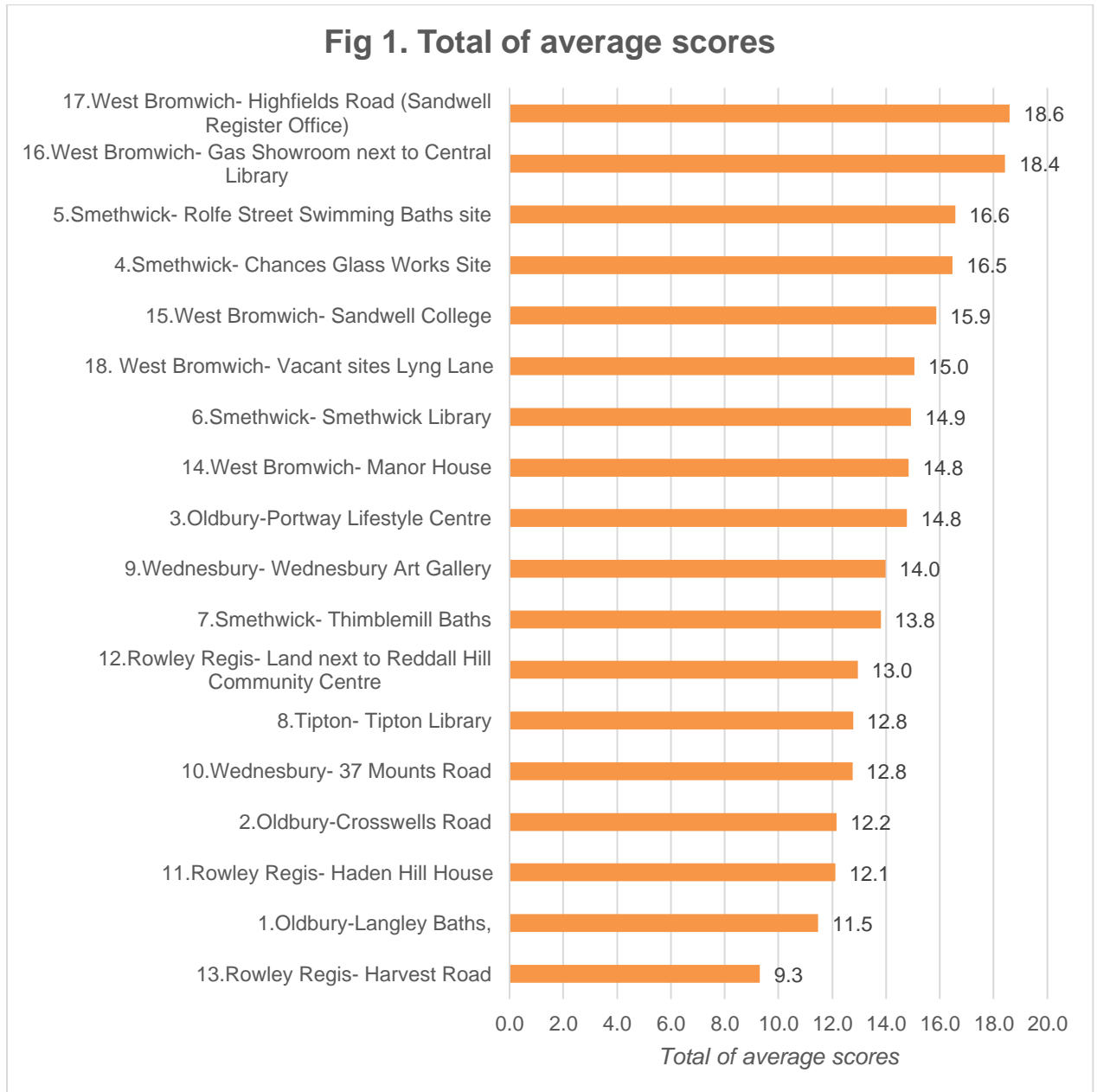
- Accessibility by transport
- Proximity to library services
- Public profile
- Attractiveness of site
- Capacity to provide a large total floorspace
- Room for partner organisations
- Regeneration potential

The workshop attendees were then asked to each independently score the individual locations against each of the critical success factors using the following scoring:

- 1= Low
- 2= Acceptable
- 3 = Outstanding
- x = Don't know

For each success factor these scores were averaged by dividing the total score with the number of people who provided a score (i.e. excluding those who did not know) to ensure sites that were unfamiliar to a number of people did not score unduly low. These average scores were then totalled up to provide the results presented in Fig 1, ranked from highest to lowest:

¹ Including the Service Manager – Tourism, Culture and Leisure, the staff of Sandwell Archives, library staff from across the Borough, the Business Manager for Libraries and Archives and the assigned SMBC Project Manager



These results were presented to the attendees at the second workshop. They agreed that the rankings generally reflected the overall relative strengths of the sites as they are known at this point in time. The discussion on the six options to analyse in more depth raised concern that the Rolfe Street Baths location is not a priority area for regeneration/development and is not an attractive location.

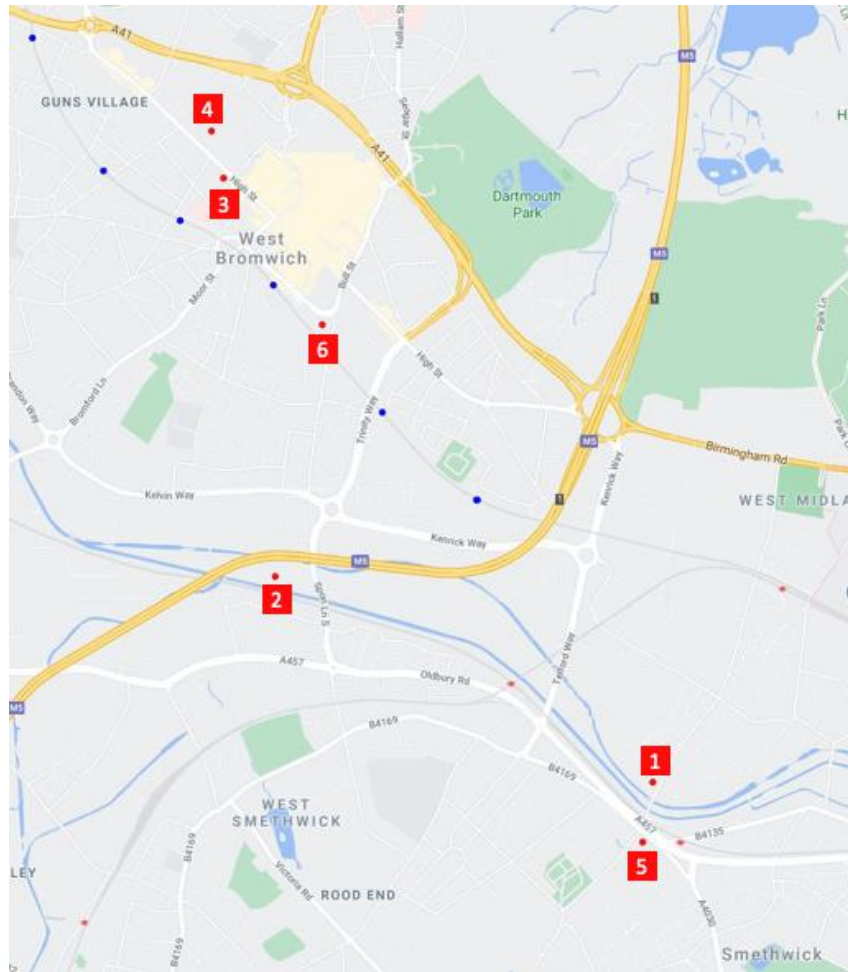
Furthermore, it transpired that it was not practical to pursue the Evans Halshaw/Lyng site. So it was agreed to replace these with Smethwick Library and the Albion Foundation Building. There was also the choice of a 'conjectural

site' of a completely theoretical site as a basis for any other site that might be under consideration in the future.

Thus the final short list of six sites to be assessed in depth are:

Option	Site	Street	Town	Postcode
1	Albion Foundation (Old Cock Inn)	Brasshouse Lane	Smethwick	B66 1BA
2	Chance Glassworks	Spon Lane South	Smethwick	B66 1NZ
3	Gas Showroom Site	High Street	West Bromwich	B70 8DZ
4	Highfields (Registry Office)	High Street	West Bromwich	B70 8RJ
5	Smethwick Library	High Street	Smethwick	B66 1AA
6	Conjectural Vacant Site	-	-	-

They are located as shown on the following map:



This choice maintains a good mix of key variables including:

- Refurbishment and new build
- Town centre sites
- Close to library services
- In a regeneration priority area
- Historical buildings

However, there is a concentration on the towns of Smethwick and West Bromwich. This was of concern but it was agreed that these locations did reflect the best opportunities. Further, it was recognised that the building is only one element of the service and that a good archives service will also deliver a range of outreach and remote services to provide access and engagement with audiences right across Sandwell.

3. How the site options have been assessed

This section describes the criteria that have been used to assess each site

Outline brief

The brief for the new building was developed by Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan in consultation with the client, with suggested floor areas and ancillary accommodation (plant and circulation) added by Levitt Bernstein.

The accommodation requirements are summarised in the appended space brief.

- The space brief calls for 1,805m² GIA (1,296m² NIA)
- The space allowances made in this calculation comply with minimum statutory space standards found in comparable new local facilities and significantly improve upon the existing inadequate provision but are not as generous as might be found in national or high-end institutions.

This site options appraisal proposes medium or high-quality exterior material specifications dependent on context. Higher quality external materials are proposed for sites adjoining listed buildings as this is likely to become a Town Planning obligation. The interior quality specification is the same for each site. Other variations between development costs arise from site specific issues such as requirements for demolition, conversion, infrastructure and landscape works.

Building brief

In the context of global climate change, the aspiration should be to develop a very low energy sustainable archive with low building running costs that meets the recommendations of BS EN 16893 and BS 4971, which favour passive buildings.

This has recently been achieved at Hereford Archive and Record Centre, described as the UK's first Passivhaus archive building. This project claims that Passivhaus offered a 4% capital cost saving, exceeded the original brief target



of BREEAM 'Excellent' and delivers on-going operational savings of around 80% compared to similar facilities built to UK Building Regulations.

It is proposed that the new archive facility for Sandwell would follow a holistic approach to energy and its wider sustainability strategy. Applying a Passivhaus design approach would deliver a highly energy efficient building and thus would materially contribute towards the Council's Climate Strategy 2020-2041 with regards to a lower carbon emissions in for the Council estate and operations. It would also provide a high profile exemplar that other local projects could learn from and apply to support the second thread of the Strategy around the built environment. The new building would also have a long life so supporting the key concepts in the Strategy of reducing use and resilience.

Energy strategy

BS EN 16893 promotes passive design and a low energy approach wherever it is appropriate to the scope and nature of the collections. For Sandwell, it is considered this could be applicable to most of the collection with only a small photographic collection requiring close environmental control. An assessment of the collections' environmental requirements should be made at commencement of RIBA stage 2 to verify this initial conclusion.

Passivhaus design is a means of delivering a high level of occupant comfort while significantly reducing the building's requirement for heating and cooling. It is not only applicable to housing but other building types, like archives, too. The Passivhaus certification scheme is recommended for adoption by the Sandwell Archives Project because it offers an internationally accepted quality assurance process for delivering low energy buildings that can be followed through the design and delivery process, whoever the developer.

Passivhaus buildings are built with meticulous attention to detail and rigorous design and construction to principles developed by the Passivhaus Institute in Germany. Through good orientation and a highly insulated building fabric, the heating requirement in a Passivhaus building is reduced to the point where space heating systems are no longer considered essential. Cooling is also minimised by the same principles and through the use of shading and in some cases via the pre-cooling of the supply air. Night purging and the use of natural cross-ventilation through open windows is encouraged during the summer months.



Whilst Passivhaus principals can be applied to any development, its effectiveness will partly depend on site parameters such as orientation and shading. This Options Appraisal considers optimality for Passivhaus application to each site.

As well as being an energy performance standard, Passivhaus also provides excellent indoor air quality. This is achieved with an 'air-tight' building offering very low air infiltration rates and supplying fresh air which is filtered and post heated by a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) unit.

To optimise Passivhaus benefits, it is recommended to locate the public and inhabited staff areas to the south of the site and the archive storage to the north. This allows the public areas to benefit from the warmth and light of the sun to improve occupant comfort and the archives to remain cooler and more thermally stable.

Energy efficient measures proposed to support the Passivhaus methodology include:

- Glazing mainly on the south side to public areas, with shading to reduce overheating risk, no windows to the archive stores.
- High air-tightness throughout, with airlocks to the storage areas.
- A buffer zone of circulation between the inhabited and storage areas.
- Archive store constructed with insulated thick concrete walls, floors, and roof. The thickness of the concrete will vary according to orientation to optimise decrement delay (i.e. the time taken for heat to pass through to the interior), thereby thermally isolating and stabilising the store.
- Decorative ventilated 'rain-screen' cladding to the archive store would act as shading and wet weather protection. Ideally, the cladding would be a reflective light-coloured material to minimise solar heat gains and help reduce fluctuations in internal conditions.
- Internal finishes to be of hygroscopic (humidity stabilising) quality to assist in tempering relative humidity levels.
- Separate mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) systems to the inhabited and storage areas. To further temper incoming air and improve air quality, this could be directed through high thermal mass construction to pre-cool the air.
- No conventional heating or cooling – no connection needed to gas supply, saving construction and running costs as well as CO₂.
- LED lighting throughout with movement detectors to switch off lighting when unoccupied thereby minimising energy use and heat gains in the archive store.

- Hot water would be provided by instantaneous electric heaters via low flow taps
- The building could approach energy neutrality if fitted with sufficient Photovoltaic panels

Wider sustainability strategy

Passivhaus should be viewed as just part of the approach to a truly sustainable building. Other environmental factors that should be considered are:

- The wider goal of creating a simple, sustainable building to create a well-designed archive facility with a long-term value.
- Well-designed facade that balances the size of windows for views of greenery, good daylight levels and balanced solar heat gains.
- The orientation and location of the public and staff areas to provide good levels of daylight, allow for natural ventilation, good air quality and views of external landscaped spaces. Note that direct sunlight and UV should be excluded or very well-controlled from collection management and handling spaces.
- Careful specification of products and materials to assist in providing a visually calm working environment.
- Internal material finishes chosen with low volatile organic compounds to provide a healthy internal environment.
- Use of local materials where possible as part of an integrated sustainable design proposal
- Connections to outside spaces such as café with external seating in a sunny location
- Healthy buildings that promote wellbeing are shown to improve occupant comfort and satisfaction, leading to high productivity and happiness.
- Protection of the archive materials with the reduction of flood risk using integrated surface water drainage measures and lowering of local external temperatures through the use of light-coloured materials and planting.

External requirements

- Owing to the town centre locations, parking need not be on site where there are public facilities nearby providing:
 - Car parking for 15 cars. Charging facility for electric cars
 - Coach parking for 1 coach
- Accessible parking for at least 2 cars should be provided on site or as nearby as possible. Being a council facility, this might be by re-designation of existing on street spaces
- No parking dedicated to staff car parking is proposed

- Access and turning space for delivery vehicles to the archive loading bay
- Secure perimeter fence or 'moat' could be considered on some sites but is not appropriate for town centre locations where security needs to be built into the building envelope (possibly with internal grilles) and levels of security increasing towards the archive storage.
- Covered and safe cycle storage for visitors and staff
- Site hard and soft landscaping, refuse storage, street furniture, external lighting etc. to suit site location requirements

Guidance for developing archive facilities

Design and management guidance is available in two key documents:

- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural heritage
- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections
- covers exhibition and storage aspects of conservation

Key recommendations of BS EN 16893 – site location and building specification checklist

This is a summary. Please refer to original document for full requirements.

- Site risk assessment to identify environmental hazards, likelihood of damage and evaluation of potential effectiveness of preventative measures, including
 - Tunnels or elevated transport viaducts
 - Ground stability
 - Flooding – avoid sites below 1% ('100 year') flood level. Consider risk from springs
 - Storage or processing of highly flammable materials at risk of fire or explosion
 - Emissions of harmful gasses, pollutants, smoke, dust etc. or sources of vibration
 - Rodents, insects and other pests
 - Nuclear power stations, defence and other target establishments, airports and flight paths
 - HV power lines and substations (risk of collapse or fire)
- Accessibility for 24-hour emergency services
- Orientation, landscape and microclimate - consider exposure to sunlight and strong winds
- Include additional capacity for growth in line with the obligations of the institution
- Site to allow for subsequent extension wherever practicable

- If self-contained within a large structure, additional risks require mitigation as much as possible
- For purpose-built new buildings or remodelling existing buildings or rooms:
 - Appoint appropriately experienced design professionals
 - Consult fire service, security experts and police
 - Utilise passive environmental control if appropriate to scope and nature of the collection
- Construction of storage areas
 - Finishes to permit the thermal and hygroscopic stability of the building and not produce dust
 - Insulation and hydroscopic properties to maintain specified conditions in event of equipment failure for at least 48 hours
 - To promote environmental stability, low air infiltration, moisture barrier and hygroscopic internal materials
 - Air infiltration less than 0.5m³/m² at 50Pa in storage areas
 - Provide airlocks to storage areas
 - Do not run pipework serving other areas through storage space
 - No windows or roof lights
 - No suspended ceilings
 - Minimise harmful internal pollutants
- Construction of display and reading spaces
 - Air infiltration rates will be higher for user comfort
 - Lighting shall conform to CEN/TS 16163 and produce minimal heat and no UVA
 - Windows at least double glazed with UVA filters and means of reducing or removing direct sunlight and solar heat gain
- Vegetation shall not be incorporated into the structure of a new building or against external walls
- Rainwater discharge systems shall be located outside the building
- Lowest shelf to be at least 150mm above the floor in case of water leaks
- One-way drainage (anti-back-up valves)
- Level floors uninterrupted by steps, sills, mats or floor grilles
- Floor loadings designed to suit proposed collections and storage system
- Column grid to allow for efficient storage layout
- Undertake fire risk assessment by suitably qualified / experienced person
- Minimise possibility of fire events and make collection spaces as impregnable to fire as is practicable
- Level of fire resistance shall be appropriate to the findings of a risk assessment. Note Clause 6.3.2 states: "If the risk assessment, including

fire-fighting response times, indicates a likelihood of fire spreading from outside a storage space, the structure shall be designed to achieve 4 hours fire resistance.”

- Minimise fire hazards in the electrical system, ventilation plant and equipment
- Install consolidated and monitored fire detection and alarm system with delayed activation of automatic fire-fighting system (to allow time for confirmation of genuine alarm)
- Install high sensitivity smoke detection system in collection spaces
- No non-storage area exit routes to pass through any areas in which collections are permanently or temporarily stored
- Provide rigorous protection against theft, vandalism, unauthorised alteration and inappropriate handling
- Undertake a security risk assessment
- Ideally a stand-alone or island site with restricted access around whole perimeter
- Physically secure building / monitored alarms
- Preferably only one visitor entrance
- Service access to plant and major distribution routes should not be within collection areas

Methodology of construction cost estimation

The detailed costings are provided in Appendix 2.

The Cost Allocation Models for the provision of a new build archive building, are based on a space brief produced by Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, for five sites that have been reviewed by Levitt Bernstein. These are at current price levels, and include no allowance for inflation.

The project is at a very early stage so therefore the Total Project Budgets are presented as a range, taking into account the quality and design aspirations that have been identified by Levitt Bernstein.

These Cost Allocation Models provide an indication of budget, and include for construction works, professional and statutory fees, client direct costs and contingency. VAT is excluded. At this early stage the budgets are largely based on assumptions, and so only provide a guide to a likely magnitude of cost. Construction costs for the higher quality options are based on providing a building using "Passivhaus" principles of a similar design aspiration as Hereford Archives and Records Centre.

The mid-point of the suggested budgets ranges from £7.1M for a conjectural vacant site to £9.2M for Option 4 Highfields (Registry Office), at current price levels. Key drivers of the variance in cost between the various options are site related items, architectural aspiration, and the level of refurbishment work of existing buildings.

The new build including fit out is priced at circa £2,700/m² for medium quality, and at £3,300/m² for higher quality, at current price levels, including fit out (Archive Shelving, Loose Furniture and the Like), but excluding external works. Refurbishment of the Highfields Building and Smethwick Town Hall have been priced at £3,800/m² to reflect the additional complexity of working on these heritage buildings.

Allowances of 5% have been included for Client Costs, and 10% for Client Contingency. The Client may wish to fund the contingency allowance from a separate budget.

The Cost Allocation Models are presented as a matrix that indicates what is included and excluded within the budgets. Site Acquisition, Infrastructure upgrade costs, for example to utilities, road access, and VAT are excluded.

Notes on appraisal of options

The options have been developed to a RIBA 0 level of detail. This allows scores and costs to be estimated on a comparative rather than empirical basis. Costs and scores for each option are considered relative to each other and suitable to inform selection of a preferred site option. The preferred option will require further research, surveys, significant design development and stakeholder engagement at the next project stage to increase cost accuracy.

Operating costs

It is not possible to calculate building operating costs. However, the Hereford Archive and Record Centre (HARC), which has a Passivhaus construction, states that it has total annual energy costs of around £12,000 for a building of 3,350m².

4. Option 1 – Old Gas Showroom



4.1 Key site data

Site Address	Next to Central Library High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8DZ
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m ²)	1,078m ²
Floor Area (m ²)	N/A –new build on vacant site
Site Type	Brownfield
Site Description	Site of 1930's gas showroom, now demolished. Adjacent to operational Central Library and vacant Law Courts on an important civic urban block with operational Town Hall (subject of improvement plans) and car parking. All historic buildings on this urban block are very attractive and listed. Prime corner location with two public street frontages and vehicle access gates at rear.
Listing	Adjacent Library (1907) and Law Courts (1880) are Grade II Listed, as is the nearby Town Hall (1874-5). Together, they form an important civic group on the High Street.
Planning Policy	Within mixed-use area including: cultural, leisure, office, retail, cafes, bars, restaurants - refer to AAP policy WBPr10 Within High Street, West Bromwich Conservation Area
Area Character	Civic / town centre
Current Uses	Vacant land
Neighbours	Central library – 0m Vacant law courts – 0m Bank, restaurant, event venue, offices – 11m Electricity substation – 31m
Car Parking	31m to Edward Street public car park Consider creation of new accessible on street spaces and/or additional accessible spaces to the three spaces extant to the rear of Central Library
Public Transport	5m to 2 bus routes 260m to Lodge Road tram stop
Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Urban
Other Comments	Opportunity to link with Central Library operationally and to share facilities. The new archive could improve access for disabled people to the Central Library (but not specifically allowed-for in the costs)
Orientation	Site not ideally orientated for passive solar design

4.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

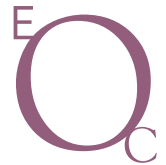
A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Not in coal mine high risk area. Undertake site search
Flooding	1	1	1	
Risk from fire or explosion	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Risk from pollutants or vibration	3	4	12	Pollution from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	3	3	9	Some risk from neighbours
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	3	3	9	Substation on same block but not immediate neighbour
Indicative overall risk score			22%	

4.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	3	
Expansion potential	2	
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
Total	15	
% of total possible score of 20	75%	



4.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

4.5 Development scope

- High quality landscape scheme (500m²) would be required within conservation area to include service area to rear and two new accessible parking spaces
- New 1,805m² three-storey building of high material quality required in conservation area and immediately adjacent to listed buildings in important civic setting

4.6 Estimated construction costs (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High
Total	7,200,000	8,600,000	9,900,000
Construction cost /m²	2,700	3,300	3,800



4.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Close to A41, bus routes and on West Bromwich high street Close to several car parks Easily accessible by pedestrians	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	One junction from the M5 Half an hour from the airport	5
Location with good public profile	On West Bromwich High Street	5
Close to other public attractions/services	Next to the Central Library and Town Hall Opposite the Registry Office Close to shopping centres and Dartmouth Park and Sandwell Valley Country Park	5
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	Central Library, Townhall and Registry Office provide many opportunities for community engagement and supporting internal council business (e.g. records management)	5
Welcoming environment	Location has received significant capital investment to boost its attractiveness West Bromwich High Street is a familiar and busy location	5
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Could have striking new build next to the restored library and over from the lovely Registry building and grounds	5
Opportunity for passive build	Yes - a new build option	5
Readily available for development	Yes	5
<i>Total score</i>		<i>45</i>
<i>% of actual score out of possible total score of 45</i>		<i>100%</i>

5. Option 2 – Brasshouse Lane (Albion Foundation)





5.1 Key site data

Site Address	Albion Foundation (Former Cock Inn) 8 Brasshouse , Lane Smethwick, B66 1BA
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m ²)	North part (43361) – 1,000m ² South part (29327) – 1,419m ²
Floor Area (m ²)	346m ² GIA
Site Type	North part (43361) - 1920's 'Roadhouse' style former pub, car park and rear service compound South part (29327) - open green space with a mix of young and mature trees
Site Description	A fairly attractive early twentieth century modest arts and crafts style two storey former pub with basement. Hard standing to front and rear with vehicle access to the side. Trees to front, side (on embankment) and rear wooded area. Interior not visited. Open grassed space to the south with perimeter trees forming gateway to the Galton Valley Canal Heritage Area and incorporating small-scale public art, other artefacts and seating.
Listing	Not listed
Planning Policy	Within site of importance for nature conservation (SINC) Within Smethwick Summit, Galton Valley Conservation Area Adjacent to national cycle network canal side routes
Area Character	Suburban / industrial heritage
Current Uses	Charitable & community activities / informal open space
Neighbours	Woodland – 0m School car parking – 2m Residential – 16m Primary school – 17m Day care / children's centre – 35m
Car Parking	On-street (unregulated) Potential for at least two onsite accessible spaces and sharing school car park (subject to agreement with Education Services)
Public Transport	10m to one bus route 350m to Smethwick Rolfe Street national rail
Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: MEDIUM risk (1-3.3%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Industrial, high pollution risk from traffic and high hazard risk from nearby industries
Other Comments	Risk of objections from demolition of existing building and encroachment of building into open space within a conservation area, and impact on SINC
Orientation	The site could offer desired north-south orientation for passive solar design



5.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Not in coal mine high risk area. Undertake site search
Flooding	5	5	25	Be wary of site levels, hardstanding and risk of run-off from surrounding embankments and neighbouring properties
Risk from fire or explosion	1	1	1	
Risk from pollutants or vibration	2	3	6	Pollution from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	5	4	20	Potentially high risk from SINC which will require control
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	2	1	2	Small risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	1	1	1	
Indicative overall risk score			27%	

5.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
	Low hazard level	2
Expansion potential	2	May be limited by sensitivity of site
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
Total score	14	
% of total possible score of 20	70%	



5.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief if some encroachment onto open space is acceptable

5.5 Development scope

- Demolition of existing building (346m² GIA)
- Address local surface water flood risk: bund / ditches / additional storm drainage and attenuation
- High quality landscape scheme and enhanced canal heritage interpretation may be required to mitigate any impact on existing trees or reduction in open space (say 1,500m² assuming two storey building). To include service area and two onsite accessible parking spaces.
- New 1,805m² two storey building of medium material quality required to mitigate loss of fairly attractive building in conservation area

5.6 Estimated construction cost (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High £
Total	6,700,000	7,500,000	9,400,000
Construction cost /m²	2,300	2,700	3,500

5.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Easily accessible by bus, train, car and on canal cycle path	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	5 minute drive from M5 Junction	5
Location with good public profile	Close to Smethwick High Street but in residential area	1
Close to other public attractions/services	2 minute walk from shops, mosque,	5
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	School over the road 2 minute walk from the Library	5
Welcoming environment	Residential location next to canal	3
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Backed by woodland and close to canal New build	3
Opportunity for passive build	New build so can be all passive build	5
Readily available for development	Yes Council owned, current tenant leaving, building has no conservation status	5
<i>Total score</i>		<i>37</i>
% of actual score out of possible total score of 45		82%

6. Option 3 – Smethwick Library



6.1 Key site data

Site Address	Smethwick Library High Street, Smethwick, B66 1AA
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m ²)	1,287m ² (including forecourt and service area to rear)
Floor Area (m ²)	1,382m ² GIA
Site Type	Part demolition, part conversion and extension
Site Description	<p>Attractive and robust-looking gothic palazzo style Victorian former town hall, now the home of Sandwell's archive service, most of its collections, a local library and community spaces.</p> <p>The front portion is a good quality historic building of red brick with stone window embellishments, bracketed cornice and pediment. Its historic interiors have been harmed by clumsy building services and low-quality adaptations for modern use.</p> <p>The rear portion seems to have been rebuilt (it was originally higher) and houses the public library and archive search room at ground level with collection storage in an unsuitable basement below.</p> <p>There is vehicle access from the rear.</p>
Listing	Built 1867. Locally listed.
Planning Policy	Within Smethwick Town Centre, High Street Conservation Area Seems to be within site identified for retail.
Area Character	Local town centre
Current Uses	Public library, archive service and community rooms
Neighbours	Shops – 2m Commercial warehousing – 2m Public house – 4m Substation - 36m
Car Parking	75m to Stony Lane public car park, which includes two accessible parking spaces There is one accessible parking space in front of the Victorian building
Public Transport	3m to 3 bus routes 100m to Smethwick Rolfe Street national rail
Flood Risk	<p>Flooding by surface water in local area: HIGH risk (greater than 3.3%)</p> <p>Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)</p>
Environment	Urban
Other Comments	The original main entrance is not used because it is stepped. There is a modern ramped main entrance to the side, but this is not very attractive. The High Street is very congested offering little opportunity for additional accessible parking. Originally the rear portion was similar in height to the front portion, giving potential for a substantial new building to the rear.
Orientation	Site not ideally orientated for passive solar design

6.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Not in coal mine high risk area. Undertake site search
Flooding	5	5	25	Sunken rear yard liable to surface water flooding needs to be addressed by new design
Risk from fire or explosion	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Risk from pollutants or vibration	3	4	12	Pollution from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	3	5	15	Current rodent problem is known and monitored
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	2	1	2	Small risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	3	3	9	Substation on same block but not immediate neighbour
Indicative overall risk score			36%	

6.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	2	Risk of flooding from surface water requires mitigation
Expansion potential	2	Limited expansion to rear
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
Total score	14	
% of total possible score of 20	70%	

6.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

6.5 Development scope

- Partial demolition of existing building – approx. 962m² GIA
- Address local surface water flood risk: infill basement or raise new rear portion on plot; include for storm water attenuation system.
- New landscape to forecourt (60m²) with planting and seating, new stone steps and ramps to historic main entrance (or external platform lift), and new service area to rear (375m²)
- High quality conversion of approx. 342m² GIA of existing Victorian building in poor condition
- New 1,463m² GIA extension of medium material quality required in conservation area but behind existing building

6.6 Estimated construction costs (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High
Total	7,000,000	8,100,000	10,100,000
Construction cost /m²	2,900	3,400	4,200

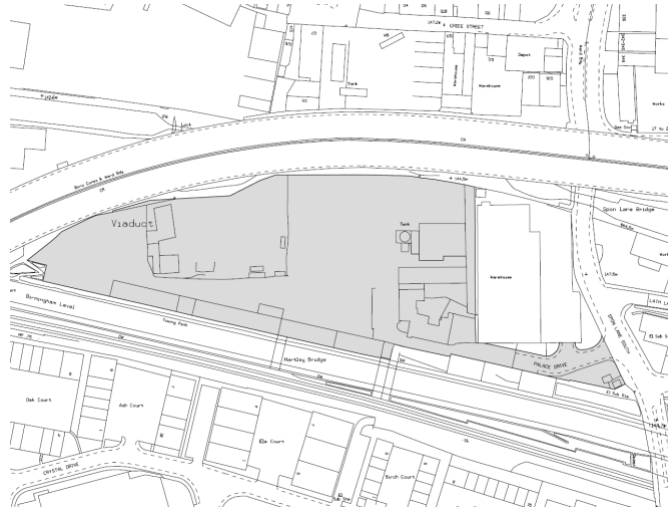


6.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description Smethwick Library	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Next to A457, bus routes and 2 minutes from Smethwick Galton Bridge railway station Next to canal foot paths	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	Accessible by railway from Birmingham 6 minutes' drive from the M5 30 minutes from Birmingham airport Next to canals	5
Location with good public profile	On Smethwick High Street so familiar location but not high profile	3
Close to other public attractions/services	Surrounded by shops and small businesses 15 min walk from Smethwick Heritage Centre Trust and Victoria Park 10 min walk from Nature Reserve Park 5 minute walk from Smethwick Youth & Community Centre Numerous places of worship in close proximity	3
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	A range of community and heritage bodies e.g. schools, youth centre, police, medical centre	3
Welcoming environment	Familiar high street environment although major A road and railway detract from the attractiveness. Next to a public house.	3
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Façade and accommodation facing the street is attractive. New build behind provides opportunity to increase visual engagement	3
Opportunity for passive build	With new build at back but not with facade	3
Readily available for development	Would require movement of library service	3
<i>Total score</i>		<i>31</i>
<i>% of actual score out of possible total score of 45</i>		<i>69%</i>

7. Option 4 Chances Glassworks



7.1 Key site data

Site Address	Chance Glassworks, Spon Lane South, Smethwick, B66 1NZ
Ownership	Not council owned
Site Area (m ²)	21,820m ² (whole glassworks site)
Floor Area (m ²)	N/A – assume new build on vacant part of site
Site Type	Industrial brownfield
Site Description	<p>Former glassworks site retaining three listed warehouses and cleared land within a large walled compound bounded by two canals and the M5 viaduct. Currently single access point next to James Lister & Sons Limited (providers of engineering supplies and services). Within mixed industrial area including heavy engineering and mineral processing.</p> <p>The principal seven storey building is Phase 1 of a development by the Chance Heritage Trust, comprising 41 residential units, 906m² of educational space 1,946m² of enterprise space, a Heritage Centre, a café and archiving facilities.</p>
Listing	Seven storey warehouse (1847), two lower warehouses on south side and two canal bridges all Grade II Listed.
Planning Policy	<p>Within mixed-use area</p> <p>Within conservation area</p> <p>Adjacent to local employment and potential high-quality employment land</p> <p>Adjacent to national cycle network canal side routes and motorway</p>
Area Character	Active industrial / Industrial heritage
Current Uses	Vacant land and warehouses
Neighbours	<p>Motorway and canals – 5m</p> <p>Engineering services – 8m</p> <p>Outdoor container, pallet storage and warehousing – 38m</p>
Car Parking	Potential for at least two new onsite accessible spaces and sharing with other visitor parking facilities under development within the wider site
Public Transport	<p>200m to 6 bus routes</p> <p>900m to Trinity Way tram stop</p> <p>1,100m to Smethwick Galton Bridge national rail</p>
Flood Risk	<p>Flooding by surface water in local area: LOW risk (0.1-1%)</p> <p>Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)</p>
Environment	Sub-urban, medium pollution risk from traffic
Other Comments	Site subject to availability, purchase costs and cooperation of existing owner
Orientation	The site could offer desired North-South orientation for passive solar design

7.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	5	5	25	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Not in coal mine high risk area. Undertake site search
Flooding	2	2	4	Investigate risk from canals
Risk from fire or explosion	5	4	20	Industrial area at risk of fire
Risk from pollutants or vibration	5	5	25	Pollution from outdoor mineral processing and M5
Rodents and other pests	5	4	20	Potentially high risk from waterways
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	3	3	9	Possible industrial targets
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	1	1	1	
Indicative overall risk score			46%	

7.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	1	Risk of contamination from former industrial uses is unknown
Expansion potential	1	
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
Total score	12	
% of total possible score of 20	60%	



7.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief subject to agreement with developer

7.5 Development scope

- High quality landscape scheme would be required within conservation area to include service area and two onsite accessible parking spaces.
- New 1,805m² three storey building of medium material quality required in conservation area and near listed buildings

7.6 Estimated construction costs (Appendix 2) (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High
Total	6,200,000	7,000,000	9,000,000
Construction cost /m²	2,300	2,700	3,500



7.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description Chances Glassworks	Score 0 =No, 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Good road connections from M5 and A roads One canal paths is a national cycle routes with potential for direct access from the canal paths 15min walk from Smethwick Galton Bridge station	3
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	Off the M5 and two canals.	5
Location with good public profile	Part of famous heritage site and visible from M5	5
Close to other public attractions/services	Development of the Chances site Can access locations such as libraries and heritage sites within short (e.g.15 minute car rides)	5
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	Chances Trust re industrial heritage, volunteering, heritage outreach, training & employment Numerous schools in locality	5
Welcoming environment	No – dramatic but not welcoming Unattractive industrial estate under the M5 flyover	0
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Yes – the historical location and the dramatic M5 flyover creates an unusual setting	3
Opportunity for passive build	Yes - as new build is the solution.	5
Readily available for development	Not known but relationships will need to be developed to further this conversation	1
Total score		32
% of actual score out of possible total score of 45		71%

8. Option 5 – Highfields (Registry Office)





8.1 Key site data

Site Address	Highfields Road, current registry office site High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8RJ
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m ²)	9,025m ² (including gardens, closest rear and side car parks)
Floor Area (m ²)	1,283m ² GIA
Site Type	Conversion and extension
Site Description	Very attractive operational registry office in elegant late Georgian stuccoed former houses, now linked into single premises, surrounded by pleasing gardens with lawns, planting and mature trees. Front of building is of high architectural design quality. Southerly aspect to central block of three storeys with two-storey wings. Rear of building overlooks car parks and is more disjointed with varied extensions, irregular windows and roof profiles. Interior not visited. Vehicle access from Sandwell Road.
Listing	Registry Office (c 1830) is Grade II Listed in a very attractive and mature landscape setting
Planning Policy	Within High Street, West Bromwich Conservation Area Side and furthest rear car parks fall within land identified for B1 (business) use only – refer to AAP policy WBPr8
Area Character	Civic / town centre
Current Uses	Registry office, public gardens, car parking
Neighbours	Job centre – 30m Bank, offices, health centre – 90m Offices – 45m Residential – 70m
Car Parking	10m to Highfields public car park Three existing accessible spaces to rear of building may require augmentation or relocating, depending on design solution
Public Transport	82m to 7 bus routes 410m to Lodge Road tram stop
Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Semi-urban
Other Comments	For the purposes of this options appraisal, it is assumed that the east wing of existing building can be vacated and made available to the new archive facility. The east wing comprises cellular rooms at various floor levels with single glazed sash windows. The constraints of the listing, existing layout, structure, security capability and floor levels will not be ideally suited for conversion to archive use, likely leading to some compromise in operation of a new facility.
Orientation	The site could offer desired North-South orientation for passive solar design

8.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Not in coal mine high risk area. Undertake site search
Flooding	1	1	1	
Risk from fire or explosion	2	2	4	Distant from neighbours
Risk from pollutants or vibration	2	3	6	Distant from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	3	3	9	Some risk from gardens
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	2	1	2	Low risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	1	1	1	
Indicative overall risk score			14%	

8.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	4	
Expansion potential	4	Could extend further onto car parks (if undeveloped)
Self-containment	3	Historic building shared with registry office
Level floorplates	2	Dependent on design solution
Total score	13	
Total % out of possible score of 20	65%	



8.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

8.5 Development scope

- High quality landscape scheme (1,500m²) would be required within West Bromwich conservation area to connect the new building with the historically sensitive site, to include two new accessible parking spaces
- High quality conversion of approx. 414m² GIA of existing Georgian building in poor condition
- New 1,391m² GIA extension of high material quality required in conservation area and immediately adjacent to listed building in important civic setting. Note:
 - A two-storey extension of required size would be the full length of the existing building and extend beyond the existing rear fenced staff car park into the adjoining public car park
 - A three-storey extension of required size would be the full length of the existing building and could be retained within the immediate boundary. However, SMBC planners may consider this out of scale with the existing two-three storey listed building

8.6 Estimated construction costs (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High
Total	7,600,000	9,200,000	10,800,000
Construction cost /m²	3,100	3,800	4,400



8.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description Registry Office Highfields Road	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Close to A41, bus routes and on West Bromwich high street Close to several car parks Easily accessible by pedestrians	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	One junction from the M5 Half an hour from the airport	5
Location with good public profile	On West Bromwich High Street Used heavily by locals for Registration and marriage ceremonies Recognised as the most attractive location in West Bromwich	5
Close to other public attractions/services	Next to the Central Library and Town Hall Opposite the Registry Office Close to shopping centres and Dartmouth and Sandwell Country Parks	5
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	The Library and Townhall provide many opportunities for community engagement and supporting internal council business (e.g. records management)	5
Welcoming environment	Designed to be memorable and set apart from everyday life	5
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	A beautiful location that local people value	5
Opportunity for passive build	Only for the storage module assuming existing office space is shared	1
Readily available for development	Would require opening discussions with the Registry Office	1
<i>Total score</i>		37
<i>% of actual score out of possible total score of 45</i>		82%

9. Option 6 – Conjectural vacant site

9.1 Key site data

Site Address	-
Ownership	-
Site Area (m ²)	Approx. 1,000m ² for urban site with service area but no parking Approx. 2,400m ² for low density neighbourhood with service area, onsite disabled parking and landscape.
Floor Area (m ²)	-
Site Type	Brownfield or car park
Site Description	This is any conjectural vacant site such as a surface car park or previously developed town centre / town centre fringe location
Listing	-
Planning Policy	-
Area Character	-
Current Uses	-
Neighbours	-
Car Parking	Assume public car parking is available nearby as well as at least two accessible spaces on site
Public Transport	Assume public transport is available nearby
Flood Risk	Less than 1% (100 year) flood risk
Environment	-
Other Comments	-
Orientation	Ideally southerly facing frontage

9.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

Without a known site, a site hazard risk assessment is not possible. For purposes of a conjectural option, it is assumed that the site, likely to be urban or sub-urban offers a satisfactorily low level of environmental hazard.

9.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
	Low hazard level	3
Expansion potential	3	Depends on chosen site offering a satisfactory level of potential land for expansion
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
Total score	16	
% of total possible score of 20	80%	

9.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

9.5 Development scope

- Medium quality landscape scheme with service area and onsite accessible parking (say 1,500m² assuming two-storey building)
- New 1,805m² two-storey building of medium material quality required to mitigate loss of fairly attractive building in conservation area

9.6 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

For this assessment it is assumed that the conjectural site scores satisfactorily on all the factors for this part of the assessment resulting in a score of 60%.

9.7 Estimated construction costs (Appendix 2)

	Low £	Medium £	High
Total	6,200,000	7,100,000	9,000,000
Construction cost /m²	2,300	2,700	3,500

10. Summary and assessment of options

The Gas Showroom provides the best site but Brasshouse Lane and Smethwick Library both offer attractive alternatives.

The scores for each site are given in the next table:

	BS EN 16893 site hazard (lower score desirable)	BS EN 16893 audit (higher score desirable)	Public venue suitability (higher score desirable)	Construction cost - medium
Old Gas Showroom	22%	75%	100%	£8.6mn
Brasshouse Lane	27%	70%	82%	£7.5mn
Smethwick Library	36%	70%	69%	£8.1mn
Chances Glassworks	46%	60%	71%	£7mn
Highfields	14%	65%	82%	£9.2mn
Conjectural	N/A	80%	60%	£7.1mn

Comparing all the options this review concludes that the best site is the Old Gas Showroom. It provides a cleared site, which offers the opportunity for a bespoke archive building using a Passivhaus approach in an attractive and central location with a good profile and low risk. The proximity of public facilities and the library and Town Hall provide exciting potential for collaborative working to connect the historic library and modern archive building and share and build joint audiences. Placing the archive building on the High Street would significantly contribute to the regeneration of Sandwell High Street by providing an attractive and intriguing civic space. It would also provide a catalyst for joint working across a range of SMBC services as well as external stakeholders within the community such as charities and educational bodies. Comparators, such as Archives + in Manchester Central Library² and The Hive in Worcestershire³, have demonstrated that a central location and having other council services close by creates a higher profile

² <http://www.archivesplus.org>

³ <http://www.thehiveworcester.org>



and connectivity for the archive that drives much wider engagement, diverse joint working and new avenues in collecting. It also provides the opportunity for the archive service to act as a trusted public hub for other council services.

The next two options in the ranking are the Brasshouse Lane and Smethwick Library options. Each brings challenges - possible reduction in size of a small public park adjacent to the existing Brasshouse Lane building and merging with an older building at Smethwick Library. But they are both accessible, known locations close to public amenities, and do not significantly restrict the potential for building a bespoke archive.

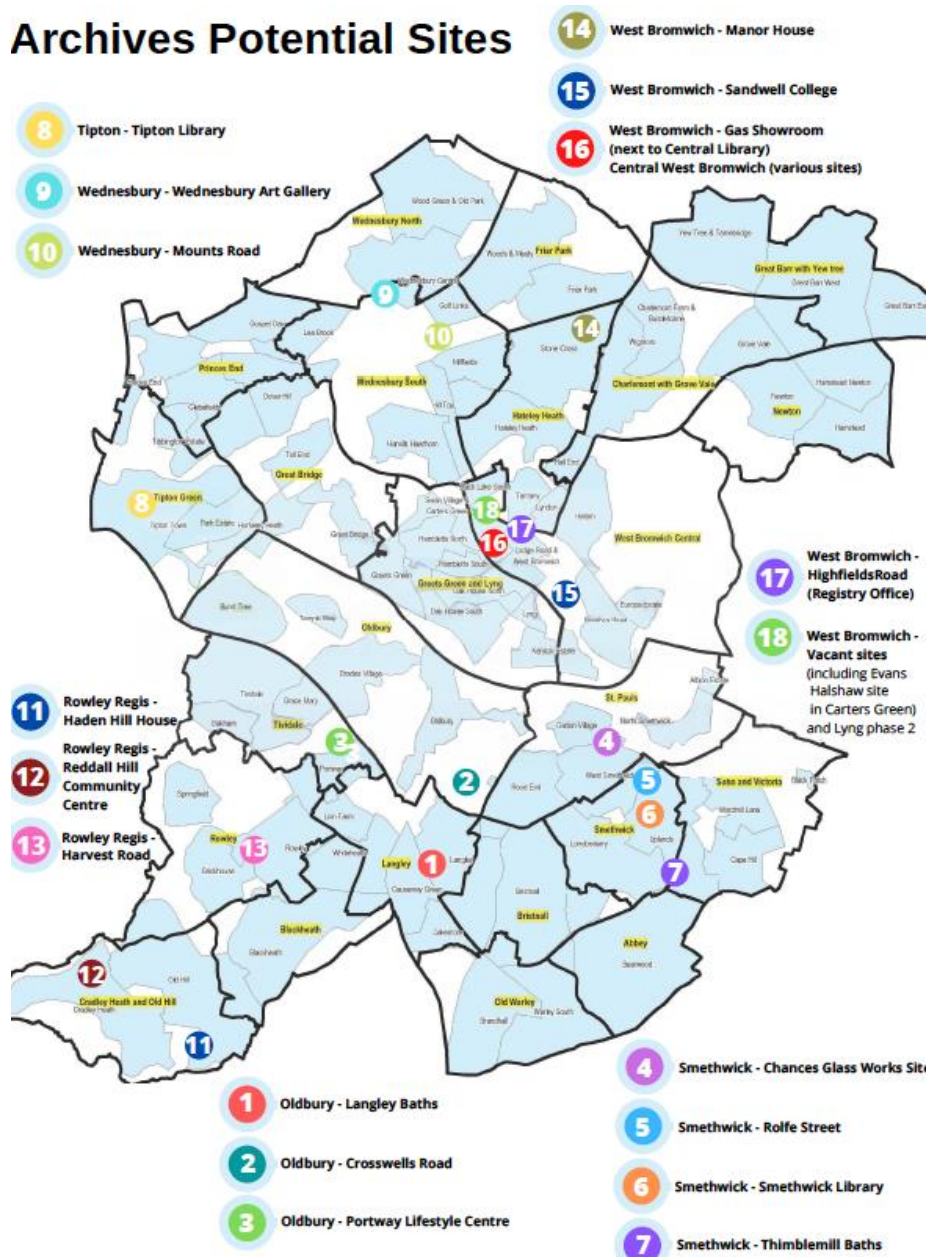
The location ranked fourth is Chances Glassworks. This has contradictory factors. It would provide a clear site on which to build a bespoke archive building and the presence of the Trust offers immense potential for public programming and collaboration. However, it is an unwelcoming location on an industrial estate and the proximity of the motorway materially increases the pollution risk (although this could be mitigated with environmental controls).

The Registry Office is ranked the lowest out of all the known sites. It has too many issues including:

- The need to use part of the Georgian Registry Office for work and public spaces, which would offer cramped accommodation difficult to accommodate larger audiences, deliver modern services or move collections around
- Loss of heavily-used parking space
- Public consternation with a modern construction being placed on this attractive, historical site

Whilst it is not possible to assess the conjectural site it can be seen that, to compete with the identified locations such a site would need to be able to accommodate a bespoke archive building with good connectivity to other public amenities, a reasonable public profile and opportunities for collaborative working.

Appendix 1 Map of longlisted sites



Appendix 2 Full construction costs developed by Core Five

Sandwell Archives

Indicative Order of Cost/ Cost Allocation Models - December 2020



Executive Summary

We have prepared a series of Cost Allocation Models for the provision of a new build archive building, based on a space brief produced by Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, for five sites that have been reviewed by Levitt Bernstein. These are at current price levels, and include no allowance for inflation.

The project is at a very early stage so therefore we have presented our suggested Total Project Budgets as a range, taking into account the quality and design aspirations that have been identified in the Levitt Bernstein Options Appraisal V3 25.11.2020. A summary table of a range of likely cost for each option follows.

These Cost Allocation Models provide an indication of budget, and include for construction works, professional and statutory fees, client direct costs and contingency. VAT is excluded. At this early stage the budgets are largely based on assumptions, and so only provide a guide to a likely magnitude of cost. Construction costs for the higher quality options are based on providing a building using "Passivhaus" principles of a similar design aspiration as Hereford Archives and Records Centre.

The mid point of our suggested budgets ranges from £7.1M for a conjectural vacant site to £9.2M for Option 4 Highfields (Registry Office), at current price levels. Key drivers of the variance in cost between the various options are site related items, architectural aspiration, and the level of refurbishment work of existing buildings.

We have priced the new build including fit out at circa £2,700/m² for medium quality, and at £3,300/m² for higher quality, at current price levels, including fit out (Archive Shelving, Loose Furniture and the Like), but excluding external works. Refurbishment of the Highfields Building and Smethwick Town Hall have been priced at £3,800/m² to reflect the additional complexity of working on these heritage buildings.

Allowances of 5% have been included for Client Costs, and 10% for Client Contingency. The Client may wish to fund the contingency allowance from a separate budget.

OPTION 1 - ALBION FOUNDATION	Area (GIA)	Cost Model 4Q 2020 Price Levels		
		Low	Medium	High
1.1. All New Build (Medium Quality)	1,805	6,700,000	7,500,000	9,400,000
OPTION 2 - CHANCE GLASSWORKS				
2.1. All New Build (Medium Quality)	1,805	6,200,000	7,000,000	9,000,000
OPTION 3 - GAS SHOWROOM SITE				
3.1. All New Build (High Quality)	1,805	7,200,000	8,600,000	9,900,000
OPTION 4 - HIGHFIELDS (REGISTRY OFFICE)				
4.1. Refurb/ New Build (High Quality)	1,805	7,600,000	9,200,000	10,800,000
OPTION 5 - SMETHWICK LIBRARY				
5.1. Refurb/ New Build (Medium Quality)	1,805	7,000,000	8,100,000	10,100,000
OPTION 6 - CONJECTURAL VACANT SITE				
6.1. New Build (Medium Quality)	1,805	6,200,000	7,100,000	9,000,000

These costs have been prepared on the basis of areas stated by Levitt Bernstein, contained within the Options Appraisal. Core Five take no responsibility for these areas.

These budgets include for construction costs at October 2020 price levels. No allowance has been included for inflation beyond this period.

Assumptions

The rates and allowances have been established on the assumption that the works will generally be fully designed by the design team, with only limited elements of contractor's design.

Only a nominal allowance is included for disposal of contaminated materials. If a site is heavily contaminated, an additional allowance should be added to the budget.

It is assumed that the design team will be commissioned to continue and complete design development in accordance with the budgets suggested. Effective Cost Management will be essential to ensure that the project is achieved within the budget.

Exclusions

The Cost Allocation Models are presented as a matrix that indicates what is included and excluded within the budgets. Site Acquisition, Infrastructure upgrade costs, for example to utilities, road access; and VAT are excluded.



Sandwell Archives



Cost Allocation Model Option 1 | Albion Foundation (Old Cock Inn)

Ref	Description	Area	Cost/m ² (Mid Point)	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property				0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works				65.20%	4,270,000	4,890,000	6,340,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works			✓		740,000	740,000	740,000	
2.02	Archive Building	1,805	2,000	✓		3,070,000	3,610,000	4,870,000	
2.03	Work beyond site boundary								✓
2.04	Remove contaminated materials			✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.05	Infrastructure Improvement								✓
2.06	Construction Works and Design Contingency			✓		460,000	540,000	730,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out				9.33%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600	900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment			✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency			✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works				11.19%	746,000	839,000	1,056,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses				0.85%	57,000	64,000	81,000	
6.00	Direct Costs				4.33%	289,000	325,000	409,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc			✓					
6.02	Business planning			✓					
6.03	Brief writing			✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding				0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding				0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies				9.09%	606,000	682,000	859,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs				0.00%		0		✓
Project Total (excluding VAT)					100.00%	6,668,000	7,500,000	9,445,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding								✓
Project Total (including VAT)					Say	6,700,000	7,500,000	9,400,000	
Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)						2,300	2,700	3,500	



Sandwell Archives

Cost Allocation Model Option 2 | Chance Glassworks



Ref	Description	Cost/m ² (Mid Point) Area	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property			0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works			64.56%	3,910,000	4,530,000	5,980,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works		✓		380,000	380,000	380,000	
2.02	Archive Building	1,805 2,000	✓		3,070,000	3,610,000	4,870,000	
2.03	Work beyond site boundary							✓
2.04	Remove contaminated materials		✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.05	Infrastructure Improvement							✓
2.06	Construction Works and Design Contingency		✓		460,000	540,000	730,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out			9.98%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600 900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment		✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency		✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works			11.19%	692,000	785,000	1,002,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses			0.86%	53,000	60,000	77,000	
6.00	Direct Costs			4.33%	268,000	304,000	388,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc		✓					
6.02	Business planning		✓					
6.03	Brief writing		✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding			0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding			0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies			9.09%	562,000	638,000	815,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs			0.00%		0		✓
Project Total (excluding VAT)				100.00%	6,185,000	7,017,000	8,962,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding							✓
Project Total (including VAT)				Say	6,200,000	7,000,000	9,000,000	
Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)					2,300	2,700	3,500	



Sandwell Archives

Cost Allocation Model Option 3 | Gas Showroom Site



Ref	Description	Area	Cost/m ² (Mid Point)	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property				0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works				66.36%	4,640,000	5,680,000	6,710,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works			✓		490,000	490,000	490,000	
2.02	Archive Building	1,805	2,500	✓		3,610,000	4,510,000	5,410,000	
2.03	Work beyond site boundary								✓
2.04	Remove contaminated materials			✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.05	Infrastructure Improvement								✓
2.06	Construction Works and Design Contingency			✓		540,000	680,000	810,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out				8.18%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600	900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment			✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency			✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works				11.18%	801,000	957,000	1,112,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses				0.85%	61,000	73,000	85,000	
6.00	Direct Costs				4.33%	310,000	371,000	430,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc			✓					
6.02	Business planning			✓					
6.03	Brief writing			✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding				0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding				0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies				9.09%	651,000	778,000	904,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs				0.00%		0		✓
	Project Total (excluding VAT)				100.00%	7,163,000	8,559,000	9,941,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding								✓
	Project Total (including VAT)				Say	7,200,000	8,600,000	9,900,000	
	Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)					2,700	3,300	3,800	



Sandwell Archives

Cost Allocation Model Option 4 | Highfields Registry Office



Ref	Description	Area	Cost/m ² (Mid Point)	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property				0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works				66.93%	4,930,000	6,160,000	7,330,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works			✓		490,000	490,000	490,000	
2.02	New Build Archive Building	1,391	2,500	✓		2,780,000	3,480,000	4,170,000	
2.03	Conversion of Existing	414	3,500	✓		1,080,000	1,450,000	1,780,000	
2.04	Work beyond site boundary								✓
2.05	Remove contaminated materials			✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.06	Infrastructure Improvement								✓
2.07	Construction Works and Design Contingency			✓		580,000	740,000	890,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out				7.61%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600	900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment			✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency			✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works				11.18%	845,000	1,029,000	1,205,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses				0.86%	65,000	79,000	92,000	
6.00	Direct Costs				4.32%	327,000	398,000	466,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc			✓					
6.02	Business planning			✓					
6.03	Brief writing			✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding				0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding				0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies				9.09%	687,000	837,000	979,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs				0.00%		0		✓
Project Total (excluding VAT)					100.00%	7,554,000	9,203,000	10,772,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding								✓
Project Total (including VAT)					Say	7,600,000	9,200,000	10,800,000	
Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)						3,100	3,800	4,400	



Sandwell Archives

Cost Allocation Model Option 5 | Smethwick Library



Ref	Description	Area	Cost/m ² (Mid Point)	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property				0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works				65.94%	4,510,000	5,370,000	6,850,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works			✓		620,000	620,000	620,000	
2.02	New Build Archive Building	1,463	2,000	✓		2,490,000	2,930,000	3,950,000	
2.03	Conversion of Existing	342	3,500	✓		890,000	1,200,000	1,470,000	
2.04	Work beyond site boundary								✓
2.05	Remove contaminated materials			✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.06	Infrastructure Improvement								✓
2.07	Construction Works and Design Contingency			✓		510,000	620,000	810,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out				8.60%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600	900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment			✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency			✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works				11.19%	782,000	911,000	1,133,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses				0.86%	60,000	70,000	87,000	
6.00	Direct Costs				4.33%	303,000	353,000	439,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc			✓					
6.02	Business planning			✓					
6.03	Brief writing			✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding				0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding				0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies				9.09%	636,000	740,000	921,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs				0.00%		0		✓
Project Total (excluding VAT)					100.00%	6,991,000	8,144,000	10,130,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding								✓
Project Total (including VAT)					Say	7,000,000	8,100,000	10,100,000	
Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)						2,900	3,400	4,200	



Sandwell Archives

Cost Allocation Model Option 6 | Conjectural Vacant Site



Ref	Description	Area	Cost/m ² (Mid Point)	Included	% Split of Total Budget (Mid Point)	Budget (Low) £	Budget (Mid Point) £	Budget (High) £	Excluded
1.00	Property				0.00%				✓
2.00	Construction Works				64.63%	3,950,000	4,570,000	6,020,000	
2.01	Site Preparation and External Works			✓		420,000	420,000	420,000	
2.02	Archive Building	1,805	2,000	✓		3,070,000	3,610,000	4,870,000	
2.03	Work beyond site boundary								✓
2.04	Remove contaminated materials			✓		Included	Included	Included	
2.05	Infrastructure Improvement								✓
2.06	Construction Works and Design Contingency			✓		460,000	540,000	730,000	
3.00	Archive Fit Out				9.90%	700,000	700,000	700,000	
3.01	Archive	600	900	✓		540,000	540,000	540,000	
3.02	Loose furniture, fittings and equipment			✓		100,000	100,000	100,000	
3.03	Contingency			✓		60,000	60,000	60,000	
4.00	Professional Fees on Works				11.19%	698,000	791,000	1,008,000	
5.00	Statutory and Sundry Fees and Expenses				0.86%	53,000	61,000	77,000	
6.00	Direct Costs				4.33%	270,000	306,000	390,000	
6.01	Client in house management costs incl fundraising, decant/ moving, etc			✓					
6.02	Business planning			✓					
6.03	Brief writing			✓					
7.00	Artwork and Off Site Wayfinding				0.00%				✓
8.00	Finance and Funding				0.00%				✓
9.00	Client Contingencies				9.09%	567,000	643,000	820,000	
10.00	Inflation Costs				0.00%		0		✓
Project Total (excluding VAT)					100.00%	6,238,000	7,071,000	9,015,000	
11.00	Finance and Funding								✓
Project Total (including VAT)					Say	6,200,000	7,100,000	9,000,000	
Construction Cost/m² (excluding Site Preparation and External Works)						2,300	2,700	3,500	



Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan Associates Ltd
Registered Office: Mill Cottage, Brownheath, Ellesmere, Shropshire
SY12 0LB, United Kingdom
Registered in England and Wales Registered number: 6591486
01939 234289 / 07719 609894/ Elizabeth@elizabethoc.co.uk /
www.elizabethoc.co.uk

Elizabeth
OXBORROW-COWAN

Consultant Archivist

An options appraisal for four
additional sites for Sandwell
Archives
February 2022

Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, Consultant Archivist
Mark Lewis, Levitt Bernstein Architects



Contents

1. Introduction and methodology	3
2. Assessments	
2.1 Option 1 - Smethwick Library	
2.2 Option 2 – Sandwell Council House	12
2.3 Option 3 – Edward Street Car Park	13
2.4 Option 4 – Smethwick Council House	19
3. Summary scores and conclusion	25

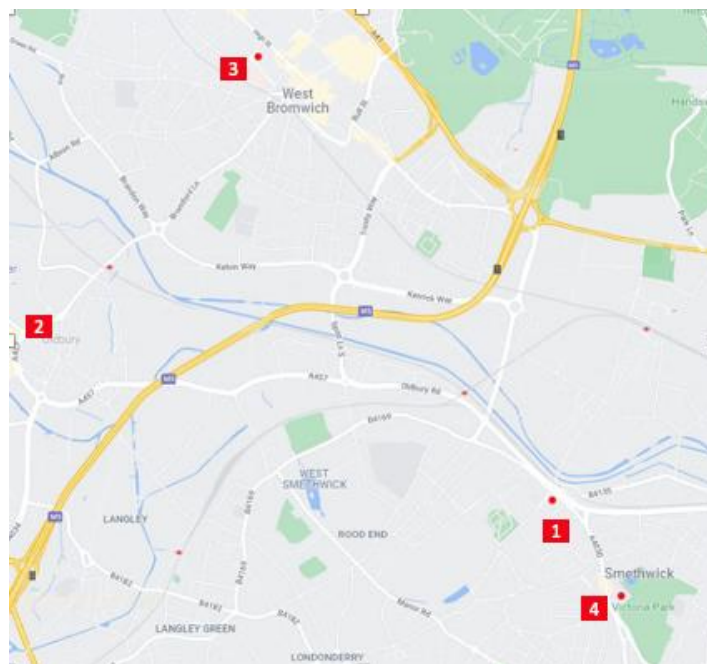
1. Introduction and methodology

1.1 Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Sandwell Council. Its purpose is to provide a high-level assessment of and construction cost for four sites for the development of new accommodation for Sandwell Archives. It is a successor report to that provided by Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan Associates in January 2021, which assessed 8 sites. Smethwick Library has been reassessed due to the presence of a culvert under the building being discovered.

The four sites that were assessed are

Option	Site	Street	Town	Postcode
1	Smethwick Library	High Street	Smethwick	B66 1AA
2	Sandwell Council House	Freeth Street	Oldbury	B69 3BY
3	Edward Street Car Park	Edwards Street	West Bromwich	B70 8NT
4	Smethwick Council House	High Street	Smethwick	B66 3NT





1.2 Methodology

This review comprised the following stages:

- A visit to each of the sites on 11 February 2022
- Analysis of each site against a variety of criteria as laid out in the January 2021 report
- The development of a very high-level construction cost for each site based on costings provided in the January 2021 report
- A final comparative assessment

This report is delivered by Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, Consultant Archivist, and Mark Lewis, Architect. Unlike the previous report there has not been the involvement of a quantity surveyor. Instead appropriate 2021 costs have been conservatively inflated by 12.5%.

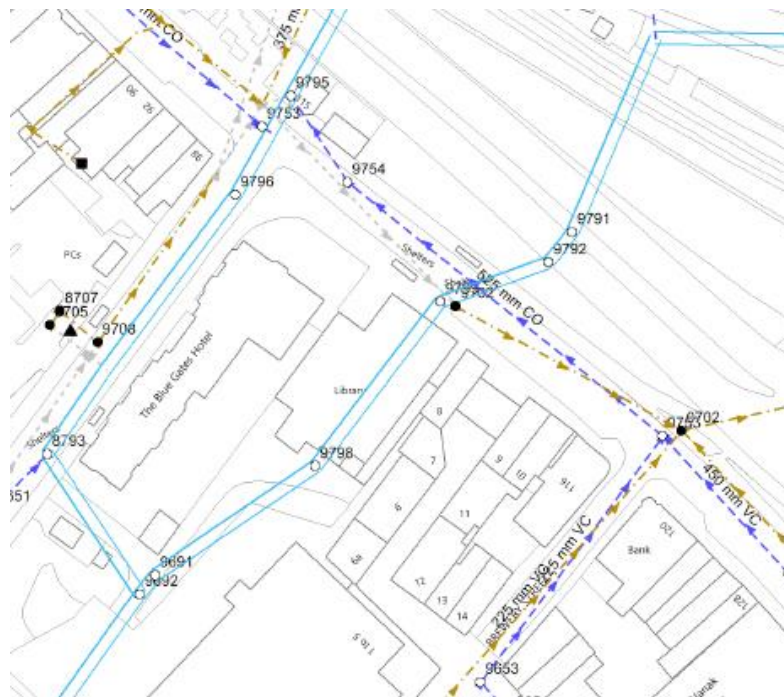
1.3 Notes on appraisal of options

The options have been developed to a RIBA 0 level of detail. This allows scores and costs to be estimated on a comparative rather than empirical basis. Costs and scores for each option are considered relative to each other and suitable to inform selection of a preferred site option. The preferred option will require further research, surveys, significant design development and stakeholder engagement at the next project stage to increase cost accuracy.

2. Assessments

2.1 Option 1 - Smethwick Library

This has been assessed again to take into account the recent finding of a culvert running underneath the building (as shown in the Severn Trent plan below).



2.1.1 Key Data

Site Address	Smethwick Library High Street Smethwick B66 1AA
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m²)	1,287m ² (including forecourt and service area to rear)
Floor Area (m²)	1,382m ² GIA
Site Type	Part demolition, part conversion and extension
Site Description	Attractive and robust-looking gothic palazzo style Victorian former town hall, now the home of Sandwell's archive service, most of its collections, a local library and community spaces. The front portion is a good quality historic building of red brick with stone window embellishments, bracketed cornice and pediment. Its historic interiors have been harmed by insensitive building services and other low-quality adaptations. The rear portion seems to have been rebuilt (it was originally higher) and houses the public library and archive search room at ground level with collection storage in an unsuitable basement below. The existing structure is load bearing masonry with upper floors of light weight suspended timber. There is vehicle access from the rear.
Listing	Built 1867. Locally listed.
Planning Policy	Within Smethwick Town Centre, High Street Conservation Area Seems to be within site identified for retail.
Area Character	Local town centre
Current Uses	Public library, archive service and community rooms
Neighbours	Shops – 2m Commercial warehousing – 2m Public house – 4m Substation – 36m
Car Parking	75m to Stony Lane public car park, which includes two accessible parking spaces There is one accessible parking space in front of the Victorian building
Public Transport	3m to 3 bus routes 100m to Smethwick Rolfe Street national rail

Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: HIGH risk (greater than 3.3%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Urban
Other Comments	The original main entrance is not used because it is stepped. There is a modern ramped main entrance to the side, but this is not very attractive. The High Street is very congested offering little opportunity for additional accessible parking. Originally the rear portion was similar in height to the front portion, giving potential for a substantial new building to the rear.
Orientation	Site not ideally orientated for passive solar design

2.1.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	5	5	25	A culverted watercourse runs centrally below the length of the building. Severn Trent have been unable to confirm its age, condition or performance
Ground stability	3	3	9	Within coalfield consultation area. Not in coal mine high risk area. Further detailed investigation recommended
Flooding	5	5	25	Sunken rear yard liable to frequent surface water flooding would need to be addressed by new design
Risk from fire or explosion	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Risk from pollutants or vibration	3	4	12	Pollution from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	3	3	9	Some risk from neighbours

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	2	1	2	Small risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	3	3	9	Substation on same block but not immediate neighbour
Indicative overall risk score			40%	

2.1.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	0	Risk of flooding from surface water requires mitigation Presence of culvert of unknown condition, construction, or performance is a severe blight on the site
Expansion potential	1	Very limited expansion to rear
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
	55%	

2.1.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

2.1.5 Development scope

- Partial demolition of existing building – approx. 962m² GIA
- Address local surface water flood risk: infill basement or raise new rear portion on piloti; include for stormwater attenuation system.



- New landscape to forecourt (60m²) with planting and seating, new stone steps and ramps to historic main entrance (or external platform lift), and new service area to rear (375m²)
- High quality conversion of approx. 342m² GIA of existing Victorian building in poor condition
- New 1,463m² GIA extension of medium material quality required in conservation area but behind existing building

2.1.6 Estimated development costs

Inflating the 2021 costs for Smethwick by an additional 12.5% i.e.:

	Low (£)	Medium (£)	High (£)
2022 - Inflated cost	7,875,000	9,112,500	11,362,500
Construction cost /m²	3,263	3,825	4,725

2.1.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description Smethwick Library	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Next to A457, bus routes and 2 minutes from Smethwick Galton Bridge railway station Next to canal foot paths	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	Accessible by railway from Birmingham 6 minutes' drive from the M5 30 minutes from Birmingham airport Next to canals	5
Location with good public profile	On Smethwick High Street so familiar location but not high profile	3
Close to other public attractions/services	Surrounded by shops and small businesses 15 min walk from Smethwick Heritage Centre Trust and Victoria Park 10 min walk from Nature Reserve Park 5 minute walk from Smethwick Youth & Community Centre 30 min walk/5 min drive to Thimblemill Library Numerous places of worship in close proximity	3



Factor	Description Smethwick Library	Score 0 =No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	A range of community and heritage bodies e.g. schools, youth centre, police, medical centre	3
Welcoming environment	Familiar high street environment although major A road and railway detract from the attractiveness. Next to a public house.	3
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Façade and accommodation facing the street is attractive. New build behind provides opportunity to increase visual engagement	3
Opportunity for passive build	With new build at back but not with facade	3
Readily available for development	Would require movement of library service	3
<i>Total score</i>		<i>31</i>
% of actual score out of possible total score of 45		69%

2.2 Option 2 – Sandwell Council House, Oldbury



2.2.1 Architectural Appraisal

Sandwell Council house was viewed externally on 11/2/22 and diagrammatic floor plans reviewed.



The building appears to be of brick clad concrete frame construction built in the 1980/1990's. If constructed with general office floor loadings, it is unlikely to be able to accommodate mobile archive storage racking, without strengthening. Its windows, external walls, roofs and roof-lights would also need significant changes to provide the necessary thermal performance.

We understand the octagonal double-height council chamber (room 131) is being considered as a location for the archive. At approximately 200m² NIA this room is significantly smaller than the 1,805m² GIA needed to accommodate the archive facility. If both entire floors of the octagonal wing were available for the archive, it would offer just over 70% of the space needed.

2.2.2 Key Data

Site Address	Sandwell Council House Freeth Street Oldbury B69 3BD
Ownership	Council owned

2.2.3 Assessment

The visual inspection and data supplied demonstrated that this space is not suitable for an archive facility. We understand that there are also other demands for use of the space. Therefore, this site is deemed unsuitable for further analysis.

2.3 Option 3 – Edward Street Car Park, West Bromwich



2.3.1 Key Data

Site Address	Edward Street Car Park Edward Street West Bromwich B70 8NT (closest location)
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m²)	Approx 1,730m ²
Floor Area (m²)	N/A – current site is undeveloped
Site Type	Urban brownfield
Site Description	Slightly sloping surface car park. Indicative site shown on West Bromwich Town Centre Masterplan as allocated for a courtyard block of 3-4 storey low density housing
Listing	Not listed, but adjacent / near to 3 Grade II listed buildings: Ryland Memorial School of Art (1902), Town Hall (1874-5), and Central Public Library (1907)
Planning Policy	Within mixed-use area including: cultural, leisure, office, retail, cafes, bars, restaurants - refer to AAP policy WBP10 Within High Street, West Bromwich Conservation Area
Area Character	Local town centre
Current Uses	Surface Car Park – approx. 70 car parking spaces
Neighbours	Civic – 11m Education – 14m Residential – 17m Cultural – 25m Western Power major substation – 27m Heath – 40m
Car Parking	0m to Edward Street public car park Consider creation of new accessible on street spaces and/or additional accessible spaces to the three spaces extant to the rear of Central Library
Public Transport	150m to 2 bus routes 150m to Lodge Road tram stop
Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Urban

Other Comments	Not easily physically linked to library owing to intervening roadway. Further investigation into history of uses of the site would be needed to confirm contamination risk and potential for below ground obstructions - such as cellars from previous buildings on the site
Orientation	Potential for good solar orientation with public areas facing southwards on Edwards Street and repository to the north at the rear of the Town Hall

2.3.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	4	5	20	Within coalfield consultation area and within 300m of former coal mining entry. Also within area of underground working. Further detailed investigation recommended. May increase foundation costs
Flooding	1	1	1	
Risk from fire or explosion	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Risk from pollutants or vibration	3	4	12	Pollution from nearby road traffic
Rodents and other pests	3	3	9	Some risk from neighbours
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	3	2	6	Some risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
HV power lines and substations	3	3	9	Substation on same block but not immediate neighbour
Indicative overall risk score			26%	

2.3.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	3	
Expansion potential	3	
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
	80%	

2.3.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief

2.3.5 Development scope

- High quality landscape scheme (800m²) would be required within conservation area to include service area to rear and two new accessible parking spaces
- New 1,805m² two or three-storey building of high material quality required in conservation area and immediately adjacent to listed buildings in important civic setting

2.3.6 Estimated development costs

Use same assumptions as Old Gas Showroom site, inflated by an additional 12.5% at least i.e.:

	Low £	Medium £	High £
2022 - 12.5% inflated cost	8,100,000	9,675,000	11,137,500
Construction cost /m²	3,038	3,713	4,275



2.3.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	3 minute walk from Lodge Street Tram stop and West Bromwich bus Station Located in the town centre	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	Very good national road links and 3 minutes' drive from A41 Direct trains from Birmingham New Street	5
Location with good public profile	Town centre just off high street	3
Close to other public attractions/services	Parking available on site Next to hospital, library & townhall Hotels in close proximity Very close to central shopping district	5
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	Close potential partners including library, Registrar, sixth form college, The Old House Museum, the Job Centre and Edward Street mental health hospital	5
Welcoming environment	Site surrounded by attractive historic buildings, residential accommodation and safe public thoroughfares Will be further enhanced by proposed development of Gas Showroom site	3
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	A new build that will have to be sympathetic to surrounding listed architecture and fit in with wider plans for reimagining the town centre and possibly a local cultural quarter development - so space and drivers for an imaginative or attractive build	5



Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Opportunity for passive build	A new build so the whole build could be passive	5
Readily available for development	Loss of current car parking space may be an issue	3
<i>Total score</i>		39
% of actual score out of possible total score of 45		87%

2.4 Option 4 – Smethwick Council House



2.4.1 Key Data

Site Address	Smethwick Council House (land to rear) High Street Smethwick B66 3NT
Ownership	Council owned
Site Area (m²)	3,570m ² (exc car park and embankment)
Floor Area (m²)	N/A – current site is undeveloped
Site Type	Suburban brownfield
Site Description	Land to rear Smethwick Council House, formerly developed as offices annexed to the Council House, but now demolished. Part laid out as surface car park and rough ground. The Council House is a very attractive landmark building. The adjacent Victoria Park is attractive and well-used. Both offer an attractive setting and would lend prominence to the archive development. Severn Trent infrastructure building in north west corner and 'Canal Feeder' embankment feature to the north should be investigated to ascertain what risk (if any) these may be to the archive development. There is a small open air electrical substation on the western boundary.
Listing	Smethwick Council House – Grade II (1905)
Planning Policy	Land use allocated for long term housing Within Smethwick High Street and Crocketts Lane Conservation Area Within curtilage of listed building
Area Character	Local town centre
Current Uses	Surface car park / disused rough ground
Neighbours	Offices – 0m Residential – 20m Public park – 0m
Car Parking	Potential for onsite parking
Public Transport	150m to 2 bus routes 700m to Smethwick Rolfe Street national rail
Flood Risk	Flooding by surface water in local area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North east corner (slightly raised land) VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remainder of site (slightly lower land) LOW risk (between 0.1% and 1%) Flooding from rivers and the sea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole site: VERY LOW risk (less than 0.1%)
Environment	Suburban
Other Comments	Connection with Victoria Park and nearby Heritage Centre offers great synergy with the archive development Some 2,000m ² surplus site area could be made available for other complementary or enabling development
Orientation	Potential for good solar orientation with public areas facing southwards towards Victoria Park and repository to the north at the rear of the Council House

2.4.2 BS EN 16893 site hazard initial risk assessment

A good result in this assessment would be a low score

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Tunnels or viaducts	1	1	1	
Ground stability	3	3	9	Within coalfield consultation area
Flooding	2	2	4	'LOW risk' part is within BS EN 16893 recommendation. Consider flood protection within design or use slightly higher land in north east corner. Potential risk from Severn Trent infrastructure building and 'Canal Feeder' require further investigation
Risk from fire or explosion	1	1	1	
Risk from pollutants or vibration	1	1	1	
Rodents and other pests	4	4	16	Adjacency to Park and lake

Site location risk	Risk level 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Score Out of 25	Comments
Nuclear power plant and defence	1	1	1	
Other target establishments	2	1	2	Low risk from neighbours
Airports and flight paths	1	1	1	
HV power lines and substations	3	3	9	Some risk from substation on site
Indicative overall risk score			18%	

2.4.3 BS EN 16893 audit

A good result in this assessment would be a high score

Criteria	Scoring 0 = unacceptable, 1 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, 5 = outstanding	
Low hazard level	3	Subject to risk assessment on Severn Trent infrastructure building and 'Canal Feeder'
Expansion potential	5	
Self-containment	5	
Level floorplates	5	
	90%	

2.4.4 Comparison with spatial brief for new archive facility

- Can accommodate desired space brief plus additional complementary or enabling development

2.4.5 Development scope

- High quality landscape scheme (700m²) would be required within conservation area to include service area to rear and two new accessible parking spaces
- New 1,805m² two-storey building of high material quality required in conservation area and immediately adjacent to listed buildings in important park-land setting



2.4.6 Estimated development costs

Using the same assumptions as the Old Gas Showroom site in the first report, inflated by an additional 12.5% i.e.:

	Low (£)	Medium (£)	High (£)
2022 - 12.5% inflated cost	8,100,000	9,675,000	11,137,500
Construction cost /m²	3,038	3,713	4,275

4.7 Suitability as a public service venue and site availability

The higher the score the more attractive the site as a public venue.

Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Easily accessible from inside Sandwell	Central location on the A4030	5
Easily accessible from outside Sandwell	Good accessibility for various transport 20 minute walk to Smethwick Galton Bridge railway station 5 minutes' drive from the M5	5
Location with good public profile	Adjacent to the popular and attractive Victoria Park	5
Close to other public attractions/services	Very good proximities: Adjacent to the Park and Smethwick Heritage Centre. Adult and Children's Services and Housing in the Council House Restaurants and shops in the neighbourhood 15 min walk each to Thimblemill and Smethwick Library	5



Factor	Description	Score 0 = No 1 = minimal 3 = satisfactory 5 = outstanding
Opportunities for collaborative working with neighbours	Numerous potential partners close by including Smethwick Heritage Centre, Adult and Children's Services, Victoria Park, Shiregate Collegiate Academy, primary schools, places of worship and Thimblemill and Smethwick Libraries	5
Welcoming environment	An pleasant location being a safe residential and retail district with surrounding shops and restaurants as well as the attractive parkland and Council House building	5
Potential to be an attractive or intriguing destination	Parkland and the listed Council House provide opportunities for a very attractive civic space and facility	5
Opportunity for passive build	New build so entire building could be passive	5
Readily available for development	No other demands on the space known of at this time	5
<i>Total score</i>		<i>45</i>
<i>% of actual score out of possible total score of 45</i>		<i>100%</i>

5. Summary scores and assessment of options

	BS EN 16893 site hazard (lower score desirable)	BS EN 16893 audit (higher score desirable)	Public venue suitability (higher score desirable)	Construction cost – medium
<i>First Round Appraisal 2021 with original costs inflated by 12.5% to 2022 prices</i>				
Old Gas Showroom	22%	75%	100%	£9.7mn
Brasshouse Lane	27%	70%	82%	£8.4mn
Smethwick Library	36%	70%	69%	£9.1mn
Chances Glassworks	46%	60%	71%	£7.9mn
Highfields	14%	65%	82%	£10.4mn
Conjectural	N/A	80%	60%	£8mn
Second Round Appraisal 2022				
Smethwick Library	40%	55%	69%	£9.1mn
Sandwell Council House	-	-	-	-
Edward Street Car Park	26%	80%	87%	£9.7mn
Smethwick Council House	18%	90%	100%	£9.7mn

The summaries show that either Edward Street Car Park or Smethwick Council House would be very suitable sites. However, Smethwick Council House is the most suitable site of all the sites assessed in the two reports due to its size, attractive location, low risks and potential partners nearby. The culvert under Smethwick Library has significantly reduced its suitability as this would provide a very uncertain flood risk.



Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan Associates Ltd
Registered Office: Mill Cottage, Brownheath, Ellesmere, Shropshire
SY12 0LB
Registered in England and Wales Registered number: 6591486
01939 234289 / 07719 609894/ Elizabeth@elizabethoc.co.uk /
www.elizabethoc.co.uk

elliswilliams

Sandwell Archive
Design Proposals
March 2023



Document Details

Job Title Sandwell Archive
Document Title Preliminary
Document Code 2942
Revision 03.2023
Issue Date 21.03.2023

Project Lead xxx
Project Lead's Email xxxx
Project Director xxx
Project Director's Emails xxxx

Document Produced By
Document Checked By
Document Issued To

Document Contents

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Existing Site Analysis
3.0 Site Photographs
4.0 Brief

5.0 Response to Site
5.1 Site, Boundary & Sun Path
5.2 Zooming Site Area

6.0 Introduction to Proposed Options
6.1 Option A Ground Floor
6.2 Option A First Floor
6.3 Option C Ground Floor
6.4 Option C First Floor

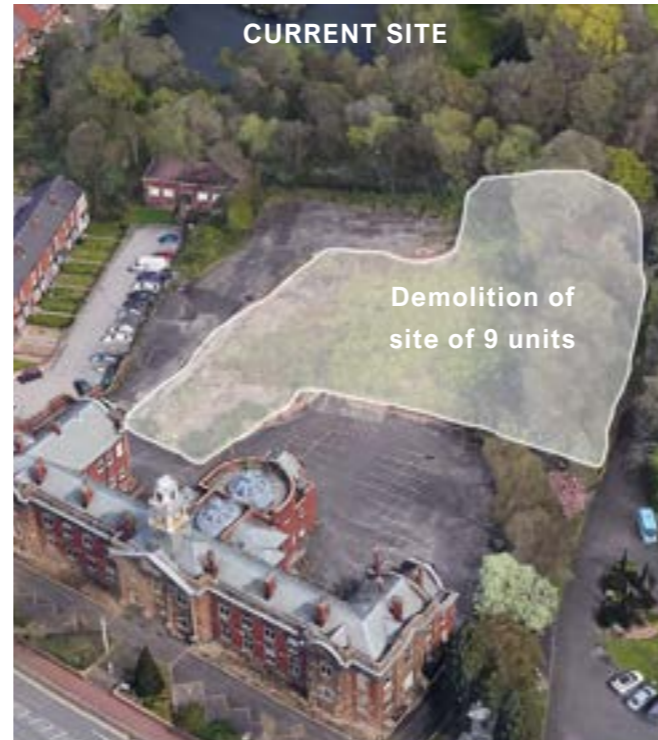
7.0 The Appearance
7.1 External Appearance, Materials & Precedent
7.2 Proposed Massing Options
7.3 Side Perspective
7.4 Side Perspective
7.5 Side Entrance Perspective
7.6 Elevations

8.0 Development of Option C
8.1 Existing, Demolition & New
8.2 Elevations
8.3 Ground Floor Plan
8.4 First Floor Plan

Appendices
9.0 Schedule of Accommodation
10.0 Feasibility Study

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ellis Williams Architects has been appointed by Smethwick Council to undertake a feasibility study for a potential Archive Building located within Sandwell Local Smethwick.



BACKGROUND AND SITE POLICY

Site Location

- Smethwick Council House, High Street Smethwick B66 3NT
- According to Planning Permission Town and County Planning Act 1990, there were proposed demolition of 9 units to the rear (By Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council May 2015).

Zoning

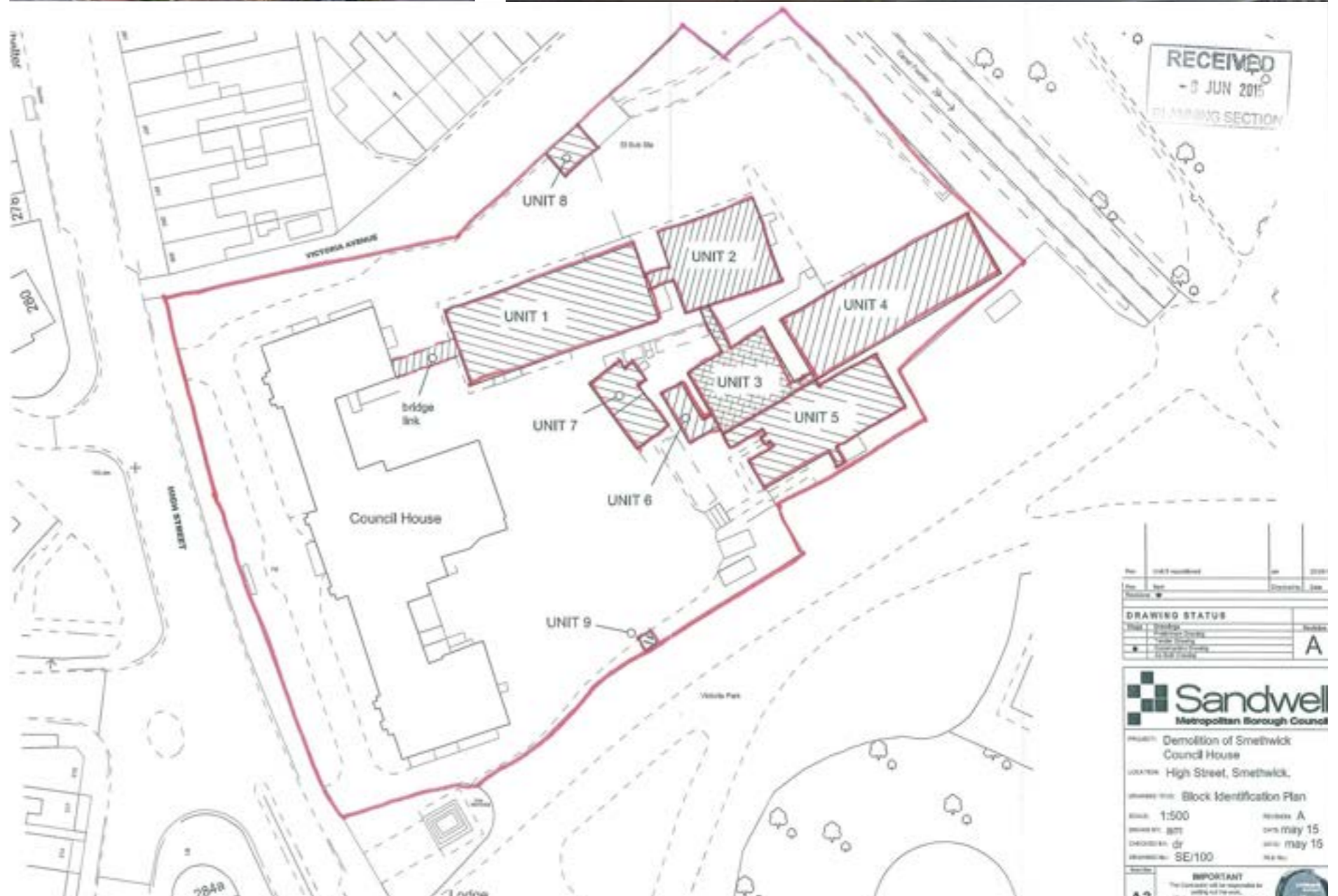
- **ENV2** - Historic character and local distinctiveness
- All development should aim to protect and promote the special qualities, historic character and local distinctiveness of **the Black County** in order to help maintain its cultural identity and strong sense of place.
- Public open space, including **Victorian parks**, often created upon and retaining elements of relict industrial landscape features; **the canal network** and its associated infrastructure, surviving canal-side pre-1939 buildings and structures together with archaeological evidence of the development of canal-side industries and former canal routes. (Policy ENV4)

Sustainable Development

- Meeting Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 or above for residential development
- Building Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) Very Good or above for other development.
- It needs to demonstrate a commitment to achieving high quality sustainable design.

Sad Eos 9 - Urban Design Principles

- All applications for new development in accordance with policy ENV3, Design Quality, of the Black County Core Strategy



Sandwell Archive
2.0 Site

2.0 EXISTING SITE ANALYSIS

Site Overview

Smithwick is an industrial town in Sandwell, West Midlands, England. It lies 4 miles (6 km) west of Birmingham city centre.

Smethwick Council House is a municipal building in Smethwick, West Midlands, England.

The building, which is located on High Street and was once the headquarters of Smethwick Borough Council, is now a **Grade II listed building**.

It was designed by Smethwick-based architect Frederick J. Gill in **the Baroque style**, built in **red brick with some buff terracotta** facings by John Dallow and Sons at a cost of £17,000 and was officially opened by the mayor on 19 June 1907. The design involved a symmetrical main frontage with fifteen bays facing onto the High Street; **the central section of three bays, which slightly projected forward and was buff terracotta faced, featured a full-height tetrastyle portico with an arched entrance on the ground floor and sash windows** on the first floor flanked by Ionic order columns supporting an entablature inscribed with the words **“Council House”**.

Smethwick has a long association with **canals**, which were the town's first major transport links from a time before decent roads and of course railways. The Birmingham Canal Navigation Old and New Main Line Canals run through the industrial areas and right past the High Street, running parallel to the Stour Valley Line: all three end up in Wolverhampton.



3.0 SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Page 582



1. Smethwick cenotaph



2. High street



3. Victoria Ave



4. The Smethwick Heritage Centre Trust



5. Roundabout



6. Harborne parish land charity



7. The Lake



8. Victoria Park + Campsite

4.0 BRIEF

EWA have been commissioned by the Council to develop a Stage 2 Feasibility report that will:

- Work with Sandwell Archives to develop the brief required for storage, technical and access requirements of a new archive's facility.
- Develop detailed plans and high-level costs for the new centre to enable accurate cost models to be determined for external funding options to be explored.

Page 583

OUTLINE OF PROJECT

A new Archives Centre is required for Sandwell to house its current and future collections. Sandwell Archives had its application for Archive Service Accreditation by The National Archives (TNA) rejected in 2017/18 because storage did not meet minimum standards. Archives storage is currently at maximum capacity, and the material is housed in three separate sites, which makes managing the collection and providing access difficult.

A NEW ARCHIVES CENTRE PROVIDES SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SANDWELL

- Opportunity to develop a new heritage centre for Sandwell that incorporates both a new Archives Centre and a records management facility to preserve the corporate memory. Economies of scale would allow Sandwell Council to develop a more proactive strategy for the acquisition of historic corporate records in a timely manner.
- The geographical area covered by Sandwell Archives is made up of several diverse communities and our aim is to ensure that our collections represent communities living in Sandwell. A new centre will allow us to fully address gaps in our collections by working closely with community groups and other local bodies to collect material.

A new Archives building would provide the opportunity to undertake a range of events and activities in a dedicated community space; for example, allowing touring exhibitions to be more effectively displayed; arts and cultural events such as music and theatre performances to be staged.

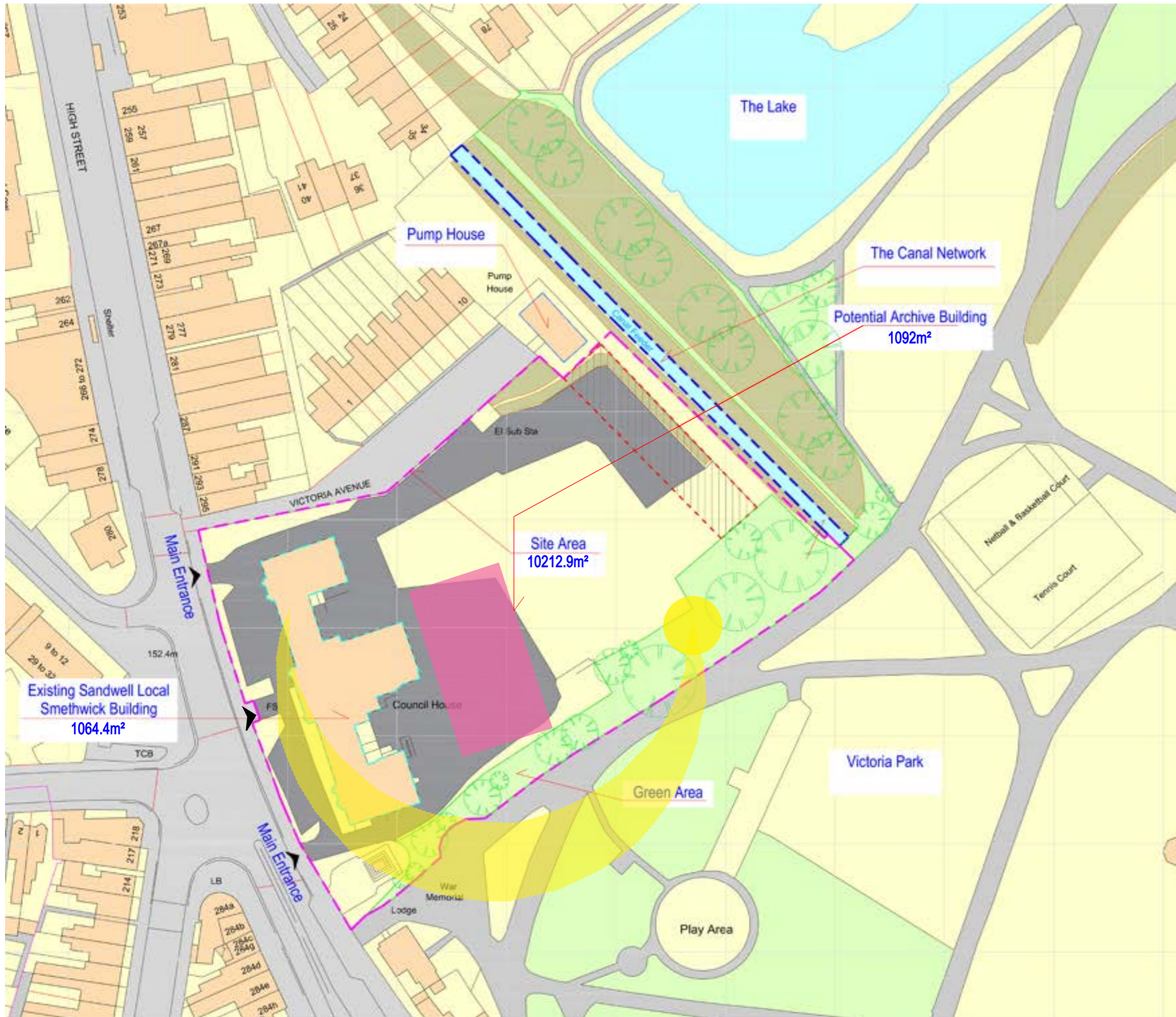
KEY OBJECTIVES

The RIBA Stage 2 report commissioned looks to develop design proposals that respond to the brief.

The report is limited to looking at the Architectural options to develop a new facility at Smethwick Council House. There has not been the ability during the process to develop further surveys to review existing structure or ground conditions or to undertake existing services surveys. These will need to be developed at the next Stage of Design development.

5.0 Response to Site

5.1 SITE ANALYSIS - SITE & BOUNDARY & SUN PATH

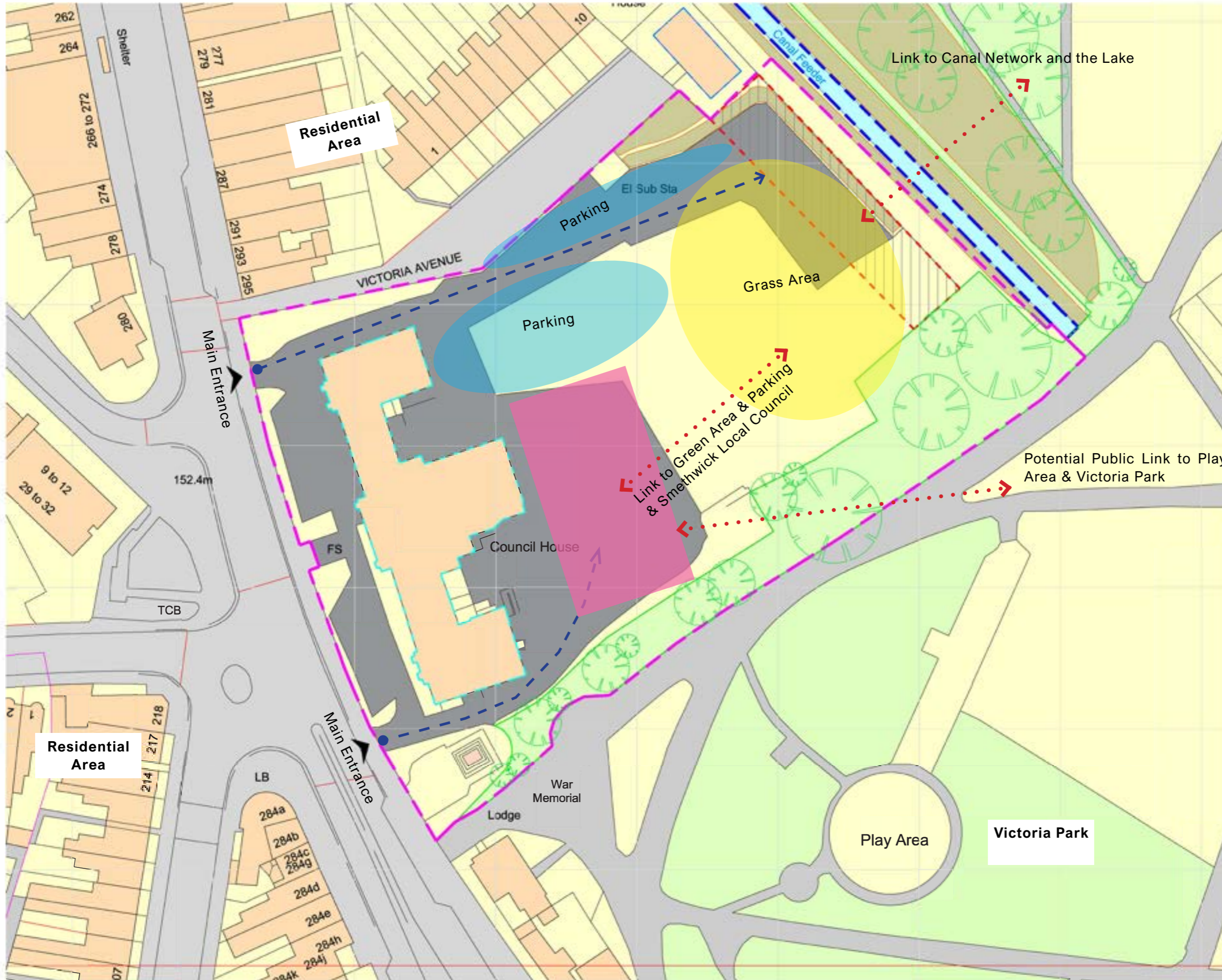


KEY


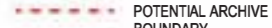




- - - RED LINE BOUNDARY
- - - POTENTIAL LOCATION
- - - THE CANAL NETWORK
- EXISTING GREEN AREA
- ⊗ EXISTING TREES
- CAR PARK



5.2 SITE ANALYSIS - ZOOMING SITE AREA



KEY

-  RED LINE BOUNDARY
-  POTENTIAL ARCHIVE BOUNDARY
-  THE CANAL NETWORK
-  EXISTING GREEN AREA
-  EXISTING TREES
-  CAR PARK



6.0 Introduction of Options

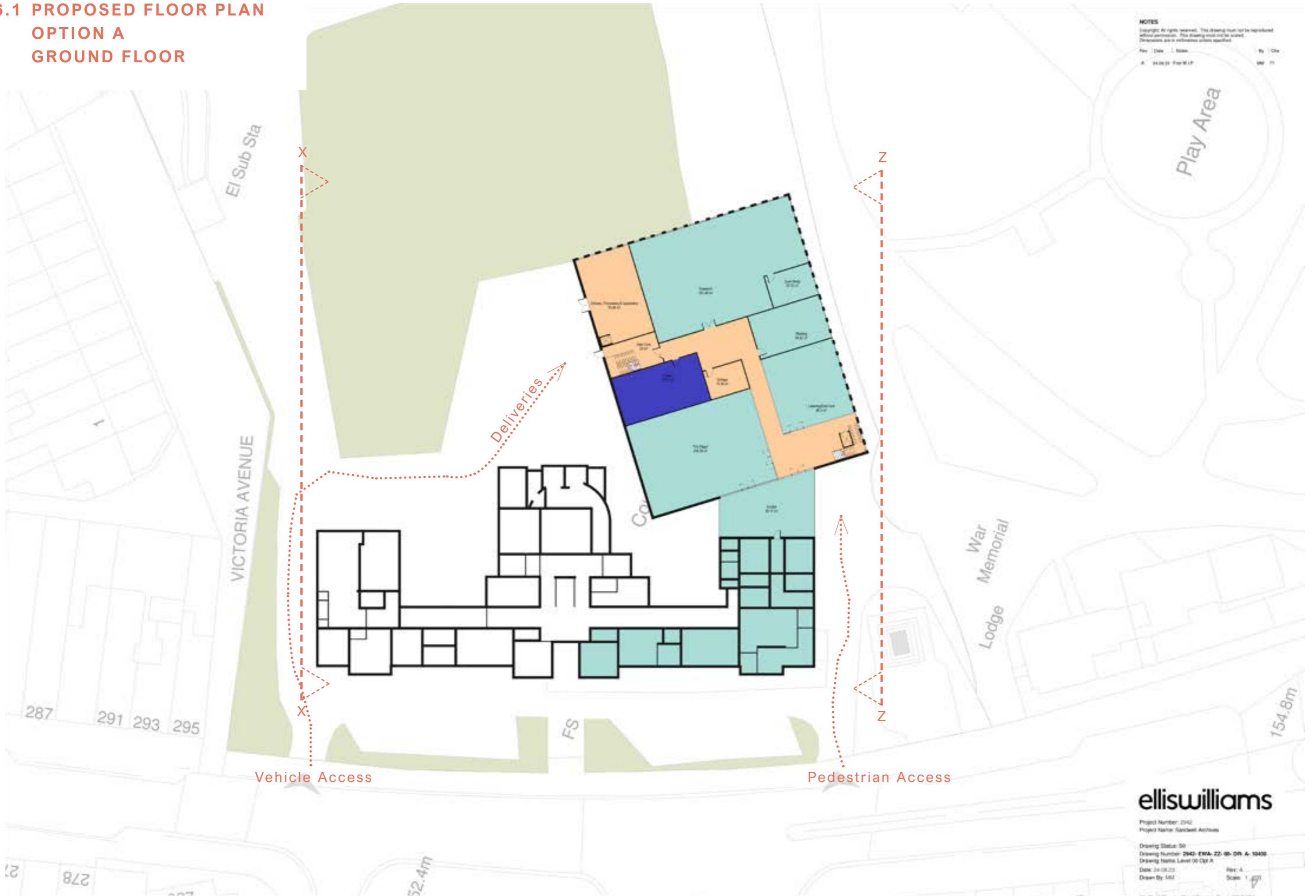
Following an initial options appraisal and costing exercise to look at several options for the development of a new archive facility on the site. EWA were asked to further develop Options A&C respectively to illustrate how the two proposals could work on the site.

Both options sit on the same side of the site looking to connect to the existing building. We have not yet had the opportunity to look at how space on the ground floor of the existing building could be used in detail, but it has been mentioned that a reception area and informal research space could be situated there, this needs further investigation as the options and brief develops.

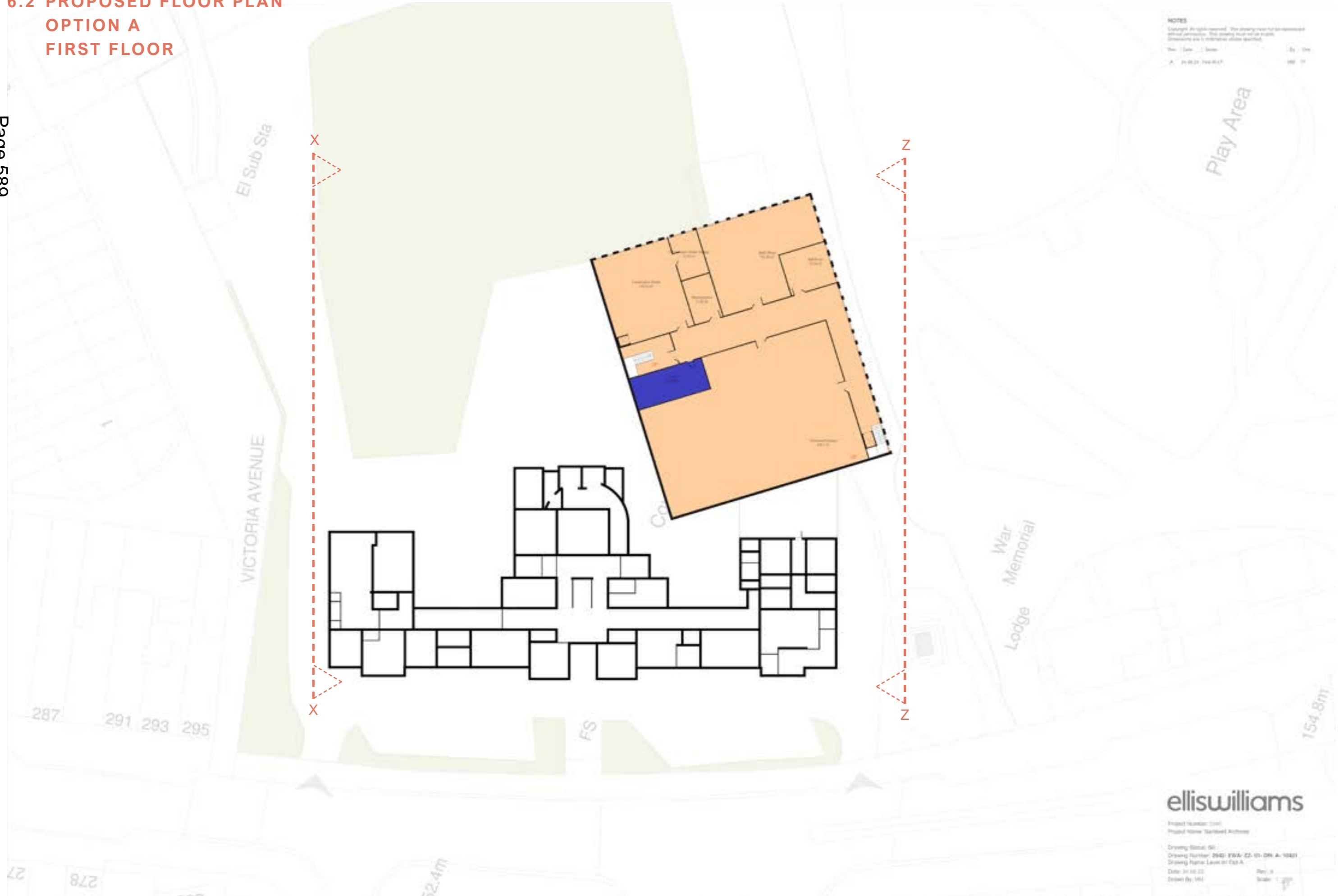
Both options look to make use of views out towards Victoria Park to give the building a civic presence, whilst the area behind the new Archive and existing building is utilised for car parking and a delivery area for the Archive.

Options explore moving public and private space between ground and First floor level, which has its pros and cons both in accessibility and cost terms. There is no hard and fast right solution to this, it needs to be considered as the brief develops which suits the development best.

6.1 PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN
 OPTION A
 GROUND FLOOR



6.2 PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN
OPTION A
FIRST FLOOR

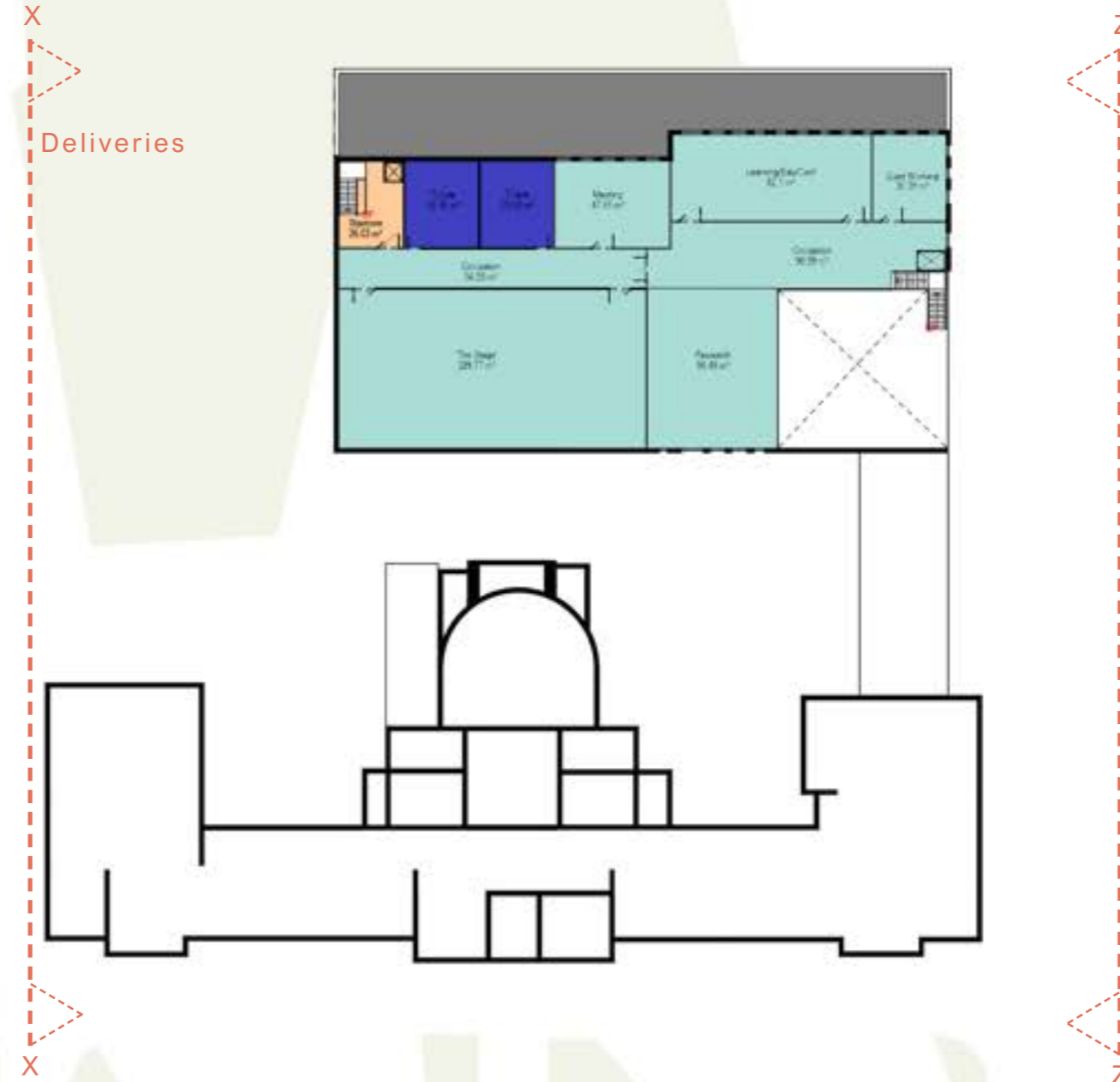


NOTES
Copyright reserved. The drawings and documents
shall remain the property of Ellis Williams
and shall not be used for any other purpose
without the written consent of Ellis Williams.
No. Date Rev. By
A. 20/03/2023 1/1

elliswilliams
Project Number: 2542
Project Name: Standard Address
Drawing Status: 50
Drawing Number: 2542-150A-22-101-DW-A-10001
Drawing Name: Level 01 Opt A
Date: 20/03/23 Rev: 0
Drawn By: 163 Scale: 1/1

**6.4 PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN
OPTION C
FIRST FLOOR**

Page 591



NOTES
Copyright All rights reserved. This drawing must not be reproduced without permission. The drawing must not be scaled. Dimensions are in millimeters unless specified.

No. | Date | Revs. | By | Drawn
A | 24.04.23 | Rev 01 | JWA | JWA

Department Title

- Archive
- Public
- Security

elliswilliams

Project Number: 2042
Project Name: Sandwell Archives

Drawing Status: 50
Drawing Number: 2042-EWA-ZZ-01-01-A-1000
Drawing Name: Level 01 Opt C

Date: 24.04.23
Drawn By: JWA

Rev: A
Scale: 1 : 200

7.1 EXTERNAL APPEARANCE, MATERIALS & PRECEDENT

Page 593

Proposed Materials -
Zinc and Brick

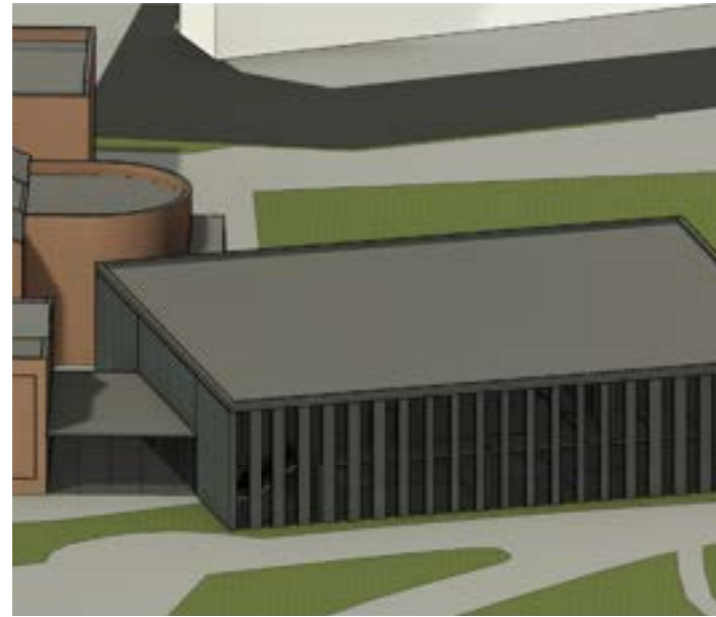
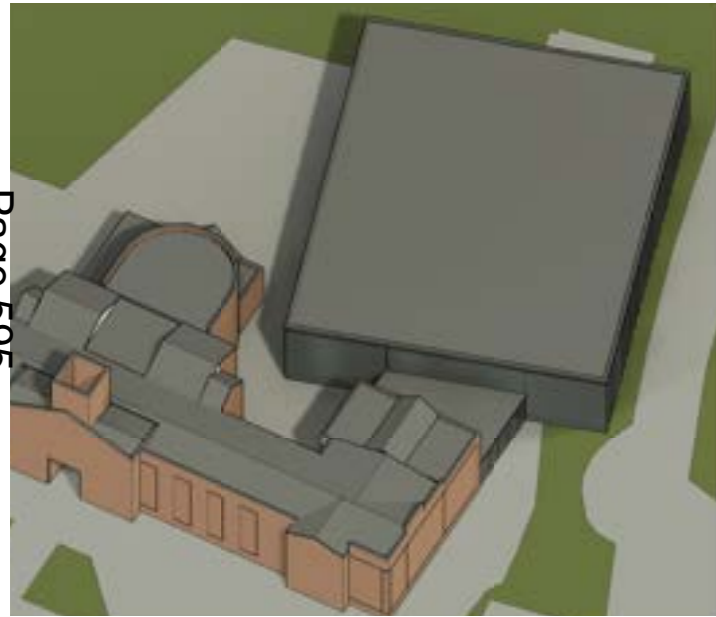


By necessity, the functional requirements of an Archive Building mean that the majority of the building's façade needs to be a blank windowless box to maintain the stable environmental conditions needed inside the building. However we have taken the opportunity to open this up further on the more public elevations facing Victoria Park to help showcase some of the activity taking place inside the building and generate interest and activity on this main public face to the building, responding to a key brief requirement to encourage the public to visit the centre.

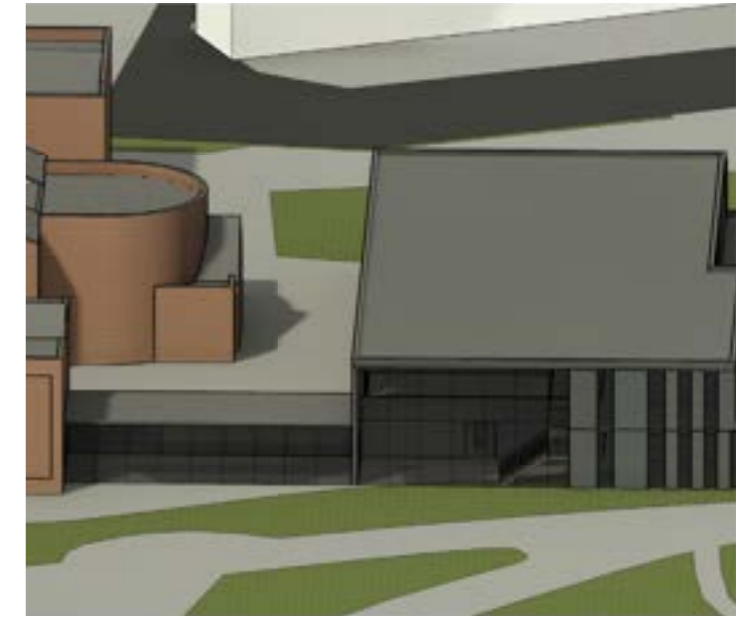
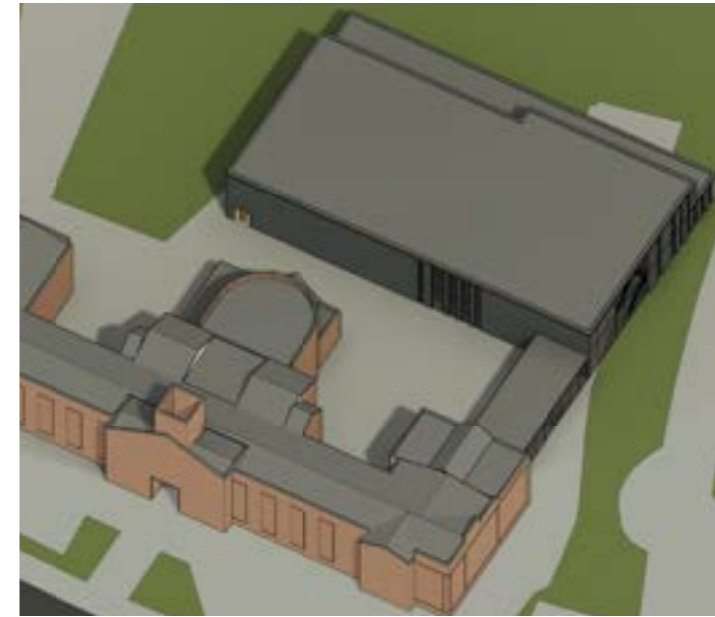




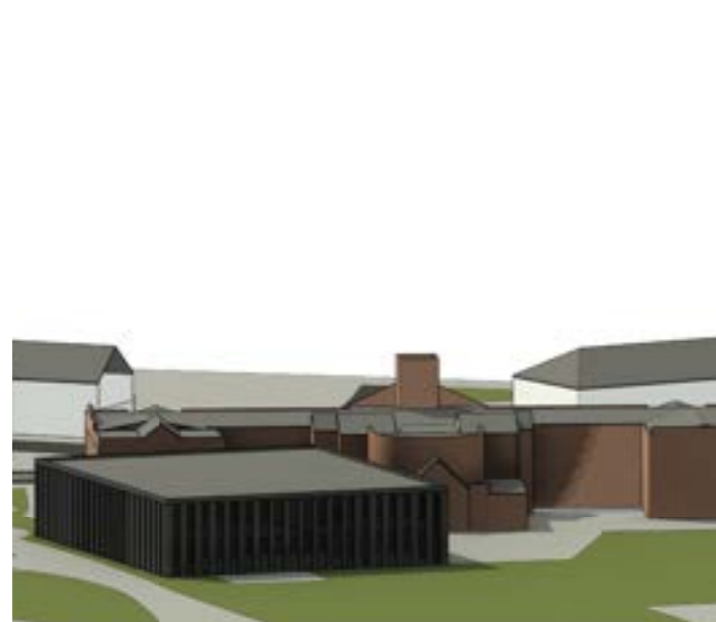
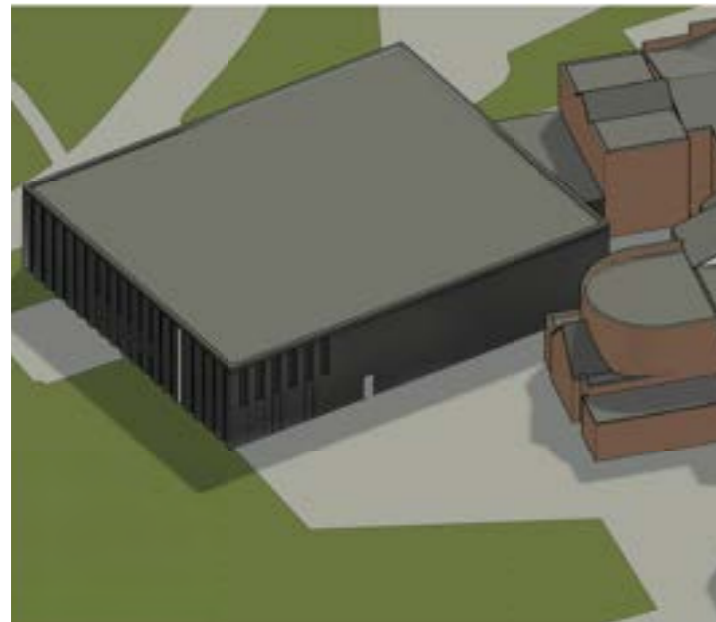
7.2 PROPOSED MASSING OPTIONS



OPTION A



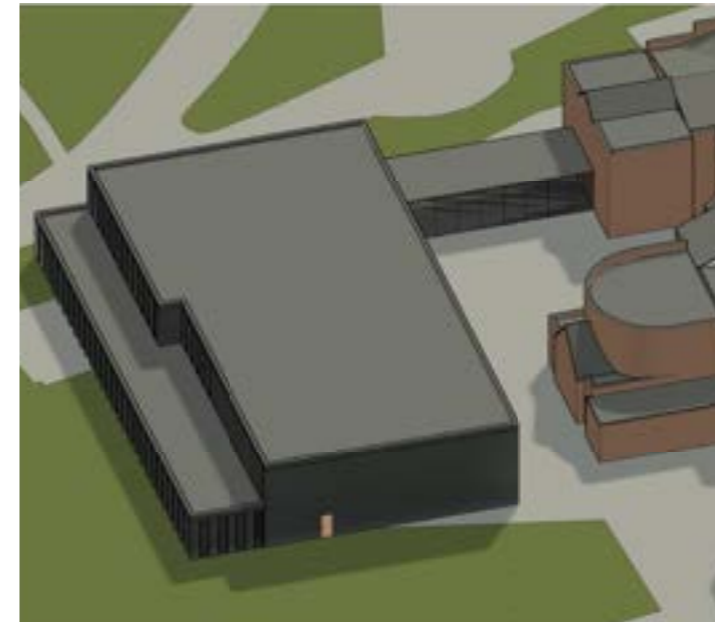
OPTION C



Option A
Area 2735m²

The option is positioned close to the existing civic building to minimise the area of the connecting element. The proposal looks to:

- Bring a closer connection between the existing building and the new Archive, enabling better connection between spaces.
- Places main public spaces on the ground floor. With Archive and staff space at First floor level
- Emphasises view towards Victoria Park.



Option C
Area 2541m²

This option moves the building away from the existing building. The proposal looks to:

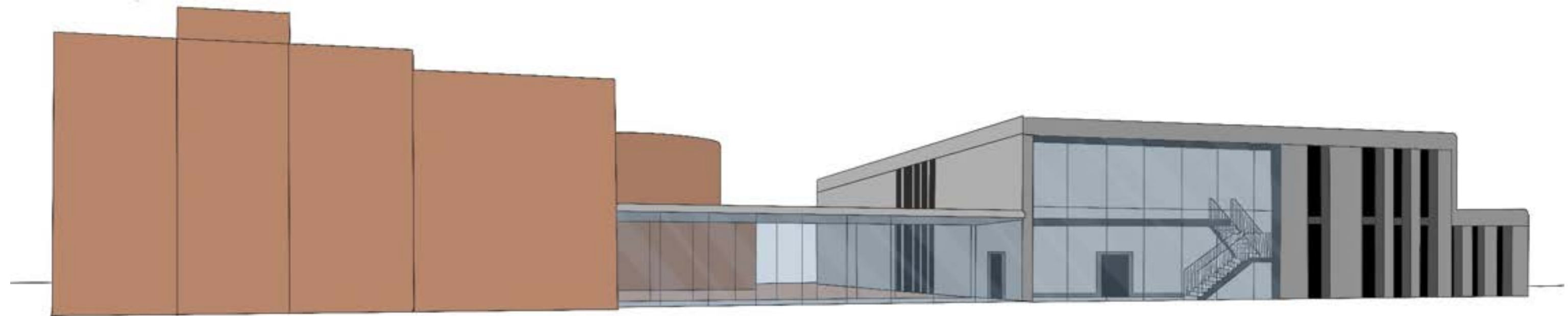
- De-risk working too close to the existing building but means distancing the connection between the two areas.
- Archive storage is put on the ground floor with supporting staff space to provide a more economic structural solution.
- Main Public areas move to First floor.

7.3 PROPOSED MASSING OPTIONS

OPTION A

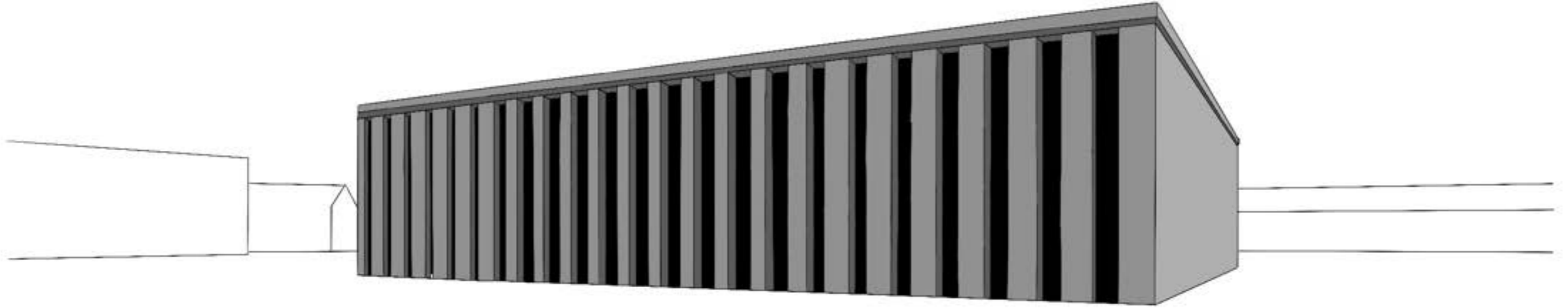


OPTION C

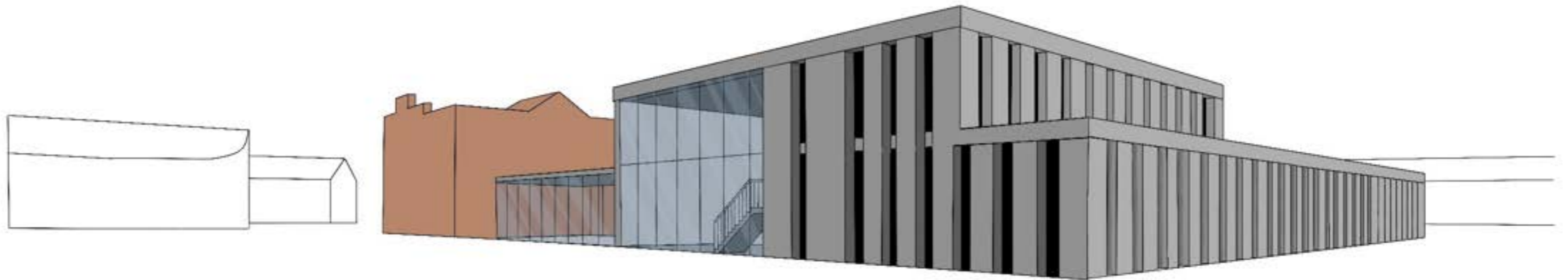


7.4 PROPOSED MASSING OPTIONS

OPTION A

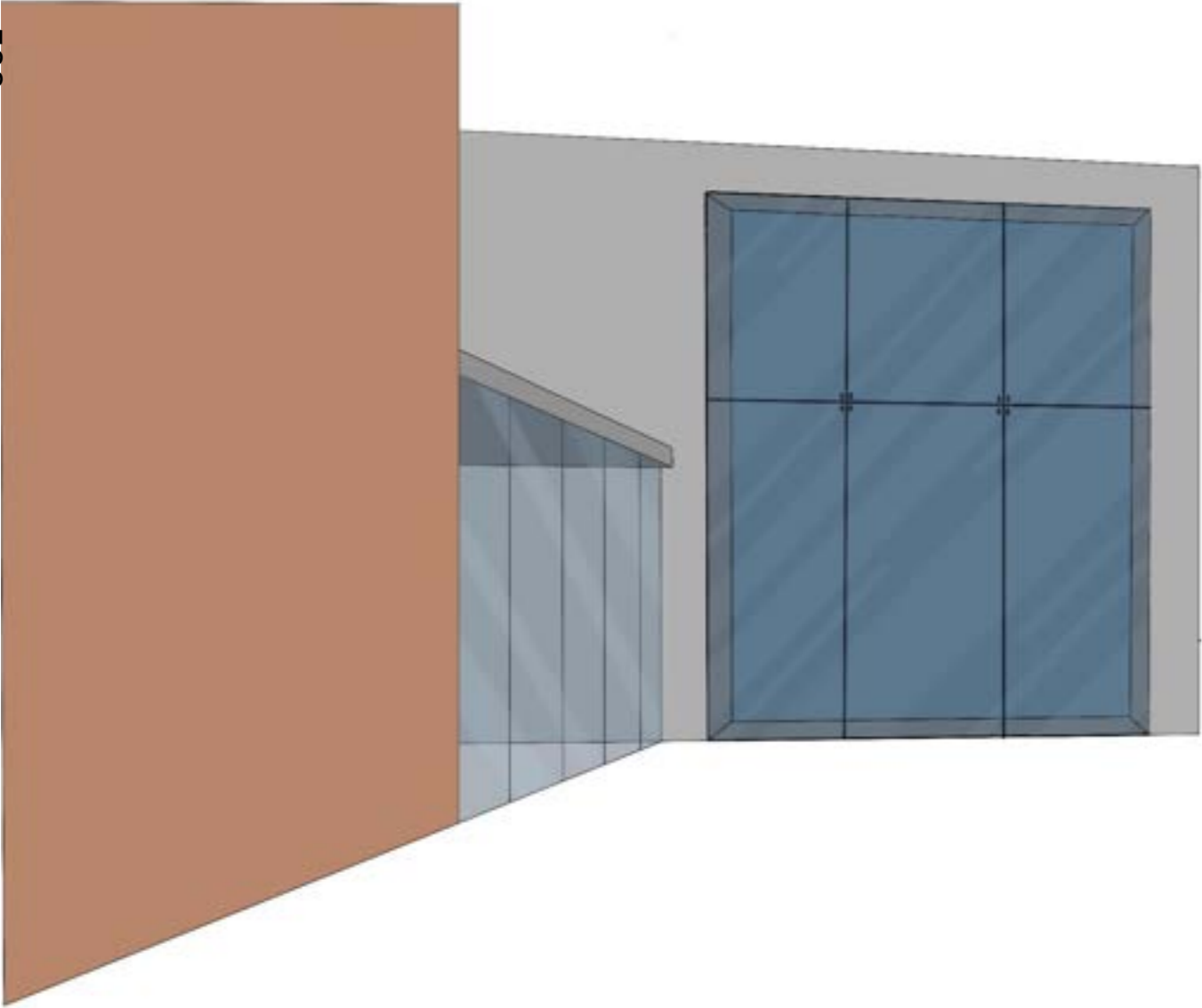


OPTION C

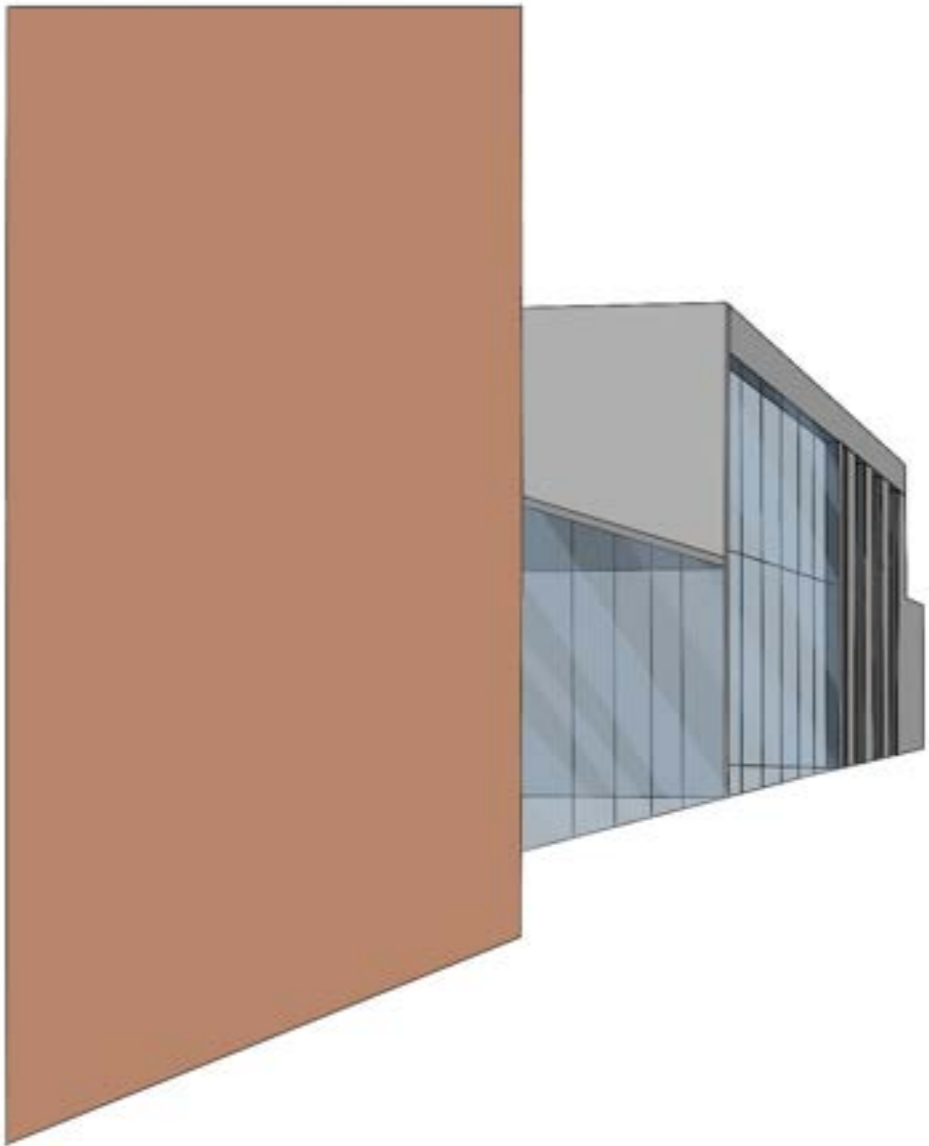


7.5 PROPOSED MASSING OPTIONS

Page 598



OPTION A



OPTION C

7.6 PROPOSED ELEVATION OPTIONS



OPTION A ZZ ELEVATION



OPTION C ZZ ELEVATION



OPTION A FRONT ELEVATION



OPTION C FRONT ELEVATION

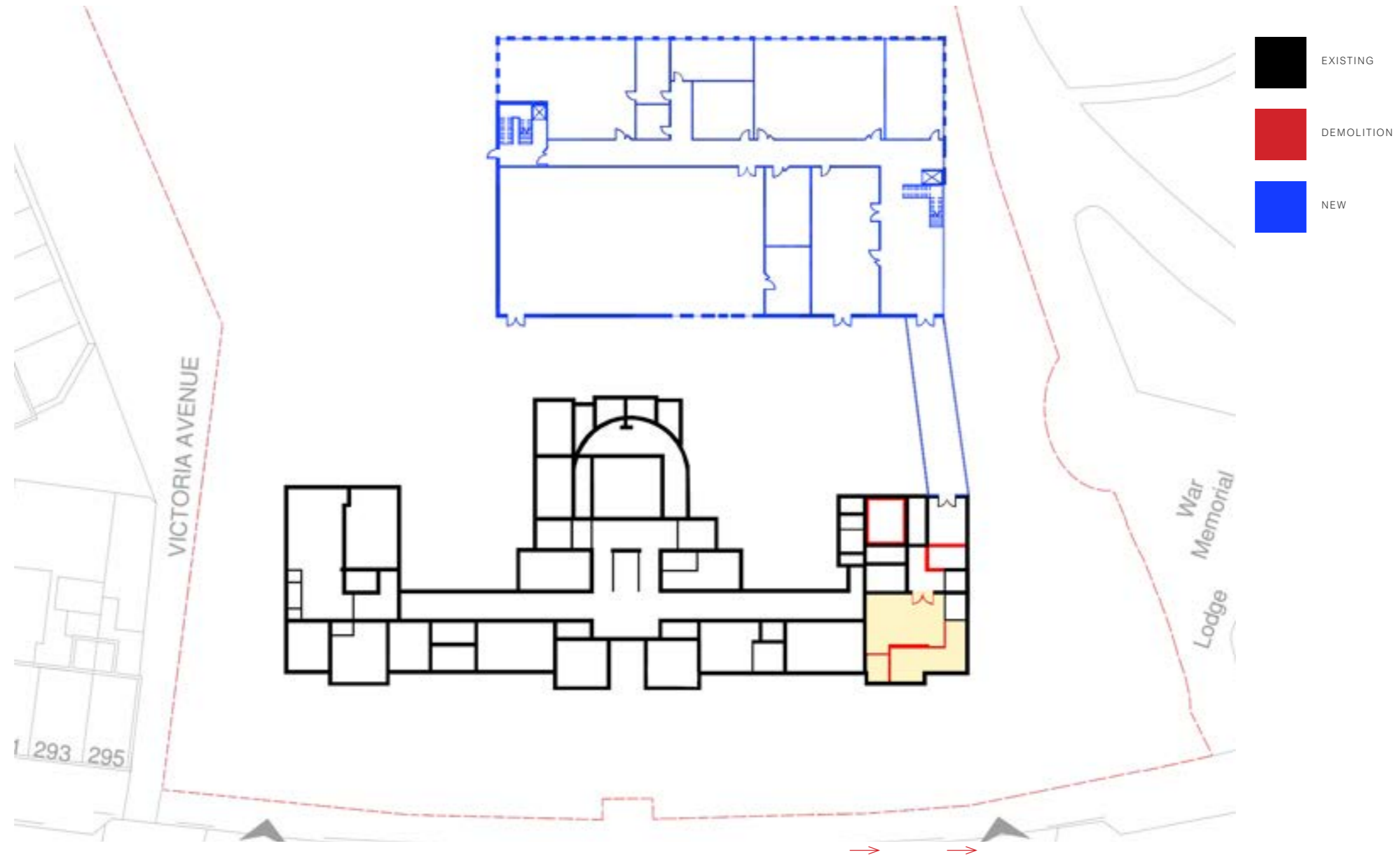


OPTION A XX ELEVATION



OPTION C XX ELEVATION

8.1 Existing, Demolition and New



Refurbished Areas.

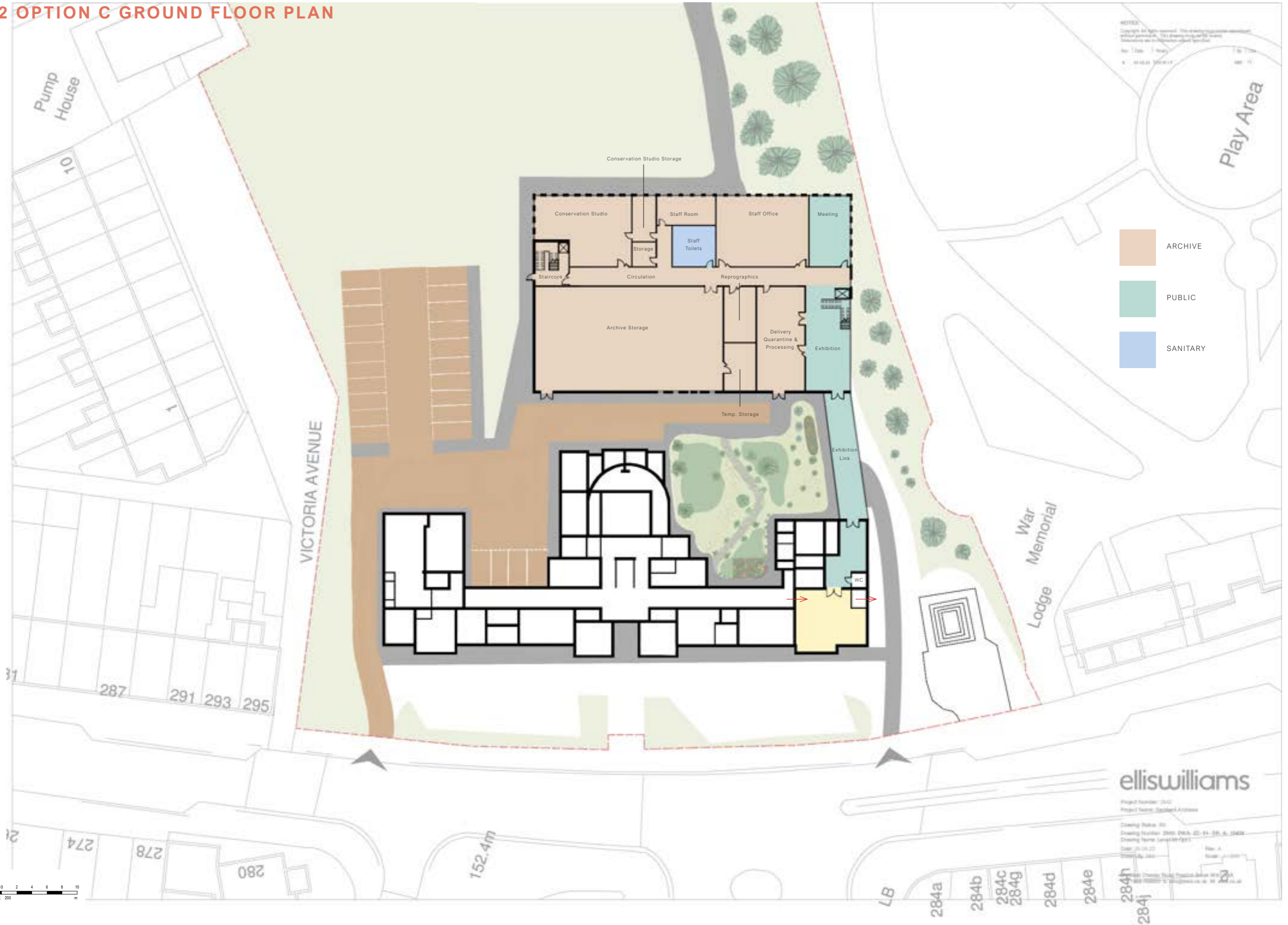
We have met with the council conservation officer Mark Stretton at Sandwell Council House to view possible areas of refurbishment of the existing building. It was agreed that there elements of the existing ground floor layout that can be adapted to open up the area to the link between the two buildings. This could create space for reception and further exhibition space.

Whilst most of the walls highlighted to be removed appear to be newer additions to the existing building, further detailed surveys will be required to determine extent of demolition and retention of areas of architectural interest

These are highlighted on the plan layouts

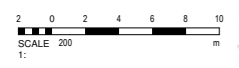
8.2 OPTION C GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Page 602



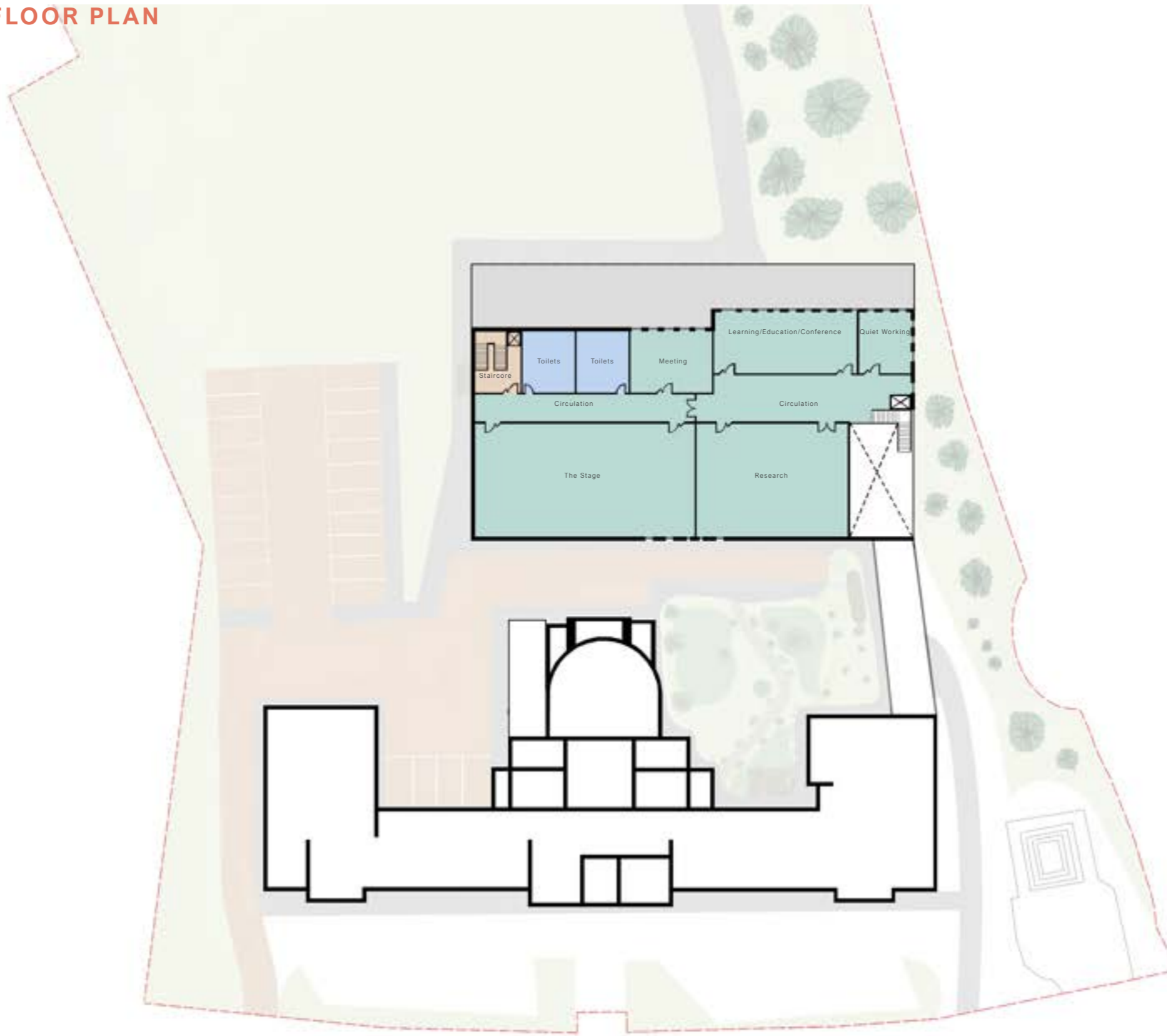
NOTES
 1. This drawing is a preliminary design and is subject to change without notice.
 2. All dimensions are in meters unless otherwise stated.
 3. The drawing is for information only and does not constitute a contract.
 4. The drawing is the property of Ellis Williams and should not be reproduced without their written consent.
 5. The drawing is the property of Ellis Williams and should not be reproduced without their written consent.

ARCHIVE
 PUBLIC
 SANITARY



elliswilliams
 Project Number: 2042
 Project Name: Salford 4 Archives
 Drawing Title: 8.2
 Drawing Number: 2042-004-02-01-00-A-1000
 Drawing Name: Salford 4 Archives
 Date: 20/10/22
 Scale: 1:200
 File: A
 User: J. Williams

8.3 OPTION C FIRST FLOOR PLAN



- ARCHIVE
- PUBLIC
- SANITARY

SCALE 200
1:200

1:200 @ A3

8.4 OPTION C ELEVATIONS



OPTION C ZZ FRONT ELEVATION



OPTION C FRONT ELEVATION



OPTION C XX ELEVATION

Schedule of Accommodation
OPTION A

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION A

REFURBISHED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Cafe & Kitchen	120
Cloakroom	30
Consultation Room	12
Reception	64
<i>Refurbished Area Total</i>	<i>226</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION A

PROPOSED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Atrium Link	86
Circulation	134.7
Delivery, Processing & Quarantine	100
Exhibition	120
Learning/Education/Conference	100
Meeting Room	60
Quiet Working	30
Research Area	280
Temporary Storage	20
The Stage'	240
Toilets	75
<i>Proposed Level 00 Total</i>	<i>1245.7</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION

PROPOSED LEVEL 01

Room	Area (m ²)
Atrium Void	86
Circulation	177
Cleaner's Store	5
Conservation Studio	133
Conservation Studio Storage	25
Meeting Room	50
Permanent Storage	530
Reprographics	22
Staff Offices	148
Staff Room	32
Staff Toilets	45
Storage (Other)	10
<i>Proposed Level 01 Total</i>	<i>1263</i>
<i>Proposed Total</i>	<i>2508.7</i>
<i>Proposed + Refurbishment</i>	<i>2734.7</i>

Schedule of Accommodation
OPTION B

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION B

Page 611

REFURBISHED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Cafe & Kitchen	120
Cloakroom	30
Consultation Room	12
Reception	64
<i>Refurbished Area Total</i>	<i>226</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION B

PROPOSED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Circulation	144.8
Delivery, Processing & Quarantine	90
Exhibition	130
Learning/Education/Conference	100
Meeting Room	47
Quiet Working	30
Research Area	250
Temporary Storage	20
The Stage'	240
Toilets	72
<i>Proposed Level 00 Total</i>	<i>1123.8</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION B

PROPOSED LEVEL 01

Room	Area (m ²)
Circulation	128.7
Cleaner's Store	4.6
Conservation Studio	134
Conservation Studio Storage	27
Meeting Room	43
Permanent Storage	524
Reprographics	28
Staff Offices	130
Staff Room	43
Staff Toilets	45
Storage	11
<i>Proposed Level 01 Total</i>	<i>1118.3</i>
<i>Proposed Total</i>	<i>2242.1</i>
<i>Proposed + Refurbished Areas</i>	<i>2468.1</i>

Schedule of Accommodation
OPTION C

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION C

REFURBISHED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Cafe & Kitchen	120
Cloakroom	30
Consultation Room	12
Reception	64
<i>Refurbished Area Total</i>	<i>226</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION C

PROPOSED LEVEL 00

Room	Area (m ²)
Circulation	196.3
Cleaner's store	6
Conservation Studio	120
Conservation Studio Storage	25
Delivery, Processing, Quarantine	90
Meeting Room	50
Meeting Room	50
Permanent Storage	360
Reprographics	30
Staff Offices	130
Staff Room	38
Staff Toilets	37
Storage (Other)	12
Temporary Storage	25
<i>Proposed Level 00 Total</i>	<i>1169.3</i>

7.0 SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTION C

PROPOSED LEVEL 01

Room	Area (m ²)
Exhibition	120
Toilets	75
The Stage'	230
Meeting Room	60
Learning/Education/Conference	100
Quiet Working	30
Research Area	250
Ciculation	165.5
Void	46.9
Flat Roof	68.2
<i>Proposed Level 01 Total</i>	<i>1145.6</i>
<i>Proposed Total</i>	<i>2314.9</i>
<i>Proposed & Refurbished Total</i>	<i>2540.9</i>

28th June 2023

Page 618

Total Project Cost

Estimate Nr 1

Rev 0

Sandwell Archives – Feasibility
Study

For

Sandwell MBC

28th June 2023

SDA Consulting LLP
Edward House
Deva Centre
Trinity Way
Salford
Manchester
M3 7BE

T 0161 819 5252
F 0161 834 6733

E info@sdaconsulting.co.uk
W www.sdaconsulting.co.uk

This Document is intended for the sole use of Sandwell MBC and should not be relied upon by any third party without our prior written consent. No liability on the part of SDA Consulting LLP will extend to any third party arising from the unauthorised use of this document. For the avoidance of doubt, the provisions of the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 do not apply to this document.

CONTENTS

1.00 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.00 ASSUMPTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

3.00 OVERALL COST SUMMARY –

4.00 COST OPTIONS

- Option A
- Option B
- Option C
- Option D

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This feasibility cost estimate has been prepared to give an indication of the likely outturn cost of the project based upon the initial proposals prepared by Ellis Williams Architects.

A total of 4nr new build options have been explored to provide the following accommodation.

- Option A – 2 storey extension with atrium link to existing building
- Option B – 2 storey stand-alone building with no link to existing building
- Option C – 2 storey extension with corridor link to existing building
- Option D – 2 storey stand alone building with reduced GIFA.

In addition to the above a small element of internal refurbishment to the existing building has been included within each option.

The overall estimated Total Project Costs for each option are summarised in the table below: -

	Estimated Total Project Cost (£)	GIFA (m2)	Cost/m2 (£)
Option A	£24,335,000	2,735m2	£8,898/m2
Option B	£22,057,000	2,468m2	£8,937/m2
Option C	£22,614,000	2,541m2	£8,900/m2
Option D	£10,358,000	1,226m2	£8,449/m2

The above costs are inclusive of construction costs, professional fees, client direct costs, client contingency and VAT.

Construction Costs

The construction costs associated with each of the 4 options are summarised below: -

	Estimated Construction Cost (£)	GIFA (m2)	Cost/m2 (£)
Option A	£13,701,000	2,735m2	£5,010/m2
Option B	£12,419,000	2,468m2	£5,032/m2
Option C	£12,733,000	2,541m2	£5,011/m2
Option D	£5,832,000	1,226m2	£4,757/m2

The above costs comprise the cost of the new build element, refurbishment of 226m2 of the existing building and an allowance for external works.

The refurbishment scope is limited to an internal upgrade of a small area of the ground floor, with no allowance for any external fabric repairs or refurbishment of the remainder of the building.

The extent of any external works has yet to be defined. The cost will depend upon the extent of the site area that is intended to be developed and the required number of car park spaces. An allowance of 10% of the building cost has currently been included within each cost option until this can be defined.

This allowance includes for site clearance, hard landscaping, soft landscaping, boundary treatments, furniture, drainage, and incoming services.

The timescale for the project has yet to be agreed but an allowance for inflation to mid-point of construction at 3Q 2025 has currently been included until this can be confirmed.

Professional Fees

An allowance for professional fee and survey costs has currently been included at 15%.

Client Direct Costs

An allowance for client direct costs has been included within the cost estimate at 17% of the construction and professional fee costs. (12% for archive / exhibition costs etc and 5% for in house management costs)

Typically, this includes for the following: -

- Archive / exhibition fit out including
 - Racking
 - Exhibition fit out.
 - Loose furniture and equipment
 - Audio Visual Installations
 - IT/Data active equipment and connections
 - Sundry items e.g., Signage, fire extinguishers, waste bins etc.
- In-house management costs & fund raising including
 - Staff costs
 - Decant & removal costs.
 - Business planning & brief writing

Risk Allowances / Contingency

A design and construction risk allowance of 10% has been included in the estimated construction costs.

A separate client contingency sum has also been included at 10% of the construction, professional fees, and client direct costs.

Value Added Tax

VAT has been included within the estimate at the current rate of 20%.

2. CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE ASSUMPTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

1. The estimate has been based upon the following information:
 - Ellis Williams Architects Site Analysis Rev 03 2023 dated 21 March 2023
 - Ellis Williams Architects Sketch Option drawings as listed below.
 - Option A – Level 00
 - Option A – Level 01
 - Option B – Level 00
 - Option B – Level 01
 - Option C – Level 00
 - Option C – Level 01
2. In compiling the cost estimate the following has been **assumed**:
 - The works for the new build and refurbishment Inflation will be carried out as a single contract.
 - The extent of refurbishment works is limited to the areas highlighted in purple on the Ellis Williams sketches.
 - The appointed contractor will have sole possession of the sites for the duration of the works.
 - The ground conditions are sufficient for traditional foundations.
 - There is sufficient capacity in the existing drainage, electricity, gas, and water networks to supply the schemes with no requirement for any upgrades.
 - An allowance of 10% of the building cost has been included for external works (incl drainage and incoming services). Once the extent of any external works including car parking is determined a more accurate estimate of the cost will be included.
 - Main Contractor preliminaries have been allowed at 15% until a programme period for construction is agreed.
 - An allowance of 6% has been included for Main Contractor's overheads and profit.
 - Design development risk allowance and construction risk allowance are included at 10%.
 - An allowance for inflation has been included at 5.75% until 3Q2025 (assumed mid-point of construction), based upon the latest BCIS All-in Tender Price Indicators on 28 June 2023.
3. The estimate has been prepared without the benefit of the following:
 - Intrusive structural surveys
 - Topographical survey
 - Site Investigation survey and report
 - Existing services surveys

3.0 Overall Cost Summary

4. The following items are **excluded** from the construction cost estimate:

- Refurbishment works to the external fabric of the existing building and all internal areas outside of that indicated on the sketches.
- Abnormal ground conditions e.g., removal of contaminated ground, gas protection measures, piling.
- Services diversions
- Upgrade of existing services infrastructure / statutory supplies
- Highway improvements beyond the site boundary
- Artwork
- Bream
- Inflation costs beyond 3Q 2025 (assumed mid-point of construction)
- Land Costs
- Finance and funding costs

	Option A New Build & Refurb	Option B New Build & Refurb	Option C New Build & Refurb	Option D New Build & Refurb
	GIFA - 2,735m2	GIFA - 2,468m2	GIFA - 2,494m2	GIFA - 1,226m2
Construction				
New Build	£8,444,600	£7,622,800	£7,824,000	£3,400,000
Refurbishment Work	£339,000	£339,000	£339,000	£339,000
External Works (incl drainage and external services)	£878,360	£796,180	£816,300	£373,900
Main Contractor Preliminaries	£1,449,294	£1,313,697	£1,346,895	£616,935
Main Contractor Overheads & Profit	£666,675	£604,301	£619,572	£283,790
Design & Construction Risk Allowance	£1,177,793	£1,067,598	£1,094,577	£501,363
Inflation - 2Q23 to 3Q25 (mid point of construction)	£744,954	£675,256	£692,320	£317,112
Total Construction Cost [1]	£13,701,000	£12,419,000	£12,733,000	£5,832,000
Design Team Fees				
Design Team Fees @ 13% of Construction	£1,781,130	£1,614,470	£1,655,290	£758,160
Other Fees/Survey Costs:-				
Planning Application / Bldg Regs/ Survey Costs @ 2%	£274,020	£248,380	£254,660	£116,640
Fees Sub Total [2]	£2,055,000	£1,863,000	£1,910,000	£875,000
Sub Total [3]	£15,756,000	£14,282,000	£14,643,000	£6,707,000
Client Direct Costs				
Archive / Exhibition fit out	£1,890,720	£1,713,840	£1,757,160	£804,840
Loose furniture & Equipment incl AV Installation	Included	Included	Included	Included
IT / Data active equipment and connections	Included	Included	Included	Included
Sundry items e.g signage, fire extinguishers etc	Included	Included	Included	Included
In house management costs & fund raising incl decant & removals	£787,800	£714,100	£732,150	£335,350
Business planning & Brief writing	Included	Included	Included	Included
Client Direct Costs Sub Total [4]	£2,678,520	£2,427,940	£2,489,310	£1,140,190
Sub Total [5]	£18,435,000	£16,710,000	£17,132,000	£7,847,000
Client Contingency	£1,843,500	£1,671,000	£1,713,200	£784,700
Project Cost, Excluding VAT: [6]	£20,279,000	£18,381,000	£18,845,000	£8,632,000
VAT at 20.0%	£4,055,800	£3,676,200	£3,769,000	£1,726,400
Total Estimated Project Cost: [7]	£24,335,000	£22,057,000	£22,614,000	£10,358,000
Cost/m2 - Construction Costs [8]	£5,031	£5,032	£5,011	£4,757
Cost/m2 - Total Project Costs [9]	£8,898	£8,937	£8,900	£8,449

Basis of Estimate

1 Ellis Williams Sketch Options A, B and C

2. To be read in connection with assumptions and exclusions

28th June 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option A

G.I.F.A: 2,735m²

Page 623

Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m ²
<u>New Build</u>					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	1,160	m2	£3,400	£3,944,000	
- First Floor	1,177	m2	£3,400	£4,001,800	
Atrium link to existing building (double height incl void)	172	m2	£2,900	£498,800	
<u>Refurbishment</u>					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£1,500	£339,000	
<u>External Works</u>					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including car parking, drainage and incoming services - assumed 10% of new build costs	1	item	£878,360	£878,360	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works				£9,661,960	£3,533
Main contractors Preliminaries @15%	15%			£1,449,294	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£11,111,254	
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit @ 6%	6%			£666,675	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£11,777,929	£4,306
Risks (Design & Construction) @ 10%	10%			£1,177,793	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£12,955,722	£4,737
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 28/06/23 to 3Q25	5.75%			£744,954	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL				£13,700,676	£5,009

28th June 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option B

G.I.F.A: 2,468m²

Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m ²
<u>New Build</u>					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	1,124	m2	£3,400	£3,821,600	
- First Floor	1,118	m2	£3,400	£3,801,200	
Link to existing building	0	m2	£3,900	£0	
<u>Refurbishment</u>					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£1,500	£339,000	
<u>External Works</u>					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including drainage and incoming services - assumed 10% of new build costs	1	item	£796,180	£796,180	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works				£8,757,980	£3,549
Main contractors Preliminaries @15%	15%			£1,313,697	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£10,071,677	
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit @ 6%	6%			£604,301	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£10,675,978	£4,326
Risks (Design & Construction) @ 10%	10%			£1,067,598	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£11,743,575	£4,758
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 28/06/23 to 3Q 25	5.75%			£675,256	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL				£12,418,831	£5,032

28th June 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option C

G.I.F.A: 2,541m²

Page 624

Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m ²
<u>New Build</u>					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	1,122	m2	£3,400	£3,814,800	
- First Floor	1,099	m2	£3,400	£3,736,600	
Link to existing building (incl void)	94	m2	£2,900	£272,600	
<u>Refurbishment</u>					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£1,500	£339,000	
<u>External Works</u>					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including drainage and incoming services - assumed 12% of new build and external works costs	1	item	£816,300	£816,300	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works				£8,979,300	£3,534
Main contractors Preliminaries @15%	15%			£1,346,895	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£10,326,195	
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit @ 6%	6%			£619,572	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£10,945,767	£4,308
Risks (Design & Construction) @ 10%	10%			£1,094,577	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£12,040,343	£4,738
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 28/06/23 to 3Q 25	5.75%			£692,320	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL				£12,732,663	£5,011

28th June 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option D

G.I.F.A: 1,226m²

Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m ²
<u>New Build</u>					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	500	m2	£3,400	£1,700,000	
- First Floor	500	m2	£3,400	£1,700,000	
Link to existing building	0	m2	£3,900	£0	
<u>Refurbishment</u>					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£1,500	£339,000	
<u>External Works</u>					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including drainage and incoming services - assumed 12% of new build and external works costs	1	item	£373,900	£373,900	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works				£4,112,900	£3,355
Main contractors Preliminaries @15%	15%			£616,935	
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£4,729,835	
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit @ 6%	6%			£283,790	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£5,013,625	£4,089
Risks (Design & Construction) @ 10%	10%			£501,363	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£5,514,988	£4,498
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 28/06/23 to 3Q 25	5.75%			£317,112	
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL				£5,832,099	£4,757

16th November 2023

Page 626

**Total Project Cost
Estimate Nr 2
Rev 0**

Sandwell Archives – Feasibility
Study

For

Sandwell MBC

16th November 2023

SDA Consulting LLP
Edward House
Deva Centre
Trinity Way
Salford
Manchester
M3 7BE

T 0161 819 5252
F 0161 834 6733

E info@sdaconsulting.co.uk
W www.sdaconsulting.co.uk

This Document is intended for the sole use of Sandwell MBC and should not be relied upon by any third party without our prior written consent. No liability on the part of SDA Consulting LLP will extend to any third party arising from the unauthorised use of this document. For the avoidance of doubt, the provisions of the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 do not apply to this document.

CONTENTS

1.00	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2.00	ASSUMPTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS
3.00	OVERALL COST SUMMARY
4.00	COST OPTIONS
	▪ Option A
5.00	COST OPTIONS
	▪ Option C

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This feasibility cost estimate has been prepared to give an indication of the likely outturn cost of the project based upon the initial proposals prepared by Ellis Williams Architects.

A refined selection of 2 nr new build options have been explored to provide the following accommodation.

- Option A – 2 storey new build with atrium link to existing building. GIFA approximately 2,423m²
- Option C – 2 storey new build with corridor link to existing building. GIFA approximately 2,199m²

In addition to the above, an element of internal refurbishment to the existing building has been included within each option. GIFA approximately 226m² in addition to the figures noted above.

The overall estimated Total Project Costs for each option are summarised in the table below: -

	Estimated Total Project Cost (£)	GIFA (m²)	Cost/m² (£)
Option A	£24,649,000	2,649m ²	£9,305/m ²
Option C	£22,680,000	2,425m ²	£9,353/m ²

The above costs are inclusive of construction costs, professional fees, client direct costs, client contingency and VAT.

Construction Costs

The construction costs associated with each of the options are summarised below: -

	Estimated Construction Cost (£)	GIFA (m²)	Cost/m² (£)
Option A	£14,120,000	2,649m ²	£5,330/m ²
Option C	£12,992,000	2,425m ²	£5,358/m ²

The above costs comprise the cost of the new build element, refurbishment of 226m² of the existing building, and an allowance for external works.

The refurbishment scope is limited to an internal upgrade of a small area of the ground floor, with no allowance for any external fabric repairs or refurbishment of the remainder of the building.

The extent of any external works is as shown on drawing 2942-EWA-ZZ-01-DR-A-10404 Rev A, and is assumed to be the same principal for Options A and C.

This allowance includes for site clearance, hard landscaping, soft landscaping, boundary treatments, furniture, drainage, and incoming services.

The timescale for the project has yet to be agreed but an allowance for inflation to mid-point of construction at 3Q 2025 has currently been included until this can be confirmed.

16th November 2023

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (cont'd)

Professional Fees

An allowance for professional fee and survey costs has currently been included at 15%.

Client Direct Costs

An allowance for client direct costs has been included within the cost estimate at 15% of the construction and professional fee costs. (10% for exhibition, AV, IT costs etc. and 5% for in house management costs)

Typically, this includes for the following: -

- Building fit out including
 - Exhibition fit out
 - Audio Visual Installations
 - IT / Data active equipment and connections
 - Sundry items e.g., Signage, fire extinguishers, waste bins etc.
- In-house management costs & fund raising including
 - Staff costs
 - Decant & removal costs.
 - Business planning & brief writing

Risk Allowances / Contingency

A design and construction risk allowance of 10% has been included in the estimated construction costs.

A separate client contingency sum has also been included at 10% of the construction, professional fees, and client direct costs.

Value Added Tax

VAT has been included within the estimate at the current rate of 20%.

16th November 2023

2. CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE ASSUMPTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

1. The estimate has been based upon the following information:
 - Ellis Williams Architects Site Analysis Rev 03 2023 dated 21 March 2023, received 8th November 2023.
 - Ellis Williams Architects Sketch Option drawings as listed below.
 - Option A – Level 00
 - Option A – Level 01
 - Option C – Level 00
 - Option C – Level 01
 - Building Gross Internal Floor Areas based on Schedule of Accommodation included in Appendices.
2. In compiling the cost estimate the following has been **assumed**:
 - The works for the new build and refurbishment will be carried out as a single contract.
 - The extent of refurbishment works is limited to the areas highlighted in purple on the Ellis Williams sketches.
 - The appointed contractor will have sole possession of the sites for the duration of the works.
 - The ground conditions require piled foundations.
 - There is sufficient capacity in the existing drainage, electricity, gas, and water networks to supply the schemes with no requirement for any upgrades.
 - Main Contractor preliminaries have been allowed at 15% until a programme period for construction is agreed.
 - An allowance of 5% has been included for Main Contractor's overheads and profit.
 - Design development risk allowance and construction risk allowance are included at 10%.
 - An allowance for inflation has been included at 6.53% until 3Q2025 (assumed mid-point of construction), based upon the latest BCIS All-in Tender Price Indicators on 14th November 2023.
3. The estimate has been prepared without the benefit of the following:
 - Intrusive structural surveys
 - Topographical survey
 - Site Investigation survey and report
 - Existing services surveys

16th November 2023

2. CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE ASSUMPTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS (cont'd)

4. The following items are **excluded** from the construction cost estimate:

- Refurbishment works to the external fabric of the existing building and all internal areas outside of that indicated on the sketches
- Refurbishment of external works, roads and parking bays in front of existing Council House
- Abnormal ground conditions e.g., removal of contaminated ground, gas protection measures
- Services diversions
- Upgrade of existing services infrastructure / statutory supplies
- Highway improvements beyond the site boundary
- Artwork
- Breeam
- Inflation costs beyond 3Q 2025 (assumed mid-point of construction)
- Land Costs
- Finance and funding costs

16th November 2023

3. OVERALL COST SUMMARY

16th November 2023

3.0 Overall Cost Summary

Page 630

	GIFA 2,649m2	GIFA 2,425m2
	Option A New Build & Refurb	Option C New Build & Refurb
Construction		
New Build	£8,073,672	£7,291,959
External Works (incl drainage and external services)	£1,274,000	£1,274,000
Refurbishment Work	£452,000	£452,000
Main Contractor Preliminaries	£1,469,951	£1,352,694
Main Contractor Overheads & Profit	£563,481	£518,533
PCSA	£238,410	£218,250
Design & Construction Risk Allowance	£1,183,310	£1,088,919
Inflation - 2Q23 to 3Q25 (mid point of construction)	£865,197	£796,107
Total Construction Cost [1]	£14,120,000	£12,992,000
Design Team Fees		
Design Team Fees @ 13% of Construction	£1,835,600	£1,688,960
Other Fees/Survey Costs:-		
Planning Application / Bldg Regs/ Survey Costs @ 2%	£282,400	£259,840
Fees Sub Total [2]	£2,118,000	£1,949,000
Sub Total [3]	£16,238,000	£14,941,000
Client Direct Costs		
Exhibition fit out	£1,623,800	£1,494,100
AV Installation	Included	Included
IT / Data active equipment and connections	Included	Included
Sundry items e.g signage, fire extinguishers etc	Included	Included
In house management costs & fund raising incl decant & removals, business planning & brief writing	£811,900	£747,050
Client Direct Costs Sub Total [4]	£2,435,700	£2,241,150
Sub Total [5]	£18,674,000	£17,182,000
Client Contingency @ 10%	£1,867,400	£1,718,200
Project Cost, Excluding VAT: [6]	£20,541,000	£18,900,000
VAT at 20.0%	£4,108,200	£3,780,000
Total Estimated Project Cost: [7]	£24,649,000	£22,680,000
Cost/m2 - Construction Costs [8]	£5,330	£5,358
Cost/m2 - Total Project Costs [9]	£9,305	£9,353

Notes:

1. To be read in connection with assumptions and exclusions

16th November 2023

4. COST OPTIONS

- Option A

16th November 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option A

GIFA 2,649m2

Page 631

Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m2
New Build					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	1,160	m2	£3,332	£3,865,233	£1,459
- First Floor	1,177	m2	£3,332	£3,921,879	£1,481
- Link to existing building	86	m2	£3,332	£286,560	£108
New Build Estimated Construction Costs	2,423	m2	£3,332	£8,073,672	£3,048
External Works					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including car parking, drainage and incoming services	1	item	£1,274,000	£1,274,000	£481
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl external works)	2,423	m2		£9,347,672	£3,529
Refurbishment					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£2,000	£452,000	£171
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl refurbishment)	2,649	m2		£9,799,672	£3,699
Main contractors Preliminaries	15%			£1,469,951	£555
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£11,269,623	£4,254
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit	5%			£563,481	£213
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£11,833,104	£4,467
Pre Construction Services Agreement				£238,410	£90
Risks (Design & Construction)	10%			£1,183,310	£447
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£13,254,824	£5,004
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 14/11/23 to 3Q25	6.53%			£865,197	£327
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL (OPTION A)				£14,120,022	£5,330

16th November 2023

Option A - Elemental Summary New Build Components

GIFA 2,423m2

ELEMENT	Total	£/m2	% of total
1.1.2 Specialist foundations	£872,280	360.00	9.33%
1.1.3 Lowest floor construction	£266,530	110.00	2.85%
1.1 Substructure	£1,138,810	470.00	12.18%
2.1 Frame	£533,060	220.00	5.70%
2.2 Upper Floors	£145,380	60.00	1.56%
2.3 Roof	£789,898	326.00	8.45%
2.4 Stairs and ramps	£65,000	26.83	0.70%
2.5 External walls	£942,547	389.00	10.08%
2.6 Windows and External Doors	£472,485	195.00	5.05%
2.7 Internal Walls and Partitions	£533,060	220.00	5.70%
2.8 Internal Doors	£218,070	90.00	2.33%
2.0 Superstructure	£3,699,500	1,526.83	39.58%
3.1 Wall finishes	£169,610	70.00	1.81%
3.2 Floor Finishes	£339,220	140.00	3.63%
3.3 Ceiling Finishes	£193,840	80.00	2.07%
3.00 Internal Finishes	£702,670	290.00	7.52%
4.00 Fittings, Furnishings and Equipment	£537,906	222.00	5.75%
M&E Services	£1,817,250	750.00	19.44%
5.10 Lift and Conveyor Installations	£100,000	41.27	1.07%
5.14 Builders Works in Connection With Services	£77,536	32.00	0.83%
5.00 Services	£1,994,786	823.27	21.34%
SUB TOTAL: New Building Construction Works	£8,073,672	3,332.10	86.37%
8.1 Site Preparation works	£96,000	39.62	1.03%
8.2 Roads, Paths and Paving's	£320,000	132.07	3.42%
8.3 Planting	£243,000	100.29	2.60%
8.4 Fencing, Railings and Walls	£31,000	25.00	0.33%
8.5 External Fixtures	£94,000	38.79	1.01%
8.6 External Drainage	£230,000	94.92	2.46%
8.7 External Services	£200,000	110.00	2.14%
8.8 Minor Building Works and Ancillary Buildings	£60,000	120.00	0.64%
8.00 External Works	£1,274,000	525.79	13.63%
SUB TOTAL: Building Works Incl External Works	£9,347,672	3,857.89	100.00%

Notes:

- All figures exclude VAT.
- Archive located on first floor.
- Assumed building height of 9m.

16th November 2023

5. COST OPTIONS

- Option C

Page 632

16th November 2023

4.0 Cost Options - Option C

				GIFA 2,425m2	
Element	Qty	unit	Rate	Total £	£/m2
<u>New Build</u>					
2 storey Archive building					
- Ground Floor	1,169	m2	£3,316	£3,876,444	1598.534
- First Floor	1,030	m2	£3,316	£3,415,515	£1,408
- Link to existing building	Incl				
New Build Estimated Construction Costs	2,199	m2	£3,316	£7,291,959	£3,007
<u>External Works</u>					
Hard / soft landscaping to perimeter of new build including car parking, drainage and incoming services	1	item	£1,274,000	£1,274,000	£525
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl external works)	2,199	m2		£8,565,959	£3,532
<u>Refurbishment</u>					
Refurbishment of existing building	226	m2	£2,000	£452,000	£186
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl refurbishment)	2,425	m2		£9,017,959	£3,719
Main contractors Preliminaries	15%			£1,352,694	£558
SUB TOTAL: Building Works (incl Prelims)				£10,370,653	£4,277
Main Contractor's Overhead & Profit	5%			£518,533	£214
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Excl Risk)				£10,889,185	£4,490
Pre Construction Services Agreement				£218,250	£90
Risks (Design & Construction)	10%			£1,088,919	£449
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE (Current day)				£12,196,354	£5,029
Inflation based on BCIS All-in Tender Price Indices @ 14/11/23 to 3Q25	6.53%			£796,107	£328
CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATE TOTAL (OPTION C)				£12,992,461	£5,358

16th November 2023

Option C - Elemental Summary New Build Components

GIFA 2,199m2

ELEMENT	Total	£/m2	% of total
1.1.2 Specialist foundations	£791,640	360.00	9.24%
1.1.3 Lowest floor construction	£241,890	110.00	2.82%
1.1 Substructure	£1,033,530	470.00	12.07%
2.1 Frame	£461,790	210.00	5.39%
2.2 Upper Floors	£120,945	55.00	1.41%
2.3 Roof	£716,874	326.00	8.37%
2.4 Stairs and ramps	£65,000	26.83	0.76%
2.5 External walls	£892,794	406.00	10.42%
2.6 Windows and External Doors	£446,397	203.00	5.21%
2.7 Internal Walls and Partitions	£483,780	220.00	5.65%
2.8 Internal Doors	£197,910	90.00	2.31%
2.0 Superstructure	£3,385,490	1,539.56	39.52%
3.1 Wall finishes	£153,930	70.00	1.80%
3.2 Floor Finishes	£307,860	140.00	3.59%
3.3 Ceiling Finishes	£175,920	80.00	2.05%
3.00 Internal Finishes	£637,710	290.00	7.44%
4.00 Fittings, Furnishings and Equipment	£415,611	189.00	4.85%
M&E Services	£1,649,250	750.00	19.25%
5.10 Lift and Conveyor Installations	£100,000	45.48	1.17%
5.14 Builders Works in Connection With Services	£70,368	32.00	0.82%
5.00 Services	£1,819,618	827.48	21.24%
SUB TOTAL: New Building Construction Works	£7,291,959	3,316.03	85.13%
8.1 Site Preparation works	£96,000	43.66	1.12%
8.2 Roads, Paths and Paving's	£320,000	145.52	3.74%
8.3 Planting	£243,000	110.50	2.84%
8.4 Fencing, Railings and Walls	£31,000	25.00	0.36%
8.5 External Fixtures	£94,000	42.75	1.10%
8.6 External Drainage	£230,000	104.59	2.69%
8.7 External Services	£200,000	90.95	2.33%
8.8 Minor Building Works and Ancillary Buildings	£60,000	27.29	0.70%
8.00 External Works	£1,274,000	579.35	14.87%
SUB TOTAL: Building Works Incl External Works	£8,565,959	3,895.39	100.00%

Notes:

- All figures exclude VAT.
- Archive located on ground floor.
- Assumed building height of 9m.

Architecture
Masterplanning
Landscape
Interior Design
Visualisation
Animation
Virtual Reality
Design Advisor
Technical Advisor

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Implementation of Boroughwide Public Spaces Protection Orders
Cabinet Member:	Public Health & Communities Cllr Syeda Khatun
Director:	Director of Borough Economy Alice Davey
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Business Manager Community Safety & Resilience Tessa Mitchell tessa_mitchell@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the implementation of a Boroughwide Public Space Protection Order for alcohol to enable authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession.
- 1.2 That approval be given to the implementation of a Boroughwide Public Space Protection Order to tackle nuisance caused by dog fouling making it:-
 - (i) an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog's faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control;
 - (ii) an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to be able to produce a receptacle to pick up dog faeces such as a dog poo bag;



- (iii) an offence for a person in charge of a dog to allow a dog into an enclosed children's play area / sports area.

Registered disability assistance dogs and their owners to be exempt from the requirements of the order

1.3 That approval be given to the implementation of a Boroughwide Public Space Protection Order to tackle the risks associated with BBQs and fires in public spaces by :-

- (i) making it an offence to have fires / BBQs in public spaces in Sandwell and not to stop these when requested to do so by authorised officers / constables;

- (ii) requiring individuals to surrender anything in their possession which an authorised officer / constable or has reasonable suspicion to be an article that has been used OR is likely to be used in conjunction with these prohibited activities.

1.4 That approval be given for alcohol, dog fouling and BBQs and fires Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders to be implemented for a period of three years commencing 1 March 2024;

1.5 That the Director Borough Economy, or any successor position, be authorised to implement, monitor and enforce the Public Spaces Protection Orders.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 In October 2017 SMBC introduced 4 Boroughwide PSPOs; 1 in relation to consumption of alcohol in a public place and 3 in relation to dogs. These were previously in place as a Designated Public Place Order and 3 Dog Control Orders which under the transitional arrangements of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 automatically became Public Spaces Protection Orders.

2.2 PSPOs last for up to 3 years and then need to be reviewed. The orders



were renewed in March 2021 and are now up for consideration again alongside a new proposal relating to fires / BBQs. Having undertaken this review and public consultation it is recommended that the 2 existing PSPOs including additional requirements in relation to dogs are renewed and a new PSPO put in place regarding fires / BBQs on public land.

2.3 The existing PSPOs have been relatively well used during the last 3 years, particularly in terms of engagement to improve behaviour and enable support to be offered where necessary. Enforcement has also been used where needed with 8 and 5 FPNs being issued respectively in relation to the 2 existing orders. Both have run throughout the covid pandemic and lockdowns.

2.4 The alcohol PSPO works in tandem with the West Bromwich Town Centre PSPO introduced in 2019, which has also contributed to tackling crime and ASB in the designated area. This prohibits:

- *Acting or inciting others to act in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, harassment alarm or distress to any person.*
- *Threatening any person with violence and /or being verbally abusive towards any person.*
- *Begging or asking members of the public for money or loitering for the purpose of begging or asking members of the public for money.*
- *Causing a motor vehicle or trailer to stand on a road and /or footpath so as to cause any unnecessary obstruction of the road and /or footpath.*

The powers of both complement each other, particularly in relation to street drinking and homelessness which remain issues across Sandwell.

2.5 Summer 2022 saw a spate of fires on public land arising from BBQs being used, particularly disposable ones. There are limited options to tackle these and therefore introducing a PSPO will provide powers to adopt a preventative approach and tackle these concerns locally.





2.6 Dogs and Alcohol are both ongoing Public Health concerns.

2.7 All the PSPO proposals have been supported by Sandwell's Multi Agency Borough Tasking Group.



- 2.8 All 3 issues are a concern in Sandwell with our public consultation showing 97% support for the Alcohol PSPO, 98% support for the Dog Fouling PSPO and 87% support for a PSPO in relation to Fires / BBQs .
- 2.9 These PSPO proposals demonstrate the council's commitment to listening to its residents, partners and communities and to take action to address issues that are important to them.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of dog mess in public places which is a considerable health risk to children. • Ability to challenge street drinkers and others so as to set an example related to behaviours and health • Understanding of the dangers of fires and damage that these can cause
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards set around cleanliness of public spaces and support for those with alcohol issues / dependency. This is particularly helpful in relation to proactive engagement with street drinkers / rough sleepers • Reduce risk of life changing injury and death from fires
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSPOs provide SMBC and other partners additional tools and powers to effectively reduce and manage ASB and its negative impact on residents • All three PSPOs support public confidence in relation to challenging Anti-Social Behaviour through offering advice and support and sanctions for non-compliance. • There is also an educational element to all three PSPOs and opportunities for engagement
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These PSPOs address ASB, which is an essential component of creating a thriving neighbourhood. • Both also demonstrate the council's commitment to



	listening to its residents, partners and communities and to take action to address issues that are important to them
--	--

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Background

In October 2017, existing Designated Public Place and Dog Control Orders were replaced as Boroughwide PSPOs under the transitional arrangements of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. These orders have to be reviewed every 3 years.

In 2021 following review and public consultation the existing orders in relation to dogs and alcohol were renewed. As outlined above these are now due for further review alongside consideration of an additional prohibition in relation to fires / BBQs in public places.

The national PSPO guidance concentrates on the need for proportionality and suggests that the question to be asked is: is the restriction proposed proportionate to the specific harm or nuisance that is being caused? Both existing PSPOs have continued to be used during the last 3 years, providing opportunities for engagement and where necessary enforcement. The public consultation has also demonstrated support for all three proposals including the additional requirements.

4.2 Consultation

A public consultation on all 3 proposals took place between 16th September and 16th November 2023. Guidance regarding undertaking Consultations on a Public Space Protection Order was published by the Local Government Association in 2018. This guidance was adhered to and the proposed PSPO was advertised in the local press, The Sandwell Herald and on SMBCs website and social media. Other specific consultees were:

West Midlands Police	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
West Midlands Fire Service	West Midlands Ambulance Service
SMBC Public Health	Cranstoun
DECCA	Transport For West Midlands



230 people took the time to take part in the consultation run through Sandwell Consultation Hub. 60% of respondents (138) stated that they had witnessed ASB related to these proposals.

4.3 Consultation Findings

An overview of the results for each element is given below:

4.31 Alcohol

It is recognised that the consumption of alcohol in public spaces can be closely linked with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The existing PSPO renewed last in 2021 **‘enables authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession. It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse’.**

97% (222/230) were in favour of continuing with the alcohol restriction. Comments included:

‘Alcohol and anti-social behaviour associated with it in public does not create a good image (especially to younger people who are influenced easily), along with discarded tins and bottles etc’.

‘Drinking alcohol in the street is not necessary, enough pubs around. It can make people abusive and very unfriendly’.

‘I think people should be able to enjoy public spaces without fear of those consuming alcohol’.

4.32 SMBCs Public Health Team were concerned that those who enforce this PSPO should be equipped to understand that the confiscation of alcohol from a person who is physically dependent can result in withdrawals and fatal seizures. There is a real need for officers who may be the ones



confiscating the alcohol to understand and assess the risk their action may result in.

To help mitigate such risks it is imperative that officers enforcing the scheme should work closely with local alcohol treatment provider, Cranstoun who are able to support engagement and delivery of harm reduction approaches including on the site delivery and support through their outreach model which covers the 6 towns of Sandwell. Awareness and training for staff is available through the Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership.

4.33 **Dog Fouling**

Sandwell has also had a PSPO in place in relation to dog fouling since 2017 **‘making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog’s faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control’** Since being renewed in 2021 this PSPO has also been relatively well used over the past 3 years, again not only providing a useful additional enforcement tool where necessary but also opportunities for engagement and education. This power promotes responsible dog ownership and reinforces the Public Health messages in relation to dog fouling and keeping our streets and green spaces clean and safe for all.

An option to strengthen this has been included in the consultation this year in relation to adding 2 additional requirements:

‘making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to be able to produce a receptacle to pick up dog faeces’

‘making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to allow a dog into and enclosed children’s play area / sports area’

- 4.34 Results from the consultation found 98% (225/230) of respondents supported the existing requirement with 92% (211/230) supporting the requirement to have receptacles to clean up dog waste and 91% (210/230) supporting dog exclusion areas. Comments included:



'I'm sick of seeing dog mess everywhere I go it's disgusting and people need to be dealt with'.

'It is a danger to young children who can risk getting toxocarid which can cause blindness. It is also a health risk, children and adults should be able to walk around and go to play area's without fear of falling, or trending into dog mess'.

'Dog fouling is an ongoing issue throughout Sandwell and it isn't pleasant when walking down the street or in parks and green areas. It's a hazard, unsightly and just disgusting and more should be done to tackle this problem and punish those who don't pick it up'.

'As a dog owner I always clear up after my own dog but am horrified by the number of people who don't'.

4.35 **Fires / BBQs on public land**

The consultation this year has also included a new prohibition in relation to BBQs and fires on public land.

'making it an offence to have fires / BBQs in public spaces and not to stop these when requested to do so by authorised officers / constables.'

During summer 2022, Sandwell experienced a significant increase in outdoor fires caused by individuals having fires / BBQs in public spaces. This is a preventable danger both to individuals, wildlife and the environment. The increasingly drier and hotter conditions have increased this fire risk. This PSPO requirement provides designated officers with opportunities to engage with those undertaking such activities to make them aware of the risks and to enforce if needed.

This type of PSPO is in place in many other areas and provides a focus on the dangers that fires and BBQs can have.

4.36 87% of respondents supported this approach (201/230) with 7% (10) unsure and 5% (8) against. Comments included:



'Barbecues left unattended could cause fire or injury to people, animals or wildlife so should be banned in public spaces. Also the gathering of people for a barbecue in public spaces then goes on to cause other problems i.e. anti-social behaviour and drinking alcohol also in public places'

'There are plenty of notices around the parks /Sandwell Valley to not have BBQ's fires etc but people ignore this because there are no consequences. If it was made an offence then people could either be fined or the BBQs removed and fires extinguished'

'Many times we have walked in the park and people have left portable barbecues or in general leave all the mess it's disgusting'

However it was recognised by some that people need to be encouraged to use parks and green spaces and that having a BBQ can be part of that. Several suggested having designated areas where these could be held safely which will be reviewed.

5 Summary of Findings

- 5.1 230 people took part in the survey which is considerably more than in 2021. Whilst acknowledging this remains an overall small number, feedback from those who took the time to respond showed clear public support for all three PSPOs as part of a toolkit of measures to continue to address these issues which are concerns across the Borough with relevant controls and safeguards in place. An overview of the consultation is attached as Appendix 1.

Public Health raised the need for training in addition for those who can confiscate alcohol from users. The Kennel Club highlighted previously the need to take account of assistance dogs and to use the PSPO as an engagement opportunity to support responsible dog ownership which will continue. Engagement is a key part of any PSPO and owners of registered disability dogs will continue to be exempt.

- 5.2 Other respondents felt that more patrols, cameras and education needed to be put into place. As a Council it is recognised that PSPOs need to be used as part of a strategy that includes enforcement



alongside other engagement to tackle these issues as effectively as possible. The use of a PSPO should never be used in isolation as for many types of crime, ASB and other unacceptable behaviour as other remedies are more appropriate and more effective. These proposals will also be shared with Scrutiny in January 2023.

5.3 A PSPO is an opportunity to engage with individuals and to offer support and advice. Enforcement is always a final resort. There are many examples of such engagement and assertive outreach work taking place across Sandwell supported by our strong partnership approaches. These provide opportunities to promote responsible behaviour and important public health messages. It is therefore, recommend that these powers are renewed and enhanced.

6 Alternative Options

6.1 Sandwell has had controls in place in relation to alcohol and dog fouling for many years. It is clear that both these issues remain public concerns and feedback indicates that they are both still needed and serve a purpose in dealing with these issues and providing reassurance for residents. The recent rise in fires attributed to fires and BBQs in public land and the dangers and destruction posed by these is also a significant concern. These PSPO's are supported by partners and will ensure direct action is taken using the most suitable tools and powers as required by individual situations. SMBC could opt to not renew / strengthen these powers and deal with any issues individually but this will require significant resources and has already proved difficulty in relation to BBQs / Fires with no specific powers available. It would also weaken opportunities for engagement. This is not recommended.

7 Implications

Resources:	The implementation of these PSPOs will not require any additional strategic resources that require the council or partners to operate outside existing budgets.
-------------------	---



Legal and Governance:

Under sections 59-75 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, local authorities have powers to make PSPOs.

The Council can only make a PSPO when it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activities carried out or likely to be carried out in a public place have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the area and are persistent, continuing and unreasonable. The Council would also need to be satisfied that the restrictions imposed were justified.

Should anyone object to the granting of a PSPO they would have to make a High Court application within 6 weeks of the order being granted.

For that appeal to be successful they would have to show that the Council did not have the power to make the order, as the issue covered has not been demonstrated, usually by empirical evidence, to be a significant enough issue to justify the restriction. The other grounds for the appeal would be to demonstrate that the consultation process was inadequate.

PSPOs can only apply to public places. This means any place to which the public, or and sections of the public, on payment or otherwise, have access to as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission.

The Council must comply with the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Publication of Public Spaces Protection Orders) Regulations 2014 by publishing the orders on its website and by erecting notices on or near the affected land sufficient to draw the attention of the public to the face that the orders are in place and the effects of this.

A PSPO can last up to three years unless it is extended by the relevant local authority (section 60). More than one extension can be granted, with each extension lasting up to three years. Where a PSPO is



	<p>extended then the relevant local authority should comply with the necessary publication requirements</p> <p>Non-compliance with a PSPO is an offence which can result in the issue a fixed penalty notice of up to £100, if appropriate. If the Fixed Penalty Notice is not paid, court proceedings can be initiated to prosecute for the offence of failing to comply with the PSPO where the maximum fine is currently £1000 (level 3 on the standard scale). Following conviction, the Council could apply for a Criminal Behaviour Order which can contain both prohibitions and positive requirements.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour through partnership working is central to the delivery of the Community Safety Strategy 2022-26. This is business as usual and adheres to all required risk assessments and required mitigations. There could be a reputational risk to SMBC in retaining existing powers and not following up on the support evident from the consultation.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>An EIA has been completed as part of this process. In particular we have been aware that street drinkers are often particularly vulnerable and the PSPO guidance specifically requires the council to consider the appropriateness of a PSPO to address issues caused by those who are homeless and rough sleeping. This PSPO will facilitate ongoing engagement with this group and offer them advice and support to address their issues. Data from the JSNA has been used but it is recognised that the data currently held in relation to protected characteristics and these specific concerns is limited.</p> <p>Previous feedback from The Kennel Club has also highlighted the need for some assistance dogs to be exempt from this PSPO and for that to be recognised by those undertaking enforcement activities.</p> <p>Public Health messages around alcohol and dogs may specifically benefit pregnant women.</p>



Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Reducing and managing anti-social behaviour, and protecting its victims has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Engaging with and supporting vulnerable people in relation to alcohol consumption, who are also more vulnerable to becoming victims of crime and exploitation will also have a positive longer-term impact on their health and wellbeing</p> <p>Reducing dog mess on streets is also a key public health message to residents which can reduce illness, especially in relation to children</p> <p>Reducing risk of injuries / death from fire is also supported</p>
Social Value:	Both PSPOs support environmental enhancements and provide opportunities for engagement with local residents regarding public health messages and strengthening civic pride. Enforcement is done through our locally employed EPOs
Climate Change:	Reducing the opportunities for fires in public places and the resulting pollution and environmental damage supports SMBCs climate change ambitions.
Corporate Parenting:	Implications for Corporate Parenting responsibilities

8 Appendices

- Appendix 1 Consultation Overview
- Appendix 2 Equality Impact Assessment
 - 2a – Alcohol
 - 2b – Dogs
 - 2c – BBQs / Fires
- Appendix 3 Draft PSPO Alcohol
- Appendix 4 Draft PSPO Dogs
- Appendix 5 Draft PSPO BBQs / Fires



9 Background Papers

List source/background documents

- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/anti-social-behaviour-crime-and-police-bill>
- LGA Guidance in Relation to PSPO Implementation 2018
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/public-spaces-protection-orders-guidance-councils>



Appendix 1

PSPO Public Consultation Report 2023

Introduction

A public consultation was held on Sandwell's consultation Hub between 16th September and 16th November 2023 in relation to renewing and enhancing Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders in relation to the following:

Alcohol:

'enables authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession. It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse'

Dog Fouling:

"making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog's faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control.

Registered disability assistance dogs and their users are exempt from the requirements of this order"

'making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to be able to produce a receptacle to pick up dog faeces'

'making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to allow a dog into an enclosed children's play area / sports area'

Fires and BBQS:

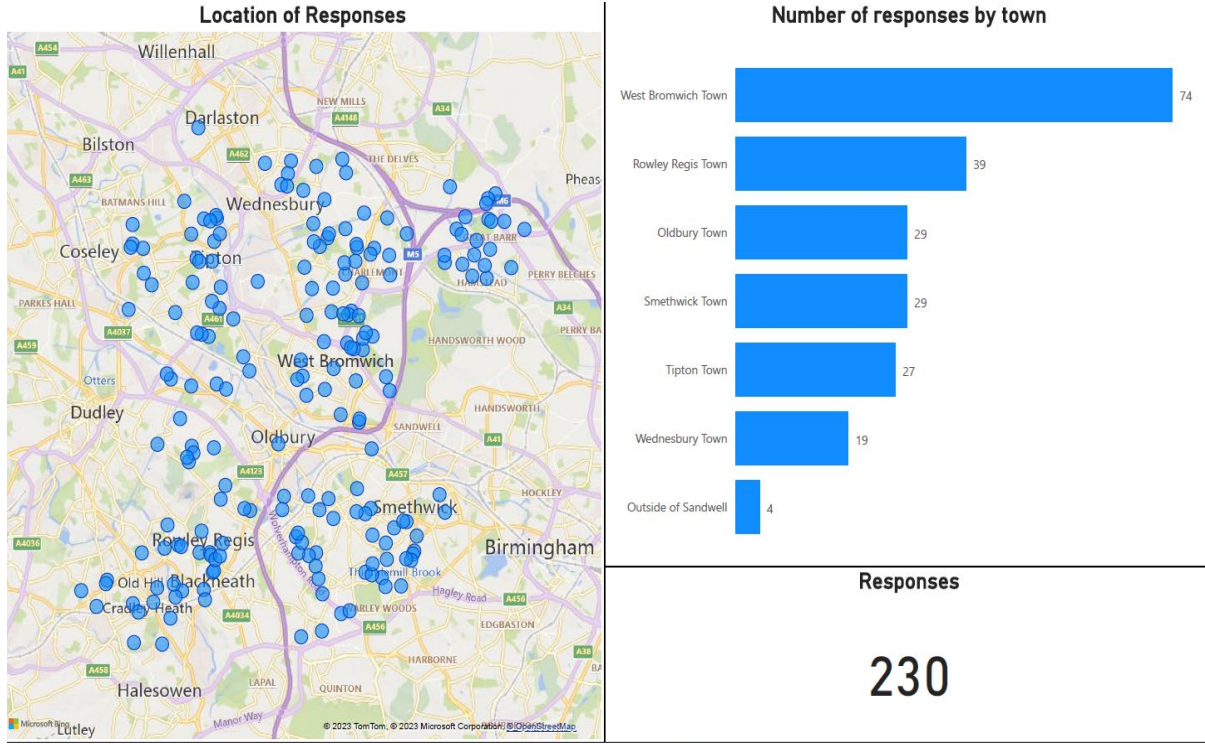
'making it an offence to have fires / BBQs in public spaces in Sandwell and not to stop these when requested to do so by authorised officers / constables.

The Consultation was advertised in the local press, The Sandwell Herald and on SMBCs website and social media. It was also promoted through existing partnership networks. Other specific consultees were:

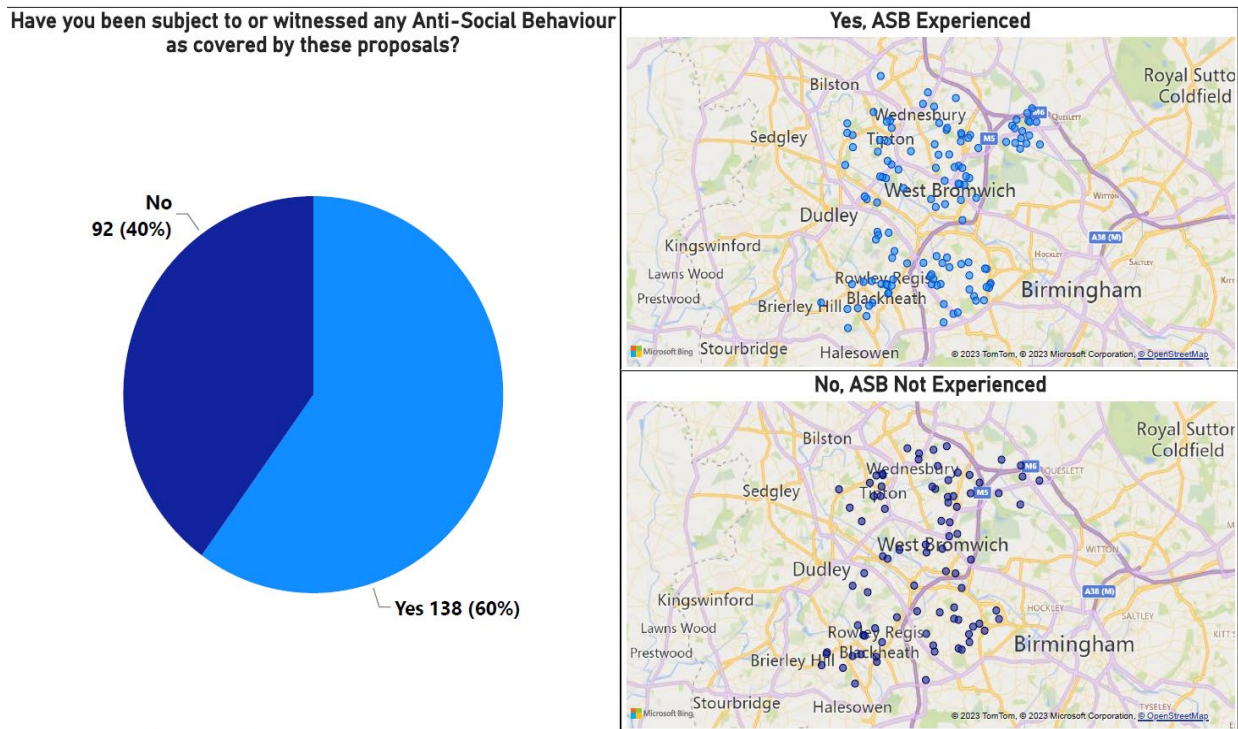
West Midlands Police	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
West Midlands Fire Service	West Midlands Ambulance Service
SMBC Public Health	Cranstoun

DECCA	Transport For West Midlands
The Kennel Club	The Ramblers

230 people took the time to take part in the consultation.



60% of respondents (138) stated that they had witnessed ASB related to these proposals.

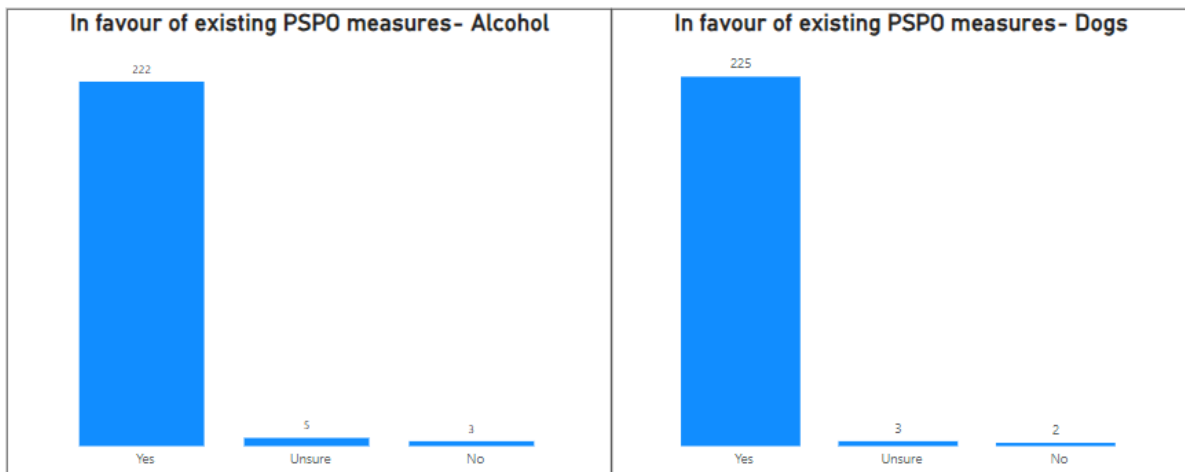


Respondents

The majority of respondents were Sandwell residents.

Resident	Business	Interested Party	Responding on behalf of an organisation
221 (96%)	1 (0.5%)	3 (1.3%)	5 (2.2%)

Findings



Yes- 96.5%
No- 1.3%
Unsure- 2.2 %

Yes- 97.8%
No- 0.9%
Unsure- 1.3%



Yes- 91.3%
No- 5.7%
Unsure- 3%

Yes- 91.7%
No- 3%
Unsure- 5.3%

Yes- 87.4%
No- 5.3%
Unsure- 7.3%

Conclusion

230 people took part in the survey which is considerably more than in 2021. Whilst acknowledging this remains an overall small number, feedback from those who took the time to respond showed clear public

support for all three PSPOs as part of a toolkit of measures to continue to address these issues which are concerns across the Borough with relevant controls and safeguards in place.

Public Health have raised the need for training in addiction for those who can confiscate alcohol from users which is in place and the existing dog PSPO contains exemptions for owners of registered disability dogs. A number of respondees also raised the idea of having designated areas for BBQs with suitable infrastructure in place to reduce risks which will be looked into.

Appendix 2 a

Equality Impact Assessment EqIA Template



You must consider the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance](#) when completing this template.

The EDI team can provide help and advice on undertaking an EqIA and also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EqIA documents.

EDI team contact email: edi_team@sandwell.gov.uk

Quality Control	
Title of proposal	Implementation of a Boroughwide Public Space Protection Order in relation to Alcohol
Directorate and Service Area	Borough Economy – Community Safety
Officer completing EqIA	Tessa Mitchell – Business Manager Community Safety
Contact Details	tessa_mitchell@sandwell.gov.uk
Other officers involved in completing this EqIA	Andrew Clarke ASB Team Manager Sandwell’s EDI Team Public Health
Date EqIA completed	13 th December 2023
Date EqIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EqIA	
Date EqIA considered by Cabinet	February 2024
Where the EqIA is Published (please include a link to the EqIA and send a copy of the final EqIA to the EDI team)	

Section 1.

The purpose of the project, proposal or decision required

In October 2017 the existing Designated Public Place Order relating to Alcohol consumption in public spaces transitioned under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 to become a Public Space Protection Order.

PSPOs last for up to 3 years and then need to be reviewed. This order was renewed in March 2021 and is now up for consideration again.

The order 'enables authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession. It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse'.

This Boroughwide proposal supports the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy objective in relation to reducing crime and ASB. The order has been useful in engaging individuals and providing opportunities for education and support. It also provides the Local Authority with enforcement powers which can be used as a last resort with individuals. Alcohol remains a contributor to ASB and over the past 3 years, 8 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for alcohol related behaviour. A public consultation has also taken place which has significantly supported the proposal and a Cabinet report recommending these proposals are accepted is scheduled for February 2024. The proposals will also be taken to Scrutiny in January 2024.

Section 2.

Evidence used and considered. Include analysis of any missing data

Sandwell Borough Information

POPULATION



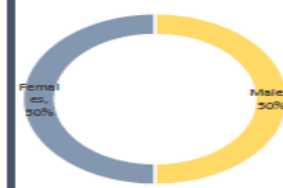
POPULATION

329,049

The latest available ONS Mid-Year estimates provide a figure of 329,042 for Sandwell.

Since 2014, the population has grown by 12,753 residents, equating to an increase of 4%.

The latest population projection gives an estimate of an increase to 347,891 by 2030; an increase of 18,849 (+6%).



GENDER

There is even split between males and females

MEDIAN AGE

37

The median age of 37 in Sandwell is lower than that across England and Wales (40).

There are variances between the wards. For example, 46% of the population in Newton are over the age of 45 compared to 27% in Soho and Victoria. The age profile of the wards will have a bearing on the prevalence of substance misuse.



BAME

34%

The 2011 census data shows that 34% of the population in Sandwell are from a BAME background, however the rate is now likely to be higher.

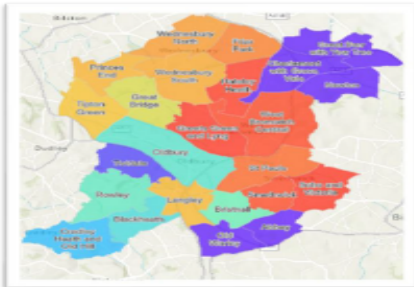
DEPRIVATION

34%

The average deprivation score for Sandwell makes it the 12th most deprived local authority in England.

Deprivation varies greatly between the wards.

There is a significant link between deprivation and substance misuse.

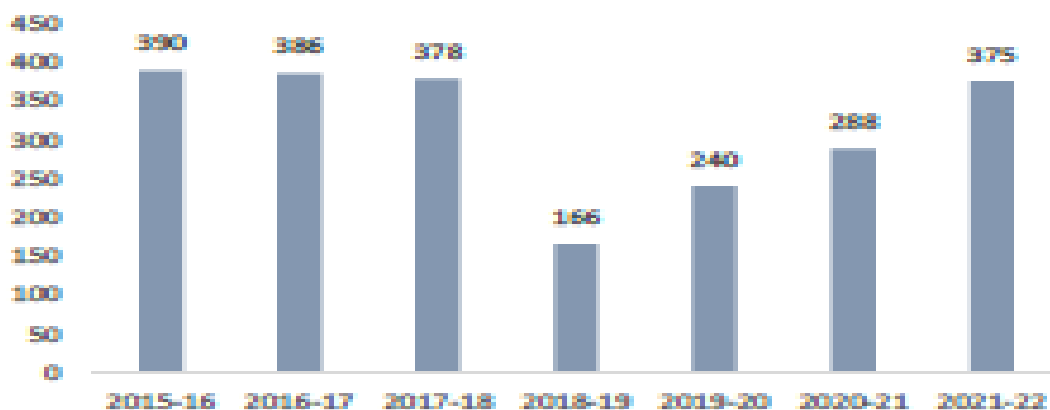


While Sandwell has considerable data regarding the population, data in relation to those who have been engaged with or issued with penalties as a result of the existing PSPO is limited. There is some data relating to those accessing alcohol treatment services.

The Sandwell Drugs and Alcohol Needs Assessment was completed in summer 2022 and provides some information regarding the extent of alcohol misuse across Sandwell and who is currently accessing services:

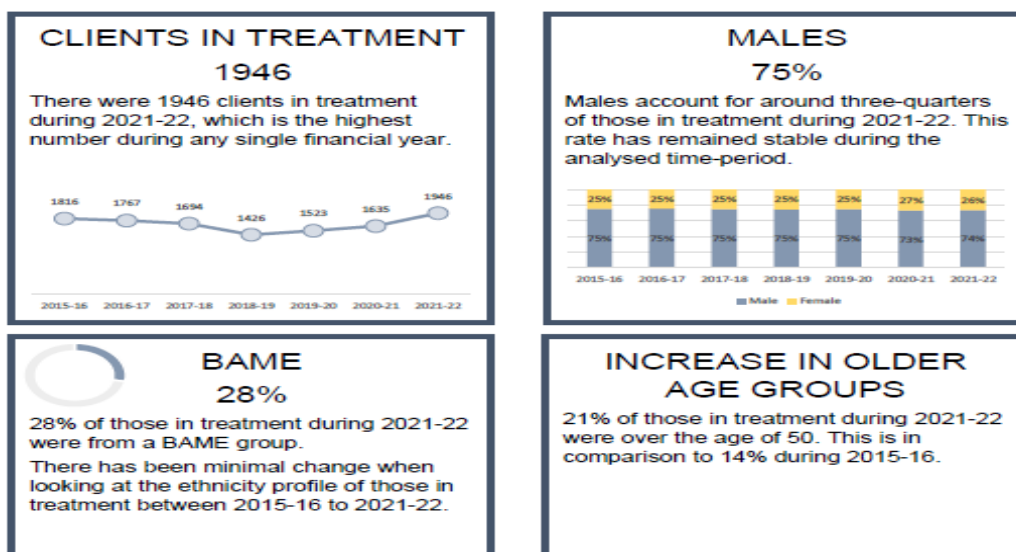
- Sandwell had the highest alcohol-specific and alcohol-related mortality rates in 2020 when compared to the Nearest Neighbours with 173 deaths recorded, a 39% increase on 2019.
- An estimated 20% of those with an alcohol need are engaging in services and those presenting to services are usually in very poor health. Nos presenting outlined below by year:

ALCOHOL ONLY



- 1946 individuals engaged with alcohol treatment services in 2021-22, of which 75% were male, 28% from a BAME background. 21% were over 50, up from 14% in the previous year.

IN-TREATMENT



- Alcohol-related offences are up 91% when comparing 2021-22 to previous years.

While acknowledging limitations in the data this does provide an overview of those engaged with alcohol services and the need for engagement, education and prevention.

Also that 8 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued over the past 3 years shows that having such powers to address such behaviour is necessary when engagement and education does not work.

3. Consultation

There are specific requirements in relation to consultations related to PSPOs, published by the LGA in 2018. In line with this guidance, a public consultation was conducted on Sandwell's Consultation Hub between 16th September and 16th November 2023. This was publicised via the local press, The Sandwell Herald and on SMBCs website and social media. Other specific consultees were:

West Midlands Police	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
West Midlands Fire Service	West Midlands Ambulance Service
SMBC Public Health	Cranstoun
DECCA	Transport For West Midlands
The Kennel Club	The Ramblers

230 people responded to the consultation with 97% supporting the Alcohol PSPO proposal.

This PSPO demonstrates the council's commitment to listening to its residents, partners and communities and to take action to address issues that are important to them.

Additional engagement with residents and businesses was also undertaken throughout the Safer 6 campaign. The proposal is also supported by Sandwell's multi-agency Borough Tasking partnership and aligns with the objectives of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Boards objective of reducing crime and ASB.

Section 4.

Summary assessment of the analysis at section 4a and the likely impact on each of the protected characteristics (if any)

There is no evidence or suggestion that this PSPO would impact more negatively on any specific protected characteristic. The aim of the proposal is to engage, educate and reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and its impact on all residents in the Borough.

There is limited information on these characteristics currently that can feed into this assessment. There is some information available from those engaged in alcohol services and while indicative cannot present a full analysis. Many alcohol users are not engaged with services, often street drinkers. However the proposed PSPO would support any individuals engaged in such anti-social behaviours and provide support and advice as needed. The outcome is to enhance community safety across the Borough. The alcohol PSPO has been in existence for several years with no reported concerns or adverse impacts.

Section 4a - What are the potential/actual impacts of the proposal on the protected characteristics?

Page 660

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Age	Ne	<p>There is no evidence that the PSPO would impact more negatively on any age group over and above another.</p> <p>The data from those engaged in alcohol services shows 21% were over 50 and Sandwell has a slightly higher than average number of young people where alcohol is identified as a concern. The PSPO with its focus on education and engagement should positively impact on these age groups with accompanying staff awareness and training.</p>		
Disability	Ne	<p>There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be</p>		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
		impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Gender Reassignment	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Marriage and civil partnership	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Pregnancy and maternity	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals. The Alcohol has a health focus which could positively benefit those who are pregnant.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Race	Ne	There is no information to indicate this protected characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals. The data available in relation to those engaged with alcohol treatment services shows 28% are from a BAME background.		
Religion or belief	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Sex	Ne	There is no information to indicate this group would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals. Information from those engaged in alcohol services indicates that 75% are male. The opportunities for engagement and education would have a positive impact on this group.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Sexual Orientation	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Could other socio-economic groups be affected?				
Carer Low income groups Veterans/Armed Forces Community Other		Sandwell is the 12 th most deprived area in England. The PSPO would not treat any of these groups differently and will provide opportunities for engagement and education with the aim of improving community safety for all.		

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then please move to Sections 6.

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

6. Section 6: Decision or actions proposed

That these proposals are accepted by Cabinet and that the PSPO is approved for a further 3 years from 1st March 2023.

Moving forward:

- Better data relating to those engaged with / receiving enforcement requirements is captured and shared through Borough Tasking to understand impact moving forward

7. Monitoring arrangements

The use and impact of PSPOs are reviewed at Town and Borough Tasking meetings and feed into the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board

Section 8 Action planning (if required)

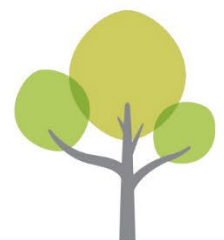
Question no. (ref)	Action required	Lead officer/ person responsible	Target date	Progress

If you have any suggestions for improving this process, please contact EDI_Team@Sandwell.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 2 b

Equality Impact Assessment EqIA Template



You must consider the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance](#) when completing this template.

The EDI team can provide help and advice on undertaking an EqIA and also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EqIA documents.

EDI team contact email: edi_team@sandwell.gov.uk

Quality Control	
Title of proposal	Implementation of 3 Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders in relation to: Alcohol; Dogs and BBQs / Fires
Directorate and Service Area	Borough Economy – Community Safety
Officer completing EqIA	Tessa Mitchell – Business Manager Community Safety
Contact Details	tessa_mitchell@sandwell.gov.uk
Other officers involved in completing this EqIA	Andrew Clarke ASB Team Manager Sandwell's EDI Team Public Health
Date EqIA completed	13 th December 2023
Date EqIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EqIA	
Date EqIA considered by Cabinet	7 th February 2024
Where the EqIA is Published (please include a link to the EqIA and send a copy of the final EqIA to the EDI team)	

Section 1.

The purpose of the project, proposal or decision required

In October 2017, Sandwell's existing Dog Control Orders transitioned under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 to become a Public Space Protection Order.

PSPOs last for up to 3 years and then need to be reviewed. This order was renewed in March 2021 and is now up for consideration again. This year as well as proposing to renew the existing requirement it is proposed to strengthen the order through the addition of 2 new prohibitions. The proposed restrictions are as follows:

Dog Fouling:

"making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog's faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control. Registered disability assistance dogs and their users are exempt from the requirements of this order" (existing)

And two new requirements:

'making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to be able to produce a receptacle to pick up dog faeces'

'making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to allow a dog into an enclosed children's play area / sports area'

Exemptions apply to any:

- *blind person who uses a guide dog for assistance*
- *physically or mentally Disabled person who uses a disability assistance dog*
- *physically or mentally Disabled person who, due to their impairment, is unable to pick up their dog's faeces*


This Boroughwide proposal supports the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy objective in relation to reducing crime and ASB. The existing order has been useful in engaging individuals and providing opportunities for education and support. It also provides the Local Authority with enforcement powers which can be used as a last resort with individuals. Over the past 3 years 5 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued. A public consultation has also taken place which has significantly supported the proposals and a Cabinet report recommending these proposals are accepted is scheduled for February 2024. The proposals will also be taken to Scrutiny in January 2024.

Section 2.


Evidence used and considered. Include analysis of any missing data

Sandwell Borough Information


POPULATION

 **POPULATION**
329,049
 The latest available ONS Mid-Year estimates provide a figure of 329,042 for Sandwell.
 Since 2014, the population has grown by 12,753 residents, equating to an increase of 4%.
 The latest population projection gives an estimate of an increase to 347,891 by 2030; an increase of 18,849 (+6%).

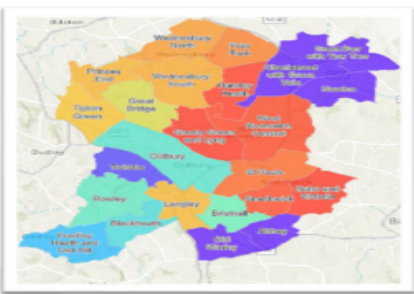
GENDER
 There is even split between males and females



MEDIAN AGE
37
 The median age of 37 in Sandwell is lower than that across England and Wales (40).
 There are variances between the wards. For example, 46% of the population in Newton are over the age of 45 compared to 27% in Soho and Victoria. The age profile of the wards will have a bearing on the prevalence of substance misuse.

 **BAME**
34%
 The 2011 census data shows that 34% of the population in Sandwell are from a BAME background, however the rate is now likely to be higher.

DEPRIVATION
34%
 The average deprivation score for Sandwell makes it the 12th most deprived local authority in England.
 Deprivation varies greatly between the wards.
 There is a significant link between deprivation and substance misuse.



While Sandwell has considerable data regarding the population, data in relation to those who have been engaged with or issued with penalties as a result of the existing PSPOs is limited and there is none in relation to dog owners.

However public concern regarding these issues is evident from the responses to the consultation. Also that 5 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued over the past 3 years shows that having such powers to address such behaviour is necessary when engagement and education does not work.

3. Consultation

There are specific requirements in relation to consultations related to PSPOs, published by the LGA in 2018. In line with this guidance, a public consultation was conducted on Sandwell's Consultation Hub between 16th September and 16th November 2023. This was publicised via the local press, The Sandwell Herald and on SMBCs website and social media. Other specific consultees were:

West Midlands Police	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
----------------------	---

West Midlands Fire Service	West Midlands Ambulance Service
SMBC Public Health	Cranstoun
DECCA	Transport For West Midlands
The Kennel Club	The Ramblers

230 people responded and there was considerable support for all the proposals:

- 98% supported the existing Dog Fouling PSPO
- 92% supporting having to have a receptacle to clean up mess
- 91% supporting the exclusion of dogs from fenced off play areas / sports areas

This PSPO proposals demonstrates the council's commitment to listening to its residents, partners and communities and to take action to address issues that are important to them.

Additional engagement was also undertaken throughout the Safer 6 campaign. The proposals are also supported by Sandwell's multi-agency Borough Tasking partnership and align with the objectives of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Boards objective of reducing crime and ASB.

Section 4.

Summary assessment of the analysis at section 4a and the likely impact on each of the protected characteristics (if any)

There is no evidence or suggestion that these PSPOs would impact more negatively on any specific protected characteristic. The aim of the proposals is to engage, educate and reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and its impact on all residents in the Borough.

There is limited information on these characteristics currently that can feed into this assessment. However the proposed PSPO would support any individuals engaged in such anti-social behaviours and provide support and advice as needed. The outcome is to enhance community safety across the Borough. Sandwell has a long established PSPO regarding dogs with no

reported concerns or adverse impacts. Exemptions are also in place for owners of registered disability dogs.

Section 4a - What are the potential/actual impacts of the proposal on the protected characteristics?

Page 673

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Age	Ne	There is no evidence that the PSPO relating to dogs would impact more negatively on any age group over and above another. The PSPO with its focus on education and engagement should positively impact on all age groups. Reducing dog mess should also positively benefit children's health.		
Disability	Ne	There is very little information available in relation to disability and dogs. However the existing dogs PSPO exempts owners of registered disability dogs so there are no adverse impacts as a result of these prohibitions. This will continue.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Gender Reassignment	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Marriage and civil partnership	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Pregnancy and maternity	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals. The Dogs PSPO has a focus on health which could positively benefit those who are pregnant.		
Race	Ne	There is no information to indicate this protected characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Religion or belief	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Sex	Ne	There is no information to indicate this group would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		
Sexual Orientation	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Could other socio-economic groups be affected?				
Carer Low income groups Veterans/Armed Forces Community Other		Sandwell is the 12 th most deprived area in England. The PSPO would not treat any of these groups differently and will provide opportunities for engagement and education with the aim of improving community safety for all.		

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then please move to Sections 6.

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

6. Section 6: Decision or actions proposed

That these proposals are accepted by Cabinet and that the 3 PSPOs are approved for a further 3 years from 1st March 2023.

Moving forward:

- Better data relating to those engaged with / receiving enforcement requirements is captured and shared through Borough Tasking to better understand impact

7. Monitoring arrangements

The use and impact of the PSPOs are reviewed at Town and Borough Tasking meetings and feed into the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board

Section 8 Action planning (if required)

Question no. (ref)	Action required	Lead officer/ person responsible	Target date	Progress

If you have any suggestions for improving this process, please contact EDI_Team@Sandwell.gov.uk

Appendix 2 c

Equality Impact Assessment EqIA Template



You must consider the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance](#) when completing this template.

The EDI team can provide help and advice on undertaking an EqIA and also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EqIA documents.

EDI team contact email: edi_team@sandwell.gov.uk

Quality Control	
Title of proposal	Implementation of a Boroughwide Public Space Protection Order in relation to BBQs / Fires
Directorate and Service Area	Borough Economy – Community Safety
Officer completing EqIA	Tessa Mitchell – Business Manager Community Safety
Contact Details	tessa_mitchell@sandwell.gov.uk
Other officers involved in completing this EqIA	Andrew Clarke ASB Team Manager Sandwell’s EDI Team
Date EqIA completed	13 th December 2023
Date EqIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EqIA	
Date EqIA considered by Cabinet	7 th February 2024
Where the EqIA is Published (please include a link to the EqIA and send a copy of the final EqIA to the EDI team)	

Section 1.

The purpose of the project, proposal or decision required

Following concerns about wild fires during the summer of 2022 and for the safety of local residents and properties, it is being proposed to implement a new Public Space Protection Order to prohibit such activities in public spaces across Sandwell. The proposed order would:

'make it an offence to have fires / BBQs in public spaces in Sandwell and not to stop these when requested to do so by authorised officers / constables. Individuals are required to surrender anything in their possession which an authorised officer / constable or has reasonable suspicion to be an article that has been used OR is likely to be used in conjunction with these prohibited activities'

This is a Boroughwide proposal which support the Sandwell Community Safety Strategy objective in relation to reducing crime and ASB. PSPOs provide opportunities for education and support but also provide the Local Authority with enforcement powers which can be used as a last resort with individuals. A public consultation has also taken place which has significantly supported the proposal and a Cabinet report recommending these proposals are accepted is scheduled for 7th February 2024. The proposals will also be taken to Scrutiny in January 2024.

Section 2.

Evidence used and considered. Include analysis of any missing data

Sandwell Borough Information

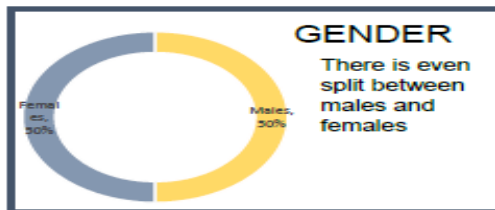
POPULATION

POPULATION
329,049

The latest available ONS Mid-Year estimates provide a figure of 329,042 for Sandwell.

Since 2014, the population has grown by 12,753 residents, equating to an increase of 4%.

The latest population projection gives an estimate of an increase to 347,891 by 2030; an increase of 18,849 (+6%).



MEDIAN AGE
37

The median age of 37 in Sandwell is lower than that across England and Wales (40).

There are variances between the wards. For example, 46% of the population in Newton are over the age of 45 compared to 27% in Soho and Victoria. The age profile of the wards will have a bearing on the prevalence of substance misuse.

BAME
34%

The 2011 census data shows that 34% of the population in Sandwell are from a BAME background, however the rate is now likely to be higher.

DEPRIVATION
34%

The average deprivation score for Sandwell makes it the 12th most deprived local authority in England. Deprivation varies greatly between the wards. There is a significant link between deprivation and substance misuse.

While Sandwell has considerable data regarding the population, there is no such comparable data in relation to those involved in fires in public spaces. However public concern regarding all these issues is evident from the responses to the consultation.

3. Consultation

There are specific requirements in relation to consultations related to PSPOs, published by the LGA in 2018. In line with this guidance, a public consultation was conducted on Sandwell's Consultation Hub between 16th September and 16th November 2023. This was publicised via the local press, The Sandwell Herald and on SMBCs website and social media. Other specific consultees were:

West Midlands Police	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
West Midlands Fire Service	West Midlands Ambulance Service
SMBC Public Health	Cranstoun
DECCA	Transport For West Midlands
The Kennel Club	The Ramblers

230 people responded and 87% supported the introduction of a PSPO in relation to Fires / BBQs .

This PSPO proposal demonstrates the council's commitment to listening to its residents, partners and communities and to take action to address issues that are important to them.

Additional engagement was also undertaken throughout the Safer 6 campaign. The proposals for this PSPO are also supported by Sandwell's multi-agency Borough Tasking partnership, including West Midlands Fire Service, and align with the objectives of the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Boards objective of reducing crime and ASB.

Section 4.

Summary assessment of the analysis at section 4a and the likely impact on each of the protected characteristics (if any)

There is no evidence or suggestion that this PSPO would impact more negatively on any specific protected characteristic. The aim of the proposals is to engage, educate and reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour and its impact on all residents in the Borough.

There is limited information on these characteristics currently that can feed into this assessment. However the proposed PSPO would support any individuals engaged in such anti-social behaviours and provide support and advice as needed. The outcome is to enhance community safety across the Borough.

Section 4a - What are the potential/actual impacts of the proposal on the protected characteristics?

Page 684

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Age	Ne	There is no evidence that the PSPO would impact more negatively on any age group over and above another.		
Disability	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		
Gender Reassignment	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Marriage and civil partnership	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Pregnancy and maternity	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		
Race	Ne	There is no information to indicate this protected characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		
Religion or belief	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		
Sex	Ne	There is no information to indicate this group would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals.		
Sexual Orientation	Ne	There is no information to indicate this characteristic would be impacted on differently as a result of these proposals		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Could other socio-economic groups be affected?				
Carer Low income groups Veterans/Armed Forces Community Other		Sandwell is the 12 th most deprived area in England. The PSPOs would not treat any of these groups differently and will provide opportunities for engagement and education with the aim of improving community safety for all.		

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then please move to Sections 6.

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

6. Section 6: Decision or actions proposed

That these proposals are accepted by Cabinet and that the PSPOs is approved for 3 years from 1st March 2023.

Moving forward:

- Better data relating to those engaged with / receiving enforcement requirements is captured and shared through Borough Tasking to better understand impact
- A review is undertaken in relation to whether designated BBQ areas would be suitable within some of our public spaces.

7. Monitoring arrangements

The use and impact of the PSPOs are reviewed at Town and Borough Tasking meetings and feed into the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board

Section 8 Action planning (if required)

Question no. (ref)	Action required	Lead officer/ person responsible	Target date	Progress

If you have any suggestions for improving this process, please contact EDI_Team@Sandwell.gov.uk

Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59
Public Spaces Protection Order (Boroughwide) 2024

This Order is made by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council ("the Council") under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59 ("the Act").

1. This Order relates to all areas within the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell including public space in the Council's area and privately owned land made available to the public, to which the Act applies ("the Restricted Area").
2. The Council is satisfied that the two conditions below have been met, in that:-
 - a. activities carried on in the restricted area as described below have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that these activities will be carried on in the public place and they will have such an effect;
 - b. the effect, or likely effect, of the activities is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by the Order.

By this Order

3. The effect of the Order is to impose the following prohibitions and/or requirements in the Restricted Area at all times, unless specifically stated:-
 - a. Consumption of alcohol in public areas, away from licensed premises

enables authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession. It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse.

Restrictions

4. Period for which the order has effect
This order will come into force on 1st March 2024 and lasts for three years. At any point before the expiry of this period the Council can extend the order by up to three years if satisfied on reasonable grounds that this is necessary to prevent the activities identified in the order from occurring or recurring or to prevent an increase in the frequency or seriousness of those activities

after that time. The Order may also be varied in accordance with the requirements of Section 61 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (“the Act”).

5. Failure to comply with this order

Section 67 of the Act states that it is an offence for any person without reasonable excuse:

- (a) to do anything that the person is prohibited from doing by a public spaces protection order, or
- (b) to fail to comply with a requirement to which the person is subject under a public spaces protection order.

A person guilty of this offence is liable on conviction in the Magistrates Court to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

6. Penalty Notices

Under Section 68 of the Act a constable or authorised person may issue a fixed penalty notice to anyone they believe has committed an offence under Section 67 of the Act. A fixed penalty notice is a notice offering the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty to the local authority. Failure to pay the fixed penalty notice may result in proceedings being issued for the offence under Section 67.

7. Validity of Order

Under Section 66 of the Act an “interested person” (being a person who lives in the restricted area or who regularly works in or visits that area) may apply to the High Court to question the validity of a public spaces protection order (or a variation thereof). Such an application must be made within six weeks of the order being made.

The grounds on which an application under this section may be made are—

- (a) that the local authority did not have power to make the order or variation, or to include particular prohibitions or requirements imposed by the order (or by the order as varied);
- (b) that the requirements of the legislation have not been complied with

When an application is made the High Court can decide to suspend the operation of the order pending the Court’s decision, totally or in part. The High Court can uphold, quash or vary the order.

8. DATED:

9. SEALED:

10. SIGNED:

This page is intentionally left blank

**Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59
Public Spaces Protection Order (Boroughwide) 2024**

This Order is made by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council ("the Council") under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59 ("the Act").

1. This Order relates to all areas within the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell including public space in the Council's area and privately owned land made available to the public, to which the Act applies ("the Restricted Area").
2. The Council is satisfied that the two conditions below have been met, in that:-
 - a. activities carried on in the restricted area as described below have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that these activities will be carried on in the public place and they will have such an effect;
 - b. the effect, or likely effect, of the activities is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by the Order.

By this Order

3. The effect of the Order is to impose the following prohibitions and/or requirements in the Restricted Area at all times, unless specifically stated:-

Dog Fouling in Public Areas

- **“Making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog’s faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control”**
- **“making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to be able to produce a receptacle to pick up dog faeces such as a dog poo bag”**
- **“making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to allow a dog into an enclosed children’s play area / sports area”**

It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse.

Exemptions apply to any:

- **blind person who uses a guide dog for assistance**
- **physically or mentally Disabled person who uses a disability assistance dog**
- **physically or mentally Disabled person who, due to their impairment, is unable to pick up their dog's faeces**

Restrictions

4. Period for which the order has effect

This order will come into force on 1st March 2024 and lasts for three years. At any point before the expiry of this period the Council can extend the order by up to three years if satisfied on reasonable grounds that this is necessary to prevent the activities identified in the order from occurring or recurring or to prevent an increase in the frequency or seriousness of those activities after that time. The Order may also be varied in accordance with the requirements of Section 61 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (“the Act”).

5. Failure to comply with this order

Section 67 of the Act states that it is an offence for any person without reasonable excuse:

(a) to do anything that the person is prohibited from doing by a public spaces protection order, or

(b) to fail to comply with a requirement to which the person is subject under a public spaces protection order.

A person guilty of this offence is liable on conviction in the Magistrates Court to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

6. Penalty Notices

Under Section 68 of the Act a constable or authorised person may issue a fixed penalty notice to anyone they believe has committed an offence under Section 67 of the Act. A fixed penalty notice is a notice offering the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty to the local authority. Failure to pay the fixed penalty notice may result in proceedings being issued for the offence under Section 67.

7. Validity of Order

Under Section 66 of the Act an “interested person” (being a person who lives in the restricted area or who regularly works in or visits that area) may

apply to the High Court to question the validity of a public spaces protection order (or a variation thereof). Such an application must be made within six weeks of the order being made.

The grounds on which an application under this section may be made are—

(a) that the local authority did not have power to make the order or variation, or to include particular prohibitions or requirements imposed by the order (or by the order as varied);

(b) that the requirements of the legislation have not been complied with

When an application is made the High Court can decide to suspend the operation of the order pending the Court's decision, totally or in part. The High Court can uphold, quash or vary the order.

8. DATED:

9. SEALED:

10. SIGNED:

This page is intentionally left blank

**Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59
Public Spaces Protection Order (Boroughwide) 2024**

This Order is made by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council ("the Council") under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, Section 59 ("the Act").

1. This Order relates to all areas within the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell including public space in the Council's area and privately owned land made available to the public, to which the Act applies ("the Restricted Area").
2. The Council is satisfied that the two conditions below have been met, in that:-
 - a. activities carried on in the restricted area as described below have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that these activities will be carried on in the public place and they will have such an effect;
 - b. the effect, or likely effect, of the activities is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by the Order.

By this Order

3. The effect of the Order is to impose the following prohibitions and/or requirements in the Restricted Area at all times, unless specifically stated:-

BBQs / Fires in Public Areas

“making it an offence to have fires / BBQs in public spaces in Sandwell and not to stop these when requested to do so by authorised officers / constables.

Individuals are required to surrender anything in their possession which an authorised officer / constable or has reasonable suspicion to be an article that has been used OR is likely to be used in conjunction with these prohibited activities.

It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse”.

Restrictions

4. Period for which the order has effect
This order will come into force on 1st March 2024 and lasts for three years. At any point before the expiry of this period the Council can extend the order

by up to three years if satisfied on reasonable grounds that this is necessary to prevent the activities identified in the order from occurring or recurring or to prevent an increase in the frequency or seriousness of those activities after that time. The Order may also be varied in accordance with the requirements of Section 61 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (“the Act”).

5. Failure to comply with this order

Section 67 of the Act states that it is an offence for any person without reasonable excuse:

- (a) to do anything that the person is prohibited from doing by a public spaces protection order, or
- (b) to fail to comply with a requirement to which the person is subject under a public spaces protection order.

A person guilty of this offence is liable on conviction in the Magistrates Court to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

6. Penalty Notices

Under Section 68 of the Act a constable or authorised person may issue a fixed penalty notice to anyone they believe has committed an offence under Section 67 of the Act. A fixed penalty notice is a notice offering the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty to the local authority. Failure to pay the fixed penalty notice may result in proceedings being issued for the offence under Section 67.

7. Validity of Order

Under Section 66 of the Act an “interested person” (being a person who lives in the restricted area or who regularly works in or visits that area) may apply to the High Court to question the validity of a public spaces protection order (or a variation thereof). Such an application must be made within six weeks of the order being made.

The grounds on which an application under this section may be made are—

(a) that the local authority did not have power to make the order or variation, or to include particular prohibitions or requirements imposed by the order (or by the order as varied);

(b) that the requirements of the legislation have not been complied with

When an application is made the High Court can decide to suspend the operation of the order pending the Court’s decision, totally or in part. The High Court can uphold, quash or vary the order.

8. DATED:

9. SEALED:

10. SIGNED:

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix A – CRSTS Programme 2022-27 - Sandwell Project Details and Progress @ February 2024

Page 701

Project	CRSTS Allocation £m	Estimated Sandwell investment £m	Lead Authority	Other Partners	Description	Strategic Outline Business Case	Outline Business Case	Full Business	Estimated/ Actual start on site	Estimate Completion date
A34/A45 SPRINT Corridor, Phase 2	£56.60	£0.30	TfWM	Walsall MBC, Solihull MBC, Birmingham City Council	Completion of Bus Rapid Transit highways improvement works consisting of bus lanes and other bus priority measures on the corridor between Walsall and Solihull/Birmingham Airport via Great Barr and Birmingham city centre	Prior to CRSTS	Prior to CRSTS	Mar-22	Jan-24 (May-23)	Jan-25 (Nov-24)
A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor	£29.00	£12.00	Black Country Team	Dudley MBC, City of Wolverhampton	Bus priority measure, segregated cycling and walking improvements on the A4123 (Birmingham New Road, New Birmingham Road, Wolverhampton Road) between Wolverhampton city centre and Hagley Road.	Feb-23	Jul-24	Jul-24	Jan-25	Mar-27
A461 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor, Sandwell	£12.00	£12.00	Black Country Team	Dudley MBC	Bus priority measures, segregated cycling and walking improvements on the A461 (Horseley Heath, Dudley Port, Burnt Tree, Birmingham Road) between Great Bridge and Castle Gate in Dudley.	Nov-22	Mar-24	Jan-25	Apr-25	Mar-27
Black Country ULEV Charging Scheme	£7.00	£1.67	Black Country Team	Dudley MBC, Walsall MBC, City of Wolverhampton	Continued roll out of on-street public EV charge points across the whole of the Black country to deliver the targets set out in the Black Country Ultra-low Emission Vehicle Strategy.	Not required	Jan-23	Aug-23	Jan-24	Mar-25
Dudley Port Integrated Transport Hub, Ph 1 & 2	£2.40	£2.40	TfWM	Network Rail	Upgrades to railway station to provide seamless and step free integration of metro, bus and rail and improved passenger facilities. Funding will deliver Phase 1 works and development of the Phase 2 project.	Prior to CRSTS	To be determined	To be determined	Sum 2024 (subject to confirmation)	Mar-27
Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan Black Country Package	£8.00	£2.00	Black Country Team	Dudley MBC, Walsall MBC, City of Wolverhampton	Package of works to deliver West Midlands LCWIP projects across the Black country. Individual projects still to be determined but at least one will be in Sandwell. SOBC will identify which schemes can be delivered within the allocated budget.	Mar-24	Aug-24	Mar-25	Nov-25	Mar-27
Sandwell Highway Maintenance Block	£23.70	£23.70	Sandwell		Annual programme of carriageway maintenance, structural maintenance and street lighting upgrades.	N/A	N/A	N/A	Annual Programme	Annual Programme
Sandwell Local Network Improvement Plan (LNIP)	£9.00	£9.00	Sandwell		Annual programme of minor highway works - local safety schemes, traffic calming, small scale measures to encourage cycling, walking and transport innovation, minor highway improvements to assist regeneration. Replaces the former Integrated Transport Block	N/A	N/A	N/A	Annual Programme	Annual Programme
Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transport Package	£19.00	£15.00	Sandwell	Birmingham City Council	Highway measures to provide bus priority, segregated walking and cycling routes in support of housing growth in Grove Lane/Midland Metropolitan University Hospital area. Cycle route includes a section within the boundry of Birmingham City Council to link with its route to the city centre.	Sep-23	May-24	Autumn 24	Apr-25	Mar-27
Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension Sustainable Access Measures	£16.00	£4.00	Black Country Team	Dudley MBC	Walk and cycle routes to link local neighbourhoods with new Metro stops in Sandwell and Dudley on the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension.	N/A	Jul-22	Aug-24 (some early delivery possible)	Jan-25	Mar-27
West Midlands Metro Line 1 Upgrades	£30.00	£10.00	TfWM		Major maintenance upgrades to West Midlands Metro Line One between Birmingham and Wolverhampton via West Bromwich.	N/A	N/A	Dec-22	TBC	TBC
West Midlands Metro Traction Power, Phase 2	£12.60	£4.20	TfWM		Power upgrades for the expanded West Midlands Metro network.	N/A	N/A	Mar-22	TBC	TBC
West Midlands Metro Wednesbury Depot Expansion	£37.90	£37.90	TfWM		Expansion of maintenance and tram stabling facilities to accommodate new trams for future metro extensions.	N/A	N/A	Mar-22	Jan-23	May-25
Total	£263.20	£134.17								

Dates in black are completed
 Dates in red are targets

This page is intentionally left blank

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Update and Local Transport Capital Programme 2024/25
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Peter Hughes Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA Cllr Danny Millard Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways
Director:	Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning Tammy Stokes Director – Borough Economy Alice Davey Interim Section 151 Officer Brendan Arnold
Key Decision:	Yes; Type (b) - an executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to: - £250,000 or more where the service area budget exceeds £10m; - £100,000 or more where the service area budget is less than £10m; Type (c) - an executive decision which is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager Andy Miller andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk Interim Assistant Director – Highways Services Mervyn Bartlett mervyn_bartlett@sandwell.gov.uk



1 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 notes the update in relation to the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) for the period April 2022 to March 2027.
- 1.2 grant approval to the following programme of minor works, highways, bridges and street lighting maintenance for 2024/25 to be funded through the Local Network Improvement Plan and Maintenance Block allocations subject to ratification and approval at West Midlands Combined Authority Board on 9 February 2024:

Minor Works Programme	Funds 2024/25 £
Major Schemes Development	140,000
Road Safety	620,000
Decarbonising Transport	300,000
Demand Management	120,000
Traffic Calming	200,000
Major Route Signing	70,000
Named Schemes Over £250k.	347,900
Total	1,797,900

Maintenance Programme	Funds 2024/25 £
Carriageway Maintenance	3,995,300
Footway Maintenance	£490,000
Bridges	603,000
Street Lighting	152,000
Total	5,240,300

2 Reasons for Recommendations






- 2.1 This report updates Cabinet on the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement programme for the West Midlands as approved by WMCA Board on 14th January 2022 and in particular those projects that are either located in Sandwell or have significant implications for the borough.



2.2 The block allocations for Local Network Improvement and Maintenance included in the CRSTS programme comprise the majority of the Council’s capital programme of minor works, highway and bridge maintenance for financial year 2024/25 and the following two years of the settlement period. These allocations are subject to ratification and approval by WMCA Board on 9th February.

2.3 Subject to that WMCA Board ratification, approval is sought to the programme of works outlined in the recommendations. Details of individual schemes will be reported back to the appropriate Cabinet Member(s) for approval in due course.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>People live well and age well:</i> The Local Transport Settlement contributes to safe and efficient roads for local people and visitors, and to the health benefits of sustainable active travel.</p>
	<p><i>Strong resilient communities:</i> Successful communities needs access to jobs, services and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. The highway network is an important enabler of this.</p>
	<p><i>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods:</i> Both new and existing residential developments rely on good quality access and links to shops, services and leisure facilities in order for them to be successful. Local Transport Settlement funding is the principle method by which the network is improved and maintained.</p>
	<p><i>A strong and inclusive economy:</i> The provision of a high quality, well maintained highway network will reduce journey times and improve journey reliability for Sandwell business who rely on it to connect to their suppliers and customers.</p>
	<p><i>A connected and accessible Sandwell:</i> The provision of a high quality, well maintained highway network is vital to enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education and services both within and beyond the Borough’s boundaries.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues



City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS)

- 4.1 The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) is a five-year capital settlement to enable the city regions to achieve their ambitions in terms of transport investment. The fund is overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT) and in the West Midlands it aligns with emerging Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5). CRSTS commenced in 2022-23 with £8.9m previously allocated to the West Midlands in 2021-22 to assist with preparation and delivery of the settlement.
- 4.2 CRSTS is the main source of transport capital funding for local transport schemes with a scheme cost of £50m or less. CRSTS draws under one heading, a number of transport funding streams including the final year of the (already allocated) Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), as well as the Integrated Transport Block (ITB) and Highways Maintenance Block (HMB). For the time being, the Active Travel Fund (ATF), which covers walking and cycling investment, remains separate.
- 4.3 The projects included in the programme bid were developed and set out against Government priority outcomes of;
- Growth and Productivity
 - Levelling up
 - Decarbonisation

In addition, Government requires that projects should, wherever feasible, deliver clear benefits for cycling, walking and public transport, prioritising these modes over the private car.

- 4.4 Government announced allocations to Local Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities in April 2022. This confirmed the previously announced provisional allocation of £1.05bn. Decision making on the projects included in the submitted programmes is devolved to WMCA, with the exception of a small number of projects (none in Sandwell) in which DfT retains a role.



4.5 The approved CRSTS programme includes the following projects which are, either wholly or partially, located in Sandwell:

Project	Allocation
A34/A45 SPRINT Corridor (Phase 2)	£56.60m
A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor	£29.00m
A461 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor, Sandwell	£12.00m
Black Country ULEV Charging Scheme	£ 7.00m
Dudley Port Integrated Transport Hub (Phase 1 & 2)	£ 2.40m
Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (Black Country Package)	£ 8.00m
Smethwick to Birmingham Inclusive Growth Corridor Transport Package	£19.00m
Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension (Sustainable Access Measures)	£16.00m
West Midlands Metro Line 1 Upgrades	£30.00m
West Midlands Metro Wednesbury Depot Expansion	£37.90m
West Midlands Metro Traction Power (Phase 2)	£12.60m
Total	£230.5m

The projects support not only the WMCA objectives, but also the regeneration priorities of the emerging Sandwell Local Plan and Sandwell's Economic Recovery & Regeneration Strategy. In total, these projects represent over £230m of investment in the transport network with impacts in Sandwell over the five years of the CRSTS programme. Where schemes cross boundaries, it is difficult to quantify the level of investment directly on the network within Sandwell, but it is estimated that this will be in the region of £130m.

4.6 Appendix A contains details of these projects, the current stage of each project, and their provisional programmes. TfWM is progressing the Metro, Rail and Sprint projects with support from Sandwell officers, where appropriate. Since the CRSTS programme was confirmed in April 2022, Sandwell officers along with the joint Black Country Transport Team (BCT) have progressed the following:

Project	Current Stage	Next steps
A461 Corridor	Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) approved by WMCA in November 2022	OBC commissioned with a submission target of March 2024
A4123 Corridor	Feasibility work completed end of 2022.	OBC scheduled for Summer 2024



Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor	SOBC approved by WMCA in December 2023.	OBC in preparation with target submission date of May 2024. Detailed design underway.
Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Measures	Initial OBC approved by WMCA in July 2022, but update requested and scheduled to be submitted in March 2024.	CRSTS funding likely to be released for early delivery of some elements of the project, with the remainder subject to approval of the Full Business Case (FBC), later in 2024.
LCWIP Black Country Package	Work underway to prepare the SOBC for submission in the Spring.	

- 4.7 Due to the rescoping of some projects and capacity issues within the design teams, some projects have experienced delays in the business case submissions. However, all of the projects listed will be delivered during the current CRSTS settlement period which ends on 31st March 2027.
- 4.8 As part of the 2023 Spring Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £8.8bn would be available nationally for a second round of funding (CRSTS2) covering five years from April 2027. The allocation for the WMCA is yet to be announced. In recognition of the impact of inflation on scheme costs, and difficulties experienced with delivery on some projects nationally, DfT also gave authorities in receipt of CRSTS funding a 'one off' opportunity to re-base their programmes in September 2023. WMCA took advantage of this opportunity, introducing an element of over-programming that anticipates a CRSTS2 allocation of a similar order to that received for the period 2022-27.
- 4.9 Following the Government's decision to abandon the northern leg of HS2 in October 2023, a further £250m has been allocated to the WMCA area for projects to ensure 'network stability' over the next five years. The majority of this funding will be allocated to existing major projects to cover identified funding gaps. However, maintenance of the network is also a key area identified for this funding. It is envisaged that Sandwell will receive £509,000 in 2023-24 and the same in 2024-25 for local highways maintenance, particularly for the resurfacing of carriageways, cycleways, and footways to prevent potholes and other road defects from occurring,



as well as tackling other asset management priorities, such as keeping local bridges and other highway structures open and safe.

4.10 As part of the ‘trailblazer’ deeper devolution deal between the Government and the West Midlands Combined Authority announced in March 2023, future CRSTS funding will form part of a single settlement agreement.

Assurance, Governance and Monitoring

4.11 The CRSTS fund is operated through, and is fully compliant with, the WMCA Single Assurance Framework (SAF). A business case will be required for each scheme within the programme (see Appendix A for progress on these).

4.12 The WMCA SAF is augmented by requirements for additional transport information. This is to ensure compliance with the CRSTS funding objectives, and to provide additional assurance regarding the ability to make the right interventions, at the delivery pace required, over the five-year programme. Each scheme needs to demonstrate as appropriate:

- *Alignment with Local Transport Plan and national CRSTS funding objectives:* Each business case should provide a specific analysis of impact against the objectives for the regional transport policy and of the funding.
- *Direct benefits to cycling and active travel:* Specific emphasis has been placed by Government on accelerating cycling and active travel measures. These are reflected in West Midlands LTP policy and recognised as the type of measures required to help de-carbonise the transport system. Each project must set out how it can, where appropriate, provide a relative advantage to pedestrians and cyclists over other modes, evidencing how it achieves this in compliance with DfT’s formal LTN1/20 guidance.
- *Direct benefit to public transport and in particular bus travel:* Specific emphasis has been placed by Government on providing priority measures to support reliable and effective bus services. These are reflected in West Midlands LTP policy and recognised as the type of measures required to help de-carbonise the transport system. Where not providing another targeted CRSTS or LTP outcomes, each CRSTS-funded project should seek to provide a relative advantage to public transport over other modes; evidence how it achieves this; and, where appropriate, detail specific bus priority



measures and their impact on journey time reliability, and traveller experience.

- *Support measures for behaviour change, road safety and network resilience:* All schemes within the CRSTS programme are expected to contribute towards the delivery of these outcomes. In developing each project business case, the scheme promoters will liaise with the relevant TfWM teams and regional groups. Each project business case will set out what engagement has been undertaken, and what specific measures will be implemented to deliver the relevant outcomes.

4.13 All the above requirements form part of the production of individual scheme business cases and will be considered as the scheme progresses through the WMCA SAF Governance.

4.14 Two key elements of the CRSTS programme have already been taken through a simplified, 'en-bloc' approval process by WMCA. These are the Local Network Improvement Plans and Highway Maintenance Block, which are discussed below.

4.15 The CRSTS approach and guidance from Government places considerable emphasis on public transparency over delivery; on regional accountability for the delivery; and on project and programme outcomes. There is clear direction that any lack of delivery pace and programme content could adversely impact funding during the latter part of the programme and in subsequent delivery periods. To help manage this, WMCA has established a number of monitoring and governance mechanisms:

- **Monthly Officer review** by the existing Strategic Transport Officers Group (comprising the senior Transport Directors from TfWM and the LHAs) to consider a delivery, risks and exceptions update from each delivery body.
- **Quarterly Formal reporting** by each delivery body covering spend, delivery, risk and programme updates for each scheme which it is the promoter for. This will be compiled, and a summary report formally considered by the Strategic Transport Board (Chaired by the WMCA Transport Portfolio holder and including Cabinet Members for each LHA as well a representation from the WMCA Transport Scrutiny Committee and Transport Delivery Committees). This reporting will also be shared with the Mayoral Office.



- **Annual Formal WMCA Board reporting:** An annual CRSTS progress and programme monitoring report will be prepared and submitted for consideration.

Funding Allocations to Sandwell for Local Transport and Highways Maintenance

- 4.16 As set out in paragraph 4.2 above, since April 2022, the funding that was previously allocated to Integrated Transport Block has been absorbed into the CRSTS. As part of the overall programme, an allowance of £107.5m has been made for Local Network Improvement Plans (LNIPs), which are a direct replacement for ITB, providing £21.5m per annum. This funding is allocated to TfWM and the seven LAs on the same basis as had previously been used for ITB. It represents a 21% uplift on the allocations received in the period 2015/16 to 2021/22 but in reality, when inflation is allowed for, does not restore funding to 2015 levels. As the figure is fixed until 2026/27, there will continue to be a year-on-year reduction in spending power.
- 4.17 As the funding is fixed until March 2027, Sandwell's per-capita allocation amounts to £1.798m per annum (subject to annual WMCA Board ratification) and this is proposed to be allocated to individual programme categories as set out in the recommendations. These are mostly self-explanatory. However, it should be noted that the 'Decarbonising Transport' category includes funding for small scale measures to assist walking, cycling and transport innovation such as micro-mobility. Many projects covered by the other categories will include provision for cyclists and pedestrians and those with impaired mobility. The allocation to the 'Decarbonising Transport' category is used to fund projects specifically aimed at these areas of work.
- 4.18 As in the past two years, when compared to ITB, a larger proportion of the LNIP 21% uplift is allocated to the road safety and traffic calming categories. This is in recognition of the statutory duty under Section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to investigate the causes of accidents and to take such measures as appear to be appropriate to prevent those accidents. This is also in line with member priorities.
- 4.19 Details of individual schemes will be reported for approval to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways as necessary. The 'Named Schemes Over £250,000' category is intended to fund larger local projects



such as junction improvements. Details of such schemes will be reported individually as appropriate.

- 4.20 With regards to assurance processes, a light-touch approach is required for this to reflect the typically low complexity/low risk projects, and often reactive nature of the works undertaken under this funding. A single WMCA SAF application has been processed by TfWM for the full £107.5m five-year allocation, allowing it to be released in annual grants to each constituent LHA. A signed declaration is required by each LA's s151 Officer, alongside a simple funding agreement setting out delivery reporting requirements. These include basic quarterly financial returns, and a short annual monitoring report using a standardised format. This sets out what has been delivered, supported by a small number of case studies showing how delivery aligns to Local Transport Plan and CRSTS funding objectives, as well as proposed delivery for the next period. These are then compiled to form a regional view as part of the overall CRSTS monitoring and reporting.
- 4.21 As with ITB, Highways Maintenance Block funding now forms part of CRSTS, having previously been allocated to LHA's on a combination of needs-based formula and challenge/incentive bases. £120.4m of funding is allocated for delivery through the local highway authorities which annually represents an 18% uplift on the 2021/22 figure.
- 4.22 Each LHA leads on procurement in line with Public Sector Procurement Guidelines. As per DfT guidance, quarterly monitoring report is required from each LHA setting out how the funding has been spent, and how the condition of the network has improved. These will also be compiled to form a regional view as part of the overall CRSTS monitoring and reporting.
- 4.23 From 2022/23, and for the subsequent three years, Sandwell receives a CRSTS allocation for maintenance of £4.741m, subject to annual WMCA Board ratification.
- 4.24 The allocation for highway maintenance constitutes the Councils primary funding to maintain carriageways, footways, bridges and streetlighting across the Borough. Prior to March 2022, highways maintenance funding was made up from highway maintenance block, incentive elements and pothole funding as detailed in the table below. The Government does periodically allocate additional funding over and above the CRSTS



allocation and in 2023/24 Sandwell received an additional £0.712m for pothole repairs.

4.25 The overall figure for 2024/25 is around 12% lower than was available in 2023/24, despite the additional funding being allocated as part of the 'Network North' announcement. This is a result of there being no additional pothole allocation in 2024/25.

4.26 Sandwell's overall local transport allocations for 2022/23 to 2024/25, including any additional allocations for maintenance, are shown in the table below compared to the previous three years' allocations under the old Integrated Transport Block funding regime.

Sandwell Allocation	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Integrated Transport Block/Local Network Improvement Plan	1,477,000	1,476,000	1,486,000	1,797,900	1,797,900	1,797,900
Maintenance Block - Needs-based	2,582,000	2,582,000	1,781,000	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maintenance - Incentive Fund Allocation	542,000	538,000	445,000	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maintenance -Challenge Fund Allocation	0	2,134,000	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maintenance – Pothole Action Fund	161,000	159,000	1,780,000	N/A	712,000	N/A
Maintenance – Network North	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	509,000	509,000
CRSTS Maintenance Block Funding	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,741,300	4,741,300	4,741,300
Maintenance Total	3,285,000	5,413,000	4,006,000	4,741,300	5,962,300	5,250,300

5 Alternative Options

5.1 With regards to the Local Network Improvement Plan, the proportion allocated to each of the individual block headings is the same as for 2023/24 and is broadly in line with ITB allocations in the preceding years. However, as in the previous two years, more of the 21% uplift on the 2021/22 figure has been allocated to the road safety and traffic calming categories, to reflect member priorities. The option exists to allocate more funding to some headings and less to others. It also remains possible to alter the allocations 'in year', should circumstances require it. However, the use of this funding is reported to, and monitored by, WMCA and



therefore should reflect the priorities outlined by Government through the CRSTS guidance, and by WMCA through the Local Transport Plan.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>These are principally contained within the body of the report. Both the LNIP and Maintenance Block allocations are exclusively spent on works within Highways maintainable at public expense. Local Transport Settlement allocations will help deliver the aims and objectives as set out in the Highway Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Plan.</p> <p>The spend set out at para 1.2 is included in the Capital Programme for 2024/25.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The proposed scope of works covered under this report are in furtherance of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) and had figured in report presented before and approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority on 14 January 2022. Since the CRSTS programme was confirmed in April 2022, Sandwell officers along with the joint Black Country Transport Team (BCT) have progressed the relevant projects to achieve the desired outcomes.</p> <p>The fund is overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT) and in the West Midlands it aligns with emerging Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5). CRSTS commenced in 2022-23. The projects are not only aligned with the identified local priorities, but they also follow the government priority outcomes of Growth and Productivity, Levelling up and Decarbonisation.</p> <p>Cabinet has appropriate legal capacity to approve the programme of minor works, highways, bridges and street lighting maintenance for 2024/25 included in the report to be funded through the Local Network Improvement Plan and Maintenance Block allocations subject to ratification and approval at WMCA Board on 9th February 2024.</p>



Risk:	<p>There are no direct risk implications resulting from the course of action recommended in this report.</p> <p>Individual projects within the programme will be assessed for risk in line with the Council policies as part of their approval process.</p>
Equality:	<p>The financial allocations outlined above form part of the overall West Midlands allocation that supports the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan known as Movement for Growth and the emerging LTP5. This has been subject of a full Equality Impact Assessment carried out by the Transport for West Midlands as part of the plan's formulation. The individual projects/work packages that make up the 2022-27 CRSTS programme and Sandwell's 2024/25 programme of minor works and maintenance will be subject of individual Equality Impact Assessments as they are bought forward for approval either at WMCA Board or SMBC Cabinet.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>It is increasingly recognised that an appropriately managed, maintained, and up-to-date road network is needed to support significant economic growth, and the associated social and well-being benefits. To maximise the benefits of economic investment programmes requires investment not only in new road infrastructure but also in maintaining and managing our existing infrastructure. The Local Transport Settlement will also contribute to sustaining the legacy of investment programmes that will deliver 2030 ambitions.</p>
Social Value:	<p>There are no implications for social value directly arising from this report. Any implications arising from individual projects will be reported as part of their approval process.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Decarbonisation of the transport system is central to the government's aims and objectives for CRSTS. It is also a principle theme within the West Midlands Local Transport Plan. All projects will need to demonstrate how they address climate change and contribute to decarbonisation through their business cases as a prerequisite of securing funding.</p>



Corporate Parenting

There are no implications for corporate parenting resulting from the course of action recommended in this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – CRSTS Programme 2022-27 Project Details

8. Background Papers

West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan: Movement for Growth (2016)

Report to WMCA Board 14:01:22

Report to WMCA Board 18:03:22

Report to WMCA Board 13:01:23



Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	Designation of Nature Conservation Sites
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA Councillor Peter Hughes
Director:	Director Regeneration and Growth Tony McGovern
Key Decision:	Yes Type (c) - an executive decision which is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Public Rights of Way Officer/Planning Policy Officer, Zoe Wilson, zoe_wilson@sandwell.gov.uk Peter Simpson, peter_simpson@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That approval be given to the Site Recommendations as detailed in Appendix A which include:

- The extension of the SINC at Land at Beaconview Road.
- The extension of the SINC at Ridgeacre Branch Canal.
- The SINC at Gower Branch Canal maintaining its current status and boundary.
- The SLINC element at Galton Valley be upgraded to SINC status, so that the entire site will be a SINC. A small section in the centre of the site to be deleted.
- The upgrading of part of the SLINC to a SINC at Thimblemill brook (West). This will extend the extent of the SINC and reduce the size of the SLINC element.



- The upgrading of the SLINC to a SINC at Haden Hill Park so that the entire site is a SINC. No action to be taken regarding the PSI, as this did not meet the required standards.
- The extension of the SLINC at Dudley to Priestfield Disused Railway, with an amendment to the boundary to exclude a building.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Bradley Locks.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Broadwell Park.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Market Place, Tame Valley.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Ocker Hill Balancing Pool.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Woden Road South.
- To maintain the status and boundary of the SLINC at Thimblemill brook (East).
- To delete the entire SLINC at Dixon's Branch Canal

1.2 That the Director Regeneration & Growth be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Sandwell Local Plan Proposals Map to reflect the designations identified in the report.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 This report informs Cabinet of the results and recommendations of the ecological surveys carried out for land at;

- Beaconview Road (SINC)
- Ridgeacre Branch Canal (SINC)
- Gower Branch Canal (SINC)
- Galton Valley (SINC/SLINC)
- Thimblemill brook (West) (SINC/SLINC)
- Haden Hill Park (SINC – part, SLINC – Part, PSI – Part)
- Dudley to Priestfield Disused Railway (SLINC)
- Bradley Locks (SLINC)
- Broadwell Park (SLINC)
- Market Place, Tame Valley (SLINC)



- Ocker Hill Balancing Pool (SLINC)
- Woden Road South (SLINC)
- Thimblemill brook (East) (SLINC)
- Dixon's Branch Canal (SLINC)

2.2 These sites all have existing designations, and in some cases, a Potential Site of Interest (PSI) as part of the survey area as well.

2.3 Of the 14 sites identified, two of the existing SINC's have been extended, one SINC maintains its current status and boundary, three of the sites have had part or all of the SLINC element upgraded to a SINC, one site with an existing SLINC has been extended, six existing SLINC's maintain their current status and boundary and one existing SLINC has been deleted.

2.4 Beaconview Road was identified as a SINC due to its significant and contiguous block of broadleaved woodland, alongside an unmodified and aesthetically appealing section of the River Tame. It is also a highly accessible, well used and valued public open space.

2.5 It is recommended to extend the SINC to include the semi-natural woodland which is of good quality, and merges well into plantation broadleaved woodland within the existing SINC.

2.6 Ridgeacre Branch Canal was identified as a SINC due to its diverse and complex suite of habitats. The site is directly connected to the Snowhill to Wolverhampton Railway (a designated SLINC) with further connections to the south and west via hedgerows. Although this site links to other sites of interest, it is very linear and surrounded by dense areas of built development. Its therefore an extremely important natural habitat within an otherwise densely built up area. It is recommended to extend the SINC into the PSI (beyond the canal terminus at the eastern end of the site), as natural succession has progressed into these areas.

2.7 Gower Branch Canal was identified as a SINC as it has a high degree of ecological connectivity with wildlife sites to the north, west and east. Five uncommon / axiophyte species were also recorded within the latest



survey. Natural grassland and aquatic / emergent vegetation are found throughout the site and are bounded by dense scrub and significant areas of broad-leaved woodland. It is recommended to maintain the SINC status of the site and its current boundary.

- 2.8 Galton Valley was identified predominantly as a SINC due to the high levels of ecological and social interest. There is also a section of the site that is currently identified as a SLINC. The recommendation is to maintain, extend and upgrade the site to a SINC in its entirety, with the exception of the area including the building / hard surfaces in the centre of the site, which is to be downgraded and deleted from the designation. The recommendation to upgrade the SLINC section to SINC was due to the progression of habitat, which has advanced towards broadleaved woodland, and neutral grassland which has succeeded to scrub.
- 2.9 The majority of Thimblemill Brook (West) is currently identified as a SINC, with a small section of SLINC to the eastern boundary. It is recommended to amend the allocation in the following way: Part deletion, extension, and upgrade. Part of the boundary to the eastern section of the site, currently a SLINC, should be deleted due to residential development that has taken place. The other section towards the eastern boundary of the site, which is also currently a SLINC, should be upgraded and integrated in to the wider SINC, including the path currently dividing the two sections of the site. This will make the entire site of SINC status.
- 2.9 This recommendation is being made despite evidence of a decline in habitat quality since the sites original designation as a result of a lack of/poor management (this decline is reflected by the site scoring mostly Mediums against the Ecological Criteria). The position of the Birmingham & Black Country Local Site Partnership is that the designation status of a site should not be downgraded when a decline in habitat quality is a result of a lack of/poor management.
- 2.10 Whilst work is needed to improve the site, it is still well-connected to the wider landscape, is of importance to the local community and is reasonably diverse. There is no significant difference in the composition or quality of habitats between the eastern and western sections of this



site, and both are in such close proximity as to render them effectively identical in social, cultural, geological and historical significance. Therefore, it follows that both aspects of the site should be included in the same designation (in this case, being of SINC value).

- 2.11 The survey carried out at Haden Hill Park includes the designated SINC (part), SLINC (part), and a previously unsurveyed PSI. The recommendation is to combine and upgrade the SLINC into the wider SINC, so that the entire site becomes classified as a SINC. This is a large site and is a key steppingstone for wildlife along the narrow River Stour Valley (SINC/SLINC) wildlife corridor that itself connects to other medium sized steppingstones in the surrounding area within a largely urban area. The continued succession of previous parkland and plantation woodlands is increasing the naturalness and aesthetic appeal of the site. Whilst some of the habitats identified in the SLINC would not meet requirements individually, they contribute to the wider diversity of the site and overall connectivity and size of the site, hence the recommended SINC status overall. The PSI was also assessed but was not found to meet criteria for designation.
- 2.12 The survey carried out at Dudley to Priestfield Disused Railway recommends that the current SLINC is extended to include the area which has developed through natural succession, which has advanced over the years along the section of disused railway. It has also been recommended that the boundary is amended to exclude the area which now comprises a building. Natural succession towards broad-leaved woodland is increasing the naturalness and aesthetic appeal of the site and it is important to maintain and extend the current size of the area in order for it to continue functioning as an important ecological corridor and local wildlife site.
- 2.13 The survey carried out at Bradley Locks SLINC has identified the natural succession that has advanced with both sides of the canal, now dominated by maturing broadleaved woodland. The extent of swamp habitat is valuable in a local context although some habitat management intervention will be required to maintain open water and more open habitats such as semi-improved neutral grassland. Management



intervention should be carried out in tandem with appropriate ecological monitoring to retain key habitats but also being aware of possible presence of legally protected species such as Great Crested Newt, Water Vole and Bat species. It is recommended that the site retain its SLINC status within its existing boundary.

- 2.14 The survey carried out at Broadwell Park SLINC recommends that the site retain its current SLINC status within the existing boundary. The ecological isolation of this site serves to highlight the relative importance of Broadwell Park as an existing SLINC within the local area. It is enhanced by having the key ecological corridor and habitat of the River Tame flowing along its western boundary. Furthermore, this is a highly accessible site and provides an important fragment of semi-natural habitat which is likely to be used by local office and factory workers, as well as the nearby local community.
- 2.15 Market Place, Tame Valley is identified as a SLINC and the survey report recommends that the site retain its current status and boundary. There is a good range of habitat and species diversity within a small site, which benefits from good ecological connectivity and a relatively unmodified section of the River Tame. The site acts as a key steppingstone between the Sheepwash LNR and the Tame valley towards Ocker Hill. It is also easily accessible and well-utilised by the local community.
- 2.16 Ocker Hill Balancing Pool is identified as a SLINC, most notable for an area of standing open water alongside the River Tame which forms the west and northern boundary. It is recommended that the site retains its current status and site boundary. Extension would be difficult as the site is situated to the north-east of Ocker Hill, with the Balancing Pond SLINC bounded immediately to the east by a railway line with a large asphalt plant beyond that; to the south is a National Grid complex which includes part of the SLINC and contains a mosaic of semi-improved neutral grassland, dense and scattered scrub and broadleaved woodland. The River Tame flows along the western boundary and, further west before reaching the A41 trunk road, is a complex of scrub, woodland and tall ruderal vegetation that acts as an effective buffer and ecological corridor to the SLINC itself.





- 2.17 Woden Road South is currently identified as a SLINC and it is recommended that the site retain its current status and site boundary. It is a large and valuable area of highly accessible public open space, which is well used, within the south-east of Wednesbury. Woden Road South SLINC is surrounded by dense areas of housing, a school to its west and east, and industrial units towards its northern boundary. However, it is linked to Hydes Road Pool and other semi-natural habitat to the south and south-west. Although there is a good level of species and habitat diversity, it does not meet species/ habitat criteria to be designated a SINC. It is therefore recommended to retain its SLINC status.
- 2.18 Thimblemill brook (East) is identified as a SLINC and it is recommended that the site retain its current SLINC status and site boundary. The site has a high degree of access and is ranked very highly in a historical and cultural context. The site merits SLINC status as a steppingstone for species along the Thimblemill Brook Valley and between several nearby local wildlife sites (potential and current). It is also a central point for nearby Local Wildlife Sites. It provides a locally important fragment of semi-natural habitat either side of Thimblemill Brook.
- 2.19 Although its scores are low for several of the key ecological criteria, it is an important and likely valuable natural asset for the local community and should be retained as a SLINC. It is also used by the local community and a focus for environmental action such as litter picking.
- 2.20 Dixon's Branch Canal was identified as a SLINC, but it is recommended that the entire site have its status removed with the deletion of the SLINC. The site has now been built over with a residential development with just a remnant boundary hedgerow of the original SLINC remaining.
- 2.21 The reports are based on recommendations made by The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. The recommendation has been endorsed by the Birmingham and Black Country Local Sites Partnership (LSP).



- 2.22 The potential for planning decisions to be challenged increases where it can be shown that Local Plan allocations are based on out-of-date or incomplete information. Ensuring that there is current information relating to the Borough's inventory of nature conservation sites, including SINCs and SLINCs, reduces this risk.
- 2.23 Incorporating environmental infrastructure principles into Local Plan documents will help meet the current Black Country Core Strategy vision for environmental transformation as well as the vision identified in the emerging SLP.
- 2.24 The provision of a network of green spaces and nature conservation sites improves the local environment, which in turn makes the borough more attractive as a place to live, work, enjoy recreation in and invest in.
- 2.25 The environmental infrastructure of the borough has the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits and contribute to environmental benefits, thus contributing to the aim of achieving a healthier population. An attractive environment will significantly improve the prospect of achieving significant numbers of high-quality new houses in locations that people wish to live in.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Nature Conservation Sites can add educational value through the provision of green infrastructure and an important ecological resource</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well Nature conservation sites have the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits, contribute to environmental benefits, reduce the urban heat island effect, and benefit high quality residential development. The environmental infrastructure of the borough also provides an important ecological and educational resource.</p>



4 Context and Key Issues

Context

- 4.1 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) are designations identified in the SAD DPD and also the emerging Sandwell Local Plan (SLP), and form part of the Borough's environmental infrastructure. Potential Sites of Interest (PSIs) are not identified in the Local plan as they have not been subject to survey but have been highlighted as sites that may be worthy of designation.
- 4.2 SINCs and SLINCs are not subject to statutory protection. The Government envisages that sites are protected from development through the Local Plan process. The identification and allocation of SINCs and SLINCs within the SAD DPD and emerging SLP is therefore crucial in maintaining and enhancing the Borough's environmental infrastructure.
- 4.3 Environmental infrastructure also includes green space, and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Such spaces are of importance as they have the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits, contribute to environmental benefits, reduce the urban heat island effect, and benefit high quality residential development. The environmental infrastructure of the borough also provides an important ecological and educational resource.
- 4.4 The Birmingham and Black Country Local Sites Partnership (LSP) was consulted in the preparation of the surveys and associated reports that form the basis of the above recommendations and its endorsement sought.
- 4.5 The Sandwell Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (SAD DPD) forms part of Sandwell's Local Plan. It sets out land use policies, allocates land for specific uses or purposes and identifies infrastructure requirements to achieve sustainable communities and development within the borough.



- 4.6 The Sandwell Local Plan is the emerging planning document which will replace the Black Country Core Strategy and the SAD DPD. The Sandwell Local Plan will continue to set out land use policies, allocating land for specific uses or purposes as well as identifying infrastructure requirements to achieve sustainable communities and development within the borough.
- 4.7 To ensure the designation of nature conservation sites remain valid and up to date, survey work has been carried out on existing SINC and SLINC. This ensures we have an up to date, defensible and robust evidence base

Background

- 4.8 All of the surveys carried out had existing designations with two of the sites also including a PSI. 10 of the 14 sites had not been surveyed since the late 1990's, one had last been surveyed in 2010/11, with the remaining three sites being surveyed in 2016, which is itself seven years ago. The PSIs which had been identified in two of the sites had not previously been surveyed.
- 4.9 Planning legislation requires that Local Plan allocations and designations are based on robust and up-to-date evidence.
- 4.10 The LSP is a group that consists of the four Black Country Authorities, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and the Black Country Wildlife Trust, EcoRecord, Geodiversity, Natural England, The Environment Agency and botanists. The LSP is responsible for approving any new sites put forward for listing and then ensuring the endorsement/adoption of those sites by their own organisations.
- 4.11 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and Site of Importance for Local Nature Conservation (SLINC) are designations applied to the most important non-statutory nature conservation sites in the West Midlands. Although these sites do not receive statutory protection, they are protected from damaging development by Local Plan policies.



Resources

- 4.12 The production of survey work and associated reports regarding the potential nature conservation sites are funded through the Regeneration and Planning budget.
- 4.13 The Council's corporate risk assessment strategy has been complied with, to identify and assess the risks associates with this decision/recommendation. This has identified that there are no significant risks that need to be reported.
- 4.14 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, sufficient resources will need to be identified within existing budgets to ensure that the ongoing potential nature conservation site review programme can be completed within an appropriate timescale, as this forms part of our core function.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The alternative is to not commission survey work, which would result in an out of date evidence base and the potential for SINC's and SLINC's to be at greater risk of being lost

6 Implications

Resources:	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, sufficient resources will need to be identified within existing budgets to ensure that the ongoing potential nature conservation site review programme can be completed within an appropriate timescale, as this forms part of our core function.
Legal and Governance:	National planning policy sets out clear expectations for local authorities to take a strategic approach to the environment and biodiversity. Survey and resurvey work on sites of ecological interest and value should contribute to current and emergent development plan documents (such as the emergent Local Plan and



	<p>important supplementary planning documents). S.40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions – commonly referred to as the ‘Biodiversity duty’. These designations support the Council in the discharge of this obligation. The continued monitoring of the status of nature conservation sites and identifying new sites is also part of the requirements of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010). Arrangements for the designation and protection of sites for planning purposes falls outside of the scope of this report and is instead undertaken the development and review of the emergent Local Plan.</p>
Risk:	The Council’s corporate risk assessment strategy has been complied with, to identify and assess the risks associates with this decision/recommendation. This has identified that there are no significant risks that need to be reported.
Equality:	The sites that are the subject of this report are included in the Site Allocations & Delivery DPD, which was subject of a full Equality Impact Assessment prior to its adoption in 2012.
Health and Wellbeing:	The maintenance of Nature Conservation sites will have a positive impact on the health and well being of the population through providing a green network of sites for Biodiversity
Social Value:	Nature Conservation sites improve the social value of the area by providing green and natural spaces, which is positive for health and well-being.
Climate Change:	Nature Conservation Sites are addressing Climate Change and link strongly to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
Corporate Parenting:	There are no corporate parenting implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.



7. Appendices

Appendix A - Site Recommendations

Appendix B – Site plans

8. Background Papers

Black Country Core Strategy (2011)

Sandwell Site Allocations & Delivery DPD (2012)

Emerging Sandwell Local Plan (Draft) (2023)



APPENDIX A

Site Recommendations

- Land at Beaconview Road - Extension of the SINC.
- Ridgeacre Branch Canal - Extension of the SINC.
- Gower Branch Canal – Maintain the SINC within the existing boundary .
- Galton Valley - Upgrade the existing SLINC to a SINC status, so that the entire site will be a SINC. A small section in the centre of the site to be deleted.
- Thimblemill brook (West) – Maintain the status of the SINC. Upgrade part of the SLINC to a SINC and delete the section that has been built over. Overall, this will increase the extent of the SINC and make the site a SINC in its entirety.
- Haden Hill Park - Upgrade the SLINC to a SINC so that the entire site is a SINC. No action to be taken regarding the PSI, as this did not meet the required standards.
- Dudley to Priestfield Disused Railway - Extend the SLINC and amend the boundary to exclude a building.
- Bradley Locks - Maintain the status and boundary.
- Broadwell Park - Maintain the status and boundary.
- Market Place, Tame Valley - Maintain the status and boundary.
- Ocker Hill Balancing Pool - Maintain the status and boundary.
- Woden Road South - Maintain the status and boundary.
- Thimblemill brook (East) - Maintain the status and boundary.
- To delete the entire SLINC at Dixon's Branch Canal.

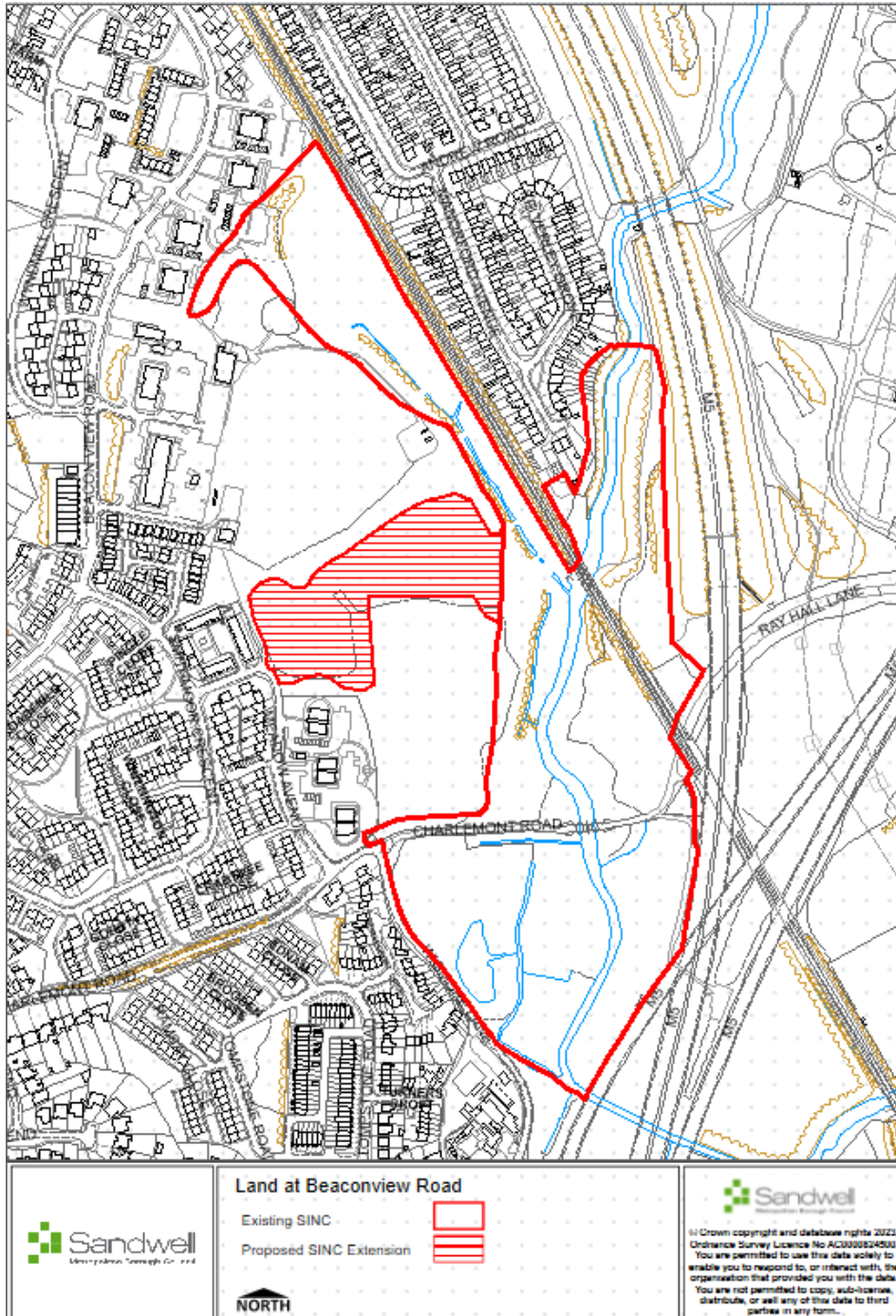


APPENDIX B

Site Plans

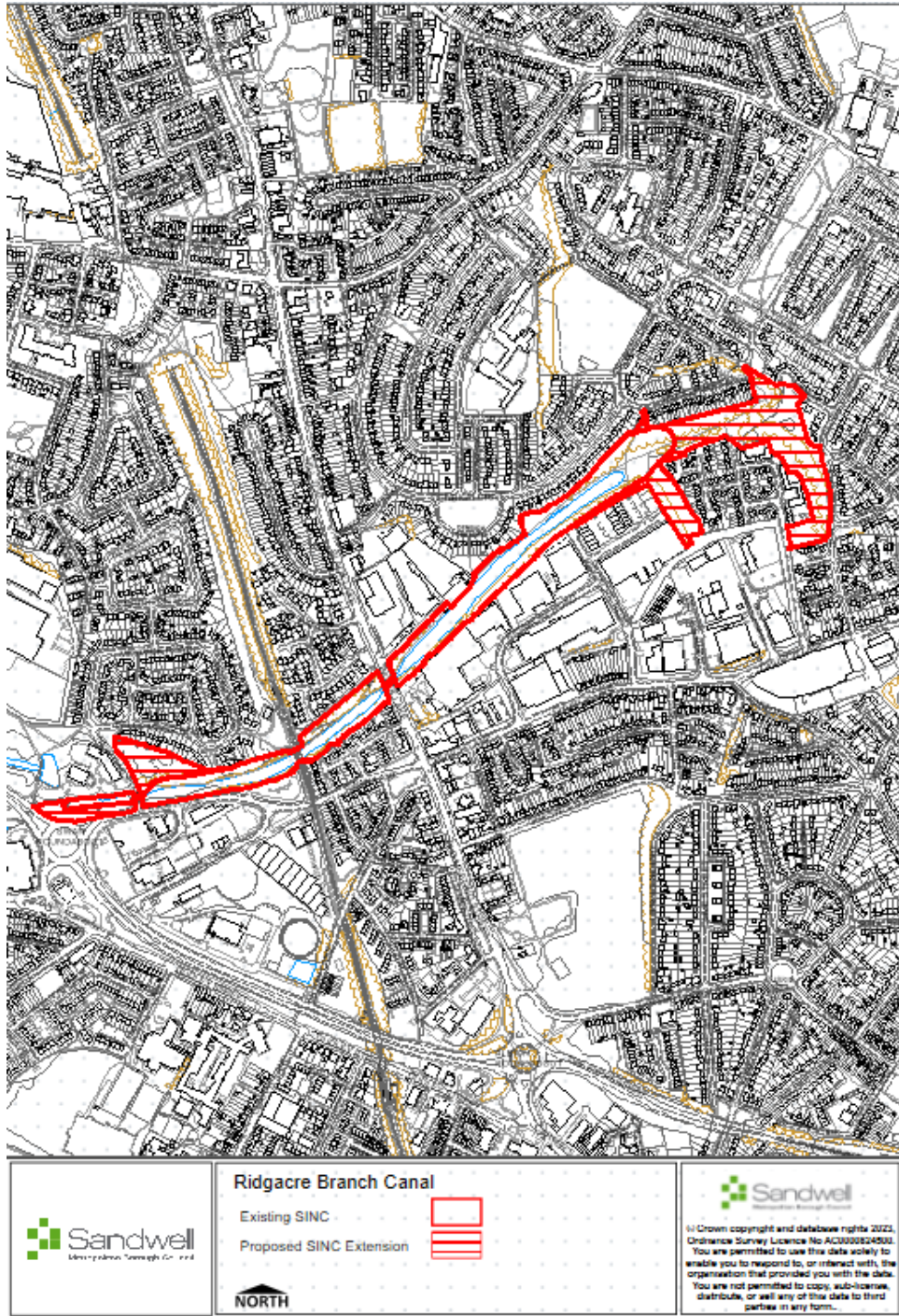
Site 1: Land at Beaconview Road:

Recommendation: Extension



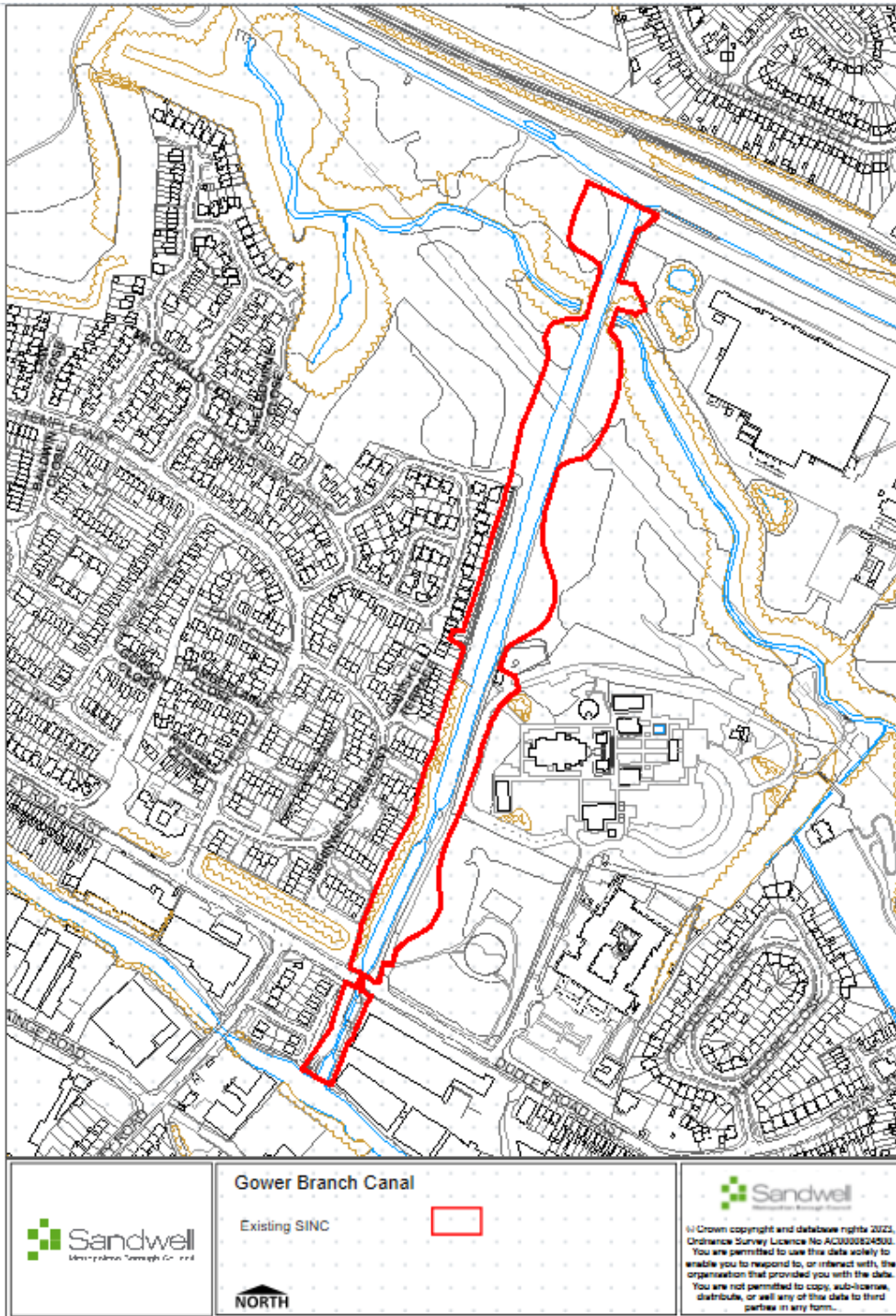
Site 2: Ridgacre Branch Canal

Recommendation: Extension



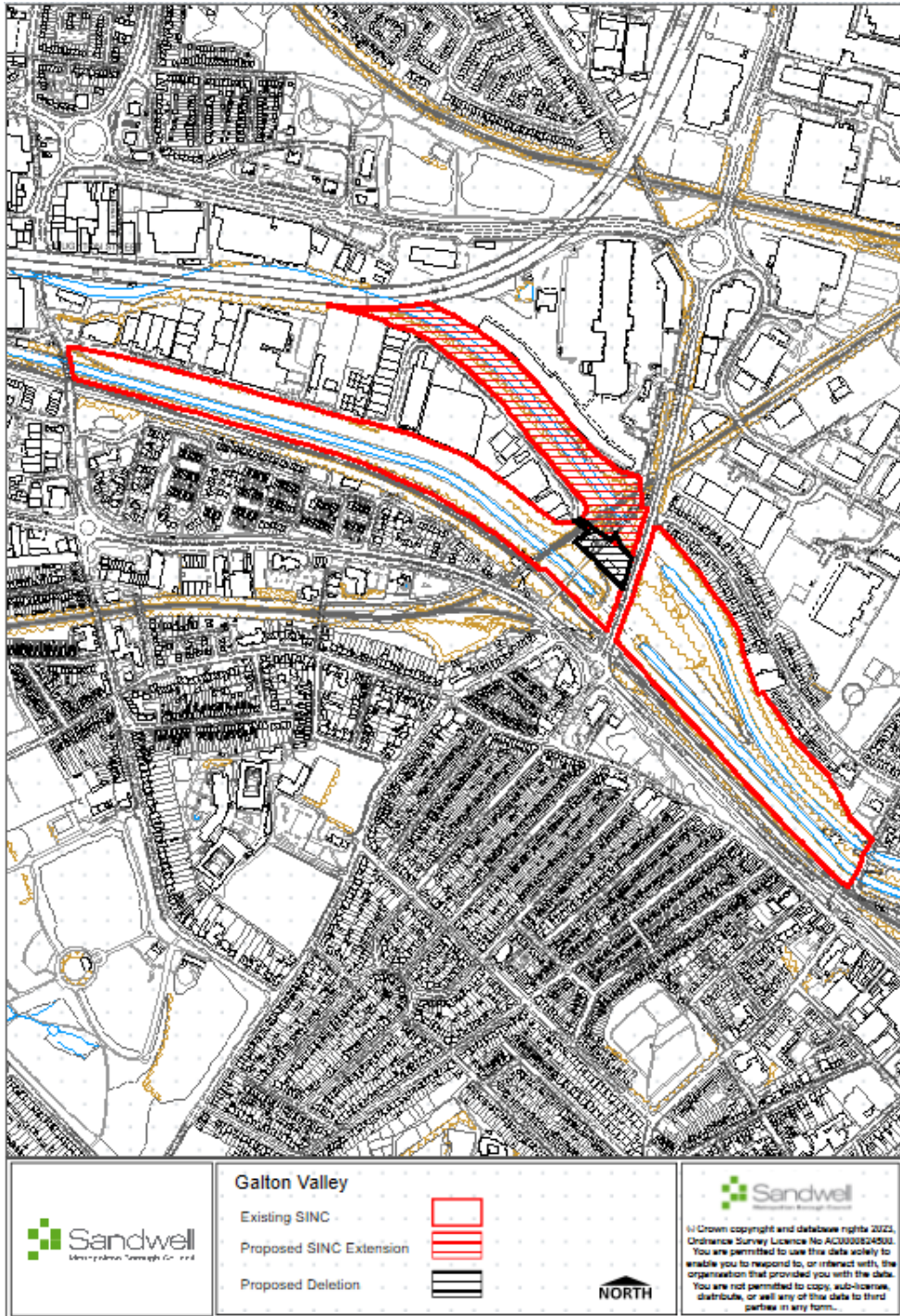
Site 3: Gower Branch Canal

Recommendation: Maintain boundary and status



Site 4: Galton Valley

Recommendation: Extension, upgrade and part deletion



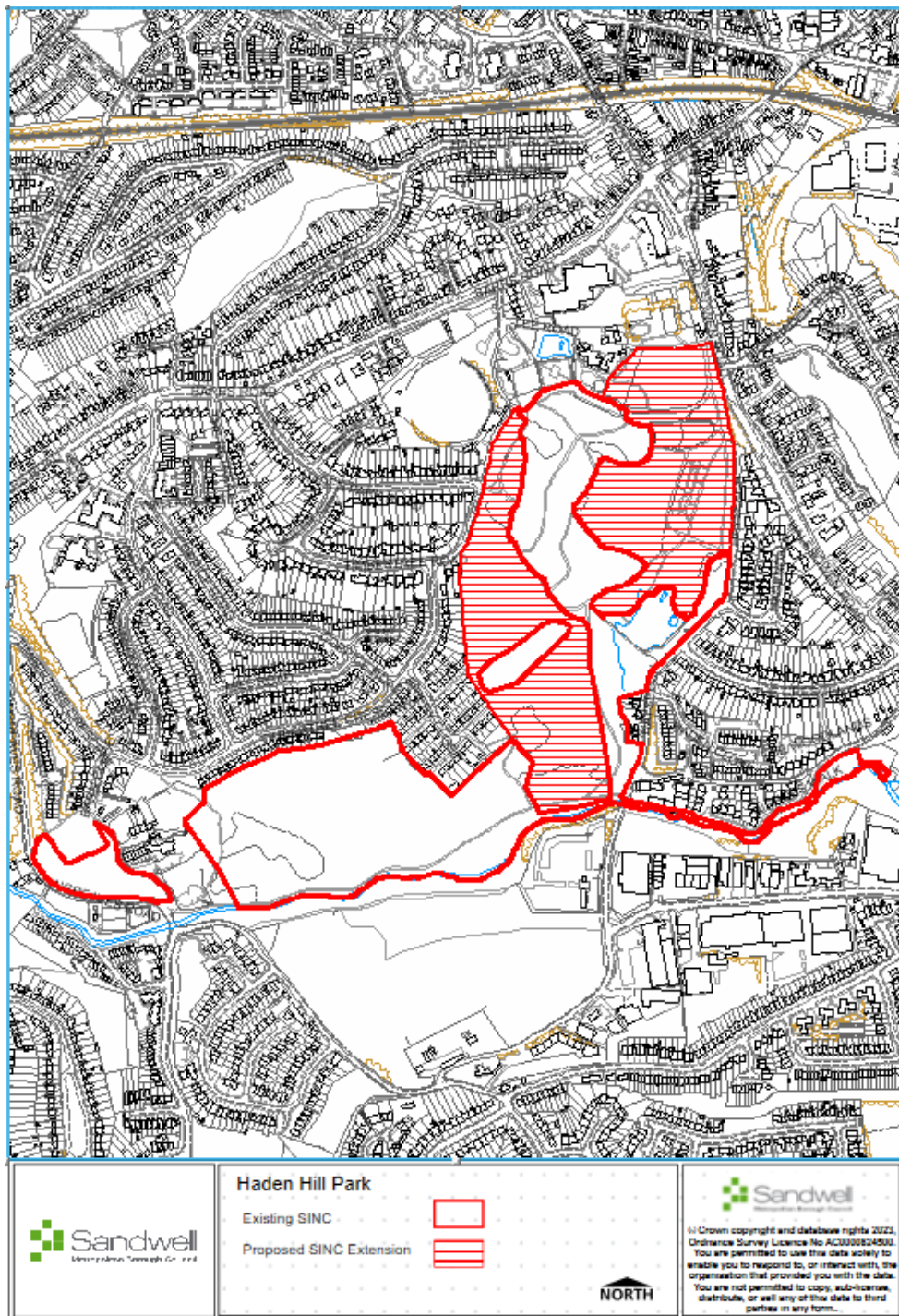
Site 5: Thimblemill Brook (West)

Recommendation: Part deletion, Extension, and upgrade



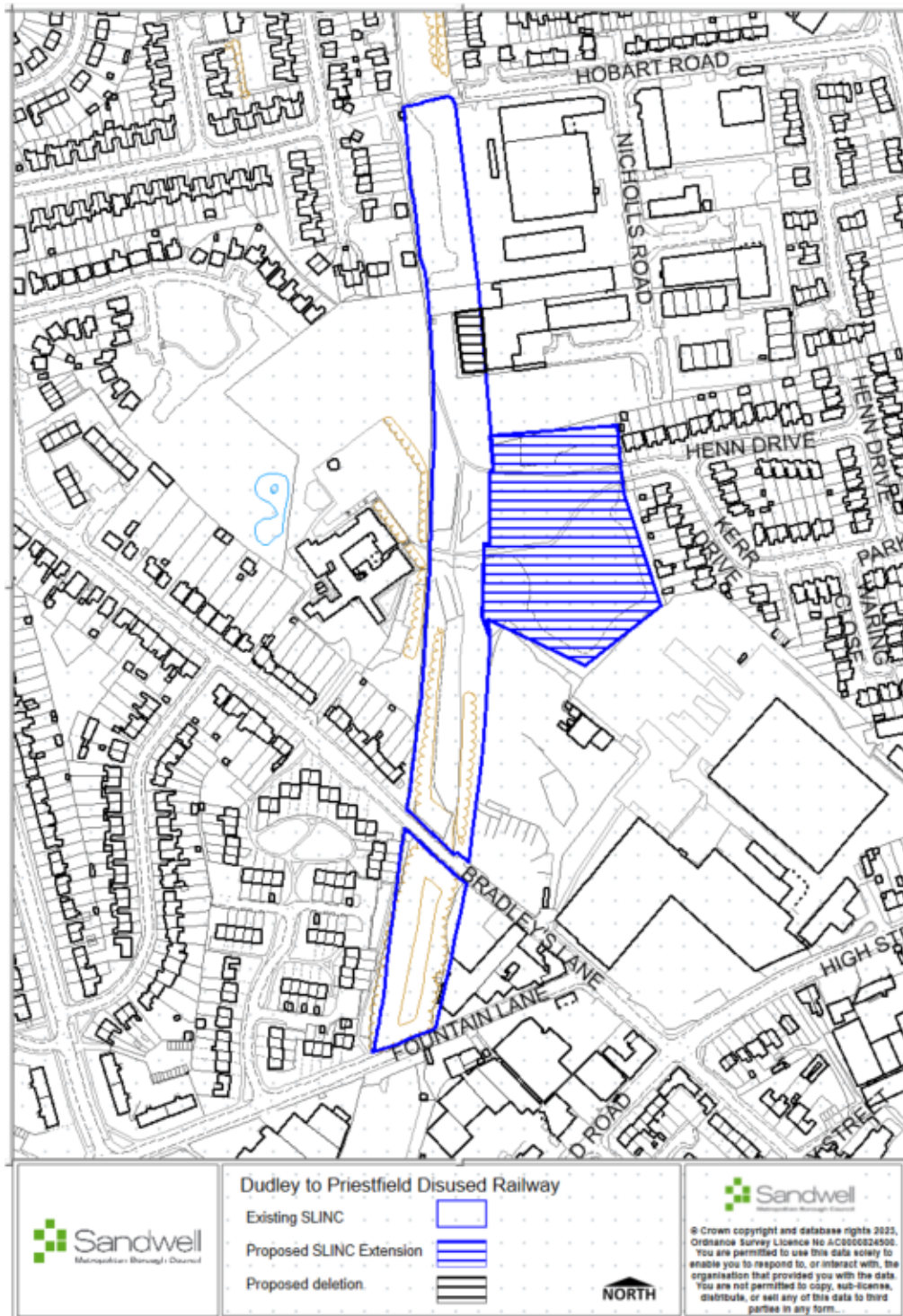
Site 6: Haden Hill Park

Recommendation: Upgrade SLINC to SINC



Site 7: Dudley to Priestfield Disused Railway

Recommendation: Upgrade SLINC to SINC



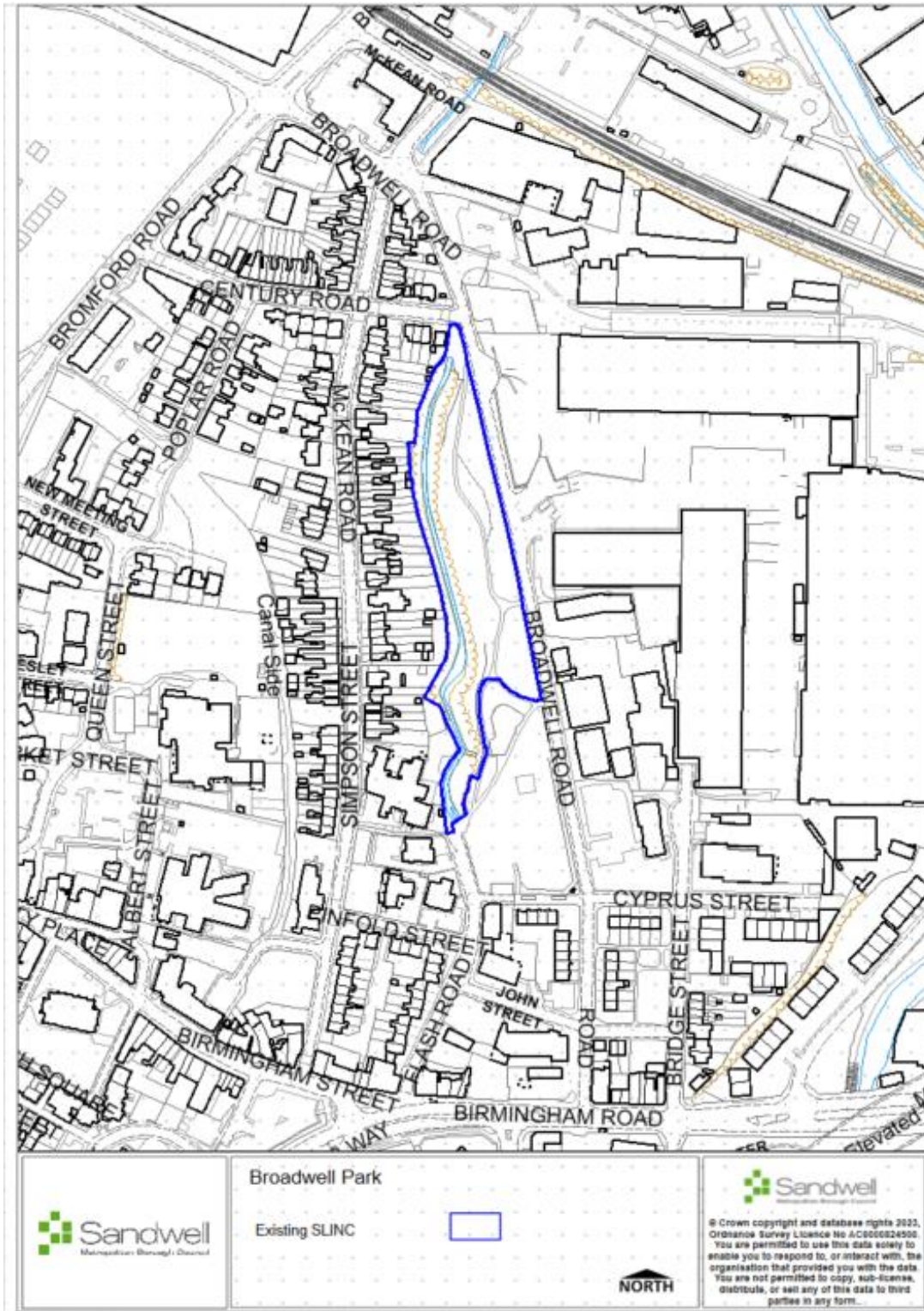
Site 8: Bradley Locks

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



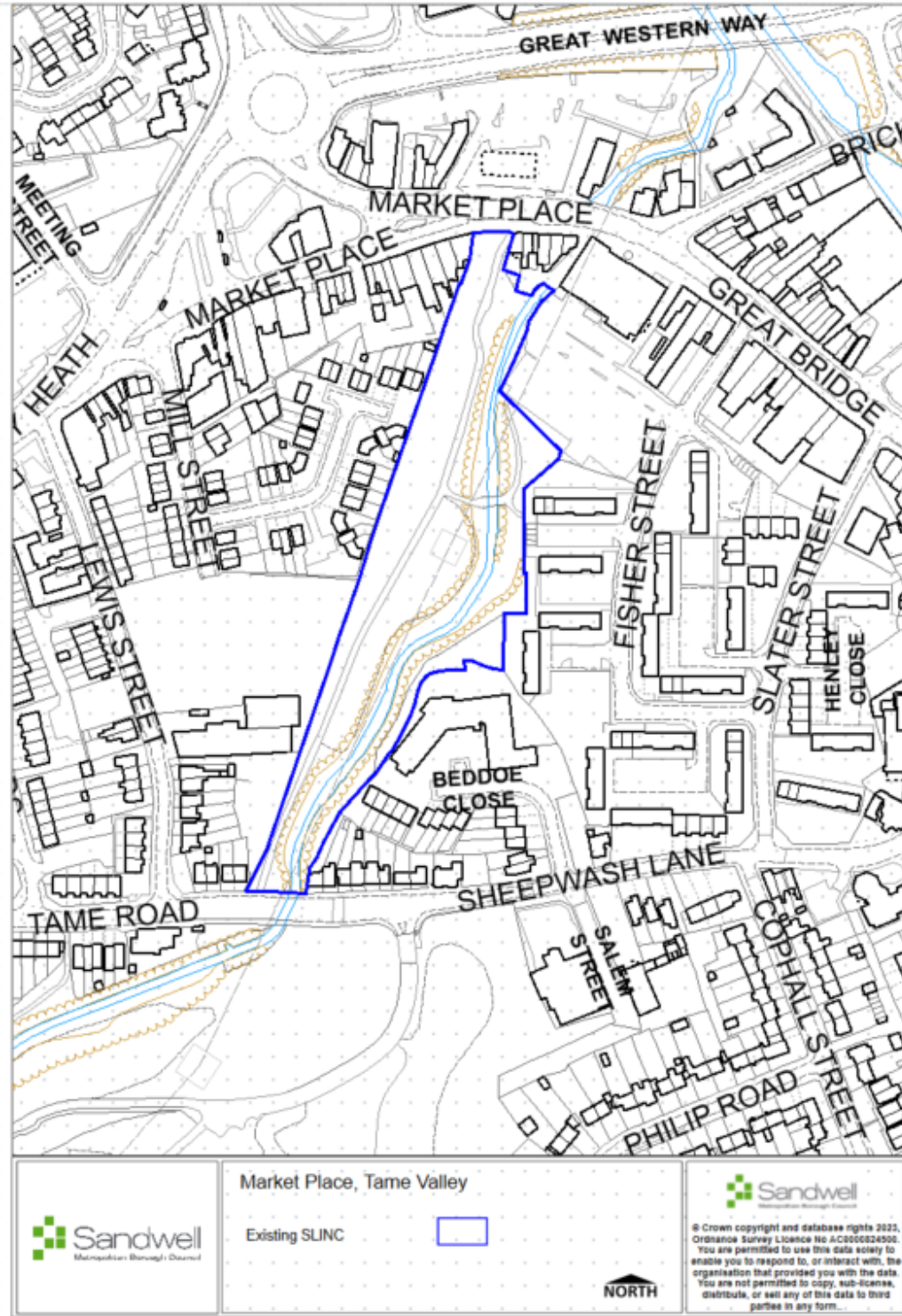
Site 9: Broadwell Park

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



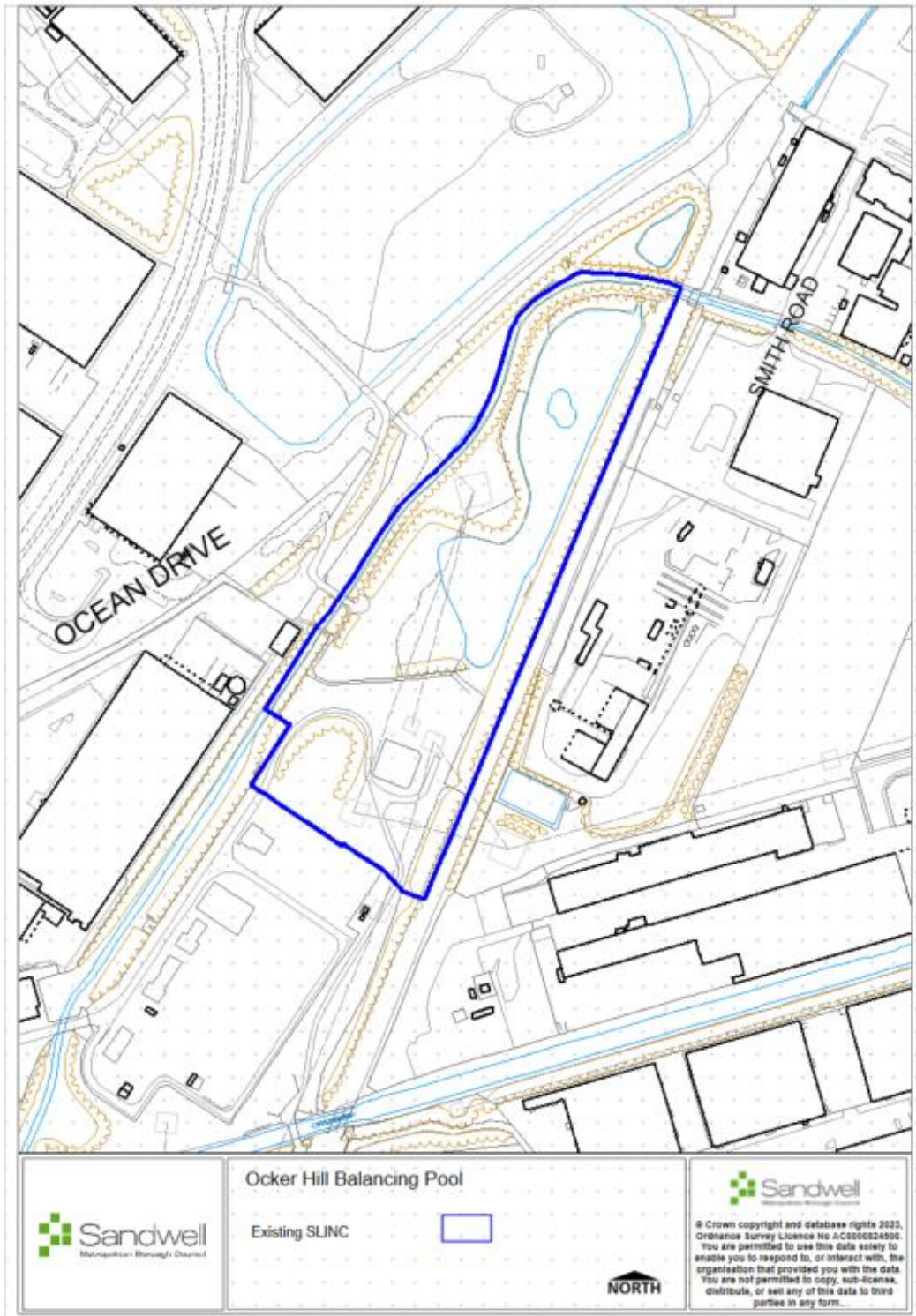
Site 10: Market Place, Tame Valley

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



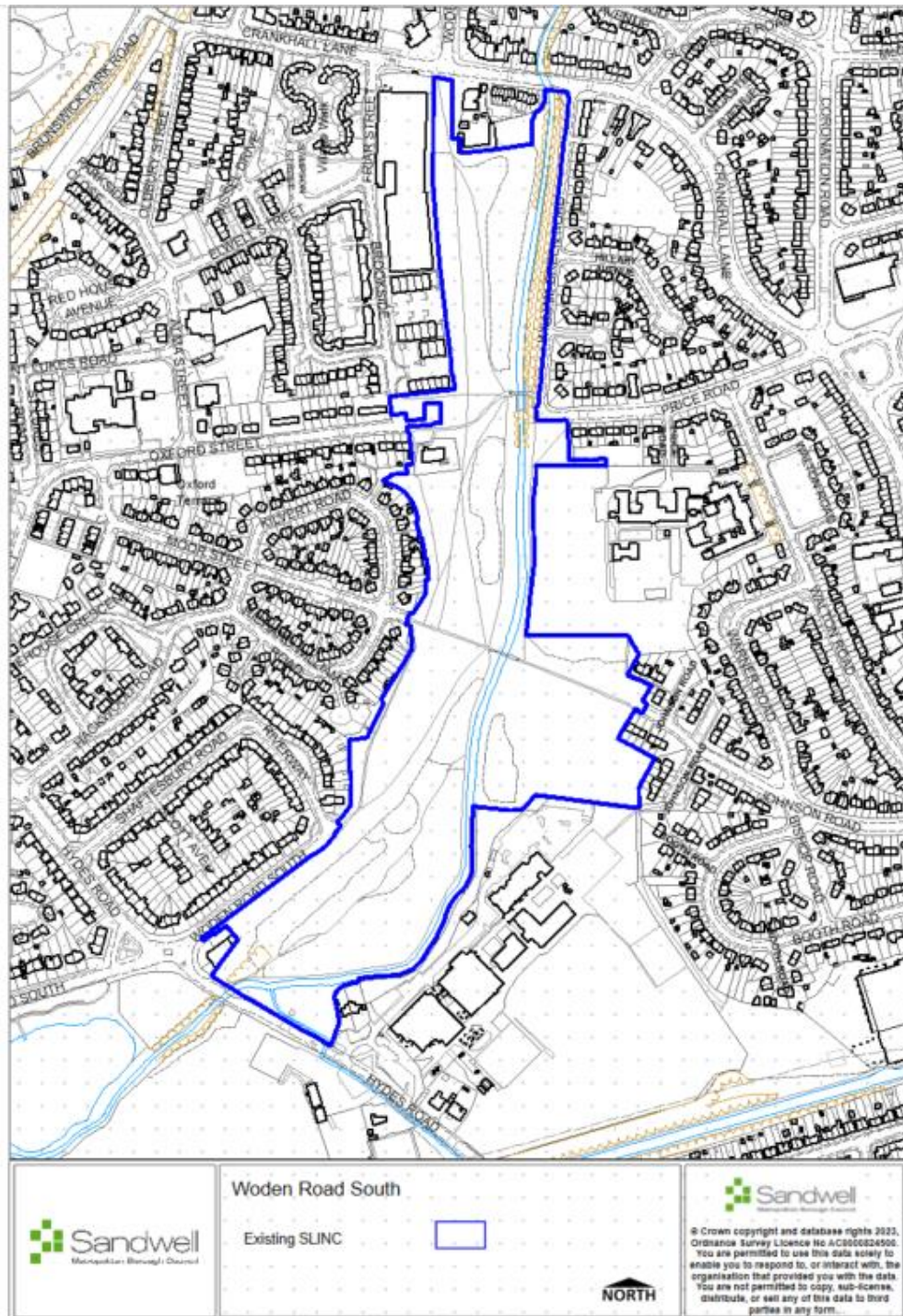
Site 11: Ocker Hill Balancing Pool

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



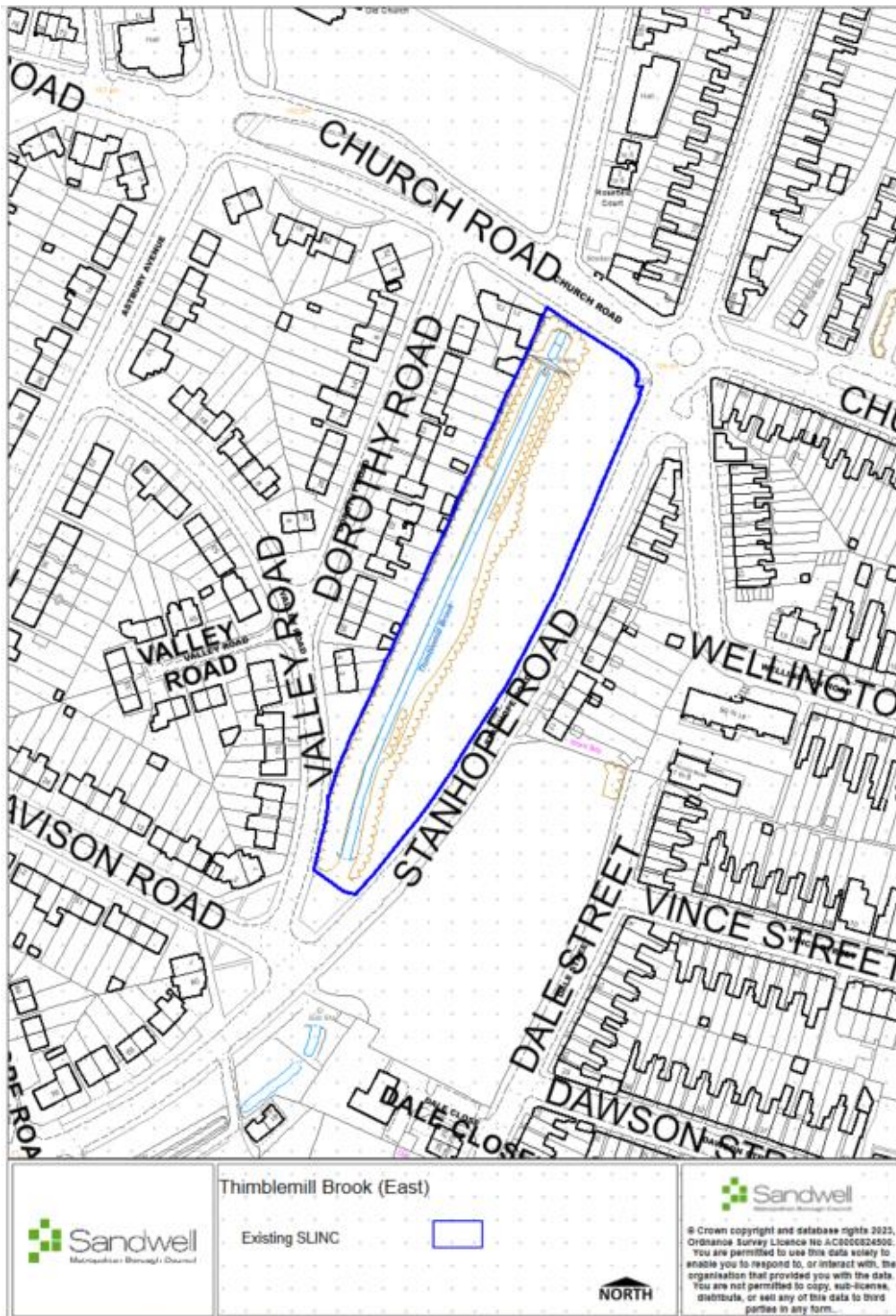
Site 12: Woden Road South

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



Site 13: Thimblemill Brook (East)

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



Site 14: Dixon's Branch Canal

Recommendation: Retain SLINC with existing boundary.



Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	A4123 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor – Initial scheme approval
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Peter Hughes Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA,
Director:	Assistant Director - Growth & Spatial Planning Tammy Stokes
Key Decision:	Yes Type (b) - an executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to more than £1m. Type (c) – an executive decision which is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Andy Miller Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk Talvinder Sandhu Transportation Team Leader talvinder_sandhu@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 that approval in principle is given to the proposed sustainable transport and highway improvement proposals that make up the A4123 Bus, Cycle and Walking Corridor in the Sandwell area, as part of an overall corridor project from Wolverhampton through Dudley and Sandwell as shown on the plans contained at Appendix A and B;



- 1.2 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning carries out public consultation on the proposals;
- 1.3 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning, in conjunction with the Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer, and the Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer, are authorised to accept City Region Sustainable Transport Fund grants from West Midlands Combined Authority under the Terms and Conditions contained in the Grant Agreements;
- 1.4 that the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways considers any objections to the proposals, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA;
- 1.5 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning is authorised to approve the submission of an Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority;






2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor forms part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Programme. It has received Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) approval through the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Single Assurance Framework Process on the 25th of November 2022 and approval for funding to deliver a further section of a cycling and walking (Active Travel) route in Sandwell from the Burnt Tree junction to Lower City Road subject to design approval. This continues the route recently delivered from the Tipton Road junction to the Burnt Tree junction as part of Tranche 2 of the Active Travel Fund.
- 2.2 The project is now at the stage where proposals are sufficiently developed where specific approvals are required to enable the proposals to be consulted on with the public and other stakeholders, and then be taken to the next stages of the WMCA Single Assurance Framework Process and proposals submitted as part of an overall Outline Business Case (OBC) for the whole corridor.



2.3 Approval is also required to enter into grant agreements with the WMCA and accept grants for CRSTS funding to enable the scheme to be further developed, including the submission of business cases, to enable detailed design to be carried out, and following full approval, for the schemes to be constructed.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>People live well and age well:</i> The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor includes extensive measures designed to encourage walking and cycling thus contributing to the health benefits of sustainable active travel.</p>
	<p><i>Strong resilient communities:</i> Successful communities need access to jobs, services and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. The transport network is an important enabler of this.</p>
	<p><i>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods:</i> New and existing residential developments rely on good quality access and links to shops, services and leisure facilities in order for them to be successful. The proposals will make a significant contribution to this objective.</p>
	<p><i>A strong and inclusive economy:</i> The provision of a high-quality transport network will reduce journey times and improve journey reliability for Sandwell business who rely on it to connect to their suppliers and customers.</p>
	<p><i>A connected and accessible Sandwell:</i> The provision of a high-quality, sustainable transport network catering for all modes is vital to enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education, and services both within and beyond the Borough's boundaries.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

Background and Project Details

4.1 WMCA has an established Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), a 10-year plan to create a strategic network of cycling routes across the West Midlands and a number of enhanced walking zones. This LCWIP includes this A4123 transport corridor and supports its objectives and the benefits for active travel it will achieve.



- 4.2 The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor project will provide a safe opportunity for the public to access and use active travel and improved bus services locally to travel to and from destinations along the A4123 in the Sandwell area and neighbouring linked destinations, which will include places of education, shops, jobs and businesses and other areas of interest and service. In addition, the project will provide improved wayfinding through new and improved signing and route information. The project will also link with completed sections further north, e.g., Burnt Tree to Tipton Road (cycle track and footways) and onwards further north to those sections of A4123 in Dudley and Wolverhampton under development as well with this project eventually providing a fully joined up corridor of active travel measures, which are also supported by the improved bus infrastructure elements under development. It is proposed the project work in Sandwell will be delivered by the Council.
- 4.3 The project that has been designed includes a dual cycle route along the A4123 and will link with a similar arrangement at the Burnt Tree junction. The Burnt Tree junction's active travel and bus infrastructure improvements are being developed currently by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and will provide an effective link between sections of the A4123, which includes the completed active travel route to Tipton Road and also to the proposed improvements to Lower City Road (see Dwg No. DR-CH-010019 at Appendix A). It is proposed that this section will be delivered in 2024/25 further to the funding agreement being made with the WMCA. The section of A4123 corridor from Lower City Road to the Hagley Road West junction in the south will be further developed further to agreement of the OBC and delivered between 2025 and 2027.
- 4.4 Alongside the cycle track which forms Option B, there are some suggested lengths of priority bus lane which are shown on plans that form Option C (attached at Appendix B) and are summarised below. At this stage they are simply suggestions, which will need the transport modelling, utilising the updated Strategic model from TfWM to validate and to show they provide not only bus priority but improvements to capacity and safety at the junctions for all transport, before they can be considered. The transport model update has only been completed recently in November 2023 and has unfortunately resulted in delays in modelling bus priority impacts along the A4123 for 4 months. In addition, consultation with TfWM and the bus service operator(s) would need to be undertaken to confirm the bus services need that priority at the various suggested locations to improve journey times, etc.



- 4.5 Improvements to the Tipton Road junction are being considered (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010073 at Appendix B). These improvements are subject to the transport modelling outcomes but will provide an effective link for cyclists and pedestrians, including a link to the canal network and provision for other transport modes using the junction.
- 4.6 Improvements to the Portway Road Junction (Dwg. No. DR-CH-010080 at Appendix B) are proposed utilising Toucan type crossings to provide a safe crossing at the junction for pedestrians and cyclists. A left turn into Portway from the A4123 is also being considered at this junction. The introduction of bus lanes will require the crossing of the cycle track to the other side of the A4123. Please note the plan detailing a preliminary design is currently being prepared by the commissioned consultant.
- 4.7 It is proposed to improve the junctions at Lower City Road/City Road with the A4123 utilising a more effective combined single junction arrangement with the A4123 providing for a safer and more efficient movement of all transport modes through that junction and is essential to support the objectives of the A4123 walk/cycle and bus measures project. This will utilise findings from the strategic transport model working and is currently ongoing (See Dwg. No. CH-DR-010078 at Appendix B).
- 4.8 The Junction at Causeway Green is being considered for improvements for the crossing of the cyclists and pedestrians utilising the new infrastructure. An improvement to all vehicle movements including buses to improve capacity and reduce queuing will also be reviewed further to completion of the strategic transport modelling. There are some suggested bus priority measures shown on the plan, but will require removal of several trees, which is a measure we are seeking to avoid if possible or mitigate by planting new trees at a ratio of two trees for every tree removed if this is deemed feasible and viable (See Dwg. No. DR-CH-010083 at Appendix B).



4.9 The junction at Pound Road is being reviewed and traffic signals timing optimised to provide for the most effective movement of the new active travel measures and the other transport modes using the junction. There could be consideration of bus priority as shown on the (See Dwg. No. DR-CH-010082 at Appendix B), but would require some mature tree removal, which is not favourable. The short section shown going south might be more beneficial. A tree mitigation strategy is being considered to assess which options are deliverable.

4.10 Improvements to Queensway and Brandhall Road junctions (please see Appendix C) are proposed to support this project, with a summary of suggested measures as follows (these will be reviewed further using transport modelling to determine the most effective solution):

- more effective junction signalling linking the junctions with provision of Toucan type crossings to facilitate a safer movement for pedestrians and cyclists crossing to schools and local amenities.
- The inclusion of right turns into Queensway, Parsons Hill and Brandhall Road from the A4123. This will improve capacity and safety for all users of the junction and will also support improved bus journey times.
- Relocation of some bus stops nearer to signals and pedestrian desire lines to encourage a more safe and greater use of the bus services.

Suggested bus lanes shown on the plan, which if validated through transport modelling, and considered beneficial, would require modification to side road entry to the junction to allow for the introduction of the bus lane. A consideration of City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding for early delivery of this junction is being made and would support the OBC submission to WMCA for SAF approval.

4.11 The Junction at Bleakhouse Road is being reviewed further to the transport modelling and will consider the introduction of Turn Left lanes, which will improve safety and movement for all users including improved journey times for bus services. There is a suggestion of bus lanes to both sides from this junction to the Hagley Road West junction (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010086 at Appendix B).

4.12 The potential to introduce a Mobility Hub (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010088 at Appendix B) is being investigated at the junction of Hagley Road West



and the A4123. Opportunities for Electric Vehicle charging points, cycle parking, and cycle hire docks to be implemented in one location as part of the hub are being investigated. It is proposed to keep as much of the existing green area as possible and no trees will be removed in this proposal. It will provide opportunity for greater integration of transport modes with use of active travel and sustainable transport and providing links to nearby bus services to other centres along the A4123 corridor and into Birmingham and Halesowen along the A456 corridor.

- 4.13 Please note there are a number of other side roads joining the A4123 which are being carefully considered for the priority of pedestrians and cyclists crossing junctions. There has been a Speed Limit Review Study undertaken which is reaching its conclusion and may recommend the reduction of speed limits along certain sections of the corridor. However, the keeping of a free-flowing traffic where possible is also being included in any recommendations further to the review with other options to calm traffic and encourage safe turning of all transport modes in and out of side roads being considered as well.
- 4.14 The use of a 'CYCLOPS' approach is also being considered for possible use at junctions along the corridor and may possibly include junctions in Sandwell. It is an innovative design approach utilising an external orbital cycle track separating cyclists from vehicular traffic in time and space, enabling multi modal transport conflicts at junctions to be managed safely. It has been successfully utilised in the City of Manchester and other Greater Manchester towns. Its use however would be subject to the transport modelling completion to ensure it would not reduce capacity at junctions along the A4123 corridor, as well as meeting design safety standards.
- 4.13 This project will involve the challenge of existing trees and some other planting clashing with the proposed cycle route. This is recognised in the Sandwell area and proposals are looking to keep as many of the existing trees as possible. Design considerations have been made to the cycle track width and its route to limit tree removal. However, in the event some trees need removing, that may also be diseased/damaged in some way, they will be replaced in a greater number by appropriate healthy trees as near to the original location as possible. A tree mitigation strategy for the project is currently being developed, which will encompass the recommendations of current tree strategies along the corridor and includes Sandwell Borough Council's tree strategy. A consideration is also be made to request CRSTS funding early to plant



trees at an early stage that are needed to replace those that will need to be removed for project delivery.

- 4.14 As part of the OBC work the links to off road routes provided by Sustrans, for example routes NCN 54 and NCN 81, which could link effectively with the new cycle route on the A4123 will be explored to encourage a greater take up cycling, especially for short journeys.. The promotional initiative for this project will seek to encourage the development of new (and support existing) leisure events and facilities to nurture and develop a culture of cycling and active travel for all and include those that do not currently cycle.

Funding and timescales

- 4.15 This scheme has £29.0 million City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding to deliver the corridor by 2027. The section of the A4123 from Burnt Tree to Lower City Road (excluding the Lower City Road Junction) is proposed for delivery in 2024/25 by Sandwell Borough Council as early funding has been allocated for this section. The remaining length of the A4123 corridor in Sandwell area will be delivered in sections during the period 2025 to 2027. Minimising disruption to all users of the A4123 and providing Network Resilience is essential and Black Country Transport and Sandwell Borough Council officers are working with TfWM officers to ensure this achieved during delivery stages of the project. It is proposed that the Full Business Case, which follows SAF approval of the Outline Business Case by WMCA will provide a more defined programme for delivery.
- 4.16 The entire corridor is expected to cost more than the £29.0 million allocated. A prioritisation exercise will take place to ascertain which section of the scheme will be delivered in this CRSTS period. However, it is requested that approval in principle is given for the entire scheme in Sandwell so that delivery can subsequently happen in sections according to funding allocations. The remaining scheme will be delivered using additional funding to be sought through a subsequent round of CRSTS or other Government Funding.



Consultation

- 4.17 The scheme in full has not yet been subject to public consultation. A comprehensive public consultation exercise is planned for early 2024 to ascertain local views around the proposed interventions. This will be supported by a public exhibition at locations in both Sandwell and Dudley.
- 4.18 Stakeholder agreement to the scheme has been sought previously through the assurance and appraisal process at the WMCA who have approved the Strategic Outline Business Case. Following this Cabinet review, the Outline Business Case will be submitted to the WMCA for approval, allowing for the release of funding for the final development stage (Full Business Case), and for some funding for early delivery of some elements of the scheme.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 One alternative option is to not continue with the scheme and reallocate the funding back to the WMCA for spending on a different scheme. This is not recommended, as it would limit the essential connections to nearby communities and amenities for all users for business, education, and other services. There is no guarantee that Sandwell Council would be able to retain the funding for a different scheme, and therefore Sandwell residents may be disadvantaged against other areas in the region.
- 5.2 Another alternative is to make significant changes to the scheme as it is drawn currently. This is not recommended as it would make it difficult to deliver by 2027 and would risk the funding being reclaimed.



6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The project will be funded through devolved allocations to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as part of its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. All fees, including SMBC staff time recharges, are including the estimated scheme cost.</p> <p>Currently £500,000 is allocated to complete the development (Outline Business Case) of the project along the A4123 corridor and £1,200,000 for the design and delivery of the Sandwell section, Burnt Tree to Lower City Road.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The scheme involves the Council carrying out works in its capacity as Local Highway Authority.</p> <p>The proposed scope of works covered under this report are in furtherance of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), which is overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT). Since the CRSTS programme was confirmed in April 2022, Sandwell officers alongside counterparts from neighbouring authorities involved in the scheme continue to co-ordinate programme planning and delivery arrangements. This will be reflected in any necessary notices or procurement works.</p> <p>The grant agreements have been reviewed and it is confirmed that these are in line with the Council's objectives and that the necessary authority exists to enter into all necessary legal transactions in relation to these arrangements.</p> <p>The delegations described in the report are in accordance with paragraph 1.3 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Constitution.</p>



Risk:	A full Risk Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.
Equality:	<p>An Equality impact Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.</p> <p>The project will support marginalised and vulnerable groups providing greater opportunity for all to travel to services and jobs safely and affordably. It will also provide opportunity for greater social interaction between all members of the community.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The project includes measures aimed to encourage the use of sustainable, non-car, modes. This will contribute towards improved air quality.</p> <p>The active travel measures along a segregated route for walking and cycling will also give a greater opportunity for safe and effective exercise providing proven physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits to the local communities.</p>
Social Value:	<p>There are no social value implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.</p> <p>When the scheme moves to the delivery stage, the appointed contractor(s) will be required to adhere to the Council's Social Value policies.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Decarbonisation of the transport system is central to the government's aims and objectives for CRSTS. It is also a principal theme within the West Midlands Local Transport Plan. All projects within the programme need to demonstrate how they address climate change and contribute to decarbonisation through their business cases. This project will provide opportunity for a greater use of active travel and sustainable bus services options instead of car use for such journeys providing many benefits, which include reduced carbon outputs and improved air quality, reduced car use and reduced congestion particularly at pinch points along the A4123 at daily peak times in morning and evening, greater journey time reliability</p>



	and resilience and a reduced journey time variability with the bus travel. An outcome of the project will be an improved environment.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no implications for Corporate Parenting responsibilities arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

7. Appendix A

Option B (Cycle route and limited bus priority)

Dwg. No. DR-CH-010016 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010017 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010018 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010019 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010020 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010022 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010023 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010024 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010025 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010026 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010027 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010028 PO3

Appendix B

Option C (Cycle Route and Full bus priority)

Dwg. No. DR-CH-010075 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010076 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010077 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010078 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010079 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010080 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010081 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010082 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010083 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010084 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010085 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010086 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010087 PO1.01



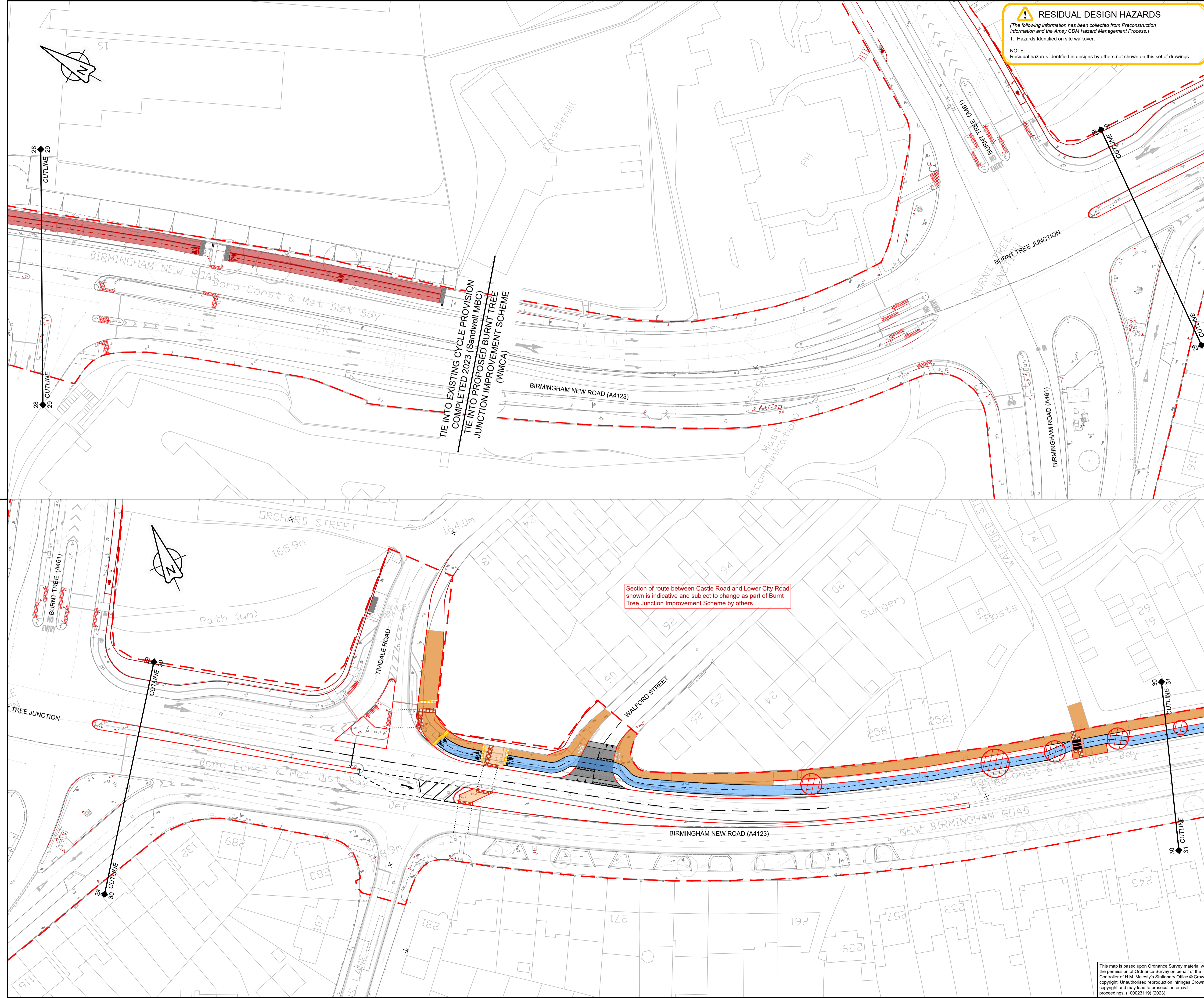
Appendix C – Indicative layout for Wolverhampton Road/Queensway Junction

8. Background Papers

West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan: Movement for Growth (2016)
Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) approved by WMCA (2023)



This page is intentionally left blank



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P04	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	JL	26/01/2024
		Checked:	Date:
		LM	30/01/2024
		Approved:	Date:
		SC	30/01/2024
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	MV	03/11/2023
		Checked:	Date:
		VR	15/11/2023
		Approved:	Date:
		LM	15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	VR	03/11/2023
		Checked:	Date:
		JL	03/11/2023
		Approved:	Date:
		LM	03/11/2023
Designed:	Date:	Drawn:	Date:
JL	05/07/2023	RC	05/07/2023
Checked:	Date:	Checked:	Date:
LM	12/09/2023	LM	12/09/2023
Approved:	Date:	Approved:	Date:
SC	13/09/2023	SC	13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 16 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010016
Location	Type	Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P04

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junctions types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn	Date
P04	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	JL	26/01/2024
		LM	30/01/2024
		SC	30/01/2024
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities	MV	03/11/2023
		VR	15/11/2023
		LM	15/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	VR	03/11/2023
		JL	03/11/2023
		LM	03/11/2023
		JL	05/07/2023
		RC	05/07/2023
		LM	12/09/2023
		SC	13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

part of **bct** Black Country Transport

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

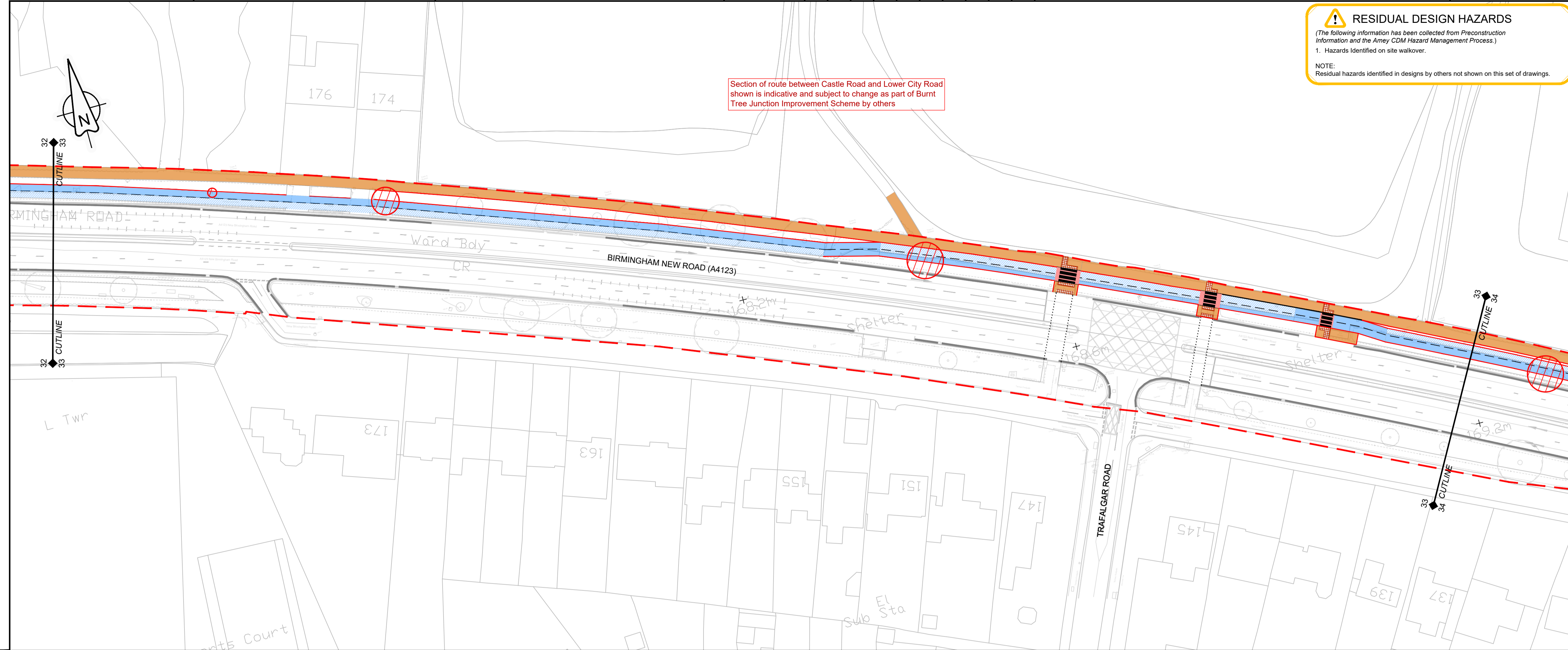
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 17 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010017
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P04

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



Section of route between Castle Road and Lower City Road shown is indicative and subject to change as part of Burnt Tree Junction Improvement Scheme by others

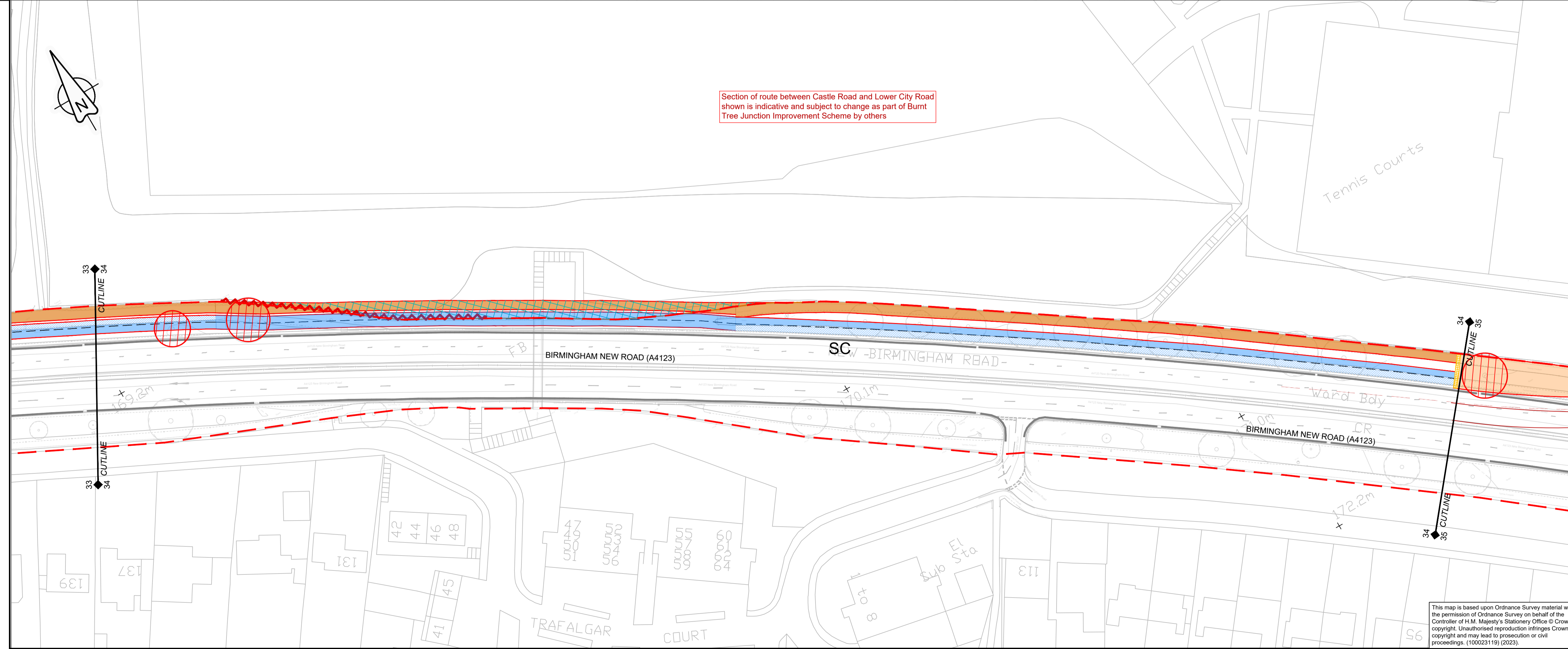
RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junctions types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P04	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	JL	26/01/2024
		Checked: LM	30/01/2024
		Approved: SC	30/01/2024
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	MV	03/11/2023
		Checked: VR	15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	VR	03/11/2023
		Checked: JL	03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	03/11/2023
Designed:	JL	Date:	05/07/2023
Drawn:	RC	Date:	05/07/2023
Checked:	LM	Date:	12/09/2023
Approved:	SC	Date:	13/09/2023



Section of route between Castle Road and Lower City Road shown is indicative and subject to change as part of Burnt Tree Junction Improvement Scheme by others

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL
 Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport
 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

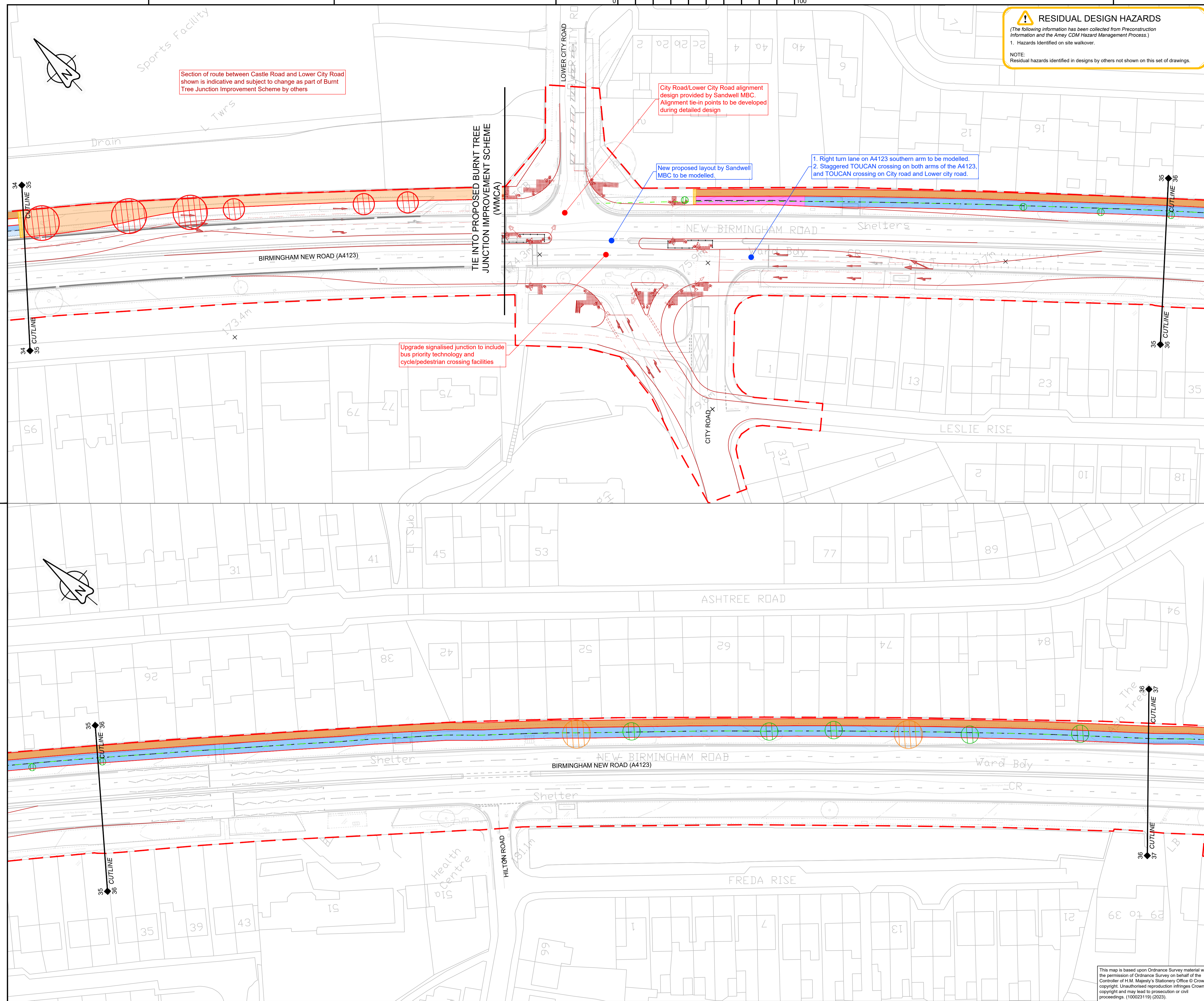
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 18 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010018
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P04

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junctions types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at times may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWI memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P04	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	JL	26/01/2024
		Checked:	Date:
		LM	30/01/2024
		Approved:	Date:
		SC	30/01/2024
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	MV	03/11/2023
		Checked:	Date:
		VR	15/11/2023
		Approved:	Date:
		LM	15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	VR	03/11/2023
		Checked:	Date:
		JL	03/11/2023
		Approved:	Date:
		LM	03/11/2023
Designed:	Date:	Drawn:	Date:
JL	05/07/2023	RC	05/07/2023
Checked:	Date:	Checked:	Date:
LM	12/09/2023	LM	12/09/2023
Approved:	Date:	Approved:	Date:
SC	13/09/2023	SC	13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

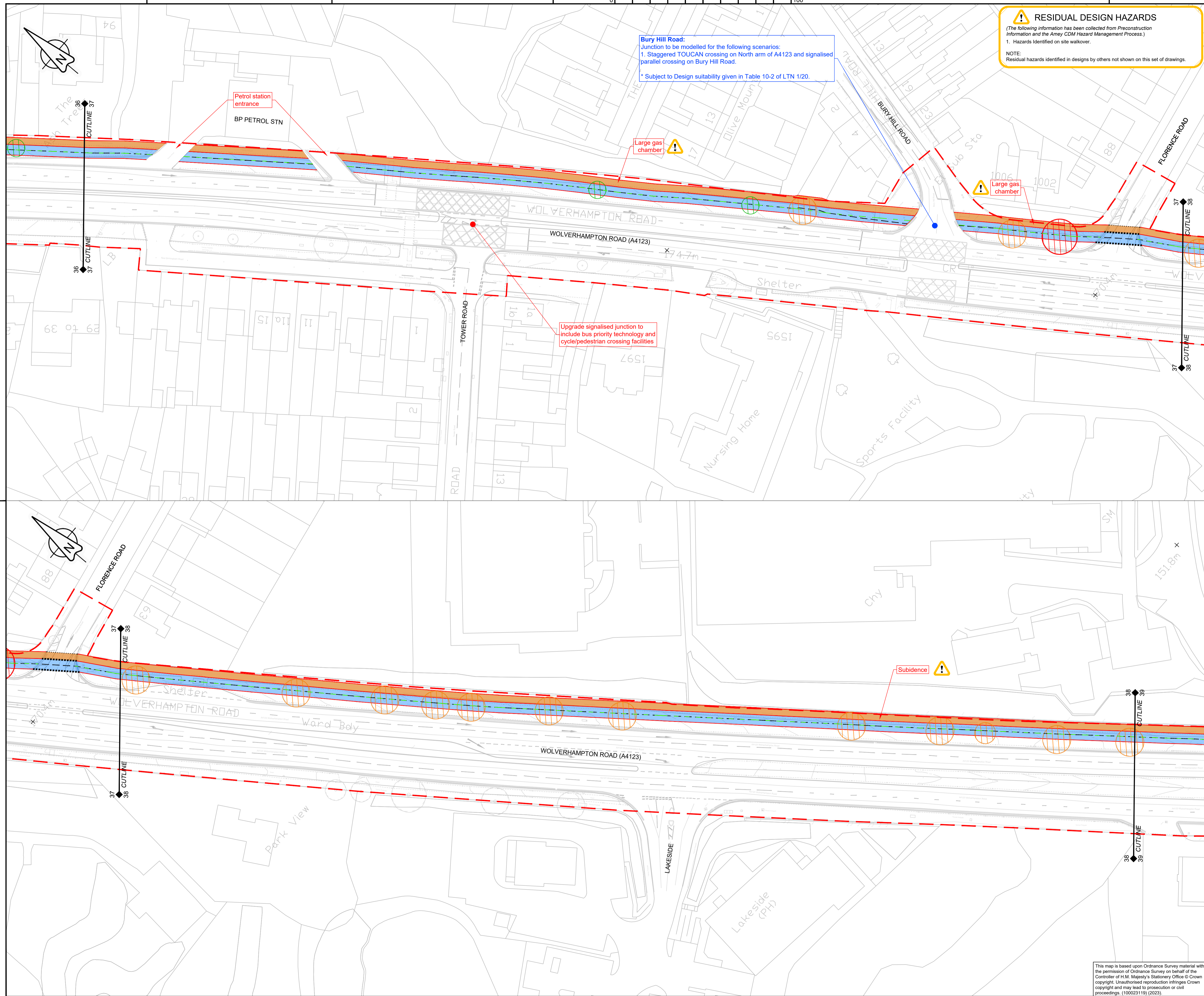
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 19 of 29**

Project Ref. No:	Scale:
COMHA1CWC018	1:500 @ A1
Stage:	Dimensions:
Preliminary Design	m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010019
Location	Type	Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P04

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junctions types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

part of **bct** Black Country Transport

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 20 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010020
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are 1 indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junctions types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

part of **bct** Black Country Transport

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

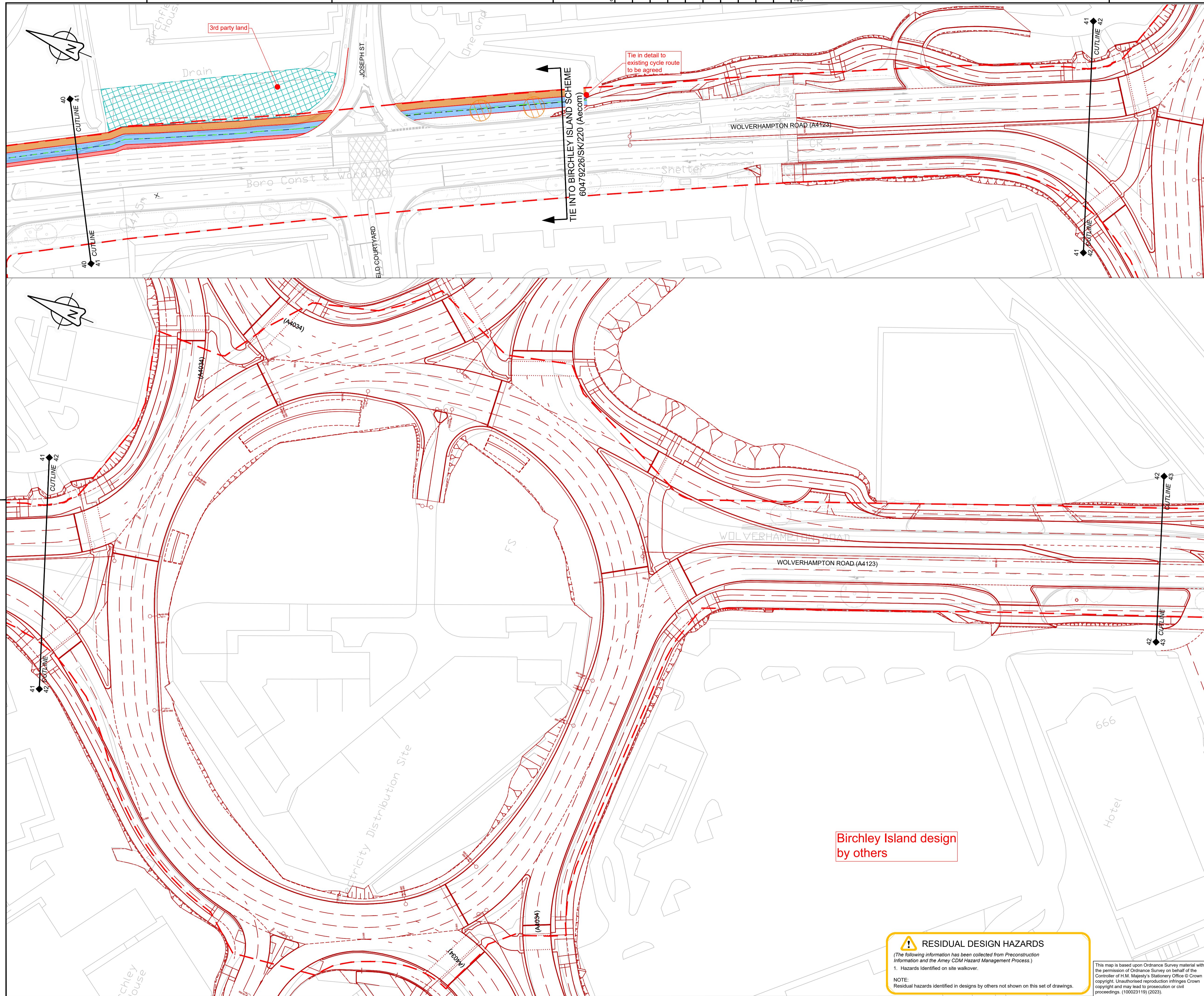
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 21 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010021
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



- NOTES:**
1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 9. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	MV	Date:	03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked:	VR	Date:	15/11/2023
		Approved:	LM	Date:	15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	VR	Date:	03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked:	JL	Date:	03/11/2023
		Approved:	LM	Date:	03/11/2023
Designed:	JL	Date:	05/07/2023		
Drawn:	RC	Date:	05/07/2023		
Checked:	LM	Date:	12/09/2023		
Approved:	SC	Date:	13/09/2023		

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
Option B - Desirable
Sheet 22 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

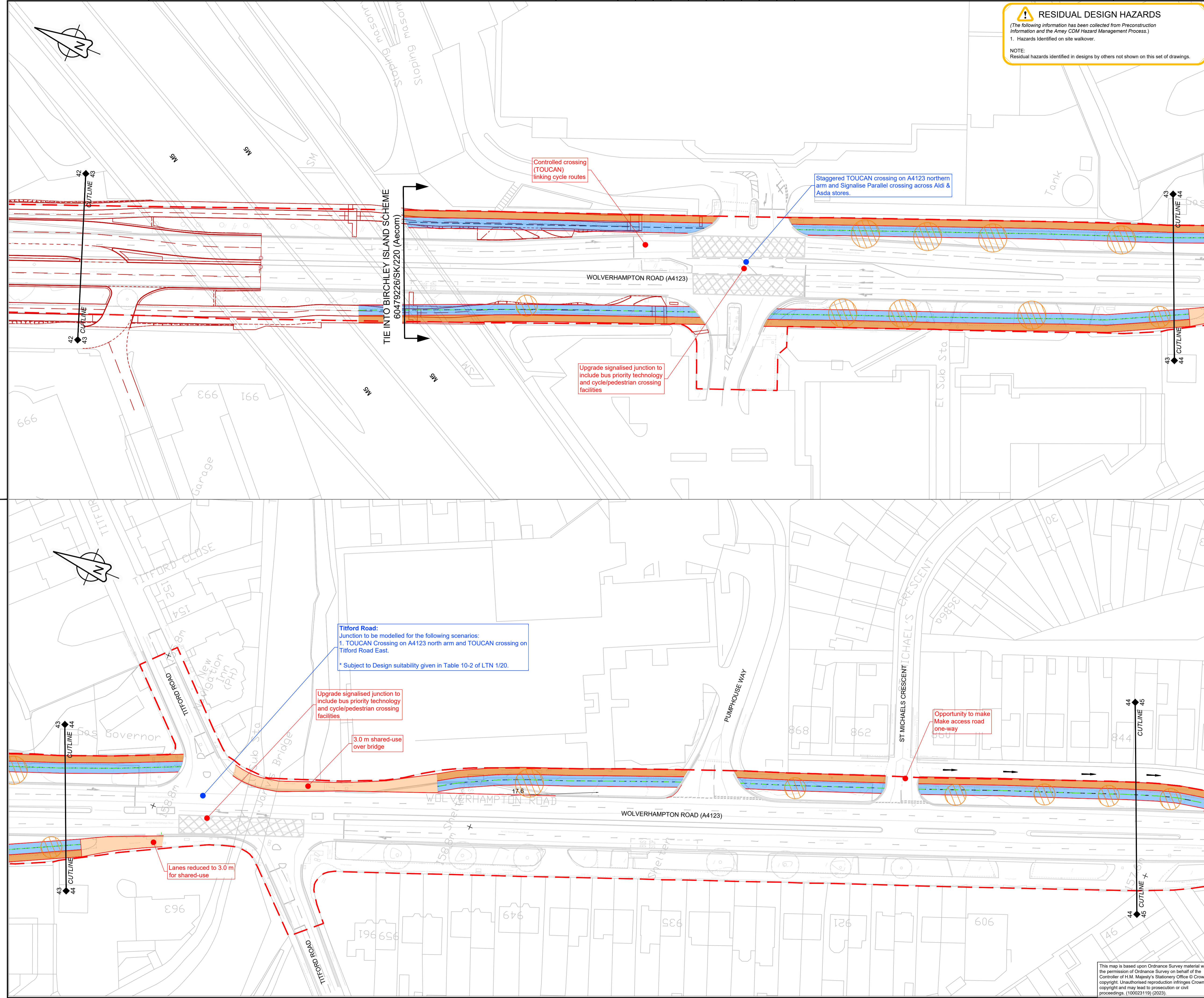
Drawing Number
Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010022
Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	S2	Suitability Description	Suitable For Information	Revision	P03
-------------	----	-------------------------	--------------------------	----------	-----

RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
1. Hazards Identified on site walkover.
NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).

Birchley Island design by others



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

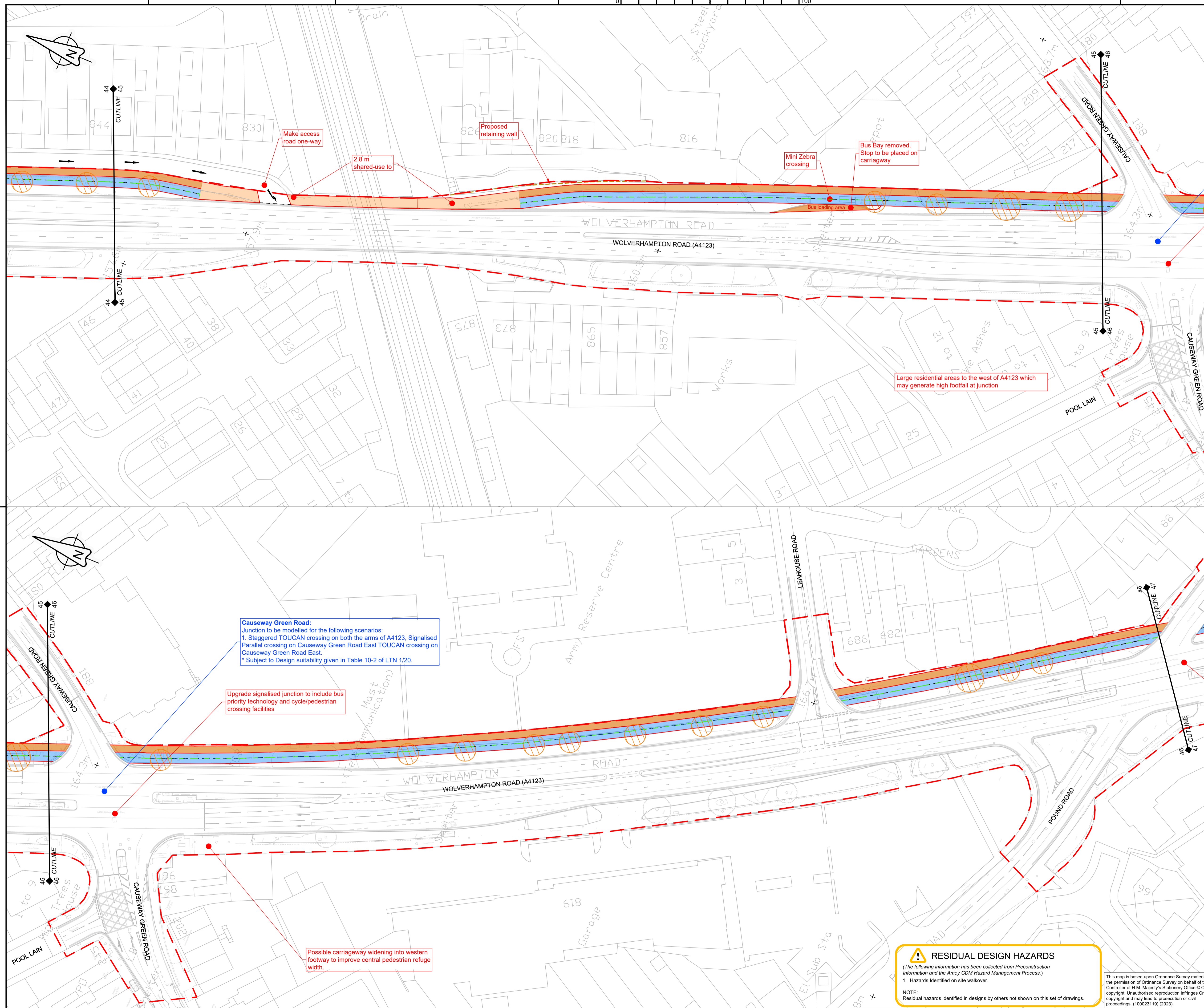
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 23 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010023
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
Option B - Desirable
Sheet 24 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010024
Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)

- Hazards Identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

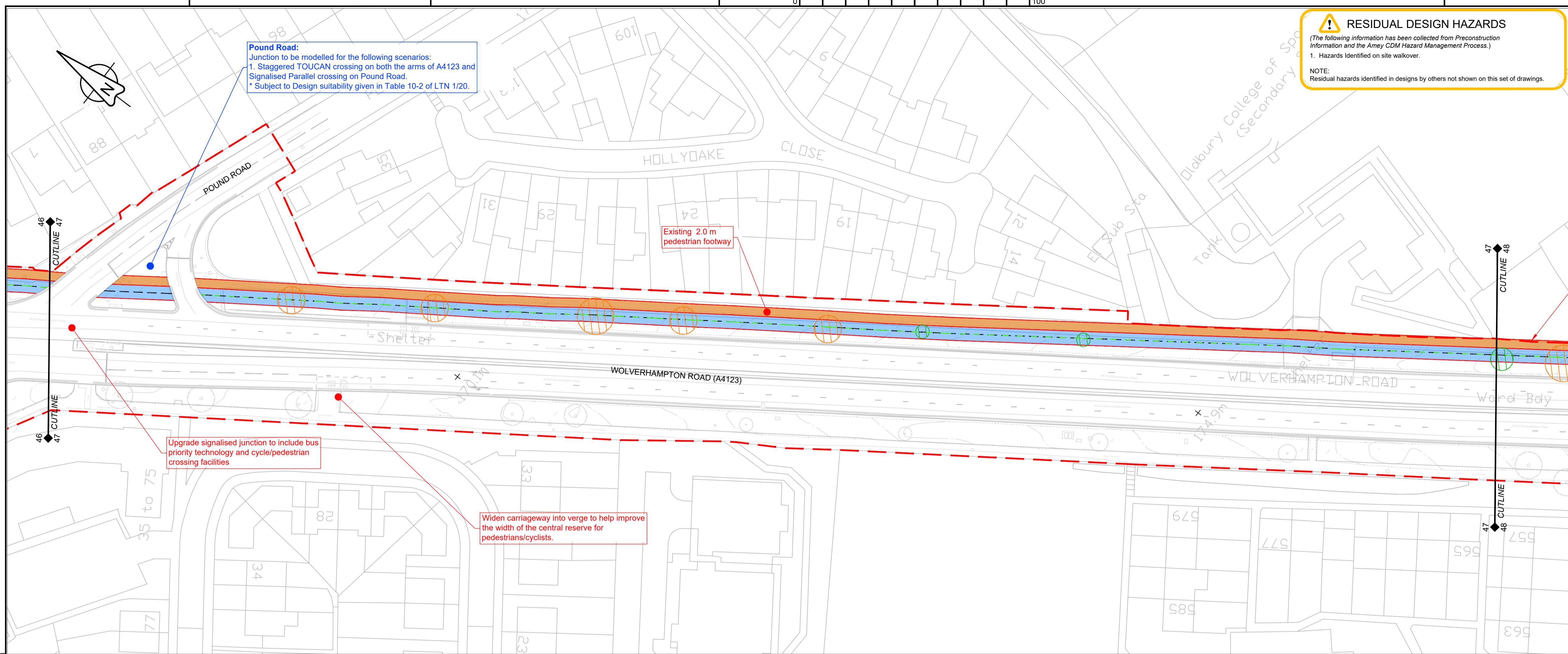
This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).

Causeway Green Road:
Junction to be modelled for the following scenarios:
1. Staggered TOUCAN crossing on both the arms of A4123, Signalled Parallel crossing on Causeway Green Road East TOUCAN crossing on Causeway Green Road East.
* Subject to Design suitability given in Table 10-2 of LTN 1/20.

Upgrade signalled junction to include bus priority technology and cycle/pedestrian crossing facilities

Possible carriageway widening into western footway to improve central pedestrian refuge width.

Large residential areas to the west of A4123 which may generate high footfall at junction



Pound Road:
Junction to be modelled for the following scenarios:
1. Staggered TOUCAN crossing on both the arms of A4123 and Signalised Parallel crossing on Pound Road.
* Subject to Design suitability given in Table 10-2 of LTN 1/20.

Existing 2.0 m pedestrian footway

Upgrade signalised junction to include bus priority technology and cycle/pedestrian crossing facilities

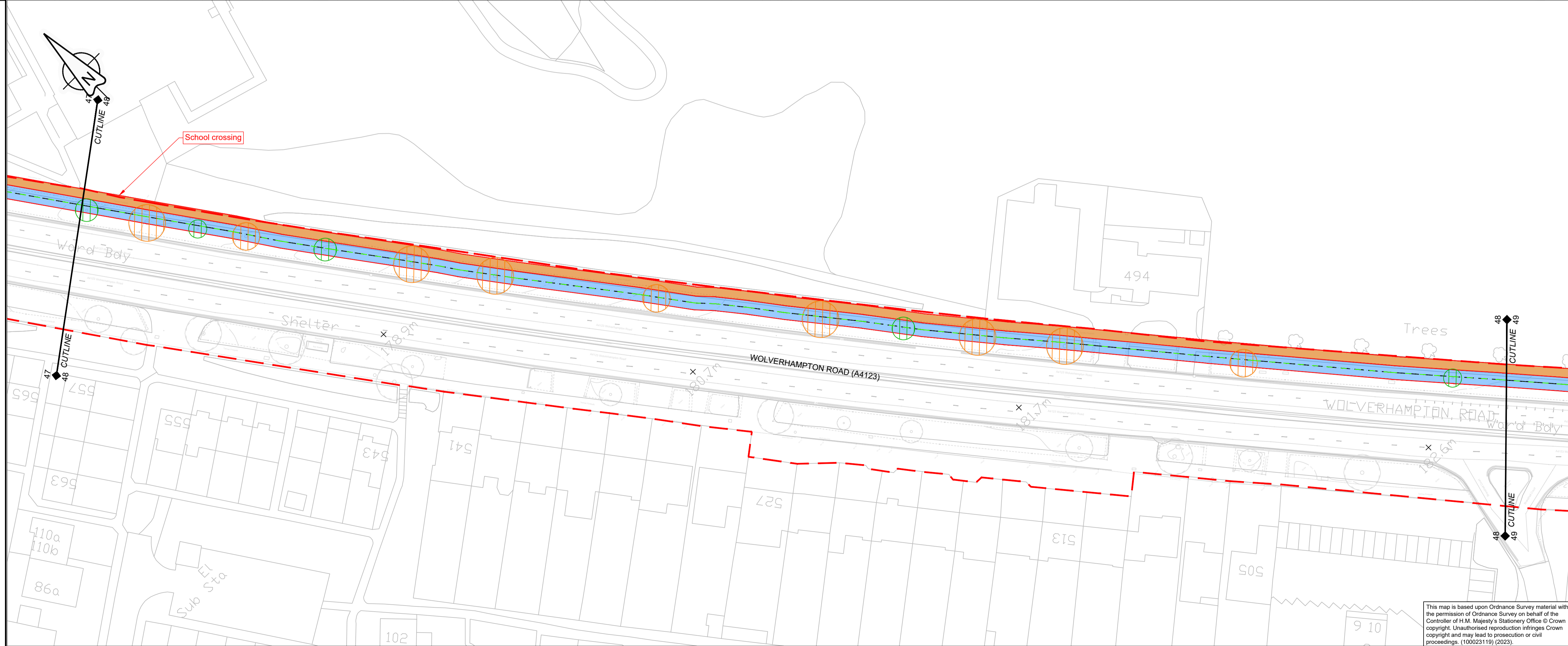
Widen carriageway into verge to help improve the width of the central reserve for pedestrians/cyclists.

RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
- Proposed shared
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority
- Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.



School crossing

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

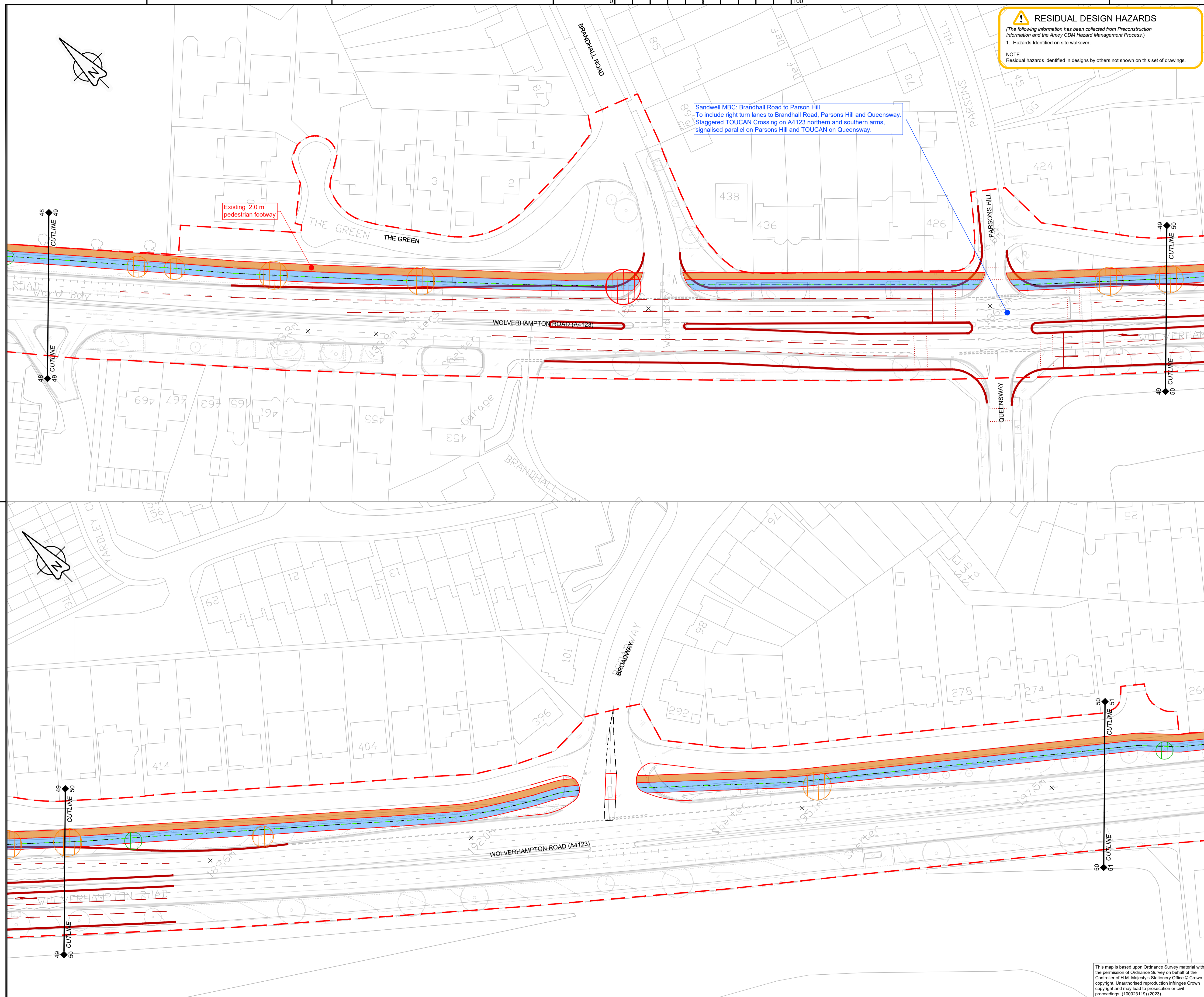
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
Option B - Desirable
Sheet 25 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010025
Location	Type	Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWI memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

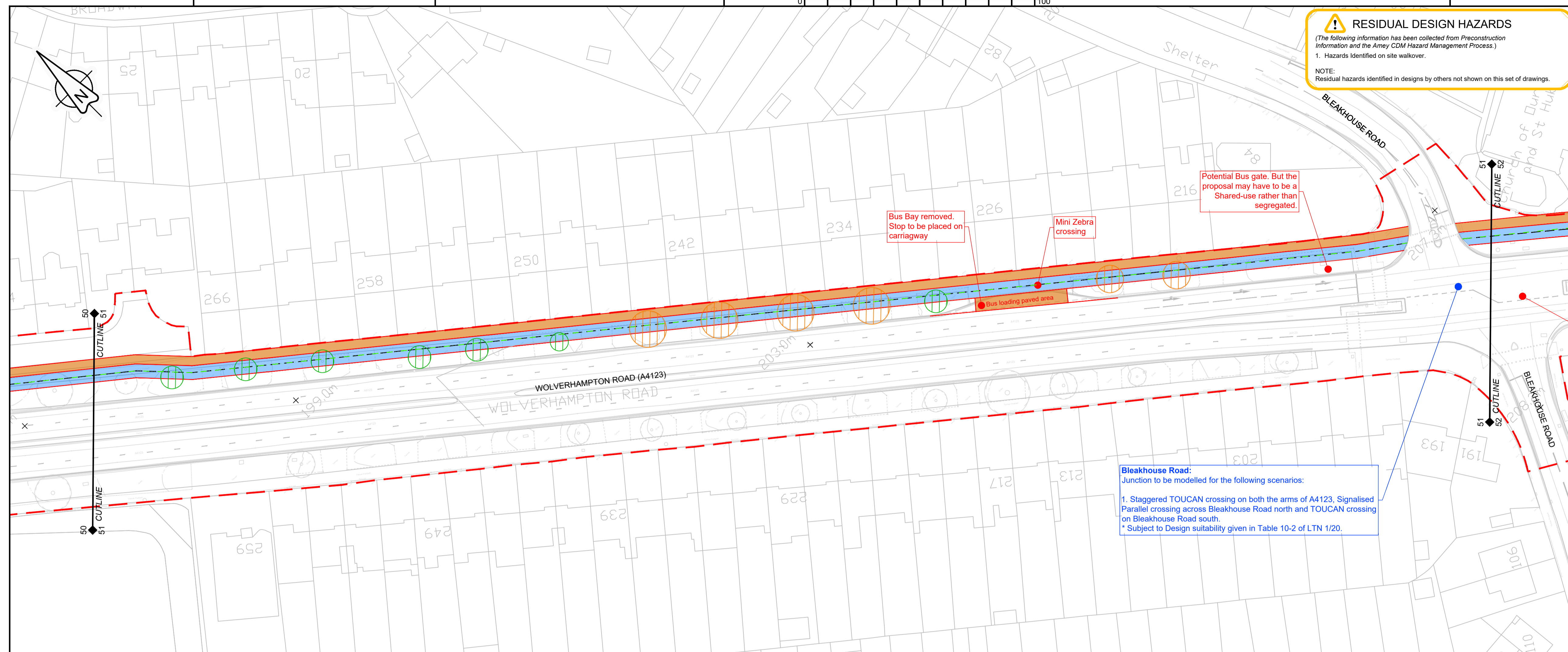
Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 26 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010026
Location	Type	Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).

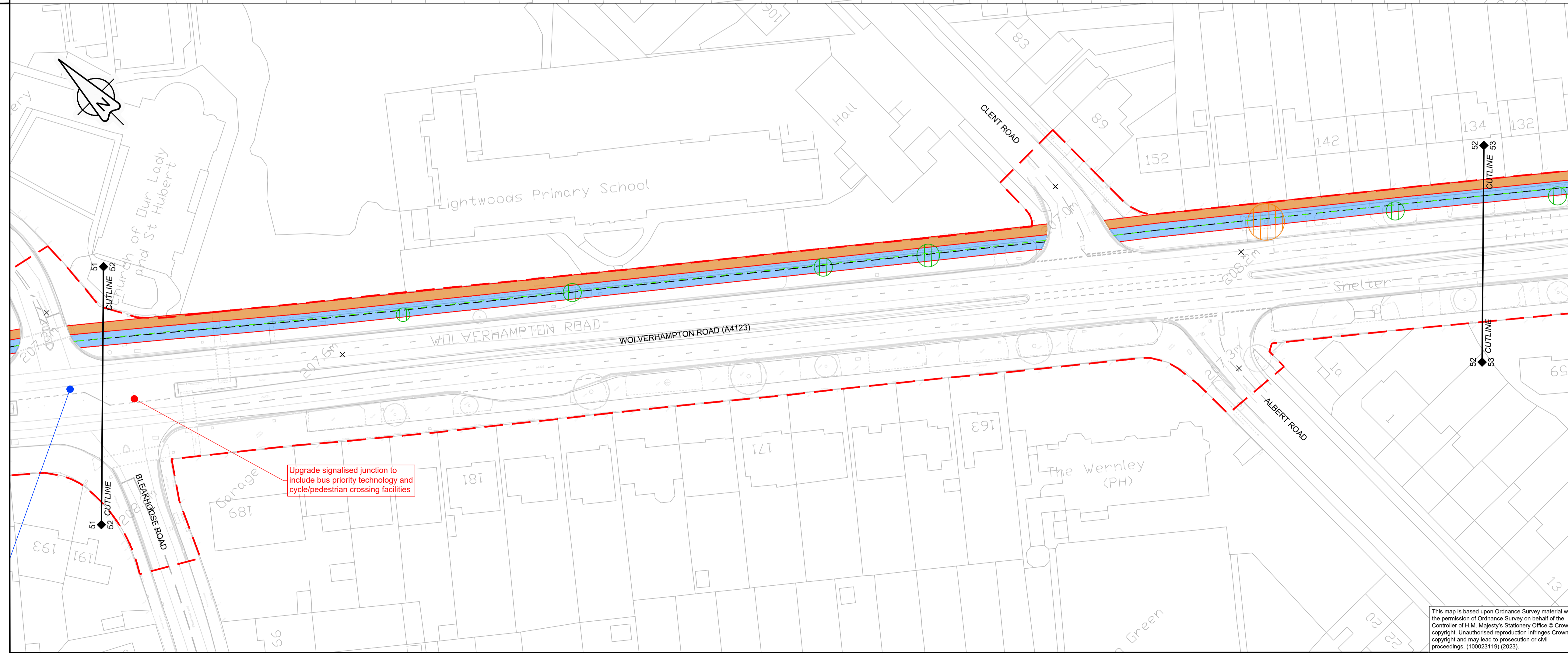


RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.


- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPi (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycle way. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Bleakhouse Road:
 Junction to be modelled for the following scenarios:
 1. Staggered TOUCAN crossing on both the arms of A4123. Signalised Parallel crossing across Bleakhouse Road north and TOUCAN crossing on Bleakhouse Road south.
 * Subject to Design suitability given in Table 10-2 of LTN 1/20.



Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

 www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

 part of 


Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 27 of 29**

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR- C - 010027
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).




RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - For drawing key refer to sheet 1.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed Road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the Bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - All the Bus Stops along the Corridor will have RTPI (Real Time Passenger Information) and CCTV installed.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at times may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m (unless shown)
 - Proposed shared
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Refer sheets 8, 12 and 22)
 - Proposed mature tree to be removed
 - Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
 - Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
 - Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
 - Proposed alteration to side road priority
 - Indicative line showing LTN 1/20 absolute minimum width of segregated footway/cycleway. Shown for information as part of tree loss mitigation review.

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: MV	Date: 03/11/2023
P03	A line added to show absolute minimum width of facilities.	Checked: VR	Date: 15/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 15/11/2023
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn: VR	Date: 03/11/2023
P02	Junction modelling notes & third party designs added	Checked: JL	Date: 03/11/2023
		Approved: LM	Date: 03/11/2023
Designed: JL	Date: 05/07/2023	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/07/2023
Checked: LM	Date: 12/09/2023	Approved: SC	Date: 13/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

 www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

 part of 


Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
**General Arrangement
 Option B - Desirable
 Sheet 28 of 29**

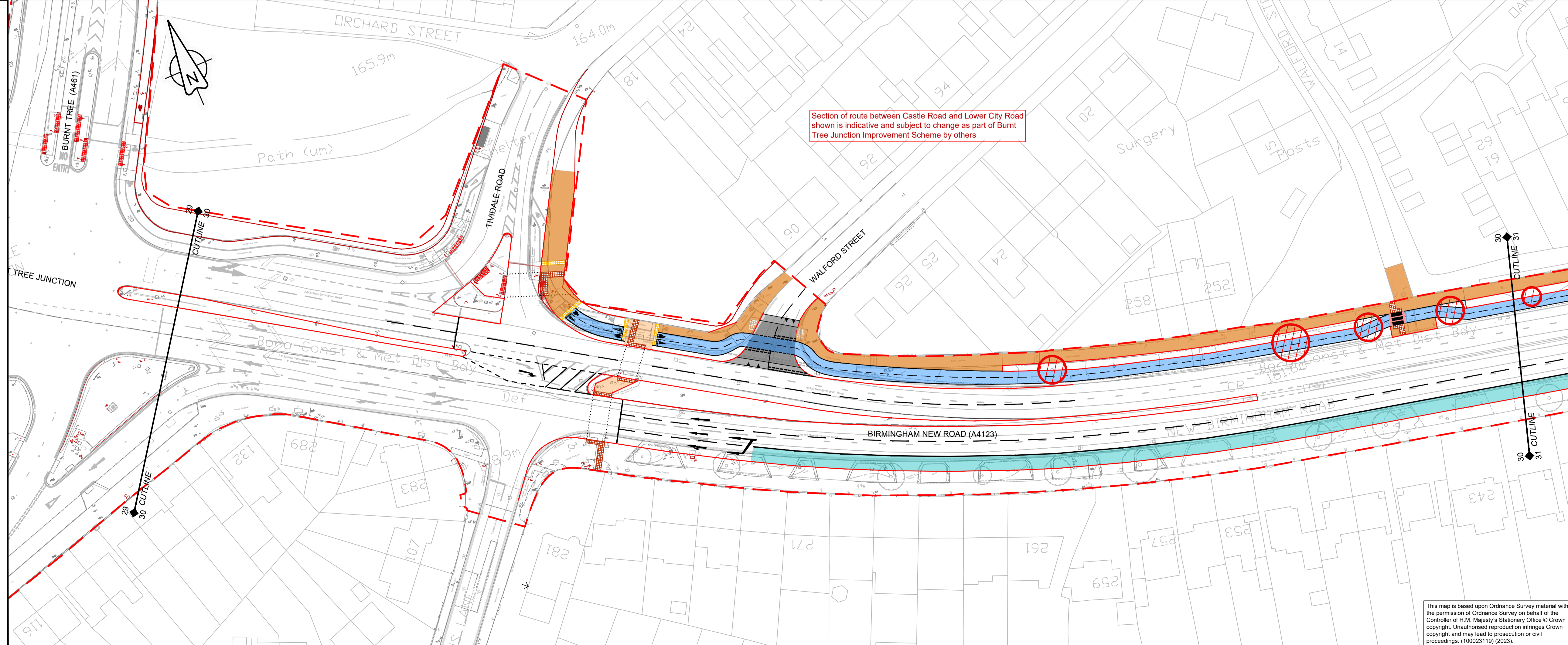
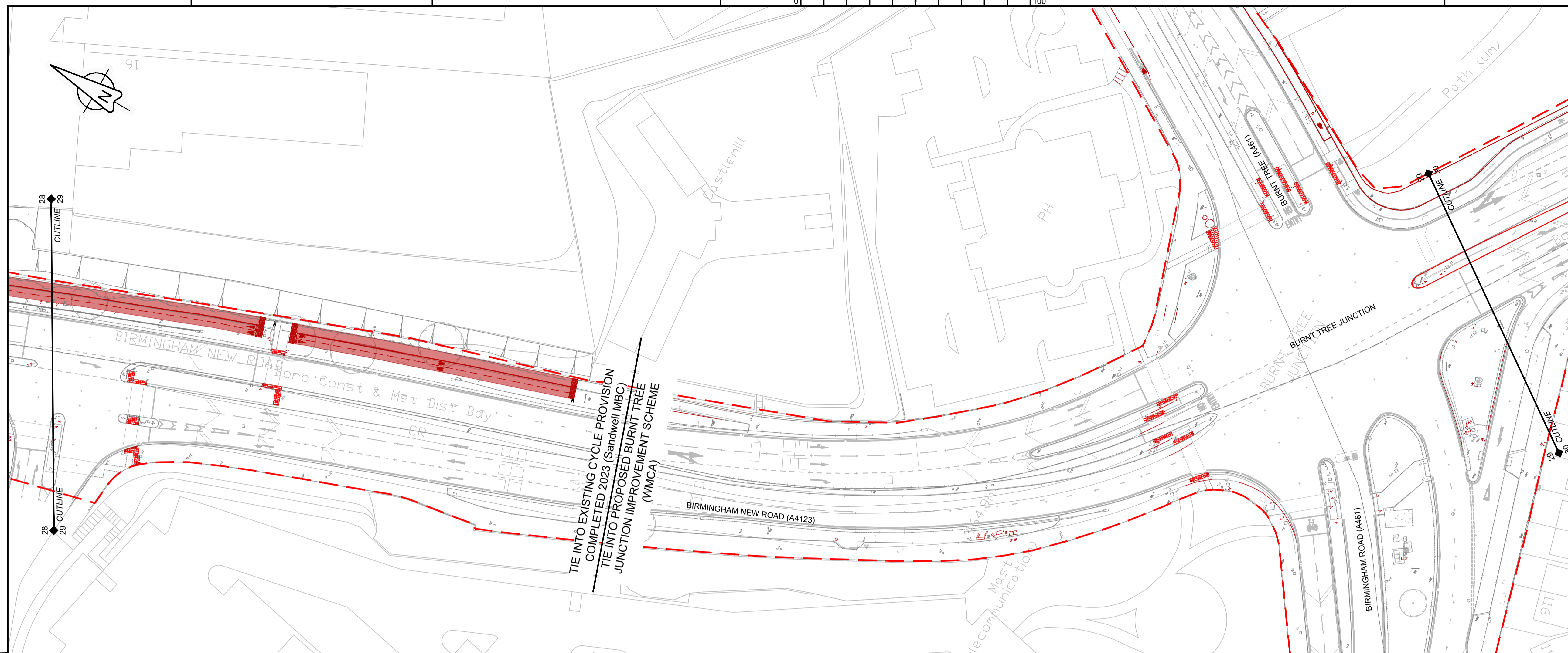
Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010028
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P03

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).

This page is intentionally left blank



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- - - Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	
P02	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	
	Drawn: JL	Date: 26/01/2024
	Checked: LM	Date: 30/01/2024
	Approved: SC	Date: 30/01/2024
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023
Designed: --	Date: --/--/----	
Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023	
Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023	
Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Dudley part of **tct**
Black Country
Transport

Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

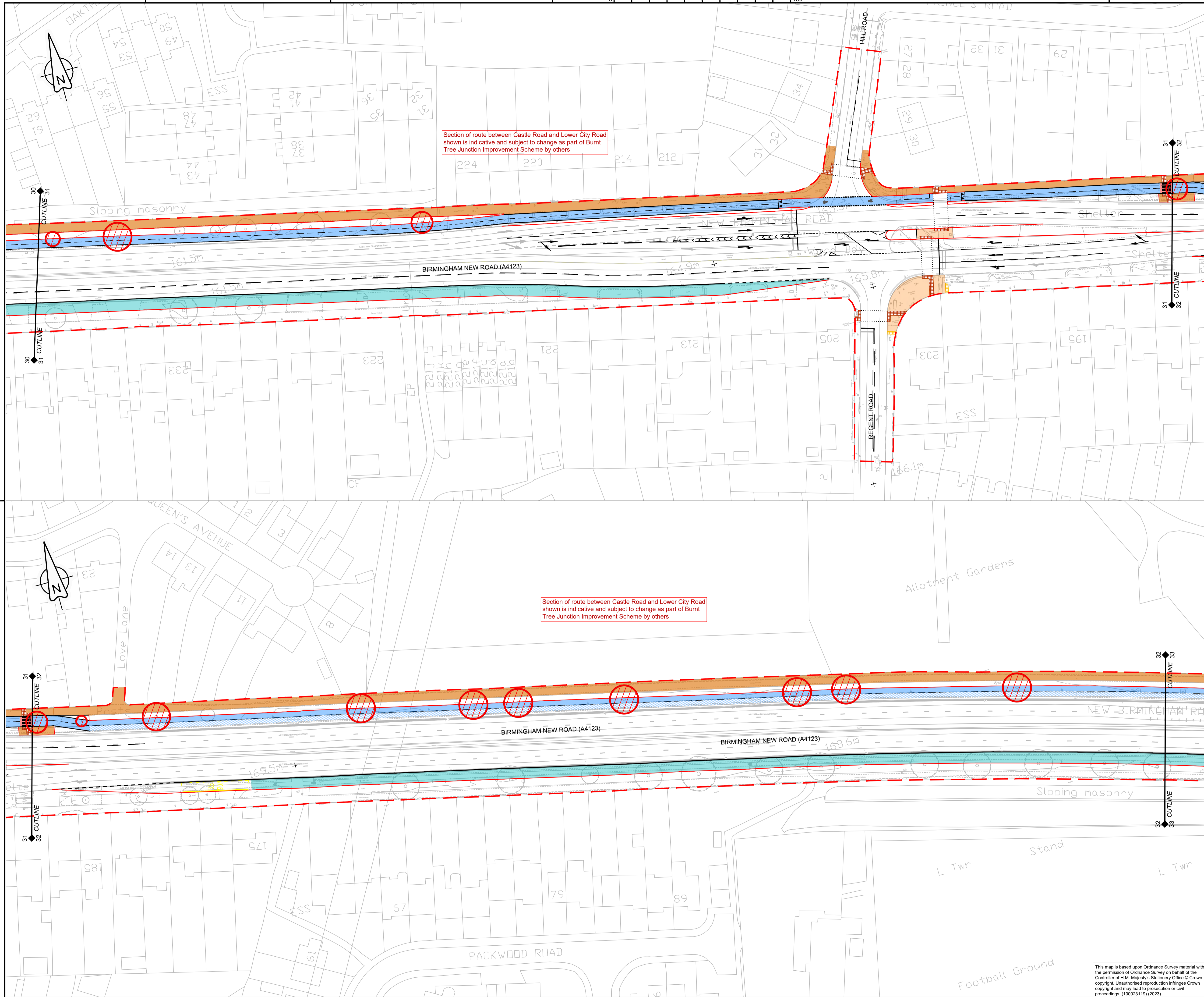
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 16 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010075
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P02

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



Section of route between Castle Road and Lower City Road shown is indicative and subject to change as part of Burnt Tree Junction Improvement Scheme by others

Section of route between Castle Road and Lower City Road shown is indicative and subject to change as part of Burnt Tree Junction Improvement Scheme by others

RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS


(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P02	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	
	Drawn: JL	Date: 26/01/2024
	Checked: LM	Date: 30/01/2024
	Approved: SC	Date: 30/01/2024
Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023
Designed: --	Date: --/--/----	
Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023	
Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023	
Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023	

Copyright in this design © Amey

 www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

 Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport


Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

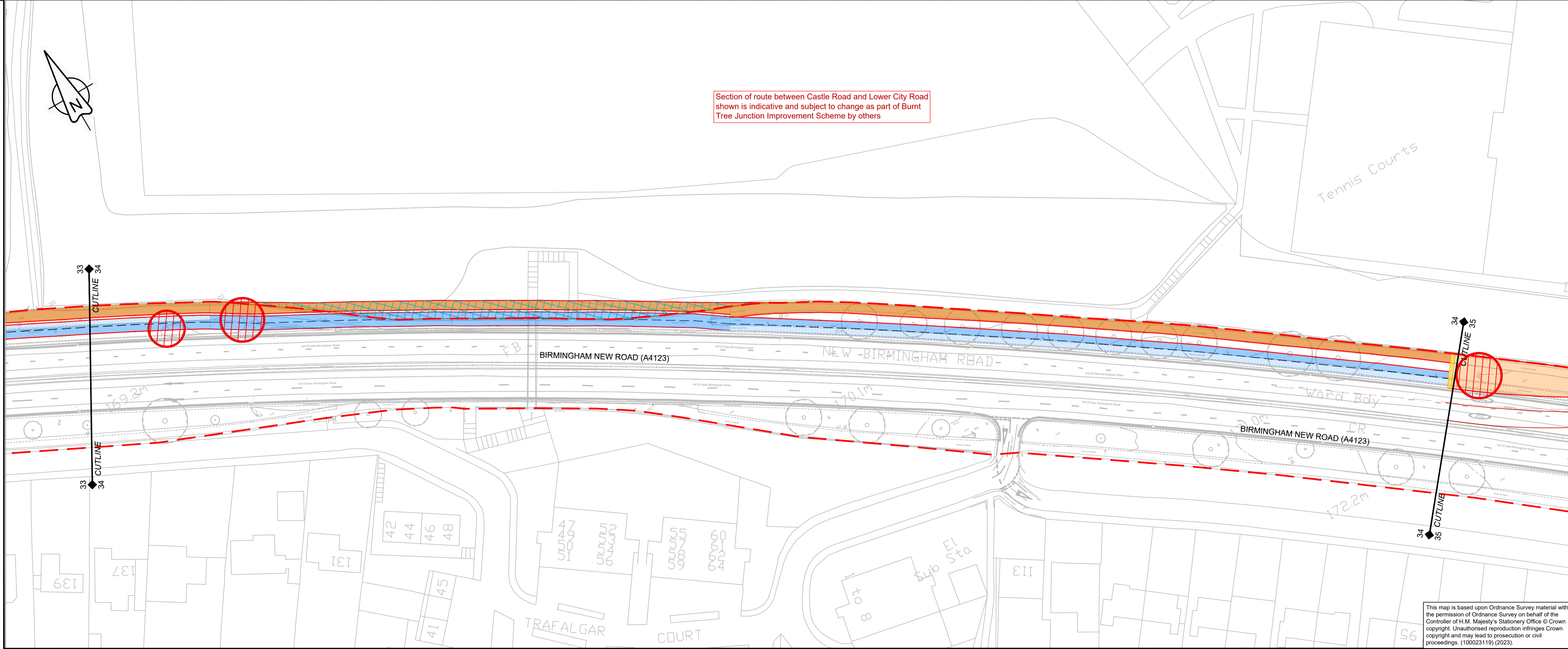
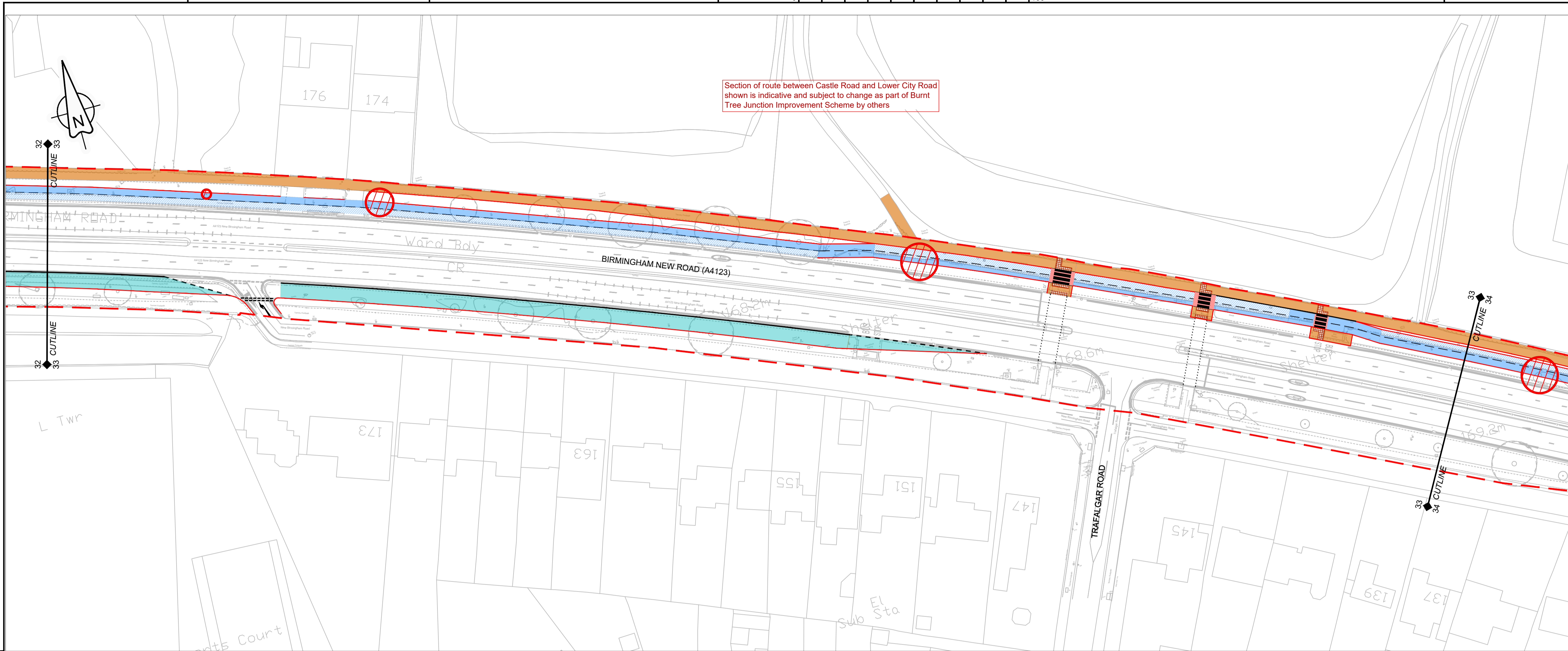
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 17 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010076
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P02

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- - - Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P02	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	JL	26/01/2024
		Checked: LM	30/01/2024
		Approved: SC	30/01/2024
Revision	Revision comment	Drawn:	Date:
P01.01	For Information Only	RC	05/09/2023
		Checked: LM	11/09/2023
		Approved: SC	12/09/2023
Designed:	--	Date:	--/--
Drawn:	RC	Date:	05/09/2023
Checked:	LM	Date:	11/09/2023
Approved:	SC	Date:	12/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct
Black Country
Transport

Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

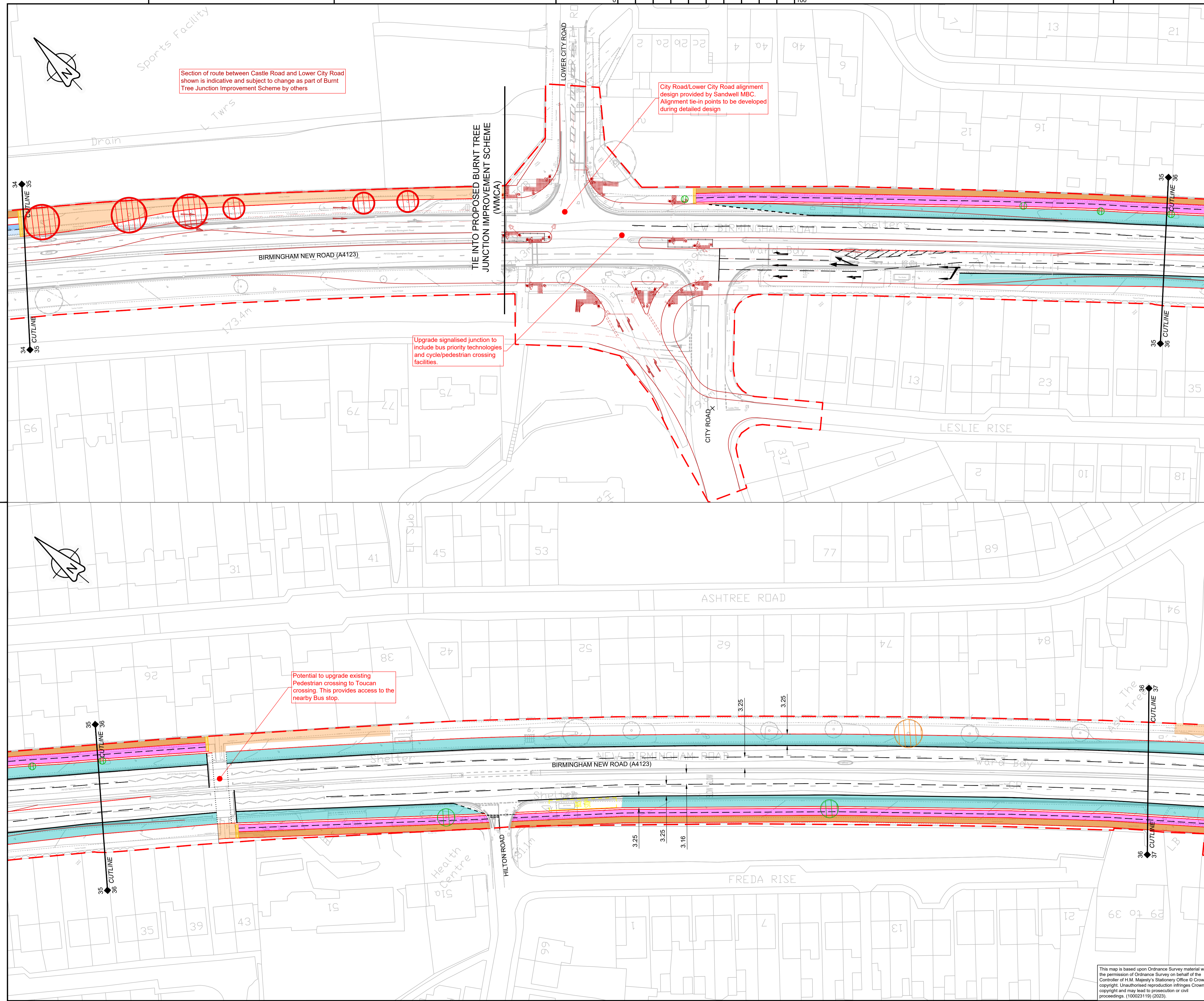
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 18 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010077
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P02

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P02	Revised for SMBC Cabinet Report	26/01/2024
	Drawn: JL	30/01/2024
	Checked: LM	30/01/2024
	Approved: SC	30/01/2024
P01.01	For Information Only	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	11/09/2023
	Checked: LM	12/09/2023
	Approved: SC	12/09/2023
Designed: VR	Date: 05/09/2023	
Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023	
Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023	
Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

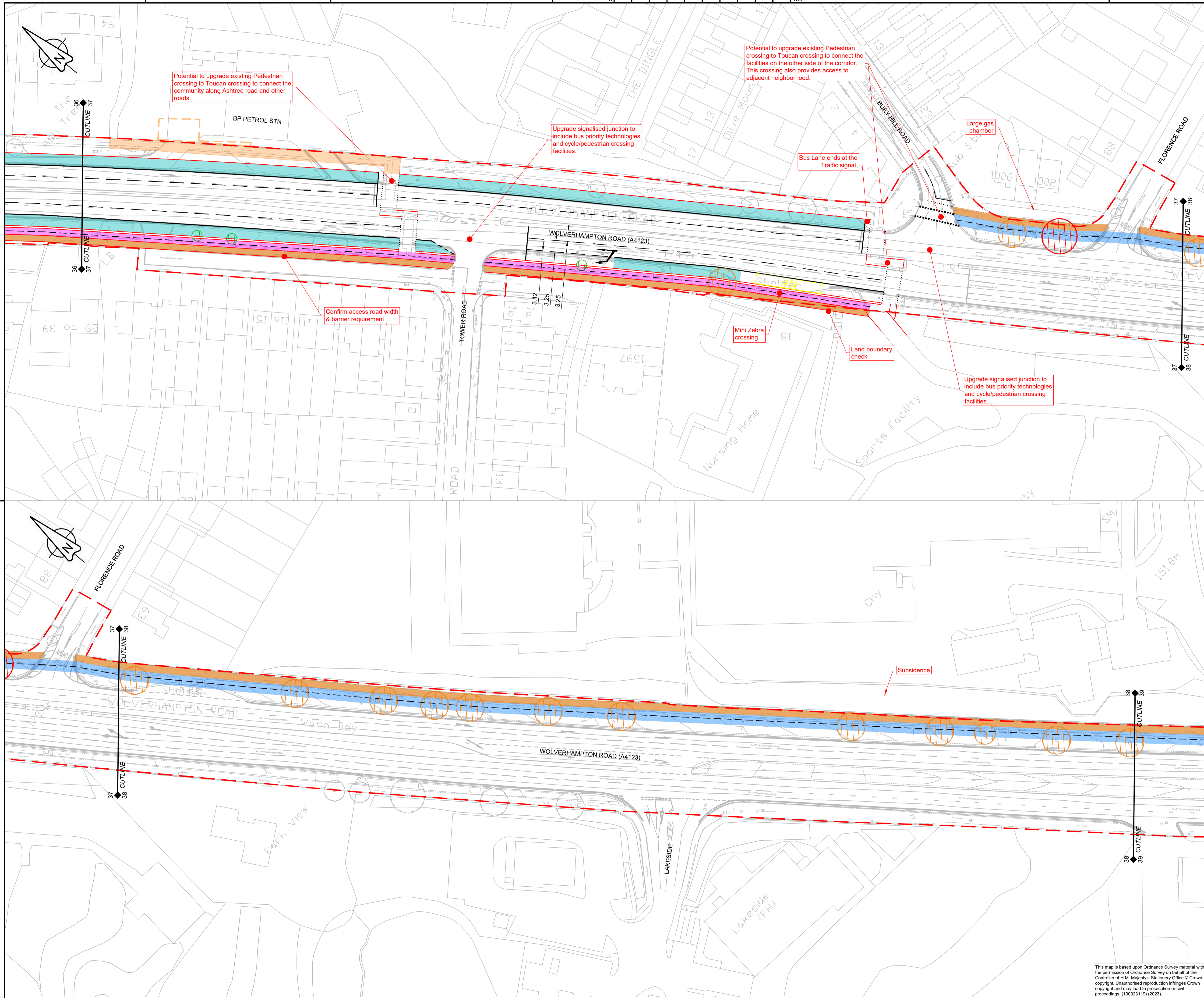
Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
Sheet 19 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m
Drawing Number	Project Number Originator Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123 -DR-CH-010078
	Location Type Role Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P02

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS

(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPi and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m
 - Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new Kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
 - Proposed bus lane
 - Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
 - Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023
	Designed: VR	Date: 05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

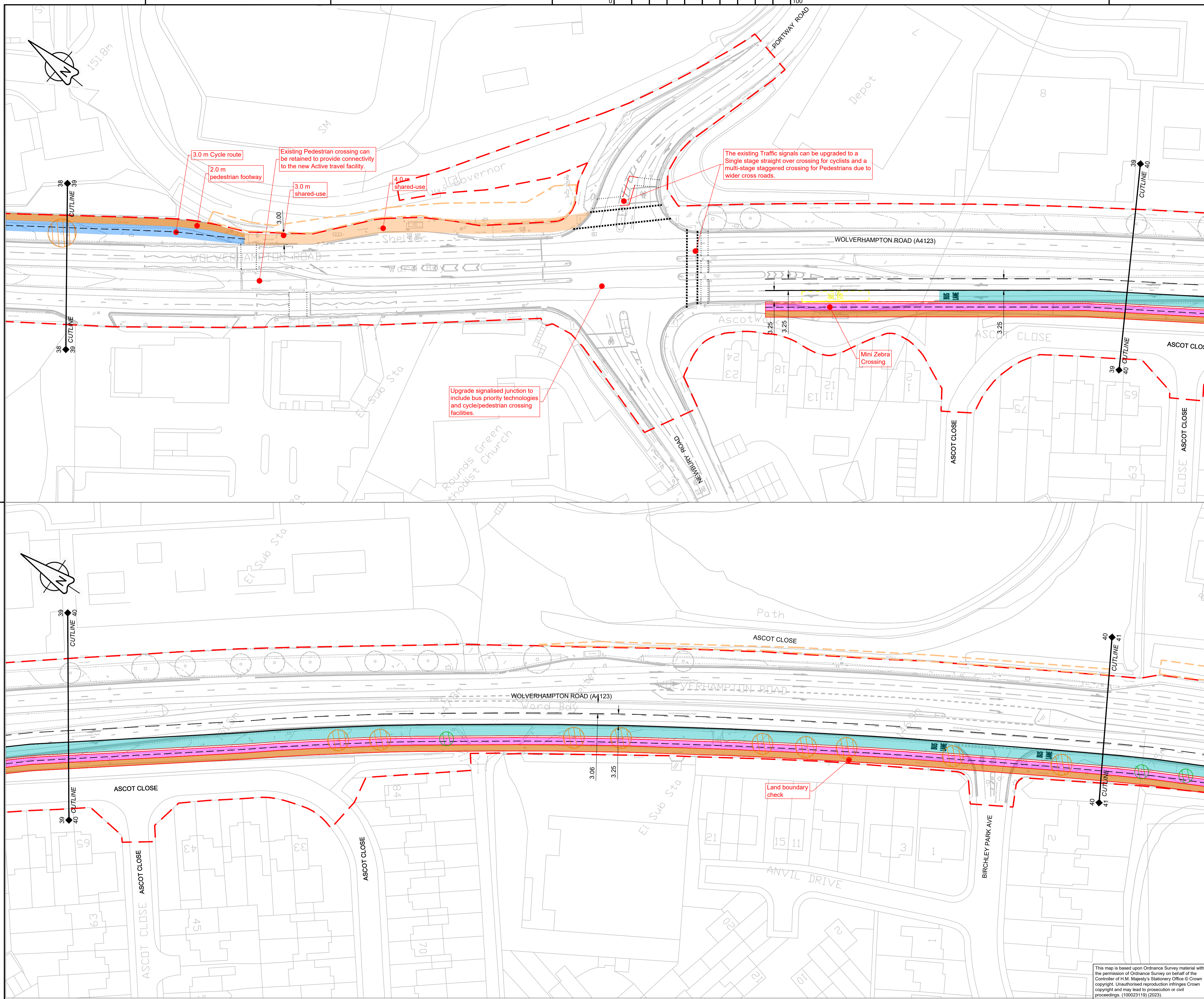
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 20 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010079
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works
- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	11/09/2023
	Checked: LM	12/09/2023
	Approved: SC	
Designed: VR	Date: 05/09/2023	
Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023	
Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023	
Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

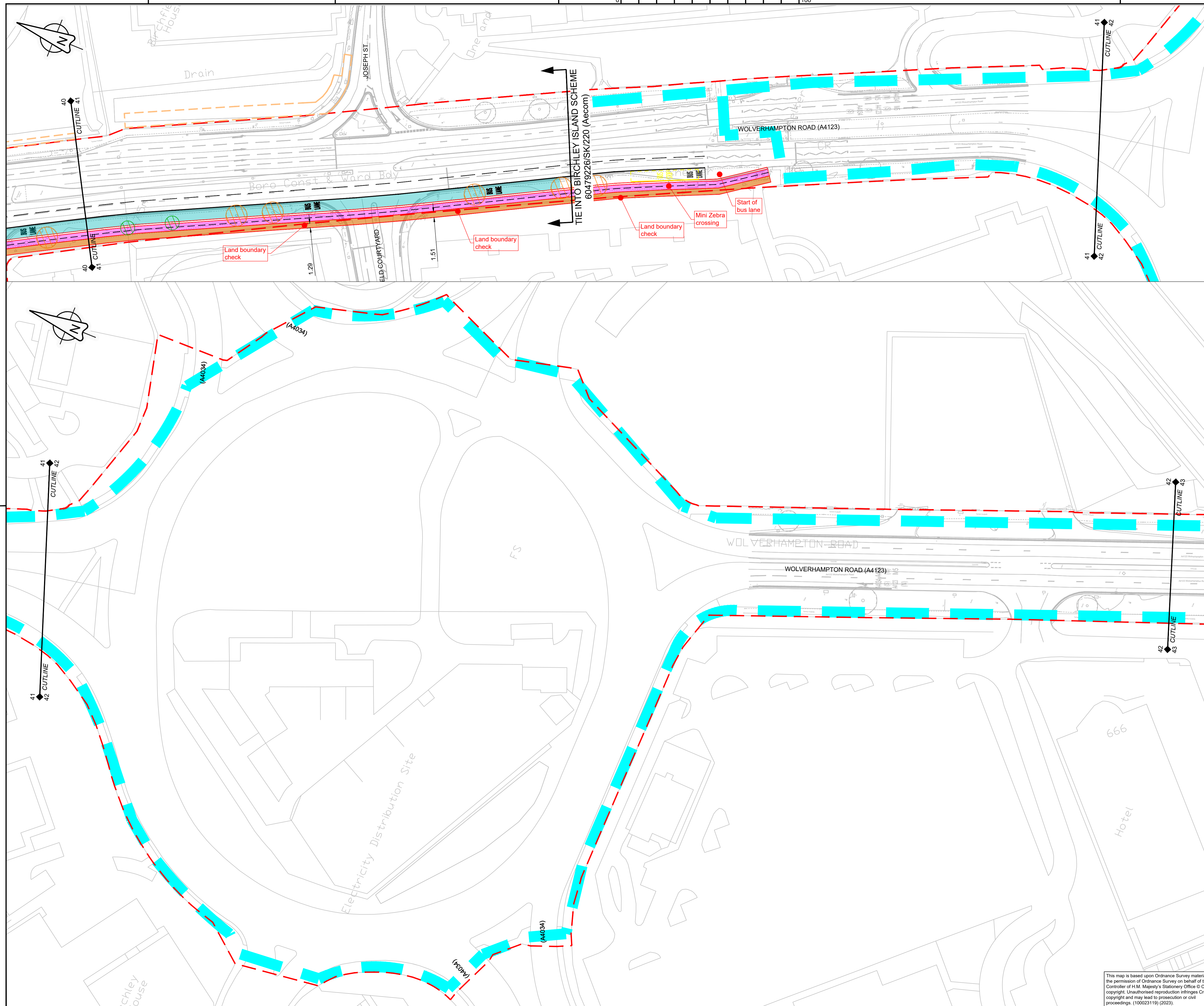
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 21 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010080
	Location	Type Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS


(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.
 NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:**
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - Design based on topographic data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:**
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m
 - Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new Kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
 - Proposed bus lane
 - Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
 - Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023
	Designed: VR	Date: 05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

 www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

 part of 


Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

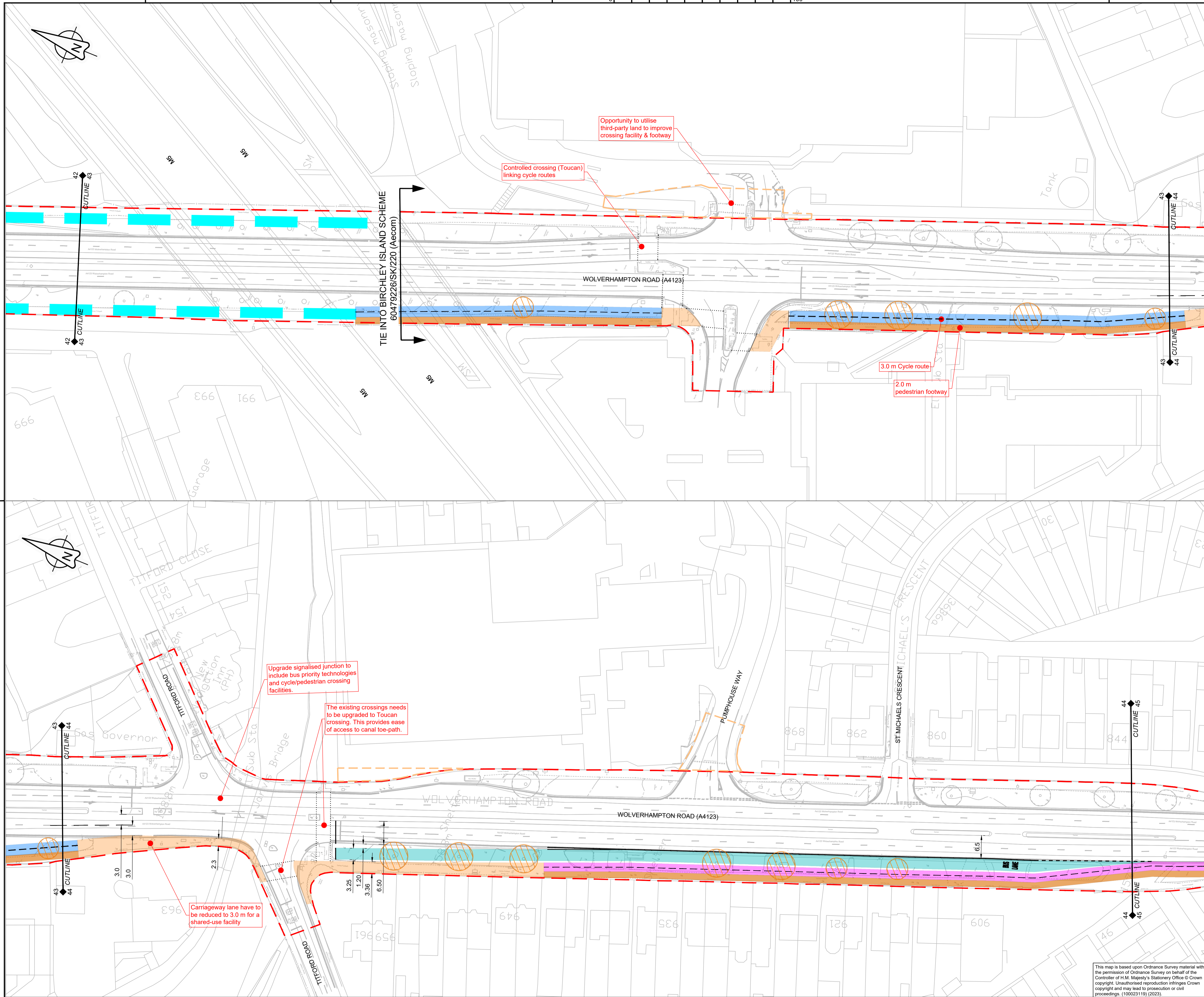
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 22 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010081
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	12/09/2023
	Designed: VR	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	12/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

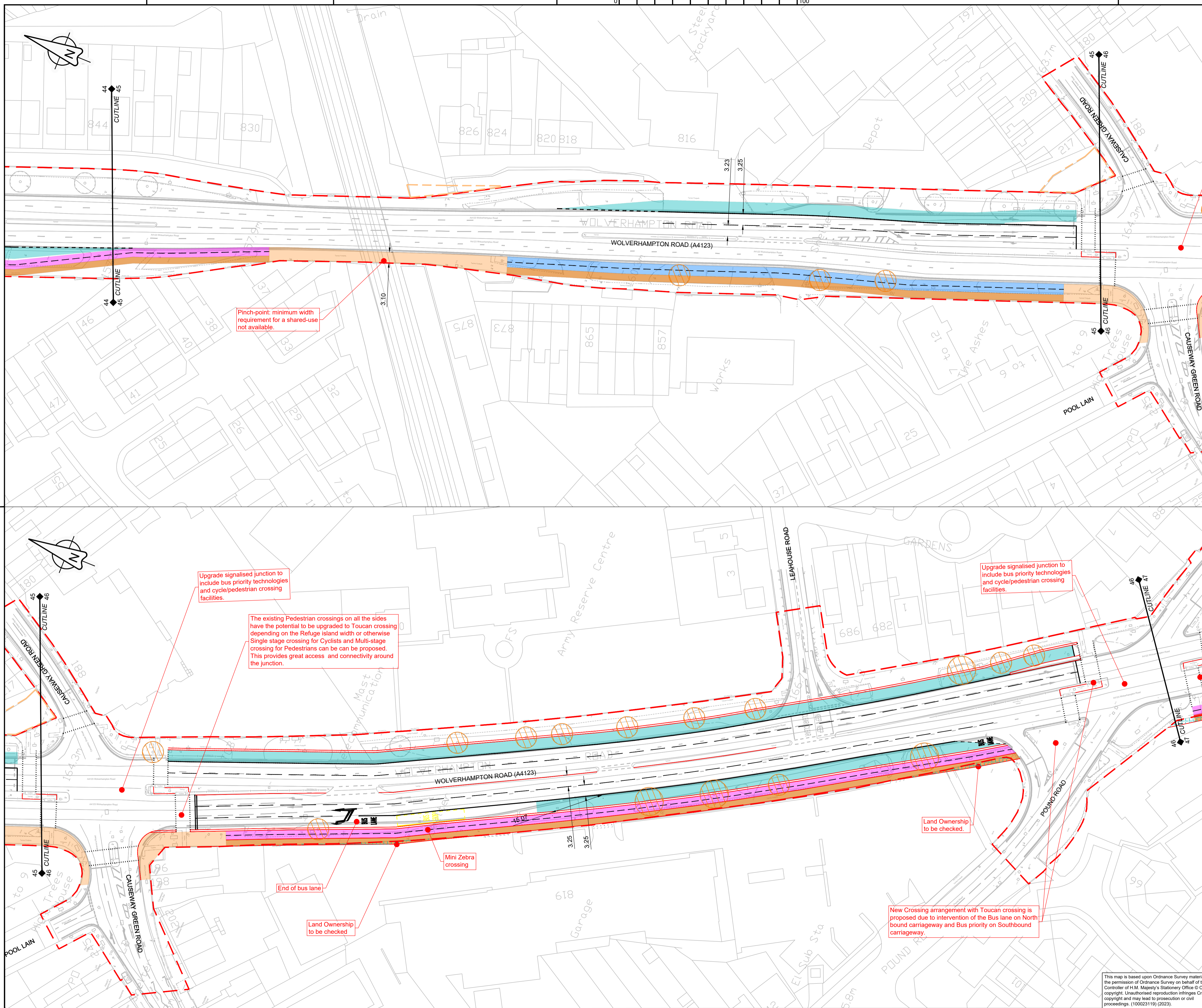
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
Sheet 23 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010082
Location	Type	Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS

(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)

- Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:

- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
- All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
- The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
- The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
- The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
- All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
- Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
- Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	12/09/2023
	Designed: VR	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	12/09/2023

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

- CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL
- Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport
- Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

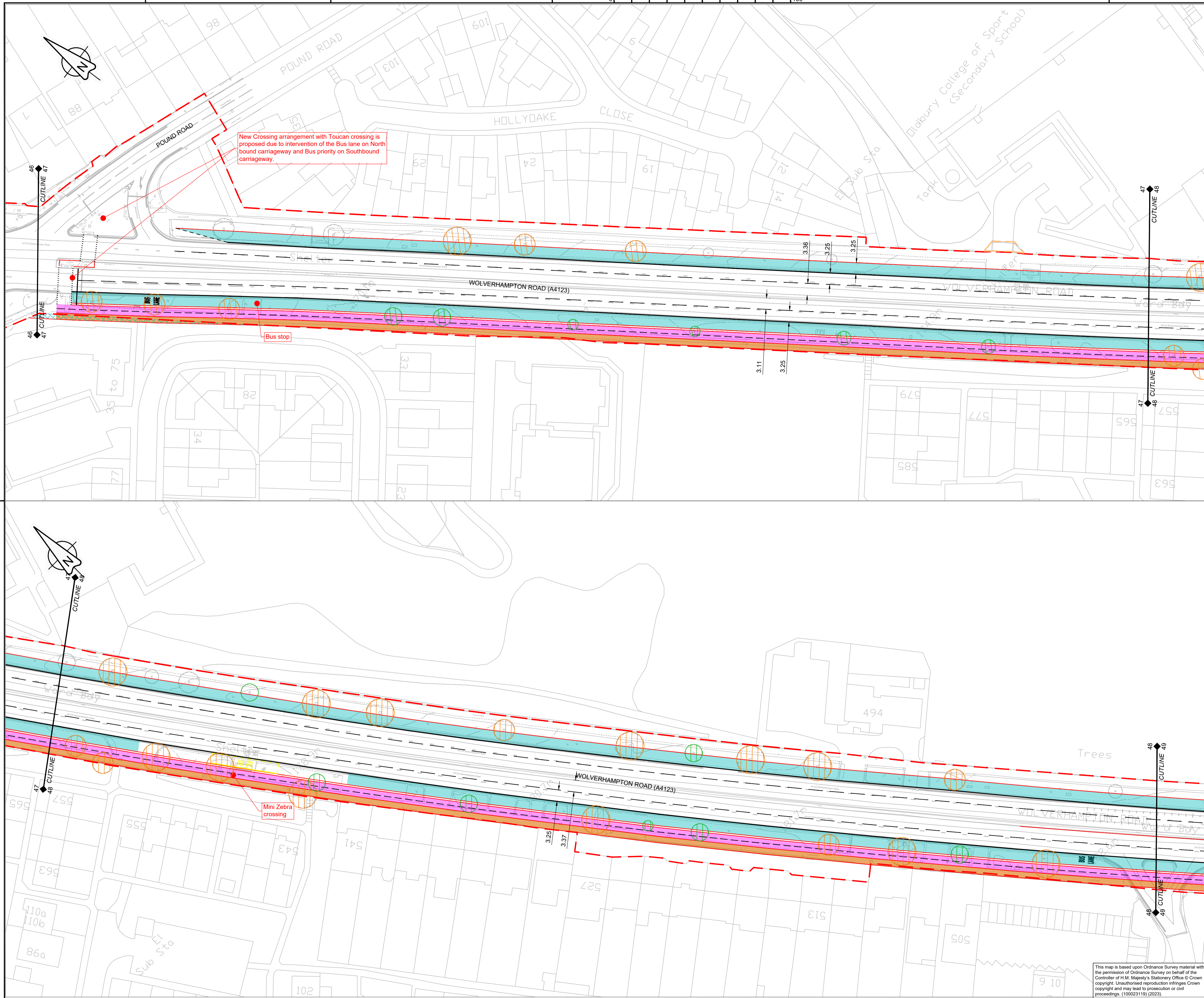
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
Sheet 24 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010083
Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

⊗ Proposed mature tree to be removed

⊗ Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed

⊗ Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed

⊗ Existing WWII memorial tree to remain

⊗ Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023
	Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023
Designed: VR	Date: 05/09/2023	
Drawn: RC	Date: 05/09/2023	
Checked: LM	Date: 11/09/2023	
Approved: SC	Date: 12/09/2023	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

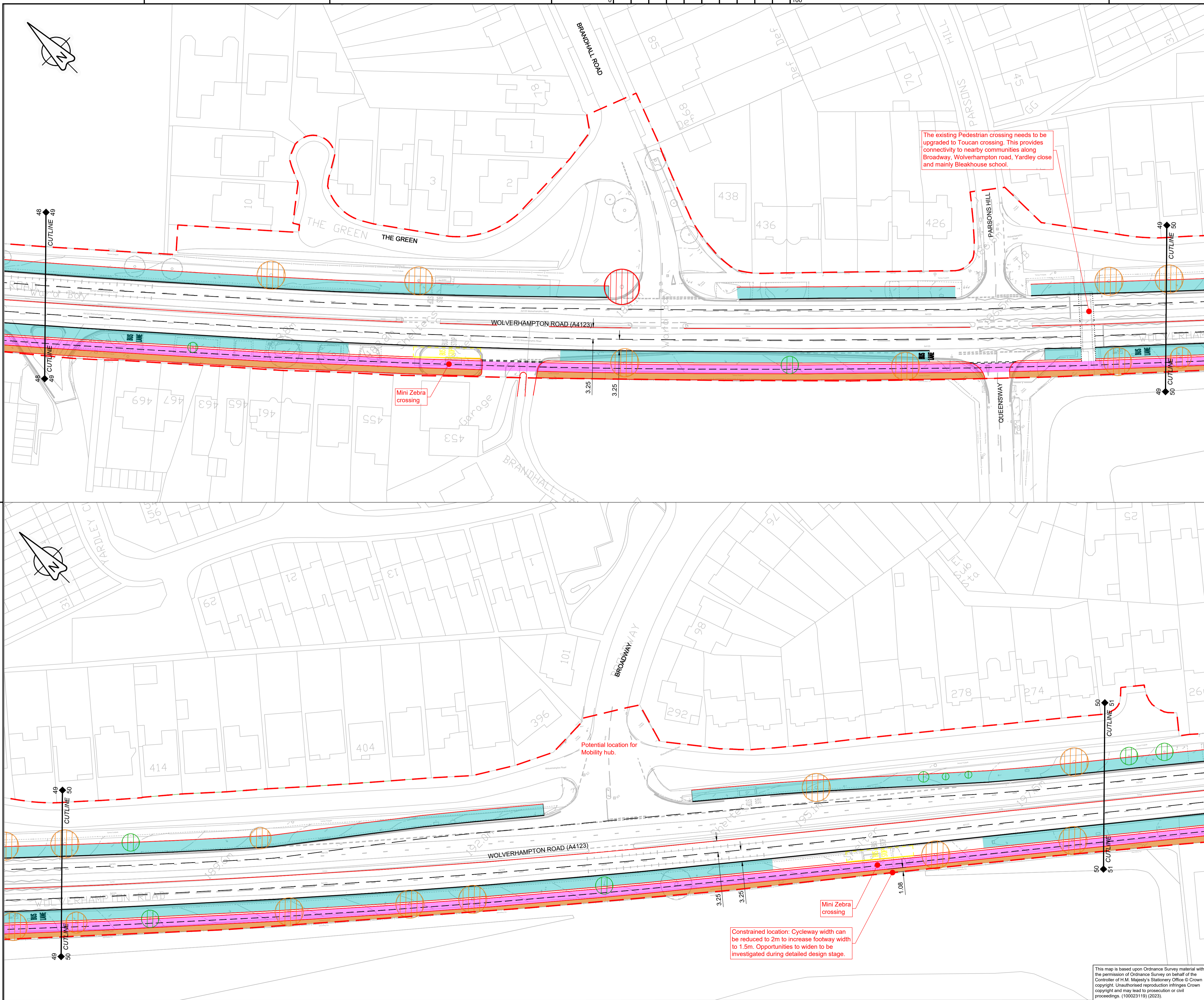
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority Sheet 25 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010084
Location		Type	Role
			Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS

(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)

- Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m
 - Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new Kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
 - Proposed bus lane
 - Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
 - Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	
	Designed: VR	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

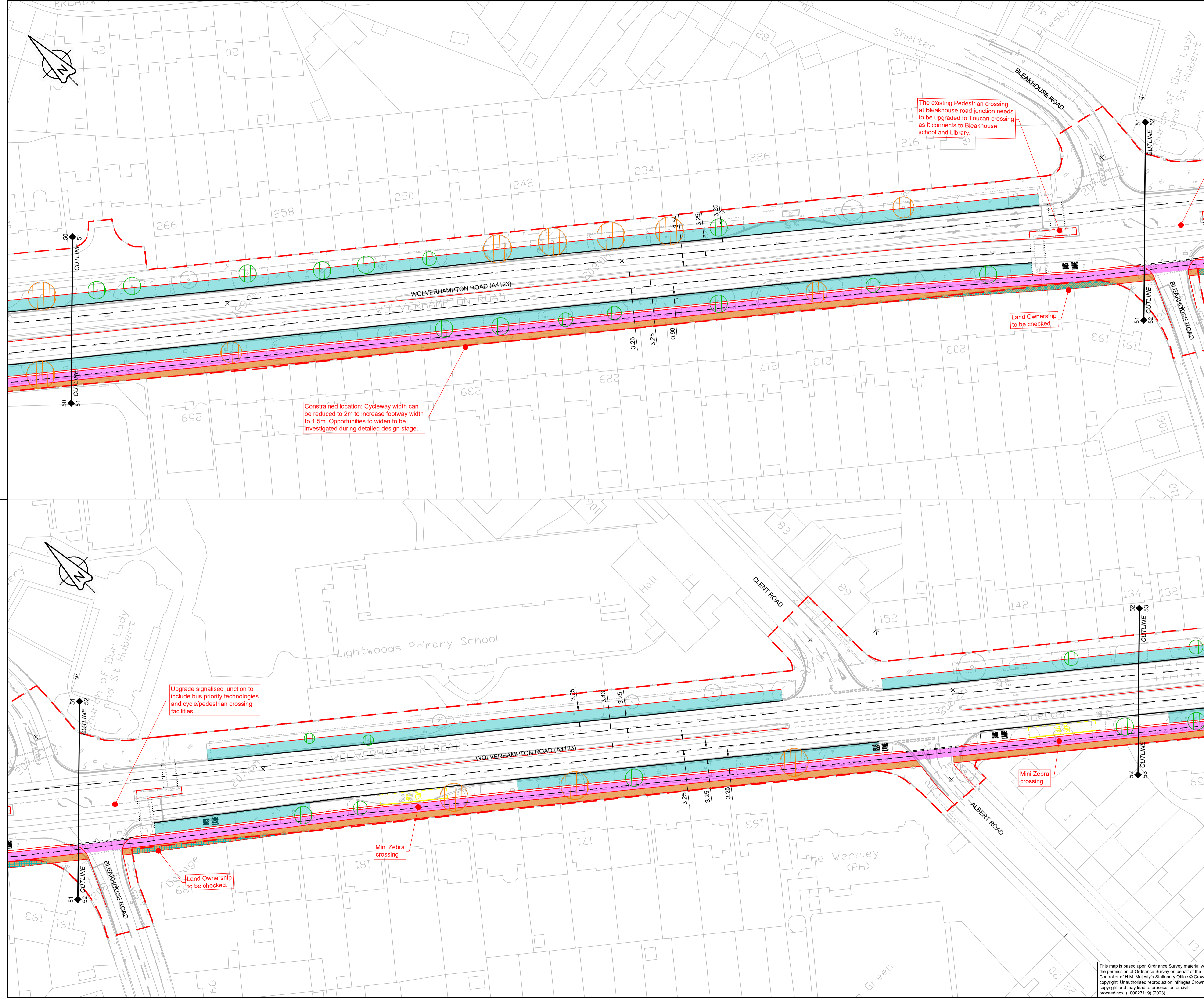
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
Sheet 26 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
A4123 -DR-CH-010085
Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS

(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)

1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	
	Designed: VR	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

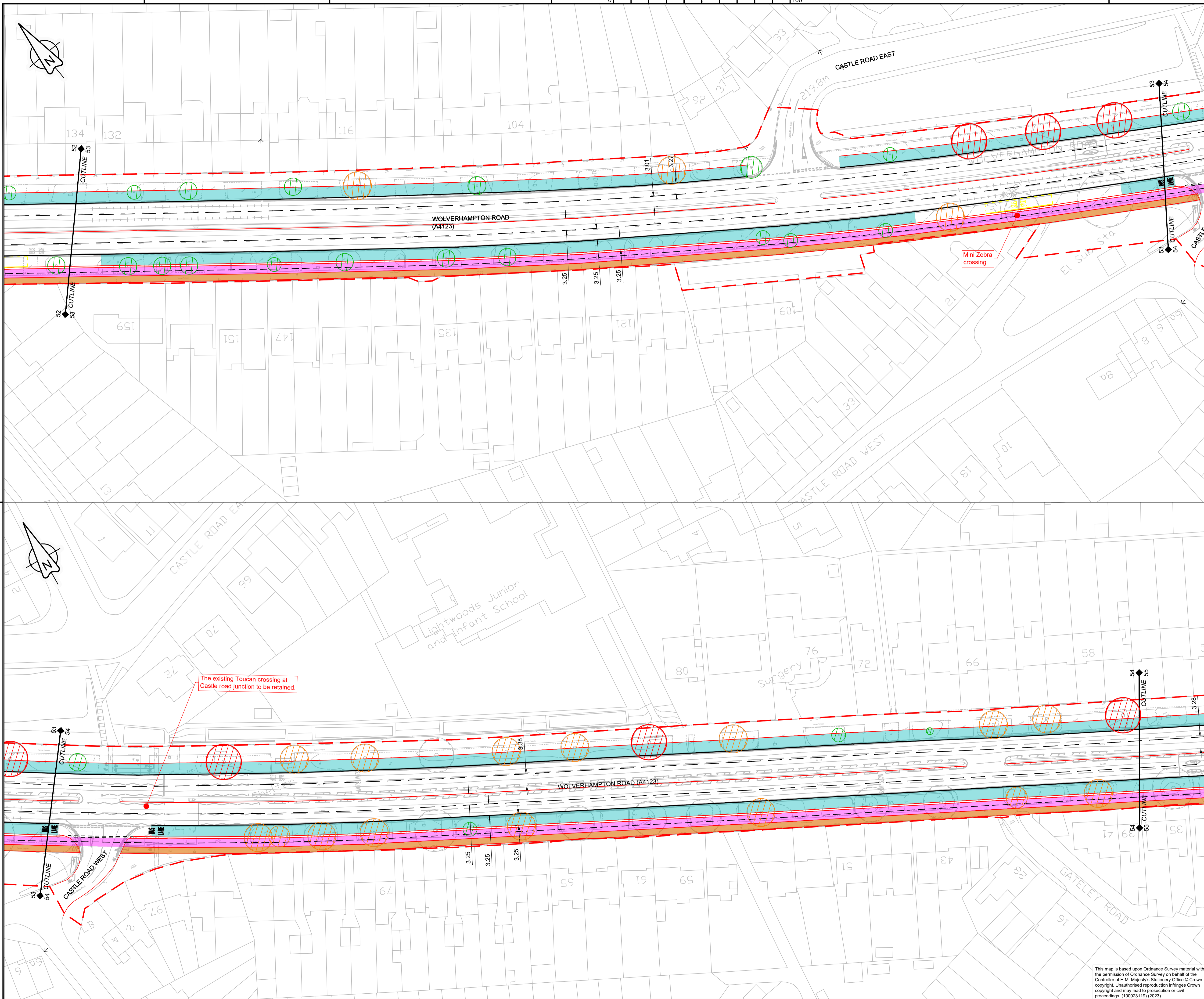
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
Sheet 27 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR- C - 010086	
	Location	Type Role Number	

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS

(The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

- NOTES:
- Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 - All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 - The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 - The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 - The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 - All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 - Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 - Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

- KEY:
- Red Line Boundary
 - Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
 - Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
 - Cycleway 2.5m
 - Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
 - Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
 - Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
 - Proposed new Kerb
 - Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
 - Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
 - Proposed bus lane
 - Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
 - Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date
P01.01	For Information Only	
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	
	Designed: VR	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	05/09/2023
	Checked: LM	11/09/2023
	Approved:	

Copyright in this design © Amey

www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

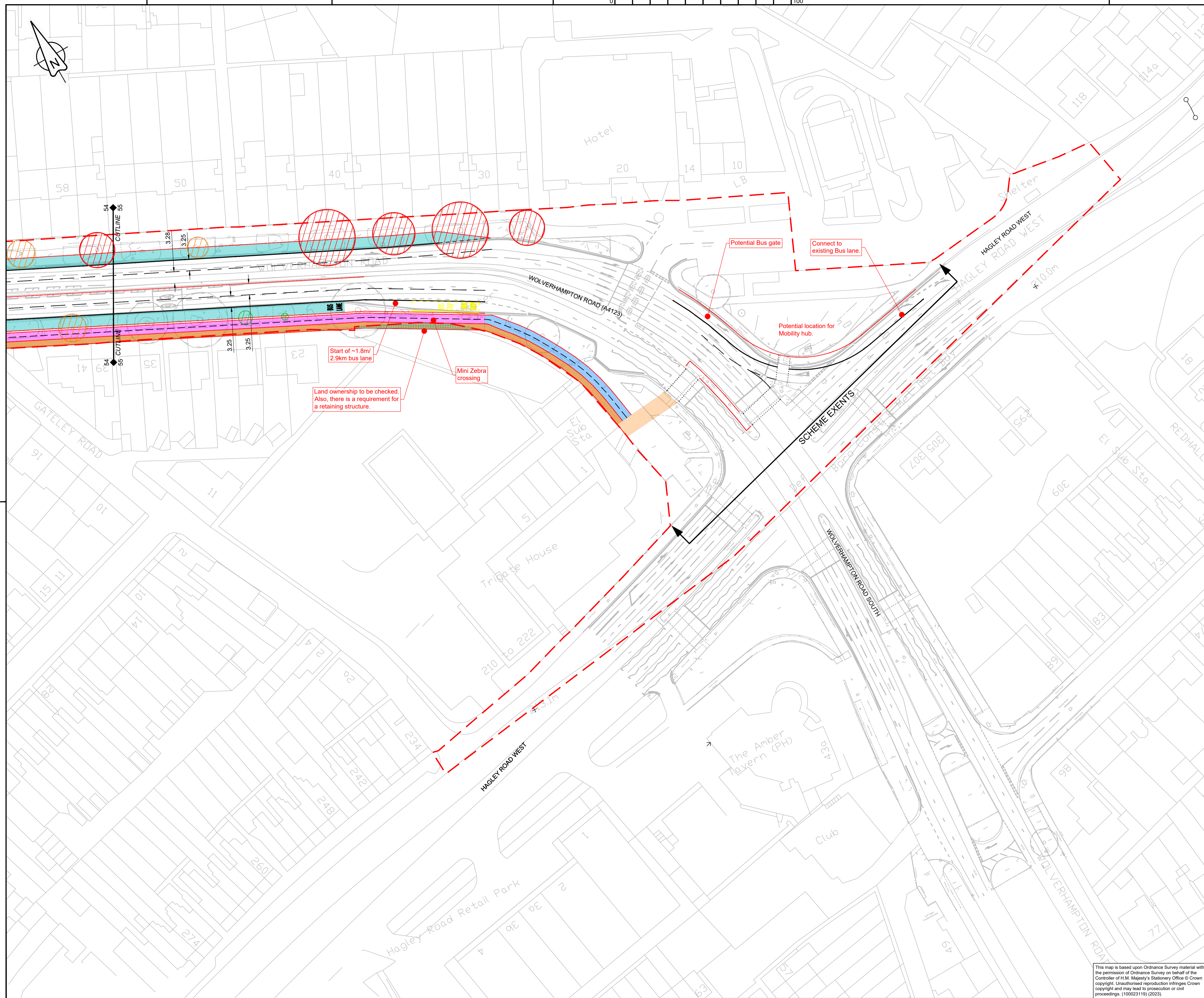
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 28 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018	Scale: 1:500 @ A1
Stage: Preliminary Design	Dimensions: m

Drawing Number	Project Number	Originator	Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN	A4123	-DR-CH-	010087
	Location	Type Role	Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



RESIDUAL DESIGN HAZARDS
 (The following information has been collected from Preconstruction Information and the Amey CDM Hazard Management Process.)
 1. Hazards identified on site walkover.

NOTE:
 Residual hazards identified in designs by others not shown on this set of drawings.

NOTES:
 1. Drawings are to be printed in full colour.
 2. All dimensions are in metres unless stated otherwise.
 3. The location of bus lanes is based on historic traffic information and where there is adequate highway width. The final design is subject to the results of traffic modelling information.
 4. The lane markings shown in the drawings are indicative only. Detailed road markings will be designed in the upcoming stages.
 5. The junction types of cross roads will be assessed in the next stage of the scheme.
 6. All the bus stops along the corridor will have RTPI and CCTV installed.
 7. Final design interface between cycle route and minor junctions to be completed following stakeholder comments.
 8. Design based on topo-survey data, therefore some discrepancies with OS Map at tie-ins may occur.

KEY:

- Red Line Boundary
- Proposed pedestrian footway 1.8 - 2.0m. Also to include other areas as shown.
- Cycleway 3.0m / Existing Cycle Facility
- Cycleway 2.5m
- Proposed shared use footway/cycleway
- Proposed Buffer 1.0 m max
- Proposed Homezone (Low Speed)
- Proposed new Kerb
- Sections of route completed or designed by Sandwell MBC/others under separate AFT funded contract
- Review 3rd party landtake option (Sheets 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 & 29)
- Proposed bus lane
- Areas outside of Red Line Boundary Plan where active travel improvement works are anticipated based on initial SOBC study. Subject to change based on development of the design
- Areas of significant proposed developer works

- Proposed mature tree to be removed
- Proposed medium diameter tree to be removed
- Proposed small diameter/staked tree to be removed
- Existing WWII memorial tree to remain
- Proposed alteration to side road priority

Revision	Revision comment	Date:
P01.01	For Information Only	05/09/2023
	Drawn: RC	11/09/2023
	Checked: LM	
	Approved:	
Designed: VR	Date:	05/09/2023
Drawn: RC	Date:	05/09/2023
Checked: LM	Date:	11/09/2023
Approved:	Date:	

Copyright in this design © Amey

Amey
www.amey.co.uk

Working on behalf of:

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Dudley part of bct Black Country Transport

Sandwell

Project Name
A4123 Transport Study & OBC

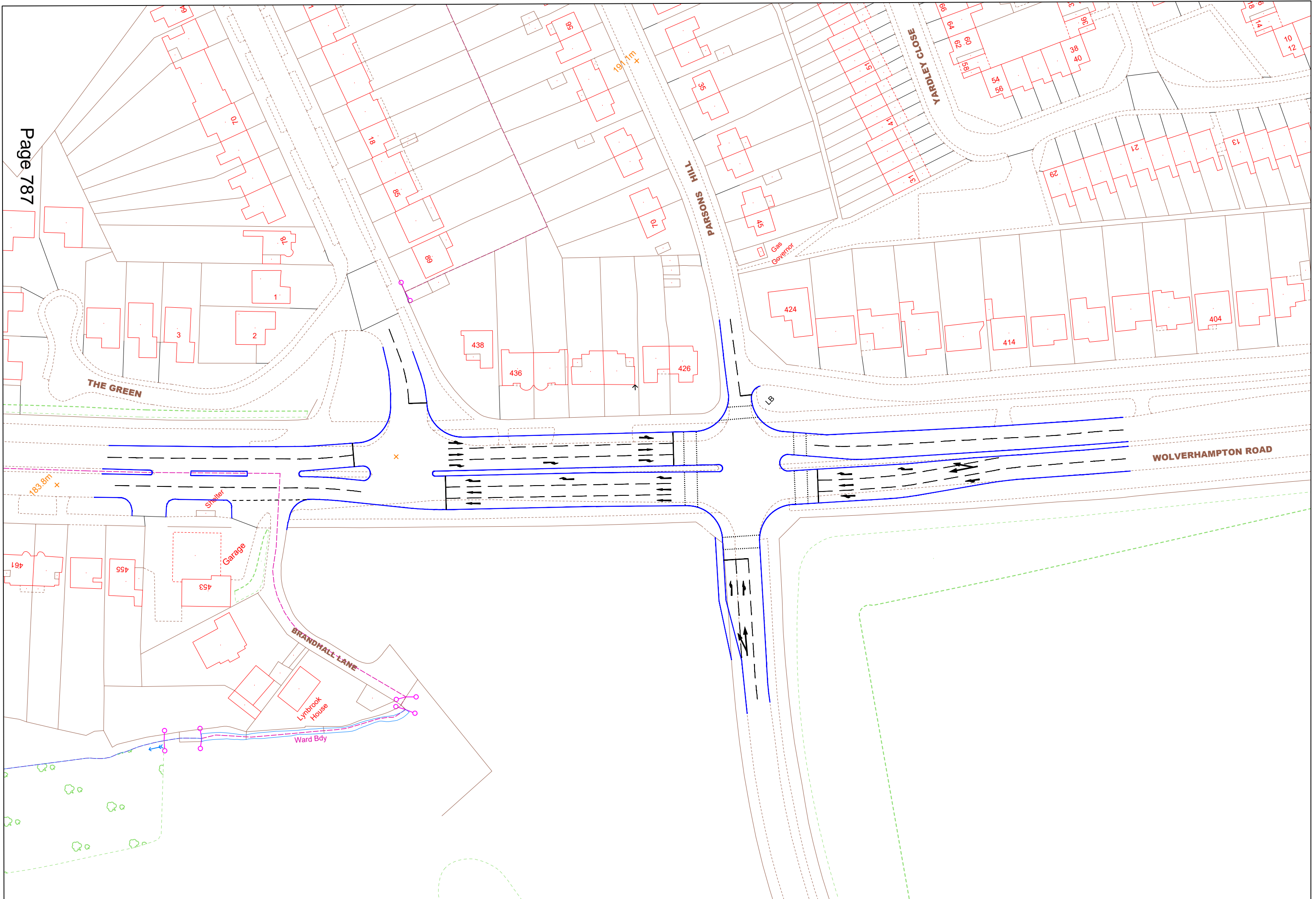
Drawing Title
Option C: Comprehensive Bus Priority
 Sheet 29 of 29

Project Ref. No: COMHA1CWC018 | Scale: 1:500 @ A1
 Stage: Preliminary Design | Dimensions: m

Drawing Number
 Project Number | Originator | Volume
COMHA1CWC018 - AMY - HGN
 A4123 -DR-CH-010088
 Location | Type | Role | Number

Suitability	Suitability Description	Revision
S2	Suitable For Information	P01.01

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of H.M. Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023119) (2023).



This page is intentionally left blank