

Former Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre

Planning Brief for Potential Development
April 2025

INTERNAL USE ONLY

DR



Introduction

This document outlines the vision to create a new park-side neighbourhood on the site of the former Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre. It will provide useful site information and planning and design guidance for a prospective partners.

The Council is seeking a high-quality residential development which introduces a mix of new housing typologies.

Development must maximise the opportunities presented by the adjacent Harry Mitchell Park to the east, Smethwick Cricket Club to the south and Broomfield Road to the north. Where viable, retention of the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre frontage is advised and downgrading of the entrance junction to provide improved pedestrian access is essential.



Vision

The site presents a rare and significant opportunity to deliver a high quality, distinctive, park-side residential scheme that activates the park, reflects local context, reanimates the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre frontage and opens up access to Smethwick Cricket Ground.

The site benefits from views of dense greenery, and the slightly secluded location adjacent to the park. The accessibility of recreation, education and retail facilities as well as public transport to the wider region should be optimised through a low-car, gently densified scheme. Further opportunities include:

- Access to nature
- Community cohesion
- New public realm and spaces
- Efficient use of space
- A mix of generously portioned apartments and townhouses



Key Objectives

- To provide a mix of sustainable homes which will meet the housing needs of families in this area in a mix of typologies.
- Create a high-quality park-side development that is an exemplar of innovative design.
- Maximise the park-side location by addressing the parks in terms of orientation and scale as well as providing new pedestrian routes.
- The use energy efficient, low carbon materials in the design and build of new homes.
- Integration of renewable technologies into the development
- Reduce the dominance of the private car and increase the opportunity for shared green space and play areas



APARTMENT TYPOLOGIES
FLOOR PLAN: 2 BED TYPE B



Site Context and Location

Location

The site (Figure 1.) comprises 9,200sqm (2.27 acre) of hard landscaping, mature borders and 8 buildings in varying condition. These include the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre, several outbuildings and a former park lodge.

Surroundings

The site is bounded by Smethwick Cricket Club to the south, Harry Mitchell Park to the east and both Broomfield Road and Coopers Lane to the north. Access is via a mini roundabout between the two roads.

Crocketts Community Primary School is approximate 220m north-east and both the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar and Faizan-E-Madina Masjid are 150m to the south-west. The site is 500m from Victoria Park and 600m from Smethwick Hall Park, therefore providing access to education, worship and leisure amenities within a 5-10-minute walk.

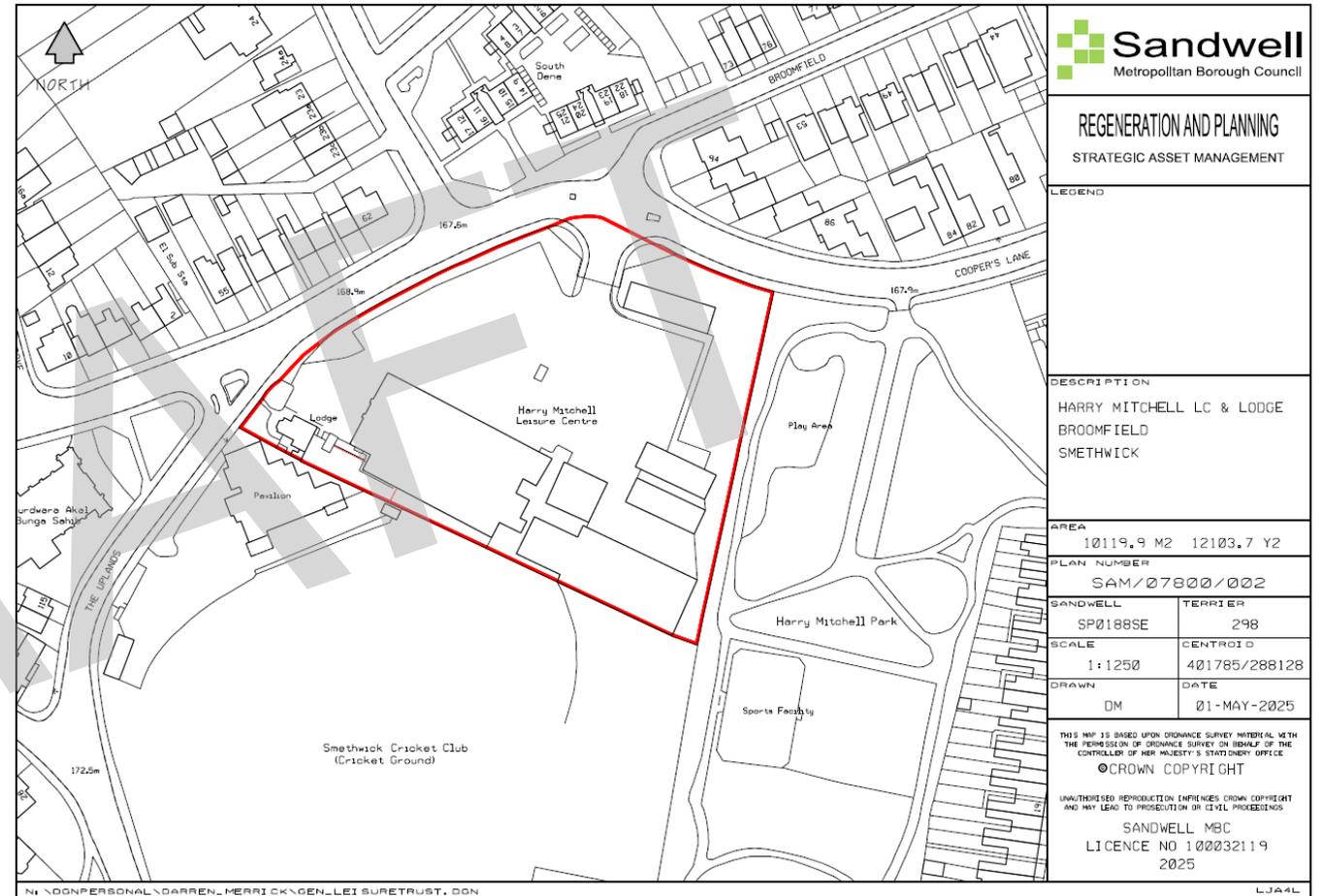


Figure 1.

Site Context and Location

Transport

The site benefits from good sustainable transport links and is approximately 750m (9-minute walk) Smethwick Rolfe Street Station and Smethwick High Street offering fast rail services to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall as well as frequent bus services to Birmingham, Oldbury and Dudley.

Owing to the sustainable location, proximity to essential services, retail and public transport provision as well as area's demographics and average rates of car ownership, reduced car parking provision is advised.



Site Context and Location

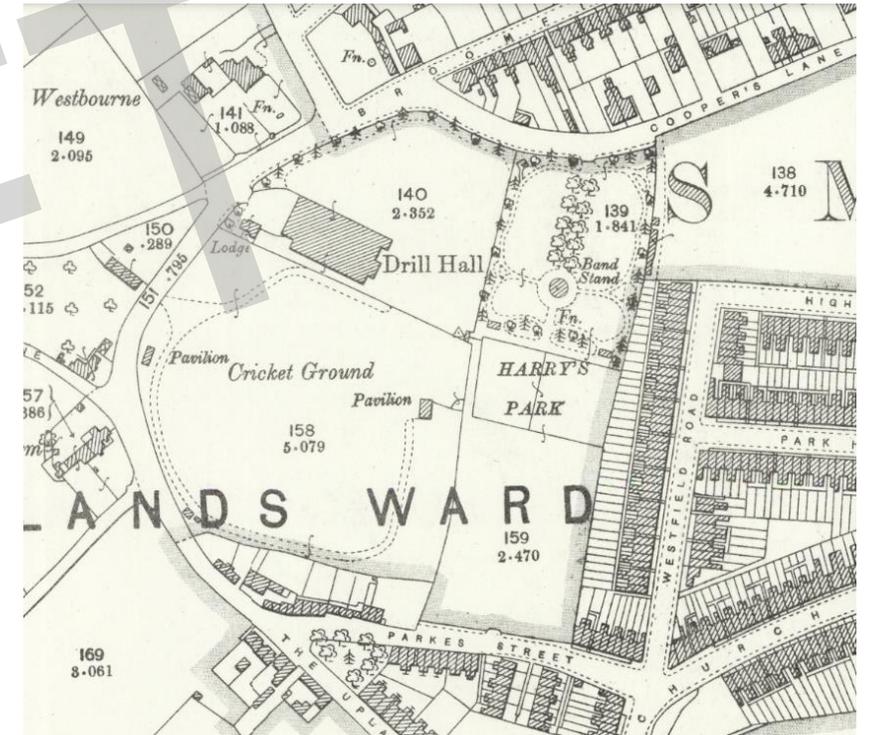
Land Use History

Historic mapping suggests that the current leisure building has been used as a drill hall with the existing car park a parade ground. The adjacent park and cricket ground have been extant since at least 1888.

Additional outbuildings were constructed by 1944. Most of these are no longer extant.

Most buildings including the sports hall and a separate building housing a foodbank are located in the south with the majority of the site taken up by a large surface level car park.

None of the buildings or structures on site are statutorily or locally designated as heritage assets. There are locally listed buildings nearby including the Akrill Memorial Church and School on The Uplands and Harborne Cottages on Cooper's Lane. There is a narrow strip of vegetation around the site perimeter including some mature trees. None of these trees are subject to a TPO.



Site Context and Location

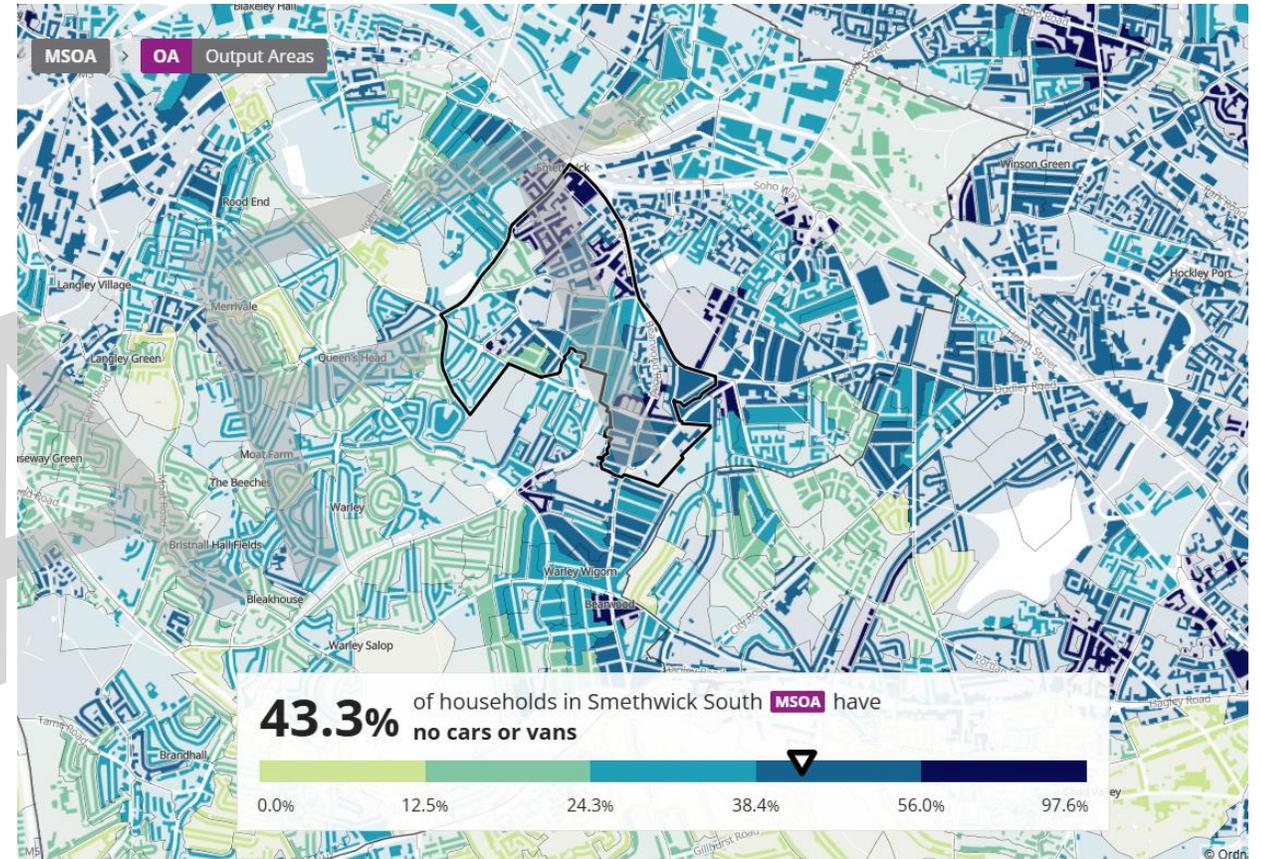
Census Data

2021 data (the most recently available) indicates that 43.3% of households in the local area (defined by the MSOA used) have no access to a car or van. This is significantly higher than the Sandwell average of 29.2%.

Only 43.1% report driving being their primary mode of getting to work. Bus (16.2%) is the second most used method of travel to work.

39.4% of households have one car or van.

The figures suggest that even with market sale housing car parking provision for the site should be lower than advised policy provision in the local plan.



Design Guidance

The site offers the opportunity for a gently densified, public-transport focused sustainable neighbourhood facilitated by nearby transport links and responding to the local context.

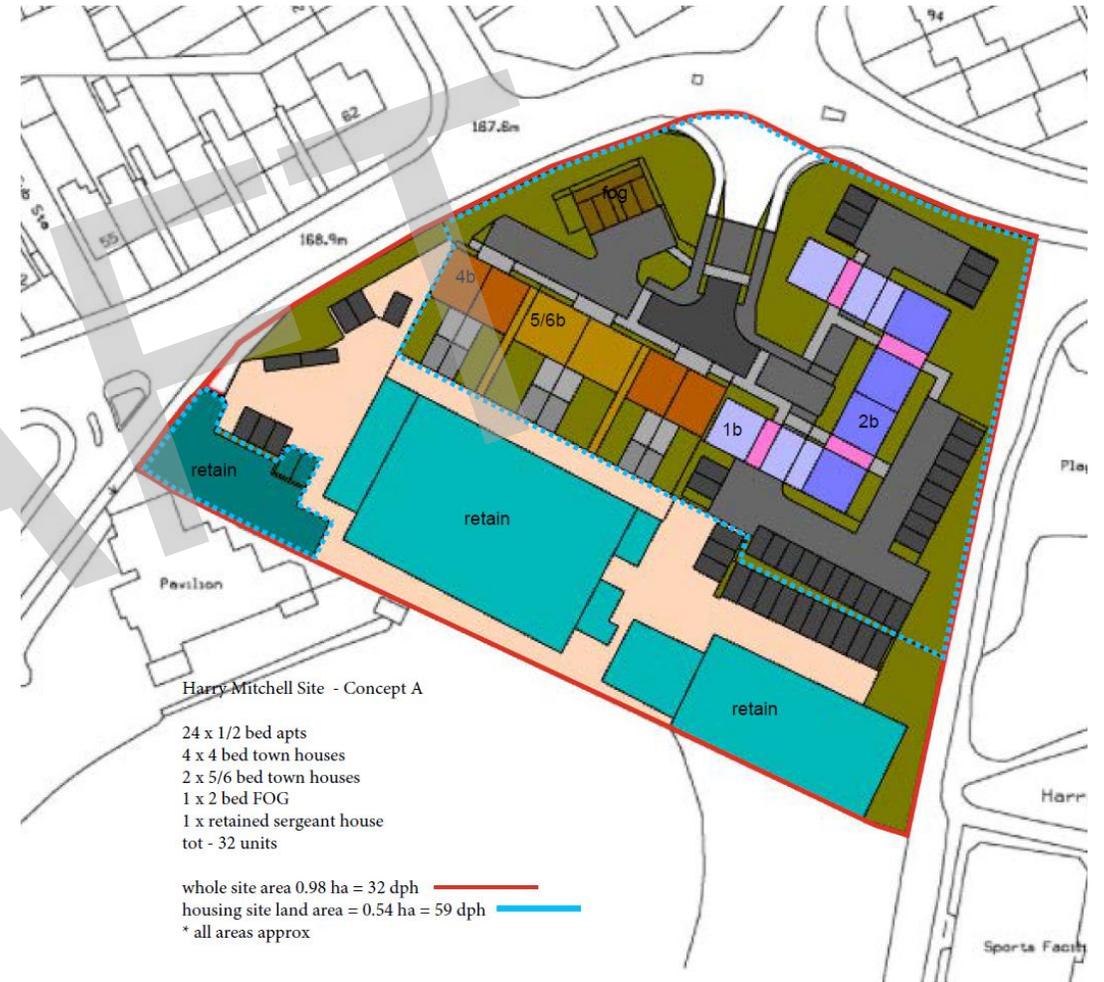
Park-side views should be maximised with a new pedestrian access route opened up to Harry Mitchell Park, improving safety, providing overlooking and adequately knitting the new homes into the existing neighbourhood.

Development should offer a mix of typologies, with apartments and townhouses created a mixed community reflecting the existing.

The part disposal of the site to Smethwick Cricket Ground may yield additional benefits for development and the wider community. Opportunities to enable the expansion of the Cricket stands should be explored with the development nestling into the remaining site while retaining access for residents to leisure amenities in the expanding Cricket Ground.

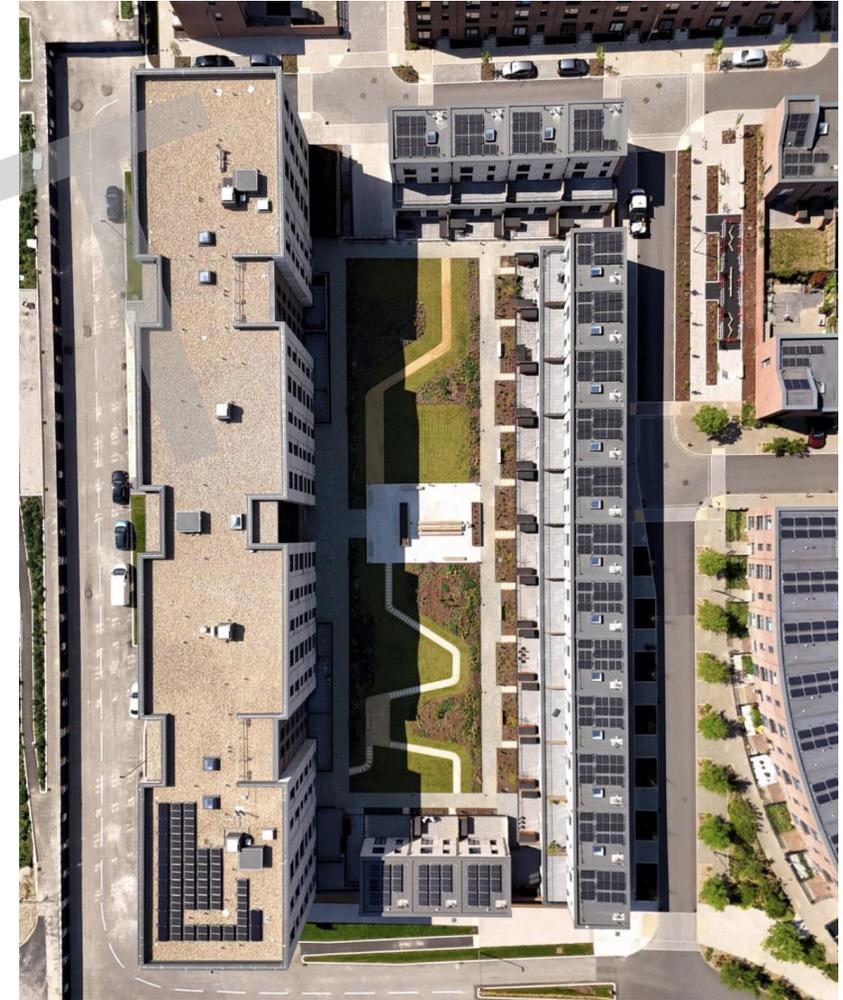
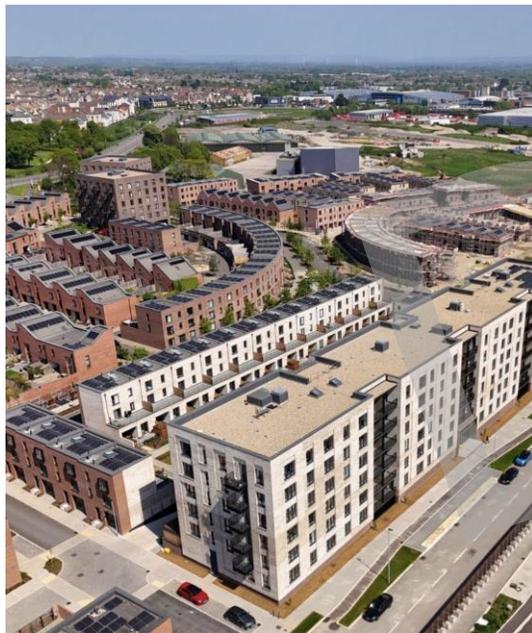
Retention of the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre entrance is preferred.





Design Guidance

Precedent imagery showing a mix of townhouses and apartments and shared green space draws inspiration from Brabazon, Bristol, Royal Wharf, Tower Hamlets and Marmalade Lane, Cambridge.



Planning Policy

NATIONAL POLICY - National Planning Policy Framework (2021) (NPPF)

The NPPF is used to guide development throughout the nation and act as a foundation for the creation of Local Development Plans (LDP's). The main message of the NPPF is for development to be sustainable. This is highlighted by "significant weight" being given to development which promotes high level of "sustainability". The most notable revisions to the NPPF in 2021, include; greater recognition being given to the environment and rather than development contributing to the environment, there is a need to "enhance" it.

REGIONAL POLICY - Black Country Core Strategy (2011) (BCCS)

The Core Strategy is a spatial planning document (dealing not only with land use but also; environmental, economic and social issues) that sets out the spatial vision, objectives and strategy for future development in the Black Country up to 2026. The Joint Core Strategy sets out the regeneration corridor approach and contains broad proposals, core policies and a monitoring and implementation framework. It is important to note, that the BCCS is the current strategic planning guidance in place and will be subsequently replaced by Sandwell's Development Plan in the next few years. On this note should development take place after the new policy document is created, proposals will be assessed against the adopted Local Plan in place, at that time.

Key policies include:

Policy HOU3 - Delivering affordable housing

Policy ENV 3- Design Quality

Policy HOU2- Housing density, type, and accessibility

Sustainability

The inclusion of green technologies in architectural design, construction and layout of the development will be encouraged. The Council has continuing commitment to encourage and promote sustainable forms of development that puts less pressure on the planet's finite (non-renewable) resources. This undertaking is reinforced by the Environmental Policy for Sandwell (details obtainable on the Sandwell Council website at: (<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/goinggreen>) which identifies various areas of environmental concern and sets out a manifesto of aims and measures. This includes; encouraging and promoting more efficient methods of energy: production, consumption and water management. It also identifies new approaches to improving the built environment, which are intended to influence and change traditional practices and help in the delivery of better environmental protection and more sustainable built development throughout the Borough. In this context, the Council will look to the developer to demonstrate a genuine commitment, to delivering a scheme of sustainable qualities.

Planning Policy

Think Local

An objective of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is to positively influence its local; economy, people's skills and employment prospects. To help achieve this objective, the Council will ensure that the use of 'Community Benefits' clause in purchasing power is fair and transparent to help maximise prosperity and increase employment that will provide social and economic benefits to the people of Sandwell.

Climate Resilience

Mitigating climate change is one of Sandwell's long-term objectives. The target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2041 is 9 years earlier than the national target. Any development whether it be business or residential, should comply with minimising carbon emissions to contribute in achieving this collective objective. This includes using energy more efficiently and where possible

LOCAL POLICY - Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (2012) (SAD DPD)

The SAD DPD is based on the spatial strategy as set out within the Black Country Core Strategy, looking at the concentration of development within regeneration corridors and centres. In particular it establishes the broad areas of housing growth and protected employment land.

The SAD DPD provides the detail of these broad areas and identifies sufficient sites or land to meet the Borough's housing land supply requirements and improve the Borough's employment areas up to 2021.

Key Policies include:

Policy SAD HE 2 - Conservation Areas

- Historic character of buildings should be respected.
- Historic character should at a minimum, be protected but ideally enhanced through development.

Policy SAD HE 3 - Buildings and Structures of Local Historic/Architectural Importance

- Any changes to buildings with such categorisation will need to have clear justification for how changes will enable benefits to be realised.
- Demolition should be resisted unless there are exceptional circumstances (i.e., no viable use).

Biodiversity Net-Gain

Harry Mitchell park is a **Designated Landscape of High Historic Value** and any development fronting the park must adhere to acceptably sensitive design standards.

Planning Policy

Local Plan

The site currently accommodates a leisure centre with various sports facilities including a sports hall, gym and an outbuilding used as a judo club.

Policy ENV6 explains that proposals that would reduce the overall value of the sport and recreation network will be resisted. NPPF paragraph 104 is clear that existing sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- a) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- b) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

The closure of the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre forms part of a wider programme of upgrades to the indoor sports and leisure provision in the south of the borough following the opening of the state-of-the-art Sandwell Aquatics Centre in July 2023.

The Aquatics Centre is located approximately 900 metres (or a 15-minute walk) west of the site. The Aquatics Centre provides better sports and recreation provision in terms of quantity and quality than at Harry Mitchell. The policy test set out at paragraph 104(b) of the **NPPF** and the emerging Sandwell Local Plan are met and do not prevent the site from being redeveloped to an alternative use.

The site falls within Smethwick's **Lower Value Affordable Housing Zone**.

The site is shown as white land on the SAD policies map with no specific land use designation. In the emerging **Sandwell Local Plan** the site is proposed to remain as undesignated white land. Harry Mitchell Park, immediately to the east, is an area of open space and is proposed to be designated as a Landscape of High Historic Value in the emerging Local Plan.

The site is suitable for comprehensive redevelopment to a residential scheme. The construction of new homes would assist with meeting Sandwell's acute housing need. Under policies in the emerging Local Plan the site would be expected to achieve a density of at least **45 dwellings per hectare** and provide **10% affordable housing**. Policy requirements relating to urban design, energy efficiency, sustainable drainage, protection of trees, housing mix, provision of open space and transport would apply. **CIL** is levied on the creation of new residential floorspace in Sandwell.

The site may be suitable for alternative uses, including sport and education uses, subject to relevant policy requirements.

Interested parties are strongly recommended to request pre-application advice from Sandwell Council.

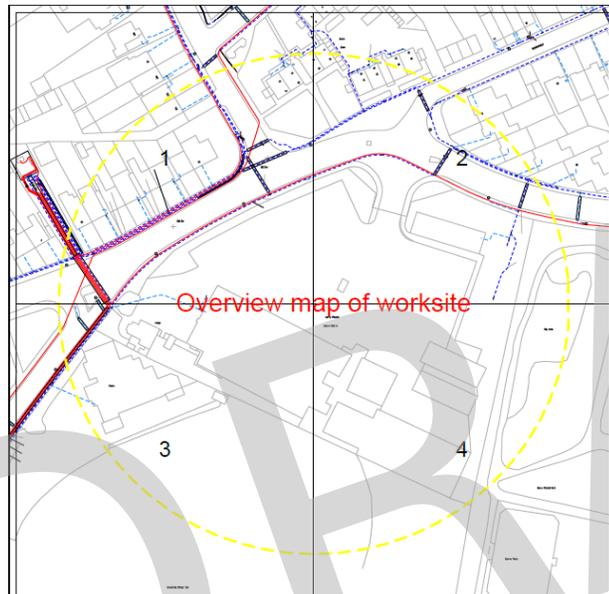
Constraints

The site falls on the edge of but still within the Coal Mining Reporting Area, however, no mining activity has been recorded by the Mining Remediate Authority.

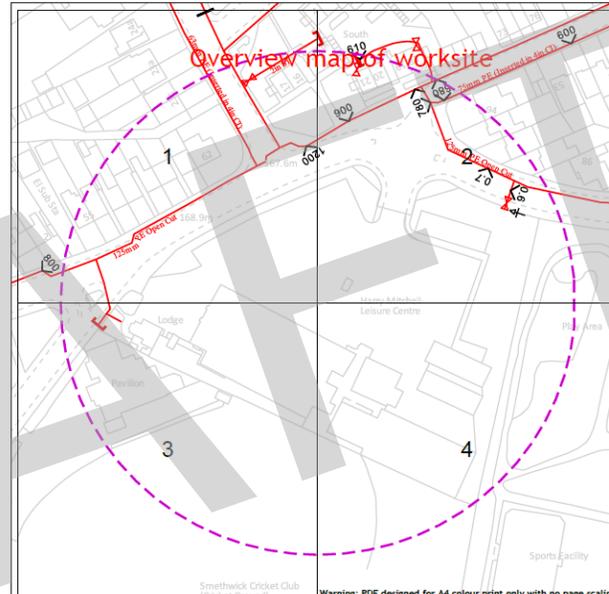
Utilities are shown opposite and do not cross the site.

The site is not in a flood risk zone.

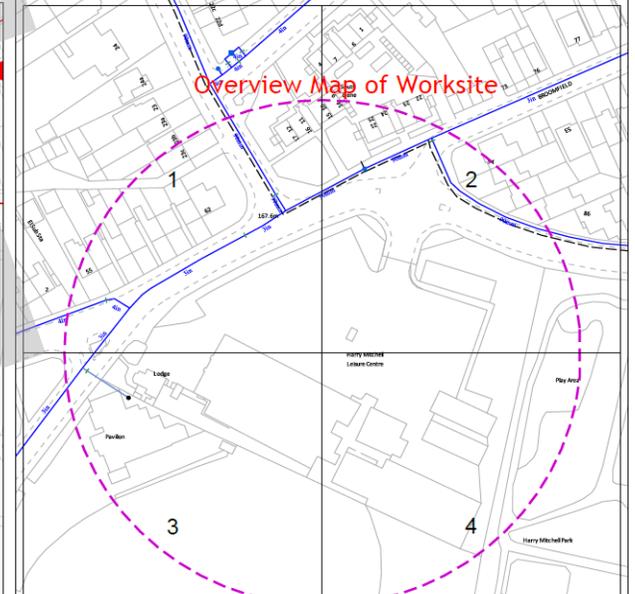
Removal of the mature trees would not be supported and would be considered contrary to the Council's Tree Strategy and Implementation Plan 2023 - 2028. The Council has committed to increase tree cover by 6% and plant 15,000 trees by 2030.



<p>Contact Us Electricity Distribution All areas 0121 623 9780 General Enquiries: 0800 096 3080</p>	<p>Link Box Site Location Line/Area</p>	<p>Overhead Line PL LW HV (11KV) HV (33KV) HV (66KV) HV (132KV)</p>	<p>Underground Cable Private Cables PME Earth Underground Earth</p>	<p>National Grid Telecoms Pole Mounted Transformer Ground Mounted Transformer</p>
<p>IMPORTANT NOTICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This information is given as a guide only and its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Services or recent additions to the network may not be shown. Cables, overhead lines & substations owned by other identity network owners or private companies may be present and may not be shown. You should always verify exact locations of cables using a cable locator and by careful use of hand tools in accordance with HSE guidance notes H5047. When working within 10m of any overhead electric line you should follow the requirements of HSE Guidance Note GS6. For further advice on working near our electricity cables or lines, call our General Enquiries number. Advice should be sought from the National Grid Electricity Distribution General Enquiries team for any work that is to take place in proximity to 132kV underground cables and 132kV overhead lines. <p>Report damage immediately - KEEP EVERYONE AWAY FROM THE AREA: 0800 6783 105</p> <p><small>Crown Copyright © All Rights Reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number: 100029432 NIEED Copyright: This copy has been made by or with the authority of National Grid Electricity Distribution (NIED) pursuant to Section 47 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 unless that first phrase is a request to accept to copyright the copy must not be copied without the prior permission of the copyright owner.</small></p>				



<p>Cadent Your Gas Network</p>	<p>Dig Sites Area: --- Line: --- LP Mains MP Mains IP Mains LHP Mains</p>	<p>Line: Valve Diameter Change Depth of cover Material Change Dip/Ton Out of Standard Service</p>	<p>Where an out of standard service is present please contact plant protection 0800 688 588 for further information. Out of standard service symbology may be used to indicate size or more of the following: • Identification of dual services • Recording of non-perpendicular services A perpendicular service/connection is laid in a straight line from the entry point at the property to the connection at the main - this includes a pipe that has a perpendicular connection and is not straight but does not deviate more than 1m off centre line.</p>
<p>IMPORTANT NOTICES</p> <p>This plan shows those pipes owned by Cadent Gas Limited in its role as a Licensed Gas Transporter (LGT). Gas pipes owned by other GTs or otherwise privately owned may be present in this area. Information with regards to such pipes should be obtained from the relevant owners. The information shown on this plan is given without warranty, the accuracy thereof cannot be guaranteed. Service pipes, valves, systems, riser connections etc. are not shown but their presence should be anticipated. No liability of any kind whatsoever is accepted by Cadent Gas Limited or their agents, servants or contractors for any errors or omissions. Safe digging practices, in accordance with H5047, must be used to verify and establish the actual position of mains, pipes, services and other apparatus on the before any mechanical plant is used. It is your responsibility to ensure that this information is provided to all persons (either direct labour or contractors) working for you on or near gas apparatus. The information included on this plan should not be referred to beyond a period of 28 days from the date of issue.</p> <p>In case of emergency call - 0800 111 999</p> <p><small>View extent: 150m, 100m Scale: 1:1025 (When plotted at A4) Drawn/Checked: The plan is reproduced from a hard copy held by Cadent Gas Limited with the permission of the controller of the Ordnance Survey Licence number: 100029432</small></p>			



<p>Date Requested: 03/04/2025 Job Reference: 36848737 Site Location: 401778 281138 Requested by: Mr Jordan Quinlan Your Scheme/Reference: HM Site 2</p>	<p>Dig Sites Area: --- Line: --- Private Valves Service Connections Valves, open Substituted, closed Flow cases Flow cases Flow cases</p>	<p>Line: As built, open As built, closed As built, open As built, closed Discontinuation lines Stop</p>	<p>South Staffs Water Registered Office: Green Lane, Walsall, WS3 7PD In Case of Emergency Call 0800 389 1031 Website: www.south-staffs-water.co.uk</p>
<p>IMPORTANT NOTICES</p> <p>The information required to give a good faith as regards to existing underground apparatus, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed, nor does it include comprehensive information about the existence or location of service pipes or cables to individual premises. The responsibility for locating and avoiding damage to apparatus on site shall be that of the person proposing to excavate in the street who shall be liable to the apparatus owner and any third party who may be affected in any way for any loss or damage caused by their failure to do so.</p> <p>Scale: 1:1025 (When plotted at A4)</p> <p><small>Based upon Ordnance Survey map data produced by South Staffs Water with the permission of the controller of the Ordnance Survey Licence number: 100029432 Plans generated by DigSAFE Pro™ software provided by Lincosoft/Mapforming.</small></p>			

Conclusion

- Redevelopment of the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre offers the opportunity for a new, healthy neighbourhood and community of <80 homes that maximises the benefits of its sustainable location and proximity to leisure facilities and green space.
- The new neighbourhood should comprise a mix of apartments and townhouses, in-keeping with the character of the area and providing a diverse community of residents.
- Opportunities for new pedestrian access to Harry Mitchell Park should be explored.
- Design should seek to increase overlooking of Harry Mitchell park to improve safety and access.
- The potential expansion of facilities at Smethwick Cricket club should be explored as this will be the opportunity to do so.
- Owing to the demographics of the area, the highly sustainable location, the need for affordable provision and the observable census data corollaries, development should advocate for reduced car parking on site to optimise the efficiency of the land use and ensure the new neighbourhood is an exemplar of good placemaking.