

# Solihull Town Centre Strategy

## Direction Paper No. 4

Public Sector Assets

June 2006

Prepared by GVA Grimley LLP

# **Solihull Town Centre Strategy**

Direction Paper No.4

Public Sector Assets

June 2006

Contact: Gary Stephens

Tel: 0121 609 8840

Email: [gary.stephens@gvagrimsley.co.uk](mailto:gary.stephens@gvagrimsley.co.uk)

[www.gvagrimsley.co.uk](http://www.gvagrimsley.co.uk)

+44 (0) 870 900 89 90





## Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Key Findings – Solihull Borough Council	3
3	Key Findings – Other Public Sector Bodies	5
4	Implications for the Emerging Town Centre Strategy	7

## Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Key Contacts	10
Appendix 2: Plan showing the General Distribution of Public Sector Land Ownerships within the Town Centre	11

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Paper draws together the key findings from a series of discussions with key public sector bodies with land and property assets or interests in and around Solihull town centre. These bodies included: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, West Midlands Police and HM Court Services. The discussions sought to identify the organisation's current assets and their future aspirations with respect to their property assets in Solihull. These discussions were held in person and over the telephone during late March and early April 2006. The contacts spoken to are identified in Appendix One. Some of the information given by the bodies is of a sensitive nature and has been treated as confidential.
- 1.2 This Directions Paper is one of six papers that form a robust evidence base for the Solihull Town Centre Study. The other papers are:
- 1. Development and Property;
  - 2. Retail Policy Considerations;
  - 3. Town Centre Health Check
  - 5. Movement and Accessibility; and
  - 6. Urban Design Analysis.
- 1.3 The next sections of the paper set out the key findings for each public sector body in turn before concluding, in the final section, with the key messages and next steps which will help to inform the next stage in the preparation of the Town Centre Strategy.



## 2 Key Findings – Solihull Borough Council

- 2.1 As a major landowner in the town centre, the Council has a number of assets of relevance to the Study. These are dealt with in turn. A plan is attached as Appendix Two showing the general distribution of public sector assets.

### **The Council House and other Council Facilities**

- 2.2 The Council House is fully occupied and the Council are reliant upon a number of satellite offices to accommodate its staff. The Council is changing the way it interacts with the public with more reliance upon the 'One Stop Shop' and the 'Call Centre' approach which will influence its future accommodation requirements.
- 2.3 There is an ongoing programme of general maintenance/refurbishment work which will maintain the present state of the building for the next five years. However, the building has significant structural issues (windows/concrete cladding) which will need to be addressed through major investment in the medium to long term (5 to 15 years). No decision has been made as yet as to whether to invest in the building, redevelop the site or relocate. The process for consideration of this matter is due to begin shortly as part of the 'Life Cycle Costings Scrutiny Process'. This will be an ongoing process undertaken by Council Officers and reported to the Council's Cabinet over the next 12 months.
- 2.4 The owners of Touchwood Court, Lend lease, have indicated that they are potentially interested in extending the shopping centre. The Council House is clearly located in a strategic position in relation to such a proposal and therefore could have significant value should the developer choose to pursue a scheme of this type. This potential will, no doubt, be an issue that the Council will wish to consider within the context of the scrutiny process highlighted above.
- 2.5 The adjoining Civic Suite also has structural problems, in this case the roof, which will require major investment. The future of this building will also be considered as part of the above process. This building has a political status amongst Members which may influence the consideration of its future (i.e. there would need to be a strong case made for it to be redeveloped).
- 2.6 In relation to leisure facilities, Parkwood have been chosen to run a new leisure centre at Tudor Grange. This decision follows much local debate and is to be funded by the development of land off Monkspath Hall Road for residential uses, subject to the necessary consents and legal agreements. In addition, the Library and Arts Centre was recently refurbished as part of the Touchwood development and is performing well as an asset with no

changes anticipated in the near future. In this context, there is not understood to be any further requirement for public sector provision of leisure facilities in the town centre.

### **Mell Square**

- 2.7 The Council are freehold owners of Mell Square with Morley Fund Management having the benefit of two 125 year leases. The Council have, however, retained control of the car park and the pedestrianised areas. The Council and Morley's are currently in discussions, under a co-operation agreement, to bring forward a comprehensive redevelopment of the site. The agreement has 12 months to run although in all likelihood discussions will continue after this time. It is too early in the process to know what redevelopment could yield in terms of additional floorspace and/or new uses, although it is known that Morley's are reviewing a range of solutions; some more radical than others.

### **Morrisons Store and the Post Office Site**

- 2.8 The Council are freehold owners of the Morrisons store and the adjoining Post Office/Sorting Office. As a second phase to the redevelopment of Mell Square, there is a potential opportunity to redevelop the land between Mell Square and Morrisons (including the Post Office) in order to better integrate the Morrisons store with the rest of the town centre. This would require the relocation of the Post Office to another site within one mile of the town centre.
- 2.9 A further potential phase could be the redevelopment of the Morrisons store itself, which does not present an appealing frontage in townscape terms to the Warwick Road.

### **Land at Homer Road/Station Road (the Triangle Site)**

- 2.10 This area has a number of landowners, including the Council. The site has a prominent position as a gateway site to the town centre and the Council has a long held aspiration for a comprehensive redevelopment to bring about a more efficient and effective use of the land. The Council's aspirations have been frustrated, in part, by the various landowners and the site is now coming forward in a piecemeal manner. The site is still, however, seen as an important opportunity by the Council.

### **Land South West of Homer Road**

- 2.11 The Council are freehold owners of these commercial properties and the tenants have the benefit of long leases (up to 150 years). There are no plans or aspirations for this area and any proposals for redevelopment would have the significant additional cost associated with the 'buying-up' of the existing leasehold interests.



### 3 Key Findings – Other Public Sector Bodies

#### **West Midlands Police Service**

- 3.1 West Midlands Police Service is the freehold owner of the Police Station on Homer Road. The buildings are sufficient to accommodate existing needs and there is an ongoing programme of internal refurbishment which will be completed within two years. A key factor that will influence their future use of this site will be the current Police Reform and the potential re-structuring of police forces within the West Midlands region. This matter has been discussed between Chief Superintendent McGinty and Julian Wain, Strategic Director for the Council. The Chief Superintendent did not wish to make any further comment at this time given the sensitivity of the issue.

#### **HM Court Services**

- 3.2 HM Court Services became the freehold owner of the Magistrates Court in Homer Road in April 2005 and are committed to the site at least until 2012. The existing accommodation is inadequate due to recent increases in staff numbers, although they propose to use the first floor of the adjoining Probation Services building to address this problem. In addition, the building does not contain a custody suite and there are currently proposals to convert part of the underground car park for a new suite at a cost of £350,000 to £500,000. A need and business case for the proposal has been demonstrated and, subject to finances and securing the necessary consents, will be implemented in 2007/08.
- 3.3 The longer term picture beyond 2012 is less certain. The West Midlands Courts Services long term strategy is tied to the development of Central Courts in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. The process has been stalled recently by the Treasury as it decides on how the development should be financed. Notwithstanding the current situation, development is expected to happen as land has already been acquired and permissions secured. After the development of the Central Courts, the role of the peripheral courts such as Solihull will be reviewed.
- 3.4 This review will be influenced by a number of factors. The demand for court services is clearly critical and although trends show an increase in demand, the greater use of fixed penalties may reduce the workload of Magistrates Courts in the future. In addition, the outcome of the current review of the restructuring of policing (see above) may have some influence as historically the structure of the Courts Service has tended to replicate the structure of the relevant Police Force. A future Courts Service that covers West Midlands and Warwickshire may therefore need to review its distribution of courts within a wider geographical area. The continued presence of the Magistrates Court beyond 2012 is therefore uncertain.

### **West Midlands Probation Service**

- 3.5 West Midlands Probation Service occupies a building adjacent to the Magistrates Court on Homer Road. The ground floor of the two storey building is currently being refurbished ready for occupation by an increased number of staff as a result of recent legislation. The Probation Service has recently invested in new offices in the north of the Borough and their role at Homer Road is very much linked with the activities of the Court. Their future within Solihull Town Centre is therefore reliant upon a continued presence of the Magistrates Court.

### **Department for Works & Pensions**

- 3.6 The Department for Works & Pensions (Job Centres Plus) occupies Park House and have no plans to invest in, or relocate from, their existing premises.

### **Solihull College**

- 3.7 Solihull College operates from two campuses outside of the town centre. The College has an aspiration for a modern and central facility for its Adult Community Learning Programme and a site in Shirley is currently being considered.

### **Solihull Primary Care Trust**

- 3.8 Solihull Primary Care Trust (PCT) owns or occupies a number of properties in and around Solihull Town Centre. As part of their joint proposal with the Council to become a Care Trust, the PCT will be undertaking a review to ensure effective use is made of its premises. This process will involve the Strategic Health Authority and the Council (representatives from Social Care) and is likely to last twelve to eighteen months.

### **West Midlands Fire Service**

- 3.9 West Midlands Fire Service operates from the Fire Station on Streetsbrook Road and has no plans to relocate.

## 4 Implications for the Emerging Town Centre Strategy

4.1 This section summarises the key messages from the Study that may influence the type and location of future property developments in Solihull town centre and recommends a number of next steps to be undertaken.

### Key Messages

- The ongoing discussions between the Council and Morley Fund Management in respect of Mell Square presents an opportunity to deliver significant physical and environmental improvements to the town centre, although the extent to which this will deliver increased floorspace for new uses is not known at this stage;
- Any redevelopment of Mell Square should have regard to the potential redevelopment of the Post Office site in order to better integrate Mell Square with the Morrisons store. The potential for the redevelopment of the Morrisons store itself could be explored as a later phase of development;
- The Council will need to decide over the next 12 months whether it wishes to make significant structural investments in the Council House and Civic Suite in order to continue with the current use of these buildings. The consideration of this matter through the 'Life Cycle Costings Scrutiny Process' will need to have regard to a number of factors, including the way in which the Council wishes to interact with the public in the future. There are clearly inter-relationships between the outcome of this process and the conclusions of the Town Centre Study;
- The 'Triangle Site' represents an important opportunity site as a 'gateway' to the town centre and aspirations to redevelop this area and the Council owned land have been frustrated in the past;
- A key factor that will influence the future use of the Police Station will be the current Police Reform and the potential re-structuring of police forces within the West Midlands region. This matter has been the subject of discussions between West Midlands Police and the Council;
- The presence of the Magistrates Court/Probation Service at their respective sites on Homer Road is unlikely to change in the short term (up to 2012). Their continued presence is less certain beyond 2012 as a consequence of changes to the structure of their respective services; and
- Solihull College has an aspiration for a town centre facility for Adult Learning.



- Solihull Primary Care Trust is shortly to begin a review of its premises as part of its proposal to become a Care Trust. This process will last twelve to eighteen months and will involve representatives from Social Care within the Council. The review will seek to make more effective use of premises and may therefore release some properties for alternative uses.

### **Next Steps**

- The Council should maintain its commitment to achieving improvements to Mell Square through continued support of the ongoing discussions with every effort given to reaching agreement with Morley's;
- Investigations should take place with the Post Office about their possible relocation from their existing premises with a joint search for alternative premises. This could release a key site adjacent to Mell Square;
- Discussions should take place with Morrisons about their future aspirations with regard to their store and how they might have a role in an improved town centre;
- The Council should ensure its consideration of the future of the Council House and Civic Suite through the 'Life Cycle Costings Scrutiny Process' has regard to the conclusions of the Town Centre Strategy, in particular, the aspirations of Lend Lease to extend Touchwood Court;
- Further discussions should take place with senior representatives of West Midlands Police Force and HM Courts Service to investigate in more detail their future plans and opportunities;
- A watching brief should be put on the premises review undertaken by Solihull Primary Care Trust to ensure opportunities that may influence the Town Centre Strategy are recorded; and
- The information provided to this study will date quickly as policy and investment decisions are made by the respective bodies and it will be important to maintain a regular dialogue with key organisations once this work is completed.

4.2 This paper needs to be read in conjunction with the other five Directions Papers for Solihull Town Centre Strategy.

## Appendices



## Appendix 1: List of Key Contacts

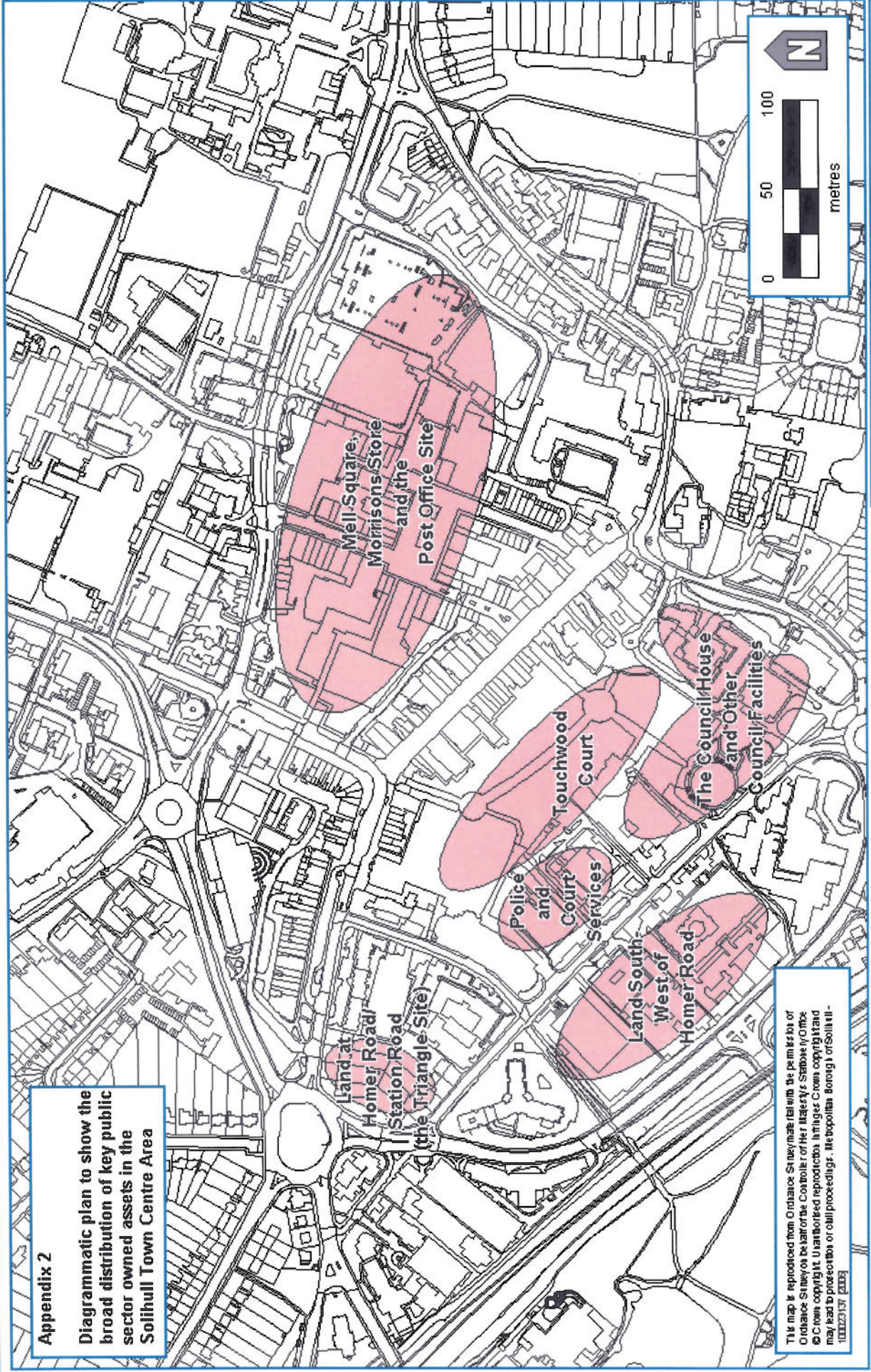
The key contacts for the Public Sector Bodies contacted as part of this Study were as follows:

- Mike Swallow and Gareth Williams of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council;
- Chief Superintendent McGinty of West Midlands Police Force;
- Bob Moffatt of HM Court Services;
- Bill Daly of West Midlands Probation Service;
- John Murnaghan of LS Trillium for Department for Works and Pensions;
- Chris Borrows of Solihull College;
- Gill Ashley Jones of Solihull Primary Care Trust; and
- Paul Timmins of West Midlands Fire Service.



**Appendix 2**

**Diagrammatic plan to show the broad distribution of key public sector owned assets in the Solihull Town Centre Area**



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey materials with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction in any form, copyright infringement, may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Metropolitan Borough of Solihull - 1000227130 2008



