



09 | Areas of Change

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This section explores seven areas of change within Solihull Town Centre which provide practical interventions in order to deliver the emerging concepts outlined in section 8, and informed by section 1 to 7.

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

It is important to recognise that the level of intervention envisaged as part of the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan will be delivered over a broad timeline, areas are likely to overlap and will influence one another as well as forming part of an evolution of the overall town centre offer as highlighted in the Vision section of this document (Section 7).

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

discussions with key stakeholders. In this context, the position of the railway station is significant – investment in the station may in the short-term be focused in the present location but that does not mean that a town centre masterplan that considers a 20 year timeframe should not look at a future where the station is relocated, with the potential wider economic and placemaking benefits that this change could generate.

Seven areas of change have been considered - incorporating key areas for intervention, setting out the key opportunities and influences associated with each area. The association with the three emerging concepts is confirmed and the ideas are reinforced through a series of precedent images and best practice examples.



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

Figure 9.1 Plan identifying the seven areas of change incorporating key areas for intervention.

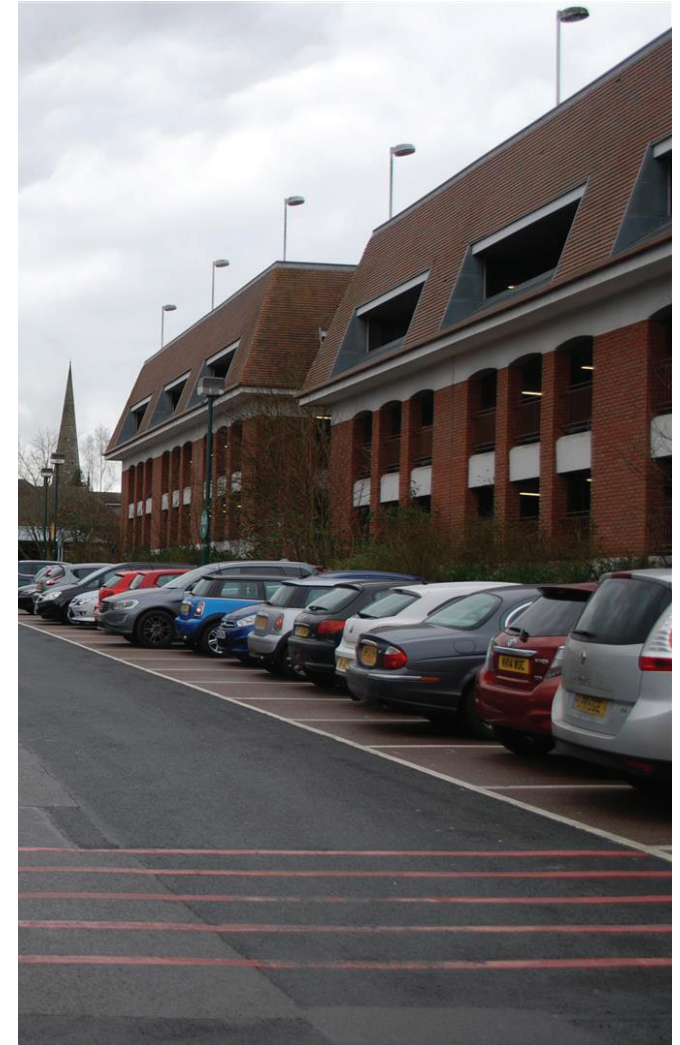
9.1 Car Parking

This section of the report considers the impact that the areas of change may have on future car parking provision in Solihull Town Centre. Development will inevitably change the way in which car parking is either integrated or displaced by new intervention but a key emerging recommendation is to ensure short stay “shopper” parking is retained or replaced as part of the car parking strategy. In this context a number of interventions have been identified which each ensure short stay parking demand is met, these are summarised below:

- Apply time limits on parking to ensure turnover;
- Performance pricing - adjusting the tariff paid to park based on expected demand to achieve 85-90% occupancy at all times;
- Reprioritising - reduce the use of town centre parking for long stay users to ensure availability for short stay users. This option recognises that the current context of Solihull offers limited scope or need to promote a Park & Ride system and therefore this intervention is linked to a modal change in long stay parking, away from vehicles and into walking, cycling and public transport;
- Parking provision by new developments could see a change in local policy which may require new developments to provide a minimum level of parking as part of their schemes to accommodate a reduction in long stay parking; and
- Future trends - the technology developed in the medium term indicates that parking in our town centres is likely to require less space and the space made available could be used more intensively and intelligently.

Further assessment of the impact on and role of car parking will be required, including the use of the Solihull Town Centre Car Park Model to test options. The following key recommendations have been made:

- Discussion surrounding quantity and proximity of parking capacity in the town centre which can support the emerging masterplan with key stakeholders;
- Calculate expected loss and replacement in capacity as the masterplan progresses;
- Consider what options for parking policy choices may be implemented;
- Output a new set of overall parking demand forecasts broken down by type of user;
- Establish if there is a shortfall between the overall supply provided and demand at a town wide level;
- Examine options to provide the capacity required and identify potential locations and management regimes for this capacity;
- Undertake modelling using the parking allocation model and traffic model;
- Adjust the location capacity and pricing regimes to reflect the results of modelling;
- Confirm a strategy and outline plan for parking provision; and
- Undertake sensitivity and resilience testing to provide comfort that the solution retains some flexibility, scalability and resilience.



9.2 Western Gateway

As discussed within Section 3, the western arrival into the town is currently dominated by roads and a lack of frontages around the Solihull Methodist Church and Homer Road Triangle, with the train station physically and psychologically disconnected from the town centre. Reconfiguration of key junctions here would provide opportunities to enhance key pedestrian and cycle connections from Solihull Train Station into the town centre, and also potentially improve journey times for buses by reprioritising and supporting sustainable travel. Supported by new land mark development fronting onto the street and an improved public realm, the Lode Lane/ Blossomfield Road roundabout could be transformed into a key visual gateway; which represents an important arrival point into Solihull Town Centre for those arriving by public transport and from the west. In the short term, upgrades to Solihull Train Station could look to improve the look and feel of the station, providing new facilities which promote its use and a more fitting representation of Solihull's future aspirations. Longer term, should the station be relocated, there is opportunity to introduce new residential uses within easy walking distance of the town centre.

Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Improve pedestrian and cycle connections into and out of the town centre	Longer term opportunities to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.	Strengthen and enhance key gateway into the town.
Enhance connection to Solihull College and Tudor Grange Park.		Promotion of high quality and sustainable new development.
Encourage greater use of sustainable travel.		Upgrade key route into town improve legibility and wayfinding.



Figure 9.2 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

9.3 Southern Gateway

Cut off from the town by busy roads and the rail line embankment, the south of the town centre feels disconnected to its surroundings, in particular Tudor Grange Park. In addition, large swathes of surface car parking leave large voids in the urban structure at a key arrival point into the town. In the short term, new residential development could provide sustainable new housing within close walking distance of the town centre and also provide a positive edge to Tudor Grange Park. In the long term a relocated Solihull Train Station could be positioned to bridge the rail line and improve accessibility into the town centre, encouraging sustainable travel. The development of a new landmark station could create an attractive new gateway into the town centre which befits Solihull's aspirational vision; which could be further supported by improved public realm and wayfinding.

The future development of this site is dependent on the decision made regarding the station's future location. This will fundamentally effect the market positioning and opportunity for the site. If the Station remains in its existing location then market interest in the site would be for suburban densities. If the station was to relocate to this site, there would be the opportunity for apartments with lower densities further out.



Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Improved cycle and pedestrian connections into the town from the south.	Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.	Creation of a landmark new station, and attractive southern gateway.
Provision of an accessible, centralised new train station to encourage greater rail usage.	Strengthen, support and extend Solihull's business and commercial offer through relocation of the station.	Positive frontage onto Tudor Grange Park. Linking the town centre with public parks.

Figure 9.3 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

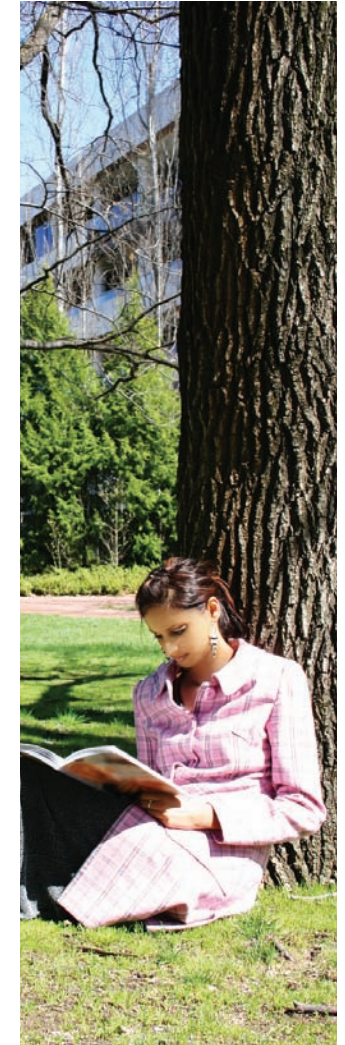


Figure 9.4 Illustrative layout of a train station at the Southern Gateway.

9.4 Business and Commercial Quarter

The spatial audit (Section 3) highlighted the poor quality of existing north-south connections, inadequate cycle provision, weak urban form and the lack of frontage along Princes Road. Through expansion of the current commercial offer and the potential integration of new urban living, there are opportunities to promote Solihull as a place to do business, whilst addressing some of the key urban design issues facing the town. Potential enhancement of Homer Road and north-south connections could provide opportunities to promote walking and cycling, and also introduce green infrastructure into the town linking with Tudor Grange Park. The introduction of landmark buildings could improve the southern aspect of the town by redefining frontage which could support a relocated new train station in the longer term.

Whilst not the full extent of the office market in the town centre, the environs of Prince's Way and Homer Road is defined by a high concentration of large, single occupier, buildings. A number of well known names including Npower, National Grid, Paragon Financial Services, and HM Immigration Office, occupy these buildings, lend the area a particular character. In particular, the area between Princes Way and Homer Road, is defined by buildings with large massing in terms of surface coverage especially, set back from the road with extensive surface parking areas. These qualities have been important in establishing Solihull Town Centre as an important location within the wider office market outside of Birmingham City Council (defined as "out of town" market).

Any proposed changes to this quarter to address the issues identified will be sensitive to the importance of this area to Solihull Town Centre (Paragon employees at this location-circa 500+, N Power 500+, National Grid 500+) and the qualities that appeal to occupiers, car parking in particular.



Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
<p>Improve north-south connections through the town centre.</p> <p>Enhance provision for cyclists to encourage sustainable travel.</p> <p>Create a more permeable town centre.</p>	<p>Strengthen, support and extend Solihull's business and commercial offer.</p> <p>Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.</p>	<p>Introduction of green infrastructure linking the town centre with public parks.</p> <p>Improving the look and feel of north south connections.</p> <p>Enhance the southern gateway into the town centre through high quality new development.</p>



Figure 9.5 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

9.5 Northern Approach

Heavily dominated by traffic and large scale highway infrastructure, the Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout currently acts as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement. The distinct lack of direct frontage onto the street and relatively poor quality of surrounding buildings mean that this key arrival point into the town fails to match the attractiveness of the inner town centre. The Lode Lane multi-storey car park was identified in the Solihull Town Centre Study (2009) as an unattractive and outdated site, with recommendations for redevelopment. The Solihull Public Realm Strategy (2014) also recognised the lack of gateway articulation and negative public realm impact caused by the multi-storey car park. This low urban quality and underutilisation brings the site forward as a key area for future change.

Improvements to the environment of Warwick Road have the potential to enhance connectivity along the northern edge of the town with opportunities to create improved crossing facilities and greater provision for cyclists. A new landmark development fronting onto the roundabout could improve the attractiveness of this important arrival point and deliver attractive new urban living and/or car parking facilities.



Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Enhanced connectivity across Warwick Road. Improved pedestrian and cycle facilities.	Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living potentially alongside new car parking facilities.	Enhance the northern arrival point into the town through high quality new development.



Figure 9.6 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

9.6 Heart of Solihull (Retail Core)

Solihull benefits from a popular and successful retail core centred around Touchwood Shopping Centre and Mell Square. The masterplan will seek to re-establish the High Street as a key component of Solihull's retail heart. Currently there is a distinct lack of quality evening offer and some of the existing public realm is tired and fails to reflect the ambitions of the town. The planned introduction of new mixed use development at Touchwood II and Mell Square will provide further diversity and vitality to the town centre whilst also acting as a catalyst for future redevelopment. Providing a greater variety of food and beverage uses, the proposals will also boost Solihull's evening economy, which could be further supported through the development of new higher density residential uses. There are also opportunities to enhance pedestrian and cycle connections through the town, using new development to reinforce and positively reflect main routes, particularly around St Alphege's Church. Furthermore, an upgraded public realm along the High Street and at Mell Square will more appropriately reflect the historic character and quality of the town centre, and provide the opportunity to create a high quality destination space for residents, visitors and workers.

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



Figure 9.7 Broad design principles and visualisations of the planned Touchwood II and Mell Square developments.



Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Improve provision for cyclists.	Increase the diversity of uses within the town centre.	Strengthen the identity and historic character of the town.
Enhance connections through the town centre through additional wayfinding measures and a clear route hierarchy.	Grow Solihull's evening economy.	Create a vibrant and attractive destination.
	Introduce further sustainable urban living to support the town centre.	Enhance streets and public realm and develop a clear hierarchy of routes to aid legibility.

9.7 Solihull Living

Elements within the north east of the town centre are underutilised and fail to provide an attractive frontage along Warwick Road. In addition, the existing building formats hinder permeability and there is a lack of positive frontage onto many pedestrian routes. With the opportunities associated with the planned Mell Square and Touchwood II developments, there is an exciting opportunity to further diversify the town and support the wider town centre's envisaged new evening uses through the creation of a new residential quarter.

We envisage the quarter may have particular appeal to the retirement market and young professionals. A greater representation of these demographic groups will support the diversification of the evening economy in the town centre, as such groups appreciate and seek an increasingly broad range of good quality and convenient leisure and entertainment options. This would provide new opportunities to consolidate and reconfigure existing car parking provision, and enable increased permeability from Mell Square through to the eastern edge of the town.

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

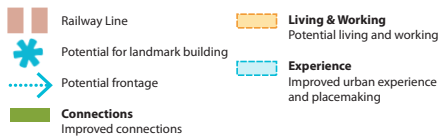


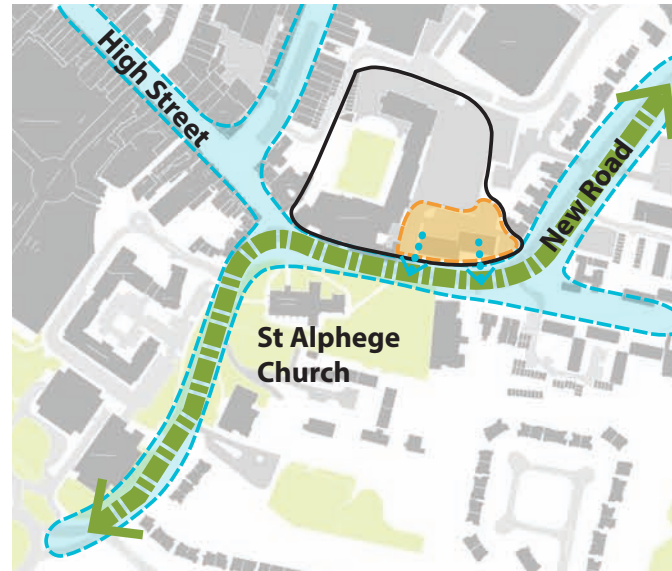
Figure 9.8 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.

Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Improved north-south connectivity	Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living potentially alongside new car parking facilities.	Positive frontage onto Warwick Road.
Improved pedestrian and cycle provision.		Improved perceptions of the northern edge to pedestrians and cyclists.
Enhanced permeability within the town centre.		Enhanced overlooking onto key routes.



9.8 St Alphege's Quarter

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



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

Association with Emerging Concepts		
Connections	Living & Working	Experience
Improved provision for cyclists.	Opportunity to diversify the town centre and provide sustainable urban living.	Creation of positive frontage onto St Alphege's Church.
Enhanced pedestrian connections along New Road.		Linking the town centre with public parks.
Improved connectivity to Malvern and Brueton Park.		Strengthen the identity and historic character of the town.



Figure 9.9 Broad design principles and precedent image examples.



9.9 SWOT Review

The below table demonstrates how the interventions within the Areas of Change can respond and react to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified within Section 3.8.

Strengths	Areas of Change Response	Weaknesses	Areas of Change Response
A high quality town rich in heritage.	St Alphege's Quarter (9.8) will look to strengthen the historic character of the town by improving the setting of St Alphege Church and frontages onto New Road.	Lack of outward frontage resulting in an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull.	Areas of change with frontages along the edges of the town (9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6 9.7 and 9.8) provide opportunities to create new attractive frontage and an outward facing town centre.
Frontages associated with the main High Street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafés and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town.	The Heart of Solihull (9.6) looks to enhance the public realm, encourage mixed uses and improve connectivity to further strengthen the High Street. Further food and beverage uses associated with Touchwood II and Mell Square will add to existing positive frontages and provide attractive built form.	Solihull's main gateways are currently characterised by large scale infrastructure.	Four key Areas of Change (9.2, 9.3, 9.4 and 9.5) are focussed around the existing junctions and look to create new attractive frontage and improved pedestrian and cycle connections. New landmark buildings could be used to further strengthen Solihull's identity and aid legibility.
Solihull town centre benefits from being in close proximity to two large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park; and Malvern and Brueton Park.	The Southern Gateway (9.3) aims to improve north south connections and will provide positive frontage onto Tudor Grange Park. St Alphege's Quarter (9.8) will improve connectivity and pedestrian / cycle experience between the High Street and Malvern and Brueton Park.	Key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull.	Improvements to Solihull Train Station (9.2) and the potential relocation in the longer term (9.3) will improve arrival points for visitors / users and better reflect Solihull's character. In addition, the Areas of Change will look to improve connectivity and experience for pedestrians and cyclists.
Existing market reputation and high quality of living.	It is envisaged that the Areas of Change will together sustain Solihull's enviable reputation and the introduction of new town city living will provide new high quality residential uses at the heart of the town.	The train station feels remote from the centre, and has a relatively poor environmental quality.	The improved connections in the short term (9.2) will enhance routes from the station to the town centre, and longer term relocation (9.3) could centralise the train station and provide closer links with the centre.
		Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and do not overlook the street.	Many Areas of change include frontages along the edges of the town (9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6 9.7 and 9.8). This provides opportunities to create new attractive frontage which overlook the street.
		There is very little greenspace within the town centre core and access to parks is at present poorly signposted.	The Southern Gateway (9.3) and St Alphege's Quarter (9.8) will provide opportunities to provide improved signage to the parks.
		The town is characterised by large single use areas, which have little interaction.	The Areas of Change will introduce new mixed uses into the town centre (offices, residential and leisure) adding further vibrancy broadening the current offer.
		Limited residential offer in the town centre.	There are opportunities to add new urban living into all Areas of Change with particular emphasis on the Southern Gateway (9.3) and Solihull Living (9.7) areas.

Opportunities	Areas of Change Response	Threats	Areas of Change Response
Train Station has the opportunity to create a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town.	Improvements to Solihull Train Station (9.2) and the potential relocation in the longer term (9.3) will improve arrival points for visitors / users and better reflect Solihull's character. It will also provide opportunity to plan for the future and encourage further usage of the train station.	Market considerations for demand and viability.	The Areas of Change are inherently flexible, providing a framework for future change. This flexibility will allow sites to come forward at different times which can respond to market demand yet still conform to and support the overall vision for Solihull.
Build on it's reputation as an affluent town.	Further diversifying the town centre offer by introducing new leisure, office and residential uses will build on Solihull's existing positive reputation and encourage greater use of the town centre.	Environmentally and socially responding to a changing demographic; elderly, youth and young families.	The Heart of Solihull (9.6) will increase leisure uses within the town centre to create a destination for families and young professionals. The introduction of new urban living within the town centre will provide attractive new housing within easy reach of the town centre uses which could be an attractive proposition for the older generation as well as young professionals.
Build on Solihull Town Centre's existing variety of public spaces, which support a range of different functions.	New development within the Areas of Change provides opportunities to create new public spaces and improve existing ones. The Heart of Solihull (9.6) in particular looks to provide a reconfigured Mell Square which has the potential to become a high quality public space and destination for events.	Responding to the competitive nature of similar towns in the wider context.	The Heart of Solihull (9.6) looks to encourage a greater diversity of uses within the town centre and support the independent retail base strengthening Solihull's identity. Solihull Living (9.7) and other Areas of Change provide opportunities to introduce new urban living to support the growing commercial and leisure uses.
Improve accessibility to surrounding parks to encourage people to use them.	The Southern Gateway (9.3) and St Alphege's Quarter (9.8) will provide opportunities to provide improved signage and connections to the parks.	Responding to climate change and the push for sustainability.	The Areas of Change look to promote improved pedestrian and cycle connections to encourage greater sustainable travel reducing dependence on the car. This is of particular importance at the Western Gateway (9.2), Business and Commercial Quarter (9.4) and Southern Gateway (9.3). In addition, improvements to the train station (9.2 and 9.3) will encourage people to travel to Solihull by train.
Increase the residential offer in the town centre.	There are opportunities to add new urban living into all Areas of Change with particular emphasis on the Southern Gateway (9.3) and Solihull Living (9.7) areas.		
Recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses provide.	The introduction of new urban living into the town centre will help support emerging food and beverage and commercial uses (Mell Square and Touchwood II) and provide new opportunities for sustainable working and living reducing the need to use the car.		
Support the wider Borough ambitions outlined by UK Central.	The relocation of the train station (9.3) will help support the UK Central ambition of creating a principal gateway between the National Rail Network and Solihull Town Centre.		