

september 1998

aston local plan



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1. introduction

1.1 This Local Plan has been prepared by the City Council to provide a framework for the future development of the Aston area and in particular to provide the context for any future development of the Aston Villa Football Club ground.

1.2 The content of the plan reflects the issues and concerns raised by local people in response to public consultation exercises held during the Spring and Summer of 1998. The City Council has also been working closely with local residents associations and community organisations through the Aston Villa Ground Development and Environmental Improvement Working Group.

1.3 The comments received from local people have been reflected in the plan. These have helped to provide a focus for the plan which tackles the following major issues:

- * How to ensure that Villa Park, Aston Parish Church and Aston Hall and Park can continue to co-exist to their best advantage, and accommodate the diverse needs of local people, tourists

and football supporters alike.

- * The historic environment.
- * Aston Villa - the impact of the existing ground and proposed developments upon the local community and surroundings and the need for a 'European class' stadium in Birmingham.
- * Aston Hall and Park - the need for improvements to play and sports facilities and the potential for restoration of the Hall and gardens to strengthen its role as a tourist destination and to secure its preservation and protection as an outstanding historic monument.
- * Community facilities - the impact of closing the Aston Villa Leisure Centre, the need for community rooms and youth facilities, requirements of religious groups.
- * Traffic, public transport and parking - problems of congestion and speeding, need to improve access to public transport, parking problems.
- * Vacant land - opportunities for redevelopment.
- * Environmental improvements - making a better, safer environment.

1.4 This Plan has been prepared using the background of the general policies contained in The Birmingham Plan (1993), and the Government's Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPG's). The Plan has been approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Birmingham Plan.

1.5 This Plan deals mainly with Planning and Transportation issues. It is, however complementary to other City Council initiatives eg. the Economic Strategy and the Kingstanding Tame Valley Area Regeneration Initiative which seeks to attract new investment and tackle training and employment problems in this part of the City. The plan also seeks to influence Employment, Economic and Leisure issues where they are considered directly relevant to potential developments eg. at Aston Villa FC and other opportunities in the area.

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2. the place and community

2.1 This Plan focuses on north Aston, Witton and the Birchfield area between Birchfield Road, Aston Lane and Witton Road (See plan 1). The area is divided between the Ladywood and Perry Barr Parliamentary Constituencies and the Handsworth and Aston Wards.

The Local Community

2.2 There are nearly 20,000 people living in the area. The average age of local people is younger than the City average with almost half (49%) aged under 24 (City 36%); this is reflected in the much higher number of households with children. The size of families in Aston is also larger with 20% having three or more children compared to an average 8% in Birmingham as a whole.

2.3 There is a very broad ethnic mix, the largest being the Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi community with 51% of the population. The white ethnic group make up 31% of the community with the Black ethnic group 14% and other groups (including Chinese) making up 4% of the population.

2.4 Unemployment in the area is well above the average at around 23.2% compared to 9.7% average for the whole of Birmingham. There is low car ownership in the area with 61% of households having no car; therefore many people rely on public transport, and shopping and community facilities within easy walking distance from home.

The Place

2.5 The character of the area is typical of other inner-city areas of Birmingham built in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. The area is split into three by the Aston Expressway (A38(M)) and the Birmingham to Walsall railway line.

2.6 Most of the area between Birchfield Road and the Aston Expressway is dominated by pre-1919 terraced housing with no off-street car parking, most of which has been improved over the last 20 years through various renewal schemes.

2.7 The Holte Estate between Aston Expressway and Lichfield

Road was redeveloped in the 1960's and 70's. The area is mainly residential with the exception of Salford Park and small workshops around the railway and Expressway.

2.8 The Witton area to the north of the railway line is a mix of industrial buildings and warehouses with several streets of terraced houses in the centre. Much of the former GEC factory which dominated the area has now been redeveloped to form modern units on the Junction Six Business Park.

2.9 The main local shopping area is centred on Witton Road, Aston Lane and Witton Square which has a number of independent shops selling a range of goods from food and clothes to furniture. The Birmingham Plan (1993) identifies an opportunity for the development of further small scale shopping. In addition there are a number of corner shops and shopping parades spread around the area which provide for the convenience and specialist shopping needs of the local community. For many people, the nearest main shopping centres

are at 'One Stop' in Perry Barr, Newtown Shopping Centre and Erdington High Street.

2.10 The main area of public open space is Aston Park which forms the grounds of the historic Aston Hall and falls within the Aston Hall and Church Conservation Area. The Hall is a Grade 1 Listed Building built between 1618-1635 and open to the public. The park has 'kick-about' areas, a playground, play centre and tennis courts. Over many years, the parks facilities have declined and concerns about crime discourage many from using the park. There are smaller areas of open space at Albert Road and Sycamore Road.

3. the football club

3.1 Football has been played at Villa Park since 1897 when Aston Villa Football Club (AVFC) relocated from their former ground at Perry Barr. Since then, Villa Park has seen much redevelopment and change (a plan to build a 130,000 capacity stadium was abandoned at the outbreak of World War II) and today it is one of the top football stadiums in the country.

3.2 Villa Park remains, however, a stadium located in a densely built-up inner city area and the influx of football fans, and the disruption caused on match days, and other events organised at the stadium, is the cause of much friction with the local community. Typical problems are caused by:

- * increased traffic congestion;
- * on-street parking by football fans;
- * litter, noise and pollution;
- * anti-social activities;
- * disruption to the daily routine.

Many local people feel obliged to stay in their homes on match days rather than socialise with friends or go shopping for their every day needs.

3.3 In recent years the capacity of Villa Park has been reduced from 48,000 to 39,339 following the conversion of terracing to seats; in line with the recommendations of Lord Justice Taylor's report on Safety at Football Grounds. AVFC have now submitted planning applications to increase stadium capacity to 50,000. The proposals include:

- * extending the North stand;
- * redevelopment of the Trinity Road stand;
- * refurbishment and extension of the Holte Hotel Public House to make a 140 bedroom hotel;
- * the relocation of Aston Play centre;
- * the possible closure of Trinity Road. Two options have been

examined as part of the consultation exercise:

- the closure of part of Trinity Road to enable the Trinity Road stand to be rebuilt across the existing carriageway;
- the diversion of Trinity Road around the new Trinity Road stand within Aston Park.



3.4 The City Council has not yet made a decision on Aston Villa's

planning applications. They are major development proposals and raise many complex issues not least the impact that they will have on the local community and Aston Hall and Park. The public consultation previously carried out has highlighted a number of key issues and clarified local residents concerns. The City Council is continuing to discuss these issues with the Club.

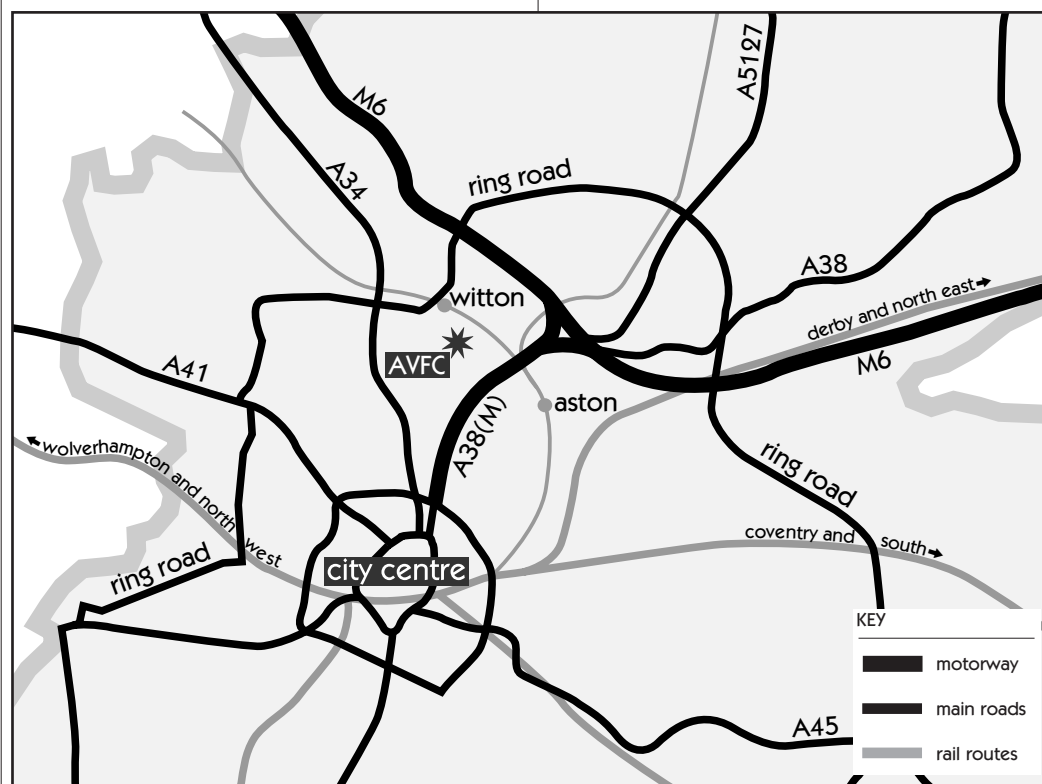
3.5 The Birmingham Plan stresses the importance of the Aston Villa Football Ground as an important leisure facility. It suggests that further proposals to improve facilities should ensure that any additional loss of amenity to local residents should be kept to a minimum.

3.6 The City Council does, however, recognise the benefits of creating a 50,000 spectator 'European Class' stadium. The failure of the bid to build the new national stadium at the NEC means that Villa Park is possibly the only football ground in the West Midlands with the potential to improve capacity and facilities to stage European and International matches. The 'strategic' need for this facility in Birmingham is strong for without it events could go to Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield or elsewhere in the Country. Similarly the development of the stadium could strengthen the City's chances of forming part of the English Football Association's bid to secure the 2006 World Cup Finals as well as providing the opportunity to stage events during development of the new national stadium at Wembley.

3.7 It is equally clear that further increases in capacity at Villa Park, if handled poorly, will place additional and unacceptable burdens on the local community many of whom have strong objections about the expansion plans and about the operation and impact of the stadium with its existing capacity.

3.8 In reaching a decision about AVFC's proposals the city council would need to be satisfied that:

- * The aspirations for improvements to Aston Hall and Park are actively assisted by the Club's proposals. In essence, the stadium together with Aston Parish Church and Aston Hall and Park would



provide a major visitor focus for local people, tourists to the city and football supporters;

- * That any expansion of the stadium would be carried out with measures to improve traffic, parking and other problems affecting the local community and that every opportunity is taken to integrate the Club with the surrounding community and deal with disruption caused on match days.

3.9 The City Council is looking to AVFC to resolve a whole range of issues. This would involve dealing with problems caused on match days and by other events which may be held. These include:

- (i) Transportation:
 - Preparation and implementation of a transport study, to include measures to ensure more fans travel by public transport.
 - Match day traffic management plan.
 - The introduction of a free residents only parking scheme and/or match day traffic exclusions.
 - The provision of park and ride schemes at sites elsewhere in

Birmingham and the West Midlands and linked to improvements in public transport services.

- The need for off-site highway improvements. For example, Witton Island may need traffic lights to be installed.
- (ii) Replacement of Aston Play Centre, play area and multi-purpose games court and associated landscaping (should their current proposals receive planning permission).
- (iii) Compensation for any loss of public open space should planning permission be granted, for current, or other future, proposals affecting the Park. Any loss of open space will, however, only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will be judged against the criteria set out in Section 6.2 of this Plan and the policies of the Birmingham Plan.
- (iv) Measures to deal with any impact on the setting of Aston Hall and Park and any other archaeological remains.
- (v) Improving facilities for people with disabilities, particularly for

people who use wheelchairs.

- (vi) Requiring the Club to look positively at using their own security arrangements eg. CCTV, for the wider benefit of the local community.
- (vii) Improved cleaning of the area after matches and other events.
- (viii) Requiring the club to use one of their existing car parks for use by their staff to reduce congestion in residential streets.

4. conference centre, hotel and other commercial operations at villa park

4.1 In recent years AVFC has expanded non-football related commercial operations at Villa Park. Examples include the MaGregor Suite, the Corner Flag restaurant and (limited) conference and exhibition facilities. Their current proposals involve the welcome refurbishment of the Locally Listed Holte Hotel Public House and its conversion and expansion to form a new 140 bedroom hotel. The proposal put forward by AVFC for the Trinity Road stand also provides some 14,500m² of space which could be used for further commercial activities or other uses, subject to meeting car parking provision.

4.2 The City Council consider that there is an opportunity here for AVFC to look positively at using this space for uses which can achieve a closer integration between the Club and community and assist in tackling some of the wider issues in the area. For example, there remains a need to address local community and social facilities. Sunderland AFC's 'life learning' project is an interesting example and the City would require AVFC to look at using this space for

non-business or commercial activity eg. use for training centre or health care.

4.3 It must also be remembered that AVFC is one of the largest businesses in the area and contributes to the vibrancy of the local economy. The Club currently employs around 200 people, with a further 1000 temporary staff employed on match-days. It represents an opportunity for local people to gain employment in an area of high unemployment.

4.4 The City Council is currently working with the Club and Birmingham Job Link to try and match the Club's employment needs to training and employment packages which would improve local people's chances of competing successfully for those jobs created by the Club. This will, however, only be guaranteed by ensuring that local people have the first opportunity to take up these jobs, with appropriate training where necessary.

5. traffic and transportation

5.1 Access to the Aston area by public transport and road is generally good. There are stations at Aston and Witton which link the area to Lichfield to the north and Redditch to the south by the cross-city line and from Coventry to the east to Walsall to the west. Bus routes are also of good quality. Spaghetti Junction provides a link to the M6 and the rest of the national motorway network and this is re-enforced by the Heartlands Spine Road which will be fully completed in June 1998 together with the Cuckoo Road link, which will open the year later, and the Lichfield Road and A34. These are all dual carriageway routes which bring motorists to within a mile or two of the Villa Park ground. However, access from these principal roads is not as good and there is considerable congestion arising from traffic to the industrial areas at Witton and Holford as well as match day traffic to Villa Park. Access from Park Circus to Aston Hall (one of the City's premier tourist attractions) is also difficult and does not present a good image.

5.2 Local congestion also takes place at the Witton Island immediately to the north of the ground. The problems of traffic congestion poor parking and servicing and pedestrian circulation inhibit the use of the Witton Centre. The introduction of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings would be of considerable benefit. Additionally, pedestrian movement across Trinity Road is also difficult, particularly for school children.

5.3 Some of these issues are being addressed through traffic calming and traffic management schemes associated with the development of the Junction 6 Business Park. However, most of the transport concerns relate to the impact of match day traffic at Villa Park. Traditionally, congestion on matchdays has been confined to a period between 12.30pm and 6pm on Saturdays but with the advent of Sky TV and the Club's success in European competitions, congestion can take place at other days of the week, occasionally in conjunction with peak hour traffic leaving industrial estates in the area.

Generally, the disruption can last for five to six hours and results in heavy demand for on-street parking, which means existing residents are unable to leave their homes and be confident of the availability of the parking space they had left earlier. In addition, fans walking from their cars to the ground deposit litter and are responsible for other forms of abuse and disturbance which makes life particularly difficult for local residents.

5.4 Whilst considerable policing takes place in an effort to reduce or manage congestion at key junctions (in particular Witton Island) there is little overall co-ordination of fan's parking or of marketing public transport. This is despite the fact that complaints from local residents are longstanding and that monies for a residents parking scheme were secured on a previous Section 106 Agreement related to the development of the Witton Road stand. Residents have not supported a residents parking scheme which necessitates their own contribution to its administration. The monies for this scheme remain unspent.

5.5 The Club provides limited off-street parking within the curtilage of the ground, together with a coach park on Witton Lane. The Club already undertakes liaison arrangements with other parking providers such as local schools, the University of Central England at Perry Barr and local industrialists. It is proposed that these are extended to provide a much better link between match day parking needs and the location and provision of spaces.

5.6 It follows, therefore, that a traffic management plan is required for the whole area. This should include the provision of additional parking spaces both at the Siemens site on and at the Serpentine site (see section 7), as well as positive management schemes between local parking providers and the Club. This would be included in a public transport and parking plan of which the main components are outlined below. The Plan could be secured by a Section 106 Agreement.

Impact of the Expansion Proposals

5.7 It is estimated from the Traffic Impact Study submitted with the clubs planning applications that approximately 3300 additional cars could be attracted to the area as a result of the proposed increases in the capacity of Villa Park by 10,661 spectators. This is on top of the extensive car parking that already takes place in the streets surrounding the ground and on sites such as the Serpentine Site.

5.8 The Sir Norman Taylor Centre for Football Research at Leicester University conducted a survey of Premier League clubs and their fans in 1996. For Aston Villa this contains some key findings which help to guide future policies which should aim to reduce the impact of any increased capacity. These are:

- a) 75% of fans live within 45 minutes travel time of Villa Park.
- b) More people travel to games by car at Villa Park than is the case nationally, less walk and fewer use supporters coaches.

c) Fans consider that if public transport facilities were improved and were reasonably priced, more would use trains and buses to travel to the ground.

5.9 At the moment there is no overall strategy for transporting fans to and from the ground. No attempt is made to publicise public transport in match programmes or by ticketing. The bulk of the coordination that takes place is with the local police in terms of traffic management and the movement of fans. There are no residents parking schemes to prevent fans parking in the surrounding streets, although an earlier legal agreement between the Club and the Council to set aside limited funds towards a parking scheme has not had the support of local residents, because they had to pay the ongoing revenue costs of the scheme.

5.10 The effect of match day parking on the lives of local residents is one of their major objections to the expansion plans. In order to reduce the impact of match days, and other big events, it is proposed

to agree and implement a **Transport and Parking Management Plan**. It is suggested that this plan is drawn up by the Club in conjunction with representatives of the Council, local residents, religious organisations, Centro, police, public transport operators and coach companies. It should deal with the needs of home supporters and away fans. The Plan will be subject to annual review by all the parties concerned.

5.11 The Plan would focus on the following key principles:

- * A parking management scheme to provide more designated off-street parking spaces on existing car parks and on new car parks identified through the local plan. The ability of traffic calming to influence the way people access match day parking spaces will be investigated and where positive indicators are achieved then provision would be a requirement of any planning permission.
- * An area of residents-only parking where staff and fans would be prohibited from parking on match days and other big events. The extent of the residents only

parking scheme will need to be considered carefully but should aim to discourage on-street parking rather than displace it over a larger area. It would be provided and operated at no cost to residents, businesses and the City Council.

- * Positive measures to promote the use of public transport such as trains, coaches and buses. This should include the use of joint ticketing schemes (eg. combined match parking and travel tickets making use of existing rail-based park and ride facilities on the Cross City and Walsall lines), as well as increased use of buses, coaches and cycling. This must ensure that there is sufficient capacity in public transport at the times required.

5.12 These proposals would be informed by the Club's own public transport study which has been submitted as part of the revised planning application and which would be the subject of further public consultation and discussion with all the parties concerned, including the police, Centro, local

residents representatives (including religious organisations), Club and other transport operators and the City Council. The principles contained in the plan would be backed up through a legal agreement which would need to be agreed and signed by the Club before planning consent were granted. The measures would be put in place before the Club were allowed to use the new stands.

Trinity Road

5.13 The club's current proposals for the rebuilding of the Trinity Road stand would extend over the existing road and onto Aston Park.

5.14 Studies undertaken by the City Council show that even at peak hours the amount of traffic using Trinity Road is relatively light. The road is used by one bus route. Thus, if the road were closed, approximately 274 vehicles per hour would be directed onto adjoining roads in the morning. In the evening the figure would be 385 vehicles per hour. If Trinity Road were to remain open, appropriate traffic calming measures could be introduced. This could

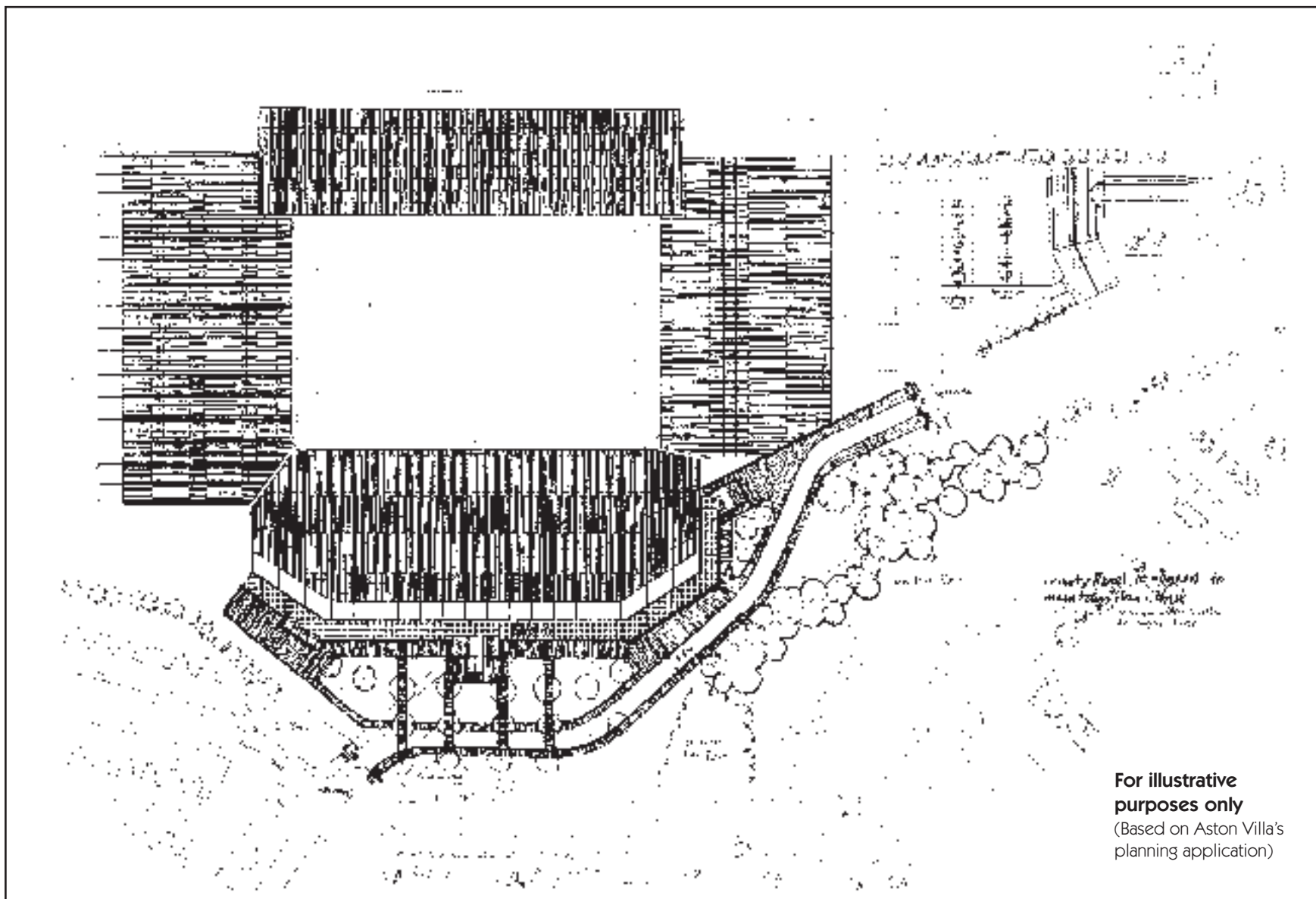
exclude buses and heavy vehicles but allow local access.

5.15 The two alternatives outlined in section 3.3 were considered during the consultation process. Residents indicated that they were strongly opposed to the closure of Trinity Road, of the two options considered in the draft plan, the second option (shown for illustrative purposes on the plan overleaf) allows for the diversion of Trinity Road and its closure to buses and lorries. There could be a public footpath on the park side. On the stand side a new plaza could be created for use by fans and members of the public. Surface materials for the footpath, road and plaza should be carefully chosen.

5.16 However, the local residents and other parties consulted on the proposals, including Conservation Areas Advisory Committee also strongly objected to the loss of land from Aston Park. It is, therefore, suggested that a further option be considered before planning applications are determined. This could involve some form of

cantilever over Trinity Road. This option would need to be designed to the highest standards and would need to avoid a tunnel effect where personal safety may be threatened in an area where there is already a significant fear of crime. This option would need to be the subject of further public consultation and would need to be considered against the principles set out in paragraph 6.2 of this local plan. It should include, if appropriate, proposals for the calming of Trinity Road to remove the current danger to people accessing the park and Play Centre.

5.17 If Trinity Road were to be diverted this could lead to the loss of the hard play area and play centre and the loss of land and trees in the Park. The Club would be required to pay for replacement facilities and compensate for the loss of the land. The money should be reinvested in the Park and providing and maintaining further open space in the area.



6. aston hall and park

6.1 The importance of Aston Park to this part of the City cannot be over emphasised. In a district of the City with few areas of open space this 17 hectare (43 acre) park provides an important role in meeting the leisure needs of many Aston residents. The park itself also provides the setting for one of the most important heritage attractions in Birmingham - Aston Hall. The Hall is a Grade I listed Jacobean Mansion built between 1618 and 1635. The whole of the park is also included in the National Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, one of only 7 such areas in Birmingham. There is a clear opportunity to build upon the tourist potential of the Hall and carry out some refurbishment of the park. This will be achieved by:

- * preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for the Hall and Park leading to the restoration of historic buildings and features;
- * improving vehicular, public transport and pedestrian access to the Hall (possibly via a direct link from the A38(M) at Park Circus);
- * meeting the local community's

aspirations for improved facilities and security within the park;

6.2 The proposals put forward by Aston Villa F.C would impact directly on Aston Park, the Aston Hall and Park Conservation Area and the setting of the Grade I Listed Aston Hall. The relationship with the proposed development will need to be considered carefully. To assess its impact the following work would need to be carried out:

- * an archaeological assesment
- * historical/landscape history research
- * tree surveys
- * photo survey
- * provision and maintenance of an appropriate landscaping scheme in keeping with the historic character of the Hall and Park.

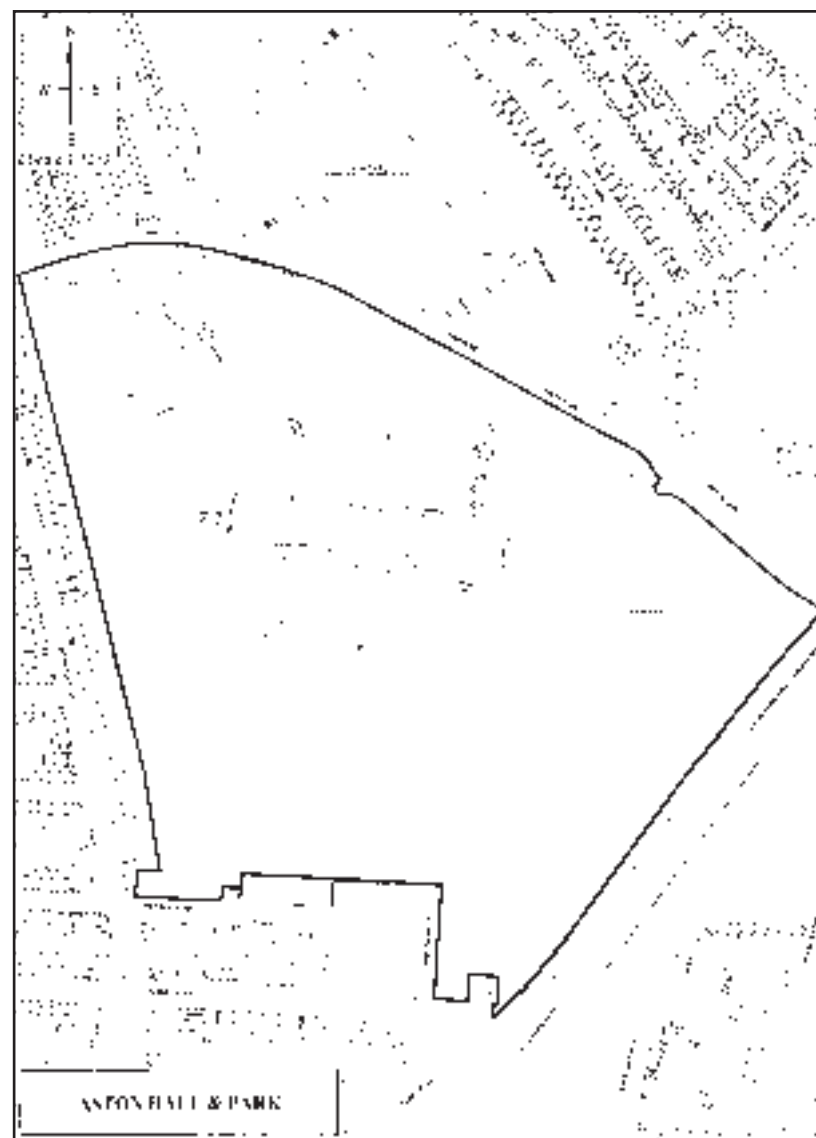
6.3 The ideas put forward in the consultation exercises were:

- * better play equipment for both toddlers and older children;
- * re-introduction of the Bowling Green;

- * Aston Play Centre should become more of a community centre catering for wider needs that at present;
- * a water feature should be provided to replace the paddling pool;
- * better maintenance with a park caretaker service re-introduced.

A detailed feasibility study now being undertaken is likely to suggest other improvements to the park.





7. the serpentine and siemens site

7.1 One of the notable features of the plan area is the lack of any extensive vacant land or property which could offer opportunities for additional development.

Serpentine Site

7.2 The largest site which currently exists is to be found on land off Aston Hall Road - a site owned by AVFC and known locally as the Serpentine Site. This 3.9ha (6.3 acre) site includes:

- * The Aston Villa Sports and Leisure Centre. In July 1997 the City Council announced its intention to withdraw funding for the Centre because of its need for ongoing subsidy and reductions in the City Council's budget. The Centre is still being operated on an interim basis by the City Council pending settlement of negotiations around its future disposal, subject to the provision of alternative facilities;
- * The Aston Tavern Public House. The public house closed in 1995 and is now in a poor condition as a result of fire damage and vandalism. This building is in the Aston Hall and Park Conservation Area and its demolition could

only be justified if the alternative proposals would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area;

- * The site of a former Asda superstore. The original superstore was burned down in 1996 and the site has now been cleared;

7.3 The Club have indicated their desire to develop this site for retail purposes. However, in terms of planning legislation, the demolition and clearance of the building means that any proposals for new retail development will require planning permission. Any new proposals for retail development here would not be consistent with retail policies set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 or the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan.

7.4 It is considered that the site should continue to contribute to relieving the shortfall in match day car parking. A number of principles should guide its use for parking:

- * The existing exits onto Serpentine Road and Village Road should not be used other than as emergency

access points;

- * The access to the site should continue to be from Aston Hall Road;
- * The Club should provide adequate security and other ancillary facilities, eg. toilets;
- * That development is sympathetic, in terms of use of materials and the design of any ancillary developments, to the setting of St. Peter and St. Paul's Church and preserve the appearance of the Aston Hall and Church Conservation Area;
- * The design of any car parking on the site should be in accordance with the Council's Car Parking Design Guidelines and ensure the preservation and enhancement of the appearance of the adjoining conservation area. The site should provide both car parking and coach parking;
- * The site covers part of the medieval village of Aston and it is uncertain whether any local or regionally significant remains survive below ground.

An archaeological evaluation will, therefore, be required in advance of consideration of development proposals, following which any archaeological remains will be required to be preserved in situ by layout and design of any new development, or excavated in advance of development if in situ preservation is not feasible.

7.5 In addition to its continued use as match day parking it may also be possible for the site to accommodate some light industrial development although the relationship with adjoining residential properties will need to be considered carefully. Any industrial development will need to ensure that match day parking is retained.

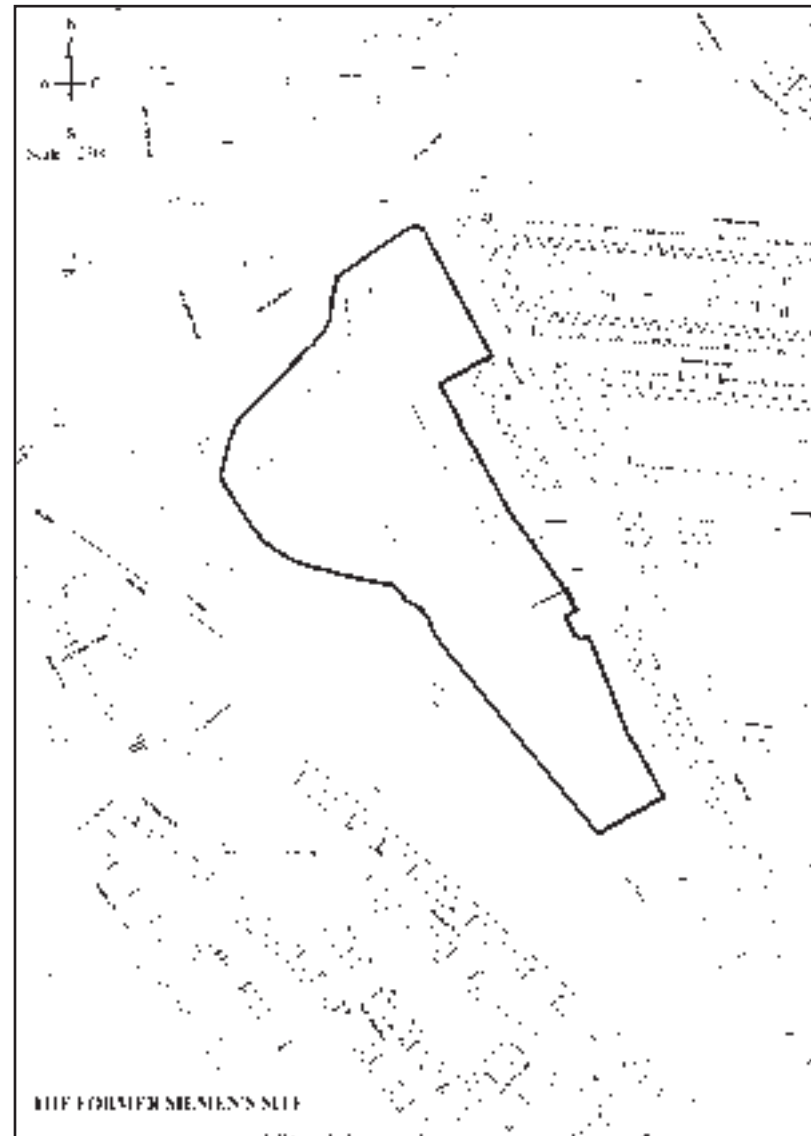


Former Siemens Site

7.6 The Club have purchased the former Siemens site within the Tame Valley Industrial area. The retention of employment on the site would be consistent with the Industrial Land Policies contained in the Birmingham Plan (1993). It should also be possible to redevelop the remainder of the site to provide additional car parking to alleviate match day problems. Measures to improve footpath links between the site and ground should also be explored. The provision of additional public toilets on the site should also be made.

7.7 The site lies adjacent to the location of an early bridge across the River Tame (since demolished and replaced) and also covers an infilled old river channel. Any development here should be covered by an archaeological 'watching brief'.

7.8 Development should also assist in implementing the City Council's proposals to establish the River Tame Walkway (see section 9.3)



8. meeting other local and community needs

8.1 Although this local plan has concentrated on planning, land use and transportation matters, it is important to remember that the issues affecting the local community are much wider than this. For example, it is important to ensure that their needs - in terms of housing, social and community facilities, and training/employment opportunities - are taken on board if the renewal and regeneration of the area is to be achieved.

8.2 Over the last 20-30 years the characteristics of the local community has seen considerable change. Today, Aston is a multi-ethnic community with substantial numbers of people who are either first or second generation Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Kashmiri, Indian and African-Caribbean.

Cultural Facilities

8.3 Whilst these communities are well established, there remains evidence that particular community needs, eg for Mosques and Madrassa's, remain to be met. A key consideration of future policy within the area will be to ensure that these

needs are catered for, although this will not be easy given the lack of any suitable vacant land or buildings. Some projects are, however, being progressed:

- * Land at nos. 1-8 The Broadway. The City Council is in the process of allocating a former transport yard to the Masjid Madrassa Faizul Islam to extend the Mosque and Madrassa at no. 330 Witton Road. The opportunity will be taken to lay out some off-street car parking spaces, some of which will be available for use by the general public;
- * Land at the corner of Albert Road and Upper Sutton Street. Here, vacant land and a vandalised children's play area may be allocated by the City Council for an extension to the Jamia Mosque (Ghausia) and Community Centre;
- * The Bangladeshi Multi-Purpose Centre. In 1997 plans were finalised to establish Birmingham's first Bangladeshi multi-purpose centre in a converted industrial building at nos. 136-146 Victoria Road. The Centre provides education, welfare and social

services aimed at the 12,000 strong Bangladeshi community who live in a 2 mile radius of the site;

- * The Jamia Mosque and community Centre (12-14 Victoria Road). In 1996 the Jamia Mosque applied for planning permission to extend their existing premises to provide:
 - improved community facilities
 - a multi-purpose sports facility
 - a day centre for the elderly
 - a creche
 - a coffee shop
 - a youth room and library.

The City Council has deferred consideration of this scheme for the completion of a legal agreement to provide off-site car parking on land on the other side of Victoria Road.

Youth Issues

8.4 Local residents have identified the need for more activities for young people in the area. As the area has a high number of families and nearly half the people aged under 24, there is a real need for affordable youth focused facilities.

8.5 The City Council's Play Centre in Aston Park provides a facility for younger children, but is also the base for the full time Youth Development Worker who has started a number of clubs and activities for older children and young adults. It is recognised that the size of the Centre limits the number of people and activities it can accommodate. Broadway School also provides a base for youth activities.

8.6 The City Council will seek to improve facilities for young people across the area. As young people tend to stay within their direct neighbourhood, a series of small localised projects would be supported. The needs of older children and young adults will be taken into account when providing new facilities within Aston Park and other parks in the area. Ideas from local people through the consultation process included;

- * basketball hoops and informal kick-about pitches in parks;
- * a variety of buildings/rooms for clubs to meet around the area;

- * homework clubs;
- * improved access to jobs - partnerships through Birmingham Job Link.

9. environment

Open Space

9.1 Aston Hall Park offers the greatest opportunity for public leisure space in the area, this has been covered in part 6 (page 16).

9.2 Given the built up nature of the area there is little opportunity for creation of new open space, therefore the City Council will also look for opportunities to improve facilities and increase the value of the existing open spaces on Witton Road/ Mansfield Road and Sycamore Road. The City Council is already working with Birmingham Groundwork to bring forward small site clearance and environmental improvements in Aston and Witton.

9.3 The Birmingham Plan (1993) identifies the potential for a walkway/cycleway alongside the River Tame to link Witton with areas of public open space in Perry Barr and Beacon Regional Park. Opportunities will be sought to improve the surrounding environment and access to the river, particularly through redevelopment opportunities on adjoining sites.

A Safer Place

9.4 In parts of the Aston area, the fear of robbery and theft has been identified as a cause for concern by many people. An area which feels unsafe does not encourage residents, shoppers or visitors to use it. Although the fear of crime is often worse than the reality, fear is enough to stop people using the area freely.

9.5 The City Council will work with the Police, shops and local businesses to reduce crime. Opportunities will be investigated for funding a Closed Circuit

Television (CCTV) scheme, initially in the area around Aston Park and operated in conjunction with the Club. Opportunities for improved street lighting will also be sought.

Rising Groundwater

9.6 Groundwater levels in Birmingham have been rising since the mid 1960's as a result of a reduced rate of industrial abstraction exacerbated by recession, and changes in both industrial and domestic water supply. A survey commissioned by the City Council has shown that areas of shallow groundwater may be created at various locations in the City including the Witton Brook Valley, Tame Valley and Hockley Brook Valley. Isolated problems have already been reported although water levels are not yet at a stage which represent a

risk to building foundations and stability. This is an issue which the City Council is continuing to monitor at a city wide level with a view to identifying any necessary remedial action should this be required.



A cleaner Aston

9.7 As a direct result of matches, and other events at Villa Park, litter is dropped in large amounts and far and wide, for example, from fast food wrappings. This would only worsen with an increase in capacity. Therefore, any approval would need the resulting cleaning requirement to be met through a legal agreement.

9.8 There would also be a need to secure increased and adequately maintained toilet facilities on main pedestrian routes to and from the ground. This would prevent an increase in, and hopefully reduce, current anti-social practices.

10. witton centre

10.1 Witton centre is a typical, small inner city centre which provides an important role in meeting day-to-day shopping needs of the local community.

10.2 The centre is dominated by independent traders, many of which have grown to meet the particular needs of the Asian community with few high street 'names'.

10.3 Refurbishment of the majority of shops in the centre was carried out in the mid-1980's under the City Council's Inner City Partnership Programme, although some shops are now showing signs of the need of further investment.

10.4 Opportunities for new retail investment are limited by the lack of available land and where any new schemes come forward then this is likely to be through conversion or redevelopment of existing property. The maintenance and refurbishment of properties will be encouraged and any new developments should seek to improve the quality of the street scene such as improvements to shop fronts and the removal of

existing solid roller shutters. The quality of the environment here remains poor with heavy traffic flows, poor parking and servicing arrangements. There are a number of buildings here (and elsewhere in the centre) which reflect the Victorian and Edwardian legacy of Aston, with the Aston Hotel possibly the most well-known local landmark. In some cases, however, the character and architectural quality of these buildings has been disrupted by modern signage and shop front design and a return to 'traditional' shop fronts would be a marked improvement to the quality of the townscape. The Shopfront Design Guide produced by the City Council's Department of Planning and Architecture provides advice on good shopfront design.

11. housing

11.1 The majority of the housing stock in the plan area is comprised of terraced housing, mostly built before 1919. The exceptions to this are pockets of more recent 'infill' housing development, eg at McGregor Close and Witton Road/ Emscote Road; and the Holte Estate, a municipal housing estate built during the 1950's and 1960's.

11.2 Much of the terraced housing in Aston was improved through the Urban Renewal Programmes carried out by the City Council in the 1970's and 1980's, although some property is now showing signs of needing further investment. On the Holte Estate, the four 'Point' tower blocks - Boulton, Murdoch, Priestly and James Watt Points - are to be demolished and rehousing has already commenced.

11.3 Two important strands of future housing policy in this area will be to:

- * ensure adequate levels of maintenance and investment in the existing housing stock. This is a burden which will fall on individual homeowners and

landlords in the absence of any significant urban renewal funding;

- * meet local housing needs, in particularly the demand for larger housing from the Asian community.

11.4 Opportunities for new housing development are limited by a lack of available land. Those that do exist are:

- land at the corner of Witton Road and Trinity Road
- Norris Road
- Christ Church, Six Ways (now complete)
- Aston Council House. Vacant space here is to be converted into flats.

12. the way forward

12.1 The aim of this Local Plan is to guide future developments and environmental improvements in the Aston area. The plan has focused on three main themes:

- * Ensuring that major developments have no additional impact on the local community;
- * Providing opportunities to encourage tourism, environmental improvements and improved shopping environment;
- * Providing new community facilities.

12.2 The plan was prepared using the comments received from the local community, traders and businesses.

12.3 The Local Plan will provide the framework for future bids under a variety of Central Government, European Community, Lottery and other funding initiatives.

contacts

Planning And Architecture

Local Planning
Darren Fradgley
(0121) 303 3988
or
Gary Woodward
(0121) 303 4507

Planning Control
Tony White
(0121) 303 4806

City Archaeologist
Dr Mike Hodder
(0121) 303 3163

Economic Development

Development and Investment
Clifford Hill
(0121) 303 4807

Transportation

Transport Policy
Doug Hyde
(0121) 303 7436

Constituency Services
Phil Tomkinson
(0121) 303 6603

Housing

Land and Property Services
Jenny Steckles
(0121) 303 3344

Leisure Services

Mike Merrigan
(0121) 454 5334

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