

SANDWELL TOWNS FUND

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Grove Lane Regeneration

DELIVERY ORGANISATION: Sandwell MBC

DECEMBER 2021

Title of proposal	Grove Lane Regeneration
Directorate and Service Area	Regeneration and Growth
Name and title of Lead Officer completing this EIA	Hayley Insley – Planning Regeneration Team Leader
Contact Details	hayley_insley@sandwell.gov.uk
Names and titles of other officers involved in completing this EIA	
Partners involved with the EIA where jointly completed	
Date EIA completed	04.02.2022
Date EIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	(PMO to arrange)
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EIA	(PMO to arrange)
Date EIA considered by Cabinet Member	(to be obtained ahead of Cabinet Approval of FBC)

1. The purpose of the proposal or decision required. (Please provide as much information as possible).

The purpose of this project is to acquire the Cranford Street site, within the Grove Lane area to accelerate regeneration for housing delivery, the first phase of a comprehensive major regeneration project to deliver new homes and associated infrastructure. The site will require demolition of existing properties on site which are in a poor state of repair, as well as remediation of the land given the past industrial uses over the years. The site is understood to have asbestos present and there are records of underground tunnels. However, the site lies within an area identified for future housing growth and has the benefit of holding the designation of a Housing Zone.

As the wider area is allocated for significant housing growth – with at least 800 homes to be accommodated within the area, phasing of development will be required. A co-ordinated and collaborative approach working with West Midlands Combined Authority and other partner agencies, stakeholders and the private sector will enable the regeneration to be delivered over time. The initial investment from the Towns Fund will create the opportunity for a first phase of development to commence in the Towns Fund timescales.

The priorities for this project are to:

1. Maximise local impact of major investments in the new hospital and Aquatics Centre. Smethwick's two transformational developments are major investments in the town and can provide new opportunities for training, skilled work, recreation, and improved health to a range of people within the area – young and old alike and from a range of backgrounds and experiences.
2. Deliver more housing. We are regenerating our strategic brownfield sites for housing, helping to meet our acute local shortages and providing the homes local people need to fulfil their potential and thrive in Smethwick. We will create attractive, high-quality urban environments that help raise aspiration and retain high-skilled workers and generate investments. This will reduce the need for green belt development and will help to ensure efficient use of resources. The housing will be tailored to meet the needs of the current and future residents that wish to reside in the area and benefit from nearby facilities and employment opportunities.
3. Regenerate and upgrade local assets. We will transform our gateway areas and major thoroughfares into attractive and well-maintained public realms, improving the appearance of the town and encouraging active travel. We will connect new assets to walking and cycling routes and the canal, improving the links between our neighbourhoods and encouraging footfall to our businesses in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure that the development coming forward and the spaces around are well connected, safe and can benefit from the regeneration coming forward.

2. Evidence used/ considered

Sandwell has a population of 327,378 people, and Smethwick accounts for 55,992 of this total, or 17%. This makes it Sandwell's second largest town behind West Bromwich. Smethwick is a younger town than many others across the district. 31% of the town's population is under twenty years old, considerably higher than the UK average of 23.5% and higher than the proportion in Sandwell of 27.3%.

Conversely, Smethwick also has lower proportions of older age groups in the population. 10.8% of the population in Smethwick is of retirement age, and the 40-64s make up 27.6%, the proportion both of these age groups make up of the total population is significantly lower than the district and UK average.

The town has a higher proportion of residents in their 30s than in their 20s than either the UK or Sandwell district, the age range of young professionals and young families. 16.4% of residents are aged 30-39 and 13.9% aged 20-29. Combined, both age groups make up 30.3% of the resident population compared to 27.6% in Sandwell and 26.4% in the UK. The town has more females than males which is the case across all towns in Sandwell and the UK.

Sandwell is a diverse borough, and Smethwick its most diverse town and the only town in where white residents make up less than a half of the population.

55.8% of the town's population is non-white – the largest proportion of non-white residents of all the towns in Sandwell. This is a much higher proportion than the regional and UK average of 18.8% and 14.0%. The town with the second highest proportion is West Bromwich where 35.3% of the population are non-white.

In terms of religion, 55.2% of Sandwell residents are Christian, lower than the national average of 59.3%. Overall, Smethwick town has a much lower proportion of Christian residents compared to Sandwell (the lowest of the six towns) but is considerably higher in terms of Sikh and Muslim religious affiliations (ranking highest of the towns on both indicators). Only 14.6% of Smethwick residents stated they follow no religion - the lowest of all Sandwell towns.

Consisting of 30 LSOA neighbourhoods (lower super output areas), the vast majority of Smethwick is deprived and 90% of LSOAs in the town is in the bottom four deprivation deciles as measured by the English Indices of Deprivation. At a more detailed level, this means that 20% are within the 10% most deprived in the country, 40% are within the 20% most deprived in the country and 23% are within the 30% most deprived in the country. Sandwell has a demand for over 1,000 new households a year, which has not been met over the last decade. This, combined with a much greater demand for housing across the Greater Birmingham area, is an opportunity for Smethwick to grow. A Property Market Report prepared as part of the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework identified a need for a range of housing type and tenure across the area. Demand for sites by housebuilders was high in this corridor due to the proximity to Birmingham City Centre, transport links and employment opportunities. Currently the demand for flatted development centred closer to the City Centre with more demand for housing as you travelled further from the city, with a preference for homes with 3 or 4 bedrooms. However, it is expected that demand for flatted stock could increase once key employment anchors such as the new hospital and proposed learning campus are delivered. Whilst it will take a while to bring forward the complete regeneration of the wider area, bringing forward this site as a first phase of development will assist in providing new homes for those wishing to locate in Smethwick. Of particular note are young professionals who wish to reside in flatted development close to Birmingham City Centre but are not yet able to meet the costs associated with town centre location. With

25% of the housing to be affordable, this will assist those on lower incomes who are unable to buy outright.

The Grove Lane development site at the centre of Smethwick would contribute to meeting this demand. This is planned as a large scale mixed use and housing development on the industrial site directly adjacent to the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital and will become a sustainable location for new housing. With the additional projects envisaged by the Town Investment Plan being the Midland Met Learning Campus and Smethwick Connected in particular, locating new housing on this site will enable residents to be close to employment and learning opportunities as well as having good connectivity by public transport, walking and cycling routes that are direct and safe to use. The latter will be of particular importance to pregnant women, older people and people with young children.

Grove Lane will provide high quality housing, outdoor space, small scale retail and improved transport infrastructure connecting the town to Birmingham. As well as economic benefits, Grove Lane will provide social benefits by utilising the areas natural assets to improve outdoor space. The West Midlands Combined Authority has purchased land in the area, indicating that it will support the development as an important means for meeting demand across the wider conurbation.

A recent OECD report on the lagging productivity in the UK's core cities, including Birmingham, recommends the development of "attractive, high quality urban environments that help to retain high-skilled workers and generate investments." The Grove Lane site has the potential to achieve this for Smethwick, fulfilling local demand and also improving the status of the whole town as a residential centre. It would also help to provide, also recommended in the report a "well-designed urban spaces with dense, mixed-use neighbourhoods encourage interactions and facilitate innovation." Such developments can make a long-term contribution to the economy of the area.

3. Consultation

The emerging Smethwick and Grove Lane masterplan places and emphasis on providing a predominantly residential neighbourhood and this project will be key to deliver the aspirations of the masterplan and the Council's Big Plans for a Great Place' in producing quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods.

Consultation activities were carried out to inform residents and stakeholders about the Towns Fund opportunity, to understand a broad range of views about Smethwick, build evidence and collate views to help shape the Town Investment Plan and the Grove Lane Regeneration project as part of the overall plan.

The responses favoured housing development and commented the below suggestions:

- Agree more housing is needed but they need to meet the community needs
- Bigger houses for larger families
- Grove Lane housing project will benefit the area because houses are quite run down and the New hospital will help Cycle track
- More social, council and affordable housing
- Bungalows for disabled people
- A range of housing that is suitable for families but also single people

A workshop, held with business and investors on the 1st October 2020, to better understand market failure around housing developments. The workshop was attended by several local government officers from TfWM, WMCA and SMBC along with private sector representatives from Countryside Homes, Cape Caring Centre and Metro Dynamics. The voluntary sector was also present from Soho and Victoria Voluntary and Community Sector. At the workshop regeneration of brownfield sites was considered within the context of the challenges faced delivering schemes within the context of Smethwick. The key takeaways from the meeting were:

- Regeneration plans must take into consideration the wider economic benefits for local people in terms of jobs and opportunities for businesses.
- The high demand for affordable, large homes was acknowledged by all participants and seen as essential to resolving current overcrowding and issues.
- Advanced construction methods mean reduced time and cost to produce development but limit onsite job opportunities.
- However, local government are focussed on developing an advanced construction strategy that builds local capacity. This is not about bringing in products to the West Midlands but development opportunities locally.
- It's not just about building more houses but the right type and tenure of housing to provide good-quality homes.
- Spatial justice and children's needs, like outdoor space and safe connections to local schools, should be reflected in plans to create environments where children grow up healthily.
- There is a need to forecast the impact of existing investment plans, such as the Aquatics Centre and hospital developments, on the local area and its demography to ensure the future offer will match demand.
- We need to take into account the developments that we are living through at the moment and think about houses as places where we live and work.

In addition, consultation on the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework and the Grove Lane Masterplan, was also undertaken between October and December 2021. The consultation took the form of an online questionnaire, social media notifications as well as face to face exhibition on Smethwick High Street and information left at Smethwick High Street. Residents and businesses were invited to view the plans and provide comments or feedback. However, there were no negative comments received on the proposal to develop this site. There were some comments – particularly from the current landholder – that questioned the type of housing being promoted for this site. However, consultants undertaking the commission on the Masterplan identified that given its location, a higher density model could be accommodated. This would serve the needs of the younger professionals and couples that wish to own or rent flatted development with links to Smethwick and Birmingham City Centre.

These consultation responses, ideas and insights have all been taken onboard in order to produce the proposals which accompany this Full Business Case and are attached.

As the site is a stand alone facility and only currently being used as a compound for the new hospital construction, very few businesses will be affected by the proposal that need to be taken account of. For those in the immediate vicinity, a construction environmental management plan will ensure that any impacts are mitigated against and kept to a minimum.

Further consultation will be planned with the impacted businesses.

4. Assess likely impact

There are possible impacts on protected characteristics particularly during construction. In particular for example, the ability for pregnant women, elderly and families with children to walk adjacent to the site during the construction phase. The potential impacts can be mitigated through a construction environmental management plan.

Benefits are also likely to be achieved for people in younger age groups and families through the mixed tenure of the new housing that will be delivered as a result of the proposals. Furthermore, local residents will see improved access to the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital and improvements to the public realm via this project and other projects being delivered within the area. The benefits of housing close to employment opportunities, accessibility to training for example will be of interest to a wide range of people regardless of age, race, sex, or sexual orientation.

Please complete the table below at 4a to identify the likely impact on specific protected characteristics

4a. Use the table to show:

- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality strands (protected characteristics), that is it could disadvantage them or if there is no impact, please note the evidence and/or reasons for this.
- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality, equal opportunities or improving relationships within equality characteristics.

Protected Characteristic	Positive Impact ✓	Negative Impact ✓	No Impact ✓	Reason and evidence (Provide details of specific groups affected even for no impact and where negative impact has been identified what mitigating actions can we take?)
Age	✓			This increase in housing in this proposal will have a positive impact on young professionals and families which are often between 20-29 and 30-39 which when combined make up the towns highest age group. Populations which are more likely to use hospitals will also gain from the proposals due to providing direct access to health facilities.
Disability			✓	Any impact through construction on this protected characteristic will be mitigated through a construction management plan to ensure there are no adverse impacts whilst development is taking place.
Gender reassignment			✓	There is considered to be few negative impacts on these protected characteristics by this project. Pregnant people or those with young children may be affected by the construction taking place. However, risk assessments will be undertaken and safe working practices implemented to ensure that these impacts can be managed appropriately. Any impact identified through the construction/delivery phase on these protected characteristics will be mitigated through a construction environmental management plan to ensure any impacts are mitigated against.
Marriage and civil partnership			✓	
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	
Race	✓			The proposals are accessible by all and a general positive impact is expected to be achieved for BAME groups particularly increased housing, access to health facilities and improved public realm.

Religion or belief			✓	Access to nearby religious buildings will be considered within the construction management plan and further transport plan within the planning application for future development of the site.
Sex			✓	The proposals are accessible by all, regardless of sex. The subsequent planning application will provide a design and access statement which will set out how the scheme will design out crime, improve perceptions of safety and mitigate any potential adverse effects.
Sexual orientation			✓	The proposals are accessible by all, regardless of sexual orientation. The subsequent planning application will provide a design and access statement which will set out how the scheme will design out crime, improve perceptions of safety and mitigate any potential adverse effects.
Other				

Does this EIA require a full impact assessment? Yes ☒ No ☐

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then you do not need to go any further. You have completed the screening stage. You must, however, complete sections 7 and 9 and publish the EIA as it stands.

If you have answered yes to the above, please complete the questions below referring to the guidance document

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

A construction management plan will mitigate any adverse impacts on protected characteristics, for example ensuring the site is safe for those passing, especially pregnant women, young children or the elderly that may be affected during the construction phase.

Moving forward, engagement with the wider community will be necessary to ensure information is readily available regarding any future development and potential impacts they may affect them. This will ensure that where possible, these impacts can be addressed and solutions sought to ensure the project benefits residents, businesses and the communities within the area and any affects are reduced, mitigated against or managed as best as possible. At a minimum information will be available as part of the planning application process once the site is ready for development. However, every attempt will be explored to ensure that as much information is cascaded to all relevant groups in the wider community, residents and businesses whilst the project moves through the process to delivery.

6. As a result of the EIA what decision or actions are being proposed in relation to the original proposals?

As a result of the EIA, monitoring will evaluate the impact of the Grove Lane Regeneration project and review the EIA on a quarterly basis to ensure that the anticipated no negative impact for any group identified is accurate and continues to have no negative impact for any group.

7. Monitoring arrangements

The project will be monitored through the Towns Fund Local Board, and through the Council's project management team as noted in the Full Business Case.

Reports will be made to the Smethwick Local Board and Towns Fund Superboard, as required with data returns due to the Towns Fund Programme Management Officer on a 6-monthly basis. Quarterly report dates will be set from project launch date.

8. Action planning

- Work with construction partner to ensure the construction plan mitigates impacts on protected characteristics

9. Publish the EIA

This EIA will be published and provided to Superboard and Cabinet in line with the project Full Business Case approval.

Question No. (Ref)	Action Required	Lead Officer/ Person Responsible	Target Date	Progress

Where can I get additional information, advice and guidance?

- Sandwell Council Intranet: [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance document](#) (SMBC Employees)
- Alternatively, please contact Kashmir Singh – kashmir_singh@sandwell.gov.uk referencing Towns Fund EIA