

# 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Study is the product of a commission from Birmingham City Council for the Tyler-Parkes Partnership to undertake the task of assessing the need, potential and viability of a community/education/arts project within the Queensbridge Road Corridor in Moseley.

1.2 The project is defined as being in two parts:

- To engage interested parties in discussions on their desire to develop a new facility, together with its viability and practicality; and
- To appraise the development opportunities of providing such a facility in the Queensbridge Road Corridor, as well as assessing any other relevant development needs in the area.

1.3 The Study has been prompted by the debate on the future of Chamberlain House, a Social Services Training Centre fronting the junction of Queensbridge Road and Yew Tree Road. The proposed sale of the building, together with the recent consultation on the future of the adjoining Highbury Hall, raised the spectre amongst local organisations of its future use for community purposes.

## **2. COMPONENTS OF THE AREA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The Queensbridge Road area – which we have taken as also embracing the eastern part of Yew Tree Road – extends from the A435 Alcester Road in the east to the junction with Moor Green Lane in the west. It forms part of an attractive square mile of the city, bounded by Pershore Road, Edgbaston Road/ Salisbury Road, Alcester Road and Dad’s Lane/Westfield Road, which is dominated by large tracts of public open space (Cannon Hill Park, Highbury Park and Hodders Lane Playing Fields) and attractive low- and medium-density residential environments. All in all, it affords a considerable and welcome contrast to the commercial centres and higher density housing to which it adjoins.
  
- 2.2 Lying broadly equidistant between the centres of Kings Heath and Moseley, the area is characterised by the dominance of educational and community buildings, set in a well-treed environment and enhanced by the proximity of Highbury Park, the sports ground and school playing field. Whilst the six-storey Britannic House – now residential apartments – an alien structure in the townscape, it is nevertheless of pleasing design and enhanced by its setting and the sports ground to the west.

## **PRINCIPAL FEATURES**

### **Queensbridge Visual & Performing Arts School**

- 2.3 Queensbridge School, a dedicated Arts College of 630 pupils specialising in the visual and performing arts, occupies a 1950s building set within the Highbury Campus that, in total, extends to approximately 3.5 hectares. The building, part of which is Grade C locally listed, is somewhat dated and, although significant sums continue to be spent making improvements within the existing fabric, it could be argued that substantial parts – for example, the classrooms and sports hall – fall short of modern expectations. Furthermore, the linear form of the building, which is about 150 metres in length, is not conducive in creating the desirable community feel to the school.
- 2.4 The school playing field, which lies to the west of the buildings along the Queensbridge Road frontage, is of poor quality. Whilst it contains an artificial cricket pitch and the capacity for five-a-side matches, it has no full-scale football pitch. One of the School's most popular recent assets is the recently-acquired floodlit Astroturf pitch that sits in front of the main building.

### ***Riverside Church***

- 2.5 The principal user of the school buildings outside hours is the Riverside Church. The Church, an independent organisation founded in 1984, has its administrative base at Riverside House, located on Alcester Road just north of Moseley Village. Whilst this building, formed from two large semi-detached dwellings, contains meeting rooms and a modern purpose-built single-storey studio, it is inadequate to house Sunday services and other popular events.
- 2.6 Since 1990, the Church, which has a following of 500 adults, 100+ teenagers and about 150 under-11s, has utilised Queensbridge School for its two Sunday Services. The school hall has a capacity of about 350, which proves

acceptable for most occasions, whilst ten or so classrooms are used as crèches, for teaching groups and for ‘Sunday School’.

### **Fox Hollies School**

- 2.7 Set within the Highbury Campus and physically attached to Queensbridge School, Fox Hollies is a small special secondary school catering for 66 pupils with severe and/or complex learning difficulties that may include sensory, physical, intellectual, medical or behaviour factors. It has the status of a Joint Performing Arts College with Queensbridge, with whom it shares some of its facilities.

### **Uffculme School**

- 2.8 Situated close to the junction of Queensbridge Road with Alcester Road, and set in extensive grounds that merge with Highbury Park, Uffculme is a primary special school catering for about 114 pupils with autism, aged from 3 to 11. Its principal buildings, which include ten classrooms, are grouped along the Queensbridge Road frontage, together with prefabricated units overlooking Highbury Park. Access into the school off Queensbridge Road is problematic.

### **James Brindley School: The Willows Centre**

- 2.9 Set within a wooded setting at a lower level than Queensbridge Road, the building occupies one of the School’s 12 sites located across the City. It is a hospital school catering for children of school age who are unable to attend mainstream school because of health-related needs. It caters for 30 in-patients and day patients in three wards.

### **Uffculme Centre & Parkview Clinic**

- 2.10 The Centre lies within the grounds of Uffcolme Hall, a Grade II listed building built by Richard Cadbury in 1891 and donated to the City in 1916 for the furthering of psychiatric health services. With Parkview Clinic, it is in the ownership of the NHS (Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Trust), is one of the Trust's administrative bases.
- 2.11 Uffcolme is now a major training and conference venue, mainly for the development of Trust staff and students, but also with facilities available to the corporate and voluntary sector. These include the Great Hall, which can be used for large meetings and presentations as well as formal dinners and weddings, a main lecture theatre and smaller conference rooms. The premises also include a small music/recording studio that is available to the general public. All income generated by letting is ploughed back into the Trust.
- 2.12 The Clinic, part of Birmingham Children's Hospital, offers child and adolescent mental health services. Set in a splendid setting overlooking the Park, the modern building occupies a position at the end of a winding drive at a much lower ground level than Queensbridge Road. A Support Unit occupies the Old Coach House.

### **Queensbridge Road Depot**

- 2.13 The Depot, sitting on a site that extends to approximately 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres), is a two-bay single-storey brick building, approximately 42m x 12m, with gable ends facing the highway. It is understood that the site and buildings were acquired from Queensbridge School about 20 years ago. It is now the central radio base for the City's Parks Patrol. The site is not used for any significant storage and no heavy plant or machinery is operated from the site.
- 2.14 The buildings and use appear somewhat incongruous in the context of the adjoining uses and the general setting of the area.

## **Queensbridge Road Sports Ground**

- 2.15 We calculate the sports ground extends to approximately 2.2 hectares (5.4 acres). Although triangular in shape, it accommodates two football pitches and, during the summer months, an artificial cricket pitch. The eastern part of the sports ground is occupied by redundant tennis courts (that are being lost to self-seeded vegetation), a graffiti-prone pavilion/changing accommodation and a small car park accessed from Moor Green Lane.
- 2.16 The predominant user of the sports ground and pavilion is Bishop Challoner School, although there is evidence that it is also used by private football clubs – Billesley Lions FC, Lourdes Celtic FC and Billesley United FC – who concentrate on junior teams. Evidence appears to suggest that the sports ground is under-used.

## **Highbury Hall**

- 2.17 The former home of Joseph Chamberlain, Highbury Hall is a Grade II\* Victorian mansion occupying a prominent position looking southwards over Highbury Park and Arboretum. Built in 1878, it was bequeathed to the City Council by the Chamberlain family in 1934 and used as a home for elderly women until 1984, following which it was restored by the Council to its former glory. It forms part of the Highbury Estate, which also includes Chamberlain House, part of Highbury Park and four residential properties.
- 2.18 The Hall, although not generally open to the public, is used for formal banquets, business conferences, hospitality events and weddings, as well as other special events available to the community.
- 2.19 We understand that the Highbury Trust, the administering body for the Highbury Estate, has no endowment and that the maintenance and revenue

costs are provided by the Council, albeit offset to some degree by income deriving from the activities. It would appear that the current debate on the Hall is three-fold: (a) the need for a more transparent separation between the activities of the Trust and the Council; (b) the concern of the Charity Commission that the activities within the Hall are not within the terms of the original bequest; and (c) the means to fund the substantial urgent maintenance work, including the replacement of the roof.

### **Chamberlain House**

2.20 Chamberlain House is a dated two-storey utilitarian building currently used as offices and as a Day Centre by the City Council's Social Services Department. Together with its car park, the building has an extensive frontage of some 130 metres to Yew Tree Road/Queensbridge Road, but is restricted in depth – only 50 metres before the embankment down to the Park – thereby limiting redevelopment opportunities. The land on which it stands lies within the ownership of the Highbury Trust and, being within the curtilage of Highbury House, it is deemed to be listed.

2.21 We understand that some 100 social care and health staff are employed within the building and their tasks include supervising the Four Seasons Gardening Project which occupies ground to the rear.

### **Highbury Park**

2.22 Highbury Park must be one of the City's most picturesque areas of public open space. Extending to about 40 hectares (100 acres), its undulating form, arboretum, formal gardens, streams, ancient hedgerows, pools and rolling grassland provide a major natural resource.

- 2.23 A significant part of Highbury Park formed part of the Highbury Estate and was acquired by the Council in 1934 with the remainder of the Estate.
- 2.24 The Park is included on English Heritage's Register of Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest (Grade II). This does not offer any additional statutory control, but the park should be protected in determining any planning application and the effect on its setting is a material consideration. It is understood that the Park includes Highbury Hall and Chamberlain House.
- 2.25 Queensbridge Road has the distinct disadvantage of having no direct pedestrian access into Highbury Park. Whilst the presence of the Park is felt – in the mature trees and landscaped grounds on the south side of the road and the decorative continuous brick wall that demarks the boundary of the former Highbury Estate – it is mostly hidden from view and travellers along Queensbridge Road are probably unaware of its existence.

## **3. THE COMMUNITIES & THEIR ASPIRATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1 It is clear that, in addition to local residents, the dominant communities in the Study area are Queensbridge School and the Riverside Church. Whilst the other schools and bodies represented in the area make a contribution, this is essentially an ancillary role. Both the School and the Church are ambitious, have positive plans to develop these ambitions and are keen to seek support from the City Council to bring them to fruition.

### **CURRENT AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

#### **Queensbridge School**

- 3.2 Queensbridge School does not lie at the geographical centre of its community. A high proportion of its pupils are drawn from less privileged backgrounds, particularly from the high-density communities of Balsall Heath to the north. Nevertheless, this proves advantageous, for not being at the heart of any single dominant community enables the school to possess a healthy ethnic mix, a position that the School considers to be unique in the City. Accordingly, no single ethnic group has more than a 35% representation. Some 22% of pupils are white, approximately half are Muslim and there is a significant Afro-Caribbean minority. It is to the disappointment of the School that only 7 to 10% of its children reside in the more affluent communities in close proximity in the Kings Heath and Moseley areas, but it has the hope that further improvements and enhancing its offer may increase this representation.

- 3.3 The ambitions of the school are illustrated in numerous actions, including its successful bid to pilot a new diploma in media and creative arts; its special relationship with the Royal Ballet; its position as lead school in a cluster piloting the national agenda; the links it is forging with South Birmingham College which will prove advantageous to those pupils whose future may lie in the construction industry; its partnership working, collegiate arrangements and joint curriculum planning with near neighbours; and its willingness to take on excluded pupils.
- 3.4 In developing its speciality in the performing arts, the School is hampered, however, by the size and quality of accommodation. For example, the school hall is dated, it has no stage (which has been absorbed into a classroom) and is gloomy, overlooked as it is by the flatted development in Woodnorton Drive.
- 3.5 Of significant importance, we understand, is the rolling out of the Government's 14-19 initiative and its introduction of national diplomas as means of retaining those pupils that would otherwise leave school at 16 and 'disappear'. The consequences of this appear clear in their demand for additional resources and, presumably, additional accommodation – a matter that we gather Queensbridge School is addressing.
- 3.6 The School acknowledges that physical education is a massive growth area, and that there is a growing appeal to use the School's sports facilities, including out-of-hours use by the local community and local community groups. In the past, the School has occasionally had a lukewarm attitude to sport, which may have been reflected in the loss of the Queensbridge Depot site and the sports ground beyond it, as well as the inadequacies of the sports hall and the poor quality of its playing field. It believes that the quality of these facilities, when experienced by the local community, could to some degree act as a deterrent, persuading parents to send their children elsewhere.

## **Riverside Church**

- 3.7 Riverside Church is a thriving organisation that has developed a partnership – a concrete relationship – with Queensbridge School. Unlike the school community, though, Queensbridge Road lies at its physical heart, with the Church drawing its followers principally from the more affluent communities in Moseley and Kings Heath. As well as making use of the facilities of the school on Sundays and occasionally on Friday and Saturday nights for charity fund-raising theatre productions, it has made donations to the school, for example, in the form of seating and lighting for the main hall. Furthermore, it assisted the School in acquiring its specialist status.
- 3.8 Whilst its Sunday worship remains its key activity, the Church nevertheless cites three areas for concentrated growth: in the performing arts; in the development of its Children’s Centre and Relationship Support Centre; and in sports.
- 3.9 Some 11 years ago, members of the Church formed a School of Performing Arts that continues to flourish and, obviously, has important linkages with Queensbridge School. In addition to productions, it has teams that go into primary, secondary and special schools, runs drama classes in the community, holds training courses for arts advisors and has a formal performance arts training school. Whilst the new studio at Riverside House offers excellent training and rehearsal space, it is inadequate for productions and other activities; and whilst use is occasionally made of the Midlands Arts Centre in Cannon Hill Park, this is not sited in the centre of the community, is not wholly appropriate for education activities and, essentially, functions more for wider public use rather than for a local community.
- 3.10 The Church’s Children and Relationship Support Centres embrace numerous activities, including an extended schools programme, pastoral care, groups for children in the throes of parental break-up, ‘stay-and-play’ crèches catering

for a maximum of 50 children and parents, parenting courses, debt counselling and marriage guidance. Again, whilst Riverside House acts as a focus for these activities, the available space serves to limit any significant expansion.

- 3.11 A burgeoning aspect of the Church's activities is in the field of sport, which is recognised as bringing value to children, particularly for those from the more deprived communities in Balsall Heath, who have experienced the loss of the sports centre on Belgrave Middleway. The Church currently has a football team, but this suffers from not having a regular base.

### **Local Communities**

- 3.12 It is clear that a significant proportion of the Kings Heath and Moseley communities that reside within half-a-mile or so of Queensbridge Road are relatively prosperous with a high representation in the professional classes, many engaged in cultural activities within the City. We are told of empirical evidence from these communities of the dearth of modern facilities in the south of the City aimed at satisfying cultural needs, particularly in the form of such matters as recording studios and venues for the visual and performing arts.

- 3.13 During our research, we were approached by the artistic director of the Geese Theatre Company, a team of actors and group workers who present interactive drama and conduct workshops, staff training and consultation within the Criminal Justice System, predominantly in custodial institutions. A charity, the Company is based at the Midlands Arts Centre, where it has access to office accommodation, rehearsal studios and storage space. With the forthcoming redevelopment of the Arts Centre, it is in search of new rentable space for its 11 staff and equipment, fearing that such a facility will no longer be available or financially viable on completion of the works. Obviously, it would be keen to participate in discussions about the prospect of new

accommodation in the Queensbridge Road area, albeit conscious that the timescale is problematic.

## **CONCLUSION**

3.14 It would appear from our discussions and research in the Study area that there is a strong desire to pursue some form of additional accommodation to enable ambitions, aspirations and new initiatives to be realised, particularly in the fields of arts, performing arts and sport, for the benefit of the identified communities. Clearly, such aspirations – which might be met by the construction of a multi-purpose building – need to be quantified and tested and a business case drawn up. We are firmly of the view, however, that, for the reasons set out below, any new facility should come under the management of Queensbridge School.

3.15 We are aware that other facilities exist within the area – for example, Uffcolme Hall – which assist in meeting community and wider need. Whilst we do not consider they are viable substitutes for the project under consideration, we are nevertheless of the view that their potential inter-relationship with any new provision needs to be examined.

## 4. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

### INTRODUCTION

4.1 If the case can be successfully made for additional accommodation in the Study area to meet the needs of the local communities, several land options have been considered. On the south side of Queensbridge Road/Yew Tree Road, we believe that the only opportunity is afforded by the redevelopment of Chamberlain House; the remainder of the land is constrained by land ownership, topography, trees and the potential impact on Highbury Park. On the north side, the Queensbridge Depot and Queensbridge School playing field appear to be the only options, although the future of Woodmaston House and flats, to the north of Queensbridge School, may also need to be considered.

#### **Chamberlain House**

4.2 The future of Chamberlain House, part of the Highbury Trust land, appears to us to be in the melting pot and intrinsically linked to the future of Highbury Hall. It seems that this will take some time to resolve and, of course, could result in its disposal for a residential apartment scheme, with the capital return being ploughed into an endowment fund to pay for the long-term maintenance of Highbury Hall – a recommendation made to the Council’s Business Management Committee in June 2005.

4.3 In view of this, it is clear that the option of utilising Chamberlain House or its site is uncertain, but perhaps doubtful. In any event, we do not see this as an appropriate contender to meet the needs set out above. Although we have

not inspected the building, we feel that it is unlikely, in view of its age, internal layout and construction, that it could be adapted successfully. If it is to be redeveloped, demolition costs would obviously be added to the overall costing of the project, as would its design imperatives, lying adjacent as it does to a Grade II\* listed building. Furthermore, we do not consider, if any new venture is to fall under the auspices of Queensbridge School and Riverside Church, that the Chamberlain Road site is suitably located.

### **Queensbridge Road Depot**

4.4 As mentioned above, the Depot is incongruous and unsightly. We see no reason why it needs to be sited in Queensbridge Road, although we accept that a new location would need to be found and costs in any re-siting would be incurred. Nevertheless, the site occupies an area of about 0.2 hectares, which could be extended to about 0.37 hectares if the redundant tennis courts were included in a redevelopment opportunity.

4.5 We believe, however, that there would be a distinct disadvantage in the use of the site, namely, security and maintenance. It would be an isolated building, not successfully policed and management would be problematic.

4.6 As will be soon below, we see the depot site as important in its role of offering the compensatory land required by planning policy – and most likely insisted upon by Sport England – to be exchanged for the loss of school playing field.

### **Queensbridge School Playing Field**

4.7 As referred to previously, the school playing field is not of high quality and does not contain a full-scale playing surface. There would be considerable advantages in providing any new facility next to the existing school building, where it could be secured, successfully managed by the School and interlink

advantageously with other facilities of the School. It is accepted that, first, the stand of mature trees which demarks the eastern boundary of the playing field and, second, the relationship with the south-facing apartments in Conifer Close could prove problematic, but this does not deter us from our view that this is the optimum location.

4.8 In endorsing this view, we would argue that Queensbridge Depot clearly poses a physical barrier between the two playing fields. Its removal, as a means of providing the necessary compensatory playing field land, would have the distinct advantage of re-uniting both playing areas, with the opportunities that this could afford for enhancement projects and improved management, including a reassessment of current usage.

4.9 By far the most significant advantage, however, would be its juxtaposition with Queensbridge School, its ability to fall under the management of Queensbridge School and, in promoted for both school and community use, could attract existing education funding, together with that targeted at new Government initiatives, including any financial resources accruing from the introduction of 14-19.

### **Woodmaston**

4.10 During our deliberations, our attention was drawn to Woodmaston House and its current consideration by the Council's Housing Department as a redevelopment opportunity. We are unaware whether this consideration relates just to the house and grounds or whether the three-storey flats in Woodmaston Drive form part of the debate. We consider that this issue needs to be explored to assess whether this is likely to present a viable option, although we suspect that there would be reluctance by the Housing Department to forgo part of the capital receipt. It must be stressed, however, that only the southernmost block of flats lies at a similar ground level to

Queensbridge School, beyond which the land rises relatively steeply northwards towards Alcester Road.

## **CONSTRAINTS TO DEVELOPMENT**

### **Planning Policy**

- 4.11 In our view, national and local planning policies do not pose any significant constraints to the pursuance of a development project.
- 4.12 In the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP), the north side of Queensbridge Road is not subject to any special allocation or designation, although, as we have previously noted, Queensbridge School is a Grade C locally listed building.
- 4.13 On the south side, the UDP makes reference to the inclusion of Highbury Park on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. It is understood that this listing includes both Highbury Hall and Chamberlain House, but excludes Uffcolme Hall and grounds, the Willow Centre and Uffcolme School. Furthermore, as referred to earlier, Highbury Hall is a Grade II\* listed building and Chamberlain House is deemed to be one in view of its position within the curtilage of Highbury Hall. The furtherance of a development project on the Chamberlain House site would obviously therefore have to have regard to the setting of Highbury Hall and the potential impact on the Park and Arboretum.
- 4.14 National planning policy, in the form of Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17), opposes the loss of playing fields to development unless an acceptable compensatory area can be provided elsewhere, a position that is echoed in policy paragraph 3.57 of the UDP.

## **Land Ownership**

4.15 We understand that, with the exception of the Uffcolme Hall Estate (the Uffcolme Centre and Parkview Clinic) all the land in the Study area is in the ownership of the City Council, albeit part in Trust.

## **Funding**

4.16 It is clear to us that the principal constraints to the furtherance of a project are those of both capital and revenue funding, matters that will clearly need to be investigated once the form of development has been quantified.

4.17 If the Chamberlain House option is discounted and development, as we suggest, is positioned next to and under the management of Queensbridge School, the following sources of funding could be explored:

- **‘Building Schools for the Future’** – Birmingham, as we understand it, was announced as a Pathfinder Wave 2 authority in 2004. Funding is restricted in the main to secondary schools and for projects that are targeted for dual use.
- **Learning & Skills Council** – which is responsible for planning and funding high quality education and training in England with the aim, in particular, of raising participation and achievement by young people.
- **Birmingham City Council** – there may be opportunities to be explored, including contributions towards the re-siting of the Depot.
- **Riverside Church** – the Church may be prepared to make contributions, although it may be unlikely that this would be towards capital costs.

## 5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 At the outset of the Study, we were asked to advise fundamentally on whether there was any mileage in the City Council pursuing the possibility of a community project in the Study area. On the evidence we have seen and heard, our response is in the affirmative. Although our brief did not include a comprehensive examination of how the needs of the community were met elsewhere in the Kings Heath and Moseley areas, we are of the view that there exists tremendous enthusiasm and ambition particularly within Queensbridge School and Riverside Church to continue to develop their activities, particularly as a means of embracing and assisting the development of the less affluent communities within their sphere of influence.
- 5.2 We believe that if the need is proven for additional accommodation to provide for this development, it should be adjacent to and under the management of Queensbridge School, with the Queensbridge Depot being re-located to provide the required compensatory playing field land and allowing the re-uniting of the two playing fields.
- 5.3 In the light of our rejection of Chamberlain House as an option, we recommend, therefore, that:
- (a) The Council, together with the major participants, quantifies the need for and identifies the optimum form of community facility needed and draws up a business case for such;
  - (b) The Council investigates alternative locations for the re-siting of Queensbridge Depot and assesses the cost of such;

- (c) The Council assures itself that there is no option available with the impending redevelopment of Woodmaston House and/or estate;
- (d) The Council selects the site adjacent to Queensbridge School for the provision of the facility and resolves that it be under the management of the School;
- (e) The Council has early engagement with Sport England in respect of the reuniting of the two sports fields and the issue of the compensatory land;
- (f) The Council reviews the usage of Queensbridge Sports Ground as part of the reuniting of the two sports fields;
- (g) The Council enters discussions with the Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Trust about the inter-relationship of the new facility with the accommodation available at the Uffculme Centre; and
- (h) The Council, with the major participants, investigates alternative forms of capital and revenue funding for the project.

5.4 We sense a degree of frustration in the lack of progress in moving forward with the assessment for and identification of the project, with two years or more having elapsed since the consultation exercise that initially raised hopes. If our view is accepted that such a project does not rest on the future of Chamberlain House, we can see no reason why urgent steps, in the form of coordinated action, cannot now be taken to pursue the initiative – the development of a ‘Queensbridge Centre’.