



Mere Green Development Framework

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This Development Framework has been prepared by the City Council, in consultation with the local community, to guide future investment in the Mere Green District Shopping Centre. It provides clear planning guidance on key development opportunities at the former 'Spring UR' and 'TRW Automotive' sites; together with the potential for public realm enhancements, such as lighting, paving, street furniture and carriageway improvement.

The Framework is consistent with the Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Birmingham Development Plan. It seeks to build on the identity and character of Mere Green, as a 'District' location, while ensuring the development necessary for the regeneration and economic success of the Centre and its contribution to the wider Birmingham economy.

Councillor Tahir Ali

Cabinet Member for Development, Jobs and Skills
Birmingham City Council

4 Introduction

This framework provides direction for the future development and management of Mere Green Centre. The framework identifies opportunities for growth as well as key issues and challenges within the Centre and its immediate area, and provides guidance for managing change that builds on the unique identity and character of Mere Green as a 'District' Centre.

Mere Green is located in one of the most prosperous parts of Birmingham, where more than 95% of the working age population is economically active. The socio-economic profile of residents of Mere Green is one of mainly a professional, managerial and skilled workforce.

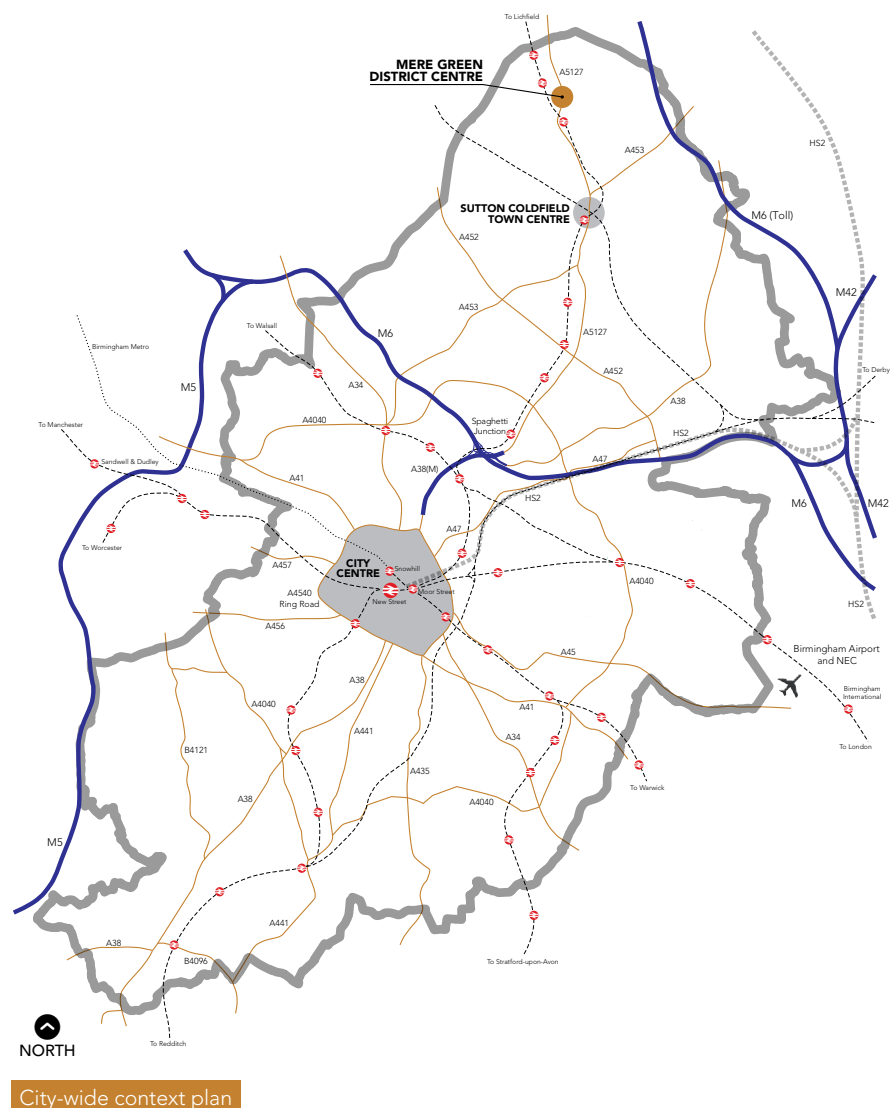
The Centre's compact nature has helped it retain a 'village' feel. The traditional focal point of the Centre is at the junction of Mere Green Road, fronted by shops, banks and other facilities.

The Centre offers a wide range of retail, office and community facilities and until recently benefited from high levels of occupancy of retail outlets. However, like many parts of the UK over the recent past the Centre has suffered from the economic downturn and changing shopping habits brought on by the use of internet shopping, with on average 1 in 9 shops being vacant (Survey June 2011). The challenge for Mere Green Centre is to create a local mix of provisions that are relevant to current need and demand.

However, the availability of the former Spring and TRW sites within and immediately adjacent to the Centre represent opportunities to deliver significant change and growth of Mere Green Centre.

Consultation on the draft of this framework was undertaken in July 2012, and a number of changes have been made to the framework to reflect comments received. Planning permission has also now been granted for

the redevelopment of the former Spring UR site which is consistent with the guidance in this framework and once developed will help to support the regeneration of the Centre.





Lichfield Road A5127

Purpose

This framework takes a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving Mere Green District Centre by:

- Setting out the Council and local community's aspirations for the Centre, including opportunities for enhancing its retail and community facilities offer, accessibility, urban environment and public realm.
- Providing informal planning guidance for developers, landowners and investors, particularly in relation to two major vacant sites: the former Spring UR land and premises located in the heart of the District Centre, and the edge of centre TRW site.
- Ensuring that development sites contribute to the overall regeneration of the District Centre.
- Considering how management and marketing can promote the District Centre.

This framework complements the City-wide Shopping and Local Centres Supplementary Planning Document, which identifies centre boundaries, primary shopping areas, and seeks to ensure that centres retain their predominantly retail function, whilst enhancing their vibrancy and viability.

Although a number of investment proposals have begun to take shape during the preparation of this Framework, it is recognised that the delivery of major development led outcomes will take longer than usual given the current economic climate. It is therefore proposed that the Framework remains in place for a period of 5 years, but be subject to an interim review in 3 years.



Astor House, Lichfield Road.



Belwell Lane

Mere Green District Centre

Mere Green is located in the Sutton Four Oaks Ward of Sutton Coldfield District. It is a key commercial Centre on the edge of Sutton Park and is situated to the north of Sutton Coldfield Town Centre, serving well-established suburban residential neighbourhoods.

The area is well connected by road and rail services offering easy access to Birmingham City Centre and the surrounding areas. The M6 and other major 'A' roads are within a short distance, and Lichfield Road connects the Centre with central Birmingham to the south and Lichfield to the north. The local Centre is served by Four Oaks and Butlers Lane train stations (10-15 minutes walk) and by a number of local bus services. A large pay and display car park adjacent to Sainsbury's superstore and Mere Green Library has approximately 600 car parking spaces and there are also other public car parks in the area with in excess of 100 spaces.

In terms of services, the Centre has around 100 retail units providing a diverse retail offer, a range of independent shops, along with a number of national chain stores such as Waitrose, Sainsbury's, banks, offices and a public library as well as other community facilities. Mere Green District Centre compares well with other local centres of similar size and the retail experience they offer. Mere Green has a number of restaurants and three public houses including the recently opened J D Wetherspoon's, helping to support an evening economy. There is good potential to build on the Centre's role as a place to meet, eat and drink, and provide evening attractions and entertainment for families and groups.

Major development opportunities exist within and immediately adjacent to the Centre at two prominent locations, namely:

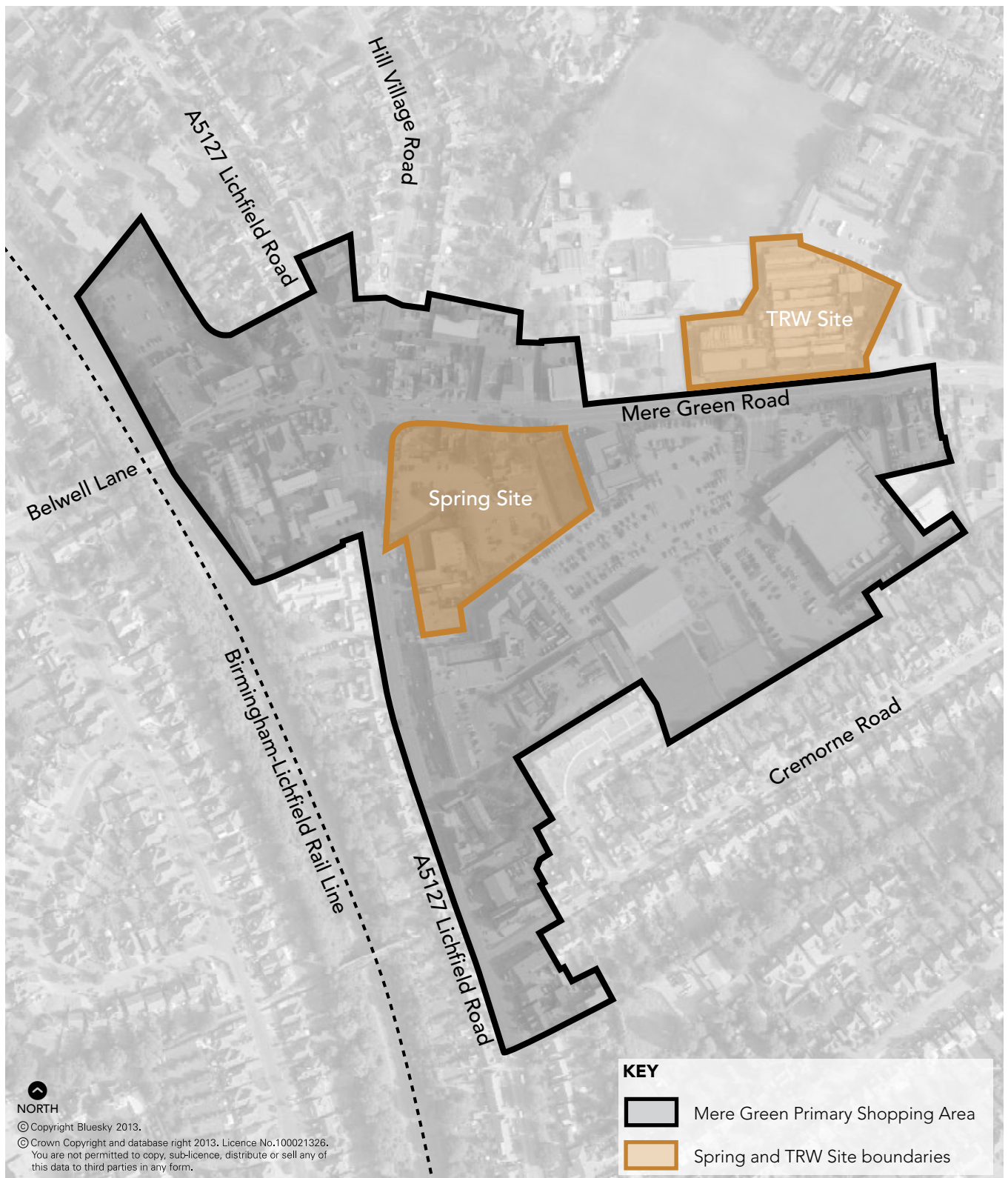
- The former 'Spring UR Site'.
- The former 'TRW Site'.

'Key' issues and challenges facing the Centre are:

- Tackling the increasing number of vacancies.
- Bring forward appropriate new development opportunities.
- Securing improvements in the quality of the public realm.
- The need to market, promote and effectively manage the Centre.



Grade II Listed Building Mere Green Road



Local context plan

Key proposals

The framework promotes a place-making approach that strengthens Mere Green's identity and distinctiveness as an 'urban village'. This character has been adversely affected by levels of traffic and the mediocre quality of the public realm within the Centre's historic heart and by more recent development on land east of Lichfield Road and south of Mere Green Road in the form of isolated buildings surrounded by swathes of car parking.

New developments and environmental improvements in and around the District Centre should lead to:

- A balanced mix of retail, other commercial and community uses and activities that support a vibrant day time and evening economy.
- A much improved environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
- A strengthening of the Centre's urban village character and identity.

A. Development and Investment Opportunities

Former Spring UR Site and adjacent land

Description

Measuring 1.2 ha (2.96 acres), the site is prominently located at the heart of the Centre with frontages to Lichfield Road and Mere Green Road, and offers the opportunity to significantly enhance Mere Green's offer by providing a high quality retail led mixed use development. The site is surrounded by predominantly commercial and retail uses along with Four Oaks Medical Centre at Carlton House and Sainsbury's car park.

The site includes retail units fronting Lichfield Road that are currently occupied by a number of smaller retailers, whilst there are vacant retail units at the junction with Mere Green Road located within attractive 3 storey buildings. A significant part of the site is given over to surface car parking. The site also includes a Grade II Listed Building which is occupied by The Old Speckled Hen Public House, which has a number of trees within its curtilage protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

A restrictive covenant on a significant part of the site prevents the land being used for a large scale foodstore.

Development Guidance

The principle of a mixed use development within use classes A1

retail, A3 restaurants/cafes, B1(a) office, C1 hotel and C3 residential (apartments) which enhances the Centre would be supported. A mix of retail units A1 and A3 uses would be appropriate at ground floor to complement the existing Centre. Residential/hotel use, primarily at first/second floor would be supported subject to appropriate scale and design.

A small scale foodstore with potential ancillary mezzanine first floor space would also be supported subject to appropriate scale.

Design Guidance

Past development of the land bordered by Mere Green Road, Lichfield Road and the residential area at Cremone Road has been piecemeal. The streets were originally lined by schools, community buildings and housing with a mix of industrial buildings and open recreational space behind. These have been replaced by larger stand-alone buildings and surface car parks.

This built form creates a poor environment for pedestrians and detracts from Mere Green's urban village character. Development at the Spring site should knit the existing fragmented Centre back together: serious consideration should be given to reconfiguration of existing land ownerships, uses and building layouts on adjacent land to the east and south of



KEY

- Buildings (active frontages to public realm)
- Pedestrian public realm

- Car parking (design as an attractive part of the public realm, with potential for use as event space)

- Main walking routes

- Protected trees

- Landmarks and focal spaces

- 1** Prominent corner in traditional village centre.
- 2** Listed Building (Old Speckled Hen PH).
- 3** Carlton House - medical centre entrance.
- 4** Library and Community Centre - entrance.

Spring Site - Indicative layouts

the Spring site to create a more attractive and better functioning urban environment.

In the northwest part of the site, buildings up to 3 storeys high have a strong building line that encloses Mere Green Road. New development should reinforce this urban character. The footway along this section of Mere Green Road is edged by almost continuous guard rail, which reduces the space available for pedestrians and restricts crossing points. Highways works and traffic management associated with new development should aim to remove this guard rail subject to comments identified within a stage 1 safety audit.

Development must comply with the principles of good urban design. Key considerations include:

- Development layout to be based on a legible network of enclosed public streets, walkways and squares that provides convenient, comfortable and safe pedestrian routes.
- Buildings to have active frontages (doors and clear glazing) facing existing streets and new public spaces, generating activity and natural surveillance that promotes public safety.
- Buildings to provide enclosure, definition and architectural interest to the 'historic heart' around the Lichfield Road/Mere Green Road junction, at a scale similar to existing buildings.
- Respect and complement the setting of retained buildings, including the listed Old Speckled Hen building.
- There is an opportunity to create a new public square within the site as an attractive, robust, and adaptable space that becomes a focus of community activity.
- A strong, coherent landscaping and planting strategy is required to create attractive pedestrian spaces and routes.

- Car parking to be laid out as an attractive space that could accommodate events as an extension to the public realm.

- Architecture, detailing and materials should be of a high standard that reinforces the District Centre character and contributes to a strong sense of place. 'Standard', bland buildings that fail to respond to the local context will not be acceptable.

Planning permission has now been granted for a mixed use development comprising retail foodstore, restaurant/cafe units, car parking and a public square with associated public realm works.

TRW Site

Description

The site has an area of 0.8 ha (1.98 acres) and has been recently cleared of the previous two storey automotive engineering buildings. It is situated to the north of Mere Green Road opposite Sainsbury's superstore, outside the defined Local Centre boundary. It is bounded by Mere Green Combined School to the west with associated playing fields, a Scout Hut and car park to the north owned by St James' Church Centre located to the east of the site. The nearest residential properties are to the north at Wilmcote Drive off St James Road. Trees along the site's boundary with St James' Church Centre are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. The Church is a Grade II listed building.

Development Guidance

The TRW site seeks to support a high quality residential use.

In addition to traditional housing, small scale residential institutions, as well as ancillary B1(a) Office uses will be acceptable provided there is no adverse impact on amenity of adjoining residents and adequate car parking is provided onsite. All uses should be in line with other relevant policies. The site is no longer acceptable for General Industrial B2.

Any proposal for retail development or D2 Assembly and Leisure on the site would need to satisfy the key sequential and impact tests as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Design Guidance

Mere Green Road is an important road corridor leading to the heart of the local centre fronted by Sainsburys supermarket, shops, a school and the Spring and TRW development sites. The supermarket, school and former TRW buildings are set back from the road behind green verges and there is an opportunity to reinforce this green character through future development of the TRW site.

Development needs to comply with the principles of good urban design. Key considerations include:

- Development would be generally expected to be 2 and 3 storeys high.
- The green verge fronting Mere Green Road should be retained and enhanced with additional tree planting and landscaping.
- Buildings facing Mere Green Road should have active frontages, with parking to be subservient in the street scene.
- Trees close to the eastern boundary of the site should be protected and their visual amenity value enhanced.
- Consideration should be given to allow possible future pedestrian access from the car park at the north of the site to allow a direct route for residents onto Mere Green Road.
- Architecture, detailing and materials should be of a high standard that reinforces the prominent District Centre character and contribute to a strong sense of place. 'Standard', bland buildings that fail to respond to the local context will not be acceptable.



KEY

	Retain green frontage to Mere Green Road		Strong building line overlooking Mere Green Road
	Potential tree planting in grass verge		Main walking routes
	Existing protected trees		Possible future pedestrian link
			Extent of site

TRW Site - Development Principles

The overarching aims are:

- To improve the existing public realm, especially within the historic heart of this District Centre, contributing to a strong sense of place and forming an attractive, safe environment for pedestrians, including people with mobility impairments.
- To take the opportunity offered by potential development sites to make good quality pedestrian connections throughout the Centre.

The original centre of Mere Green is around the junction of Lichfield Road, Mere Green Road, Belwell Lane and Hill Village Road. Today it is enclosed and overlooked by 2 and 3 storey buildings that include banks, shops, restaurants and a public house. The space is dominated by traffic and pedestrians are restricted to the edges, with particularly narrow footways at Mere Green Road. The public realm is undistinguished, with patched blacktop pavement and uncoordinated street furniture. There are significant areas of generally unattractive private forecourts and car parks, often demarcated by concrete bollards.

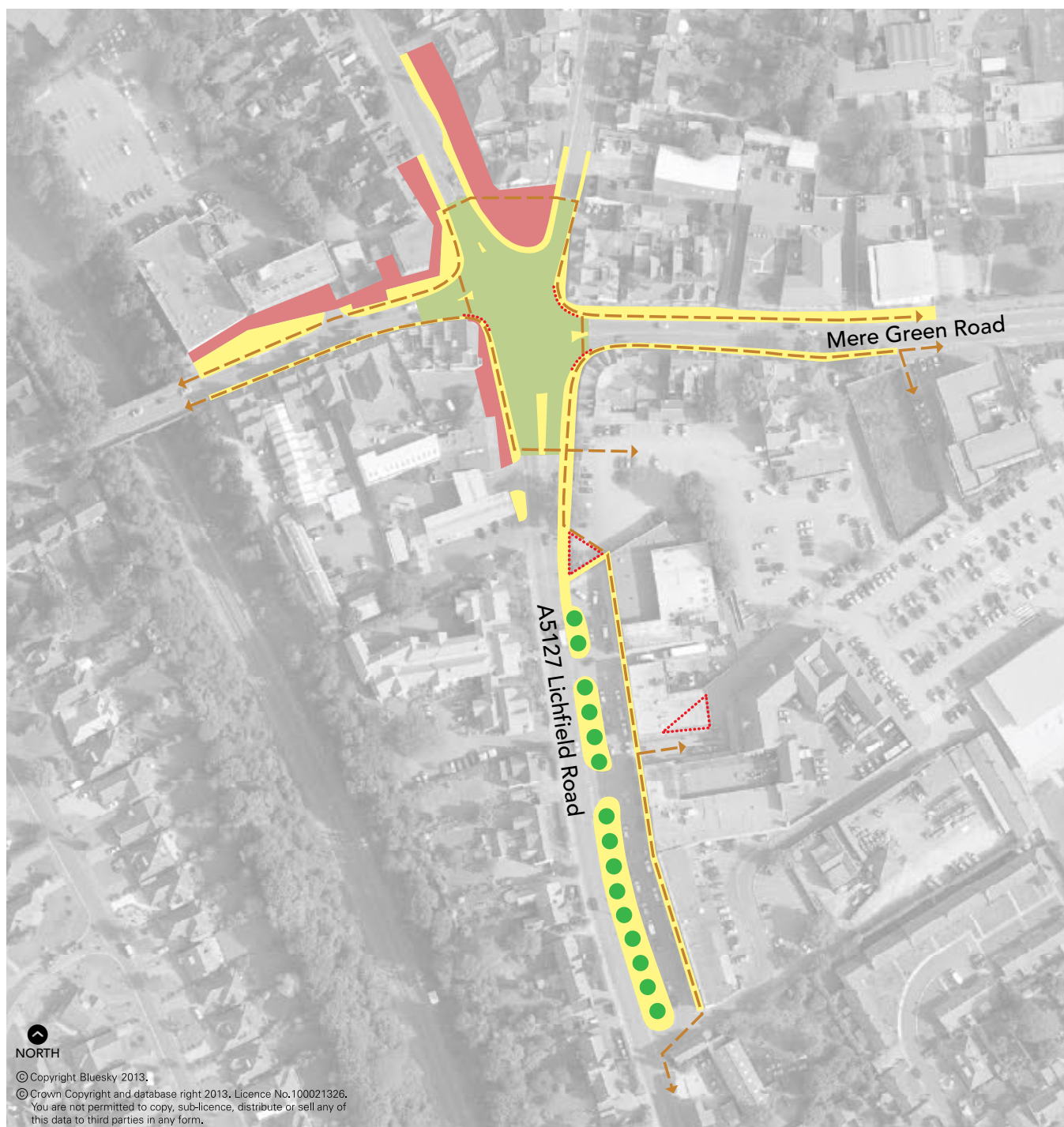
Potential improvements include reconfiguring the junction to provide more space for pedestrians, upgrading of public realm paving, lighting and street furniture and enhancement of private forecourts and car parks. These are subject to funding and agreement with landowners and other stakeholders.

The southeast corner of the space is bordered by architecturally interesting 3-storey buildings within the Spring development site. These buildings provide good definition and enclosure to the space and form a local landmark: they should either be retained within future development or replaced by buildings of similar scale and interest, whilst taking the opportunity to create additional frontage pedestrian space.







Along Mere Green Road, fronting the Spring site, the footway is enclosed by almost continuous guard rail, reducing the space available for pedestrians and restricting crossing points: consideration should be given to removal of barriers where consideration for pedestrian safety permits this.



Belwell Lane



KEY

	Public realm: footways - upgrade and simplify paving and street furniture		Private forecourts and frontage parking - co-ordinate with public realm
	Public realm: carriageways and roundabout - upgrade		Main walking routes
	Increase footway space		Potential tree planting in grass verges

Public realm proposals

key proposals / mere green development framework

Management and marketing

The framework supports the appointment of a Centre Manager in Mere Green, who would seek to address the challenges faced by the Centre, by:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with the local community in proposals to improve and enhance the role, function and quality of the Centre. • Facilitating greater involvement of local retailers and the business community in bringing forward marketing opportunities to sustain the Centre's diverse activities. • Actively supporting existing and potential business occupiers in order to retain vitality and viability of the Centre. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising and supporting community activities, such as food, craft fairs and farmer's markets to attract people and visitors into the Centre. • Ensuring that there is effective coordination of local services that serve the Centre's users. |
|---|--|

Other matters

The information contained in this advice is, to the City Council's knowledge, correct at the time of writing. However, the City Council advises developers and investors that it is their responsibility to check site conditions, availability of services etc prior to entering into negotiations. Any view expressed in this guidance reflects current policy at the time of writing.



Lichfield Road A5127

Appendix 1

Policy guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

Developments would need to meet the requirements set out within the National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out the Government's three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, environmental and social planning policies for England.

The Birmingham Plan: Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (UDP, 2005)

The UDP (2005) contains a number of policies that will guide development in the City.

Policies in the UDP will continue to apply until the City's Birmingham Development Plan (previously known as the Core Strategy) is adopted.

Chapter 7 of the UDP set out the key policies for shopping and centres, stating that existing centres will continue to be the main focus for new retail developments. The importance of centres in the life of the community, not only as locations for shops, but also as a source of employment, culture, social and business services.

The City Council will seek a developer contribution towards the provision of affordable housing on residential developments of 15 dwellings or more. The percentage of dwellings sought will be 35% (land privately owned). The City Council will provide details of the precise affordable housing mix it would consider appropriate when a proposal is brought forward.

Emerging Birmingham Development Plan (BDP)

The BDP aims to provide a 20 year framework for sustainable growth in Birmingham, with proposals to provide significant levels of new homes and jobs in the City.

The BDP seeks to:

- Ensure that a choice of housing is available to meet all needs.
- Support the restructuring and growth of the City's economy.
- Support a network of accessible 'vibrant centres'.
- Ensure that growth does not compromise the City Council's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint and takes account of the likely effects of climate change.

Specific Policy NW11 for Mere Green identifies the growth and development of Mere Green Centre and encourages levels of growth in line with those identified in Policy SP18. Policy SP18 sets out the proposed levels as below:

	2008-2021	2021-2026	2006-2026
Retail Comparison floorspace	5,000sqm gross	5,000sqm gross	
Office floorspace			5,000sqm gross

'Shopping and Local Centres' Supplementary Planning Document (2012)

The document seeks to encourage new investment into centres and to protect and enhance their vibrancy and viability. The need to balance the provision of retail and non retail uses within centres seeking to maintain: primary retail function of centres, prevent an over concentration of non retail uses, and ensure that proposals resulting in a loss of retail do not have a negative impact on the viability and vitality of existing centres.

Car Parking Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document (2012)

This city-wide document, adopted in February 2012, sets out the car parking standards which will apply when planning applications are considered for new development. The document aims to ensure that access needs of new developments are properly provided for, a balance is struck between the needs of different road users, the impact of new development on congestion is minimal and Birmingham continues to attract new investment and development.

The document also sets out proposed standards for parking for people with disabilities and for cycle and motorcycle parking. It also sets out in general terms where financial contributions may be sought from developers towards public transport improvements through legal agreements attached to planning applications.

'Places for All' Supplementary Planning Guidance (2001)

The aim of Places for All is to emphasise quality of design and sustainability firmly based on proven design principles. The guidance also reflects national planning policy as well as building on the principles of good urban design contained within the Birmingham Plan.

'Places for Living' Supplementary Planning Document (2001)

Places for Living is concerned with the delivery of good design in residential developments across the City. It sets out design guidance for residential development based on meeting community needs; well-connected and legible places; creating safe places with clearly defined public and private realm; sustainability, and responding positively to local character.

'Public Open Space in New Residential Developments' Supplementary Planning Document (2007)

This aims to ensure that adequate public open space, children's play and sports pitches are provided to serve all new residential developments in the City. The policy primarily applies to proposals that consist of 20 dwellings or more and expands on existing policy contained in the adopted UDP (2005). Whilst each planning application will be determined on its own individual merits, the guidance ensures a consistent approach to public open space provision as part of new residential development.

Achieving sustainable design and development

A commitment to sustainable development should be demonstrated and, where appropriate, buildings should be designed to be robust and adaptable to meet changing future requirements. The design of the development should achieve high levels of thermal insulation, reduce CO₂ emissions through the use of renewable energy, provide water conservation measures, optimise sustainable urban drainage, maximise the use of sustainable materials, use low energy systems, and source labour and materials locally. The Emerging BDP supports the use of the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM standards for commercial developments (Policy SP7).

Listed Buildings and Tree Preservation Orders

Grade II Listed Building SP 19 NW 2/115, Corporation School (Formerly listed as Hill County Infant School), 1976.

Grade II Listed Building SP 19 NW 2/116, Church of St James', 1834-5.

Tree Preservation Order No.691 (The Green PH, Mere Green Road, Mere Green, Sutton Coldfield), 1995.

Tree Preservation Order No.868 (Land at Waitrose Supermarket, Belwell Lane, Sutton Coldfield), 1999.

Tree Preservation Order No.1265 (St James' Hall, Mere Green Road, Mere Green, Sutton Coldfield), 2008.

