



# The Wider Botanical Gardens Area

## Draft Framework

January 2014



## Contact

Development and Culture Directorate  
Birmingham City Council

### Click:

#### Email:

[consultation\\_P&R\\_south@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:consultation_P&R_south@birmingham.gov.uk)

#### Web:

[www.birmingham.gov.uk/widerbotanicalgardensarea](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/widerbotanicalgardensarea)

### Call:

#### Telephone:

Keith Watson  
(0121) 303 9868

### Visit:

#### Office:

1 Lancaster Circus  
Birmingham  
B4 7DJ

### Post:

P.O. Box 2470  
Birmingham  
B1 1TR

You can ask for a copy of this document in large print, another format or another language. We aim to supply what you need within ten working days.

Call (0121) 303 9868

If you have hearing difficulties please call us via Typetalk 18001 0121 303 9868 or email us at the above address.

Plans contained within this document are based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

© Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.  
Birmingham City Council. Licence number 100021326, 2014.

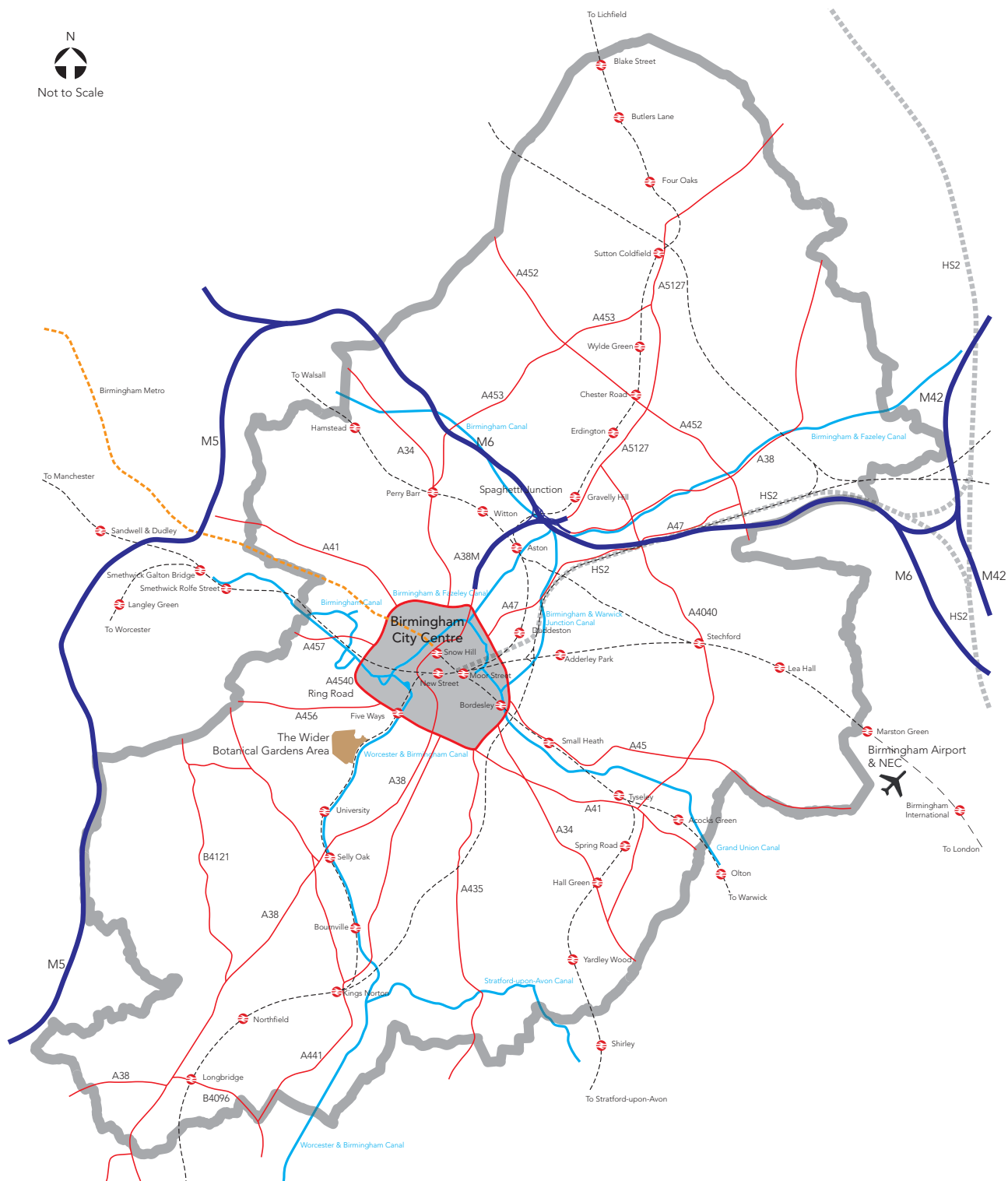
© Photographs: Birmingham City Council and Calthorpe Estates

# Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Context	4
Vision	6
Consideration of key assets	8
Policy context	12
Issues and Challenges	14
The Opportunity	16
Delivery	18



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved Birmingham City Council 100021326, 2014



## Plan 1 Location Plan

# Foreword

The area surrounding Birmingham Botanical Gardens has a unique character, and is home to a number of important organisations. The City is keen to ensure that they all have a bright future, but also that the character of the area is maintained.

This draft framework sets out clear recommendations for the wider Botanical Gardens Area, to facilitate the investment potential of several important sport and education providers as well as Birmingham Botanical Gardens itself. It provides a co-ordinated local vision for the area building upon the strategic approach within the emerging Birmingham Development Plan.

It is our aim to ensure that the wider Botanical Gardens Area becomes known as an important location for first class leisure, sport and education provision within Birmingham. This will be achieved by ensuring the delivery of high quality facilities fit for the 21st Century.

This framework will help to secure a co-ordinated approach to investment proposals, assisting the Botanical Gardens, leisure organisations and schools to develop with confidence. The Council is committed to working with the local community, businesses and partners to achieve the goals set out in this framework, and invites you to comment on our proposals.

## **Councillor Tahir Ali**

Cabinet Member for Development, Jobs and Skills  
Birmingham City Council

# Introduction

The area bounded by Westbourne Road, Richmond Hill Road, Farquhar Road and the railway, (see Plan 2) referred to as the wider Botanical Gardens Area, is a unique area of Birmingham. It is characterised by green, open spaces with a number of nationally and locally significant leisure, recreational and educational uses which reflect the area's rich history.

The area is surrounded by some of Birmingham's most prestigious housing and Edgbaston Ward remains one of Birmingham's premier suburbs.

The importance of both the historic and green environment is reflected in that the whole of the area falls within Edgbaston Conservation Area and the following considerations are also recognised.

There are:

- Two nationally recognised parks and gardens of specific historic interest (Birmingham Botanical Gardens and The Guinea Gardens).
- 3 areas of Protected Trees (Tree Preservation Orders).
- 7 Listed Buildings of historic and/or architectural importance.
- 2 sites of local importance for nature conservation.
- 5 different sports playing fields.
- 2 private sports clubs.
- An area of historic allotments (the Guinea Gardens).
- Important links in two wildlife corridors.

The area is home to Birmingham Botanical Gardens, some of the best independent schools in the country, a number of substantial residential properties, a public house/restaurant and offices. These activities, however, generate considerable vehicular trips within the area and peak period congestion raises concerns about parking and highway capacity in the area.

The management of these assets lies in the hands of each of the main occupiers. To maintain what is special about the area and to tackle some of the problems requires a co-ordinated programme of investment. It is clear, however, that the historical and environmental assets that are worthy of protection in themselves impose considerable constraints on the ability to invest. These assets have to keep pace with modern demands and needs if they are to remain viable, competitive and attractive in the future.

To maintain the area's uniqueness and make it suitable to meet the demands of the 21st century is beyond any one occupier or user. To move forward requires a shared vision, an agreed set of priorities and action and collective effort. This framework has been prepared to facilitate and support this process.

## Purpose of document

The City Council considers a framework document to be an appropriate way to identify:

- What is special about the area.
- What needs to be protected and enhanced.
- Issues and problems that detract from the area.
- How to address those issues.
- A vision for the area.
- A set of opportunities and actions to encourage ongoing investment and maintenance.
- A proposed way forward.

The framework is non statutory and has no formal planning status but it is hoped all parties will commit to it, endorse its content and use it as a means of guiding and encouraging ongoing investment.



Image 1 Botanical Gardens





**Plan 2** The Wider Botanical gardens Area



# Context

This area forms part of the historic Calthorpe Estate, purchased by Sir Richard Gough in 1717, and subsequently added to. Originally the parkland and surrounding fields to Edgbaston Hall; Edgbaston was largely developed in the first half of the nineteenth century as a prestigious residential estate. Large parts of Edgbaston now fall within the Edgbaston Conservation Area, characterised by tree-lined avenues, substantial houses and significant areas of open space.

Edgbaston is a high-quality, high-value suburb, and the key assets found within the Wider Botanical Gardens Area reflect this. Opened in 1832, the Botanical Gardens cover 6 hectares of land and is an important facility attracting many visitors to the area and to the city.

Edgbaston is widely regarded as offering some of the best independent schools in the country. 11 independent primary and secondary schools are present within the locality, 3 having operations within the boundaries of the Framework Area itself. Each of the 3 schools has their own designated playing field.

A number of sports clubs utilise land surrounding the Botanical Gardens; the Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society (EALTS) and Edgbaston Croquet Club are both well-established. There are two unused former playing fields, one off Richmond Hill Road, the other to the rear of Farquhar Road.

Towards the south of the site, complementing the horticultural presence of the Botanical Gardens, are the Guinea Gardens – ‘Westbourne Road Allotments’ – which date back to the late 18th century. They are the last remaining example of groups of detached rented gardens in Birmingham and one of only four such sites remaining in the country. The Gardens are Grade II listed on English Heritage’s Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

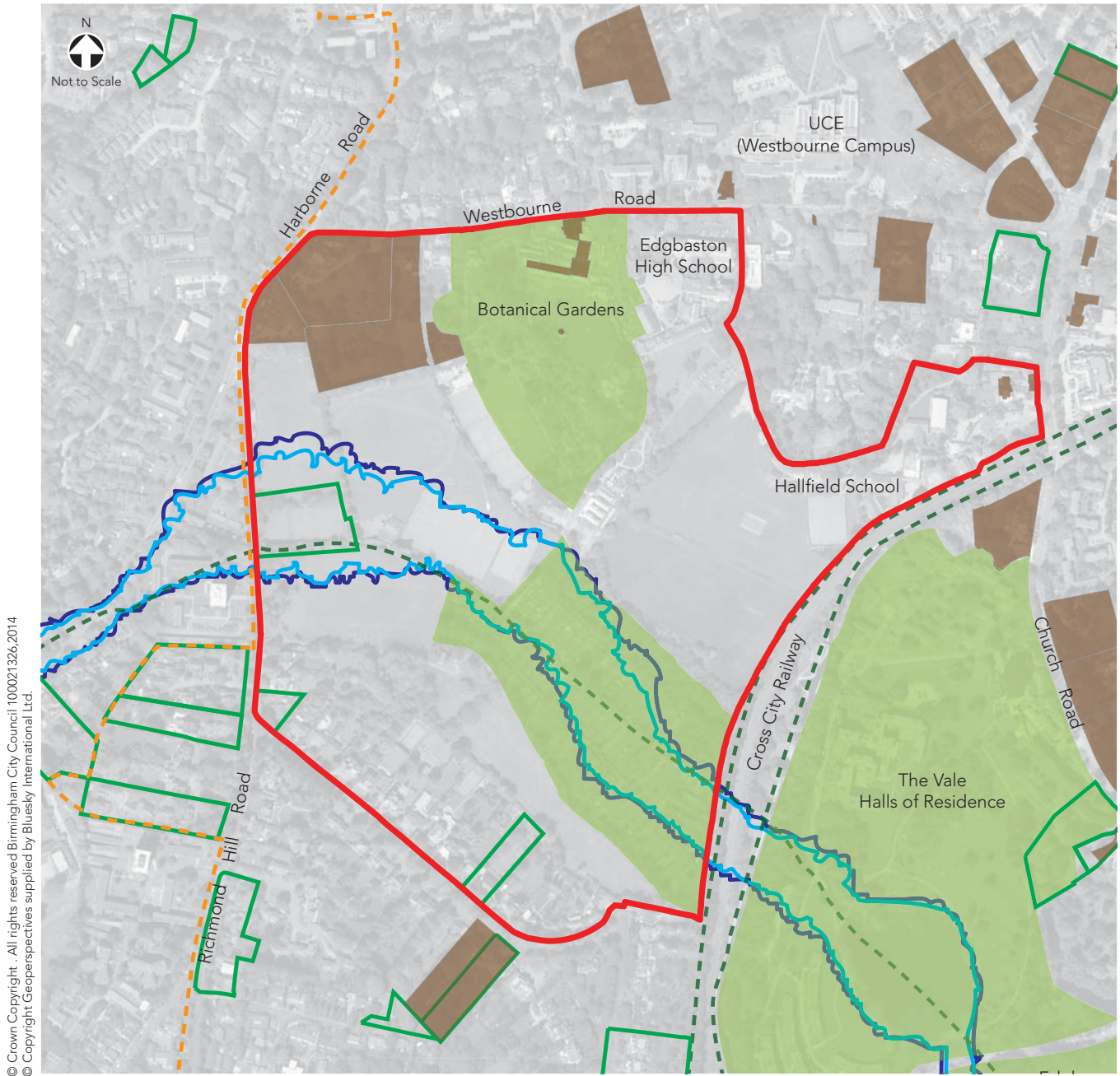
The Chad brook passes through the area and is subject to occasional flooding. The flood corridor and a number of other environmental and constraints are shown on Plan 3.

A number of high-quality, high-value residential properties are also in the vicinity fronting Westbourne Road and on Farquhar Road. The other properties within the study area comprise The White Swan, a pub/restaurant, and Westbourne Manor, now occupied as an offices for Pertemps.



**Image 2** Botanical Gardens





# Vision

The vision for the wider Botanical Gardens area is:

- to offer nationally recognised leisure attractions, a first class independent education offer and sporting facilities that are second to none.
- to secure ongoing investment to maintain, enhance and promote its position as a premier destination of choice.
- to have improved access and parking, and
- that the historic, environmental and landscape assets that make the area unique have been maintained and upgraded.

The aim is to achieve this over the next 5-10 years.

This vision is both aspirational and challenging and recognises that to maintain what is already exceptional and unique about the area requires ongoing commitment and investment from the land owners and occupiers. Implementation requires a unified approach to taking the area forward which this framework provides.

## Objectives

Alongside this vision this framework also sets out the conditions and opportunities necessary to attract investment and renewal. These include:

- Securing appropriate levels of growth - opportunities are provided for the Botanical Gardens, EALTS tennis club and the Croquet club to invest in, expand and enhance their facilities.

- Rationalising and enhancing playing pitch provision – the framework maintains school playing field provision and brings back in to use the former West Midlands Police sports ground to deliver upgraded facilities for the Edgbaston Girls High School.
- Improving connectivity – a new access is provided easing pressure on the local road network and providing additional car parking serving the Botanical Gardens, EALTS, the Guinea Gardens, The Croquet Club, West House School and Edgbaston Girls High school.
- Enhancing environmental and historical character - maintaining the best of the areas assets and providing the context to secure new funding for maintenance and investment.
- Promoting sustainability – providing opportunities to demonstrate best practice in sustainable development and delivering an area that minimises its carbon footprint.





**Image 3** EALTS and Botanical Gardens



# Consideration of key assets

**Birmingham Botanical Gardens** operate as an independent educational charity and unlike many other similar botanic gardens, such as Edinburgh or Kew, are self-financing. Attractions on site include the Gardens themselves (recognised as an historic park and garden), with over 7,000 plants on display, four historic glasshouses, a tearoom, gift shop and plant sales area, gallery and facilities for corporate events, banqueting, conferences and weddings. The grounds retain much of their original 1832 layout and are a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC). The Gardens are a major visitor attraction to Birmingham and are keen to continue to be able to make an ongoing positive contribution to the city.

The Gardens have aspirations to increase the range of facilities and attractions on offer, however, plans, including one for a new glasshouse, cannot be implemented due to poor access and constrained parking. There is limited available space to expand, meaning that such underlying constraints cannot easily be overcome. The gardens are currently re-assessing their business model and are keen to explore how to maximise visitor numbers, provide improved educational facilities and become an exemplar of addressing the eco/sustainability agenda.

**Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society (EALTS)** is the oldest continuously operating tennis club in the world, and the second largest in Birmingham. Recent investment at the nearby Priory tennis club, also in Edgbaston, has increased competition. EALTS has an excellent reputation for junior coaching and wishes to remain competitive through strengthening their existing facilities and securing their long term future through a new lease.

At present, the Society has 12 courts (6 grass, 4 shale, 2 artificial grass), however all are outdoors, which constrains use especially in winter. In order to remain competitive, the Society must be able to operate throughout the year, in-keeping with modern tennis being an all-year game. Many associated facilities with the existing courts are also outdated.

The tennis courts are, at times, under-utilised during the daytime, and there may be an opportunity to increase local school's use of them. There is an already existent partnership in place which allows West House and Edgbaston High Schools to use the Society's facilities for junior tournaments.

Access to the club, via a narrow single width lane is poor and egress onto Westbourne Road dangerous with restricted vision. Parking is limited. There is a need to improve these elements; however the club is unlikely to be able to pursue these changes without external financial assistance. Aspirations exist for new indoor and all-weather facilities, and the club may need additional land in order to accommodate these.

The Lawn Tennis Association is believed to be supportive in principle of expansion and new development, but requires security of tenure through a renewed lease as a condition of any funding being granted.

**Edgbaston Croquet Club** has been located on its current site since 1915. Although it is recognised that croquet is a minority sport compared to tennis, the club has aspirations to expand its facilities and create a higher profile for itself. The club is self-funding at present and seeks to attract external funding in order to increase its influence.

Membership is near capacity for its current facilities, with three full-size lawns and a small basic clubhouse. The current facilities are adequate to hold national tournaments, however there are aspirations to have 4+ courts which would not only allow a larger membership base to be accommodated but also would facilitate larger competitions to international level.

Expansion has been under consideration for some time, but costs and funding have not been



**Image 4** Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society (EALTS)



fully explored at present as the requirement for additional land has not been identified. Sharing of lawn facilities would not be appropriate due to the croquet lawns being mono-functional, but a shared clubhouse facility, possibly with the tennis club could be considered.



**Image 5** Edgbaston Croquet Club

**Edgbaston Guinea Gardens** are not only a historical asset for the Wider Botanical Gardens Area, but also a local community asset. A number of original features remain – chiefly hedgerows – enabling English Heritage to include the site as Grade II Listed in its Register of Parks and Gardens and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. It is also listed as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC).

There are no major problems with the site, however there are occasional minor issues with flooding. There is a waiting list for allotment plots to become available but expansion has not been considered. Access is not ideal; it shares the substandard row access road with EALTS, and there is no dedicated parking.



**Image 6** Guinea Gardens



**Image 7** Guinea Gardens

**Edgbaston High School for Girls** founded in 1876, is Birmingham's oldest independent school for girls. It has over 940 students aged 2 ½ to 18 and provides a very high standard of education. In recent years the school has undergone a period of refurbishment and major development. It opened a new all-weather surface playing field for hockey, netball and tennis in 2007, refurbished its swimming pool in summer 2008, as well as continuing to maintain a state of the art gymnasium. It also has playing fields providing a running track, rounders pitches and cricket square. In 2011, a £3.5 million development programme added a new Sixth Form centre, new library and fitness suite to the School's facilities.

There is sufficient on-site parking for staff and visitors, however, traffic generated by pick-up and drop-offs at the beginning and end of the school day can be a problem.

**Hallfield School** a leading co-educational day preparatory school for 550 children aged between 3 months and 11 years. The school has extensive facilities including an extensive 4 hectare playing field, well equipped sports hall and an all weather area. The school is set within an 8 hectare campus. Whilst providing pupil drop off facilities, these are regularly over stretched causing congestion on Church Road. The school is developing plans to increase their parking provision and consider ways of improving safety. The school also has medium and long term aspirations to upgrade and improve their facilities through selective redevelopment and site rationalisation.

**West House School** is a preparatory day school for boys between the ages of 4 and 11, with a nursery caring for children from the age of twelve months.



**Image 8** Edgbaston High School for Girls

Although the main teaching campus is located outside the Wider Botanical Gardens Area on St James Road, the school has access to the Richmond Hill playing fields which include two full-size football pitches, a cricket square and pavilion. There is no dedicated parking, parents and users having to park on the road.

**Pertemps** are one of the UK's largest recruitment agencies and have an office at Westbourne Manor to the site's north-west. Their offices are generally self-

contained and there are no major issues with their site or operations at present.

**The White Swan** public house lies just south of Westbourne Manor, and is a popular eating and drinking venue. It has a sizeable car park.

The **vacant fields** off Richmond Hill Road and to the rear of Farquhar Road have been used in recent times as sports pitches, for bowls and for police dog training, however these activities no longer



**Image 9** Hallfield School



operate. There may therefore be opportunities to put these currently vacant spaces back into use whilst maintaining the character of the area.

Residential properties flank three sides of the area with two substantial houses on Westbourne Road, maisonettes and a 12 storey tower block fronting Richmond Hill Road and substantial detached properties along Farquhar Road. A large parcel of land between the West House playing field and the Botanical Gardens is currently used as a private garden area.



**Image 10** The White Swan



**Image 11** Farquar Road East

# Policy context

The National Planning Policy Framework states that there is a need to achieve sustainable development; growth which meets the needs of today, with minimal adverse impact.

One aspect towards achieving sustainable development is through conserving and enhancing the historic environment (NPPF, section 12); particularly relevant given the historical context of the Edgbaston area. A need to protect Birmingham's historical listed buildings is highlighted in paragraph 3.25 of the city's Unitary Development Plan, with Conservation Areas, such as Edgbaston, being a "powerful means of preserving the best of historical and architectural heritage" (paragraph 3.20).

The number of playing fields in the Wider Botanical Gardens area also means that consideration must be given to the NPPF's 'Promoting Healthy Communities' section (section 8), where it is stated that existing open space should be retained and not developed upon unless there is a clear surplus to requirements or the loss of land can be adequately replaced.

Paragraph 3.57 of Birmingham's UDP echoes the stance of the NPPF by saying that "Development on playing fields will not normally be allowed". Whilst paragraph 3.60 places further importance on the provision of sports pitches and playing fields; "The quality of sports pitches is important. Encouragement will continue to be given to improvements, for example to changing facilities, and to the provision of all-weather pitches, which can be used more intensively than grass pitches", a stance which facilitates the numerous sports clubs and schools seeking to develop and expand in the area.

Chapter 16 of the UDP focuses specifically on Edgbaston. Due to the area's desirable character and high quality residential environment, the UDP does not foresee any proposals for large parts of the district. High quality improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged, subject to the need to safeguard local amenity (paragraph 16.15).

This policy context is also reflected in the Birmingham Development Plan 2031 (pre submission draft document) approved by the City Council in December 2013 and published for Statutory Consultation in January 2014. Once adopted it will replace and supercede the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (UDP).





Image 12 Botanical Gardens

# 14 Issues and challenges

Those features and characteristics that make the Wider Botanical Gardens Area unique require ongoing investment and maintenance to ensure their continued special status. For example listed buildings and historic gardens need to be maintained, school facilities kept up to date and visitor facilities enhanced to meet changing needs and aspirations. Many people expect to travel to these facilities by car and expect safe access and egress and adequate parking facilities. Many of the area's unique features, however, pose development constraints that are not easily overcome and have prohibited investments and improvements. Given this the area now has a number of pressing problems. These may be summarised as:

## General Issues

- Capacity of roads, with congestion particularly at peak times and the beginning and end of the school day.
- Pressure on parking places with limited scope to increase provision.
- Poor access to several of the facilities.
- Limited opportunities for expansion expansion sites or new development opportunities.
- Issues over leases and long term security acting as a hindrance to securing funding.
- Pressures to maintain listed buildings and conserve historic landscapes.

## Site specific challenges

- **Botanical Gardens:** Previous plans for new visitor facilities and expansion have been hindered by an inability to provide additional car parking and improve upon their constrained access. The Gardens have a desire to provide new investment and facilities but have limited scope to achieve this. The listed glass houses also need significant investment and maintenance.

- **EALTS:** Access to the site is poor and parking provision is limited. There is a desire to provide indoor facilities and upgrade existing facilities, including the clubhouse. This cannot be achieved without security of tenure and additional land for development.
- **Croquet Club:** Has long term aspirations for a fourth lawn to attract international tournaments and increase membership levels. This would require additional land.
- **Guinea Gardens:** would benefit from better, safer, access and dedicated parking.
- **Schools:** Ongoing investment by the schools can be constrained by factors imposed by the Conservation Area.
- **Playing Fields:** Some of the playing fields are affected by poor drainage and occasional flooding.





**Image 13** Access to EALTS and Guinea Gardens

# The opportunity

To resolve the current issues and provide the best potential to maximise investment opportunities requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. A radical solution that requires co-operation between the key occupiers offers the best overall potential.

The following set of actions is recommended:

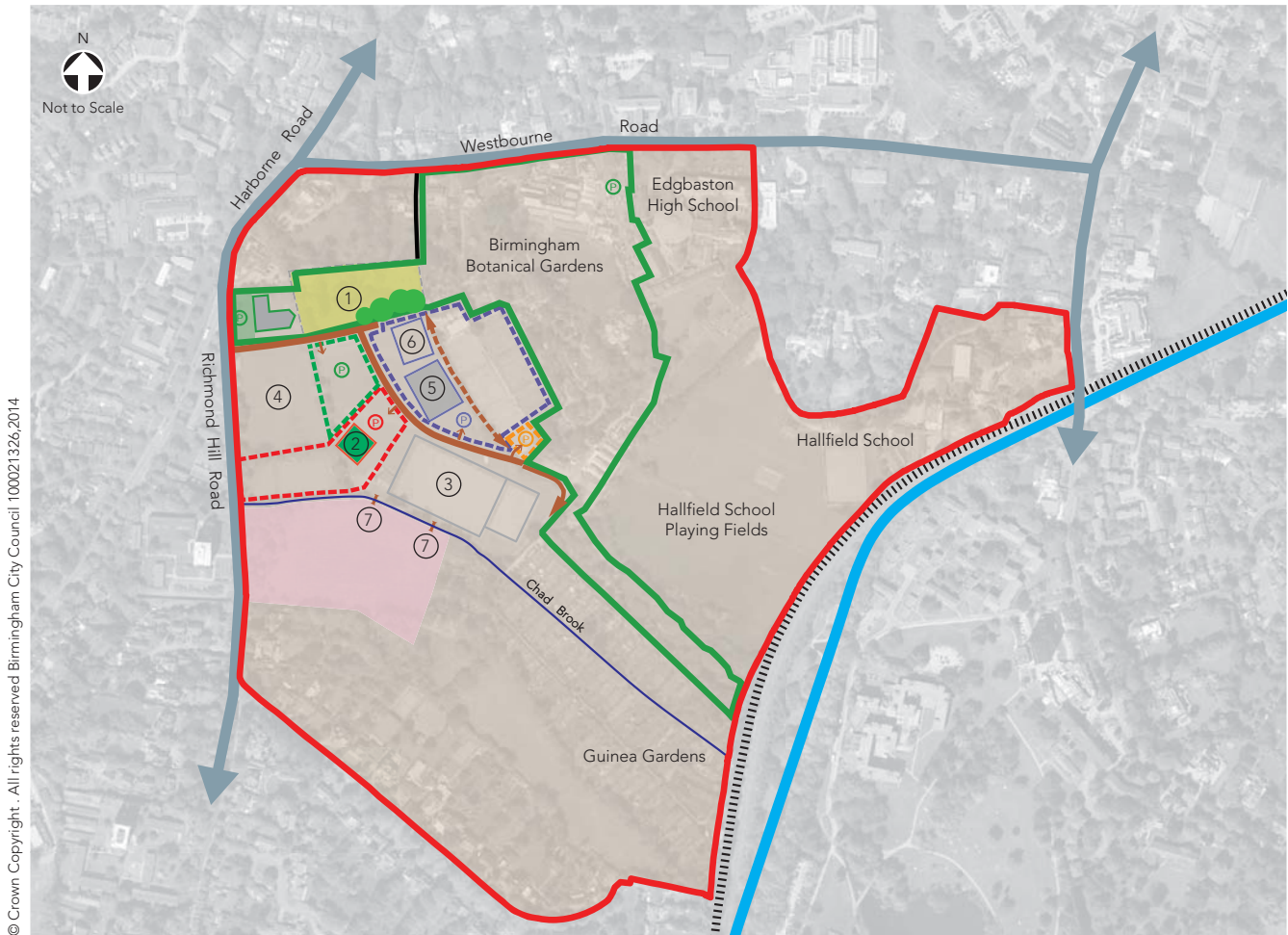
- The creation of a new access road from Richmond Hill Road to replace the current access to EALTS and the Guinea Gardens, The existing access from Westbourne road would be closed.
- Garden land to the south of Westbourne Manor and numbers 13 and 15 Westbourne road be incorporated into the Botanical Gardens.
- Creation of a new development opportunity for the Botanical Gardens on the northern third of the existing West House playing field. This could provide the opportunity to develop a new visitor facility and car park and enable separate entrances and parking for their conference and wedding operations.
- The route of the new access road through the northern end of the playing fields creates additional opportunities for EALTS to develop an indoor tennis facility, possible new outdoor courts, additional parking and the potential to redevelop or relocate their club house.
- Dedicated parking could be provided to serve the Guinea Gardens and West house School.
- Additional land is available to create a fourth lawn for the Croquet club.

To achieve this clearly impacts upon the existing use of school playing fields. It is therefore further proposed that:

- The Edgbaston High school for Girls running track area be relocated to the playing field formerly used by the West Midlands Police off Richmond Hill Road. This will be subject, where necessary to the provision of car parking, maintenance facilities, landscaping, improved drainage and footbridges crossing the brook.
- Whilst West House School loses a third of its exiting playing field, this must not be at the expense of any loss in quality of the remaining pitch and its ability to provide for both cricket and football. The loss will also be subject to agreeing appropriate boundary fencing/landscaping, groundman's and pavilion facilities. Off road visitor and coach parking facilities could also be created.
- Planning consent is in place and further scope exists to improve parking and access to Hallfield School playing field.

Once agreed as a unified package of proposals and endorsed by the City Council, Calthorpe Estates and each user group; the framework offers the best opportunity to secure new developments and maximise financial investment in the future of the area's assets.





### Key: Opportunities

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Framework Boundary   | Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society                 | Land to be leased to Botanical Gardens for garden extensions and possible new visitor facility |
| Potential extent of Birmingham Botanical Gardens               | Edgbaston Croquet Club                                    | Extension to Croquet Club (including additional lawn and car parking)                          |
| Main vehicle routes  | Overflow Car Parking for use by West House School         | Retained all weather pitches for Edgbaston High School   |
| New access from Richmond Hill Road                             | New Parking for Guinea Gardens                            | West House School Playing pitch retained   |
| Access to Guinea Gardens retained                              | Sports Pitches Edgbaston High School for girls            | Indoor tennis court building incorporating new club house                                      |
| Existing access road to be downgraded to footpath within EALTS | Green frontage to Richmond Hill Road                      | New outdoor courts   |
| Narrow access road to be closed                                | Screen planting to protect views within Conservation Area | New improved footbridges   |
| Cross City Railway Line  |   |  |
| Worcester & Birmingham Canal                                   |   |  |

### Plan 4 Opportunities

the opportunity / the wider botanical gardens area framework

# Delivery

The Framework provides a mechanism for both promoting the area and attracting investment. Implementation of these recommendations will be dependent upon the co-operation and commitment of a number of parties and in part require co-ordinated actions. Delivery could take number of years.

## Working in partnership

In providing a clear vision for the area and an agreed set of opportunities; each of the users will be able to move forward with their individual plans and investment decisions with confidence. Partnership working, however, will be important as some of the opportunities are dependant upon others being implemented first and collaboration will be essential.

The co-operation and commitment of the following parties will be necessary:

- Calthorpe Estates, who own the freehold to the land and control the leases to each user.
- The Schools agreeing to the revision of their playing field arrangements.
- Sport England co-operating in the vision which provides additional sporting facilities, whilst improving the quality of existing facilities.
- Birmingham City Council, acting in a facilitating and supporting role.
- Support from the parent bodies of the sporting organisations.

- Access to and support from a number of funding sources such as the Heritage Lottery, Sport England, Parent bodies eg the LTA etc.

The local community for whom protection of amenity will be paramount.

In order to secure and deliver change the following key elements will also be important:

- Ensuring development quality and infrastructure through the statutory planning process.
- Utilising Section106 planning obligations, where appropriate.
- Exploring opportunities for any enabling development funding to secure heritage objectives and the opportunities identified in this framework.
- Securing sustainable development and reducing carbon footprints.
- Phasing of key projects.

Delivery will also be subject to resources becoming available and provision being made for long term management and maintenance.

## The statutory planning process

Although a non statutory document, this framework has been drawn up to adhere with the guidelines set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan and the pre submission Birmingham Development Plan 2031.

Any developments that come forward will be expected to be of the highest design quality and adhere to Birmingham's "Places for All" supplementary planning guidance.

Where applicable the City Council will seek to secure local employment opportunities through the use of planning obligations. This would include the use of targeted employment strategies to link training to employer demand, and the use of local employees in both the construction and operation phases of developments to maximise the economic benefit to the city.



**Waheed Nazir**

Director of Planning & Regeneration  
Birmingham City Council











