

7.0 TOWNSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

7.1 Introduction

This chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES) provides an assessment of the townscape and visual impact of the proposed Development at the Beorma Quarter. Mitigation measures are also described where appropriate. This document is based on, and closely follows the previous approved 2009 TVIA but has been revised and updated in response to current policies and the revised development proposals.

Both the previous and current TVIA processes and documentation have been carried out by qualified, experienced landscape architects (Bell Fischer Associates).

7.2 Legislation and Policy Context

7.2.1 National Policy

National planning guidance is prepared by Central Government and is set out in the new National Planning Policy Framework.

National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Section 7: Requiring Good Design and Section 8: Promoting Healthy Communities

Paragraph 56: states *“Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible for good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people”*.

Paragraph 58: states that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- *Function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- *Establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- *Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public spaces as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*

- *Respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*
- *Create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.*

Paragraph 61: states “*planning policies and decisions should address the connection between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment*”.

Paragraph 69: states planning policies should aim to achieve places which promote:

- *Opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, including through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres and active street frontages which bring together those who work, live and play in the vicinity;*
- *Safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- *Safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas.*

7.2.2 Local Policy

The current Unitary Development Plan for Birmingham incorporating Alterations 2005 (The Birmingham Plan), which looked forward to 2011, is soon to be replaced by the new Local Development Framework, notably the Pre-submission Version of the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP), published December 2013. The Birmingham Development Plan sets out a vision and objectives for the future of Birmingham and will be a City-wide spatial strategy. It is expected that the BDP will be adopted by the Council on 1st April 2015.

Unitary Development Plan for Birmingham incorporating Alterations 2005 (The Birmingham Plan):

The planning policy for Digbeth and the site is covered within the City Centre policies in Chapter 15, which identifies the site lying within three key initiative areas: the Bullring Redevelopment Area, the Digbeth Millennium Quarter and the Eastside Initiative. There are no policies specific to the Site within the UDP, however paragraph 15.5B states that: “*Parts of the Digbeth Millennium Quarter are of great architectural and historic importance, and new development will be expected to respect the character of these areas*”. Policies 3.25 and 3.27 set out the criteria against which development in the conservation area will be assessed.

Pre-submission Version of the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) (December 2013) with modifications incorporating the Birmingham Core Strategy 2026 Consultation Draft – December 2010 The proposals map accompanying the draft BDP shows the Site lying within a Growth Area and a Conservation Area. Section 3: The Vision, Objectives & Strategy, sets out the Council's vision for Birmingham including eleven key objectives which will shape its future development. Those relevant to the TVIA include:

- *To develop Birmingham as a City of sustainable neighbourhoods which are safe, diverse and inclusive with locally distinctive character.*
- *To protect and enhance the City's heritage and historic environments.*
- *To conserve Birmingham's natural environments, allowing biodiversity and wildlife to flourish.*

Policy GA1.3 covers The Quarters, including the site within Digbeth:

New development must support and strengthen the distinctive character of the areas surrounding the City Centre Core raising their overall quality, offer and accessibility. The City Centre is formed by seven Quarters with the Core at its heart. Within each Quarter varying degrees of change are proposed that relate to the overarching objectives of delivering ambitious growth whilst supporting the distinctive characteristics, communities and environmental assets of each area

Digbeth – Creating a thriving creative and cultural hub with a high quality, exciting and easily accessible environment.

Policy GA1.4 – Connectivity: *Measures to improve accessibility to and within the City Centre will be supported, including:*

- *An enhanced high quality network of pedestrian/cycle routes, public open spaces and squares*

Policy TP12 – Historic Environment: *the historic environment, consisting of archaeological remains, historic buildings, townscapes and landscapes, including locally significant assets and their settings in addition to designated and statutorily protected features, will be valued, protected, enhanced and managed for its contribution to character, local distinctiveness and sustainability.*

Birmingham Big City Plan (July 2011) launched in September 2010, as a non-statutory document that sets out a vision and framework for how the City Centre will be transformed and its key proposals are reflected in the BDP. It will sit alongside the emerging Birmingham Development Plan. Within the Big City Plan, the City Centre has been divided into seven distinctive 'quarters', the Site is located within the quarter known as Digbeth.

Digbeth: About this quarter – states: *Within this core area the streetscape is wholly derived from the area's industrial past as a warehouse and industrial quarter. Street blocks are compact and composed of building plots which vary in shape and size.*

Digbeth: The Masterplan vision – states: *The ambition for the area is to use its historic roots as a foundation for growing its established creative businesses and developing a vibrant urban community with entertainment, living and cultural opportunities. By embracing the existing building fabric and delivering a high quality, exciting and safe public realm Digbeth will become a flourishing creative and cultural hub for the city.*

Digbeth: Big ideas – states: *In Digbeth the fundamentals are all there to create a thriving, active and authentic part of the city centre. With some enhancements to the physical infrastructure of the area, the potential can be truly fulfilled. To facilitate the renaissance we will address a number of key issues, including:*

- *Providing safe and convenient connections into and through the quarter.*
- *Supporting its gritty and authentic character*
- *Balancing the needs of local businesses, residents, cultural and creative activities*
- *Responding to the opportunities and challenges that the proposal for HS2 in neighbouring Eastside will bring.*

Building Heights – tall buildings (defined by BCC as buildings exceeding 15 storeys in height) are acceptable at the north end of the site within a New Height Ridge Zone shown on page 31. It states: *Tall buildings provide the opportunity to manage and create an identifiable skyline, memorable for its key buildings.*

Digbeth, Deritend, Bordesley High Streets (Dibeth/Deritend) Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Supplementary Planning Policies (SPD) 2009: the site sits at the west end of the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area was designated on 31st May 2000 in order to preserve the most significant remains of Birmingham's mediaeval townscape and its setting within a distinctive inner city industrial quarter.

Part B2.2 – New Development in the Historic Environment, Key Design Principles states:

- *All new buildings should follow the street frontage line at the back of pavement. Dominant architectural elements or features, which project beyond the building line will not be permitted.*
- *New buildings should not generally appear to be significantly higher or lower than their neighbours and should reflect the building heights characteristic of the locality or character*

area. This will normally limit new buildings to a maximum of six industrial/commercial storeys. Where setback storeys are employed to reduce apparent height these must be in proportion to the street frontage elevation and should be carefully designed to minimise bulk and mass.

- *The plan form and architectural treatment of new development should complement the historic and architectural character of the conservation area. In particular, principal elevations must always front the street.*
- *Local identity should be reinforced through the use of materials traditionally employed in the area. All building materials should be of high quality.*
- *New buildings must preserve views and vistas characteristic of the conservation area and respect the setting of key historic landmarks. The creation of new landmarks will be discouraged.*

High Places: A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings (SPG) 2003: the supplementary planning guidance was adopted by Birmingham City Council in 2003. The subject has been revisited with the publication of the Buildings Heights section of The Big City Plan in July 2010 and the emergence of the draft BDP. The SPG provides guidance on the location, form and appearance of tall buildings. The SPG discourages tall buildings (defined by BCC as buildings over 15 storeys in height) outside the Central Ridge Zone of the City, where most tall buildings are located. The SPG states:

- *Birmingham welcomes and encourages well-placed, high quality, tall buildings that would enhance the image of the city and the development of Birmingham's overall economy as a competitive city in the national and international context*
- *Unless there are exceptional reasons tall buildings should not be located in areas where they disrupt an existing coherent townscape of merit or block important views and sightlines of key buildings and spaces; for example in a conservation area or adjacent to listed buildings.*
- *The general presumption should be that tall buildings outside the city centre ridge zone will only be appropriate in defined or exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, any such proposals will continue to be considered on their merits and judged in relation to design guidance in the UDP and current Supplementary Planning Guidance such as 'Places for All'.*

This SPG is partly updated by statements regarding building height made in The Big City Plan, as previously discussed.

"Places for All" Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 2001 states: *"We need to use land efficiently, encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport, and allow access for everyone – including people without a car. All buildings should relate to their context, be adaptable, accessible and well*

insulated with quality as a main priority". In order to achieve these design qualities BCC identified 5 main principles:

- *Creating diversity – the aim must be to create or build within places that have an accessible choice of closely mixed complementary activities.*
- *Moving around easily – places should be linked up with short, direct public routes overlooked by frontages.*
- *Safe places, private spaces – places must be safe and attractive with a clear division between public and private space.*
- *Building for the future – buildings and spaces should be adaptable to enhance their long-term viability and built so they harm the environment as little as possible.*
- *Build on local character – development must consider the context and exploit and strengthen the characteristics that make an area special.*

“Places for Living” Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 2001 sets out 5 main principles to encourage high quality residential proposals:

- *Places not estates – successful developments must address wider issues than simply building houses and create distinctive places that offer a choice of housing and complementary activities nearby.*
- *Moving around easily – places should be linked up with short, direct public routes overlooked by frontages.*
- *Safe places, private spaces – places must be safe and attractive with a clear division between public and private spaces.*
- *Building for the future – buildings and spaces should be adaptable to enhance their long-term viability and built so they harm the environment as little as possible.*
- *Build on local character – developers must consider the context and exploit and strengthen the characteristics that make an area special*

The SPG encourages the design of attractive streets and spaces (page 28) by stating: *“New streets and public spaces should incorporate a public realm strategy in their design to make them safe, attractive and useable by many people with different needs. General aspects to consider include: local character, existing landscape features, the size and type of space, location and prominence, connections to the*

wider area, circulation patterns and desire lines, variety of uses surrounding space, ratio of building height to width, design of surrounding buildings and microclimate.”

7.3 Assessment Methodology and Significance Criteria

This assessment is based on architectural drawings from Broadway Malyan (BM) and Bell Fischer Landscape Architects (BFLA), which are being submitted as part of the planning application, and visualisations by Broadway Malyan, which are included within this section. This assessment takes into account the physical fabric of the local area as a Conservation Area and the listed buildings within and adjacent to the development site. Consideration is also given to existing tall buildings and consents/application for other tall buildings in the city centre, the skyline of Birmingham and the appropriateness of the site for a tall building.

This review of the previous 2009 assessment has taken into account the methods outlined in the following current best practice guidance:

- *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (2013) produced jointly by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
- *‘Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment Advice Note 01/2011’* by the Landscape Institute

Assessment of Townscape Effects

Townscape receptors with the potential to be affected by the proposed development have been identified; these typically include Townscape Character Areas, designated townscape features (such as listed buildings), public open spaces, transport routes and the application site itself. Once identified, a subjective, professional analysis can be made of all available information to interpret townscape quality.

For purposes of the baseline study, the overall quality of the townscape is summarised and defined in Table 7.1:

Table 7.1

Scale	Quality of Townscape
High Quality Townscape	Has valued features that are significant in the context of the surrounding area, with distinctive components and structure. These landscapes are considered to be of particular importance to conserve and may be particularly sensitive to change in general

Scale	Quality of Townscape
Medium Quality Townscape	Has features that are distinctive to the local area, with some recognisable and consistent structure
Low Quality Townscape	Has no distinctive features or character and is often in a poor condition

Sensitivity can then be attributed in relation to the townscape and its capacity to accommodate the proposed development. Once this townscape baseline is established, an assessment of the likely changes to the existing townscape character, as a result of the proposed development, can be made. The criteria for magnitude of townscape effect used are derived from the proportion of the area or townscape features affected by the proposed development, context, setting and the duration of the effect.

In accordance with the guidelines, the magnitude of townscape effect is summarised and defined in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2

Scale	Magnitude of Townscape Effect
High adverse (or beneficial) effect	Obvious long-term and vivid changes to townscape character. Very noticeable in the vicinity, due to the introduction of prominent elements over an extensive area
Moderate adverse (or beneficial) effect	Partial changes to townscape character. Proposed development will be reasonably noticeable within the vicinity, due to difference with existing landform, scale and pattern of development
Low adverse (or beneficial) effect	Slight or temporary alterations of townscape character. Not readily noticeable and does not significantly influence character of surrounding area

The assessment of the proposals is based on National and Local planning policies and guidance. Listed buildings and conservation areas are taken to be of high sensitivity in townscape terms.

Assessment of Visual Effects

The visual assessment considers the visual amenity of the site and the surrounding area. It identifies potentially sensitive visual receptors and approximate visibility of the proposed development.

The sensitivity of the visual receptors and views will be dependent on the type of receptor and frequency of use, the speed at which the view would be gained, the landscape designation of the viewpoint, the quality of the intervening landscape, the scale of the landscape and the context of the view. The most sensitive receptors may include users of public footpaths and residential properties with views affected by the proposed development.

For the purposes of this baseline study, sensitivity is summarised and defined in Table 7.3:

Table 7.3

Scale	Sensitivity of Receptors
High Sensitivity	Views from public footpaths, bridleways, parks, viewpoints, tourist hotels, residential properties, slow - medium moving vehicles on scenic routes
Moderate Sensitivity	Views from sporting or recreational facilities - not related to the enjoyment of the landscape, schools, slow - medium moving vehicles
Low Sensitivity	Views from industrial, office or other workplaces, fast moving vehicles

The significance of the resulting visual effect is the degree to which the nature and appearance of the proposals would affect the character and quality of the existing view. It is therefore a result of the magnitude of change and the degree of sensitivity of the view to change.

Magnitude is determined by the distance from the proposed development, the extent to which the proposals would be visible and the extent within the overall view, presence of other built structures and duration of operations.

In accordance with the relevant guidelines the significance criteria for the magnitude of visual effects is summarised and defined in Table 7.4:

Table 7.4

Scale	Magnitude of Visual Effects
High adverse (or beneficial) effect	<p>Where effects are adverse - the proposals create dominating change in views from sensitive receptor types. Or major changes to views from very sensitive receptor types that would cause major deterioration in view.</p> <p>Where effects are beneficial - the proposals change the nature of the view, creating a marked improvement.</p>
Moderate adverse (or beneficial) effect	<p>Where effects are adverse – the proposals create distinct changes to views, from sensitive receptor types, that would cause some deterioration in view.</p> <p>Where effects are beneficial – the proposals form an immediately apparent feature in a less sensitive view, such that it affects and improves the overall view</p>
Low adverse (or beneficial) effect	<p>Where effects are adverse – the proposals create major changes to views from receptors of low to moderate sensitivity. Or small changes to views from very sensitive receptor types that would cause limited deterioration in view.</p> <p>Where effects are beneficial – the proposals create small changes to sensitive views or a recognisable new element within a view of low sensitivity, such that there is some localised improvement.</p>

In order to assess the visual impact of the proposed Development, two separate images have been prepared from each viewpoint selected:

- **Existing** – the view as it exists today; and
- **Proposed** – with the proposed scheme inserted (as a fully rendered image where visible and indicated where concealed) in order to place the proposed development in context

In summary, this part of Birmingham is historically rich and significant views exist into and out of the site both from Birmingham city centre and west along the High Street Corridor towards the tall buildings of the city centre. Notable views exist from the St Martin’s Church (Grade II*) and from the Nelson Statue in the Bull Ring, (listed Grade II*). The Development lies opposite the iconic Selfridges building. The visual assessment considers the potential impact of the proposed Development of the setting of the Conservation Area and the listed buildings through a range of distant, mid-range and local views selected by BFLA in association with Birmingham City Council.

7.4 Baseline Conditions

In this section, the existing character and quality of the townscape, both in terms of the Site itself and the surrounding area, have been assessed having regard to the planning policies outlined in 7.2.

7.4.1 Evolving Characteristics of Birmingham City Core

Because the built form of Birmingham is continually evolving, buildings that have received planning permission, and even some already under construction, are not yet visible in the photographs selected for the View Assessment.

7.4.2 Characteristics of the Local Area

The proposed development area is located to the east of Birmingham city centre. The site occupies a prominent corner location on a major arterial route into the city (A41 Digbeth). The site lies adjacent to a number of significant city landmarks which help to place it in a wider context and connect it to the city centre. These include the 19th century St Martin's Church (Grade II* listed), Nelson's Statue (Grade II* listed) and the Selfridge's department store located in the Bullring shopping centre. The southern boundary of the site is defined by the roadway (A41) along Digbeth, beyond which are the city's markets. Allison Street and the Digbeth Police Station lie to the east. It is bounded to the north by Well Lane beyond which is the former Umbrella Works (RTP Crisp building) (Grade II listed), which has been redeveloped as apartments. Further north lies the Bull Ring car park and the refurbished Moor Street Station. The other highly visible structure is the Rotunda (Grade II listed) which acts as a strong orientation marker within the area.

The Bullring, which has been extensively redeveloped to create one of Europe's biggest retail developments, is connected to the rest of the city centre and its network of public spaces and pedestrianised streets, which has been continued through the Bullring and culminates in a new public square around St Martin's Church.

Despite its proximity to the city centre, Digbeth is predominantly industrial in character and makes a marked contrast to the townscape character of the Bullring. The traditional scale of development in the area is set against the metropolitan scale of the city centre. There are limited physical and visual connections between the area and the adjacent city centre, especially to St Martin's Church, the Bullring and Selfridges.

The Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley High Street Conservation Area was designated in May 2000 in order to preserve the most significant remains of Birmingham's medieval townscape and its setting within a distinctive inner city industrial quarter. The Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley High Street

Conservation Area encompasses an area which stretches along Digbeth, Deritend and Bordesley High Streets and extends north east to the Warwick Bar conservation area.

The conservation area covers much of what can be still readily discerned of Birmingham's medieval townscape in its street pattern and surviving town (burgage) plots. These plots, just above the present day Allison Street, opposite St Martin's Church, would have been among the first plots to be laid out sometime in the late 12th century. Since the early history of the town is poorly documented the below ground archaeology of the area is particularly important.

The pre-industrial growth of the tiny agricultural settlement described in the Domesday Book of 1086, into a substantial market town of traders and craftsmen laid the foundation for the industrial expansion of the 18th and 19th centuries. The industrial heritage of the area is evident in its gridiron street pattern, the product of 18th and 19th century growth, which still survives in much of the area. Many buildings within the area date from the mid-19th to 20th century which reflects its commercial vitality in that period. They include examples of the 'shopping' or workshop ranges and small manufactories so typical of the city – the former Allison Street Works, (1870, 1888) built for umbrella furniture manufacturers, is an impressive example of a late 19th century manufactory.

The High Street corridor suffered some coarsening of its urban grain in the early twentieth century when narrow building plots were amalgamated. Manufactories increased in scale and mass, a trend illustrated by the Cold Store on Digbeth. However the decline of local industry in the mid-1970s onwards and the severance from the central business district and the market area caused by the post war road system, resulted in changing uses and vacancy in the area. This economic decline in the late 20th century resulted in a large number of gap sites in the local area.

The remodelling of Queensway, the establishment of the Eastside initiative to regenerate the eastern side of the city centre and the Bull Ring development, have all contributed to raise the profile of this part of the city. Some regeneration within the Digbeth area has occurred recently such as the redevelopment of the Custard Factory and new developments being proposed include the mixed used scheme at Connaught Square fronting High Street Deritend, The area is being promoted for positive change as part of the expansion of the City Centre Core in the draft Birmingham Development Plan and the Big City Plan. It is proposed that this area of northern Digbeth will be developed as higher density mixed use development to match the scale and intensity of the existing city centre.

However, at present, the local area still has many vacant sites and obsolete buildings of little merit making the character of the street façade drab and dilapidated. As a main arterial route into the city centre, Digbeth presents an unwelcoming arrival to the city. There is little street activity and pedestrian movement is relatively light. Pavements are narrow with no connectivity into the surrounding areas. The area lacks any formal public open space and it is proposed in the Big City Plan

that The High Street (including Digbeth, High Street Deritend and High Street Bordesley) will need major remodelling to reduce car dominance creating an improved pedestrian environment and space for activity along its length. The vision, in the Big City Plan, is that: *'The High Street will become a primary walking route from which a network of local walking routes, will run north-south and east-west. Along these routes a series of pocket parks and larger open spaces will be created. Street furniture and distinctive lighting of places and buildings will provide visual interest, enhance safety and create a sense of place'*. Currently the area is dominated by high levels of traffic circulation and this creates a barrier which limits interconnectivity with surrounding areas particularly to the city centre.

The character of the local area makes a stark contrast to the bustle and activity of the Bull Ring area. The Bullring, with its high quality design, well detailed materials and related street furniture and planting, contrast with the Digbeth area streetscape which comprises poor quality paving, limited street furniture, no planting and generally feels drab and unkempt.

7.4.3 Characteristics of Development Site

The overall development site of 0.77 Ha includes Phases One, Two and Three. Phase One works began in February 2013 and includes the refurbishment of the Grade II Listed Coldstore building, the construction of a new hotel on the corner of Allison Street & Digbeth and associated public open space.

The Phases Two and Three site, of 0.6275 Ha, is currently made up of a number of buildings, many of which are unused and a car park.

Numbers 136-140 Digbeth are 3-4 storey narrow town properties, a number of which are locally listed. On the corner of Digbeth and Park Street is the Royal George public house (now vacant). Facing Selfridges on Park Street is a former music hall which is now vacant. Behind these buildings is a vacant area of derelict land that is bounded by the Park Street multi-storey car park.

A public car park fronts onto the corner of Allison Street and Well Lane and on the opposite corner of Well Lane and Allison Street is the Grade II listed RTP Crisps building, which has been converted to residential use.

The site is fragmented with a mixture of historically important buildings, vacant properties, modern extensions, vacant land and car parking. The layout is awkward with the centre of the site underutilized.

The site is a component part of an urban area which has undergone extensive physical and economic change. The disused and dilapidated nature of much of the site and of the surrounding area, gives the site an unwelcoming appearance.

However, it is recognised that there are sensitive issues that need to be taken into account including its archaeological importance and its location within a designated conservation area. The fine urban grain associated with the medieval street pattern is still discernible today in the positioning of the existing buildings and the most important of these are the 12th century burgage plots between Park Street and Allison Street (136-144 Digbeth). As the site is the location of the original settlement of Birmingham it is a site of great archaeological interest.

The site's frontage faces onto Digbeth and Park Street. There is also a series of distinguished buildings which are locally listed 136-7 Digbeth and 138-139 Digbeth, a double unit which has an attractive frontage but a large modern extension to its rear. The building line is characteristically set back from the pavement creating a defined street frontage. However, this sense of enclosure has been dissipated by mid-20th century road widening which resulted in the demolition and rebuilding of the street frontage on the southern side of Digbeth which stands in contrast with the historic street frontage on the development site.

7.4.4 The Proposed Development

The development proposals are described in detail in the planning drawings accompanying this application in the Design and Access Statement.

In summary the proposed Development is for a high density, high quality mixed use development, that is self sustaining but connected to the wider urban environment. It comprises the refurbishment of the 135-136 & 137 Digbeth and the façade of 138-139 Digbeth and construction of three new blocks including a 30 storey tower to provide shops (A1) and/or a restaurant and café (A3), office space (B1), and residential (C3) together with a plant basement under the footprint of the building and creation of new landscape areas.

The scheme envisages the retention and refurbishment of locally listed No's 135-136 (Grade A) and 137 Digbeth (Grade B) and their conversion to A1/A3 use. The retention of the main Digbeth Street façade to the locally listed No's 138-139 Digbeth (Grade B) – the BVSC building, which is incorporated into the design of Building 2. In addition, the two new buildings, building 2 and building 3, are proposed and arranged in such a way as to reinstate the boundaries of the original urban block bounded by Digbeth, Park Street, Well Lane and Allison Street. A publicly-accessible, hard-landscaped amenity space will be created in the centre of the development which will be known as Orwell Place.

Building 2, at the corner of Digbeth and Park Street and directly opposite St Martin's Church, the Bullring and the iconic Selfridges department store, comprises a 30 storey tower. Residential apartments will occupy the upper 18 floors, over 11 floors of B1 office use, above a ground level with office lobby, back of house, servicing and A1 retail and/or restaurant space. An undercroft provides pedestrian access from the corner of Park Street and Digbeth through to the newly formed and publically accessible Orwell Place beyond. The Digbeth Frontage to the building incorporates the façade of the existing Grade B locally listed building at 138-139 Digbeth.

Building 3, fronting on to Well Lane is made up of three elements. The first element, adjacent to Building 2, comprises a 14 storey tower section with 69 residential apartments over a shop (A1 use) or restaurant (A3) at ground level. The second 10 storey element, with its entrance on Alison Street, consists of 10 floors of business use (B1) over a ground floor entrance lobby. The third element faces on to Well Lane and comprises a 4 unit residential/work element.

The design has developed from a sound appreciation of the special historic character of this part of Birmingham and the character of the emerging urban setting. The site contains some of the city's last surviving remnants of the medieval property subdivision system, known as burgage plots, which are characterised by groups of long, thin plots with narrow frontages that faced onto a market place. The development proposals involve a number of buildings forms which follow the historic burgage plots to present a visual and physical depiction of the historical land-use sub-division.

A public route will cut through the site following the line of the medieval Hersum Ditch, intended to represent its former existence and providing a welcoming public passage. Public space in the site, including the main square, known as Orwell Place, and routes through it will be reconfigured to create the most efficient use of the site area. These routes will emphasize the visual and physical connections between the Digbeth area and the nearby pedestrian areas within Birmingham city centre. In particular, pedestrian links will be created in order to link the development across Park Street and Digbeth to the Bull Ring development.

7.4.5 Townscape Sensitivity

Landscape/townscape character areas differ in their range of townscape features and the patterns these create, and consequently in their ability to accommodate different types of development. Some areas may be particularly sensitive and others more resilient. Some townscapes may present opportunities for improvement that will help with the eventual integration of the development with the surrounding townscape.

The proposed development site is considered to be sensitive to change due to its historic value and designation as a conservation area. The archaeological value of the medieval burgage lines and the line of the former Hersum ditch are important in defining the medieval development of Birmingham.

The location of the site, adjacent to the high quality townscape of the Bullring, which is a widely visited site important for tourism and shopping and the urban identity of Birmingham make it sensitive to change. The site's relationship with St Martin's Church and the iconic Selfridges building, add to its sensitivity.

However, the low quality streetscape and dilapidated townscape do not reflect the area's significance as a major gateway into the city centre or its increasing importance as part of the expanding city centre core. Many of the buildings within the development site and in close proximity to it detract from the character of the area, and the diversity in the quality of these buildings give the area a capacity for change.

In conclusion, as an area of **medium quality** with some distinguishing features with capacity to change, the townscape is considered to be of **moderate** sensitivity.

7.4.6 Potential Visibility

BFLA undertook a field survey to assess views that offer a wide coverage of the site from near, long and distant viewing positions, including those listed in Appendix B of 'High Places' A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings (2003).

Views of the site are generally limited around Birmingham city due to the topography, surrounding buildings and road layout. The widest ranging views of the site are from the south west, particularly from the Irish Quarter. When approaching from the north, the site is hidden by the natural topographic ridge running through the city centre and intervening city centre buildings. In the majority of cases views of the site will be restricted to the tall tower building proposed for the centre of the development. The remainder of the development will be hidden by the surrounding urban fabric.

7.5 Assessment of Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

7.5.1 Impact during Construction

During the construction period the majority of existing buildings will be demolished and a number of new buildings will be constructed. This work will involve the use of tower cranes and other related

plant necessary for the construction process. There is likely to be a considerable volume of heavy traffic delivering materials and removing excavated material.

The site will be closed off during the works with hoarding to reduce the visual impact of the works. However high level crane activity and other construction operations will be visible from many of the views considered below. In summary, the significance of effect is considered **low to moderately adverse** with the impact on the short distance views, such as those from the Bullring being the most significantly adversely affected.

Mitigation opportunities exist during the construction phase by the use of robust, attractive hoardings; by control of construction vehicle movements and the prevention of dust.

Residual impact after mitigation: **Minor adverse**

7.5.2 Impact on Townscape Character

As described above the existing townscape character of the development area is rich in historical and industrial heritage. However, the low quality streetscape and dilapidated townscape does not reflect the area's significance as a major gateway into the city centre, or its increasing importance as part of the expanding city centre core and its close proximity to a central hub of the city.

As part of a Conservation Area designation, the site is considered capable of absorbing significant change which is appropriate to the historical context. The cultural and historic heritage of the site will be incorporated into the design through the retention of the existing listed buildings and their facades. The layout of the new buildings will follow the 12th century burgage plots on Digbeth and retain their separate identities as historic building plots.

Burgage lines and other historical features will also be highlighted in the landscape treatment. Historic features will be used as the basis to create a new public square and well-detailed public realm with high quality landscaping materials, many of which will echo the characteristic paving materials of the area. The character of the area will be strengthened and enhanced by the high standard of design employed in the development.

It is considered that there will be a positive improvement to the local townscape character and individual features within the site. The proposed development will be noticeable within the vicinity and very noticeable from the Bullring area due to the prominence of the 30 storey tower. It is considered that the development will have a moderate magnitude of townscape impact.

As a result, the proposed development will result in effects which will appreciably restore and enhance existing townscape character, features and their setting and have a **moderate beneficial** impact on the townscape character of the area.

7.5.3 Visual Impact

Views were selected by BFLA, in consultation with Birmingham City Council planners, which offer a wide coverage of the site from near, long and distant viewing positions. The proposed Development will not be sufficiently tall to have an impact of the majority of the views listed in Appendix B of ‘High Places’ A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings (2003), hence only views A, D and E, from this document, have been assessed. Mostly, the Development is visible in Local Views – special attention has been paid to the visual impact of the development along Digbeth High Street as this is a major arterial route into the city.

Each view is presented as it existed at the time of the photograph and provides the basis by which the proposals are then assessed. Separate photomontages, incorporating a computer-generated (CGI) of the design proposal by Broadway Malyan, are also provided in *Appendix 7.1* at the rear of this section. The resulting photomontages were produced by Broadway Malyan.

Accompanying each view is an assessment of the relevant historical and planning policy context that may inform a judgement of the scale and massing of the proposals and their relationship to the setting of listed buildings and the local conservation area.

Based on the external character and perceived qualities of the proposals, the impact will be judged adverse, neutral, or beneficial to the existing townscape. Where adverse or beneficial, the degree of impact is judged to be neutral, low, moderate or high. The full list of views selected for assessment is tabled below and the details are presented in Appendix 7.

Table 7.5

Ref.	Long Distance View
D1	View E in <i>High Places</i> SPG: From Park Circus over the A38 Aston Expressway
D2	View A in <i>High Places</i> SPG: From the bridge where Bordesley Green Road crosses the West Coast Rail Line beside Adderley Park Station
D3	View D in <i>High Places</i> SPG: From the hill in the centre of Kingston Hill Local Park, Keeley Street, Bordesley
D4	Irish Quarter: Junction of Alcester Street and Green Street

Table 7.6

Ref.	Local Views
L1	Digbeth: from the pedestrian crossing of Digbeth near the junction with Birchall Street
L2	Digbeth: corner of Moat Lane and Bradford Street
L3	Bullring: Nelson’s statue
L4	Park Street: pedestrian crossing opposite Selfridges
L5	Allison Street: opposite the RTP Crisp building
L6	Edgbaston Street

View location maps are shown on Figure 7.7a and 7.7b.

7.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The development, comprising a number of buildings ranging up to 30 storeys, is intended to provide a high quality extension to the existing Bullring area whilst retaining the historic essence of the site and integrating with its local surroundings.

The proposed development site is located within a townscape area which is designated as a conservation area, with a distinctive historic and industrial character, which is sensitive to change. However the impact of this high density mixed-use development has to be considered within the context of the drive for redevelopment of this area as an extension to the city centre core. Overall the development will have a **moderate beneficial** impact on the townscape character of the area.

Views of the development from long distance views are often blocked by intervening buildings or have a noticeable but insignificant impact on the view as the development merges into the existing urban skyline. The significance of visual impact is **low beneficial**.

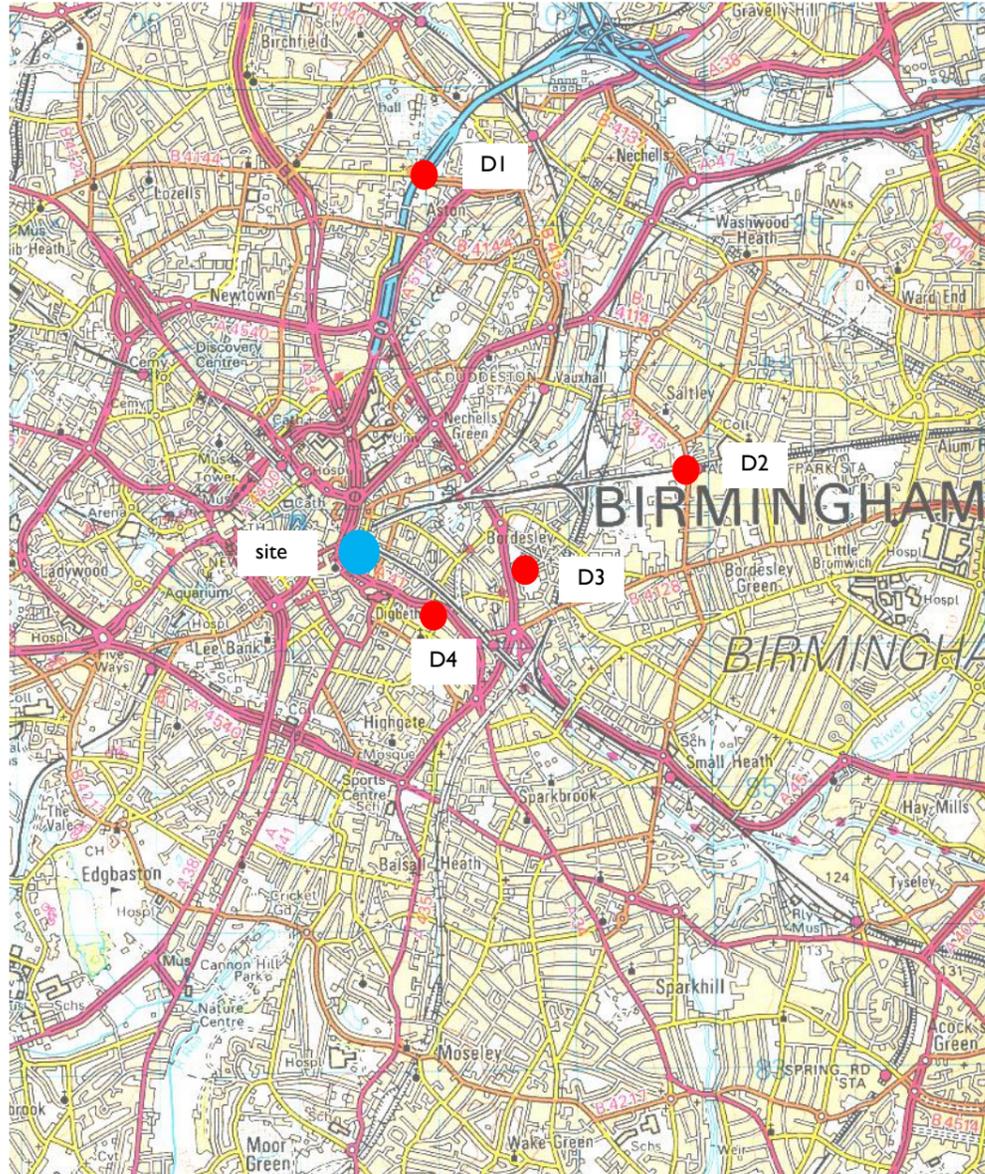
The visual impact of the development is most noticeable from local views along Digbeth and from the Bullring and the outdoor market. Although the visual impact is in these cases is often considerable, the development preserves characteristic views within, from and into the local area and does not block key views or important sightlines within the area. It is considered that the overall significance of

impact is **moderate beneficial** as the proposed development would result in a conspicuous improvement to the existing views and positively influence the local townscape.

Based upon the appraisal of the townscape and visual impacts discussed above, the residual impacts associated with the **Construction Phase** are deemed to be of **LOW ADVERSE** significance and short-term and temporary in nature. The residual impacts associated with the **Operational Phase** are deemed to be of **MODERATE BENEFICIAL** significance and long-term permanent in nature.

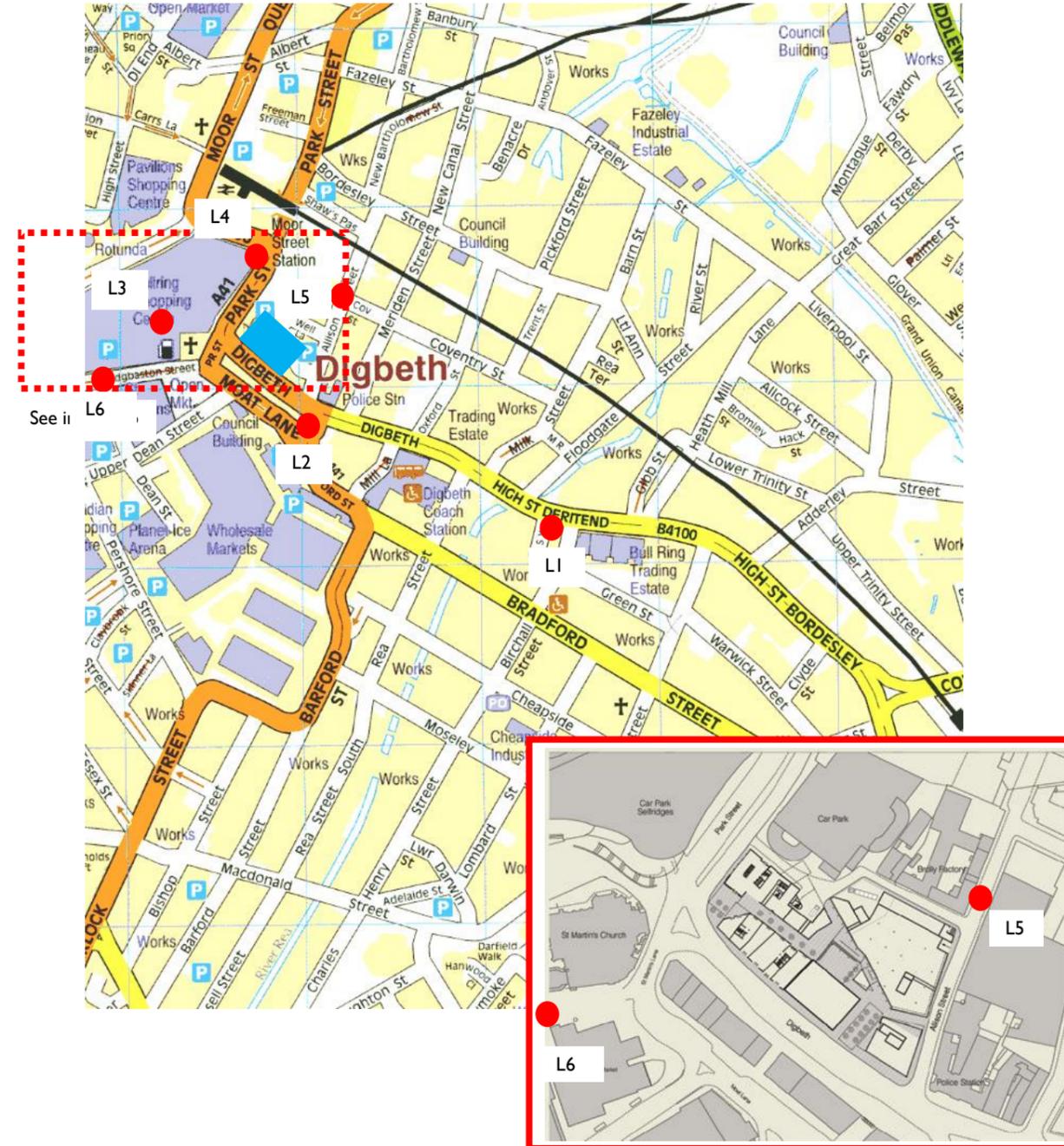
LONG DISTANCE VIEWS

Figure 7.7a: View Location Map



LOCAL VIEWS

Figure 7.7b: View Location Map



Immediate area

D1: Park Circus over the A38(M) Aston Expressway



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This view is defined in *SPG High Places: A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings* (March 2003) as a key view of the city centre. It is listed as View E in the SPG. The tall buildings on the central ridge zone which dominate this panoramic view help to create a memorable skyline.

The viewpoint is 2.8km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View D1 has been assessed as **moderate**.

Proposed View

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Low beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

The proposed Development will barely be distinguished among the mass of similar height buildings on the skyline. Therefore the proposed development will have a low beneficial effect on the moderate sensitivity of visual receptors at View D1.

D2: Bordesley Green Road crosses the West Coast Rail Line beside Adderley Park Station



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This view is defined in *SPG High Places: A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings* (March 2003) as a key view of the city centre. It is listed as View A in the SPG. A wide expanse of central Birmingham is visible from the viewpoint which is dominated by the tall buildings on the central ridge zone.

The viewpoint is 2.51 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View D2 has been assessed as **moderate**.

Proposed View

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Low beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

The proposed Development will barely be distinguished among the mass of similar height buildings on the skyline. Therefore the proposed development will have a low beneficial effect on the low sensitivity of visual receptors at View D2.

D3: Kingston Hill Local Park



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This view is defined in *SPG High Places: A Planning Policy Framework for Tall Buildings* (March 2003) as a key view of the city centre. It is listed as View D in the SPG.

This is a panoramic view of the central ridge zone from Kingston Hill Local Park with the Rotunda and Selfridges clearly visible. This view is considered of high visual sensitivity as it is a well visited view in a public open space, with its orientation focussed in the direction of the city centre. The development site is the central focus of this view.

The viewpoint is 1.34 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View D3 has been assessed as **high**.

Proposed View

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **low beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

The proposed Development relates in height and extent to the range of building heights on the skyline and is not readily noticeable. The distance of the proposed Development from the viewing point, means that the new buildings merge into the existing urban background. Therefore the proposed development will have a low beneficial effect on the high sensitivity of visual receptors at View D3.

D4: Irish Quarter - Junction of Alcester St and Green St



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This is a view of the central ridge zone from the Irish Quarter with the Rotunda dominating the skyline. The spire of St Martin's clearly punctuates the skyline despite its lower position and the organic shape of the Selfridges building dominating the mid-rise tier of buildings. This is a quiet back street with low volumes of local pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The viewpoint is 0.727 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View D4 has been assessed as **low**.

Proposed View

The proposed Development would form a central part of this view of Birmingham city core, becoming the centrepiece of this cluster of tall buildings on the skyline. It will rise between the Rotunda and the BT tower filling the sky gap between these two buildings and obscuring part of the iconic Selfridges Building. The proposed development is clearly identifiable within the view.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Low beneficial effect**

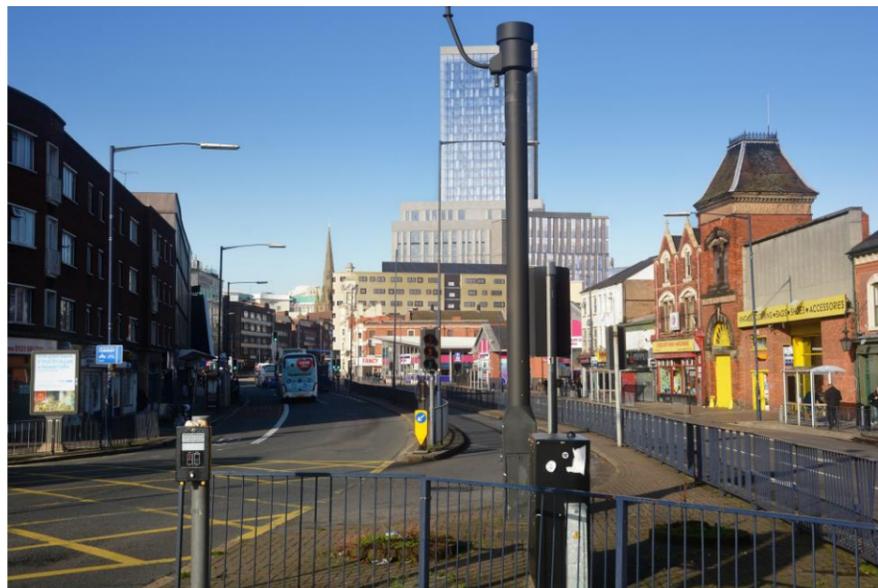
Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a low beneficial effect on the moderate sensitivity of visual receptors at View D4.

L1: Digbeth - Junction with Birchall Street



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

Digbeth and High Street Deritend provide one of the major arterial routes into Birmingham City Centre carrying both vehicular and pedestrian traffic into central Birmingham. The gentle curve of this ancient route as it sweeps up toward St Martin's Church past the Police Station is a distinctive element of the approach. The topography allows fine westerly views up Digbeth towards city centre landmark buildings on the Birmingham Ridge. The Rotunda on New Street, rising above the new hotel in Phase 1, and St. Martin's Church form a key visual link to the City Centre from the high street. As this is a busy transport corridor with little pedestrian traffic, views are mainly from fast moving vehicles.

The viewpoint is 0.527 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L1 has been assessed as **low**.

Proposed View

The Development would form a prominent element of the view from this point on Digbeth, marking a visual gateway into the city centre. The new buildings would obscure the Selfridges Building and the Rotunda although not obstructing views of St Martin's Church. The Development would create a new visual link between this key approach to the city and the city centre.

The tower within the development would rise above the height of the spire of St Martin's Church and the Rotunda and dominate the skyline.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Moderate beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a moderate beneficial effect on the low sensitivity of visual receptors at View L1.

L2: Digbeth - Junction of Moat Lane and Bradford Street



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

The Rotunda on New Street becomes a focal point along this axial view along Digbeth, rising from behind the transept of St Martin's Church. The view up the high street is framed on the north by the Police Station, the new hotel in Phase 1 and on the south by an unremarkable office block. The Cold Store, Digbeth Police Station and hotel are important landmark buildings along this section of Digbeth, with the tower of the police station on the corner with Allison Street acting as an important local focal point.

As this is a busy transport corridor with little pedestrian traffic, views are mostly from fast moving vehicles.

The viewpoint is 0.186 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L1 has been assessed as **low**.

Proposed View

The proposals would largely merge with the overall built form of the city centre, leaving the axial view to the Rotunda and St Martin's untouched.

The proposed development becomes an important and immediately obvious new feature within the urban scene and changes the townscape character.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Moderate beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a moderate beneficial effect on the low sensitivity of visual receptors at View L2.

L3: Bullring - Nelson's Statue



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This viewpoint is on a main pedestrian thoroughfare within the Bullring development. It is a widely visited site important for tourism and the urban identity of Birmingham and within the setting of St Martin's Church and Nelson's column both of which are listed Grade II*. It is also within the setting of the city's most iconic landmark, the Selfridges building.

The viewpoint is 0.137 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L1 has been assessed as **high**.

Proposed View

The Development would form a prominent element of the view from this viewpoint at Nelson's Statue. The buildings of the new development will have a cohesive effect on the view, creating a link between the buildings in the Bullring and the organic shape of the Selfridges building and mirroring the spire of St Martin's Church. The new buildings will create a vibrant urban backdrop to the open spaces of the Bullring.

The proposed development will become an important new feature within this urban scene and has an immediate effect on the townscape character.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Moderate beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a moderate beneficial effect on the high sensitivity of visual receptors at View L3.

L4: Park Street - pedestrian crossing outside Selfridges



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This is a partial view of the site down Park Street towards the junction with Digbeth. The redevelopment on Park Street associated with the Bullring shopping centre has introduced contemporary buildings which step up in scale to six storeys. A high level suspended bridge connects the car parking on the east side of the street with the Selfridge's department store opposite. There is little pedestrian traffic and most receptors will only glimpse the view as they pass the corner of the Selfridges building in fast moving vehicles.

The viewpoint is 0.097 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L1 has been assessed as **low**.

Proposed View

The development will rise above the multi-storey car park filling the existing gap in the line of buildings along Park Street. The Development will act as a dramatic counterpoint to the rounded profile of the Selfridges Building contrasting with its distinctive rounded profile.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Moderate beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a moderate beneficial effect on the low sensitivity of visual receptors at View L4.

L5: Allison Street - opposite the RTP Crisp building



View as existing



View as proposed

Existing View

This narrow view close to the proposed Development site is dominated by the new hotel in Phase 1 and the renovated residential building, the RTP Crisp building. This is a quiet back street with low volumes of local pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The viewpoint is 0.141 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L1 has been assessed as **low**.

Proposed View

The lower buildings associated with the southern end of the Phase 2 & 3 Development will be visible within this view. The RTP Crisp building will screen the view of most of the higher towers of the development. The development which faces onto Allison Street is designed to link into the vernacular of the RTP Crisp building, creating a more cohesive streetscape.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **Moderate beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

The development is not a prominent feature within the view but blends into the surrounding urban fabric. Therefore the proposed development will have a moderate beneficial effect on the low sensitivity of visual receptors at View L5.

L6: Edgbaston Street



Existing view



Proposed view

Existing View

The view is taken from the wide pedestrianised street which runs alongside the outdoor market. This tree lined street is a well visited open space with a high volume of pedestrians passing along it. There is a direct connection into the Bullring and the city centre. The view of the development site is more distant. The spire of St Martin's Church interrupts the sky line.

The viewpoint is 0.205 km from the development site.

The sensitivity of receptors at View L6 has been assessed as **moderate**.

Proposed View

The tower of the proposed development is clearly visible and becomes a focal point of the view along Edgbaston Street and will be readily detected by the majority of viewers. The view to St Martin's Church is not interrupted.

Magnitude of Visual Effects: **low beneficial effect**

Conclusion:

Therefore the proposed development will have a low beneficial effect on the moderate sensitivity of visual receptors at View L6.



SECTION 7: TOWNSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT

Environmental Statement
Beorma Quarter (Phase 2 & 3), Birmingham
