

Report to Planning Committee

28 June 2023

Application Reference	DC/22/67785
Application Received	14 December 2022
Application Description	Proposed 3 storey community skills hub building with 2 No. detached outbuildings for storage, substation, plant room, new vehicular access and gates to front, car parking, cycle storage, enclosed skip/refuse bays, boundary fencing, landscaping and associated works.
Application Address	Sandwell MBC Public Car Park Lower High Street
Applicant	Sandwell College
Ward	Cradley Heath & Old Hill
Contact Officer	Alison Bishop Alison_bishop@sandwell.gov.uk

1. Recommendation

1.1 Subject to the application being reported to Full Council, that planning permission is granted subject to conditions relating to:

- i) External materials (to include detailed design of the chain motif to the window reveals);
- ii) Landscaping scheme;
- iii) Boundary treatments;




- iv) Ground investigation and remediation;
- v) Electric vehicle charge points;
- vi) Low NOx boilers
- vii) Noise assessment relating to fixed plant and mitigation;
- viii) Construction management plan (to include logistics plan, dust suppression measures etc);
- ix) Cycle storage;
- x) Bin storage;
- xi) Waste management/refuse plan;
- xii) Parking/drop and access to be laid out and retained;
- xiii) Travel plan;
- xiv) Details of sustainable drainage system (surface water) and disposal foul;
- xv) Details of security measures to include CCTV, Lighting, access entrance points;
- xvi) Jobs and skills plan;
- xvii) No vinyl to windows serving the frontage of the development.
- xviii) Parking servicing and management plan; and
- xix) Parking surveys before and post development and any subsequent mitigation.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The submission has demonstrated that the scale and design of the proposal sits comfortably within the site and wider area. Parking whilst limited, has been justified through the evidence provided in the Transport Assessment and appropriate mitigation identified should manage parking issues resulting from the development. Finally, the location, design and landscaping would safeguard the privacy/outlook/light of adjoining residential property.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people – provides a new education facility within Sandwell specifically for residents within Cradley Heath and Rowley Regis.</p>
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	Strong resilient communities – provides opportunities for additional training to assist with future employment for young people.
	A strong and inclusive economy – provides an opportunity for apprenticeship during construction and work thereafter through training.

4 Context

- 4.1 At the last committee meeting the application was deferred and further information was requested regarding student travel patterns by car, due to the age demographic of students and is detailed in **8.6 (e)** of the report. It should also be noted that parking provision has been increased within the site to now provide a total of 10 parking spaces which includes, 2 disabled bays, 8 dedicated parking spaces and 2 drop off spaces. In addition, further information was requested regarding the relationship of the development to the residents on Printers Drive and this is detailed in **13.6** along with plans appended to the report. Finally, clarification was sought about the site selection process/member engagement and the Town Funding position. Whilst not material to this decision **section 14** provides an overview of these details for information purposes only.
- 4.2 Members also visited the site before their March planning committee meeting.
- 4.2 The application is being reported to your Planning Committee because it is a departure from the development plan, a s106 is required and 29 objections as well as a petition from local residents has been received. In addition, Councillor Vicki Smith also requested that the application should be reported to Planning Committee referring to concerns relayed to her from residents in relation to a lack of parking within the site.
- 4.3 To assist members with site context, a link to Google Maps is provided below:

[Lower High Street, Cradley Health](#)



5 Key Considerations

- 5.1 The site is allocated for housing in the Development Plan.
- 5.2 The material planning considerations which are relevant to this application are: -

Government policy (NPPF)
Proposals in the Development Plan
Overlooking/loss of privacy
Loss of light and/or outlook
Overshadowing
Public visual amenity
Layout and density of building
Safety Security/ASB
Design, appearance and materials
Access, highway safety, parking and servicing
Traffic generation
Noise and Pollution

6. The Application Site

- 6.1 The application site is a vacant piece of hardstanding. The site had been previously used as a Council pay and display car park but is now closed.
- 6.2 The site is situated to the north of Lower High Street, Cradley Heath opposite Sydney Road and Mary Macarthur Gardens and adjacent to the Lidl retail store. To the rear of the site is a new residential development (Printers Drive). The site is located 220 metres from Cradley Heath train station and 200 metres from Cradley Heath town centre.

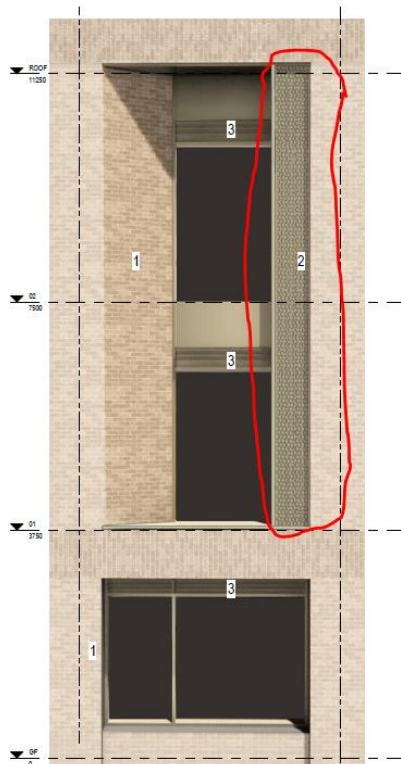
7. Planning History

- 7.1 There is no planning history associated with the site.



8. Application Details

- 8.1 The applicant proposes to construct a 3-storey community skills hub building. The building is an irregular shape which sits to the frontage of Lower High Street. At the widest point it measures 34 metres (W) by 25.5 metres (L) and reduces to 14 metres adjacent to the existing builder's yard. The maximum height would be 13.7 metres, to include roof plant. The building would incorporate a palette of materials which would largely be a textured buff colour and would be arranged in soldier and standard bond courses to the front elevations and a hit and miss Flemish bond detail to the side elevation. The proposed design would also incorporate a perforated metal spandrel panel with a chain making motif to the side of the window reveals. As indicated in the bay section extract below: -



8.2 The building would provide education and training for the following individuals: -

16-18 years old

19-25 years old (NEETs)

24+ (un)employed adults.

8.2 A café would also be provided to serve both students and the wider community on the ground floor.

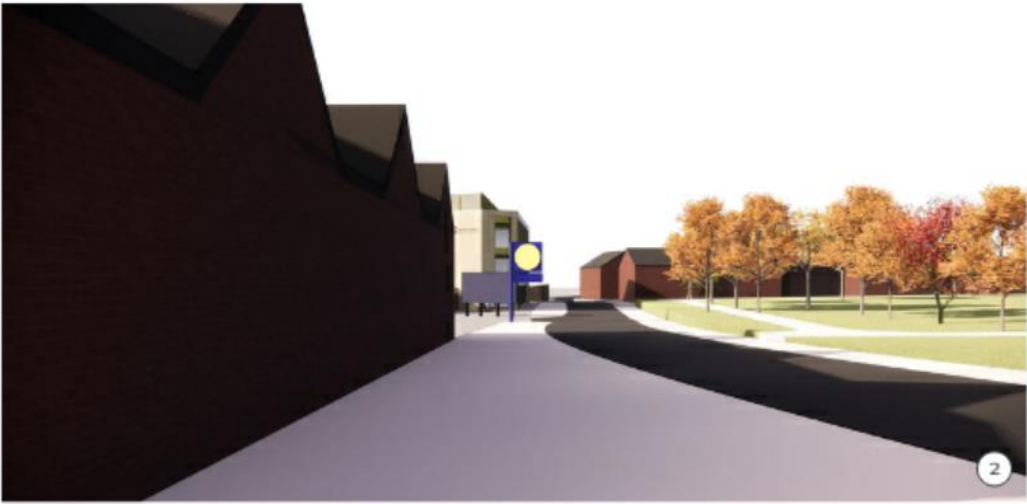
8.3 14 staff would be employed at the site and the building would accommodate a total of 183 students in any given day.

8.4 12 parking spaces are provided within the site, which includes, 2 disabled bays, 8 dedicated parking spaces and 2 drop off spaces.

8.4 The application includes various supporting documents such as a Transport Statement, Design and Access Statement, Ground investigation report, Archaeological Desk Based Assessment and Drainage Report.

8.5 The Design and Access Statement provides a narrative about how the design solution evolved and justifies the materials choice and the scale of the building. Firstly, the buff colour materials are influenced by the stone buildings situated within Cradley Heath and refers to the former Municipal Building, now the Fire Station on the corner of Barrs Road/Halesowen Road. The scale in relation to its setting is demonstrated by a photomontage showing the building both along Lower High Street and to the rear from residential properties (Printers Close). See image extracts below: -





Views from Cradley Heath Town Centre



View from Mary Macarthur Gardens



The flat roof design was chosen due to the irregular shape of the building whereby pitch roofs would have looked awkward and complex. Instead it is considered that a flat roof with plant above and a simple screen would allow plant and photovoltaics (pvs) to enjoy the extensive roof, provide safe access for their maintenance and reduce the scale and massing compared to a full pitched room.

The landscaping scheme proposes to enhance the existing native planting to the rear of the site and would introduce additional native trees.



Existing view from South into Printers Drive off Chester Road

8.6 The Transport Statement has indicated that: -

- a. There are 371 public car parking spaces within a 6-minute walking distance of the site and at peak times (07:00-19:00) a total of 46 spaces remained empty.
- b. The site is 2km from a number of surrounding residential areas and so a high proportion of students could walk to the site.
- c. Several bus services operate along Lower High Street with a bus stop within 100 metres of the site and the train station 200 metres from the site.



- d. The development provides 18 sheltered cycle spaces to support sustainable travel to the site which have been located immediately adjacent to the building.
- e. The original Travel Survey took place in January 2022 of users of the existing Sandwell College campus. 279 (63%) staff and 980 (16%) students responded. The findings showed that 75% of staff and 20% of students travelled by car and 57% of students travelled by public transport. When applying this pattern to the site, this equates to a daily total of 10 staff and 36 students by car, however at peak times this would likely be 18 (am) and 11 (pm) car journeys.

Subsequent to this original survey given the questions raised by members regarding the travel patterns of adult learners, further analysis has been carried out to review the travel patterns of adult learners from existing student survey information. This indicated that those students on an ‘Adult Study’ course type were recorded to have the highest propensity to travel by car (20%), in comparison to ‘A’ level students (1%), School leavers (1%) and Apprenticeships (11%) course students.

A further sensitivity test has been undertaken to demonstrate a more realistic position that takes into consideration the likely number of students on site on any given day, based on their course type, the average group size and average number of students within a group. The table below shows three scenarios:

Scenario 1 – summaries the current position as already outlined

Scenario 2 – considers the same but then applies the specific driver mode by age.

Scenario 3 – provides more realistic numbers of students on a given day (110) as provided by the College and applies scenario 2 above.



Table 2: Sensitivity Test

		Car Driver Mode Share	Scenario 1 (TA)			Scenario 2			Scenario 3		
			Pupil Ratios	Pupil Nos	Daily Car Driver Trips	Pupil Ratios	Pupil Nos	Daily Car Driver Trips	Pupil Ratios	Pupil Nos	Daily Car Driver Trips
Pupil Nos.	16-18 year olds	1%	0%	0	0	35%	63	1	35%	38	0
	19-24 year olds	11%	0%	0	0	27%	50	6	27%	30	3
	Over 25s	20%	100%	183	36	38%	70	14	38%	42	8
	Total	-	-	183	36	-	183	20	-	110	12

Source: PJA

To conclude when this additional sensitivity testing is applied the number of car born trips is reduced further.

- f. A Travel plan will be implemented from initial occupation and both staff and students will be aware that there is no car parking provision within the site. The Travel Plan would include annual monitoring reports, a cycle to work scheme for staff, TOTUM discounts (student discount cards for retail purchases) and bus metro train passes for students.
- g. There will be no loading bay on street. Refuse will be in line with the existing Traffic Regulation Order. Servicing deliveries would occur within the car park. No minibuses would be stored within the site.
- h. Data analysis of accidents along Lower Higher Street shows that there have been no serious accidents adjacent to the site.
- i. Occasional weekend use for community use which would be a meeting room with maximum capacity 12 and that the off-street parking would be available during these times.
- j. Café users would be staff and students but also open to members of the public; however this would likely be linked to Lidl and Station use passers by linked trips only.

9. Publicity



9.1 The application has been publicised by neighbour notification and press notice. A petition and 29 neighbour objections have been received.

9.2 **Objections**

Objections have been received on the following grounds:

- i) Traffic generation/road safety concerns
 - a. Proximity of the site to the junction of Sydney Road and at a bend in the road will cause safety issues when vehicles exit the site.
 - b. Construction traffic will cause massive disruption and will use side streets to avoid traffic congestion.
 - c. Lower High Street is an extremely busy road.
 - d. The builder's yard adjacent, already causes congestion from deliveries and customers.
 - e. Congestion on residential streets (Whitehall Road) would affect emergency vehicle access.
 - f. Safety of children if vehicles fly park and force pushchairs into the road around the park.

- ii) Insufficient parking
 - a. Limited parking within the development for staff/students.
 - b. Parking is already a problem in surrounding streets due to train commuters/builders yard/Buddhist Centre/Dentist.
 - c. Parking will occur on resident's streets adjacent, as the resident's parking zone only covers part of Sydney Road.
 - d. Loss of existing much needed car park.
 - e. Concerns about construction parking during development of the site.
 - f. Nearby town centre car parks are limited to shoppers with only 1½ hours free use.
 - g. Reduces parking for children with young families using Mary Macarthur Gardens



- iii) Inappropriate Design
 - a. The design is a brutalist monolith which will detract from the amenity of Mary Macarthur Gardens and is not in keeping with the locality.
 - b. Overdevelopment of the site – too dominant within the street scene/insufficient parking.
 - c. The site is too small for the footprint of the building.
 - d. Limited outside space for students/staff.

- iv) Amenity concerns (loss of light/privacy/outlook)
 - a. The building, due to being on higher ground and proximity, would affect the privacy/light of residential properties on Printers Drive.
 - b. Due to the size of the building it will impact on the outlook from residential properties.
 - c. Overshadowing of residential properties would affect solar gain to solar panels.

- v) Noise/Air pollution
 - a. Noise increase to residential properties from the proposed use (increase footfall students/staff).
 - b. Air pollution increased from additional traffic.

- vi) Increased Anti-Social Behaviour/safety
 - a. Concerns about increase threat of break-ins to residential properties.
 - b. Safeguarding of children – privacy
 - c. Increase in litter (already noted when children are off school)
 - d. Parking disputes could increase community tensions.

- vii) Loss of Trees/wildlife
 - a. Loss of trees
 - b. Impact on wildlife

- viii) Other
 - a. Offer of free bus passes would be impossible to enforce



- b. Questions about public consultation prior to the submission of the planning application
- c. The site closes at 5pm so would not be inclusive to the wider community
- d. A better location would be to use the site opposite the station.

Non-material considerations have referred to loss of property value.

9.3 Responses to objections

These are addressed in section 13 (Material considerations).

10. Consultee responses

10.1 Planning Policy

The site is allocated for housing and is departure from the Development Plan however due to the surrounding development and its proximity to the town centre an education facility is deemed acceptable. Further discussion will be referred to in section 12 regarding relevant policies within the development plan.

10.2 Highways

Concerns had been expressed regarding the lack of parking provision within the site and how the site would operate. Following the submission of further details, Highways have removed their objection on the understanding that proposals within the travel plan (i.e. cycle to work schemes, travel passes etc) would incentivise staff and students to use sustainable transport. This however relies on the success of the Travel Plan, which would be difficult to enforce if staff/students chose to use cars to travel to the site. The Highways service have therefore requested that a s106 agreement also secures an obligation for the applicant to undertake baseline surveys before the development commences and then a further survey after the development is complete and occupied. If it is then found that car traffic related to the development is affecting adjacent residential streets, then the applicant



would contribute to further mitigation in the form of further residents' parking schemes/TROs.

10.3 **Public Health (Air Quality)**

No objections subject to conditions relating to electric vehicle charge points, low NOx boilers and a construction method statement to control dust emissions.

10.4 **Public Health (Contaminated Land)**

No objection subject to condition relating to site investigation and remediation measures.

10.5 **Public Health (Air Pollution and Noise)**

No objection subject to condition relating to noise assessment and mitigation.

10.6 **West Midlands Police**

No objections but provide commentary in relation to secured by design principles, such as CCTV, security to building and lighting.

10.7 **Lead Local Flood Authority**

A sustainable drainage strategy has been submitted and is deemed acceptable.

10.8 **Severn Trent**

No objection subject to standard conditions regarding a detailed drainage scheme for the disposal of surface water and foul from the site.



10.9 Urban Design Officer

The roof design and materials for the development are considered to be out character with the area. The officer asserts that Cradley Heath is predominately a red brick with pitched roofs. Notwithstanding this, if the materials are deemed acceptable, details relating to the chain motif should be conditioned. Other matters which can be conditioned related to minimal planting to the frontage, the location of the cycle storage/parking, boundary treatments, bins storage and no vinyl on the windows serving the café/ground floor space.

11. National Planning Policy

- 11.1 National Planning Policy Framework promotes sustainable development but states that local circumstances should be taken into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities for each area.
- 11.2 The guidance also refers to development adding to the overall quality of the area by achieving high quality design, achieving good architecture and layouts. The applicant has provided significant evidence to justify the design proposal and its relationship within the footprint of the site.
- 11.3 The same guidance promotes sustainable transport options for development proposals and paragraph 111 states that developments should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. The Highways team do not consider that the development would have a severe impact on the highway network as the number of trips associated with this development would be only circa 1% increase in vehicle trips of the existing highway network.

12. Local Planning Policy

- 12.1 The following polices of the council's Development Plan are relevant:



CPS4: Place Making
DEL1: Infrastructure Provision
HOU5: Education and Health Care Facilities
ENV3: Design Quality
ENV5: Flood Risk, Sustainable Drainage System and Urban Heat Island Effect
ENV7: Renewable Energy
ENV8: Air Quality
EMP5: Improving Access to the Labour Market
TRAN4: Creating Coherent Networks for Cycling and Walking.
SAD HE5: Archaeology & Development Proposals.
SAD EOS9: Urban Design Principles
SAD EMP2: Training and Recruitment

- 12.2 The site is allocated for residential development and so this proposal is contrary to the allocation and is a departure from the development plan. As such there should be a robust justification to set aside this policy.
- 12.3 Policy HOU5 refers to new educational facilities being well designed, suitably located and providing a need within the area. With regard to location, the site is conveniently located to Cradley Heath town centre and the train station. Design considerations will be referred in later sections. The site itself is situated on the edge of the centre sandwiched between the Lidl Store and a commercial builder's yard. Given these factors, it is considered that a more commercial use is better suited to this location than a housing site. Turning to need, Sandwell College has identified, largely through the Town Funding process, that there is a need for an education facility to serve the residents of Cradley Heath and Rowley Regis. As has been outlined above, this facility is aimed at young adults to provide them with skills to support them into employment.
- 12.4 CPS4, ENV3 and SAD EOS9 refers to understanding historic character and local distinctiveness which makes a positive contribution to place-making. The scheme should be well designed providing good pedestrian and public transport access. Matters of scale and compatibility



with their surroundings should also be considered. In the main, the proposal sits comfortably within the group of buildings fronting Lower High Street, as the visuals referred to in the design and access statement demonstrate. The levels do drop significantly to the rear of the site and visuals show that the housing scheme is on significantly lower ground.

The materials choice is more unconventional given the strong red brick presence within Cradley Heath, however it is acknowledged that other civic buildings within the locality used buff materials, such as stone, render and brick. I do however consider that to ensure the massing and scale of the building assimilates and responds to Cradley Heath as a place, that the use of the chain motif, using perforated metal, should be included and that landscaping to the rear boundaries is enhanced to retain and soften the impact of the building to residential property on Printers Drive.

12.5 TRAN4 refers to creating good pedestrian and cycle connections to sites. The proposal's main door is currently served to the side elevation with no visual connection from the main façade. Ideally a direct link from the public realm would be preferred, but the design requires a side entrance for appropriate security when entering the building. The cycle stores are located to the rear of the site and it had been requested that these are located adjacent to the building, however the applicant has stated that for logistical reasons the materials store needs to be located nearest to the building.

12.6 ENV5, 7 and 8, these policies refer to sustainable drainage, renewable energy and air quality. The development proposes to incorporate a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS), introduces photovoltaics within the roof (renewable energy) and conditions can be attached to mitigate air quality such as the Travel Plan, electric charge points, low NOx boilers and a dust management plan during construction.

12.8 EMP5 and SADEMP2 refer to securing access to the labour market. In this instance this can be achieved firstly through a condition which



require an employment and skills plan during construction, but in addition the proposal itself seeks to provide training to support young people back into employment.

- 12.9 The site falls within an area of archaeological significance, a desk-based assessment accompanied the application and its conclusions state there is limited significance of buried archaeology within the site and no further action is required.

13. Material Considerations

- 13.1 National and local planning policy considerations have been referred to above in Sections 11 and 12. With regards to the other material considerations, these are highlighted below:

13.2 Proposals in the Development Plan

The site is allocated for housing, in this instance given the location of the site it is considered that a commercial use is better suited.

13.4 Access, highway safety, parking, servicing and traffic generation

Residents have expressed concerns about the impact of this development within the local highway network, in particular, with regard to highway safety. The Transport Statement has demonstrated that there is no data showing that significant accidents have occurred on this section of Lower High Street. The vehicular access to the site only serves limited traffic which again will not significantly affect traffic. In terms of the national policy the proposal would not have a severe impact on road safety to warrant refusal and Highways have not objected on safety grounds.

The wider concerns relate to traffic generation serving the new development. The Transport Statement has carried out analysis of the likely vehicle movements based on surveys of staff and adult students at the Central West Bromwich Campus. This suggests that at worst, on



any given day, there would be a total of 46 vehicles and that within 2km of the site there is sufficient parking provision from existing public car parks. Notwithstanding this, as a means to ensure that cars associated with this development use these car parks rather than parking on adjoining streets, the s106 agreement would ensure that this is monitored and if found to occur, sanctions in the form of additional resident parking schemes and/or TROs would be introduced at the cost of the applicant. On the basis of the information submitted and the safety net of the s106 agreement, highways have no objections to the proposal.

Other concerns referred to existing businesses causing problems in the locality, however this cannot be a justification to refuse permission if the scheme demonstrates that it would not impact on the road safety and parking. Given the analysis and proposed mitigations it is considered that the scheme is acceptable in highway terms.

13.6 Loss of light and/or outlook, Overshadowing and loss of privacy

Residents on Printers Drive, off Chester Road have raised concerns about loss of privacy, light, overshadowing and outlook. In the first instance the application site, in the main, does not directly interface with residential properties and is situated opposite the resident's parking court.

There are however, side elevations which face part of the application site. These elevations are 27.3 metres from the rear elevation of the building. In addition, the rear elevation immediately adjacent to these residential properties provides a stairwell and a blank façade, therefore given the separation and the design of the building it is considered that there would not be any direct overlooking or loss of privacy. See image below:





SOUTH ELEVATION
1:100

Turning to concerns about overshadowing, members requested additional information was provided and details of the modelling of the path of the sunlight during the day have been provided to demonstrate that the building will not cause harm to residential properties in Printers Drive. The full detailed drawings for the winter, spring, summer and autumn equinox are appended to this report and demonstrate that due to the orientation of the sun, there will be no overshadowing from this development towards Printers Drive.



The image below indicates the orientation of the sun and an extract of the sunlight plan for the Spring equinox is provided.



Solar Study: Spring Equinox



9:00



12:00



15:00

Red circles indicate the shadow cast by the development during the day.



13.7 Design, layout, appearance and materials

Residents have stated that they consider the design to be a ‘brutalist monolith’ which will detract from the amenity of Mary Macarthur Gardens and is not in keeping with the locality. They consider that the development is too dominant and the footprint too large for the site with no outside space for staff/students. The Design and Access Statement provides visuals showing the proposal in context to existing built form, which indicates that the scale of the building would assimilate with the wider context of the area. Design can be subjective, but the applicants have provided evidence of where they have drawn their design influences from within Cradley Heath’s past and present along with reference to civic buildings of this design style in other areas of the country. From the visuals presented I do not consider that the development would unduly detract from the character of the wider area or the setting of the adjacent gardens. Turning to spatial standards, the footprint is large, but provides opportunity for enhanced landscaping to the boundaries, although arguably trees to the frontage rather than planters would assist with breaking up the vertical lines of the building. In terms of the latter, the applicants have stated that planters were chosen because of tree root constraints and to retain outward views from the building. Whilst limited outdoor space is provided, given the proximity of the gardens opposite and nearby town centre, it is considered that students and staff have easy access to additional outdoor space and facilities.

13.8 Safety Security/ASB

The Police have raised no objections to the proposal, aside from recommendations regarding security of the building. Residents to the rear of the site will naturally be concerned about safety. But it is considered that the presence of this building is more likely to improve safety and natural surveillance of the site and boundaries would be improved along with the addition of CCTV and lighting. Other matters such as litter, safeguarding of children and parking disputes have been raised. The proposed boundary treatments to the rear and security



measures would protect residents from trespass and loss of privacy. In terms of litter, this will be for the management of the applicant, but appropriate waste facilities will be provided within the site. With regard to parking disputes, the s106 should ensure that if inappropriate parking arises, this can be managed.

13.9 Noise and Pollution

Public Health have raised no objections to the proposal subject to conditions requiring a noise assessment for plant and any mitigation thereafter to be implemented. Electric charge points, low NOx boilers and a construction management plan have also been recommended and can be conditioned.

13.10 Loss of Trees/wildlife

The site is currently all hardstanding with some landscaping to the boundaries. The development would introduce additional landscaping (including trees), therefore it is considered that there would be a neutral impact for both trees and wildlife.

13.11 Other considerations

It should be noted that the land is currently in the ownership of the Council. Therefore, prior to entering into a s106 agreement to secure parking mitigation, the land would have to be transferred to the applicant. It is understood negotiations are already taking place. However, this in itself has no bearing on the recommendation and is in the interests of transparency.

It is acknowledged that the proposed Travel Plan measures may not be adopted by students and staff, however the surveys suggest that take up of public transport is high for students. Furthermore, given the catchment area for students will be within the local area, walking and cycling is more likely to occur.



Questions have been raised about public consultation prior to the submission of the planning application. This in itself is not a requirement of a planning application submission, notwithstanding this, 42 neighbours on the surrounding streets of Lower High Street, Chester Road, Printers Drive, Sydney Road and Compton Street, Cradley heath have been consulted. Residents in turn, have responded to the planning submission and their concerns reported to your committee and have been responded to within this report.

The facility is specifically for the local community of Cradley Heath and Rowley Regis, albeit specially for those trying to improve their education attainment in order to gain employment. Alongside this, the café will be open to the public and the facility can be used for community use at the weekend.

14. Site selection, funding process and member engagement

Funding process

On 6th September 2019 it was announced that 101 Towns had been identified by Government to benefit from the Town Fund. In Sandwell, West Bromwich, Smethwick, and Rowley Regis were identified for Towns Fund by Government. A Town Investment Plan detailing proposed projects was submitted for each Town in October 2020 and in March 2021, Heads of Terms for £23.5m was offered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which was accepted following Cabinet approval.

The Satellite Education Hub was one of the 6 projects originally put forward as part of the Town Investment Plan to deliver a much-needed uplift in education, training and skills amongst the people of Rowley Regis. Following the submission of the full business case in March 2022, Government approved 5 of these 6 schemes, including £9m for a Satellite Education Hub.



The £9m funds will be released once DLUHC receive full assurance that the project is proceeding, which is subject to a favourable planning committee decision. Should this not be the case, there is a high risk that the approved £9m investment would be lost to Cradley Heath as the Towns Fund programme ends in March 2026.

Site Selection Process

The following sites were considered as part of the site selection process:-

- Cradley Heath Town Centre
- High Street / St Anne's Road
- Land at Lower High Street / Silverthorne Lane
- Former financial Services head office, Old Hill town centre
- Former Hill Passage / Haden Road car park, Old Hill

There were several constraints which were as follows:-

- i) Pursuing a privately-owned site at this stage is not a viable option due to the following considerations:
- DLUHC may require evidence of land acquisition prior to approving/releasing funding for project
 - If private landowners are reluctant to sell site, a CPO process can take 12-18 months with no guaranteed outcome (Aug 23 - Feb 2025). Project would not be approved by DLUHC at this late stage as the Towns Fund Programme ends 31st March 2026.
 - Additional funding would have to be sought to cover the legal costs of proceeding with a CPO (c£250,000)
 - No guarantee of approval from DLUHC following project change request.



- ii) Sites too small to accommodate the skills hub
- iii) Sites poorly located to public transport
- iv) Buildings not suitable for refurbishment to meet the needs of the skills hub

Member Consultation

There has been full involvement of the Rowley Members in the decision by the Council to promote and support the development, in partnership with Sandwell College, of a Satellite Education Hub on the former Lower High Street car park. The project was discussed as a number of Town Members meetings which are provided below. Although there was discussions and concerns regarding parking issues, no objections were received with regards to the site selected for the project.

20th September 2020

At the early stages of the Towns Fund Programme, proposed projects were presented to Town Members Meeting on 20th September 2020, where the Satellite Hub was discussed along with other Towns Fund projects. Queries regarding parking were raised at this point. However, the project continued to be developed with further updates provided at subsequent meetings.

26th July 2021

The scheme – along with two other Rowley Regis Towns Fund proposals – was discussed at length in a specially-convened Rowley Town Members meeting on 26 July 2021, which was attended by a members of the Planning Regeneration team and Sandwell College to provide additional detail and answer questions – of which there were very few, both raised by the late Councillor Shackleton, seeking points of clarification.

16th June 2021



The late Cllr Shackleton raised the issues of elected member consultation at June 2021 Cabinet. This resulted in Cabinet approving a Town Lead and Deputy Lead on each Local Board to represent their wards and report back to Town members meeting.

September 2021

Shortly after this, in September 2021, a report was prepared and submitted to the Cabinet Member [at that time, Councillor Padda] as a first step in the formal process of disposing of the site to Sandwell College. The report alludes to a broad consensus of Member support for the proposal.

November 2021

A further response was provided in November 2021, following the tabling of another question from Councillor Shackleton on the same theme.

14 December 2021

An update on the progress of the Satellite Hub business case was presented to the elected members.

7th April 2022

Following the submission of the Full Business Cases in March 2022, an updated was provided to the Town members meeting in April 2022.

9th March 2023

A Towns Fund update was presented to Town Members meeting in March 2023.

15 Alternative Options

15.1 Refusal of the application is an option if there are material planning reasons for doing so. In my opinion the proposal is compliant with



relevant polices and there are no material considerations that would justify refusal.

16 Implications

Resources:	When a planning application is refused the applicant has a right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, and they can make a claim for costs against the Council.
Legal and Governance:	This application is submitted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
Risk:	None.
Equality:	There are no equality issues arising from this proposal and therefore an equality impact assessment has not been carried out.
Health and Wellbeing:	None.
Social Value	Apprenticeships and job opportunities can be conditioned during construction
Climate Change	Sandwell Council supports the transition to a low carbon future, in a way that takes full account of the need to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Proposals that help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, will be welcomed.

17. Appendices

Location/Context Plan
 Site Layout
 Proposed Elevations
 Proposed Floor Plans
 Proposed Landscape Plan
 Sunlight plans



