

Policy & Spatial Planning  
Solihull MBC  
Council House  
Manor Square  
Solihull  
B91 3QB

**VIA EMAIL**

29665/A3/MAS/JB/sw

15<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

**REPRESENTATIONS TO THE SOLIHULL DRAFT LOCAL PLAN SUPPLEMENTARY REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION – LAND WEST OF STRATFORD ROAD, HOCKLEY HEATH: SITE REFERENCE 417**

Barton Willmore LLP is instructed by Rainier Developments Ltd (the 'Client') to submit representations to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Supplementary consultation (the 'draft Plan') in relation to their land interests at Hockley Heath. This is referenced within the Plan as 'Land west of Stratford Road', Hockley Heath and is referenced in the Council's Site Assessments document as 417 (hereafter referred to as the 'site').

Whilst we appreciate that this is a non-statutory consultation and it does not seek to deal with Birmingham's unmet housing needs, this is clearly a significant factor in the overall housing requirement for Solihull which should be considered properly now. If, as numerous parties have identified, for instance North Warwickshire Borough Council, the overall numbers increase through the Regulation 19 consultation, additional sites will need to be identified. As we will set out in this response, our Client's site is particularly well placed to address this need. Our main concern however lies with the way in which the site has been assessed by the Council.

We set out below our comments and responses to the questions we consider are relevant to our Client's land interests.

**Question 1: Do you believe that that there are exceptional circumstances that would justify the Council using an existing alternative approach, if so, what are the exceptional circumstances and what should the alternative approach be?**

Given the findings of the Employment Land Review (2017), we query whether there is adequate evidence regarding employment needs to answer this question. There is scope for an uplift in the housing requirement as a result of the HS2-related growth, as well as the potential to capitalise on the clear need for wider than local employment growth identified through evidence such as the 2015 West Midlands Strategic Employment Site Study (WMSESS), which identifies the M42 corridor as the area of highest demand for strategic industrial and commercial uses (Area A). The forthcoming new WMSESS is likely to be published before the draft Plan is adopted. On top of Birmingham's unmet



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housing needs, the potential for higher housing numbers as a result of these points is something we consider could be an exceptional circumstance to justify an uplift beyond the standard method minimum (which we currently calculate to be 777 dwellings per annum).

**Question 2: Do you agree with the methodology of the site selection process, if not why not and what alternative/amendment would you suggest?**

We object to the manner in which our site (site assessment reference 417) has been assessed as 'red'. We do not agree with the conclusion in the Site Assessment which states it will have 'more negative than positive effects and development of the site would result in a disproportionate expansion of Hockley Heath that would be contrary to the Spatial Strategy'.

An appropriate landscape buffer, including trees and hedgerows, would be incorporated into development to provide a defensible boundary to the north and west of the site. The east and south are both contained by residential development.

We also object to the Council's conclusion that the site would result in a reduction in the gap between the village and Blythe Valley Park and Cheswick Green. Firstly, the distance between the village and the Blythe Valley Park is approximately 3.2km, whilst the distance between the village and Cheswick is almost 6.5km. Secondly, this approach is inconsistent as paragraph 159 of the draft Plan indicates that for Whitlock's End Farm, the proposed 300m gap 'should be seen as the minimum necessary to provide a meaningful gap'. As mentioned above, the distances between Hockley Heath and Blythe Valley and Cheswick Green are substantially more than the minimum gap, therefore the Council's site assessment process is not consistent.

We do not agree that landscape presents a constraint to development as the landscape character assessment is broad in nature and a more site-specific assessment may come to a different view given the context here. In any case, the Council have identified a number of larger allocations with similar landscape character assessments and as such consistency in the approach to assessments is required.

In terms of nearby assessments, the site adjacent to 84 School Road is assessed as 'green' on the following basis:

**"The site lies adjacent to the settlement in a lower performing parcel of Green Belt. The site is relatively enclosed and is bordered by residential development. A defensible Green Belt boundary could be established in this location. The site has medium accessibility and is within an area of high landscape sensitivity, medium landscape value with a with very low capacity to accommodate change. The site is well related to the settlement being located between a ribbon of development along School Road, a small residential scheme to the rear and the main part of the village. The SA identifies 6 negative and 5 positive effects, of which distance to a primary school is a significant positive."**

An assessment of our Client's site could result in an almost identical conclusion.

The site contains good accessibility to services and facilities in the village. This includes a school and buses to Dorridge, which contains a rail station with direct links to Solihull and Birmingham. Other nearby services and facilities in Hockley Heath can be accessed by a short walk or cycle as shown on the appended Connectivity Plan. We have also appended a Concept Plan.

In terms of the settlement hierarchy, we consider that Hockley Heath should be higher and identified as suitable for increased levels of growth. As set out in the 'Draft Local Plan: Topic Papers', only accessibility of the settlement means its growth opportunities are restricted. However, there are a

number of Figures within the Accessibility Mapping Methodology Report which identify that the settlement has good bus services.

### Step 2 – Refinement Criteria

In terms of the factors set out in the table at paragraph 75 of the draft Plan, we have assessed the site as follows:

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Response</b>
In accordance with the spatial strategy	We consider that Hockley Heath is a sustainable location for additional housing growth as it has a sufficient range of services and facilities within the village, including a primary school. In addition, there is a bus service to Solihull, Dorridge and Stratford-on-Avon. It is worth noting that the site is of a sufficient scale to provide the additional services not currently available, for instance a GP surgery, should it be required.
Any hard constraints only affect a small proportion of the site and/or can be mitigated	As we have identified within the Vision Brochure previously submitted, there are no constraints which cannot be mitigated, including heritage, flooding, ecology, trees and access. Development here would not adversely impact upon the character of the settlement.
Site would not breach a strong defensible boundary to the Green Belt	As above, the site can create a new strong landscape buffer to the north.
Any identified wider planning gain over and above what would normally be expected	New community facilities could be provided within the site, including land for a new primary school, sports provision and a GP surgery.
Sites that would use or create a strong defensible boundary to define the extent of land to be removed from the Green Belt	As above, defensible boundaries can be established.
If finer grain accessibility analysis shows the site (or the part to be included) is accessible	As shown on the appended Connectivity Plan, the site is within close proximity to bus services and is within walking distance of the services and facilities within the village.

The site is in single ownership and is available for development with no legal or ownership problems. Given it is free from significant constraints and there is strong market demand for housing in this area, it can therefore be considered deliverable (from the point of Local Plan adoption) in terms of the definition within the NPPF.

**Suggested change:** the site is reassessed as a 'green' site in light of the above and accordingly identified within the draft Plan as an allocated site.

### **Questions 4 to 9: Balsall Common sites**

Whilst we agree with the spatial approach to development in Balsall Common, we would query whether there is evidence on the deliverability of some sites, for instance Barratts Farm (site 1),

which has over 10 landowners within the allocation and relies on significant infrastructure for its delivery. Evidence is required to demonstrate delivery and a housing trajectory will be crucial in the Regulation 19 Plan. Sites with less land assembly issues that are available for development now (such as our Client's) are much more deliverable in the early years of the Plan.

**Question 19: Do you agree with the infrastructure requirements identified for Hockley Heath, if not why not; or do you believe there are any other matters that should be included?**

Whilst it is not clear at present what the capacity of Hockley Heath Primary School is, the tight boundaries of the school site indicate that it has no room to physically expand if required in the future. As noted in the draft Plan, it also has issues regarding access. As we have set out, we consider Hockley Heath is a sustainable settlement suitable for more growth than currently identified in the emerging Plan. We appreciate that increased growth will need additional infrastructure requirements. As identified in the previously submitted Vision Brochure, our Client's site can provide land for 'Community Facilities' as part of a masterplan-led development. This could include land for a new/relocated Primary School up to 2-form entry. There is also sufficient space for formal sports provision or other social infrastructure, such as a GP surgery.

**Question 20: Do you believe that Site 25 land south of School Road should be included as allocated site, if not why not? Do you have any comments on the draft concept masterplan for the site?**

We have no immediate concerns with the inclusion of this site, much in the same way that we consider our Client's site should be included if a consistent approach to assessment was taken. Fundamentally, we think Hockey Heath is a suitable location for growth and it has a role to play in meeting the Borough's overall housing requirements.

**Question 21: Do you have any comments to make on potential changes to the Green Belt boundary north of School Road that would result in the removal of the 'washed over' Green Belt from this ribbon of development?**

We raise no issue with the amended Green Belt boundary, but we use this to highlight the similar justification for the removal of our Client's site from the Green Belt given the potential creation of strong, defensible boundaries and the poor contribution it makes to the purposes of the Green Belt.

**Question 30: Do you believe that Site 10 west of Meriden should be included as allocated site, if not why not? Do you have any comments on the draft concept masterplan for the site?**

Whilst we have no objection to Site 10 (west of Meriden), we understand that this site is being promoted by McCarthy and Stone, and we question whether these 100 dwellings are Class C2 or C3. If this site is intended to be delivered as C2, what contribution does this make towards meeting the Council's overall housing requirement and what contribution, if any, it will make the overall affordable housing requirement?

**Question 37: What compensatory provision should be made for land being removed from the Green Belt? Where relevant please give examples that are specific to individual sites proposed for allocation.**

The proposals will provide opportunity to link into the wider movement network and nearby public rights of way to encourage accessibility beyond the village into the surrounding countryside.

As mentioned, we consider our site as being suitable for the provision of sports pitches. Provision of this to the north or west of the site would assist in the transition between the development and the countryside and would maximise the gap between the village and Blythe Valley and Cheswick Green.

**Question 38: Do you have any comments on these amber sites, i.e. is it right they should be omitted, or do you believe they should be included, if so why?**

There appear to be inconsistencies in the way that the amber sites have been assessed, e.g. sites 49 and 328 were assessed as amber within the Appendix D to the report to 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019 Cabinet meeting, which authorised the consultation document; however, the Site Assessment document itself now concludes that these sites are 'green'. This should be clarified.

**Question 39: Are there any red sites omitted which you believe should be included; if so which one(s) and why?**

If the site is re-assessed on the basis of all the matters already set out above, we consider our Client's site (reference 417) should be included as a 'green' site.

**Question 40: Would the above approach of requiring affordable housing contributions of 40% of total square meterage or habitable rooms / floorspace incentivise developers to build more smaller market housing?**

No. This approach would cause uncertainty for developers and the Council and is not likely to work in practice. It would not be clear how much affordable housing will be delivered through the draft Plan. If the Council allocate sufficient sites which have proportionate evidence regarding their viability and deliverability, this would be the best way of addressing the delivery of much-needed affordable housing.

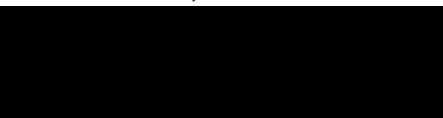
**Conclusion**

We consider that Hockley Heath is a sustainable location for additional housing growth. Our Client is concerned regarding the manner in which their site west of Stratford Road, Hockley Heath has been assessed. If assessed in the same manner as some of the draft allocations in Hockley Heath, this would result in the site being assessed as 'green' and therefore should be included in the draft Plan as an allocation.

The site is available now and offers a suitable location for development that is achievable. It is in an area of high demand for housing with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered within five years. As such this site can be considered deliverable in terms of the definition within the NPPF. Development on the site can come forward in a sustainable and high quality manner that could assist in meeting both Solihull's housing needs and the unmet housing needs of Birmingham, as emphasised in the Vision Document. This is supported by the identification of the broad area here (Location NS5) as being suitable for large-scale development in the Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study. Deliverable developments on sites such as this will assist in ensuring a steady supply of housing during the early years of the Local Plan Review, as required by the NPPF.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further and would be grateful if you could consider our comments in reassessing our Client's site. If you have any queries regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact Mark Sitch or me.

Yours faithfully



**MARK SITCH**




Senior Partner

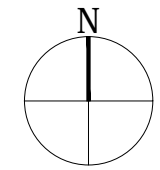


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Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd

**LEGEND**

-  Site Boundary (16.83Ha)
-  Potential Development Area
-  Public Open Space
-  SUDs
-  Primary Road
-  Secondary Road
-  Potential Community Area
-  Adjoining Land being Promoted



Ashford Grange

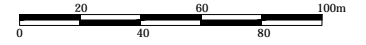
ASHFORD LANE

ROAD

PH and Motel

Project  
**Land West of Stratford Road,  
 Hockley Heath**  
 Drawing Title  
**Concept Plan**

Date 18.12.18	Scale 1:2,500@A3	Drawn by AS	Check by JB
Project No 29665	Drawing No BM-M-11	Revision B	












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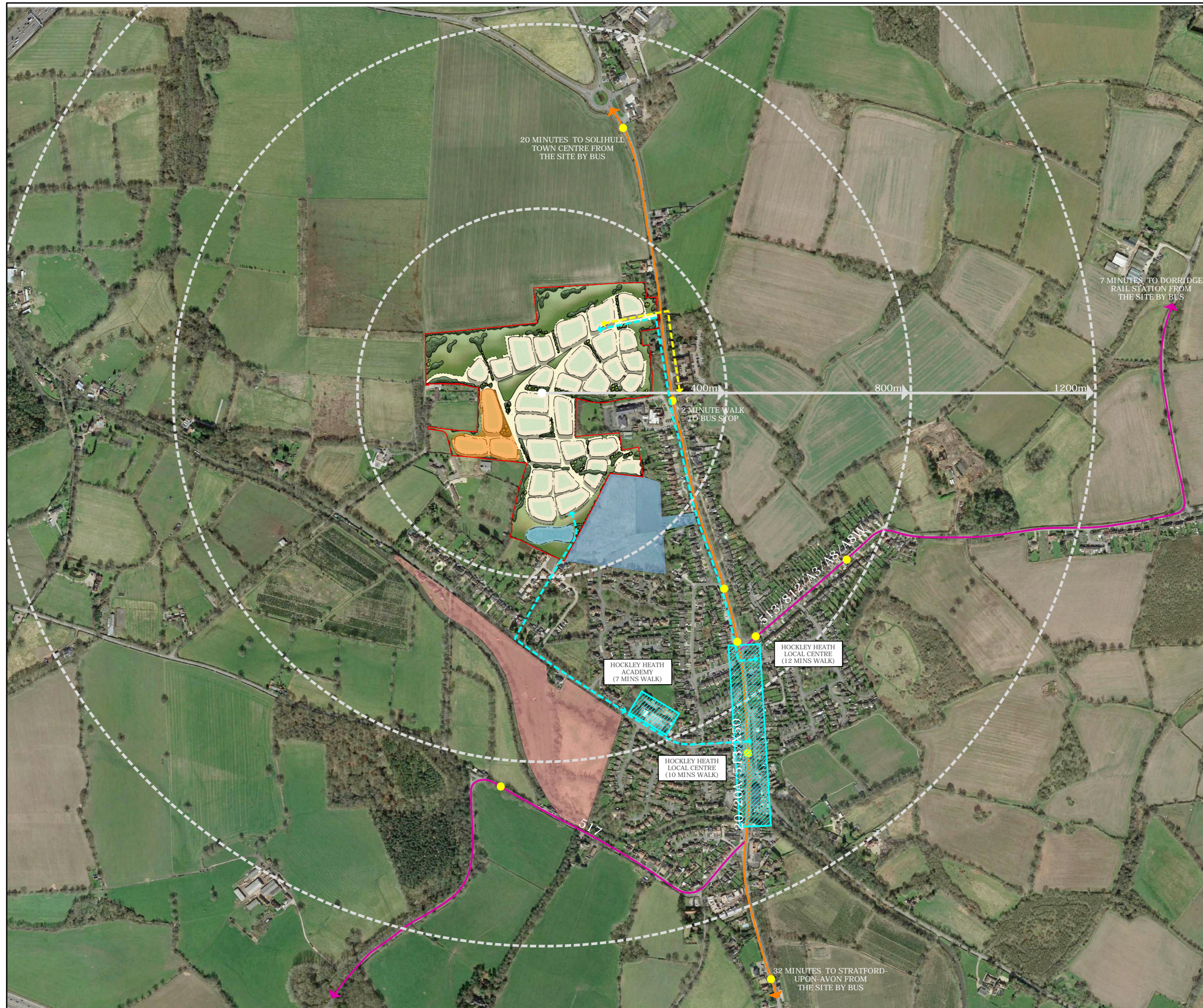
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LEGEND

-  Site Boundary
-  Walking and Cycling Routes to Local Facilities (walking times in brackets)
-  Indicative Distance from the site
-  Bus Stop + Walking Route
-  20/20A/513/X50 Regular Hourly Service to Shirley, Blossomfield, Illshaw Heath, Solihull, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Dorridge and Hockley Heath
-  513/812/A3/A8/A8W/517 Regular Hourly Service to Solihull, Dorridge and Hockley Heath
-  Draft Housing Allocations (Regulation 18)
-  Adjoining Land being Promoted
-  Potential Community Facility



Project  
**Land West of Stratford Road,  
 Hockley Heath**  
 Drawing Title  
**Connectivity Plan**

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
14.03.19	NTS	AS	LH
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
29665	BM-M-12	B	

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