

## **A Civic Centre for Selly Oak: An outline of the possibilities by Community Partnership for Selly Oak**

**Summary:** The Community Partnership for Selly Oak proposes a partnership to regenerate the core 'civic centre' of Selly Oak. The partnership would be of Birmingham City Council, the University of Birmingham, the developers associated with the Battery Retail Park (led by Sainsbury's) and the Life Sciences campus, and the Community Partnership for Selly Oak (CP4SO) which represents 14 local community associations.

**The problem:** Bournbrook is at the centre of Selly Oak and has been in decline over the last 50 years. Family homes have been converted into poorly developed and managed private rented housing. The area and its infrastructure have become degraded. This is bad for residents including students (the main tenants), and bad for the university's and the city's reputation.

**The opportunity:** Bournbrook in Selly Oak is an area of historic significance. A substantial remnant of that history is a cluster of five Grade 2 listed Victorian buildings on Bristol Road; they are badly neglected but could be restored to become the civic centre of Selly Oak. Surrounding them are large developments of student housing; this will soon be followed by development of the Life Sciences campus and Retail Park. Whatever we do, the area will be hugely affected, either negatively or positively. With a joint approach that benefits all of the stakeholders it should be possible to harness some of that energy and investment to upgrade and find new uses for the listed buildings. With sensitive restoration of the buildings and the areas between them, this could become the heart of a renewed Selly Oak. Proximity to the canal running from Birmingham to Worcester offers additional opportunities to make this an attractive recreational area leading up to the canal and then on to the Retail Park and Life Sciences campus. Studies undertaken by students of UoB's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies in collaboration with CP4SO have highlighted the exciting potential of the area, drawing upon its historic assets. These studies were shared with the stakeholders mentioned below.

**Who wins?** Sainsbury's and the other retailers will be more easily and pleasantly accessed by customers walking from Bournbrook. The Life Sciences campus will be more easily accessed by employees walking from Selly Oak station and from local buses. The city council, Sainsbury's and university will all gain from the evidence of their commitment to community engagement and from the reputational effects of environmental improvement. An enhanced environment in Bournbrook would improve the experience of the many (particularly international) students who live in and walk through the area: this is important not only to student satisfaction but also to the university's future recruitment.

**Who pays?** Restoration of the buildings and surrounding areas should be made a consequence of developers' investments. We anticipate that a prestigious plan for restoration of the buildings and area would lead to investment by developers and occupiers, either through their own direct investment or by the creation of a pooled fund from land sale or rental. The city council already has some accumulated resources in the form of section 106 funding under which contributions are made by developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure, the need for which has arisen as a result of new development.

**Development of the proposal:** CP4SO held meetings in 2017 with representatives of (i) the design and conservation unit of the city council at the suggestion of the city council's strategic director, (ii) the university's director of hospitality and accommodation services and director of estates, (iii) the

city council design/conservation and planning departments together with the university's residential and environmental services, (iv) Land Securities, the developer of the Retail Park. All indicated their interest in the proposal and in taking part in discussions with other partners, their agreement that making this a pleasant site would benefit them, and their concern to benefit the community. More specifically, the site is seen by city council officials as one with great potential to become a focus for enhancing Selly Oak's identity ('place making'), leisure facilities and, possibly, community housing. The university representatives suggested that ways should be found for making the library building work for the community; possible uses have been discussed. Land Securities expressed interest in development of the land adjacent to the canal, the railway viaduct and the library in a manner that complements their scheme, creates a distinctive sense of place and enhances the area's historic character.

The buildings form a cluster on Bristol Road near Selly Oak railway station. All are Grade 2 listed. They were previously all in the ownership of the city council, but now this is true only of the Library

- The Selly Oak Institute (number 3 in first page of images) – vacant
- 641 Bristol Road - the park-keeper's cottage (number 4) – student residence
- 659 Bristol Road – the water pumping station manager's cottage (number 5) – vacant
- Selly Oak Library (number 6) - vacant
- The Water Corporation Pumping Station (the original pump by James Watt & Co) (number 7). Now used as an electricity sub-station

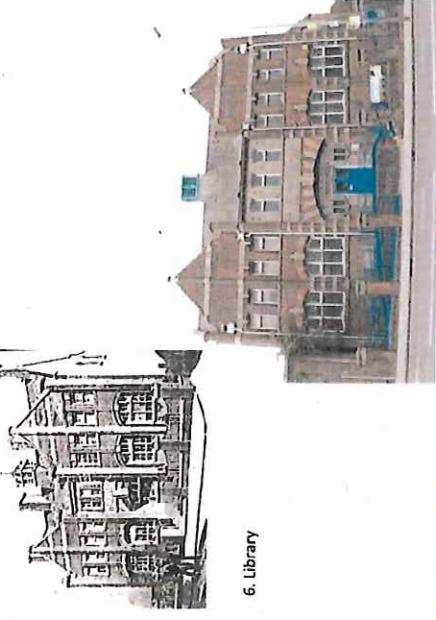
Other buildings and areas nearby are a terrace of Victorian workers' cottages, the Bristol Pear public house, and the Bournbrook recreation ground which under the Selly Oak Supplementary Planning Document is seen as a site for family housing.

**Existing plans and proposals relevant to the site:**

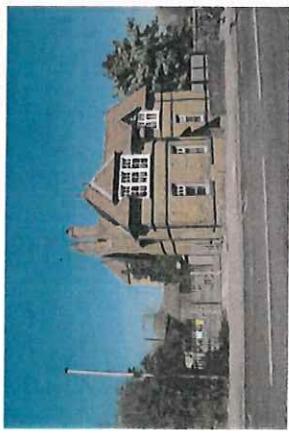
- Development has now begun on the Retail Park and Life Sciences Campus
- In September 2017, the city council cabinet committee prioritized Selly Oak to trial its approach to development in partnership
- The city council's 2015 planning vision for Selly Oak highlights that the Library site is at the heart of the area's regeneration potential, linking directly with the canal-side corridor, the Battery retail site, Life Sciences campus and recreation ground. All the sites mentioned in the city council's Selly Oak Supplementary Development Plan will be affected by these planned developments. Bristol Road is due to be downgraded (therefore with less traffic) when the bypass road is completed by about 2021
- The Canal and Rivers Trust has plans for increasing the size of the nearby canal basin
- In 2005, the city council commissioned Drivers Jonas to undertake a study of Selly Oak Centre. Their report notes the dereliction of the area, and the threat to the Victorian buildings referred to in this note. They recommend creation of a 'historic or heritage quarter in this location', 'revitalizing shopping and community life'. They comment that 'Selly Oak has a fantastic opportunity to undergo regeneration and provide a centre that overcomes many of the issues and problems referred to by businesses, residents and others'.

**Possibilities:** The second, third and fourth pages of images are graphic designs by students of the University of Birmingham MSc Urban and Regional Planning to illustrate how a civic centre could be developed.

**Civic Centre established by 1884**



6. Library



4. Park Keeper's  
Cottage



5. Water Pumping  
Station Manager's  
Cottage (?)



8 Bournbrook Recreation  
Ground



1. Bristol Pear PH



2. Workers' Cottages



3. Selly Oak Institute

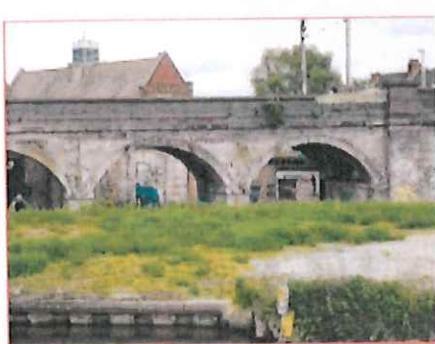


7. Selly Oak Well Water Pumping Station

### Selly Oak Civic Centre: Graphic Designs by Students of MSc Urban and Regional Planning



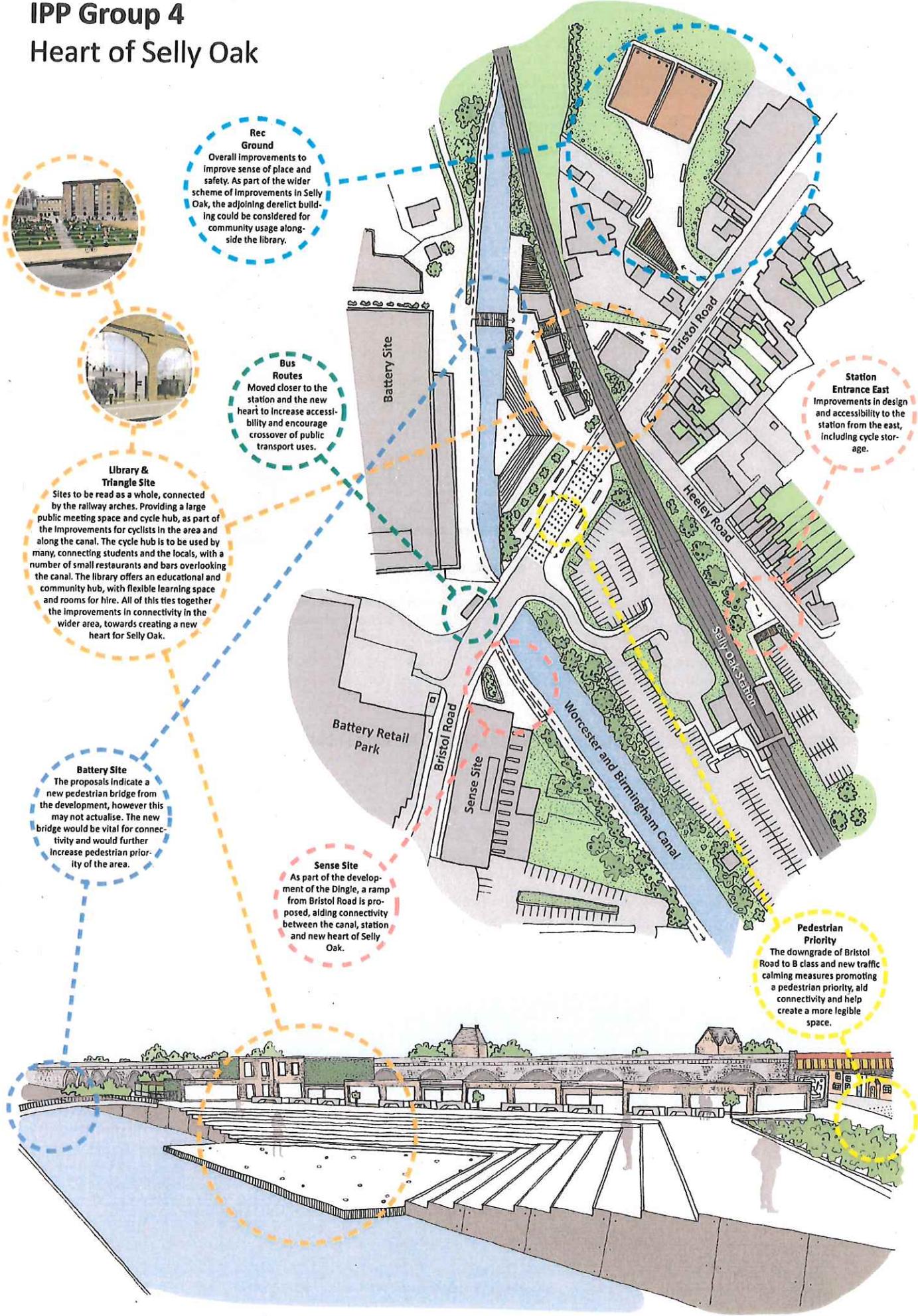
Selly Oak Library and its surroundings – as existing, and as possible with public realm investment, street calming and adaptive re-use of the building itself.



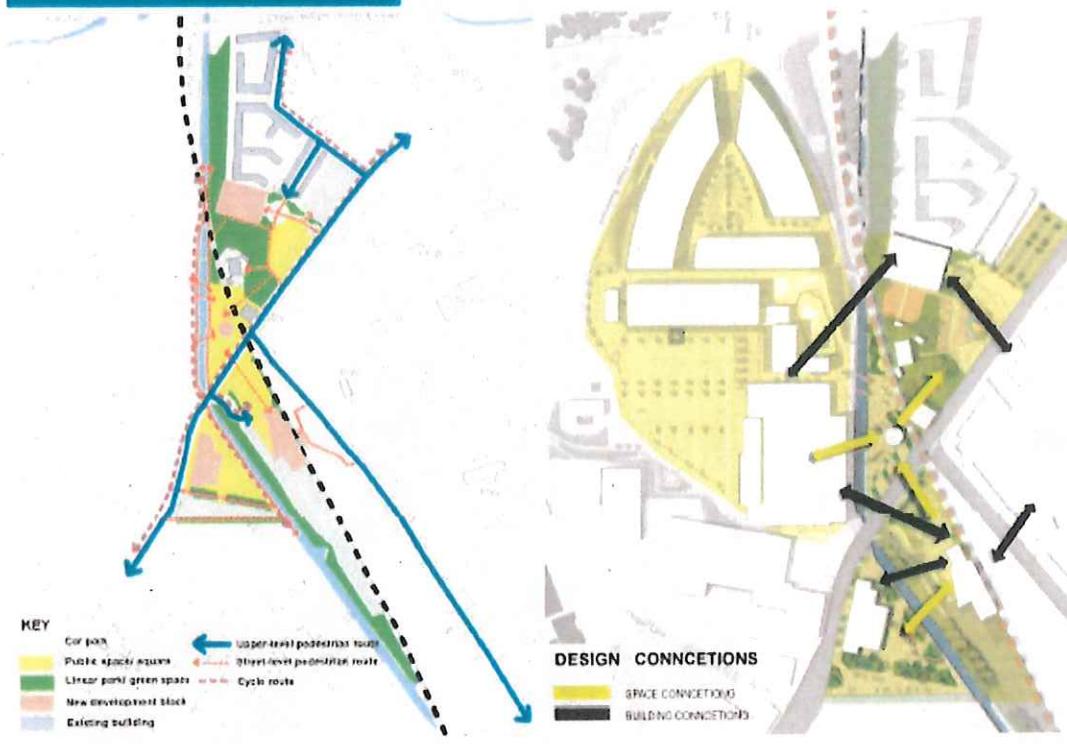
Potential for productive adaptation of the railway viaduct and arches facing onto both the library and to the canalside space.

# IPP Group 4

## Heart of Selly Oak



## PROMOTIONS



### Core Plaza

Enhancing the connection between the Campus, Selly Oak Station, Aldi, Sainsbury's and the library, the core plaza is designed to encourage the family activities in the heart of the district.

Create a new destination at the heart of the district that brings people out of their buildings and into the public realm

Proposals to create a stronger sense of place and connections in the heart of Selly Oak