Committee Date:	18/09/2014	Application Number:	2014/04538/PA
Accepted:	23/06/2014	Application Type:	Full Planning
Target Date:	22/09/2014		
Ward:	Nechells		

Holt Street/Love Lane, Land at corner of, Innovation Birmingham Campus, Aston, Birmingham, B7 4BB

Erection of a three storey building for research & development (Use Class B1b) and office (Use Class B1a)

Applicant:	Thomas Vale Construction Lombard House, Worcester Road, Stourport On Severn, Worcestershire, DY13 9BZ
Agent:	Acivico 1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 7DG

Recommendation

Approve Subject To Conditions

1. Proposal

1.1 The application relates to a vacant plot of land within Aston Science Park which it is proposed to develop as "Digital Plaza" and would provide accommodation for anchor clients, technical organisations and other functions relating to innovation. It is proposed that the Digital Plaza development would be provided in several phases with this current application proposing phase 1 of the development in the form of a new three storey building to be called iCentrum which would provide a technology incubation facility.

1.2 The proposed iCentrum building would provide three floors of accommodation set around a central atrium. On the ground floor however the high ground to ceiling height proposed allows for the option of a further mezzanine floor being provided above part of the ground floor accommodation. The building, including the mezzanine level, would provide a gross internal floor area of 4,097 square metres and include the following facilities:

- Reception area;
- Cafeteria and adjoining kitchen;
- Auditorium;
- Individual offices of various sizes;
- Open plan offices;
- Hot-desking areas;
- Meeting rooms of various sizes
- Break-out spaces.

1.3 The iCentrum building would be located at the junction of Holt Street and Love Lane, at an angle to the existing roads. It has been located in this position in order to respond to the position of the location of the Faraday Wharf development which lies to the east of the site and to enable the building to address the existing streetscape.

It also would allow a large hard landscaped area to be provided at the front of the site to define the main entrance which would be from Holt Street. The proposed location would also allow further buildings to be accommodated on the site which as shown on an illustrative master plan provided for the larger Digital Plaza site. The development would make use of part of the existing access road within the site from Love Lane which was associated with a former industrial use on the site. Holt Street would be used for pedestrian access only.

1.4 The building would have a square form with the central section providing a full height atrium. The ground floor accommodation would be of a double height and largely glazed but with areas of blue engineering brickwork. This would be generally set back to act as a plinth to the first and second floor accommodation which would have a larger footprint and overhang the ground floor accommodation supported on columns. The first and second floor accommodation would be of white render set behind a brise soleil comprising of square perforated metal panels which would be attached to the building with a tensile wire metal framing system. The metal panels would project 600mm-800mm in front of the rendered façade on all four sides of the building and be arranged in groups of four panels to give a regular pattern of squares across the building. The panels would not be located in front of the window openings which would have dark grey aluminium frames set into the render. It is intended that the metal panels would be of two colours namely dark grey and anodized silver and arranged in a stylised version of the binary code patterning on the face of the building to reflect the intended digital media use.

1.5 In addition to the general pallet of grey and silver colours proposed, through tone rendered panels would also be provided to the two staircase cores which extend from the ground level to the flat roof of the building. These are shown as being of dark purple and lime green colours. On the roof the central glazed atrium would project above the flat roof of the building and it is also proposed to provide a blue metal mesh screen around the plant areas. These additional colours have been chosen to match as closely as possible the colours used on the Innovation Birmingham logo. It is also proposed to provide photo voltaic solar panels so the building can achieve a Bream “very good” rating. The plans also show iCentrum indicative signage on the front elevation of the building which would be in the form of blue internally illuminated individual letters attached at high level to the metal panels. .

1.6 The application is accompanied by a strategic landscape scheme for the site showing areas of new hard and soft landscaping. This includes new tree planting partly to replace several trees on the existing road frontages which would need to be removed.

1.7 The proposal only proposes to provide parking for disabled persons. This would be in the form of 3 spaces situated on the Love Lane frontage. It is intended that the main car parking facility for iCentrum would be provided by the existing car park at Faraday Wharf, which has surplus spaces and is also operated by Innovation Birmingham and is located adjacent to the site.

1.8 In support of the application the agents advise that development would be managed by the wider Innovation Birmingham Campus and that the iCentrum building has been specifically developed to support new start up businesses, particularly in the innovation field, and once fully occupied should accommodate 400 new jobs.

1.9 A Design and Access Statement, Planning Statement, Transport Assessment, Travel Plan, Air Quality Statement, Geo-environmental Assessment, Ecological Assessment Report, Arboricultural Assessment and Site Waste Management Plan

have been submitted in support of the application. An EIA screening has also been undertaken which concludes that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required

Site Location Plan

Site Layout

Illustrative images

2.0 Site & Surroundings

2.1 The application site of 0.51 ha lies on the northern side of Aston Science Park and lies within the designated Enterprise Zone which identifies the Digital Plaza site. It has frontages to Love Lane to the south and Holt Street to the west. It forms approximately half of a larger vacant plot which extends northwards to adjoin the A38 Aston Expressway. The eastern boundary adjoins the Digbeth Branch Canal, its associated tow path and embankment. The area alongside the canal is identified as a wildlife corridor and is also locally designated as a SLINC site.

2.2 The site currently comprises mainly of hard standings and an associated internal access road known as Enterprise Way which remains from when the was previously occupied by an industrial building which has now been demolished. It was more recently used to accommodate temporary site offices which have now been removed. The site has been excavated in the past to provide a level plateau so that the levels within the south west corner of the site are about 1 metre below the existing road levels and marked by a retaining wall. The frontages are bounded by landscaping and a number of mature trees and also provide a number of car parking spaces associated with the previous uses. The vacant plot to the north is an area of developing grassland that has been undisturbed since the early 1990's.

2.3 The surrounding area is characterised by industrial and office uses including those within the Science Park and Aston University to the south. Faraday Wharf an existing office/research building also run by Innovation Birmingham lies on the opposite side of Love Lane. The A38 Aston Expressway is located approximately 50 metres to the north.

Site Location

Site View

3 Planning History

3.1 10/04/2008 - 2007/07240/PA – Full planning permission granted for erection of a six storey 195 bed hotel and eight storey 130 bed hotel with 206 parking spaces and associated landscaping and access on the entire vacant plot

4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1 Transportation – No objection subject to conditions requiring parking, turning, service and delivery space, cycle storage details, a car park management plan, occupiers to affiliate to Travelwise and a package of highway measures including reinstatement of redundant footway crossings, provision of vehicle access points and associated footway and lighting alterations around the site frontage.

4.2 Regulatory Services – No objections subject to conditions being imposed dealing with any unexpected contamination found and requiring submission of a gas assessment, noise levels for plant and machinery and details of any extraction equipment required. They also request that electric charging points be provided, commercial vehicles using the site should comply with Euro 5/V standards, parking spaces should be designated for low emission vehicles, that a differential parking charging scheme based on vehicle emissions be provided and that a travel plan with public transport subsidies and mechanisms for discouraging use of high emissions vehicles be requested.

4.3 Severn Trent Water – No objection subject to a drainage condition being imposed and also point out that there public sewers located within the application site which may not be built close to, directly over or be diverted without consent.

4.4 West Midlands Fire Service – No objections subject to access to a pumping appliance being available.

4.5 Canal and Rivers Trust - No objection but have raised the following issues:-

- Concerned that the bin store and substation, have been sited closest to the canal
- The supporting information identifies the presence of the basin from historic maps and therefore any planning permission should include a requirement for this to be investigated to ensure a record is produced.
- The site landscaping should include native species in order to maintain the appearance and biodiversity of the waterway
- Any lighting scheme should not provide flood lighting to the canal corridor to show consideration for protected species such as bats and should utilise lighting which minimises light spill to the canal.
- If the historic canal basin is likely to be affected by ground disturbance, no new contamination pathways should be created from the basin to the canal or any other receptors
- Concerned that the construction work could have an adverse impacts on the infrastructure of the canal in terms of stability, drainage, pollution, erosion, increase in water levels etc.
- The developer could consider using the canal water for cooling
- Request a condition is imposed to require a ground investigation and assessment of the historic canal basin.

4.6 Local businesses, residents, Ward Councillors, MP and residents associations notified of the application and site/press notices displayed. Three letters received. Two are from Aston University which support the application and consider that it is a very exciting and impressive facility which would showcase and engender new technology innovation in the City. They consider it is likely to attract considerable international focus, will offer employment opportunities for students help the university to develop the City's reputation as a global hub for innovation, will enable an expansion in business incubation activities and have strategic benefits to the growth of the creative and wider economy

4.7 The third letter objects to the building on the grounds that the proposed design is ugly, of insufficient quality with no architectural merit and is concerned about its long term commercial viability. They consider it will set a poor precedent for future development in the location

5. Policy Context

5.1 Birmingham UDP 2005, draft Birmingham Development Plan, Places for Living SPG, Places for All SPG, National Planning Policy Framework. The site also lies within the Digital Plaza site within the designated Enterprise Zone

6. Planning Considerations

6.1 The application site is not allocated for any specific use in the UDP. It is however located in the 'Eastside' area of Birmingham City Centre which the UDP seeks to promote as an area for new high technology industry, business, research and development. The UDP recognises that Aston Science Park provides *"quality business space in an attractive setting for high technology occupiers"* and it therefore supports the continued expansion of the Science Park.

6.2 In the pre submission Birmingham Development Plan the application site is located in the Eastside quarter which is to be the focus for well-designed mixed use developments including offices, technology, residential, learning and leisure. It is also specifically identified as a development site. However the site is also designated as a Core Employment Area and therefore policy TP18 applies. This states that Core Employment Areas will provide the focus of economic regeneration activities and this is defined as B1b (Research and Development), B1c (Light Industrial), B2 (General Industrial) and B8 (Warehousing and Distribution). Policy TP18 states that applications for use outside these categories will not be supported unless an exceptional justification exists.

6.3 It is intended that the application building would be used for offices and well as research and development and therefore one of the main issues to be considered is whether the office use can be supported in this core employment area. Also to be considered is whether the design of the building is appropriate, whether sufficient parking can be provided and the impact on the adjacent canal.

6.4 **Office Use**

6.5 Although the application building would provide office type accommodation it is primarily aimed at providing facilities to meet the current and future demand for highly flexible sustainable work locations for knowledge, economy and tech based businesses. In particular it is to target those at the start up and early stages of development. Innovation Birmingham who will manage the development already provide similar facilities in the adjacent Faraday Wharf building which is now fully occupied and houses 53 companies as tenants and 68 members who are hot desk tenants. To date its Entrepreneurs of the Future programme has helped establish over 90 businesses in the last four years and created 160 new high tech jobs. .

6.6 There is now a waiting list for accommodation at Faraday Wharf and therefore it is intended to expand the existing Innovation Birmingham campus by developing a Digital Plaza complex of which the iCentrum building would the first phase. Although the accommodation provides an office type environment it is specifically aimed at incubating and housing small high tech-based businesses who may become the city's digital entrepreneurs of the future. It therefore needs to offer an independent work centre providing access for tenants and external clients to the latest collaboration platforms in order to meet their needs, aspirations and working requirements. It is therefore to accommodate a new incubator concept, provide a focal point for the Smart City agenda engaging with the ICT, Digital Media, Smart built environment and its interactions with Medtech. It is also anticipated that there would be engagement with local medium sized enterprises from across Greater

Birmingham to promote their growth and development through new innovations in their products and services within local supply chains.

6.7 The iCentrum and the wider Innovation Birmingham Campus has also been designed to meet the LEP's strategy for growth including its prioritisation of giving support for growing new successful businesses and start-ups. It is anticipated that iCentrum would support at least 25 new start-ups per annum and eventually provide 400 high tech jobs. It is also intended to be a new flagship development within the Enterprise Zone, and its first speculatively built development, promoting confidence in investing Birmingham.

6.8 Therefore although the proposed use of the building would be offices as well as research and development, it would not provide standard office type accommodation which the core employment area seeks to resist. Instead it has been specifically designed to provide space for knowledge economy businesses to locate and grow in order to support the economic growth strategy of Birmingham and the wider LEP area. Its location within Aston Science Park, where there are already a number of research and development facilities, is therefore considered to be acceptable particularly as the development is also supported by Aston and Birmingham City Universities who are located adjacent to the site and already work closely with Innovation Birmingham.

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6.10 **Design**

6.11 The design of the building has been influenced by:

- The desire to create an exemplar modern building of the highest quality and construction to attract young entrepreneurs and start-up businesses with demanding requirements.
- The need for the building to relate to the existing uses at the Science Park and future phases of the Digital Plaza development
- The need to provide a legible development with clear entrances and easy and safe walking routes;
- The need to provide a high quality landscape setting including the retention of mature landscaping
- The need to provide an imaginative lighting scheme which will ensure that the development provides a safe, but exciting, environment during the evening/night;

6.12 These requirements have led to the building being sited close to Faraday Wharf so it can be seen as part of the existing Innovation Birmingham campus and as well as phase 1 of the larger Digital Plaza development. The three storey height proposed reflects the heights of other buildings nearby in the Science Park and the floor plans show that the building would provide highly flexible space so that can meet the needs of knowledge economy business over time. This includes a central atrium space which has been designed to ensure that there is a large central space within the building where occupants can meet and also ensure there would be sufficient natural light and ventilation. Generally shared facilities are proposed on the ground floor of the building including a cafeteria, auditorium with the accommodation above on the first, second and mezzanine levels provided work space which can be either open plan or in enclosed office space as the need arises.

6.13 Externally the aim has been to create a sustainable development by minimising the amount of solar gain to the building hence the inclusion of the brise soleil. This would however be provided to all elevations as the building has been designed to have the appearance of a pavilion within a landscaped setting with all four

elevations visible from its surroundings. It is intended that the combination of the overhangs, wire mesh brise soleil and partly covered roof would all work together to help regulate the degree of solar gain. In addition the variations in the roof space and layering of the external elevations are designed to give the building an interesting and creative appearance to reinforce its intended use and address the need for the building to be identified as a distinct space. It is also proposed to provide photo voltaic solar panels so the building can achieve a Bream "very good" rating.

6.14 The materials proposed include double height glazing on the ground floor with areas of blue engineering brickwork. White render is proposed at first and second floor level set behind the brise soleil of grey and silver metal panels. There would also be several areas of colour provided in the rendered panels to the two staircase cores and in the metal screen to the roof plant which are shown as being in the Innovate Birmingham colours of dark purple, green and blue.

6.15 It will be noted that an objection to the design has been received on the grounds that the proposed design is of insufficient quality, lacks architectural merit and would set a poor precedent for future development. Officers were initially concerned about the design the brise soleil which as originally proposed was in the form of large metal petals that were to be attached to the first and second floor across the entire elevations including the windows. It was considered that this lost the layering effect and the panels did not reflect the form of the remainder of the building. This design has now been amended to the square perforated metal panels which would project 600mm-800mm in front of the rendered façade in the form of four panels to give a regular pattern of squares across the building. The panels would not now be located in front of the window openings and would be arranged in a stylised version of the binary code patterning on the face of the building to better reflect the intended digital media use.

6.16 There is no specific design concept to the existing buildings on Aston Science Park which have been built to with a variety of designs, materials and heights over a number of years. This building has been designed to reflect its intended creative use as well as provide more sustainable facility. I consider that as amended it would be of a suitable high standard both in terms of design and materials and that would fit into its surroundings. It would provide active frontages to all elevations and also provide a suitable landscaped setting for the building. Whilst 7 existing trees on the Holt Street frontage would need to be removed the submitted tree survey shows that they are all category C trees of low quality and the Tree Officer raises no objection to their removal. Several rows of replacement trees on both road frontages are proposed to compensate for their loss. Overall it is considered that the iCentrum building would be a welcome addition to the Science Park consistent with policy guidance including Places for All.

6.17 **Access and Parking**

6.18 The main vehicle access to the site would be from Love Lane making use of part of the existing road known as Enterprise Way which would be altered to form a cul de sac but could be extended in the future to serve further phases of the Digital Plaza development. As proposed this access would allow a separate service yard to be provided giving refuse, service and coaches the ability to access the site. The access point from Holt Street would be closed off to vehicles but be available for pedestrians. It is only proposed to provide only 3 disabled car parking spaces for the development fronting Love Lane but occupants would be able to make use of the existing car parking facilities available in Faraday Wharf.

6.19 In support of the parking arrangements a Transport Statement has been submitted showing that the adjacent Faraday Wharf car park, which is also operated by Innovation Birmingham, is underused. It provides 400 car parking spaces of which 25% (100 spaces) are normally unoccupied and would be available for occupants of the iCentrum development. Transportation officers raise no objection to this arrangement and note the parking provision for the site is to be shared with the existing decked car park on the Faraday Wharf site. They comment that the parking provision in Faraday Wharf equates to 1 space per 37sqm which is a higher level of provision than current guidelines which establish as a maximum provision 1 space per 45sqm. For the proposed iCentrum development this would give a maximum of 90 spaces so the 100 spaces available are considered to provide a suitable level of off-site parking.

6.20 They also comment that the site is highly accessible from the City centre by all modes and no additional pedestrian or cycle improvements are sought from the development. The canal towpaths are all being improved as part of the Cycle City Ambition Grant scheme and cyclists have a short ride to connect to the Digbeth Branch Canal towpath and National Cycle Network. The site layout plans show a cycle parking area in a rear courtyard area which appears to be secure and overlooked and should provide 12 spaces as a minimum based on current guidelines. Conditions are recommended to cover cycle parking details as well as the other highway requirements requested by Transportation.

6.21 It will be noted that Regulatory Services have requested that conditions be imposed to require that no fewer than 10% of parking spaces shall be provided with electric vehicle charging points. As the application proposals only provide 3 parking spaces for disabled persons it is not considered reasonable that one of these (33%) should be provided with charging points. In addition it is not considered that it is reasonable or enforceable to require that any commercial vehicle operated by the occupier of the development comply with Euro 5/V emission standards or that any of the three parking spaces be designated for low emission vehicles or use a charging systems. The applicants have provided a draft travel plan which is to encourage use of public transport but it is not considered to be appropriate to require the applicant to make further public transport subsidies or use mechanisms for discouraging use of high emissions vehicles. Most of the parking for the development is to be provided off site and does not directly form part of the application proposals.

6.22 **Impact on the Canal**

6.23 The site lies alongside the Digbeth Branch Canal which is identified as a wildlife corridor and is also locally designated as a SLINC site. Although the application site abuts the canal towpath and associated planting the development does not encroach on this area. The building at it closest point lies about 9 metres from the boundary with the canal and the access road, which is existing lies about 5 metres away. It is however proposed to locate a bin store and sub-station adjacent to the site access adjacent to an area previously used as an external storage area in conjunction with the previous industrial building. This lies about 2 metres from the tow path but the existing vegetation between the bin store and the tow path would be retained.

6.24 Although the Canal and Rivers Trust express concern about the location of the bin store and sub-station it is not considered they would have an adverse impact on the canal. There were previously hard standing areas in this location associated with the previous uses of the site and both the sub-station and bin store areas area only

require low means of enclosure that would be largely screened by existing vegetation.

6.25 The Canal and Rivers Trust also request that an archaeological investigation is undertaken to record the historic canal basin that previously occupied part of the site The canal basin area is indicated in an area proposed for landscaping and although it is within the application site it is to be retained by the City Council. The landscaping is to be carried out under a licence with BCC whereas the remainder of the site is to be leased. The master plan shows that this area may be developed in the future as part of the wider Digital Plaza development and it is therefore considered that it would be more appropriate to carry out an archaeological evaluation, if required, in conjunction with any further phase of development. The Councils archaeologist has raised no objection to the development and has not asked for any further investigations to be undertaken.

6.26 With regard to the other points raised by the Canal and Rivers Trust the landscaping scheme indicates that the area along the eastern boundary of the site with the Canal would be planted as an ecological enriched buffer zone including native species In addition the an ecological report has been submitted with the application which sets out other measures to enhance the ecological value of the site including the provision of a wildflower meadow on part of the site which has been incorporated into the design. Conditions are recommended requiring the details of the landscaping and ecological enhancement measures to be provided and that any lighting scheme provided does not flood light the canal corridor. The construction work is largely confined to the existing areas of hard standing and the applicants have confirmed that it would not affect the stability of the canal

7. Conclusion

7.1 The proposed ICentrum building has been specifically designed to attract further new high technology industry, business, research and development to Birmingham. The site is specifically identified as a development opportunity in the emerging Birmingham Development Plan and is within the designated Enterprise Zone. Although the building would accommodate office type floor space within a designated core employment area this is considered to be acceptable as it is specifically aimed at providing flexible space for incubating and housing small high tech-based businesses. Many of these types of business are already based at Aston Science Park in the adjacent Faraday Wharf development also managed by Innovation Birmingham By providing a further facility in this location, potential occupants can take advantage of existing Innovation Birmingham facilities as well connections with Aston and Birmingham City Universities who are located close by. The development is therefore considered to be acceptable in principal and although the design has attracted an objection, as now proposed it is a good and appropriate standard. The development is also judged to have no adverse impact on the adjacent Digbeth Branch Canal

8. Recommendation

8.1 Approve subject to the following conditions.

1 Requires the submission of unexpected contamination details if found

2	Requires the prior submission of a Gas assessment
3	Requires the submission of extraction and odour control details
4	Limits the noise levels for Plant and Machinery
5	Requires the prior submission of a drainage scheme
6	Requires the submission of a scheme for ecological enhancement measures.
7	Requires the prior submission of hard and/or soft landscape details
8	Requires the submission of hard surfacing materials
9	Requires the submission of boundary treatment details
10	Requires the submission of a lighting scheme
11	Requires the prior submission of a construction method statement/management plan
12	Requires the prior submission of sample materials
13	Prevents occupation until the turning and parking area has been constructed
14	Requires the submission of cycle storage details
15	Requires the delivery and service area prior to occupation
16	Requires the submission of a car park management plan for disabled spaces
17	Requires the applicants to join Travelwise
18	Requires the submission and completion of works for the S278/TRO Agreement
19	Requires the scheme to be in accordance with the listed approved plans
20	Requires the submission of details of the bin store and sub station
21	Requires the submission of details of the photo voltaic panels
22	Requires the submission of signage details
23	Requires the submission of retaining wall details
24	Prevents the use from changing within the use class
25	Limits the approval to 3 years (Full)

Case Officer: Lesley Sheldrake

Photo(s)

Figure 1- internal view of the site

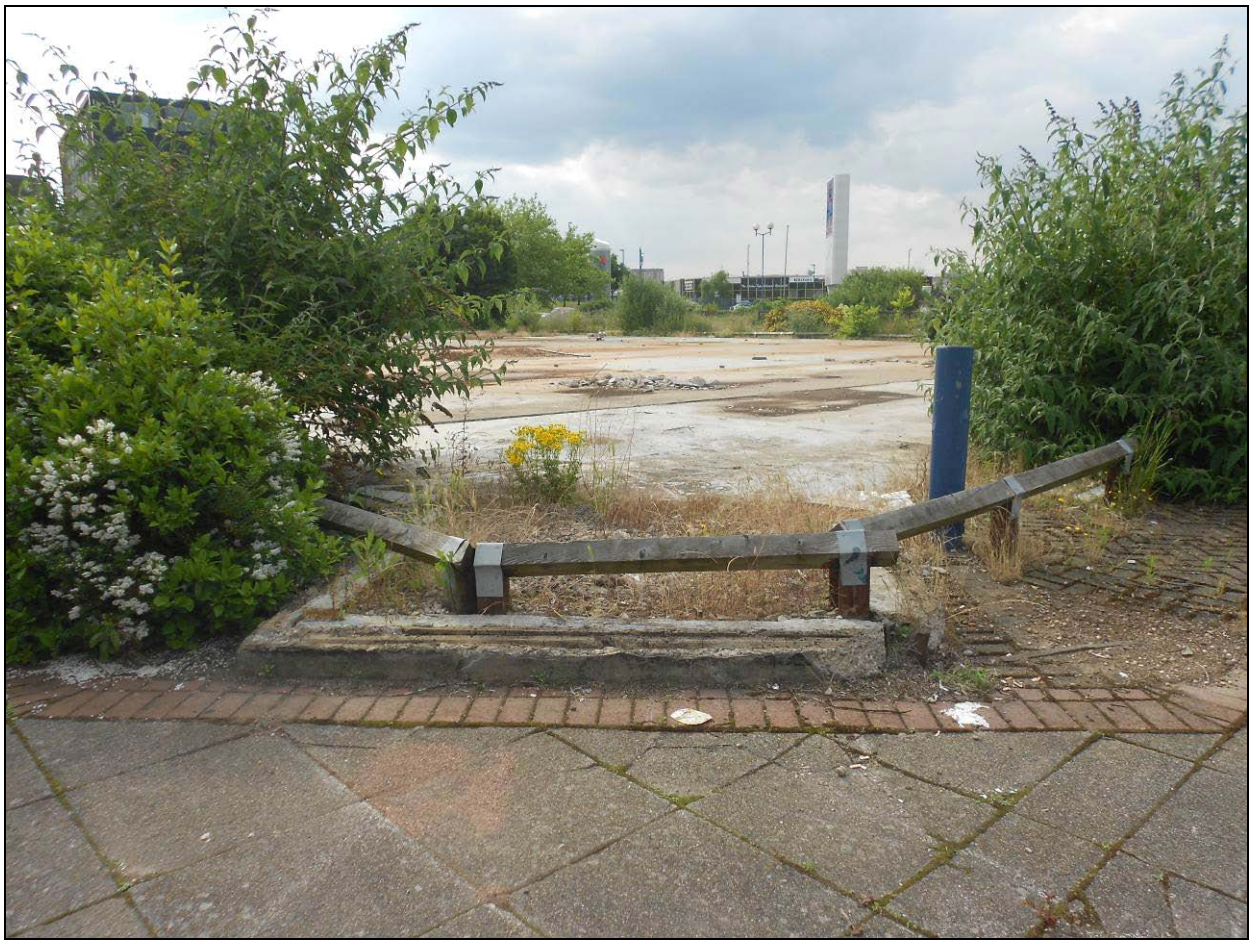

Figure 2 – View of site from the junction of Holt Street and Love Lane

Location Plan