

Leigh Street Quarter

Development Brief

Approved November 2008

This document has been prepared to give a simple clear expression of the kind of place that the Leigh Street Quarter should become. It is intended to be a starting point for thinking and expresses the underlying principles, concepts and expectations that are sought from the regeneration of the area. This document takes forward the ideas and analysis that formed part of the February 2007 Imagine the Future Part 4 Consultation. It incorporates comments made during the Public Consultation about the brief carried out in June/ July 2008.

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The brief is available and is free to download from the WDC website. Printed copies are also available at the WDC Queen Victoria Road Office priced £6. If you have difficulty accessing a copy of the brief, please contact Carol Courcha at Carol_courcha@wycombe.gov.uk or 01494 421277.



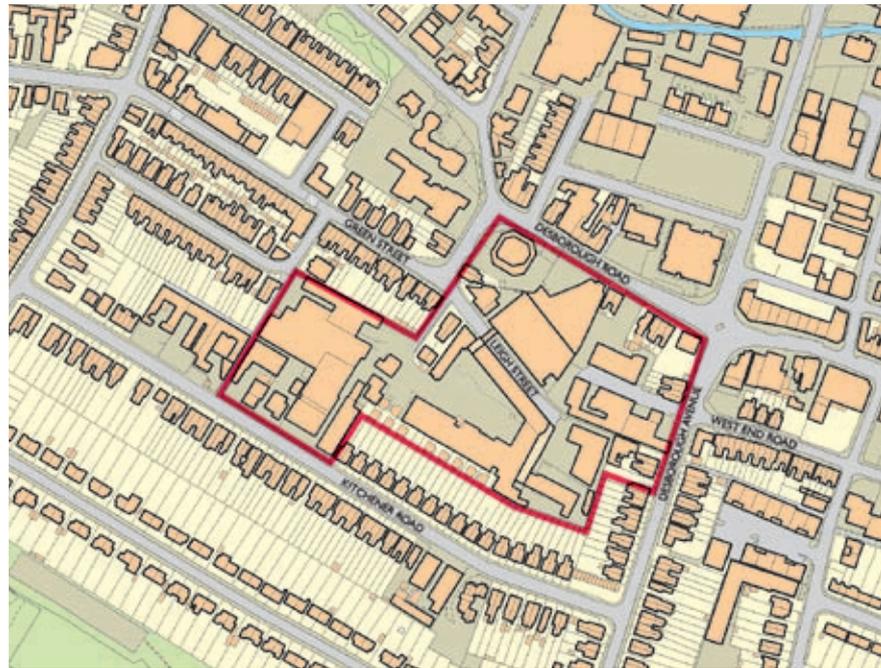
Spatial Planning Division

November 2008

I. Introduction

The Leigh Street Quarter covers an area of approximately 2.8 hectares and is located to the west of High Wycombe town centre. The site is partly vacant and accommodates a number of business, residential and community uses as well as a small amount of leisure use.

The site sits in a diverse context of surrounding uses, and is in close proximity to Desborough Road and the town centre.



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However it suffers from a lack of connection and effectively functions as an isolated backland site. The distinctive historic fabric, need for regeneration and mix of potential uses present an opportunity to both resolve the structural connection issues and create a vibrant mixed use Quarter.

This brief is being produced to satisfy the requirements of the Wycombe Development Framework Core Strategy and Preferred Options Site Allocations Document which require a comprehensive development brief.

They advocate a development of a mix of uses including business, live / work units, residential and community uses. It should also secure significant environmental improvements to protect and enhance the Conservation Area, facilitating the retention buildings of heritage value and provide high quality pedestrian links to the surrounding area.

This document also draws on background studies undertaken by Child Graddon Lewis Architects and Designers representing the owners of Birch House and Commercial Square.



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2. The Brief's Purpose and Structure

This document provides non-statutory development guidance for the site that will be used to evaluate planning applications for redevelopment as and when they are submitted with the aim of coordinating development to achieve wider objectives.

The objective of this document is to provide a clear basis for future development of the Leigh Street Quarter, which is likely to take place as a series of separate scheme designs due to the complex land ownership. This document is intended to fulfil the requirement for a comprehensive development brief included in the Preferred Options Site Allocations Document.

This brief will assist landowners and developers to formulate proposals that achieve wider objectives and to reassure local people and businesses about what is intended and what the benefits and impacts will be. When approved, this brief will be a material consideration for the purposes of Development Control.

The principles in the brief have been subject to involvement of key stakeholders and the wider community and have been prepared alongside work for the Wycombe Development Framework.

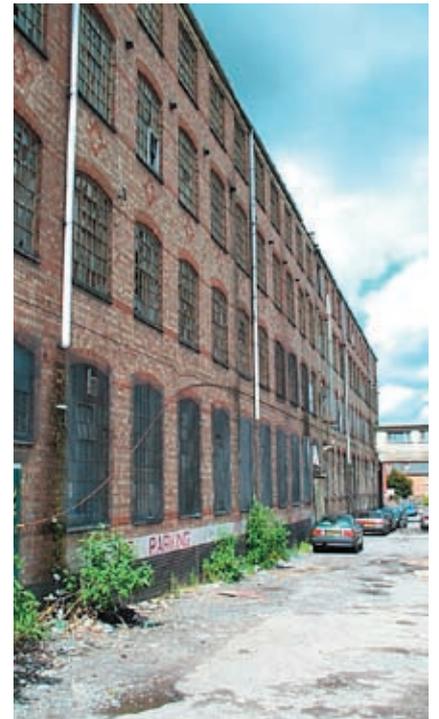
An initial consultation workshop event was undertaken as part of the Imagine the Future 4 in March 2007. Results of this workshop can be found in Appendix 2. The Brief has also been subject to Public Consultation in June/ July 2008. Comments made during the consultation can be found in Appendix 3.

This brief for redevelopment sets out:

- A summary of key planning policy **principles**
- **Analysis** of the site and its context, and the redevelopment **issues** and how they can be resolved.
- Redevelopment **objectives** that guide the concept
- The **brief** for redevelopment and its key components
- Potential **Phasing** Options based on landownership.



From Green Street looking east to Birch House, Leigh Street



From Leigh Street looking west to Birch House.



Commercial Square looking east



From Leigh Street looking east to 241 Desborough Road.

3. Key Planning Policy Principles

The current policy framework is the **Adopted Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011**. Under this plan, the bulk of the Leigh Street Quarter is an Employment Area covered by **Policy E3** (see appendix I). The one exception to this is 241 Desborough Road, which is a snooker club/ bingo hall. Under these policies a change of use is not acceptable in the Leigh Street Quarter.

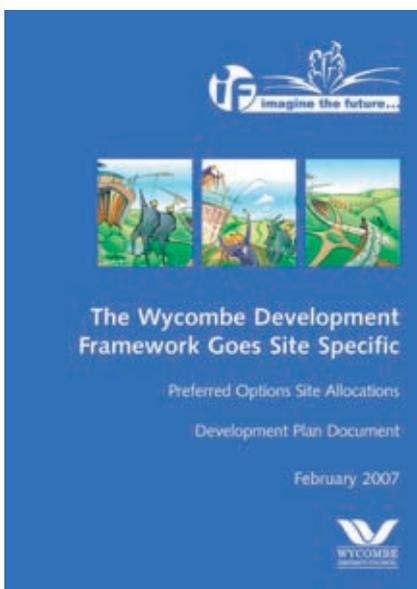
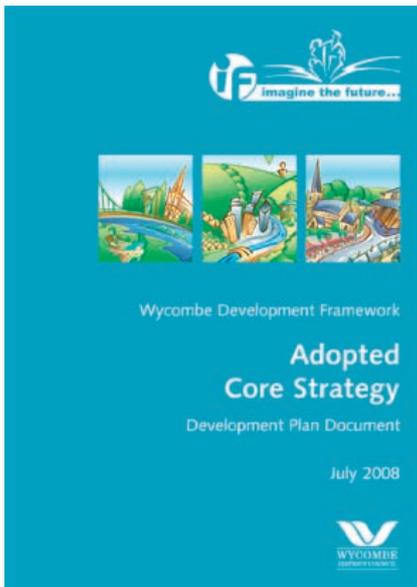
However, emerging policy under the **Wycombe Development Framework Site Allocations Preferred Options DPD** indicates that mixed use development would be acceptable in the Leigh Street Quarter.

The following uses are acceptable under the new policy:

- **Business:** At least 1 ha of the site to be retained as business use, to incorporate small business and start-up accommodation.
- **Housing:** Residential uses are suitable as part of the redevelopment. It is for applicants to justify the number of dwellings that can be accommodated with appropriate design, height, density and open space provision and within the specified land use mix.

Other potential uses that could be acceptable:

- **Retail:** Any proposed retail uses on the site would need to be robustly justified in terms of the need, impact and sequential tests. This is because the site is outside the designated local district centre and there are no proposals in the SADPD for retail on the site. Therefore such proposals would have to pass the relevant tests in order to comply with Policy SI (New Retail Development) of the Adopted Local Plan and national planning policy in PPS6.
- **Community:** The community facilities on the site including the Skidz Project, the High Wycombe Amateur Boxing Club and Commercial Square Studios should be retained in line with Policy CS 15 of the WDF Adopted Core Strategy.



See Appendix I for extracts from the **Core Strategy** and **Site Allocations Preferred Options DPD** that specifically relate to the Leigh Street Quarter.

Key Policy requirements of any development:

In the context of the adopted policy which safeguards employment land, mixed use development will only be permitted strictly on the proviso that a **package of benefits** are provided as part of the proposal to accord with our emerging policies.

Under this package, all of the following would have to be delivered:

- **Affordable housing:** 40% of bedspaces should be affordable in line with the Core Strategy policy and SADPD.
- **Open Space:** As stated in the SADPD, open space requirements should be provided off site. However, a small element of open space, e.g. in form of public squares or/ and courtyards should be integrated into the development. The site is within an identified area of open space deficiency.
- **Community:** Existing community uses should be retained and additional facilities provided that would benefit the local area and foster the growing creative industries culture.
- **Environmental Improvements/ Public Realm:** Significant environmental improvements to the area to be achieved. Public realm improvements including Public Art to enhance and protect the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area.
- **Conservation:** Key heritage buildings to be retained and restored as outlined in the brief.
- **Sustainable construction:** A high standard of resource efficiency will be expected as set out in Policy CS 18 of the Core Strategy. Lower standards may be acceptable for the conversion of existing heritage buildings. See page 14 for further details.

4. Analysis of the Site and its Context

The Site: Main Issues

- The Quarter is adjacent to Desborough Road which forms the focus for the community and shopping.
- There is poor pedestrian and vehicle access to the Quarter which isolates the site from the wider Desborough area and contributes to the potential for crime.
- A heritage of furniture making reflected in the Conservation Area forming part of the Quarter.*
- A diverse mix of uses within and adjoining to the Quarter.
- A varied environmental quality – the Quarter overall has a neglected run-down feel.



Desborough Road looking west towards the area



Access to Leigh Street from Green Street



The Site: Key Responses

- Proposed uses adjacent to Desborough Road should reflect the focal role this street plays in the wider area.
- Provide better, safer pedestrian and vehicle links to the wider area through connecting existing streets and footpaths.
- Identify and preserve key buildings and characteristics which relate to the furniture making past.
- Provide a framework that facilitates the creation of a vibrant mixed use Quarter that encourages regeneration and redevelopment while retaining important existing community and creative uses.



Footpath from Leigh Street to Desborough Avenue



Leigh Street looking west

* for more details regarding the furniture making history, please refer to "High Wycombe 'Furniture Town' The Built Heritage" by Marian Miller 2004 Oxford Brookes University MSc Dissertation.

Townscape Setting: Main Issues

- A valley setting with a significant change of level across the site.
- Distinctive historic furniture factories which are visible from a wide area.
- A mix of building styles, scales, heights and quality.
- A confused and piecemeal structure within the more regular grid development pattern of Desborough.
- Poor definition of public and private space.
- A deficiency of public open space.



 Area deficient in open space



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-  Valley sides
-  Principle development blocks
-  Principle routes
-  Distinctive factory buildings
-  Leigh Street Quarter Area Boundary



Birch House looking south from Desborough Street

Townscape Setting: Key Responses

- Realise opportunities to create views and accommodate level changes through buildings rather than retaining walls.
- Retain distinctive buildings and key views. Reflect the historic spatial and built character in the new development structure.
- Ensure redevelopment facilitates the creation of a legible structure and layout which links and complements the surrounding grid pattern.
- Create a public realm that provides quality urban spaces with development while also providing some financial contribution to public open space off site.



-  Poor street frontage
-  Poor definition of public and private space



Leigh Street looking east to dead end

Connections: Main Issues

- Effective dead end nature of Leigh Street.
- Poor pedestrian east - west and north - south routes.
- Lack of direct connection with Desborough Road.
- Poor vehicle access to internal areas of the site.
- Perceived lack of parking provision and traffic congestion.



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Principle vehicular and pedestrian route



Other important vehicular & pedestrian routes



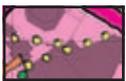
Effective dead ends



Public footpaths



Poor Pedestrian routes within the Quarter



Lost historic footpaths



Leigh Street Quarter Area

Connections: Key Responses

- Create a legible, safe and attractive connection between Leigh Street and Desborough Avenue.
- Ensure redevelopment provides active frontages to all key pedestrian routes and improves the safety and spatial characteristics of these routes.
- Create a new direct connection between Leigh Street and Desborough Road.
- Improve pedestrian environment along Desborough Road.
- Ensure redevelopment realises opportunities to improve vehicle access and provide efficient parking solutions to meet the needs of the uses proposed and visitor parking.
- Facilitate use of alternative modes of transport e.g. cycling.
- Investigate possibility of creating rear parking areas for existing residential areas in Kitchener Road.

Land use Setting: Main Issues

- The legacy of a blanket policy protecting employment land combined with historic buildings unsuited to modern employment needs.
- A fragmented mix of landownership and land uses.
- Surrounding predominantly residential use.
- Changing context of Desborough & the town centre.
- Policy requirements of at least 1 Ha of employment land, and provision of 40% affordable housing.
- A number of existing community uses including the Skidz Project, the High Wycombe Amateur Boxing Club, Commercial Square Studios - open to the public at certain times, Wycombe Radio Car Club and High Wycombe and District Model Railway Society.



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-  Predominantly Employment uses
-  Predominantly Residential uses
-  Predominantly Community uses
-  Predominantly Retail uses
-  Predominantly Leisure uses
-  Leigh Street Quarter Area Boundary

Land use Setting: Key Responses

- Retain at least 1 hectare of business use across the whole site allowing other complementary uses as appropriate.
- Retain flexibility in land use to accommodate changes in market conditions and likely phased approach to redevelopment.
- Protect existing residential amenity
- Allow for growth in uses that complement and feed off the increase in activity and value resulting from development in the town centre and wider Desborough area.
- Retain existing community uses and ensure that studios remain affordable to help foster a creative industries culture.
- Provide community facilities for small meeting places.

Summary of Analysis

The site sits in a diverse context of surrounding uses, and is in close proximity to Desborough Road and the town centre. However it suffers from a lack of connection and effectively functions as an isolated backland site. The distinctive historic fabric, need for regeneration and mix of potential uses present an opportunity to both resolve the structural connection issues and create a vibrant mixed use Quarter that could become a focus for creative industries.

The fragmented landownership could frustrate the need to change the structure of the area and create a new cohesive sense of place. This brief provides the tool to ensure the whole area is regenerated in a comprehensive way which is essential to realise the objectives of the specific planning policies for this area.

5. Redevelopment Objectives

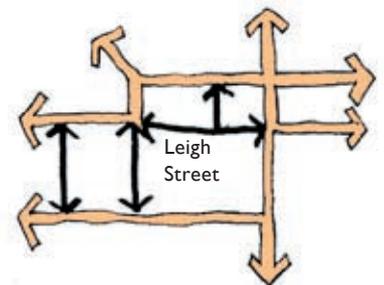
To connect the area with the surrounding streets (Desborough Road & Avenue)

Providing direct and attractive new pedestrian/ cycle connections from Leigh Street in a north and east direction to Desborough Road and Desborough Avenue respectively. These connections need to be wide enough to allow views into the site, be attractive and safe to use and have active frontage along them.



To create a legible structure for the Quarter

Making sure connections are clear and easily understood. Getting the structure right is key to the area functioning well and will support the aims of vibrancy and regeneration. If this is not achieved the area will remain a backland site largely isolated from the area it needs to support these new uses.



To reinforce landmark historic buildings (Birch and Albany House)

Ensure new development reinforces the presence of these landmark buildings that can be seen from the wider town. New buildings close by should be subservient in height or demonstrate the retention of key views.



To create an active frontage to Desborough Road and other main streets.

New buildings should have frequent entrances and windows to animate the street and increase the perception of safety. Building frontages should have a direct relationship with the pavement.



To facilitate a vibrant mix of uses and future flexibility to accommodate change

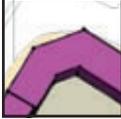
The fostering of a community of creative industries within a wide mix of uses will have positive economic and cultural benefits. In practice this means using common building forms that adapt well to change, developments acknowledging and engaging with the local cultural communities and having a policy in place that allows a variety of outcomes while retaining the key use of employment. To encourage small businesses with the potential to grow and share work opportunities with others in Leigh Street, e.g. architects; designers; crafts people, and furniture makers.

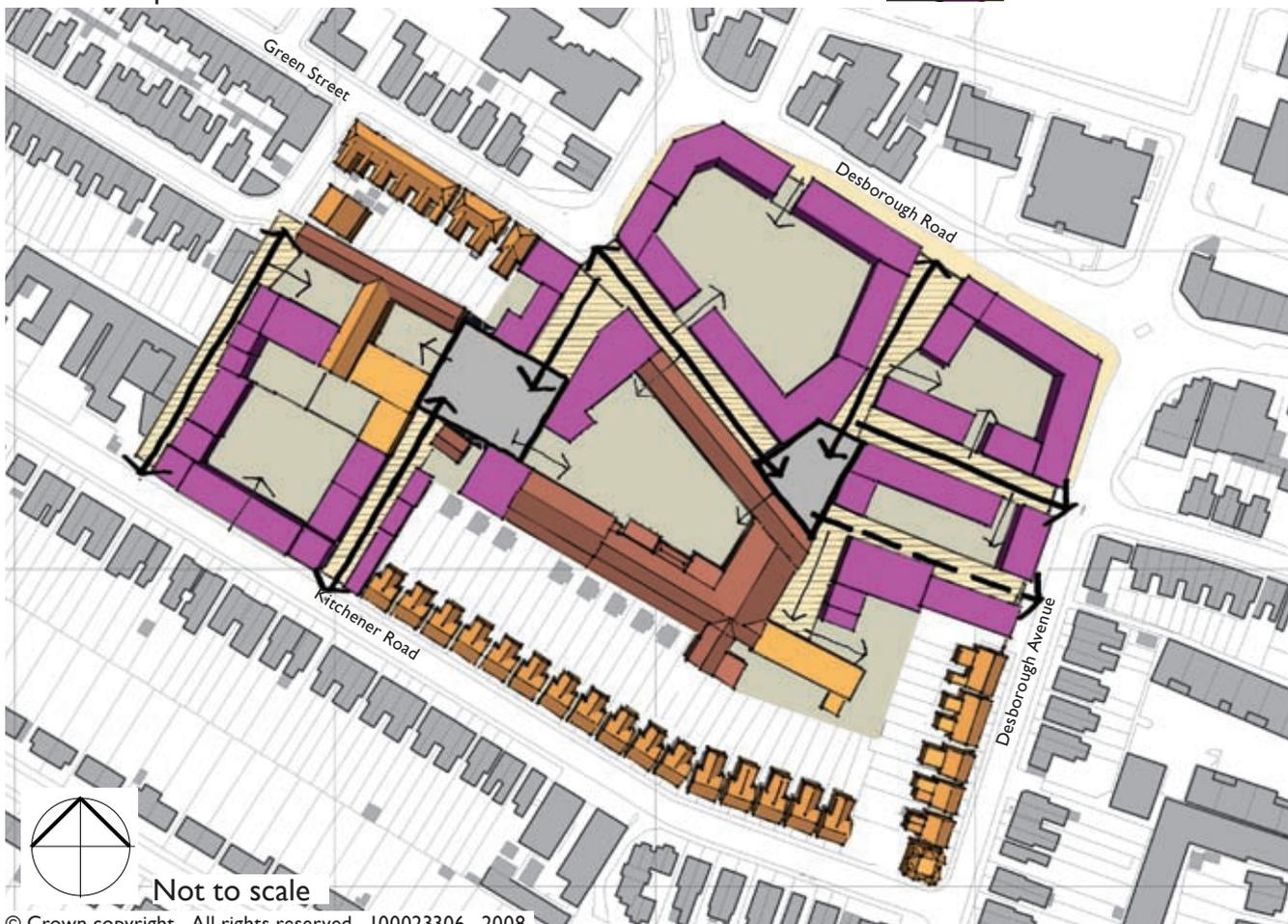
6. The Brief for Redevelopment

The key elements to be delivered in this brief are **structure** and **connection**. How the place is put together and how you get around. The creation of streets, spaces and routes. The mix of uses follows on from this and should retain a degree of flexibility, although there are some key uses of employment, residential and community that should be incorporated.

The illustration below is a **development framework** for the whole site. It incorporates new connections to Desborough Road and West End Road and improves existing routes. It uses the structure formed by the heritage buildings and adds to it to create a series of perimeter blocks, urban spaces and courtyards. Resolving the issues of structure and connection will facilitate the creation of a vibrant area with the capacity to support a wide range of uses.

The plans are not intended to show definitive site boundaries or configurations, instead they illustrate the main development principles. It is entirely possible that a different layout could deliver the same objectives. Similarly not all of the area needs to be redeveloped to achieve all the objectives. This brief does not seek to relocate existing successful uses/ buildings that do not compromise the new structure and connections.

-  Potential new development sites
-  Retained Refurbished Heritage Buildings
-  Other Retained Buildings
-  Proposed new or improved pedestrian connections



Not to scale

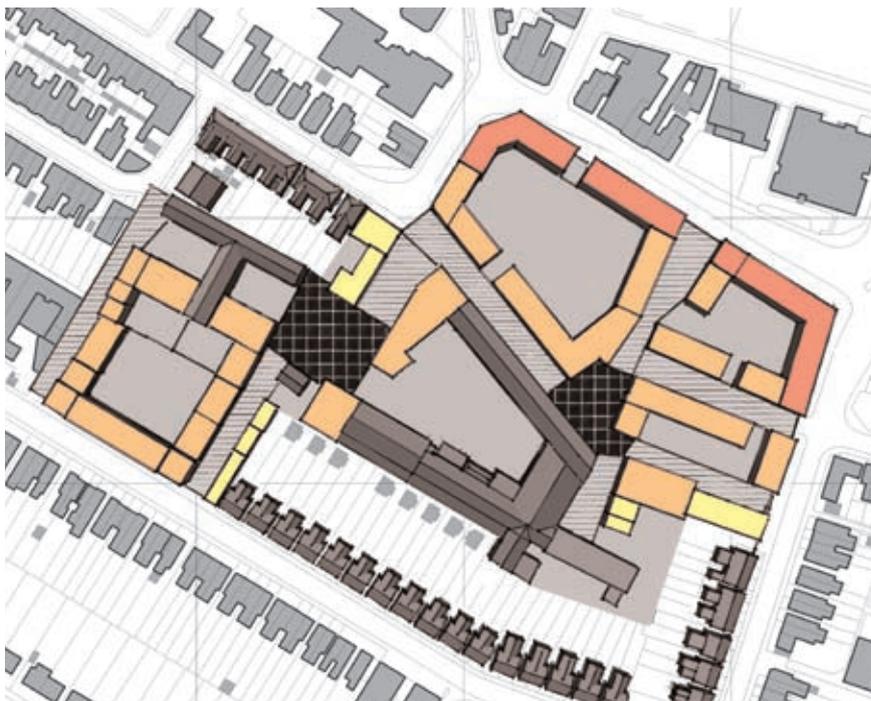
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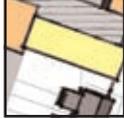
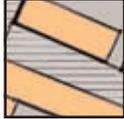
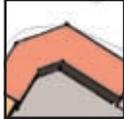
Proposed streets, spaces and routes

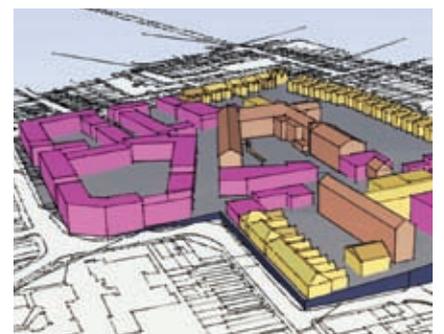
-  Existing surrounding streets & footpaths
-  New streets: pedestrian & cycle routes with vehicular access where required to service sites.
-  Improved existing streets/ footpath/ cycle connections
-  New pedestrian focused urban spaces/ squares.



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Indicative heights of new development:

-  Predominantly two storey
-  Two and three storey
-  Predominantly three storey with some four storey elements.
-  Existing retained buildings.



Indicative Sketch views of development blocks from Desborough Road looking south west & from Green Street looking south east.

7. Activity and Land uses

Apart from the new street structure and spaces, when phases of redevelopment come forward, the primary land uses to be considered for these areas are **business** and **residential**.

Alongside these primary uses there will be a range of secondary uses. These should include:

- Existing Community uses

And in addition could include:

- Leisure
- Additional creative/ artist studios / gallery space
- Small shops / cafes / restaurants serving the Quarter supporting the main Desborough Shopping area
- Community facilities of the range outlined in the WDF Core Strategy policy CS15 including small meeting places.

Until the time of redevelopment, the existing uses remain on the site.

Employment would be a mix of small office and business units and studios, with also employment uses in the lower floors of residential buildings. The aim is that employment should provide at least 1 Hectare of the built floorspace of the whole Leigh Street Quarter area. The provision should include a proportion of affordable studio spaces for creative artists/ crafts-people/ businesses.

The **housing** will include 40% affordable units and be a diverse range from apartments, studios and live work units close to Desborough Road and in the old furniture buildings. Sites in proximity to the residential areas of Kitchener Road and Upper Green Street would be more suited to family housing. Density would reflect this mix with the higher densities being in the vicinity of Desborough Road and the studio/ apartments in and adjacent to the heritage furniture factories.

Sustainable Construction Techniques

It is expected that high standards of resource efficiency will be met. This will be demonstrated through submission of a statement with the application setting out measures to achieve this.

Lower standards will be acceptable for conversion of existing heritage buildings subject to viability. The following will be expected for any new development:

- A high standard of energy efficiency
- High levels of water efficiency including grey water recycling;
- Generation of at least 10% of energy demand through on-site renewable energy generation
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems .
- Use of materials rated 1 or 2 in the BREEAM construction guide
- The recycling of redundant materials arising from demolition and construction and reduction of waste going to landfill

8. Phasing and delivery

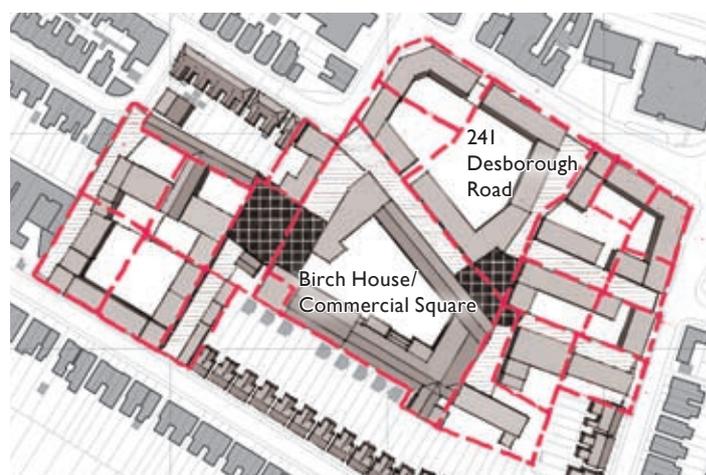
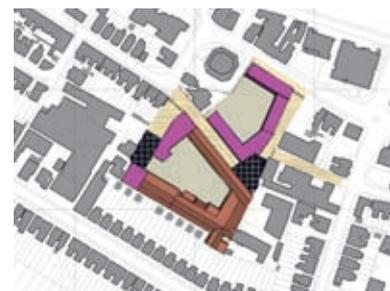
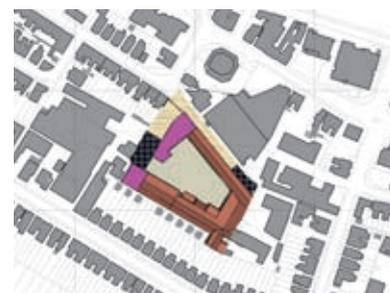
The vision presented here will take a number of years to realise because of the fragmented ownership and varying time scales of developers. The structure illustrated in section 6 allows an incremental approach as sites become available for redevelopment while also allowing existing successful uses to remain.

There is an opportunity to achieve, in a relatively short space of time, the key aims of the brief through the redevelopment of a couple of sites in the centre of the Quarter namely, Birch House/ Commercial Square and the 241 Desborough Road. In fact the imminent need to regenerate these sites has in part lead to the production of this brief.

Any single redevelopment in this area should support and at the very least not prejudice the realisation of the key aims of this brief in terms of structure, connection and land use.

9. Other information

Please refer to our website for information regarding details of our pre-application advice service and details of what information to include in a planning application.



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Development Brief**

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