

DARLASTON STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: **BASELINE REPORT**

August 2009





Walsall Council



urbed



SQWconsulting



August 2009

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Appendix 2 - Roundtable Report
Appendix 3 - Public Consultation 1 Report
SQW Report - Socio Economic Analysis
DTZ Report - Property Market Analysis
JMP Report - Transport Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This report comprises spatial and design analysis for the Darlaston Strategic Regeneration Framework. The report considers:

- Strategic & Planning Context
- Historical Development
- Land Use & Community Facilities
- Urban Form & Townscape
- Heritage Value
- Greenspace
- Consultation
- Area Analysis

It is accompanied by a further 3 reports from the consultancy team as follows:

- DTZ Commerical and Property Market Analysis
- SQW Economic Analysis
- JMP Transportation Analysis

An executive summary is also provided which summarizes the key issues and opportunities. The purpose of the baseline report is to provide an evidence base on which to build a robust regeneration strategy for Darlaston.

URBED, DTZ, SQW, JMP and Landscape Projects were appointed by Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group in May 2009 to prepare a Strategic Regeneration Framework for Darlaston.

The 10-15 year vision will outline how Darlaston should change to create a more sustainable place to live and work. Key focus areas are:

- The revitalisation of the town centre
- Attracting high quality industry
- Investment in community uses
- Provision of new housing
- Improving green spaces
- Improving the environment and design
- Enhancing the historic character and heritage value
- Improving access and connections
- Improving education, training and skills development

The Darlaston Regeneration Area is one of the ten areas identified in the Walsall Strategic Regeneration Framework. It forms part of the second tranche of the ten priorities approved by the Cabinet in October 2006.

Darlaston is considered a strategically positioned district centre within the borough of Walsall with key links to the Black Country Route and the M6 motorway. The area forms a gateway link with Sandwell and the wider Black Country region. Darlaston is located within regeneration corridor 6 of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy, the vision for this corridor is to play a part in attracting high quality industry to the Black Country. Good quality residential and green spaces will add to the historic character and heritage of central Darlaston and the vitality of its centre.

A separate, important regeneration initiative that interfaces with the Darlaston SRF is the Darlaston Strategic Development Areas (DSDA) which is largely classified as a core employment area, within the Walsall UDP. Realising the potential of the SDA is one of the shared aspirations of the Council and Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC)

PROJECT PLAN.

The work programme sets out 4 stages to the project as set out in the table below:

Baseline Analysis and Issues	May – July 09	Areas Walkabouts Baseline Analysis Stakeholder Meetings Roundtable Workshop Public Consultation on Issues Baseline Report/ Thinkpiece
Option Development	August – October 09	Developing Options Stakeholder Option workshop Public Consultation on Options Options Report
Draft SRF	October – November 09	Draft SRF Public Consultation on Draft SRF
Final SRF	November – January 10	Issue Final Draft Report Comment and Review Period Final Report

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The aims of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy for the Black Country are to reverse out migration, raise income levels, create an inclusive and cohesive society and transform its environment.

Darlaston is located within the Birmingham city region and the Black Country Regeneration Area. Specifically it is located in the employment land investment corridor and the Black Country growth corridor. These are both a focus for regeneration activity. The exact boundary of the employment land investment corridor will be defined through the Black Country Joint Core Strategy.

This important document will identify land suitable for employment purposes to meet the portfolio requirements, as well as land that can be transferred to housing to meet the areas requirement.

WALSALL REGENERATION COMPANY

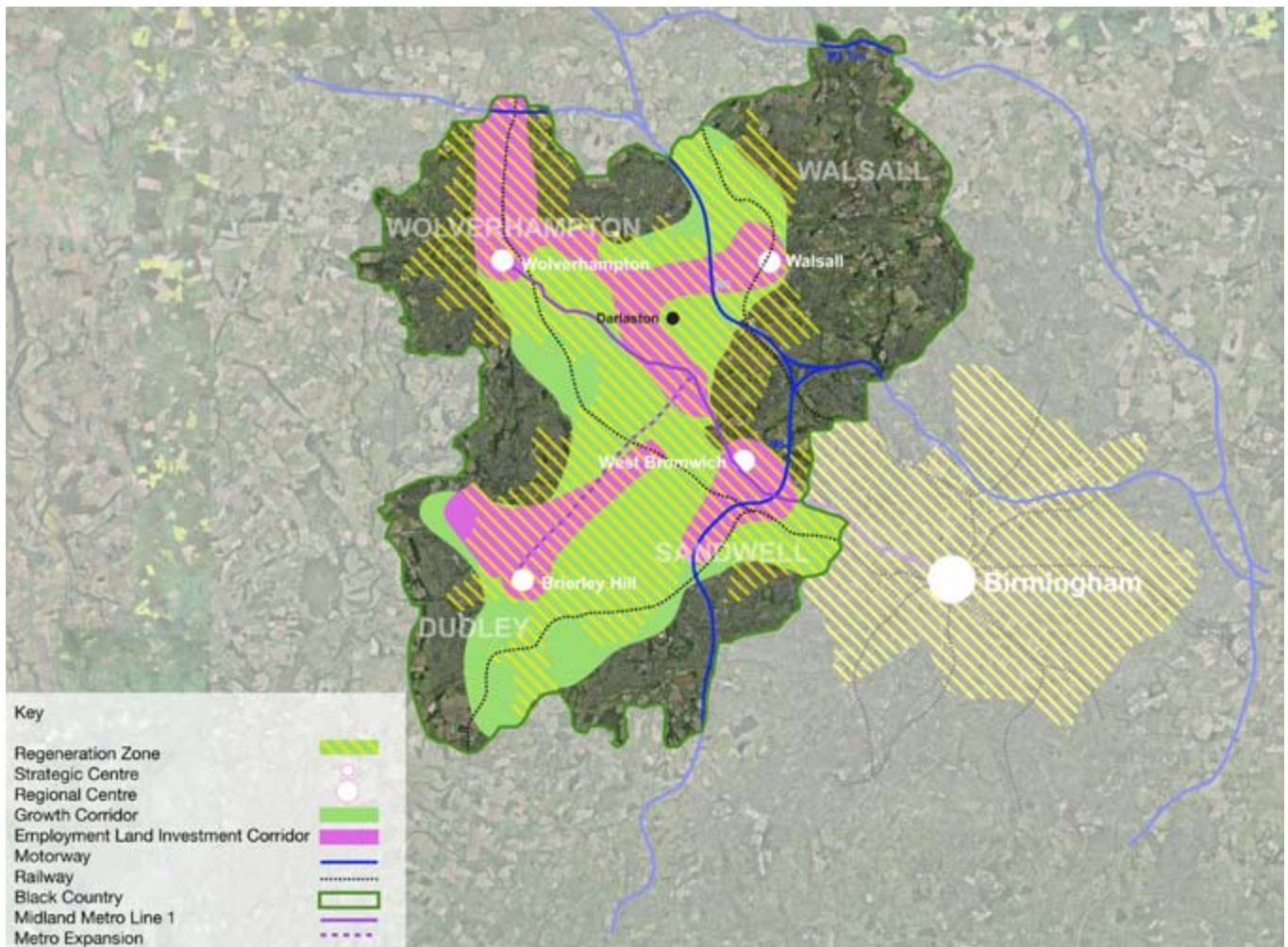
Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC) was established in March 2004 to help deliver regeneration activity and economically reposition Walsall and contribute to the wider regeneration of the Black Country and its role in the city region.

The designated area of WRC includes the town centre and neighbouring areas, canalside communities to the north and Darlaston Strategic Development Area, straddling the M6, to the south west.

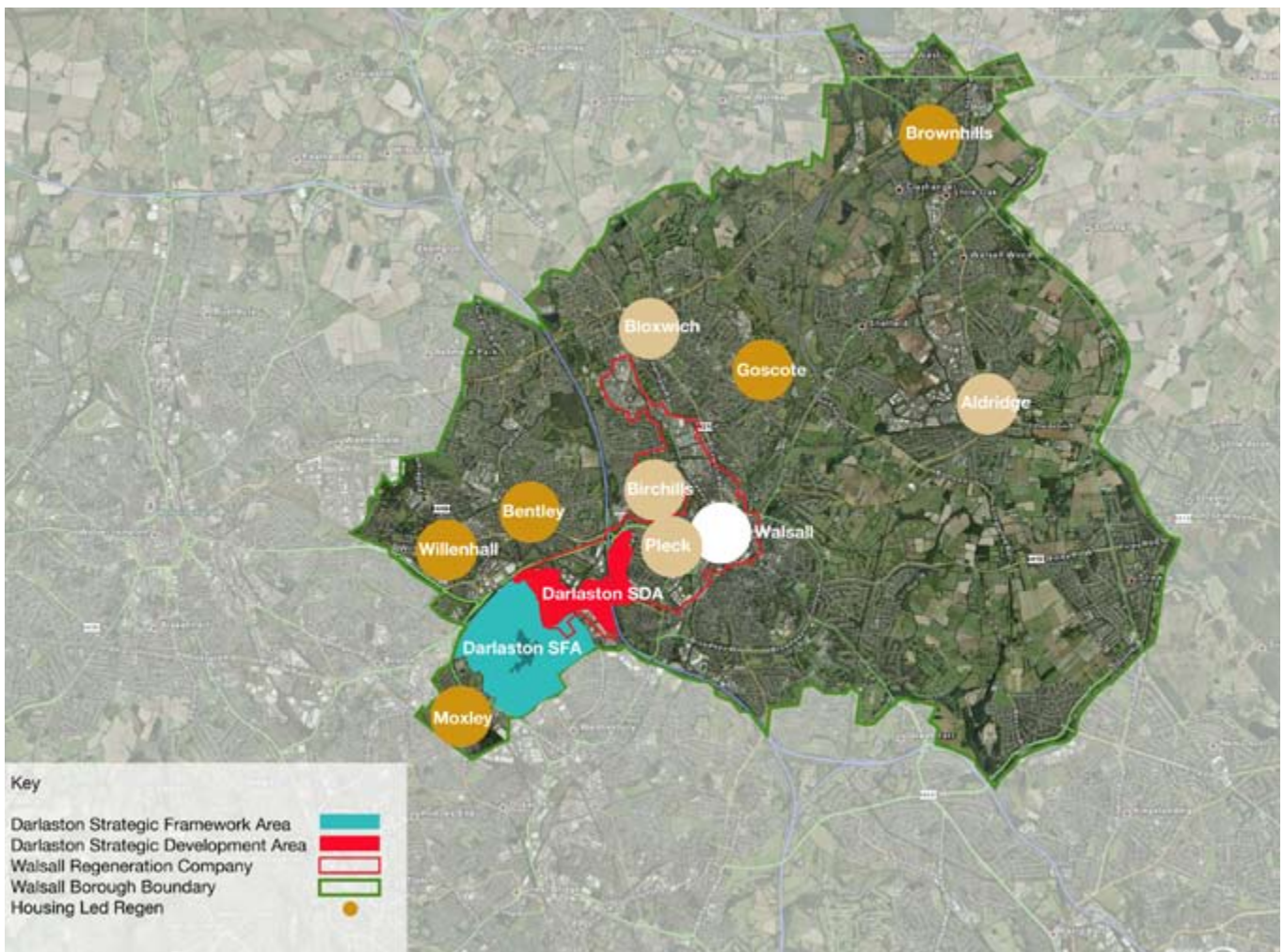
Advantage West Midlands, English Partnerships and Walsall Council, are the founding partners of WRC and are working successfully with the private sector, other public sector organisations and community stakeholders to deliver a co-ordinated programme of transformational regeneration. WRC is focused on attracting a total of more than £750 million of private and public sector investment within a decade, creating more than 5,500 jobs, over 1,500 new homes and reclaiming in excess of 70 hectares of land.

Transformational projects that WRC is leading on include:

- Walsall Gigaport - Potentially the most significant of the strategic transformational projects within the WRC portfolio, Walsall Gigaport could over time create up to 3,200 jobs, while retaining and attracting new commercial enterprises to the town. The granting in October 2008 of outline planning consent for Walsall Gigaport is a genuine milestone. It paves the way for the introduction of a 'next generation' technology platform that will act as a magnet for attracting new and emerging industries focusing on a select number of key sectors that are best suited to exploit the advantages offered by fibre optics.
- Walsall First - Building work on the £65 million new Walsall College is on target to be completed in Spring next year and this educational 'centre of excellence,' is due to open for learning in September 2009.
- Birchills - WRC's drive to create a thriving 'office corridor' - Walsall Gigaport - together with a 'next generation' fibre optic network presents a significant opportunity to spread the benefits throughout the WRC area.
- Darlaston Strategic Development Area - A major strategic location of more than 54 developable acres, Darlaston SDA represents one of the West Midlands' prime regeneration opportunities. Falling both sides of the M6 at the very heart of the national motorway network, and with easy access to Birmingham International Airport, Darlaston SDA presents a compelling case for national and international companies looking to establish a high profile presence. With substantial investment required to remediate the land, WRC's strategy is built around a clear focus on delivering solutions. Establishing a close working relationship with the Environment Agency, the approach is recognised as an innovative model of best practice. This has encouraged regional development agency Advantage West Midlands to acquire a key site within the SDA to kick-start development. Pilot remediation is planned to commence in early 2009 with full engineering works to follow. WRC is seeking to create a high quality environment, emphasising the area's



The Black Country Context



Walsall Context

heritage and canal, forming an early feature of the Black Country Urban Park. Links to Walsall Gigaport by fibre optic cable will give businesses locating here broadband at speeds of a gigabyte a second, 120 times faster than normal, in both directions. Truly a fifth 'Industrial Revolution' on sites that once housed the 'engine room' of the first. With connectivity at the speed of light the platform is there for inspirational transformation, leading the way for the Black Country and West Midlands. Darlaston SDA has the potential to create between 2,500 and 4,500 jobs with 21st century skills

- Walsall Regeneration Company, together with its partners, is also investigating innovative approaches to 21st century public realm, seeing economic drivers as being the lynchpin to its success and sustainability.

WALSALL STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Regeneration Framework approved by the Council in March 2006 is a 10-15 year view of development in Walsall's district centres. These are shown on the plan opposite. The priority projects have been in the areas of Brownhills, Moxley, Bentley, Goscote Lane, and Willenhall.

The Regeneration Framework builds on and complements the statutory planning framework (the Unitary Development Plan and the future Local Development Framework by focusing on projects and delivery and by helping to deliver sustainable social, economic and environmental regeneration. Strategic objectives for each of the centres listed below are set out in the framework. Work commissioned by Walsall Council since (including the SRF for Darlaston is intended to develop the detail of these regeneration strategies in greater detail.

- Aldridge
- Bentley
- Brownhills
- Bloxwich
- Darlaston
- Goscote
- Moxley
- Pleck
- Willenhall

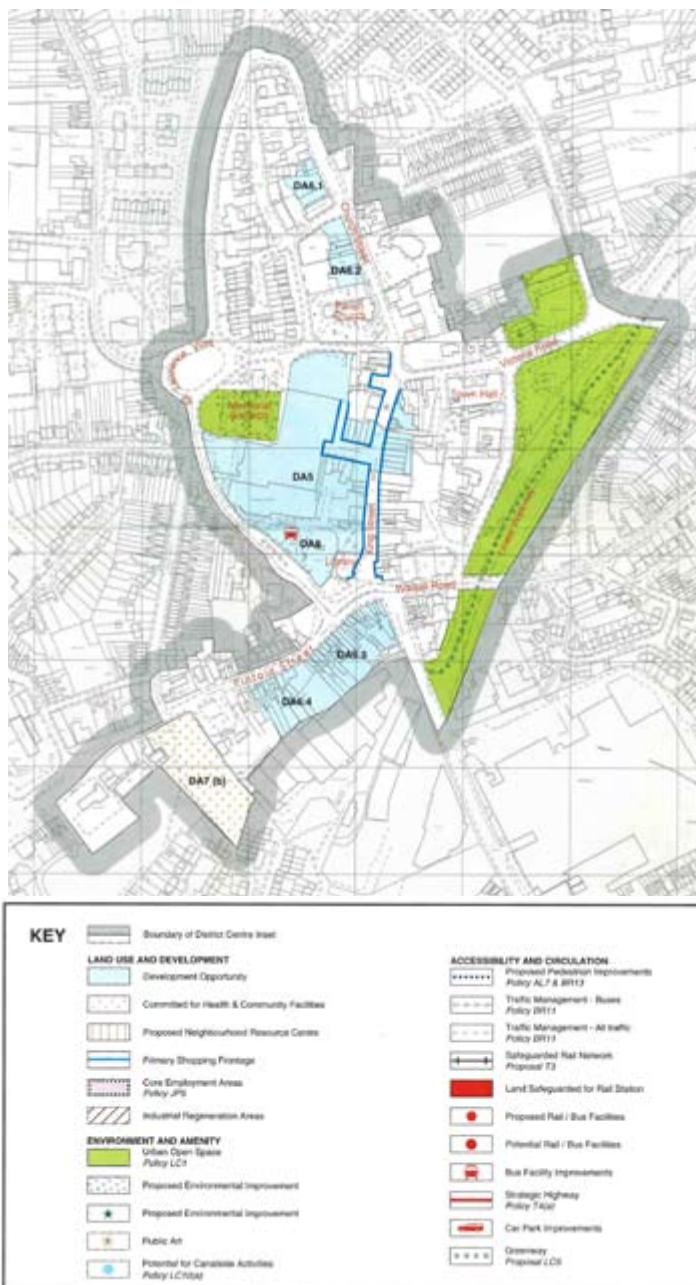
BENTLEY LOCAL CENTRE REGENERATION

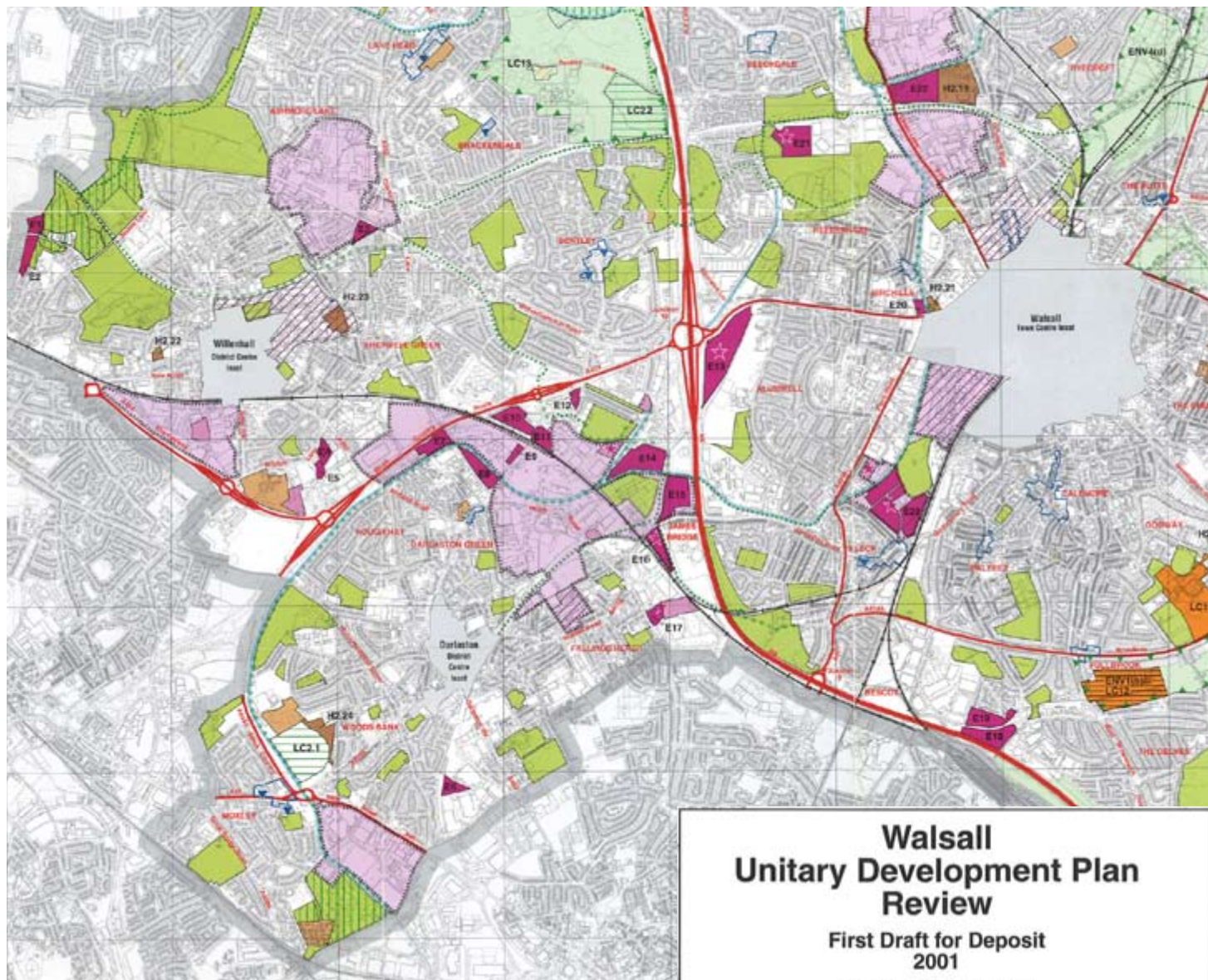
Following extensive community consultation between July 2006 and March 2007 the Bentley Regeneration Framework study was produced. The framework provides a guide to the regeneration of Bentley local centre and the surrounding area. A vision for change has been endorsed by the Bentley community, the Council and its stakeholder partners. Brownhills Regeneration

The Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) identifies several projects for Brownhills:

- food and retail
- traffic improvements
- public transport and pedestrian access

A housing Masterplan has identified three canal side mixed tenure schemes that would provide over 200 new properties with a mixture of three-storey apartments, one and two bedroom flats and four bedroom detached homes. The local Project Reference Group in partnership with the council and our key partners Walsall Housing Group (WHG) commissioned LDA Design consultants to develop an Environmental Strategy for the area that 'builds upon' the work of the housing Masterplan and the recent improvements in the area.





Walsall Unitary Development Plan Review

First Draft for Deposit
2001

PROPOSALS MAP

KEY

- Borough Boundary
- Town & District Centre Inset Plans

ENVIRONMENT & AMENITY

- Green Belt
- Proposed ENV1
- Additions to Green Belt
- Proposed ENV1(a)
- Deletions from Green Belt
- Proposed ENV1(b)
- Existing Developed Sites in the Green Belt
- Policy ENV4
- Open Land
- Proposed ENV7
- Great Bar Hall & Estate and St Margaret's Hospital
- Policy ENV9
- Forest of Meria boundary
- Policy ENV18

HABITAT AND SPECIES PROTECTION

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Policy ENV20
- Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
- Policy ENV20
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- Policy ENV20
- Proposed Local Nature Reserve
- Proposed ENV21(a)

JOB AND PROSPERITY

- Employment Land with Planning permission
- (for information only - Table 4.2)
- Employment Land - New Proposals
- Proposal JP1
- Best Quality Sites
- Policy JP6
- Core Employment Areas
- Policy JP6
- Industrial Regeneration Areas
- (for information only - Paragraph 4.1)

STRENGTHENING OUR CENTRES

- Local Centres
- Policy S5
- Local Centre development/ investment opportunities
- Policy S5 (d)

HOUSING

- Housing land with planning permission
- (for information only - Table 6.2)
- Land Allocated for New Housing Development
- Proposal H2

TRANSPORT

- Strategic Highway Network
- Policy T4(a)
- Safeguarded Rail Network
- Proposal T3

LEISURE & COMMUNITY

- Urban Open Space
- Policy LC1
- Proposed Urban Open Space
- Policy LC2
- Greenways (complete or under construction)
- Proposal LC5
- Greenways (proposed)
- Proposal LC5
- Canals
- Policy LC10
- Potential for canalside activities
- Policy LC10(a)
- Education
- Policies LC11 & LC12
- Cemetery extension
- Proposal LC13

MINERALS

- Minerals Safeguarding Areas
- Proposal M1

GOSCOTE

Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group (WHG) appointed Entec UK Ltd, in September 2006, to develop a Regeneration Framework Strategy for approximately 630 acres known as the Goscote Lane Corridor.

MOXLEY

The council and Walsall Housing Group (WHG), on behalf of the Moxley Project Reference Group (PRG) commissioned consultants DTZ to produce a Regeneration Framework for Moxley to help co-ordinate the physical and environmental regeneration of the area for the next 10-15 years. This has focused on providing new quality housing and associated community facilities.

The final Regeneration Framework document was approved by council cabinet in April 2008. The framework includes the AP UK site adjacent to the Darlaston SRF area. This proposed residential development will transform the site into a modern residential area, with highly designed, safe streetscapes and areas of public amenity space. Open space improvements will consist of improved access to the canal providing links with the rest of the area along a green corridor to the Moorcroft Woods Nature Reserve. The wards pool and surrounding green space will be improved and publically accessible as a result of the development.

WILLENHALL

Willenhall has avoided the extensive redevelopment that has affected many other settlements in the conurbation. It is widely regarded as one of the most intact and unaltered small town centres in the Black Country. While mainly comprising nineteenth and twentieth century buildings, there are some earlier survivals and the irregular street pattern reflects the town's medieval origins.

Much of the town centre is a designated conservation area and a £2.1 million bid for Heritage Lottery funding is being prepared with the support of to fund enhancements to local buildings. A Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme is being progressed for the town centre supported by English Heritage and SRB.

An Area Action Plan is currently being prepared for Willenhall

and will include proposals for:

- Developing new family housing
- New businesses and innovation centre
- Bigger and better town centre
- New school, parks and arts venue
- New rail service and local station

PLANNING CONTEXT

The development plan is the Walsall Unitary Development Plan adopted in 2005. The emerging development plan is at an early stage of preparation.

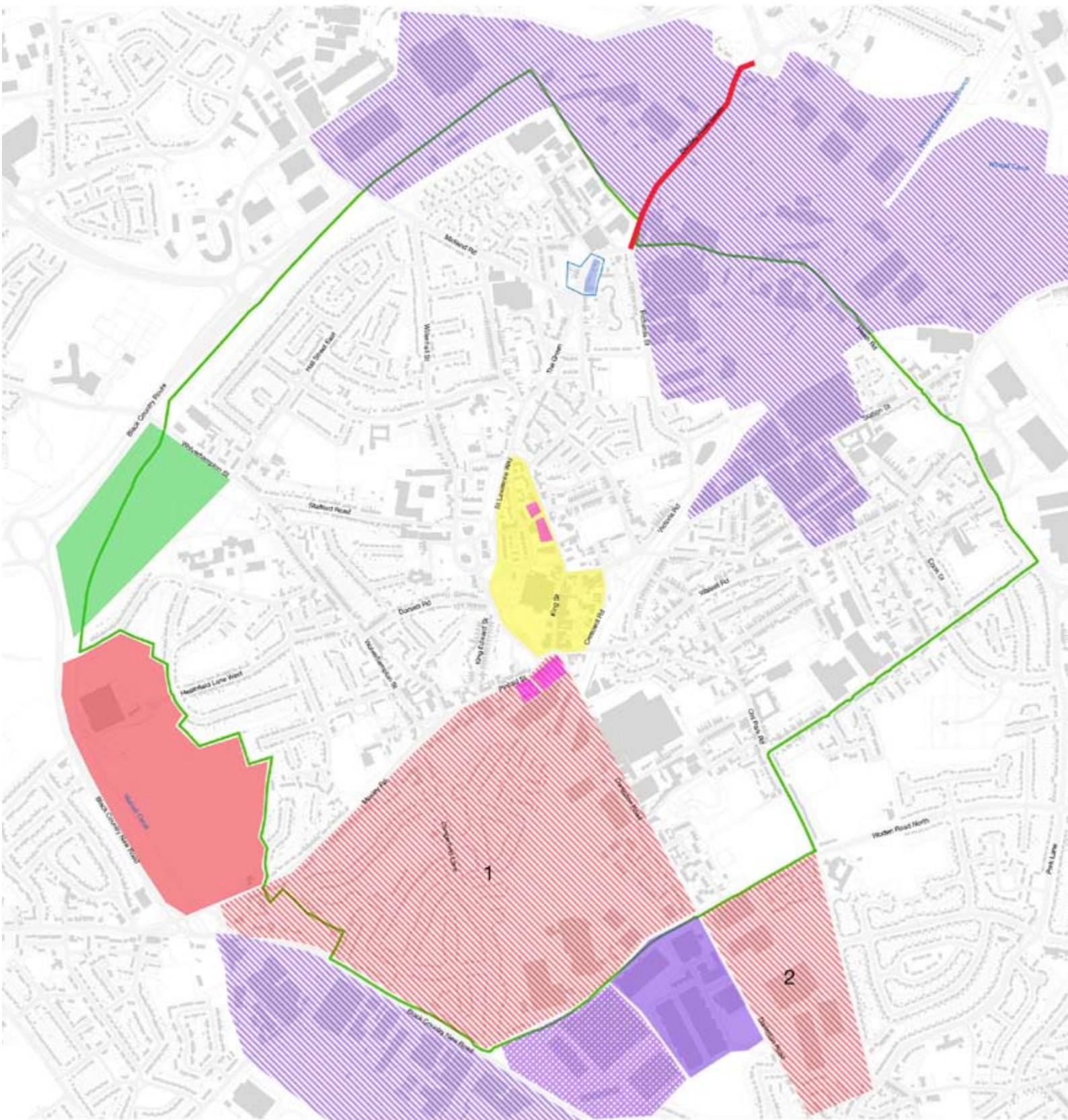
Relevant policies for Darlaston in the adopted plan include Policy JP5 Core Employment Areas. This policy covers a large area of land to the north east of Darlaston town centre around Heath Road and Station Street (in the proposals map opposite this area is highlighted light purple).

These areas will be safeguarded for core employment uses, permissions for which may be subject to conditions to prohibit change to other uses, such as Class B1(a) offices. Proposals for other uses will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:

- 1. A need would be met which could not be satisfied elsewhere in the Borough; or
- 2. The range and quality of employment opportunities would be significantly increased.












(b) When windfall sites or buildings in core employment areas come forward for reuse or redevelopment they will normally be safeguarded for core employment uses according to the above policy.

The core employment areas are defined on the basis that they contain major concentrations of core employment uses and/or good quality buildings or development opportunities. The policy will ensure that these areas, the best industrial areas that Walsall has to offer, will be retained for these uses. This safeguarding policy will apply to any land within these areas, whether allocated in the Plan, already committed by planning permission for employment uses, or windfall sites that may emerge in the future. With respect to sites or buildings where the existing uses are not Core Employment Uses, Policy JP5 will apply when they become available for an alternative use or for redevelopment. While the existing use continues, other employment uses, as defined by Policy JP7, that are ancillary or complementary to the development of such businesses would be acceptable in principle; for instance development of the EMR site at Bentley Road South as a Recycling Park.

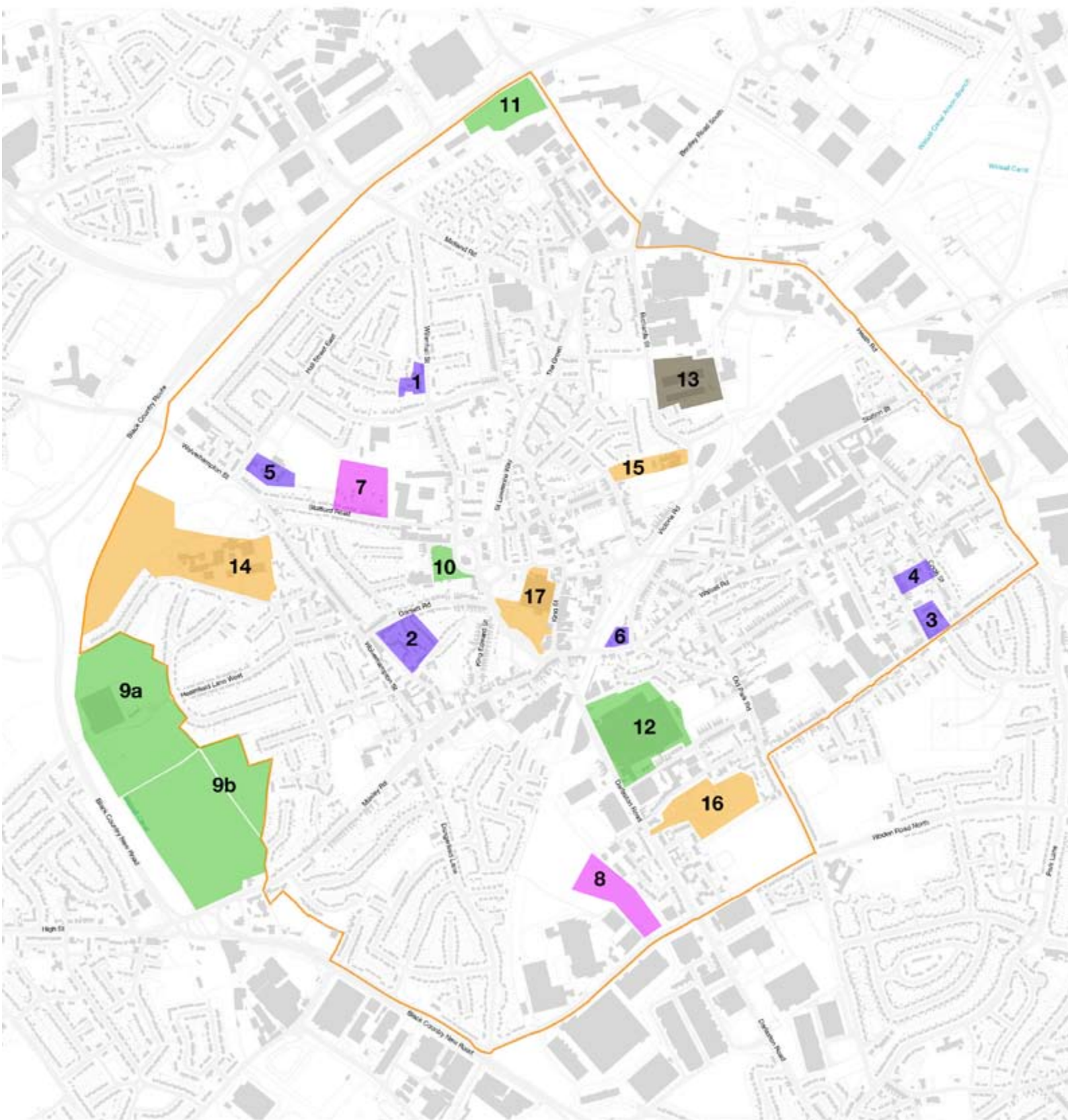


Planning Policy Plan

Legend

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | Darlaston Town Centre Boundary (UDP) |  | Protected Retail Frontage (UDP) |
|  | Local Centre (UDP, JCS) |  | Open Space Improvements (JCS) |
|  | Core Employment Land Allocations (UDP JP5) |  | Residential Led Regeneration (JCS) |
|  | High Quality Employment Land (JCS only) |  | Development Opportunity Sites (UDP DAG) |
|  | Local Employment to be Retained (JCS) |  | Housing Options (JCS) - |
|  | Highway Improvement (JCS) | | 1. 1095 Units |
| | | | 2. 490 Units |

Site No.	Site Name	Information
1	Willenhall St	20 houses and 17 flats - Woodbourne Homes
2	Dorsett Road/Wheelwright Close	
3	Spirit Mews/Cobden Street	
4	Monarch Court/Cobden Street	
5	The Avenue/Hall Street	
6	Walsall Road/Avenue Road	
7	Stafford Road (Persimmon)	70 No dwellings (52 houses and 18 apartments) 2 x 2bed, 24 x 3bed, 26 x 4bed and 18 x 2bed apartment
8	TRW Automotive Site (MarCity)	230 Dwellings. 101 affordable units for Accord Housing plus 13 additional affordable units (Affordable 30 x Apartments, 54 x 2/3 bed house, 24 x 4/5 bed, 6 x 2 bed bungalow) (Private sale 45 x apartments, 96 x 3bed houses, 7 x 4bed houses)
9a	APUK	304 units granted - no start as of yet on site. Permisson is valid untill November 2011
9b	Moxley Tip	Proposal for recycling facility in tandem with outline permission for housing to the east of the site (02/2122/FL-OL/M1).
10	Alma St/School St	22 No dwellings - Development by Accord Housing site to be managed by Carma Housing. Residents currently being moved into units, to be completed in September.
11	Central Point Willenhall Rd (Warehouse)	68,300sq ft warehouse and 5,350sq ft offices - Farnley Investments Ltd
12	Servis Site	224 units (159 x Houses and 65 x apartments). Reserved matters application expected imminently as expiry of outline permission is in Aug 09
13	Wincanton Transport (Richard St)	90 residential units in total, 9 x 2 bed flats, 10 x 2 bed bungalow, 28 x 3 bed house, 21 x 4 bed house, 16 x 5 bed house and 6 x 3 bed 0% carbon house. Application going to Development Control committee Outcome still to be confrimed.
14	Darlaston Academy Proposal	Pre-app consultation underway on the Academy and the adjoining George Rose Park (£300,000 secured for improvements to the park to off set loss of George Rose playing fields for inclusion within academy development). Outline application for change of use of land (open space to education) imminent. Outline application for the Academy mid August with full application to be submitted early next year. £500,000 to be spent on current school buildings this summer to improve them for the duration of their use by the academy until the new school is built.
15	Darlaston Multi-Purpose Centre	The site is the location of the former Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre which was closed following a leisure centre/services review in 2008. The remaining buildings on site were scheduled for demolition summer 2008. A bat survey undertaken in the summer of 2008 concluded that two of the four remaining buildings could be demolished (which subsequently happened). The survey further concluded that there was evidence of the presence of bats in the other two remaining buildings and these couldn't be surveyed until this summer. The results of this summers surveys should be available within the next month or so - preliminary results indicate that bats are not located within these buildings.
16	Kings Hill Park	£275,000 S106 funds allocated to the park for improvement works. Consultation currently underway (led by Green Space Improvement services - Clive Morris), consisting of a questionnaire circulated to the local area. Results from this consultation to be relayed to Urbed when made available.
17	ASDA	Plans for an internal mezzanine to expand their George clothing line offer; as well as increasing the existing carparking by building a deck over the entire surface to nearly double capacity.



Pipeline Development Plan

Legend

 Built Out Sites	 Developments Currently on the Market	 Significant Planning Applications
1. Willenhall St/Bird Brook Close	7. 'The Keep', Stafford Rd. (Persimmon)	13. TRW Automotive Site (Marcity)
2. Dorsett Road/Wheelwright Close	8. 'Satchwell Grange' (Bloor Homes)	Richards Street (262 units) - REFUSED
3. Spirit Mews/Cobden Street	 Significant Planning Permissions	 Planning Proposals
4. Monarch Court/Cobden Street	9a. AP(UK) Site (304 units)	14. Darlaston Academy
5. The Avenue/Hall Street	9b. Moxley Tip - Recycling and Housing	15. Darlaston Multi-Purpose Centre
6. Walsall Road/Avenue Road	10. Alma Street / School St (22 units)	16. King's Hill Park
	11. Central Point, Willenhall Road (Warehouse+Offices)	17. ASDA (Mezzanine and Deck Carpark)
	12. Servis Site	

There are a specific set of policies focused on Darlaston district centre which also provide Supplementary Planning Guidance. These were informed by the Darlaston Town Plan produced in 1999 and predate the rebuilding of the ASDA store in its current configuration. The policies encourage a contraction of the main shopping area to consolidate existing uses and to encourage inward investment around the new anchor foodstore. In this respect the primary shopping area is focused on the pedestrianised area of King Street/High Street and represents a smaller retail core area than has existed in the past. Proposals include new development opportunities (residential and other town centre uses), environmental, pedestrian and bus facility improvements. Other relevant land use policies include:

- Policy LC1 Urban Open Space which protects various green spaces in the area such as Victoria Park, Kings Hill Park and George Rose Park.
- Policy LC2 Proposed Urban Open Space in relation to the Moxley Tip Site
- Policy LC10 relating to the Walsall Canal
- Proposal LC5 Proposed Greenway along the line of the disused railway and Victoria Park to the Canal and part of the Walsall Canal.
- Policy S5 Local Centres which applies to Darlaston Green and protects this retail frontage.

BLACK COUNTRY JOINT CORE STRATEGY

Emerging planning policy for Walsall will be informed and established in part by the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country (March 2008). This has completed its Preferred Options Consultation. Submission to the Secretary of State is anticipated in late 2009 following further public consultation.

As part of the evidence base for this GVA Grimley reported that the required development path for the Black Country economy is based on restructuring towards service sector office based activities and the comparative advantage that the location has in relation to logistics. The GVA assessment also highlighted the cautious approach to the release of employment land and stated that Walsall will have a deficit in employment land by 2006. The approach to the robust protection of Core Employment Areas in Walsall (such as that in the study area) is consistent with this advice.

The spatial objectives of the Joint Core Strategy which will underpin change comprise:

- Restructuring the sub-regional economy by providing sufficient high quality employment land within regeneration corridors
- Modelling sustainable communities on redundant employment sites
- Ensuring a network of vibrant and attractive town, district and local centres
- A first class transport network

The Joint Core Strategy will provide further definition to the regeneration corridors outlined in the adopted RSS. In relation to the study area this currently proposes safeguarding the core employment land south of Heath Road and promoting new residential development south of the town centre. Current proposals in the JCS of relevance to the Darlaston Strategic Development Framework include:

- Up to 1095 additional residential dwellings at Woods Bank (south of the town centre)
- Darlaston town centre public realm improvements
- Open space improvements to George Rose Park
- Darlaston Green local centre designation
- Protection of high quality employment land at Heath Road (110 hectares)
- Highway improvements to Bentley Road
- Potential metro/bus rapid transit link to Darlaston town

There are also several allocations in key competing areas within the catchment area which will have an influence of the future regeneration direction and strategy for Darlaston, these comprise:

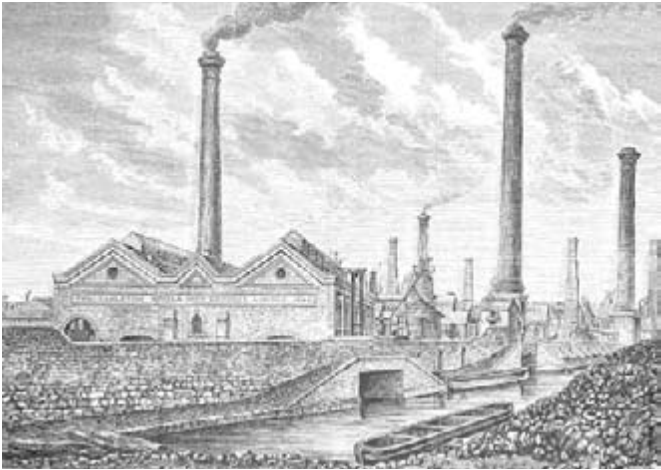
RESIDENTIAL

- Housing led regeneration in Moxley (816 additional dwellings) including 300 (with consent) at Heathfield Lane
- Medium – high density housing allocation north of Willenhall town centre (3,000 + new homes).
- 490 additional dwellings at Kings Hill (Wednesbury North)
- 1,350 additional dwelling south of Wednesbury town centre
- Also, 874 dwellings at Bilston Urban Village

EMPLOYMENT (PROTECT)

- Large high quality employment allocations in Moxley at south of Holyhead Road and south of Black Country route.
- Local employment allocation at Wednesbury Trading Estate
- High quality employment allocation at Bescot Industrial Estate
- High quality employment land allocation west of Black Country Route, Wednesbury.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT



The Darlaston Iron and Steel Company, Heath Road, 1865

Darlaston as we know it today is built upon the foundations of a great Industrial past.

Located in the heart of the West Midlands in the borough of Walsall, in what was the centre of the South Staffordshire coalfield and came to be known as the Black Country, Darlaston is a Victorian town that has since lost much of its traditional industry and is struggling to define itself in the shadow of its industrious past.

The future of this Black Country town looks unclear as the Victorian foundations that made Darlaston a robust and successful industrial centre are gone. Despite this Darlaston still has the opportunity to regenerate itself and replicate the innovation, determination and passion that made it a world leader in the manufacture of nuts and bolts.

The development of Darlaston is similar to many other former industrial towns in that its early fortunes were entwined with the land that surrounds it. Situated between the Darlaston Brook, River Tame and the Bird Brook, Darlaston is believed to have been colonised in the 7th Century within a clearing in the woods around what we know today as The Leys.

By the 12th Century a small farming community had developed on the fertile lands surrounding The Leys. Centred around a church and its rectory, a windmill and a manor house. Darlaston was a closely knit settlement. The medieval street plan remains partly intact today in streets such as King Street, Church Street and Victoria Road (formerly Pardoes Lane)

Although Darlaston was never on a main trading or travelling route, it did develop around a crossroads on routes between Wednesbury to the south, Willenhall to the north, Bilston to the west, and Walsall to the east. This may also suggest why Darlaston has never had a major market throughout its history, with Willenhall being the likely local market for traders around the area. This cross point became known as the Bull Stake due to it being the ideal location for the blood sport of bull-baiting, a common public spectator sport in provincial towns before its outright ban in 1835 under the cruelty to animals Act.

Between the 15th and 17th Century Darlaston started to expand its agricultural trade by the introduction of cottage industries that exploited the generous deposits of coal and iron ore close to the surface. Many pits were sunk and foundries established on the open fields surrounding Darlaston. Specialist metal industries developed, such as gun makers as well as nut and bolt producers. With this came additional employment and wealth, and as a result the settlement started to grow into its surroundings. More common land was developed for housing; streets such as King Street were lined with residential buildings to house workers in the burgeoning metal trades.

By the time of the 18th and 19th Century, the Industrial Revolution had taken hold and Darlaston was very much at the centre of it. The opening of the Walsall Canal in 1799, a branch of the Birmingham canal, allowed the rate of trade to be increased, opening up new national markets; as well as defining and containing to this day the urban form of Darlaston to the north and east of the centre. Added to this in 1837 was the opening of the Grand Junction Railway, connecting Liverpool and Manchester to Birmingham. James Bridge Station to the north of the centre was Darlaston's first point of connection, which led to the rapid growth of factories in the area. The South Staffordshire Railway Company in 1863 built a branch line south from James Bridge to connect Wednesbury, via Darlaston, establishing Darlaston's own town station in the process. To meet this added demand the town developed at pace, building new factories, housing, shops and roads as well as added transport in the form of an electric tram. King Street's original residential buildings were converted throughout the 1800's into shops to capture the trade of a rapidly growing population. Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire (1885) lists 20 different types of specialist shop along King Street.

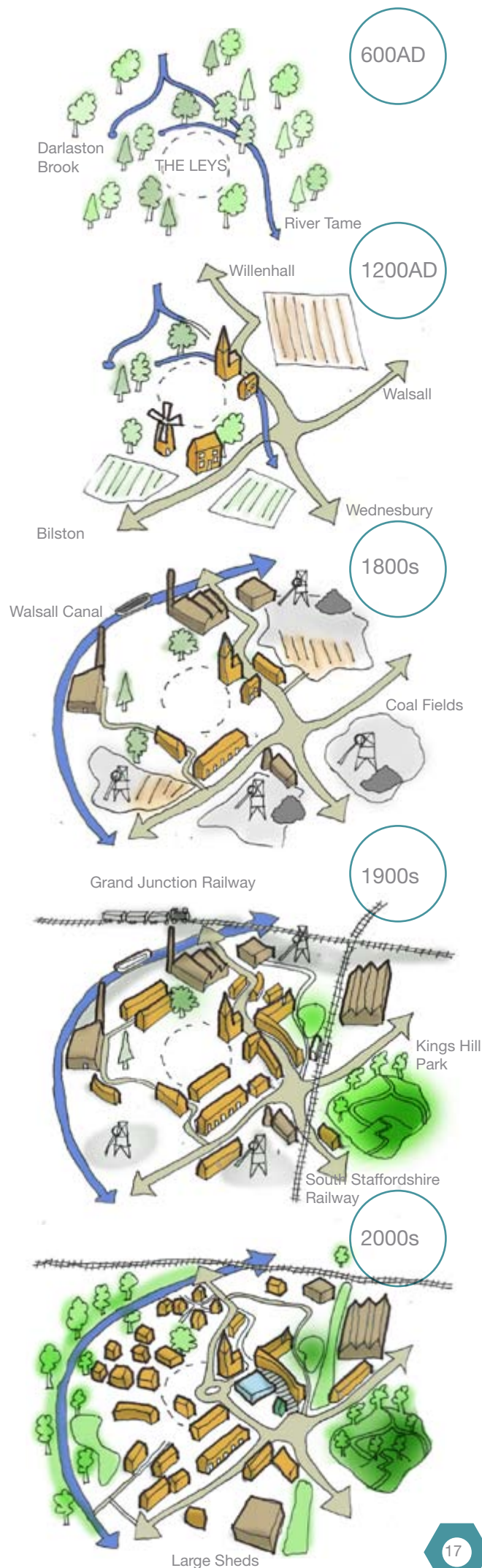
Darlaston's Civic presence developed in the late 19th Century with the construction of the Town Hall, Police Station and Library as well as the establishment of public open spaces such as Victoria Park, which were fully funded by local industrial philanthropists. Companies such as Charles Richards and Sons Ltd and Rubery Owen and Company Ltd. played key roles in Darlaston's development as a town, as they would also create social activities such as sports grounds and clubs for the use of its workers. Rubery Owen, a large local employer in 1930, followed this pattern by establishing the Owen Memorial Gardens which are now unfortunately disconnected from King Street by the presence of the ASDA store.

During the Interwar period (1918-1939) large council built housing estates such as Rough Hay and Woodsbank were constructed to house families from the inner city Victorian slums as well as housing a growing population. These semi-detached buildings are characterised by large green spaces front and back. In turn these developments had an impact on the form and layout of Darlaston as a whole, shifting away from the tightly formed Victorian streets and communal spaces in favour of a more generous private internal and external space for each property. This was a period when the identities of towns within the Black Country started to become further amalgamated, blurring boundaries as housing estates merged into one another with little way of differentiating between them.

Further public space in the form of Kings Hill Park in the south in 1904 and George Rose Park (named after John George Rose, Chairman of the Local Urban District Council) in the west was opened in 1924. Both parks represent a concerted effort by the council to re-imagine the waste lands and defunct pits left over from earlier industries as well as to address the local high unemployment rate at the time. By employing local people in the parks construction and upkeep as well as improving the setting and amenity for the people of Darlaston, these two parks meant much more than somewhere to walk the dog.

Darlaston continued to grow after the Second World War due to its national reputation for nuts and bolts production, leading to global markets bringing further prosperity to the area. Despite this continued boom in trade, Darlaston lost its passenger railway in the 1950's and together with James Bridge station were demolished in the mid 60's, which inadvertently signalled the start of Darlaston's decline.

The late sixties witnessed a drop in trade as cheaper metal industries were established across the world leading to loss in trade and Darlaston's fortunes.





Top end of King Street in 1956 - Open to vehicles



Top end of King Street in 2009 - Pedestrianised



Bottom end of King Street in 1890 with trams and lots of activity



Bottom end of King Street in 2009 with a lot less activity

The 70's represented the era of a mass rebuilding programme initiated to kick-start Darlaston's regeneration in face of the national economic struggle. Sites were cleared and new highways built as the dawn of the automobile age was breaking. Historic streets to the west of King Street were lost to make way for the construction of St. Lawrence's Way which ultimately led to the pedestrianisation and bypassing of King Street. In line with the mass building programme many of King Street's buildings on the west side were demolished to allow for a supermarket, a modern shopping precinct and a new library to capture the car mobilised trade. The addition of two 15 storey residential tower blocks completed this optimistic, albeit flawed vision for Darlaston's future.

From the 70's till now, Darlaston has seen numerous demolitions, mainly of the buildings erected during the 70's such as the tower blocks and shopping precinct. These removals have allowed the supermarket to develop further, establishing a larger store on the same site as well as expanding its car park towards King Street, but unfortunately in the process disconnecting itself and its customers from

the remaining small shops on King Street. Other demolitions have resulted from business closures, with former industrial sites razed and converted to residential use, as with the Rubery Owen factory.

More recent developments show signs of promise, despite being disconnected, such as the award winning Swimming Pool and the Surestart centre on Crescent Road. The refurbishment of the Victorian Town Hall also shows movement in the right direction by investing in the maintenance of existing key landmarks. Unfortunately most development to date appear to be delivered in a piece meal fashion only when sites become available, with little thought or appreciation for a wider strategy to benefit the town as a whole. This has tended to manifest itself in a number of generically designed commercial and private housing developments. Although signs of private investment are by no means a bad thing, the opportunity to create a town that is greater than the sum of its parts is being missed through poorly laid out schemes that do not fully integrate themselves into their setting or consider a wider context.



1889



1920



1946



1968



1980



2009

Legend

- Darlaston District Centre
- Building
- Road

LAND USE

Although housing forms the major land use within the study area, the residential neighbourhoods of Darlaston are encircled, and to an extent permeated, by the legacy of Black Country industrial land-uses.

LAND USE TYPE AND DISTRIBUTION

To the north, south and east much is still active employment land, though with employment densities generally far lower than at the area's economic peak. Historic heavy engineering enterprises have largely been replaced by lighter industry and distribution, but a classic land use pattern of manufacturing surrounded by homes still operates around Station Street and All Saints Road.

West of the town the former industrial and mining sites along the canal are cleared and open. This area houses major road infrastructure round the Black Country Route/New Road, with the remainder left waste due to contamination.

The distribution pattern of active employment uses can be broadly characterised as two 'arcs of industry', northern and southern, running alongside historic canal and rail routes, and penetrating the residential heart in places.

The town centre continues to house key retail and civic uses, including the large ASDA superstore, the town hall, post office and police station. There are few retail areas outside of the centre, limited mainly to small convenience stores serving local neighbourhoods.

Open space and green infrastructure (GI) occupies a substantial amount of Darlaston, with aerial photographs showing the area to be surprisingly green. Private gardens, formal public parks, playing fields, waste ground and a green corridor along the canal all contribute to the quantity of GI, although quality varies widely as will be detailed in the 'Greenspace Analysis' section.









Recent years have seen changes in the land use pattern. Planning policies requiring a majority of new housing to be provided on previously developed 'brown-field' land, coupled with long term decline in the Black Country's manufacturing industries, have contributed to an increase in residential land use relative to employment. Ad-hoc redevelopment of 'windfall' sites such as those along Stafford Road and Darlaston Road has tended to involve a change of use.

The Local Planning Authority is now concerned this trend has gone too far and is taking a more restrictive approach to loss of employment land in Walsall.

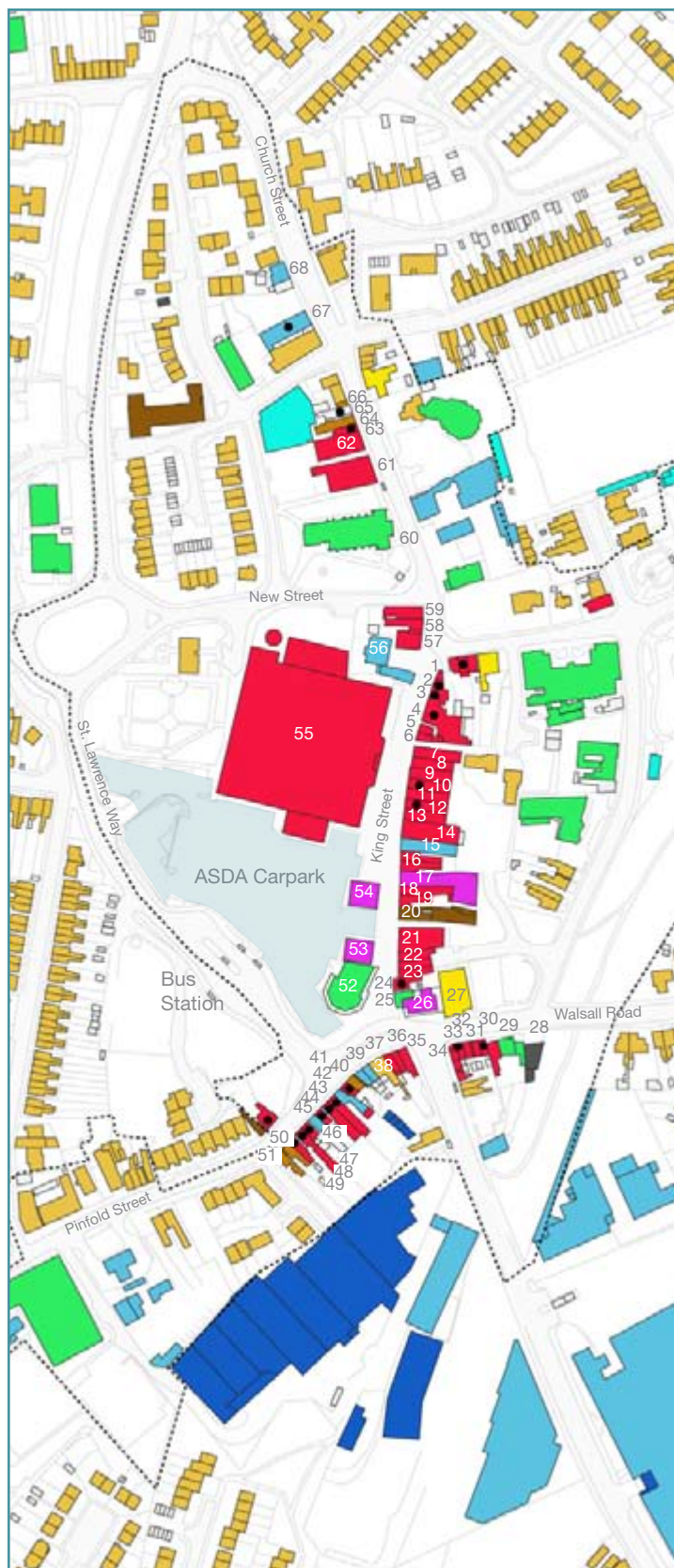


Predominant Land Use Plan

Legend

- | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|---------------|
|  | District Centre |  | Water |
|  | Employment Area |  | Site Boundary |
|  | Residential Area |  | Main Roads |
|  | Green Space |  | Railway |

1. Best Choice – Convenience Store
2. Vacant (Formerly Unique Beauty Salon)
3. Vacant (Formerly Darlaston DIY)
4. Vacant (Formerly Darlaston Online)
5. Kit 'n' Heels – Shoe Shop
6. Darlaston Pet Shop
7. Darlaston Jet – Jobs/Education/Training Agency
8. Jennie Florists
9. Walsall Hospice – Charity Shop
10. Vacant
11. King Street News and Phones
12. Vacant
13. Carousel - Amusements
14. Boots - Pharmacy
15. Walsall Housing Group - Offices
16. Sun Shack – Tanning Salon
17. Coral – Bookmakers
18. Nameless Shop – Gift shop
19. City Shoes – Shoe Shop
20. Kings Eatery – Restaurant
21. Ethel Austins – Clothes Shop
22. Firkins Family Bakers
23. Clemmy's School Uniform Shop
24. Vacant (Formerly Discount Store)
25. Watts and Attewell Opticians
(Trevor A Bomber Accountants above)
26. Halifax Bank
27. Kinky Boots Bar (Former Bank)
28. Central Motor Co
29. Dentist
30. Vacant
31. The Staffordshire Bull Terrier Shop – Dog Shelter
32. Electra-Vision – Electrical Appliance Shop
33. Vacant
34. Newsagent and Off-license
35. Kamal Video and Photography
36. Victorian Nails
37. Zigzag Hair
38. Unknown – Resi? (Formerly 3 Horses Pub)
39. J9 Accommodation
40. Sicilian Pizza – Takeaway
41. Unknown – Resi?
42. Infinity
43. Eastern Styles – Vacant?
44. Vacant
45. Vacant (Resi above)
46. Darlaston Accidents
47. Vacant (Resi above)
48. Vacant
49. Vacant
50. New Rainbow Fish Bar – Takeaway
51. Golden Garden Chinese – Takeaway
52. Darlaston Library
53. William Hill
54. Lloyds TSB Bank
55. ASDA
56. Accord Housing Association
57. Darlaston Carpets
58. Tattoo Parlour
59. Vacant (Formerly Pedal Power – Cycle Shop)
60. St Lawrence Church
61. Wendy Hair Salon
62. Flower Care – Florists
63. Sidney Webb & Son Ltd – Funeral Directors
64. Kiran's Classic Asian Cuisine
65. Vacant
66. L&S Middleton Fish and Chips – Takeaway
67. Vacant
68. West Midlands Media



Building Use Plan within District Centre

TOWN CENTRE

Whilst the boundary of the district centre is cast quite wide the primary retail area is focused along King Street and the southern part of Church Street, anchored by the large ASDA store. Of the 70 commercial units, 22 of these are vacant, 10 are café, pub, restaurant use, 4 are A2 type uses (financial and professional services) and 7 are in community use (Library, town hall, St Lawrence's Church, gym, post office, police station and Sure Start).

Whatever way people arrive to the town, everyone becomes a pedestrian. Pedestrian footfall and passing trade is very important from a retail perspective. Strong pedestrian circuits linking arrival points with key attractions (high street, main shops etc) through active frontages and quality routes are very important to the success of retail centres. In this respect Darlaston performs very poorly. The retail circuit is based upon arriving to an ASDA store (largely by car) and leaving or maybe walking onto King Street and backtracking. The lack of shops and vacancies on King Street does little to entice shoppers to remain for any time.

Pedestrianised in the 70s King Street is predominantly one sided with the majority of units being on the eastside. The west side now provides little activity or enclosure due to demolitions and the presence of ASDA's surface carpark and dead elevation. This weakens the attractiveness and strength of the high street.

In terms of access the street is accessible by foot from the supermarket carpark (west), Walsall Road (south), Church Street (north) and through two alley ways from the rear of the Town Hall and Crescent Road (east).

The condition of the pedestrianised route is reasonable made up of redbrick paver borders with concrete city paving insets, finished at either end by granite setts. However the route is broken up by obstructive brick constructions that contain litter bins and lamp posts. Furthermore the route is evidently underused and footfall is way below the necessary amount to sustain the number of current retail units. This is mainly down

to the orientation of the ASDA store that turns its blank side onto King Street creating a route between the carpark and the supermarket that does not involve a linked trip to King Street.

In terms of arrival by bus the bus stop is directly linked to the ASDA store, physically disconnected from the core town centre a negative factor compounded by the lack of visibility of King Street which is hidden behind a single storey retaining wall for the supermarket carpark. Alighting from the bus, you are faced by a stair and ramp that delivers you into the vast supermarket car park, yet again bypassing King Street.

At the northern tip of King Street, at the corner of Church Street are three well restored Victorian shops, however two of which currently sit vacant and are the result of low footfall and demand. The building condition of the remainder of King Street is mixed with several poor quality recent additions in between poorly maintained Victorian buildings.

The Pinfold Street area does not trade well. At present there are many vacancies and the building condition is very poor with some appearing to be on the edge of dereliction. As a first impression of Darlaston these shops detract from the town's image and potential as a thriving shopping centre. It suffers from disconnection from the high street (King Street) and any positive pedestrian circuit by a busy road (linking Wolverhampton to Walsall), the environmental impact of the road and lack of pavement space to accommodate pedestrians. Unattractive and damaged fenced edges along the road limits pedestrian movement and creates yet another barrier to accessing these shops.

In terms of public realm and district centre identity and 'branding' there appears to be an inconsistent use of street furniture with multiple styles present which gives a cluttered and confused streetscape

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Pre-school children are well served by the new Sure Start children's centre on Crescent Road, in a beautifully restored and extended historic building re-opened in 2007. There are also two nursery schools. Pre-school provision is based in:

- Darlaston Sure Start Children's Centre, Crescent Road
- Rowley View Nursery School, Dangerfield Lane
- Catherine's Cross Day Nursery, Pinfold Street

There are five primary schools across the study area, three on the west side of the former rail route and two on the east. It is thought that demand for places is strong. They are:

- Rough Hay Primary Primary School, Rough Hay Road
- St. Josephs Catholic Primary School, Rough Hay Road
- Pinfold Street Junior and Infant School, Pinfold Street
- Salisbury Street Primary School, Salisbury Street
- Kings Hill Primary School, Old Park Road

There are two secondary schools serving the catchment, one within the study area, and a catholic secondary school in adjacent Willenhall:

- Darlaston Community Science College, Herberts Park Road, due for closure and replacement by a new City Academy with an intake of 245 pupils from September 2009
- St. Thomas More Catholic School, Darlaston Lane

There is no Further or Higher Education presence in Darlaston, a deficiency that is of concern to local businesses, according to consultations with the Chamber of Commerce. Walsall College serves the area from its town centre campus.

Darlaston Library opened in 1987 and is due to be refurbished. It provides a centrally located service convenient for both parking and public transport, and opens until 6pm every night except weekends.

A One Stop Shop offering advice on jobs and training opened on King Street in 2008.

Civic Buildings

1. Town Hall
2. Darlaston Library
3. Police Station
4. The Leys Hall
5. Wednesbury Community Library

Sport and Leisure Facilities

1. Darlaston Leisure Centre (Swimming Pool)
2. Wednesbury Leisure Centre
3. Willenhall Leisure Centre
4. Spring Fitness Centre

Healthcare

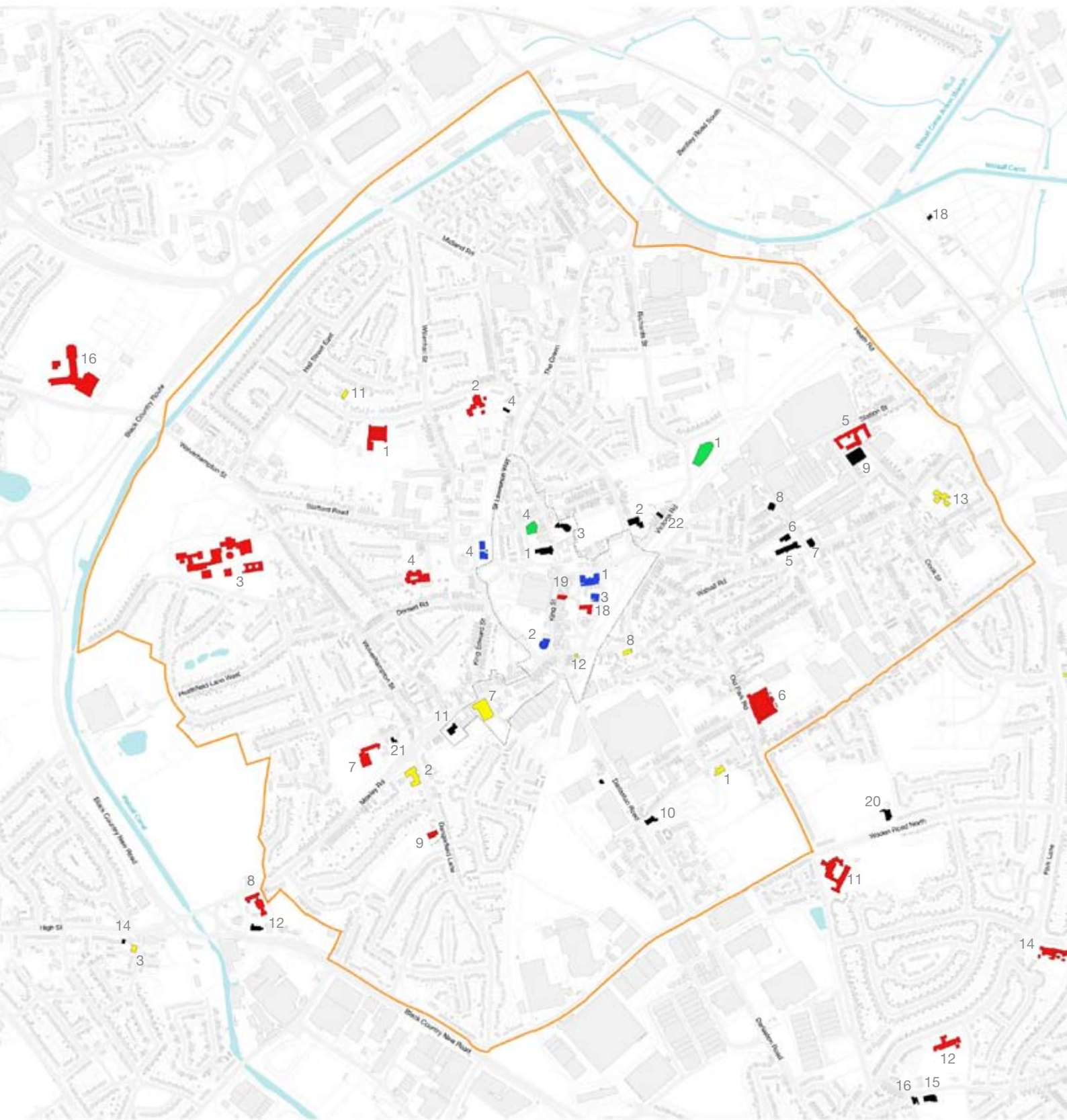
1. Kings Hill Day Hospital
2. The Willows Nursing Home
3. Moxley Medical Centre
4. Dovedale Court Nursing Home
5. Bartholemew Lodge Care Home
6. Surgery – Park Home
7. Darlaston Health Care
8. Darlaston Medical Centre
9. Surgery – Church Street
11. Rough Hay Surgery
12. Bhandal Dental Surgery
13. Fallings Heath House – Nursing Home
14. Camberford Court Residential Home

Education and Childcare

1. Rough Hay Primary School
2. St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School
3. Darlaston Community School
4. Old Church of England Primary School
5. Salisbury Primary School
6. Kings Hill Primary School
7. Pinfold Street Junior Mixed and Infant School
8. Moxley Nursey and Infant School
9. Rowley View Nursery School
10. Holyhead Primary School
11. Old Park Primary School
12. St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
13. Albert Pritchard Infant School
14. Wood Green Junior School
15. Moorcroft Wood Primary School
16. St. Thomas More RC School
17. The Wonder Years Day Nursery
18. Darlaston Surestart
19. Darlaston Jobs, Education and Training Agency (JET)

Religious and Community

1. St. Lawrence's Church
2. Darlaston Methodist Church
3. St. Joseph's RC Church
4. Blackall Pentecostal Church
5. All Saints Church
6. Youth Centre – Whitton St.
7. Mosque – Bull St.
8. Mosque
9. Hindu Samaj Mandal
10. St. Andrew's Church
11. Youth Centre – St. John's Rd.
12. All Saints Church
13. Neighbourhood Office – People's Centre
14. Moxley Methodist Church
15. St. Mary's RC Church
16. St. Mary's Catholic Church
17. St. Bartholemew's Church
18. Chapel – Cemetery Road
19. Wesley Community Centre
20. Wednesbury Youth Centre
21. Darlaston National Spiritualist Church



Community Facilities Plan

Legend

- Civic Buildings
- Sport and Leisure Facilities
- Health Care
- Education and Childcare
- Religious and Community Facilities



Darlaston Youth Centre, Bills Street



Darlaston Post Office, Victoria Road

YOUTH FACILITIES

Valuable youth work is provided by the council through dedicated outreach workers. They visit young people in schools and places where they congregate after hours, such as parks and playgrounds, and run various engagement activities to boost self-esteem and confidence.

The voluntary sector provide further positive activities for young people, such as the 4th Darlaston Scout Group from its historic base on Victoria Road.

A skateboard park has been installed in George Rose Park, and is well used. There are a number of playgrounds across the area, discussed in more detail in the green space analysis below.

There is also Darlaston Youth Centre on Bill Street. This is a valuable local facility but is seen as too distant for young people from the west of the area to access with confidence, even when transport is provided. Consultation revealed a strong perception that youth provision remains limited.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Darlaston is fortunate in having retained its fine town centre Post Office and Police Station buildings in their original form and function. There is also a sub-post office at Rough Hey.

Darlaston Swimming Baths replaced a fine 1930s building with a widely praised piece of contemporary architecture by Hodder Associates, opened in 2000. It is very well used by local schools, and may be something of a victim of its own success – anecdotal evidence during consultations with local people shows some residents feel hours of access are too restricted.

Closure and demolition of the Multi Purpose Centre opposite the Baths has deprived the town of a high profile base for community activities, without replacement.

Anecdotal evidence from residents and voluntary/outreach workers suggested absence of a shared community building at the centre of town is a constraint on service delivery by the voluntary/community sector.

Darlaston Town Hall, the former base for the town's Urban District Council, now enjoys a brighter future after a £1/2m refurbishment brought it back into public use after a period of closure in 2006. It now hosts various public and partnership meetings and events. It is believed there is capacity for more active use of the building.

There are several community meeting spaces beyond the town centre. Leys Hall has recently been refurbished and is managed by Old Hall Peoples Group to provide a function room with stage accommodating up to 150 people; various activities are run from the hall for different age groups. Walsall Housing Group provide a community house on Rough Hey Road, which acts as a base and advice centre for local community, tenants and residents associations.



Zia-e-Madinah Mosque, Walsall Road



Surgery, Rough Hay Road

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Darlaston is well provided with places of worship for followers of a variety of world religions.

For Christians, there are active church congregations at a number of churches, including:

- St. Lawrence Parish Church, Church Street
- Darlaston Methodist Church, Slater Street
- Darlaston Spiritualist Church, Pinfold Street
- Salvation Army, The Leys

There are several mosques for followers of the Islamic faith:

- Masjid-e-Umar, Muslim Welfare Society, Bills Street
- Zia-e-Madinah Mosque, Pakistani Muslim Welfare Society, Walsall Road
- Masjid Mohammadia, Darlaston Muslim Educational Trust, Cobden Street
- Bangladeshi Islamic Society, Cook Street

Darlaston has a Hindu Temple at:

- Hindu Samaj Mandal, Salisbury Street

There is also a Sikh Temple in Darlaston at:

- Shri Guru Ravidass Temple, Pinfold Street

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE HOMES

The NHS has various facilities in Darlaston, including:

- Darlaston Health Centre, Pinfold Street
- GP Surgery, 67 Church Street
- GP Surgery, Walsall Road
- Kings Hill Day Hospital

Care homes for elderly residents are provided at:

- The Bush, Bush Street
- The Orchard, Station Street
- Pinfold House (Accord), Pinfold Street

URBAN FORM & TOWNSCAPE



Town Centre, ASDA store sits next to King Street

The plan to the left shows a figure ground plan, this shades up the buildings in black. The resultant pattern indicates the nature of streets and spaces that make up Darlaston.

The Victorian urban form that makes up many British towns is largely formed by a grid-iron character. This creates an ordered style of continuous, enclosed and well connected streets and spaces. Darlaston as a whole is not characterized by this style. Such areas still remain to the east of the town centre, but the most notable character now is the lack of any distinct pattern.

Many different types of buildings and layouts exist cheek by jowl (such as cul-de-sacs, industrial sheds, vacant land, garden suburbs and more modern layouts) and are largely disconnected and in places inward looking. The cumulative effect of this is to create quite a discordant and fragmented character which is difficult to understand and enjoy. The effects this has on the image of Darlaston and attracting people into the town as a shopper, visitor and future resident is of significance and must inform any place-making strategy for Darlaston.



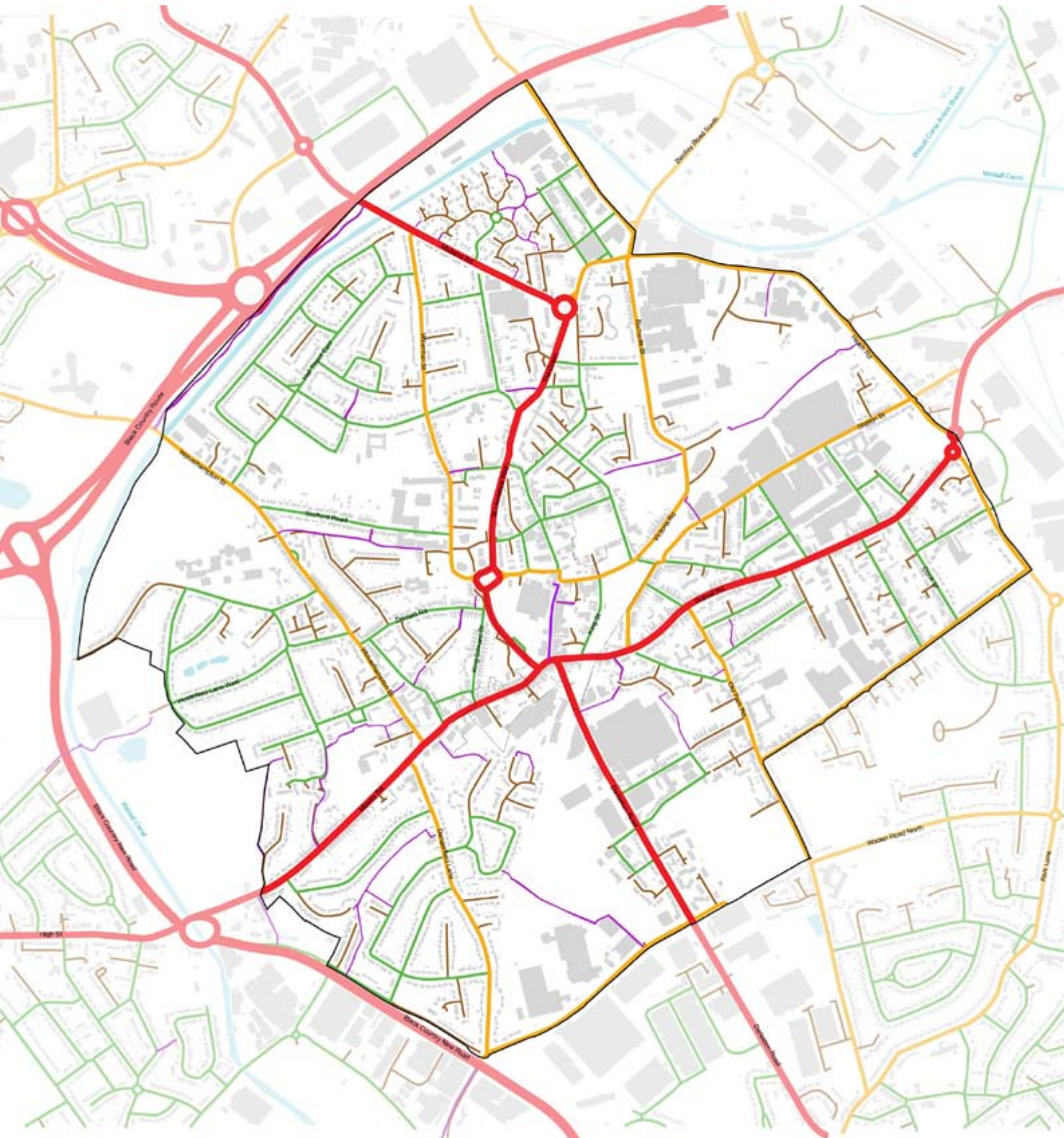
View down Franchise Street showing the proximity of industry to residential



STREET HIERARCHY

The definition of the townscape is in part dictated also by the streets and roads along which buildings are formed. In the case of Darlaston this has been the case from almost its origins, which can still be seen today in the form of the distinctive crossroads meeting at the bottom of King Street in the centre (shown in red). Unfortunately the well connected streets Darlaston once had are, in part disconnected which can be seen by the brown lines on the map opposite.

Since the major road building programmes of the 1970's and subsequent bypasses, there appear to be roads and infrastructure that are now mis-sized for their current useage. Roads such as St. Lawrence Way, Pinfold Street, Darlaston Road and Stafford Road suffer from this mismatch.



Street Hierarchy Plan

Legend

- Primary Roads - Main Traffic Routes
- Secondary Roads - Connecting Routes
- Tertiary Roads - Residential Streets
- Dead-End Roads - Terminating Route
- Pedestrianised Route and Rights of Way

CHARACTER AREAS

The Darlaston Strategic Regeneration Area (SRA) covers a large expanse of land, which we have broken down into key character areas to assist in the analysis and option development.



Character Area Plan

1. HEATH ROAD

The Heath Road area is located to the north of Darlaston just outside the regeneration area boundary. It comprises of the Owen Road Industrial Estate, Keyway Retail Park, Access 10 Business Park, and large industrial units around Willenhall Road and Heath Road. The area is self enclosed with little other land use giving it a distinct character. The Walsall Canal runs through the middle of the character area but the area surrounding has very little interaction with the waterway, with a large wall acting as a barrier along the canals banks. The area offers good transport links with the Black Country Route running through the area, as well as good access to the east of the area via Heath Road.



2. MIDLAND ROAD

The Midland Road character area lies between the Rough Hay and Heath Road character areas, but is isolated and clearly separate from both. The self enclosed area is largely residential. The northern area of the site is fairly low quality and suffers from some social issues, these problems decrease along The Green toward the town centre. There is a gated entrance to the residential estate along Midland Road specifically for emergency vehicles to gain access to the estate, representing the difficult access of the area.



3. ROUGH HAY

This area lies to the west of the town centre and has a distinct character. It combines Rough Hay East and West and includes Rough Hay JMI School. The residential area has a high proportion of rental and social housing stock and there is high unemployment in the area. The most deprived part is along Lowe Avenue, backing on to Walsall Canal to the west of the area.



4. TOWN CENTRE

This area comprises Darlaston District Centre and the immediate area surrounding. This includes mixed stock residential and some smaller industrial units. The area also includes Victoria Park and Darlaston Swimming Pool with the opportunity of green connections from the centre to other parts of Darlaston. The centre is currently dominated by the large ASDA store on the pedestrianised King Street.



5. STATION STREET

This character area comprises Salisbury and Kings Hill. This is a mixed area with industrial uses located adjacent to residential estates and Salisbury JMI School in the north of the area. In the south of the area is Kings Hill Park and Kings Hill JMI School. Salisbury/Kings Hill is an ethnic minority area with varied places of workshops in close proximity, including churches, mosques and a Hindu Mandir.



6. GEORGE ROSE PARK

The George Rose Park character area consists of the Woods Bank residential area, Darlaston Community School and George Rose Park. This is a more desirable housing area in Darlaston with higher a higher proportion of owner-occupied dwellings. The Black Country Route also borders the area running alongside Walsall Canal, separating it from industrial estates.



7. DARLASTON ROAD

This area is similar to the Heath Road character area. It comprises a number of industrial estates including PDH, Bescot, Woods Bank, and Kings Hill Park Industrial Estates. Darlaston Road and the Black Country Route offer good transport links. To the north of the area, bordering Kings Hill Park there is a more mixed area with residential and industrial land use.



GATEWAYS

We have identified six main gateways into Darlaston at present. They are reviewed below. The four main gateways are each end of the Darlaston section of the east-west A4038, and similarly on the north-south A462. A further two local gateways are identified, at Darlaston Lane/Wolverhampton Street, Willenhall Road/Bentley Road South.

MAIN GATEWAYS

- **1. A4038 Moxley Road 'western gateway'**
 - the environment here is very poor. There is little spatial enclosure in a townscape characterised by billboard hoardings, highways infrastructure and gap sites.
- **2. A4038 Walsall Road 'eastern gateway'**
 - Walsall Road has a good sense of scale and the two roundabouts are partially enclosed by mature trees and buildings, but this gateway still lacks definition and animation, with surrounding sites being dominated by surface car parking and inactive frontages.
- **3. A462 Midland Road 'northern gateway'**
 - the environment here has benefitted from extensive 'greening', and the gateway is more clearly announced by the Black Country Route road bridge, and Walsall canal corridor. The southerly side of Midland Road is lined with attractive inter-war period suburban houses and their gardens. Unfortunately the more recent new-build estate on the site of the old Rubery Owen factory faces away from the public realm, presenting a long blank wall that deadens the main street frontage. This is mitigated somewhat by a well managed green strip, but still reduces the sense of activity.
- **4. A462 Darlaston Road 'southern gateway'**
 - the approach from Wednesbury enters the Darlaston study area at the Sandwell and Walsall boundary on Woden Road. The environment here is marked by a change from industrial to residential use, but unfortunately the housing exhibits the tendency of some post-war designs to present a blank and inactive edge to the street. It is not until slightly further north of the initial threshold that more conventional suburban housing lines the approach, but there is only a short run on the west side before industrial sites reappear. Kings Hill Park is barely visible, and character buildings like the former pub currently lie empty.



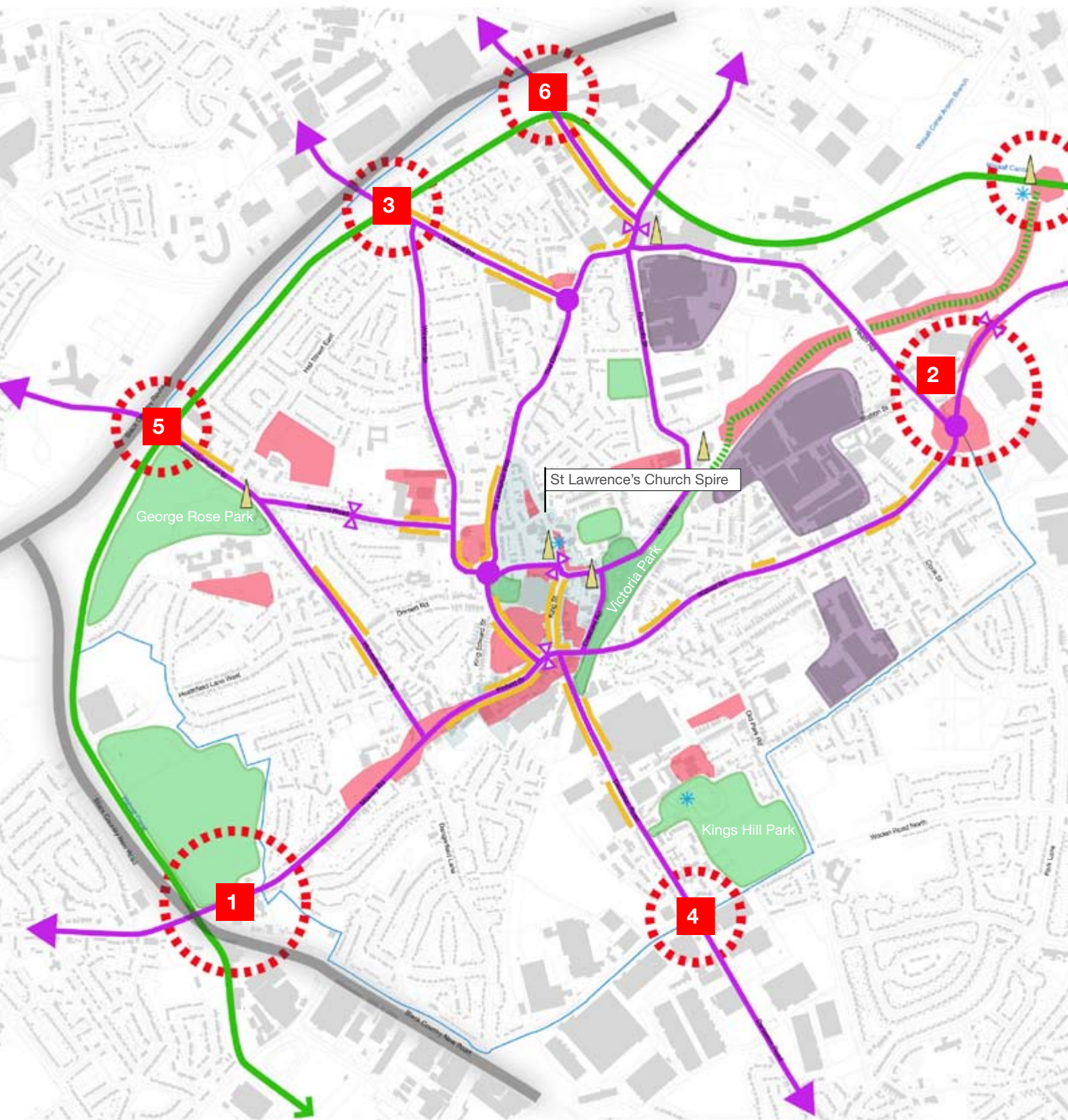
Welcome to Darlaston sign on Pinfold Street (1)

LOCAL GATEWAYS

- **5. Darlaston Lane – Wolverhampton Street**
 - this is perhaps the most appealing point of entry to Darlaston, the exit from the Black Country Route road bridge and canal corridor defined by the leafy view into George Road Park, then punctuated by its ornate 'landmark' gates. The service yard for cement mixers detracts from this leafy prospect but the shell-like mixing drums are at least unusual.
- **6. Willenhall Road – Bentley Road South**
 - the two roads approaching the Heath Road junction pass through an unreconstructed industrial townscape, whose robust qualities have been degraded by dereliction. The curved colonnaded brick façade of the old Charles Richards factory survives despite the roof being removed from the main factory building, a potentially important piece of industrial heritage. Regrettably the well proportioned 1930s canal side pub, 'the Boat', is a charred shell, providing a terrible first impression on this approach from the Marshland Way junction of the Black Country Route.

Darlaston Road (4)





Urban Analysis Plan

Legend

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|--|--------------------|
| | Landmark | | Heavy Industry |
| | Main Traffic Route | | Green Corridor |
| | Pinch Points | | Prominent Position |
| | Gateway entry and exit | | Barrier |
| | Tired/inactive frontage | | |
| | Area of opportunity | | |
| | Significant green space | | |

URBAN FORM

MAIN ROUTES

Like many towns, Darlaston is essentially built round a cross roads, at the 'bullstake' intersection of the east-west A4038 and the north-south A462. These through routes are many people's main experience of the town, and as such act as the 'shop window' defining outsiders' perceptions and expressing local civic pride.

At present neither route fulfils this shop window role in an especially positive or memorable way, leaving Darlaston as 'just another' piece of an often repetitive post-industrial landscape.

The sections of each key through route are reviewed in sequence below.

■ A462 – (North-south)

Midland Road- As reviewed in the 'gateways' section above, Midland Road is quite 'leafy' in aspect, with the south side offering a good impression along the run of well-kept semi-detached houses. Regrettably this is not mirrored by the north side, where development has turned its back on the main public thoroughfare, a negative impression mitigated only partially by the attractive street trees and wildflower verge.

The Green- A vestige of the old 'Darlaston Green' village character remains along this section of the corridor, with some traditional small shops and terraces overlooking a green lined with mature trees. However, this section's most prominent feature, the large roundabout junction, lacks definition or enclosure by a clear built form, eroding townscape quality.

Blockall Close- The route widens at this point, and it appears by the ample roadside verge area and 'Radburn' (back-to-front) configuration of the adjacent 1970s housing around Foster Street that a dual carriageway was once envisaged here.

St. Lawrence Way- Towards the New Street roundabout junction the configuration is similar to Blockall Close, with development set well back and screened from the road, and frontages turned away. The effect is a 'placeless' section of route lacking in interest and activity.

At the large roundabout and to the south the character changes as elements of the town centre come into view east of the route – the spire of St. Lawrence's church, ASDA, the Great Croft Street bus lay-by and the Library. The well-proportioned terraces on the west side of the roundabout offer some further definition; however, there is no active frontage whatsoever along the building line for most of the section, which is abutted by a blank retaining wall and the cleared site of the Wesley's Fold tower blocks.

Darlaston Road – After the Bullstake junction (described below in the section on the A4038 east-west route) the A462 heads south along Darlaston Road. As noted in the 'gateways' section, character alternates between industrial and residential and back, with contemporary industrial sites dominating. The largest of these, the former Servis factory, is no longer in use despite its modern appearance.

Two of Darlaston's public parks actually border the road, Victoria Park and Kings Hill Park, but their visual presence is minimal, offering little to the experience of the route.

■ A4038 – (East-west)

Moxley Road – As noted in the section on 'gateways' above, the first section of Moxley Road from the A41/A444 roundabout is heavily degraded. It passes the south end of the old Moxley tip, edged by gap sites and billboard hoardings, and dominated by the heavily engineered highways corridor. The canal passes beneath unannounced and unnoticed.



Midland Road (3)

Moxley Road improves as it passes Sandwell and Festival Avenues, with well constructed suburban terraced townhouses and semis lining both sides of the street for a quarter of a mile, giving a good sense of visual continuity and enclosure.

These qualities are diluted as Moxley Road widens into a short and apparently superfluous section of dual carriageway and featureless landscape buffer strips either side of the staggered Dangerfield Lane/ Wolverhampton Street junction, another key intersection lacking definition by adjacent built form.

Pinfold Street - A more comfortable sense of scale returns as the road narrows again east of Mill Street, but the building line is disrupted by gap sites and large footprint buildings. The small sign welcoming visitors to Darlaston town centre appears isolated and ironic.

Traditional street form and rhythm survives at the east end of Pinfold Street, but only in a row of shops that appears underused and in places derelict. This dereliction on a key route is all the more negative for being in some of the town's oldest remaining character buildings, particularly the Three Horseshoes former public house.

Walsall Road - Walsall Road starts by the site of the 'Bullstake', which still gives its name to the cross roads traditionally at the heart of Darlaston town life. Although dominated by traffic lights, road markings and railings, just enough of the historic building massing and street form remains to give a sense of the junction's enduring importance as the town's movement fulcrum. The former (Trustee Savings?) Bank is a building of real quality, and King Street frames views to the spire of St. Lawrence's Church.

Beyond the bullstake, the road has an attractive Victorian/Edwardian suburban quality past Crescent Road and Victoria Park. The minor road junctions round Avenue Road, Gordon Street and Bull Street are well defined, with a handful of local landmark buildings with well detailed decorative shop/pub frontages.

Around Bill Street and Salisbury Street the corridor has an urbane quality, with distinctive church and mosque buildings adding some sense of place, and a higher density of development enhancing pedestrian activity. Some blank frontages and set-backs break up the building line, and boundary treatments and general public realm quality is mixed at best, but overall street form remains intact up until the Park Lane roundabout.



Willenhall Road (6)



Walsall Road (2)

HOUSING AREAS:

There is a broad distinction between the character of housing east and west of the old King Street/Church Street spine.

■ Pre WW1

Most of the town's remaining historic (i.e. pre WW1) housing stock is found east of this spine. This is in large part because the west side of the town centre was subject to substantial clearance and redevelopment during the 1960s and 70s. The housing alongside Victoria Park and to the east is a coherent area of 19th century style housing in a variety of styles and sizes. Pockets of intact pre 1919 housing can also be found west of Victoria Park in places like King Edward Street and Booth Street.

■ Interwar - Garden suburbs

Darlaston saw major expansion in the inter-war and post WWII years. Much of this was built by the local authority in of the classic 'garden suburb' planning and architectural style. These are low density estates of semi-detached houses built of traditional materials, mostly with quite generous garden space and some with street greening in the form of trees and verges. Rough Hey and Dangerfield Lane typify these layouts. A characteristic local feature are the boundary walls, constructed of grey reconstituted stone made from industrial by-products. These are distinctive but look grey and when under-maintained can detract from the street scene.

There are also streets of privately built inter war style suburbia, though strictly speaking some probably date from the years immediately after WWII as demonstrated by names like 'Victory Avenue'.

■ Post war- 1960s and 70s developments

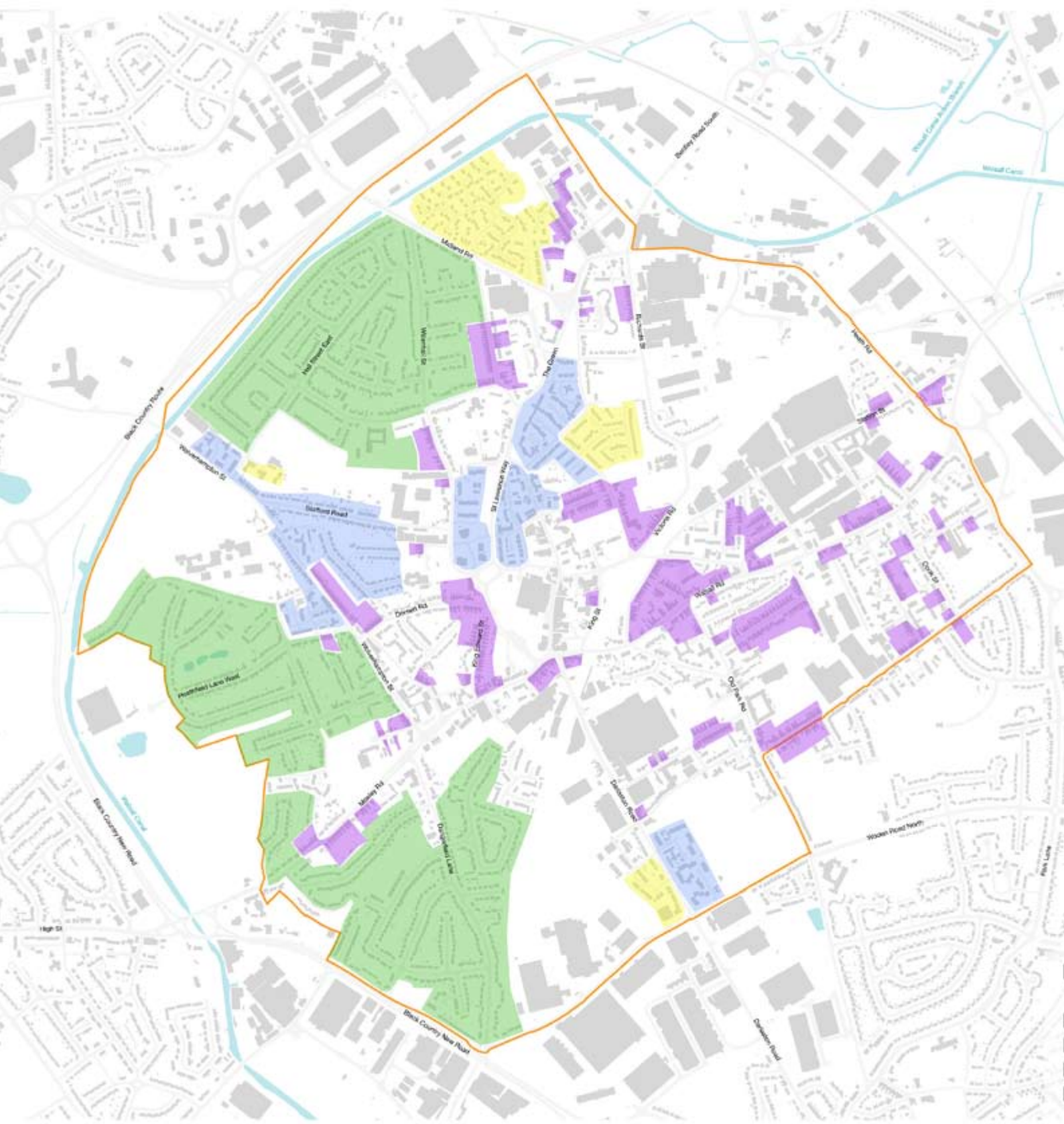
The west side of the town centre and its context was subjected to comprehensive clearance and redevelopment in the 1960s and 70s. Housing character of the time is typically short terraces and low rise flatted blocks in 'Radburn' style layouts. The tall high rise towers built then have already been demolished in the early 21st century.

Resulting townscapes are inward looking and tend not to offer significant interest or animation to main roads, deliberately facing more local pedestrian thoroughfares.

■ Post Industrial infill

Since the sudden contraction of manufacturing in the early 1980s, new housing has been built on former industrial sites. Much of this even more 'introspective' in layout than the Radburn models. Development of the old Rubery Owen site consists of housing facing into short cul-de-sac streets in developments surrounded by brick walls. The entire estate has just one single points of vehicular entry from surrounding streets. In places such as Midland Road this predominance of inactive street frontages has proved unhelpful to wider public realm quality.

More recent development improves on this model in accordance with revised national and local planning guidance that came into force from the 1990s onwards, elevating the importance of design and streetscape. Some of the latest housing developments in and around the area are making an active contribution to street character and vitality by offering their active front elevations to the public realm, instead of blank back and side walls.



Housing Stock Plan

Legend

- Pre WW1
- Inter War - Garden Suburbs
- Post War - 1960/70s
- Post Industrial Infill

EMPLOYMENT AREAS:

To assist understanding of their impacts on overall townscape quality we have grouped the numerous employment sites into two key sections, the northern and southern arcs mentioned in the land-use section above.

- The northern arc is made up mainly of older premises on rail and canalside industrial sites. Although the environment within this area is heavily degraded in places, it does not have a highly negative impact on wider amenity as it is largely screened from key routes and residential areas, with the exception of Richards Street and Station Street.
- Where the historic industrial premises remain intact, there is some heritage value to the factory townscapes, even where in dilapidated condition. The Richards and GKN complexes are probably the best examples, with the buildings on Salisbury Street particularly fine.
- The southern arc has more modern units in better overall condition, but, because it straddles the busy A462 main southern road route and gateway, actually has a stronger impact on visual amenity.
- This area is undergoing major restructuring of land-use from employment to residential, presenting an opportunity to reconsider future character.

CENTRES:

Town Centre - Historically Darlaston enjoyed a well defined town centre, with clear focal points like the Bullstake and Church Street. The town centre's character has been badly compromised by the clearance of King Street's western edge and the dead supermarket frontage that dominates almost half the traditional high street. The qualities of a central place have not been obliterated completely though, with the civic area round the Town Hall and Victoria Park exuding appeal, and the large supermarket maintaining the town's position in the retail hierarchy.

As detailed above in the section on gateways and approach routes, the sense of arrival is weak, the edges of the centre having long been cleared of most character streets and buildings on the key east-west and north-south corridors.

SMALL LOCAL CENTRES

We would expect a town of around 20,000 to contain several clearly defined local centres in addition to the main town/district centre. There are some small convenience stores and other facilities like pubs and a post office in Rough Hey, Wolverhampton Street, Darlaston Green and Walsall Road, with individual stores scattered around the neighbourhoods, but they are modest in terms of anchoring distinct local identities across the area.

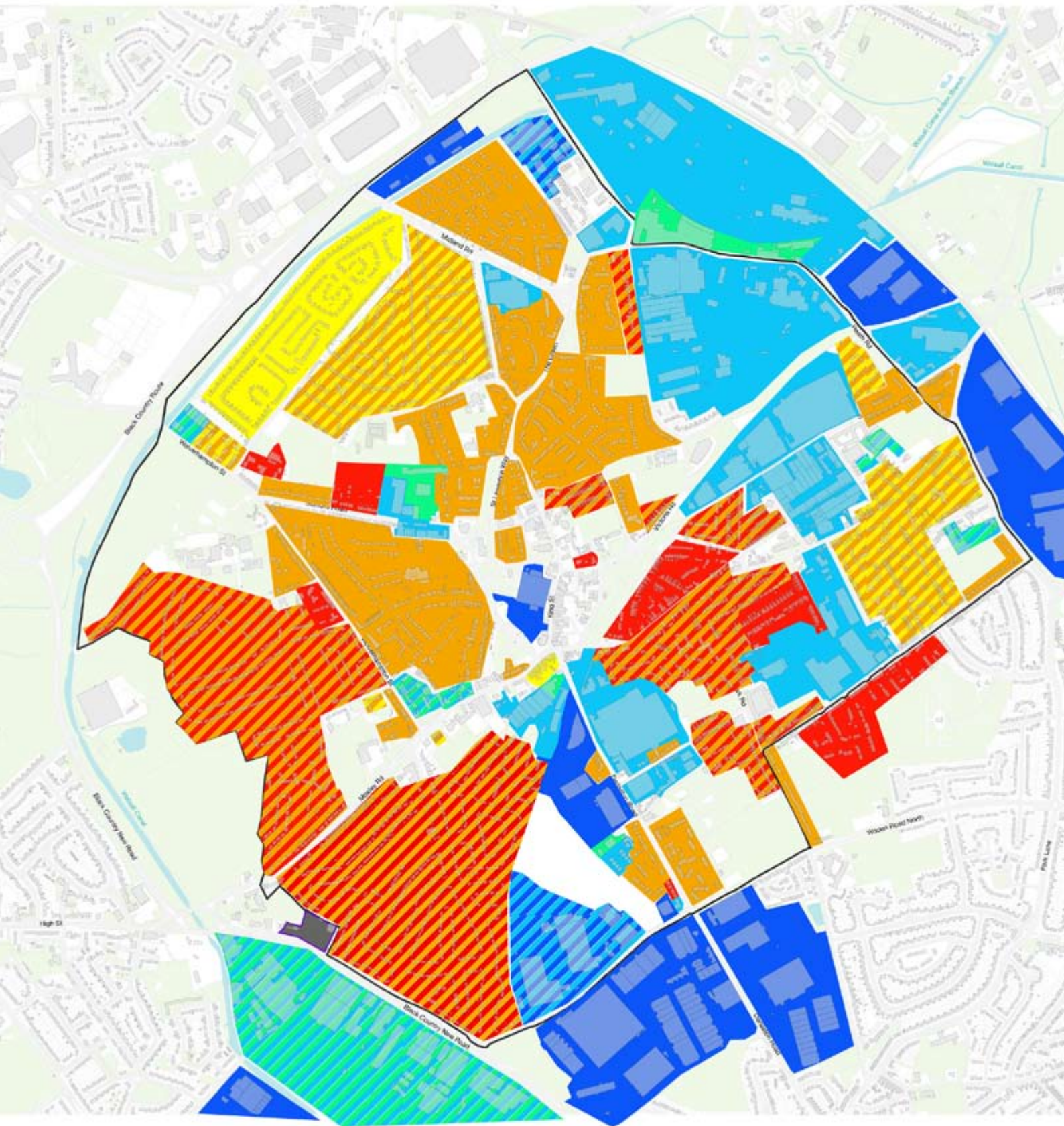
In consultation with residents the suggested reasons for this relative absence of strong local centres are the roles the old factory enterprises historically played as the focal point for community life. The factories had canteens, recreation grounds and social clubs as well as the work itself, and as such played the primary role in their communities.

With most now gone and replaced by often inward looking housing or smaller enterprises, the role of local focal points in anchoring community identity may need a rethink – shopping parades, schools and parks are likely to be important alternatives.

LANDMARKS

Overall Darlaston lacks memorable landmarks, with a handful of important exceptions. They are:

- St. Lawrence's Church – the tall stone spire is visible from some distance (including the balcony of the Walsall Gallery) and along key approach routes, as well as from various points within the town centre and neighbourhoods. There is a distinct axis along Stafford Road between the spire and the ornate gates to George Rose Park.
 - ASDA and Darlaston Library – Highly visible from the key through routes, the supermarket and library form the most prominent markers of the town centre next to the church.
 - Zia-e-Madinah Mosque on Walsall Road – the minarets of the Mosque are a memorable landmark feature.
 - St. Barts and St. Mary's churches Wednesbury – These 'twin spires' are almost adjacent to each other on a steep hill side, forming a clear marker of the neighbouring town south across the Sandwell boundary. They can be seen from points like the ASDA car park.
 - Factory sites – Black Country residents who know the area by the works that once occupied various sites still refer to them in navigating the town.
-



Building Condition Plan

Legend

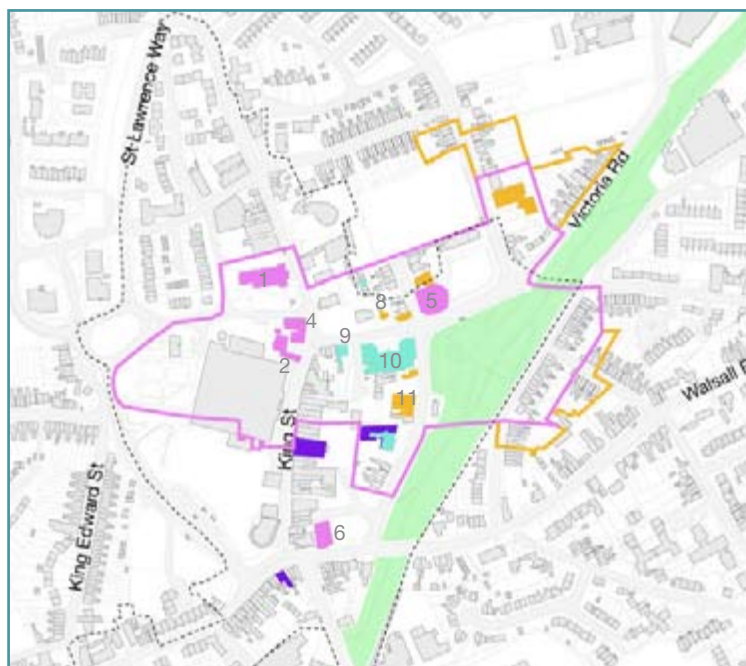
Employment Areas

- Good
- Good/Fair - Mixed
- Fair
- Fair/Poor - Mixed
- Poor

Residential Areas

- Good
- Good/Fair - Mixed
- Fair
- Fair/Poor - Mixed
- Poor

HERITAGE ASSETS & VALUE



Heritage and Assets within District Centre. From top left and down: Accord Offices, King Street, War Memorial, Victoria St., St. Lawrence Church, Church St, Pardoes Cottage, Victoria St., Town Hall, Victoria St.



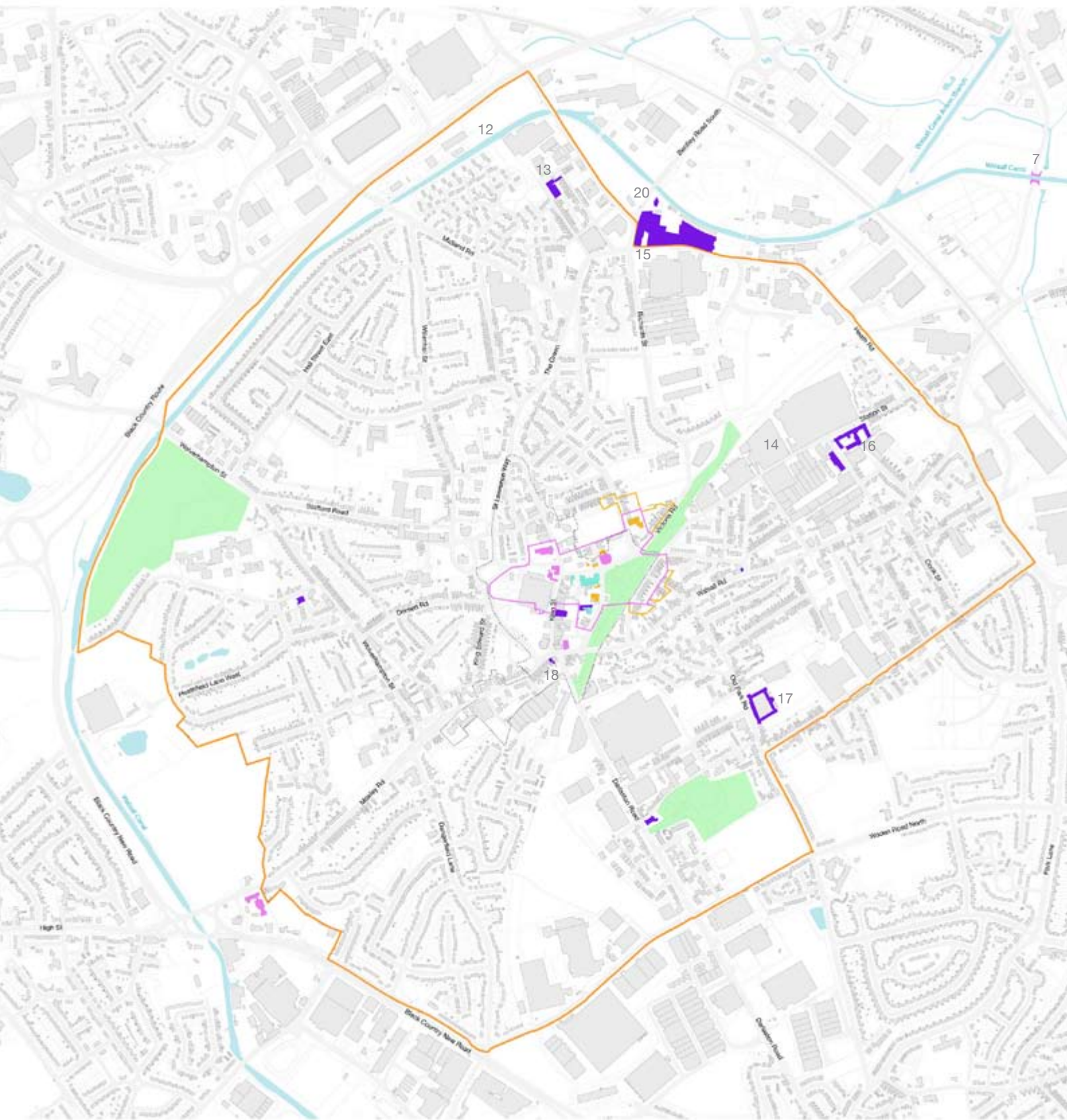
Alongside the Conservation Area Appraisal detailed below, Walsall Council have recently undertaken an initiative called the 'Darlaston Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme', aimed at restoration of historic buildings and open spaces.

Beneficiaries of this and other heritage related investment to date include shops in the conservation area, the War Memorial and the Town Hall, which was saved from falling into disuse. Victoria Park has also been improved.

Darlaston Conservation Area was designated by Walsall Council in 1977. The area covers 6.5 hectares of the historic town centre. Walsall Council have recently undertaken a conservation area and management plan (February 2007) - the below is extracted from this document, available online at: http://www.walsall.gov.uk/darlaston_conservation_area_appraisal-2.pdf

The special interest of Darlaston Conservation Area lies in its buildings but also in its streetscape. The buildings in the Conservation Area are almost all Victorian, and display a great variety of architectural styles. However, these large Victorian buildings sit within a much older medieval village street plan, and this gives Darlaston its intimate, tight-knit feel.

There are seven listed buildings / structures within the Conservation Area, all Grade II listed, and four buildings on the Local List, held by Walsall Council. However, the qualities and characteristics of the Victorian streetscape and Medieval street layout as a whole are also of particular note. This should be considered when assessing the potential impact of any proposed changes or new development.



Heritage and Assets Plan

1. Church of St. Lawrence
2. 35 King Street
3. White Lion Public House
4. 1 – 3 Church Street
5. War Memorial, Victoria Road
6. Former Bank building, Walsall Road
7. James Bridge Aquaduct
8. Columbarian, rear of Rectory Avenue
9. Swan Public House, Victoria Road
10. Darlaston Town Hall, Victoria Road

11. Darlaston Police Station, Crescent Road
12. Walsall Canal
13. Former Rubery Owen offices, Booth Street
14. Former GKN complex, Salisbury Street offices (poor)
15. Former Charles Richards factory, Heath Road (derelict)
16. Salisbury Street School
17. Kings Hill School
18. Three Horseshoes Pub, Pinfold Street (derelict)
19. Three Crowns Pub, Darlaston Road (former pub)
20. The Boat, Bentley Road South (derelict)

Legend

- Existing Conservation Area
- Statutory Listed Buildings
- Locally Listed Buildings
- Proposed Listed Buildings
- Proposed Conservation Area Extension
- Buildings of Interest
- Green Space of Heritage Value



James Bride Aquaduct - Bentley Mill Way



Charles Richards Building - Heath Road

Some of the fundamental townscape characteristics of the historic centre of Darlaston have been seriously damaged by clearance of traditional buildings and the introduction of new developments of an inappropriate scale and form, particularly along King Street.

It is important to highlight these developments to ensure that any future proposals within the Conservation area are more sympathetic to the historic townscape, and do not overpower the intimate qualities of the Conservation Area.

Four key negative factors are identified in this Appraisal:

- The loss of significant areas of heritage buildings
- New developments that do not respect the heritage townscape
- The poor standard of maintenance
- Inappropriate poor quality shop-fronts and signage that detract from the heritage buildings.

LISTED BUILDINGS

We believe all the statutorily listed buildings within the Darlaston study area are located within the town centre conservation area, with the exception of the former bank building on Walsall Road.

LISTED BUILDINGS (ALL AT GRADE II)

- Church of St. Lawrence
- 35 King Street
- White Lion Public House
- 1 – 3 Church Street
- War Memorial, Victoria Road
- Former Bank building, Walsall Road

Similarly, we believe all the buildings on the council's local list are also situated within the conservation area.

LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

- Columbarian, rear of Rectory Avenue
- Swan Public House, Victoria Road
- Darlaston Town Hall, Victoria Road
- Darlaston Police Station, Crescent Road

OTHER ITEMS OF HISTORIC/ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST

There are buildings and heritage assets of interest beyond those designated above.

Foremost amongst these is the Walsall Canal, which played an important part in Black Country history.

Other buildings of interest include former industrial offices and workshops. The management block of Rubery Owen survives in good condition and in use as a centre for small businesses, although the main factory has gone. Both the offices and factory buildings of the former GKN works survive intact, but the former is in poor condition. Reduced to a mere shell, the curved wall of the Charles Richards factory remains another imposing reminder of Darlaston's industrial heritage.

The neighbourhoods contain some good quality public and commercial buildings – the board schools at Salisbury Street, Rough Hay, Kings Hill and Pinfold Street are held in great local affection, and the loss of others such as Slater Street in recent years is regrettable in terms of townscape character. The new swimming baths are an admirable addition to Darlaston's legacy of civic buildings, and may well be 'heritage of the future'.

The variety of places of worship is a distinctive feature of Darlaston, with the Walsall Road and Salisbury Street Mosques and Hindu temples providing clearly recognisable landmarks.



Rubery Owen Building - Innovation Centre, Booth Street



Building - Salisbury Street

There are also several pubs and retail blocks that contribute to Darlaston's character – at present several are empty and at real risk of demolition.

Incremental loss of such locally liked heritage buildings has proved very damaging to Darlaston's sense of identity and pride over time – each may in itself be relatively modest, but collectively help make or break the sense of place.

Other key elements of historic/architectural interest include:

- Walsall Canal
- Former Rubery Owen offices, Booth Street
- Former GKN complex, Station Street workshops and Salisbury Street offices (offices in poor repair)
- Former Charles Richards factory, Heath Road (derelict)
- Salisbury Street School
- Kings Hill School
- Rough Hay School
- Pinfold Street School
- Darlaston Swimming Pool
- Mosques and Hindu Temples on Walsall Road and Salisbury Street
- Three Horseshoes Pub and neighbouring block of shops, Pinfold Street (derelict)
- Three Crowns Pub, Darlaston Road (former pub)
- The Boat, Bentley Road South (derelict)



Police Station, Crescent Road



Post Office, Victoria Road



King's Hill Primary School - Old Park Road



Victorian Shops, Church Street

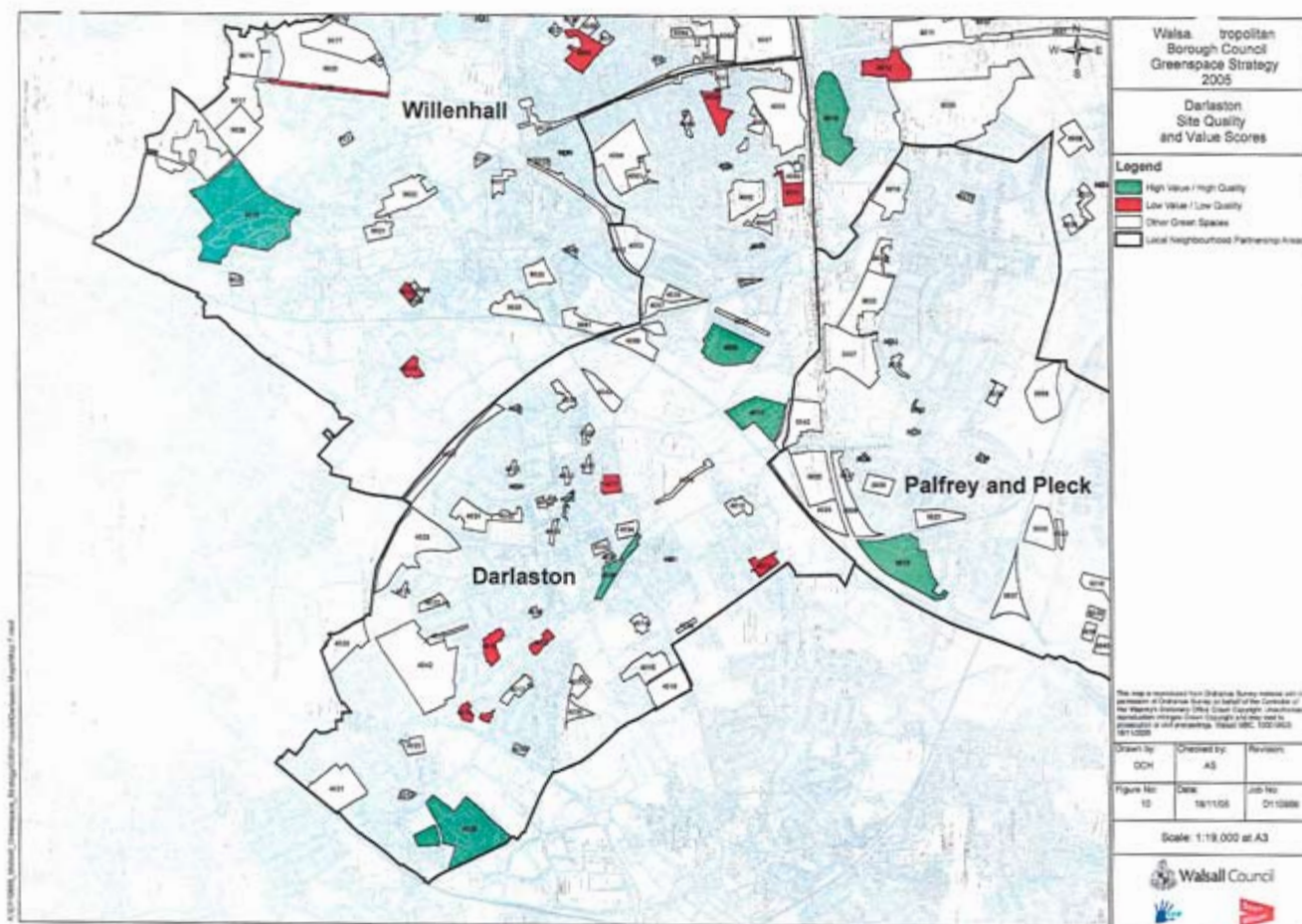


Former Three Horse Shoes Pub - Pinfold Street



Building - Corner of Bull Street

GREENSPACE



Site Quality and Value Scores

Walsall Council carried out a detailed Audit and Assessment Report in February 2006 to support preparation of its Green Space Strategy. This formed the key evidence base for the Borough's Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

The Walsall Green Space Strategy Audit looked at the Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) area of Darlaston. It is important to note that the LNP area differs from the SRF study area in that it also includes Bentley and Moxley.

The audit assessed quantity, quality, accessibility and value of green spaces in the area. The main points are summarised below, with additional commentary on the three main spaces based on site visits and consultations carried out for the SRF.

TYPE, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION

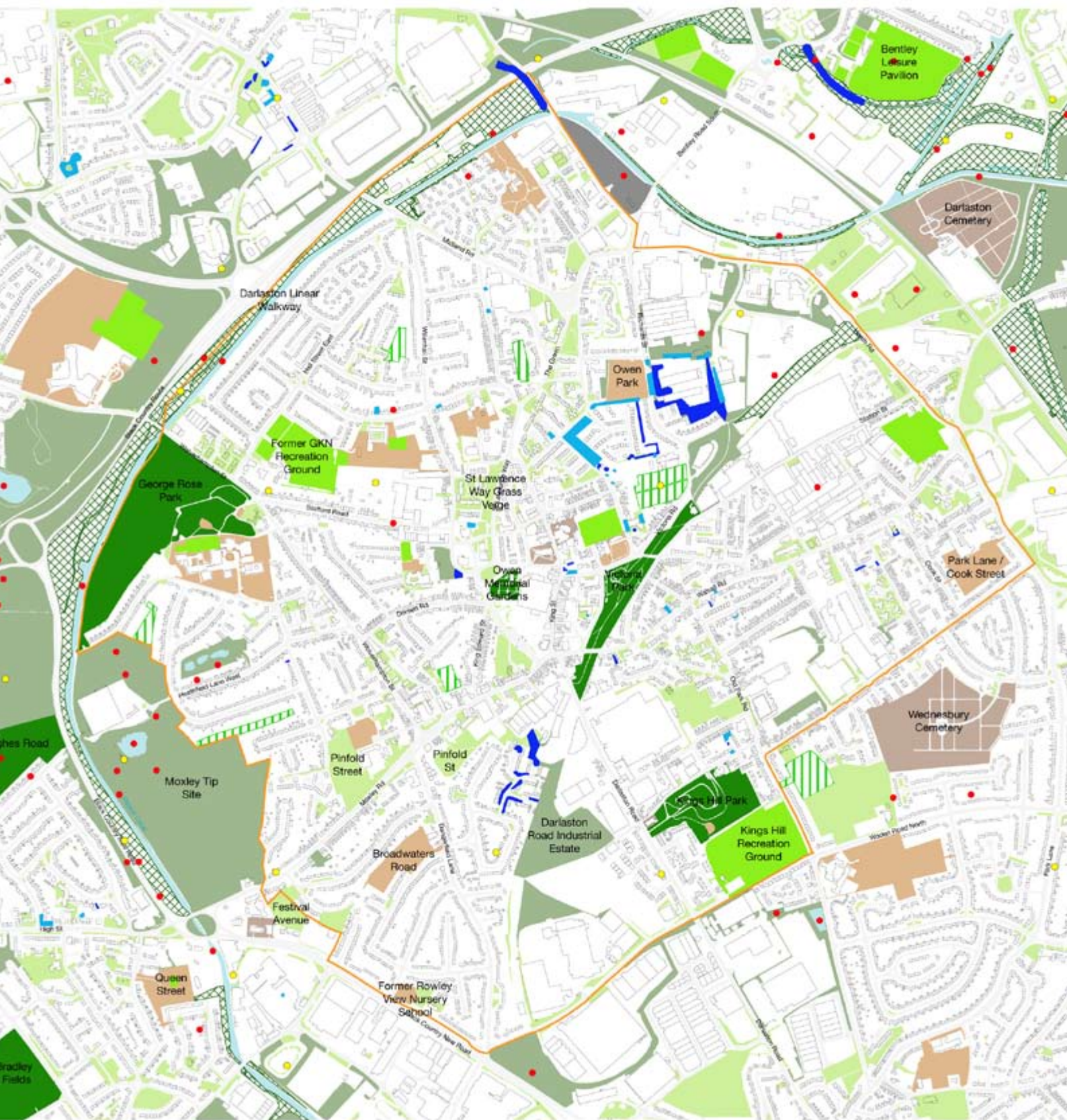
Altogether the Audit identifies 67 green space areas within the Darlaston LNP, 42 of which are classed as 'unrestricted' sites – i.e. there is full public access at all times. Unrestricted green spaces cover 13.1% of the LNP area.

Parks and Gardens are the 'highest' identified open space type - Darlaston LNP has the greatest number of spaces thus designated of the LNPs in the borough, with a total of 5 recognised by the audit. This is in comparison to Willenhall and Paddock LNPs that only have one area of green space of this classification.

These are the most significant open spaces in the LNP;













- George Rose Park
- Lower Bradley Playing Fields (outside SRF study area)
- Hughes Road (outside SRF study area)
- Kings Hill Park
- Victoria Park

All in the SRF have neighbourhood level significance (serving an immediate community).



Open Spaces Plan

Legend

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
|  | Parks and Gardens |  | Allotments |
|  | Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space |  | Cemeteries and Churchyards |
|  | Green Corridor |  | Derelict Land |
|  | Outdoor Sports Facilities |  | Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) |
|  | Amenity Green Space |  | Protected and Notable Species |
|  | Provision for Children and Young People |  | Problem Species |

QUALITY OF OPEN SPACE

High Quality/Low Value	High Quality/ High Value
Bentley Cemetery Bentley Recreation Ground Berkeley Close Broadwaters Road <i>Kings Hill Park</i> <i>Queens Street</i>	<i>Bentley Leisure Pavilion</i> <i>Darlaston Cemetery</i> <i>Moorcroft Wood LNR</i> <i>Victoria Park</i>
Low Quality/Low Value	Low Quality/ High Value
<i>Festival Avenue</i> <i>Owen Park</i> <i>Park Lane/Cook Street</i> <i>Pinfold St</i> <i>Pinfold Street</i> Poplar Avenue Wilkes Avenue	Anson Road Play Area <i>George Rose Park</i> <i>Hughes Road</i> <i>Lower Bradley Playing Fields</i> Poplar Avenue/Bentley Lane

Green spaces falling within or in close proximity to the framework boundary are highlighted in italics.

Key messages regarding quantity of open space from the audit are:

- The Darlaston LNP area has the lowest overall quantity of green space of all the LNPs, with 146.44 hectares
- Per head of population, Darlaston ranks 8th out of the 9 LNP areas for quantity of green space.
- There are 3.94 hectares of green space (both restricted and unrestricted) per 1,000 population; this is significantly less than the borough average of 4.98.
- The picture is slightly better for 'Darlaston South', which aligns more closely with the SRF area, where there are 4.12 hectares of unrestricted green space per 1,000.
- Green space is scattered throughout the LNP, creating a lack of continuity in open space connections.
- A positive result of this distribution is that there are no major areas without access to unrestricted green space within the LNP area.
- So, despite the fairly low amount of unrestricted green space, Darlaston has very good access to these spaces in comparison to other LNP areas in the borough, with less than 5% of households with no access to accessible green space compared to 45% in Pheasey and Paddock.
- There are no green spaces within the LNP which exceed 20 hectares in size. Nearly one third of all green spaces are smaller than 2 hectares.
- The largest and most significant in terms of size within the framework boundary is George Rose Park at 9.85 hectares.
- Natural and Semi-natural Green Space accounts for just over a quarter of green space in the area. Together with Parks and Gardens, this accounts for nearly two thirds of unrestricted green space per 1000 population. Outdoor Sports Facilities combined with Parks and Gardens make up one third of provision.
- Darlaston also has the greatest number of areas for the Provision of Children and Young People with 10 sites covering 10.72 hectares, and the lowest proportion of households without access to children's play provision.
- The audit does not recognise Owen Memorial Gardens as a green space. Owen Park is also classed under Provision for Children and Young People and given a low quality/low value status. The number of Parks and Gardens in Darlaston could therefore change dependent on classifications.
- Despite these high scores the household survey (of 83 people) in Darlaston found that 63% of respondents indicated a large deficiency in green space of all types.



George Rose Park



The Canal

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

As well as quantity, the Audit also assessed the quality of 22 sites within Darlaston LNP. Quality was assessed in accordance with the Green Flag Award criteria <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/award/key-criteria/> (see the table above).

- Darlaston scored 34, slightly less than the borough average of 35.
- The audit found that there is almost double the amount of sites rated as low quality/low value than high quality/high value. This number is also high in comparison to the rest of the borough.
- The low quality/low value sites were all either Amenity Green Space or Provision for Children and Young People and all had local level significance.
- 57.8% of respondents from the household survey were dissatisfied with the quality of green spaces in the area.

It should be noted that significant improvements have been made in response to the report since it was produced 3 years ago, especially in terms of provision of play areas and recreation grounds, and an active youth outreach programme.

We have visited each of the main open space areas within the SRF area and consulted with residents, elected members, Friends Group participants, the Darlaston Community Association and Walsall Council open space and youth outreach officers.

The following summarises our analysis of the main spaces,

- George Rose Park and the Proposed Academy:
- Kings Hill Park
- Former GKN Recreation Ground
- Victoria Park and the Walsall Canal 'green corridors'

GEORGE ROSE PARK AND THE PROPOSED ACADEMY

This early 20th century municipal park has an open aspect to the Walsall Canal, with a more densely wooded section lying between the ornate entrance on Wolverhampton Street and the secondary school. A good quality children's playground and skate-park have been installed in recent years, with funds thought to be in the region of £150k, and are well used. The playing fields are used by local sports teams, dog walkers and so on. The former park keeper's house and storage has been refurbished for use as an office for council staff.

The proposal to develop a new Darlaston Academy on the park will mean loss of a quantity of accessible recreation space in George Road Park. There is a commitment to mitigate this by investment in the remainder of the space, and by making available the facilities of the new school for community use.

Loss of part of the green space for the flagship Darlaston Academy was raised as a concern at the roundtable workshop and drop-in consultations. This view was tempered by broad acknowledgement that educational provision is in need of major investment to improve attainment and skills.

The decision on the location of Darlaston Academy within George Rose park is a priority council policy. URBED's input to the SRF is looking at issues in the round, and must remain neutral on this issue. At this stage there is still flexibility as the application goes through the planning process, and the council have welcomed our team's thoughts on principles they should use to assess potential regeneration impacts.

From URBED's baseline work and consultations to date we believe this part of Darlaston contains a cluster of public assets with important contributions to make to future regeneration.



Kings Hill Park



Owen Memorial Garden

This contribution will be better if the assets work together to create a critical mass equal or greater to the sum of their constituent parts. The assets include:

- Darlaston School/Proposed Academy
- George Rose Park, including playing fields, playground, mature trees and landscape, ornamental gates, park keepers house/storage.
- Walsall Canal; recreation and wildlife corridor, potential for more development and leisure.
- Former GKN recreation ground – high quality but underused infrastructure.
- Local housing and primary schools.
- Visibility from Black Country Route

We believe Wolverhampton Road and Canal can act as a 'front door'/ gateway to Darlaston.

The school/academy and park are potentially high profile 'landmark' assets adjoining the road and canal corridors.

It is vital therefore that the school and park relate well, both to each other and the gateway.

We also believe it is positive for both the pupils and parkland that the space is accessible and welcoming to young people from the school, and to people of all ages.

In practical terms we believe this should mean:

- New academy buildings should provide enclosure, animation and overlooking to the park and canal.
- Pedestrian access for pupils, visitors and staff should be maintained and improved on the busy 'desire line' route across the park between the school and Hall Lane East, with a securable gate between the two opened in the mornings and afternoons.

- If the Academy goes ahead development of the park should be seen as a combined project.
- We observed pupils accessing Hall Lane East from the park and school in large numbers; pavement and crossing facilities should give pedestrians full priority at morning and afternoon arrival/leaving time.
- Boundary treatments should be secure without being 'hostile' – i.e. no palisade fencing or similar.
- The ornamental gates to George Road should be opened up during the day – keeping them locked sends a negative message about confidence in Darlaston's parks and people.

We believe the focus on youth associated with such a major investment in education can be complemented by revitalising assets like the park and recreation ground, in line with demographic need.

The idea of using the park keeper's house outbuildings for workshop type activities (e.g. cycle repair etc.) for young people at risk of disaffection and exclusion is a good one worthy of further exploration. The proposed 'adventure play' theme in the park, with skate ramps taking advantage of the banked topography further reinforces this theme. Balancing this youth focus could be facilities for other generations e.g. tea rooms for older residents.

The school/academy and park, canal and recreation ground could then become a 'Learning Landscape' in which different generations could meet.



Owen Park



Victoria Park

KINGS HILL PARK

The park was opened in 1904, taking advantage of the views afforded from the high mound, a well landscaped slag heap from an old pit shaft.

According to the council's youth outreach and park management officers, Kings Hill is used positively by many groups and individuals, with the example given of football games where Asian and white youths mix without racial tension.

Like many such spaces, the park used to have more facilities, including a paddling pool. As with George Rose and Victoria Parks, Walsall council have made efforts in recent years to reverse the decline in attractions, and a major investment has been made in quality new play facilities.

Friends of Darlaston Park South have a £250k business plan using Section 106 from the TIW site, to complement money already spent through NRF on the playground.

There was a common feeling during our site visits and consultations that Kings Hill Park and its surrounding recreational spaces were very hidden, not only from visitors but also for many of the residents of Darlaston. The gateways, with the exception to the one off Darlaston Road, are understated and poorly defined with low quality signage indicating what lies beyond.

We believe the secluded nature of Kings Hill Park has become overly dominant, making visitors feel somewhat isolated and insecure. Over-mature planting needs radically thinning down to open up views and reduce fear of crime. The meadow on top of the mound has lost the commanding vistas its elevated position should afford across the area due to the growth of thick vegetation.

The location of the mound on a line between the two historic church spires of 17th C St. Lawrence Darlaston and 13th C St. Bartholomew's Wednesbury is of interest. It may be possible to open up views from the top of the mound in ways that 'frame' the axis between. The mound would also make a good site for some kind of landmark art or lighting installation.

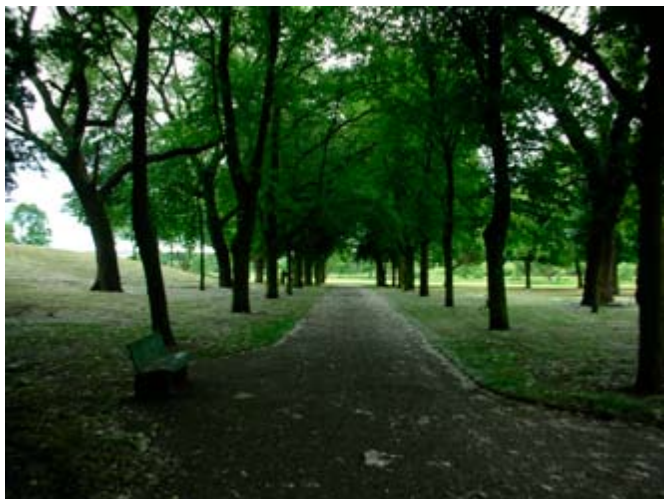
FORMER GKN RECREATION GROUND, HALL STREET

The former GKN recreation ground on Hall Street has superb sports and recreation facilities, including:

- fenced all-weather pitches,
- a large football/rugby pitch with covered spectator stands,
- floodlighting,
- two competition standard bowling greens,
- ample parking, and
- a large social club pavilion.

Although in council ownership, it remains almost dormant due to a lack of resources on the part of its managers, the Darlaston Community Association (DCA). The site is fenced round by steel palisade and the green space hedged off from view from Hall Street and Crawford Avenue. Constant breaches of this barrier mean vandalism of the facilities is a chronic problem, and there is an air of near dereliction despite the best efforts of DCA committee members to secure and repair the area.

It is clear that this underuse of public assets is untenable in an area deprived of accessible sports and recreation facilities. We believe meetings have taken place recently between the DCA and council officers in an attempt to bring the recreation ground back into wider use.



Within George Rose Park



Canal side near George Rose Park

VICTORIA PARK AND THE WALSALL CANAL 'GREEN CORRIDORS'

Our initial view is that the visual and physical barriers around the site, intended as part of its security, are in fact a major part of the problem. They mean the site is not overlooked and prevent residents from taking any sense of 'ownership', as they would if they were able to look out across the area and enjoy access to it. Exacerbating this, new development in 'The Avenue' and Stafford Road 'turns away' from the green space, representing a missed opportunity to offer more intensive natural surveillance.

We believe a radical review of the area's configuration may be required to protect and revitalise its core recreation functions. Removal of the hedge and palisade would allow the many homes and pedestrians along Hall Street and Crawford Avenue to see across the space and thereby 'police' it. A new development strip around the east and south sides, facing into the space, would mean active overlooking from four directions, with capital receipts ploughed back into renewing the facilities.

There is an opportunity to encourage more intensive use of the accessible but in places unwelcoming green corridors along Walsall Canal and Victoria Park as connections and greenways for communities in the area.

Victoria Park has enjoyed some investment near its Victoria Road entrance, where it provides a pleasant formal seating and recreation area, but there is still much scope to improve the landscaping along the former rail corridor, now a basic linear park and footpath.

Walsall Canal offers a direct traffic free pedestrian and cycle route from the edges of Darlaston back to the heart of Walsall town centre, where the Art Gallery and Urban Splash investments are transforming the waterside into a modern mixed use destination. By cycle the journey is only 10 – 15 minutes for someone in good health, about as quick as travelling by motor vehicle.

The experience is not always comfortable, as much of the corridor is not overlooked by development, and despite considerable greening and reclamation under the auspices of the old Black Country Development Corporation, boundaries remain those typical of an environmentally degraded post-industrial area.

BIODIVERSITY

Darlaston does not contain a significant amount of nature conservation value. Fingers of greenspace do penetrate into the town centre, albeit in some cases in a fragmented manner. The main area of biodiversity interest is the old Moxley tip site. This forms part of a significant area of open space at interface between Darlaston and Moxley. The site includes the Wards Pool and Walsall Canal. This is a proposed urban green space site in the development plan and a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (second tier SLINCS). The pool is a former clay pit which has filled with water over the years. Whilst the water quality contains few nutrients, it hosts a variety of plants and invertebrates. A further 3 Council owned pools (third tier SLINCS) are located north of Heathfield Road West. However these are not publicly accessible at present and are landlocked by housing. These could provide a much better recreational and amenity asset for the local neighbourhood.

The Canal is only a third tier SLINC, but this is largely due to the lack of detailed survey work. It hosts a diverse aquatic flora and invertebrate, is a continuous feature with notable ecological value along its length. It is designated as a wildlife corridor. The Council has an aspiration to link the linear walkway along the disused railway line with the canal.

The greenspace plan also identifies recorded instances of protected and notable species and problem species (such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed) and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).

CONSULTATION

A series of stakeholder consultation events have been held to obtain the views of those who have a great deal of knowledge of the area. A Roundtable workshop was held with key stake holders where they were asked to express their likes and dislikes of the area and what they would like the town to become like in 10-20 years. A public consultation was also held over 3 days where members of the community were asked what they liked and disliked about living in Darlaston, the improvements they would like to see and what they feel are the most important issues to them.

To summarise, the key issues were:

WALKABOUT AND ROUND TABLE WORKSHOP

- Poor gateways into Darlaston project a negative impression, such as Pinfold Street.
- Traffic congestion in the town centre detracts from shopping environment. In addition, bus corridors such as Stafford Road also suffer from excessive use.
- Unsafe routes and crossings for pedestrians and cyclists deter alternative modes of travel in a place that should be easily walkable.
- Hidden assets are not used to full potential, such as the Town Hall, the canal and Victoria Park.
- Green spaces suffer from misuse and poor connectivity to neighbourhoods.
- Dominance of ASDA store and lack of connection to King Street means the smaller shops are struggling to survive.
- The town centre is tired and lacks identity with several poorly defined spaces.
Serious lack of youth facilities.
- Leisure offer is also poor, especially since the loss of the multi-purpose centre.
- Public transport is in need of upgrades - particularly increased evening bus services and better designed bus stops and newer buses.
- Address worklessness through upskilling and training.
- Business rates considered to be too high
- Educational offer in need of improvements, in particular adult education and locally based resources.
- Metal base engineering industries need to innovate, adapt and create value in the local economy.
- A wider choice of shops on offer is needed in the town centre, as well as protecting those that remain now.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Likes:

- The major factor that people liked about Darlaston was the community spirit and friendliness of the population. The majority of people who attended the consultation all had friends and family that had lived in the area for generations.
- The primary schools in the area were also identified as a major positive to the area, as were the parks and green spaces, although it was noted that some were in need of some maintenance.

Dislikes:

- The antisocial behaviour of the youth in the area was highlighted as a problem. There are particular issues with the misuse of drugs and alcohol in the parks after dark.
- The lack of police presence in the area to combat the antisocial behaviour and number of burglaries in the area was a key issues felt across all of Darlaston.
- The lack of facilities in the area for all ages is seen as a major weakness.
- The lack of identity of the town and how the town has become 'second fiddle' to Walsall and other surrounding areas.
- The deterioration of the High Street. Although ASDA is identified as providing a good retail service to the area it has also caused the deterioration of the rest of King Street and the run down appearance of the town centre is regarded as a major issues for the area.
- The lack of variety of small shops and a regular market for the town centre was also a key negative point to Darlaston.

Priorities:

The top priorities that came out from the consultation echo the comments that have been raised throughout; an improvement to the safety of the area, more community facilities being wanted for all and an improvement to the shops and green space in the area. The top 5 priorities were;

- Cleaner and safer streets
- Further leisure and cultural facilities
- Better youth facilities
- Improved and better connected green space
- Improved community facilities



Roundtable consultation



Roundtable discussions



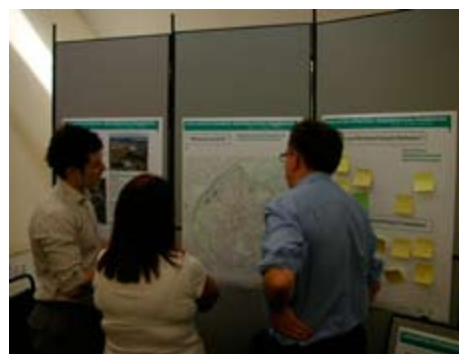
Mapped outcomes from Roundtable discussions



Feedback from the public consultation



Public consultation discussions



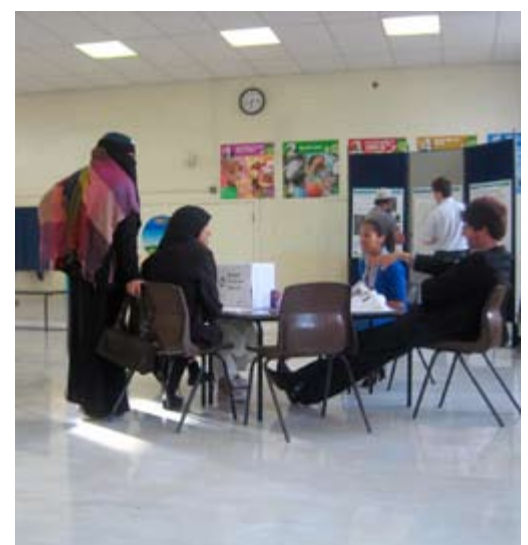
Public consultation at Rough Hay



Public consultation at Darlington Town Hall



Priority mapping



Public consultation at Salisbury Primary School

AREA ANALYSIS

This section reviews each of the Character Areas and their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities



1. HEATH ROAD

Description	The Heath Road area is located to the north of Darlaston just on the edge of the SRA. It comprises of large industrial units around Willenhall Road and Heath Road. The area is self enclosed with little other land use giving it a distinct character. The Walsall Canal runs through the middle of the character area. The area offers good transport links with the Black Country Route running through the area to the north, as well as good access to the M6 to the East.
Urban Form	Area has a coarse grain with stand alone buildings (shed like industrial and retail) in space with little active frontage and poor enclosure of streets and spaces. The canal, railway and former railway route have contained development onto distinct sites.
Socio-Economic	Key employers in area: ZF Lemforder and Kebrell Nuts and Bolts.
Property Market	Popular Retail stores IKEA and Tesco. Business north of Heath Road thriving and in expanding sectors, especially GP Batteries, EMR, Acerinox, Bradken. Vacant Wincanton site refused planning permission for housing.
Movement	Access from north of Heath Road and area to motorway constrained by poor condition of rail and canal bridges. Public transport is also poor.
Constraints	Intrusive highway infrastructure Poor connectivity Environmental impact of industry Large land-take of car auctions and salvage, low employment density
Opportunities	Reuse and restoration of heritage, such as Boat house pub and Charles Richards facade Reintroduce railway services to Walsall-Wolverhampton line: Explore scope for Tram/Rail/Rapid Transit interchange Improve quality of accessibility and movement along the canal as link to Walsall town centre Create extension of Victoria Park via linear park: review opportunities to create new development Need to modernise business environment

CONSULTATION

One participant thought Darlaston was now a neighbourhood living in a town's body.

Heavy trafficked and HGVs in the area

Need to improve connections to the town centre and public transport

The metal base engineering industries still remain, as they clearly have a competitive advantage. It is these businesses that can innovate, adapt and create value in the local economy. Upskilling is required to support this advanced manufacturing sector.



2. MIDLAND ROAD

Description	The Midland Road character area lies between the Rough Hay and Heath Road character areas, but is isolated and clearly separate from both. The self enclosed area is largely residential. The Walsall Canal runs to the north of the area.
Urban Form	Made up of mostly detached houses laid out in a random street pattern, this self enclosed community is inward looking and has no interaction with Midland Road. A gated entrance to the residential estate from Midland Road specifically for emergency vehicles to gain entry to the estate, represents the difficult access, as there is only one road in.
Socio-Economic	Comparatively low claimant rates and high economic activity. Least deprived area in SRF (IMD 2007)
Property Market	Private housing area
Movement	Cul-de-sac layout deters through movement Inward looking configuration 'deadens' north side of Midland Road gateway approach
Constraints	Canal corridor and open space poorly animated Layout limits scope for change Darlaston Greens character is undermined by surrounding development and environment
Opportunities	'Green Wall' treatment on Midland Road Help with energy saving/generation to home owners Possible reconfiguration of roundabout junction to give definition and enclosure to Darlaston Green Canal corridor improvements Enhance Innovation Works incubator space

CONSULTATION

Managed work space on Booth Street is under-utilised

Development at Darlaston Green stalled, blights area

Trees been lost at Darlaston Green



Good houses but room for environmental improvement

3. ROUGH HAY

Description	This predominantly residential area lies to the west of the town centre and has a distinct interwar residential character. It includes Rough Hay primary school, surgery a local centre of shops and Hall Street recreation ground. The residential area to the north, backs on to Walsall Canal.
Urban Form	Rough Hay consists mostly of semi-detached houses in a garden suburb style. The houses have benefited from decent homes but the amenity space and public realm (boundary treatments etc) is still poor affecting the image of the estate.
Socio-Economic	High levels of social exclusion Low level of economic activity Highest claimant count in the SRF Highest incapacity benefit rate In 5% most deprived area (IMD 2007)
Property Market	Social housing has been improved to decent homes, but the wider environment has not. The Keep Persimmon 52 Houses and 18 apartments currently being marketed and receiving kickstart funding from HACA.
Movement	Midland Road and Wolverhampton St carry significant volumes of traffic Residential streets have benefited from calming Bus routes penetrate the area Pavements are narrow, e.g. Hall St East Pedestrian volumes high at school times
Constraints	Canal is invisible from most of the area Few development sites Poor image Under utilised recreation ground. Lack of youth facilities
Opportunities	Darlaston Recreation Ground can be a flagship facility Restoration of garden suburb character through street greening and public realm enhancements, this could change perceptions Canal corridor



CONSULTATION

Good community spirit exists

The recreation ground on Hall Street was mentioned several times as a much needed youth attraction, despite this the facility remains dormant, overgrown and partly vandalised

"There is nothing for young people to do, so they cause mischief instead."

"There is nothing to do in the area, no walks or gym facilities."

"Not enough Police presence in the area by day or night."



St Lawrence Way

4. TOWN CENTRE

Description	This area comprises of the Darlaston District Centre and the immediate surrounding area. This includes mixed residential and some smaller industrial units.
Urban Form	The town centre is dominated by the ASDA store and its carpark, as well as the presence of St. Lawrence Way. Large areas of land have little built form upon them so urban form is weak. The town hall, police station, post office, Church Street shops and St. Lawrence's church are strong Victorian buildings that create a pleasant backdrop for the street, despite being hidden from view from entering from the east.
Socio-Economic	Less deprived areas in the SRF (IMD 2007)
Property Market	Low demand for retail space Housing on Crescent Road in need of investment There has been a trend in change of use from retail to other uses which do not always provide an active shopfront
Movement	Traffic by-passes King Street entirely Lack of linked trips from the ASDA Acute lack of footfall on King Street Poor east-west permeability for pedestrians Heavy traffic severance across Pinfold Street has killed shops
Constraints	Current format of ASDA store Absence of attractors other than supermarket Severely degraded conservation area character on King St Tired and small format retail units on east side of King St Heavily engineered traffic and parking infrastructure Lack of pedestrian circuits and poor gateways



Opportunities	Investment in ASDA as chance to integrate with King Street Redevelopment of former tower block site Possible reconfiguration around the Leys area New connections east and west linking retail core to Victoria Park and Station Street Future rapid transit and linear park green links Enhance Victoria Park as a central hub for people from all the communities of Darlaston. Potential expansion of town hall's role Redevelopment of Round cinema site Provide Walsall College with outreach service
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5. STATION STREET

Description	This character area comprises of Salisbury and Kings Hill. This is a mixed area with industrial uses located adjacent to residential estates and Salisbury JMI School in the north of the area. In the south of the area is Kings Hill Park and Kings Hill JMI School. Salisbury/Kings Hill is an ethnic minority area with varied places of workshops in close proximity, including churches, mosques and a Hindu Mandir.
Urban Form	Station Street has the most complex urban form and perhaps embodies Darlaston's urban form as a whole. Streets range from differing periods but on the whole are well connected and consist of well defined building lines some enhanced by mature trees. Stark contrasts can be seen where large gritty industrial buildings sit side by side to residential houses and community buildings. The former railway to the north and Park Lane to the east have restricted urban development.
Socio-Economic	Low levels of economic activity. Contains some of higher claimant counts in Bentley and Darlaston North Ward. Comparatively poor performance of 11 yr olds at Salisbury primary school. Contains area of 5% most deprived in England (IMD 2007) High percentage of population from ethnic background. (Asian/Asian British)
Property Market	Mixture of housing types and ownership (WHG and Accord)
Movement	Poor condition of roads in places and difficult HGV access. Poor pedestrian crossings near school. Poor bus services also.
Constraints	Perceived safety issues at Kings Hill Park Some conflict between residential and industrial uses Poor pedestrian environment Lack of support for SMEs
Opportunities	Remodel and open up and improve the park S106 funds Scope out opportunities for central conferencing and training space. Provide support for small businesses Improve highway+environment around Station St. Redevelopment of vacant sites Potential showcase bus route along Walsall Rd.

CONSULTATION

"Salisbury Primary School building is in a poor state and there are lots of leaks when it rains."

"A need for Walsall college to have a greater presence to allow the businesses in the area an opportunity to harness local talent via apprenticeships and also to ensure that further education is promoted to the younger generation."



6. GEORGE ROSE PARK

Description	The George Rose Park character area consists of the Woods Bank residential area, Darlaston Community School and George Rose Park. The Black Country Route also borders the area running alongside Walsall Canal to the West as well as separating it from industrial estates beyond.
Urban Form	Similar to Rough Hay this area consists mostly of semi-detached houses, but benefits from slightly less cul-de-sacs and a busier main street that carries through traffic and brings with it activity and life. George Rose Park is the most significant space in the area and creates a buffer between the black country route and the residential area.
Socio-Economic	Comparatively poor performance of GCSE attainment at Darlaston community science college. Falls within 10-15% of most deprived (IMD 2007)
Property Market	Interwar social housing (WHG) some Accord HA ownership and private housing. Land off Heathfield Lane West permission for 300 houses.
Movement	Stafford Rd onstreet parking can impact on bus and large vehicle movements. Potential bus showcase route along Moxley Rd. and Dangerfield Lane.
Constraints	Potential impact of loss of open space through Academy. Environmental impact of Black Country Route Under utilised open space around APUK site.
Opportunities	Darlaston Academy, educational and community benefits. Opportunity for new youth facilities in park and links to Hall St. recreation ground. Improve links to town centre.

CONSULTATION

"There are too many groups of youths with poor behaviour. George Rose Park is a haven for underage drinking and graffiti."

"Don't like the condition of the canal."

"The potential loss of open green space."

"The footpaths are badly in need of repair that at present they are dangerous"



7. DARLASTON ROAD

Description	This area is similar to the Heath Road character area. It comprises a number of industrial estates including PDH, Bescot, Woods Bank, and Kings Hill Park Industrial Estates. Darlaston Road and the Black Country Route offer good transport links. To the north of the area, bordering Kings Hill Park there is a more mixed area with residential and industrial land use.
Urban Form	Darlaston Road is lined by a mixture of empty offices, industrial units and differing types of housing. The general appearance is haphazard and creates an urban form that is neither one or the other. The significant presence of Kings Hill Park is accommodated behind the housing to the east but suffers from a lack of natural surveillance as well as hidden and underwhelming entrances. South of the area the urban form is much more distinct with self-contained modern and clean industrial/commercial sheds
Socio-Economic	Falls within area of 10-15% most deprived. (IMD 2007) High density of employment to east of Darlaston Rd. (A&R vehicle services and PAL adhesive products)
Property Market	Change of use from industrial and residential e.g. Satchwell Grange Bloor Homes scheme currently on site for 262 units and extant permission for 224 units on Servis site.
Movement	Potential bus showcase route along Darlaston Rd. Potential redesign of Darlaston Road
Constraints	Relocation of Huntley Nesbitt Evan from Woods bank Industrial estate. (loss of 150 employees)
Opportunities	Potential for further housing development. Improve approach and gateways to town centre along Walsall Road and Darlaston Rd. Create better linkages east-west to town centre.

CONSULTATION

A major problem is people move out of Darlaston when they are trained. The neighbourhood is not a location of choice.

NEXT STEPS

The baseline has highlighted the strategic issues facing Darlaston in terms of its spatial character, economic role and function, housing market, population and workforce, transport, town centre and community facilities. This has defined the challenges that Darlaston faces in restructuring its economy and place for a more sustainable future. The baseline has also explored the more local issues facing each of the neighbourhoods and town centre along with opportunities. Using this evidence base the consultancy team will now explore a series of options and the related spatial and economic implications. Once a preferred option is selected the regeneration strategy for Darlaston can be developed.

August 2009



July 2009