

## Section 5: Historic Character Area Profiles

### 5.1 THE CHARACTER AREA PROFILES

As we have seen in section 4.1, the Character Areas created here are intended to be a way of assisting the presentation and understanding of BCHLC data. They do this in the first instance by dividing the study area—the Black Country—into 51 areas, the landscape of each of which shares, in broad terms, something in common.

The profiles on the following pages look at each Character Area in turn. They are particularly intended to be a contribution towards understanding the **character** and **local distinctiveness** of the Black Country landscapes.

The BCHLC is a database of essentially fine-grained, ‘hard’ information—details of individual dates, types of land use, plot sizes etc.—all organised into pre-defined categories. The Character Area Profiles describe the landscape in a slightly different way. They use the BCHLC data, but organise it in an overview and within a less strictly defined set of ideas. These ideas are generally connected with the aim of being able to convey a sense of place, a written sketch of *what a place is like*. The Profiles make reference to some individual features (both present and past), but try to look at the broader patterns, the context for these features.

So why is this important? Ideas of character and local distinctiveness have a significance in the current national planning policy, both for the purpose of selecting sites and/or structures for conservation but also to inform the design of new development.

In the case of conservation, guidance on planning and the historic environment has asserted the value of the distinctiveness of wider landscapes, beyond the protection through designation of individual sites or buildings:

*‘The whole of the landscape, to varying degrees and in different ways, is an archaeological and historic artefact, the product of complex historic processes and past land-use... Much of its value lies in its complexity, regional diversity and local distinctiveness, qualities which a national register cannot adequately reflect.’ (PPG15, 1994)*

Similarly, on the question of new development, guidance often encourages the reinforcement of local distinctiveness, *‘features .... which contribute to its special character and sense of place’\**.

Before we can conserve or even pay attention to the local distinctiveness of an area, we need to be able to understand it. It is to this aim that these Profiles are directed.

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*\*By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice*, Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment, Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions, 2000.

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## Netherton Character Area (DY01)

### SUMMARY:

This is generally a residential part of modern Dudley, although also encompassing recreational and wooded areas, together with industry straddling the canal in its south. The eastern boundary of the area borders similar residential areas of Sandwell (the canal also continues into Old Hill Character Area SD04), while the western boundary is formed by the change to a more industrial area alongside the canals and dual-carriageway<sup>1</sup>.

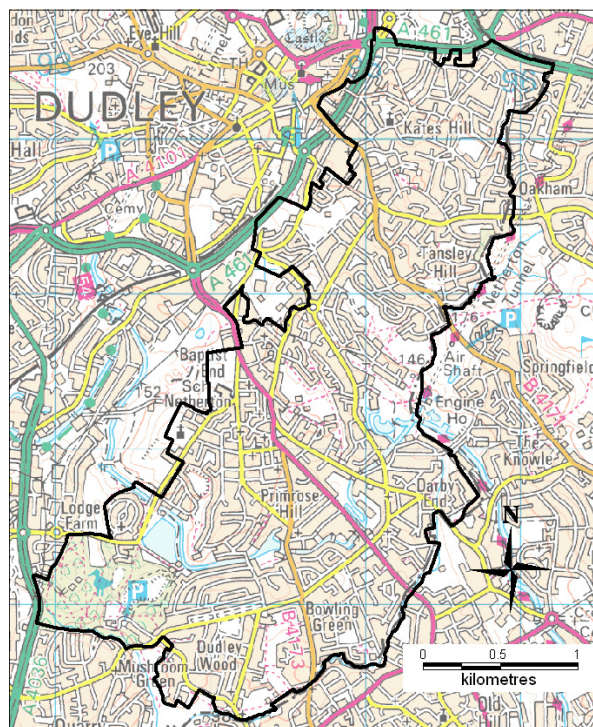
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate and, in general, over shallow coal. The high ground in its north-east is dolerite. From this point, which is at more than 200m elevation, the land falls by around 100m over the Character Area's length, reaching its low point at its southern limit.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

Despite being skirted in the north west by the dual carriageway of the Dudley Southern by-pass (1999), this area is largely made up of quieter residential streets, with the only A road through the area (Cinder Hill/Halesowen Road) running south-west from Dudley town centre - the route being one of the oldest through the area.

On the high ground in the north, the housing is in many cases a legacy of the southern expansion of Dudley and, in the north-west in particular mid-to-late Victorian terraces and villas survive. Much of the



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remainder of the north comprises large areas of inter-war semi-detached housing survive from the 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbanisation of Dudley.

In the south, housing is of perhaps more mixed origins, although it includes some large developments of semi-detached properties from the 1950s. The area's central band also includes significant post-war terraced housing dating from the 1960s and 70s.

Recreational & wooded areas include the playing fields of Netherton and Warren's Hall Parks, together with local nature reserves such as the large area of Saltwells Wood in the south west corner of the Character Area.

Netherton Arts Centre is typical of the Victorian townscape of the centre of the town. However large swathes of the surrounding area are typified by later, 20<sup>th</sup> century housing.

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area Profile DY09 Brierley Hill.  
Historic Landscape Characterisation of the Black Country, First Report

## HISTORIC CHARACTER<sup>2</sup>:

In the pre-industrial period the southern half of this area formed part of the large common of Pensnett Chase, while the northern section included the open fields which were part of the agricultural hinterland of the settlements of Netherton and Dudley (the latter being centred immediately to the north-west of the Character Area). Most of what is now the Character Area's boundary with Sandwell (i.e. its eastern edge) was also the line of Mousesweet Brook, a tributary of the River Stour running to the south.

Important changes took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Pensnett Chase was enclosed, and mining was known to have developed in several locations. This included the area which is now Saltwell's Nature Reserve (in the south-west corner of the area), for example.

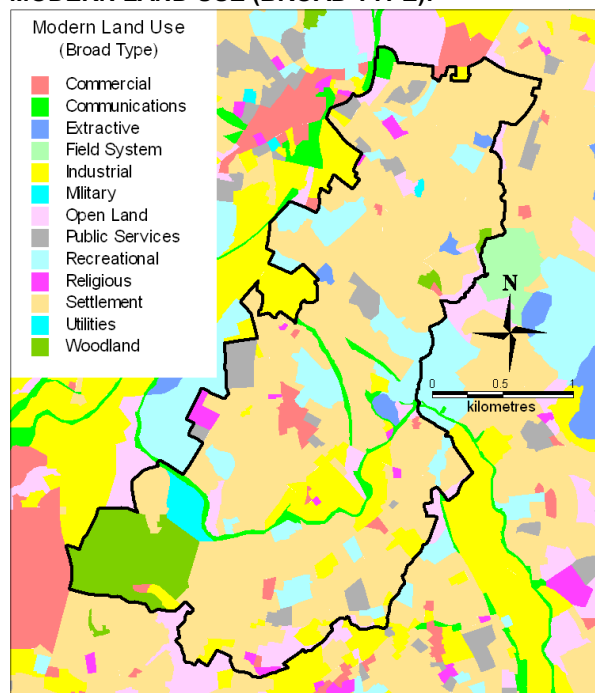
By the end of the 1830s, a canal was opened across the area linking the pre-existing canals between River Severn and north of the Black Country (in the west) and that already running to the centre of Birmingham (in the east). By this time, most of the area between the route of the canal in the south and the centre of Dudley in the north was dominated by areas of mining. Tramways were used to transport coal and other products to the new canal. Dudley and Netherton, among other local settlements, grew to service these extractive industries.

Later, further 19<sup>th</sup> century improvements in transport brought the railways in the form of the Great Western Railway Windmill End branch line, which crossed the area and linked it with the rest of the rail network at both Dudley and Old Hill. Another branch provided a goods station in the south-central part of the area, next to the then Netherton Works, producing chains and anchors (now the location of the Washington Centre). South of the canal, a network of private mineral railways also provided access to the main rail network in the west.

With the assistance of this infrastructure, the extractive industries and associated settlement grew and, by the time of the survey of the Ordnance Survey first edition in the 1880s, mining and mining towns had consumed all but small areas of the Character Area, forming the eastern part of a large area of mineral extraction covering the whole of the central part of what is now the modern Metropolitan Borough of Dudley.

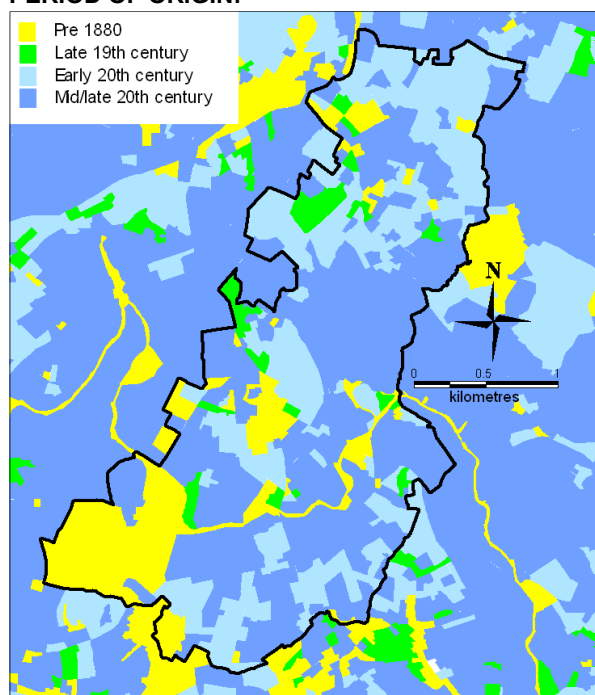
<sup>2</sup>This summary draws in part on maps researched and compiled by Dudley MBC Historic Environment Team - see <http://cmis.dudley.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=5447>.

## MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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## PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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However, the shrinkage of land used by mining towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> saw the beginning of the area's transformation. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the use of this land for new suburban streets, as well as the continuity of older areas of housing into newer forms, contributed to the slow change from mining to the predominantly residential character of the present, as described overleaf.



## Halesowen Character Area (DY02)

### SUMMARY:

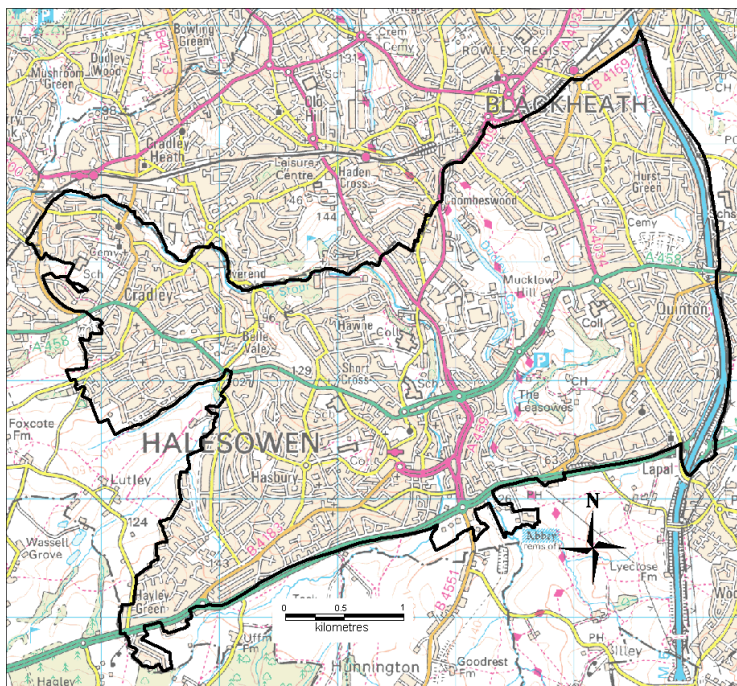
This is a large residential area incorporating the commercial centre of Halesowen. Also near the centre of the area is a significant area of industrial and recreational land, next to a section of the Dudley canal. The northern and eastern boundaries of the area border similar residential areas of Sandwell<sup>1</sup>, while the southern boundary marks the end of the Black Country conurbation, beyond which is a more agricultural landscape<sup>2</sup>.

### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate and, with the exception of a small area at Coombeswood in the north, is generally off the shallow coal measures. The River Stour rises south of the area and flows north through its centre, forming the area's northern boundary as it flows west. The higher ground is split by the Stour valley into an area in the west (reaching around 220m) and in the south-west (about 150m).

### MODERN CHARACTER:

For its large size, this area is an unusually modern landscape in Black Country terms - as much as three quarters of its area is mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century development. In this sense it represents the modern expansion of the metropolitan conurbation south into previously more rural landscapes.



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The commercial centre of Halesowen lies in the south central part of the area, served by the A458 (shown in green running east-west on the map above) and the A459 (in red, running north-south). The parish church is medieval and there are a few Georgian houses of interest, but much of the modern centre of the town dates from redevelopment in the 1960s.

With the exception of Victorian and Edwardian terraces on the older streets of Cradley and Blackheath in the north-west and north-east respectively, large parts of the remainder of the area can be characterised as 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban streets lined with post-war semi-detached properties.

North-west of Halesowen town centre lies a significant industrial district alongside the last navigable section of the Dudley canal.

Part of the east-west route of the A458.  
This view looks west towards Cradley.

<sup>1</sup>The canal also continues into Character Area SD04 Old Hill.

<sup>2</sup>See Character Area Profile DY03 Hayley Fields & Illey.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER<sup>2</sup>:

This area differs from many in the Black Country in that, owing largely to its geology, its landscape was not dominated by the effects of mining and quarrying in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, at a time when much of the central Black Country was transformed by burgeoning industrial towns and open-cast mining, its landscape was in general one of agriculture, small-scale settlement and industry (or at least industry which did not dominate the landscape in the same way as the open cast mining to the north). Despite this different historical background, the 20<sup>th</sup> century growth of housing around the Black Country saw the area's ultimate transformation to a suburban landscape with much in common with the rest of the conurbation.

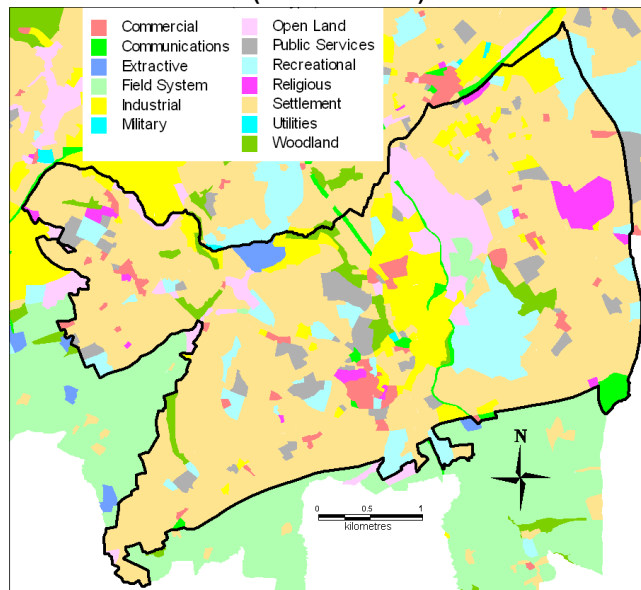
In the pre-industrial period the settlement at Halesowen was large in Black Country terms, having been an Anglo-Saxon settlement which was promoted by Halesowen Abbey in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The town was surrounded by open fields and meadows, and the latter lined the banks of streams which still flow north through the Character Area to the Stour valley. In the early industrial period these watercourses, including the Stour itself, provided power to a string of mills and forges, and these industrial sites contributed in particular to the development of the north-west corner of the Character Area, where the Stour exits the area and is at its strongest. This area, Cradley, is also the part of this Character Area which historically has seen the largest area of colliery land.

The canals arrived in the area in the 1790s, linking Coombeswood (in the northern central part of the area) with the rest of the Black Country, as well as Birmingham (to the east) via a 2 mile tunnel. The latter was closed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The railways were late to become established in the area, and Halesowen station opened in 1878 on a now closed line between Old Hill and Longbridge. The modern industrial district of Halesowen (in the centre of the Character Area), which is broadly situated between the line of the Stour and the Dudley Canal, occupies much of the former railway land.

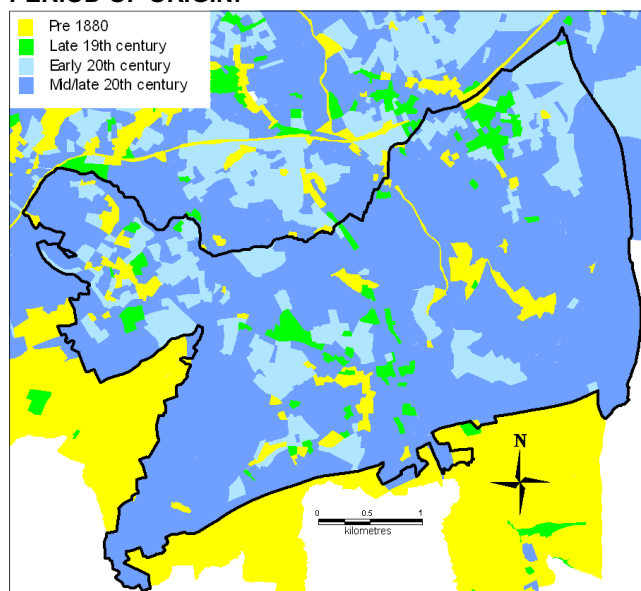
Older industrial landscapes, such as the large 19<sup>th</sup> century Coombeswood Tube Works (which existed to the north of the modern industrial district) left an area

## MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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## PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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of open land (shown in pink on the map of modern land use). However, since the HLC was recorded, this too has been the site of more modern industrial re-development.

Much of the extension of suburban Halesowen dates to the 1960s when the town was effectively by-passed by the new line of the A456 (the dual carriageway on the area's southern edge), which linked with the new M5 motorway. Since that time, available land between the road and the town has been used to add to the town's residential neighbourhoods.

<sup>2</sup>This summary draws in part on maps researched and compiled by Dudley MBC's Historic Environment Team.



## Hayley Fields & Illey Character Area (DY03)

### SUMMARY:

This is an area on the edge of the Black Country conurbation, characterised almost entirely by fields interspersed with small, scattered settlement, chiefly hamlets and farmhouses. The northern boundary of the area is formed by the change to the much more intensely residential character of Halesowen<sup>1</sup>, while in the south the limit of the area is marked by the boundary with rural parts of Worcestershire.

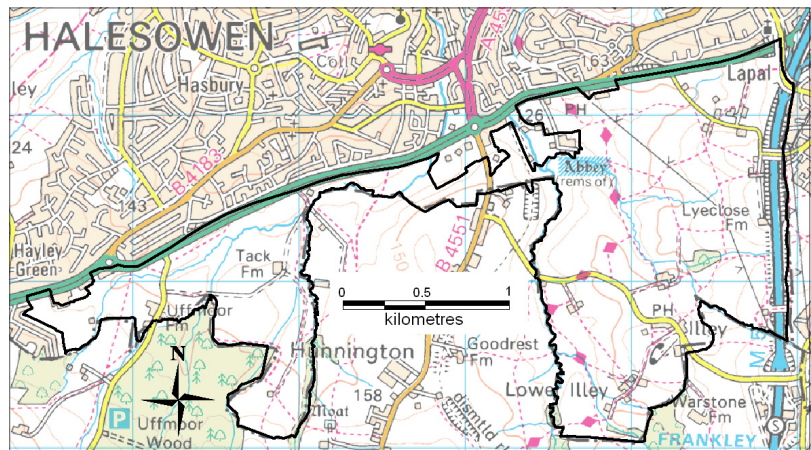
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate and is generally at around 150m elevation. Not far from its source in the Clent Hills to the south west, the River Stour passes through the area, entering the modern conurbation in the centre of the Character Area.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

This Character Area is one of only three in the Black Country in which fields systems account for the majority of land. Although it is the smallest of these, it is nevertheless the one most dominated by agricultural land (more than 90% of its area<sup>2</sup>).

Tributaries of the River Stour cross the area, joining the river before it exits the Character Area under the



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Hagley Road in the north. In several places these streams mark not only the limits of the area, but also the boundary between Dudley and Worcestershire.

Settlement in the area is generally accounted for by a dozen farmsteads (more than in almost any other Black Country Character Area), some of which form small hamlets (i.e. Illey, Lapal). Mapped evidence shows that almost all of these pre-date the early 19th century, although many of the buildings are more recent.

The modern landscape is also defined by two major roads, the dual carriageway of the east-west A456 and a north-south section of the M5 motorway, which converge at junction 3 of the M5 in the north-east corner of the area. Both were opened in the 1960s, and while the A456 Halesowen by-pass (Manor Road) provides the principal route of access to the area, it also serves to divide the area from conurbation to the north.



The River Stour as it approaches the Hagley Road in the centre of the Character Area.

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area Profile DY02 Halesowen.

<sup>2</sup>As recorded in 2000, characterisation of the Black Country, First Report

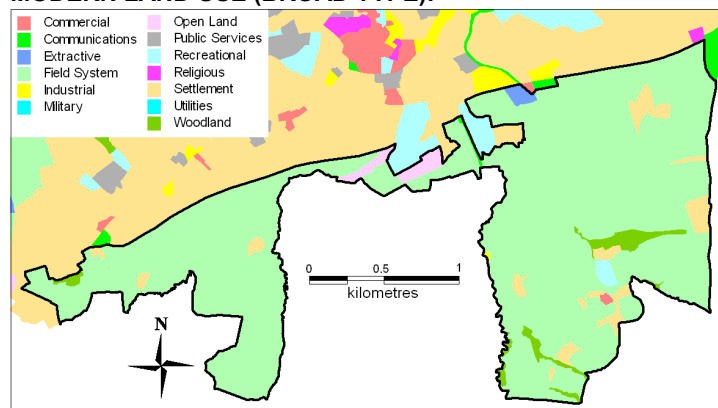
## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

In the medieval period the east of the area was, for 300 years, within the near vicinity of St Mary's Abbey (the remains of the buildings themselves are immediately outside the northern central boundary of the Character Area). There is evidence that the establishment of the Abbey in this location in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the proximity of the watercourses flowing north towards Halesowen. These were used, for example, to feed the nearby system of fish ponds which, although now dry, have left their mark on the modern fields (this area is, in fact, possibly the best surviving remains of such a system in the Black Country) .

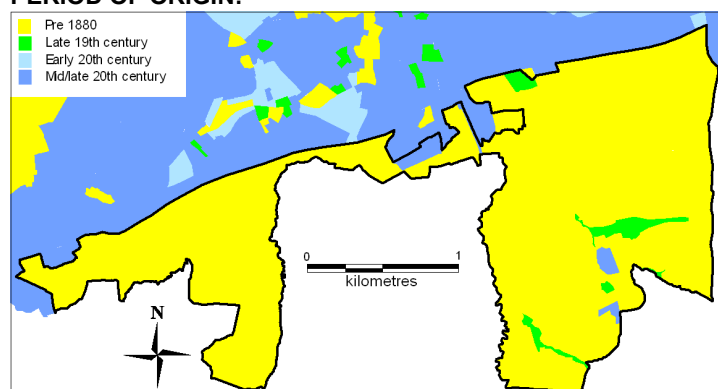
The creation of granges in the area was also part of the Abbey's efforts to develop its supply of agricultural goods. As the modern landscape is still largely field systems, many of these also retain evidence of medieval ridge and furrow.

The area did not have an industrial phase but, despite this, important pieces of transport infrastructure crossed the area in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Dudley No.2 Canal ran through the north-east corner of the area and, from 1798 when the Lapal Tunnel opened, provided a southern link between the Black Country and Birmingham. Where the canal crossed under Manor Lane (now incorporated into the route of the A456 dual carriageway) the area's sole colliery lay on its banks. The Lapal Tunnel closed in 1953 and the remaining navigable section of the canal also now comes to an end before it reaches the Character Area.

## MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



## PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



A now disused railway line ran north-south across the Character Area at its narrowest point. It previously linked Halesowen with the rest of the Black Country in the north and the Birmingham suburb of Longbridge in the south-east, and was operational between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and post war 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Illey Mill, located on one of the watercourses which, in several places, form the Character Area's common boundary with Worcestershire. There is evidence of a mill at this location from at least the medieval period.



## Stourbridge Character Area (DY04)

### SUMMARY:

This is a large area in the south-west corner of the Black Country, having the commercial centre of Stourbridge at its centre and, in its north-east, the industrial town of Lye. Although predominantly residential, the northern edge of the area runs along the valley of the river Stour, and encompasses important industrial areas along its banks. The southern and western boundaries mark the end of the Black Country conurbation, beyond which is a more agricultural landscape<sup>1</sup>.

### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate with pebble beds in its west and the southern end of the coalfield accessible in its north-east. It is some of the lowest lying land in the Black Country, reaching about 70m in its north-west. The River Stour, which drains most of Dudley and south-west Sandwell, flows east to west along the northern boundary of the area.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

In many ways this area is characterised by mixed use and mixed origins. As well as being one of the largest residential areas covered by any of our Character Areas (nearly two-thirds of its area<sup>2</sup> is covered by housing),

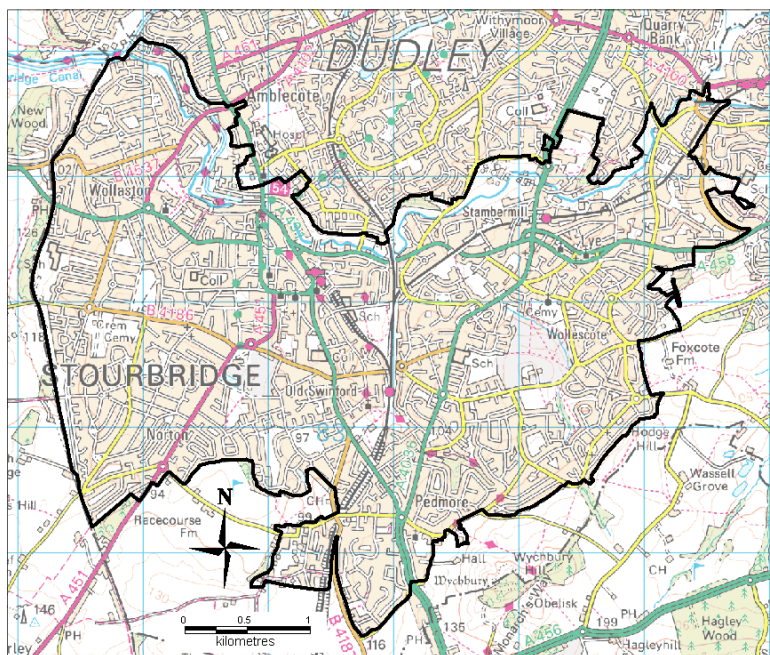
its boundaries also encompass the largest area of industry in Dudley outside of an 'industrial' Character Area.

The map of modern land use (overleaf) shows the way these different uses are distributed: a band of industrial

and open land follows the river valley across the north, and the centres of Stourbridge and Lye are situated just south of this. South of these centres again lie the residential suburbs.

The map of the period of origin of these suburbs also shows, in general, an east-west distribution. Around the town centres some small 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces remain, surrounded largely by inter-war development. Meanwhile the southern half of the Character Area was most recently developed, and contains particularly large areas of late 20<sup>th</sup> century detached properties (only two other Character Areas in the Black Country have more)

Two large inter-war recreational areas are also important features of the area: Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge, and Stevens Park, Wollescote.



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Flats built on the site of a 19<sup>th</sup> century clay pit near to Stourbridge Junction station.

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area Profile *DY08 Pedmore & Lutley*.

<sup>2</sup>As recorded in 2000.

### HISTORIC CHARACTER:

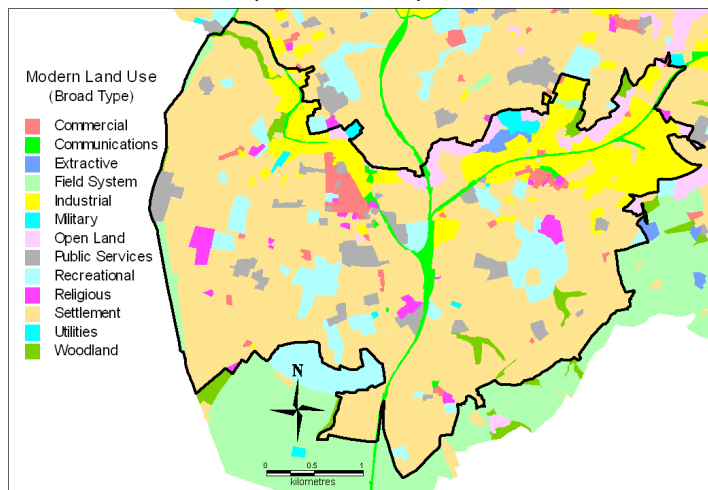
Although the commercial centre of what is now Stourbridge is by far the most important in the modern Character Area (as shown by the area of red in the north central part of the adjacent map), the town here developed at a relatively late point, only receiving a grant of a market and fair for example at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Before this point, the settlements to the south, i.e. Old Swinford and Pedmore (located to the west of and south-west of what is now Stourbridge Junction Station) were probably at least as important.

More generally, in Black Country terms this area's particular importance is that it included within its boundaries one of the larger watercourses flowing through the area. In an age when water was vital source of industrial power, the River Stour supported the location of a string of mills and forges along its banks. Stourbridge itself grew on the south bank of the river, at the point at which it was crossed by the important road route to Wolverhampton (now the A491).

Although there was a failed attempt to make the Stour itself navigable in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in order to provide access to the region's mineral wealth, it was not until a hundred years later that a canal was cut making possible the longer-term transportation of coal, iron and other goods out of the Black country to the river Severn. It was the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before a branch of the canal was opened into the centre of the town of Stourbridge.

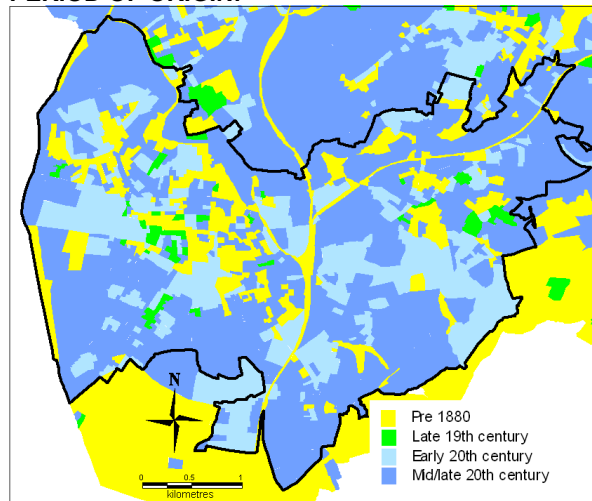
At this time both Stourbridge and Lye, being located next to the canal and/or river, had both usurped the more agricultural settlements as centres of trade and industry. Lye also had the advantage of being situated over the shallow coal of the South Staffordshire coalfield and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the landscape of the north-east of the Character Area featured several collieries, as well as clay extraction and associated brickworks. Lye also had the advantage of being more conveniently situated for the new railway network which arrived in the second half of the century. Lye station was opened in 1863 while Stourbridge Town came later, in 1879 (even though a station had existed earlier at Stourbridge Junction).

### MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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### PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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The 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion of suburban housing over previously agricultural land in the south of the area took place in parallel with the replacement of much of the built environment of the Stour Valley in the north and north west -- the townscape which had facilitated the area's early industrial development. In the north-east, for example, new industrial sites replaced collieries, while around the centres of Stourbridge and Lye, areas of 19<sup>th</sup> century housing were replaced with new homes, often in the form of post-war high density properties (terraces, flats or maisonettes).



## Dudley North Character Area (DY05)

### SUMMARY:

Predominantly residential, this very large area includes the suburbs immediately to the north of the commercial centre of Dudley (at its south-eastern edge), as well as those surrounding the centres of Coseley and Sedgley in its north. The northern limit of the area is defined by local authority boundaries between Dudley and Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Sandwell. In the south, the area runs as far as more industrial areas in Pensnett and Brierley Hill<sup>1</sup>.

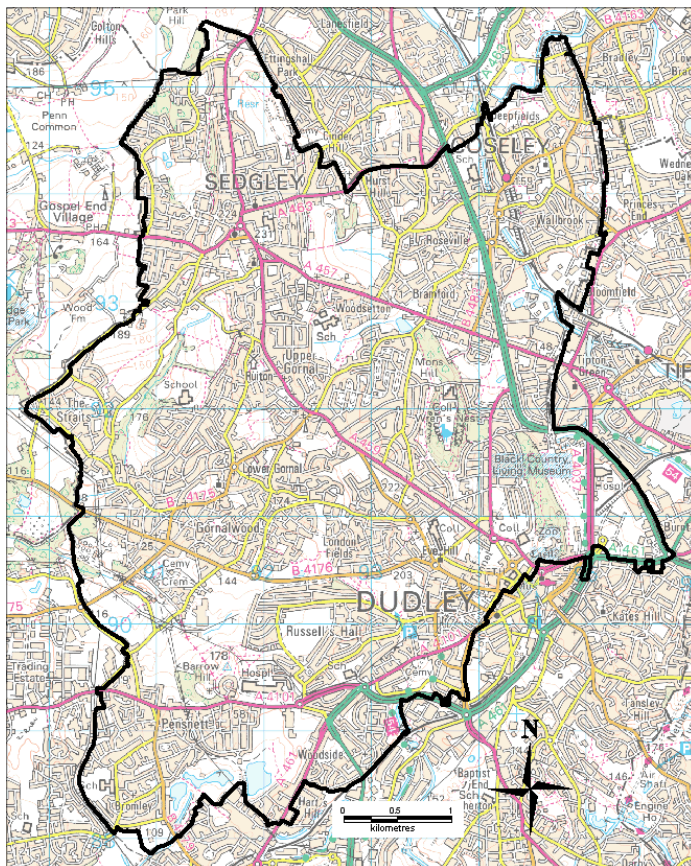
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area encompasses the point where the long shallow coalfield under the Black Country is interrupted by a high limestone ridge. Within the area, the ridge runs from Sedgley in the north-west to Dudley town centre in its south-east. Elsewhere, coal is accessible, and the lower land in the far south-west and north-east sits over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. Isolated areas of dolerite exist, particularly in the south.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

The largest of any of our character areas, its size is really a result of the continuity of 20<sup>th</sup> century development, particularly housing, across its landscape.

While most of the landscape has been developed since the second world war, there are also some significant areas of housing from the inter-war period, notably the two large estates which flank the *Wren's Nest* promontory near the centre of the area.



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Below: Dudley Zoo, in the east of the area, was built in the late 1930s at the same time the town's new suburbs.



Meanwhile some of the Black Country's most recent housing is also present nearby at *Milking Bank*.

This area encompasses the largest expanse of open rough grassland in the Black Country - a relatively high proportion of the area (notwithstanding recent development in places such as *Castlegate Way*, at its eastern point). More official recreational areas include *Wren's Nest* itself, *Sedgley Golf Centre* (in the west) and the *Black Country Living Museum* (in the east).

The area's only canals and railways run through the lower ground, off the ridge, in the east and north east, and it is here - in what has been referred to elsewhere as '*Coseley corner*'<sup>2</sup> - that most of the surviving industrial sites are situated.

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area profiles *DY06* and *DY09* respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Dudley Borough Landscape & Townscape Character Study, Dudley MBC, 2000.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

In the medieval period the Character Area would have encompassed a large section of the main road from Wolverhampton (running diagonally through the area on the same line as the high ground of the limestone ridge). The route passed through the settlement at Sedgley (in the area's north-west) on its way to the town of Dudley itself, which grew up at the foot of the castle nearby. Along with Walsall and Wolverhampton, Dudley was one of the Black Country's largest medieval settlements.

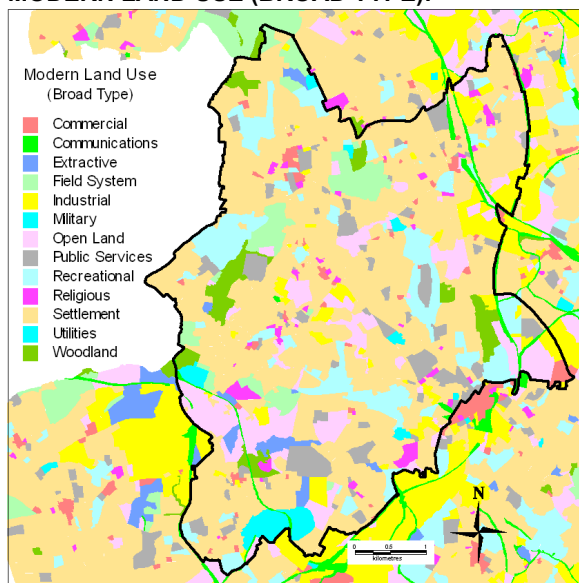
At the same time, the south and west of the area would have been part of *Pensnett Chase*, a large area of common land which defined the historic character of much of what is now the modern Borough.

By the time of the region's early industrialisation, coal mining featured heavily in the lower parts of the area - particularly to the west of Dudley town centre. Already, by the time of Ogilby's 17<sup>th</sup> century map of the road into Dudley from the west, several coal pits lay alongside it. Possibly owing to the early exploitation of coal by squatters on common land on this road at Gornal Wood, the street pattern is particularly dense and irregular, as illustrated by the maps below.

While the line of the first Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal (1770) only skirted the north-east of the area, the newer, straighter route (1837) cut through the hill at Coseley via a long tunnel. Railways were also laid through the lower lying land in the south-west and north-east. In Coseley, the presence of accessible minerals and good transport infrastructure supported the development of the mining and industry typical of that part of the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

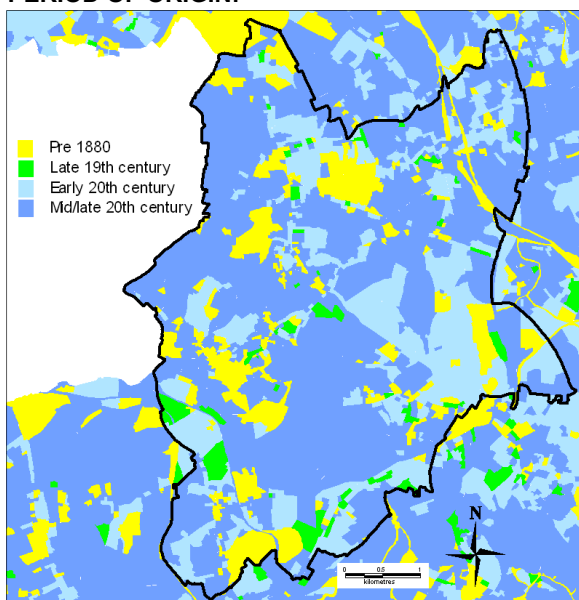
As late as WW1 much of the Character Area was still either agricultural or covered with large colliery sites. However, large scale 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbanisation started after the war, and included some of the largest housing developments of the period in the Black Country at *The Priory* and *Wren's Nest*. These were planned around a geometric street pattern between the

## MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



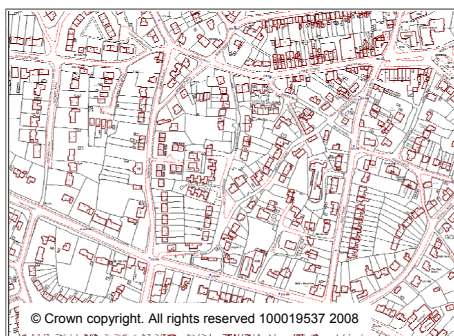
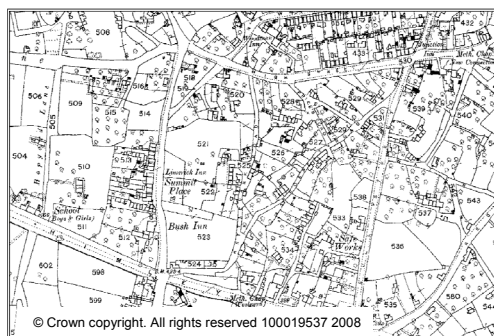
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newly laid out long straight routes of the Birmingham New Road (1927) and *Broadway*, the latter providing a new route out of Dudley to the north-west.



The settlement of Gornal Wood (in the south-west of the area) has a long-standing and possibly unique street layout. The maps show the area in 1880 (left) and 2000 (right).



## Pensnett North Character Area (DY06)

### SUMMARY:

An area of industry on the edge of the Black Country, this area is unusual in that the majority its industry is accounted for by a single trading estate – one of the largest planned industrial estates in the country. The area is flanked by largely residential areas<sup>1</sup>, while the north of the area, which includes the largest area of extractive industries in Dudley, borders rural Staffordshire.

### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

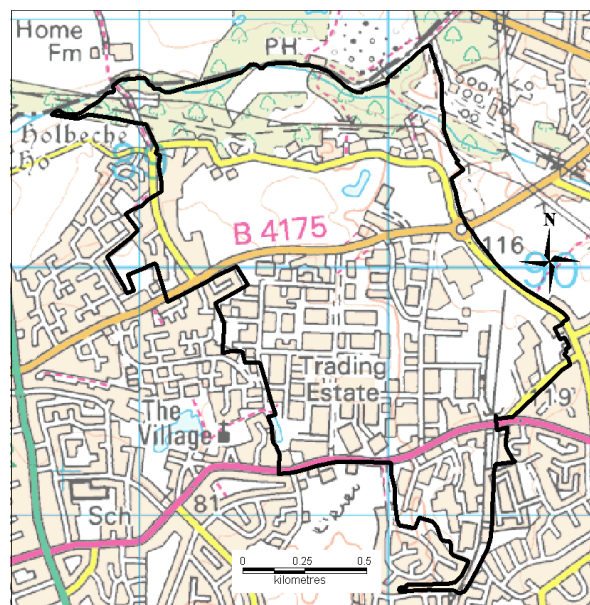
This small area of low lying land (for the most part below 100m) is generally over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate with some shallow coal in its east.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

This is a predominantly industrial area and, unlike most other parts of the Black Country, contains almost no housing. In one sense at least, it is the most modern Character Area in Dudley, with three quarters of its landscape originating in the period since 1938.

The industry in the area is dominated by the *Pensnett Trading Estate*, which occupies 70 hectares - most of the area between two principle east-west routes through the area, the B4175 and A4101. An area of former extractive industry which became available after the WW2, the Estate is the location of nearly 200 firms and is characterised by plots laid out on a grid of straight avenues, the longest of which is half a mile.

Although there are certainly similar industrial estates elsewhere, the scale of this single planned site is not repeated anywhere else in the Black Country.



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A view of part of Pensnett Estate in 2008, looking west towards rural south Staffordshire.

Despite this large individual transformation of the landscape away from extraction, clay quarrying in particular remains an important part of the landscape, occupying most of the northern half of the area. This area is the largest of its type in the southern half of the Black Country.

The legacy of mining is also famously illustrated by the subsidence which created the *Crooked House* pub, on the area's northern boundary.

Today, the industry in the area is serviced via the two roads already mentioned, but the modern landscape still retains evidence of the canals and railways which once moved goods and materials to and from the area (see overleaf). On the south-eastern edge of the area, and in its north, the curve of what was a branch of the *Great Western Railway* is still evident on the map of modern land use (see over).

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area Profiles DY05 Dudley North and DY07 Kingswinford.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

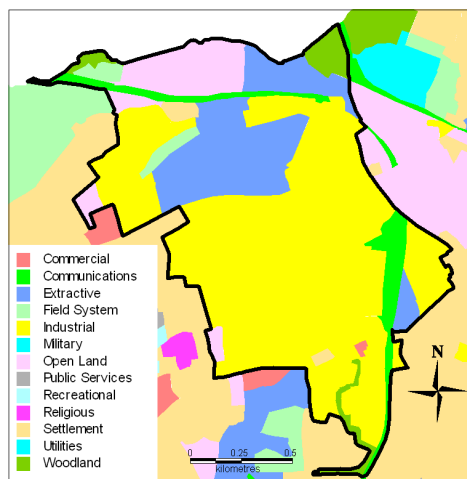
In the pre industrial period, this area lay between the settlement of Kingswinford, just to its south-west, and the edge of Pensnett Chase at its eastern edge. Although most of the settlement lay outside its boundaries, the area took in several open fields which surrounded Kingswinford. With the exception of one or two farmsteads and a country houses, now disappeared, the area has never itself been an area of settlement.

In Black Country terms, the area was relatively late to become involved in large scale mining and iron-working. However, by the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the industrial activity which would define the area's later character had got underway in its south-east, with evidence of collieries and furnaces being shown on the Ordnance Survey map of the 1830s. With this industrialisation, the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a range of different solutions to the challenge of transporting goods in and out of the area (shown in the schematic map of Pensnett Trading Estate at the bottom of this page). Most visible in 1835 was the private inclined rail line which descended several miles from the south-east of the area to join the Staffordshire & Worcestershire canal in the west.

Although the huge Shut End iron works dominated the landscape of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the end of the Victorian period the site had become disused, making way for the later *Stourbridge Refractories Company* to occupy the same location.

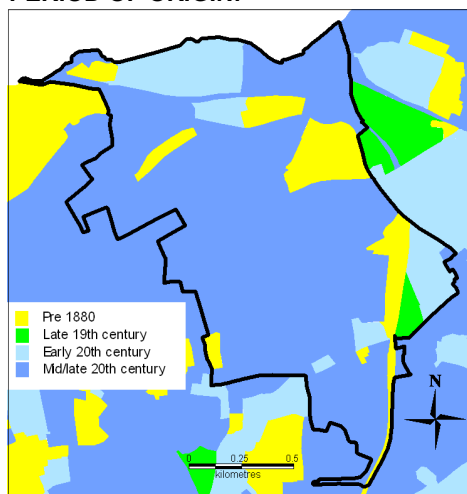
Among the products of the Stourbridge Refractories Company were firebricks (used in lining furnaces, kilns, etc.). More generally, the production of bricks and tiles has been a tradition in the area since at least the early 1800s. Although still part of the area's character today, in the immediate pre-war period the brick and tile industry accounted for all the large manufacturers in the area. What is now the source of *Ketley Bricks* and *Dreadnought Tiles* (on the area's eastern point) is not only a long-standing location of tile production, but possibly the oldest manufacturing facility still in operation in the Black Country.

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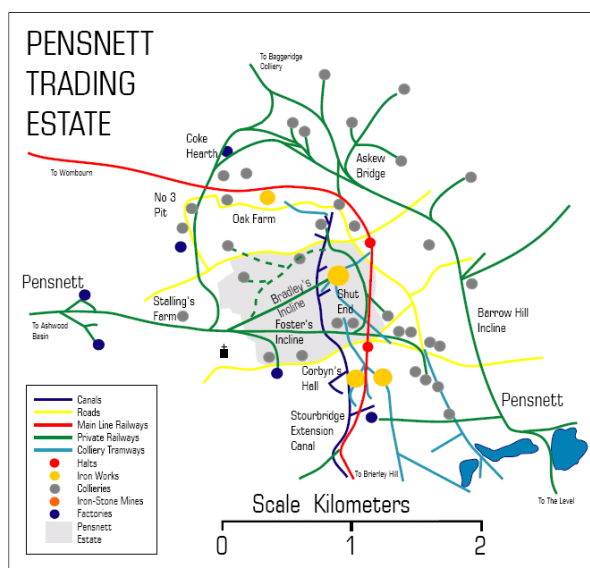
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This building, now a security block at an entrance to the Pensnett Estate, appears to be a survivor from an earlier phase in the landscape.



The complexity of 19<sup>th</sup> century transport links in and around what is now Pensnett Trading Estate are illustrated by this map, produced by Ian Grant for [www.lostlabours.co.uk](http://www.lostlabours.co.uk).



## Kingswinford Character Area (DY07)

### SUMMARY:

This is a residential district (more than two thirds of its area is accounted for by housing<sup>1</sup>) at the edge of the conurbation and includes the small commercial centre of Kingswinford. In the south of the area are a number of important industrial units which together comprise the Stourbridge glass quarter. The northern and western limits of the Character Area are formed by the shared boundary with rural Staffordshire, at its southern edge is the valley of the river Stour, while in the east are more industrial areas of Pensnett and Brierley Hill<sup>2</sup>.

### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area generally lies over sandstone and mudstone, and is off the shallow coal seams which lie elsewhere beneath the Black Country. It is some of the lowest lying land in the Black Country, particularly in the south where the land sinks to below 70m in the valley of the River Stour, the area's southern boundary.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

While much of the area comprises modern, post-war residential suburbs, these are built around a more historic 'spine' of the north-south A491 (shown in green, running the length of the area on the adjacent map), a longstanding road route between the towns of Wolverhampton and Stourbridge.

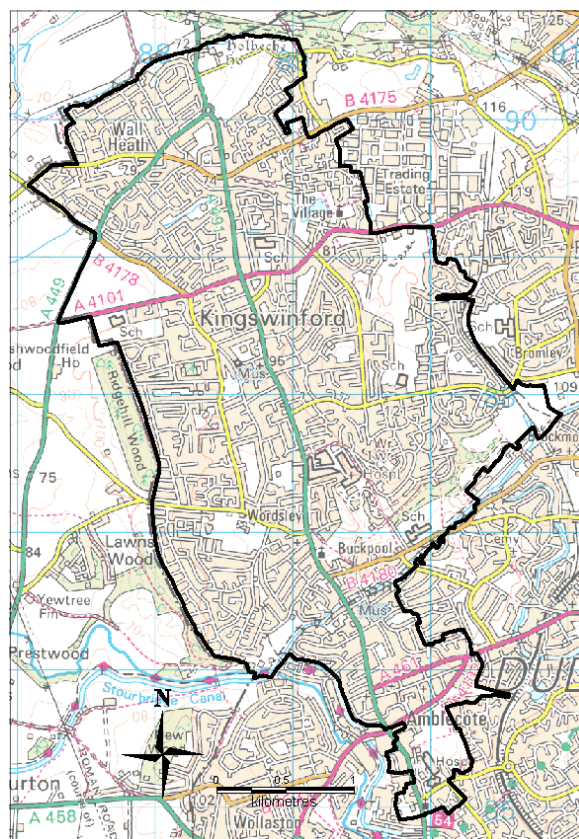
In the north, the commercial centre of Kingswinford lies on this route, while in the south, an area of mixed commercial, industrial and residential use (as well as mixed period of origin) clustered around it forms the glass quarter of Stourbridge. This area is unusual in its concentration of glass-making traditions, but also in the

proximity to each other of industrial and housing units

when, elsewhere in Black Country, these divisions have often been rationalised to create larger areas of either residential or industrial use.

The rest of the area largely comprises streets lined with semis and detached housing built in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on former agricultural land (with one exception, it is the Black Country Character Area with the largest area of 1960s and 1970s semi-detached housing). Within these suburbs, are also a number of important public services built or expanded in the post-war period, including schools and a large hospital site in the south.

A statue at the junction of two A roads on the southern edge of the area marks the 'Crystal Mile', the centre of the glass industry on the route between Stourbridge (in the south) and Wordsley in the centre of the Character Area.



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<sup>1</sup>As recorded in 2000.

<sup>2</sup>See Character Area Profiles DY06 Pensnett North and DY09 Brierley Hill respectively.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

The historic character of this area is distinctive in Black Country terms in so far as it retained large areas of agricultural land long after other areas of the sub region were turned over to mining and quarrying, to industry, or to housing. For a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - and as late as the Second World War - active field systems were commonplace (in the 21<sup>st</sup> century only two significant areas remain).

In most of the area, particularly in the east, these field systems were the result of piecemeal or irregular enclosure of land in the years prior to 1750. However, along its western edge the area had been part of *Ashwood Hays* in the medieval period, a large swathe of unenclosed common land. In this part, the fields were laid out later, in a more regular way, as part of planned enclosures around 1800.

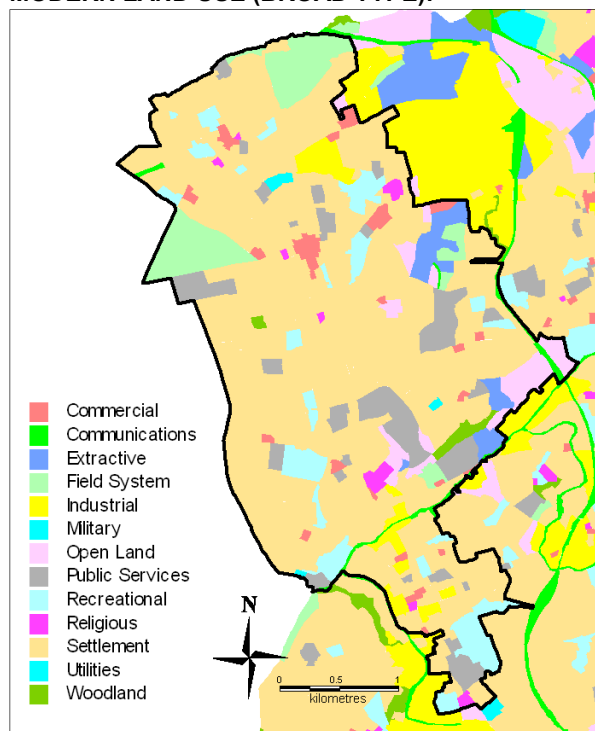
The unusually late use of the area for agricultural purposes does not imply, however, that the area had no experience of extraction or of industry.

Particularly in the east of the area, coal mining and clay quarrying has left its mark (the dark blue areas on the adjacent map indicate either active or disused extractive sites). In the north west, an area of industrial units was constructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century next to a disused railway line - sharing similarities in its character with the planned post-war industrial areas nearby in Pensnett North Character Area (DY06).

The industry of the south of the area, i.e. the Glass Quarter along the A491, is of a generally different type however. As indicated overleaf, some of this character comes from the location of small, longstanding industrial units in what has been, and remains, a predominantly residential area. In this sense, 20<sup>th</sup> century 'zoning' to separate of housing and industry has not taken effect in the way it has elsewhere in the Black Country.

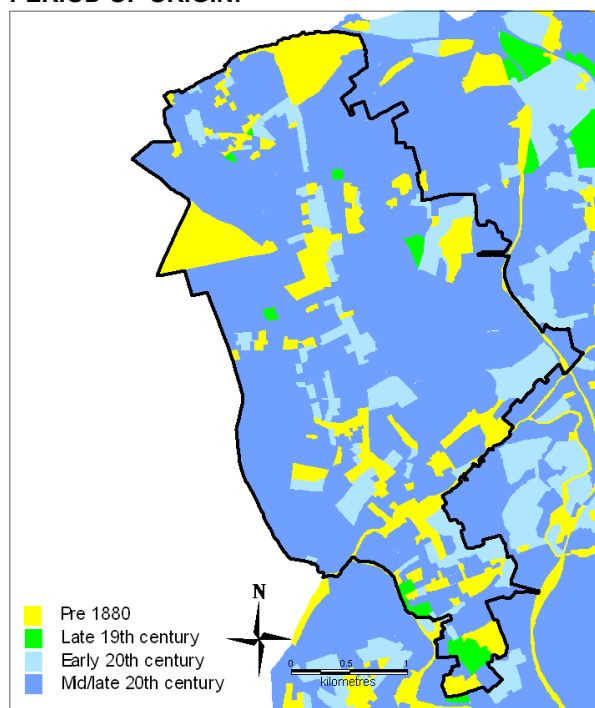
This is reflected in the data recorded in the HLC: outside of the Stourbridge Glass Quarter and neighbouring Stour valley, only the north of Cradley Heath (SD10) hosts more pre-1880 industrial sites within a largely residential district.

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## Pedmore & Lutley Character Area (DY08)

### SUMMARY:

This is an area on the edge of the Black Country conurbation, characterised almost entirely by fields interspersed with small settlements. The northern boundary of the area is formed by the change to the much more intensely residential character of Stourbridge<sup>1</sup>, while in the south the limit of the area is marked by the boundary with rural parts of Worcestershire.

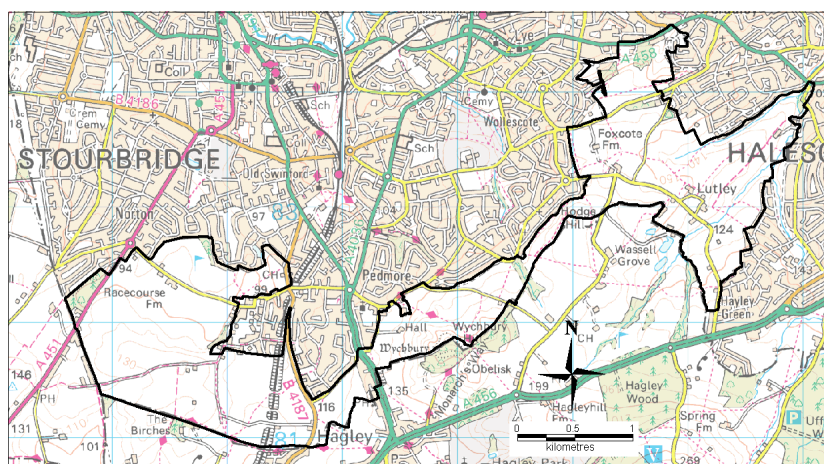
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The south-western edge of the modern Black Country, this area is over red sandstone and pebble beds. It is generally low lying by Black Country standards, although Pedmore, in its centre, and the area to the east, is higher land, reaching about 180m.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

On the margins between the conurbation and rural parts of Worcestershire, this Character

Area is one of only three in the Black Country in which fields account for the majority of land. A narrow strip of agricultural land, it forms a rural buffer between the towns of Halesowen and Stourbridge, as well as between the latter and the Worcestershire village of Hagley to the south. Although the landscape beyond



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its southern limits is generally more rural in character, the area borders a number of less agricultural parts: the village of Hagley itself, a large country club and golf course, and small areas of woodland.

The Character Area is crossed by a number of transport routes generally radiating from Stourbridge in the north. These include the railway line south towards Worcester and the dual-carriageway of the A491. With the exception of post-war housing alongside this route and the nearby Pedmore Hall, almost all of the settlement in the area is accounted for by farmsteads.

In the west, where the area meets the residential part of Halesowen, it is crossed by a tributary of the River Stour, Lutley Gutter, which also forms its boundary in places.



The landscape adjacent to *Racecourse Lane*, in the north-west corner of the Character area. This is the first agricultural land south of Stourbridge. Buildings of Racecourse Farm are visible in the background.

<sup>1</sup>See Character Area Profile DY04 *Stourbridge*.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

The persistence of the area's rural nature has, in contrast to the rest of the Black Country, led to the survival of ancient features in the landscape - clues to its character before the medieval period. Examples of this include the remains of the iron age hillfort at Wychbury Hill, on the edge of central strip of the Character Area (the border with Worcestershire actually divides the monument). This is one of the few visible hillforts surviving within the area of the modern Black Country.

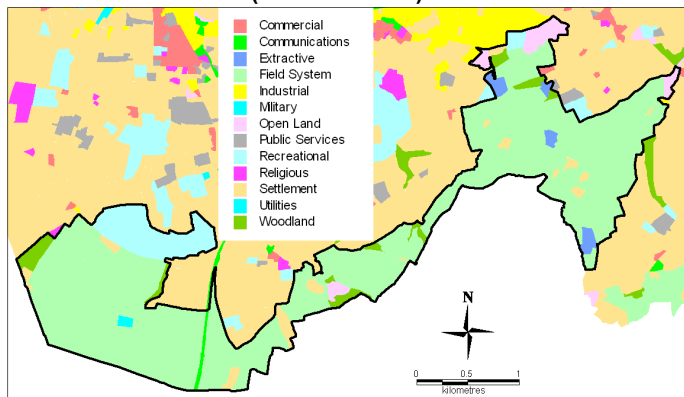
Just to the north is another site which originates in an earlier landscape, i.e. that of Pedmore Hall. Although the current hall itself is predominantly modern, its location and surroundings, with its straight, tree-lined approach and pond, probably date to at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Further west, the Character Area was part of a large area of common land in the medieval period. However, the land had been parcelled into enclosed fields by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their straight boundaries suggest that this enclosure was a planned rather than piecemeal process.

Little in the way of settlement ever encroached on the west of the area. However, the historic character of the east was slightly different, with the village of Lutley (previously Lower Lutley) lying at its centre. Lutley lies close to a tributary to the River Stour and to Lutley Lane, a route which follows the line of the watercourse and joins the Hagley Road in the south, the latter being turnpiked in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. The watercourse had powered mills along its route and one in particular, Lutley Mill, pre-dates the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although no longer used for its original purpose, it has given its name to the adjacent road and a nearby 20<sup>th</sup> century pub.

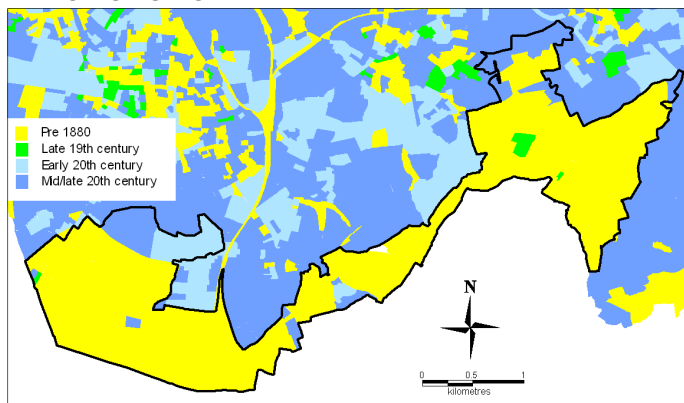
The fields in this eastern part of the Character Area had been enclosed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although particularly in the north, in the area of *Foxcote Farm* (marked on the map overleaf) these original divisions

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were later removed - perhaps in the 20<sup>th</sup> century - to produce much larger areas of enclosure.

In addition to agriculture, the landscape retains evidence of extractive industries which have been carried out during different parts of its history. Although not on the scale of that in the central Black Country to the north, a number of former mines and quarries have now given way to small areas of grassland or woodland. These include Norton Covert, a former sandstone quarry in the far west of the area which is now a recreational woodland.

Recreational land also has a tradition in the area's north-west, where the site of the Stourbridge Golf club was, in an earlier phase, used for horse racing (a use still referred to by the nearby *Racecourse Lane*: see photo on previous page).



## Brierley Hill Character Area (DY09)

### SUMMARY:

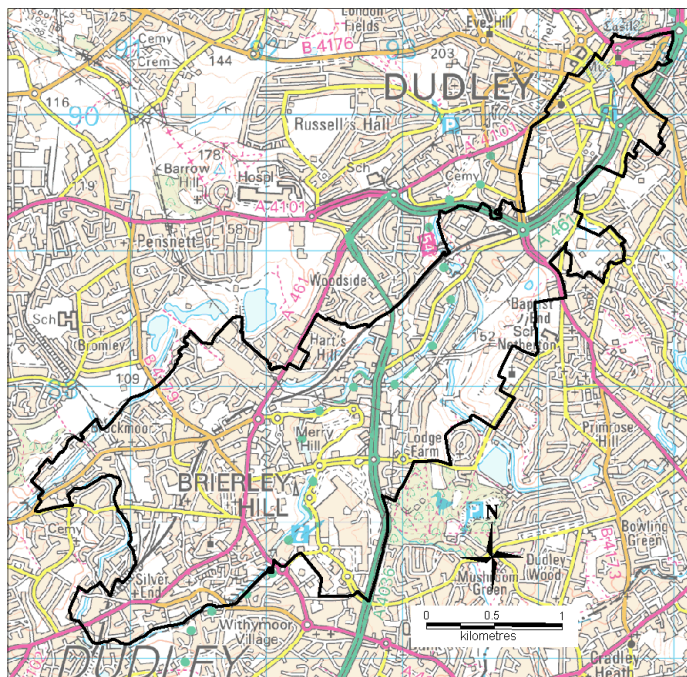
Dudley's largest industrial district<sup>1</sup>, this area also includes more commercial land than any other part of the Black Country, encompassing the older centres of Dudley and Brierley Hill, as well as the large late 20<sup>th</sup> century retail park at Merry Hill. The character and shape of the area is also heavily influenced by the presence of an unusual density of communications infrastructure. The limits of the area are defined by the change to more residential areas beyond its boundaries.

### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

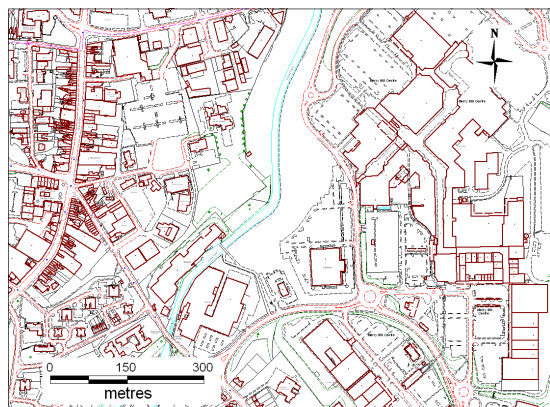
This area lies over coal measures as well as sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. Like the area to its south<sup>1</sup>, the land in this area falls considerably over its length from its high point of about 200m in the north-east, reaching a low point in the area's west.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

The importance of this area as a commercial and retail centre expanded in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century on the opening of the *Merry Hill Shopping Centre* on former industrial land in its south. Merry Hill, combined with older centres nearby in Brierley Hill and Dudley, account for more commercial land than any other Black Country Character Area (more than the centre of Wolverhampton, and three times that of any other).



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Originally envisaged as an area of renewed industry, the construction of the vast Merry Hill shopping centre in the 1980s (shown on the right of the above plan) took advantage of relaxed public planning rules and tax incentives. However, the scale of the project challenged the economy of the older centre of Brierley Hill (on the left of the plan), Dudley town centre (in the north-east of the Character Area), as well as retail centres further afield.

In the north-east, significant parts of the surviving centre of Dudley date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the core of Brierley Hill, marked in the bottom left of the map above and centred on its north-south High Street, has an essentially 19<sup>th</sup> century character. The High Street itself is made up of dense area of two and three storey largely commercial buildings.

Despite the spread of shops and offices, the area is still an important industrial centre, being one of the largest areas of industry in the Black Country, and the most extensive in Dudley. Many of the remaining industrial sites have historical connections to the canals and railways which run through it. However, the core of the industry comprise estates of large, regular units which were planned in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The character of the north-east of the area has been influenced by the opening at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of the dual carriageway of Dudley Southern by-pass.

<sup>1</sup>As recorded in 2000.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER:

The Character Area has included important commercial and retail functions since the medieval period, when Dudley (in the far north of the Character Area) was one of the Black Country's few towns.

Dudley was laid out at the foot of the nearby Castle, probably in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The other historic centre, Brierley Hill (to the south west), is a product of the later industrial age. While Yates' 1775 map, for example, shows the main Dudley to Stourbridge road, i.e. the modern Brierley Hill High Street, it marks no development on it where the commercial centre lies today.

In the medieval period most of the area, save for its northern part, lay within *Pensnett Chase*, a large area of common land. This remained the case into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the Chase by then hosted both coal mines and plantations to supply wood for the smelting of iron.

By 1779, the Dudley canal had been cut through the area, creating a large loop around the high ground on Brierley Hill High Street, and providing access to the River Severn in the west and, in 1792, to the northern Black Country via the Dudley Tunnel. Along the canalside were brickworks, glassworks, and iron furnaces. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the laying of a railway along the length of the Character Area which, before its closure in the 1960s, served industrial sidings and 5 passenger stations within it - a measure of local activity in the period.



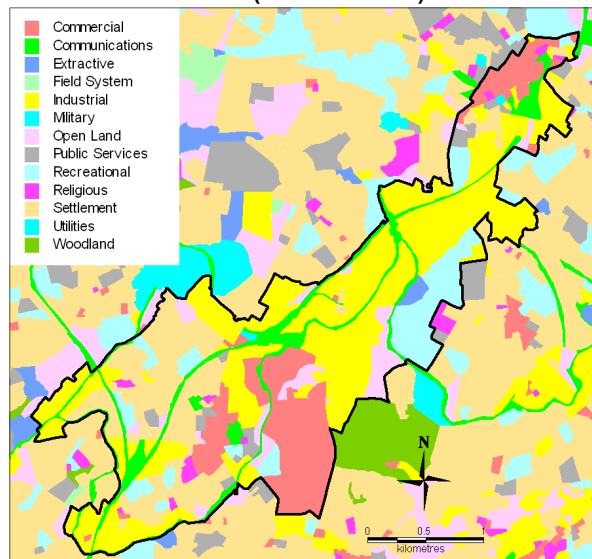
By the same period, large parts of the landscape, like the Black

Country more generally, had become dominated by collieries.

However, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century the area was undergoing another large scale shift in its land use, and the inter-war years in particular saw a reconstruction of several sites which had become available through the decline of coal extraction. In the central part of the area these became the location for planned industrial districts (referred to under Modern Character overleaf) while, in the west they were generally used for housing developments.

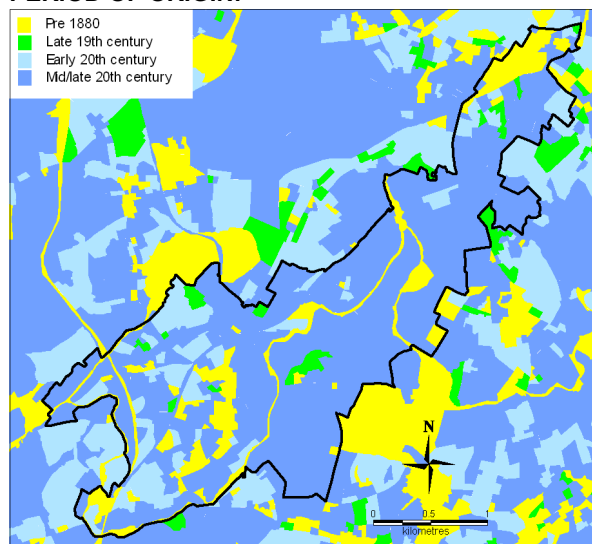
The former office building of the Harris and Pearson brickworks stands on Brettell Lane in the far south west of the Character Area, within the loop of the canal. The building was built in 1888 and, although it went out of use in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has recently been restored by the *West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust*. The site at Brettell lane is one of several brickworks which have existed in the area.

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## Quarry Bank Character Area (DY10)

### SUMMARY:

This is a largely residential area, including the small commercial centre of Quarry Bank in its east. Unusually dominated by residential streets, the area contains a small amount of recreational and open land, and few industrial sites, unlike the more industrial districts which lie beyond its northern and southern limits.

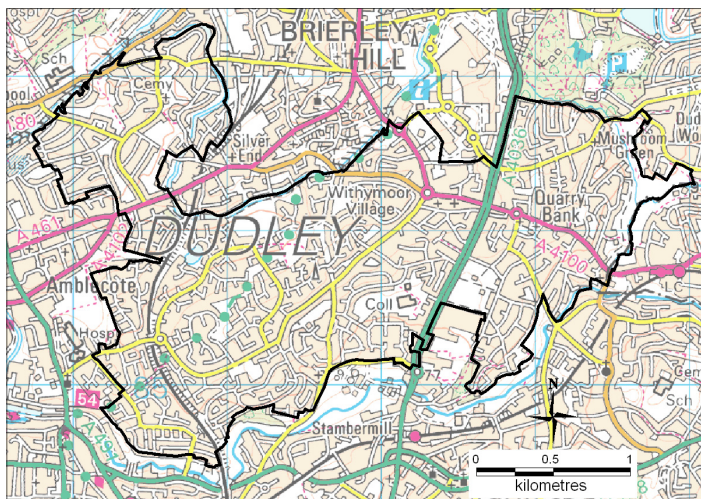
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area is generally over shallow coal. A ridge of higher ground at its centre (reaching about 130m) descends to the valleys at its edges, including the valley of the River Stour which forms the area's southern boundary.

### MODERN CHARACTER:

This area is overwhelmingly residential: it is the most dense area of housing in Dudley and, for their size, only three other Character Areas in the Black Country contain more residential neighbourhoods.

The housing itself is also, in general, relatively recent in its construction, much of it built in the last thirty years on land which had previously been used for extractive industries. One particular development, crossed by a north-south rail line, accounts for a large parts of the south-west of the Character Area. This is, in fact, the largest area of housing built since the mid seventies in the Black



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Country, and one of the last great instances of recycling of mining and quarrying land.

As can be seen from the map of the area's period of origin (overleaf), the eastern half of the Character Area is generally older, centred around the east-west route of the A4100 Quarry Bank *High Street* (shown in red on the map above) and the intersecting north-south *New Street* (in yellow).

Other than housing, recreational and open land is significant. Three large areas of park and public open space were created from former mining land - much of it contemporary with the development of late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing mentioned above. Open land marks the eastern edge of the area at *Mousesweet Brook*.

One of the largest roads in this part of the Black Country, the A4036 *Thorns Road*, connects the area with Merry Hill and Dudley to the north. It was converted to a dual carriageway in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Canals, rivers and streams form several stretches of the boundaries of this largely residential area. Here, a sequence of nine locks on the Dudley Canal lies on the edge of the Character Area and divides it from the commercial and industrial areas of Brierley Hill to the north. Housing within the Character Area can be seen in the distance.

## HISTORIC CHARACTER<sup>1</sup>:

Although the south-west of the area is today a relatively modern landscape, it is this part of the area - rather than Quarry Bank in the east - which was host to some of the oldest recorded settlement in the area. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Yates' 1775 map showed the only road on to the ridge in the centre of the area came up from Stourbridge, outside of the area's south west boundary. Buildings are shown lining this road, which appeared to run towards an area of early coal pits in the north-east. Since Yates' survey, the road and its buildings have disappeared under the late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing estate which now occupies the area.

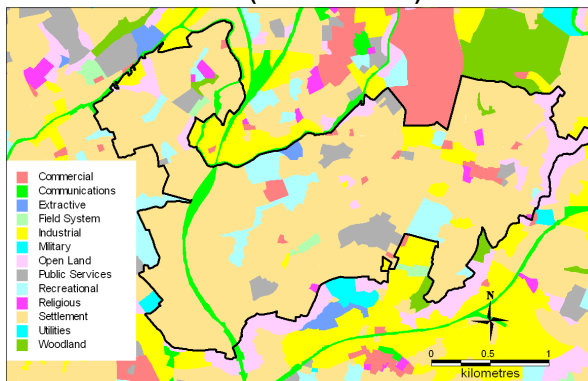
In the medieval period, all of the eastern half of the area lay within *Pensnett Chase*, an area of common ground covering most of the central area of what is now the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley. It was within this part of the Character Area that the early coal extraction is recorded, around the centre of what is now the settlement of Quarry Bank.

Quarry Bank itself grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century over this landscape. Much of the rest of the Character Area, particularly in its north and west, was taken by collieries, clay pits and brickworks. But in the east housing, pubs, schools, and small factories sprang up around the High Street. Although Quarry Bank itself did not have a railway station, perhaps important in its development was the fact that its main street led down to the ironworks of *Cradley Forge* (just outside the south-east corner of the Character Area) and the nearby industrial areas on the Stour Valley. From the 1860s these areas were served by the Stourbridge Railway (now part of the *Jewellery Line* out of Birmingham Snow Hill).

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw new suburbs created around the core of Quarry Bank, with inter-war streets extending to the north and south, over what had been fields and woodland. Land occupied by the nearby Thorns colliery was converted to recreational use as Steven's Park.

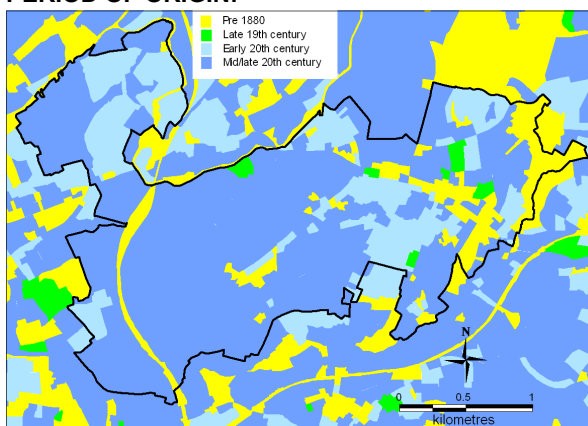
Suburbanisation in the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, which also transformed large parts of remaining open land in the Black Country, also saw the creation of the modern character of the 'peninsular' of housing in the Character Area's north-west. This low-lying area on the banks of *Audnam Brook*, previously brick works

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## PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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and collieries in an otherwise agricultural area, was laid out with new housing estates.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of Quarry Bank High Street as a local commercial and retail centre has been influenced by the proximity of the vast Merry Hill Shopping Centre, immediately outside the Character Area to the north<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>This summary draws in part on maps researched and compiled by Dudley MBC Historic Environment Team.

<sup>2</sup>See DY09 Brierley Hill Character Area Profile.