

Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley Character Area (SD01)

SUMMARY:

This is an industrial area with a landscape largely the result of post-1938 development. In this sense it is not unusual in the Black Country, but it is a very large area of its type. Although the land here has a mixture of uses (settlement, open land, transport), it contains a larger area of industrial sites than any other Black Country Character Area. Particularly to the south, it borders more residential areas, although similar industrial landscapes exist to the east and north¹.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

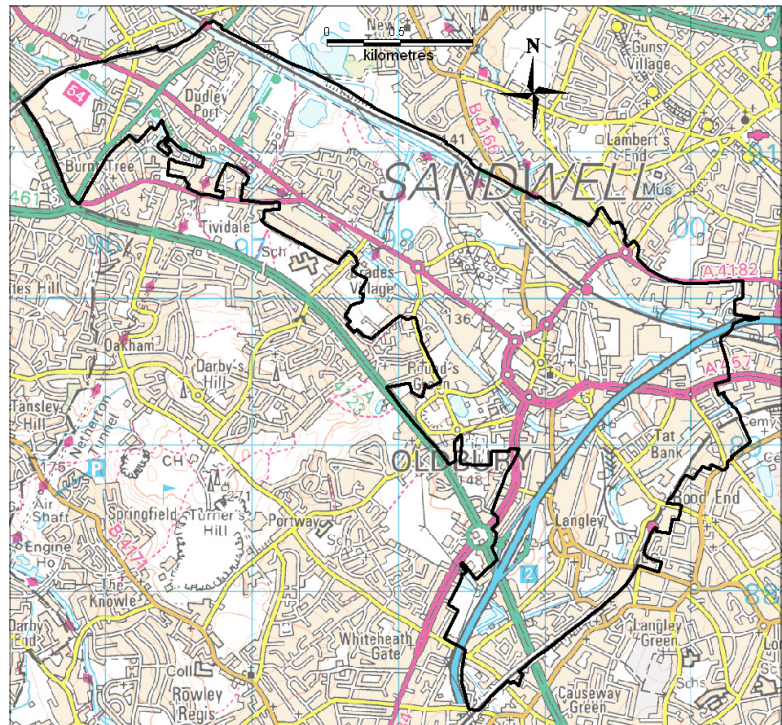
In general, the area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, although shallow coal is accessible from the centre of the area. The area includes part of the of Tame valley which created the low lying position it has relative to most of the surrounding landscape.

MODERN CHARACTER:

The presence of large areas of industry in this Character Area, including both large individual sites like the multi-national *Rhodia* (in its south) as well as estates of smaller units, is in part a result of its position straddling communications routes, both historical and modern. These routes include the two main canal routes between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, two railway lines (and three stations), and the M5 motorway (junction 2 of which is in the south of the area).

Significant areas of housing also exist between the canals, railways and industrial sites. These include the older settlements of Langley and Tat Bank (in the south-east), Oldbury and Brades Village (in its centre) and Dudley Port (in the north-west) but, in addition, more recent housing expansion from the last 30 years, most notably at Temple Way alongside the route of the A457 heading north-west from Oldbury towards Dudley Port.

Open land is also a feature of the area, in particular between the old and 'new' lines of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal. This area - much of it rough grassland - is in part a legacy of clay and coal extraction in the area. In the 21st century, this land has hosted some new development — notably, in 2006, the Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple, said to be the largest Hindu Temple in Europe.



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This industrial site on Bromford Lane in the north-east of the area came into use in the mid to late 20th century and was built on the site of allotments next to a railway line.

¹See the *North Smethwick* and *Great Bridge* Character Area profiles.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

The settlement of Oldbury, on a hill in the centre of the area, has a name originating from the Anglo-Saxons who called it 'Old Burh' (ancient settlement) — suggesting it had existed long before their arrival.

As for the wider area, many would argue that the lines of the Birmingham canal have done much to define its limits (although its valley position was probably a pre-condition to their construction). The original, southerly, line of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal opened in 1770, forming a particularly circuitous route around Oldbury to avoid the high ground at the town's centre. Nearly seventy years later, in 1838, the *Island Line* opened a more direct, northerly route between Smethwick (in the east) and Tipton Factory Junction (in the west), bypassing Oldbury. On this route, Dudley Port junction derives its name from being the town's nearest convenient loading-point.

The Titford branch, which runs to the southern extremity of the Character Area, was opened in 1837. It linked the canals to Titford pools, which were meant to act as a reservoir to supply water to the system.

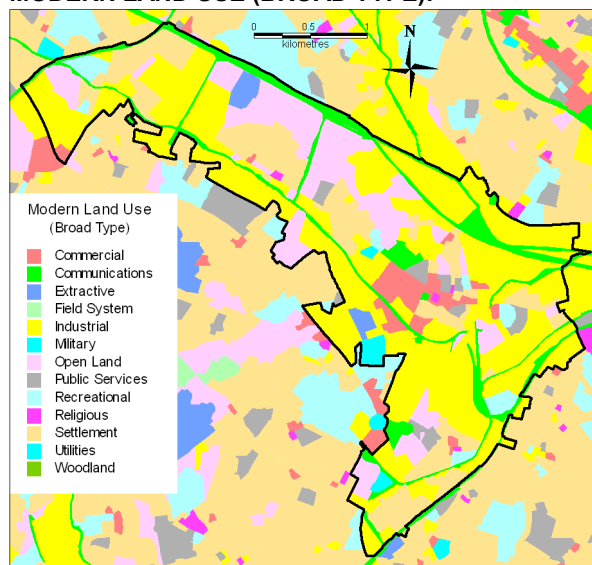
Like other parts of the Black Country, the area was rich in limestone, coal and ironstone, much in demand by the industries of Birmingham. This justified the investment in the canals, and went on to influence the area's transformation from rural to predominantly industrial. Attracted by a cheap and efficient transport system, industrialists established their factories, mainly metalworking, alongside the canals; many of them having their own basins and wharves.

The railways arrived in the middle of the 19th century, with stations at Dudley Port and Oldbury (the station is now known as *Sandwell & Dudley*). They also brought manufacturing: one of the largest employers in the area at the time was the *Oldbury Railway Carriage and Wagon Works*, established in 1854 in the east of the area.

At this time, the landscape of the Character Area was dominated by collieries, brick works and associated clay pits. These occupied swathes of land in between the canals and settlements mentioned above.

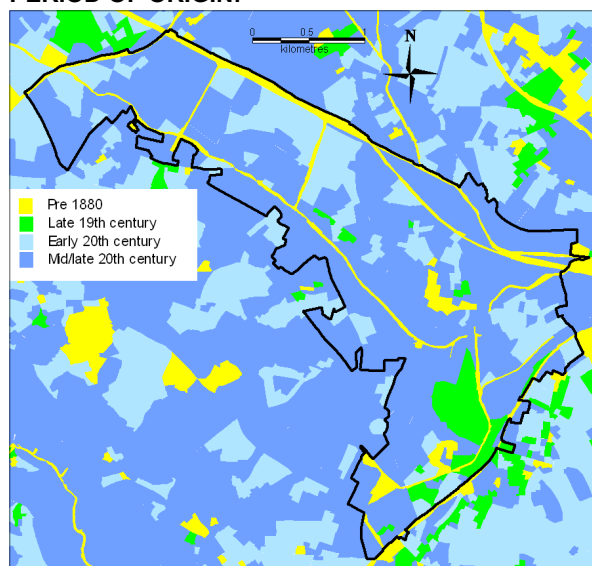
In addition to extractive industries, chemical processing has also been important to the area. For the majority of its history, the large canalside chemical processing plant now owned by *Rhodia* in the south of the Character Area was the concern of *Albright & Wilson*. Established in the area in the middle of the

MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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19th century, it became a large influence on the landscape and the lives of local people both at work and at play (two of the local parks in Langley were provided by the company).

The 20th century has seen the transformation of both the settlements and industrial mining infrastructure which would have been familiar in the previous century. Oldbury in particular saw the terraced streets at its centre replaced by local government buildings (the administrative centre of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) and a large hypermarket. Meanwhile, many of the larger industrial and extractive sites were replaced by smaller industrial units on several industrial estates. The former sites of Conegre colliery (in the west) and the *Oldbury Railway Carriage and Wagon Works*, are examples of this trend.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr Character Area (SD02)

SUMMARY:

This is largely a residential area comprising almost exclusively 20th century housing and, in this respect at least, it is not uncommon in its character within the modern Black Country. However, the area also includes significant areas of fields which continue to the north beyond the modern Sandwell boundary¹. The junction of the M5 and M6 motorways is at the area's western edge and the area is crossed by several other wide roads.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

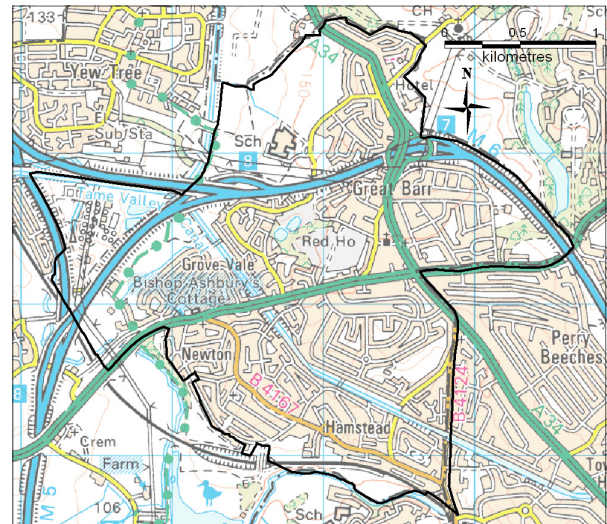
The area generally lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, and coal measures are only accessible at depth. The south-west of the area is in the valley of the River Tame while, within a short distance, the land rises by about 60m to its high point in the north-east at Great Barr (about 170m).

MODERN CHARACTER:

This residential area borders the city of Birmingham and functions in many ways as a suburb of the city.

Housing, which represented just over half of the area in 2000, is of generally lower density than in many parts of the Black Country. Around Great Barr, for example, there is a ring of inter-war semi-detached and detached housing, centred roughly around the wide junction of two large roads: the A34 north out of Birmingham and the east-west A4041 Newton Road. The junction, in the east of the area and visible on the adjacent map, includes a small retail centre and is known as Scott Arms after a landmark pub.

North of the A4041, which bisects the area, is also characterised by low density similar housing, albeit from a later period. It includes suburban properties from the second half of the 20th century, with a



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concentration of detached houses surrounding the inter-war Red House Park (in the centre of the area).

The housing in the southern part of the area is generally of a different character, with more small semis and terraces. The character of this area is also influenced by the former presence of one of the last collieries in the Black Country at Hamstead, on the southern edge of the area, which closed in 1965. Serviced by the Tame Valley Canal and the former route of the *London Midland & Scottish Railway* (both of which remain part of the modern landscape), the colliery also has contemporaries among the nearby surviving housing, such as the short inter-war terraces on James Road and Holland Road.

The large water reclamation works which occupies the western part of the area alongside the River Tame and the canal was established in the inter-war years, and thus predates the slip roads of the junction of the M5 and M6 motorways which was built in the late 1960s.

The oldest landscapes in the area are those of the remaining fields in its north-west, which continue beyond its boundary towards Barr Beacon, in Walsall¹.



Inter-war housing arranged in short terraces on Spouthouse Lane, Hamstead, in the south-east of the area, seen from the aqueduct carrying the Tame Valley Canal.

¹See *Barr Beacon & Aldridge Fields* Character Area profile.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

Until well into the 20th century this area consisted largely of agricultural land. It was only in the period between the wars that residential development began to spread.

The Tame Valley Canal had been one of the later canals to be built in the Black Country, being opened in 1844. It connects the Walsall Canal in the east to the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal in the west. The hill at Great Barr necessitated the excavation of a deep cutting for the canal where a bridge takes Newton Road over it, whereas only a kilometre away an aqueduct is needed to carry the canal over Spouthouse Lane (see photo over page).

The area's only colliery was at Hamstead and, after the earlier shallow, open workings elsewhere in the Black Country, it was a late attempt to extract the remaining coal from some depth: sinkings began in 1875 and only reached the coal five years later at a depth of more than half a kilometre.

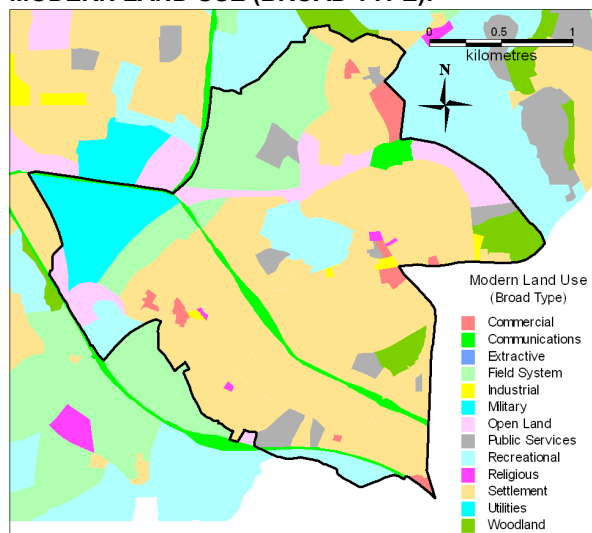
Before the discovery of coal there, Hamstead was only a small hamlet. However, in the early 1880s when the colliery began commercial extraction the population increased dramatically. Miners and their families converged on the area from other mining areas in the country, including South Wales and the north-east of England. Hamstead Village was thus born to serve the colliery, and the two were inter-dependent until the colliery closed. It was the last colliery to be operational within what is now Sandwell, closing in 1965.

The main Birmingham to Walsall Road runs through the eastern part of the ward with a major junction at the Scott Arms where it crosses the Newton Road. The roads themselves are on ancient routes but the Scott Arms was originally an 18th century coaching inn: which flourished because of its position at the road junction. The Georgian building was demolished in 1966 and replaced by a modern brick one, set well back from the road to accommodate the busy junction. The inn has given its name to both the road junction and the nearby shopping centre.

In more recent times motorways have also made their mark: the M6 runs through the area with two junctions, one with the Birmingham to Walsall road and the other with the M5. Both motorways were opened in 1970.

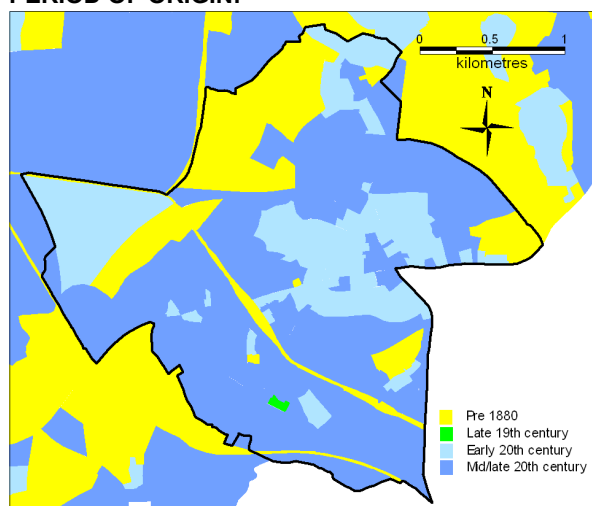
The east of the area is land previously belonging to Great Barr Hall (the home of the Scott family, after

MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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whom the Scott Arms public house was named). At the turn of the 20th century, the hall and grounds were taken over by the Walsall and West Bromwich Guardians. Some of what was the park has now been covered with housing, and most of the remainder, including the Hall itself, now lies in Walsall. The Red House, in a public park in the centre of the Character Area, is another of Great Barr's big houses. Owned by a succession of local industrialists, it had a number of uses before it was closed in the 1920s. The adjacent park was opened to the public in 1929, during the residential development of the wider area.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

West Bromwich Character Area (SD03)

SUMMARY:

This area comprises West Bromwich town centre, an important location for shops and offices in the east of the Black Country, together with its surrounding, largely residential area. It also includes some industrial sites situated to the south. The area is bounded by more intensely industrial areas to its south and west, by generally more modern housing to its north, and by the recreational areas of the Sandwell Valley to the east.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The centre of this area represents a high point (about 170m), and the land falls away gently on all sides. In general, the area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, although coal is accessible in its north-west.

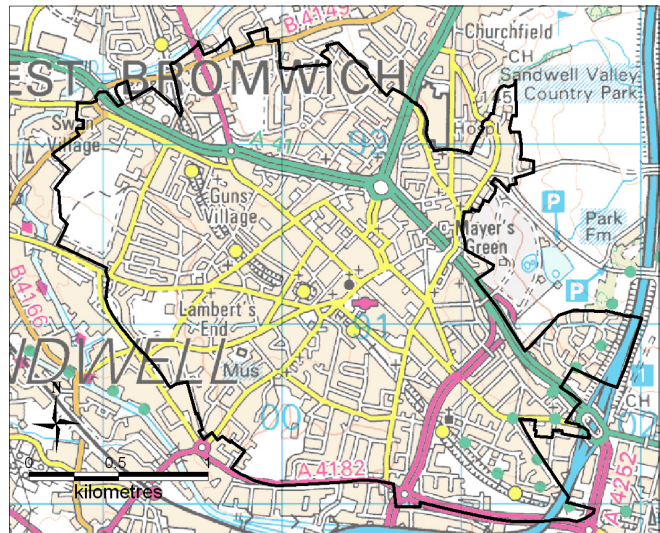
MODERN CHARACTER:

The residential character is formed by streets and houses of a number of different types. Rapid expansion in the 19th century (see over) is reflected in the surviving areas of Victorian terraces to the west of the centre, between Dartmouth Street /Lodge Road, and in its east, between the town centre and the M5 motorway.

Added to these, two large areas of later, inter-war housing comprise small semi-detached houses or short terraces: the 'Hamblett's estate' in the west of the area,



West House (in the centre of the Character Area) was itself an example of 20th century re-development but now is in an area of further change. The foreground is on the former site of Victorian public baths.



which was built on former colliery land, and the housing built on fields in the north of the area at Lyndon. The last part of the area to see the transformation from green space to settlement was that now occupied by the Sandwell Valley estate of detached properties next to the M5.

The town's wider industrial character is also represented inside the area in a district of factories and depots south of the town centre (between Lyng Lane and Trinity Way).

The centre of West Bromwich has been transformed since the early 1970s, with the construction of the indoor shopping facilities at *The Sandwell Centre*, the Ringway, and the pedestrianisation of a section of the High Street. While the thoroughfare of the Street (running north-west to south-east through the centre of the Character Area) has often struggled to retain its importance since the town's heyday, it still hosts a number of important buildings and continues to change its character - the ambitious and controversial arts complex 'The Public' being a recent example of this.

Perhaps an important legacy of this change has been communications infrastructure. The Black Country Spine Road (built in the 1990s) skirts the town centre to join the M5 at Junction 1 (built in the 1960s), while public transport has also seen changes: a new bus station and opening of the Midland Metro line through the town in 1999.

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

Among Black Country towns, West Bromwich was late to develop. Prior to the 19th century, what is now the centre of the town was little more than an area of barren heath land crossed by the Birmingham to Wolverhampton turnpike road (part of the Holyhead Road, and the route of the modern High Street).

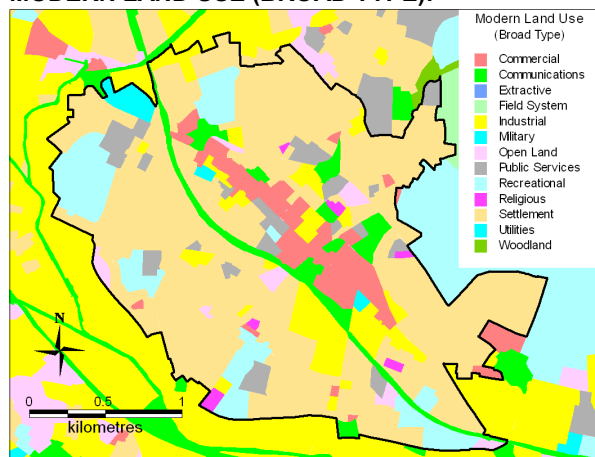
In these times, the old village of West Bromwich lay some way to the north of its present location: maps of 1775 and 1830 mark the site of the modern town as 'Bromwich Heath'. But with the enclosure of 1804, the town as we know it today had begun to develop. Improvements to the Holyhead Road in the 1820s produced the broad High Street, a prominent feature of the modern town and, as the town grew, its centre shifted from the old village to the area around the site of the modern Sandwell Centre.

The south eastern section of the High Street developed rapidly as the town's commercial area and, by 1840, an open market was being held - a tradition which has continued into the present. The north-western section of the High Street was built up later: the Town Hall for example was opened in 1875. Since the end of the 19th century the main feature of Carters Green, at the north-western end of the High Street, has been the large red-brick clock tower, erected as a tribute to a local Alderman.

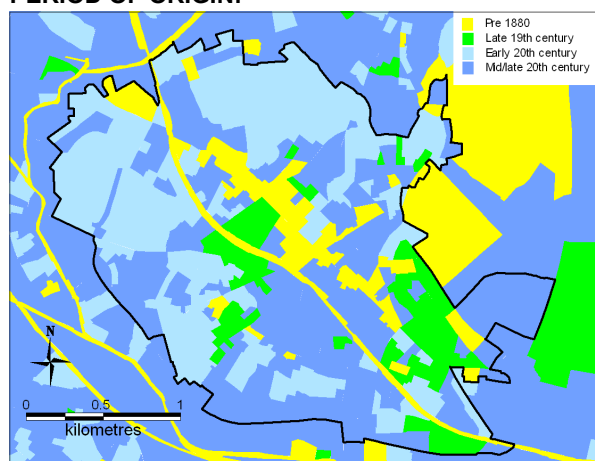
Key to the town's 19th century development and expansion was the presence nearby of iron, coal, and marl for brick making. By the early part of the century a number of collieries existed in the west of the Character Area, where today there is housing, parks and schools. Several ironworks were also situated just outside the southern and western edge of the area, along the route of the local canals. By the later part of the century, clay pits and brickworks were evident within the area, notably the 'Victoria Bluebrick and Tile Works', situated on what is now the site of Greets Green playing fields (accessible from Claypit Lane).

Immigration to the area was substantial in the 19th and early 20th centuries as factories sprang up and employment prospects were good. At a time when commuting for individuals was not easy, people tended to live close to their place of work and the area became much more residential as well as being commercial and industrial. Later, as the extractive industries declined, the space was used for housing, and this function came to predominate.

MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



The route of the Midland Metro which bisects the Character Area, for the most part in a deep cutting, was originally that of the Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Dudley Railway, which opened in 1854. It had a station very close to the town centre, off Paradise Street - now the location of West Bromwich Central Metro stop. The line began to decline in use in the 1960s, closed in the early 1970s, and reopened as the Metro in 1999.

In the second half of the 20th century, the town experienced economic decline, appearing as one of the most deprived parts of the Midlands by the time of the 2001 census - a position which has caused it to be the target of public regeneration initiatives such as New Deal for Communities (1999) and Housing Market Renewal (2004).

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Old Hill Character Area (SD04)

SUMMARY:

This is one of the smallest Character Areas in the Black Country: it is predominantly an industrial district and is surrounded by large residential areas. In part, its modern character of 20th century industrial units is a result of its position between the Dudley No.2 canal, which forms much of its eastern edge, and the now dismantled railway on its western edge, which previously ran from the centre of Dudley in the north to Old Hill Station in the south.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. Its length runs along the side of a larger limestone ridge crossing the Black Country in a north-west to south-east orientation. Steep slopes run from the lower ground to the west of the area to the higher points of the ridge in the east.

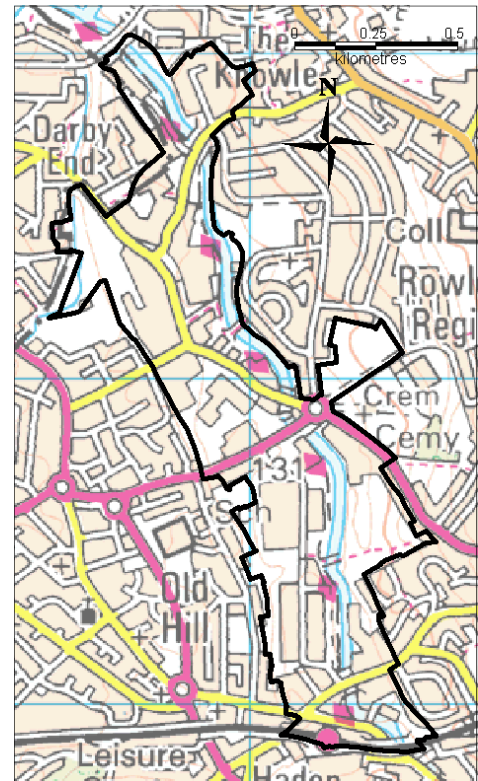
MODERN CHARACTER:

Almost all of the landscape of this predominantly industrial Character Area originates after the point at which the 4th edition Ordnance Survey map was drawn in 1938. Other than the canal which runs along the area's eastern side, only a few features survive from before this time: an industrial estate (south of the roundabout and cemetery marked on the adjacent map) appears to incorporate buildings from a former chain works, two pub buildings originate from at least as early as the 19th century, and a small area of open land in north-west of area remain from when it was part of an agricultural area.

The southern part of the area (i.e. south of Garratt's Lane - the A



Old Hill Station, at the southern end of the Character Area.



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by two large industrial areas built on former colliery land

(including the Waterfall Lane Trading Estate). In the northern half, the industrial units are generally smaller, although they share the same history as the location of collieries and include substantial industrial estates (such as Unisant trading estate and Sapcote industrial estate).

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER:

The area itself never appears to have been a centre for settlement, and in early maps (such as Yates' map of Staffordshire in 1775) the few features which appear include roads on the line of the modern Garratt's Lane and Powke Lane (the route running south-east to north-west through the area).

The character of the area as a location for mining and industrial production was reinforced at the end of the 18th century by the opening of the Dudley No.2 Canal in 1797. Via tunnels to the west and south, the canal linked the area to Birmingham and the rest of the Black Country coalfield.

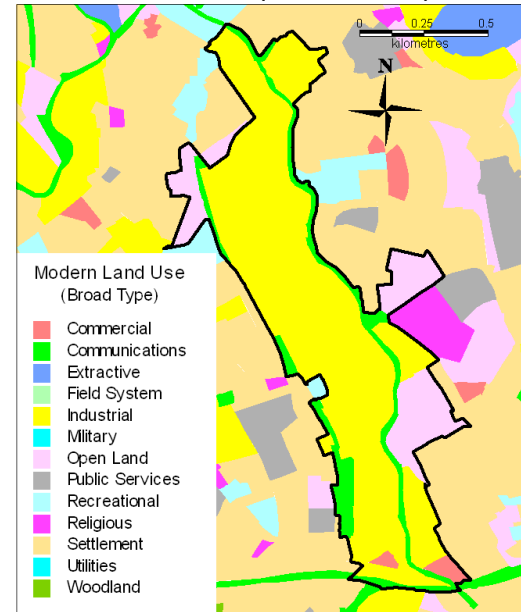
The rail line between Dudley and Old Hill (sometimes known as the 'Bumble Hole Line'), although now closed, has effectively defined the western boundary of the Character Area. For a hundred years between 1868 and 1968 it ran the three miles between the two towns servicing a number of neighbourhoods with small stations along its route.

By the time of the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map in 1880, most of the Character Area was occupied by collieries (principally Hyatt's Colliery, Gawn Colliery, Old Hill Colliery, Fly Colliery, Old Lion Colliery and Haden Hill Colliery) and, to a much lesser degree, industrial sites (for example Birmingham Pottery, Old Hill Iron Works, and the Lion Works making iron tubes).

However, half a century later, in the 1930s, we see the coal pits lying closed, many of them not having been re-opened after the 1926 General Strike as a result of flooding. The iron works also suffered a decline, although industries such as drop forging continued to employ local people on the 20th century industrial estates in the area which replaced the collieries.

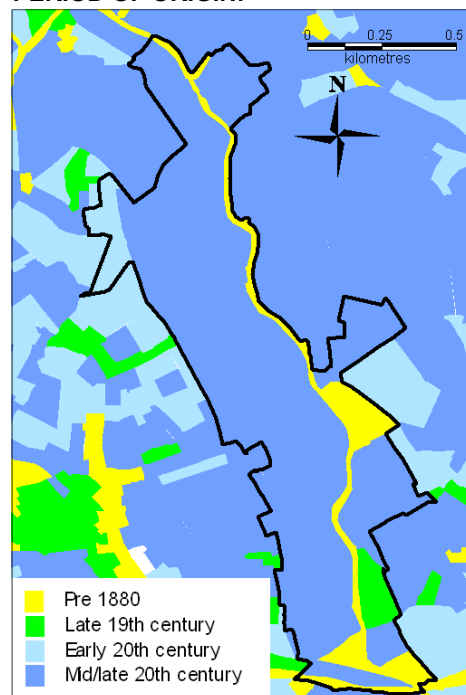
In addition to the collieries and ironworks, several brick and tile works have existed in the area. Other ceramics were also important: Royal Doulton Potteries for many years had a factory (formerly Birmingham Pottery) situated in the far north-east of the Character Area. It closed in 1979.

MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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Yew Tree Character Area (SD05)

SUMMARY:

This is a largely residential area dominated by housing from the period after 1938, and including large areas of mixed semi-detached and terraced housing. The neighbourhood is divided from other areas of similar housing immediately to its north by the boundary between Sandwell and Walsall¹. At its southern and eastern edges are the routes of the Tame Valley and Rushall canals (1840s) and M6 motorway (1970) at its junction with the M5.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

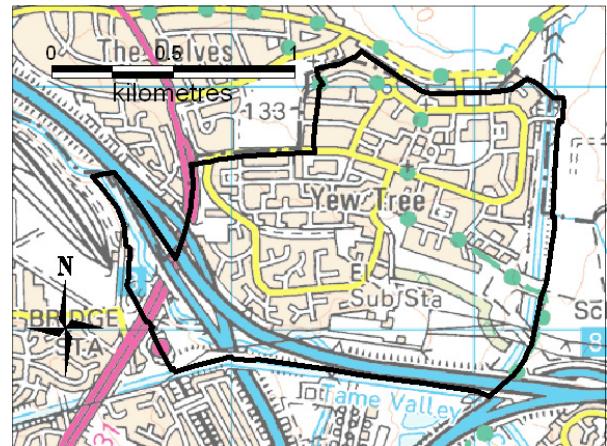
Unusually in Sandwell, this area lies over limestone and mudstone which continues north into Walsall. It is relatively low lying, being situated in the valley of the river Tame.

MODERN CHARACTER:

The landscape of this area is essentially a post-war residential suburb and, with the exception of the canals and railways, almost no part of the built environment originates before the time the 4th Edition Ordnance Survey map was drawn in 1938.

The character of the area was to a large extent defined in the 1950s & 1960s when the then local authority - West Bromwich County Borough Council - chose it as a location of a large public housing estate. Yew Tree Estate is possible the largest single surviving area of mixed mid 20th century semi-detached and terraced housing in Sandwell.

However, this character has been added to and altered by substantial private house building in the period since the early 1990s. This, combined with changes in ownership, meant that by the end of the 20th century owner-occupied properties outnumbered Council housing.



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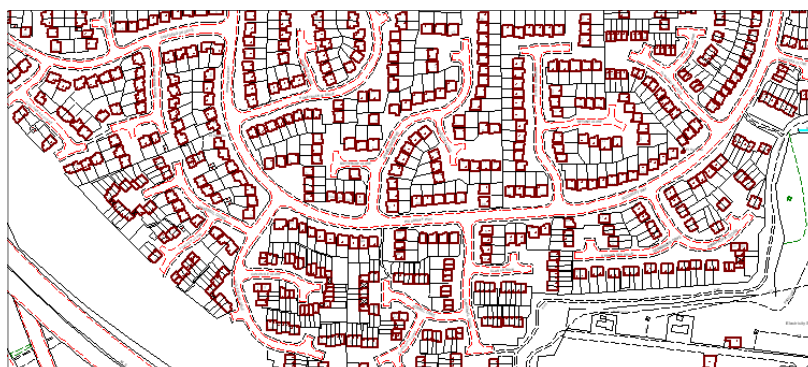
The late 20th century housing generally comprises medium-sized detached properties laid out around cul-de-sacs (see figure below). This type of development is relatively uncommon in Sandwell.

The Electricity sub station in the south-west, in terms of area the largest in the Black Country², is also part of the mid 20th century development of the area.

Some of the last canals to be built in the Black Country skirt the area's southern and eastern boundaries, while the railway line from Birmingham to Walsall together with its station at Tame Bridge, lie in the west. The

development of road infrastructure has seen the south of the Character Area dominated by the junction of the M5 and M6 motorways.

These barriers which encompass the southern edges of the area reinforce the local population's connection with the centre of Walsall, some 3km to the north-west, rather than West Bromwich which is 5km to the south.



The pattern of late 20th century cul-de-sacs and housing radiating from the arc of Woodruff way in the south-west of the Character Area.

¹See *South Walsall* Character Area Profile.

²As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER³:

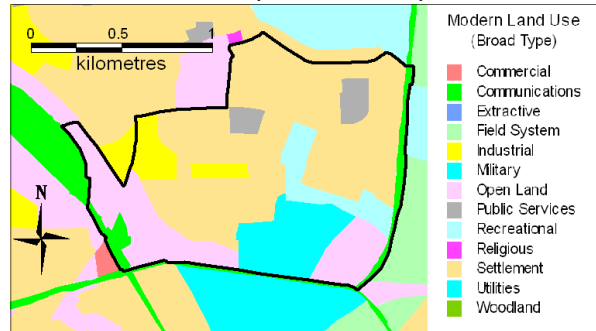
Until well into the 20th century this area was composed almost entirely of agricultural land, much of it worked from Delves Farm and Yew Tree Farm, previously located in the north of the area.

Residential development only began to cover the landscape during the period after the First World War.

Public housing played an important part in this development and significant in this was the fact that the administration of the area underwent a major change in 1931. Previously, the area had been part of The Delves, itself administered from Wednesbury (the centre of which is 3km to the west). Under the Wednesbury Corporation Act, the larger part of The Delves was transferred to Walsall and the remainder passed to West Bromwich. It was on this latter part that the Yew Tree Estate was subsequently built.

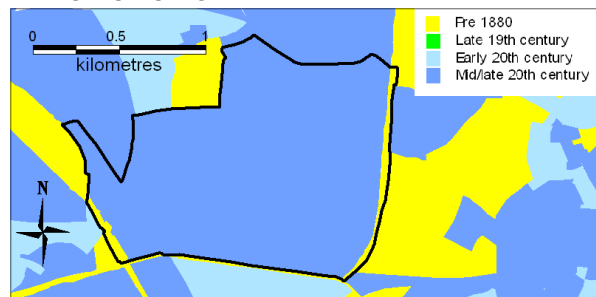
The Tame Valley Canal, on the southern edge of the area, was opened in 1844 and, as such was one of the last Black Country canals. It is elevated on an embankment for much of its route here, and an aqueduct carries it across the River Tame itself. Unusually in the Black Country, in the south-west corner of the character area the canal aqueduct crosses a railway line - another indication of the lateness of its construction since most other canals preceded the advent of the railways. Three years after the construction of the Tame Valley Canal an extension to the waterway was built - the Rushall Canal - from the south-east point of the character area. This linked it with the Walsall Canal to the north.

MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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Built in 1837, the route of the Grand Junction Railway runs along the western edge of the area. Tame Bridge Parkway Station was opened on this line in 1990 to serve new housing built on the site of the former Tame Bridge industrial estate. Apart from this estate, there has historically been very little industrial activity in the area.

³This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Rowley Regis & Blackheath Character Area (SD06)

SUMMARY:

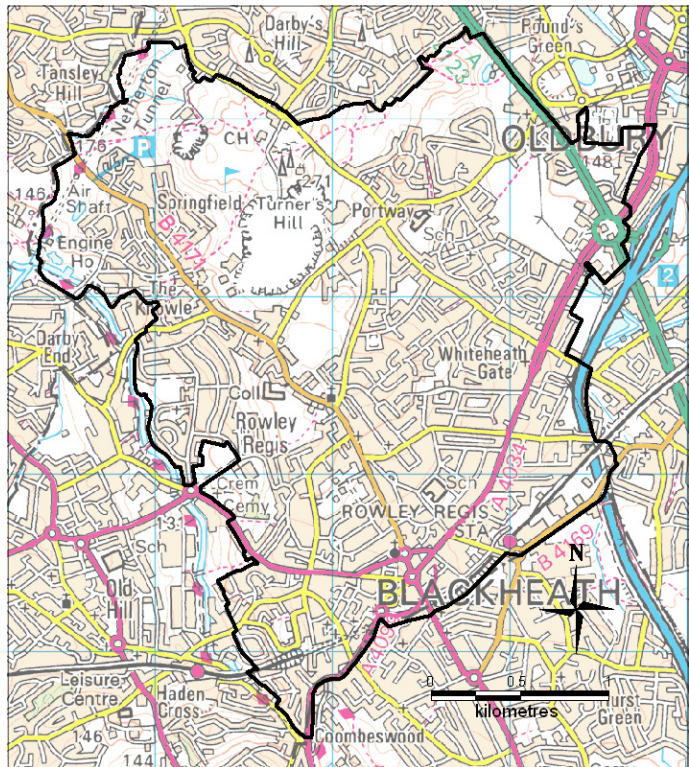
This area combines 20th century housing with large units of open and recreational land. It includes *Turner's Hill*, the highest point in the Black Country, which dominates the surrounding area. Housing dates largely from immediately before and after WW2 when large networks of streets and housing were laid out. Industrial areas lie beyond its eastern and western limits, while more areas of housing lie to the north-east and south in Dudley.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The centre and north of the area lies over dolerite and the remainder over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The area is generally high ground, peaking at *Turner's Hill* in the north which, at 270m, is the highest point in the Black Country and has particularly wide views over areas to the south and east.

MODERN CHARACTER:

The Character Area comprises a mixture of housing types, with the older (pre-WW2) housing generally located in the south and more recent construction further north. Two particularly large areas of housing and associated streets survive: immediately north of the A4034 (see adjacent map) lie the legacy of 1930s expansion of the settlement of Blackheath: while at the western edge of the area, Brickhouse is the location of a large municipal estate.



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Views of *Turner's Hill* (here seen from the south-east) dominate the south and east of the Character Area.

The land used for recreational purposes is generally in the north, and includes a 20th century country park and nature reserve, an interwar golf course, and, in the east, playing fields laid over brickworks and colliery land. In addition, substantial areas of grassland and woodland flank *Turner's Hill*.

Despite the predominance of housing, recreational areas and open land, there are also some 20th century industrial sites in the southern part of the area, while the higher ground in the north shows the legacy of the continuing tradition of quarrying.

The south and east of the area are generally well-served by roads and, to a lesser extent, railways. The M5 skirts the area (with junction 2 just outside it), crossed by the dual-carriageway of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Road. Rowley Regis station links the area to other locations between Birmingham and Worcester. Although the area was not the location of canals, underneath its north western edge lies the last canal tunnel to be built in Britain, opened in 1858.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

Prior to the industrial revolution this area was primarily agricultural, but the presence of coal and 'Rowley rag', a volcanic dolerite stone useful in producing road surfaces, ensured that it rapidly became an area of industrial activity.

The oldest settlement in the area, Rowley Regis (in the centre of the area), has always comprised a collection of scattered settlements rather than a single nucleus.

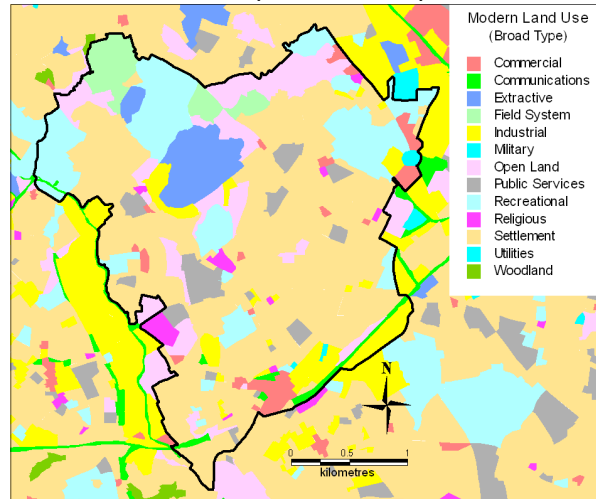
The development of Blackheath, further south, was a later product of industrial expansion. Indeed, Blackheath as a township, did not exist until 1841. However, builders had not been slow to capitalise on the 'coal boom' which had begun in the 18th century. Before this, the area had more commonly been known as 'Bleak Heath' and was mainly uninspiring heath land or farmsteads. However, it was transformed almost overnight as pit winding gear loomed on every horizon. Local collieries included Springfield and Warrens Hall (both in the north-west of the area), the latter having now become the site of a park and conservation area.

In addition to coal and ironstone mining, by 1850 Blackheath housed a range of new trades and, with these, came the need for housing for the workers. This led to a rapid rise of terraced accommodation and demand for brick making, where supply could hardly keep up with the demand. The already booming population was added to when coal miners were recruited from Wales to work local pits.

Some of the streets built to house local mining communities no longer exist in the modern landscape. Tory Street, for example, was a purpose-built collier community in the far south-west of the area, next to the railway line. However, it was demolished and replaced by a council estate in the 1930s (the location of Grange Road).

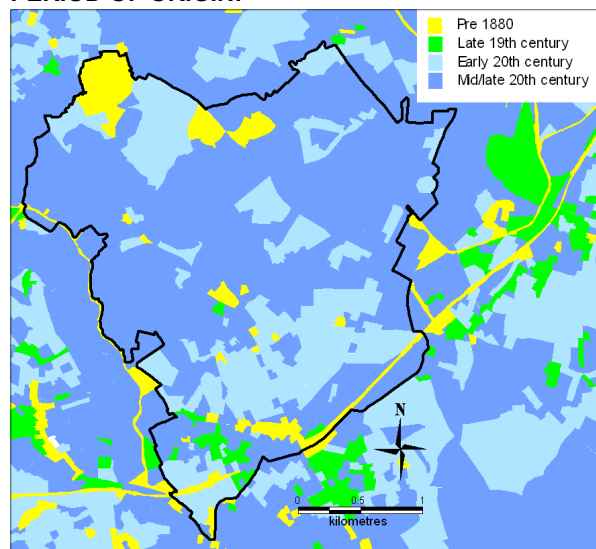
Quarrying of dolerite took place from the 17th century at least, but it increased in the early 19th century when the use of Rowley Rag for metalling roads came into its own. From then on, the number of quarries in the area rose dramatically and this contributed to the rapid change in the landscape.

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The Rowley area has been known for two other industries: nail making and the manufacture of Jews harps, the former having been an important local industry since medieval times

Like many other parts of the Black Country, the Character Area experienced an dramatic increase in house building in the years between the wars, and much of this survives in its southern part.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Sandwell Valley Character Area (SD07)

SUMMARY:

This area is unique in the Black Country in that it is dominated by recreational land, chiefly Sandwell Valley Country Park, which comprises more than half of its area¹ - with most of the remainder accounted for by agricultural land. The eastern edge forms the Boundary with the city of Birmingham, although at this point the open land continues. On all other sides, the Character Area is surrounded by residential areas, except in its far south where it adjoins the industrial districts of North Smethwick.

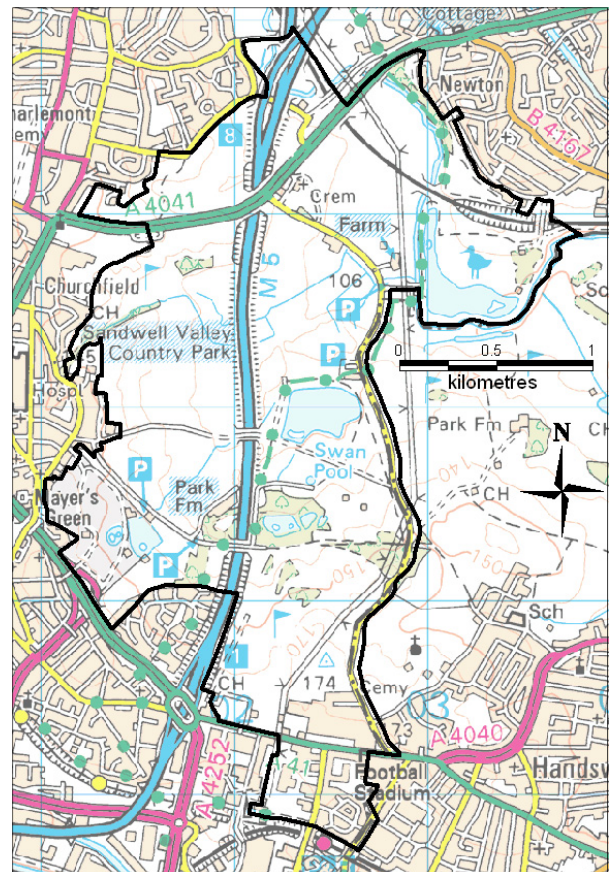
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The area lies almost entirely over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The valley of the River Tame, which flows through its northern part, is some of the lowest land in the Black Country. Its southern part is higher ground rising to the location of *The Hawthorns* football stadium in its south, famously the highest in the football league.

MODERN CHARACTER:

The Sandwell Valley is unusual as a large area of green space which has survived at the centre of the West Midlands conurbation. More than two million people live within 20km of the Character Area, and the recreational facilities contained within it are used both by local populations and by those who travel further.

Sandwell Valley Country Park itself occupies large parts of the east of the area and straddles the M5 motorway. It includes two bodies of water: Swan Pool (in the centre of the area); and Forge Mill Lake (next to the River Tame in the north-east). Two further large areas of recreational land are given to golf courses: Sandwell Park in the south-east and



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Since the late 1960s, one of the busiest sections of the M5 motorway has crossed the centre of Sandwell Valley, the single largest recreational area within the Black Country.

Dartmouth in the north-west, south of the dual carriageway of the A4041 Newton Road. King George Playing Fields and Dartmouth Park stand between the Country Park and the centre of West Bromwich in the south-west.

The Stadium of West Bromwich Albion Football Club is in the far south, across the A41 Birmingham Road. It celebrated its centenary in 2000, and access was improved by the opening of the nearby Metro station the year before.

The oldest surviving parts of the modern Character Area are the agricultural areas in the north and west.

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

The estate which became the Sandwell Valley was owned by the Earls of Dartmouth from the early 18th century. Sandwell Hall (demolished in 1928) was built by the first earl on the site of the 12th century Benedictine priory close to the Sand Well, a natural spring from which the district takes its name. The 4th earl moved away from West Bromwich in 1853, leaving the hall to be used for a variety of purposes until its destruction in the 20th century .

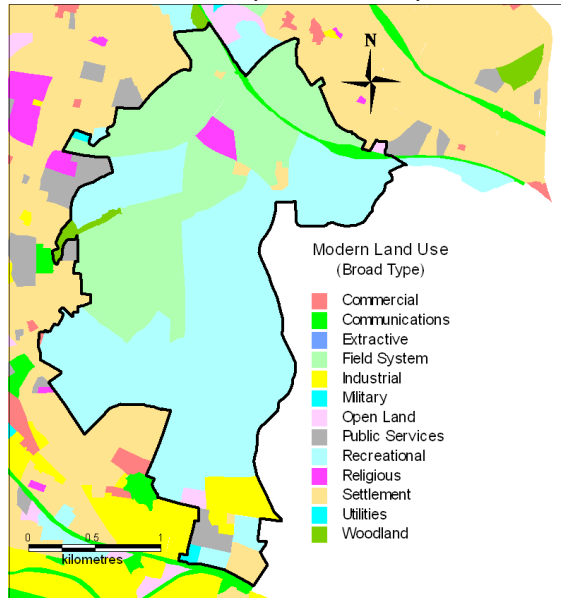
Dartmouth Park originates in a decision in 1877 by the Earl of Dartmouth to lease part of his estate to the town of West Bromwich for use as a public park. The freehold of the park was transferred to the Local Authority in 1919, and was used as a First World War memorial.

In the late 20th century, Sandwell Park Farm was restored as a working farm using 19th century farming methods.



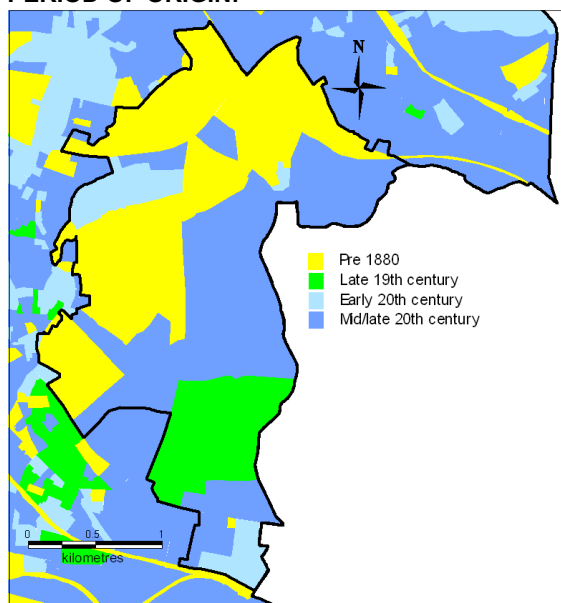
The early 19th century buildings of Sandwell Park Farm, now restored, include a visitor centre, and exhibition and meeting space.

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²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Tipton & Princes End Character Area (SD08)

SUMMARY:

Situated at the centre of the Black Country, this is an area of 20th century housing (accounting for about half of its area¹) together with significant industry, canals and railways. Historically, the area has been host to more mileage of canals, and at a greater density, than any other Black Country Character Area. Today, the extent of the area is defined by the Sandwell boundary on three sides and, in its east and south-east, it borders areas of more industrial character.

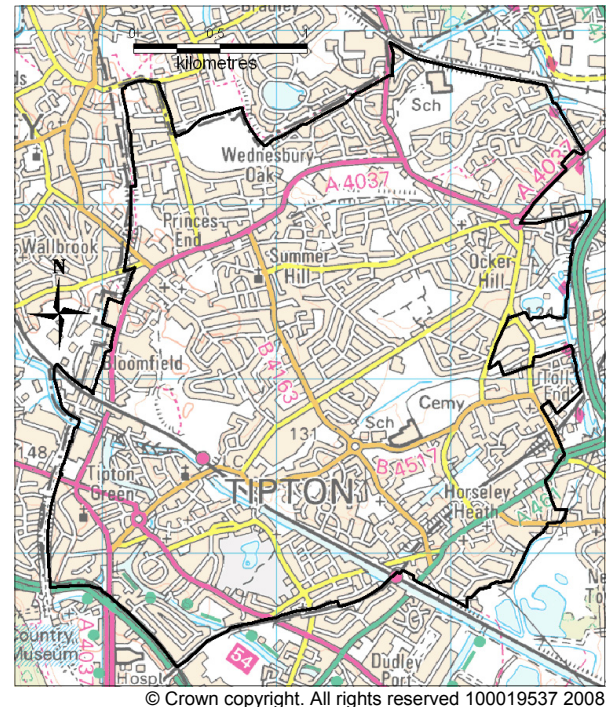
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies on sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, although coal is also accessible in several parts. The area is positioned between a higher ridge of land to its south and west, and lower ground in the Tame valley to the north and east.

MODERN CHARACTER:

This is an area which is largely residential and includes two small retail centres at Princes End in the north-west and Tipton in the south. The latter has been the area's principal shopping area for 200 years, although it has recently lost out in this respect to the retail park just outside the eastern edge of the Character Area.

As elsewhere in the Black Country, many of the surviving residential landscapes are based on inter-war housing built on colliery land. Examples here include the large Tibbington estate in the centre of the area, as well as areas of streets around Ocker Hill in the north-east. These examples sit alongside large areas of semi-detached and terraced properties from the immediate post-war period. The later part of the

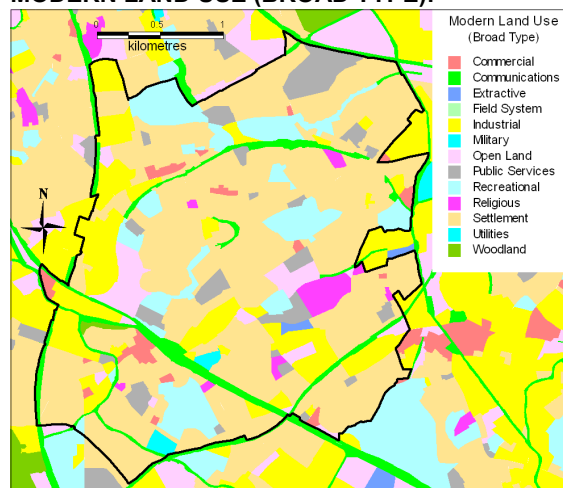


20th century has also made its contribution in the streets laid out either side of what was the Gospel Oak branch of the Walsall canal in the north of the area, for example.

For a predominantly residential district, the Character Area retains a sizeable section of commercial and trade premises, in particular along its western edge. The factories and warehouses in this area give the A4037 Bloomfield Road an industrial character, before it continues north as Princes End High Street. Particularly in the south of the Character Area, remnants of a previously more extensive network of canals and railways, together with some surviving Victorian terraces, give the modern landscape an 'older' feel than the housing estates further north.

In recent decades Tipton has contained some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the region, attracting regeneration initiatives such as Tipton City Challenge scheme in the 1990s.

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¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER:

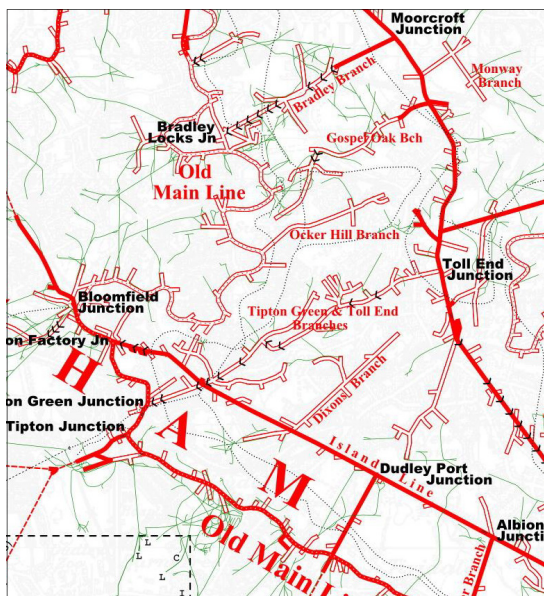
The area owes its transformation from a rural environment (the name Tipton Green originates from a clearing in a wooded landscape) to the development of local coal and iron industries.

Although mining in Tipton dates from the 13th century, it was the industrial development of the 18th and 19th centuries which accelerated the extraction of coal, ironstone and limestone in the area.

Amongst 19th century industries, the iron trade predominated, and the largest producer in the Black Country was the Bloomfield Ironworks (on the western edge of the Character Area), founded in 1830 and surviving until 1906. Gospel Oak Iron Works at Princes End was in existence by 1811, while Moat Foundry was established in 1877 and specialised in builders' ironwork and oven grates. Other iron works included the Wednesbury Oak Works, in the north, which specialised in producing high quality pig-iron.

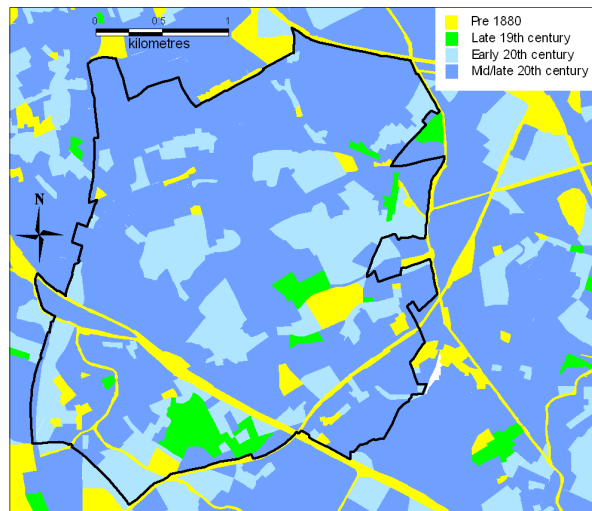
Aside from iron, other industries were also important. A soap and chemical works, known as 'The Factory' was established at Tipton around 1783 and, on the area's southern edge, the 'Model Sausage Factory'

Below: Part of Richard Dean's map of the present and former canal network, originally drawn in 1989 (this sample is taken from the 2008 edition). The density of canals, greater in Tipton than in any other part of the region, illustrates how the town acquired the name 'the Venice of the Midlands' (*surviving canals are shown in solid red, while routes now closed are drawn as open lines*). Reproduced with permission from the Historical Map of the Birmingham Canals by Richard Dean (www.cartographics.co.uk/page3.htm).



²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

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was a well-known landmark until as late as the 1960s (it is now the site of the Boscobel housing estate).

Many local firms survived for a surprisingly long period, despite economic upheavals. The *Horseley Bridge & Engineering Company*, established in 1792 in the south-west of the area, continued into the 20th century as a trading unit of *NEI Thompson*, making water tanks. The company's earlier products included elegant iron canal bridges, such as Smethwick's Galton Bridge. In the late 20th century the land previously occupied by the works was used for housing.

The original line of the Birmingham Canal had opened in 1770, conveying coal from Tipton to Birmingham. Sixteen years later the Walsall canal opened to the north, and the network of man-made waterways which developed between these routes (including the new route of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal) was so extensive that it earned Tipton the title 'the Venice of the Midlands'.

Railways arrived in 1852, with a number of stations in the area and connections to Wolverhampton, Dudley and Birmingham. Only two of these stations survived into the 21st century.

The 20th century saw the decline of Tipton's traditional heavy industries; by the time of the 1902 Ordnance Survey map there was much evidence of old coal shafts which had long-since ceased production. The slag heaps were flattened and the old shafts either filled in or remained waterlogged. The reclaimed land provided either open space for recreation or was covered in street after street of either municipal or private housing, giving the area its modern residential character.

Tividale Character Area (SD09)

SUMMARY:

This is an area of housing, the majority being semis or detached houses from mid 20th century, largely built after the Birmingham New Road (shown in green on the map below) was laid out between the wars. It is one of the most residential of the Sandwell Character Areas, with housing covering more than 70% of its area¹. At its western edge is the boundary between Sandwell and Dudley, in the north-east lie industrial areas, while immediately south are areas of open and recreational

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

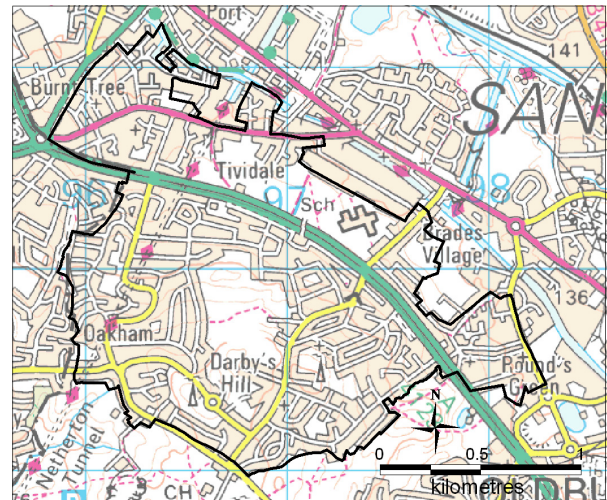
The south of the area lies over dolerite, while the north is on sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The slope of the land generally falls from its high point on its southern edge down to the line of the canal in the north-east.

MODERN CHARACTER:

The landscape of this area is dominated by Darby's Hill in its south.

The oldest surviving houses in the area are in small areas of Victorian and Edwardian terraces, including those which front the A4033 (shown in red on the adjacent map). Inter-war developments of semi-detached homes overlook or front the wide, dual carriageway of the New Birmingham Road which was

opened in 1927 (and is shown in green). However, the most common housing type in the area is the small semi-detached house built in the years following WW2. With this, a large school was built between the dual-



carriageway and the Birmingham canal (now *Tividale Community Arts College*).

More modern housing developments include those on the south bank of the Birmingham canal (see picture), as well as those lining the streets on the southern and western edges of the area. Many of the latter are larger, detached properties and, although situated in Sandwell, have a close relationship with the centre of Dudley nearby in the west.

The large areas of open land in the centre of the area (as well as that immediately outside it to the south) are the legacy of extensive quarrying.



A view looking south on to the 1990s *Tividale Quays* development at Monins Avenue at the northern point of the area. These flats, semis and detached homes are part of a modern transformation of the south bank of the Birmingham Canal from industrial to residential use. The large canal basin which forms the centre of the development was extended from an earlier spur serving a 19th century iron and galvanising works. In the background, the post-war housing on the side of Darby's Hill is visible.

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

In the early industrial age, a map of 1775 showed the settlement of Tividale located on the main road between Oldbury in the east and Dudley in the west (what is now the route of the modern A4033 passing through the north of the Character Area). Darby's Hill and the track from the hill heading west to Dudley were the only other features within the area which merited inclusion at that time.

Partly as a result of its difficult topography, the canals and railways built through the Black Country in the 18th and 19th centuries largely bypassed the Character Area in favour of more northerly routes. As a result, the area was not served by passenger railways and, although the original route of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal skirts the area's northern edge, the only canal which crosses it does so via a deep tunnel more than 2.5km long (built in 1858), therefore giving little benefit to the area. The Netherton Tunnel was the last canal tunnel to be built in the country and was also the widest, having a towpath on each side, and a total width of more than 8 metres.

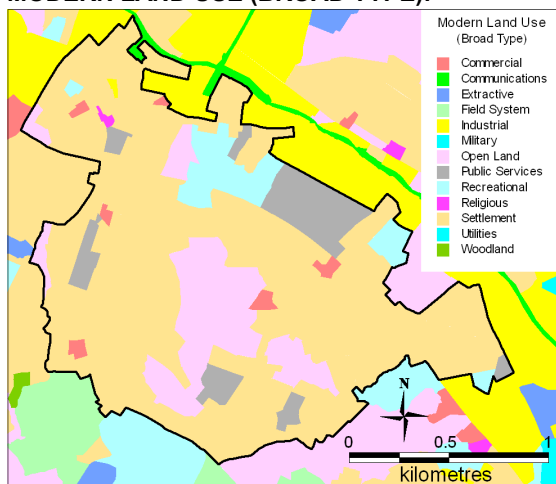
Although service to the area by passenger railways was poor, for a period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Tividale was at the centre of a network of electric trams serving the Black Country (which ran along the route of the A4033). The site of the tram depot has since been covered by housing, but examples of the vehicles can still be seen at the nearby Black Country Museum.

The slope of the land and its distance from canals and railways meant that the area was not a good location for manufacturing industry. Instead, its development before the 1930s largely took place as a result of its mineral wealth. In the last two centuries of the millennium the area was severely scarred by stone quarries, marl pits and coal mines: scars which have only become less visible since the late 20th century.

In common with the geology of the Character Area to the immediate south³, the area lies over a stone known as 'Rowley Rag' which is very hard and particularly suited to road building. Quarrying began in the area on a commercial basis in the early part of the 19th century, but the number of quarries quickly grew. The extraction of Rowley Rag in the area continued until the second half of the 20th century.

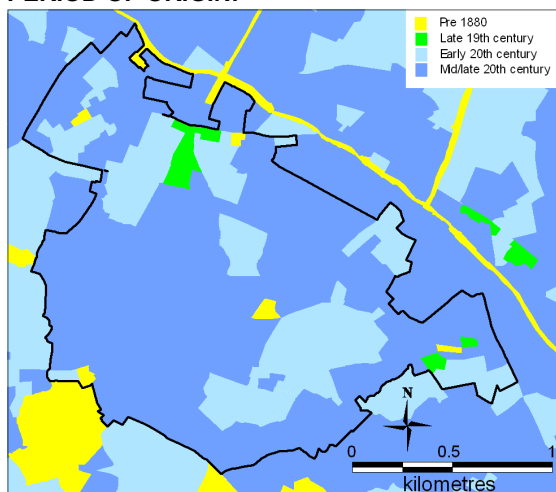
The mining of coal was a more short-lived activity in the Tividale area. While Grace Mary Colliery (in the south-east of the area) was operating by 1842, operations only

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really began in earnest when the more accessible parts of the Black Country Coalfield were becoming exhausted in later in the 19th century.

This is because extracting coal in Tividale was a more difficult proposition owing to the depth of the seams. This can be gauged from the necessity at Lye Cross Colliery (in the south of the area), of digging through nearly 200 feet of rock before reaching the thick coal at a depth of over 600 feet. At other collieries shafts were sunk even deeper before coal was reached. Many of the collieries ceased production before the end of the century and all but one had gone by 1920.

One distinctive feature of the landscape, due to the elevated location of the mines and quarries and the distance to the nearest canal, was the construction of several light railways with gravity inclined planes. These crossed the area and took the products of mining and quarrying down to the wharfs on the Birmingham canal to the north.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

³See SD06 *Rowley Regis & Blackheath* Character Area.

Cradley Heath Character Area (SD10)

SUMMARY:

While almost half of this area comprises housing¹, it is one of the most mixed in terms of its modern use, including (especially in its west) significant industrial land and (in its south) recreation. The housing is also unusually mixed in terms of its period and density, ranging from 19th century terraces to late 20th century detached properties. The area overall is defined on three sides by the boundary between Sandwell and Dudley, and in the east by the adjacent industrial area.

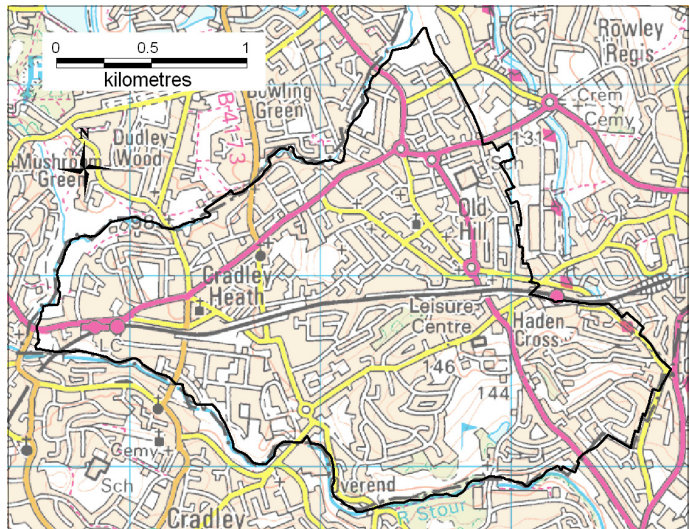
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The only part of Sandwell which lies south of the high limestone ridge crossing the Black Country, it is generally low lying, with the course of the River Stour at its southern boundary.

MODERN CHARACTER:

This is an area of generally mixed character, with both residential neighbourhoods and, particularly in its west, important commercial and industrial districts.

Housing in the area comprises a number of different types. In the northern half (i.e. north of the railway line visible on the adjacent map), in and around the centres of Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Victorian terraces sit alongside the post-war high density housing, such as that in the image below. In the south, character is defined much more by inter-war streets with large areas of semi-detached homes from the same period.



The railway line running east-west through the area links Birmingham in the north-east to Worcestershire in the south-west and includes stations at Old Hill (in the east of the Character Area) and Cradley Heath (in the west). The latter station fronts on to the A4100, the principal road through the area and the High Street of Cradley Heath itself.

The industry within the Character Area includes collections of post war units, an example being *Portersfield Industrial Estate* south of Cradley Heath, which was laid out next to the river on the site of the former Stour colliery. However, there are also the survivors from previous phases of industry, such as the works at the end of Bank Street (on the northern edge of the area), which originate in the late 19th century/early 20th century.

The main areas of recreational land in the modern Character Area are laid out around the two large houses in the south (Haden Hill House and Corngreaves Hall - see *Historic Character* overleaf). These encompass a cricket ground, golf course, public park and bowling greens.

An area comprising both industrial and residential properties, modern Cradley Heath also contains examples of a range of housing types. This high density late 20th century neighbourhood in the centre of the area was built on former colliery land.

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER:

The River Stour is not only the southern boundary of the Character Area (as well as of Sandwell), but has also had a particular significance during the Industrial Revolution. At that time, this local river is said to have boasted more water-powered installations that could be found on a similar length of any English watercourse.

Cradley Heath was also the location of important technological changes and was, for example, the venue for 17th century experiments to smelt iron using coal as an alternative to charcoal. This was important at a time when forests were disappearing at a rapid rate and the Black Country's coal was an easily-accessed alternative. There were also plenty of local examples of collieries including Black Waggon, Stour, Silverthorne, Saltwells, Bearmore, Timbertree, Granville & Gorsty Hill, and Riddings.

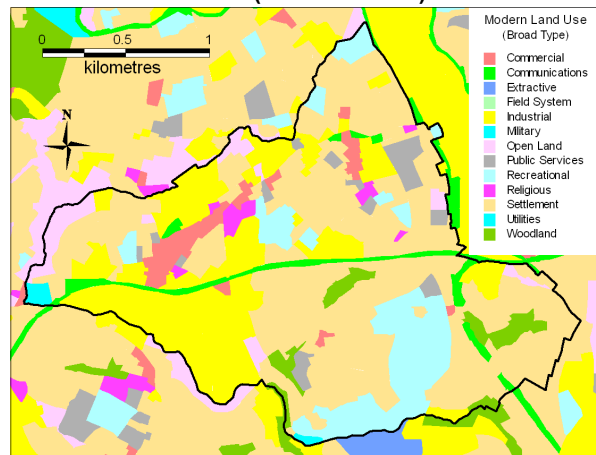
The Character Area, together with the adjoining area to the east³, also has a long tradition of chain and anchor making. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Cradley Heath and Old Hill formed part of a network of chain-making townships in the Black Country. Chains were often produced in small workshops alongside chain-makers' cottages, and the living and working conditions endured by men, women and children was famously grim. This in turn led to a successful strike in 1910 to force local employers to pay new nationally laid down wage rates.

The other prominent local trade connected was nail-making. The sheer range of size and length of nails delayed the mechanisation of their production and ensured that a domestic cottage industry endured after others had been replaced.

Cradley Heath's 19th century skyline was dominated by the vast Corngreaves Works in the south-west of the Character Area, once the largest industrial iron complex in the Black Country. The site had its own railway network with over 20 sidings for loading and unloading. Depression in the Staffordshire iron trade resulted in the collapse of the company before the start of the 20th century and the site is now the Corngreaves Trading Estate.

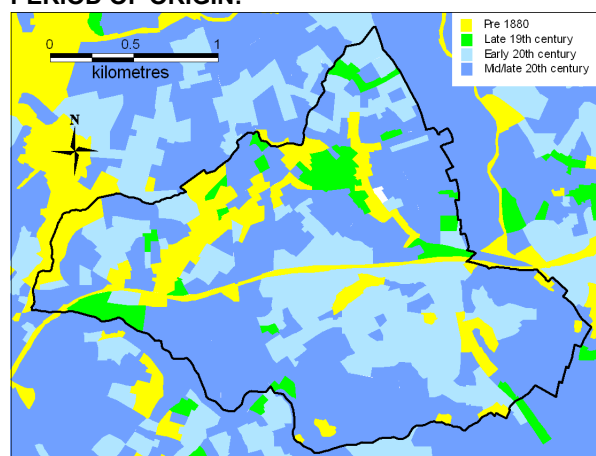
Local industrialists of the 19th century often had houses near to the works they owned and two large

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properties in the Character Area, Haden Hill House and Corngreaves Hall (now owned by the local authority), are examples of this.

Meanwhile, the development of housing for ordinary people took place in several phases of expansion. By the start of the 20th century, the result of Victorian development could be seen in the large number of terraced streets radiating off the older routes crossing the area (in particular what is now the A4100, and the route of the modern A459 which crosses it). Further phases in the 20th century saw the transformation of the southern part of the Character Area from mining and agriculture to a new residential area.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

³See SD04 *Old Hill* Character Area Profile.

Central Smethwick & Cape Hill Character Area (SD11)

SUMMARY:

This residential area is unusual in the Black Country in that it maintains much of its Victorian character, despite its subsequent development (only one other area is similar in this respect¹). Alongside the remaining 19th century and Edwardian housing, there is more area of pre-1900 parks, allotments and cemeteries than in any other Character Area in the Black Country. To its east is Birmingham, while newer housing lies to the south, and the industrial areas of Smethwick to its north.

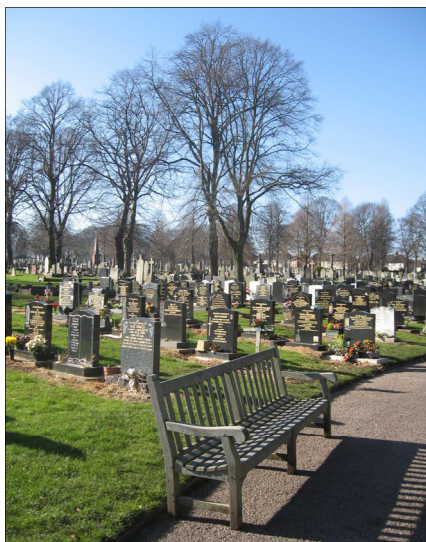
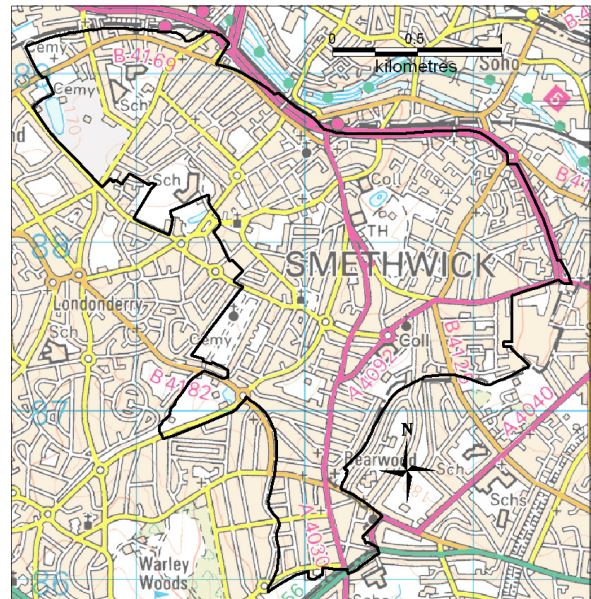
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone, with mudstone and conglomerate in its west. For the Black Country it is relatively high ground (between 150m and 180m). Thimblemill Brook runs to lower ground in the north.

MODERN CHARACTER:

This is a largely residential area and a landscape generally defined in the Victorian period. It contains more pre-1910 terraced housing than any other Black Country Character Area and, even where houses have been demolished and replaced, the characteristic grid iron street pattern which was favoured at the time largely remains. With the exception of the south, these streets have recently formed part of an area of high economic deprivation and the effects of deprivation has been included the condition of local housing.

Within this general model of Victorian settlement, 20th



Uplands Cemetery, on the western edge of the area, was opened in 1890. It is one of a number of open spaces within the Character Area which were laid out during the Victorian transformation of the area from agriculture to residential land.

century development is also now well represented. Housing survives from the inter-war years, for example, in the large area of small semis in the area's north-west (east of West Smethwick Park) and in the neighbourhood of semis and short terraces to the east of Uplands cemetery. In addition, several landmark buildings in the southern part of the area date from the 1930s.

Much of the north-western part of the Character Area now has a more modern, late 20th century character, having been rebuilt after the demolition of the first wave of terraced streets.

In Black Country terms, the area is the residential neighbourhood closest to the centre of Birmingham, 2½ miles to its east, and it sits between two important radial routes out of the city centre - the A457 in the north and Hagley Road in the south (both on the line of earlier turnpiked routes). On its northern edge, the area is served by railway stations on lines from Birmingham to the west.

Commercial areas are generally organised along the streets which form the main A roads (shown in red on the map above) although, added to this pattern, is a large redeveloped retail park on Cape Hill in the east of the area. The shopping streets have a distinctive character brought about in part by shops which serve local communities originating in South Asia, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

¹See *Wolverhampton Inner Western Suburbs* Character Area Profile.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

In Black Country terms, the historical character of Smethwick is distinguished in that it is 'off the coal' and it was therefore not directly affected by the development of mining in the way that several other Black Country towns were. Instead, the driver of Smethwick's development was the transport corridor to the north, which moved goods on canals and railways between Birmingham and the Black Country proper (i.e. towns over more accessible coal). This attracted industry on a huge scale, caused the expansion of the local population, and prompted the rapid construction of housing over previously agricultural land.

In the early 19th century, Smethwick as a settlement was centred on Bearwood Hill in the south, where a turnpike road out of Birmingham crossed the road from Harborne in the south. In fact, before 1842 Smethwick was part of the parish of Harborne (now in modern Birmingham). An early corn mill in the south of the Character Area was converted to making thimbles and, by 1775, was known by this activity. The Thimble Mill pool still survives today and the mill itself has given its name to several features in the modern residential landscape.

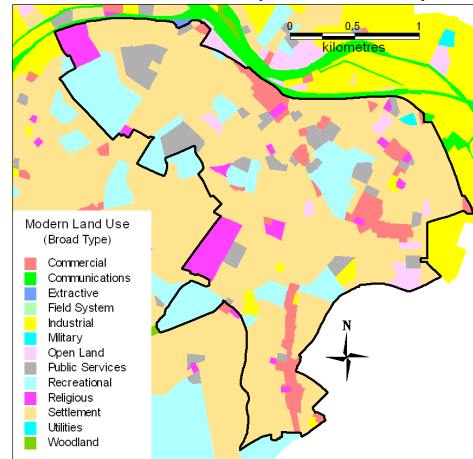
With the building of the canals, the town centre moved to the northern edge of the Character Area, to the present High Street. The rapid population expansion in this northern part in the early 19th century necessitated a new church to serve the local population, and Holy Trinity was built. By the late 19th century new streets and estates of houses had been laid out, with some remaining farm land turned into allotments, cemeteries and parks.



Large parts of Cape Hill (in the east of the area) and Bearwood (in the south) retain the Victorian tunnel-back housing which played a major part in the town's expansion.

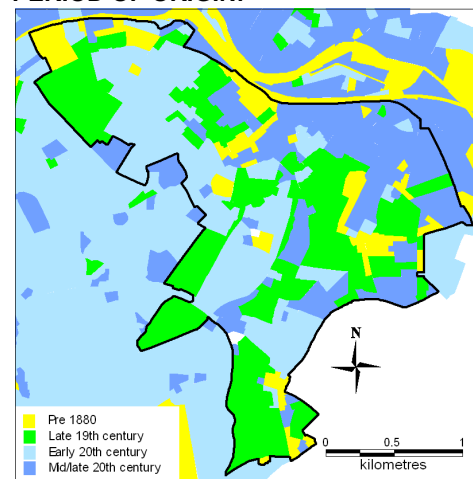
²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

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The industry outside the northern edge of the character area continued to be

highly influential. For example, the most important factor in the development of West Smethwick (the far north-west of the area) was the presence nearby of Chance Brothers' glass works.

In fact, the wealth of Victorian Smethwick was such that many of the public facilities in the area (particularly the parks and schools) originated as donations from factory-owners. Examples of these being the schools created by the Chance family, and the park donated by the brewery owner Harry Mitchell.

Among those coming to work in Smethwick industries in the second half of the 20th century, were many bringing religions which were not served by local facilities. This caused the conversion of several local buildings: the largest being that of the Congregational Chapel on the High Street to a Sikh Gurdwara. On its opening in 1961 it was said to be the largest in Europe.

The unusual character of the modern High Street where it forms the Character Area's northern edge is partly a result of the decision in the 1980s to demolish one side of it to make way for a dual-carriageway. The A457 Tollhouse Way is now one of the busiest stretches of A road in Sandwell, but the High Street has undoubtedly suffered.

Warley Character Area (SD12)

SUMMARY:

This residential Character Area is one of only three large areas of early 20th century suburbs in the Black Country. In many ways it represents the advance of suburban housing in a southerly direction, being bordered by older settlement to the north and containing more recent development in its south (continuing into Dudley¹). The modern boundaries with Birmingham and Dudley lie to its south, and the industrial areas of Oldbury and Langley to its north-west.

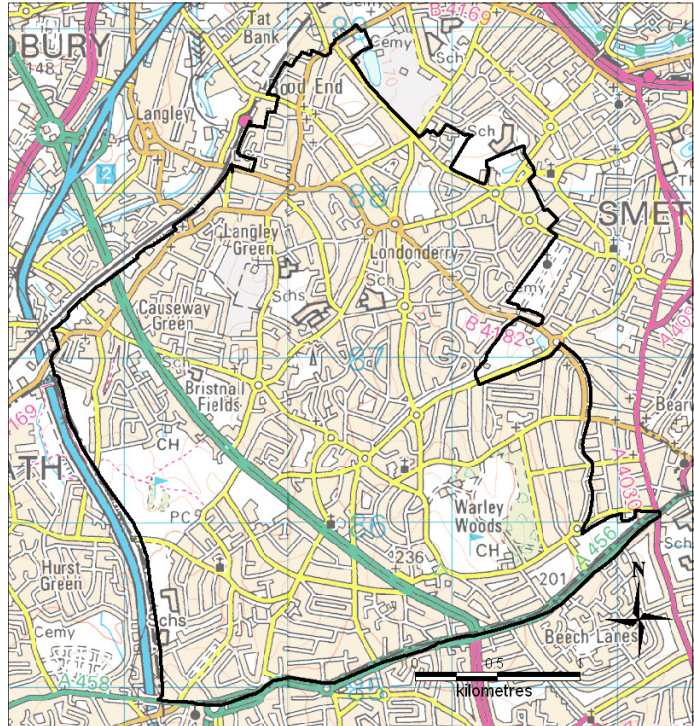
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

This area lies over sandstone and mudstone. At 180m to 220m, it is higher than much of the land around it, making it an obstacle for the canals, railways and major roads which, until 1927, skirted around it. Thimblemill Brook flows north through the area.

MODERN CHARACTER:

This is one of the largest single residential areas in the Black Country and probably contains the most 1930s housing of any Character Area outside Wolverhampton. This type of accommodation fills large swathes of the northern and central parts of the area and comprises in large measure small semi-detached properties, often built on geometrically laid out streets or crescents.

The oldest housing in the area is generally strung out along the roads between the settlements of Rood End, Langley Green and Causeway Green, on the area's north-western edge. Causeway Green is also the point at which the a principal road route between Wolverhampton and Birmingham (built between the wars) enters the area to cross it in a north-west to south-east direction. This



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One of the largest areas of inter-war housing in the Black Country, typified by small semi-detached properties on curved streets and best exemplified by The Oval, seen here, in the east of the Character Area.

route also marks a boundary in terms of the period of the landscape: north of this line, the landscape largely originates from the period before 1938, south of this line it is, with the exception of Brandhall Golf Course, more modern.

Another golf course can be found within the boundaries of Warley Woods public park in the south-west of the area. Warley Woods themselves are, in the absence of canals and railways within the area, one of the oldest features in the landscape, originating as a private park in the 18th century.

The south of the area is bounded by two important roads: the A456 Hagley Road and, since the late 1960s, by the M5 in the west—which also forms the boundary with Dudley. The Jewellery line provides a passenger rail station at Langley Green, just outside the area in its north-west.

¹See *Dudley Character Area Profiles*.

HISTORIC CHARACTER:

Although densely urbanised today, this area was almost entirely agricultural until the time it was surveyed for the Ordnance Survey's 3rd edition map of the area in the late 1920s.

Within the earlier rural landscape, small settlements existed along the north-western edge of the area, as well as in the hamlets of Bristnall Fields and Warley Salop in its centre. Meanwhile, on the area's eastern edge, Bearwood's Edwardian streets had expanded to meet the current boundary of Warley Woods.

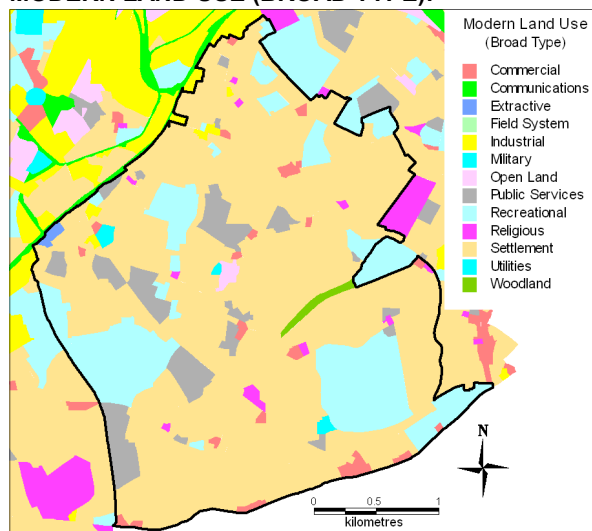
The area has a complex administrative history. The now disappeared name of Warley Salop, a settlement in the centre of the Character Area (on what is now the junction of George Road and Hill Top Road) was, as its name implies, a detached part of Shropshire, while its counterpart, Warley Wigorn, was similarly in Worcestershire. A tree known as Three Shires Oak (cut down in 1904), stood at what is the eastern edge of the Character Area where Staffordshire once met the other two counties (appropriately, on the junction of Wigorn Road and Three Shires Oak Road).

The inter-war years saw the area's transformation to the suburban landscape we see today, starting with the opening of the Wolverhampton Road (A4123) in 1927. This broad dual carriageway cutting across previous routes symbolised optimistic ideas of a future based on the car. But even its construction, which used colliery waste in its foundations, and employed many unemployed Black Country miners as labour, paid reference to the area's past.

The following decade saw an unprecedented expansion in housing into the agricultural land north of the Wolverhampton Road. Alongside the road itself, as well as several side roads leading off it, private houses were constructed, but much of the north of the area was given over to the local authority semis and short terraced housing typical of the period. This served to differentiate it from the Edwardian terraces and earlier detached properties around Warley woods in the east, more frequently used by the local middle classes.

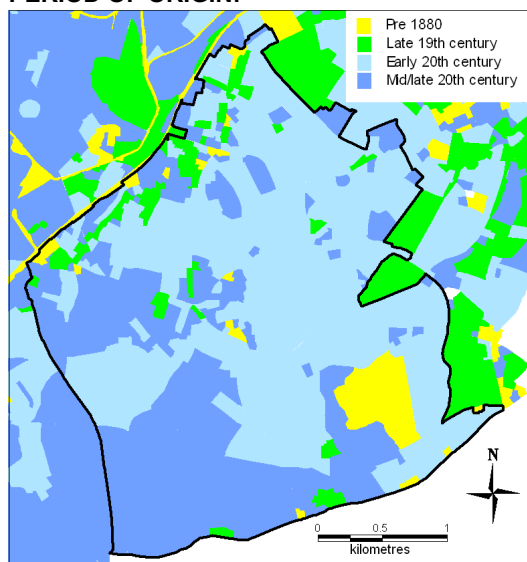
Although there was some small earlier settlement at Brandhall in the south (there is a reference to it as the Manor House of Warley Wigorn as early as 1444 and, more recently, the golf course was created from farmland in 1908), the first development of the area to the south-west of the Wolverhampton Road mostly took place in the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, several thousand council

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houses, flats and bungalows were built by the local authority (then Oldbury Council). The area was further enhanced by facilities such as a new primary school in the 1950s, a Baptist church in 1963, a clinic in 1969, and a new youth centre built onto the existing Perryfields High School in 1970. In the centre of the housing estate, there is a shopping precinct, as a community centre (1966) and the public library (1961). Some of the high-rise flats in Brandhall have now been demolished and replaced with low rise homes built by housing associations.

Wednesbury & Hill Top Character Area (SD13)

SUMMARY:

This is one of the largest residential areas in the Black Country (three-fifths of its area is accounted for by housing¹) and it includes the important commercial area of Wednesbury. The boundary with Walsall is in its north, at its eastern edge are motorways, and industrial districts lie to the west. The housing in the area is, in general, more recent than that of the West Bromwich Character Area to the south.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The majority of the area lies over coal (perhaps to a greater extent than in any other Sandwell Character Area), while in the south-west the underlying geology is sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The north-eastern edge of the area follows the valley of the River Tame, and the land rises from there to high points at Wednesbury (in the north-west), Hill Top (in the south-west) and Charlemont (in the south-east). The Oldbury Arm of the Tame flows south-west to north-east across the area.

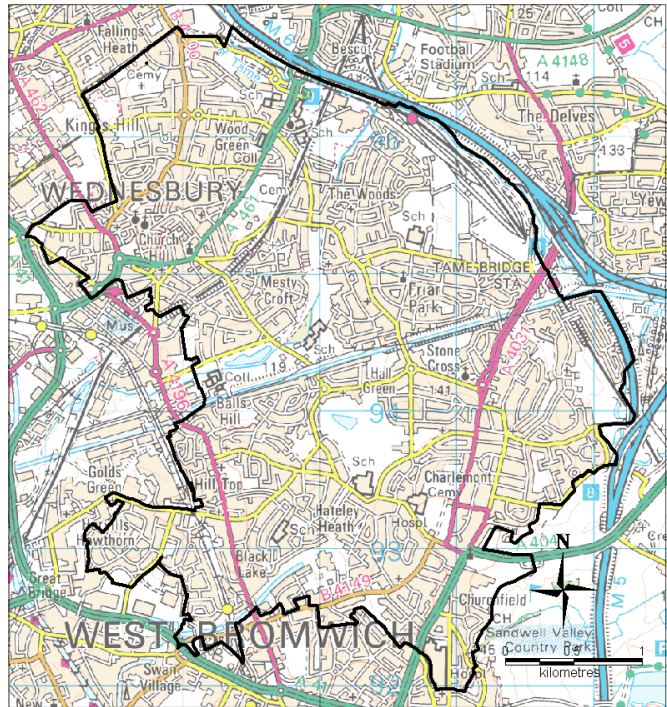
MODERN CHARACTER:

This is a largely residential area, although much of the earliest housing (at Wednesbury and Hill Top) has been replaced. The vast majority of area is occupied by 20th century properties, many of them built on Council estates. Examples of this include Friar Park (in the east of the area) with its large plan of small, inter-war terraces and, on the opposite side of the area, the 1950s semis and terraces at Harvills Hawthorn.

Schools, hospitals and cemeteries form an important part of the landscape. Many, like Heath Lane cemetery and Sandwell General Hospital were built to serve the town of West Bromwich, immediately to the south.



Wednesbury market place, in the north-west of the Character Area, reflects the town's earlier prosperity as a centre of coal mining and industry.



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The Tame Valley in the north-east has always been a transport corridor and, since 1847, the rail route between Birmingham and Walsall. Passenger stations are included at Tame Bridge and Bescot, and the freight facility at Bescot sidings is one of the largest in the region. Since 1970, the Tame Valley has also been the route of the M6, and Junction 6 lies on the northern edge of the Character Area. The creation of a car-based retail park to the west of Junction 9 (including *IKEA*, just outside the area), has had an important influence on this part of the landscape.

In the 21st century, the west of the area has benefited from the re-establishment of a disused rail corridor represented by the opening of the Midland Metro, with stops at Black Lake and two serving Wednesbury town centre. This has re-opened an important link with the cities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

¹As recorded in 2000.

HISTORIC CHARACTER²:

The town of Wednesbury has Saxon origins and the parish church is first mentioned in 1210. High Bullen, the route of the modern A461 marked in green on the map overleaf, appears to have been the centre of the medieval settlement. The Character Area also includes the original centre of West Bromwich at Churchfields in the area's far south east: modern West Bromwich is now centred to the south.

Like many others in the Black Country, the area has a tradition of mining and iron working. A large area of collieries was situated immediately west of the area: it was this source of coal which was the destination of the first canals in the area in the late 18th century (the canal still forms the area's south-western boundary).

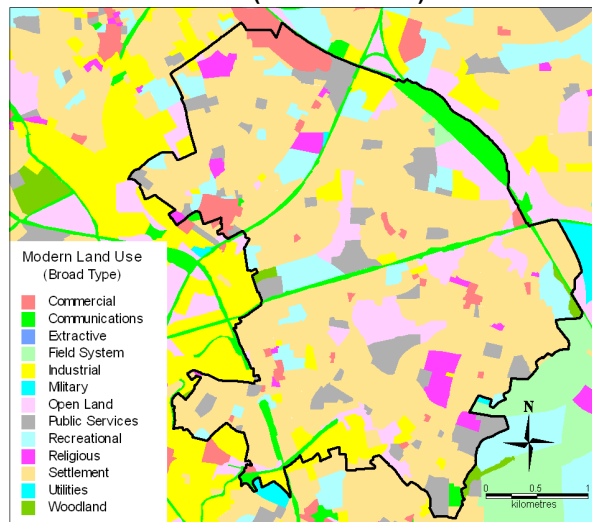
Later, in the 19th century, the effects of coal mining could be found covering several parts of the landscape within the area which, aside from the settlements of Wednesbury and Hill Top, had until then been largely agricultural. The Tame Valley canal, which runs east-west in a straight line across the Character Area, was a relatively late addition to the network (in 1844) to provide an alternative route between the Black Country coalfields and Birmingham. In the following decade the railway lines also crossed the area, ultimately contributing to the canals' decline in use.

The industry which developed was generally located in the areas along the western and southern edges of the area. But the story of coal mining and ironworking industries exploiting a previously agricultural landscape is not one which distinguishes this area from its neighbours. It is rather the widespread replacement of the previous landscape with housing developments, particularly from the end of the 1930s onwards, which has given the area its modern character.

These large housing developments were made possible by the fact that substantial areas of fields and woodland still existed in the Character Area in the early 20th century, as well as the fact that it had been collieries (and their spoil heaps) rather than industry which had predominated in the Character Area during the 19th century. When the latter were removed (some as late as the 1950s), the possibility opened up for large-scale housing construction on them, in addition to that which had been possible on previously farmed and wooded areas.

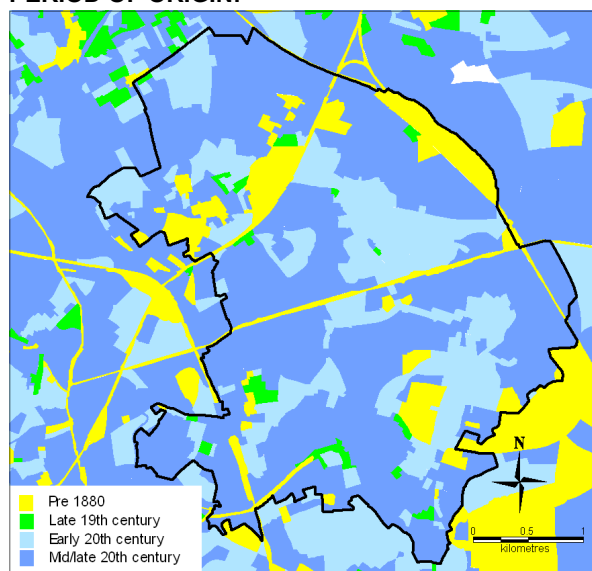
The housing which was built to serve the growing Black Country population was mixed between private and public sponsorship. However, a large contribution

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was made by construction under the aegis of the local authorities of the day (since absorbed into Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council). Large council estates were built at Wood Green (on fields, in the north of the area), Friar Park (on fields, in the east), and Harvills Hawthorn (on rough grassland, in the south-west) for example.

The expansion of the population of Wednesbury and West Bromwich also led to the expansion of services such as schools, hospitals and cemeteries. In the 1930s the workhouse in the far south of the area became Hallam Hospital (now Sandwell General), while the cemetery at Heath Lane (a little to the north) became one of the largest in the Black Country.

²This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).

Great Bridge Character Area (SD14)

SUMMARY:

This Character Area, together with those to its south¹ form the single largest area of industrial land in the Black Country. Defined by its position along a river valley running over the South Staffordshire coalfield, it has been used as a route by canals, railways and, most recently the Black Country New Road. Bounded by residential areas to its east and west, and by Walsall in its north, it includes the commercial centre of Great Bridge.

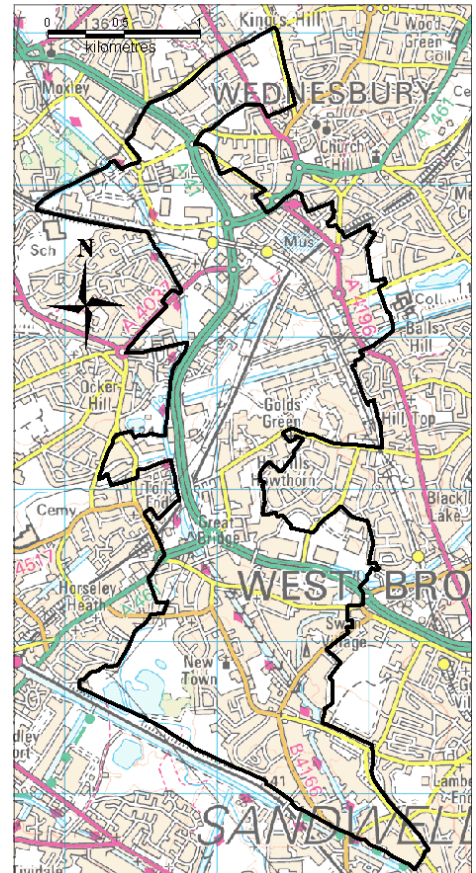
GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The north of the area lies over coal, while the south is over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate. The area sits in the valley of the River Tame (Oldbury Arm) which enters the area in its south and exits in its north-west.

MODERN CHARACTER:

More than half of this area is currently industrial, and the majority of these industrial sites have been developed in the mid to late 20th century². The oldest industrial sites, dating from before WW2, are scattered along the eastern side of the area, often alongside the lines of canals, past and present. The landscape still retains some of the 18th and 19th century transport infrastructure in the shape of the Walsall Canal (1786) and the Tame Valley Canal (1844) but its disused railway lines have relied on the Midlands Metro to breath new life into them.

Most of the housing in the area is in Great Bridge in the south-west, in a wedge of land between canals. It has included substantial post-WW2 high density development, in particular purpose built and high-rise flats. Nearby, the old commercial centre of Great



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Typifying the area's role as a communication corridor, the Metro line from Birmingham to Wolverhampton follows the route of the former Great Western Railway through the north of the Character Area. Opened at the very end of the 20th century, it includes stops servicing Wednesbury town centre and the new Black Country New Road.

¹See *Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley* Character Area Profile.

²As recorded in 2000.

Bridge on one side of the canal has now been dwarfed by the site of a 24-hour Asda on the other.

Recreational land is represented in the south-west of the area in the shape of a significant park and nature reserve, established in the 20th century on the site of earlier brickworks and collieries.

The Black Country New Road has had a huge influence on the recent life of the area. Like much of the land next to it, the large electricity sub-station (previously a colliery in the area's centre) has been redeveloped for industrial use since the HLC was recorded in 2000. Significant among this development, and a measure of the accessibility of nearby motorways, has been the growth of new 'logistics' sites.

HISTORIC CHARACTER:

This area's modern landscape of dual-carriageways, giant industrial sheds and hypermarkets, conceals some of the earliest exploitation of the mineral wealth of the Black Country.

Coal extraction shaped much of the northern part of the area's first non-agricultural uses while, in the south, clay pits and brickworks performed a similar function. Ironworks were also feature of the area, both north and south.

Some of the first coal mines in the area were sunk at Ball's Hill (on the area's eastern edge) as early as 1707, but it was 100 years later, during the first half of the 19th century, and after the arrival of the canals, that the majority of mines were opened.

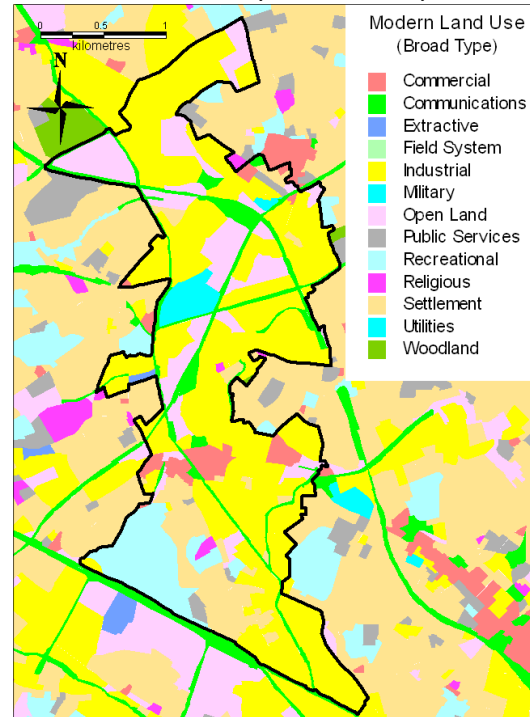
The canals first came to the area in its south-east, when the need to transport coal to manufacturing centres brought about the opening of the Balls Hill Branch of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Canal in 1769. This route, now closed, ran up the eastern side of the area to connect Hill Top with the canals to Birmingham in the south.

Sixteen years later, another branch, this one still surviving, was cut from the same south-east location to run up the western side of the Tame Valley to the towns further north, in particular to Darlaston and Walsall. The Tame Valley Canal which joins this route near the centre of the Character Area was a latecomer, opened in 1844 to provide an alternative route between the Black Country and Birmingham.

The first railway through the area was opened between Walsall and Dudley in 1850, running across the area from Wednesbury towards the south-west. Four years later, it was crossed at Wednesbury by a line between Birmingham and Wolverhampton (there were separate stations). The latter line forms the current route of the Midland Metro, although it is anticipated that the Wednesbury-Dudley line will re-open as a further connecting Metro line.

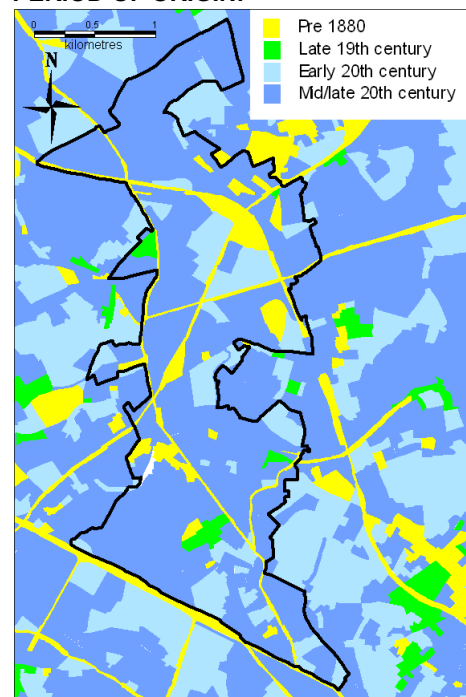
By the end of the 19th century the extractive industries were in decline, making way for the 20th century development which, for the most part, characterised the area at the time of the recording of the HLC.

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North Smethwick Character Area (SD15)

SUMMARY:

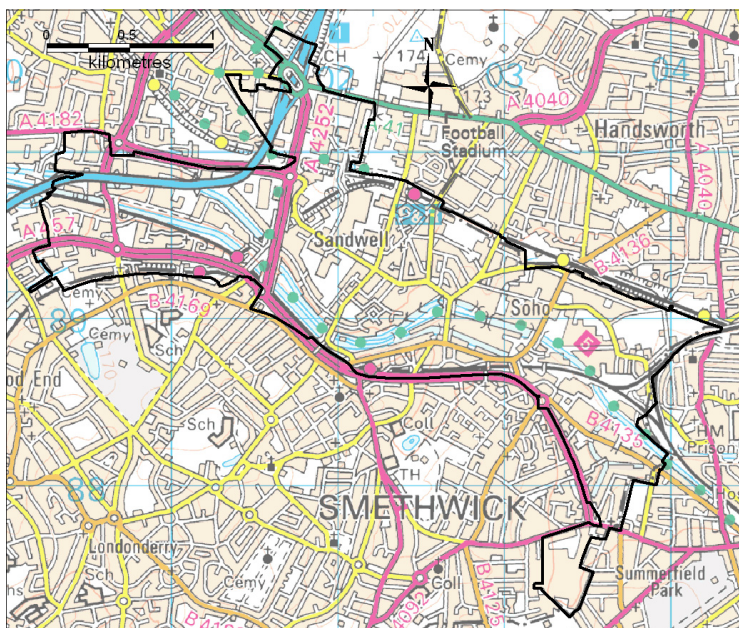
One of the largest areas of industrial land in the Black Country¹, its character has been formed by the transport corridors (canal, rail, road and, most recently, metro) running east-west through the area from the centre of Birmingham (only 3km to its east) to the Black Country coalfields, Wolverhampton and beyond. The large industrial corridor continues beyond the Character Area to the west², while to the south lies the residential part of modern Smethwick.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The west of the area lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, while the east is over red sandstone and pebble beds. Crucially, the area contains a low point of a north-south ridge running between Birmingham and the Black Country coalfields.

MODERN CHARACTER:

This is an area dominated by industry, most of it the result of post-war development. In addition, canals, railways and major roads have also left an important legacy, defining the way the landscape is used, but also in creating barriers within it. This latter point is illustrated by the housing in the centre of the area (Brasshouse Lane and roads off) which is separated from the centre of



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two canals, a dual carriageway and the West Coast mainline railway.



The 'new' wider, straighter canal route between Birmingham and the Black Country coalfields, shown at its junction with the older route (in the centre of the Character Area), preceded the expansion of Smethwick as a location for industry.

Although the factories and depots in the area include some important reminders of the large employers of Smethwick's early industrial canalside development (such as the remains of Chance's glassworks in the west, and the Soho Foundry in the east), much of the modern landscape (at least a fifth of the industrial land) is given over to trading estates of smaller units.

The manufacturing tradition also continues alongside other industries. In the north, large logistics and distributive concerns have made use of the access to junction 1 of the M5 while, in the east, scrap and wholesale merchants are part of the local mix of trades.

As a long-established industrial area, north Smethwick's older sites are continually subject to change. Since the data for the HLC was collected in 2000, the large brewery site, which survived as an outcrop of industry on the area's far south-west, has since made way for a large housing development.

¹As recorded in 2000.

²See SD01 *Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley* Character Area profile.

HISTORIC CHARACTER³:

The landscape of north Smethwick was largely defined in the second half of the 18th century, as it became the link between Birmingham and the Black Country.

In 1760, what is now the east-west dual-carriageway of the A457 (see map overleaf) was turnpiked (the surviving toll-house giving its name to the modern road and shopping centre) and, in 1769, the first canal was built along a similar route, using numerous locks to cross the Smethwick ridge. These developments were important in that they started to attract industry to what was then an agricultural environment.

Early industrial sites included the Soho Foundry (now *Avery-Berkel Ltd*), built in 1795, and the glassworks in West Smethwick which was established in 1814. However, it was not until a wider and straighter replacement canal was built in 1827 (excavating through the ridge and dispensing with the need for so many locks) that the industrialisation of the area expanded to eventually dominate its character.

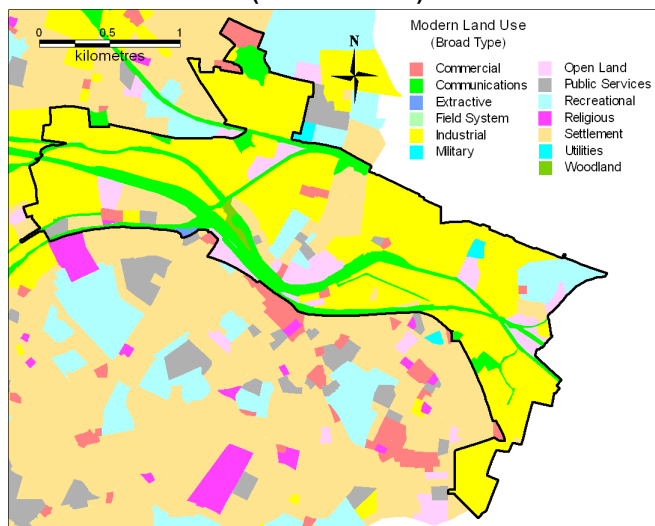
By the time of the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of the 1880s, industry had taken over much of the east of the area. The north was meanwhile still largely agricultural, although one of the last Black Country collieries to be opened, Sandwell Park, was situated in the fork of a railway junction (close to what is now The Hawthorns station).

At this point in its development, much of the newly expanded residential and commercial centre of Victorian Smethwick was within the boundary of the Character Area. These streets (including Rolfe Street) started to change to industrial uses in the 20th century, as the centre of Smethwick was pushed south of the railway.

The railways had arrived in the mid 19th century, and their routes have done much to define our Character Area, forming large parts of its northern and southern boundaries. In the 1990s, line and station closures were in some way reversed by the opening of the 'Jewellery Line' (1995) with new stations at Smethwick Galton Bridge and The Hawthorns, together with line 1 of the Midland Metro (1999).

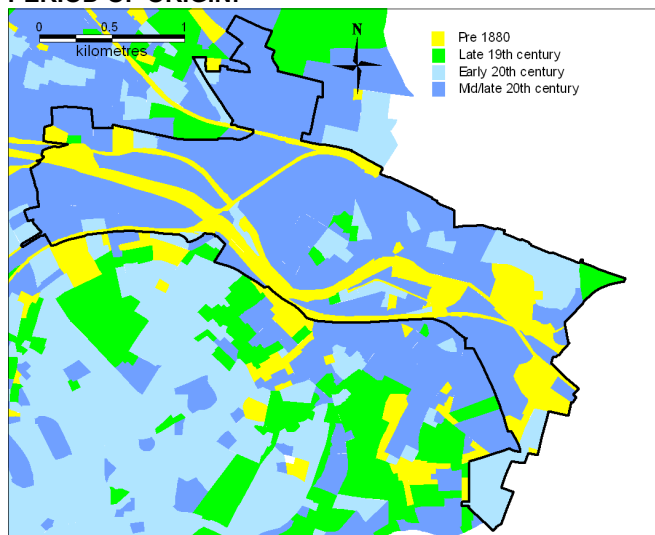
The railways also influenced the development of industry from the 19th century. *The Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co. Ltd*, for example, was

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established in the north of the area in the 1860s and remained a feature of the area until 1963. It became a nationally prominent manufacturer of rolling stock, and is now the location of an industrial estate.

Other 19th century manufacturing sites have played an important role in the town's development. *Fox, Henderson & Co.* opened in the south-east of the area in the 1840s. Although the firm itself closed in 1856, its site was then occupied by one of the predecessors of *GKN*, in its day one of the town's largest manufacturing employers. Later (in 1878), *Mitchell's & Butlers' Cape Hill Brewery* opened a site at Cape Hill which expanded to occupy 90 acres by 1914.

³This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).