

# SANDWELL DESIGN CODE



**Allies and Morrison**  
with **Phil Jones Associates**  
October 2025

## Stage 1 Baseline analysis report



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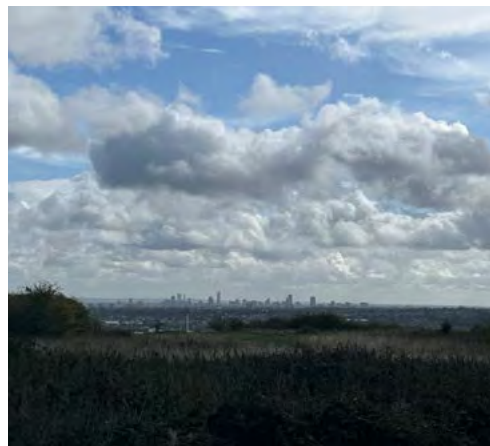
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# *CELEBRATING SANDWELL'S DIVERSE CHARACTER*





# INTRODUCTION

Sandwell is a multi-centred and highly urbanised metropolitan borough. Each town is a place in its own right, and set strongly within the Black Country, but with important influences from Birmingham and Wolverhampton. There is a history of strong local communities focused around key industries. Communities have seen then population change over last 50 years, bringing with it new vibrancy and activities.

There is significant pressure and desire for growth in Sandwell – for both industry and homes.

Sandwell Council has commissioned a team led by Allies and Morrison to prepare a Design Code for the borough. The Design Code is to be shaped by a deep understanding of the borough and led by community priorities on design. It's aim is to raise the quality bar for design in the borough and ensure new development is context-led.

Stage 1 of the work has been focused on gathering data, knowledge, information and views on the character of the borough. This analysis has generated three outputs:

- A **Baseline Report** - which focuses on character analysis, data and mapping, and review of the current context (**this document**).
- An **Engagement Report** - which summarises the events and activities undertaken to draw in local knowledge and views to help inform the priority themes for the Design Code.
- A **Conclusions Summary** - which outlines the common threads between the baseline analysis and the engagement inputs.



West Bromwich Town Hall



Wednesbury mosaic



# SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This baseline report provides a comprehensive assessment of Sandwell, providing a deeper understanding of what the Design Code could help with and the character it should draw on. It is based on onsite survey analysis and desktop data analysis.

Beginning with a **policy review**, the report then examines Sandwell's historic evolution to understand how industrial legacy and urban growth patterns have shaped the place it is today. The report then explores the **character** of place through multiple lenses: people and socio-economics, movement and transport, landscape nature and climate, public spaces, and built urban form. Recognising that the borough comprises **six distinct towns** - Wednesbury, Tipton, Smethwick, West Bromwich, Rowley Regis and Oldbury - each with their own heritage and character, the report delves into the particular nuances of these areas.

For the borough-wide assessment, early data analysis is focused on the six town approach covering the whole borough. We acknowledge that there are other centres in the local plan but

the general analysis geographically provides a full area coverage.

Through this layered analysis, the baseline establishes a holistic understanding of Sandwell's current position and provides the evidence base necessary to inform decision-making that responds to both borough-wide priorities and place-specific regeneration areas.

Throughout the report some examples of the comments made through the engagement activities are included under relevant themes to help provide a flavour of local opinions and preferences. It is important to read this report in conjunction with the Engagement Report and Conclusions Summary to gain a complete understanding of local views and priorities.



Recent residential development in Oldbury



Modern residential development in West Bromwich



Protect our green spaces

We love trees, but just don't like big trees.

New builds are built quickly and the quality is lower

Streets aren't safe for cycling

Places need to feel safer, especially for my kids

Parking needs sorting

The surrounding industry is a positive. But we need more trees between the two!

Young people need activities and places to go

The real strengths of our area are the parks and the canals

We have nice traditional buildings and homes in Sandwell

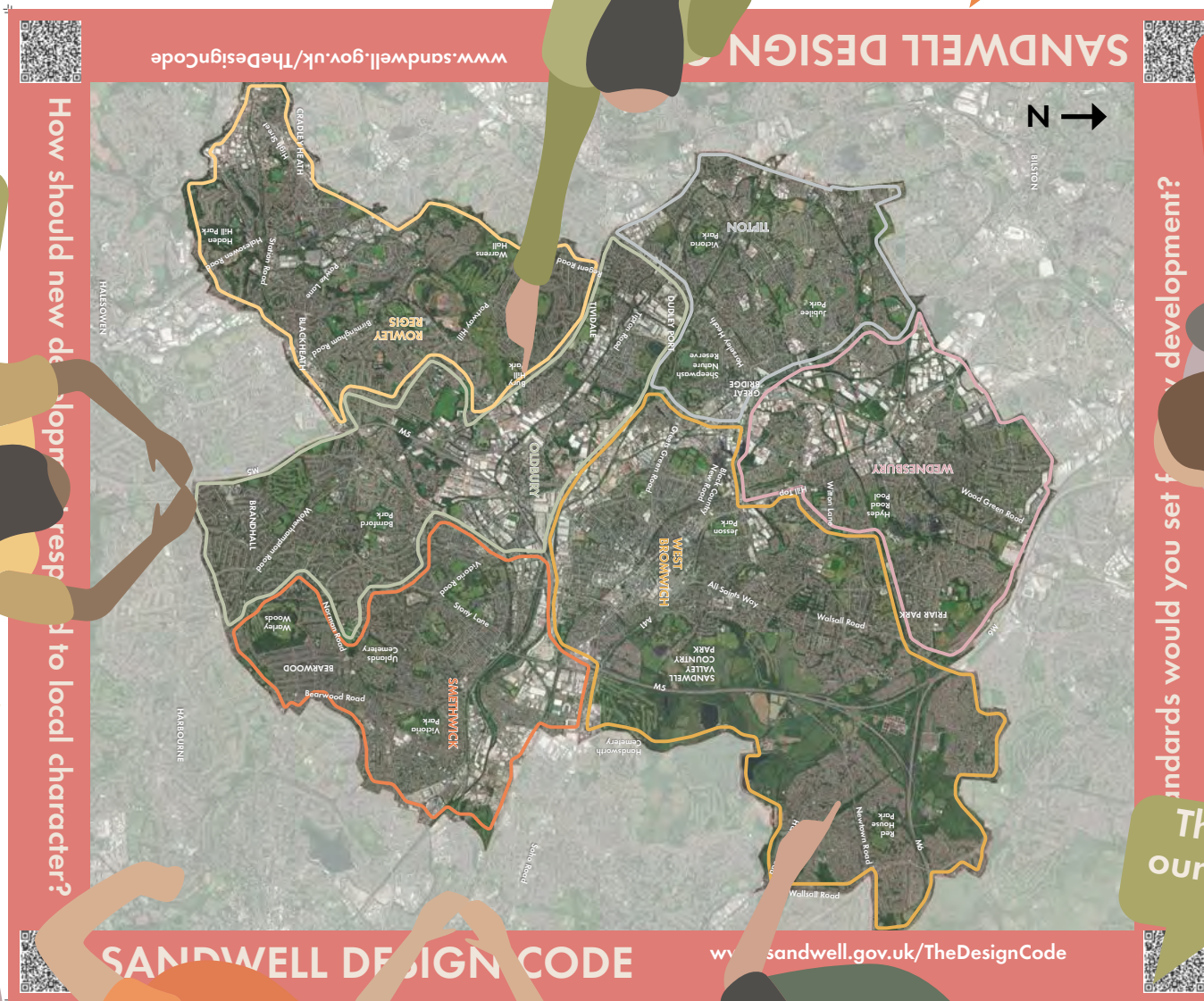
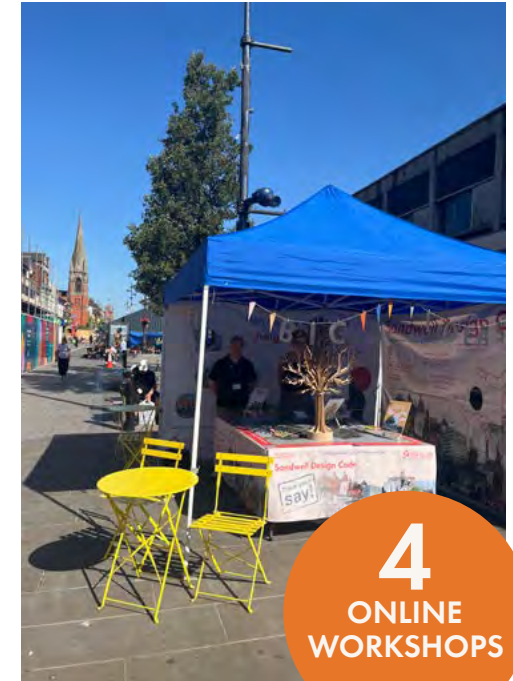
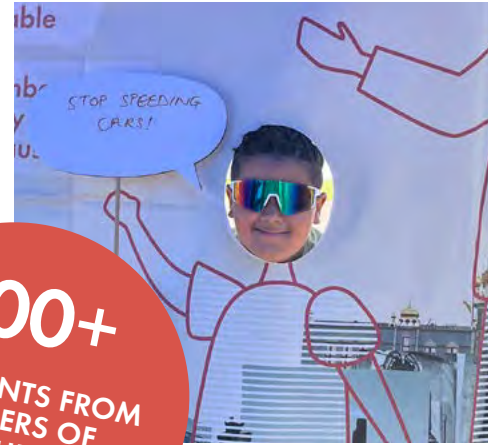


Image of the table top map used to engage local residents with a selection of comments made at the events





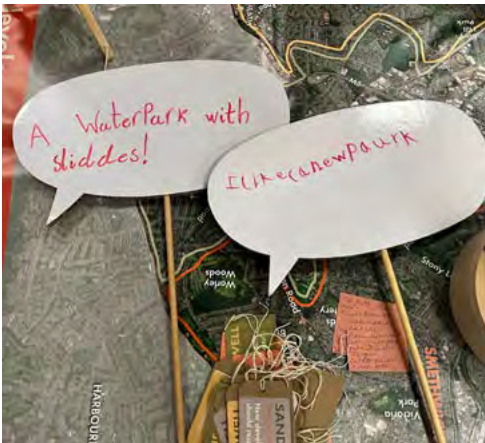
**7**  
IN-PERSON  
COMMUNITY  
EVENTS

**700+**  
COMMENTS FROM  
MEMBERS OF  
THE PUBLIC

*LED  
BY  
LOCAL  
COMMUNITIES*



**4**  
ONLINE  
WORKSHOPS



**46**  
ONLINE  
SURVEY  
RESPONSES





# POLICY BASIS

# 1 POLICY OVERVIEW

## 1.1 INTENDED ROLE OF THE DESIGN CODE

The Sandwell Design Code will support the new Sandwell Local Plan which is scheduled to be adopted next year (2026). It is anticipated that the Design Code will be formally incorporated as a Supplementary Plan under the process yet to be confirmed on the back of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

It will replace the existing Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document which was last updated in 2014.

The draft proposed Sandwell Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2024 and is currently under examination.

The Sandwell Vision and the draft Sandwell Local Plan set out a clear set of objectives and priorities for the borough. The Design Code offers an important opportunity to action progress in relation to each of the design-related aspects.

The draft Sandwell Local Plan outlines the following key challenges for the borough:

- Climate change and protecting and enhancing the environment
- Providing good quality housing that meets the needs of a growing population
- Supporting a resurgent economy that provides access to employment and opportunities for investment
- Supporting strong and competitive centres
- Keeping Sandwell connected
- Providing infrastructure to support growth
- Health and Wellbeing

Each of these has can be influenced by design, and therefore the Design Code can make significant progress against these through the development of borough-wide and area-specific design requirements.

The draft new Local Plan provides a strong basis upon which to progress. Placing the production of the Design Code at the centre of the design policies enables a firm footing for the Code, and the wording in the Reg 22 draft (December 2024) ensures a degree of flexibility in the final content and format.

### Policy SDS5 - Achieving Well-designed Places

A Design Code supplementary plan will be produced for Sandwell, reflecting local character and design preferences, and providing a framework for creating high quality places.

The design of new development will be expected to adhere to the extant Design Code requirements once it is adopted; schemes that do not do so will be refused planning permission unless a reason for adopting a different approach can be clearly demonstrated and evidenced.

**Policy wording in draft Sandwell Local Plan (Dec 2024)**



# 2 DRAFT NEW SANDWELL LOCAL PLAN

## 2.1 KEY LOCAL PLAN OBJECTIVES

Within the draft new Local Plan there are a set of 18 objectives. Design touches each of these, but there are 5 objectives in particular that the Design Code will have a key role in.

- Objective 1 relating to **climate change**
- Objective 4 relating to enhancing the **historic built environment, and distinctive and attractive places**
- Objective 10 relating to **healthier communities**
- Objective 13 relating to **good urban design**
- Objective 15 particularly around **character and heritage**

The status and content of the emerging Sandwell Local Plan will be reviewed at various stages throughout the Design Code, accounting for modifications that are subject to public consultation.

**Objective 1:** Ensure new development takes a proactive approach to climate change mitigation, adaptation and carbon reduction, and that development is resilient to climate change.

**Objective 4:** To protect, sustain and enhance the quality of the historic built environment, ensuring the retention of distinctive and attractive places and beautiful buildings, including listed parks, scheduled monuments and their settings.

**Objective 10:** To provide a built and natural environment that supports the making of healthier choices through provision for physical activity and recreation, active travel, encouraging social interaction and discouraging harmful behaviours.

**Objective 13:** To require new development to deliver a high standard of design reflecting local character and distinctiveness and that creates greener and safer places that people feel proud to live and work in.

**Objective 15:** To support Sandwell's towns and local centres as places for economic, residential and cultural activity, with good access to services, in ways that protect their heritage, character and identity.



A large, stylized, light beige letter 'B' is positioned on the left side of the image. The letter is thick and has a modern, rounded design. It is set against a dark purple background that features a torn paper effect, with irregular, jagged edges separating the dark purple areas from a lighter purple area in the center-right.

B

HISTORIC  
EVOLUTION





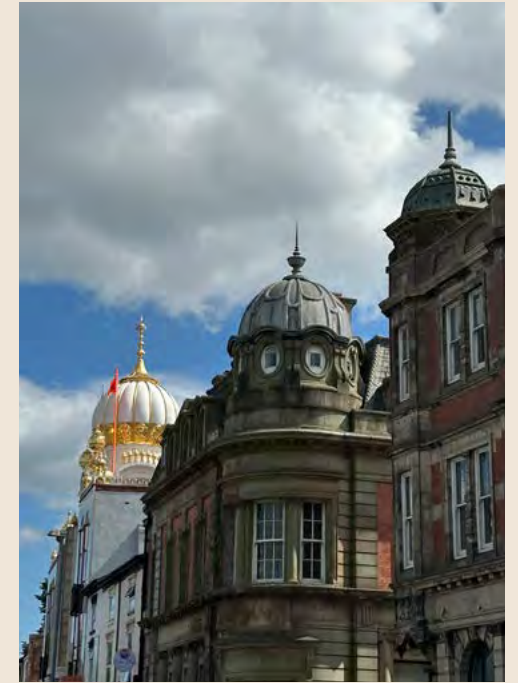
Rowley Regis



West Bromwich



Cradley Heath



Smethwick



Cradley Heath

# EXPLORING SANDWELL'S DIVERSE CHARACTER



Rowley Regis



Victoria Park



Smethwick



Tipton



Oldbury



# 3 PHYSICAL EVOLUTION

## 3.1 HOW HAS THE LANDSCAPE SHAPED THE BOROUGH?

Sandwell has a fascinating history. It has been shaped by the underlying landscape from which many threads of character start.

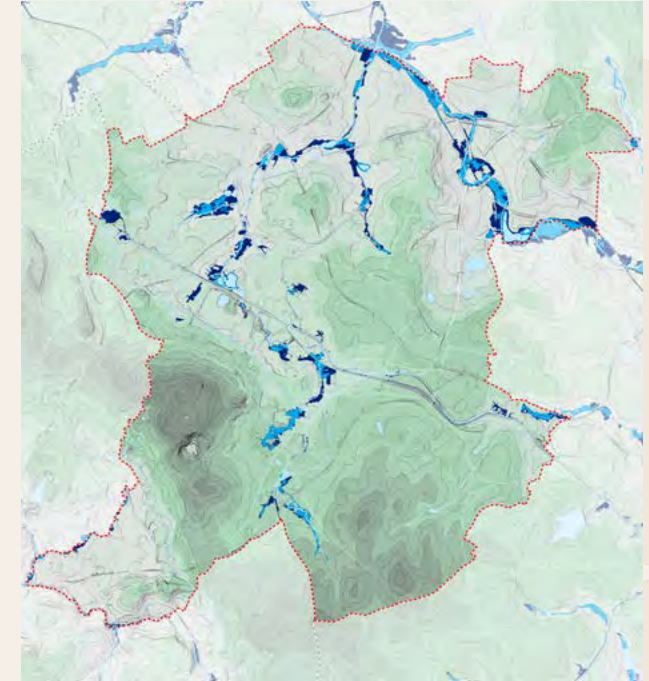
Sandwell lies within the geological and industrial heart of England, forming part of the South Staffordshire Coalfield with sedimentary rocks spanning from Silurian to Triassic periods. This geological heritage provided the mineral wealth that drove industrialisation and fundamentally shaped settlement patterns.

The natural topography centres on the River Tame valley, which creates Sandwell's most significant geographical feature. Sandwell Valley Country Park occupies 270 hectares within this river valley, representing the borough's largest green space.

The Rowley Hills in the south of the borough form an important high ground of ridges which can be seen from most of the borough.



Blue and green infrastructure



Topography and flooding



## 3.2 WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE CANAL NETWORK?

Sandwell boasts a 40-mile canal network and this illustrates the relationship between natural topography and industrial development. These waterways follow natural contours, particularly the River Tame corridor, whilst creating artificial topography through locks, embankments, and cuttings.

The canals now serve as important green corridors, providing recreational opportunities and wildlife habitats whilst maintaining their role as distinctive linear features in the urban landscape.






Photos showing the existing conditions of the canals within Sandwell

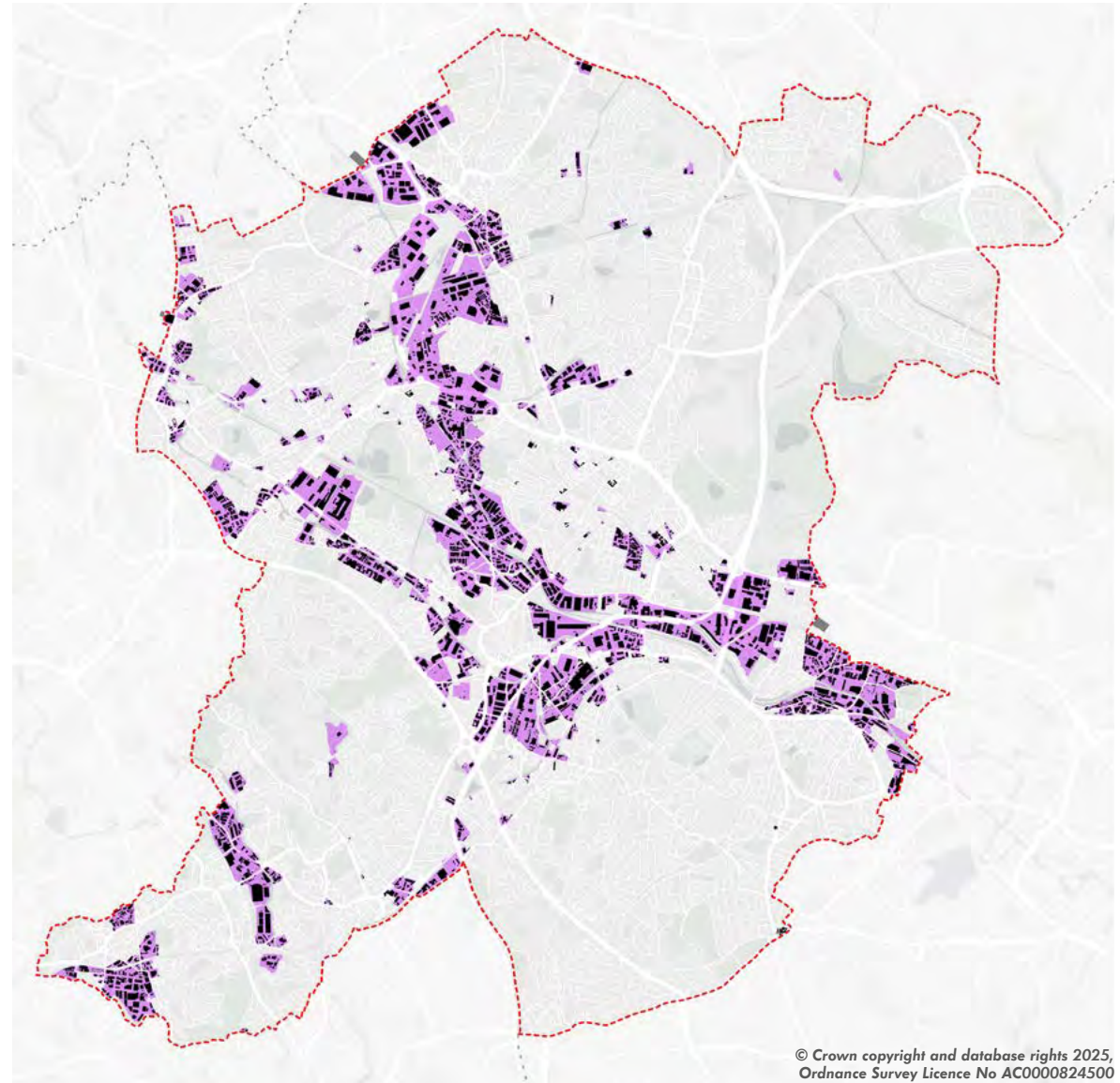


### 3.3 THE CANAL NETWORK AS A FOCUS FOR INDUSTRY

Sandwell has been significantly influenced and shaped by industry. Much of this industry grew up adjacent to the canal network and that has created an industrial corridor stretching along the canals and, later, the adjacent railways, that is still very much present today.

Other evidence of its industrial heritage, separate from the primary corridor, lies in the direct extraction of materials such as quarrying in the Rowley Hills. Areas of geological interest and large topographical fluctuations were also impacted by industry, prior to the industrial revolution.

-  Sandwell
-  Neighbouring Boroughs
-  Industrial land
-  Industrial Buildings



Industrial uses within the borough



### 3.4 EXISTING INDUSTRY

The quality of industrial units varies over the borough, with a diminishing quality in more contemporary units.

Despite this, the character of older industrial buildings are of much higher architectural quality, usually comprising of red brick with detailing on facades. With much of these buildings in poor condition, enhancing and re-providing these buildings of value could provide a way to celebrate Sandwell's heritage.



West Bromwich



Smethwick



Wednesbury



Oldbury



Smethwick

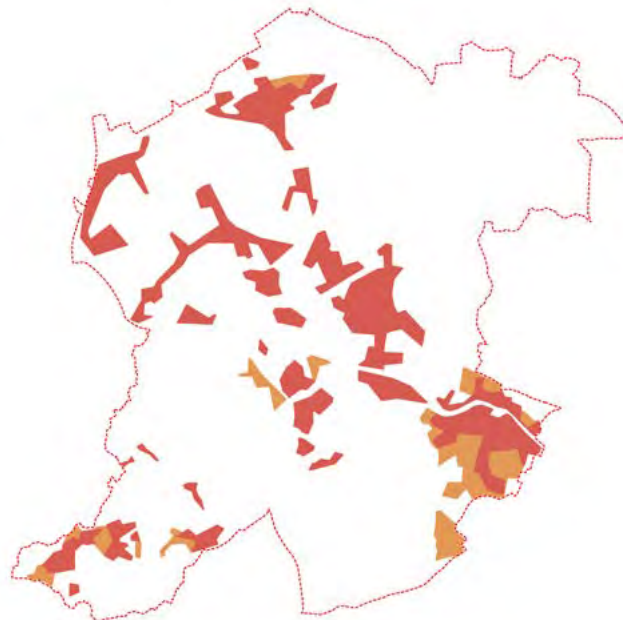


West Bromwich

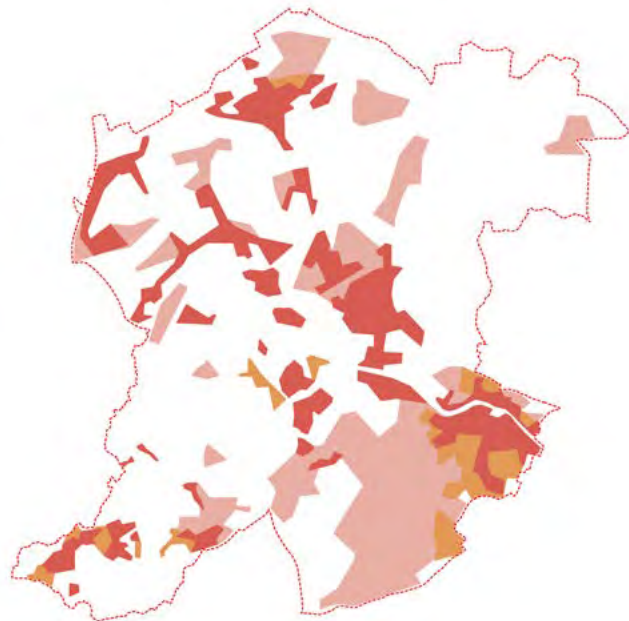
### 3.5 EVOLUTION OF SETTLEMENTS



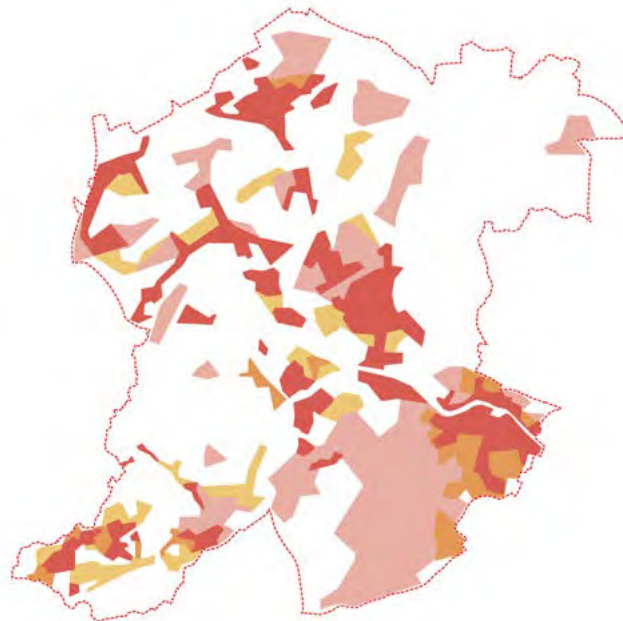
c.1840s



c.1890s

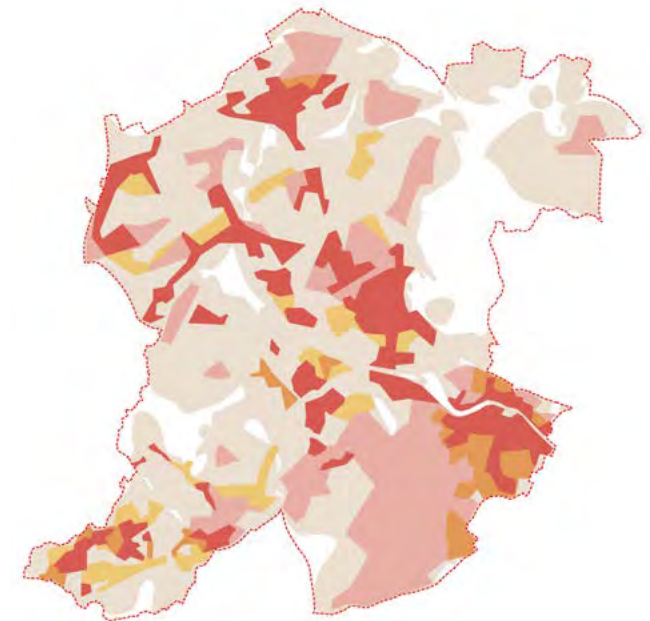
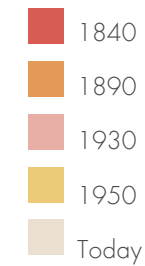


c.1930s



c.1950s

This grid of plans shows how the village and towns of the borough grew and expanded over the decades. Whilst a significant amount of growth took place on the back of the Industrial Revolution, it is the period since the Second World War that has seen extensive residential neighbourhood development.



Today



### 3.6 ORIGINS

The earliest documented settlement in the region is Wednesbury, which has particular significant historical importance. In the 900s, Wednesbury was made a fortified town as a defence against the Vikings. This strong foundation meant it was already a significant community when recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Wadnesberie.

Oldbury represents another ancient settlement with well-documented origins. It was already considered old in 1086, when it appeared in the Domesday Book. This age is reflected in the name – ‘Oldbury’ which comes from the Anglo-Saxon words ‘Eald’ (meaning old) and ‘Byrig’ meaning ‘fortified town.’

Smethwick and Tipton also have well-documented origins in the Domesday survey. Smethwick was recorded as Smedeuuich, its name suggesting a ‘settlement on smooth land’. Tipton was listed as Tibintone, likely meaning ‘Tibba’s estate’ or manor, pointing to a personal association with the founder or early owner.

West Bromwich and Rowley Regis, complete the historical picture. West Bromwich was initially recorded in the Domesday Book as Bromwic, a

name meaning ‘broom village’ due to the gorse prevalent in the area. Its modern growth began in earnest when it became a crucial stop on the coaching roads in the 18th century. In contrast, Rowley Regis was absent from the Domesday Book. Its history is traceable to the 12th century, and the highly significant element ‘Regis’ was added around 1140 to denote that the land was part of the royal hunting grounds.

While having ancient roots, the towns of Sandwell largely remained small, rural, agrarian communities until the Industrial Revolution where the region’s landscape and economy were then radically transformed.



### 3.7 19TH CENTURY

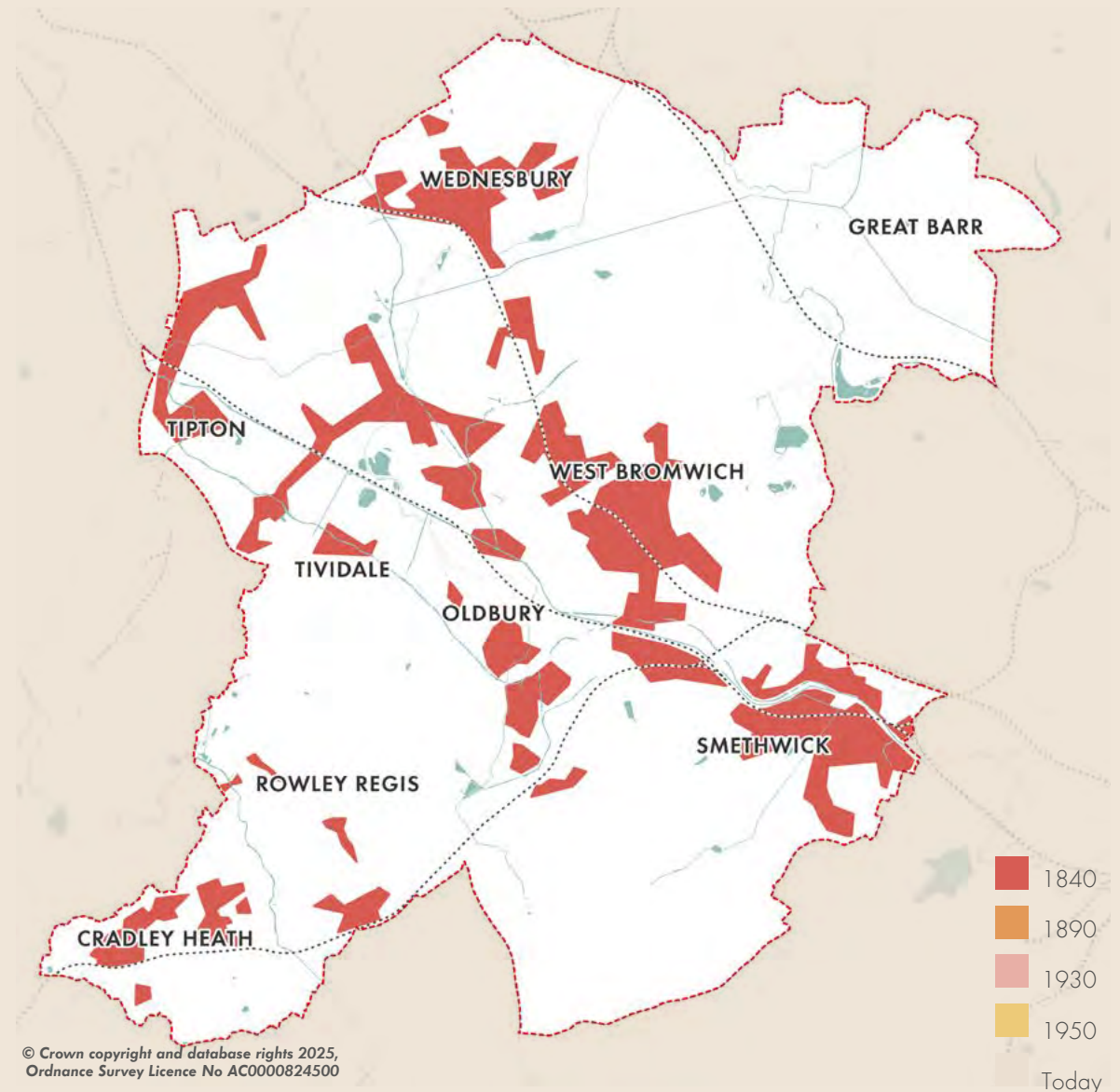
#### The birth of industrial Sandwell

Sandwell was central to the Industrial Revolution and the heart of the Black Country industry. Significant industrial growth, based on local coal and ironstone reserves, came on the back of the opening of the canals in the 18th Century. A number of ironworks were established here, including the Soho Foundry in Smethwick, which was associated with the legendary engineers James Watt and Matthew Boulton.

The Victorian period transformed Sandwell from scattered agricultural settlements into an industrial-centric area. Manufacturing industries proliferated, particularly tube making, chain making, and metalworking. Urban development occurred organically around these industrial sites, creating dense terraced housing in two-up, two-down configurations to facilitate the growing workforce.

Railway introduction enhanced the connectivity and horse-drawn trams, later electrified, began serving major routes by the 1880s.

Population: Vast increase from c.20,000 (1840s) to c.180,000 (1890s)  
Drivers of change: Industrial Revolution and coal-powered manufacturing





## 3.8 VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN ERA

### Consolidation and Reform

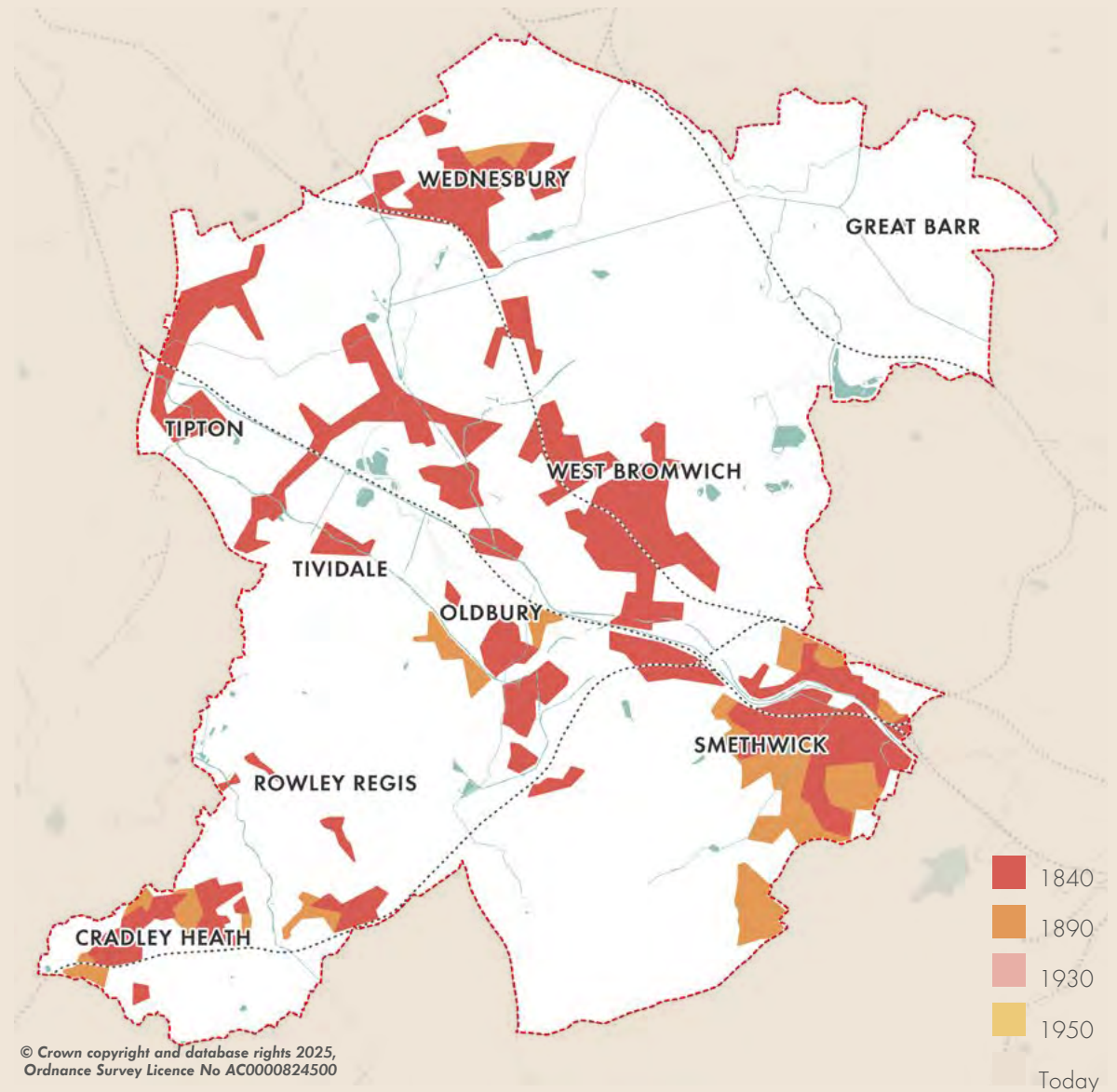
This period brought urban improvements addressing the challenges of the era of industrialisation. Public health initiatives became a priority, with better sewage systems and improved water supply, while the first council housing schemes began improving working-class conditions.

Industrial development during this era evolved; different areas within Sandwell began to develop particular industrial expertise, creating distinct local economies within the broader conurbation. The introduction of electric power to factories marked a significant technological leap, improving productivity and working conditions while beginning the gradual transformation away from steam power.

The introduction of the first motor bus services began to challenge the dominance of trams, offering greater flexibility in route planning and service provision.

Population: c. 200,000

Drivers of change: Social reform and municipal improvement initiatives



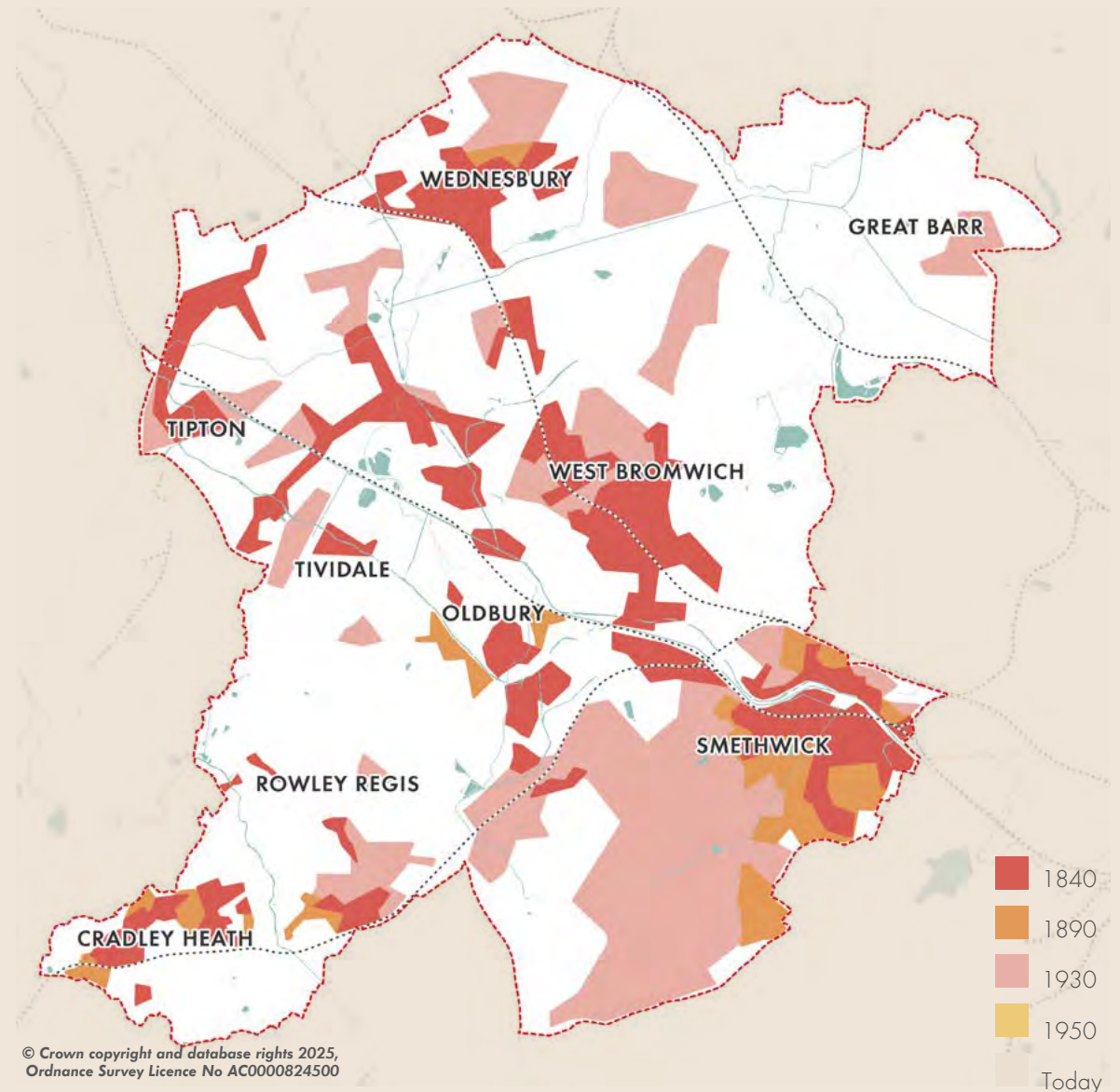
### 3.9 THE WORLD WARS

#### Transformation Through Conflict

During the First World War the area's industrial infrastructure was rapidly converted to munitions production, with factories that had previously manufactured consumer goods or general engineering products now producing military equipment. This conversion brought significant changes to the local labour market, most notably the unprecedented entry of women into heavy industry roles that had previously been exclusively male domains. The influx of war workers created additional pressure on housing stock that was already stretched, leading to overcrowding and temporary accommodations.

The building typologies of the wars period reflected both wartime necessities and evolving planning philosophies. Council housing estates built during the inter-war period showed the influence of garden city design principles, with lower densities, better layouts, and improved amenities compared to Victorian terraced housing.

Population: c.220,000 (1920s), declining to 210,000 (1940s)  
Drivers of change: Wartime production demands and economic depression





### 3.10 WHAT DID SANDWELL EXPERIENCE DURING THE WORLD WARS?

The First World War dramatically impacted Sandwell with the area's industrial infrastructure rapidly converted to support war efforts. This influx of war workers created additional pressure on housing stock that was already stretched, leading to overcrowding and temporary accommodations.

The inter-war period brought mixed fortunes to Sandwell, reflecting the broader economic instability of the era. Traditional heavy industries faced severe decline as international competition increased and demand for coal and steel fluctuated dramatically. However, this period also saw significant housing reform, with substantial council house building programmes.

The Second World War again transformed Sandwell's industrial landscape, with factories once more converted to support the war, bringing some prosperity but also making the area a target for enemy bombing.

The production of tanks for Russia, Smethwick, 1941  
Source: Ministry of Information official photographer, Imperial War Museum



Bomb damaged housing in Sandwell, c.1940  
Source: Sandwell Archives Service

### 3.11 POST-WAR ERA

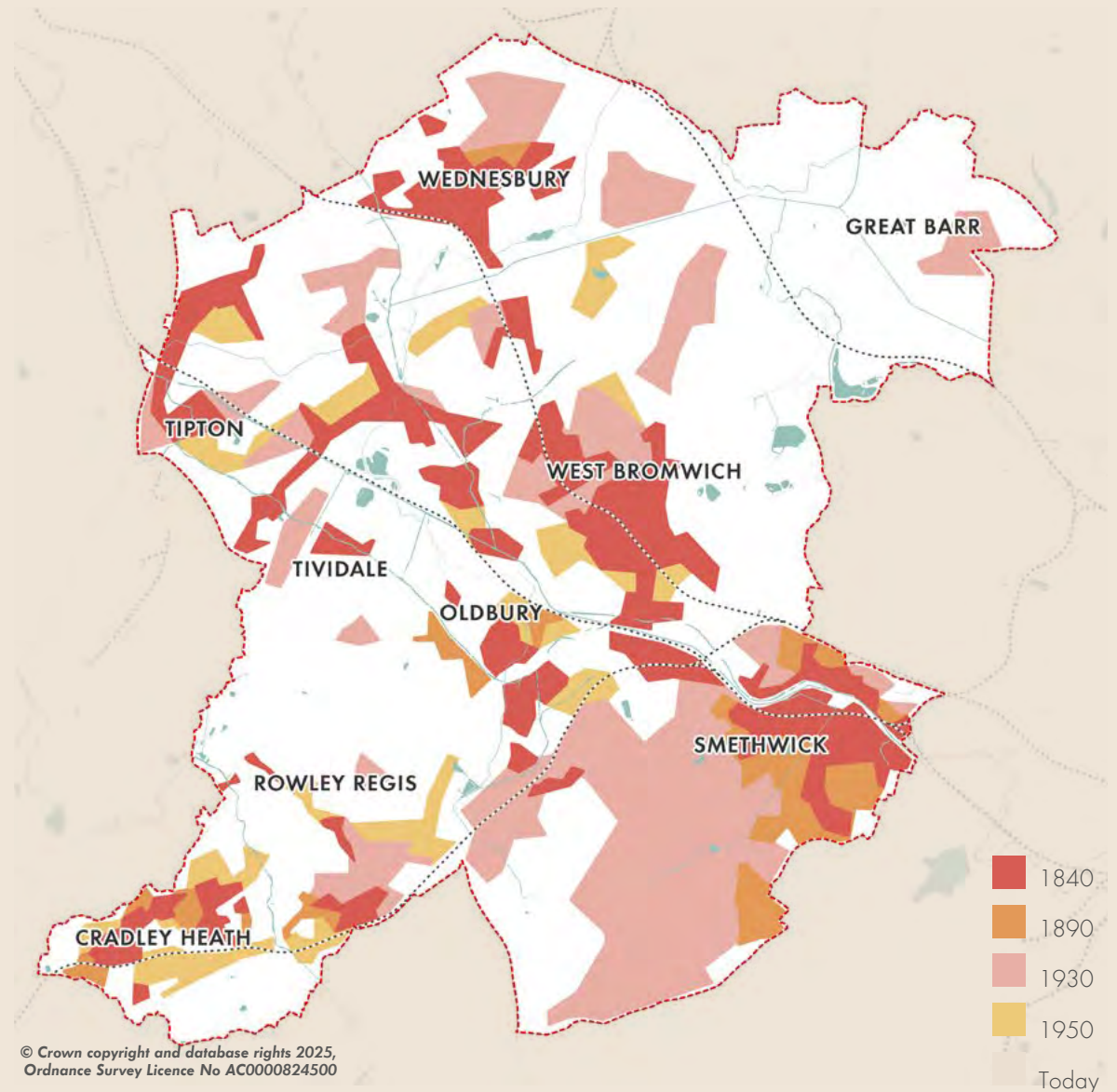
#### Rebuilding

Post-war reconstruction fundamentally reshaped Sandwell through comprehensive redevelopment and large-scale Victorian slum clearance. New towns planning principles influenced housing estate design, while modern industrial estates incorporated improved working conditions. Mass council housing programs created extensive estates, with experimentation including tower blocks and deck access housing.

De-industrialisation dominated from the 1960s, with factory closures creating persistent unemployment as coal mines, steel works, and heavy engineering plants became uneconomical.

Population: c. 300,000

Drivers of change: Urban redevelopment followed by de-industrialisation





### 3.12 POST-WAR ERA

#### Today

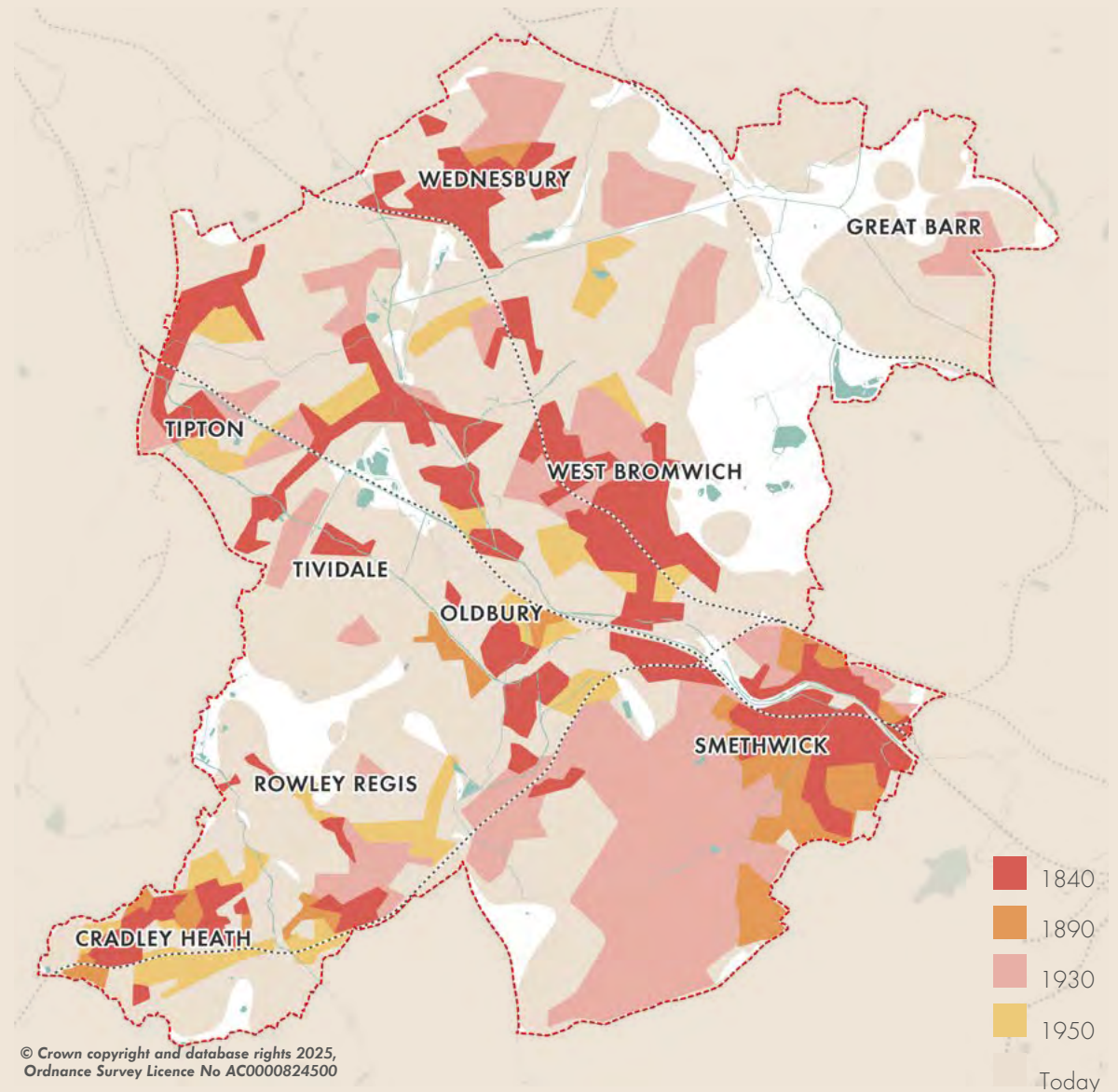
The 1974 creation of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough unified six former towns under coordinated administration, enabling strategic planning and more effective responses to de-industrialisation challenges. Economic transformation continued the shift to services, with major shopping centres, retail parks, and modern business parks attracting new employment types. Cultural industries investment included arts venues and facilities improving the area's image.

Urban regeneration focused on brownfield development of former industrial sites and housing renewal programs addressing problematic post-war housing stock. Environmental improvements restored canal networks and created green spaces, while transport integration improved through better public transport connections, including West Midlands Metro extensions.

Significant Caribbean and South Asian immigration created multicultural communities, while educational expansion included comprehensive schools and further education colleges.

Population: c.340,000

Drivers of change: Post-industrial economic restructuring and regeneration

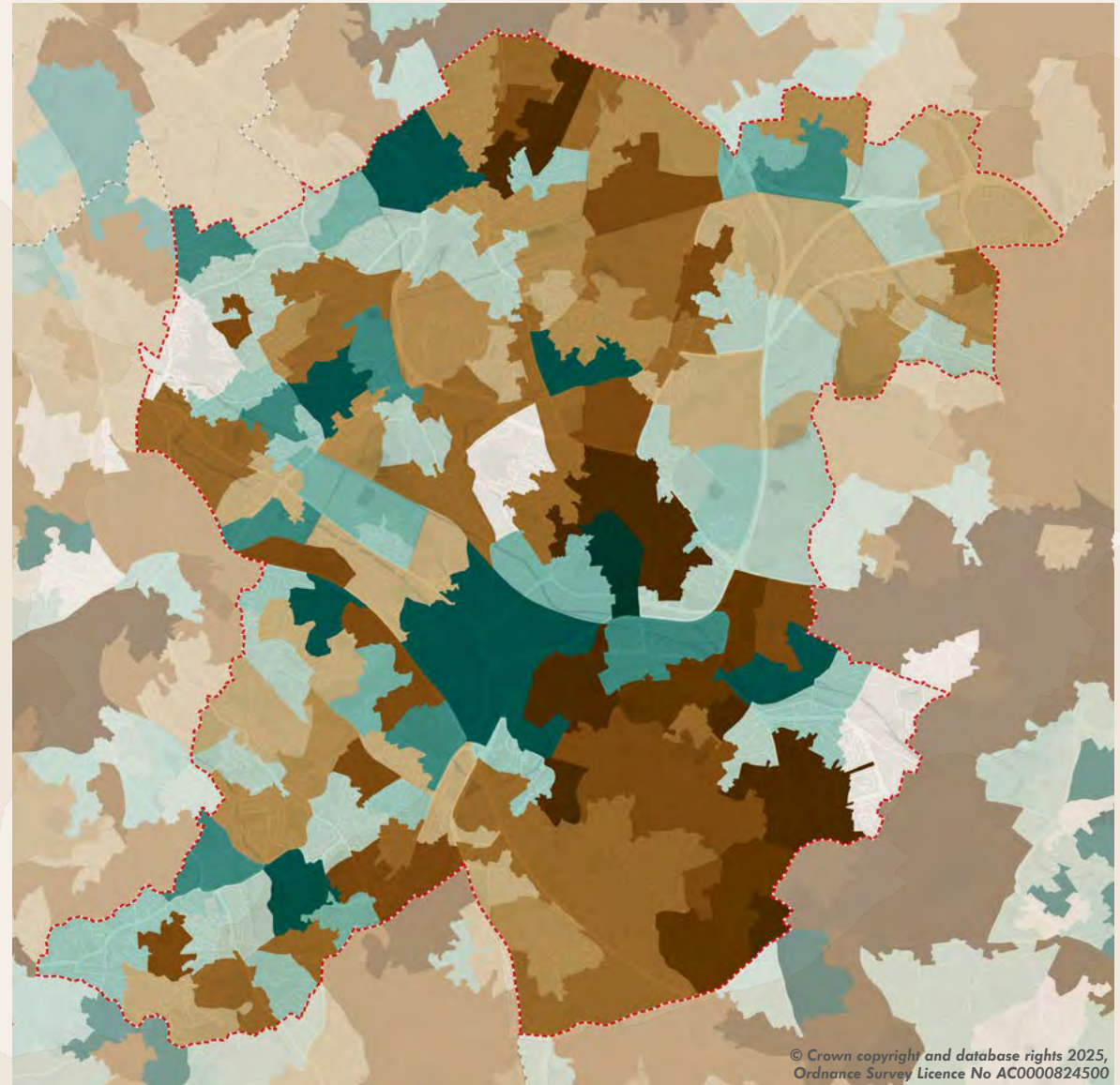
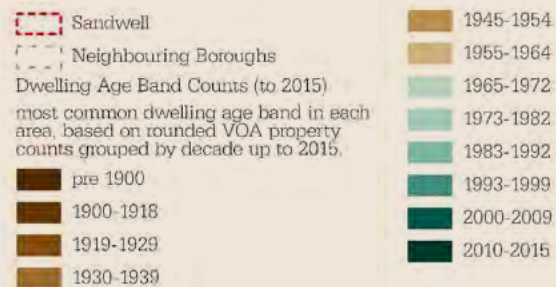


# 4 HOW IS THE HISTORY REPRESENTED TODAY?

## 4.1 DWELLING AGE

This plan reveals what remains today from the layers of historical development in Sandwell. It shows the age of dwellings, so focuses on housing stock rather than all buildings. The oldest housing stock (pre-1900 to 1919-1929) is concentrated around the central areas of Smethwick, Oldbury, and West Bromwich.

The progression outward demonstrates typical suburban expansion, with post-war housing developments and modern estates spreading towards the periphery. This pattern reflects both population growth and the post-war reconstruction efforts that characterised much of the West Midlands, showing how the borough evolved. Over the last couple of decades there has been urban renewal in urban centres and intensification linked to new transport infrastructure.

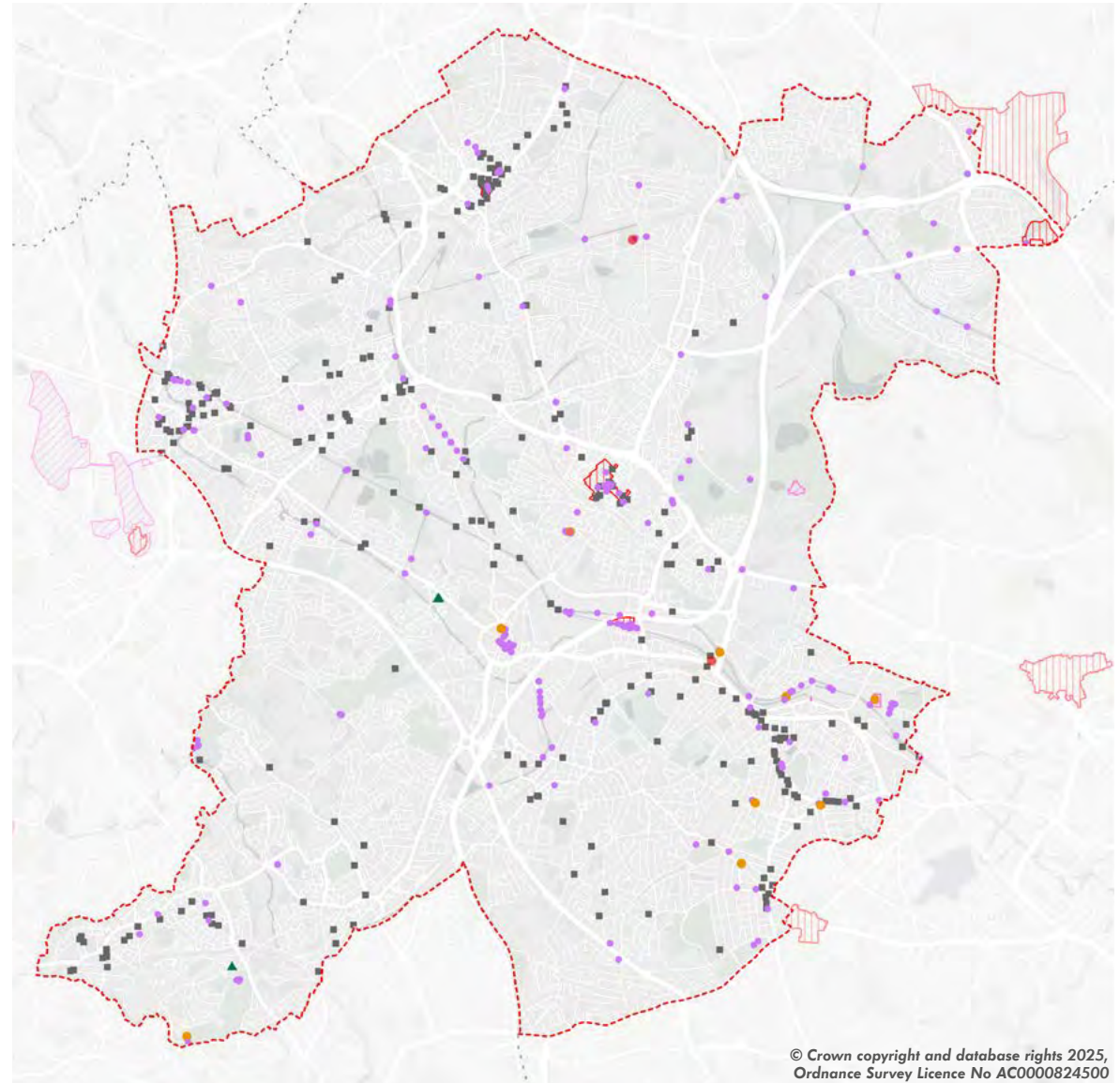




## 4.2 HERITAGE ASSETS

Sandwell has numerous heritage assets that showcase its architectural and industrial significance. The Grade I listed Smethwick Galton Bridge stands as Thomas Telford's masterpiece of 1829 engineering, while Bromwich Hall - the Manor House represents one of the region's finest Tudor timber-framed buildings from the late 15th century. The Oak House in West Bromwich was upgraded to a Grade I listed building in 2024 and is a good example of a large timber-framed yeoman's house.

The extensive collection of Grade II listed buildings encompasses the breadth of Sandwell's built heritage. These include numerous historic public houses, Victorian schools, railway stations and bridges, workers' housing, and civic buildings such as libraries and town halls.



## Example Grade I assets



Smethwick Galton Bridge



Bromwich Hall - the Manor House

## Example Grade II\* assets



Summit Bridge, Smethwick



The Big House, Oldbury



The Waterloo Hotel, Smethwick



Soho Foundry (Former Boulton and Watt Foundry pattern stores and erecting shops), Smethwick



Smethwick Old Church



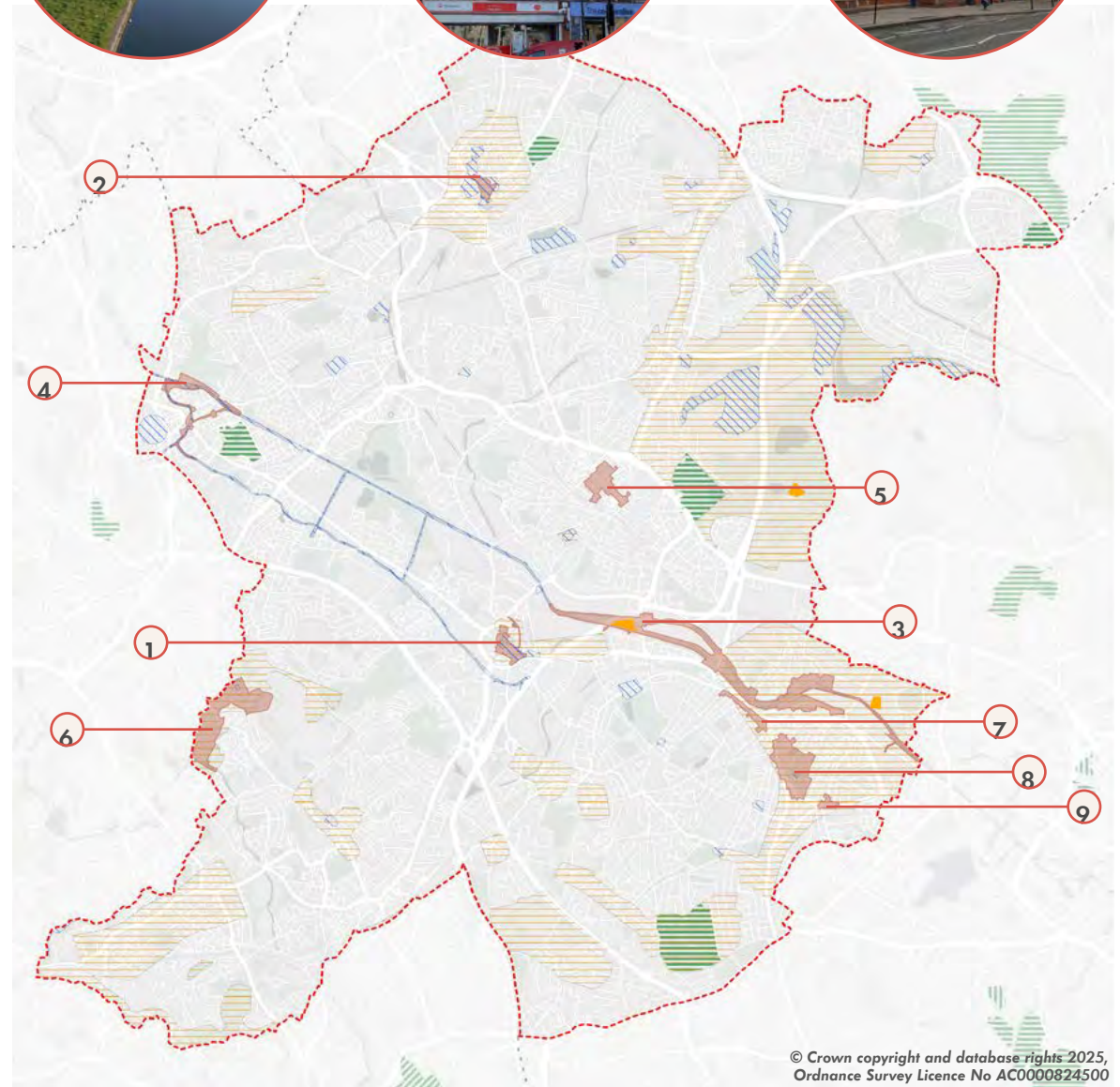
Corngreaves Hall, Cradley Heath



## 4.3 CONSERVATION AREAS

Sandwell has nine conservation areas that preserve locations of significant elements of architectural and historic interest. These designated areas span across the borough's historic towns, including Church Square in Oldbury, Market Place in Wednesbury, three areas in Smethwick (Galton Valley, Town Centre High Street, and High Street/Crocketts Lane), Factory Locks in Tipton, High Street in West Bromwich, Windmill End at Warrens Hall in Rowley Regis, and Cape Hill Town Centre in Smethwick.

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Oldbury Church Square CA          | 6 Rowley Regis Windmill End CA                |
| 2 Wednesbury Market Place CA        | 7 Smethwick Town Centre High Street CA        |
| 3 Smethwick Summit Galton Valley CA | 8 Smethwick High Street and Crocketts Lane CA |
| 4 Tipton Factory Locks CA           | 9 Smethwick Cape Hill CA                      |
| 5 West Bromwich High Street CA      |   |



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#### 4.4 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SANDWELL?

Sandwell has constantly been evolving through history with social, economic, and physical pressures being exerted at various points. The place's ability to adjust to changes and recover from disturbances represents a resilient place with high adaptive capacity.

By understanding historical failures and successes, it is clear Sandwell holds the ingredients to allow for further change in the future using today's character to inform this. Designing more effectively and appropriately to address specific local contexts and vulnerabilities is imperative.





**G**

**CHARACTER**

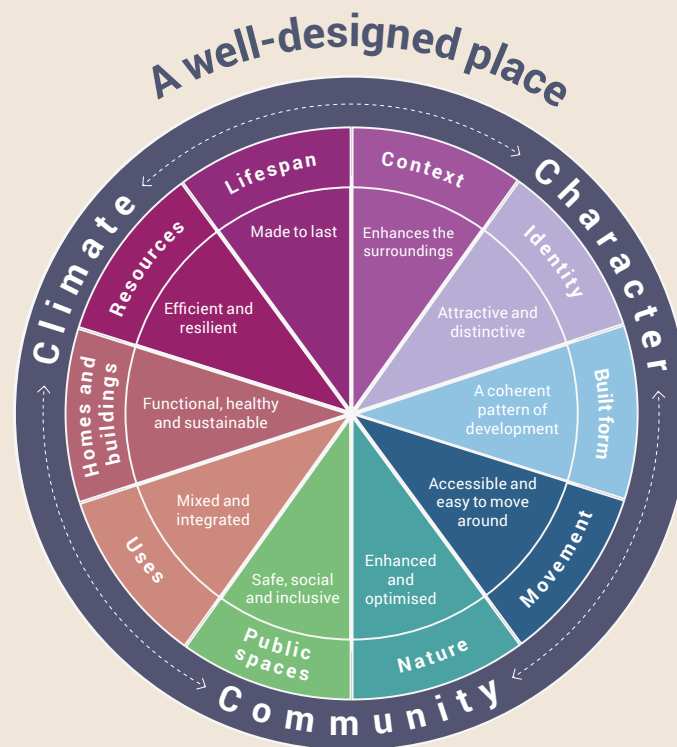
## 5 IDENTIFYING THEMES

The National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code provide an important basis for steering the Sandwell Design Code.

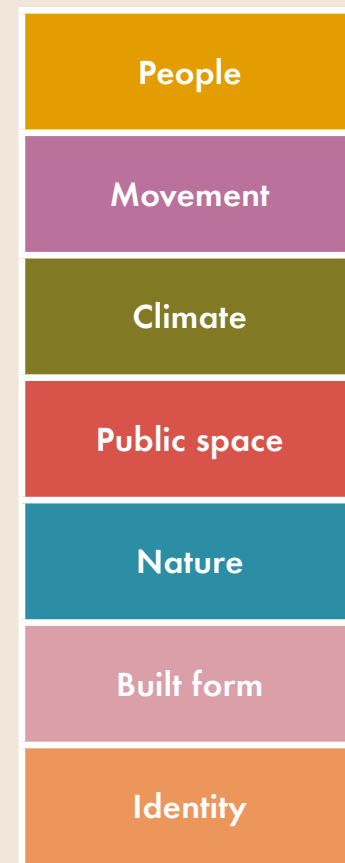
Updates to both of these national documents are expected imminently and it is important that the early stages of work on the Sandwell Design Code learns from the experiences of previous Codes and the best structuring mechanisms.

The National Design Guide identified 10 characteristics of 'A well-designed place'. However, reviews have suggested that using these ten characteristics to structure codes can become unwieldy and there is a danger of not fully addressing elements such as climate.

For the baseline analysis we have therefore used a slightly refined set of headings to ensure everything is covered, whilst avoiding too much overlap.

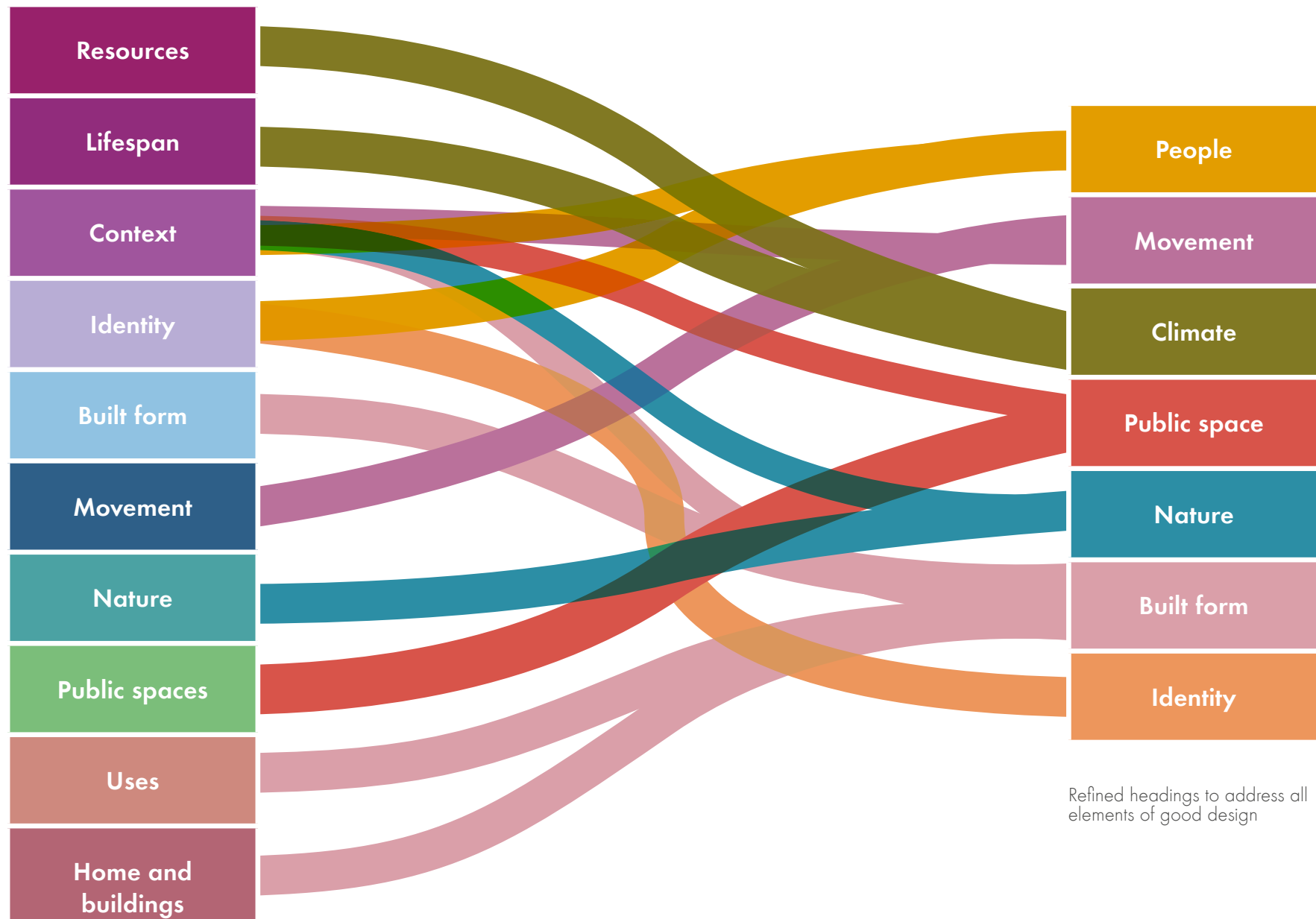


Existing 10 Characteristics of Well Designed Places



Refined headings to address all elements of good design





Refined headings to address all elements of good design

# 6 PEOPLE & SOCIO-ECONOMICS

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section we consider population characteristics and some of the factors that influence the social morphology of the borough.

Sandwell is a densely populated area, with approximately 340,000 residents, as of 2021. The borough ranks as the second most densely populated local authority in the West Midlands.

Its population is remarkably diverse, reflecting modern Britain's multicultural character. The population is predominantly white (57.2%), with non-white minorities representing the remaining 42.8%, with Asian people being the largest minority group at 25.8%. Black, Black British, Caribbean or African people follow this at 3.7%. This multi-culturalism is celebrated throughout with a rich and vibrant collection of community infrastructure and religious facilities. There is a strong sense of community throughout the diverse groups, and thus, six towns.

But Sandwell continues to face socio-economic challenges and the borough ranks among England's most deprived districts. Understanding the challenges will help shape the priorities for the Design Code.



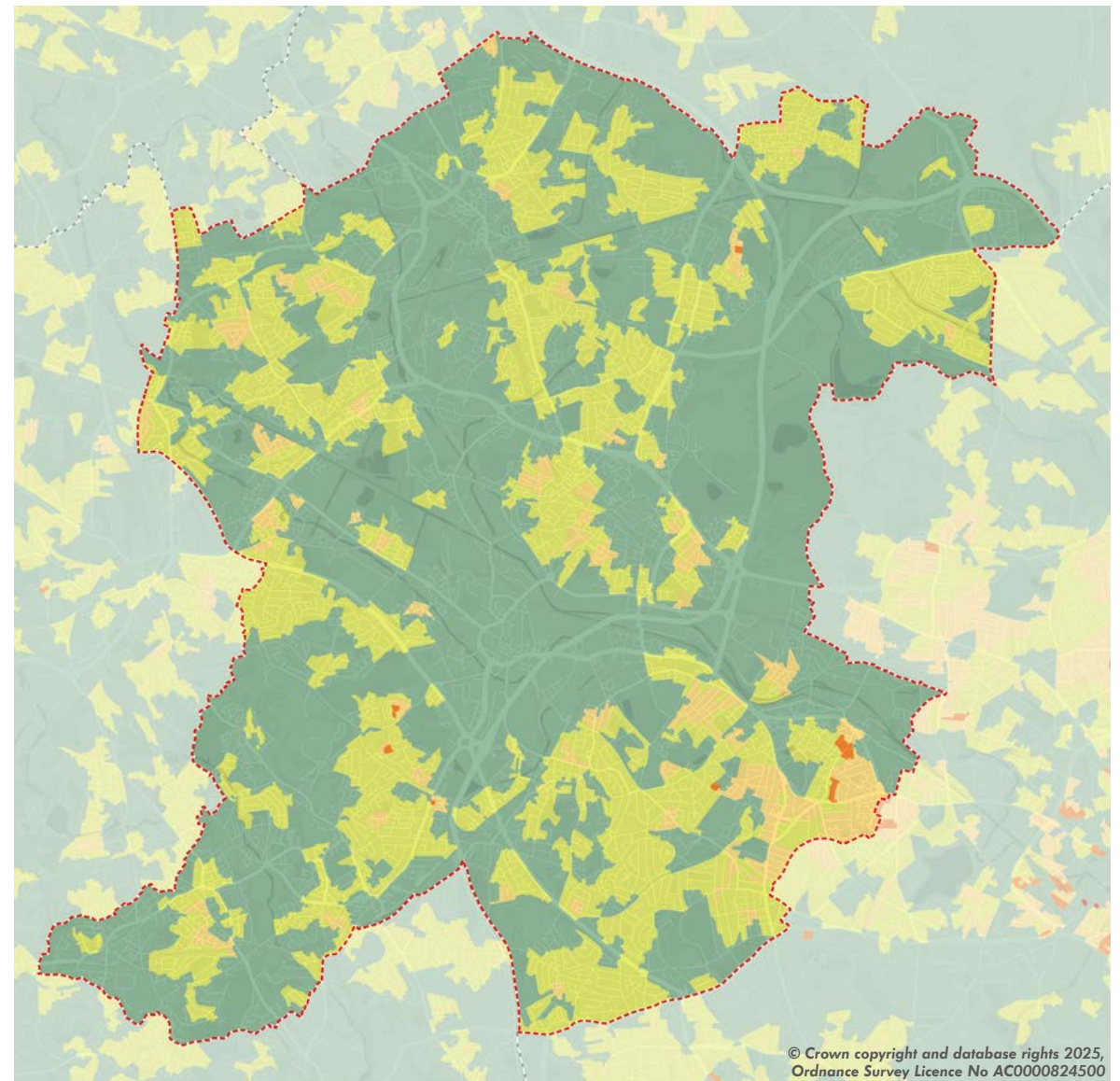


## 6.2 RESIDENTIAL POPULATION DENSITY

Sandwell ranks as the second most densely populated local authority in the West Midlands, trailing only Birmingham in population concentration. The borough has approximately 4,000 people per square kilometre.

The borough's population distribution reveals fascinating historical patterns linked to its industrial heritage. Higher population densities cluster around the peripheries of former industrial zones, reflecting the residential growth during the Victorian era. Smethwick emerges as the most densely populated area within Sandwell, a concentration largely attributed to its housing mix (with a high number of terraced streets and flatted developments) and its proximity to Birmingham.

The pressure to deliver more housing, and therefore increase densities, is significant. Sandwell Council's Housing Needs Assessment 2025 shows a doubling in housing need with 20,423 households on the Housing Register. 52% of households require a 1 bed property, 26% need a 2 bed property, and 7% need a 4 bed or more property. Future projections indicate that by 2041, 39,726 social housing and affordable housing units for renting will be required. This is an increase of 4,609 properties. Projections indicate that of these 4,609, 34.5% should have four bedrooms or more.

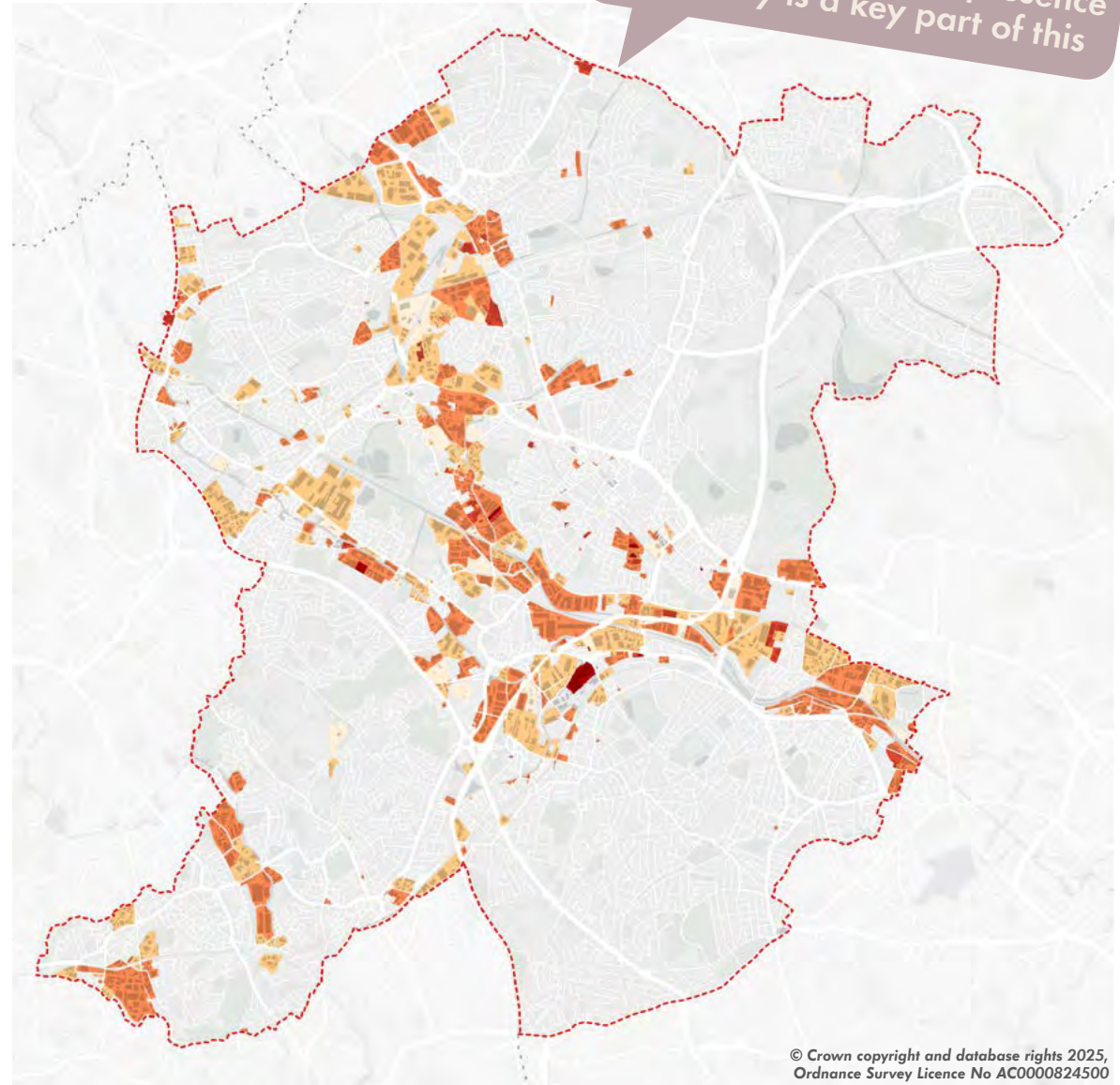


## 6.3 INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYMENT DENSITY

The extensive amount of industrial estates and buildings in the borough means it is useful to look at employment density as well as residential density. This plan provides an indication of the intensity of employment.

The calculation takes building floor areas and then applies an employment density assumption (36 m<sup>2</sup> per worker) to estimate how many jobs are likely to be generated (or could theoretically be accommodated).

In the same way that the residential density plan in section 8.2 suggests number of people per square kilometre, this plan shows the number of jobs per hectare. It highlights the varying intensity of employment space across the borough, with some of the oldest sites along the canal network showing medium to high intensity.







## 6.4 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Sandwell's community infrastructure is shaped by educational and religious facilities that serve as social anchors throughout the borough.

The borough's multi-faith character is reflected in its varied religious facilities, with Christianity representing the largest group at 39.9% of residents, followed by those with no religious affiliation at 26.1%. The Muslim community (13.4%) and Sikh population (11.5%) contribute to a rich tapestry of religious buildings and community centres. Smaller communities (Hindu (2.8%), Buddhist (0.3%), and Jewish (0.1%)) also help create a comprehensive network of faith-based infrastructure.


Community stuff and infrastructure is needed. This church does a lot – but there's so much more needed.

Young people need activities and places to go


 Sandwell  
 Neighbouring Boroughs

### Community infrastructure

Important Buildings

 Cultural Facility


 Education


 Emergency Service

 Medical Care


 Religious Buildings

 Retail


 Road Transport

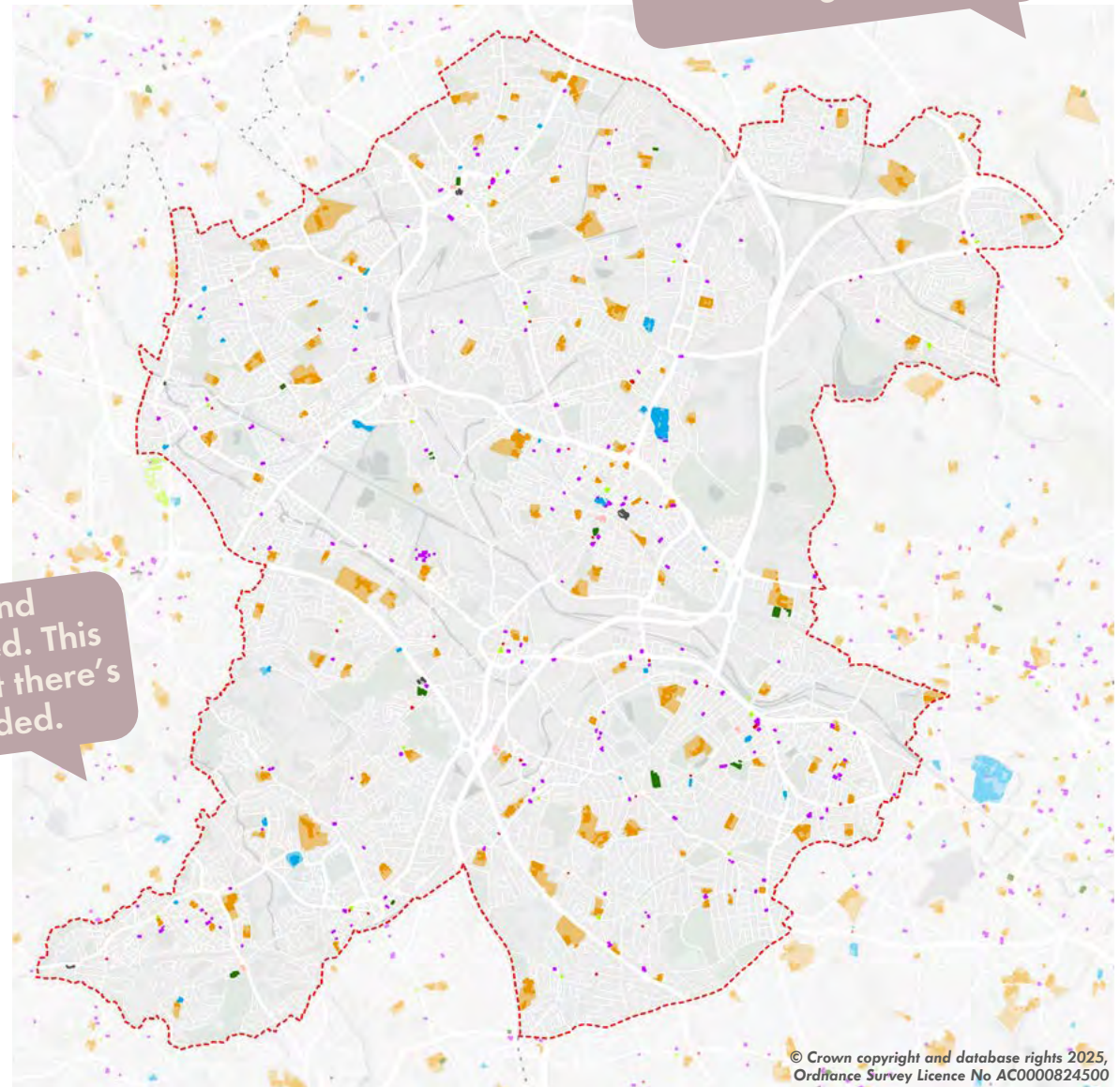
 Sports Or Exercise Facility

Functional Sites

 Education

 Medical Care

 Road Transport

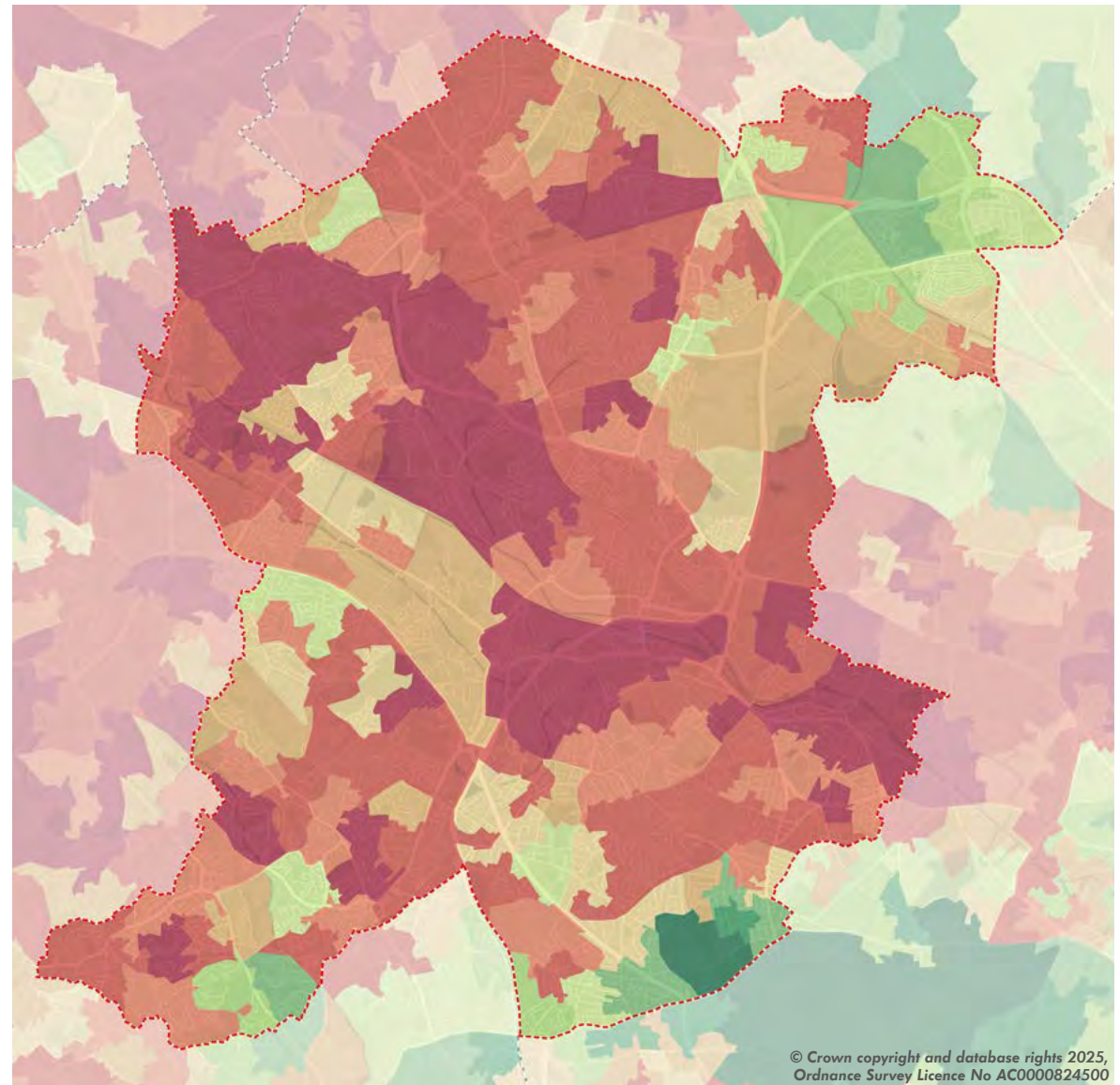
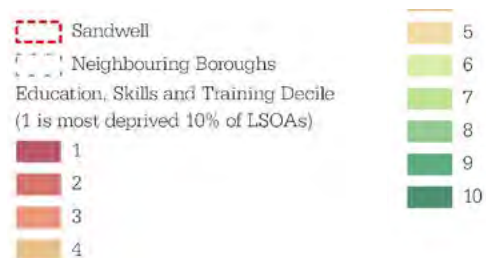


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## 6.5 EDUCATION

Education in Sandwell faces significant challenges, with the area ranking poorly in the Education, Skills and Training domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Central areas including Smethwick, Oldbury, Great Bridge, and Tipton fall within the lowest national brackets for educational attainment, adult skills, and English language proficiency.

The scale of the educational challenge is evident in qualification levels: nearly 30% of Sandwell residents aged 16 and over lack any formal qualifications, exceeding the England and Wales average of 18.2%.

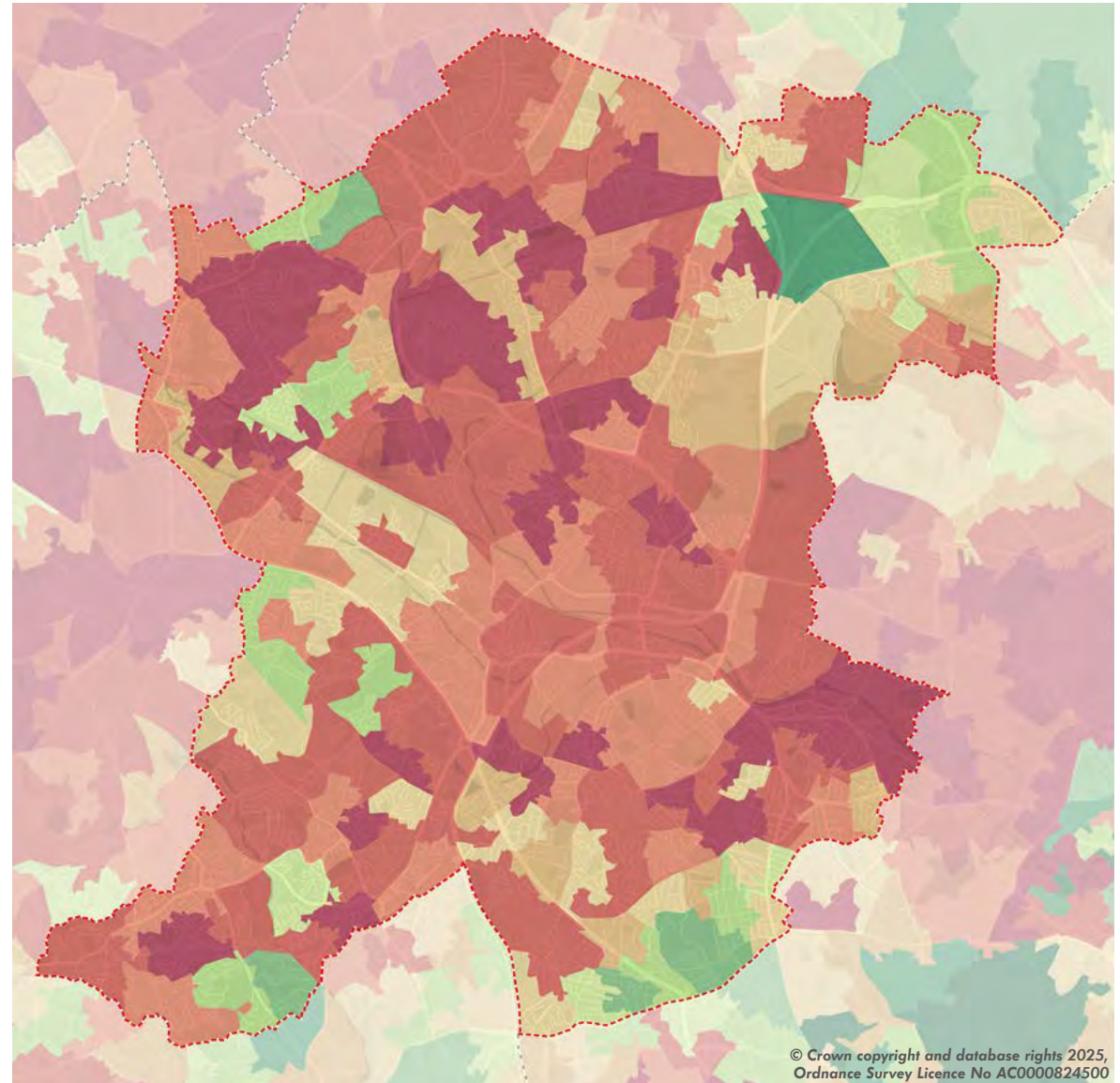
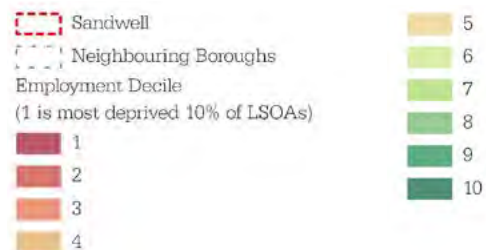




## 6.6 EMPLOYMENT

Employment levels in Sandwell reflect the challenges facing many post-industrial areas in England. With 88% of economically active residents in employment, Sandwell falls below the national average of 93%.

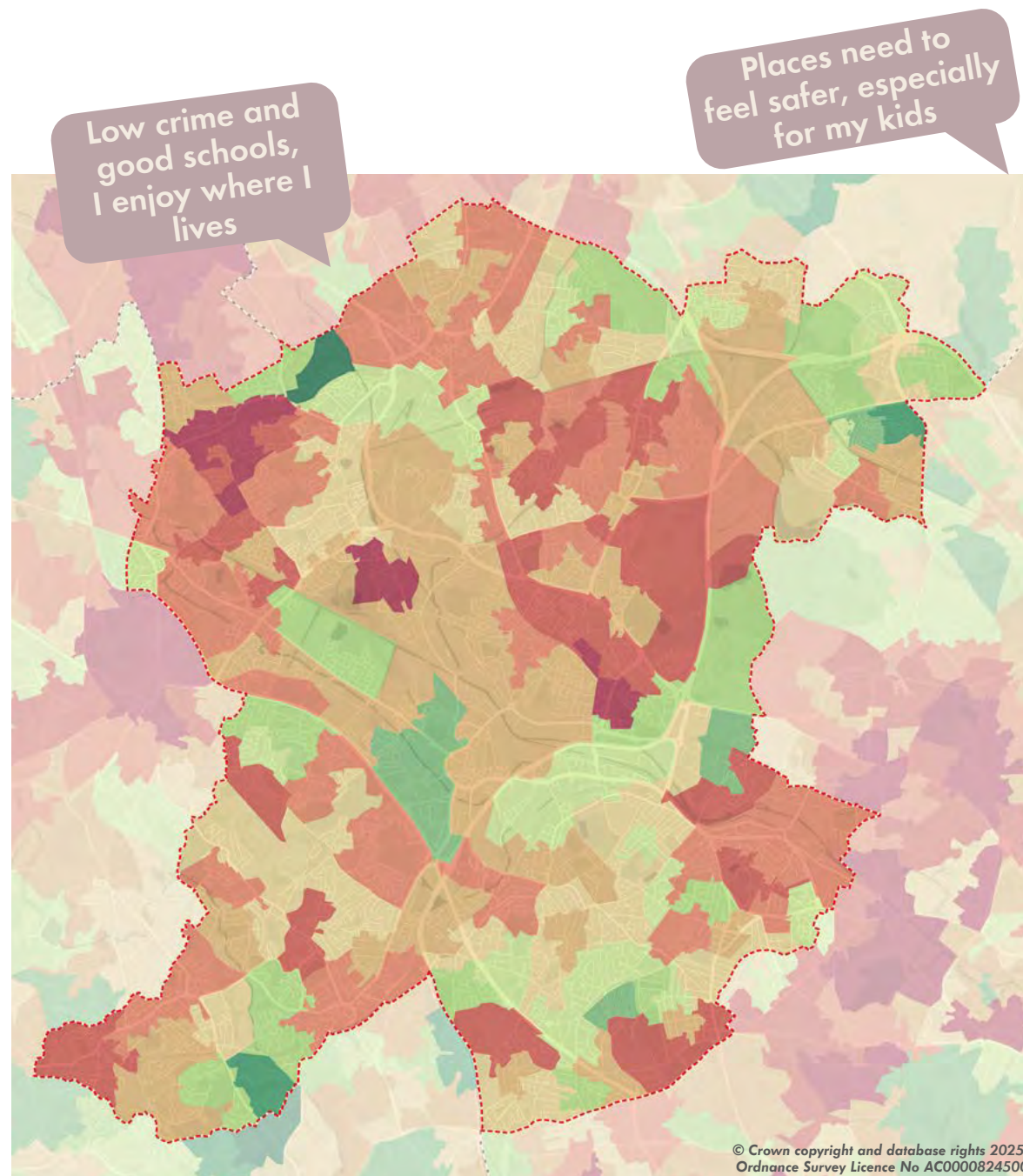
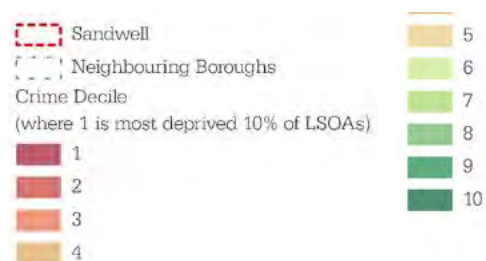
The local economy demonstrates significant commuter flows, with approximately 59,000 people travelling into Sandwell daily for work, while nearly 62,000 residents commute outside the borough for employment. The job density figure of 0.63 jobs per working-age person emphasises this employment shortfall, falling below both the West Midlands Metropolitan average of 0.80.



## 6.7 CRIME

Sandwell presents a relatively safe environment for residents, with an overall recorded crime rate of 48.4 per 1,000 residents, 42% below the national average.

However, residents' perceptions of neighbourhood safety reflect greater concern. While overall safety perceptions remain stable year-on-year, a significant gap persists between day-time and night-time confidence levels. The Council's regular resident survey provides a useful window into people's concerns. After dark, only 63% of residents feel safe in their local area, with just 20% feeling very safe. Young people particularly experience this shift, feeling secure during daylight hours but becoming concerned once darkness falls. Poor lighting, especially around transport links, emerges as the primary safety concern.

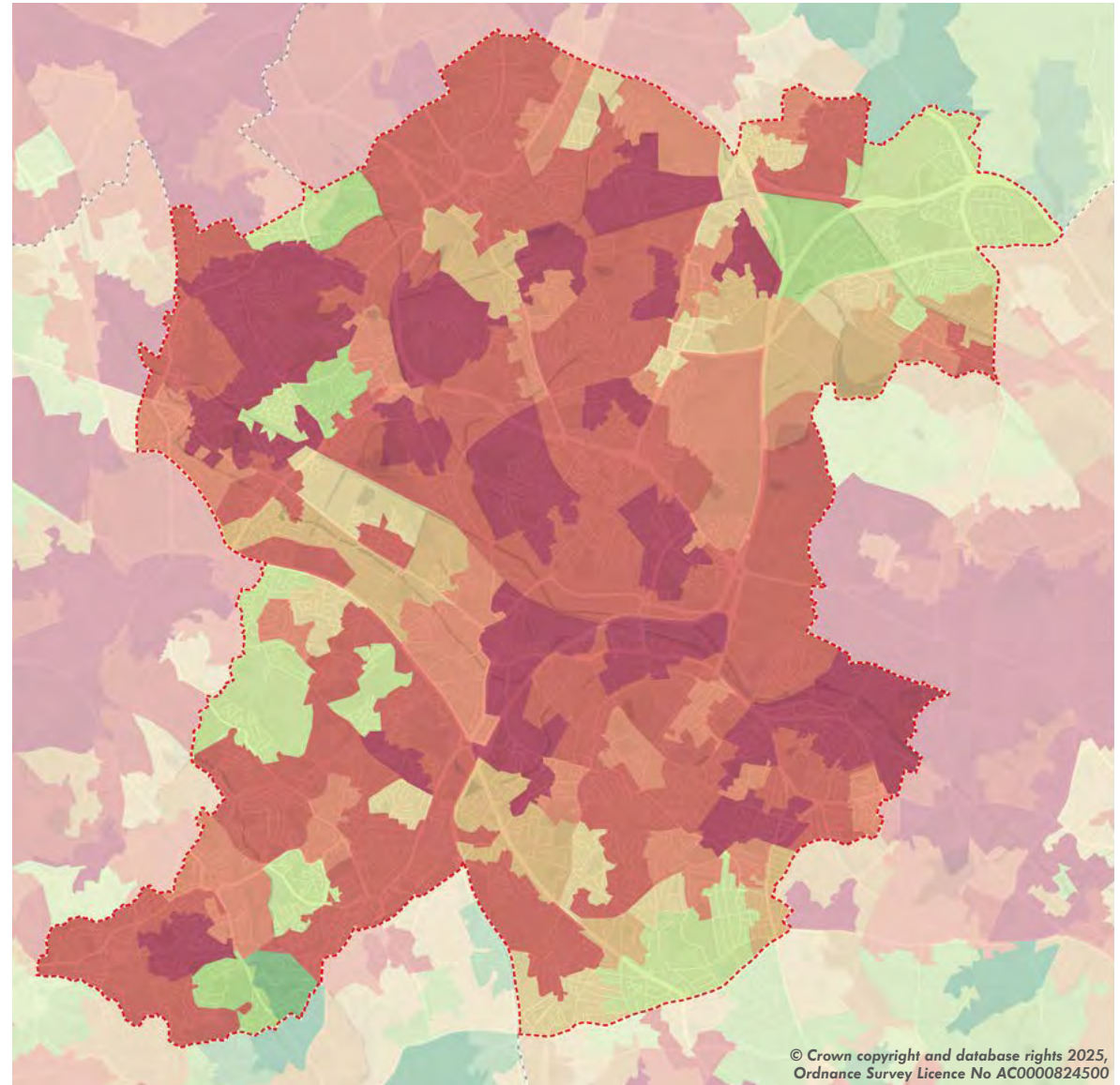
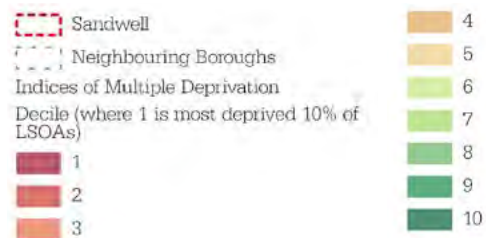




## 6.8 OVERALL INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION (IMD)

Despite ongoing improvements, Sandwell continues to rank among England's most deprived districts, grappling with persistent challenges in educational attainment, skills development, child poverty, and health outcomes.

Geographically, areas of high deprivation are distributed relatively evenly throughout Sandwell, creating a complex pattern of socioeconomic challenges. However, the borough's outskirts demonstrate notably better conditions, with areas such as Cradley Heath near Haden Hill Park and Great Barr in the north showing reduced levels of deprivation.



## 6.9 FOCUS ON HEALTH

Health is a stated priority issue for the Council and socio-economic data highlights the concerns regarding population health.

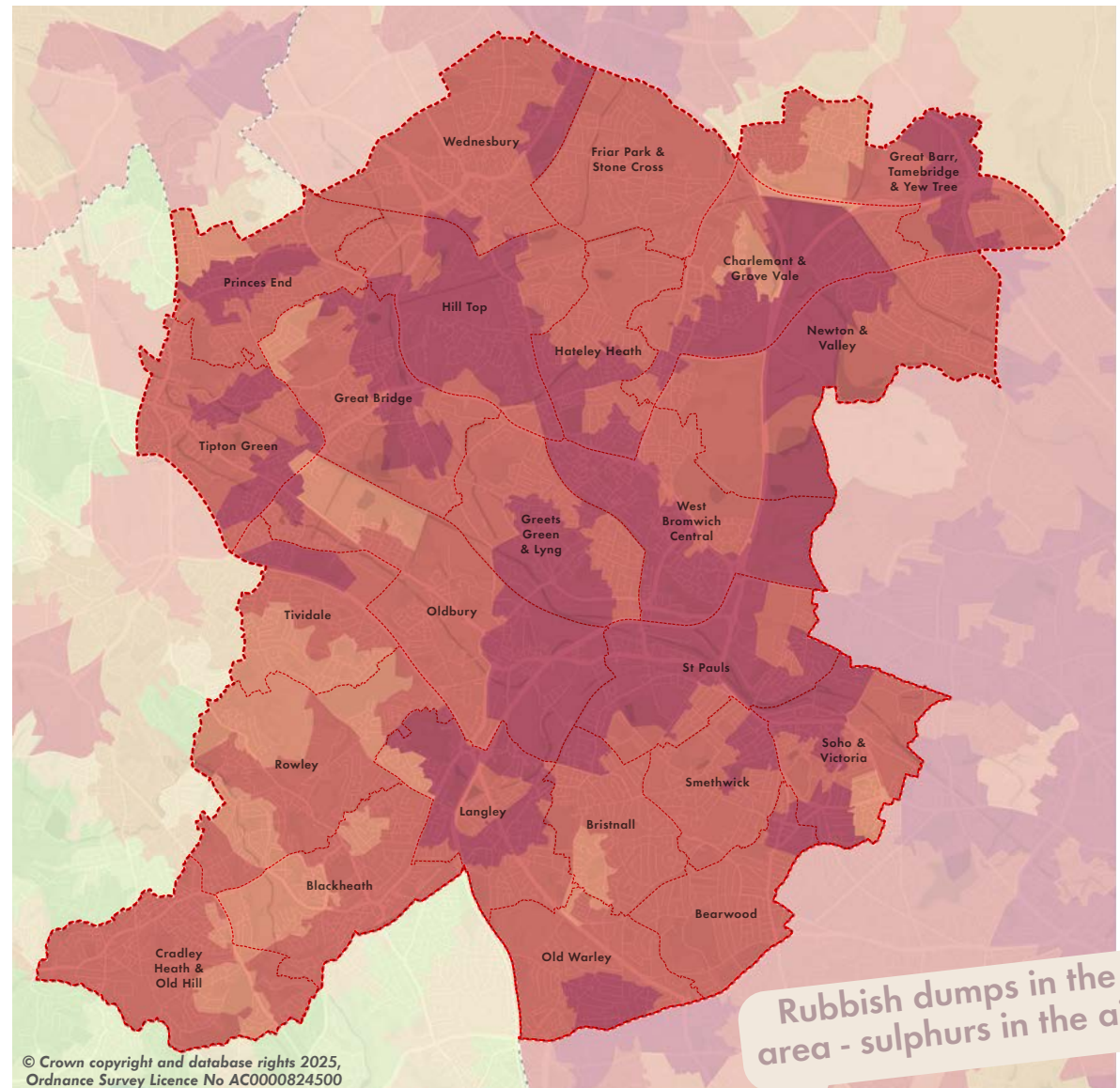
Deprivation is a key driver of poor health in the borough. Within deprivation there are physical environmental factors that are contributing to this, in particular air pollution. The Health Deprivation and Disability decile is an important contributor to Sandwell's over IMD score. Local communities in many parts of the borough including Cradley Heath, Tipton and East Smethwick have some of the poorest health in the country.

Within the IMD score, a sub-domain is factored in to cover the quality of the outdoor environment. In Sandwell this element illustrates the negative impact the quality of people's outdoor environment has on people's health. This sub-domain includes measures of air quality and road traffic accidents, both of which are problematic in many parts of Sandwell. This sub-domain measures four air pollutants that have the greatest impact on human health: nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), benzene, sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), and particulate matter (PM).

Need to focus on improving people's mental health

Outdoors Sub-domain Decile  
(where 1 is most deprived 10% of LSOAs)

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10



Rubbish dumps in the area - sulphurs in the air



“Children and infants are susceptible to harm from inhaling pollutants such as PM because they inhale more air per pound of body weight than do adults - they breathe faster, spend more time outdoors and have smaller body sizes. In addition, children’s immature immune systems may cause them to be more susceptible to PM than healthy adults.”

<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/inhalable-particulate-matter-and-health>

## 6.10 PARTICULATE AIR POLLUTION

Particulate matter pollution is particularly high in Sandwell. This is measured both as fine grained PM2.5 and coarser grain PM10.

Both PM2.5 and PM10 are inhaled by humans. PM2.5 is able to travel into and deposit on the surface of the deeper parts of the lung, while PM10 generally deposits on the surfaces of the larger airways of the upper region of the lung.

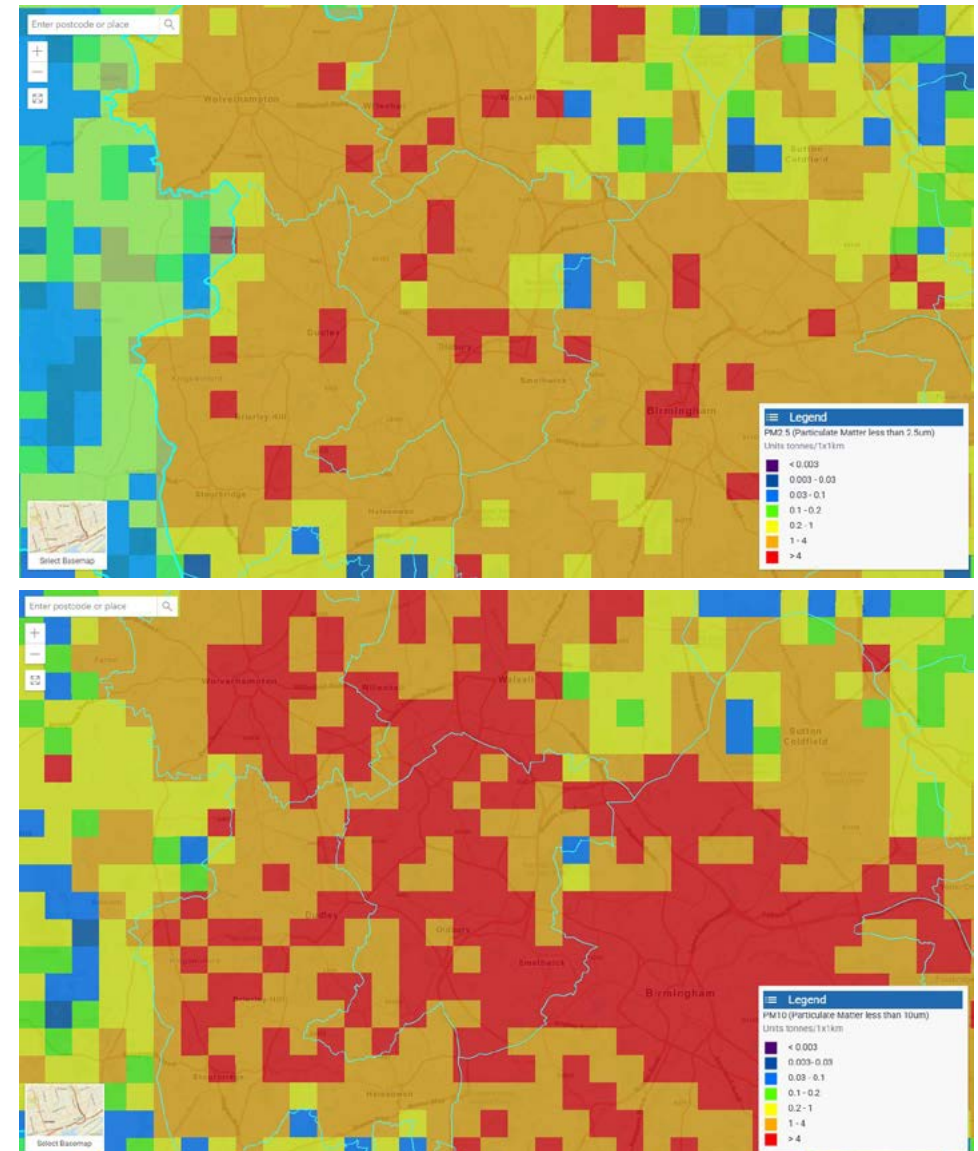
Of all of the common air pollutants, PM2.5 is associated with the greatest proportion of adverse health effects related to air pollution, both in the UK and world-wide (World Health Organization’s Global Burden of Disease Project).

“Ambient fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is the world’s leading environmental health risk factor.”

(McDuffie et al, 2021, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-23853-y>).

Whilst the maps suggest PM10 levels are higher and more concerning for the borough, it is also clear that PM2.5 levels are markedly higher in the borough than areas outside.

The primary contributing factors in the borough are likely to be industrial combustion activities and vehicle engines and movements. **Measures that reduce vehicle use and movements and limit pollution from industrial processes will have an important impact.**

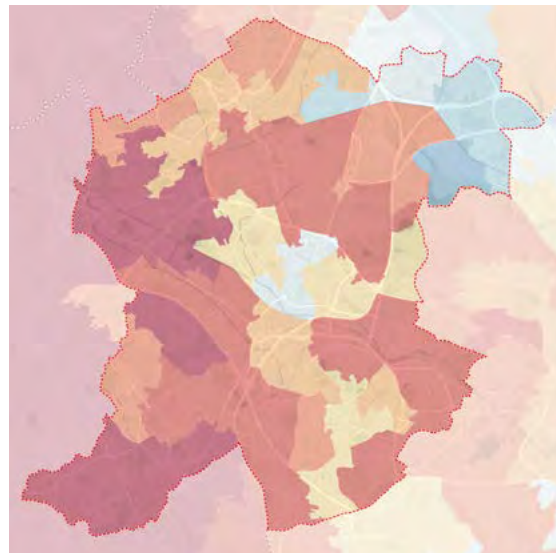


Top: PM2.5 particulate matter Bottom: PM10 particulate matter. Source: UK National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory for 2023 © Crown 2025 copyright Defra & DESNZ via [naei.energysecurity.gov.uk](http://naei.energysecurity.gov.uk) licenced under the Open Government Licence (OGL)

## 6.11 ADULT HEALTH

Levels of adult obesity in the borough are higher than the national average. Western parts of the borough in particular are significantly higher, such as Cradley Heath, Tipton and Tividale/Oakham. The percentage of overweight adults is high in the borough with 71.6% of adults classified as overweight. There are also concerning statistics for the younger generation, with 31% of Sandwell's 10-11 year olds obese - this is the highest percentage in the sub-region.

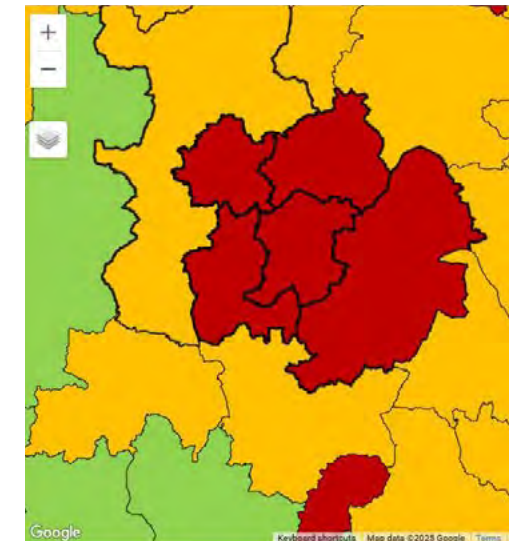
Sandwell has the highest rates of mortality from cardiovascular disease for under 75s in sub-region - with 125.2 in 100,000 population dying from this cause, compared to the England average of 77.4.



Adult obesity levels, by Medium Super Output Area, 2021 Census data



The percentage of physically active adults is low in Sandwell (50.7%), which means almost half the adult population is inactive. This follows a pattern in the sub-region but Sandwell's figure is the starkest.



Proportion of adults who are physically active by district (red indicates less than two-thirds are active), Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles. 2025 © Crown copyright 2025

The Sandwell Better Mental Health Strategy 2023 states that:

Approximately 1 in 5 working age adults in Sandwell (21.5%) are estimated to have a common mental problem, which is higher than both the West Midlands region (17.7%) and England as a whole (16.9%). Common mental health problems are less prevalent among older people aged 65+, but this is still higher in Sandwell (13.4%) compared to the regional and national averages (10.7% and 10.2% respectively).

[Source: OHID Public Health Profiles. Estimates are based on national survey estimates (Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey) applied to local demography (ONS). 2017]



# 7 MOVEMENT & TRANSPORT

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a summary of movement and transport within Sandwell, covering public transport, walking and cycling and vehicular modes.

Information regarding speeds, collisions, public transport and active travel infrastructure are presented through a series of plans produced from data sets available.



Dudley Port viaduct and aqueduct



Active travel routes through Tipton



Low speed zones, Oldbury



Bus stop, Tipton



Smethwick station



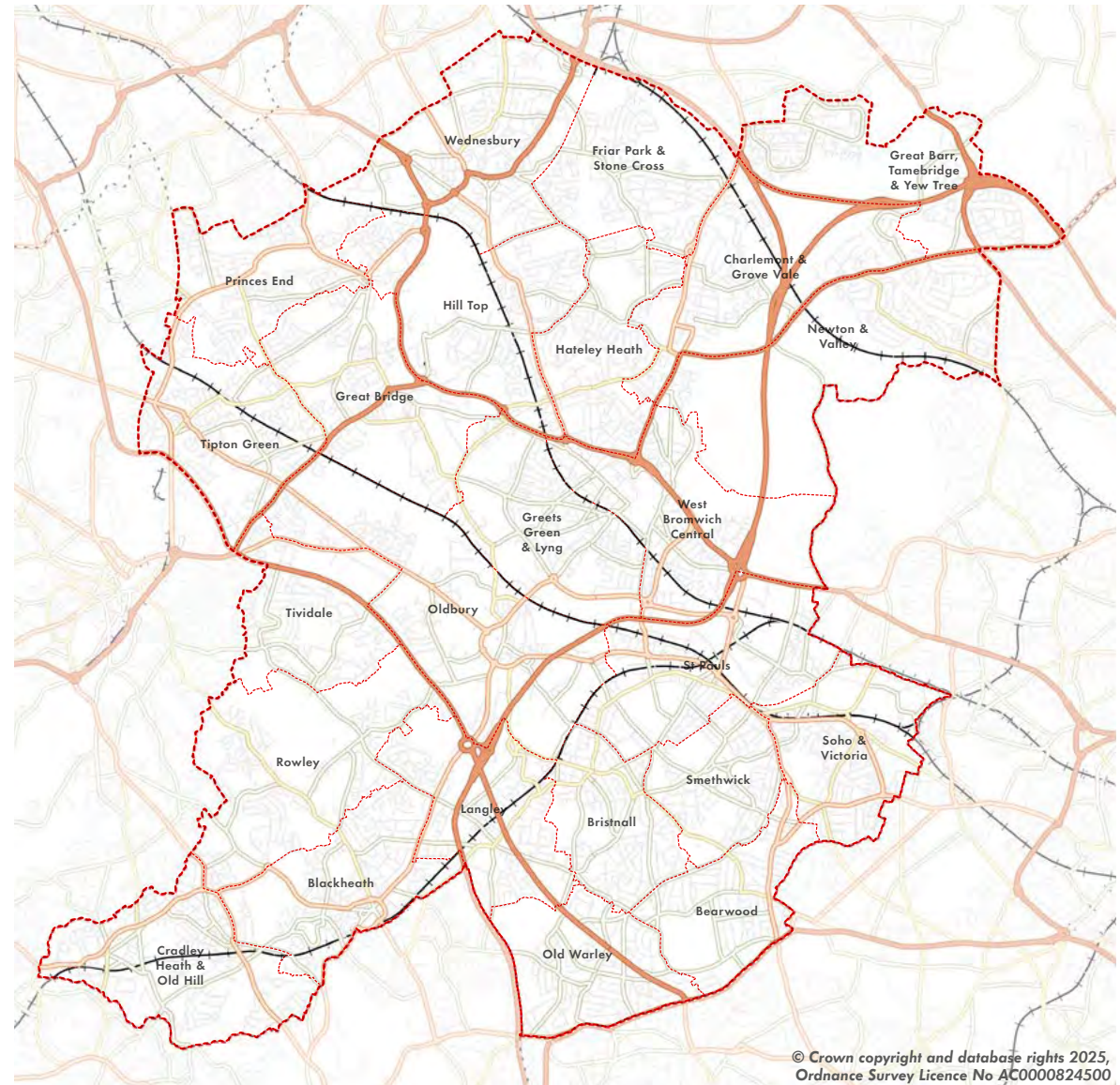
Smethwick rail infrastructure

## 7.2 HIGHWAYS

Sandwell is crossed by major roads and motorways including:

- Motorways managed by National Highways: M5, M6
- A-Roads managed by National Highways: A41
- Other Main Roads: A4041, A4123, A4301, A461

The close access to the National Highways Strategic Road Network supports key sections of the industrial and business economy based in the borough. With the presence of these main roads, high traffic flows and congestion caused by through traffic is a concern for residents in the borough, particularly during rush hour. The amount of vehicles passing through Sandwell has a significant impact on the highway network.

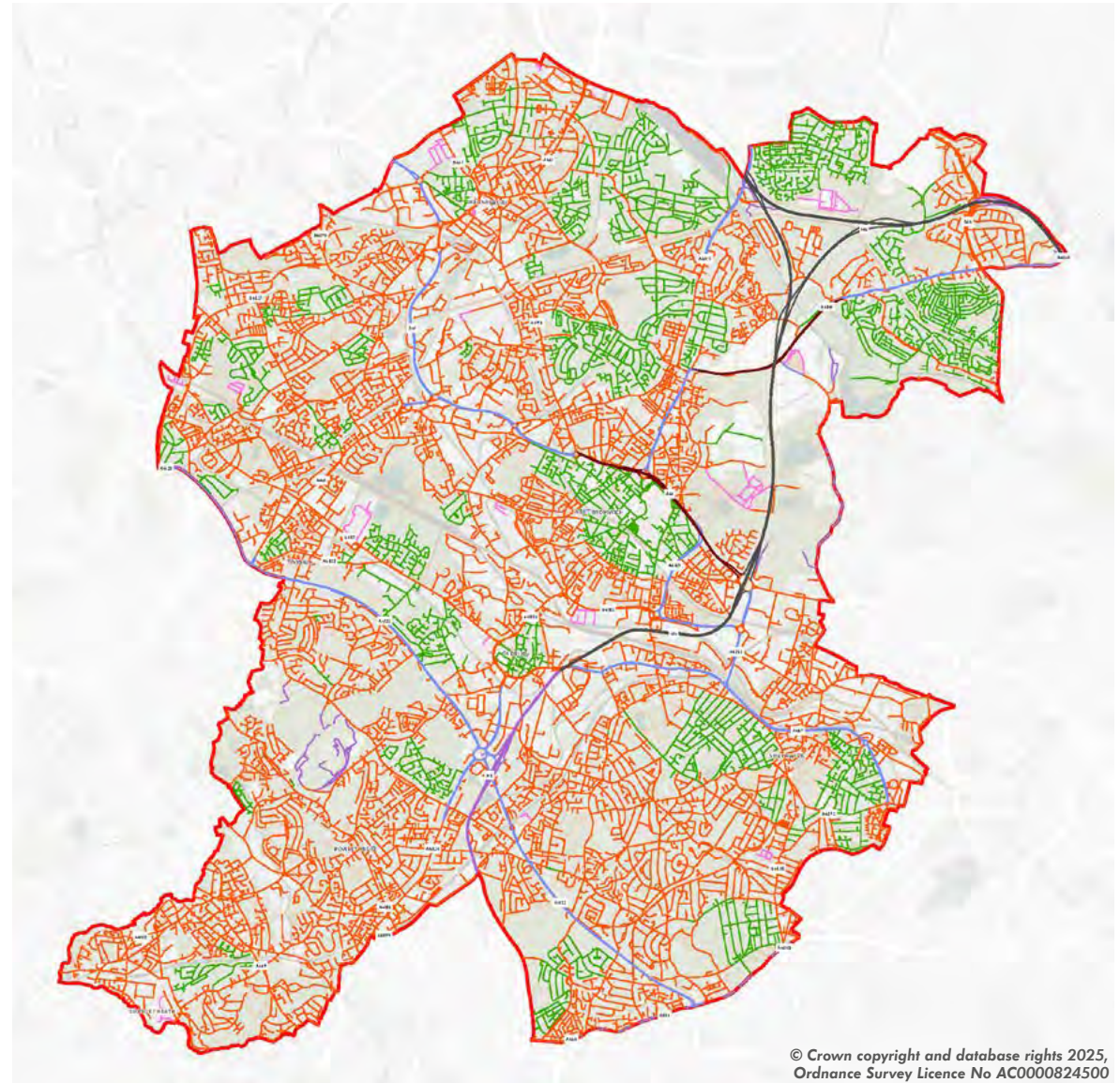
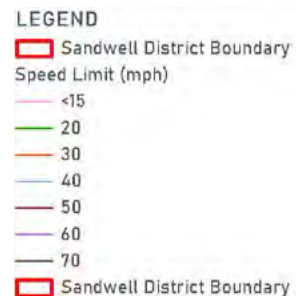




## 7.3 STREETS - SIGNED SPEED LIMITS

The designated speed limits of each part of the highway network within Sandwell are shown on the diagram opposite.

The predominate speed limits are 20mph and 30mph on non-main roads. There are, however, a number of higher speed main roads that cut through the urban fabric of Sandwell. This presents permeability, safety and accessibility challenges, as well as impacts on the quality of the public realm environment.





## 7.4 STREETS - AVERAGE ACTUAL SPEEDS

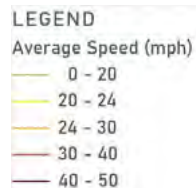
The average speeds of vehicles on Sandwell's highway network are shown on the diagram opposite.

Speed data can be reviewed against designated speed limits to see if there are any particularly troublesome areas where speeding occurs.

Whilst the plan does not highlight many areas of concern, there is anecdotal evidence of speeding cars which is a real concern for residents in some areas.

Cars drive too fast  
around my estate

Stop speeding cars!





## 7.5 COLLISIONS

Understanding the pattern of accidents can be very useful in pinpointing areas of concern or conflict between different users. Collision data has been plotted on a map for the years 2019 to 2023.

The collision data is broken down into three categories: slight, serious and fatal.

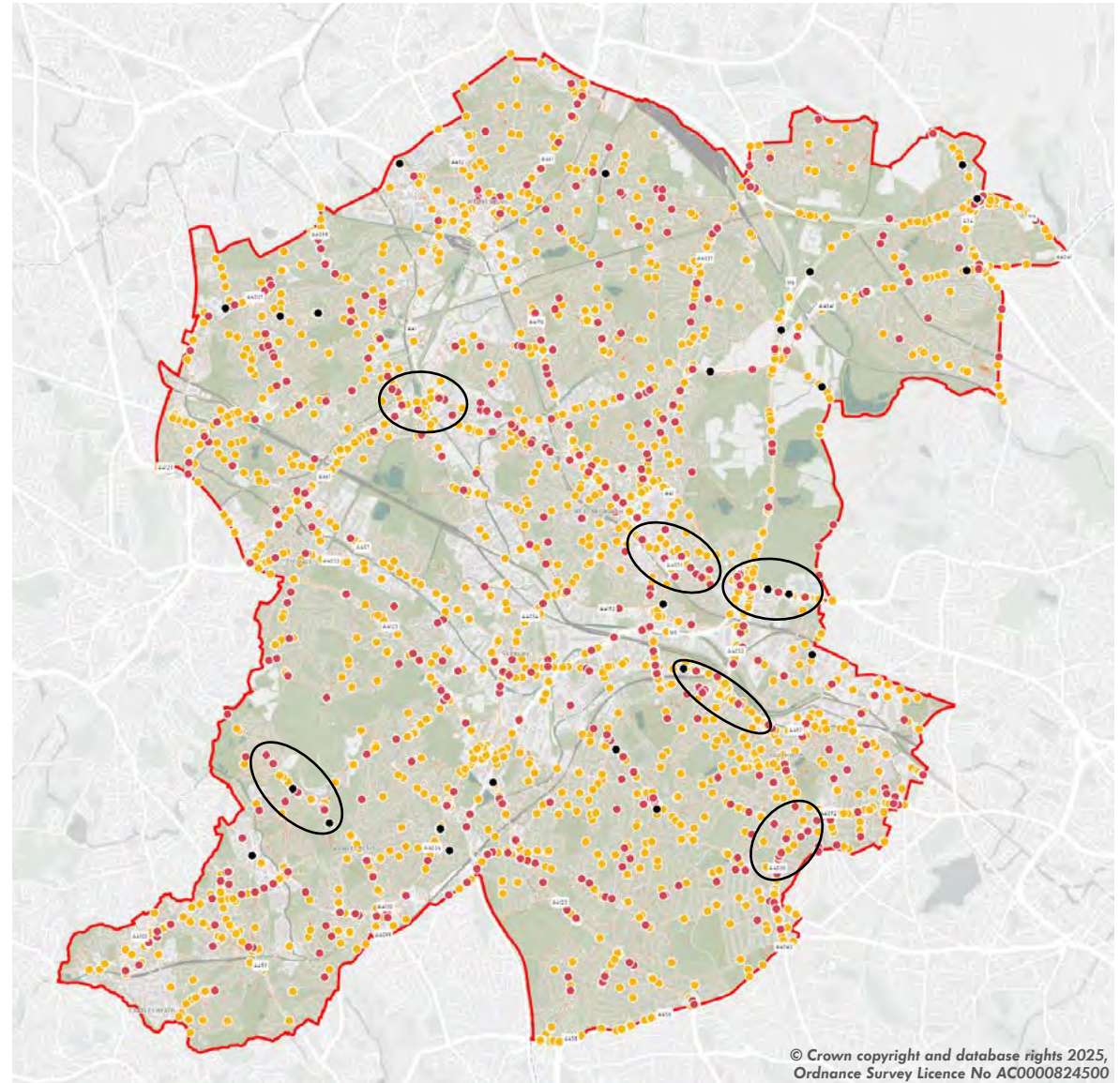
The plan shows there are some clusters of accidents - mostly on main roads, but also on key local streets with lots of activity.

In the development of the design code, this data will help to inform how street design can be improved.

### LEGEND

#### Severity

- Fatal
- Serious
- Slight












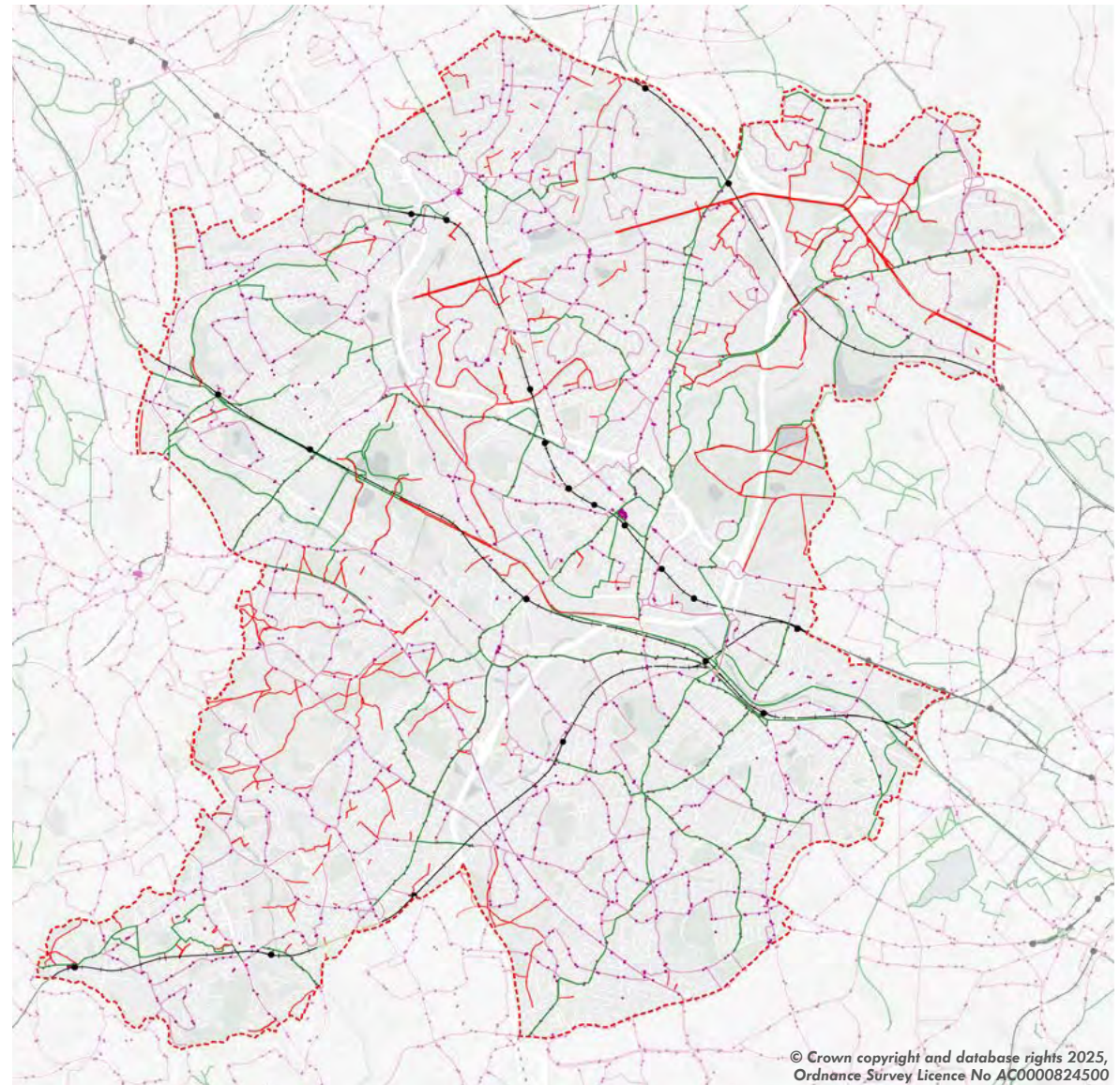
## 7.6 PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The borough is increasingly well served by rail and metro links running east-west across the borough into Birmingham and west to Dudley and Wolverhampton.

New links such as the Wednesbury - Dudley Metro link are under construction and will start to address north-south movement demand.

The plan also shows the dense network of bus routes through the borough which is particularly important in providing connections north-south and serves parts of the borough with less access to the rail and metro network.

-  Sandwell
-  Neighbouring Boroughs
-  Railway track
-  Railway tunnel
-  Railway Stations
-  Bus route
-  Bus stop



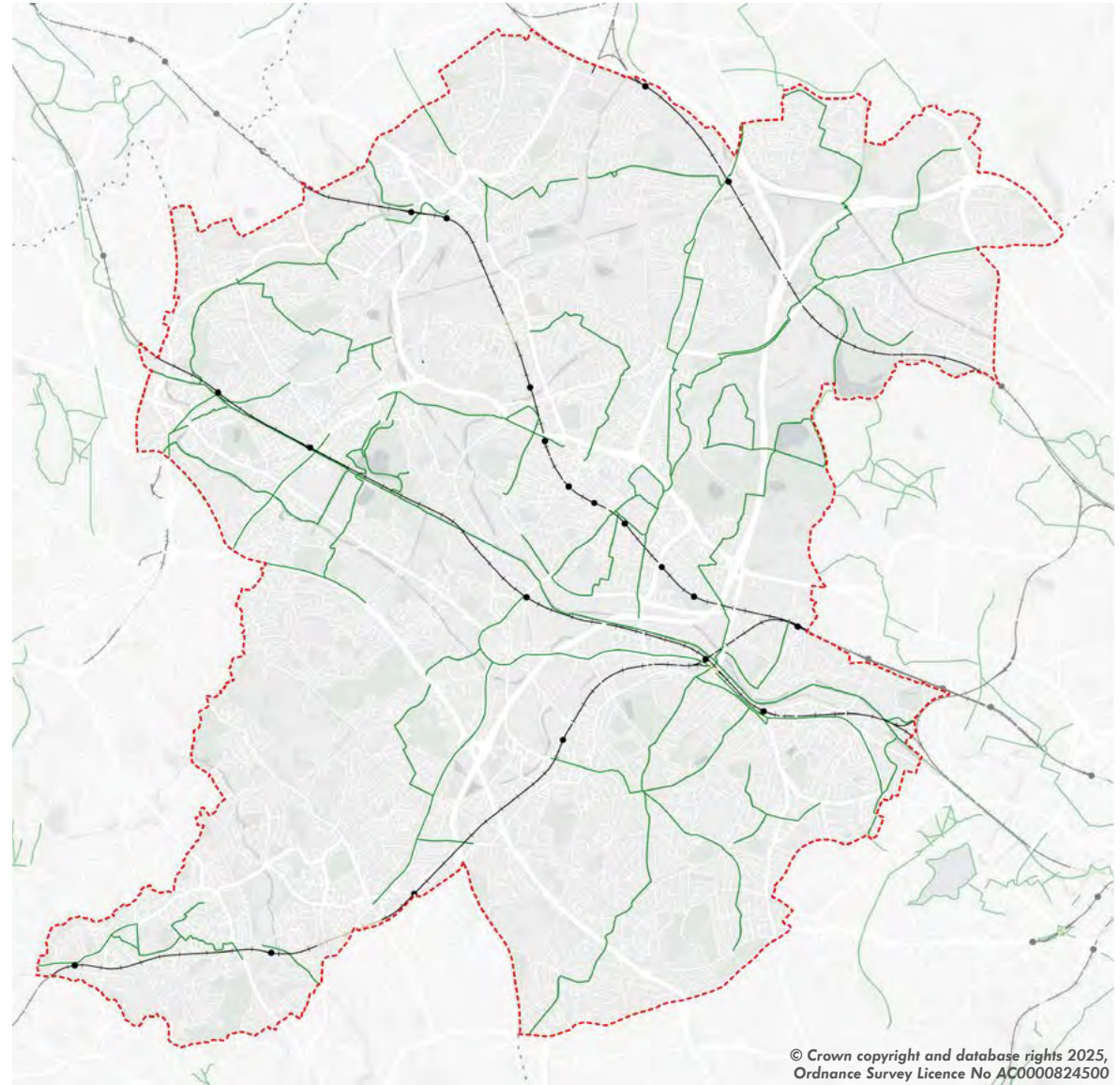


## 7.7 EXISTING CYCLE ROUTE NETWORK

The cycle network has expanded in the borough over recent years through the introduction of segregated lanes.

A blueprint for expansion has been developed by Sandwell, in particular linking to the canal network. Further details are outlined in the Sandwell Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which is summarised on the following page.

-  Sandwell
-  Neighbouring Boroughs
-  Railway track
-  Railway tunnel
-  Railway Stations
-  Cycling network



## 7.8 LCWIP

The Sandwell Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is a strategic plan created by the local authority to improve infrastructure for walking, wheeling and cycling within the borough. The goal is to make these modes of transportation more accessible, safe, and enjoyable, encouraging more people to choose them for shorter journeys or as part of longer trips, for leisure or for commuting.

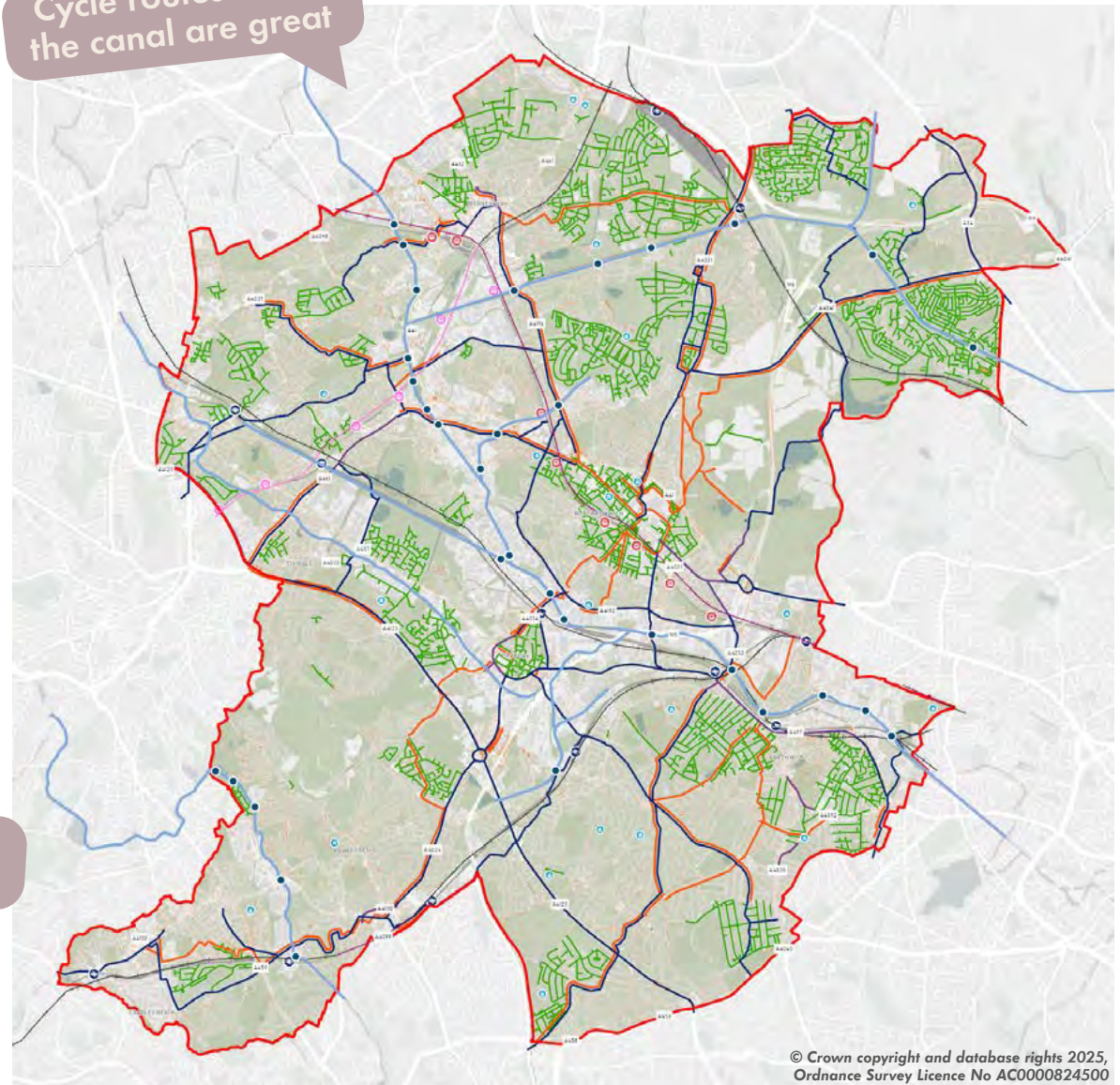
The benefits extend beyond pedestrians and cyclists and aims to make life easier for users of mobility scooters, wheelchairs, pushchairs and prams.

All proposals within the LCWIP are subject to funding.

LEGEND	
	Railway Station
	Rapid Transit Station
	Proposed Rapid Transit Station
	Secondary School
	Canal Access Point (Indicative)
	Proposed LCWIP Route
	Segregated Cycle Routes
	Advisory Cycle Route
	20mph Zone
	Railway
	Rapid Transit
	Proposed Rapid Transit
	Canal

Everyone should be able to walk to a park like mine

Cycle routes along the canal are great



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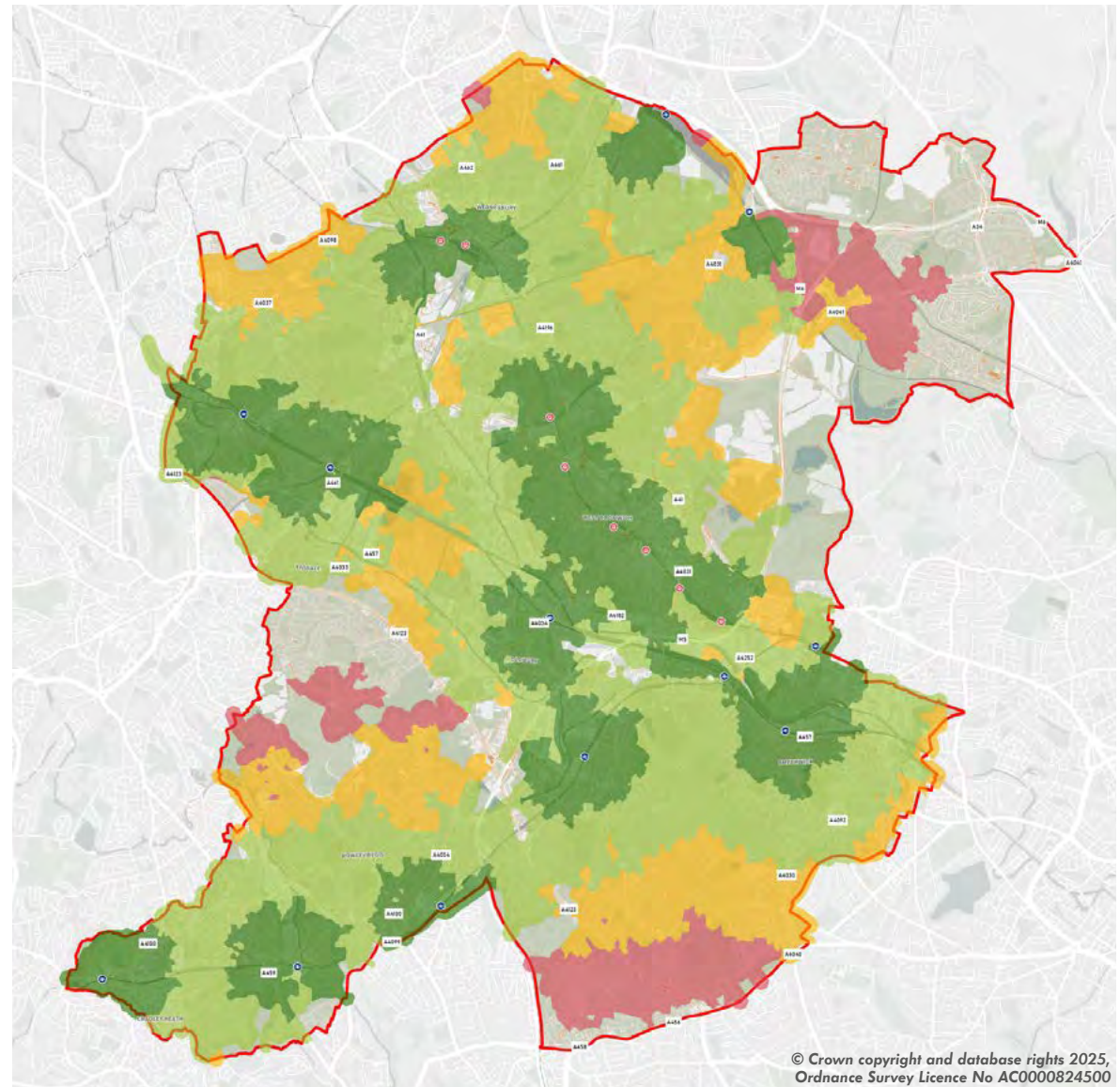
## 7.9 CYCLING JOURNEY TIME TO RAIL STATIONS

Cycling isochrones around railway stations provide an indication of the distance a cyclist can travel to or from the station within a given time period.

The majority of Sandwell is within 15 minutes cycling time from a railway station or Rapid Transit station. A significant portion of which is within 10 minutes cycling time.

While cycling journey times to and from stations provide an indication of accessibility in terms of journey times, they do not provide an indication of the quality of the cycle infrastructure.

**LEGEND**  
**Station Type**  
• Railway Station  
• Rapid Transit Station  
**INCLUDING TOWPATHS**  
**Cycling Time**  
0 - 5 mins  
5 - 10 mins  
10 - 15 mins  
15 - 20 mins

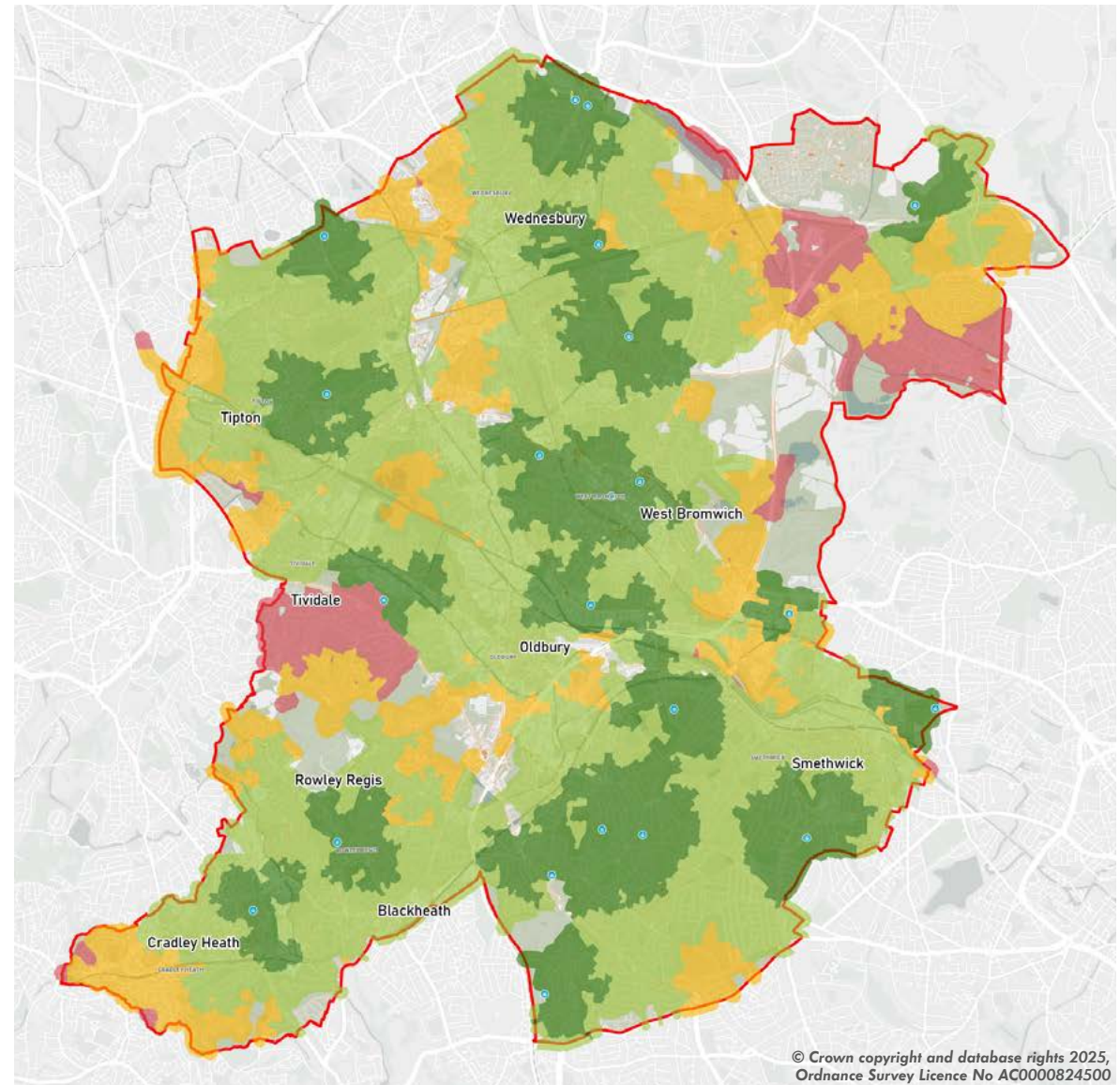


## 7.10 CYCLING JOURNEY TIME TO SCHOOLS

Cycling isochrones around schools provide an indication of the distance a cyclist can travel to or from secondary schools within a given time period.

The majority of Sandwell is within 10 minutes cycling time from a secondary school.

While cycling journey times to and from schools provide an indication of accessibility in terms of journey times, they do not provide an indication of the quality of the cycle infrastructure.





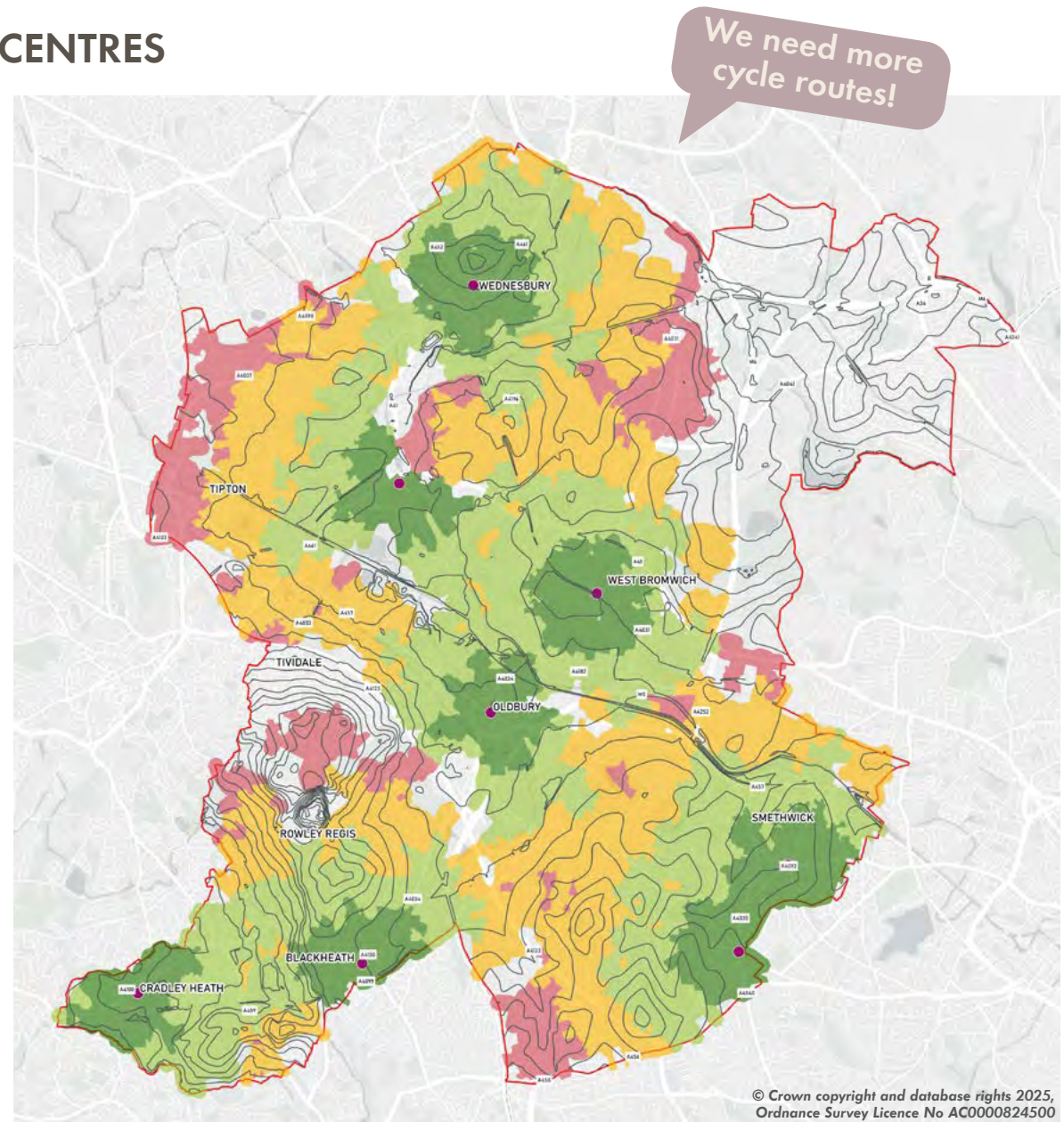
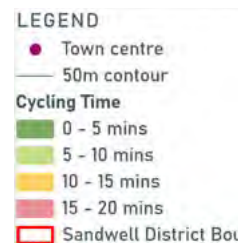
## 7.11 CYCLING JOURNEY TIME TO TOWN CENTRES

Cycling isochrones around town centres provide an indication of the distance a cyclist can travel to or from the town centre within a given time period.

Town centres offer areas of employment, retail and other civic uses - all of which are important for a vibrant local community.

Access to town centres by cycling is varied. The majority of Sandwell is within a 15 minute cycle to a town centre, there is also a significant amount of areas which are more than 15 minutes cycle time.

While cycling journey times to and from town centres provide an indication of accessibility in terms of journey times, they do not provide an indication of the quality of the cycle infrastructure.

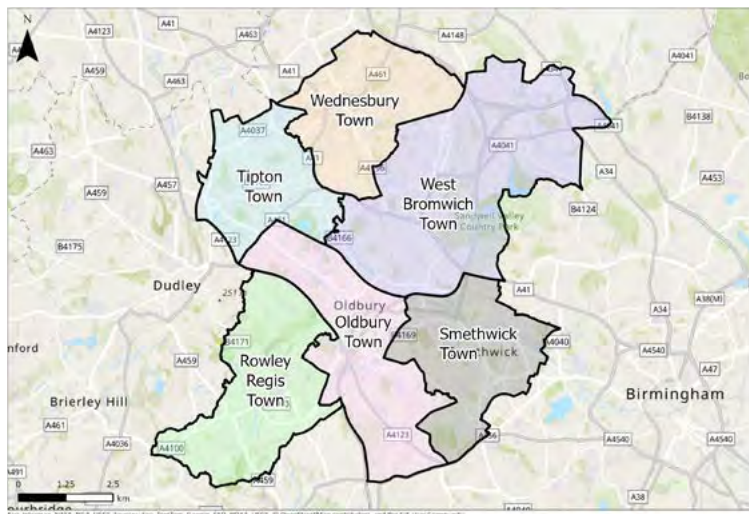


## 7.12 AVERAGE CAR OWNERSHIP

The average car ownership across Sandwell has increased over the last two decades, as can be seen by the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Census data. This is the case for types of dwellings, across all areas within Sandwell.

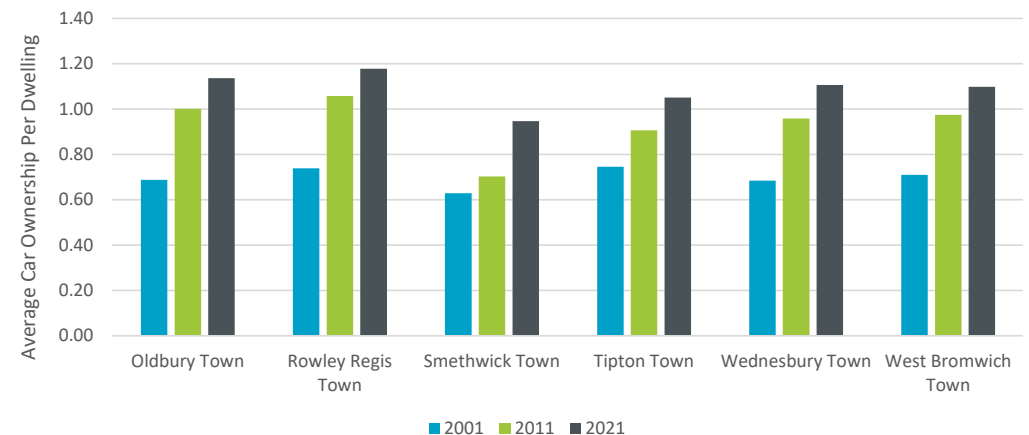
Oldbury has seen the largest increase vehicles per dwelling between 2001 and 2021, averaging an extra 0.45 vehicles per dwelling.

Smethwick has the lowest average vehicle ownership of 0.95, with Rowley Regis averaging the highest vehicle ownership rates of 1.18 vehicles per dwelling.



Census Year	Area within Sandwell	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 or more bedrooms	All Households
2021	Oldbury Town	0.62	0.83	1.05	1.29	1.14
	Rowley Regis Town	0.65	0.89	1.19	1.26	1.18
	Smethwick Town	0.61	0.65	0.77	1.36	0.95
	Tipton Town	0.58	0.95	1.01	1.35	1.05
	Wednesbury Town	0.56	1.02	1.13	1.43	1.11
	West Bromwich Town	0.60	0.79	1.01	1.47	1.10
2011	Oldbury Town	0.54	0.73	0.90	1.18	1.00
	Rowley Regis Town	0.59	0.86	0.98	1.47	1.06
	Smethwick Town	0.39	0.58	0.68	0.92	0.70
	Tipton Town	0.49	0.72	0.86	1.34	0.91
	Wednesbury Town	0.50	0.78	0.99	1.11	0.96
	West Bromwich Town	0.51	0.73	0.90	1.36	0.97
2001	Oldbury Town	0.53	0.63	0.80	0.90	0.69
	Rowley Regis Town	0.56	0.69	0.70	0.97	0.74
	Smethwick Town	0.64	0.56	0.67	0.82	0.63
	Tipton Town	0.60	0.71	0.85	0.97	0.75
	Wednesbury Town	0.48	0.66	0.62	0.95	0.68
	West Bromwich Town	0.54	0.67	0.70	0.91	0.71

Average Car Ownership Per Dwelling (All Types and Tenure)





# 8 LANDSCAPE, NATURE, & CLIMATE

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the environmental characteristics and green infrastructure of Sandwell.

Having been at the heart of the Black Country's coal mining and manufacturing industries, Sandwell faces unique environmental challenges stemming from its industrial legacy.

The borough's topography varies significantly from north to south, with low-lying northern areas particularly vulnerable to flooding, while elevated areas in the south provide natural drainage advantages. Sandwell's green infrastructure comprises diverse typologies, though connectivity between these spaces remains fragmented.



Green canal links, Smethwick



Green canal links, Tipton



Victoria Park, Tipton



Victoria Park, Smethwick



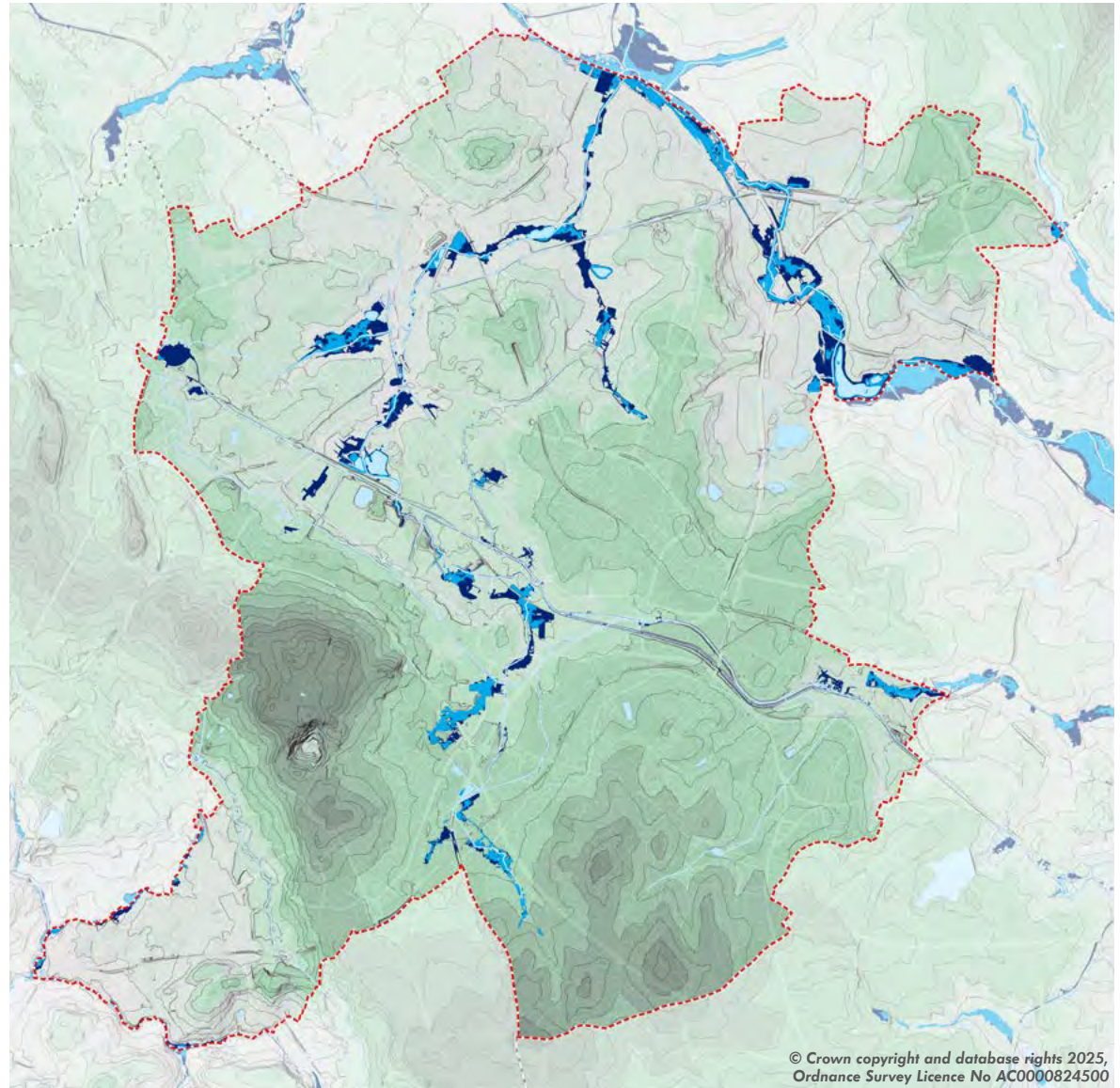
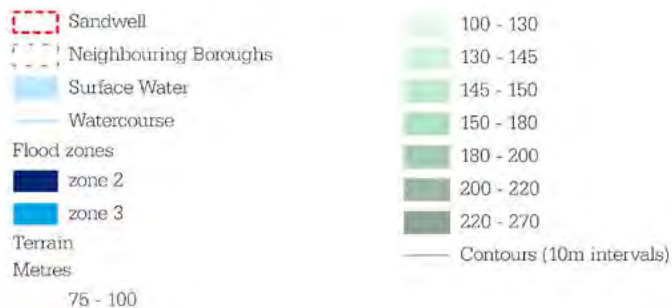
## 8.2 FLOODING AND TOPOGRAPHY

Sandwell is characterised by relatively low-lying topography, with its lowest elevations situated to the north, which are especially susceptible to flooding.

The southern areas near Rowley Regis in the southwest and Warley Woods in the southeast represent the borough's most elevated terrain.

The drainage system is dominated by extensively culverted watercourses, though two notable exceptions exist: the River Tame, which drains much of the borough, and the River Stour in the southwest. An extensive canal network traverses the area, incorporating numerous culverts and feeder streams.

Where land is difficult to develop due to flooding or topography (such as steepness of slope) the land is often left underutilised for development, becoming a place where nature takes hold.





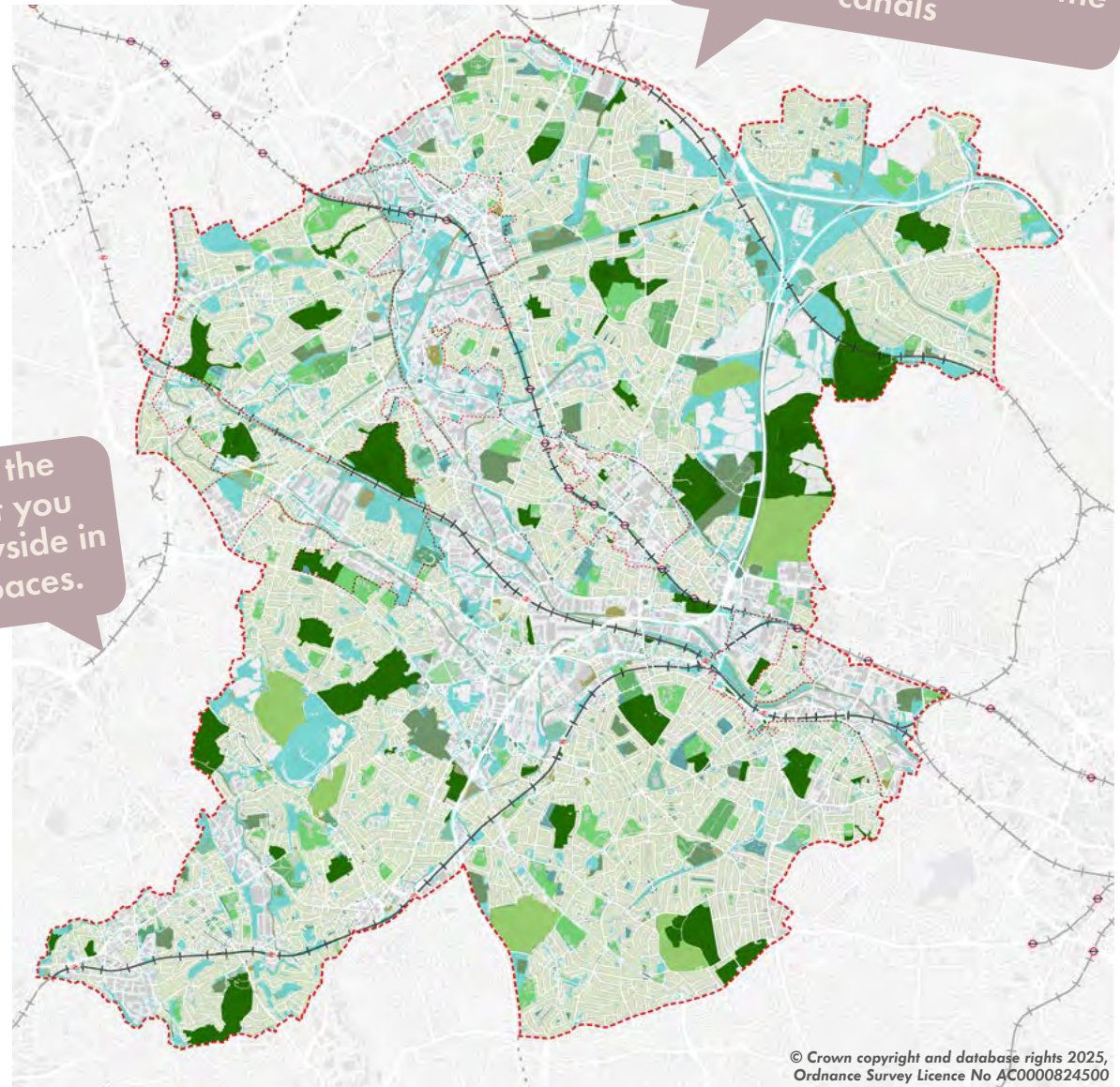
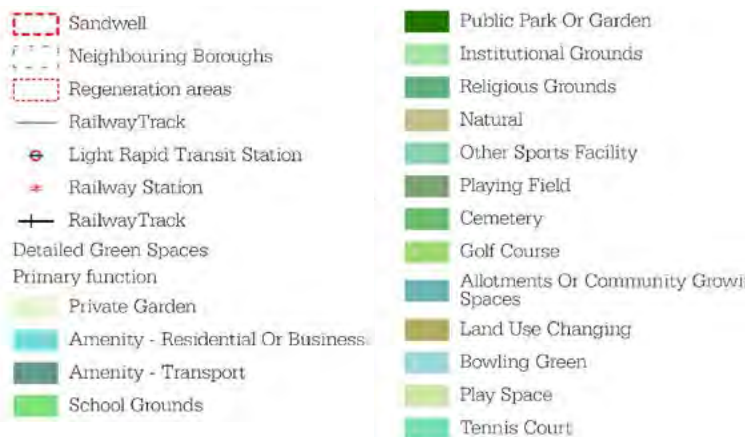
## 8.3 DETAILED GREEN SPACE TYPOLOGIES

Sandwell has a great mix of green spaces, from large public parks and gardens, to golf courses and playing fields. While private gardens in residential areas are the most common type of green space, the larger public areas make up an extensive proportion of green space. The overall impression is of a green borough with a strong mix of spaces.

But even though there are lots of these green spaces spread across the borough, they're not always well connected for people or wildlife.

A strong positive for the area is the sense that you could be in the countryside in some of the green spaces.

The real strengths of our area are the parks and the canals



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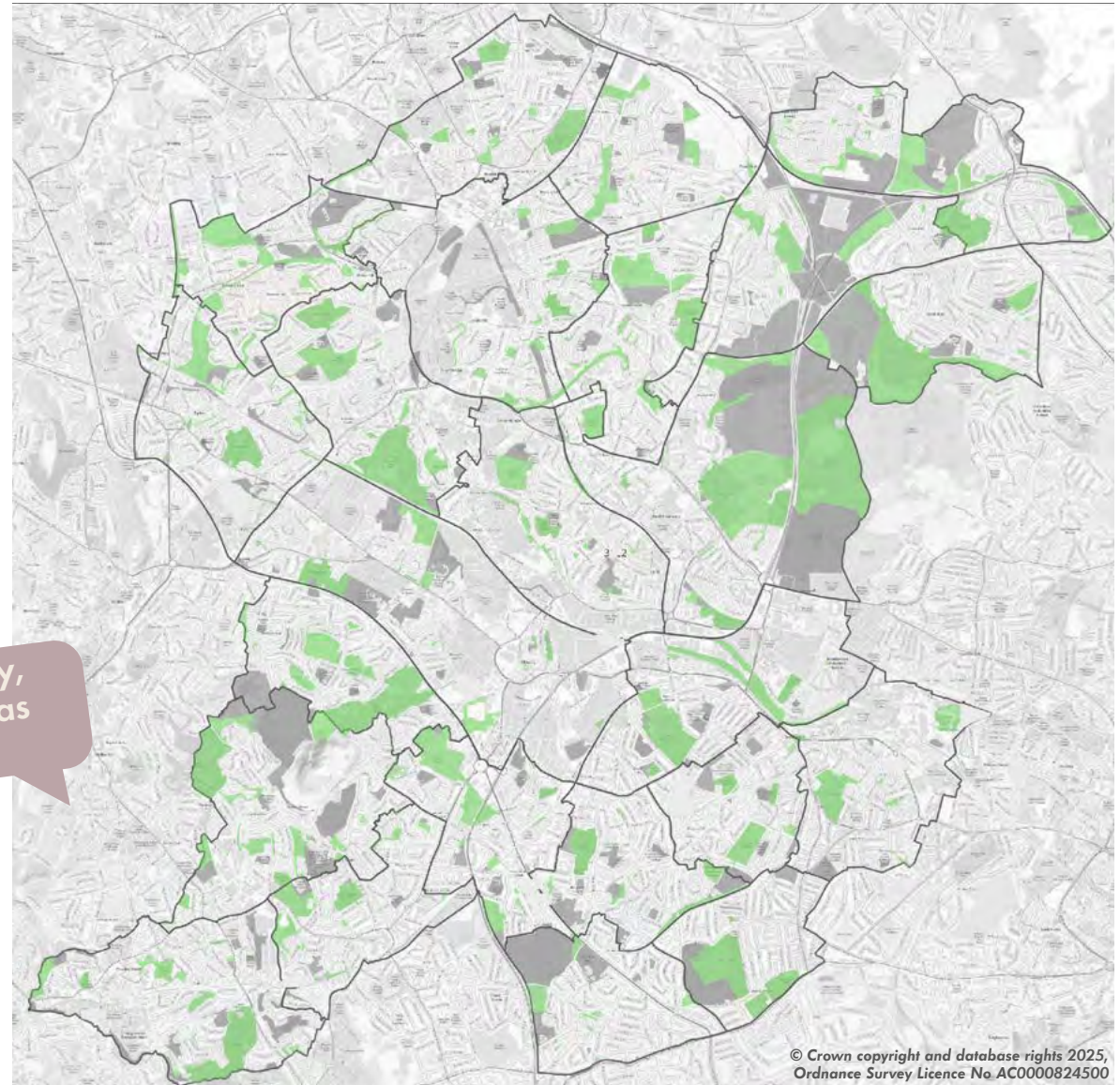
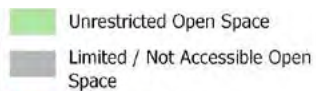
## 8.4 ACCESSIBILITY TO OPEN SPACE

Access to open space varies across the borough, with some neighbourhoods having limited options. In particular the Oldbury town area and its hinterland has notably less access to open space. Parts of Smethwick, around Brandhall for example, also have reduced access.

We need to raise the bar on quality of green spaces provided in new residential developments

The park is a long way, would be good if it was closer.

Mapping information taken from the Sandwell Open Space Assessment 2024



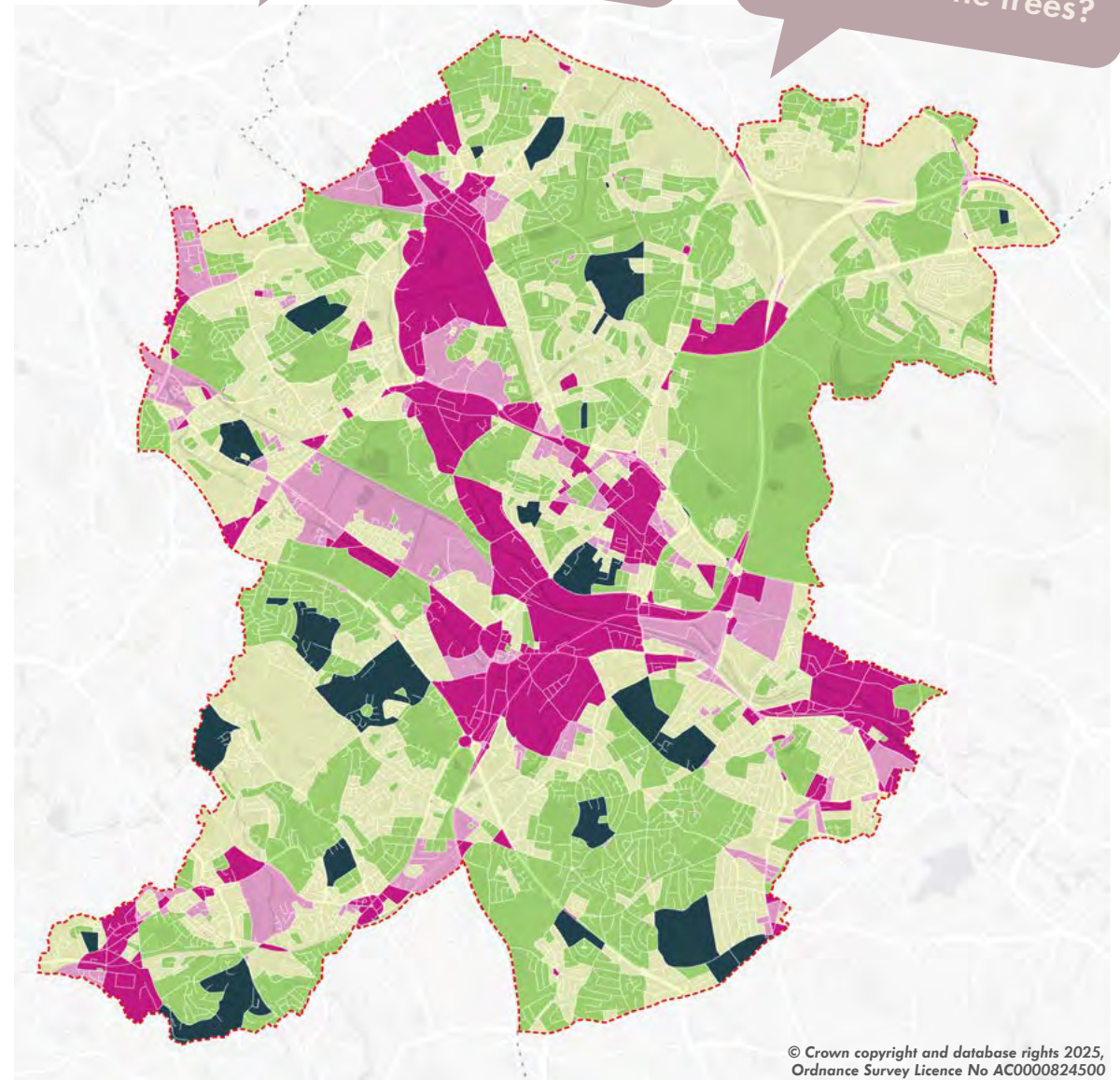
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## 8.5 URBAN GREENING FACTOR (UGF)

The Urban Greening Factor (UGF) serves as a planning tool to evaluate the quality and quantity of urban greening in development proposals. It involves calculating a score for a site by multiplying the area of different greening features, such as green roofs, trees, and planted surfaces, by associated factor weightings. This total weighted figure is divided by the site area to provide a UGF score, with a higher score indicating a greener area which is likely to be more biodiverse and resilient to climate change.

The industrial areas of the borough are understandably the least green, but there are also a number of residential neighbourhoods which also score below 0.3 or 0.4 which is considered an absolute minimum level of greening. Overall, the greenness of the borough's parks does not spill out into many of the neighbourhoods. Significant areas have no street trees and limited greenery beyond back gardens.



Despite the borough appearing green, much of the residential areas have a lack of planting and greenery along streets and in public spaces.

### Over 0.5 score

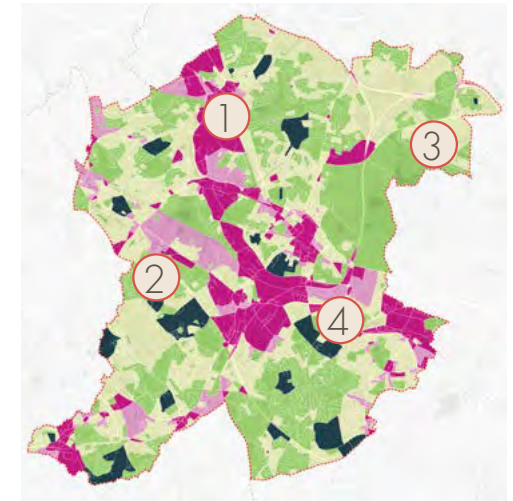
Those parts of the borough scoring better are often characterised by:

- Detached residential
- Regular 10m or more back gardens
- Larger front gardens with retained soft landscape alongside parking

### Less than 0.5 score

Those parts of the borough scoring less well are often characterised by:

- Semi-detached residential
- Loss of front gardens to parking
- Few surviving street trees evident



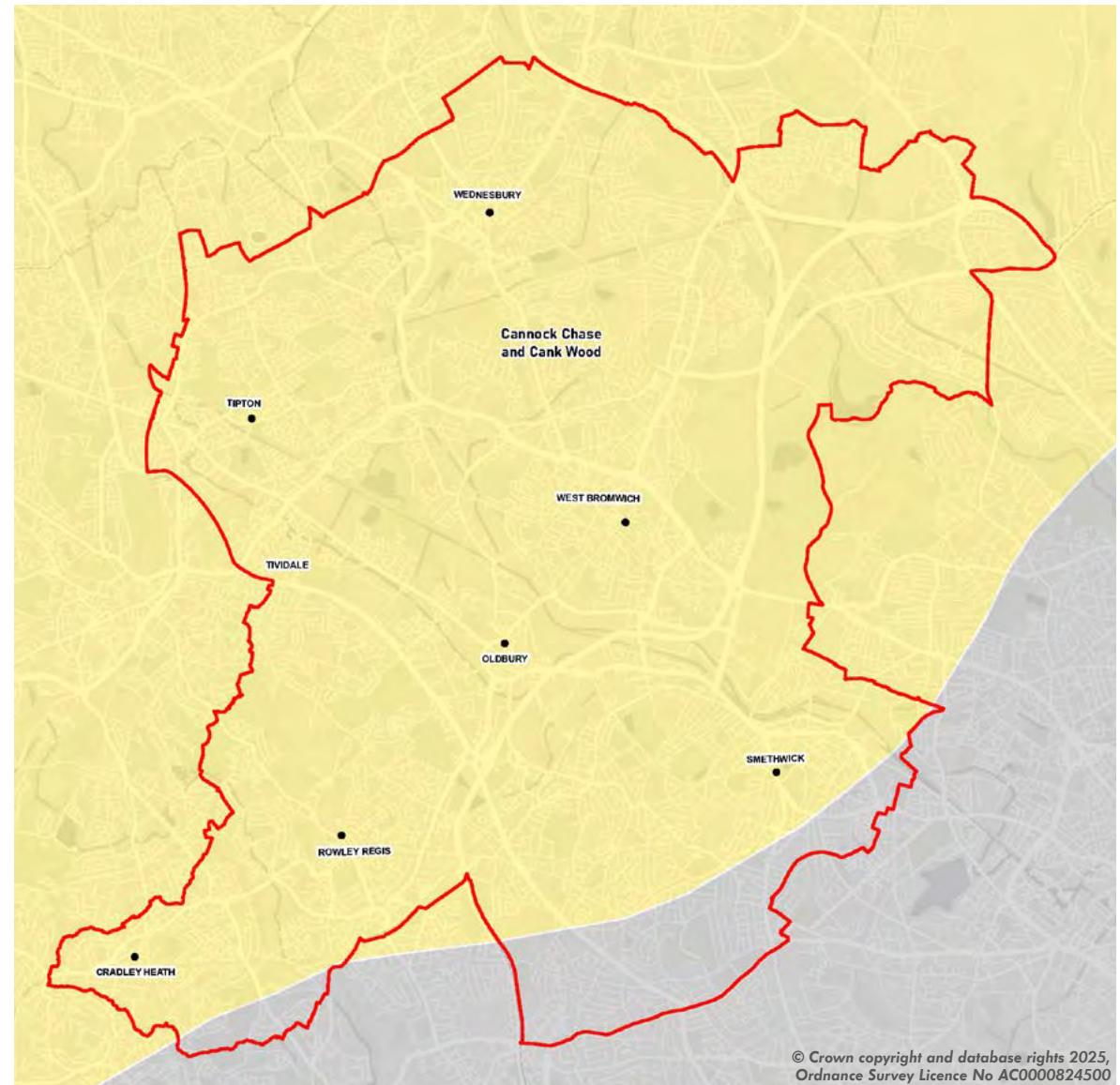
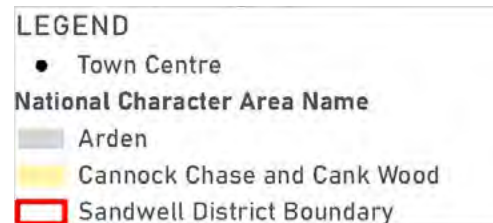


## 8.6 NATIONAL CHARACTER AREAS (NCA) - LANDSCAPE

Sandwell is divided across two National Character Areas:

- NCA 67: Cannock Chase and Cank Wood
- NCA 97: Arden

The Cannock Chase and Cank Wood covers the majority of the borough. A summary of the features, issues and opportunities of each character area is provided on the following pages.



## 8.7 NCA 67 - CANNOCK CHASE AND CANK WOOD

### Location and Character

- Covers much of the Black Country conurbation and its northern setting.
- Plateau formed by sandstone and South Staffordshire Coalfield geology.
- Historically part of the hunting forest of Cannock Chase.

### Key Natural Features

- Heathland of international importance at: Sutton Park National Nature Reserve & Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Part of the Cannock Chase National Landscape (previously AONB).
- No major rivers, but canals are significant.

### Landscape and Land Use

- South: Urban development dominates.
- North: Open landscapes with conifer plantations, heathland, and farmland.
- Contains Forest of Mercia (Community Forest).
- Rich industrial archaeology and historic parks.
- Outstanding geodiversity.

### Ecosystem Services

- Agriculture and forestry: food and timber.
- Recreational access via extensive rights of way.
- High visitor pressure causing issues (e.g. Cannock Chase SAC).

### Key Issues and Opportunities

- Development pressure likely to continue.
- Opportunity to improve landscape quality, biodiversity, and green infrastructure.

### Headline Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs, Natural England)

- SEO 1: Expand lowland heathland to boost habitat connectivity and climate resilience.
- SEO 2: Manage and expand green infrastructure (woodlands, canals, restored mining sites).
- SEO 3: Conserve and enhance character (AONB, Forest of Mercia, Black Country) and maintain food/timber production while boosting resilience and tranquillity.



## 8.8 NCA 97 - ARDEN

### Location and Character

- South and east of Birmingham, part of the West Midlands conurbation.
- Historically between the River Tame and the River Avon.
- Includes parts of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and edges of Coventry, Warwick, Stratford-upon-Avon.
- Higher ground: Clent and Lickey Hills (west), Nuneaton Ridge (east).
- Central area: gently rolling, fragmented semi-natural/ancient woodland.

### Key Landscape Features

- Mature oaks in hedgerows.
- Distinctive field boundaries.
- Historic parklands.
- Narrow river corridors.
- Strong cultural links to William Shakespeare and the Forest of Arden.

### Geology and Biodiversity

- Among the most geologically diverse of NCAs.
- Contains many geological and biodiversity assets.

### Land Use

- Mixed: residential, agriculture, industry (including coal mining in north east).
- Numerous transport routes: road, rail, air, canal.
- Increasing development pressure, especially near Birmingham and Coventry.
- Potential for new green infrastructure linking urban and rural areas.

### Headline Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs, Natural England)

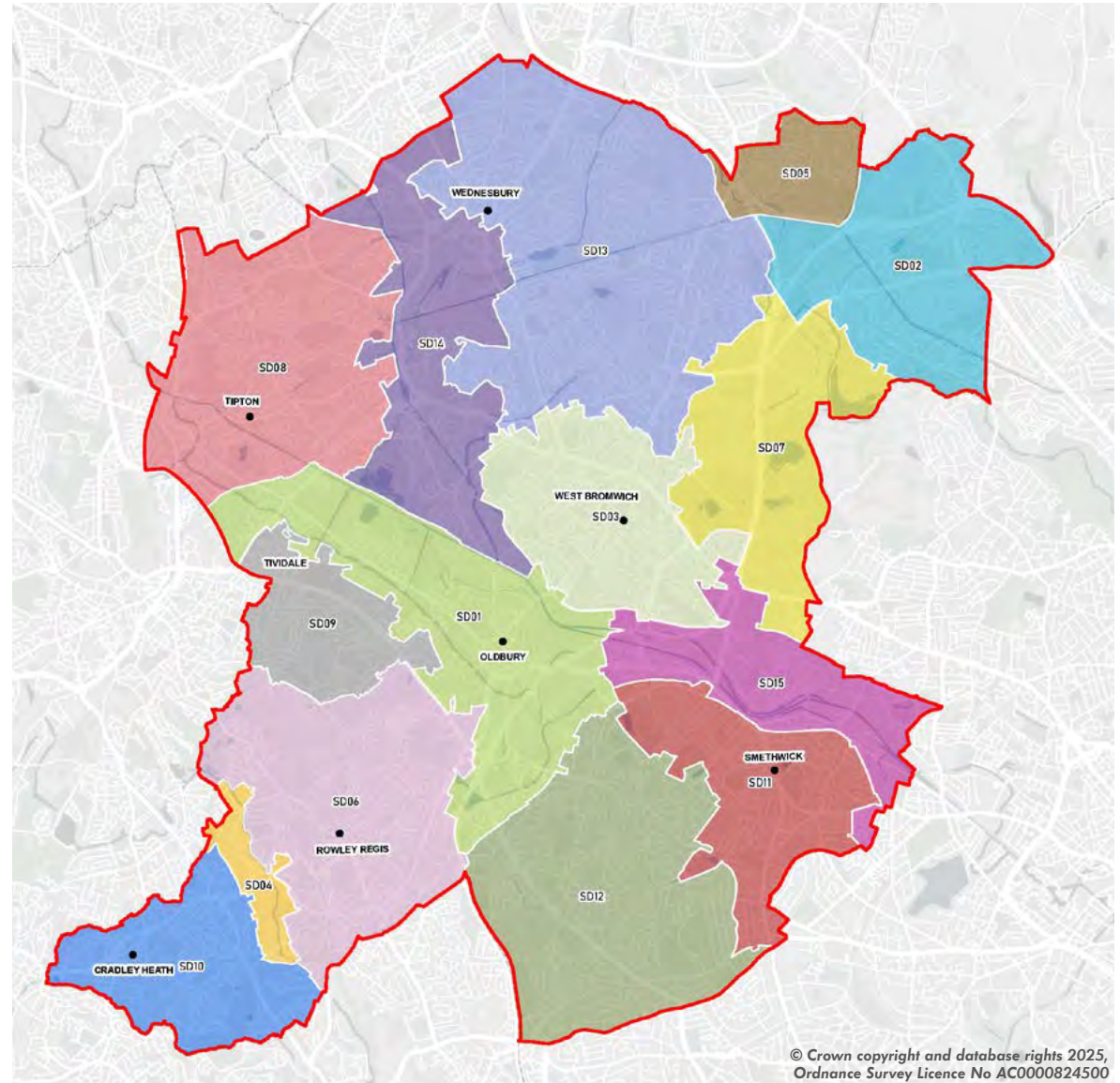
- SEO 1: Manage/enhance woodlands, hedgerows, heaths, and field patterns for biodiversity, timber, and climate regulation.
- SEO 2: Create woodland/heath networks and green infrastructure linking urban and rural.
- SEO 3: Conserve/enhance geological, industrial, and cultural heritage for public access and sense of place.
- SEO 4: Enhance aquatic features (rivers, meadows, reservoirs) for soil, water, and resource protection.

## 8.9 REGIONAL CHARACTER AREAS - LANDSCAPE

The Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment, which was completed in 2019, identified a number of areas which have distinct landscape characters. The Local Character Areas for Sandwell are set out listed below and identified on the plan.

### LEGEND

- Town Centre
- SD01 - Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley, Mid/late c20 industrial
- SD02 - Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD03 - West Bromwich, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD04 - Old Hill, Mid/late c20 industrial
- SD05 - Yew Tree, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD06 - Rowley Regis & Blackheath, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD07 - Sandwell Valley, Pre 1900 recreational
- SD08 - Tipton & Princes End, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD09 - Tividale, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD10 - Cradley Heath, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD11 - Central Smethwick and Cape Hill, Pre 1900 settlement
- SD12 - Warley, Early c20 settlement
- SD13 - Wednesbury & Hill Top, Mid/late c20 settlement
- SD14 - Great Bridge, Mid/late c20 industrial
- SD15 - North Smethwick, Mid/late c20 industrial
- Sandwell District Boundary





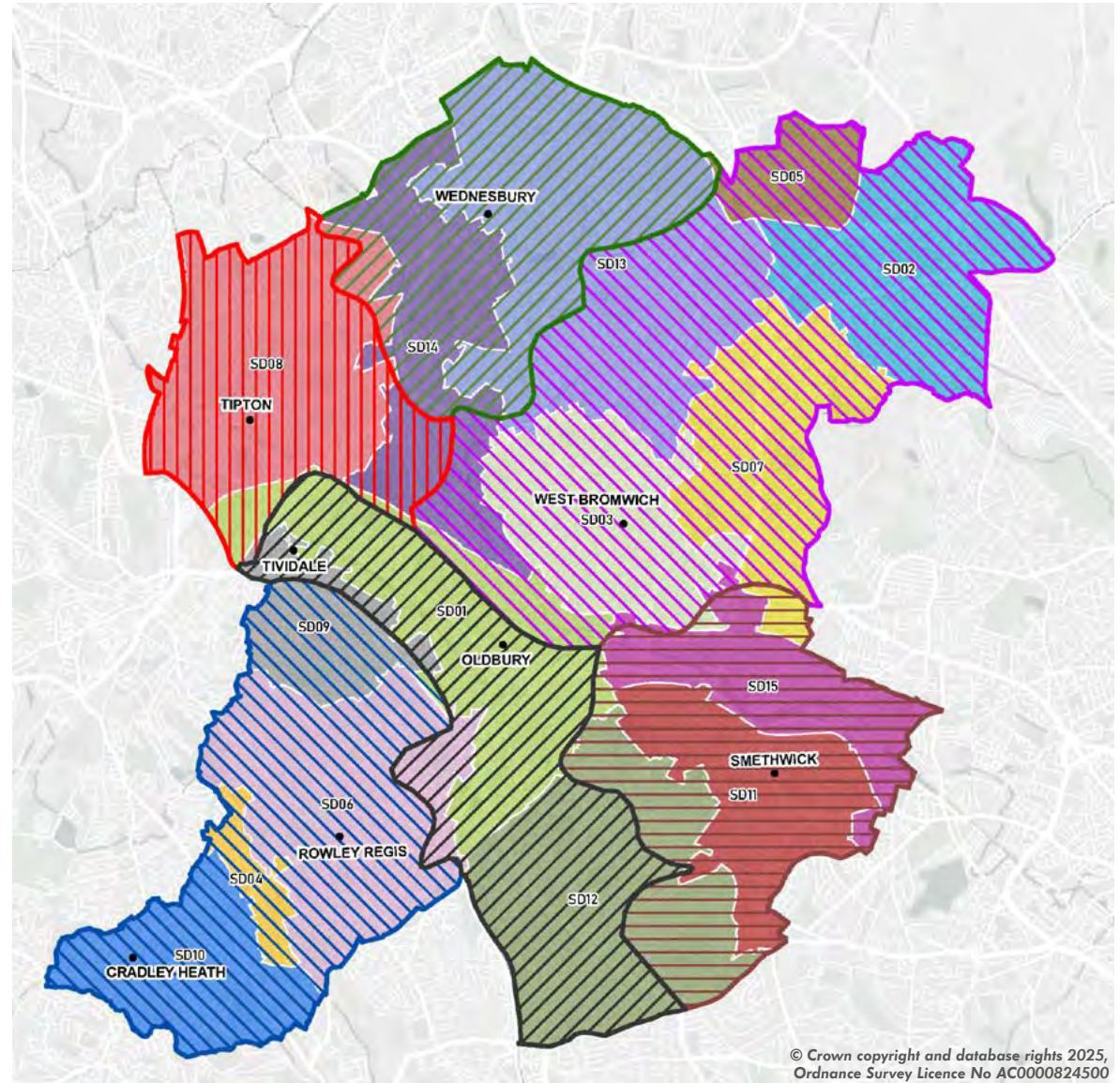
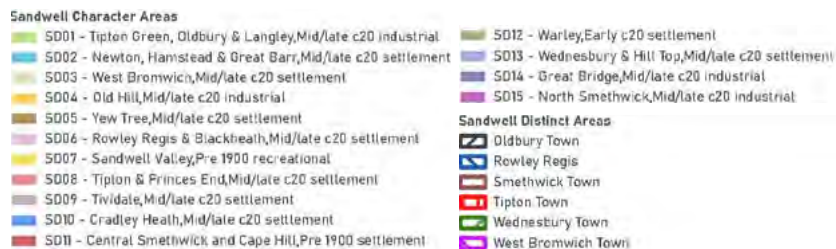
## 8.10 REGIONAL CHARACTER AREAS - LANDSCAPE

The six Sandwell Places/Towns have been overlaid over the relevant Sandwell Distinct Landscape Character Areas to highlight common characteristics. Some parts have a limited number of character areas and therefore a very strong identity, particularly Tipton, Oldbury and Wednesbury.

- Tipton: SD08 (minor areas in SD01 & SD14)
- Oldbury: predominantly SD01 & SD12 (minor areas in SD06 and SD09)
- Wednesbury: SD14, SD13

Those with a greater variety of landscape characters, including West Bromwich and Wednesbury suggest a more diverse character with finer grain shifts across the area.

- West Bromwich – SD02, SD05, SD07, SD13, SD03 (minor areas in SD14)
- Rowley Regis- SD04, SD06, SD 09 & SD10
- Smethwick – SD11, SD15 (and parts of SD12)

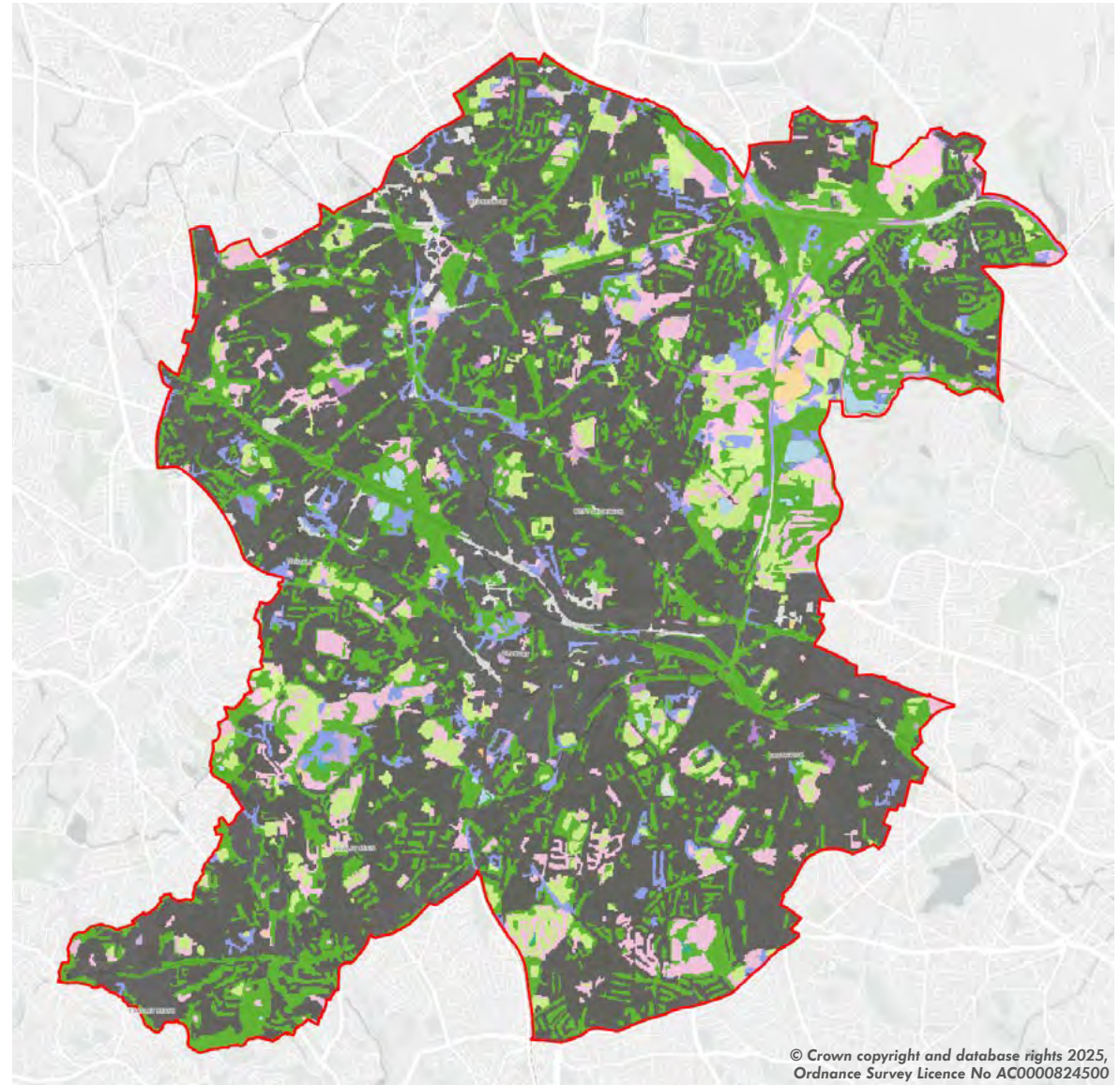




## 8.11 HABITAT MAPPING

There are a diverse range of habitat types throughout Sandwell, as listed in the key below.

When excluding the built-up areas and gardens, habitat zones are spread across Sandwell, with a particular concentration to the north-east.





## 8.12 NATURE RECOVERY

### The Nature Recovery Network (NRN)

The NRN is a key part of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, launched in 2018. Its aim is to expand and connect natural habitats across England to help wildlife thrive and deliver wider environmental and social benefits. Its aims are to

- Create 500,000 hectares of new wildlife habitat.
- Better connect existing protected sites, landscapes, and urban green and blue spaces.
  - Support biodiversity while also improving:
    - Public access to nature
    - Pollination
    - Carbon storage
    - Water quality
    - Flood management

### How It Will Help:

- Strengthen and expand areas rich in wildlife, including new and restored habitats.
- Improve the landscape's ability to cope with climate change by supporting natural systems like clean water, healthy soil, and air quality.
- Protect the natural and cultural character of the countryside.
- Provide more opportunities for people to enjoy and connect with nature in everyday life.

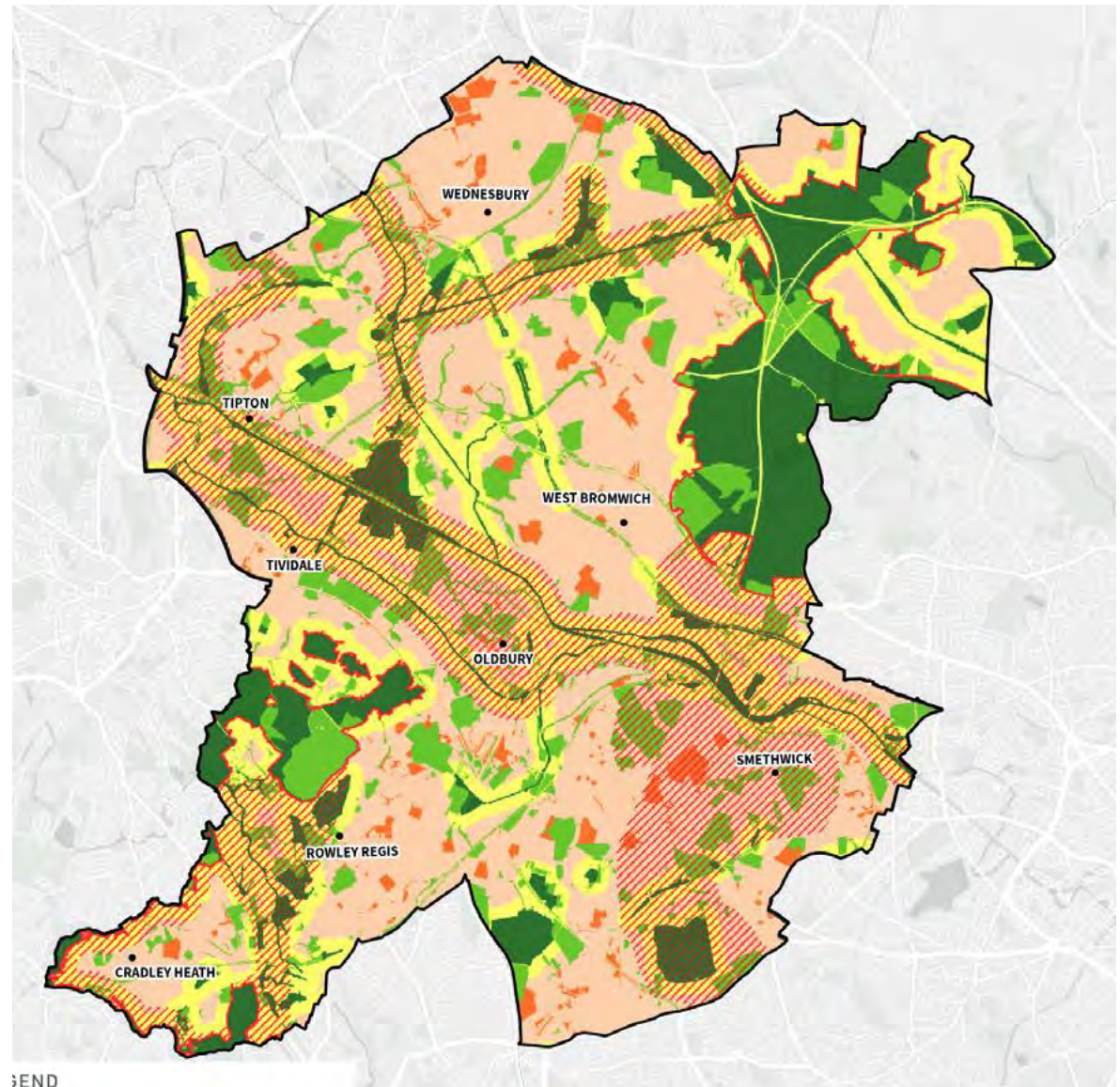
The plan on the next page includes several key features: it highlights areas that are currently rich in wildlife, shows how these areas are connected, and identifies the best places to invest in nature recovery across the wider landscape.

## 8.13 EMERGING SANDWELL LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY OPPORTUNITY MAP

This plan illustrates the emerging Sandwell Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) map.

It highlights Core Landscapes, Priority Network Restoration Areas and Core Habitat Zones which are each described on the following page.

Within the forthcoming Local Plan, this draft map will be superseded by the emerging West Midlands Combined Authority version. This also applies to the following accompanying text overleaf.



END

Source: Sandwell Borough Council. Appendix 1 – Sandwell Local Nature Recovery Strategy Map



### **Core Landscapes:**

- Large, ecologically coherent areas made up of multiple land parcels.
- These areas often have similar geology, soil types, habitats, landscape character, and land use history.
- Typically, less affected by urban development and often resemble rural landscapes.
- They support a high abundance and diversity of semi-natural and Priority Habitats, along with associated species.
- Core Landscapes are key targets for ecological recovery efforts, including habitat restoration and creation.

- Often follows linear blue and green corridors such as canals, rivers, and dismantled railway lines.
- Acts as ecological linkages that enhance biodiversity and landscape connectivity.

### **Core Habitat Zones:**

The Core Habitat Zone includes land parcels with the highest ecological value.

- Criteria for Inclusion:
- Parcels with an ecological value score of 4 or above (based on a defined evaluation methodology).
- Sites with nature conservation designations not already captured by the scoring system (e.g. some Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation).
- Additional areas identified in Natural England's Combined Habitat Network dataset.
- Purpose: These zones are a priority for ecological protection and restoration due to their biodiversity significance.
- Core Expansion has been prioritised into Core Habitats 1 and 2

### **Priority Network Restoration Zones:**

- Areas outside of Core Landscapes where ecological restoration is prioritised.
- Chosen based on a high density of Core Habitat and Core Expansion parcels.
- To connect fragmented Core Landscapes and support a coherent ecological network across the Black Country.
- Includes both natural and built environment features.

### **Core 1 Habitat:**

- These are the most ecologically valuable areas.
- They contain high-quality, semi-natural habitats that are important for biodiversity.
- Often include designated nature conservation sites and areas with rare or priority species.
- These areas are a top priority for protection and restoration.

### **Core 2 Habitat**

- These areas are still ecologically important but slightly less valuable than Core 1.
- They may include good-quality habitats that support wildlife and connect Core 1 areas.
- Often used to expand or buffer Core 1 zones.
- They are also a priority for ecological enhancement, especially to improve connectivity.

### **Urban Matrix Recovery Zone 1**

Includes built-up areas like homes, businesses, gardens, and streets that are close to important wildlife habitats—within 150 metres. Because they're nearby, these places have a good chance of helping nature thrive. That's why improving green spaces in these areas is a top priority.

### **Urban Matrix Recovery Zone 2**

Includes built-up areas that are farther away from important wildlife habitats. These places still have potential to improve green spaces, but they're not as high a priority for investment as Zone 1.



## 8.14 SANDWELL'S LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Sandwell has ten Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

- **Codsall Coppice** - mature oak woodland, wetland and grassland providing habitat for local wildlife species, offering a valuable green space in an urban/suburban setting.
- **Forge Mill Lake** - 63 hectares centred around a large lake, alongside the River Tame, located within Sandwell Valley Country Park. Areas of grassland, young woodland, hedgerows and areas of scrub provide a rich and varied place for wildlife and people.
- **Gorse Farm Wood** - 6.2 hectare site located in Great Barr, open to visitors, features a woodland, willow carr, grassland, pools, streams, and a recently created area of young heathland.
- **Holly Wood** - 5.2 hectares of mixed broadleaf woodland and with a stream fed wet meadow, offering access to visitors all year round.
- **Mousesweet Brook** - 4.3 hectares in Cradley Heath made up of wet woodland, grassland, a pool and the Mousesweet Brook. Footpaths and a boardwalk link the different habitats and a footbridge over the brook leads to the Saltwells Local Nature Reserve.



Holly Wood



Gorse Farm Wood



Codsall Coppice



Mousesweet Brook



Forge Mill Lake



- **RSPB Sandwell Valley** - wildflower meadows, lakes, marshes, and woodland provide habitat for breeding birds and migratory species, making it popular for birdwatchers and wildlife enthusiasts.
- **Sheepwash** - 39 hectares of young woodland, grassland, pools, streams and the River Tame linking various habitats with easy access for visitors
- **Sot's Hole** - 5.5 hectares situated on a geological fault line, semi-ancient woodland both in damp and dry conditions, a small stream and areas of marsh.
- **Warrens Hall** - 17 hectares of canals and stream-side grasslands, hedgerows, pools, high on the Rowley Hills with superb views to the Clent Hills and Shropshire.
- **Bumble Hole** - centred around the canal system in the Netherton area, wetlands, meadows, woodlands, and hedgerows, support a rich biodiversity, linked to Warrens Hall LNR, offering a valuable green space in an urban/suburban setting.



Bumble Hole



RSPB Sandwell Valley



Sheepwash



Warrens Hall



Sot's Hole



## 8.15 FOCUS ON CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The draft Sandwell Local Plan identifies climate change as a headline challenge for the borough, and the Sandwell vision states that the borough will be at the forefront of tackling climate change (both adaptation and mitigation).

Any vision or code for design in the borough must be informed by the reality of what future climate the borough will be experiencing in the coming decades. The Met Office provides locally-specific projections for 2 degree and 4 degree climate scenarios. The following pages provide an overview of the extreme weather Sandwell is likely to experience over the coming decades and which new development, streets and spaces will need to be able to manage.

Where are  
the trees?

New buildings must  
have heat pumps, good  
insulation, solar panels.

Sustainable housing could  
lead to wider economic growth

Sample of climate related  
comments from local  
engagement

### ***Sandwell specific climate projection - Met Office/BBC What will climate change look like near me? tool***

"Temperatures above 30C for two or more days can trigger a public-health warning. In the 1990s, this happened about once every four years for locations in the South. By the 2070s, projections suggest it could be as frequently as four times per year - 16 times more often, if we do not curb our emissions.

Summer rain is likely to become less frequent but could be heavier. Without regular rainfall, the ground has a harder time absorbing water when it finally does come, leading to a greater risk of flash flooding.

Floods will likely become a staple of warming winters as well.

Steady rain, which is currently a feature of winter months, will probably continue, and total rainfall is expected to increase.

When the ground is already saturated, waterways tend to rise. Bridges and sewers designed for historical rainfall levels may come increasingly under pressure.

Warming temperatures could also mean cold spells become less frequent."

# SUMMER

2 degree scenario:

- 25% of summer months over 25 degrees
- 5% increase in intensity of wet summer days



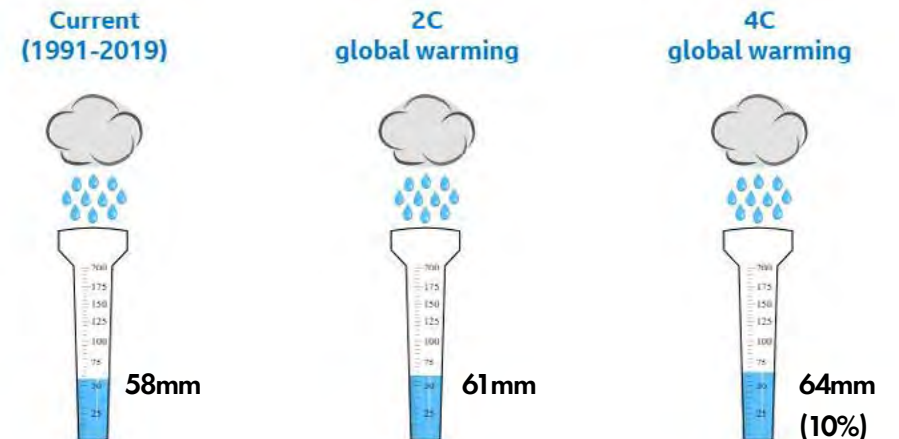
Average no. of summer days above 25 degrees per month (Oldbury)



Hottest summer day temperature (Oldbury)



Average no. of rainy days per month in summer (Oldbury)



Amount of rainfall on the wettest summer day (Oldbury)



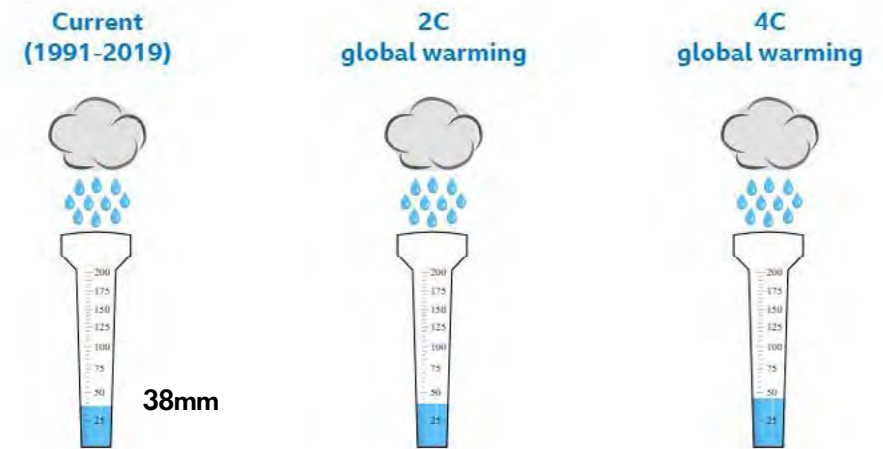
# WINTER

2 degree scenario:

- 5% increase in intensity of wet winter days



Average no. of rainy days per month in winter (Oldbury)



Amount of rainfall on the wettest winter day (Oldbury)

# 9 PUBLIC SPACES

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the public spaces within Sandwell, examining how these areas serve the community's social, recreational, and well-being needs. Nearly a quarter of Sandwell is made up of green spaces - over 2,000 hectares.

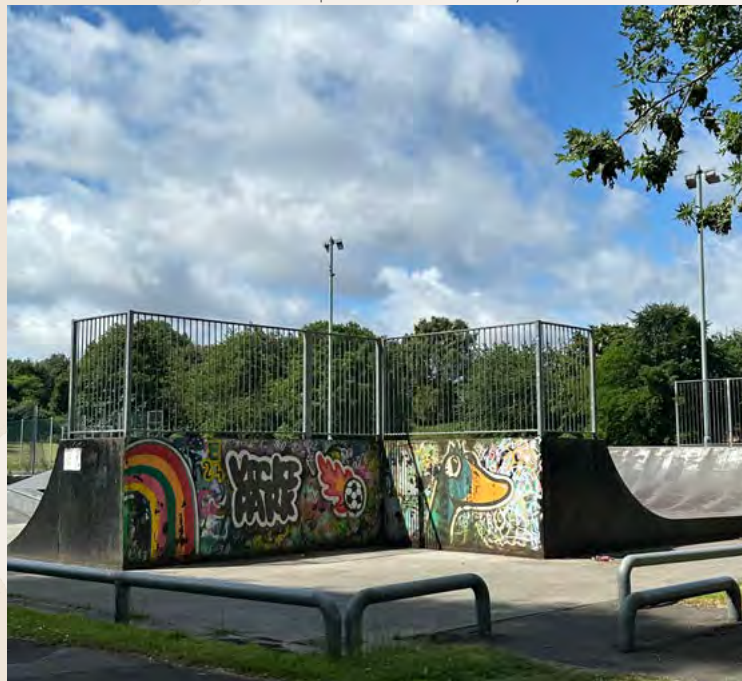
There are formal public spaces that facilitate community interaction. These include spaces for meeting and respite such as Ethelfleda Square in Wednesbury or New Square in West Bromwich. A number of traditional market spaces are also present such as West Bromwich High Street and Indoor Market (currently being re-provided), Wednesbury Outdoor Market and Great Bridge Market. However, these spaces can also hold challenges and when not activated, they can feel poorly configured for social interaction.



Hampton Court, Cradley Heath



Stalls outside Tipton Shopping Centre



Public recreation in Victoria Park, Tipton



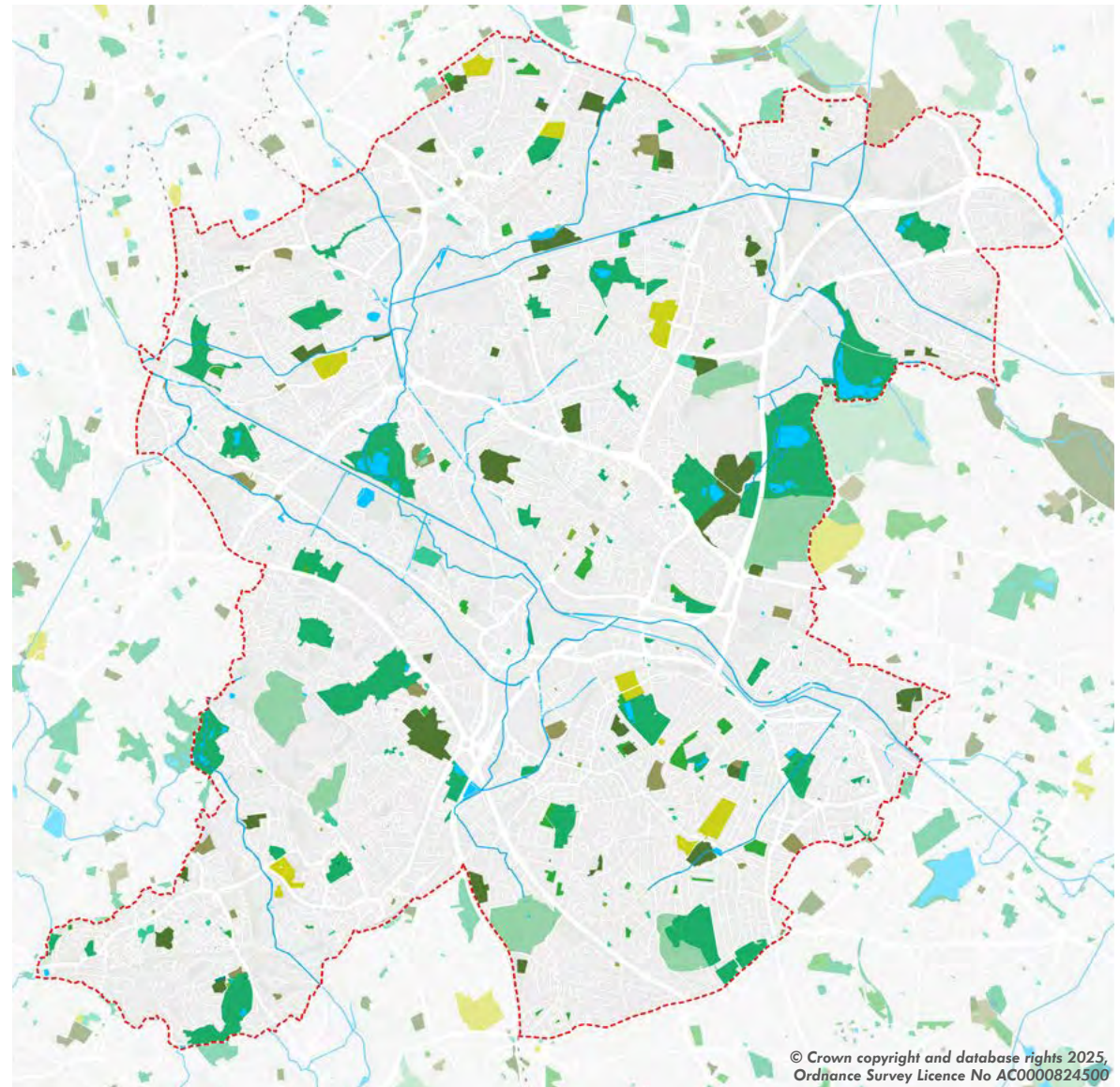
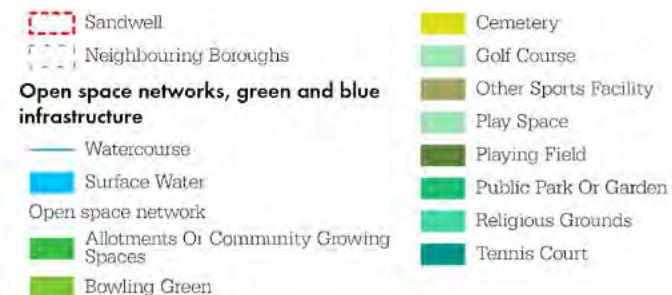
Formal space for interaction, Oldbury



## 9.2 NATURAL OPEN SPACE NETWORKS

As highlighted in section 8, the borough has an extensive open space network. The borough maintains 32 public parks and gardens, including 15 prestigious Green Flag Parks, alongside 211 amenity green spaces ranging from intimate local areas to expansive communal grounds. Connectivity across the borough is enhanced by 22 green corridors with active recreation well-catered for with 48 outdoor sports facilities.

Together these provide an important public resource of green spaces to support social interaction, access to nature, recreation and sport.



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## 9.3 HARD-SCAPED CIVIC PUBLIC SPACES

Some locations have strong civic spaces which underpin the image of town centres, whilst others are lacking spaces to congregate and meet.

### Smethwick:

1. Smethwick High Street triangle at one end of the High Street with Lions of Great War memorial sculpture - a lovely space, but undermined by the Tollhouse Way traffic.
2. Tollgate Shopping Centre space - a sheltered space off the High Street with potential, but needs more activity in vacant units.
3. Holy Trinity Church Yard which provides a welcome green space within a dense area.

### Oldbury:

5. Space/Square around the Cenotaph - used for market stalls, can feel quite exposed, but has strong backdrop and setting.
6. Council House gardens (to rear) - main area of green space and planting in the centre.
7. Council House front space - no longer the main entrance to the building, generally used for parking.





## 9.4 HARD-SCAPED CIVIC PUBLIC SPACES

### West Bromwich:

1. High Street pedestrianised area has seen recent improvements and is now a well-used series of spaces incorporating historic features and public art
2. New Square to the rear of Queens Square Shopping Centre forms a series of spaces edged partly up cafés, restaurants and leisure uses.



### Wednesbury:

3. Ethelfleda Square at the western end of the High Street has very recently been refurbished including new seating and planters.
4. Market Place square at the eastern end of the high street includes the clocktower and is activated by attractive historic buildings.



### Rowley Regis:

5. Market Square in Cradley Heath is a sheltered space off the High Street, but is struggling due to shop vacancies.
2. Market Place in Blackheath is currently being transformed from a roundabout to more of a public space and interchange at the eastern end of the High Street.

What's missing – seating and relaxation spaces where people can just sit in greenery.

# 10 BUILT URBAN FORM

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter examines the built urban form of Sandwell, analysing its distinctive structure, building heights, and plot characteristics.

The borough's residential fabric historically consisted of traditional terraced housing positioned in close proximity to industrial zones. This creates an interesting relationship between varying characters; balancing human scale with industrial prominence. Across the borough, there is a huge range in urban grain with many areas experiencing very large urban blocks with less permeability.



Industrial-residential juxtaposition in Tipton



Continuous relationship between residential and industrial uses, Cradley Heath



Integrated industrial typologies along high streets, Blackheath Market

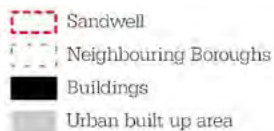




## 10.2 URBAN STRUCTURE

The borough is fundamentally defined by an east-west oriented infrastructure that facilitated industrial growth. This linear infrastructure created a distinctive urban grain that continues to influence contemporary development patterns.

The plan shows the building footprints across the borough, highlighting the extent of large industrial buildings through the central corridor of Sandwell. The residential fabric is in comparison much finer grain but includes a wide spectrum of housing types from traditional terraced housing, historically positioned in close proximity to industrial zones and employment centres, through to suburban housing estates.



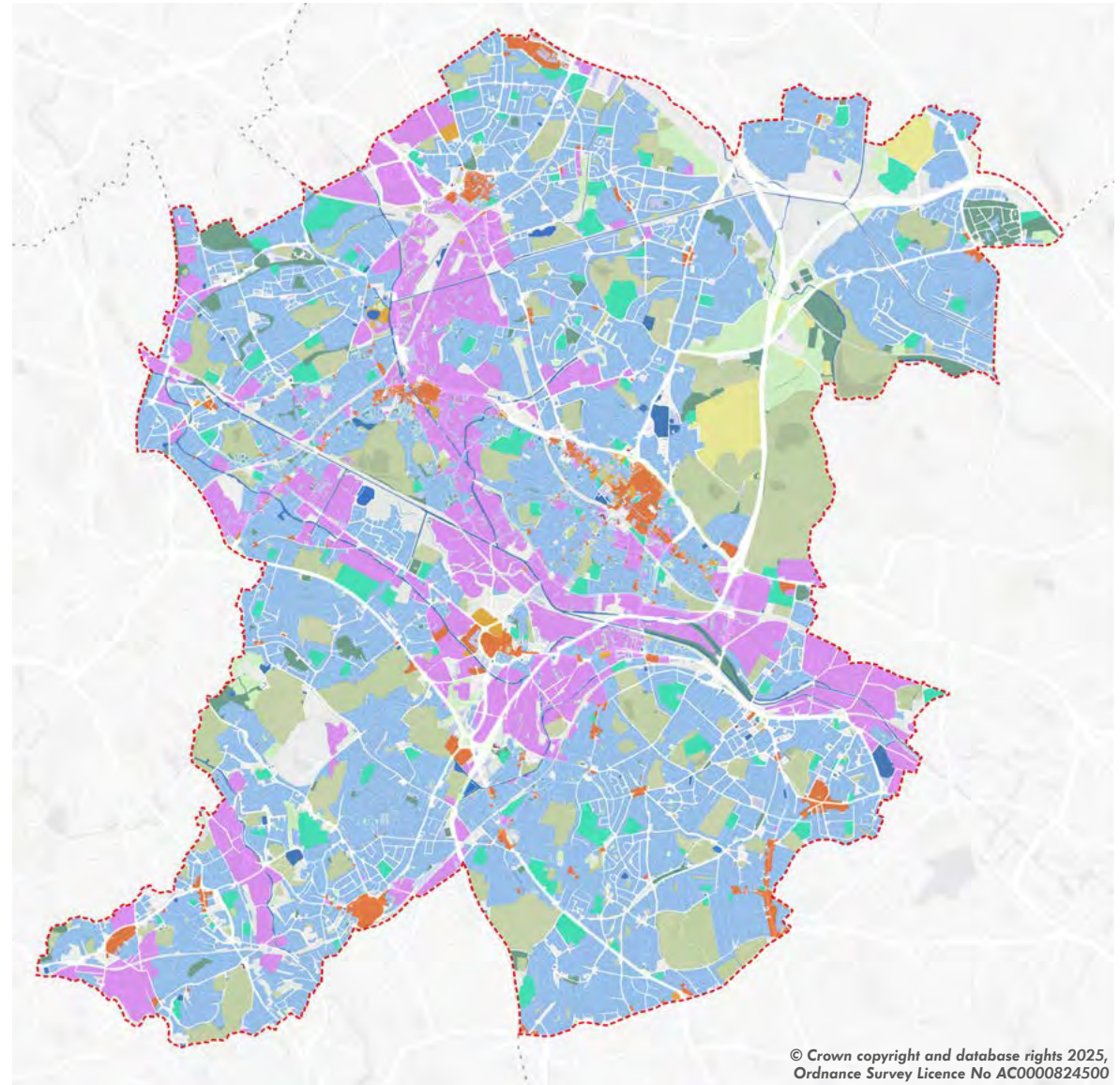
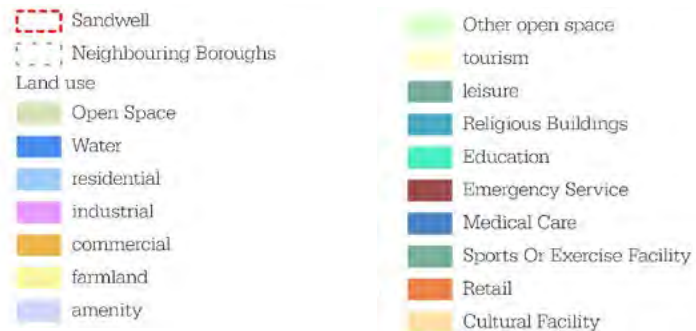
Urban grain plan showing the building footprint of each building in the borough



## 10.3 LAND USES

The borough is defined by its industrial legacy, spilling westwards from Smethwick and Birmingham and dividing the residential communities either side. Areas of commercial, retail, education, and health are relatively distributed evenly across the borough.

A network of town centres, district and local centres serve the borough providing mixed use community hubs.



Predominant land uses across the borough

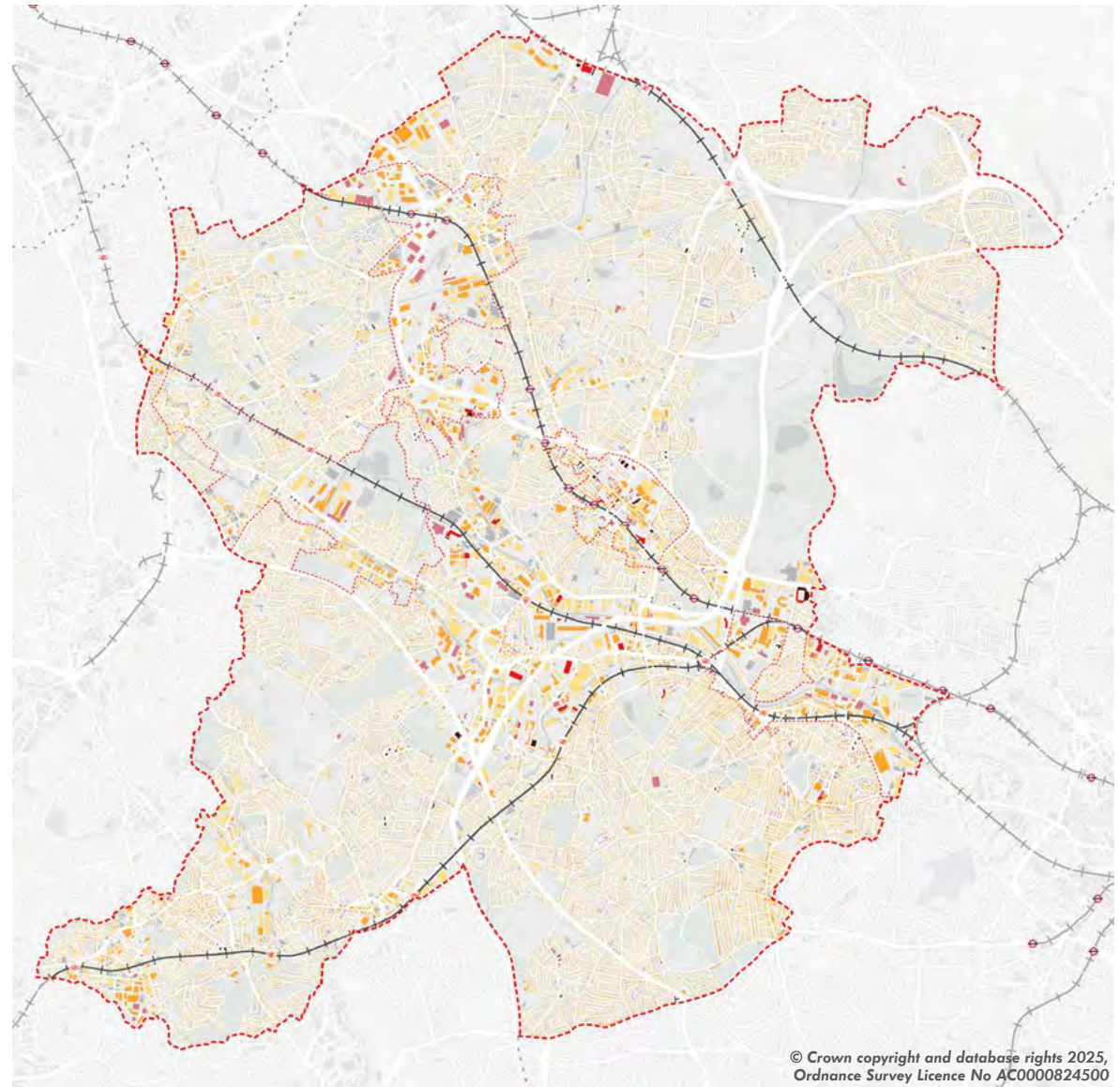


## 10.4 BUILDING HEIGHTS

The borough's built environment is predominantly composed of low-rise and mid-rise structures, creating a relatively consistent skyline across most areas. However, this general pattern is punctuated by strategic exceptions where taller buildings emerge along key industrial corridors, main routes and town centres.

-  Sandwell
-  Neighbouring Boroughs
-  Regeneration areas
-  Railway Track
-  Light Rapid Transit Station
-  Railway Station
-  Railway Track

- Building heights  
Storeys (3.2m)
-  0-1
  -  1-2
  -  2-3
  -  3-4
  -  4-5
  -  5-13



Building heights of each building in the borough (note the storey heights have been generated by dividing the actual buildings heights by 3.2m reflecting an average single storey)

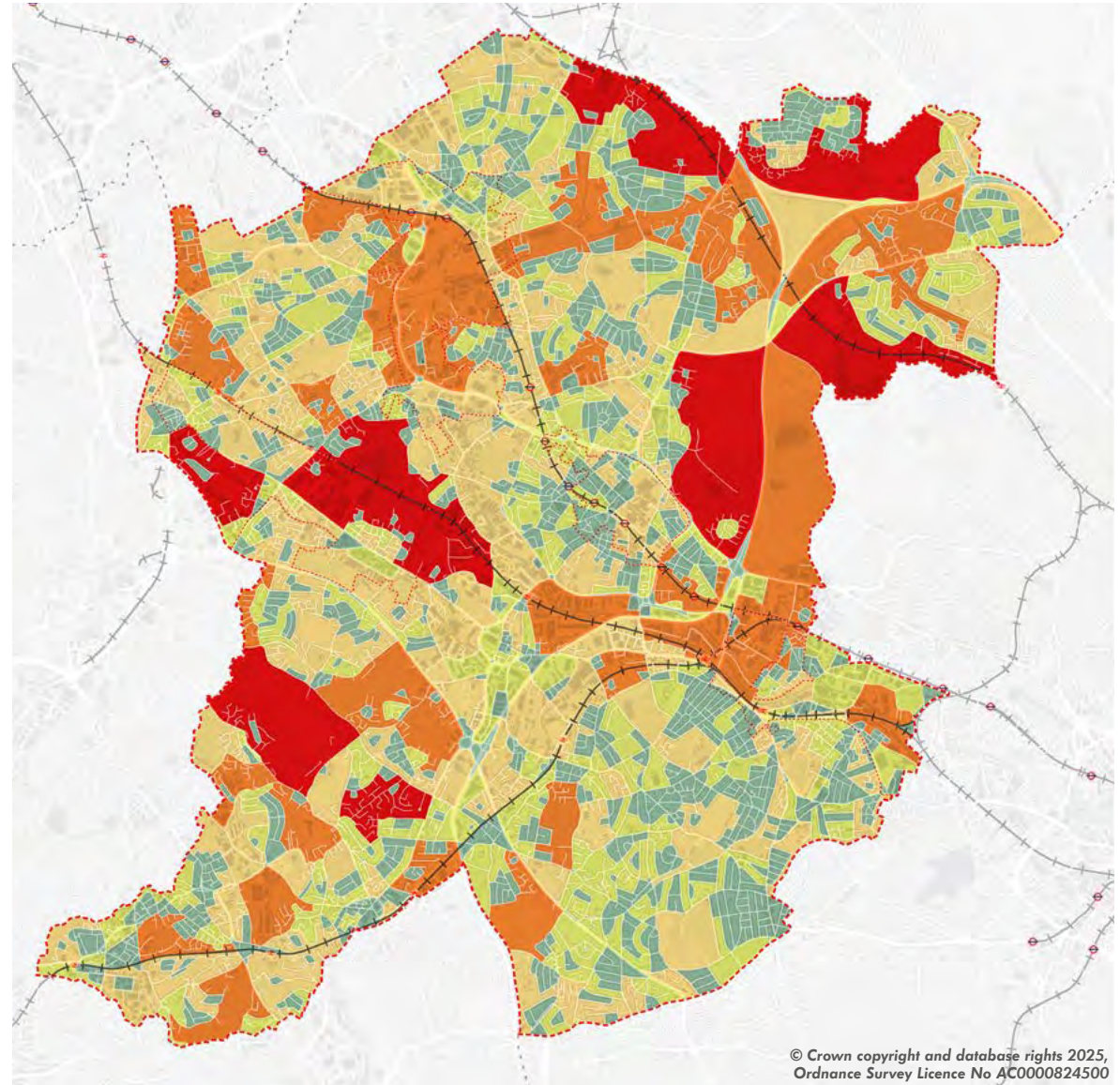


## 10.5 PLOT PERIMETER

This plan looks at the size of urban blocks by measuring the outer perimeter of each street block in metres. Generally, the street blocks in the borough have a perimeter of under 5,000 metres, with the majority of blocks in urban residential neighbourhoods under 2,000 metres.

Some of the finest grain blocks are the urban terraces in Smethwick for example which are generally 75 metres wide and up to 400 metres long, producing a plot perimeter of under 1,000 metres. The most extensive plot perimeters typically encompass natural and recreational spaces, including Sandwell Valley Park, RSPB Sandwell Valley, and Sheepwash Nature Reserve.

Beyond these natural areas, Sandwell has huge variances in urban block sizes. The contrast between large-scale industrial zones and much smaller residential urban blocks, creates a unique urban morphology that informs the spatial character of the borough.





## 10.6 EVOLVING CONTEMPORARY URBAN FORM



Cradley Heath



Tipton



Rowley Regis



Cradley Heath



Wednesbury



Oldbury



West Bromwich



Tipton



Oldbury





Oldbury



Cradley Heath



Rowley Regis



Oldbury



Tipton



Dudley Port



West Bromwich



Oldbury





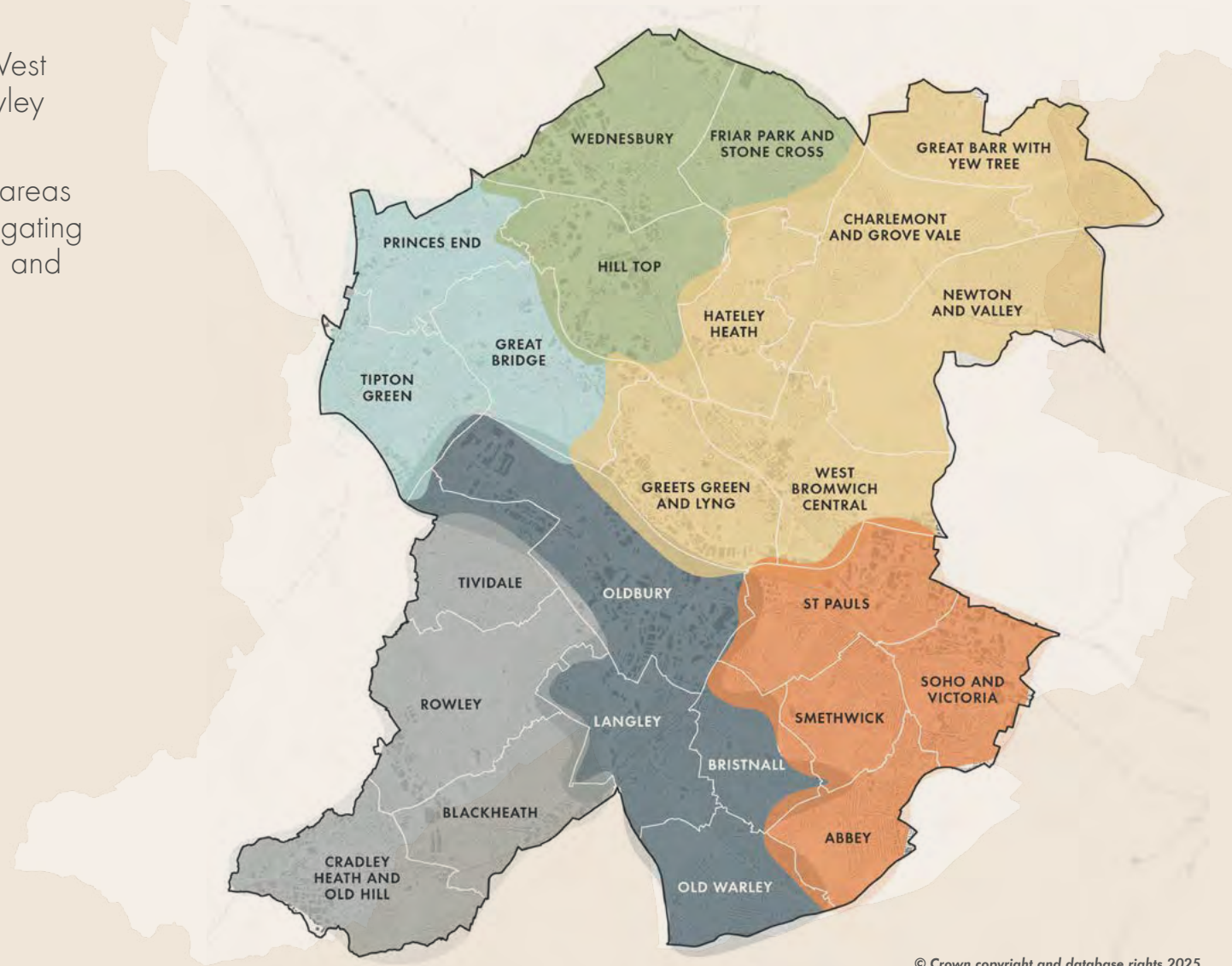
# THE SIX AREAS

# 11 DISTINCT AREAS OF SANDWELL

## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

Sandwell is comprised of 6 distinct yet connected areas; Tipton, Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Smethwick, Oldbury, and Rowley Regis.

The following chapter examines these six areas within the borough in further depth, investigating the stories that have informed the physical and social morphology of place.



- Tipton
- Wednesbury
- West Bromwich
- Smethwick
- Oldbury
- Rowley Regis



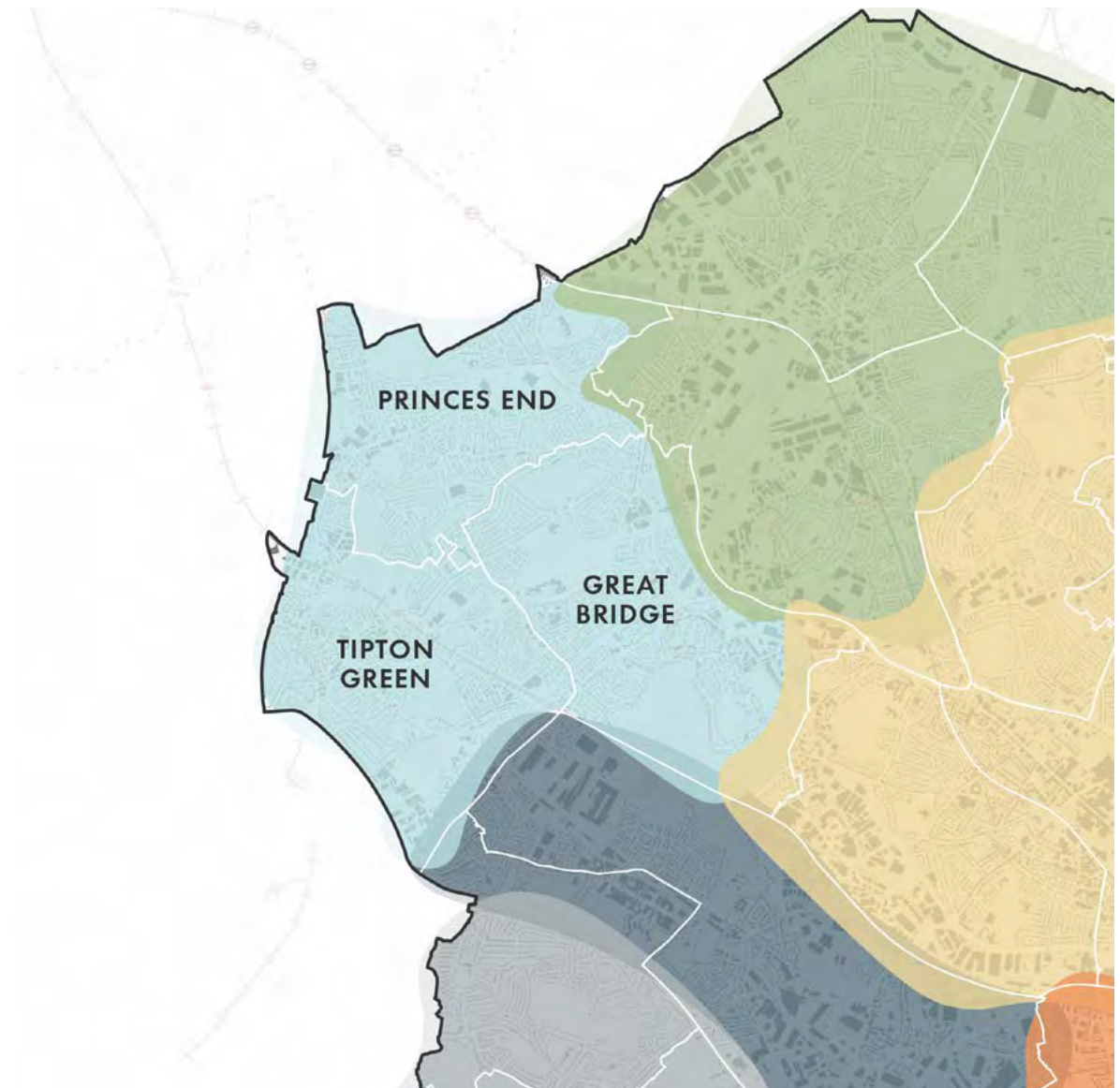
# 12 TIPTON

## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

Tipton is located in the northwest of Sandwell, comprising of Great Bridge, Princes End and Tipton Green. Bordering Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton, this area covers 9.4 square kilometres and is home to 44,125 residents according to the 2021 census.

With a population density of 4,673 residents per square kilometre, Tipton is a relatively densely populated community. The town has a lower level of population diversity, with 36% of residents from ethnic minorities – primarily from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Asian/Asian British backgrounds. This diversity sits below Sandwell's borough-wide figure of 48%.

Tipton or Owen Street District Centre is the main centre serving the area, supported by other local centres including Princes End and Dudley Port.



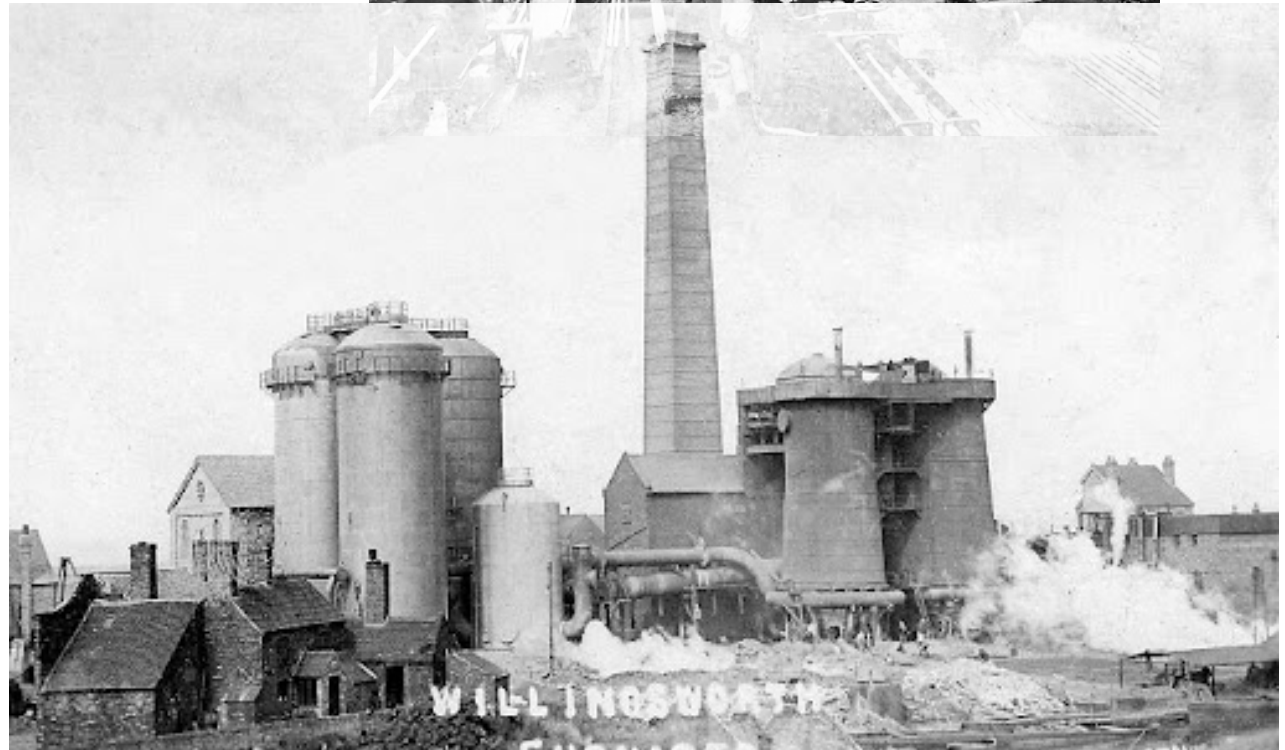
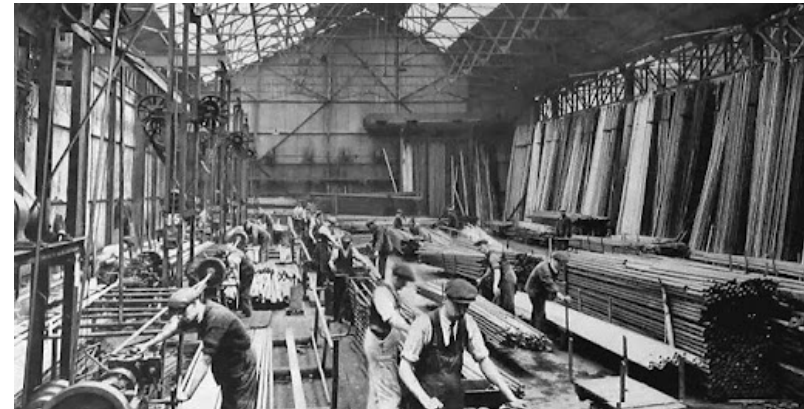
## 12.2 THE HISTORY OF TIPTON

Tipton's rich coal, iron ore, and limestone deposits established it as a major ironmaking centre. Growth accelerated following the construction of the Birmingham Canal in 1770. The extensive canal network - with more than thirteen miles within the parish of Tipton - earned Tipton the nickname "Venice of the Midlands."

Tipton excelled in heavy engineering with technical innovation flourishing. The world's first successful steam engine was erected at Coneygree in 1712, followed by Horseley Ironworks building the world's first iron steamship in 1822. Joseph Hall's revolutionary wet puddling method transformed ironmaking in the 1830s, whilst H.P. Parkes crafted the world's largest anchor in 1866. Subsequently, innovation continued - Beans Foundry constructed the world speed record-breaking Thunderbolt in 1937.

From the late 1920s, Tipton's landscape transformed through council housing developments replacing slum conditions. Early estates included the isolated Moat Farm Estate at Ocker Hill, dubbed the "Lost City."

Ironmaking at Tipton  
Credit: Bev Parker, The annals  
of Tipton





## 12.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

The canals remain an important part of Tipton's local character, though many have been lost and some that remain have become more hidden from view. Whilst some historic buildings along the waterways have survived, many now stand vacant and are gradually deteriorating.

The town benefits from valuable green spaces, with parks such as Victoria Park serving as important community assets that provide recreational opportunities and enhance the local environment.

The area is primarily characterised by a mix of suburban terraced and semi-detached housing, which forms much of the residential landscape and reflects the town's evolution from its industrial past.



Photographic examples of common typologies across Tipton



## 12.4 AREA NUANCES

Tipton is comprised of various typologies with semi-detached and flats, maisonettes, or apartments being dominant within the area. Terraced and detached housing are also present, but less common. Inter-war garden city style housing estates are common, with runs of four terraced houses and front gardens (some lost to parking) along many streets. Examples include Oval Road and Highfield Road. There are also modern examples such as Bell Street.

Industrial uses are less present compared to other areas of the borough, with Great Bridge providing the most along the north-south Walsall Canal axis up to Wednesbury.

Tipton has seen a significant amount of residential development over recent decades. These are generally suburban in character, but apartment blocks have also been introduced as part of larger schemes. These contemporary developments are varied in approach, despite many appearing to emulate the vernacular materiality.

Overall, brick is by far the most common material, but extensive render and pebble-dash are also present. Hung tiles and boarding are seen on more modern housing.

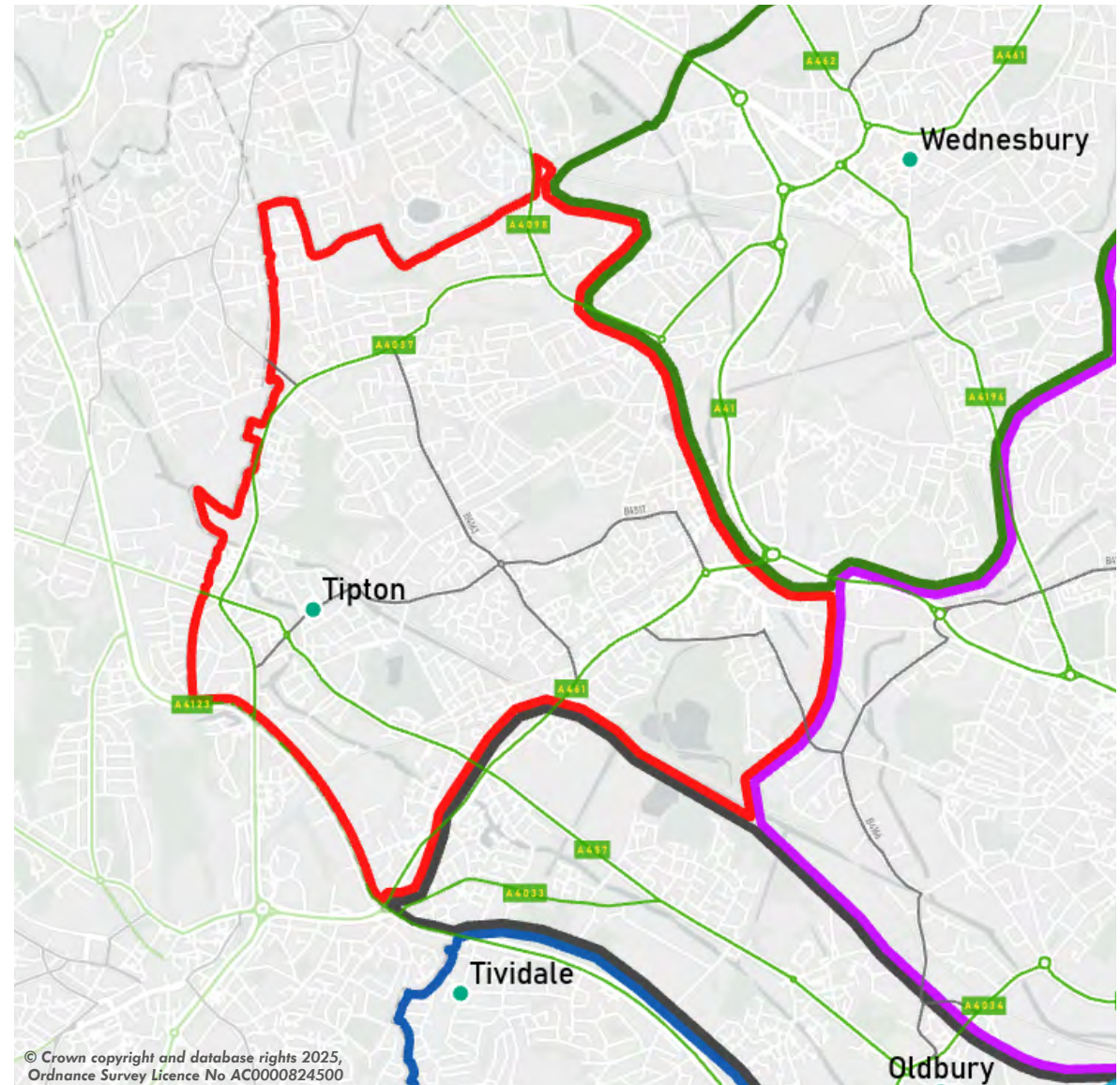




## 12.5 STREET CHARACTER

Tipton's street and highway character reflects its industrial past and position within the Black Country. The town is framed by key routes such as the A41, A461 and other main links toward Dudley, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. These corridors are generally wider, with roundabouts and junctions designed for high traffic volumes and access to industrial estates. Within the town centre, the streets are smaller in scale, with a compact grid serving shops and community facilities. The town centre has seen layers of road interventions over the last 75 years, most of which have sought to prioritise vehicular movement.

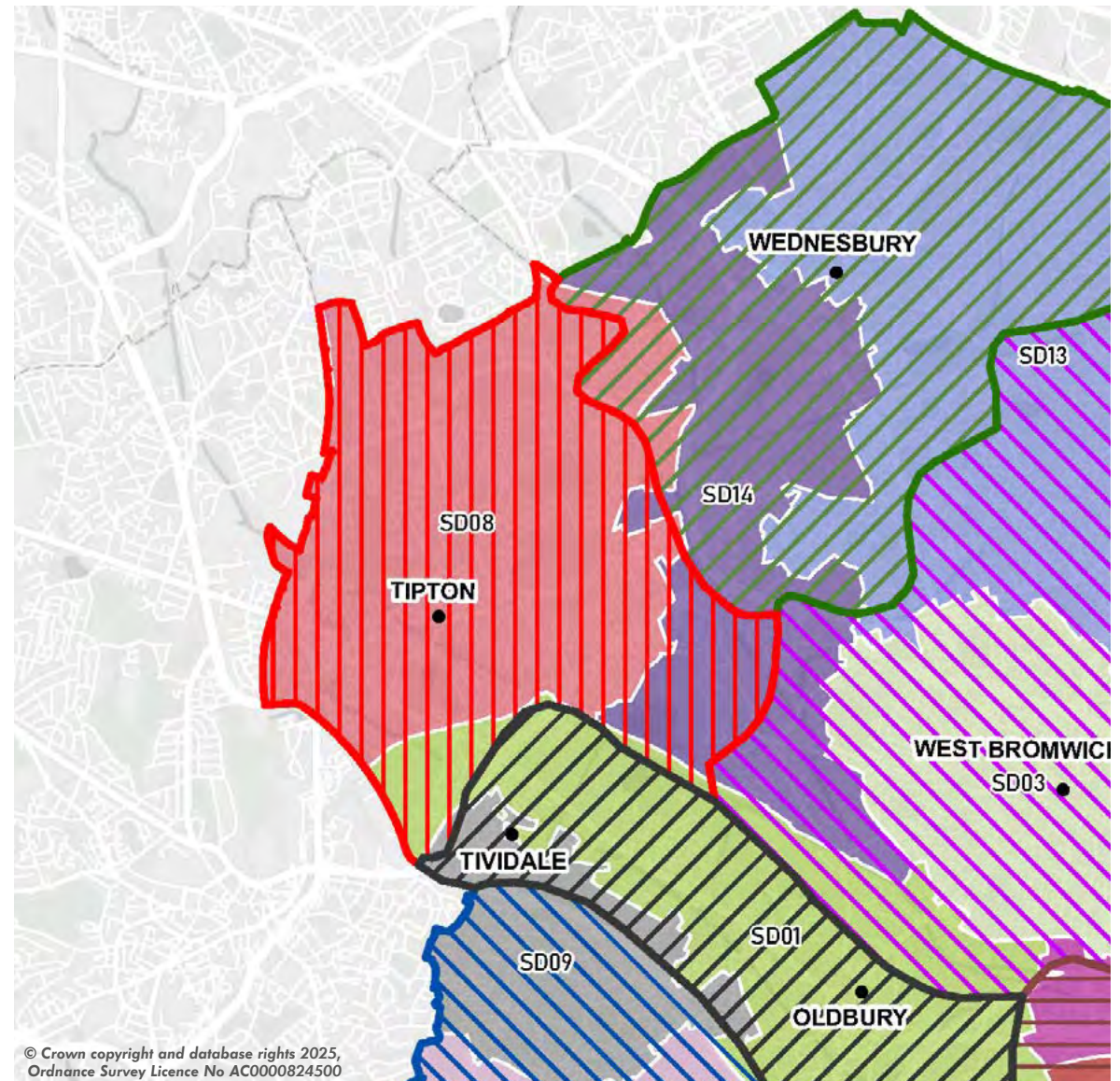
There are still residential areas which consist of narrow terraces and short streets, some of which are aligned alongside former canal routes, creating a tight, enclosed character. To the north of rail line and in Princes End, longer and slightly wider streets influenced by garden city style character predominate. Some still have tree lined avenues such as Powis Avenue, but many have lost much of their greening.





## 12.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- The canals of Tipton have shaped settlement and former industrial block patterns, much of which is still evident today in the area's structure.
- The Factory Locks Conservation Area is an important asset, both in terms of heritage and landscape:
  - Zone A: Historic locks, bridges, and canal heritage structures.
  - Zone B: Telford's New Line – 19th century bridges, boatyards.
  - Zone C: Brindley's contour canal – mixed modern/residential setting.
  - Zone D: Former Tipton Green Branch Canal – now green space.
- Green infrastructure is focused on key parks such as Victoria Park (Green Flag award) and Coronation Gardens, but also surviving canal routes as well as repurposed canal corridors.
- Sheepwash Park and Local Nature Reserve is a significant local green asset.





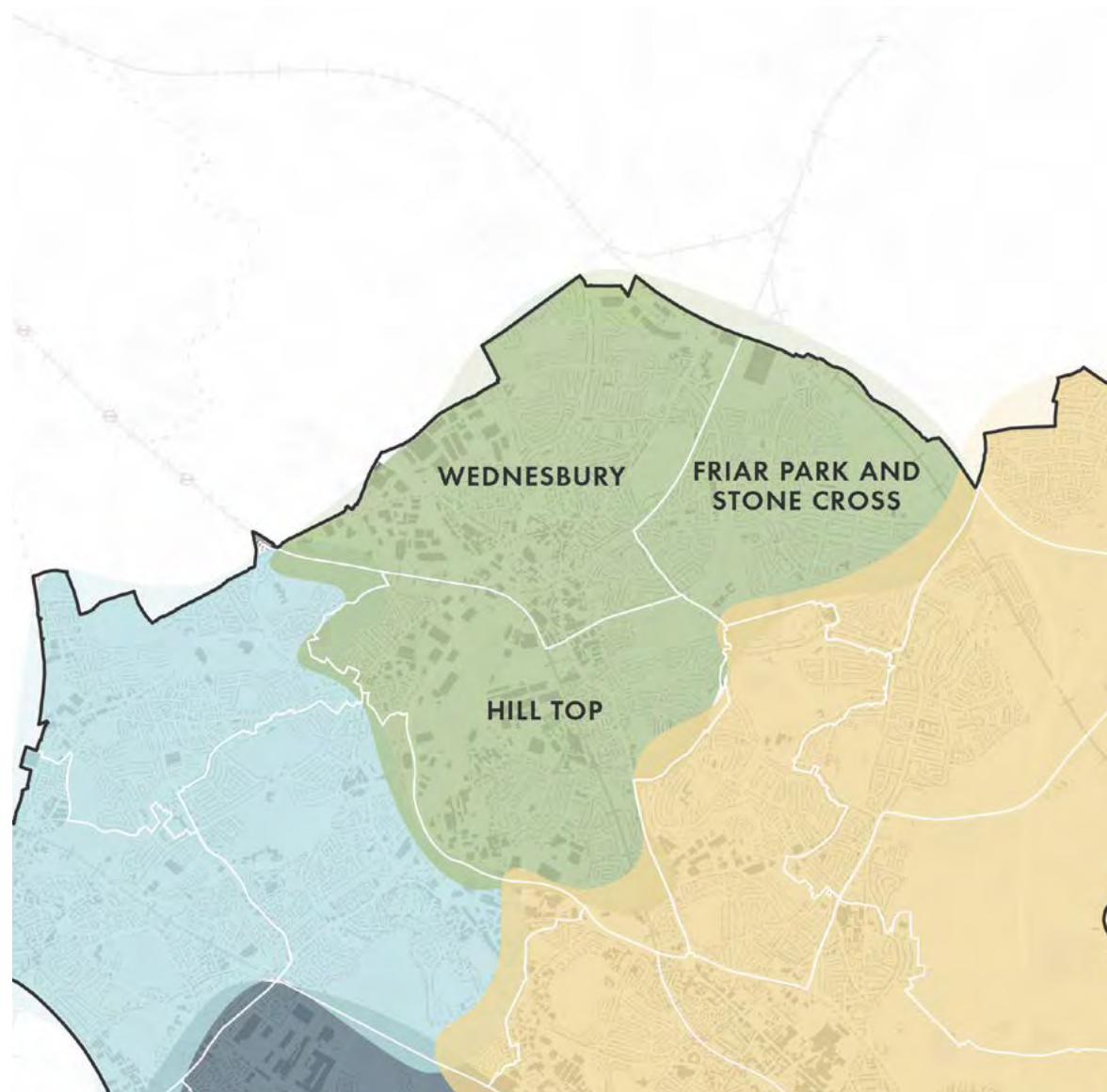
# 13 WEDNESBURY

## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

Wednesbury is in the northern part of Sandwell, comprising the wards of Friar Park, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South. Bordering Walsall to the north, this compact town covers 11.37 square kilometres and is home to 41,336 residents according to the 2021 census.

Wednesbury has a high incidence of industrial uses, wrapping along the southern and western edges of Wednesbury North and South.

Wednesbury is the main town centre serving the area, and this is supported by a number of district and local centres including Crankhall Lane and Park Lane.

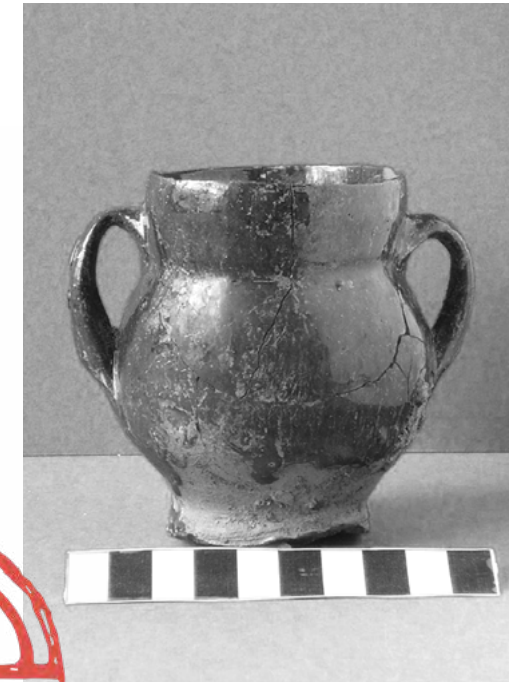
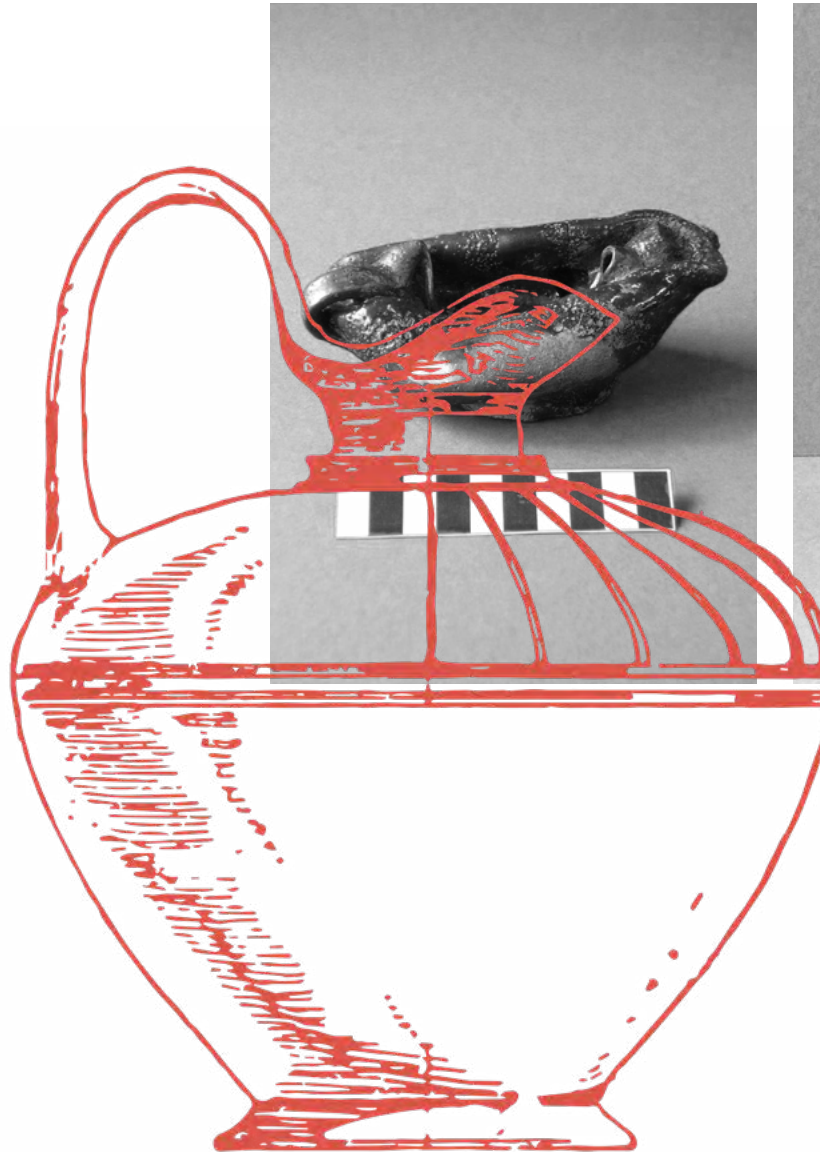


## 13.2 THE HISTORY OF WEDNESBURY

By the 17th century, Wednesbury had established itself as a pottery centre of national significance. "Wedgbury ware," crafted from distinctive yellow-white and bluish clays excavated at Monway Field, which they would paint with slip from the reddish earth of Tipton. This pottery industry, with references dating to 1422, represented one of England's earliest large-scale ceramic enterprises.

The 20th century brought significant social transformation through council housing. Beginning in 1926, Wednesbury's housing programme started modestly, however the 1,000th council house was occupied by 1931, and by 1944, over 3,000 council properties existed, rising to 5,000 by 1959. This programme demolished 1,250 older houses deemed unfit for habitation.

Industrial decline in the later 20th century prompted regeneration efforts. The transformation of the former FH Lloyd steel works exemplifies this renewal, purchased by IKEA and opened as one of Britain's first stores in 1991 after extensive land remediation.



Pottery discovered in Wednesbury, 2006  
Credit: William Mitchell, prepared for  
Sandwell Borough Council



### 13.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

The area's urban character is defined by a significant concentration of retail, commercial and industrial land uses, particularly in its central core.

The predominant housing stock across Wednesbury's three wards consists of late 19th and early 20th-century terraced housing. This is particularly prominent in north of Wednesbury where Victorian and Edwardian terraced streets dominate the higher ground of Church Hill.

The Friar Park ward contains significant inter-war development from the late 1920s and early 1930s to rehouse families from town centre slum clearances. An extensive area of inter-war council housing planned out in garden city style exists north of the Tame Valley Canal and exhibits tree-line avenues and grids of streets with runs terraced and semi-detached housing.



Photographic examples of common typologies across Wednesbury



## 13.4 AREA NUANCES

The sub-areas consisting of Wednesbury, Friar Park and Stone Cross, and Hill Top are diverse in their typologies, but there is a pattern of key eras of development.

Industrial uses dominate the area, particularly across Hill Top and the southern section of Wednesbury, but also found within residential areas, for example Brookside in Friar Park.

Overall across the area, the residential is dominated by semi-detached forms. But there are large sections where other typologies prevail. Victorian terraces have a strong presence to the east and north of the town centre. Flatted typologies are present more along major roads, such as along Holyhead Road. Non-perimeter block house and flat typologies are present in Friar Park ward, for example St. Luke's Road and Village Walk.

Brick is again the most dominant material. The Victorian and Edwardian properties exhibit a rich mix of bay windows, porches and more terracotta. These older residential streets also have a greater incidence of street trees and front garden planting.



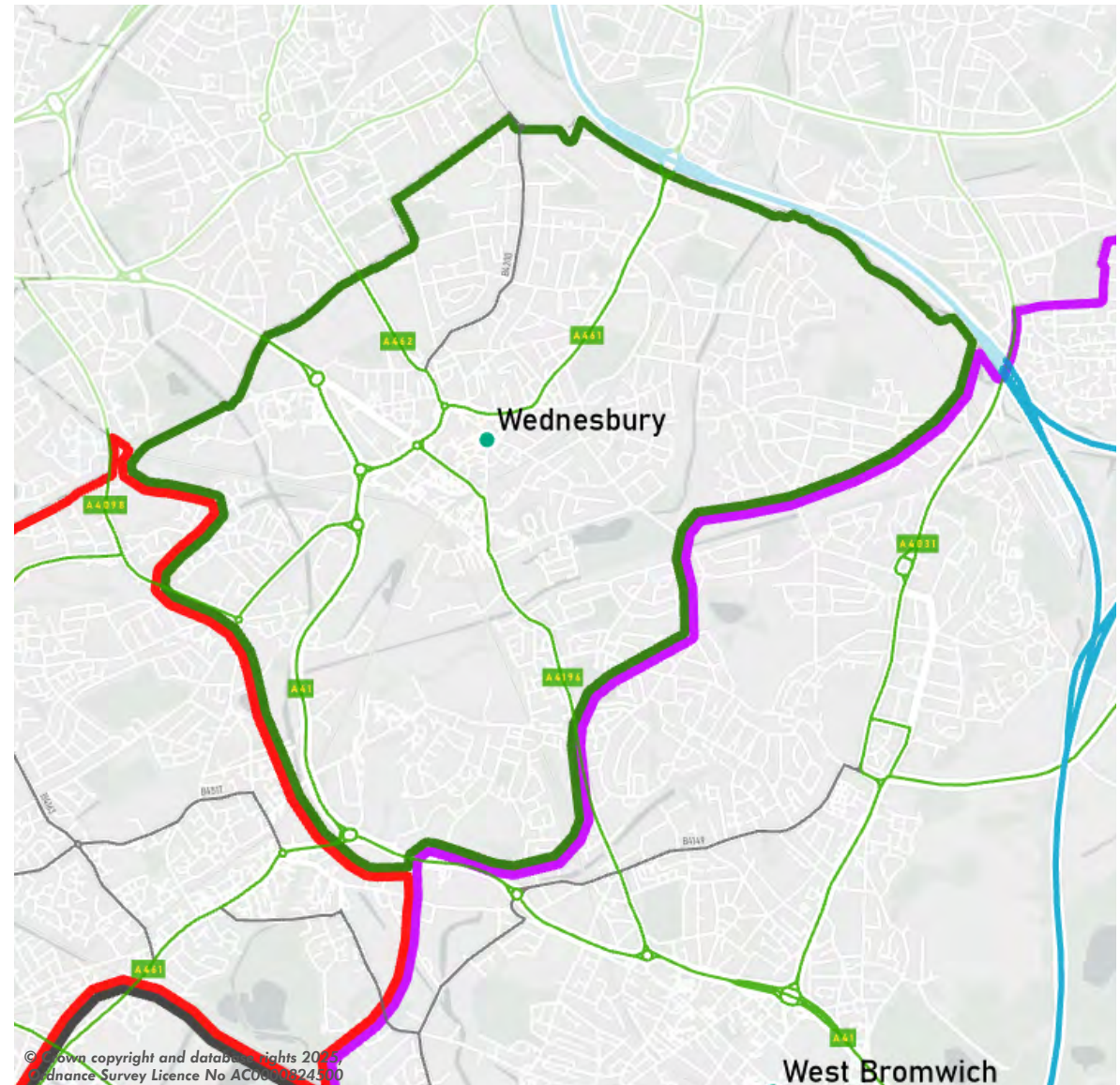


## 13.5 STREET CHARACTER

Wednesbury's street and highway character is shaped by a contrast between strategic through-routes and a compact local network.

The main corridors are wide carriageways designed to carry high traffic volumes and link the town to the wider Black Country and motorway. These routes often include large roundabouts and signal-controlled junctions, creating a functional but vehicle-dominated edge to the town. In contrast, the inner streets are narrower, with a dense grid serving retail, community, and residential areas. Here, buildings sit close to the street, pavements are modest in width, and on-street parking is common.

Beyond the centre, residential neighbourhoods combine short terraces and cul-de-sacs, producing a varied but typically compact urban street character.





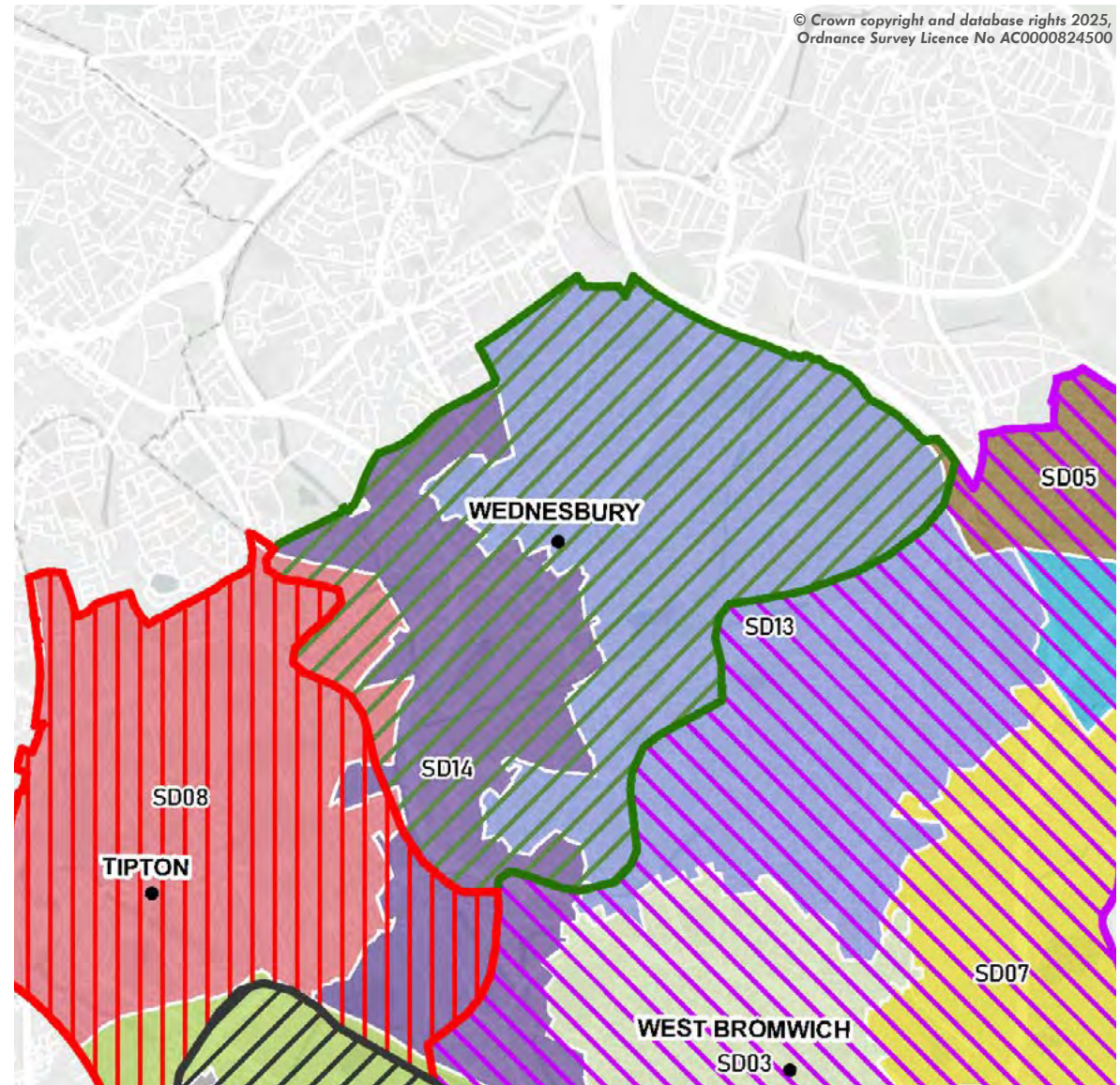
## 13.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Wednesbury's landscape character is a mix of industrial history, modern urban development, and green spaces. The town's core features historic Victorian and Edwardian architecture, with narrow, red-brick streets around the Market Place and Clock Tower, creating a strong sense of enclosure (and designated as Conservation Area).

Beyond the centre, post-war housing estates provide a suburban feel with semi-detached homes and tree-lined streets. In contrast, the industrial edges are more utilitarian, defined by large warehouses, brownfield sites, and transport infrastructure with limited vegetation.

Green spaces like Brunswick Park, the River Tame corridor, and community gardens soften the dense urban environment, providing ecological and recreational benefits and supporting local biodiversity. This blend of historic, suburban, and industrial zones, complemented by green infrastructure, defines the town's distinct landscape.

To the north the combination of the railway and M5/M6 route creates a strong, and in parts relatively impenetrable, boundary.





## 13.7 REGENERATION AREA / WEDNESBURY TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

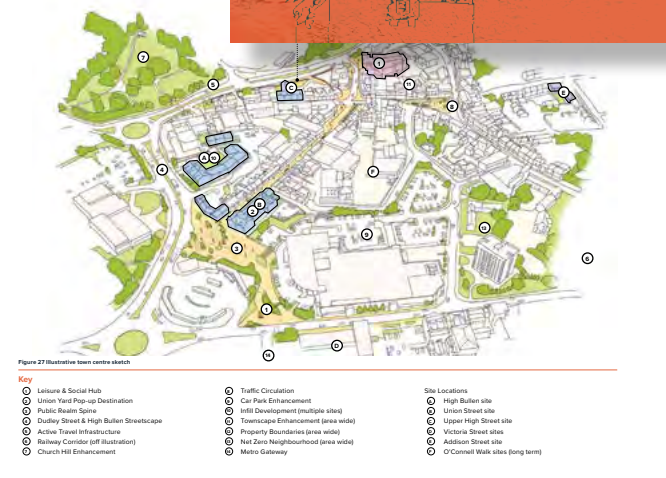
Between 2020 and 2024 the Wednesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) delivered the restoration and enhancement of a number of assets in the town's historic centre.

Following this, the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan outlines a 10 year strategy to revitalise the town centre as a vibrant hub for living, working, and leisure. The plan addresses challenges like vacant retail units, negative public perceptions, and poorly maintained buildings. It aims to improve the environment with enhanced public spaces and green infrastructure, and to diversify land use by introducing more residential, business, and leisure facilities, especially to attract families and create a stronger evening economy.

Key strategies include enhancing public transport connectivity, particularly to the metro stop, improving walking and cycling routes, and undertaking infill developments and townscape enhancements. The masterplan recognises that the existing character, identity and heritage of the town centre can be enhanced and revealed as distinctive assets.

The Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan was finalised in 2023 and sets the vision for this major brownfield site in the north of the area to be redeveloped into a new neighbourhood set within parkland. It includes area-wide and site-specific Design Codes.

Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

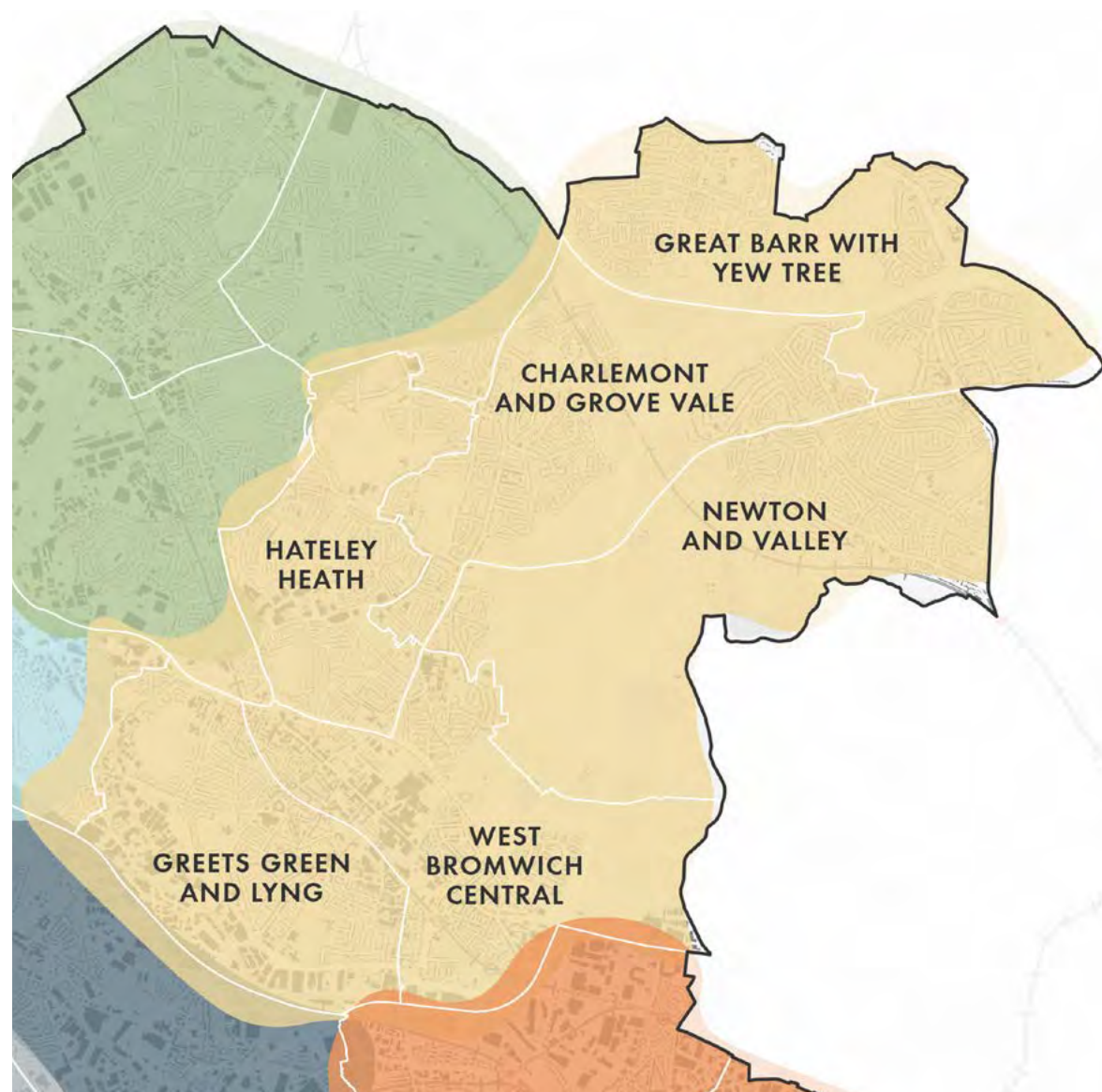
# 14 WEST BROMWICH

## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

West Bromwich is located in the northeast of Sandwell. Covering 25.19 square kilometres, the town is home to 83,638 residents (2021 census), making it a densely populated area with 3,320 people per square kilometre.

The town comprises six wards: Charlemont with Grove Vale, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Greets Green and Lyng, Hateley Heath, Newton and Valley, and West Bromwich Central. West Bromwich enjoys a strategic location, bordered by Walsall to the north and Birmingham to the east.

West Bromwich forms the main town centre serving the area, whilst Great Bridge is also an important hub.





## 14.2 THE HISTORY OF WEST BROMWICH

West Bromwich transformed from rural settlement to industrial powerhouse during the 19th century following coal discoveries west of Broomwich Heath, which gave the town its name. This coal-fuelled expansion established thriving spring, gun, and nail-making industries.

The town's mid-to-late 19th century prosperity is reflected in its high-quality municipal buildings, including the town hall and library (1874-75), with architectural development continuing into the 20th century through additions like the Church of St Michael and the Holy Angels' spire (1911). West Bromwich's architectural heritage spans centuries, from the 13th-century moated manor house (now a restaurant) and 16th-century Oak House museum to the rebuilt Church of All Saints (1872).

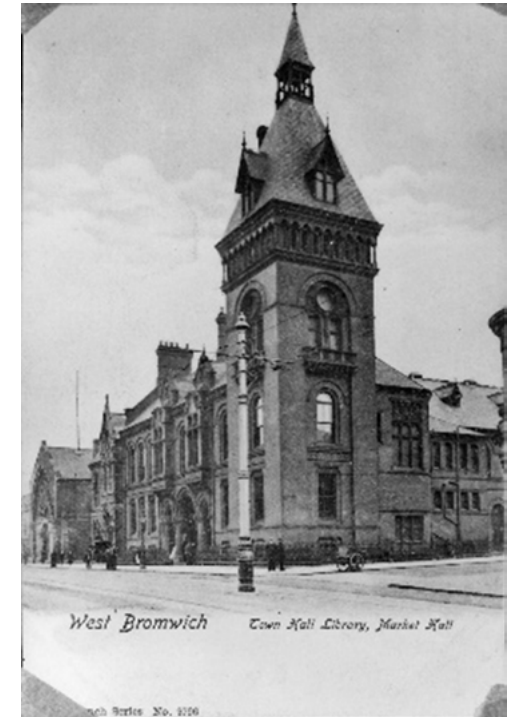
The town's sporting identity centres on West Bromwich Albion Football Club. Here three celebrated black players rose to prominence in the late 1970s, as the club became the first professional team in British football to field three black players regularly.



West Bromwich Albion Football club, c.1950. Credit: Sandwell Archives



West Bromwich town centre, c.1900. Credit: Sandwell Archives



West Bromwich Town Hall, 1904  
Credit: Out of copyright. Author/owner unknown

### 14.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

Victorian and Edwardian terraced houses dominate West Bromwich's older residential areas. There are substantial council estates developed from 1948, beginning with the Harvills Hawthorn Estate. These comprise low-rise blocks and semi-detached houses.

The northern areas of Great Barr with Yew Tree and Newton feature more 1920s-30s semi-detached houses with tree-lined streets and generous plot sizes, creating a more suburban character.

West Bromwich town centre is layered with many eras of buildings and different uses from intact stretches of civic Victorian and Edwardian buildings at the northern end of the High Street to modern large format shopping centres including the King's and Queens Shopping Centres.

To the south and south west of the town centre are a number of more modern estates and typologies. Developments in recent decades such as the Lyng and Urban 180 have introduced a new character to this part of the area.



Photographic examples of common typologies across West Bromwich



## 14.4 AREA NUANCES

The West Bromwich area contains the largest amount of green space, influenced by the vast greenery of RSPB Sandwell Valley to the east.

West Bromwich Central is the densest and most diverse of the wards. It is marked by a significant concentration of typologies around a dense, urban core. Other wards are predominantly residential areas, with semi-detached housing being the modal type and pockets of detached neighbourhoods distributed throughout.

Brick is again the most common material, but the area displays a much greater variety of styles and materials than other parts of the borough. This is in part due to the layering of many decades of development, but also the greater range in land uses.



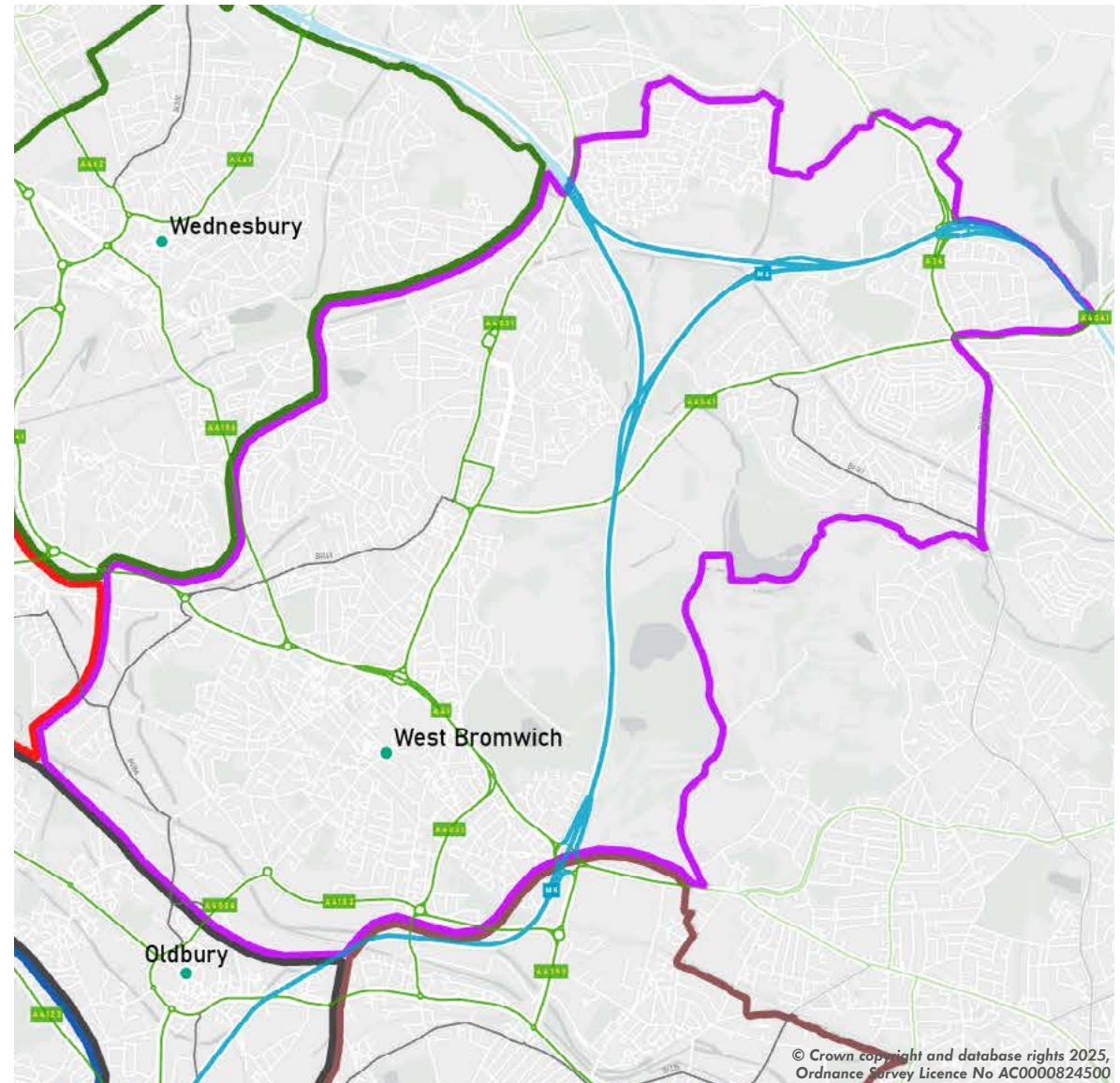
Photographic examples of the range of house styles across the West Bromwich area

## 14.5 STREET CHARACTER

West Bromwich features a diverse highway and street network shaped by its industrial heritage and modern regeneration. Major routes like the M5, A41, and A4031 provide strategic regional connectivity, some of which are red-route corridors to manage congestion.

The historic High Street forms the town's civic core, with areas of pedestrianisation and higher quality public realm.

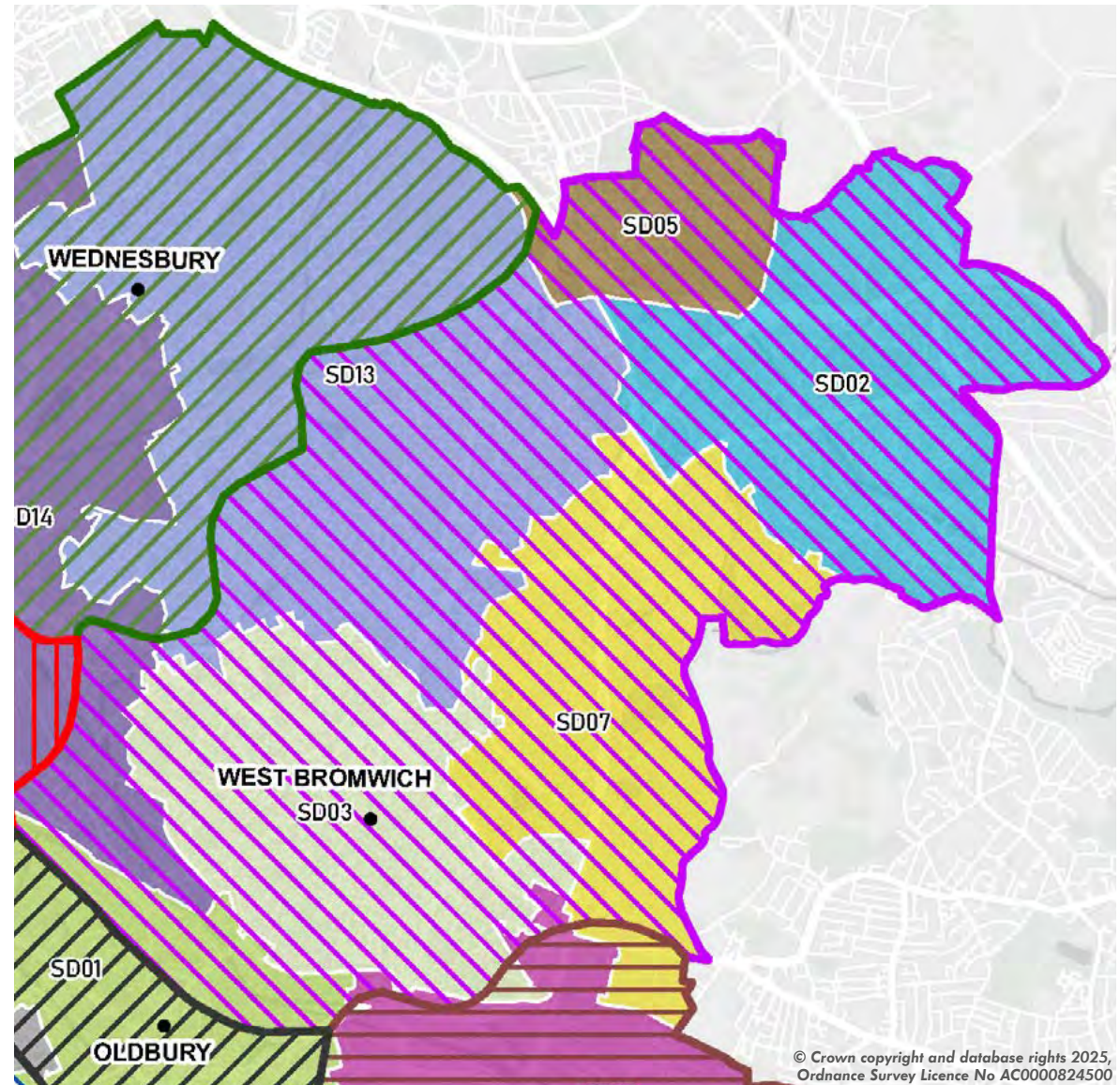
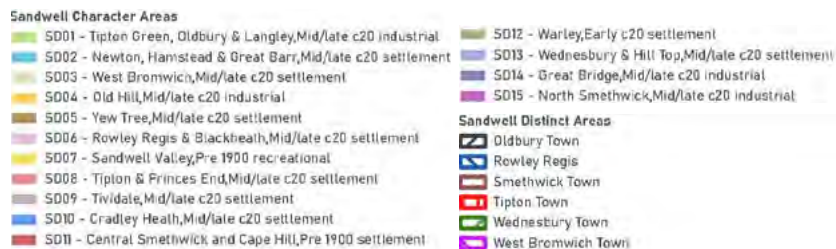
Residential areas feature a mix of 20 mph and 30mph streets. Overall, West Bromwich reflects a blend of high-capacity routes and neighbourhood-scale urban character.





## 14.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- Located in central Sandwell on sandstone, mudstone, and conglomerate geology; with coal in the northwest.
- The area developed in the 19th century on former heathland.
- Today, the town centre core is surrounded by large residential areas, with industrial sites generally in the south of the wider area and a mix of Victorian terraces, inter-war housing, and later residential neighbourhoods elsewhere.
- The High Street Conservation Area covers the northern part of town centre which was part of what was known as the The Golden Mile (one of the longest high streets in the UK).
- Geosites: The landscape includes assets such as geological exposures, historic buildings, and monuments from industrial era.
- A stronger green character is evident north of the A41, particularly in the residential streets around the valley parkland.





## 14.7 REGENERATION AREA / WEST BROMWICH TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

The West Bromwich Town Centre Masterplan outlines a 20 year vision for the town's transformation into a more resilient, thriving, and inclusive place.

The plan seeks to address challenges such as retail oversupply, high vacancy rates, and a lack of economic diversity by introducing a stronger mixed-use environment.

Key proposals include creating a new central hub and market square, developing green spaces and sustainable transport networks, and delivering new residential and commercial communities. The masterplan is a long-term strategy that aims to attract private and public investment, with an initial focus on revitalising key areas like Kings Square and the Town Hall Quarter.

The masterplan will change the character and grain of the southern part of the High Street and introduce greater permeability.



West Bromwich Town Centre Masterplan, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



# 15 SMETHWICK

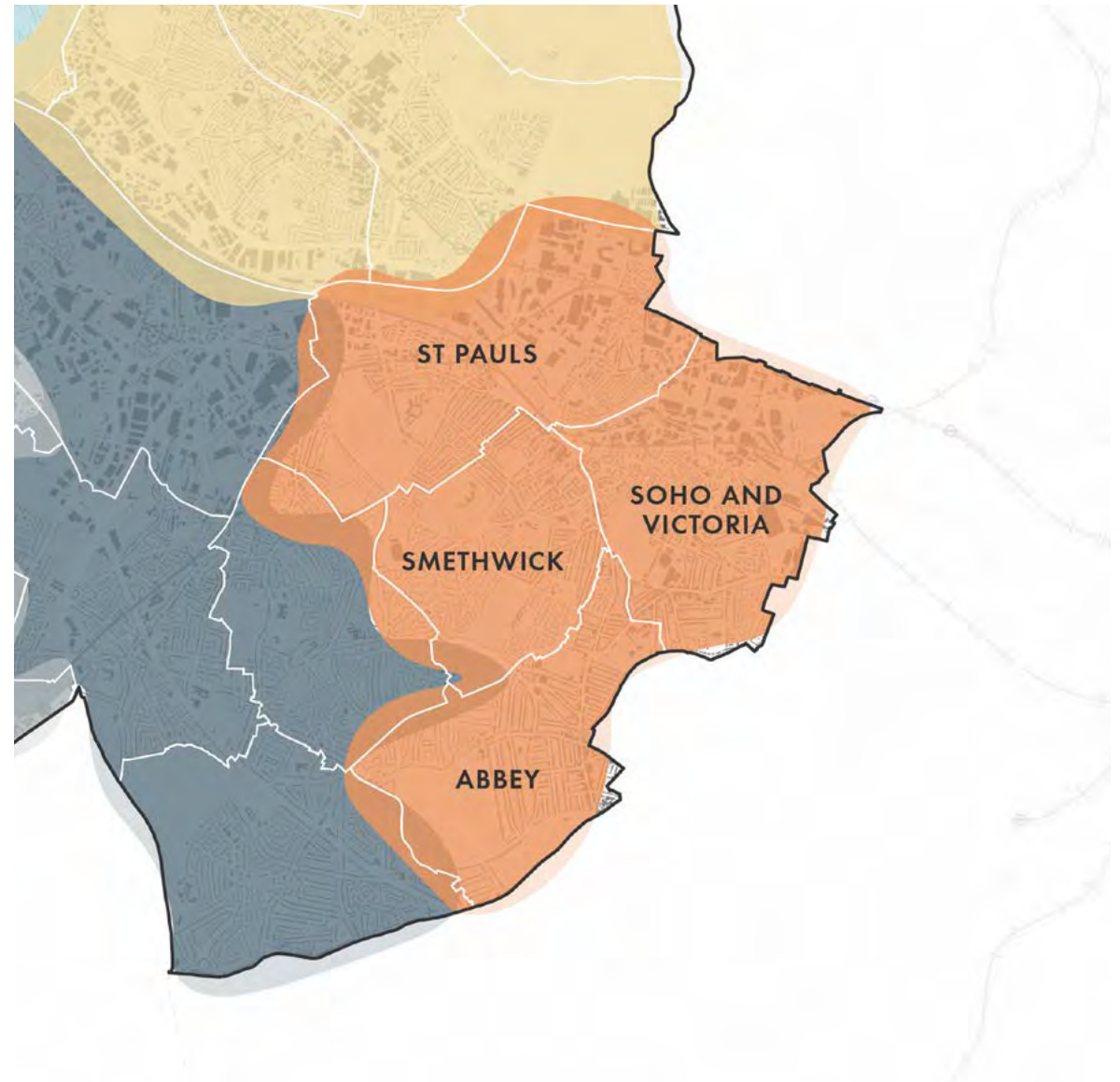
## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

Smethwick is situated in the southeast of Sandwell, comprising the wards of St Pauls, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria, and Abbey. It plays an imperative role in the threshold to Sandwell from Birmingham, with train journeys taking 6 mins from Rolfe Street station and 9 mins from Galton Bridge station. The canal side cycling links offer quick active travel routes into the city too.

Covering an area of 14.73 square kilometres, Smethwick is home to 64,007 residents, resulting in a population density of 4,345 residents per square kilometre.

The town is notably diverse, with 76% of its population from ethnic minority backgrounds—significantly higher than the broader Sandwell average of 48%. This rich cultural diversity makes Smethwick one of the most multicultural communities in the region, contributing to its distinctive character and heritage.

There are two town centres serving this area: Bearwood and Cape Hill. A number of district and local centres also provide important hubs including Smethwick High Street and Brandhall.



## 15.2 THE HISTORY OF SMETHWICK

Smethwick's industrial heritage began with blacksmithing recorded from the 16th century and a brassworks established by 1772. The arrival of the canals in 1769 attracted foundries, rolling mills and glassworks to cluster along the canalside. This industrial boom culminated with the establishment of the prestigious Boulton, Watt and Son's Soho Foundry in 1796, which cast components for their steam engines.

The area's engineering prowess is embodied by Thomas Telford's masterpiece, Galton Bridge (1828-29), which remains a Grade I listed monument today.

Glassmaking emerged as Smethwick's second major industry, dominated by the Chance family whose works produced all the glazing for the 1851 Crystal Palace. This industrial expertise later proved vital during WWII, when the Railway Carriage and Wagon Works manufactured tanks and aircraft, that proved crucial to D-Day operations.

The 1960s brought significant demographic transformation as Caribbean and South Asian immigrants arrived, leading to complex race relations. This period saw Conservative MP Peter Griffiths gain global notoriety through

a racially charged campaign featuring inflammatory slogans that attracted international attention, including condemnation from American activist Malcolm X.



In 1898 father and son Edward Richard Taylor and William Howson Taylor founded the Birmingham Tile and Pottery Works in Smethwick. In 1902 they changed the name to Ruskin Pottery in honour of John Ruskin.

Credit: Sandwell Archives



(Left) Unfortunately, the needs of housing and modernisation led to the demolition of picturesque buildings, including Warley Abbey in 1957.

Credit: Sandwell Archives



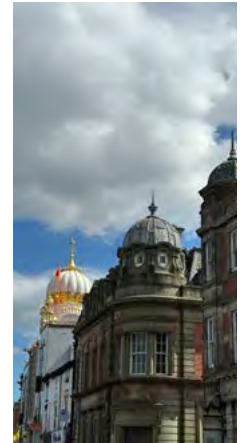
### 15.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

Smethwick's industrial past has largely influenced transport infrastructure development patterns, with the railway and the A457 built parallel to the canal, leading to spatial severance of the area.

These linear canal-side links and other green spaces, such as Victoria Park and Warley Woods, are important public spaces for residents as well as wildlife.

Smethwick's housing is dominated by Victorian and Edwardian terraced properties built for industrial workers. Inter-war semi-detached properties, post-war council housing, and recent apartment developments provide additional housing types.

The area retains industrial character with housing integrated alongside commercial and light industrial uses.



Photographic examples of common typologies across Smethwick



## 15.4 AREA NUANCES

Smethwick is generally defined by its mix of typologies including mixed-use centres and terraced housing. Semi-detached housing is also common with pockets of flats, maisonettes, or apartments. This concentration of dense residential and commercial areas represents its historic morphology. Soho and Victoria contains the most industrial zones along the north eastern edge, showing the integration typical of a lot of the borough.

Many buildings in Smethwick display a richness of design typical of the Victorian era. Façades include different window types and detailing and doors and porches are also well-detailed with curved and pitched shapes.

Brick dominates the materiality. Render is particularly evident in the inter-war and post-war buildings, but has also been introduced on older terraced properties by owners.

Recent developments include Galton Locks next to the canal and Windmill Eye and Capehill sites further north, which have added contemporary developments with a range of brick colours.



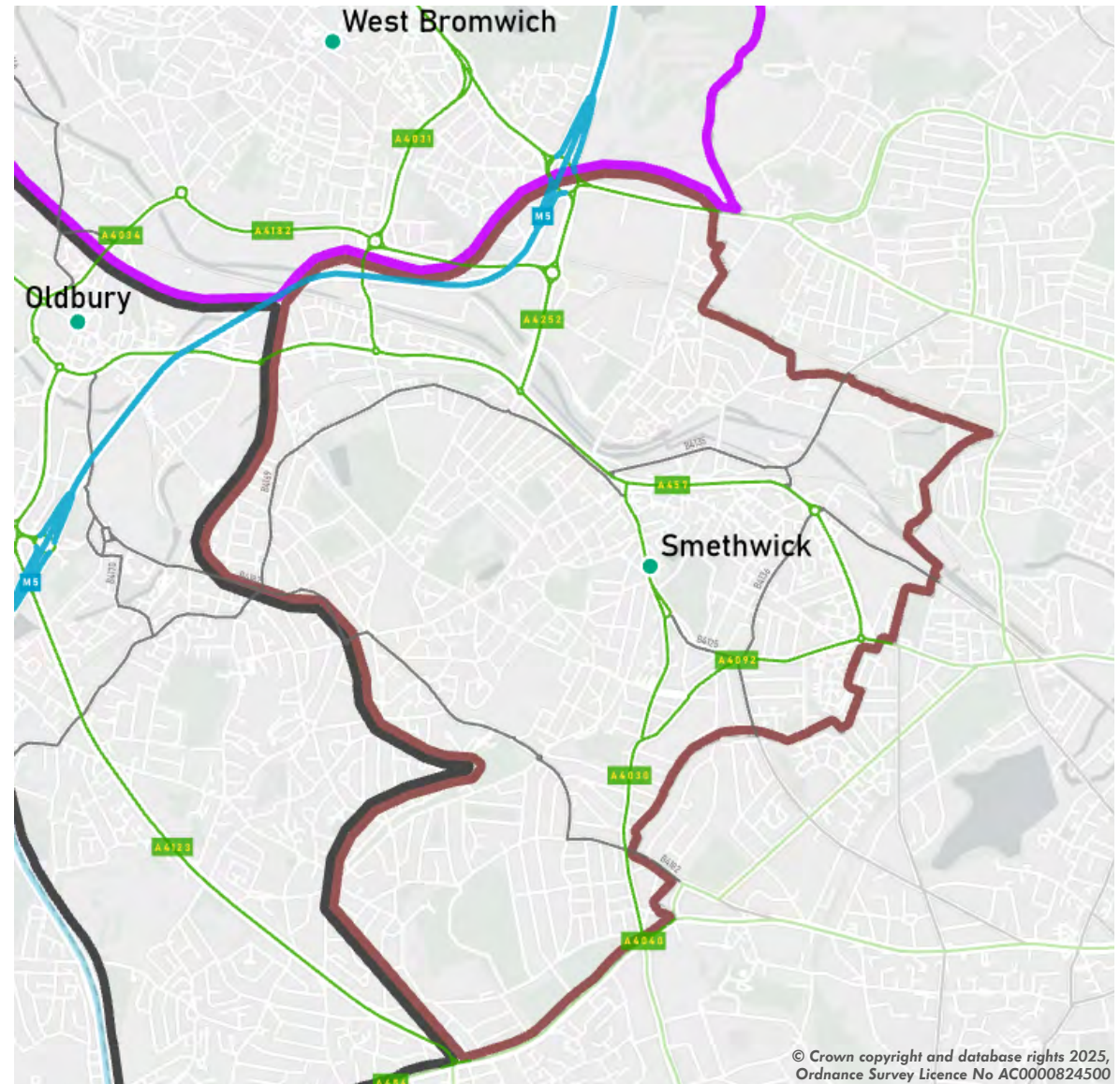
Examples of the range housing styles across the Smethwick area



## 15.5 STREET CHARACTER

Smethwick's highway network combines major arterial corridors with a dense pattern of residential streets. The A457 and A4252 form key connection to the M5 motorway J1, carrying significant volumes of traffic. These routes are designed as multi-lane carriageways with roundabouts and signalised junctions.

Residential areas are characterised by narrow terraces and short grid-like roads, often with on-street parking. Traffic management measures, including one-way systems and controlled crossings, are in place to improve flow and safety.

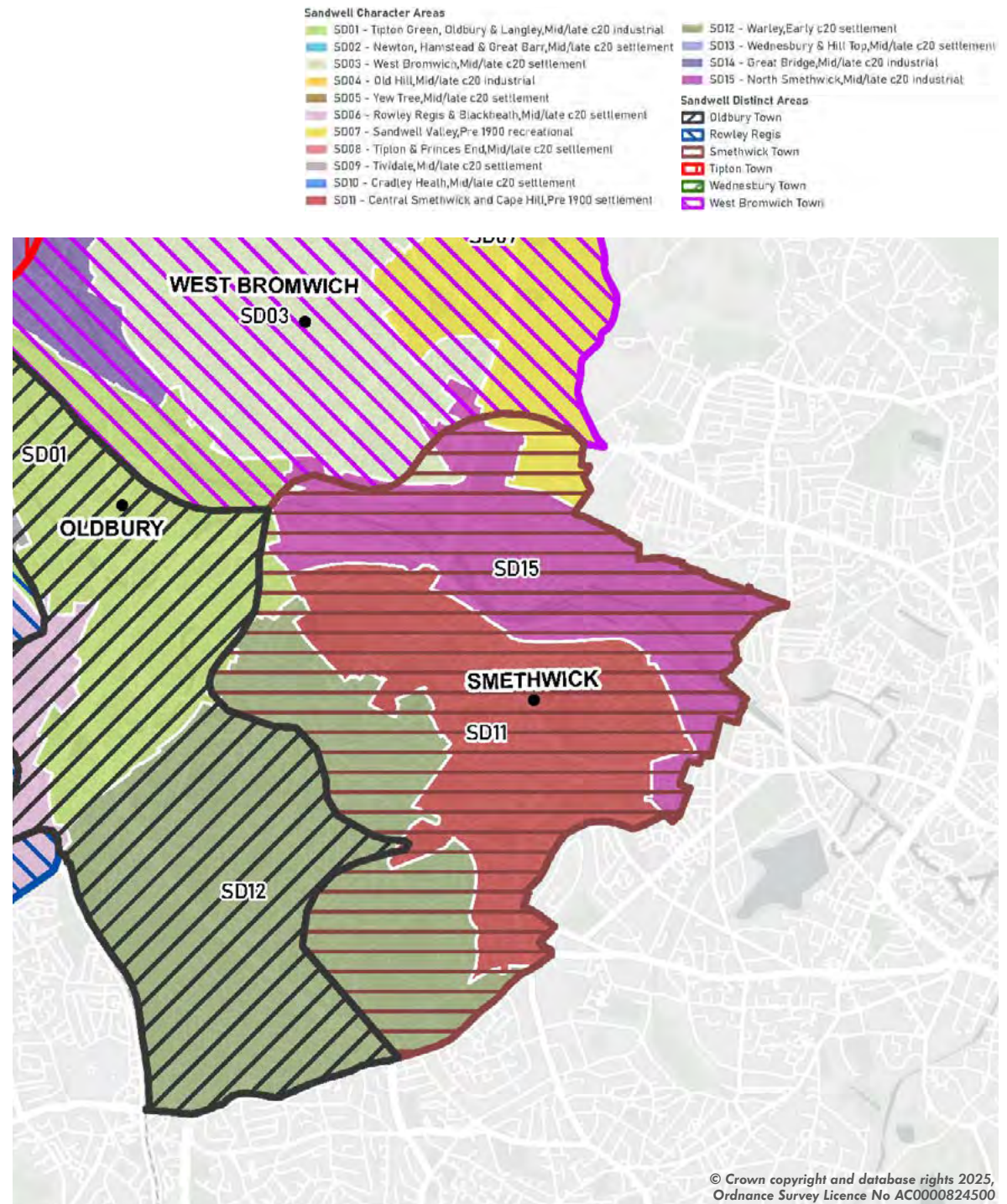


## 15.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- Canals are central features of Smethwick's landscape and include listed structures as well as many wildlife areas. Much of the canal network through Smethwick is in cuttings which creates a dramatic relationship, but real accessibility issues.
- There are three conservation areas, the largest of which is Galton Valley which covers the canal network through the area.

### Notable features:

- Rolfe Street – predominantly industrial with mixed-use premises.
- Black Patch Park and Soho Foundry (Grade II\* Listed).
- The Sandwell Aquatic Centre and the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital are significant modern structures in the area.
- Key centres include Cape Hill Town Centre, Smethwick High Street and Bearwood Town Centre.
- Mixed-use zones:
  - Grove Lane / Cranford Street – industrial.
  - Windmill Lane – mainly residential with retail and community facilities.





## 15.7 REGENERATION AREA / ROLFE STREET MASTERPLAN

The Rolfe Street Masterplan outlines a vision to transform the area into a distinctive residential community. This plan builds upon the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework and aims to guide future development by providing urban design principles and a design code.

The site has a rich history and is located in one of the most significant areas for brownfield urban renewal. The masterplan highlights the importance of retaining and refurbishing historic buildings, like the Grade II\* listed Engine Arm Aqueduct and the Grade II listed retaining wall to the former Corporation Yard, to preserve the area's unique sense of place. The plan also identifies a strong emphasis on public transport and active travel, with proposed improvements like a mobility hub at Rolfe Street Station, to create a low-car environment and contribute to net-zero carbon targets.

The masterplan proposes a series of typologies including townhouses, apartment blocks and mews housing. Illustrations recommend extensive use of brick and a strong influence from the historical industrial character.



Smethwick Rolfe Street Masterplan, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

## 15.8 REGENERATION AREA / GROVE LANE MASTERPLAN

The Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework Document outlines a plan for urban renewal along the historic canal district stretching from The Roundhouse in Birmingham to Galton Bridge in Smethwick.

The framework aims to transform the area by delivering up to 4,000 new homes and improving infrastructure. Key principles guiding this vision include promoting a healthy community, enhancing local centres, and creating green neighbourhoods with a focus on active travel links. The framework details specific redevelopment opportunities, such as the areas around the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital and the City Hospital site, and proposes a comprehensive transport strategy to address congestion and improve connectivity.



Grove Lane Masterplan, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and collaborators

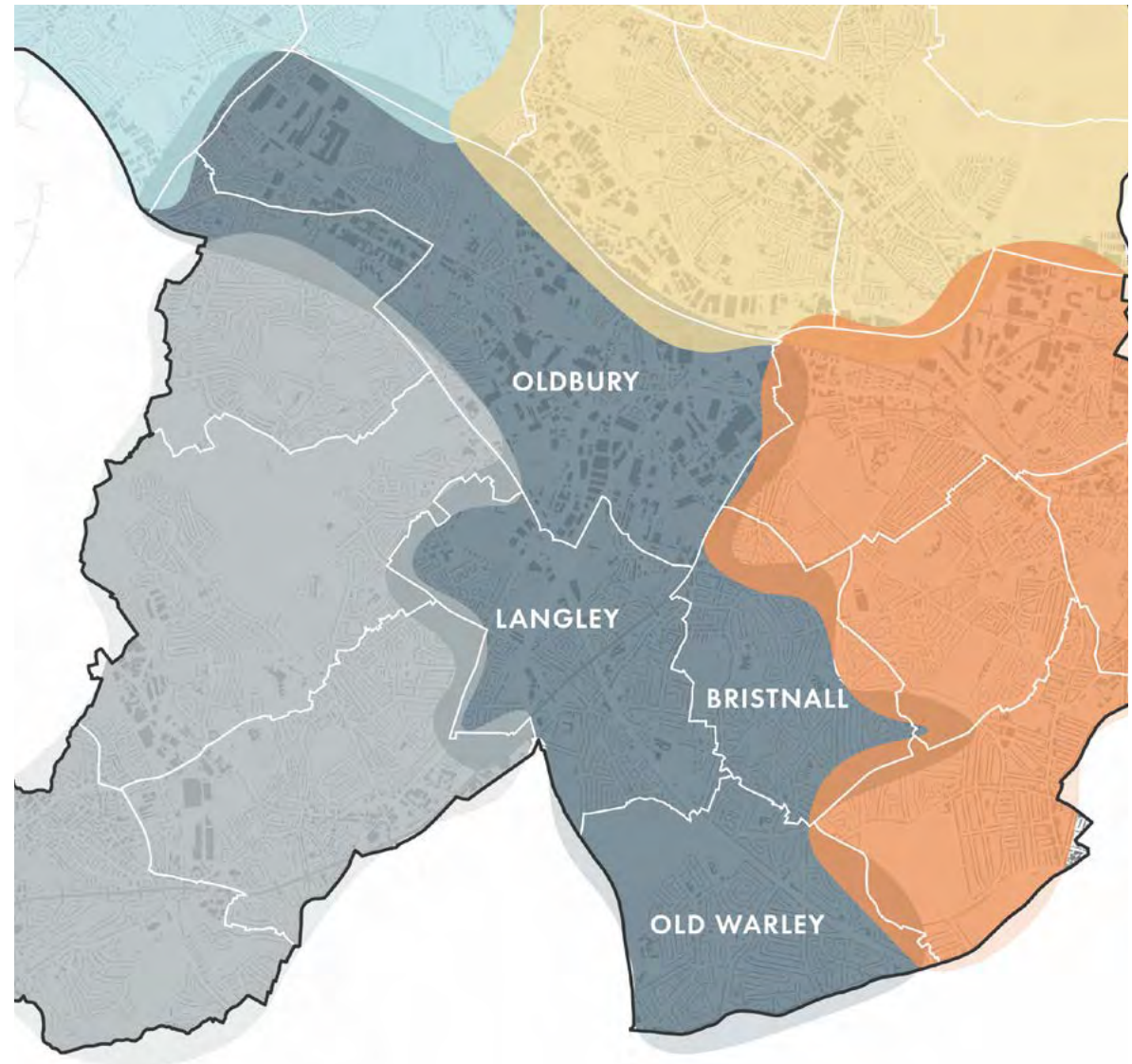


# 16 OLDBURY

## 16.1 INTRODUCTION

The Oldbury area stretches south from Oldbury town centre to the southern part of Sandwell and comprises of the wards of Bristnall, Oldbury, Langley and Old Warley. It also incorporates areas off the Dudley Road to the west of the town centre up to Dudley Port.

With a population of 54,929 residents spread across 14.52 square kilometres, Oldbury maintains a population density of 3,699 residents per square kilometre. Much of the industrial uses can be found in the Oldbury ward itself, slowly decreasing the further south. Oldbury town centre provides an important hub for the area.



## 16.2 THE HISTORY OF OLDBURY

Coal mining and iron working dominated the early 1800s and transformed Oldbury into an industrial-centric area, with collieries, forges and foundries spreading across Oldbury and Langley. Four blast furnaces operated from the 1780s to 1860s, establishing the town's industrial foundation.

Development exacted a heavy environmental price. Green fields disappeared beneath spoil heaps, marl holes, quarries and pollution.

Industry diversified from 1837 onwards: chemical works supplied Smethwick's glass industry, phosphorus extraction began in 1850, followed by tar distillation and plastics manufacture. As mining declined, brick production expanded using local Etruria marl.

Oldbury's wartime contribution proved vital. The Carriage Works built most First World War tanks, whilst Albright and Wilson manufactured phosphorus bombs.

Oldbury Carriage Works manufactured the first 1,000 tanks, utilising local Black Country factories for wheels, frames, ironwork, and other components. Testing took place in Oldbury. In 1918, they rapidly produced over 2,000 tanks for the 100 Days Offensive, which ended the Great War.

Credit: Out of copyright. Copyright holder unknown

Workers mining the thick seam in the South Staffordshire Coalfield.  
Credit: Dr T Daniels, Langley and Oldbury Local History Society





## 16.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

There are several green spaces that provide recreational areas for residents and visitors, including Bury Hill park that provides panoramic views over the borough.

Dense networks of Victorian terraced housing dominate central Oldbury, particularly around the historic town core. These two-storey brick terraces, built for industrial workers, feature characteristic narrow frontages with minimal front gardens and rear yards. Many retain original features including bay windows and decorative brickwork.

Lion Farm represents a large estate with tower blocks, whilst Brades Road features additional council developments, including Darley House and Foley House - two of Oldbury's tallest tower blocks. These 1960s developments introduced high density social housing.

Bristnall and Old Warley wards contain substantial inter-war semi-detached properties, reflecting suburban expansion during the 1920s-30s.

More modern housing developments in the area include Fountain Lane near Sandwell and Dudley Station and Brades Rise to the north.



Photographic examples of common typologies across Oldbury



## 16.4 AREA NUANCES

Oldbury is characterised by a mix of residential and industrial land use with a large mixed-use centre to the north. The residential areas are a mix of terraced and semi-detached housing with the large tracts of industrial land along major transport routes like canals and roads.

The other wards have a residential focus with semi-detached housing distributed across the area. Flats, maisonettes, or apartments are dispersed throughout, alongside clusters of institutional campuses including numerous schools.

The area has a stronger suburban character than Wednesbury and West Bromwich, despite its central location. Albeit, there are many instances where intensification is taking place and a shift towards a more urban character is evident. Areas such as Brandhall exemplify this.

Brick is dominant, with render also prevalent on later properties.

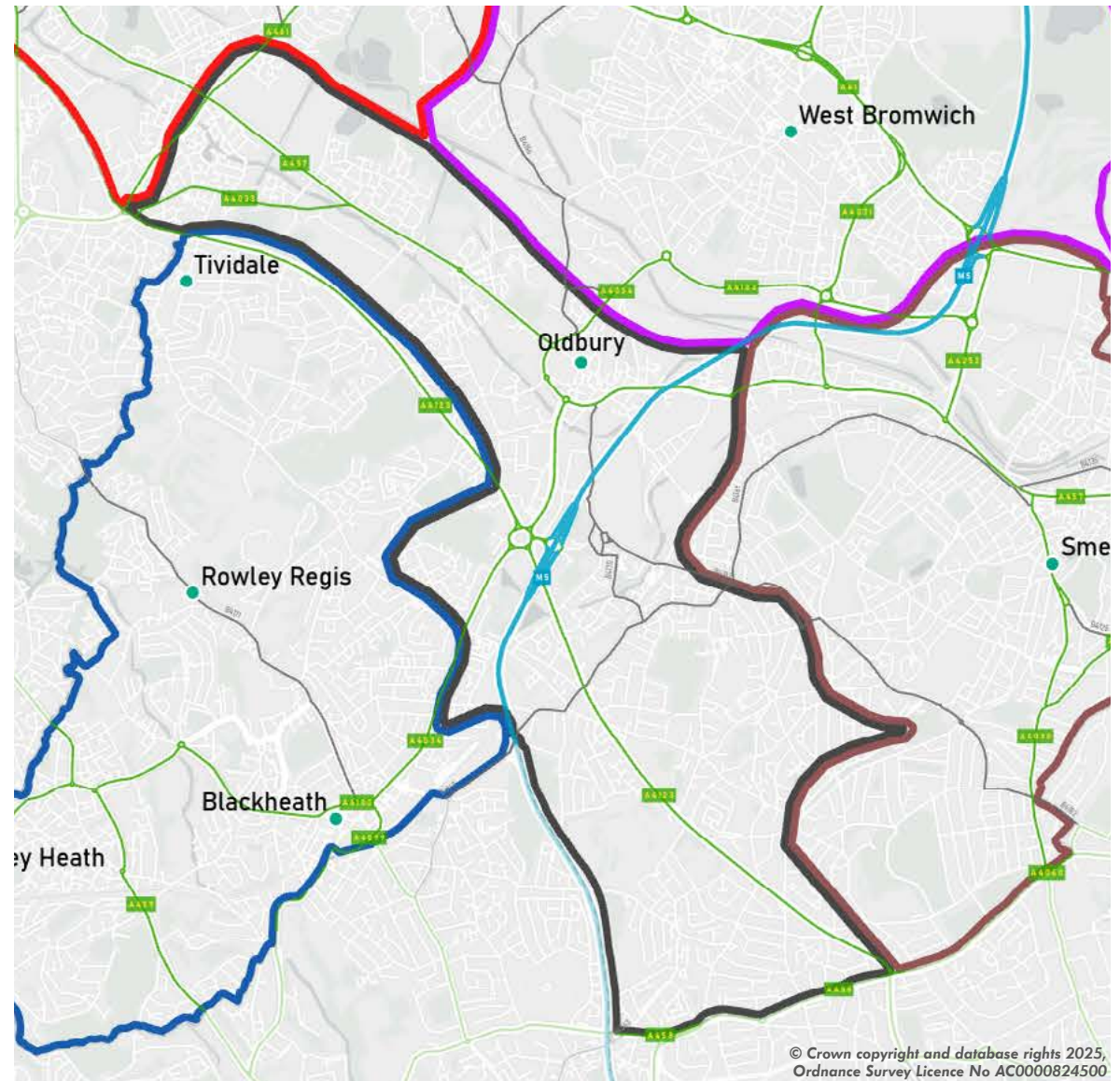




## 16.5 STREET CHARACTER

Oldbury's streets and highways reflect a combination of strategic regional infrastructure and local residential character. The M5 motorway runs through the town on an elevated viaduct, with Junction 2 providing direct access. The impact of the M5 junction and viaducts are a significant feature of the town. Major routes such as the A4123 Wolverhampton Road and the A457 form key corridors, designed as wide carriageways with roundabouts and signal-controlled junctions to manage heavy traffic flows. Birchley Island is a notable junction, linking the A4123, A4034 and motorway.

Residential streets are typically narrower, often lined with redbrick terraced or semi-detached housing, reflecting Oldbury's industrial heritage. These local roads have standard footways, limited on-street parking, and varying levels of tree cover. The overall network demonstrates a layered character, enabling regional connectivity with the finer grain of local neighbourhood streets.



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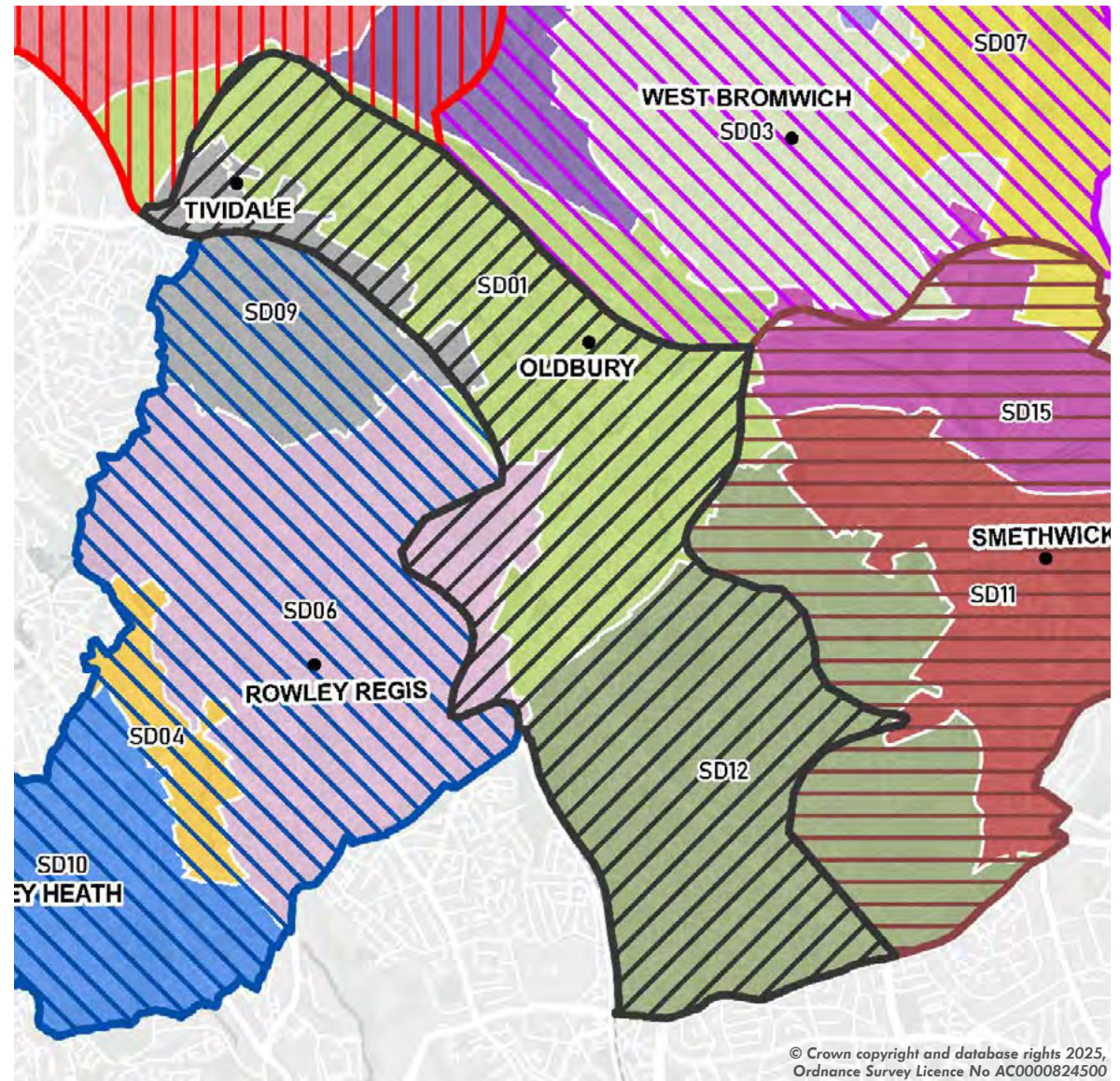


## 16.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- The Oldbury area has an industrial landscape typical of the Black Country.
- Located on a gently sloping hill over former agricultural land (now urbanised).
- The landscape features historic farmstead typologies and enclosure legacy.
- Historic canal loop created a unique canal island settlement pattern.
- Key viewpoints: framed by Church Square and Birmingham Street.
- Outward views show the Rowley Hills beyond the urban edge.
- Some of this historic industries and land uses in the area impact the uses of land, such as the Rhodia/Solvay exclusion zones.
- Oldbury Church Square Conservation Area extends through much of the town centre.

### Sandwell Character Areas

SD01 - Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley, Mid/late c20 industrial	SD12 - Warley, Early c20 settlement
SD02 - Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr, Mid/late c20 settlement	SD13 - Wednesbury & Hill Top, Mid/late c20 settlement
SD03 - West Bromwich, Mid/late c20 settlement	SD14 - Great Bridge, Mid/late c20 industrial
SD04 - Old Hill, Mid/late c20 industrial	SD15 - North Smethwick, Mid/late c20 industrial
SD05 - Yew Tree, Mid/late c20 settlement	
SD06 - Rowley Regis & Blackheath, Mid/late c20 settlement	<b>Sandwell Distinct Areas</b>
SD07 - Sandwell Valley, Pre 1900 recreational	Oldbury Town
SD08 - Tipton & Princes End, Mid/late c20 settlement	Rowley Regis
SD09 - Tividale, Mid/late c20 settlement	Smethwick Town
SD10 - Cradley Heath, Mid/late c20 settlement	Tipton Town
SD11 - Central Smethwick and Cape Hill, Pre 1900 settlement	Wednesbury Town
	West Bromwich Town



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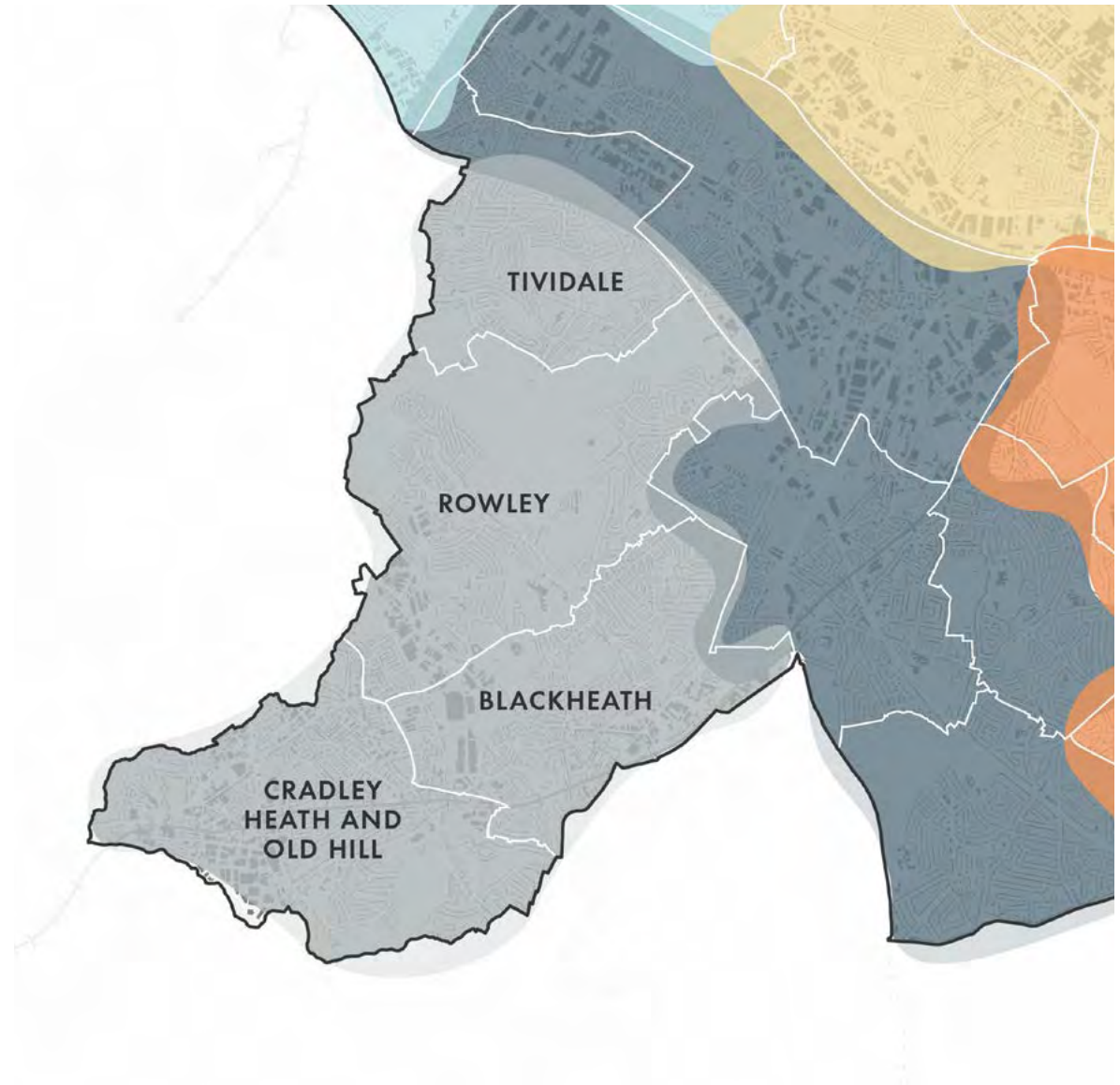
# 17 ROWLEY REGIS

## 17.1 INTRODUCTION

Rowley Regis is located in the southwest of Sandwell. Covering an area of 13.68 square kilometres, it is home to 53,791 residents according to the 2021 census, giving it a population density of 3,932 people per square kilometre, comparatively low for the borough.

The town comprises five wards: Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Rowley, and Tividale, and borders the metropolitan borough of Dudley to the west. There are two town centres serving this area: Cradley Heath and Blackheath, and a series of train stations on the line running along the south of the area.

Rowley Regis is a group of former villages which by the early twentieth century had coalesced into a larger urban area. Collectively the places bear the imprint of former industry (some of the earliest in the Black Country) which included nail and chain-making, coal mining and the quarrying of Rowley ragstone, a hard dolorite (basalt) used mainly for road building. Whilst there has been much redevelopment in recent decades, the variety and informality of surviving groups of buildings at Rowley Regis are characteristic of other Black Country towns.



## 17.2 THE HISTORY OF ROWLEY REGIS

Rowley Hills traces its origins to medieval times as part of the Royal hunting grounds. The suffix “Regis” was added around 1140 to denote the crown’s ownership of this portion of Rowley.

The area underwent significant transformation during the early to mid-19th century with the advent of industrial mining. Coal extraction commenced at the Earl of Dudley’s Ramrod Colliery in 1855, followed by operations at Rowley Hall Colliery from 1865 and Bell End Colliery off Mincing Lane.

The region is renowned for its distinctive geological features, particularly the Rowley Hills themselves, celebrated for quarrying the prized Rowley Rag Stone. These hills form a crucial part of the watershed divide between the rivers Trent and Severn, whilst boasting Turner’s Hill – the West Midlands’ highest point at 269 metres above sea level. Its commanding elevation offering panoramic views across the surrounding countryside.



Photograph of Turners Hill in the late 1950s.

Credit: Photo used courtesy of the Jim Rippin Collection



## 17.3 CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER

Rowley Regis exemplifies the classic Black Country topographical arrangement, described as a “Town in Tiers”.

The area contains several valuable green spaces, including Haden Hill Park in Cradley Heath, the former home of the Haden family.

The dominant typology consists of Victorian terraced houses. These are typically two-storey, two-up-two-down brick cottages with minimal front gardens and small rear yards. In Old Hill and Cradley Heath particularly, these terraces retain their original tight street pattern.

In the 1920s and 1930s there were substantial council estates developed, notably around Blackheath and Tividale. These semi-detached and short terraced houses follow garden suburb principles with more generous amenity space.



Photographic examples of common typologies across Rowley Regis



## 17.4 AREA NUANCES

The area shows a mix of mixed-density and low-density residential typologies. While all areas share this core characteristic, there are distinct nuances: Rowley Regis is notable for its extensive open spaces, including the large Rowley Hills. In contrast, Blackheath and Cradley Heath and Old Hill are characterised by a greater concentration of retail/commercial and industrial land uses, reflecting their historical and ongoing roles as local centres. The most prevalent housing types across these wards are semi-detached and detached homes, with terraced houses and flats also common, particularly in the denser mixed-residential areas.

Brick is again the dominant material, but the area see variation in colour beyond the typical red brick seen in other parts of the borough.

There are limited larger modern developments in this area, but a couple of recently developed sites include Doulton Road to the east of Rowley and Ross to the south.



Examples of housing styles across the Rowley Regis area

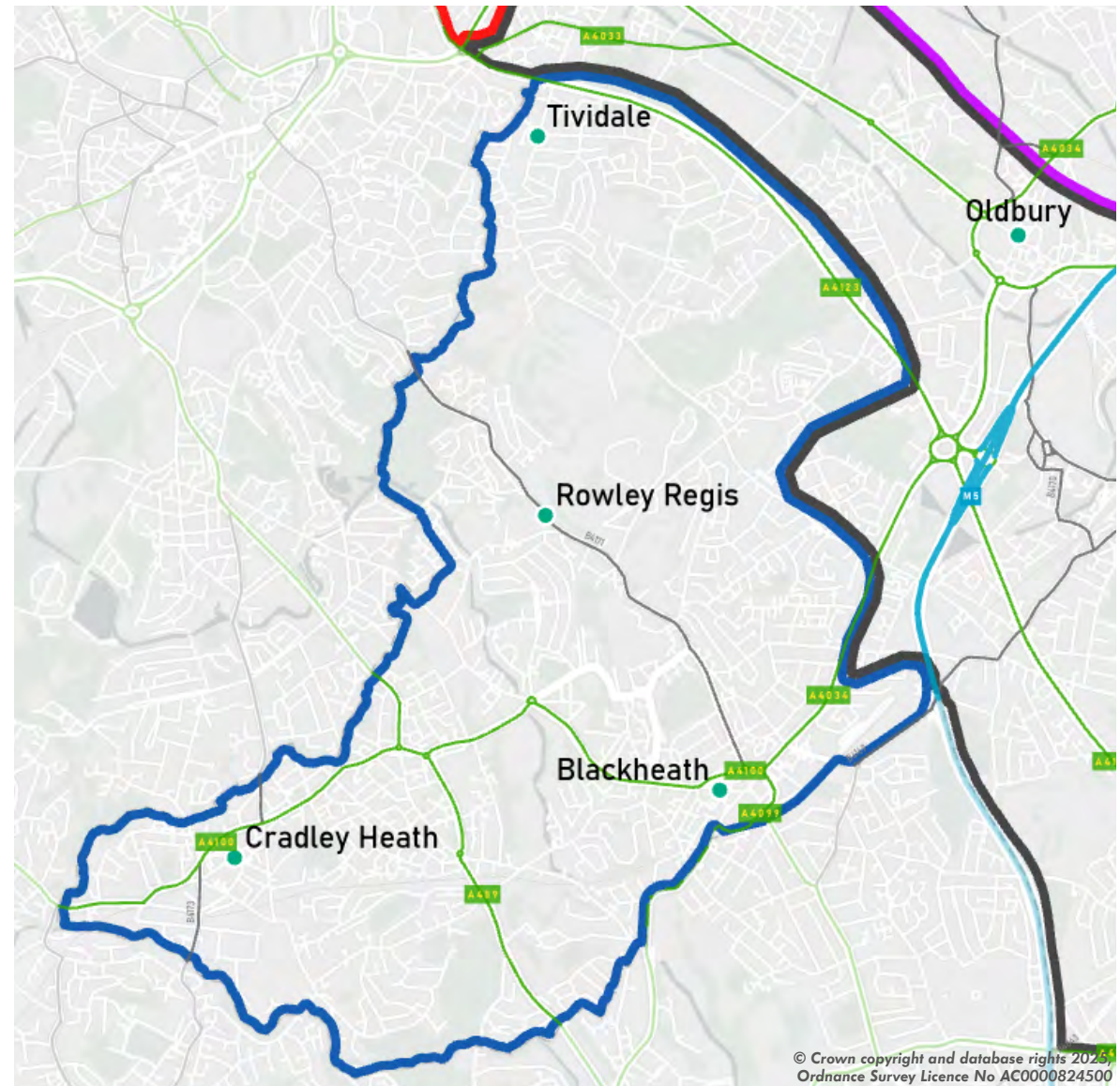


## 17.5 STREET CHARACTER

Rowley Regis has a varied street and highway character shaped by its hilly topography and mix of historic and suburban development.

The main routes through the town are wide A-roads and B-roads that carry traffic between Dudley, Oldbury and Blackheath. These corridors include large junctions and roundabouts, serving as the part of the connection onwards to the M5. In contrast, many residential areas sit on narrower, winding local roads that respond to the steep gradients and natural topography.

Traditional terraces and post-war estates are common, creating streets that are compact, with limited parking and modest pavements. Newer housing areas incorporate cul-de-sacs and wider carriageways, giving a more suburban character compared with the older, denser core.





## 17.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### Overview

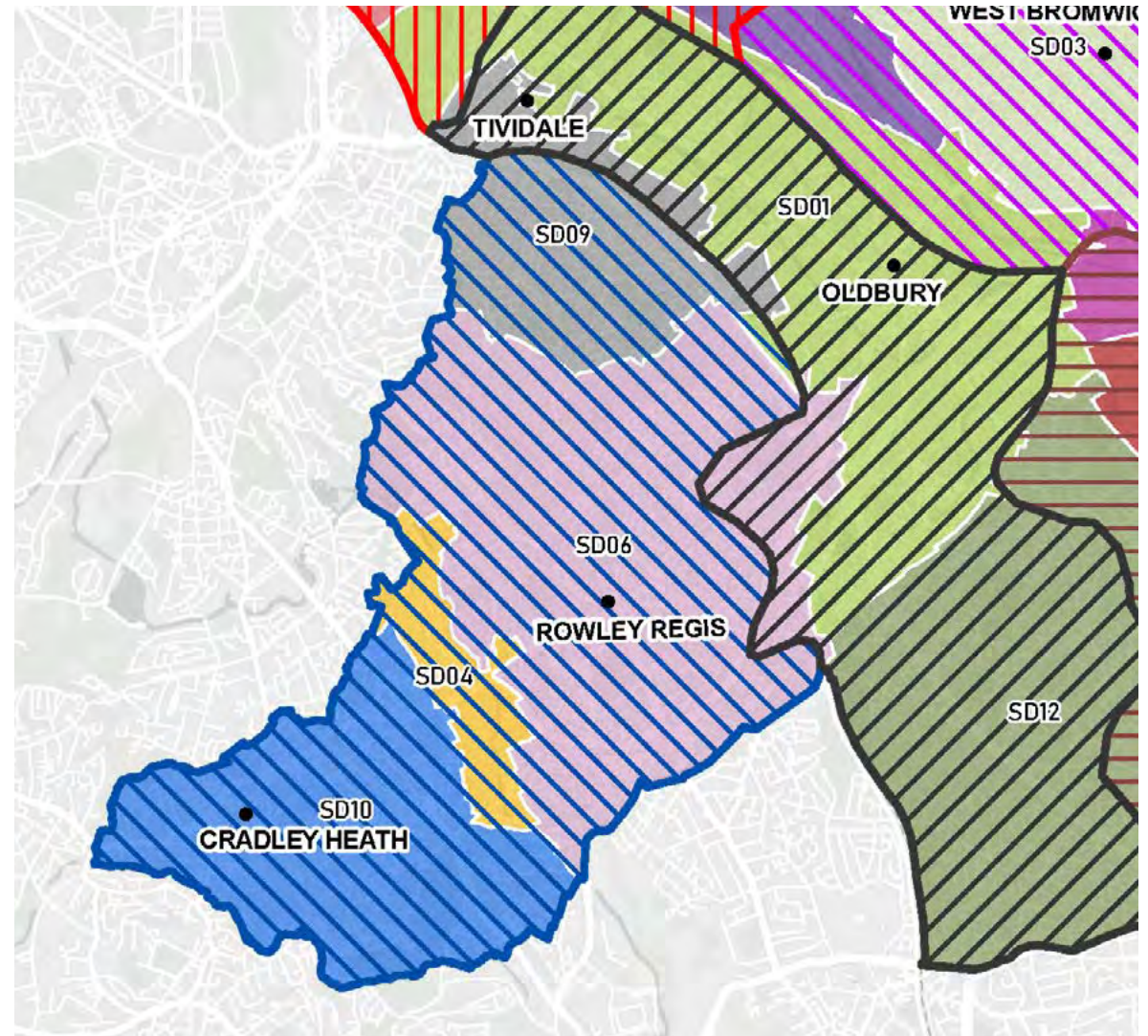
- The landscape is comprised of four hills: Turner's Hill (highest at 271m), Bury Hill, Portway Hill, and Darby's Hill.
- The Rowley Hills are a prominent landscape feature visible from across the Black Country.
- They form part of the UNESCO Black Country Global Geopark, are designated as Strategic Open Space and protected by Article 4 Direction.
- The Rowley Hills are mainly used for informal recreation by residents and visitors.
- They form part of an unbroken open space and wildlife corridor from Bumble Hole (Dudley) to Wolverhampton Road (Sandwell).

#### Sandwell Character Areas

SD01 - Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley, Mid/late c20 industrial	SD12 - Warley, Early c20 settlement
SD02 - Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr, Mid/late c20 settlement	SD13 - Wednesbury & Hill Top, Mid/late c20 settlement
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SD09 - Tividale, Mid/late c20 settlement	
SD10 - Cradley Heath, Mid/late c20 settlement	
SD11 - Central Smethwick and Cape Hill, Pre 1900 settlement	

#### Sandwell District Areas

Oldbury Town
Rowley Regis
Smethwick Town
Tipton Town
Wednesbury Town
West Bromwich Town



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## **Landscape Assessments**

- Landscape Capacity and Landscape Character Assessments have been undertaken for the Rowley Hills area (2023, Lepus Consulting).
- The assessment divides the area into 4 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs):
  - LCA 1 – Warrens Hall Park.
  - LCA 2 – Warrens Hall Farm.
  - LCA 3 – Dudley Golf Club and Turner's Hill.
  - LCA 4 – Portway Road SOS and Bury Hill Park.
- Together they are assessed as highly valuable under Landscape Institute TGN 2021 guidelines.

## **Special Qualities to Protect and Enhance**

- Rich geological and industrial history.
- Diverse habitats and biodiversity designations.
- Setting for heritage assets.
- Distinctive upland landscape and undeveloped skyline.
- Green infrastructure assets.
- Panoramic views across the Black Country.
- Highly valued open spaces.
- Areas of relative tranquillity (particularly in the west).

# 18 IDENTITY APPRECIATION

## 18.1 OVERVIEW

The identity of Sandwell is suggested through the combination of previous themes. People and socio-economics, movement and transport, nature, landscape, and climate, public spaces, and built urban form all play a role in providing an overall view of the borough's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Additionally, analysis of existing physical design attributes provide an evidence base of what positive and negative tropes have been realised in Sandwell, providing a proposition of which current issues to delve into.

It is clear that common features exist across the borough that help form an identity at the larger scale. These include the network of canals, the juxtaposition of residential and industrial, the topography, and the common character of much of the suburban housing across the borough.

Sandwell is though a place of six parts.

The six towns are strong in the community's understanding of local identity. These towns are born of landscape character and historic evolution. The connection between work, home and community has been historically strong in each town, and while this relationship has

changed over recent decades, there remains strong community spirit and sense of connection to and within these towns.

In each town, historic fabric, urban grain and green space underpin local character. Surviving historic buildings on each of the high streets as well as modern community buildings and places of worship form important landmarks in the townscape. Most towns have one or more public parks, many of which have long histories, that connect communities to the wider landscape.

Together, the understanding of this locally specific character and the issues operating at a borough-wide level build up a picture of the identity the Design Code must draw through - celebrating the good and addressing the challenges.



## 18.2 SUMMARY OF ISSUES



### People and socio-economics

Sandwell is a dense borough with a strong sense of community, largely centred around town centres and places of worship, with less than a third of the population being non-religious.

The borough suffers from high levels of deprivation, with higher unemployment and fewer qualifications compared to regional and national averages. While it has a history in manufacturing, retail, and healthcare, Sandwell's economic growth is dependent on supporting quality land for business and addressing the skills gap among its workforce.

An interesting contrast exists in public safety. While people may fear crime, the official data shows that Sandwell's crime rate is actually lower than the average for the wider West Midlands area.

Lastly, environmental health is a major concern due to pollution from industry and vehicles. The area has high carbon dioxide and particulate matter emissions. While efforts have been made to encourage walking and cycling, such as new cycle routes, there is a continued reliance on cars.



### Movement and transport

Vehicular infrastructure dominates the borough, with pedestrians and cyclists coming a firm second on most streets. This causes many issues not least safety concerns, a fact corroborated by collision data. This problem is exacerbated by the high rate of car ownership in the borough, a trend that has been on the rise for the past two decades. The reliance on private vehicles has led to a call for a fundamental shift in the approach to motor vehicles, with the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) being a key starting point for this change.

Despite the high car ownership, analysis suggests that Sandwell's town centres are well positioned to be accessible via active travel. For most residents, key destinations are within a 15-minute cycle, with the exception of the northeast part of the borough. However, the convenience of car travel has created its own set of problems, particularly concerning parking. Even in recently developed schemes, streets have experienced excessive pavement parking and the loss of front gardens to parking.

The borough's transport network is also characterised by significant spatial severance.

Major physical barriers such as railways, canals, and main roads create a lack of permeability, fragmenting communities and hindering seamless movement. While these features pose challenges, the canal network, in particular, is also an asset. There is a need to celebrate this historical network while simultaneously improving safety and access for recreational use.

Sandwell is becoming increasingly well-connected by public transport. The borough is served by a growing network of rail and metro links that run east-west, offering residents viable alternatives to private car use and helping to reduce traffic congestion and environmental impact.

## **Landscape, nature and climate**

Sandwell is a green borough, with 40% of the land area taken up by green space, and with patches of green distributed throughout. The borough has many beautiful green spaces, including multiple nature reserves, however many are not accessible to the public and this distorts the spatial provision meaning some

parts have far less access to green space such as Oldbury. Connections between these green spaces can be limited, with a reliance on the canal network for providing wildlife and green corridors.

Within the borough, a variety of landscape character areas exist, offering opportunities for bespoke, locally-focused initiatives to improve the environment. However, residential streets generally feel less green, underscoring the need for creative ways to increase urban greenery and street trees.

Sandwell faces significant environmental challenges, particularly related to air quality. The borough was declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2005 due to high concentrations of nitrogen dioxide. While overall levels are showing a downward trend, some areas still have high concentrations, primarily due to traffic and congestion.

To address these issues and align with the national 25 Year Environment Plan, there is a need to better link existing habitats to create more resilient ecosystems. The plan aims to improve biodiversity and create a cleaner, greener country.







## Public spaces

Sandwell is notable for its rich and well-maintained soft landscape public spaces. The borough celebrates a significant number of parks, with 32 in total, and an impressive 16 of them have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag status.

The borough's public spaces present a paradox of quality and activation. The soft landscapes are a major strength, providing valuable recreational and natural areas. Conversely, the urban hard landscape, while featuring some good individual spaces, lacks a strong network of spaces for community gathering. The quality of hard civic spaces in the town centres needs attention.



## Built urban form

The built urban form is deeply shaped by its industrial heritage, which has left a significant imprint on the landscape. This legacy is particularly evident along the canal network. While much of this industry has changed, it remains a vital economic component, with many people commuting into the borough for employment. However, this industrial history also contributes to a complex socio-economic picture.

Large industrial plots, often with impenetrable perimeters, fragment the urban fabric and can make areas feel disconnected and inaccessible. Yet, within this landscape there are pockets of high quality, derelict or disused industrial heritage buildings that possess significant opportunities.

Contemporary development in Sandwell presents a mixed picture - the quality of these additions is inconsistent and leans towards specific typologies across the borough, primarily smaller semi-detached homes. Some specific design quality issues are outlined in the following section.

# 19 EMERGING DESIGN ISSUES

## 19.1 BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

Boundary treatments vary across Sandwell with mixed materials, heights, and styles. Over time, original soft landscaped front gardens have been replaced with hardscaped areas for parking and ease of maintenance, similarly with the use of artificial grass. This can lead to issues such as surface water run off and biodiversity loss.

Whether for privacy or security, large walls and gates can create an oppressive feelings along a street front. Additionally, garages utilised as storage space push cars onto driveways, streets, and pavements which exacerbates boundary issues.

Survey analysis across modern developments in the borough shows that boundary treatment is a real indicator of quality. Where a lack of clarity exists between public and private space, problems are generated and the quality of space quickly deteriorates.

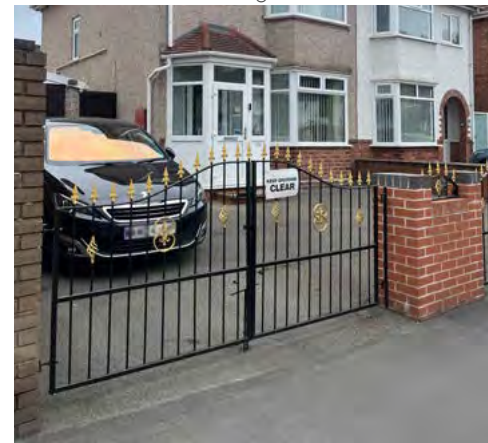
Overleaf is a spectrum of examples showing the range in boundary definition found in the borough from little to strong.



Gated and hardstanding



Zero or limited definition



Gated and hardstanding



Artificial grass

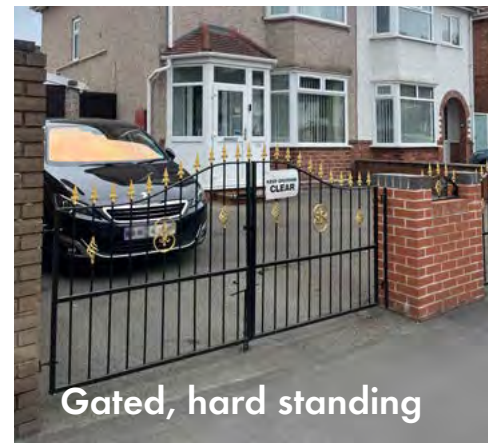


Garage space neglected for cars



Walled and gated, all hardstanding







## 19.2 RETROFIT

Sandwell's buildings and spaces have adjusted to changing economic cycles and lifestyles over the decades. In some instances this has involved innovative adaptation of historic buildings to suit new uses. But more commonly, vacant or underused buildings have been demolished to make way for new developments.

The loss of buildings has multiple negative impacts, most notably in relation to local character and embodied carbon.

There are some great examples in the borough where entrepreneurial spirit has triumphed and bucked the trend found in other parts of the country. The many local public houses which have been retained and turned into desi pubs are a prime example of this. There also industrial buildings which have stood the test of time and now stand as landmarks within industrial areas. But there are many buildings still at risk, where innovative solutions and entrepreneurial spirit is needed to save them from demolition. A retrofit first approach would require any developer to exhaust all options for retrofit before considering demolition and material re-use.



Examples of retrofitted buildings alongside those still vacant and awaiting new uses



### 19.3 RESIDENTIAL - INDUSTRIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between residential and industrial uses are inherent within Sandwell and remains a contention with more recent developments.

Industry fronting, or indeed backing, onto streets with housing presents a challenging and dominative environment induced by the appearance and massing of industrial units.

In addition to the buildings themselves, the associated industrial infrastructure such as road widths and turning requirements, cause detriment to the quality of residential areas.

Opportunities to both enhance the quality of industrial developments in these sensitive contexts, as well as address the quality of streetscape along routes at the juxtaposition will need to be considered.

*Sandwell has a wonderful sense of evolution – continually changing. It allows things to fail and try again. A space for piloting things. The big presence of industry is a key part of this*



Examples of the residential-industrial interface common across the borough

## 19.4 DESIGN QUALITY / FAÇADES

The analysis of recent developments across the borough has highlighted concerns about the design quality coming forward in applications. In particular, a lack of richness in facade design is apparent - with limited articulation beyond simple window and door placement.

Many developments do not appear to have been informed by an analysis of local character and context, with standard house types delivered with little or no changes to pick up local character.

The quality and robustness of materials is also a concern. Rendered façades have weathered badly in many instances.

*The new houses that are being built are so plain. No richness, just brick. But if you look across the road, you see much more rich design*

*Quality of materials is key for visual "enrichment" - doorways / entrances / sills / arches quality lost.*

*New builds are built quickly and the quality is lower*



Examples of building façades and problematic design interventions from across the borough



## STRENGTHS

strong community

accessible town centres

canals

well-maintained parks

industrial heritage

strategic infrastructure links

## WEAKNESSES

residential - industrial relationships

high pollution & emissions

underutilised public spaces

fragmented urban fabric

dominance of cars

## THREATS

continued reliance on cars

air quality issues worsen

inconsistent development quality

## OPPORTUNITIES

encourage active travel

utilise canal network

enhance urban greening

connect green spaces

rejuvenate industrial heritage sites



ED

**NEXT STEPS**

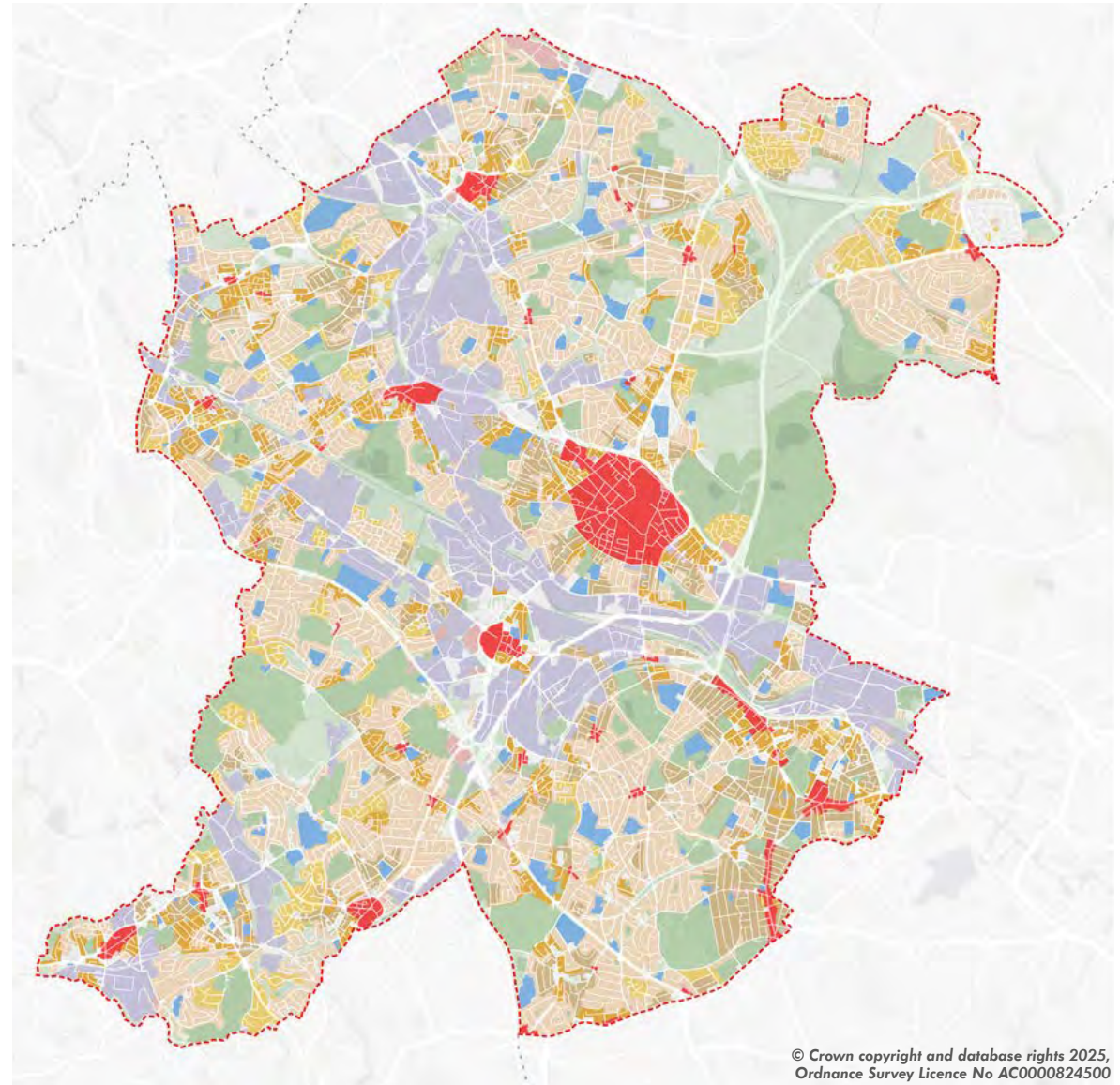
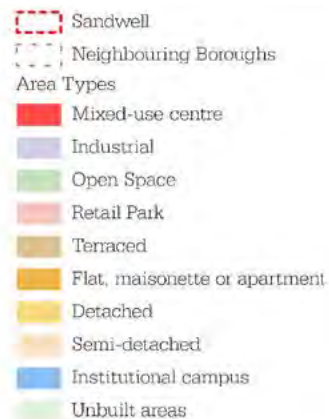


# 20 NEXT STAGE OF WORK

## 20.1 TOWARDS AREA TYPES

Stage 1 has involved extensive analysis and community engagement. The conclusions from bringing together the baseline analysis from this report with the engagement findings are provided in the **Conclusions Summary** document. These conclusions will steer the early thinking on the scope and focus for design guidance and rules that will emerge through the next stages of work.

Stage 2 will involve identifying the design vision for the borough and key places within it. As part of this an important task is to identify area types. These are essentially character informed typologies that define where design codes will apply. This plan shows an initial iteration of existing characters that will inform future area types.

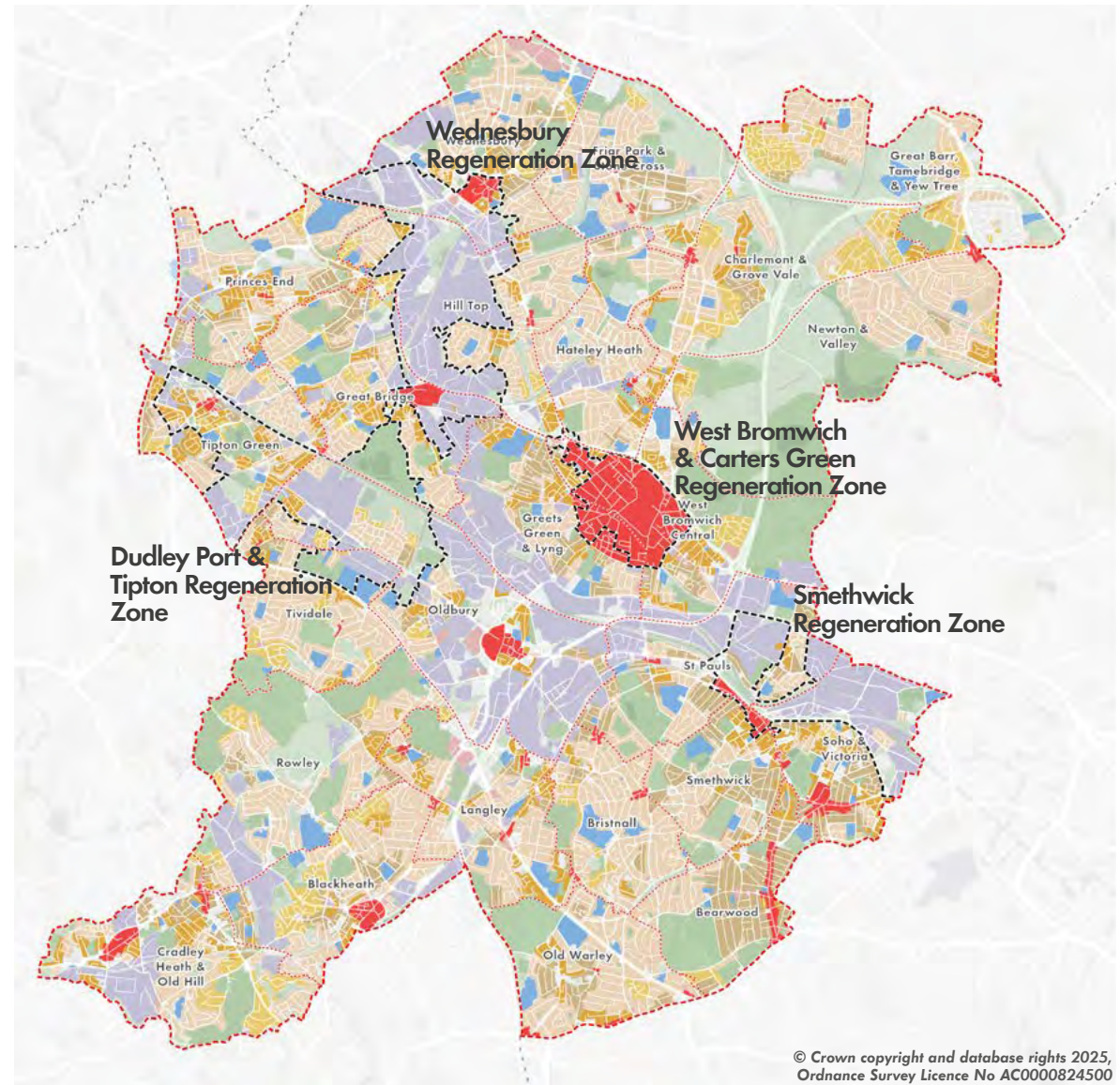


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Initial iteration of existing character types to underpin future area types

Alongside the area types refinement in Stage 2 will also be decisions about which parts of the borough should be subject to area-specific design codes and which parts can be subject to borough-wide guidance and rules.

Early work in preparation for Stage 1 suggested that the borough's four regeneration zones will be the focus for area-specific design codes. These are outlined on the plan here.



Area types plan showing regeneration areas



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**Allies and Morrison**  
October 2025