SANDWELL DES G C D E Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Allies and Morrison with Phil Jones Associates October 2025



Stage 1 Conclusions summary



CONTENTS



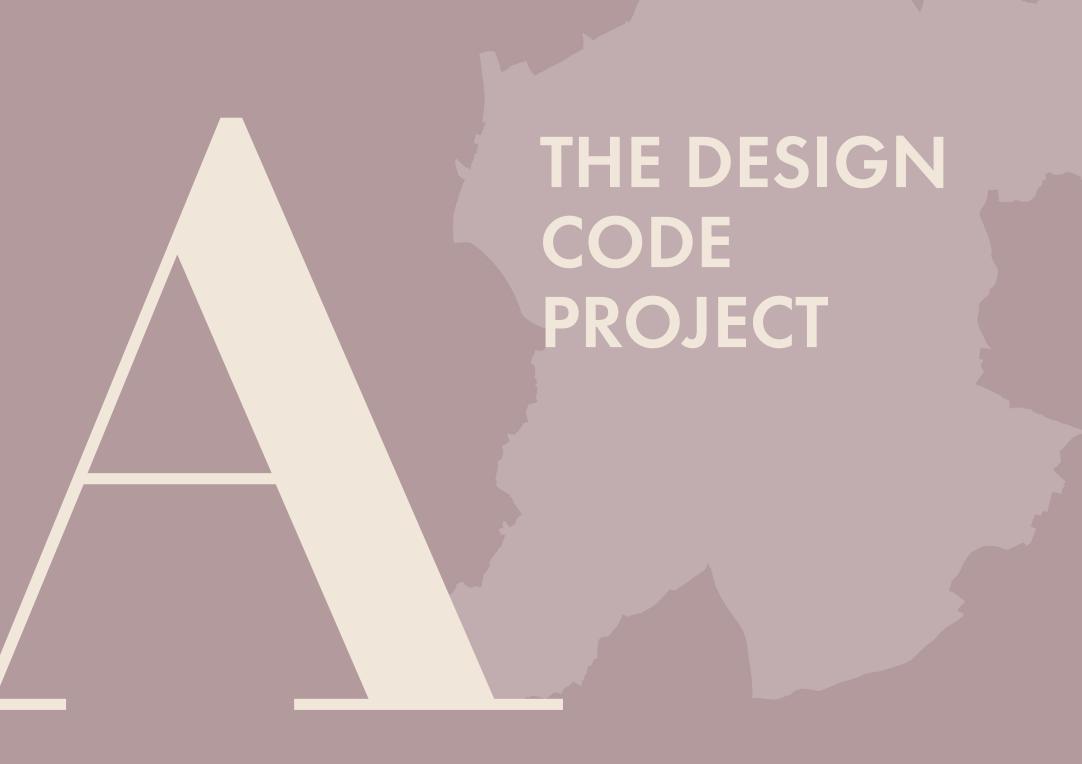
A	THE DESIGN CODE PROJECT	. 3
1	INTRODUCTION	5
2	ENGAGEMENT	€
В	CORRELATING THEMES	10
3	VEHICULAR INFRASTRUCTURE	12
4	HEALTH	17
5	GREENING AND TREE PLANTING	23
6	THE CANAL NETWORK	27
7	SAFETY AND THE FEAR OF CRIME	30
8	PUBLIC SPACES AND COMMUNITY	
	INFRASTRUCTURE	33
9	HOUSING MIX	37
10	DESIGN QUALITY	40
11	BOUNDARY TREATMENTS	44
12	SPATIAL SEVERANCE	47
13	INDUSTRY	50
С	NEXT STEPS	5 3

The collage pictures used throughout this document have been prepared for the Design Code project using a mix of contemporary and historic images from the borough. This includes images from the Jubilee Arts Archive: www.jubileeartsarchive.com

All maps in this report use Ordnance Survey data under Sandwell Council's licence:

© Crown copyright and database rights 2025, Ordnance Survey Licence No AC0000824500.

You are permitted to use this data solely to enable you to respond to, or interact with, the organisation that provided you with the data. You are not permitted to copy, sub-license, distribute, or sell any of this data to third parties in any form.











West Bromwich



Cradley Heath





Smethwick









Oldbury



EXPLORING



Victoria Park Smethwick



Tipton details



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 FIRST PHASE OF WORK

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 an increasing influence of Birmingham and Wolverhampton. There is a history of strong local communities focused around key industries. Communities have seen significant population change over last 50 years, bringing with it new vibrancy and activities.

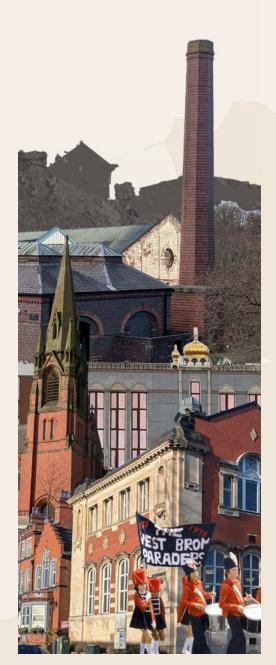
There is significant pressure and desire for growth in Sandwell - for both industry and homes.

Sandwell Council has commissioned a team led by Allies and Morrison to prepare a Design Code for the borough. A Design Code is a planning document that includes a set of design requirements for the physical development of an area. It will include a review and replacement of the existing Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document. The Design Code is to be shaped by a deep understanding of the borough and led by community priorities on design. Its 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.
- 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 (this document).

This Conclusions Summary identifies the common themes across the whole of Stage 1 work - so the correlating themes that came out strongly through both the community engagement and the baseline analysis. It is very much about summarising the headline issues to be addressed in an easily digestible form. Please do consult the more detailed reports for further information.



2 ENGAGEMENT

2.1 OUTREACH

The team has undertaken extensive engagement, both with local communities and internally with various departments in the Council.

Between the end of June and mid September the team took a pop-up market stall to a host of local events including the SHAPE Youth Festival and local community days such as the Brasshouse Community Open Day. A mix of in-person and online discussions have also been had with local community interest groups. An online survey on the Council's Design Code website was also promoted for further input. All these activities have been invaluable in feeding the project with detailed local knowledge and a sense of the priority issues to be addressed.









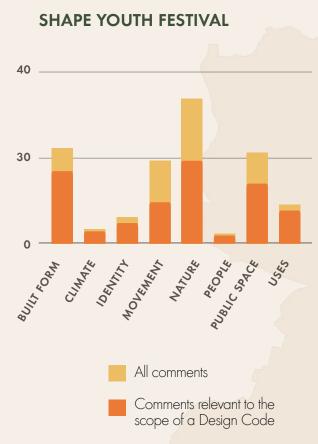


2.2 RANGE OF COMMENTS

The team asked local communities two prompt questions to start discussions: what they thought was special about their neighbourhood; and what they would like new development to respond to. This generated insightful conversations and comments that the team transcribed and analysed.

They covered a host of topics from trees to community centres, and shopfronts to bin storage. The graphs shown here give a sense of the coverage of comments. Some of the issues raised are aspects that are well within the scope of a design code to address, others can less easily be impacted by a design code but provide valuable context for informing priorities.





2.3 **COMMON THREADS**

Across all the engagement inputs there are some common themes that have emerged. The five shown here were the most popular topics of conversation. Within these themes are a wealth of detailed views and also differences in opinion. All the findings from the engagement have been looked at alongside the baseline data and site survey analysis to identify correlating themes, and to help prioritise the issues that the future Sandwell Design Code should address. The following section summarises these.

Community

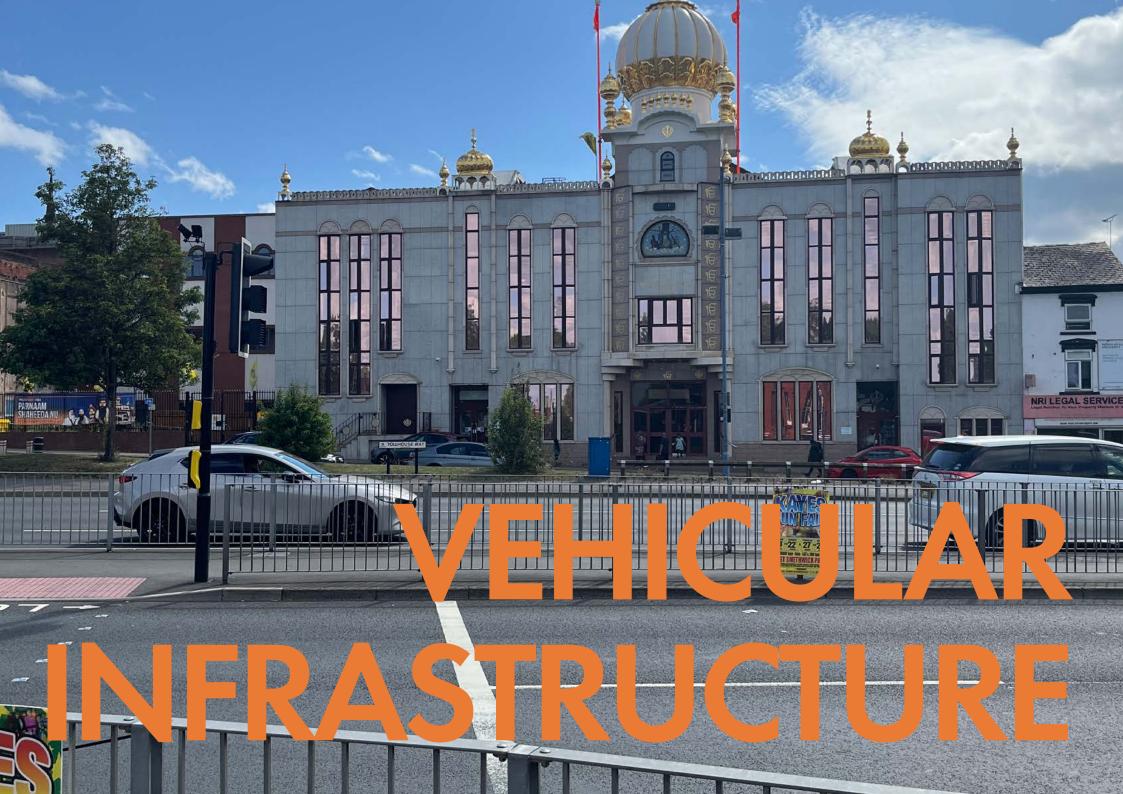
infrastructure



Transport

infrastructure





3 VEHICULAR INFRASTRUCTURE

3.1 CAR DOMINANCE





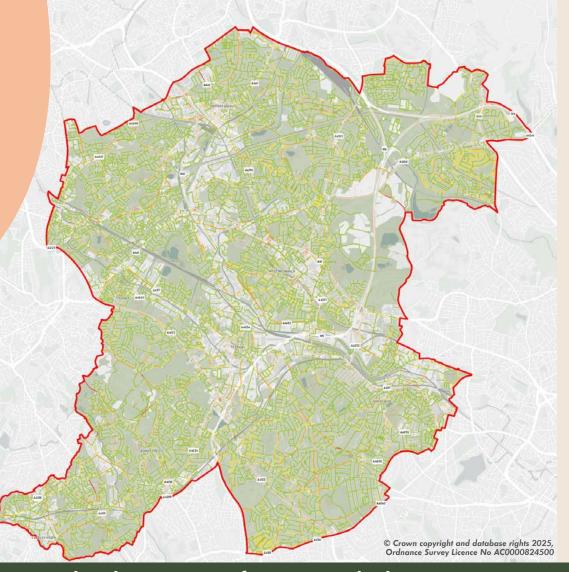
The road round
Victoria Park experiences
speeding issues

Cars drive too fast around my estate

Stop speeding cars!

Speed measures make spaces safer The average speeds of vehicles on most of Sandwell's highway network are below 20mph, but speeding is a common concern.





Despite improvements in access to public transport, the dominance of private vehicles continues to grow.

Stop speeding cars!

LEGEND Severity

- Fatal
- Serious
- Slight

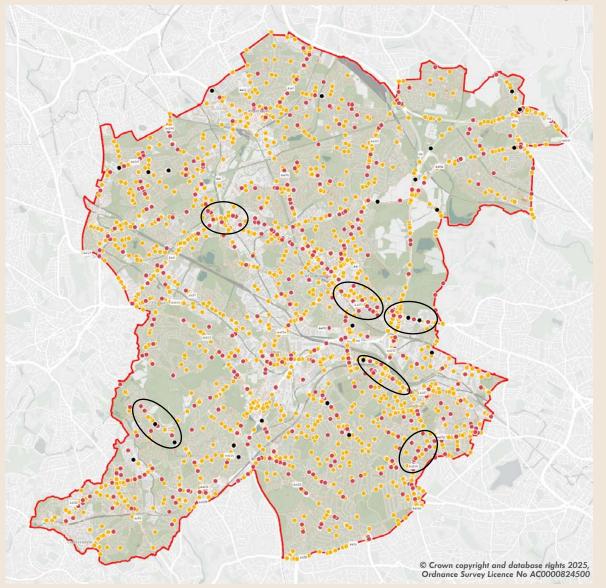
3.2 COLLISIONS

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.

There are some clusters of accidents - mostly on main roads, but also on local streets with lots of activity.

In the development of the design code, this data can be used to inform street design and movement parameters.



3.3 **CAR OWNERSHIP**

The average car ownership across Sandwell has increased over the last two decades, this includes across all parts of the borough, and is increasing at a faster rate than elsewhere in the West Midlands and UK.





Average Car Ownership Per Dwelling (All Types and Tenure)



3.4 PARKING ISSUES

Workshops and site visits have highlighted parking to be a real challenge across the borough leading to the loss of front gardens and extensive pavement parking.

Pavement parking is a real issue. Sometimes I have to go on the grass with my mobility scooter to get round.

Households use to have 1 car, now each has 2 or 3

More parking, drives are blocked Boundary treatments have been lost to parking, we need to reinforce identity

Parking is starting to dominate streets

I dislike the lack of parking













Parking is a high priority but it is a divisive topic. Many residents want better provision. Informal and formal parking can lead to a reduction in soft landscape amongst other issues.



4 HEALTH

4.1 AIR POLLUTION FROM VEHICLES



Main roads are always busy!



Great Bridge
Tipton Green

Tividale

Greets Green & Lyng

Hill Top

Wednesbury

Friar Park & Stone Cross

Hateley Heath

Bromwich Central

St Pauls

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

& Yew Tree

Need to focus on improving people's mental health

Streets aren't safe for cycling

Rubbish dumps in the air area - sulphurs in the air

Cradley
Heath &
Old Hill

© Crown copyright and database rights 2025,
Ordnance Survey Licence No AC0000824500

Air pollution from vehicles is a driver of health deprivation in the borough. The presence of major roads as well as high volumes of vehicles on local roads feeds this.

4.2 PARTICULATE AIR POLLUTION

Particulate matter air 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).

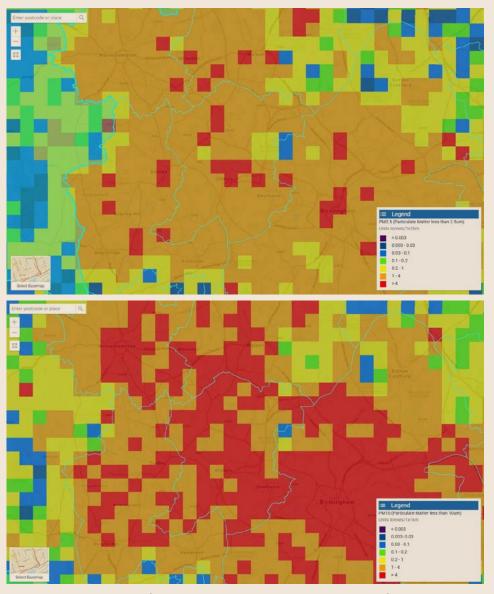
"Ambient fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is the world's leading environmental health risk factor." (McDuffie et al, 2021, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-23853-y).

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.

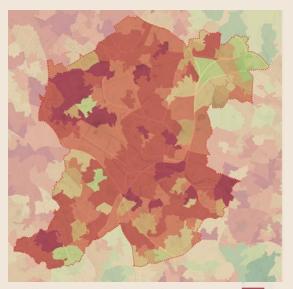
"Children and infants are susceptible to harm from inhaling pollutants such as PM because they inhale more air per pound of body weight than do adults - they breathe faster, spend more time outdoors and have smaller body sizes. In addition, children's immature immune systems may cause them to be more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

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



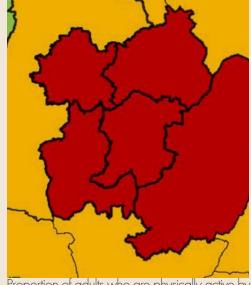
Top: PM2.5 particulate matter Bottom: PM10 particulate matter

The Health Deprivation and Disability decile is an important contributor to Sandwell's overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (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.



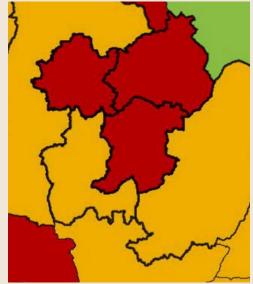
Health Deprivation and Disability
Decile (where 1 is in the most deprived
10% of areas in England) © Indices
of Deprivation 2019 for the Ministry
of Housing, Communities & Local
Government (MHCLG)

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.

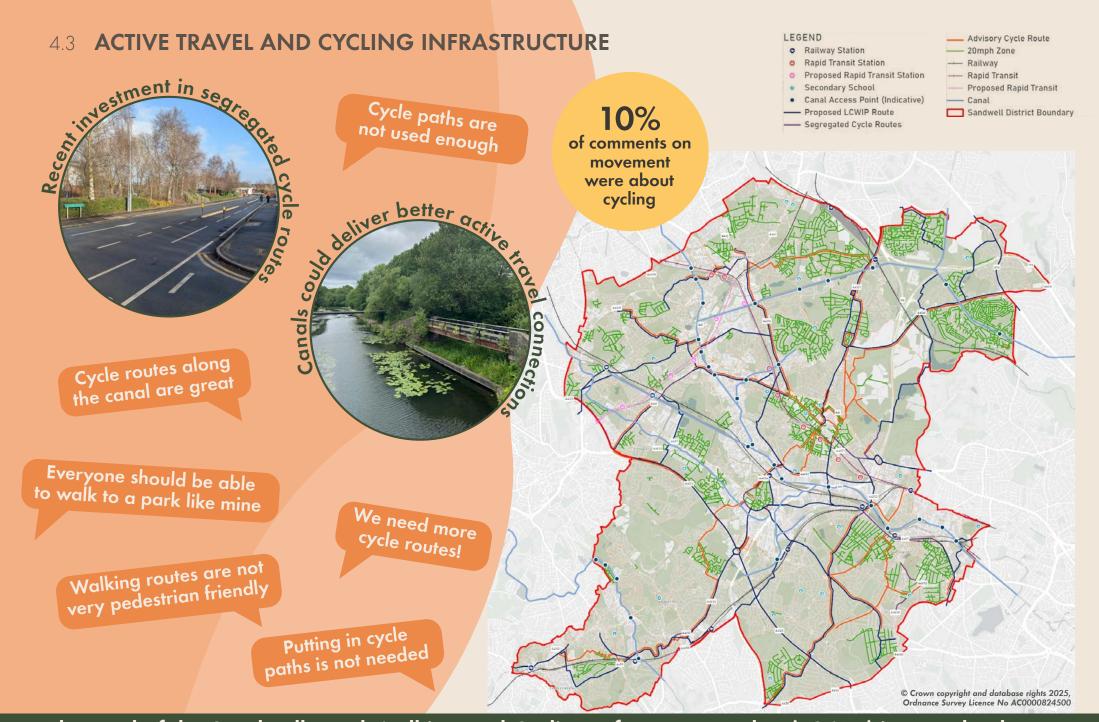


Proportion of adults who are physically active by district (red indicates less than two-thirds are active), Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles. 2025 © Crown copyright 2025

The percentage of overweight adults is high in the borough with 71.6% of adults classified as overweight. This emphasises the need to provide infrastructure to support healthy lifestyle choices including safe and attractive active travel routes and green spaces for recreation.



Proportion of adults who are obese (red indicates over 68% are obese), Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles. 2025 © Crown copyright 2025



The goal of the Sandwell Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is to make these modes of transport more accessible, safe, and enjoyable for all users.

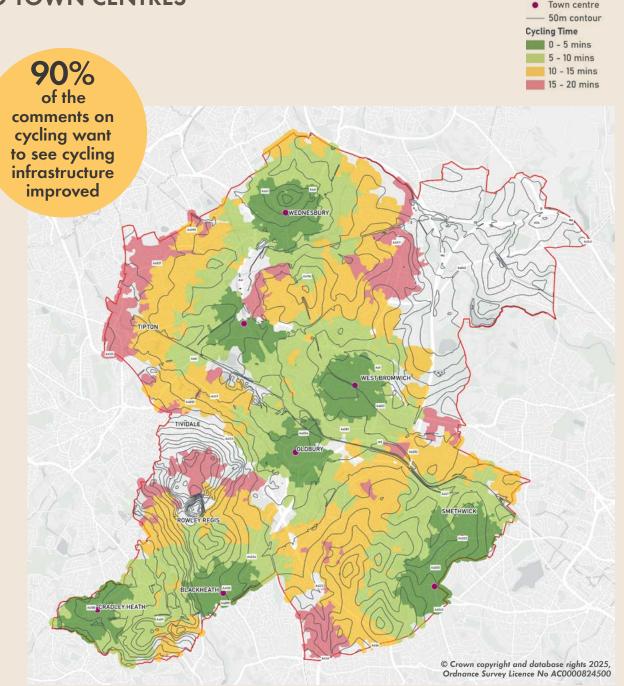
4.4 ACCESSIBILITY - CYCLING TIMES TO TOWN CENTRES

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.

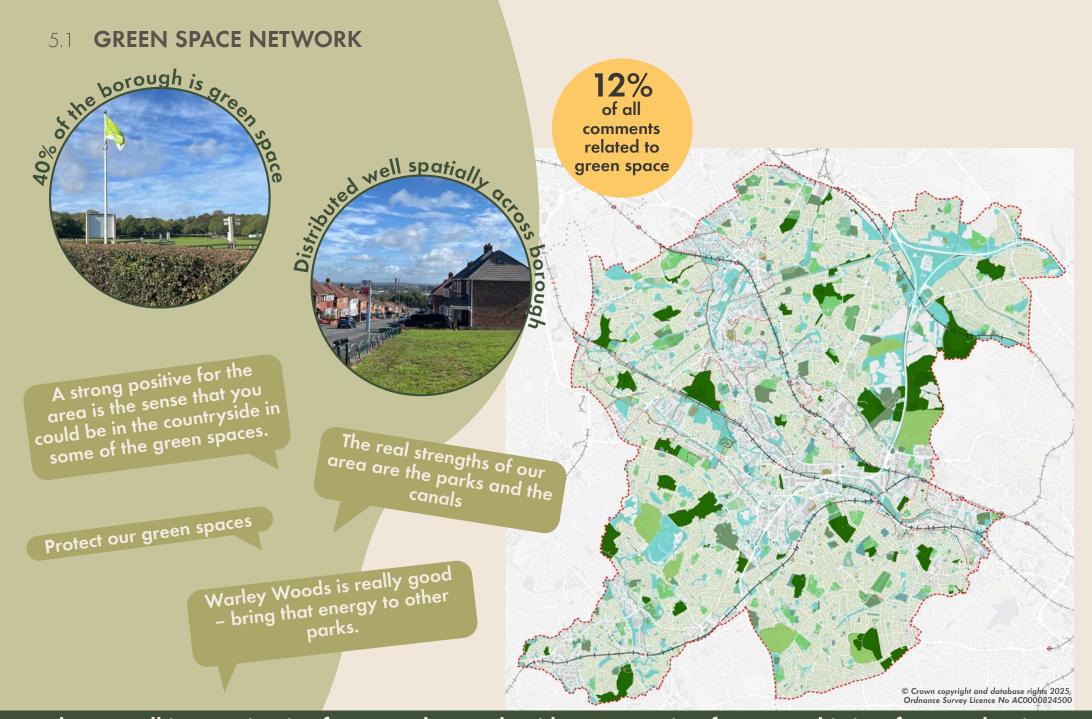
Town centres offer areas of employment, retail and other civic uses - all of which are important for a vibrant local community.

Access to town centres by cycling is varied. The majority of Sandwell is within a 15 minute cycle to a town centre, but there are also significant areas which are more than 20 minutes cycle time.

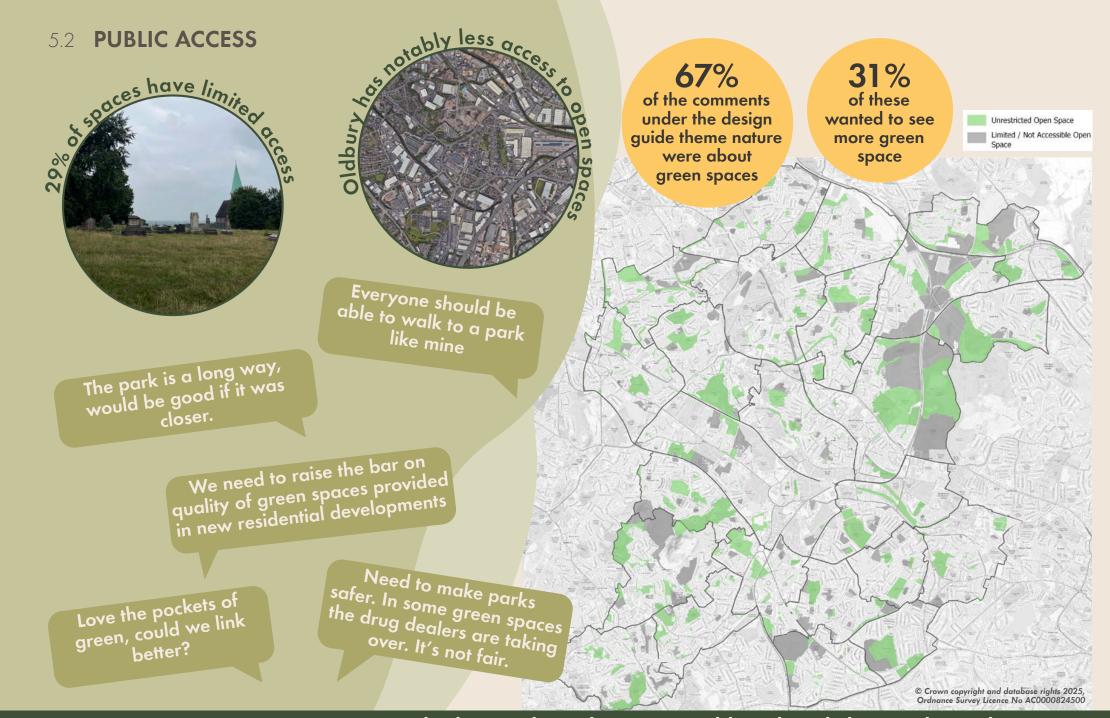
While cycling journey times to and from town centres provide an indication of accessibility in terms of journey times, they do not provide an indication of the quality of the cycle infrastructure.



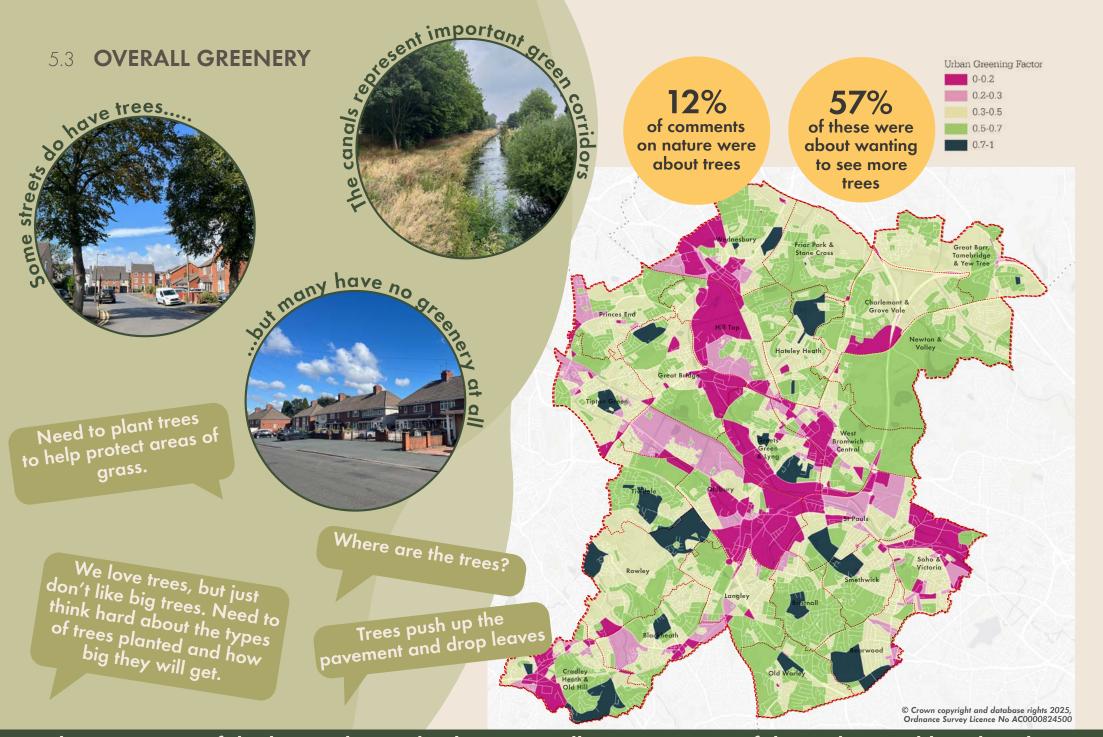




The overall impression is of a green borough with a great mix of spaces. This is a feature that is highly valued by local people.



Access to open space varies across the borough, with some neighbourhoods having limited options. Communities want parks to be safe spaces.



The greenness of the borough's parks does not spill out into many of the wider neighbourhoods. Significant areas have no street trees and limited greenery beyond back gardens.



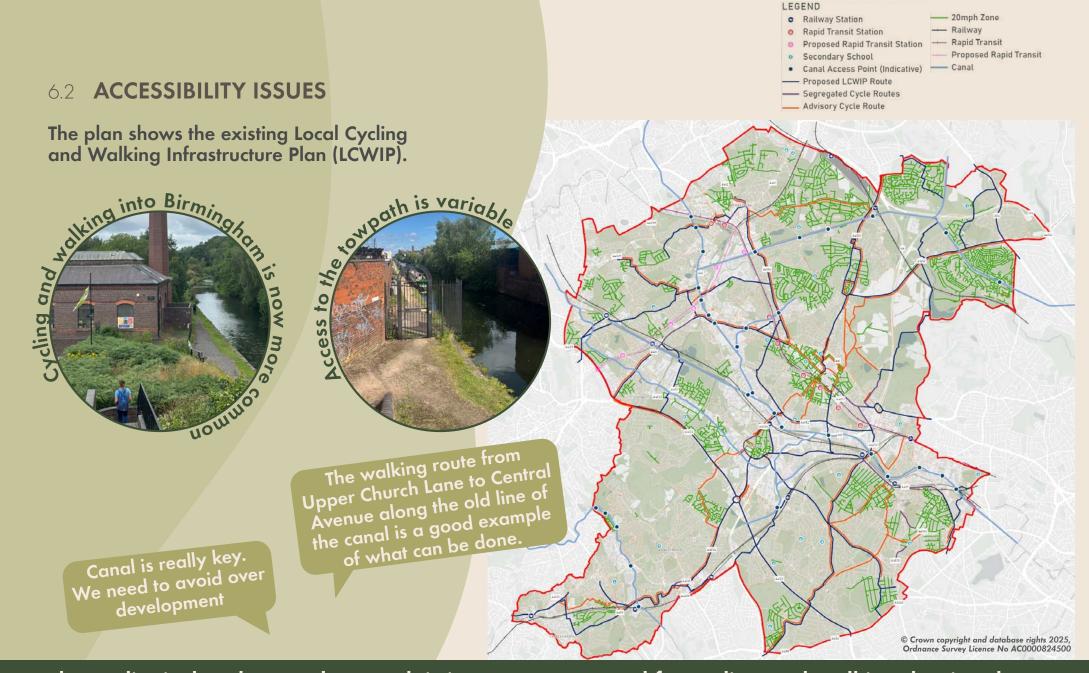
6 THE CANAL NETWORK

THE NEED TO CELEBRATE Canals are key part of the character and should There is not enough signage to the waterways be seen as arterial parks The Boat Gauging House is at real risk - we need to give new life to these great buildings linked to the canal restoration Zones It would be great to have canal-side WEST BROMWICH cafés to create vibrancy Sol waterway Cycle routes along the canal are great © Crown copyright and database rights 2025, Ordnance Survey Licence No AC0000824500

Archaeological Priority Areas

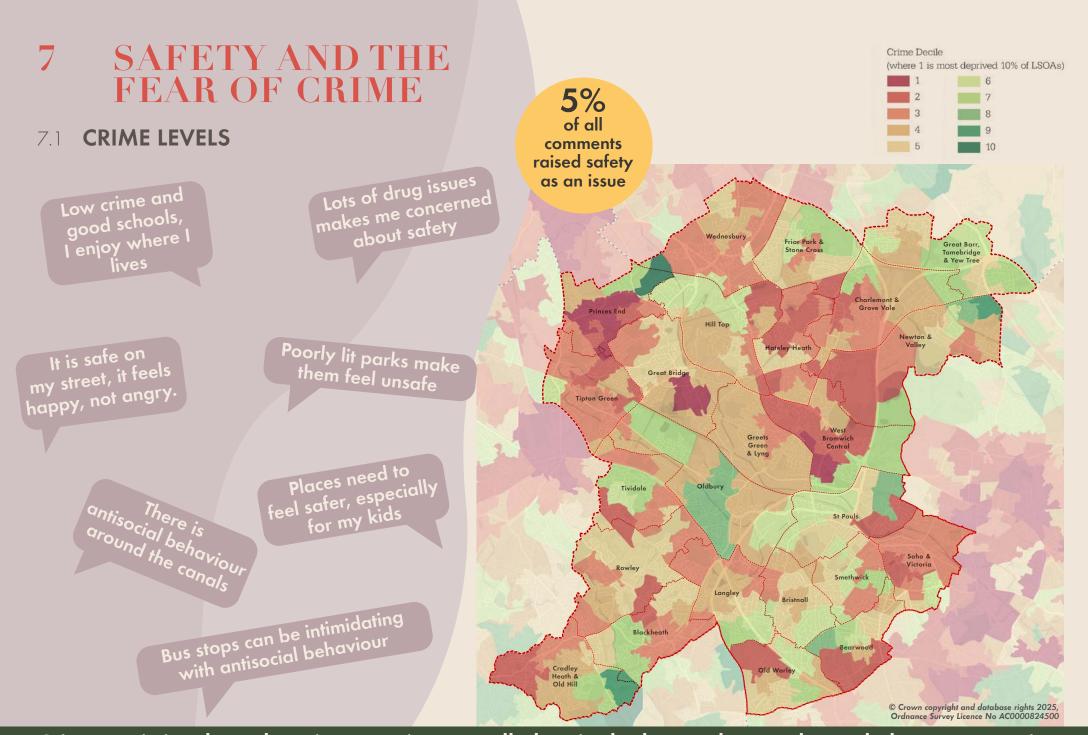
Areas of Potential Archaeological

Local people really love the canals and are keen to seem them celebrated more, including the historic buildings around them, and opportunities to bring new frontage and activity realised.



The reality is that the canal network is in some parts good for cycling and walking, but in others pretty bad. Access points are limited and the continuity of routes is patchy. There are also long stretches with no frontage or activity overlooking the canal, many of which are in deep cuttings.





Crime statistics show the crime rate is generally low in the borough. Local people have contrasting views - some find it very safe, others see it as a top priority for improvement.

7.2 ANECDOTAL ISSUES

An important role for the Design Code is to balance Secured by Design principles and measures to support improved perception of safety.





I like my house and neighbours, It feels safe!

Groups of kids are intimidating. Too many people hanging around.

Need cameras to make parks safe

Wednesbury feels safe - some good new development

Better shared entries to flats would feel safer Safety and crime are a top priority.

For the Design Code the priorities on safety look to be provision of community infrastructure as part of new development, and well-defined spaces with well-positioned entrances to buildings.



8 PUBLIC SPACES AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCT

8.1 LACK OF QUALITY PUBLIC SPACES

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

Young people must feel safe, we should make spaces for them to feel connected again 8% of the comments under nature wanted to see more play areas





Young people need activities and places to go

12% of the comments on public space were about safety concerns

The New square West Brom is good.





Overall there is a desire to see more quality public spaces, both in town centres and nearer to local neighbourhoods.

8.2 LACK OF COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

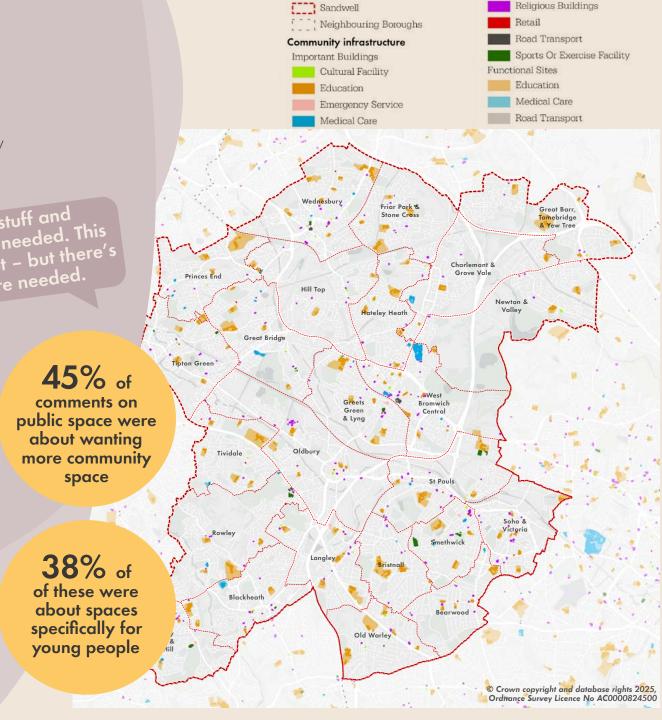
Sandwell's community infrastructure is shaped by educational and religious facilities that serve as social anchors throughout the borough.

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

Lots of concern about the loss or lack of community facilities.

Everyone agreed there was a big need for community spaces.

Community infrastructure is key. Need more spaces in the community.



8.3 RELIANCE ON PLACES OF WORSHIP

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.













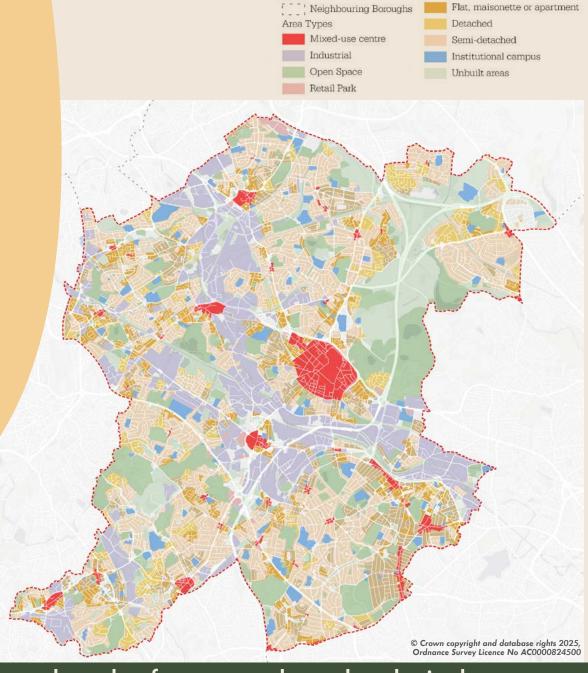
9 HOUSING MIX

9.1 SUBURBAN HOUSING DOMINATES

Across the borough's residential areas the vast majority is suburban housing - commonly semi-detached or garden city style. Local people have a preference for houses over flats, a view that is driven by concerns that flats don't support families and aren't good quality. The Design Code will need to explore the demand for a range of types and sizes of accommodation to meet local needs, achieve high quality design that creates an uplift in quality where needed, and improve accessiblity by sustainable transport.

We have nice traditional buildings and homes in Sandwell

We need to be building houses not flats



Sandwell

Suburban housing is the dominant housing typology, but future growth needs to be in denser forms and will need to challenge local communities whose preference is for houses.

9.2 INTERGENERATION LIVING AND THE POLARISED NEEDS

More need for assisted/
independent living. Not enough
properties to downsize.
Not enough independent
bungalows / flats / communal
spaces.

...interested in high rise....
we should not be frightened of
3 or 4 floors. More European
attitude to living....People
may have to behave, sharing
common spaces.

of the comments
under the theme
built form were about
needing a wider
range of housing
typologies

Bigger homes for intergenerational living means more expensive? How can we make it affordable?







New housing must deliver better homes at the extremes to address local needs - this means good quality flatted schemes that work for families as well as single people, and the integration of more innovative designs to support multi-generational living.



10 DESIGN QUALITY

10.1 LACK OF RICHNESS IN FACADE DESIGN

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

More robust materials - no buff bricks

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

New builds are built quickly and the quality is lower













Façade's tend to lack contemporary design and the material palette is limited, with materials weathering badly. Car space provision also plays a role in lower quality.

10.2 STANDARD PROVISION

The borough has seen extensive housing development in recent decades but there have been limited examples where the quality of design has stepped beyond basic provision. Viability is a concern and there is a need to establish design quality thresholds that raise the bar without making developments unviable.

New developments not great, after a few years don't look great at all.

New development – same standard everywhere, it needs be better.

Sites have been developed without enough parking – and so now there are cars all over the pavement.

The flatted development where I live was really thought about in it's design it is lovely

of the comments under the built form theme were about wanting to see better quality of materials and design

of survey respondents said that there were no good examples of new development in their area

The approach to new builds is similar throughout the borough with a low range of tenure options and only basic standard forms selected.

10.3 HOUSING - RELATED NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

The general low quality design is evident and recognised by local people. At its worse this can result in residents feeling unsafe.

Not flats – nothing too tall Flats make sense for crisis, want more detached houses but we need lots of houses.

New apartment block – are they stupid? Who wants to live there?

New developments – such as the top of Rowley by the church look like they'd be really noisy flats and therefore difficult to live in. Noise insulation – need to make sure developments stick to the rules on insulation to make flats liveable.

9%
expressed
negative comments
about housing
stock and
quality







11 BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

10.4 INDICATOR OF QUALITY

A lack of boundary treatments has been revealed as a real indicator of poor quality more generally. The lack of clarity between public and private space generates lots of problems.

There is range of different boundary treatment across the borough, with cultural influences further diversifying the approach. Some, whilst clearly defining public and private space, can feel oppressive.





























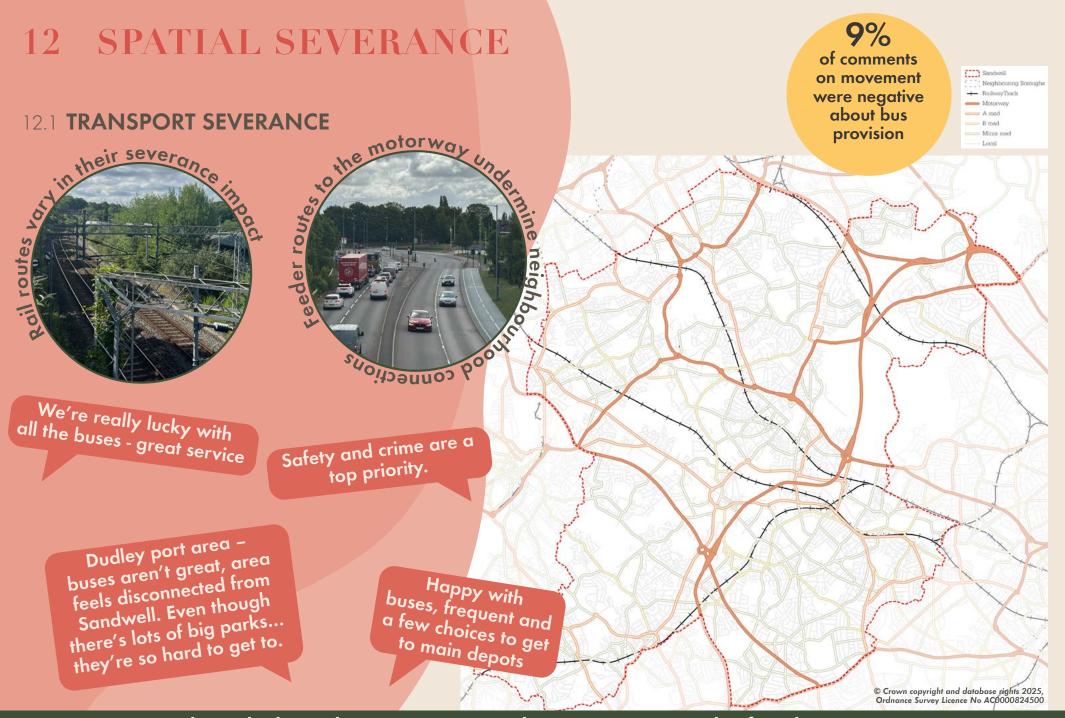




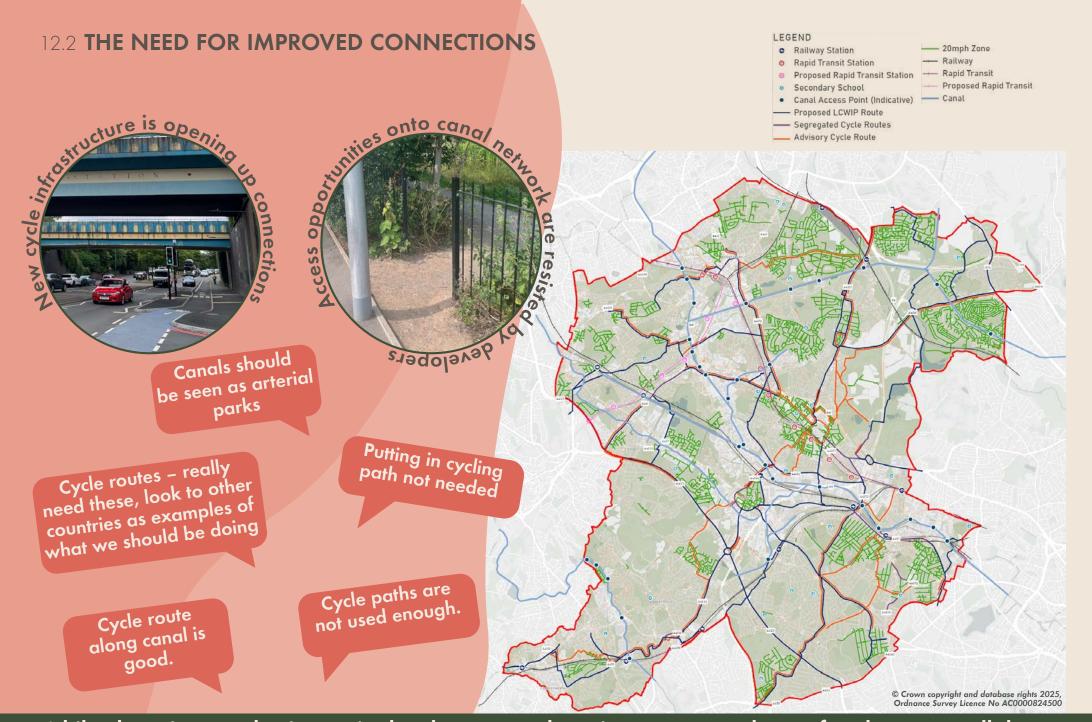








Easy movement by vehicle and train is prioritised over connections by foot between neighbourhoods. New developments need to help increase permeability where possible.



Whilst there is some hesitancy in the short term about investment and use of cycle routes, all the evidence points towards the expansion of this being key to Sandwell's future.



13 INDUSTRY

13.1 A PHYSICAL BARRIER



The industrial areas align with the railways and canals and together they combine to reduce permeability in central parts of the borough.

Canals are a key part of the industrial character.



Permeability Plot perimeter

1-1000

© Crown copyright and database rights 2025, Ordnance Survey Licence No AC0000824500

Neighbouring Boroughs

Regeneration areas

Industrial areas contribute to the fragmented character of the borough, but it's important they are supported in situ to enable economic viability.

13.2 RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSING

The historic evolution of industry in the borough means most industrial areas are cheek by jowl with residential neighbourhoods. This means many streets have homes on one side and the backs of industrial sheds on the other.

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

Within the industrial areas we want to see some planting within the parking courts.











13.3 APPROACH TO RETROFIT

The surviving historic buildings in industrial areas have strong architectural character and opportunities for retrofit should be maximised where possible. New designs should also reference their design in terms of scale, form and materiality.



Improve and recycle buildings!

Need creative new uses for these old buildings

Developers need to look at retrofit options first.





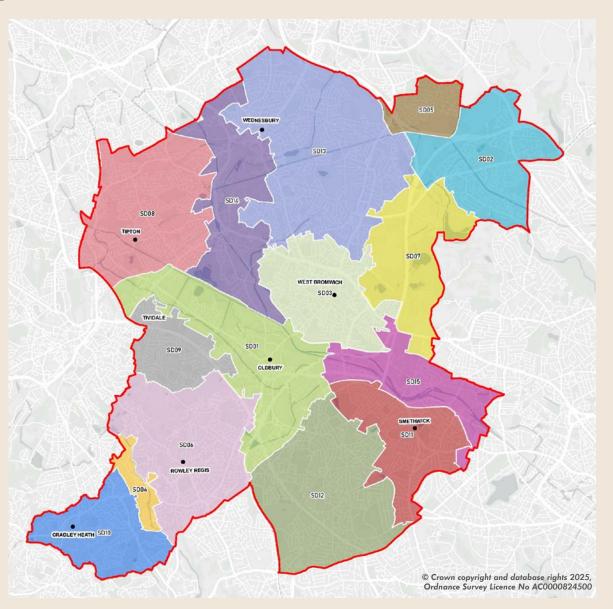
There is strong support for re-using old buildings. Climate ambitions point towards a retrofit first approach, but viability will continue to be a constraint in some instances.



14.1 REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

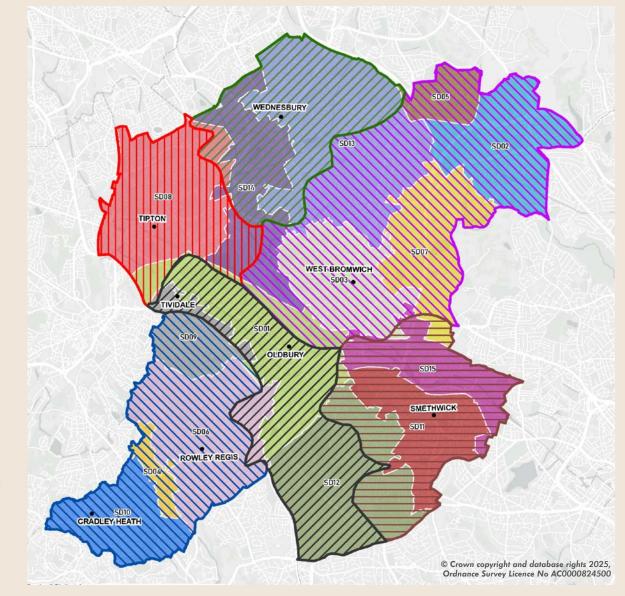
The Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Assessment, which was completed in 2019, identified a number of areas which have distinct landscape characters. The Local Character Areas for Sandwell are set out below and identified on the plan.

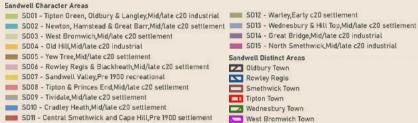
LEGEND Town Centre SD01 - Tipton Green, Oldbury & Langley, Mid/late c20 industrial SD02 - Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr, Mid/late c20 settlement SD03 - West Bromwich, Mid/late c20 settlement SD04 - Old Hill, Mid/late c20 industrial SD05 - Yew Tree, Mid/late c20 settlement SD06 - Rowley Regis & Blackheath, 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



14.2 SANDWELL'S SIX TOWNS

Sandwell Character Areas have been overlaid with Sandwell's six town areas to highlight common characteristics. There is a strong synergy between the two which suggests the six town boundaries make a sensible starting point for defining character areas. An understanding of local character will be central to informing any area-specific codes or rules that need to vary between different parts of the borough.



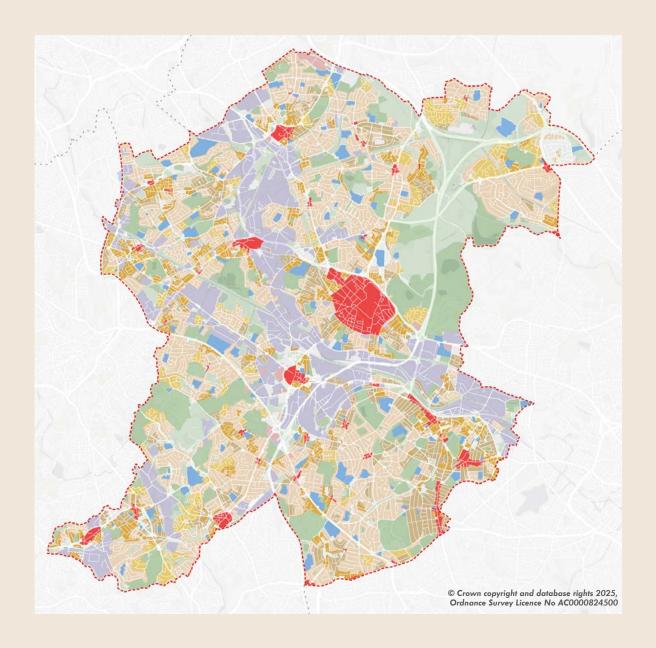


14.3 TOWARDS AREA TYPES

Stage 1 has involved extensive analysis and community engagement. The conclusions from bringing together the baseline analysis and the engagement findings here will steer the early thinking on the scope and focus for design guidance and rules that will emerge through the next stages of work.

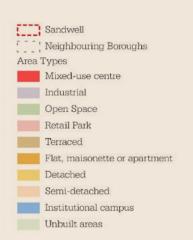
Stage 2 will involve identifying the design vision for the borough and key places within it. As part of this an important task is to identify area types. These are essentially character informed typologies that define where design codes will apply. This plan shows an initial iteration of existing characters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





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 boroughwide 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.





Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners is not responsible for nor shall be liable for the consequences of any use made of this Report other than that for which it was prepared by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners for the Client unless Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners provides prior written authorisation for such other use and confirms in writing that the Report is suitable for it. It is acknowledged by the parties that this Report has been produced solely in accordance with the Client's brief and instructions and without any knowledge of or reference to any other parties' potential interests in or proposals for the Project.

Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners accepts no responsibility for comments made by members of the community which have been reflected in this report.

THANKYOU

Please do say in touch with the Sandwell Design Code project and have your say at

www.sandwell.gov.uk/TheDesignCode

