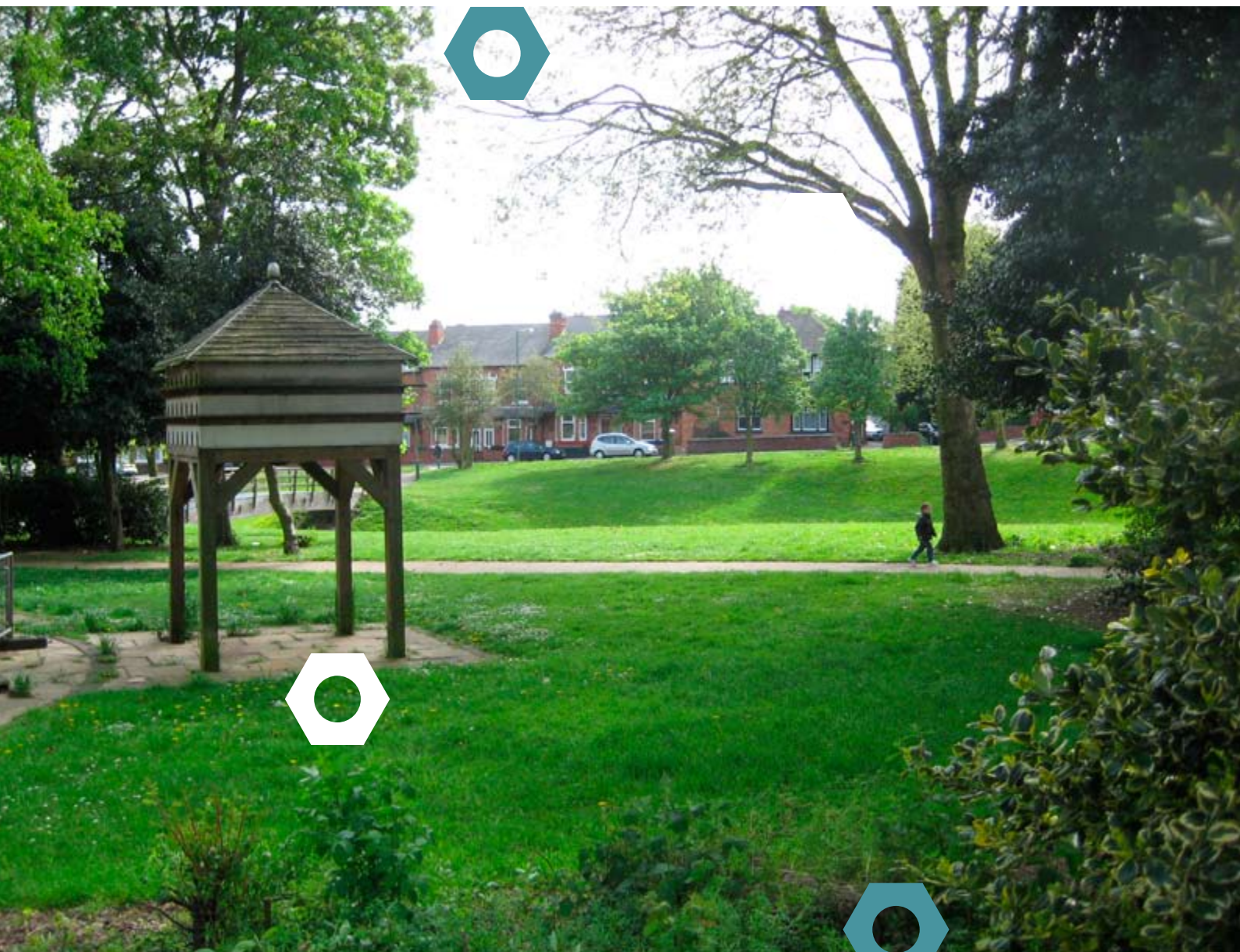


# DARLASTON STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

August 2009





Walsall Council



urbed



SQWconsulting



August 2009

For all matters regarding this project please contact Helen Flage  
by calling:  
0161 200 5500  
or e-mailing: [helen@urbed.coop](mailto:helen@urbed.coop)  
or posting: URBED, 10 Little Lever Street, Manchester, M1 1HR



Canal side near George Rose Park

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# DIAGNOSIS

Darlaston began as a small medieval farming settlement and grew throughout the industrial revolution to become a prosperous Victorian metalworking Black Country town specialising, eventually, in the manufacture of nuts and bolts which were exported all over the world. It was during this time of sudden growth in population and industrial wealth that the 'Victorian Town' of Darlaston, that we see today, was established. By the 1950s and '60s Darlaston was regarded as the industrial engine of the country.

Since those times the areas manufacturing and engineering base has significantly contracted in part due to global competition. The current challenging business and enterprise environment pre-date the onset of the current recession and are illustrated by the significant decline in employment (900 persons from 2003-2007). The large increases in financial and public service employment experienced by the UK economy as a whole have almost entirely bypassed Darlaston.

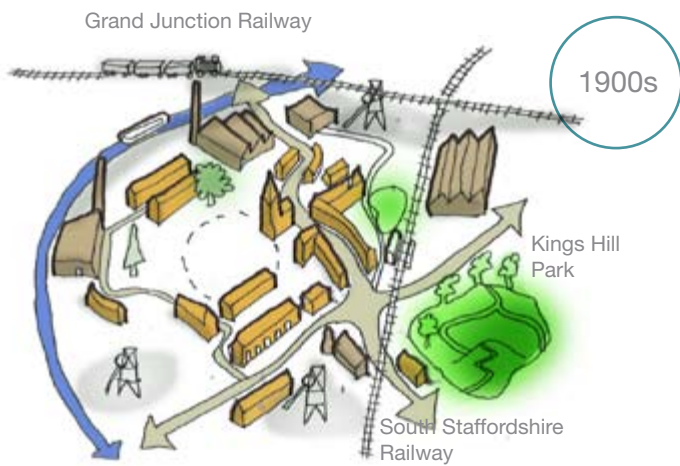
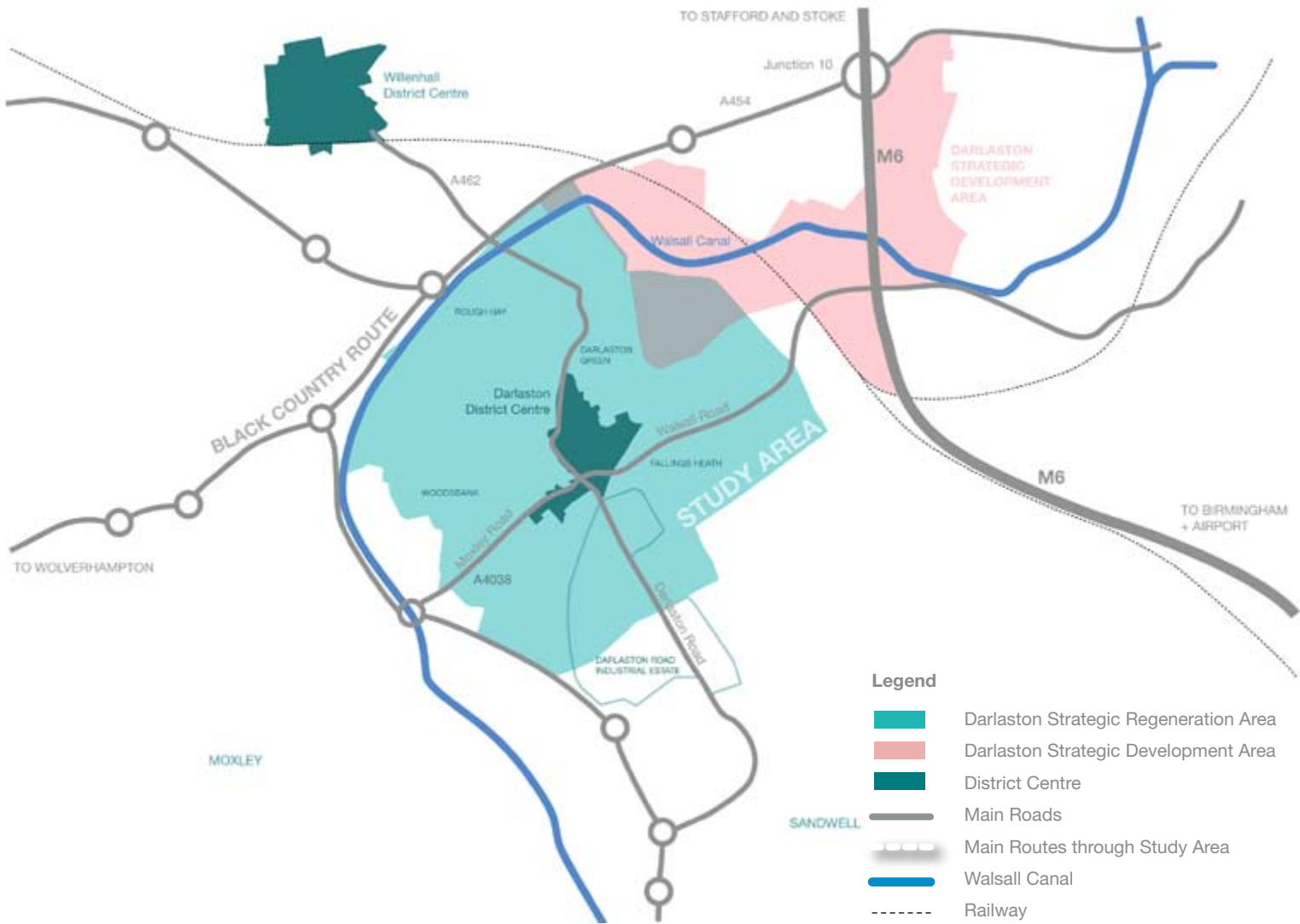
Over time a hollowing out has occurred of the town which has seen the transition from a self-sufficient closely connected and inter-related series of residential areas, factories, workshops and town centre to a fragmented area with a contracted economic role and function. This has been accompanied by out migration and the shrinking of the town centre.

The legacy of the past has left a workforce struggling to adapt to the changing economy and employment opportunities.

To an extent the infrastructure of the town remains but is inhabited by more of a neighbourhood, 'a neighbourhood living in a town's body' as one consultation participant as put it. This poses the question of do you refit the neighbourhood to fill the town's body? (i.e. by sustainable growth) or do you encourage the town to downsize to a neighbourhood or series of neighbourhoods?. The answer is probably somewhere inbetween.....

The further assessment of the most sustainable strategy for Darlaston raises important questions in terms of the relationship of Darlaston with the wider region for jobs and services and in terms of future growth, stability and contraction in terms of the role of the town centre, housing areas, employment land, public transport and social infrastructure.





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# DARLASTON'S PEOPLE

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Population contraction has followed the decline in employment as people move towards areas perceived as offering greater economic opportunity. The population of Darlaston South has contracted by 3.5% in the six years to 2007. Overall the population of the two wards has shrunk by 630 persons in just 6 years from 2007. This de-population is particularly pronounced in the working age population leaving an increasing proportion of retired people.

The increase in economic activity shown by the working age population across Walsall as a whole is not mirrored in Darlaston. Economic inactivity rates are higher in Darlaston South than Bentley and Darlaston North. Particularly high claimant rates are in Fallings Heath and Rough Hay West which also has the highest incapacity benefit rate, double the regional and national rates. The latest figures report a significant increase in JSA claimants in Walsall over the last year of a 3.38% increase, ranked the 5th largest increase in Britain. This reveals the vulnerability of the Darlaston area to current recessionary pressures.

Another trend is high economic inactivity in the working age ethnic population with evidence that the reduction in employment opportunities in Walsall is being disproportionately shared by the areas ethnic population.

There has been a substantial shift in the Walsall borough's employment base make up over recent years which have seen an increase in the professional groups and in personal service occupations and a decline in administrative and secretarial occupations.

However lower skilled occupations are over-represented in the Darlaston area. Elementary occupations are 50% higher than national averages. More noticeable is the expansion of Process, Plant & Machine operatives which are over double the national average and 30% higher than Walsall for this particular occupational group. There is an under-representation of high-value occupations (professional, technical, managers etc).

A greater level of out-commuting has been witnessed from Walsall to other districts which indicate greater income prospects which are worth the travel to work. There is no evidence of this in Darlaston where the labour market shows significant self containment. This is in part due to poor transport links to employment opportunities (e.g. Birmingham) as well as the cost of commuting in comparison to the income likely to be achieved (in low pay work).

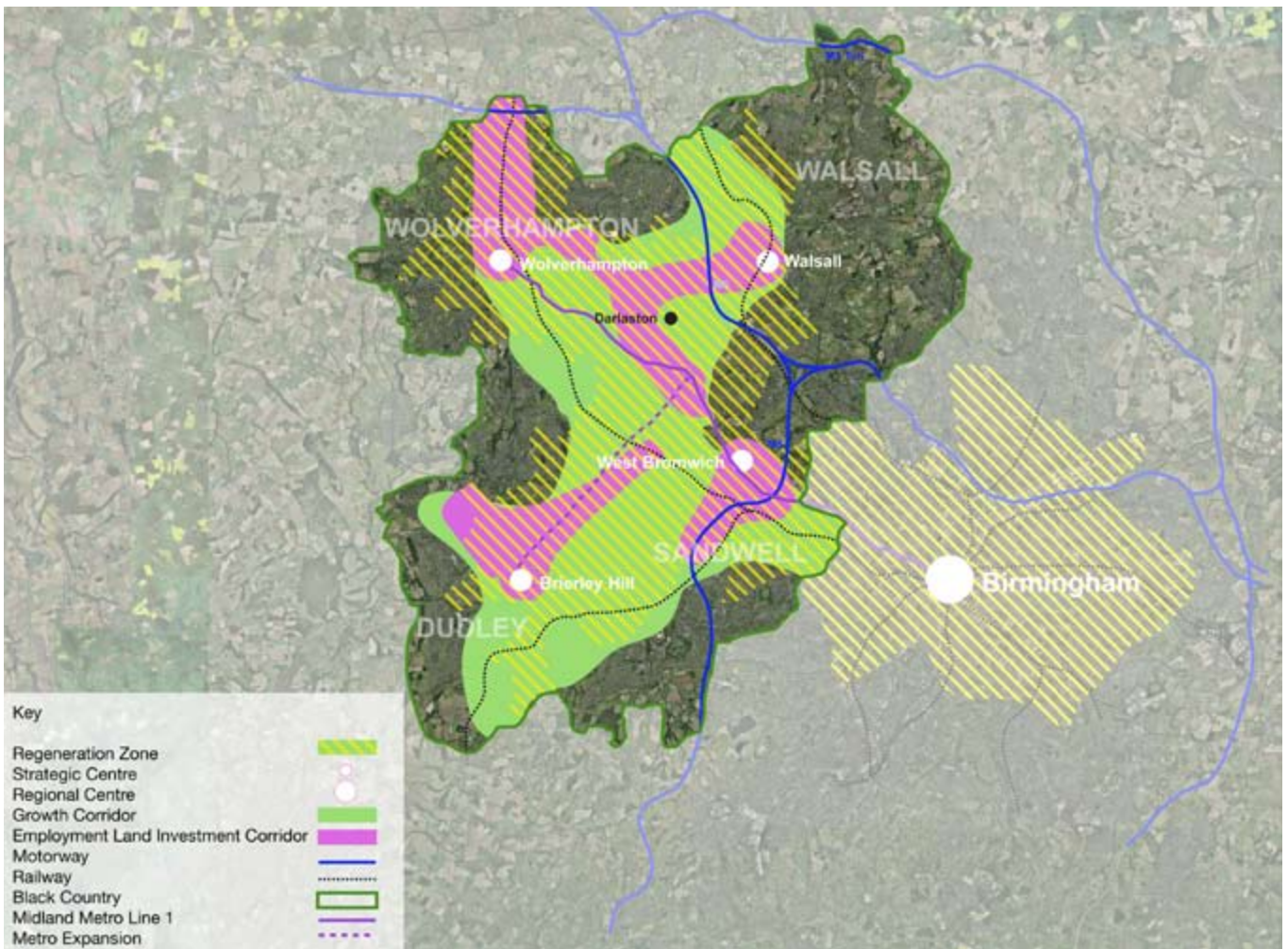
There has been a transition at the Walsall level to significantly higher resident-based earnings than work-based earnings which indicates a greater outflow of commuters to higher value jobs outside of the Walsall district.

Skills are a key driver of productivity with qualifications and economic activity contributing to the demands and capabilities of the workforce. In Darlaston the evidence is that the resident population is relatively poorly placed to be able to respond to the challenges of the worsening economic climate by possessing lower levels of skills and qualifications than the borough and wider sub-regional economy.

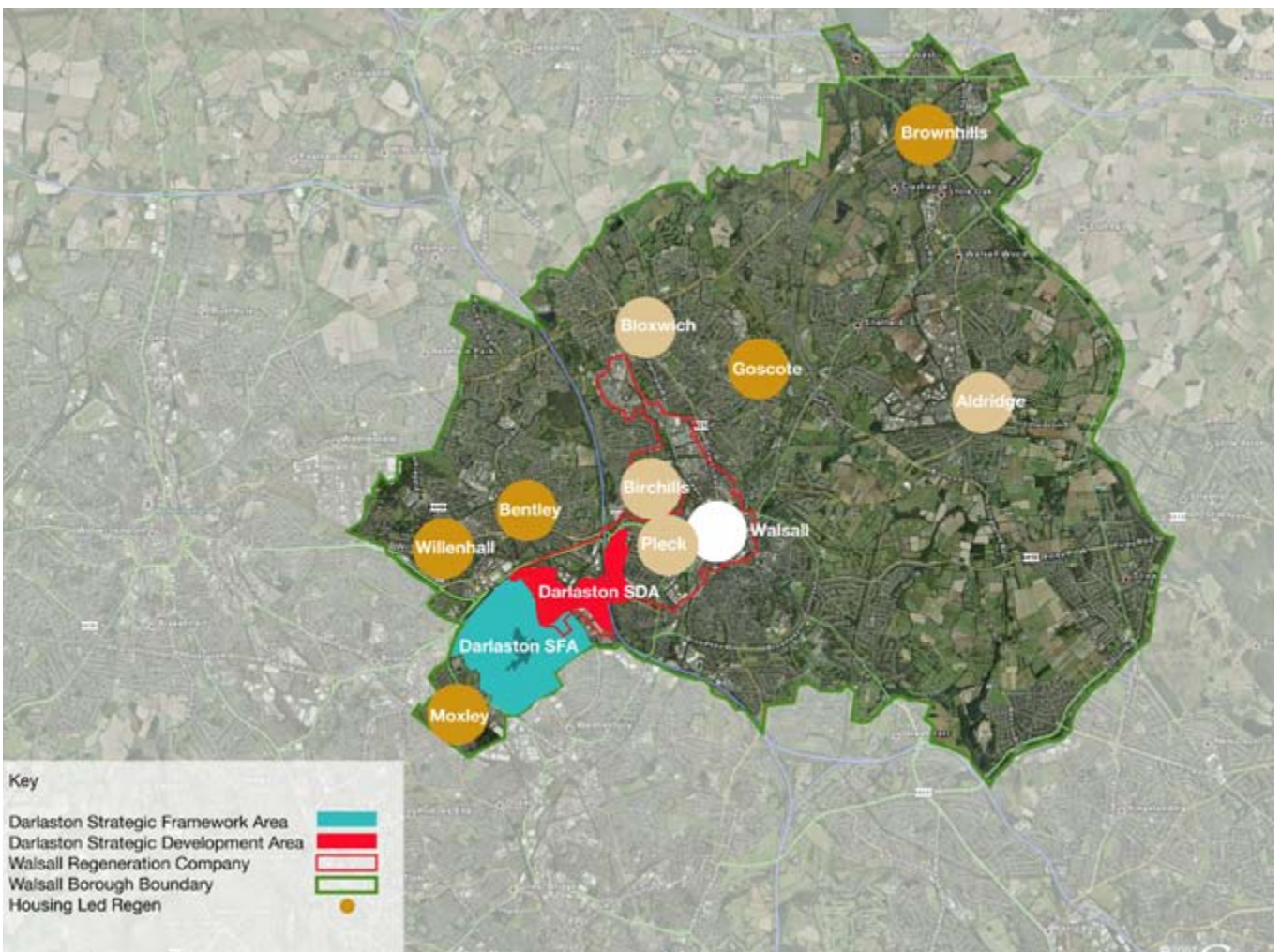
Local residents are therefore more likely to be employed in industries that are more vulnerable to low cost competition and are more likely to fill lower skill/value positions within these businesses. This is a worrying trend in terms of the vulnerability of the areas ethnic population and the projected population increase over the next decade.

In terms of new entrants to the workforce in Darlaston, indicators of local educational performance identify the worrying tendency for attendees at school to lag behind their peers in most other parts of the borough. The proportion of people gaining no qualifications at 2001 was approaching 45-47%. Qualification attainment was lowest in 1997 at 16% attainment of 5 GCSE A\*-C, while this has improved to 28% in 2008 it still lags behind all other Walsall wards by 50%. Whilst a clustering of deprivation is found at the local level in Darlaston the degree of deprivation is highly variable. Education, Skills and Training is a key contributory factor to deprivation across the board. The most deprived area is Round Hay West and Fallings Heath (falling within the 5% most deprived areas in England).

There is a need for investment and resources to encourage the re-skilling of the local working age population and to ensure that Darlastons school leavers are as equipped as possible to take advantage of post-compulsory education and training and the world of work.



The Black Country Context



Walsall Context

# DARLASTON'S ECONOMY

Darlaston is located on what was known as the South Staffordshire coalfield and became industrialized during the nineteenth century as a location for coal mining, nut and bolt and gun lock manufacturing. In the 1950s and '60s Darlaston was regarded as the industrial engine of the country. The town's industrial strengths in engineering and manufacturing have been vulnerable to global pressures starting in the 1980s.

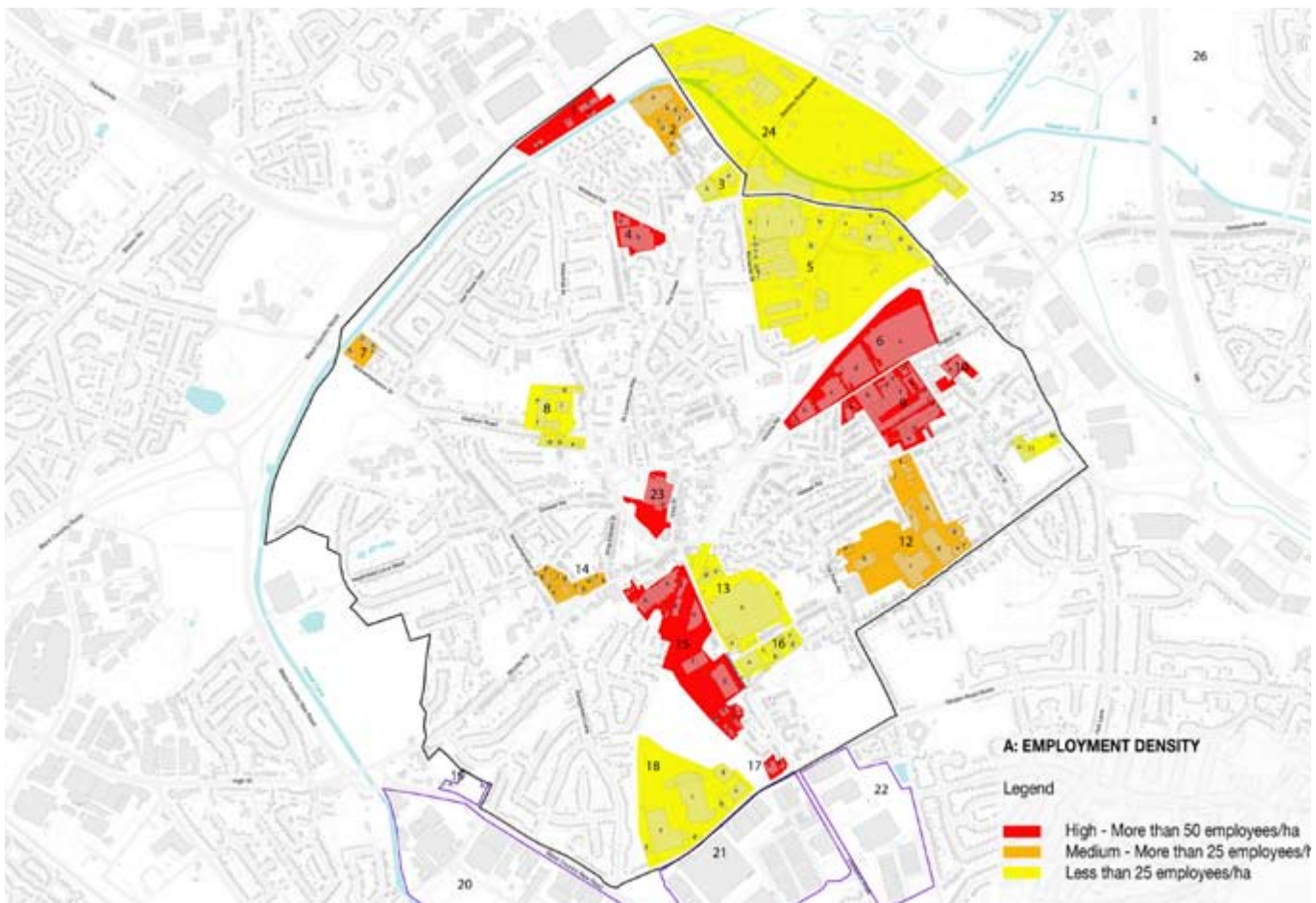
The West Midlands Regional Observatory has recently produced a report (May 2009) that highlights those areas that are most vulnerable to the impacts from the current recession, both the wards that constitute Darlaston have been identified as being among the 20% most vulnerable wards in the West Midlands region.

From 2003-2007 the overall employment base for Darlaston declined by 11%, representing a loss of some 900 employees. In manufacturing there was a decline of 36% over the same period. The other sector to experience decline was financial services with a loss of around 200 employees which is significant as the sector was already poorly represented in Darlaston.

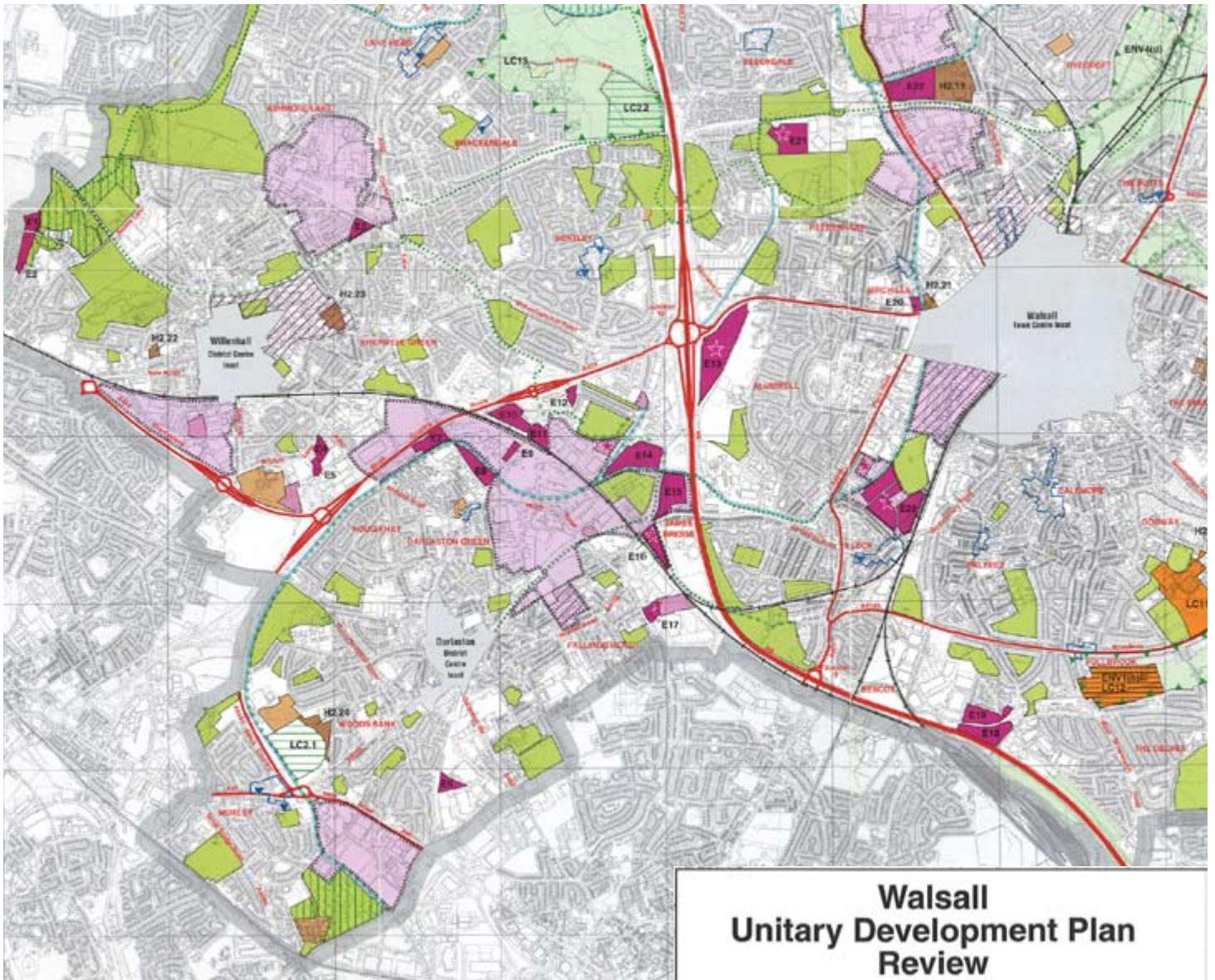
The only sector that experienced an increase in its employment base over this period was distribution which grew by 400 jobs (increase of 24%). More recently in 2007 the four major employment sectors in Darlaston are:

- Distribution, hotels and restaurants (c. 33% of total employment)
- Manufacturing (c. 28% of total employment)
- Public administration, education and health (c. 14% of total employment).

The relative under-representation of both financial and public services is probably the most significant reason why overall employment has fallen, as job losses in manufacturing have not been compensated by service sector employment. The only sector that is growing is distribution and that sector is increasingly becoming mature. There is no emerging sector that is growing that could become a specialist theme for the Darlaston economy. There are some sub sectors of manufacturing that have coped with the overall de-industrialisation trend. These are businesses operating in advanced, specialist, knowledge intensive sectors such as medical instruments.







## Walsall Unitary Development Plan Review

**First Draft for Deposit  
2001  
PROPOSALS MAP**

KEY	
	Borough Boundary
	Town & District Centre Inset Plans
ENVIRONMENT & AMENITY	
	Green Belt Proposal ENV1
	Additions to Green Belt Proposal ENV1(a)
	Deletions from Green Belt Proposal ENV1(b)
	Existing Developed Sites in the Green Belt Policy ENV4
	Open Land Proposal ENV2
	Great Bar Hall & Estate and St Margaret's Hospital Policy ENV9
	Forest of Meria boundary Policy ENV16
HABITAT AND SPECIES PROTECTION	
	Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Policy ENV20
	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SIN) Policy ENV20
	Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Policy ENV20
	Proposed Local Nature Reserve Proposal ENV21(a)
JOBS AND PROSPERITY	
	Employment Land with Planning permission (for information only - Table 4.2)
	Employment Land - New Proposals Proposal JP1
	Best Quality Sites Policy JP6
	Core Employment Areas Policy JP6
	Industrial Regeneration Areas (for information only - Paragraph 4.1)
STRENGTHENING OUR CENTRES	
	Local Centres Policy SS
	Local Centre development/ investment opportunities Policy SS (d)
HOUSING	
	Housing land with planning permission (for information only - Table 6.2)
	Land Allocated for New Housing Development Proposal HD
TRANSPORT	
	Strategic Highway Network Policy TA(a)
	safeguarded Rail Network Proposal T3
LEISURE & COMMUNITY	
	Urban Open Space Policy LC1
	Proposed Urban Open Space Policy LC2
	Greenways (complete or under construction) Proposal LCS
	Greenways (proposed) Proposal LCS
	Canals Policy LC10
	Potential for canoeists activities Policy LC10(a)
	Education Policies LC11 & LC12
	Cemetery extension Proposal LC13
MINERALS	
	Minerals Safeguarding Areas Proposal M1

The level of VAT registrations and de-registrations serves as a good proxy of entrepreneurial activity. At the Walsall level the number of registrations has declined between 2003-2007 by -10%.

The long term prosperity of Darlaston will be dependent on the ability of the area to attract, retain and grow its business and employment base, and to find new forms of economic activity to replace jobs that have been – and will continue to be – lost in declining sectors. It must do what it can to retain the remnants of its manufacturing business and employment base, particularly in high-knowledge, high-value sectors or that are in sectors that for other reasons are less prone to competition from low-cost locations.

The main challenges are to attract new businesses to the area and to harness the area's latent entrepreneurial potential. There should be particular emphasis on attracting existing businesses and encouraging new start businesses in sectors that have above-average longer term growth prospects. Such sectors might include advanced manufacturing, environmental technologies and environmental services.

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# DARLASTON'S HOUSING

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The Darlaston housing market is highly self-contained, especially in Darlaston South ward. However, a definable wider market catchment exists that extends to include Willenhall South and Wednesbury North, and this has been used as a wider local benchmark area to compare market statistics with the Darlaston Study Area.

Overall, the workplace and household migration statistics reveal,

- The highly self contained nature of the Darlaston residential market, especially Darlaston South
- Where there is interchange with neighbouring wards, the relationship is one of households moving out to more popular neighbouring wards; from Darlaston South to Wednesbury North and Bilston East; and to a lesser extent from Darlaston North to Willenhall South
- The population loss trend is especially notable for Darlaston North, for despite being an important provider of jobs for households in Wednesbury North, it is a net loser of households to Wednesbury North

Such trends would suggest a deficit of aspirational housing product in Darlaston, as does a relative under representation of the key 35-49 age group, which is a key “trading up” age group.

Analysis of the structure of the housing market in Darlaston, in comparison with the benchmark areas, reveals a comparative lack of housing choice, including a smaller pool of owner occupied housing, and within that pool, less larger and detached accommodation.

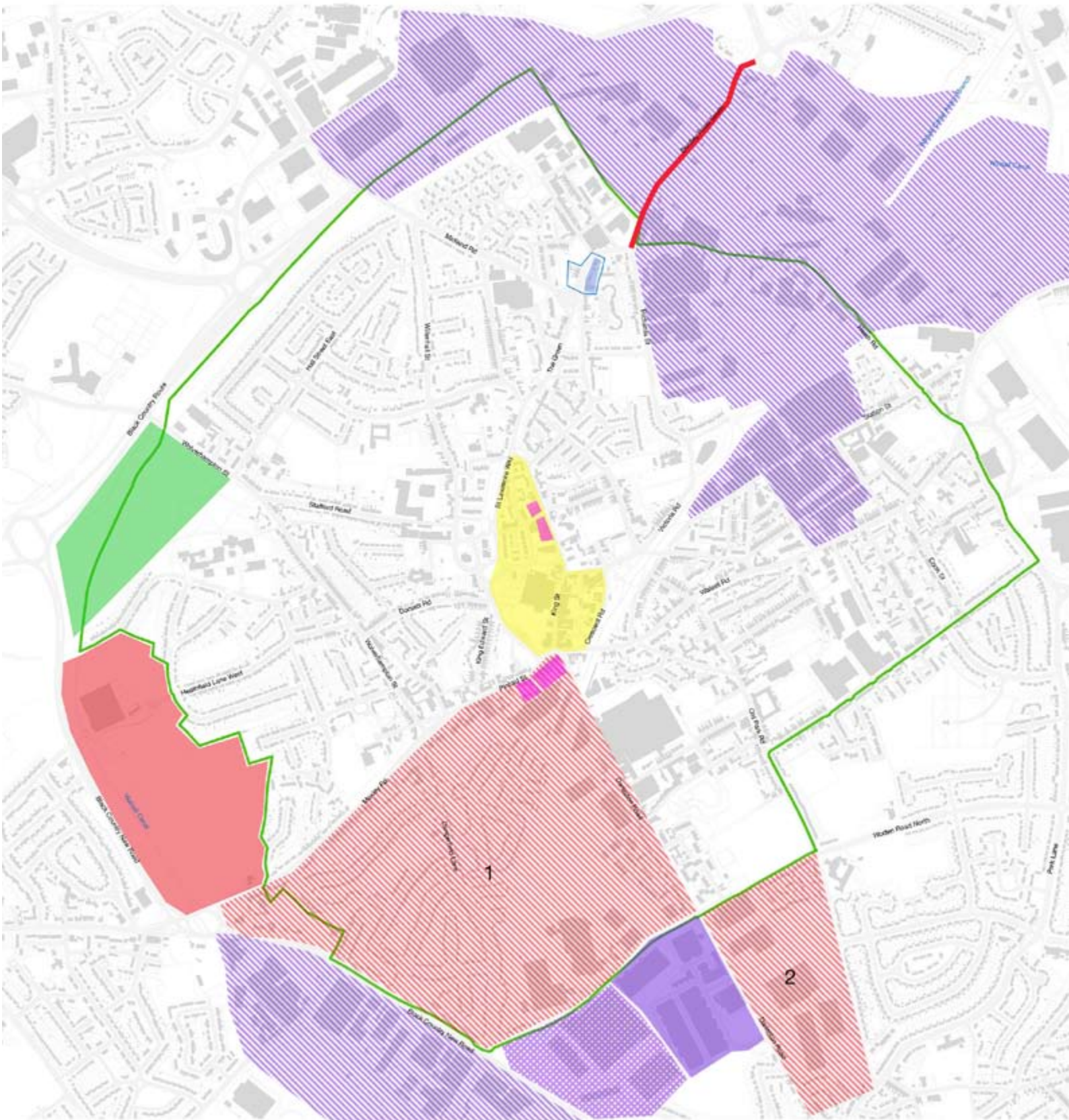
The relative lack of housing choice is not just a concern relating to aspirational housing. There is a relatively high level of overcrowding in the owner occupied sector in Darlaston, which may be linked to the unaffordability of larger housing. There is clearly a comparative lack of housing choice in Darlaston. Darlaston needs larger accommodation, not only to provide a product to retain aspirational buyers, but also an affordable product to address the very high levels of overcrowding in the owner occupied sector, where household mobility may be affected by affordability constraints

The highly local base of the Darlaston housing market, and the relatively low income of that market, has left it particularly exposed to the effects of a housing market downturn fuelled by a collapse in the availability of cheap (i.e. based on income multipliers in excess of 4) mortgage finance and the most severe recession the West Midlands has faced in nearly thirty years.

However, core local base is loyal, and an analysis of the social housing market suggests a general satisfaction with living in the town, with voids and turnover for houses generally low, though somewhat higher for apartments, which is to be expected.












Overall, the supply of housing land in Walsall could be considered healthy. Walsall Council has calculated that, based on the build rate for the past 10 years, Walsall's current commitments will give a housing land supply of between 14.1 and 19.9 years. Walsall's housing land supply is significantly in excess of the 5 year requirements detailed in PPS3.

With regard to Darlaston and the surrounding residential catchment area, most of the top 10 largest developments in neighbouring Wednesbury North have been within half a mile of the southernmost extent of residential Darlaston. This is clearly a popular area with developers, and it may be recalled that the emerging Joint Core Strategy suggests neighbouring Kings Hill, Wednesbury may accommodate 490 new build dwellings in the future, alongside the proposal for 1,095 dwellings in the Woods Bank/Darlaston Road area of Darlaston.



Planning Policy Plan

Legend

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

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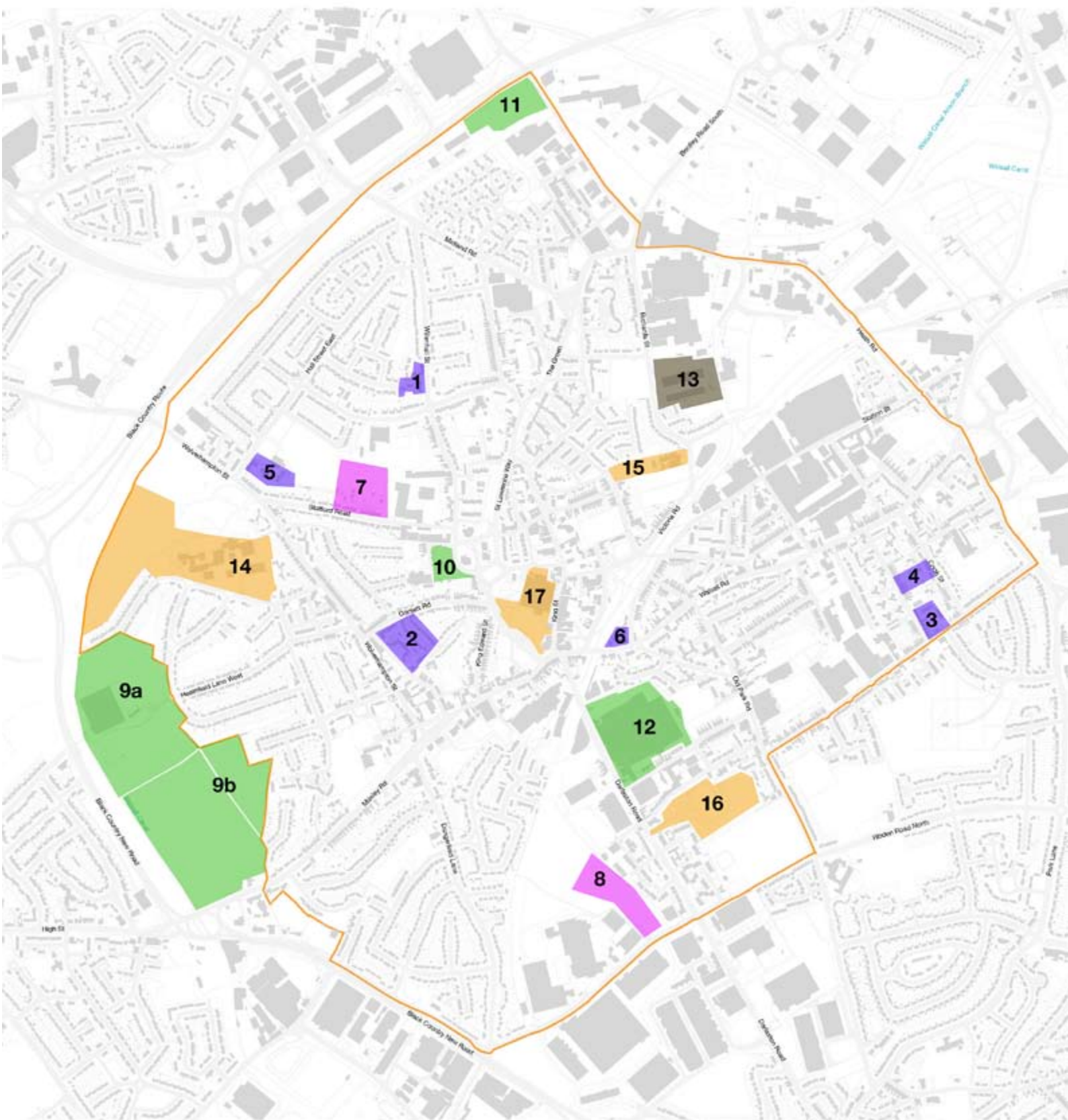
Overall, the Darlaston market catchment area pipeline supply is significant, as it represents 21 years supply based on the average annual completion rate for the Catchment Area over the past 5 years. Also, one must consider planned large scale strategic housing development just outside the defined market catchment (such as the 874 dwellings planned at Bilston Urban Village, and the 3000 new homes proposed north of Willenhall Town Centre), as they will have an undeniable material effect on the Darlaston market due to their size. This significant volume of housing supply must be taken into consideration when constructing development options for the Darlaston Regeneration Framework.

This volume of future housing supply aside, the evidence of this residential and commercial markets baseline study suggests that a controlled measure of new housing will be crucial in Darlaston in order to address the need for a greater selection of larger, family, housing options in both owner occupied and affordable tenures.

The new housing will also have an important role in enhancing the urban fabric of Darlaston, in a manner such that the new housing not only satisfies local housing need and contributes to regional housing delivery targets, but also enhances the function of the town, and townscape and neighbourhood offer of Darlaston,, through exploiting local environmental attributes, and contributing to the regeneration of key sites. The role of the framework may be less about regeneration led by a quantum of housing, and more about the targeted use of housing as a regeneration tool.

We would suggest that the nature of housing development earlier in the decade may not have always met this objective, with a notable concentration of apartments and townhouses, and under representation of larger homes. This may partly reflect the “infill” nature of much of the development of this period, on former employment sites, tending towards small developments (average around 33 units) built to a high density (around 62 dph).

The most recent developments (those on site), are on larger sites, designed to a lower density, and hence being able to offer a wider choice of housing more akin to local needs, which is encouraging. The point about large sites is a pertinent one. The options proposed through this regeneration framework should consider the appropriate deployment of site assembly tools, where there is evidence that such intervention is feasible and desirable, and that it might secure the critical mass and site frontage required to ensure a land use mix (and within that mix, an appropriate mix of residential dwelling sizes and tenures as applicable) that is best possible for the town of Darlaston.



Pipeline Development Plan

Legend

- Built Out Sites**
- 1. Willenhall St/Bird Brook Close
- 2. Dorsett Road/Wheelwright Close
- 3. Spirit Mews/Cobden Street
- 4. Monarch Court/Cobden Street
- 5. The Avenue/Hall Street
- 6. Walsall Road/Avenue Road

- Developments Currently on the Market**
- 7. 'The Keep', Stafford St. (Persimmon)
- 8. 'Satchwell Grange' (Bloor Homes)
- Significant Planning Permissions**
- 9a. AP(VK) Site (304 units)
- 9b. Moxley Tip - Recycling and Housing
- 10. Alma Street / School St (22 units)
- 11. Central Point, Willenhall Road (Warehouse+Offices)
- 12. Servis Site

- Significant Planning Applications**
- 13. TRW Automotive Site (Marcity) Richards Street (262 units) - REFUSED
- Planning Proposals**
- 14. Darlaston Academy
- 15. Darlaston Multi-Purpose Centre
- 16. King's Hill Park
- 17. ASDA (Mezzanine and Deck Carpark)

# DARLASTON AS A PLACE

Overall the townscape of Darlaston is characterized by its lack of coherent urban form. Many different types of buildings and layouts exist cheek by jowl (such as cul-de-sacs, industrial sheds, vacant land, garden suburbs and more modern layouts) and are largely disconnected and in places inward looking. The cumulative effect of this is to create quite a discordant and fragmented character which is difficult to understand and enjoy. Main routes (which act as the front covers to the neighbourhoods and town centre) through the town to the centre are of a poor quality as are the gateways, none of which create a memorable or impressive image of the town.

A high quality townscape is largely confined to the town's conservation area based around the north of the town centre and Victoria Park. Most of these buildings are Victorian and display a great variety of architectural styles. Some of these qualities have been eroded by more modern interventions into the urban fabric. Other buildings of historic/architectural interest are pepperpotted throughout the area. Such buildings mainly comprise schools, religious buildings, public houses and former offices and workshops. It is important these buildings are protected into the future to maintain Darlaston's collective sense of identity and pride.

Apart from the areas parks outlined below much of the open space in Darlaston seems to lack much of a function and is of a poor quality. There are many areas of incidental open space which does not particularly contribute to the townscape of the area at present. Some of these areas do not work as they are poorly enclosed and overlooked.

Walsall's Open Space Assessment (2006) found that Darlaston has the lowest overall quality of green space across Walsall. It does better for public access and the overall quantity of green space but this is still less than the borough average. Green space is scattered throughout the area with a lack of connections and continuity.

The largest and most significant green space is George Rose Park this was assessed by the audit as being low quality/high value. The proposal to develop the Darlaston Academy will mean a loss of recreational space. There is a commitment to mitigate this loss by reinvestment in the remainder of the space.

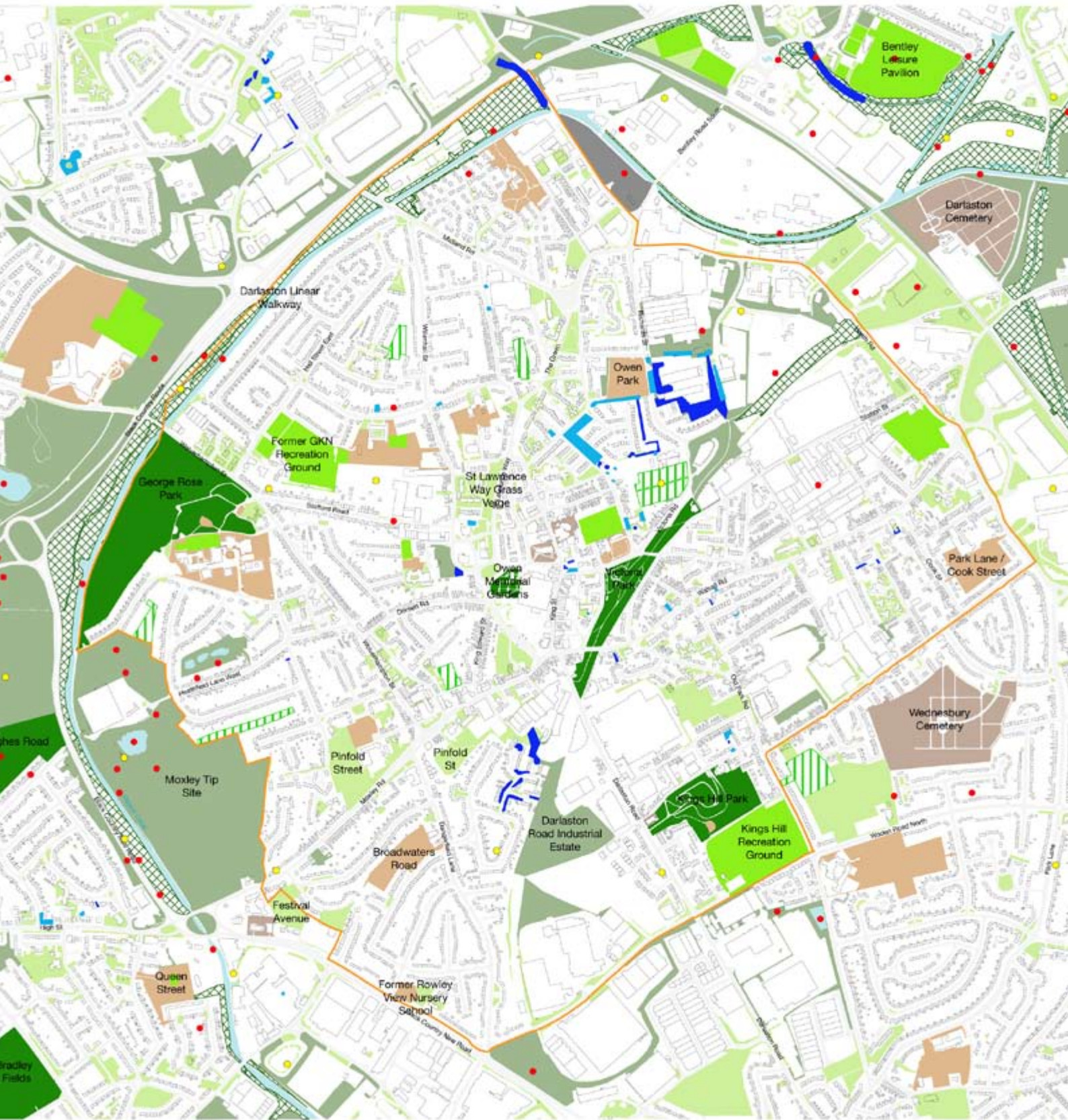
Victoria Park was assessed as being High Quality/High Value. This park in the centre of town has enjoyed investment over the last few years. There is now much scope to improve access and landscaping along the former rail corridor to the Walsall Canal.

Kings Hill Park assessed as High Quality/Low Value is a continued focus for investment through section 106 monies. Whilst the recreational areas of Kings Hill are used by many groups and individuals, there is a common view that the park is much hidden from public view with poorly defined gateways and signage. This secluded nature has become overly dominant, making visitors feeling somewhat isolated and insecure. Landscaping measures should address this issue and open the space up to the wider neighbourhood.

The former GKN recreation ground on Hall Street has superb recreational facilities, including fenced all weather pitches and floodlighting. Unfortunately it remains almost dormant due to the lack of resources on the part of its managers, Darlaston Community Association. This is a significantly under-utilised resource which given the lack of youth facilities in the area needs to be addressed as a priority.















Existing Figure Ground Plan



Open Spaces Plan

**Legend**

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

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In terms of 'social infrastructure', community facilities are largely concentrated in a band from east to west across the study area. Apart from the town centre there are few discernible community clusters of facilities that form a heart to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Facilities seem lacking in the far north-west, east, and west of the area. There are no further or higher education facilities in Darlaston, the nearest being Walsall College in the town centre. A lack of youth facilities has been flagged up in the consultation. The closure of the multi-purpose centre opposite the swimming baths has left the town without a shared focus for community activities.

Town centres are barometers of the health of their wider hinterlands. Many people choose to live in a house and a neighborhood based on the quality of the local centre. Darlaston town centre is underperforming and this has a negative impact on Darlaston as a whole and its future. In regeneration terms focusing on the town centre first can have a positive ripple effect on the neighbourhood as a whole. We believe the town centre must have an important role into the future as it has a significant catchment and is quite remote from other centres.

At present it is dominated by the ASDA store which really is a double edged sword in that whilst it attracts lots of trade into the town, the wider high street does not benefit from this, in part due to the poor integration of the store into the centre. Other negative factors which contribute to this poor performance are the poor quality and position of key arrival points to the town (e.g. bus facility), low quality commercial units, lack of choice and mixture of shops, poor character and quality of public realm and environment, lack of integration with conservation area, Victoria Park and community assets on edge of the town. The centre needs to provide more attractions diversify its offer through housing, office, community and cultural uses and broaden its appeal, role and function.

In terms of employment areas four of Darlaston's main employment areas fall within the allocation of UDP Policy JP5, Core Employment Land, where the onus is on the protection of such sites.

Conversely, six of the employment areas fall within the Woods Bank Corridor, suggested by the emerging Joint Core Strategy as an area that could accommodate up to 1,097 units of housing.

Notably, some of the best quality (in terms of physical fabric of the premises) employment premises lie within the Woods

Bank / Darlaston Road Corridor suggested for housing; the Corridor also accommodates a number of high density employment areas and several large employers.

On the north side of Darlaston, the best quality premises are found immediately north of the study area, which is home to some major employers (e.g. Bradken) and or companies in fast growing sectors (e.g. EMR Recycling).

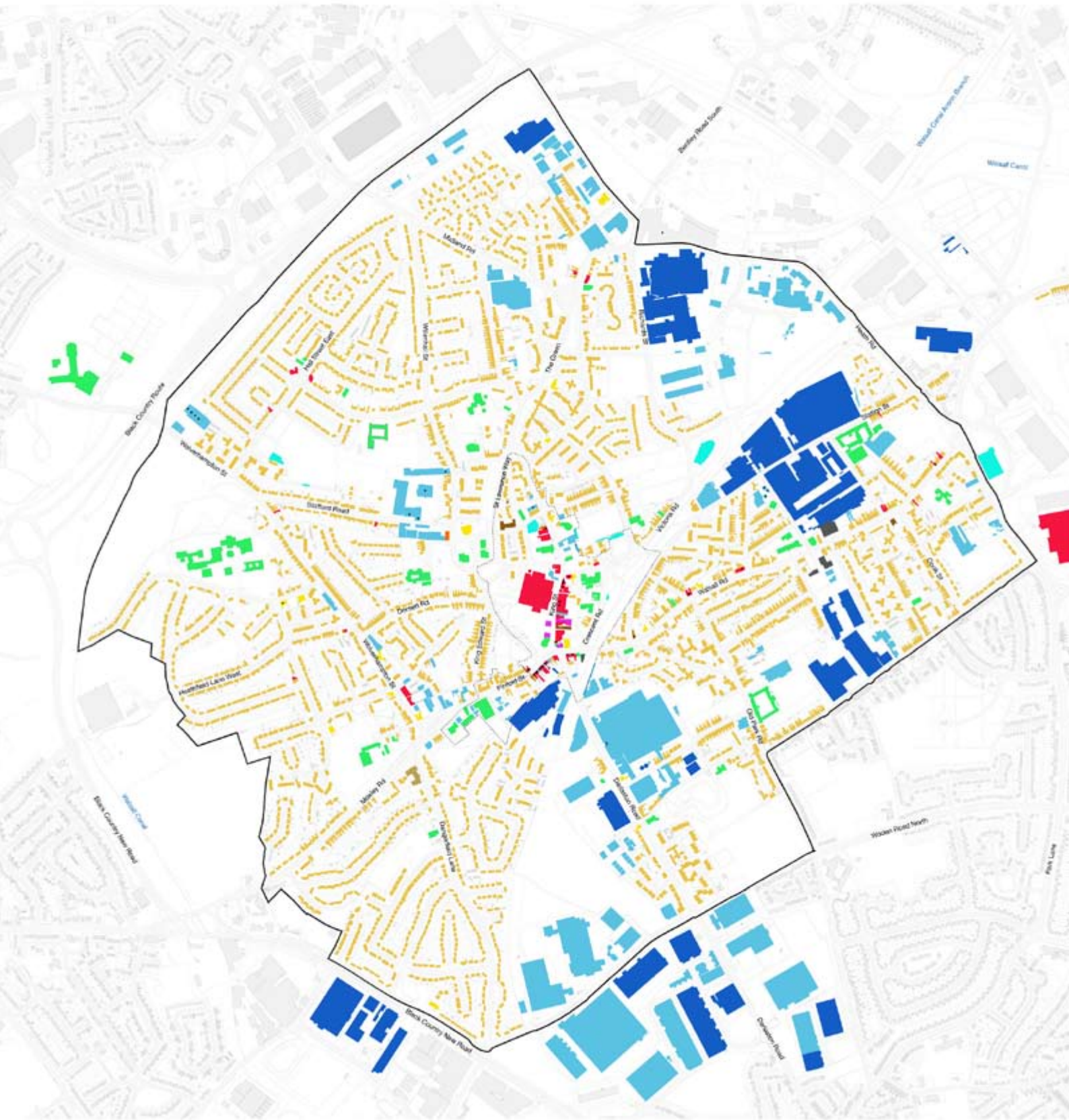
The quality of premises within the core employment land areas is generally only fair, though this should not belie their status as important employment locations, with two of the (the premises of ZF Lemforder and Caparo Fastenings and Central Trading Estate), achieving densities of over 50 employee per hectare and housing at least 400 employees. ZF Lemforder and Caparo Fastenings house the two largest employers in Darlaston, whilst the Central Trading Estate is notable for the concentration of small businesses accommodated.

South of Heath Road, is notable for the low density of employment, due to the positioning on the majority of the area, of two low employment density businesses (a car auctioneers and a car salvage business), which offsets a smaller area of high density employment accommodated in a sub divided former works in the north west part of the site. These two quite different characteristics make the Area an important contributor to the employment land mix of Darlaston. Within the sub divided works area in the north west of the Area are a notable number of small and medium sized businesses, whilst the Car Auctioneers and the Salvage business, which take up the majority of the Area, seem to be expanding businesses investing in their premises.

An analysis of uses that may prejudice the future alternative uses of neighbouring sites reveals remarkably few points of potential conflict. However, notable potential conflict points are highlighted in proximity to the Walsall Canal Corridor, where there is an area of non-core employment land, which could have residential potential, but which is in close proximity to key businesses such as EMR Recycling and Barnfather Wire where there is potential for conflict due to the noise emissions of these two operations.

An analysis of land holdings suggests complex land ownerships in a number of possible future areas of change (be it to residential or employment led regeneration), though it is notable that the land holding pattern in the Darlaston Road Corridor seems more simple





Building Use Plan

Legend

- Vacancy
- A1 Shops
- A2 Financial and Professional Services
- A3 Restaurants and Cafes
- A4 Drinking Establishments
- A5 Takeaways
- B1 Business
- B2 General Industrial
- C1 Hotels
- C2 Residential Institutions
- C3 Residential
- D1 Non Residential Institutions
- D2 Assembly and Leisure
- Sui GenerisWater

# MOVING IN AND AROUND DARLASTON

Darlaston is surrounded by key national and regional routes including the M6 and Black Country Route. However whilst the area is well connected congestion on these routes has the effect of routing traffic through the local Darlaston road network. This is not to the economic benefit of Darlaston which takes the negative environmental impact of this traffic without much trade off. However it does indicate that Darlaston is not in an isolated market catchment and that this offers a captive source of trade for its retail centre, for example, if the offer can be improved.

In terms of journey to work data this is very localized with 80% of the population traveling 10km to work. Notably there are a low number of residents traveling to Birmingham which is the principal employment centre in the region.

Within Darlaston 42% of households have no access to the car this figure is significantly higher than the national average of 27% and given the gaps in public transport this is an important issue to address in terms of social exclusion. Car ownership is a proxy for income levels which indicates the levels of deprivation in the area.

In terms of bus services the key issues have been raised:

- Poor evening and Sunday bus service provision
- Lack of bus services to employment areas
- Poor bus penetration to residential areas
- Poor bus stop infrastructure and user real time information
- Bus services delayed by on-street parking
- Opportunities to improve local bus services through a comprehensive review of service

The bus station located on St Lawrence Way provides very basic facilities, has poor crossing points, is poorly connected and is isolated from the main centre. The station does not provide a welcoming environment for its users.

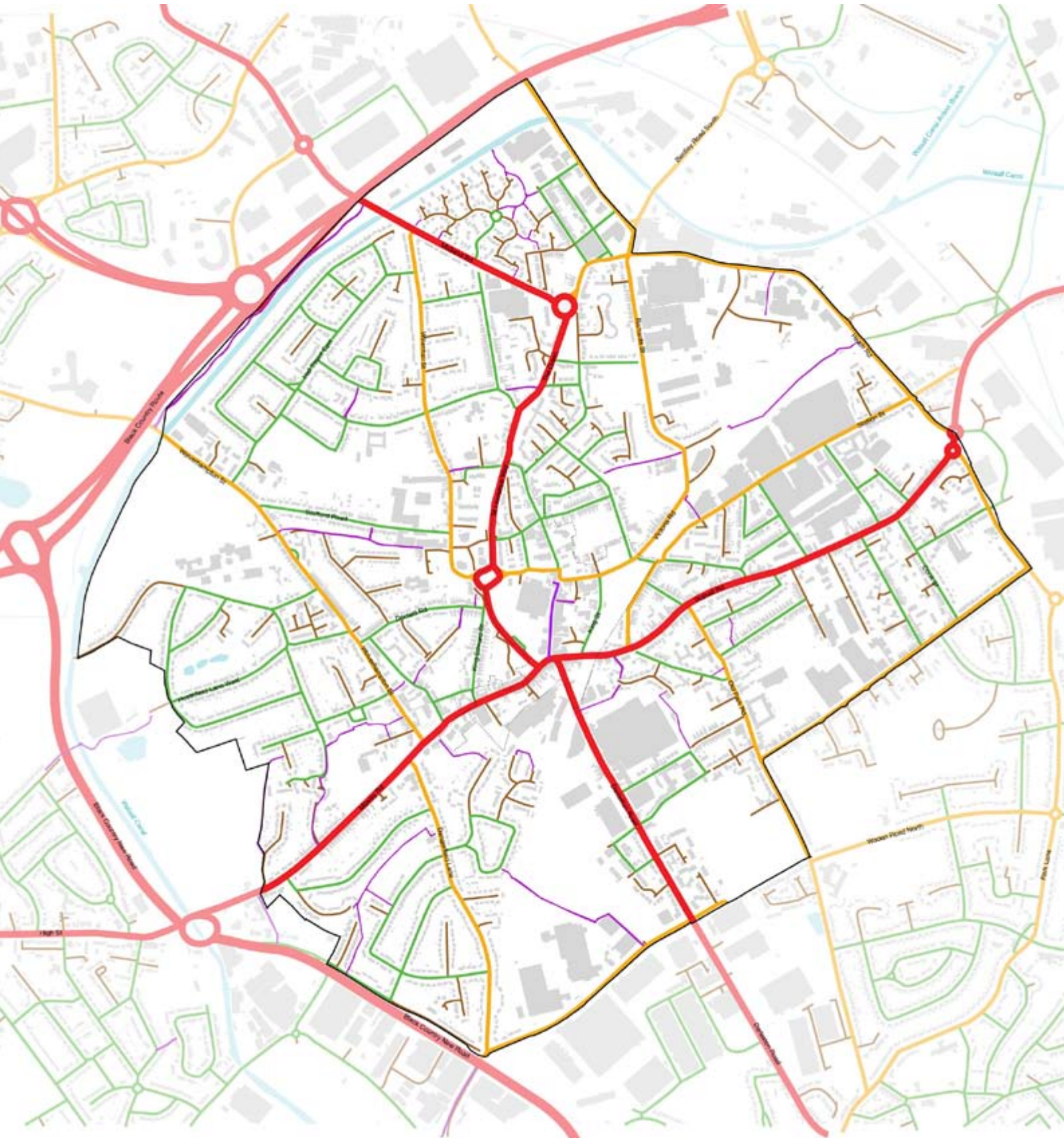
Darlaston was served by two rail stations in the past. The nearest existing station which serves the Darlaston locality is Bescot Stadium Station which is over 3 km from the district centre. Access to this station is poor by all modes of transport except the car. There is no direct bus service to the station and the nearest bus route is the 334 service. This service involves a 19 minute walk from the bus stop to the station. Walsall station is more accessible in terms of bus service provision.

A passenger service used to operate between Walsall and Wolverhampton with very limited stops. This service ceased to operate in December 2008 due to low patronage. Plans have been proposed for the reopening of Willenhall Bilston Street Station. If passenger services are reinstated it is clear that wider benefits would be established with the reopening of Willenhall Station. This would benefit residents of Darlaston by providing better access to the rail network. The opening of a station at Darlaston James Bridge Station could also potentially improve access for residents and employees of local industry.

In reviewing the options for improved rail links, better access to Birmingham by rail would improve the attractiveness of Darlaston as a residential location, and bring a strong regeneration benefit.

The current Midland Metro operates to the west of Darlaston. The 5W's is a proposed extension to the Metro network and would provide a direct link to Darlaston by operating in close proximity to the district centre. It would link Wednesbury, Walsall, Willenhall and Wolverhampton. However funding issues mean that implementation is not likely before 2016. Under consideration are lower cost forms of rapid transit including bus rapid transit and tram trains (able to share existing freight lines).

There is little cycling provision in Darlaston with no clear dedicated cycle lanes or paths being designated, raising safety concerns where cyclists and vehicles share the road space. There is a small quantity of cycle parking facilities present within the district centre but they are not well positioned in terms of access from the district centre. In terms of walking the condition of the pathways and pavements in the majority of Darlaston are poor. Many of the footways do not conform to the DDA (2005) throughout the area. In places the pavements are narrow and pedestrians cannot pass each other easily. This also raises safety issues. In addition key crossing points are poorly marked or are inadequate for pedestrians.



Street Hierarchy Plan

**Legend**

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

# CHARACTER AREAS

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



Character Area Plan

## 1. HEATH ROAD

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



## 2. MIDLAND ROAD

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



## 3. ROUGH HAY

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



#### 4. TOWN CENTRE

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



#### 5. STATION STREET

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



#### 6. GEORGE ROSE PARK

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



#### 7. DARLASTON ROAD

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



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# AREA ANALYSIS

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



Town Centre, ASDA store sits next to King Street



View down Franchise Street showing the proximity of industry to residential . (Covered in the Station Street Character Area)



## 1. HEATH ROAD

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

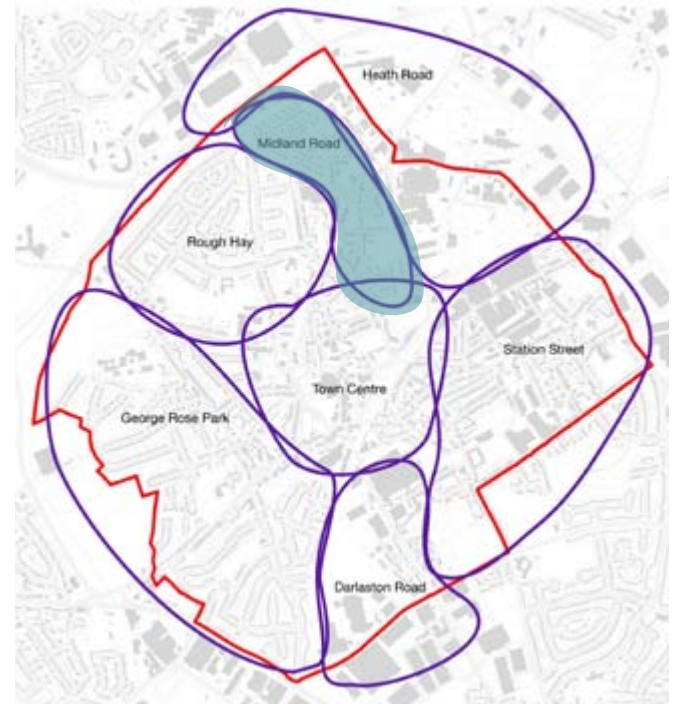
## CONSULTATION

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

Heavy trafficked and HGVs in the area

Need to improve connections to the town centre and public transport

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



## 2. MIDLAND ROAD

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

## CONSULTATION

Managed work space on Booth Street is under-utilised

Development at Darlaston Green stalled, blights area

Trees been lost at Darlaston Green





Good houses but room for environmental improvement

### 3. ROUGH HAY

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



**CONSULTATION**

Good community spirit exists

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

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

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

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



St Lawrence Way

## 4. TOWN CENTRE

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



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

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



### CONSULTATION

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

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



## 6. GEORGE ROSE PARK

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

**CONSULTATION**

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

“Don’t like the condition of the canal.”

“The potential loss of open green space.”

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



## 7. DARLASTON ROAD

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

**CONSULTATION**

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

August 2009