



Walsall Council



Walsall Council  
**Walsall Heritage Strategy**  
Baseline Report

June 2021



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# **WALSALL HERITAGE STRATEGY – BASELINE REPORT**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) has been commissioned by Walsall Council to produce a Heritage Strategy and Action Plan for Walsall borough covering the period 2021-2026. The aim of the strategy is to highlight the Council's vision for the borough's heritage, improve the Council's heritage capacity and to stimulate heritage activity in the most diverse forms across the borough. The heritage strategy will set out actions which will enable Walsall's heritage to be a contributing factor in the successful delivery of key Council policies and to help reduce the inequalities in health, wellbeing, environmental and economic indices.

1.1.2 The strategy will provide a vision, present key themes to guide proposals and actions, and put forward methods of governance and delivery to motivate, enable and monitor the delivery of the strategy. It will be followed by a set of priority projects and supporting action plan as a pathway to demonstrate how heritage-related projects can deliver economic and community priorities. The plan will outline approaches to community engagement and how local businesses can be involved in, and benefit from, the projects. It is vital that intangible aspects of heritage and diverse interpretations of heritage take their place in the strategy and action plan.

1.1.3 The development of the Strategy has been funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), this funding has also included the appointment of a Heritage Programme Officer (funded for three years) as increase capacity and drive the delivery of the Strategy.

### 1.2 Walsall Proud and the Corporate Plan

1.2.1 Walsall Council is **PROUD** of our past, present and for our future and is committed to reducing inequalities and ensuring all potential is maximised and its employment policies, procedures and guidelines are designed to support this vision and deliver the Council's priorities. The **Walsall Proud Programme** (WPP) is the Council's future transformation programme to achieve its vision to support Walsall's residents to live, work and play well in the local area. The ambition is to modernise ways of working to be digitally enabled, more flexible, and efficient as part of the priorities in the Corporate Plan 2021-2022.

- 1.2.2 Walsall Council's **Corporate Plan 2021-22** highlights the need for regeneration in the borough to tackle the inequalities around health and economic outcomes and build resilient communities. The plan's vision is that *'Inequalities are reduced and potential is maximised'*. The aims and values of the Plan will be used as a 'golden thread' throughout further strategies and key documents. Current knowledge and further consultation with communities will help to shape how the Council meets their needs to reduce inequality and maximise their potential.
- 1.2.3 The Heritage Strategy and Action Plan will support and help to deliver the vision within the Corporate Plan and integrate with the Walsall Proud Programme.

### **1.3 Defining Heritage**

- 1.3.1 Heritage forms a large part of any town or city's identity. It adds distinctiveness and can be used as a catalyst to engage with communities, help them share stories and connect with each other.
- 1.3.2 'Heritage' can mean many different things to many different people. It is often used to reference history, lineage and ancestry, property, livestock, plants, design and branding. It can reference the 'traditional', 'time-tested', 'vintage', 'classic' or can be emblematic of fine craftsmanship. In its broadest sense, 'heritage' refers to elements that somehow have a connection with the past and can represent something we have inherited from generations gone by that still hold historical importance.
- 1.3.3 In the context of this Baseline Report and subsequent Heritage Strategy, we have taken a broad definition, encompassing the history of Walsall and its residents, the natural environment, architecture, built heritage, communities, individuals, their stories and where they come from. Heritage isn't defined by historic buildings, museum collections or stories of past industry. People also make up our heritage; our connections with the past and with each other, our shared interests and values, and our hopes for the future.
- 1.3.4 Heritage can generate value, promote economic growth, stimulate cultural activity and help create vibrant and exiting places for all. The following evidences the value of heritage to the economy, society, health and wellbeing and climate change mitigation.

## **1.4 This Document**

- 1.4.1 The development of the Heritage Strategy is being undertaken in two phases.
- 1.4.2 Firstly, a baseline study to assess and understand Walsall, the current heritage offer, and to begin to draw out opportunities for intervention. This will inform the second stage – the Heritage Strategy that will set out a clear direction and set of actions to be taken on by Walsall Council and partners.
- 1.4.3 This document, *Walsall Heritage Strategy – Baseline Report*, summarises the first stage of work.

## **1.5 Methodology**

- 1.5.1 The first step in the development of the Baseline Report is to understand the heritage, both tangible and intangible, to identify what matters and why, and to whom. This is done through the review of existing documents and data, and through engagement with professional and community stakeholders. Due to Covid-19 pandemic site visits have not been possible at the time of writing the Baseline Report.
- 1.5.2 There are a number of resources that help us understand Walsall borough and its heritage potential. These include:
- Planning and Policy documents provided by Walsall Council
  - Historic Environment Record
  - Historic England National Heritage List for England (NHLE) and Heritage at Risk Register (HAR)
  - Walsall Local Heritage data
  - Conservation Area documentation
  - Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Study
  - Historic Ordnance Survey Mapping
  - Online and documentary research
  - Current and historic aerial photography
  - Current and historic photography
  - Engagement with professional and community stakeholders

1.5.3 Consultees on this Study who helped to inform and guide production of the Baseline Report, leading on to the subsequent Heritage Strategy, included internal Walsall Council staff in addition to wider representatives from external organisations engaged across the public, private, third and voluntary sectors. A list of Consultees can be found in Appendix A.

## 1.6 Structure

1.6.1 This document is presented in five sections.

- Section **1.0 Introduction** introduces the project and its purpose.
- Section **2.0 Heritage – A Driver for Change** highlights the power of heritage projects / programmes in benefitting economic and social regeneration, promoting health and wellbeing and supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, all based on wider national case studies and research.
- Section **3.0 Background and Evolution** provides an evidence base for the subsequent Heritage Strategy and is broken down into the following sections:
  - **3.1 Walsall Borough** – introduction to the borough, its location and demographics.
  - **3.2 Climate** provides a brief overview of current carbon emissions and Climate Change Action Plan.
  - **3.3 Regeneration and development** – brief overview of current and upcoming regeneration and development projects within the borough.
  - **3.4 Historic overview** – a brief historical background to the borough and each of its localities, any remaining physical heritage that may help to shape the strategy.
  - **3.5 Walsall Localities** - provides a brief overview of each area and highlights any surviving assets.
  - **3.6 Communities** – outlines existing community driven initiatives and ways in which proposed heritage-related projects can better connect with communities through existing programmes.
  - **3.7 Key assets** – outlines current visitor attractions, cultural, natural and learning assets that have been identified based on their potential contribution to heritage-related projects or their current contribution to the heritage of Walsall.
  - **3.8 Policies and strategies** – information to key ongoing and future policies and strategies projects that have informed this report, and wider projects to which the Heritage Strategy will align.

- Section **4.0 Challenges and Opportunities** draws out key issues that have arisen from the evidence base and is supported by a SWOT analysis.

## **2.0 HERITAGE – A DRIVER FOR CHANGE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

2.1.1 This section draws on wider research and evidence from across the UK to demonstrate how heritage can generate economic benefits, stimulate social regeneration, enhance health and wellbeing, mitigate climate change and help places adapt to changing circumstances. It demonstrates how heritage can, and has, influenced place making and formed a meaningful part of people’s lives the world over. It is not focussed on Walsall, but is focussed on identifying case studies and best practice to inform what happens in Walsall.

### **2.2 Economic Regeneration**

2.2.1 Heritage and the historic environment form an integral part to the economy and its growth with multiple economic activities depending on it. In 2019 in England, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the heritage sector provided over 206,000 jobs directly and supported a further 355,000 jobs indirectly in multiple sectors including construction, tourism, public, creative industries and social services sectors. Heritage employment outstripped the rest of the UK economy growing almost twice as fast between 2011 and 2019. The heritage sector in England generated a greater GVA<sup>1</sup> than the security, defence, aerospace and arts and culture industries in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

2.2.2 According to the 2020 Historic England Heritage Counts data<sup>3</sup>, the heritage sector in the West Midlands supported 46,322 jobs in 2019.<sup>4</sup>

2.2.3 The returns of heritage led regeneration can often outstrip the costs. Using a Transparent Economic Assessment model, a study carried out by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) across six projects found that over three times the original grant funding issued would be returned over 10 years. In addition, the projects created significant temporary economic benefits and direct and indirect jobs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gross value added (GVA) is defined as the value of output less the value of intermediate consumption.

<sup>2</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

<sup>3</sup> See dashboard on <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/>

<sup>4</sup> These were made up of 18,830 Direct, 11,391 Indirect and 16,101 Induced FTE jobs

<sup>5</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

## Visitor economy

- 2.2.4 Heritage attracts people to places. Millions of domestic and international tourists visit England each year with some travelling primarily to visit heritage attractions. Their visits support jobs contributing to national economic growth. A total of £18.4bn was spent on heritage related visits and trips in 2019 and 7 of the top ten visited attractions in England in 2019 were heritage attractions.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.2.5 In the period 2000 to 2019 visits to heritage attractions in the West Midlands region nearly doubled<sup>7</sup> well above the English average of a c.66% increase.
- 2.2.6 Tourism has severely declined due to the impacts of Covid-19. The 2021 forecast suggests that inbound tourism to the UK from overseas will be up 21% on that of 2020. However, this will still only be at 29% of the 2019 rate i.e. pre-Covid-19. The limitations to travel outside of the UK may encourage visits locally and domestically, with UK heritage attractions potentially benefitting from increased overnight stays in the UK.

## Built heritage

- 2.2.7 Urban areas all over the country have a rich architectural history and heritage assets that provide workspaces, homes, community spaces and visitor attractions. The historic environment adds to the distinctiveness, identity and sense of place (see section 3.5). It attracts investment, businesses and people<sup>8</sup>. The density of historic buildings is strongly related to the overall movement of businesses into an area<sup>9</sup> in this context it is clear that the re-use and upkeep of historic buildings can enhance business opportunities. The nature of historic buildings can often offer flexibility in space, and can add to a businesses' distinctiveness and character. Adaptive re-use aims to preserve those elements of the buildings that contain such values, while at the same time adapting the place for new uses.<sup>10</sup> The creative industries have been one of the fastest growing sectors over the past decade with many favouring historic buildings as their base.
- 2.2.8 In order for built heritage to be safely re-used, it must be conserved. The conservation and re-use of heritage assets epitomises the fundamental principles of the circular economy

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.visitbritain.org/annual-survey-visits-visitor-attractions-latest-results>

<sup>7</sup> See visitor attraction trends data on <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://dcmsblog.uk/2019/09/derby-a-heritage-high-street-success-story/>

<sup>9</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

<sup>10</sup> Built Cultural Heritage 2020, Interreg Europe

and sustainability and can be a source of regional regeneration. The ongoing need to repair, maintain and restore historic buildings creates strong dependencies between the heritage, construction and development sectors.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.3 Social Regeneration, Health and Wellbeing**

- 2.3.1 Heritage can combine the tangible with the intangible and support both physical and mental health. It should be integral to supporting wellbeing and cohesion of communities.<sup>12</sup> A growing body of evidence is demonstrating how heritage can benefit people's wellbeing. Historic England's *Heritage and Society* report from 2019 states that *'engaging with or living near heritage is associated with higher life satisfaction and quality of life. The research highlighted the therapeutic effects of historic landscapes and 'blue' and 'green' spaces (such as canals, rivers, and historic parks), and the importance of shared identity and connection'*.<sup>13</sup> Heritage can be a strong contributor to job creation, skills development and education and provides a resource for research and teaching as well as volunteering opportunities.
- 2.3.2 Heritage offers a sense of belonging, identity and an understanding of place. Physical heritage can provide spaces to visit and can host activities for people to be a part of. As we move out of the restrictions of Covid-19, a focus on health and wellbeing will be more central to development and organisations. Strategies that put wellbeing at the forefront are likely to thrive.
- 2.3.3 Heritage is for all and should be accessible to all. The role of heritage as a catalyst for inclusive growth is an important part of the wellbeing economy, plays an essential role in society and can help to create social cohesion and can increase civic pride and activism. Policies centred on inclusion, reducing inequalities and community engagement will stimulate regeneration, increase interest in heritage and in turn favour the sustainability of heritage assets.
- 2.3.4 Access to greenspaces, whether parks, canal networks, or open land, contributes to health and wellbeing and are often easily accessible and often encourage physical activity. Heritage in green spaces can be used as a tool to help increase knowledge on

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<sup>11</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

<sup>12</sup> The Heritage Alliance: Heritage, Health and Wellbeing. 2020

<sup>13</sup> The Heritage Alliance: Heritage, Health and Wellbeing. 2020

environmental issues. Green spaces are also an important part of our historic environment with some being heritage assets in themselves.

## **2.4 Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption**

2.4.1 Heritage is inherently sustainable and is an integral part of a low carbon economy. Investing in the reuse of historic buildings to extend life and durability adds value to the buildings themselves, increases their value to society and reduces overall carbon footprint.

2.4.2 When a historic building is refurbished and retrofitted, it will often emit less carbon by 2050 than a new building.<sup>14</sup> The adaptive reuse of typical historic buildings reduces waste from demolition and conserves the building materials. It also generates jobs, particularly due to the process of repair, reuse and retrofitting being more time consuming than constructing new buildings, requiring more work and for longer.

2.4.3 The historic environment can positively influence the objectives of a transport plans, such as aiming to reduce traffic congestion in historic towns and cities, encouraging use of public transport, the promotion and enhancements of better transport links. In addition, new uses in and around historic centres can contribute to carbon reduction through the reduced need for car based travel to these centres compared with more dispersed and suburban development that may not be as easily accessible using public transport.

### **Post Covid-19 Recovery**

2.4.4 Heritage can play a vital role in the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in supporting the economy, helping to create jobs and promote activities, as well as utilising the increased appreciation and use of greenspaces to promote health and wellbeing outcomes.

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<sup>14</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

## 3.0 BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION

### 3.1 Walsall Borough

#### Location and Population

- 3.1.1 Situated at the heart of the West Midlands, Walsall is located centrally within the UK, to the north-west of Birmingham. It is one of seven Metropolitan Boroughs in the West Midlands, one of four Black Country authorities. It has an estimated population of 285,500 (ONS 2019) which is predicted to increase by 5.9% over 10 years.<sup>15</sup> It is located central to the motorway network, with transport links to Birmingham, London and the rest of the UK. **(Figure 1).**
- 3.1.2 Diversity of places, population and communities contribute to the borough's vibrancy, something which Walsall celebrates. There has been a significant increase in the level of ethnic diversity in the decade up to 2018, with a higher rate than most of England and Wales. Residents identifying as White British are the largest group, with those identifying as being of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage forming the largest minority groups. Other populations include a small Eastern European populace who make up about 1% of borough residents.<sup>16</sup> Walsall also homes approximately 400 asylum-seekers and refugees in any one year and has welcomed people from across the world, particularly those from the Middle East and Central and West Africa. There is also an existing settled and itinerant Gypsy and Traveller population.<sup>17</sup> The south of the borough has a higher percentage of minority ethnic residents (55.5%), followed by the west (19.8%), the north (14.2%) and the east (9%) (2011 census).<sup>18</sup>
- 3.1.3 The diversity of populations in the borough is considered an asset (see section 3.7.24), however, there is a tendency for localities to be insular whether due to a historically recognised identity or a preference to 'stay local'. There is a strong socio-economic divide between the affluent east and the deprived and less healthy west.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/home/demographics/population>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

<sup>18</sup> Walsall Insight, Locality Overviews: North, South, East, West. 2018-2019

<sup>19</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

- 3.1.4 Meeting the needs of both a growing younger population, and older population in the borough will prove important factors when it comes to planning for the future.<sup>20</sup> The predicted growth of Walsall's older population over the next 10 years is 12.4%. There has already been an 8.8% increase in births between 2004 and 2014, and an 11.34% increase in reception pupils between 2012 and 2017.
- 3.1.5 Due to the nature of information available, information on demographics and populations in Walsall borough is presented in the following four groups of wards (**Figure 2**):
- North: Bloxwich and surrounding wards including Blakenall, Birchills Leamore, Bloxwich East, and Bloxwich West.
  - South: Walsall town centre and surrounding wards including Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck, and St Matthews wards.
  - East: Aldridge, Walsall Wood, Brownhills and surrounding wards including Pelsall, Pheasey Farm Park, Rushall, Streetley.
  - West: Willenhall and Darlaston and surrounding wards including Bentley and Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South.
- 3.1.6 An overview of the borough in more detail and the character of its localities can be found in Section 3.5 Walsall's Localities.

### **North**

- 3.1.7 Bloxwich and the surrounding areas are located to the north east and make up 15% of the borough overall. The population density for these wards is 35 people per hectare which is higher than the borough average of 27. The area has a younger age profile than the borough overall. Ethnicities are made up of 14.2% minority ethnic residents which is lower than the borough average of 24.1%. The majority of neighbourhoods suffer from severe multiple deprivation and the highest concentration in the borough.<sup>21</sup>

### **South**

- 3.1.8 Walsall and the surrounding areas in the south covers 17% of the borough. The population density for these wards is 37.4 people per hectare which is higher than the borough

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/>

<sup>21</sup> Walsall Insight, Locality Overview: North. 2018

average of 27. The area has a younger age profile than the borough average. Ethnicities are made up of 55.5% minority ethnic residents which is well above the borough average of 24.1%. Levels of deprivation are on average with the borough overall with pockets of more deprived neighbourhoods towards the town centre. The least deprived areas are towards the east of the area.<sup>22</sup>

### **East**

3.1.9 The demographic data available for the east of the borough covers an area of almost 50% of the borough. The population density for these wards is 18 people per hectare, far lower than the borough average of 27. The age of the population is above the borough average. Ethnicities are made up of 9% minority ethnic residents which is lower than the borough average of 24.1%. The east of the borough is significantly less deprived than the borough overall with neighbourhoods in Aldridge and Streetly among the least deprived in England, although some areas of relative deprivation do exist including parts of Brownhills, Pelsall, Rushall and Aldridge.<sup>23</sup>

### **West**

3.1.10 The West of the borough covers 18% of the borough overall. The population density for these wards is 39 people per hectare which is higher than the borough average of 27. The area has an age profile on average with the borough overall. Ethnicities are made up of 19.8% minority ethnic residents which is lower than the borough average of 24.1%. Levels of deprivation are on average with the borough overall with a mixture of deprivation levels with areas to the north being the least deprived.

## **3.2 Climate**

3.2.1 In Walsall 25% of emissions come from industrial and commercial sources, 35% from domestic sources and 37% from transport. Figures shows that since 2010, Walsall's carbon emissions have reduced by 22.5%, lower than the Black Country average of 24.5%.<sup>24</sup> Following the climate change emergency declared by the Council in September 2019, a steering group has been formed and action plan developed to help Walsall become a net zero carbon authority by 2050 in line with the national target.

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<sup>22</sup> Walsall Insight, Locality Overview: South. 2019

<sup>23</sup> Walsall Insight, Locality Overview: West. 2019

<sup>24</sup> Cabinet – 18 December 2019 Response to the Climate Change Emergency, Walsall Council

### **3.3 Regeneration and Development**

#### **Economic Investment**

- 3.3.1 Regeneration is a constant theme within Walsall. There has been significant investment in the borough in the last 7 years with investments in Walsall Town Centre alone reaching over £384 million. These include the £11m Business and Sports Hub at Walsall College, £32m HQ for Jhoots Pharmacy, £12m cinema development at Walsall Waterfront, £7.8m Primark and Co-op project and £7.8m mixed use scheme which includes a 60 bed Travelodge hotel.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.3.2 The Council is investing in activity to stimulate development in the wider borough and is directly involved in improvement and investment in public realm in the town centres. The Council is also seeing continued investment in the areas surrounding the town centres with new housing and employment opportunities. Communities are also experiencing the delivery of over 1,500 new homes and the development of 56,000m<sup>2</sup> of new employment space. By 2031, there may also be a further 8,000 homes along the Walsall to Wolverhampton Corridor.
- 3.3.3 Recent activity in the wider region includes The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) that works collaboratively to deliver the vision of a more prosperous West Midlands through economic, industrial, transport and community strategies, priorities and research. Recent activity includes the launch of a five-year plan to reach net zero carbon by 2041<sup>26</sup> and the investment to support the redevelopment of this historic Symphony Hall in Birmingham<sup>27</sup>. Midlands Engine brings a collective voice to the region, is a catalyst for change bringing together the activity of local and combined authorities, LEAs, universities, businesses, bringing together ideas and resources. In 2020 it developed £17bn worth of investment opportunities in a variety of sectors and sites that attracted international interest.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Transport**

- 3.3.4 Completion of the Chase Line electrification, increased passenger services to Birmingham International and London Euston, and the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail line with new

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<sup>25</sup> Corporate Plan 2018-2021 Walsall Council

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/green-light-for-region-s-ambitious-net-zero-carbon-plan-with-funding-for-new-capital-projects/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/wmca-invests-256k-to-support-redevelopment-of-symphony-hall/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.midlandengine.org/>

stations at Willenhall and Darlaston, will benefit both residents and businesses. When complete (due in 2022<sup>29</sup>), the improvements to junction 10 of the M6 will also increase connectivity.

### **Phoenix 10**

- 3.3.5 The Phoenix 10 Scheme is a key project going ahead through the Land and Property Investment Fund. Located between Darlaston and Walsall town centre, the 44-acre derelict site, once home to James Bridge Copper Works (closed in 1999), is earmarked for the regeneration scheme. Construction is likely to start in 2023, with completion in 2027, to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century Industrial & Business Park.<sup>30</sup>

### **Towns Fund**

- 3.3.6 Walsall and Bloxwich are among 100 towns selected to get a share of the Government's £3.6 billion Towns Fund, which aims to transform the economic growth prospect of towns with a focus on improved transport, broadband connectivity, skills and higher value jobs. £25m was awarded to both Walsall Town Centre and Bloxwich.
- 3.3.7 Towns Fund Proposals are not yet in the public domain but initial proposals include a construction skills academy, vehicle technology training centre, performing arts venue, enhancement of pedestrian and cycle connectivity, digital skills hub, town centre community learning campus, social enterprise and create arts centre, active public spaces and green spaces projects, community capital fund and multi-agency digital access centre.

### **Future High Streets**

- 3.3.8 Walsall has been confirmed as one of the areas shortlisted to receive funding from the Future High Streets Fund. So far 15 areas across England have been awarded a share of £255 million and Walsall is one of the remaining 57 areas to receive a share of provisional funding of £576 million to further develop plans. It will enable the delivery of ambitious regeneration plans and fund new local projects such as improvements to transport infrastructure, new homes and the transformation of underused spaces. Details on potential projects are currently being developed by the Council.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/our-work/west-midlands/m6-junction-10-improvement/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://phoenix10walsall.co.uk/>

### **Walsall Town Centre Masterplan**

- 3.3.9 The Walsall Town Centre Masterplan 2019 and Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan 2019 have also been developed and provide a vision for further development, investment and transformational change in the town centre over the next 15 to 20 years. Details on these can be found in Section 3.8.

### **Love Willenhall Masterplan**

- 3.3.10 Currently in development is the Love Willenhall Masterplan that aims to create a more vibrant healthy and prosperous community. It will form the basis of a supplementary planning document to give the Council more influence to help landowners tackle the derelict buildings and bring them back into use. It will be under development with community and faith groups, voluntary organisations, businesses and schools. The development is currently at the survey stage.

### **Heritage related development**

- 3.3.11 Building on Walsall's leather heritage, the Saddlery School, a new training centre for leather working, has recently opened in a converted vacant shop at The Bridge in the centre of Walsall town centre. The investment by the Saddlers Company Charitable Fund in the new premises and this training initiative will help the local leather industries and will plug a skills shortage, reinvigorate an ageing workforce and connect the community back to a part of the town's heritage.<sup>31</sup>
- 3.3.12 Kiondo is a community organisation focussed on place-making. They have recently secured over 5,000 square feet in the Old Hogs Head pub in the Grade II listed Brookes Works, built originally as shops and saddle works. The focus is now on fund-raising with local partners and communicating with the people of Walsall to restore the space into a multi-disciplinary arts and community hub, creative studios and community led design research labs.<sup>32</sup>
- 3.3.13 In 2018 Walsall Council created a flagship, cultural and social learning hub incorporating the central library, local history and archive collections in the restored Lichfield Street Central Library building combined with the 1960s art gallery building. It was remodelled

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<sup>31</sup> <https://thesaddlers.org/uncategorized/saddlers-open-walsall-leather-skills-centre-to-teach-craft-to-future-talent>

<sup>32</sup> <https://walsall.kiondo.co.uk/>

and refurbished, transforming the Grade II listed building to local history centre and is home to Walsall Archives, children's library, coffee shop and ICT lounge. It provides a varied calendar of activities and events and provides room hire.

- 3.3.14 Walsall Arboretum received grant funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) in 2010, enabling a major restoration scheme. Over the last decade, the Arboretum has seen a significant increase in visitors and volunteer involvement.
- 3.3.15 Barr Beacon also secured grant funding from the NLHF in 2012, delivering the "Raising the Barr" project, which included the restoration of the site's heritage features, such as rare design of flagpole, an historic tree plantation, and its war memorial.
- 3.3.16 Willenhall (2012-2015) and Bloxwich (2002-2006) were part of a Townscape Heritage Initiative to repair, restore and reuse historic properties and their traditional architectural features in order to improve the image and character of the area, and to encourage the economic regeneration and heritage enhancement of the Conservation Areas.

### **3.4 Historic Overview**

- 3.4.1 Walsall borough has a rich heritage and a past to be proud of. It was formerly known as the 'town of a hundred trades' and was recognised internationally as the British leather goods capital. This section provides a brief historical overview of Walsall borough. It is followed by Section 3.5 Walsall's Localities which briefly reflects their history and outlines their current context in relation to heritage. Assets that may hold heritage value that lie outside of these centres have also been considered.

#### **Early Walsall**

- 3.4.2 The borough's heritage dates back to the Anglo-Saxon and Roman periods. Various archaeological findings dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century have been discovered across the borough. The earliest mention of Walsall appears as 'Walesho' in the will of Wulfric Spot in 1002. Other mentions include in a charter of 1159 by Henry II.<sup>33</sup> Walsall began as a small village surrounding the parish church and later expanded to a small agricultural town with common fields farmed in strips, after which some street names remain, such as Long Street, Wisemore, Chuckery, and Butts Road.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/Walsall/origins.htm>

- 3.4.3 The initial settlement grew around St. Matthew's church in Walsall town centre. Most occupants will have lived in the centre, as well as surrounding areas known as the 'Foreign'. The Foreign included areas such as Bescot, Caldmore and Walsall Wood as hamlets, and with Bloxwich as a larger settlement.
- 3.4.4 Although the main activities in the Middle Ages were agricultural, there is evidence of industrial activity as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the mining of ironstone and coal at Walsall Manor, Birchills, and to the south of the town centre. The Mayor of Walsall was created as a political position in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and by the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Walsall had acquired its first Town Hall, the original Guildhall on High Street.
- 3.4.5 By the late 1600s, Walsall was a thriving town with a rapidly growing population. People were beginning to move to the borough from elsewhere in order to find work in the many new industries. The borough was becoming less reliant on agriculture and turned instead to more industrial practices.

#### **Walsall's – The Town of 100 Trades**

- 3.4.6 The industrial age of Walsall flourished with the proximity of coal, ironstone and limestone (which used as a building material and burned to produce lime for agriculture and an ingredient for tanners). In the early days of Walsall's industrial, work was carried out in small workshops, usually in a yard behind the craftsman's house. Early trades included smithing, lime burning, milling and textile working for tailors, glovers, drapers and shearmen. There were also barbers, cobblers, butchers, bakers and carpenters.
- 3.4.7 There were leather tanneries in the town by the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century with complete leather goods being produced by the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the many goods manufactured in the town were part of the metal trade, of which Walsall is famous for today. Goods included awl-blades, buckles, chains, locks, nails, brass and pewter hollowware. Lorinery trades (the manufacture of bits, stirrups, buckles and spurs) and saddlery developed out of the requirements of horse transport and the production of horse furniture. Goods were transported and sold across the country. Other metal working included the production of pewter and brassware for household utensils. There were also coppersmiths, bell-founders and brass foundries casting window casements. A directory of trades published in 1767 listed 84 buckle makers, 66 chape makers (metal pins), 38

publicans, 19 spur and rowel makers, 13 snaffle makers, 10 ironmongers, 8 stirrup makers, 7 chapmen and merchants, and several awl-blade makers, blacksmiths, chandlers, curriers, fellmongers, gunsmiths, locksmiths, nailers, skimmers, tanners, and whitesmiths.<sup>34</sup> Other trades included textile, leather working, rope making, nut and bolt manufacture and lock making. Walsall has become known for its leather goods, saddlery and metal work.

- 3.4.8 The Industrial Revolution changed Walsall. It grew from a village of 2,000 people to a borough with of over 17,000 by 1801. It continued to grow, its population reaching 140,000 by 1901.<sup>35</sup> The construction of the canal running through the borough, built between 1785 and 1842<sup>36</sup>, reflects the town's importance as an industrial centre. The town received a railway line in 1847, 48 years after the completion of the canal. Walsall Railway Station on Station Street became the main gateway to the town since the 1840s providing access to the trade networks in the industrial age.

### **Walsall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

- 3.4.9 By 1900 the town centre had become an affluent and vibrant shopping and business area with leather production at an all-time high. Large numbers of people travelled to and from the town centre using the frequent tram services. By the early 29<sup>th</sup> century there was an Irish element to the population in the Blue Lane and Coal Pool areas.<sup>37</sup>
- 3.4.10 By the end to World War I, after a short lived boom in the economy, Walsall suffered the recession of the early 1920s. The pressures of war disrupted trade and led to the rise in foreign competition. The loss of many traditional exports such as steel, coal and textiles impacted Walsall resulting in substantial job losses and the closure of two canal branches. By 1922, there were over 9,000 people out of work in Walsall. The national housing shortage in the early 1920s led to the development of council housing, of which there were almost 8,000 by the end of the 1930s. Housing production ceased, however, due to the commencement of World War II. Industrial production briefly picked up again, as did rates of employment, due to essential work required for the war effort.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/Walsall/18thcentury.htm>

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data\\_cube\\_page.jsp?data\\_theme=T\\_POP&data\\_cube=N\\_TOT\\_POP&u\\_id=10076912&c\\_id=10001043&add=N](https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data_cube_page.jsp?data_theme=T_POP&data_cube=N_TOT_POP&u_id=10076912&c_id=10001043&add=N)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.ukwaterwaysguide.co.uk/map/walsall-canal/main-canal>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol17/pp143-146#fn39>

- 3.4.11 The borough fared relatively well during World War II, considering its status as an industrial town. After the war local industry returned to normal production with some suffering due to rising wages. The increasing population led to the construction of further council housing, with 15,000 new houses by 1958, and other multi-storey developments in the 1960s. According to a contemporary census, by 1961 the population included people from India, Pakistan and Jamaica largely in the Caldmore and Palfrey areas.<sup>38</sup>
- 3.4.12 Redevelopment of Walsall borough in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the loss of many historic buildings including the 1930s George Hotel at The Bridge, and much of High Street and Digbeth. Although some surviving buildings have been converted into offices and shops, others lie empty and in various states of degradation. Others have been lost to arson attacks in recent years including industrial buildings such as the former factory at the canal head as well as the Jabez Cliff former leather factory in Walsall town centre.

### **3.5 Walsall's Localities**

- 3.5.1 Walsall borough contains a mixture of urban and rural landscapes with a third of the Borough classed as Greenbelt, made up of open spaces, Local Nature Reserves and open farmland with public rights of way. Most of the borough is highly industrialised and densely populated, while areas to the north and east of the borough are comparatively more open and greener. The borough developed as a series of dispersed centres which is still reflected today. Each urban centre is different in character and has its own identity and history. The following provides an overview of each locality, any surviving assets relating to heritage, either within or nearby these centres (**Figures 4-12**). It is important to note that there are other residential areas in Walsall, all with their own identities and communities, however for the purposes of this study, they have been grouped into the larger conurbations. Information on existing assets such as visitor attractions, conservation areas and listed buildings is included in section 3.7 Key Assets. This section is intended to provide a brief overview of each areas and highlight any surviving heritage assets that relate to their history. Locations are provided in relation to the wider borough and to Walsall town centre, as it is the strategic and geographic centre to the borough. The remainder of information in this report references back to each of these localities, however, it should be noted that

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol17/pp143-146#fn39>

the entire borough has been studied and that the following list does not prioritise one area over another.

3.5.2 The localities are as follows (**Figure 3**):

- Walsall Town Centre
- Aldridge
- Bloxwich
- Brownhills
- Darlaston
- Pelsall
- Rushall
- Streetly
- Walsall Wood
- Willenhall

### **Walsall**

3.5.3 Walsall is rich in architectural, industrial and social history. The street layout still reflects medieval street plans with its historic core still evident today. The high street was the original centre of the town with a market dating back to 1220. The built heritage reflects many eras of Walsall's development with the most prominent historic building stock dating from Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods. The town retains much of its historic interest alongside more modern architecture, ranging from compact traditional Victorian worker's cottages with ancillary buildings to high status Victorian and Georgian villas. Ecclesiastic building always existed but additional places of worship, with further public and civic buildings being constructed over last 200 years.

3.5.4 The most evident period of change is between the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the expansion of trade, industry, housing and communication networks, the centre of Walsall radiates outwards from the ancient core (the parish church, now St. Matthew's, survives as a major landmark from which the medieval town grew).

3.5.5 Some parts the town remain recognisable in its late 19<sup>th</sup> century form, however, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a number of buildings demolished as a result of slum clearance, and the construction of social housing in its place. The urban form has simplified over time

with the fusing of plots and the scale of development increasing. The town centre has also become fragmented in places with street forms being altered by modern infrastructure, particularly the construction of new roads and building schemes.

- 3.5.6 The majority of surviving historic buildings within the town centre date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and include rows of shops and offices. The outer edges of the immediate town centre have a scattering of listed Victorian and Georgian houses. There are many historic buildings in the town centre that are derelict or in a poor state of repair. The original fabric is a risk of being lost due to absent ownership, lack of maintenance and/or unsympathetic additions and alterations. The area includes multiple conservation areas: Church Hill Conservation Area, Bridge Street Conservation Area, Lichfield Street. Bradford Street abuts the edge of the Town Centre whilst Walsall Locks Conservation Area extends to Walsall Crown Wharf, by the New Art Gallery Walsall.
- 3.5.7 Important late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century municipal buildings remain, including the Council House (1902-05), Town Hall (1903) and Walsall Central Library (1906). Other surviving examples include the Victorian Arcade (1895-7) and Lloyd's Bank (c.1900), both located adjacent to The Bridge area. Earlier notable buildings include the County Court on Lichfield Street (1831), the Imperial Cinema (1868) on Darwall Street and the Green Dragon Inn Public House (c1773) on High Street. Adjoining this is the prominent Grade II\* Listed Guildhall (1867), and adjacent the former Police Station (1866) and St. Matthew's Church at the top of High Street.
- 3.5.8 Surviving industrial buildings include Brookes Works Saddlery (1890-91) on Leicester Street and Hatherton Works (1901) on Holtshill Lane.
- 3.5.9 The majority of buildings mentioned are Grade II listed, however, there are also several other unlisted, brick-built buildings, situated throughout the town centre add to the town's sense of place. These include buildings along George Street and Darwall Street.
- 3.5.10 Other assets include Walsall Leather Museum which provides a social history of leather manufacture in Walsall and is set in a renovated Victorian factory. It is situated approximately 0.5km north of Walsall town centre. Further information on this asset can be found in section 3.7.5.

- 3.5.11 Another historic asset is the Walsall Canal head. It forms a branch of the Walsall Canal enabling industrial access to the centre of the town. It is also home to the New Art Gallery Walsall. The area today is surrounded by modern infrastructure including five and six storey apartments with ground floor restaurants. There is also a four-storey brick building on the southern edge of the canal head which was subject to an arson attack in 2020 and is in an unknown state of repair.
- 3.5.12 Outside of Walsall town centre are a number of other historic assets including the Grade II listed Victoria Corn Mill (1850-60) on Long Acre Street to the north of the town centre. It is sited within a working industrial estate, however, the occupation of the mill itself is currently unknown. Also to the north of the town centre on the Walsall Canal are the Grade II listed Birchills Tollhouse (1840s) and Former Boatmans Rest (c.1900), which has now been granted planning and listed building consent for conversion to residential use.
- 3.5.13 Highgate Brewery (1898) sits within a residential area to the south east of the town centre, is reached by a single access road. It is currently unoccupied and closed in 2010. It is one of relatively few buildings of this type survive and in a recognisable form and reportedly still holds brewing equipment of importance.
- 3.5.14 Historic green spaces include the Grade II Registered Park and Garden, Walsall Memorial Garden and Walsall Arboretum, the latter occupying the site of Reynolds Hall of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was subsequently a group of open quarries called Walsall lime-pits. The Arboretum is situated c 0.5km north-east of the centre of Walsall and is formed of c.11ha and comprises lake, gardens, green spaces, play areas and sports facilities. It was restored to its former glory over the last ten years with investment from the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) and with capital investment from the Council totalling approximately £7.5m. This has seen the park receive significant increase in visitors and volunteer involvement. The site has also received a further 4 grants totalling £395,000.

### **Aldridge**

- 3.5.15 Aldridge lies to the east of the wider borough approximately 5.3km from Walsall town centre. It became an industrial village after the improvement of transport links to the area. Hay Head Wood Local Nature reserve shows the scale of activity in the areas with

remaining elements of industrial activity such as mine shafts, brick mounts for steam engines and lime kilns. These remnants sit on Daw End Branch, a section of canal built between 1803 and 1847. Aldridge also has a number of other greenspaces including Leigh's Wood Local Nature Reserve, Lodge Wood and Longwood Coppice, Stubbers Green, Anchor Meadow playing fields and The Croft. To the east of the area is further greenspace including golf club and farmland, leading out to expansive countryside.

- 3.5.16 The area began as a small agricultural settlement up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it became an industrial town with coal mines, lime kilns and brickworks and there are a number of remaining factories and large industrial estates in the area. The Aldridge Conservation Area encompasses the main surviving areas of the historic village of Aldridge, comprising a mixture of residential areas and public open space.
- 3.5.17 The population continued to grow after World War II with people and businesses vacating the congested parts of Birmingham for Aldridge. Large new housing and industrial estates were developed, and the older shops and cottages of the High Street were replaced by a modern shopping centre. It remains this way, with most historic buildings serving as private residences aside from the Grade II\* listed Church of St. Mary opposite Aldridge Croft. Aldridge Transport Museum (see section 3.7.7) sits within an industrial estate on the western edge of the urban area of Aldridge.
- 3.5.18 Aldridge is home to many clubs and societies including sporting clubs, youth theatre, air cadets, scouts and church youth groups. There is also Aldridge Marina on the Daw End branch of canal running from the north east of the Borough from Brownhills down to the Rushall Canal.

### **Bloxwich**

- 3.5.19 Bloxwich lies in the north west of the wider borough approximately 3.7km from Walsall town centre. It has a known history dating back to before the Norman Conquest. Throughout the Middle Ages it was a small agricultural village. Many cottage industries existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including the making of nails, needles and saddle blades. Bloxwich Hall, built in 1830 for an ironmaster, now serves as office spaces. As does 'Manor House', now used as a hospital for the elderly.

- 3.5.20 The oldest surviving building in Bloxwich sits on the corner of Samuel Street. Known as the 'Coffee Shop' with foundations dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Another building of interest is the old Vicarage also dating back to the 1600s. The Grosvenor cinema, built in 1922, also survives and has been of mixed use since its closure in 1959. Three large housing estates were built in the 1950s and 1960s, along with several schools, expanding the area further.
- 3.5.21 There are a number of listed buildings relating to brewing. The mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Grade II listed Royal Exchange Public House and adjoining brewhouse which lies empty north, before entering Bloxwich urban centre/high street. The Turf Tavern, a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century house, converted in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century to public house, remains open as a public house and has internal alterations of c.1920. It sits opposite Bloxwich Park. Nearby is the Grade II listed The Romping Cat built in 1900, which still operates as a public house. Bloxwich also has the Grade II Listed Church of All Saints on the High Street built in 1874-7.
- 3.5.22 The urban centre has a mix of historic and late 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings including All Saint's Church and a row of interesting shop frontages opposite. The Grade II listed Bloxwich Hall, built in 1830, remains to the south of the high street, and is now used as offices.
- 3.5.23 Greenspaces include King George V Memorial Playing Fields, opened in 1937, Bloxwich Park and Promenade Gardens opened in 1829 which are highlights of Bloxwich. Bloxwich includes Bloxwich Park Conservation Area, Elmore Green Conservation Area and Bloxwich High Street Conservation Area.
- 3.5.24 Beginning in 2002, the Bloxwich Townscape Heritage Initiative aimed to restore and repaired local shop frontages to improve the image and character of the area and the promotion of local interest in the heritage aspects of the town. According to the Townscape Heritage Initiative Schemes Evaluation Ten Year Report (2013), the programme improved the condition of some buildings, however, there is *'no sense in which the local community has been particularly engaged in the programme, or that their understanding of the value of the local heritage has improved.'*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Townscape Heritage Initiative Schemes Evaluation Ten Year Report, 2013, Department of Planning Oxford Brookes University

### **Brownhills**

- 3.5.25 Bloxwich lies in the north eastern part of the borough approximately 8km from Walsall town centre. The name Brownhills first appeared in documents as late as the early 18th century when it was settled by coal miners. The Wyrley and Essington Canal was opened in 1797 and when the opening of coal mines spread northwards, a horse drawn tramway was built linking the workings to the canal loading wharves. Coal mining remained the main industry at Brownhills until the 1950s. Built heritage comprises the two Grade II listed footbridges on the canal either side of Brownhills. The area is predominately residential and benefits from surrounding greenspaces including Brownhills Common Local Nature Reserve and SSSI which is home to the roaming deer of the heaths of Chasewater up to Cannock Chase.

### **Darlaston**

- 3.5.26 Darlaston is located in the south west of the borough approximately 3.7km from Walsall town centre. Throughout the Middle Ages, Darlaston was primarily a small agricultural settlement, the mains streets of the town today being medieval thoroughfares and many street names reflecting its past. The village developed rapidly throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the mining and metal trades attracting new populations due to its location on the South Staffordshire Coalfield. Surrounding open land was soon covered with mine shafts, foundries and workshops. The town's industry specialised in gun locks, nuts and bolts. 35 bolt makers were recorded as working in Darlaston in 1851. Due to the influx of workers and the excellent transport links such as the Birmingham Canal navigations and the Grand Junction Railway, the population grew too rapidly for the town to manage. Poor conditions led to a high death rate. The town was once described as the '*unhealthiest town in the Black Country*', and the place was no longer in demand. Slum clearance in the area took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a large amount of housing was constructed between the wars and after World War II. There was also a large amount of Victorian terraced housing demolished during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century being replaced by houses and flats. Much of the town's industry had ceased to operate by the 1980s leaving increasing levels of unemployment.
- 3.5.27 Remaining historic buildings include the cluster 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings on the corner of Church Street and King Street. They comprise Grade II listed shops and The White Lion public house adjacent to St. Lawrence Church and opposite the historic Victoria Park.

There are a series of late 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick buildings nearby including Darlaston Town Hall, which is still used as the town hall, and Darlaston Police Station, now converted to apartments. The notable interest of Darlaston Conservation Area lies in both the buildings and its streetscape. Predominantly Victorian, its buildings display a variety of architectural styles and sit within an older, medieval village street plan.

- 3.5.28 Other remaining structures include two churches and a Grade II listed war memorial. The remainder of the area is made up of housing with pockets of green space, as well as large industrial areas. It is separated from Walsall town centre and the eastern and northern areas of the borough by the M6 motorway. Greenspace includes Moorcroft Wood lying to the south of Borough.

### **Pelsall**

- 3.5.29 Pelsall lies in the north of the borough approximately 5.5km from Walsall town centre. It began as a small agricultural settlement with a record of 1563 listing only 14 households. Clusters of houses developed on the fringes of the village centre by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The area gradually developed, with the cutting of the canal in 1794 opening up the area to industry. Pelsall became a mining village and a centre for nail making. A Methodist Chapel and school were opened by 1844 and a High Street by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pelsall Hall, after which the colliery was named, is the only building of notable architectural or historic significance within the area which is inaccessible to the public. The population reached over 3,000 by 1901 from under 500 a century before. Many coal mines ceased trading in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however one survived until 1977. The village kept its rural atmosphere well into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with several working farms surviving until post World War II. Much of this land was since utilised for housing development, however, the ancient common remains. Pelsall contains two conservation areas, Old Pelsall and Pelsall Common.
- 3.5.30 Today Pelsall is mainly residential with a small high street. There are green spaces within the locality and as it is the most northerly point of Walsall borough, its northern edge borders expansive farmland. Greenspaces include Pelsall Common which is cared for by the local community and Pelsall EDC Playing Fields.

## **Rushall**

- 3.5.31 Rushall is located fairly centrally within the borough between Walsall and Aldridge and is approximately 3.3km north east of Walsall town centre. Rushall's history began at least as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period. It was a thriving village at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now mostly residential. Due to road improvements, housing developments and the increase in population, the area has lost much of its historic character.
- 3.5.32 Historic buildings include the Grade II Listed St. Michaels Church, Rushall War Memorial and Rushall New Hall which neighbours the buried remains of a modest fortified manor house, neither of which are publicly accessible. There were a number of quarries in Rushall Hall's park, which flooded to become Park Lime Pits Local Nature Reserve. Within Old Rushall Conservation Area, the church and churchyard are the only publically accessible parts of the Conservation Area.

## **Streetly**

- 3.5.33 Streetly lies in the most south eastern part of the wider borough as is approximately 7km from Walsall town centre. Archaeological evidence in Streetly dates back to prehistory, with the earliest written record being found in an Anglo-Saxon Charter from 959. During the Middle Ages, the area was still largely forested but left as heath and marshland during the 18<sup>th</sup> century with some land let as nine farms.
- 3.5.34 In 1879 Streetly Railways Station was opened providing access to and from the area but closed in 1965. Housing was limited to a small area up until further development began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century including roads. Much of the area remained relatively rural until after 1945 and the housing stock, churches and library date from the 1960s and 1970s. The area remains mainly residential whilst retaining much open space, the small village has grown into a residential suburb with easy transport links. Today, Streetly borders Sutton Park, a medieval deer park that sits outside of Walsall borough boundary.
- 3.5.35 Greenspaces include Barr Beacon Local Nature Reserve, one of the highest points in the West Midlands, with a War Memorial at its summit. The site is on the greenbelt land and is of local importance for nature conservation and historically was the site of a beacon, where fires were lit in times of impending attack or on celebratory occasions. Of natural and

historic interest the Grade II Registered Park and Garden Great Bar Park, which surrounds the Grade II Listed Great Barr Hall.

### **Walsall Wood**

- 3.5.36 Walsall Wood is located immediately north of Aldridge in the north east of the wider borough and is approximately 6.5km from Walsall town centre. It was one of the main settlement areas on the outer edges of Cannock Wood prior to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Limestone was quarried here during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The canal opened during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to transport coal and other raw materials to the iron and steel industries of the surrounding areas.
- 3.5.37 Manufacture in the area included nail, chain and brick making, as well as mining. The population rose with the opening of Shelfield Colliery in 1864 and Walsall Wood Colliery in 1871 (closing in 1964 due to exhaustion of coal reserves). Around this time public services, including police station, post office, gas and sewerage works, were introduced. 1882 saw the opening of the freight railway line, with a passenger line opening two years later. A tram service was introduced in 1904 between the area and Walsall Town, however, this was replaced in 1927 but a motor bus service.
- 3.5.38 By the 1920s the population has grown to over 8,000 and the area was well established as a shopping area.
- 3.5.39 Castle Fort at Castlebank Plantation is located on the eastern edge of Walsall Wood is a Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (8<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) hillfort, it is also a scheduled monument. Small scale excavation and archaeological observation in advance of development undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s have indicated that archaeological remains survive within the hillfort despite the construction of the nearby house and outbuildings. The site is not currently accessible to the public.

### **Willenhall**

- 3.5.40 Willenhall lies in the west of the borough and is approximately 4.7km from Walsall town centre. Willenhall was a small agricultural village throughout the Middle Ages. The population increased dramatically with the exploitation of iron and coal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of the town's growing prosperity is still visible in some of the buildings of the area. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the construction of a new main road, making trade easier, and

the growth of settlements around the town and local industries. It also saw a miner's strike in the 19<sup>th</sup> century where mines were flooded and lost.

- 3.5.41 Lock making is the most prevalent industry of Willenhall, which began in the Elizabethan era in Willenhall, Bilston and Wolverhampton. It became concentrated to Willenhall by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with a source from 1,855 quoting 340 lockmakers in the area, mostly working from small workshops. Willenhall became known as 'Humphshire' due to the work resulting in the poor posture of workers over time.
- 3.5.42 The condition of the town was drastically improved after a cholera epidemic in 1849 and the Willenhall Local Board of Health was founded. Several municipal buildings were erected to reflect civic pride including the Town Hall and Library building in 1866, public baths in 1938. Willenhall Memorial Park was opened in 1922, which had a significant amount of investment in the 1990s from the NHLF. It remains a town with its own identity.
- 3.5.43 Willenhall is rich in architectural heritage. Running until 2015, Willenhall was part of a five-year Townscape Heritage Initiative to repair, restore and reuse historic properties and their traditional architectural features and the enhancement of key buildings in the historic town centre.
- 3.5.44 The historic Market Place has a number of interesting shop frontages and listed assets including the characterful cluster of the Grade II listed The Bell Public House and adjacent shop (both late 17<sup>th</sup> century) and offices at 33 Market Place (mid 18<sup>th</sup> century). There are a number of other interesting buildings occupied as shops along this road opposed by 20<sup>th</sup> century shops. Many units are either closed or run-down.
- 3.5.45 Another area of noteworthy character is Union Street and Upper Lichfield Street with the Grade II Listed Trinity Methodist Church (c.1860) and pair of lockmakers houses with workshops (early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century). This historic row faces a superstore and car park.
- 3.5.46 Willenhall is also home to the Grade II Listed Locksmith's House Museum (see section 3.7.6), a small end of terrace house, run by the Black Country Living Museum. This is situated away from the town centre on New Road. It is separated from Walsall town centre

and the eastern and northern areas by the M6 motorway. Willenhall Conservation Area includes historic assets such as the Grade II Listed Clock Tower in the Market Place.

3.5.47 Currently in development is the Love Willenhall Masterplan that aims to create a more vibrant healthy and prosperous community. It aspires to bring empty and derelict buildings back into use and will be under development with community and faith groups, voluntary organisations, businesses and schools. The development is currently at the survey stage.

### **3.6 Communities**

3.6.1 Walsall is proud of its diverse range of communities across the borough. Communities can be defined by the shared attributes of people within it and/or by strength of connections between them. To be able to generalise about a community, it is important to understand these shared attributes and to involve and motivate individuals within the groups when developing projects and programmes. Shared attributes are not defined exclusively by broad demographic terms but also common ideas and interests. It is, therefore, not relevant to define all community groups by broad demographic terms such as their gender, age, race, location, education level, income or occupation.

3.6.2 A critical aim of the heritage strategy is to reduce inequalities through heritage-related projects. In order to do this, projects need to be for all, accessible to all, and created with all in mind, particularly 'outsider' communities, i.e. those not already involved in projects/groups, by providing attractive ways in to become 'insiders'. This may be done by identifying these 'outsiders' and presenting a way in through a credible link between what is on offer and shared values.

3.6.3 A way in which proposed heritage-related projects can better connect with communities and individuals is through partnerships with existing community driven initiatives. There are a number of organisations, services and initiatives already working with communities and volunteers across the borough. These include:

- Walsall for All
- Resilient Communities
- One Walsall
- Walsall Community Network

- Creative Factory
- Don't Settle (Beatfreaks)
- Creative Black Country
- Kiondo
- Critical Friends at The New Art Gallery Walsall
- Urban Hax
- Societies and Special Interest Groups

3.6.4 **Walsall for All** is a long term strategy for creating strong and integrated communities. The vision is to *'create integrated, empowered and inclusive communities where people from all backgrounds come together to celebrate what they have in common'*.

3.6.5 Walsall was chosen as one of five areas to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop projects to help train, support and equip people, organisations and groups to improve the quality of lives. The **Walsall for All** strategy was published in 2019. More information on this strategy can be found in section 3.7.6.

3.6.6 **Resilient Communities**<sup>40</sup> is a 'New Model of Personal Responsibility, Community Led Solutions, Integrated Community Safety and Community Protection and Enforcement'. The programme was launched in 2019 and aims to deliver against the following:

- people live a good quality of life and feel they belong;
- children grow up in connected communities and feel safe everywhere;
- people are proud of our town, district centres and communities.

3.6.7 It focusses on the assets of the population and is a citizen led way of improving quality of life. The approach enables the people who know what best meets their needs to create solutions to local issues, ensuring relevant and meaningful delivery. It brings the Council and other partners closer to the people of Walsall and helps communities by facilitating their own solutions. The model has four components:

- Enabling people to have personal responsibility
- Community led solutions
- Integrated services for the delivery of support to communities

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<sup>40</sup> Resilient Communities – A New Model of Personal Responsibility, Community Led Solutions, Integrated Community Safety and Community Protection and Enforcement. Cabinet –PROUD programme - 23 October 2019

- Integrated enforcement

- 3.6.8 The Resilient Communities model has enabled the Council to develop strong, direct relationships with multiple communities in the borough. Outstanding projects include Walsall Together to enhance social care, Walsall Outreach supporting vulnerable people, Community Champions scheme to support those most at risk from COVID-19, and the Neighbourhood Natters series of community projects to befriend and support vulnerable.
- 3.6.9 **One Walsall** provides a voice for the voluntary sector in Walsall and provides information, support, networking opportunities and funding advice for community groups, charities and social enterprises and is run by the borough's Volunteer Centre. It aims to support voluntary and community organisations to develop, connect and collaborate with partners, and increase volunteering and community action overall. One Walsall is made up of team members from a variety of backgrounds and is governed by a board of Trustees.
- 3.6.10 **Walsall Community Network** is a group of 15 community associations, some of which have been serving the communities for over 40 years.
- 3.6.11 **Creative Factory** develops and delivers exciting and dynamic arts and heritage projects and events with local communities in the West Midlands celebrating local diversity and culture. It runs a number of weekly activities at their community arts workshop based near Walsall town centre. It uses the arts to support mental health and promote community cohesion and has strong partnerships with local authorities, schools and places of worship. Creative Factory has enabled community groups to develop a variety of projects including exhibitions such as 'Punk in Walsall' as well digitally accessible content such as 'Walsall Windrush Generations', a project which collected stories from Walsall's early African and Caribbean Communities and presents them on their website. It is involved in events and festivals across the Black Country.
- 3.6.12 **Don't Settle** is part of National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) 'Kick the Dust' programme, which was set up in 2018 as a pilot grants programme to test new approaches to engaging young people with heritage across the Black Country. The project launched as a three-year programme in February 2019 and is led locally by Beatfreaks, a socially driven collective of creative companies based in Birmingham, which is guided by a Youth Steering Committee. It has focuses on the discrepancy between the diversity of citizens in communities and the

range of stories and perspectives reflected by heritage organisations. To tackle the discrepancy, Beatfreaks are working with local young people of colour and key organisations across the region to present a wider range of stories, broaden heritage audiences and get the young people they work with directly involved in decision making in the sector. Community participation and co-creation and co-evaluation are priorities.

- 3.6.13 **Creative Black Country's** mission is to 'make the most of the Black Country through arts, culture and creativity'. It is a regional action learning project funded by Arts Council England through the Creative People and Places programme which aims to engage audiences in areas where evidence shows people are less likely to take part in publicly funded arts and culture. It operates across Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall and explores and develops new creative projects with local people. It takes a co-creation and asset-based approach to community based projects and has a strong connection with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors including community groups, arts organisations, artists and creatives. The project has been running since 2014.
- 3.6.14 **Kiondo's** vision is to '*build a better Walsall by unlocking the dreams & ambitions of each community across the borough.*' By building connections with the local authority, voluntary sector, businesses and local residents Kiondo will create a manifesto for Walsall to capture the needs, values and ambitions of the local communities to create a new collective vision for Walsall's future. They have secured over 5,000 square feet in the Old Hogs Head pub in the grade II listed Brookes Works, built originally as shops and saddle works. The focus is now on fund-raising with local partners and communicating with the people of Walsall to restore the space into a multi-disciplinary arts and community hub, creative studios and community led design research labs.
- 3.6.15 **Critical Friends** at **The New Art Gallery Walsall** in Walsall town centre, is a small team of community members to help evaluate the gallery's programmes and communications and to explore ways in which they might do things differently. The group was created to ensure that the gallery's visitor offer is always as welcoming, relevant and engaging to all as it can be. The team reflects the diversity of Walsall by being made up of members from a variety of backgrounds.

3.6.16 **Urban Hax** is a non-profit makerspace based in Walsall. Its mission is to create a community of makers, innovators and hobbyists who come together and share skills, knowledge and crafts with the wider community. It provides work space, storage and other resources relating to science, art and technology to enable people to grow and share their projects and knowledge. Thought talks, classes, workshops and collaborative projects, Urban Hax facilitates the creative process and social connectivity.

### **Societies and Groups**

3.6.17 The following list comprises other known community societies and groups within Walsall:

- Friends of Parks Groups and Green Space Forum – *Borough wide*
- Brownhills Community Association – *Brownhills*
- Ryecroft Community Hub - *Walsall*
- Sneyd Community Association – *Walsall*
- Manor Farm Community Association - *Walsall*
- The Walsall Disability Hub – *Walsall*
- Aldridge Local History Society – *Aldridge*
- Jerome K Jerome Society – *Walsall*
- Pelsall History Centre – *Pelsall*
- Afro Caribbean Centre - *Walsall*
- Walsall Family History Group – *Willenhall*
- Darlaston Amateur Artists – *Darlaston*
- Talking Pictures – *Aldridge*
- Victorious Arts - *Aldridge*
- Walsall Artists Network – *Walsall*
- Walsall Community Arts Team – *Walsall*
- Walsall Gilbert and Sullivan Society - *Brownhills*
- Walsall Handspinners Knitters and Weavers - *Aldridge*

## **3.7 Key Assets**

3.7.1 The following sets out assets that may contribute to the future heritage offer of Walsall. They are grouped by the following typologies:

- **Visitor Attractions and events** – Attractions that are currently providing a draw to the area and that have the potential to contribute to heritage related projects. They are considered as cultural assets.
- **Cultural Assets** – Assets that have value because of its contribution/potential contribution to the heritage offer of Walsall. These include museums, archives, listed buildings and conservation areas. It also includes information on intangible heritage including existing trades and communities.
- **Natural Assets** – Assets that have value because of their potential contribution to the heritage offer of Walsall due to their story in Walsall's past and/or their historic use i.e. former industrial site.
- **Learning Assets** – Assets/resources/institutions that may contribute to the heritage offer of Walsall and mainly comprise of libraries.

3.7.2 They are listed below with short descriptions, where appropriate, as well as location.

#### **Visitor attractions and events**

3.7.3 The following have been drawn from a variety of sources including Trip Advisors top 'things to do' in Walsall. The list comprises current tourism activities that are considered relevant to heritage and that may already provide a draw to the area. The location of these is shown on **Figure 13**. This is not a complete list of cultural assets in Walsall borough. These can be found in section 3.7.13.

#### **The New Art Gallery Walsall**

3.7.4 Situated in Walsall Town Centre, The New Art Gallery Walsall is an international standard gallery and home to artwork collections by prestigious artists. It acts as a cultural and educational facility, a focus of civic pride and community identity. Their vision is to inspire lifelong engagement with art through positive learning experiences. The Gallery is home to The Garman Ryan Collection, which was the key reason for Arts Council England (ACE) funding the gallery's new site in 2000. The gallery's collection includes work by world renowned artists such as Picasso, Braque, Gericault and Delacroix. It also has a specially designed Archive Room and changing exhibitions programme.

### **Walsall Leather Museum**

- 3.7.5 Providing a social history of leather manufacture in Walsall, the museum provides hands on activities for visitors and school groups. Set in an authentic Victorian factory is displays interpretation of the leather trade, Sister Dora and Florence Nightingale and also holds a collection of everyday and worker's clothing from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It offers talks on science and war topics and hands on making sessions in leather workshops.

### **The Locksmith's House**

- 3.7.6 Located in Willenhall, The Locksmith's House Museum celebrates the efforts of small family run lock making businesses that thrived over a century ago. The museum offers a perspective on how lock making operated alongside family life through recreated spaces within the surviving working class family home. It is supported by costumed guides, hands on activities and display gallery. It currently opens for open days and events, and of part of the Black Country Living Museum.

### **Aldridge Transport Museum**

- 3.7.7 A museum in Aldridge run by volunteers with a collection of buses, coaches and commercial vehicles with a West Midlands connection. It is situated within an industrial estate to the west of Aldridge.

### **Chasewater Railway**

- 3.7.8 With a terminus located just outside the northern edge of the Brownhills area, Chasewater Railway forms part of Chasewater Country Park and is rapidly gaining recognition as one of the major visitor attractions on the Walsall, Lichfield and Cannock areas. The Railway operates passenger trains from the Victorian style Brownhills West station, northwards around Chasewater reservoir towards Chasetown with a round trip of 4 miles and hold events are held throughout the year.
- 3.7.9 Although technically just outside of the Walsall borough boundary, it provides an important link to the area's industrial past. Chasewater Country Park is also an attraction nearby to Walsall with watersports activities, nature trails, cycling trails and visitor centre offering recreational workshops, conference facilities, gift shop and café.

### **Walsall Arboretum**

- 3.7.10 The largest area of greenspace in Walsall town centre. This Victorian public park first opened in 1874, occupies c.11 ha and is part of the Arboretum conservation area. The area includes a lake, gardens, green spaces, play areas and sports facilities and was restored with investment from the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF). With the arboretum opening towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has potential to contribute to the heritage offer of Walsall and is a tangible asset.

### **Willenhall Memorial Gardens**

- 3.7.11 Opened in 1920 a tribute to servicemen of World War II. The park features a café, children's play area, skate park, outdoor gym, community pavilion, sports facilities and fishing pond. The park has been regenerated by the local community including the Friends of Willenhall Memorial Park Group.

### **Bourne Pool and Waterside Walk**

Located south east of Aldridge on the edge of Walsall borough, Bourne Pool was created in 1443 to power a 15<sup>th</sup> century iron mill. Today, a nature walk runs around the pool. Archaeological findings from the Mesolithic Age onwards were discovered nearby and with a history relating to industry, it could form part of the heritage offer of Walsall.

### **Barr Beacon**

- 3.7.12 Barr Beacon, located near Streetly, is a Local Nature Reserve and one of the highest points in the West Midlands. Located on the greenbelt land it is of local importance for nature conservation and history. A war memorial stands on one summit with a War Memorial on the other. From here visible landmarks can be seen including Cannock Chase, the Lickey Hills, Lichfield Cathedral, Aldridge Airport, and Birmingham city centre. Also visible are at least eleven counties including Powys, Wales.

### **Cultural Assets**

- 3.7.13 The cultural assets of Walsall range from Listed Buildings to museums and leisure activities. Most of the cultural assets that are accessible to the public lie within Walsall Town Centre (**Figure 14**). They are as follows:

## UNESCO Geopark

3.7.14 In 2020, the Black Country was welcomed into the network of Global Geoparks as a place with internationally important geology and because of its cultural heritage and the active partnerships committed to conserving, managing and promoting it. It is particularly celebrated due to the significant part it played in the industrial revolution. There are currently 9 sites that contribute to this status in Walsall borough including Shire Oak Quarry Local Nature Reserve, Daw End Railway Cutting and Linley Wood, Hay Head and The Dingle Local Nature Reserve, Walsall Geotrail (comprising Walsall Arboretum, The New Art Gallery Walsall and Walsall Leather Museum), Sutton Park, Barr Beacon Local Nature Reserve and Pinfold Lane Quarry.<sup>41</sup>

## Museums and Galleries

- The New Art Gallery Walsall – *Walsall Town Centre*
- Walsall Leather Museum – *Walsall*
- The Locksmith’s House Museum – *Willenhall*
- Aldridge Transport Museum – *Aldridge*

## Places of Worship

3.7.15 There are over one hundred Christian churches, three Hindu temples, twelve Islamic mosques and four Sikh temples in the Walsall borough.<sup>42</sup>

## National Heritage Listings

3.7.16 Walsall borough has a total of 172 designated National Heritage listings.<sup>43</sup> It contains 4 Grade II registered parks and gardens and 5 Scheduled Monuments. The borough has 163 Listed Buildings (158 Grade II, 5 Grade II\*), most of which are concentrated within Walsall Town Centre and the urban centres of surrounding localities.

## Heritage at Risk

3.7.17 10 assets are also on the National Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) including six conservation areas, one Grade II listed church, one Grade II\* listed church and one Registered Park and Garden. These are as follows:

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<sup>41</sup> <https://blackcountrygeopark.dudley.gov.uk/sites-to-see/>

<sup>42</sup> Walsall Standing Agreed Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Religion and Places of Worship in Walsall 2017: <https://bit.ly/3znVCKu>

<sup>43</sup> [https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/results/?searchType=NHLE+Simple&search=walsall&facetValues=facet\\_ddl\\_countyDistrict%3AWalsall%3AcountyDistrict%7C](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/results/?searchType=NHLE+Simple&search=walsall&facetValues=facet_ddl_countyDistrict%3AWalsall%3AcountyDistrict%7C)

### Conservation Areas:

- Bloxwich High Street
- Bradford Street, Walsall
- Bridge Street, Walsall
- Caldmore Green, Walsall
- Church Hill, Walsall
- Elmore Green, Bloxwich

### Listed Buildings:

- Life and Light Mission Church (former Trinity Methodist Church), Willenhall (Grade II)
- Church of St. Matthew, Walsall (Grade II\*)

### Registered Parks and Gardens:

- Great Barr Park, Walsall

### Local Heritage Listings

3.7.18 There is a Local List for Walsall is currently out of date but the latest information lists 283 properties as being of local architectural and/or historic interest.<sup>44</sup> In early 2021 Black Country<sup>45</sup> authorities were provided government funding to enable local lists to be updated in accordance with recently published guidance provided by Historic England<sup>46</sup> and in recognition of the Black County becoming a UNESCO Global Geopark.

### Conservation Areas

3.7.19 A conservation area is 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Walsall currently has 18 conservation areas<sup>47</sup> (**Figure 14, and Figures 4-11**), five of which are located within Walsall Town Centre. Information on the Conservation Areas is currently undergoing renewal. The following has been drawn from a combination of information provided by the council and from the analysis of existing plans.

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<sup>44</sup> [https://go.walsall.gov.uk/locally\\_listed\\_buildings](https://go.walsall.gov.uk/locally_listed_buildings)

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-heritage-list-campaign-call-for-expressions-of-interest/local-heritage-list-campaign-guidance>

<sup>46</sup> Historic England, Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage, January 2021

<sup>47</sup> [https://go.walsall.gov.uk/conservation\\_areas](https://go.walsall.gov.uk/conservation_areas)

- **Aldridge**, *Aldridge* – encompassing the main surviving elements of the historic village of Aldridge including a mix of residential areas and public open space.
- **Walsall Arboretum**, *Walsall* – area including a formal Victorian park with lakes and Victorian villas and streets that immediately surround it.
- **Bloxwich High Street** – *Bloxwich* – high street with a variety of small to medium sized shops. Most buildings in the conservation area are of commercial use.
- **Bloxwich Park**, *Bloxwich* – marking the northern gateway to Bloxwich and comprising of open green spaces and a number of industrial and residential historic buildings.
- **Bradford Street**, *Walsall Town Centre* – consisting of the southern section of Bradford Street contains Georgian and Victorian buildings.
- **Bridge Street**, *Walsall Town Centre* - consisting of a number of building styles currently taken up by offices and shops. It includes The Bridge market area and a number of listed buildings including Lloyd's Bank and the Victorian Arcade. The conservation area included the northern section of Bradford Street and Bradford place, inclusive of the war memorial.
- **Caldmore Green**, *Walsall* – area situated just under 1 km south of Walsall Town Centre comprising of shops and housing. Historic buildings include the Grade II listed White Hart dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, former cinema and others dating from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Church Hill**, *Walsall Town Centre* – land preserving the Medieval street layout and is a focal point of the town. Two Grade II\* Listed buildings are St. Matthew's Church and the Guildhall. The area is home to the Grade II Registered Walsall War Memorial Garden and a further 18 Grade II Listed Buildings, and 23 Locally Listed Buildings.
- **Darlaston**, *Darlaston* – area consisting almost all Victorian buildings on a medieval street plan, with several Grade II listed buildings, open space including Victoria Park and Owen Memorial Garden.
- **Elmore Green**, *Bloxwich* – area of Bloxwich marking the principle entrance from the south. This area comprises a number of historic buildings including All Saint's church and Bloxwich Hall as well as a green open space and mature trees.
- **Great Barr**, *approx. 3km NW of Streetly* – historic grounds and Grade II listed Great Barr Hall which is in a very poor state of repair and is on the Buildings at Risk Register. A former country house of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century listed for its architectural interest, historic interest and its group value together with its surrounding landscape which is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.

- **Highgate**, *approx. 1km SE of Walsall town centre* – mainly residential occupation with the vacant late 19<sup>th</sup> century Highgate Brewery at its centre.
- **Lichfield Street**, *Walsall Town Centre* – land featuring early 20<sup>th</sup> century civic buildings that combine to form the Civic Quarter including the Council House, Town Hall, and Walsall Central Library.
- **Old Pelsall**, *Pelsall* – area of land, the special interest of which lies primarily in its association with the early development of Pelsall and its later industrial past. The former Pelsall Hall Colliery site forms the bulk of the conservation area and is not accessible to the public. Pelsall Hall itself, after which the colliery was named, is the only building of notable architectural or historic significance within the area and is also inaccessible. The conservation area is surrounded by 20<sup>th</sup> century housing.
- **Old Rushall**, *Rushall* – land surrounding Rushall Hall which comprises the hall itself and the remains of a moated site. Investigations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed archaeological findings dating from the Saxon period. The area is inaccessible to the public.
- **Pelsall Common**, *Pelsall* – area of primarily green and open land with surrounding Edwardian and Victorian properties contributing to its historic character. There is also a high proportion of 20<sup>th</sup> century development.
- **Walsall Locks**, *Walsall Town Centre* – land comprising the arm of the Walsall Branch Canal from the Birmingham Canal and the Walsall Junction Canal. It includes a short flight of eight locks to meet the Wyrley and Essington Canal. It also includes examples of canalside buildings.
- **Willenhall**, *Willenhall* – town centre area including the historic Market Place, Union Street and Lichfield Street. Most of the area comprises historic and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings occupied by retail outlets.

### Canal Network

3.7.20 Several canals run through the Borough as are both historical and natural asset. Walsall has a long association with its canals, which helped the borough thrive in its industrial heyday.

3.7.21 Walsall Canal, which was built in four stages from 1785 to 1841, runs from Birchills southwards to Walsall town centre where it branches off to Walsall Town Wharf, providing moorings for boaters and access to the town. The main canal continues down through Darlaston and on to the Tame Valley Canal.

- 3.7.22 The Wyrley and Essington Canal, built in the 1790s, runs from the west of the Borough eastwards through Bloxwich and on to the north east of the Borough turning northwards to Chasewater reservoir. There is also the Cannock Chase extension off the Wyrley and Essington in the north at Pelsall.
- 3.7.23 The Daw End Canal, which connects the north east branch of the Wyrley and Essington Canal and the Rushall Canal, opened in 1800. It runs from Brownhills in the north of the Borough, southwards to meet the Rushall Canal (opened in 1847) which continues south, under the M6 to meet the Tame Valley Canal. The Tame Valley Canal runs eastwards from Walsall Canal to Salford Junction and was opened in 1844 and abandoned in the 1960s. It is largely hidden from its built-up surroundings by high embankments and deep cuttings providing secluded greenspace for walkers, cyclists and anglers.

## **Intangible Assets**

### **Diversity and Community**

- 3.7.24 Walsall has a diverse range of communities across the borough all of which have their own cultures and traditions. Activities and events across Walsall bring people of different backgrounds together. There are many already being delivered by community members. Faith groups organise social gatherings open to all including multi-faith Iftar celebrations, Christmas tree festivals and the Diwali celebrations at Walsall Art Gallery. The Hindu and Sikh community pave the way in recruitment of volunteers for these events. There is also an annual Remembrance Day which recognises contributions from different cultures and ethnicities. An Anne Frank Holocaust event, hosted in 2017, explored prejudices through historical and modern day examples. It was attended by 1,500 young people had the largest attendance of any associated in the country that year.<sup>48</sup>
- 3.7.25 Faith representatives from across the borough provide vital support to 'people in need'. They provide free hot meals and support for 'rough sleepers' in partnership with YMCA Black Country Group. Some community associations have also provided drop-in outreach services to new European families that have recently settled in the borough with the aim of reducing tensions and supporting community cohesion.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

<sup>49</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

- 3.7.26 The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community organise the annual Walsall Pride event with increasing attendance and have recently reported feeling better supported.<sup>50</sup>

### **Trade and Craftsmanship**

- 3.7.27 Traditional craftsmanship continues in Walsall with the countless leather manufacturers still active in the borough. Walsall has more saddlers and leather goods makers than anywhere else in northern Europe with generations of families being involved in the trade.<sup>51</sup> The knowledge and skills are being passed to younger generations through the new Saddlery School.

### **Natural Assets**

- 3.7.28 The natural assets of Walsall Borough are regarded as of equal importance as other assets and form a large part of the Borough's heritage. There are several typologies of natural assets and green spaces within Walsall borough. These range from recreational spaces including parks, commons and playing fields to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), and Sites of Local Importance of Nature Conservation (SLINC).

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserves (LNR)**

- 3.7.29 There are seven SSSI within Walsall borough ranging from wetland, grassland and previous industrial sites such as quarries and railway cuttings. There are also 11 Local Nature Reserves, several of which are also of potential heritage value due to their prior use as industrial sites (**Figure 15**). A third of the Borough classed as Greenbelt, made up of open spaces, Local Nature Reserves and open farmland with public rights of way.

### **Learning Assets**

- 3.7.30 Learning assets include libraries archives and history centres. There are seven libraries and one mobile library service spread across seven wards of Walsall borough. The main central library is Lichfield Street Hub in Walsall Town Centre which also has a learning centre, local history centre and is the home to Walsall Archives.<sup>52</sup> The converted grade II listed Lichfield Street Library and 1960s art gallery were converted into a modern facility in 2018. A full list of library services is as follows:

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<sup>50</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.thefield.co.uk/country-house/luxury-country-house/walsall-leather-where-to-buy-the-best-30858>

<sup>52</sup> <https://go.walsall.gov.uk/walsalllibraries/Our-Libraries>

- Lichfield Street Hub (Central Library and Archives) – *Walsall Town Centre*
- Walsall Local History Centre – *Walsall*
- Aldridge District Library – *Aldridge*
- Bloxwich District Library – *Bloxwich*
- Brownhills District Library - *Brownhills*
- Darlaston District Library – *Darlaston*
- Mobile Library Services – *Visits over 40 sites across Walsall*
- Streetly Community Library - *Streetly*
- Willenhall District Library – *Willenhall*

### **3.8 Policies and Strategies**

3.8.1 The following policies and strategies form a framework from which the heritage strategy will operate. They include:

- Walsall Council's Corporate Plan 2021-22
- Walsall Town Centre Masterplan 2019
- Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan 2019
- Walsall Plan: Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020
- Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper
- Walsall for All
- Community Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2018
- Climate Change Action Plan
- Black Country Plan
- Black Country Core Strategy
- Green Spaces Strategy 2018-2022
- Site Allocation Document (SAD)
- Walsall Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)
- Love Willenhall Masterplan
- Draft Walsall Town Centre Characterisation Study (March 2016)

3.8.2 Walsall Council's **Corporate Plan 2021-2022** highlights the need for regeneration in the borough to tackle the inequalities around health and economic outcomes and build

resilient communities. The plan's vision is that *'Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised'* and its employment policies, procedures and guidelines are designed to support this vision and deliver the Council's priorities through:

- Improved staff satisfaction
- Improved customer experience
- Financial benefit and service efficiency

3.8.3 The plan is based around five Priorities:

- Economic Growth for all people, communities and business.
- People have increased independences, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.
- Internal focus – all Council services are efficient and effective.
- Children have the best possible start, are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

3.8.4 The Council will use this framework to set the strategic intent and help inform key decisions. Their 'Markers of Success' in the plan will be used to measure performance and track the quality and delivery of progress.

3.8.5 **Walsall Town Centre Masterplan 2019** provides a vision for further development, investment and transformational change in the town centre over the next 15 to 20 years. Walsall Council is also investing in public realm in the urban centres of the borough, as well as new and improve homes and on the Walsall to Wolverhampton corridor.<sup>53</sup> The plan is supported by the **Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan 2019**. It provides the planning framework to support the regeneration of the town centre in the short, medium and long term. The vision is that by 2026, Walsall Town Centre will have been regenerated as a sub-regional focus for the local economy and the community, providing its catchment area with a choice of shopping, leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities, office market and town centre living set to combine local heritage with modern design. Ten objectives are set out in the plan with the following four relating directly to heritage:

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<sup>53</sup> Corporate Plan 2018-2021 Walsall Council

- Strengthen the current cultural offer through increasing the mix of uses within the town centre such as a cinema, performance venues and community facilities, complemented by leisure uses such as restaurants, cafes and bars in order to provide an attractive centre for visitors both day and night.
- Support businesses to increase employment opportunities, skills and aspirations through high quality jobs in a variety of sectors, supported by good links with education and training providers in the town centre.
- Conserve heritage assets and seek opportunities for their enhancement whilst delivering high quality sustainable design that is well integrated, secure and encourages greater activity in the town centre with innovative and high quality design and architecture at the core.
- Transform the experience and perception of Walsall Town Centre for those who shop, work, visit, invest and live in Walsall through measures such as improved public realm, civic spaces, quality of place, new homes, pedestrian access and security alongside the active promotion of the centre and organisation of community events.

3.8.6 There are also a number of actions that relate to specific cultural facilities, historic character and public realm which heritage-related projects will align with and support. These include:

- The protection of the Walsall Library, Walsall Leather Museum and New Art Gallery Walsall as key cultural facilities/destinations.
- Promotion of the Town Hall as key cultural venue for events and concerts.
- Enhancement of the environments around the New Art Gallery and The Bridge, and the promotion of The Bridge as an area for community events and performances.
- Consideration of the historic environment should be demonstrated in development proposals and any effects that may be caused.
- Encouragement of the sensitive re-use of historic buildings of special architectural or historic interest.
- Developments within the St. Matthew's Shopping Quarter area will be expected to protect, conserve and where possible, enhance heritage assets including the Conservation Areas and listed and locally listed buildings within the area.

3.8.7 The **Walsall Plan: Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020** states that all work to improve outcomes must also consider inequalities across the population. Reducing inequalities is the core action within and underlying all priorities proposed. The plan also sets out four 'obsessions' (gaps where all partners can work together to make a visible difference). Heritage related projects can contribute to making this difference. They are:

- To support the capacity of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) in Walsall, and greater connectivity between the VCS and partners, in order to improve health and wellbeing for all, by increasing the number of Walsall residents who volunteer, in particular around loneliness and isolation, and physical activity (Health and Wellbeing Board).
- Supporting and empowering vulnerable children and young people to improve their physical and mental health (Children and Young People's Partnership).
- Quality apprenticeships for all ages (Walsall Economic Board).
- To improve outcomes for the homeless/rough sleepers (Safer Walsall Partnership).
- "If it doesn't feel right, then act on it" (Safeguarding Boards).

3.8.8 In March 2018, the government published their **Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper**, which recognised that tailored local integration plans are needed to tackle issues that are specific to each area. Walsall was chosen as one of five areas to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Council delivered a **Walsall For All**<sup>54</sup> long-term strategy for creating strong and integrated communities in Walsall funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The vision is *'to create integrated, empowered and inclusive communities where people from all backgrounds come together to celebrate what they have in common. A place where our residents are safe and valued, and everyone has fair opportunities to fulfil their potential and contribute to the growth of Walsall.'* It is guided by four priorities:

- Connecting across communities
- Young people learning and growing together
- Working and contributing together
- Living together

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<sup>54</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

- 3.8.9 Guiding principles include:
- An asset based approach
  - Equal and fair opportunities
  - Empowering and engaging communities
  - Partnership approach
  - Learning
- 3.8.10 The strategy also builds on the **Community Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020** which highlighted the need to work with both indigenous and minority communities, and those with any protected characteristics that may experience barriers or disadvantage.<sup>55</sup>
- 3.8.11 The **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2018** aims to improve health and wellbeing of the local community and reduce inequalities by evidencing health and social care needs and priorities and by setting out actions for local authorities, the NHS and other partners. There are 14 key priorities, the following of which directly relate to, and can be supported by, heritage-related projects:
- Where possible upgrade or replace facilities so that there is good provision of attractive leisure facilities in the borough
  - Working with key organisations e.g. WHG to develop and promote joint leisure schemes
  - Improving provision of green spaces, play and leisure facilities and promoting to residents the benefits on health and wellbeing of using these
  - Use planning as a mechanism for improving residents' access to green spaces, health facilities, leisure opportunities and healthy food
- 3.8.12 Since the declaration of the climate change emergency in 2019, Walsall Council have formed a **Climate Change Action Plan** to become greener and more energy efficient. A steering group has been formed and action plan developed to help Walsall become a net zero carbon authority by 2050.

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<sup>55</sup> Walsall for All Strategy - Our vision for integrated and welcoming communities. January 2019

- 3.8.13 Currently in development is the **Love Willenhall Masterplan**. In development with communities, faith groups, voluntary organisations, businesses and schools it aims to create a more vibrant healthy and prosperous town and community. One aspiration is to find ways of bringing empty and derelict buildings back into us. The development is currently at the survey stage.
- 3.8.14 The **Black Country Plan** is a joint plan produced by the four Black Country councils, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Walsall and is a planning framework for the whole of the Black Country that will provide a direction on the future growth of the region and reflect the aspirations of local communities. It is currently in the second review stage and will go to public consultation in the summer of 2021. The plan will replace the Black Country Core Strategy which was adopted in 2011. A part of the Black Country Plan, a Historic Landscape Characterisation Study was carried out in 2019 to assess areas based on specific historic characteristics and identify priorities for future historic environment assessment. These included Conservation Area Reappraisal, Review of Local Lists and Historic Environment Record enhancement.
- 3.8.15 **Black Country Core Strategy**, adopted in 2011, sets out how the Black Country should look in 2026 and established clear directions for change. The vision consist three major directions: sustainable change; environmental transformation; and economic prosperity. In relation to heritage, the policy of historic characters is that *'all development should aim to protect and promote the special qualities, historic character and local distinctiveness of the Black Country in order to help maintain its cultural identity and strong sense of place.'*
- 3.8.16 It also states that historic assets should make a positive contribution towards the wider economic, social and environmental regeneration and that they should not be considered in isolation but conserved and enhanced within their wider context.
- 3.8.17 Walsall's **Site Allocation Document (SAD)**, adopted in 2019, allocates sites for homes, jobs, shops and other uses, and protects land to meet the current and future needs of Walsall. It also seeks to improve the environment and protect assets. In relation to heritage, the plan mentions requirements for landscape and other management plans to secure the

enhancement and future maintenance of Great Barr Hall and estate, and the potential for producing a masterplan or development brief for Highgate Brewery.

- 3.8.18 **Walsall Supplementary Planning Documents** (SPD) include Designing Walsall (SPD), Walsall Shop Front (SPD), and Water Front (SPD) and Streetly Special Townscape Character Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) are used to inform decision making on a variety of development proposals and planning applications.
- 3.8.19 Walsall is a key player in significant wider partnerships including The Black Country and West Birmingham Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP), The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- 3.8.20 **Green Spaces Strategy** 2018-2022 identifies green spaces in the borough and sets out a strategy and action plan. There are a number of aims that potential heritage related projects will align with. These include the provision of opportunities for people and communities to participate in green spaces; develop and strengthen existing partnerships; and to realise the potential that green spaces can play in addressing health inequalities. A number of other strategies relating to green spaces include **Walsall Connecting Greenspaces** as part of the **Rethinking Parks** fund.

## **4.0 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

- 4.1.1 Based on the research presented above and consultation with various professional and community stakeholders, it is clear that Strategy will need to address a series of challenges relating to connectivity, access, resourcing and capacity if it is to deliver meaningful change in the context of the 5 priorities set out in the Corporate Plan (see section 3.8.2).
- 4.1.2 It is also clear that there are a large number of opportunities that the Strategy could use to deliver against the Council's priorities, including opportunities relating to the reuse of physical assets, existing community groups, improvements to accessibility and the general appetite for heritage-based projects as an enabler for community engagement and economic growth. Proposals that come forward in the Strategy will deliver against the priorities of the Corporate Plan 2021-2022).
- 4.1.3 These challenges and opportunities are highlighted below and a summary SWOT analysis is presented in Section 4.4.

### **4.2 Challenges**

#### **Connection to Walsall**

- 4.2.1 There is a perceived sense of disconnection when it comes to the communities and residents within each locality. Discussions and consultations have revealed that there is not a strong sense that the wider localities belong to or have an affinity with Walsall borough. Localities are often considered as towns / settlements in their own right, places with their own histories, services and identity. Many people do not necessarily think of themselves living in "Walsall".
- 4.2.2 Strengthening peoples' sense of belonging while also connecting these localities, physically and intellectually to encouraging a sense of pride in both the localities and the borough as a whole is a complex challenge and not one that will be met by a single action, project or strategy. While local pride and a sense of belonging offers a route to connect people with place and strengthen cohesion, it can also create barriers between communities and reinforce cultural differences.

- 4.2.3 This underlying reality will need to be taken into account when developing and delivering the Strategy.

### **Barriers to Access**

#### **Physical barriers**

- 4.2.4 Major physical barriers, such as the M6, sever the western areas of Willenhall and Darlaston from other parts of Walsall. This leads to residents in these areas looking westwards and southwards to Wolverhampton and Wednesbury as their “local” towns. Their sense of connection and daily interaction with Walsall is weakened. While removing the M6 is not an option, identifying longer-term projects to strengthen a sense of connection will be important and could contribute to the Council’s stated priority to build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.
- 4.2.5 Similar but smaller scale physical barriers occurs on a more local level across the borough, restricting access to heritage assets and severing local communities. A recognised example of this is the A4148 dual carriageway which severs the Leather Museum from Walsall town centre. Here and in other locations options may exist for physical changes to address disconnections, or for the relocation of facilities to improve connectivity. Other barriers may include public transport and getting around the borough, particularly in relation to cost.
- 4.2.6 In addition to these external physical barriers, many potential users will also not be able to access heritage assets physically. There are a number of historic buildings and visitor attractions that present physical challenges for those with mobility and sensory restrictions. There is also the matter of health and safety for those who can visit physically. These location specific issues will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis and it is likely that a number of historic buildings will need to undergo significant audits and modifications before reuse. Doing so can help drive economic growth (by making places more viable), improve access with the consequently health and well-being benefits and support cohesion and a sense of belonging – all of which relate to Council priorities.

#### **Intellectual and Cultural Access**

- 4.2.7 One of the main challenges when speaking about heritage in its broadest sense, is what the term ‘heritage’ means to different people. For some it is “old things” e.g. buildings,

country estates etc. for others it is more about the stories or legacies of their ancestors. There are many layers of value applied to all of these and different elements therein, with the same “old thing” being valued in many different ways by different people. There are also often contrasting views over the value associated with heritage, a fact evidenced by ongoing conversations and conflict in society about historical statues and the legacy of the slave trade (for example).

- 4.2.8 ‘Heritage’ can represent an opportunity to one person, and a barrier to another, or simply indifference to the term. The fact that heritage can be a misunderstood term or a ‘not for me’ term, represents the lack of awareness and / or the lack of relevancy of heritage activity outwards to audiences. This reinforces the need for future heritage activity to be designed with, and for, individuals and communities – there is not a single story to be packaged and told to everyone, nor is there a single set of physical “old things” whose retention would safeguard our heritage.
- 4.2.9 Generally speaking, intellectual access to heritage is broadly limited to those already engaged with and interested in a relatively standard and recognised “heritage” in Walsall. This includes a number of societies and groups, some of which have an aging membership. There may also be a lack of suitable communication, which is also linked with limited intellectual access to heritage, and an inability to bring sites to life for certain groups.
- 4.2.10 There are always new opportunities and new ways of increasing awareness and inviting new people to experience heritage. A key priority should be to consider how heritage related projects will be created with the communities and individuals and how metaphorical doors can be opened or created to invite people in who are currently not engaging with heritage in all its forms. Addressing this could help develop a stronger sense of belonging and cohesion in local communities, open up increase access to heritage and the associated health and wellbeing benefits and create opportunities for learning and skills development.

### **Challenging sites and assets**

- 4.2.11 Challenging sites and assets are physical assets that may not be easily included in development in the near future. These sites may be derelict or damaged beyond practical reuse or may be difficult to physically access. The current situation regarding lower land

values and low returns on development (including refurbishment and conversion works) in Walsall is exacerbating this issue, making it difficult for developers and funders to justify works to historic buildings and places that carry a conservation cost. This is particularly an issue in the key historic centres, such as Walsall Town Centre, where pre-existing market issues (e.g. low rents and property values) have been worsened by the pandemic in 2020-21.

- 4.2.12 Conversely, there is significant potential to use the distinctive and quality heritage assets of the borough to create a strong sense of identity and to drive up rental, property and land values. This may however require pump priming and / or ambitious longer-term investment.
- 4.2.13 Examples outside of the core centres where a combination of ownership, complexity of heritage, land values and other site specific issues have created particular and notable issues include the derelict Great Barr Hall and the unoccupied Highgate Brewery.
- 4.2.14 Great Barr Hall (see section 3.5.35) has been subject to general physical degradation, fire damage and water damage, and subsequently downgraded from Grade II\* to Grade II.<sup>56</sup> The majority of the roof has been lost or is damaged, the site is unsafe and is supported by scaffolding. An architecture firm were commissioned to plan the renovation and rebuilding of the site in 2012<sup>57</sup> and a planning application for housing on the site as well as creation of a conference/wedding venue, lawn restoration, construction of a summer house and boat house, and the reinstating of bridges over the lakes. The associated proposals remain as current planning and listed building consent applications. Development proposals may be limited due to the physical nature of the asset and surrounding area, options for development should be further explored.
- 4.2.15 Highgate Brewery (see section 3.5.13) is another site that poses challenges to development and inclusion in heritage initiatives. The site has been up for sale several times with the latest evidence of its sale in 2018 but the building still lies empty. Like many historic buildings that are left vacant, Highgate Brewery will be at a greater risk of damage and degradation the longer it remains unoccupied. Options for re-use are sometimes limited,

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<sup>56</sup> [Great Barr Hall and Chapel, Non Civil Parish - 1076395 | Historic England](#)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.lapwortharchitects.com/conservation-architects/great-barr-hall-survey/>

however, temporary or partial use may help to safeguard the building and allow it to fulfil its social, cultural and economic potential.

- 4.2.16 Addressing these profile sites, as well as other challenging sites across the borough, could potentially create a sense of momentum for heritage-led regeneration, shift perceptions of the borough as an investment location and potentially deliver housing, economic and other benefits for communities; all of which are key priorities for the Council.

### **Physical heritage across the borough**

- 4.2.17 Walsall's localities vary greatly in the quantity and quality of heritage assets. Places such as Willenhall, Darlaston and Walsall, which are relatively rich in known physical assets, it seems straight forward to assume that heritage activity could thrive here by utilising these assets. Other areas such as Aldridge, Brownhills and Streetly, are comparatively less rich in physical heritage assets (particularly those that are not private residencies or significantly dispersed). This could result in initiatives that rely on physical assets being less appropriate for these areas, further isolating them from heritage involvement. This emphasises the need for more initiatives to be community based and rely more heavily on the intangible rather than the tangible.

### **Capacity**

- 4.2.18 There are, and have been for some time, significant capacity issues in the heritage sector and associated sectors in the borough. These issues include, or have included:
- Limited Conservation Officer capacity in the Council.
  - Reduction in core funding for the New Art Gallery Walsall, leading to a significant reduction in staff numbers.
  - Reduction in funding for staffing in the archives and libraries service.
  - Absence of a professionally staffed Building Preservation Trust in the borough able to bring resources focused on conservation and reuse projects.
  - Limited active Friends groups and civic societies.
- 4.2.19 Many of these issues stem from a sustained decline in public sector finances over the last c. 10-12 years, a prioritisation of funding for activities that are seen to more directly impact

on economic activity and community wellbeing, and a continued shift to project-based funding for organisations rather than providing long-term sustainable support.

- 4.2.20 In response, and with support from the NLHF, the Council has appointed a Heritage Programme Officer to deliver the Strategy, and created a Conservation Officer post to support the management of the Borough's built heritage. The Council's health and wellbeing and green spaces teams have also been strengthened and are better placed to be able to support some initiatives under the aegis of the strategy. The One Walsall initiative is also developing capacity in third sector organisations and within the Council to support communities across the borough.
- 4.2.21 Additionally, the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust has received grant funding which has enabled it to appoint staff for the first time, creating capacity to potentially support projects in Walsall.
- 4.2.22 Canal and River Trust are applying for National Lottery Heritage Funding for their Waterways, Wildlife & Wellbeing Nature Recovery Network project. Included in the proposal is the completion of the longest designated local nature reserve in England along the Wyrley & Essington Canal, and the improvement of the Cannock Extension Canal in Walsall. The proposal includes, amongst others, the development of two community engagement roles and one conservation project officer dedicated to Walsall, with Walsall Council as a main partner.
- 4.2.23 Black Country Museum, whilst there is currently no dedicated representative for Walsall the organisation is wanting to do more to develop dedicated Walsall specific initiatives and projects with the Locksmith's House in Willenhall.
- 4.2.24 Further capacity and greater collaboration is likely to be required to drive the success of heritage strategy and meet the Council's corporate plan priorities. In this context there may be opportunities to work with local businesses, nature conservation organisations, the Canal and Rivers Trust, the Black Country Museum, communities, arts organisations, developers and schools and colleges to help to increase capacity and deliver the strategy outcomes whilst delivering benefits to those involved.

4.2.25 This lack of resource has been compounded by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which caused a sharp decline in revenues in digital, cultural, media and sports industries. In a survey by Historic England undertaken in April 2020, 80% of heritage sector respondents had suffered a loss of income with 60% postponing or cancelling events. The heritage sector is vulnerable to the pandemic and the future is unpredictable, so how it will unfold from now on remains uncertain. In the medium/long term, financial constraints are likely to limit conservation work, affecting the overall sustainability of heritage sites.<sup>58</sup>

### **Funding**

4.2.26 As well as issues relating to the capacity to deliver change, there are also potential and historic issues relating to capital and operational funding for projects. Many projects will require significant capital investments to support their delivery which is increasingly challenging in difficult economic circumstances as more organisations chase the same pots of money to deliver their projects.

4.2.27 Projects that are not heritage based can often take priority for funding and resource, meaning investment in heritage related projects, from inception to delivery to maintenance, is restricted. This is a common theme for many places, but one that has also arisen out of research and consultation with Walsall stakeholders. One challenge to heritage related projects that can take priority and receive the support they deserve.

4.2.28 Although application for National Lottery Grants for Heritage has reopened since its postponement to support the recovery and emergency funds during earlier stages of the pandemic, the availability of such resources in the future may be uncertain, particularly as the sector recovers. Historically, Walsall has had only limited success with attracting NLHF funding but their prioritisation of the borough offers a strong opportunity to underpin and support a number of future projects, programmes and initiatives.

4.2.29 There is also an opportunity to work with the Architectural Heritage Fund through their “Transforming Places Through Heritage” programme<sup>59</sup> as well as with the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country and their “Nature Recovery Network”. These and other

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<sup>58</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

<sup>59</sup> See <https://ahfund.org.uk/england>

initiatives provide opportunity to shape projects and delivery positive outcomes for the borough's heritage and communities.

4.2.30 Outside of 'pure' heritage funding such as that provided by the NLHF and a vast array of other trusts and charities of varying sizes and scales<sup>60</sup>, Walsall has also been successful in attracting, and is in the process of applying for, a range of national government funds including the Towns Fund, Future High Streets (see section 3.3). Many of the projects promoted through these funding routes have strong heritage, cultural, or urban regeneration elements and could support the delivery of the strategy. The current 'deprived' status of the borough, the government's levelling-up agenda and the emerging priorities of the WMCA would also indicate that the borough is in a strong position to attract further funding and it will be critical to ensure that this can support and drive keynote heritage projects in the borough.

4.2.31 In addition to traditional charitable and national government funding avenues, there are also other funding models available that could support individual projects and programmes in the borough, either completely or in part. For example, commercial funding can be deployed to enable the sensitive conversion and re-use of historic buildings (albeit this is likely to be challenging in the borough given the land and property value situation). Alternately, organisations such as Homes England may be able to support more challenging sites in the borough through their funding and development model.

4.2.32 For smaller projects, there are more locally orientated social investment models that can help unlock viable schemes and opportunities e.g. CICs, Credit Unions, specialist impact bonds, community ownership, Community Asset Transfer, crowdfunding etc. These all require specialist support and expertise to successfully deliver.

## **4.3 Opportunities**

### **Carbon reduction**

4.3.1 A number of urban centres are rich in physical heritage assets with the possibility of utilisation in heritage projects. Many assets are in decline and would benefit from reuse. The adaptive re-use of a historic building will emit less carbon by 2050 than a new

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<sup>60</sup> See <https://www.heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org/> for an overview of key heritage related funders in the UK

building.<sup>61</sup> It reduced waste from demolition and conserves the building materials whilst creating more jobs during its conversion period. Walsall has a number of historic buildings that may be open to adaption and re-use and doing so may significantly reduce carbon emissions, a target of the borough. Additionally, a programme of renovation and refit will help create sustainable jobs, drive economic activity and develop skills and learning opportunities, these are all Council priorities.

## **Community engagement**

### **Existing groups**

- 4.3.2 Walsall is proud of its diverse range of communities and there are a number of community groups and societies that are already engaged in projects (see section 3.6). This suggests that there is already an appetite for community engagement and therefore opportunities to relate to heritage. As discussed above there are however capacity issues with the existing groups.
- 4.3.3 Looking forward, the existing community driven initiatives such as the Resilient Communities and Walsall for All initiatives (see section 3.6) offer a clear opportunity for supporting groups, increasing capacity and developing projects. The Resilient Communities model has enabled the Council to develop strong, direct relationships with multiple communities in the borough. This can be drawn upon to identify crossovers between community groups and heritage projects to deliver shared aims such of enhancing quality of life, connecting communities, enhancing pride in towns and communities. This will reinforce the importance of both sectors and will help to gain funding and resources to benefit both.
- 4.3.4 There are also opportunities to work with wider initiatives such as Don't Settle and Creative Black Country (see section 3.6) to better connect with the region. After all, community doesn't end at administrative boundaries.

### **Co-production**

- 4.3.5 There are opportunities to work with communities to develop and deliver meaningful and relevant experiences. Building on co-creation work such as The New Art Gallery Walsall's Critical Friends groups (see section 3.6) all projects should have the community as their

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<sup>61</sup> Heritage and the Economy 2020, Historic England

heart. The West Midlands Young Combined Authority is made up of 30 young people as part of their decision process and Birmingham Hippodrome Young Advocates engages 150 people to help to shape the future of Birmingham Hippodrome's work in mentoring, training and skills development. Urban Hax facilitates and creates a community of makers, innovators and hobbyists who come together and share skills, knowledge and crafts with the wider community. Local communities develop and deliver dynamic arts and heritage projects through Creative Factory. Creative Black Country co-creates projects with community groups, arts organisations, artists and creatives.

- 4.3.6 There are opportunities for all projects, ranging from local authority governance down to small individual projects, to be developed with people, rather than for people. Co-creating/co-producing projects and programmes ensures that all work is relevant and for all members of the community. It will strengthen a sense of belonging, improve cohesion and drive heritage projects in the direction which may be more sustainable in the long-term given that they come from a community.

#### **Online presence/digital access**

- 4.3.7 The way in which people are seeking information and experiences is changing. Through website and social media presence, an engaging online experience is increasingly becoming the norm and expectation of consumers and visitors.
- 4.3.8 Online content can also provide opportunities for enhanced pre- and post-visit engagement that can lead to richer and more frequent engagement. This can be particularly important for education and community projects. An engaging online presence is essential to remain relevant and visible in the digital age. It also allows access for those less able to engage physically with projects. This approach has excelled in recent months due to the Covid-19 pandemic restricting physical visits. Digital content, particularly social media, can be used to directly involve communities with heritage. An example of a heritage organisation utilising social media to connect with more people is the Black Country Living Museum, which created relatable and relevant content about life in lockdown. It was named in TikTok's 100 top UK accounts for 2020 and now has 1m followers worldwide.

4.3.9 The NLHF Digital Confidence Fund provides the opportunity for organisations and groups to access grants and mentoring as part of the Digital Skills for Heritage initiative. As Walsall is one of the 13 priority areas included in the scheme, this resource should be utilised when developing projects and programmes. It can be used for building and maintaining an online presence, connecting with communities and digitising and cataloguing archives and collections. This aligns with the WMCA Digital Roadmap which aims to ensure everyone has access to digital opportunities, realise the potential of digital to transform the economy and use digital public services to ‘build a fairer, greener, healthier region’.

**UNESCO Geopark status**

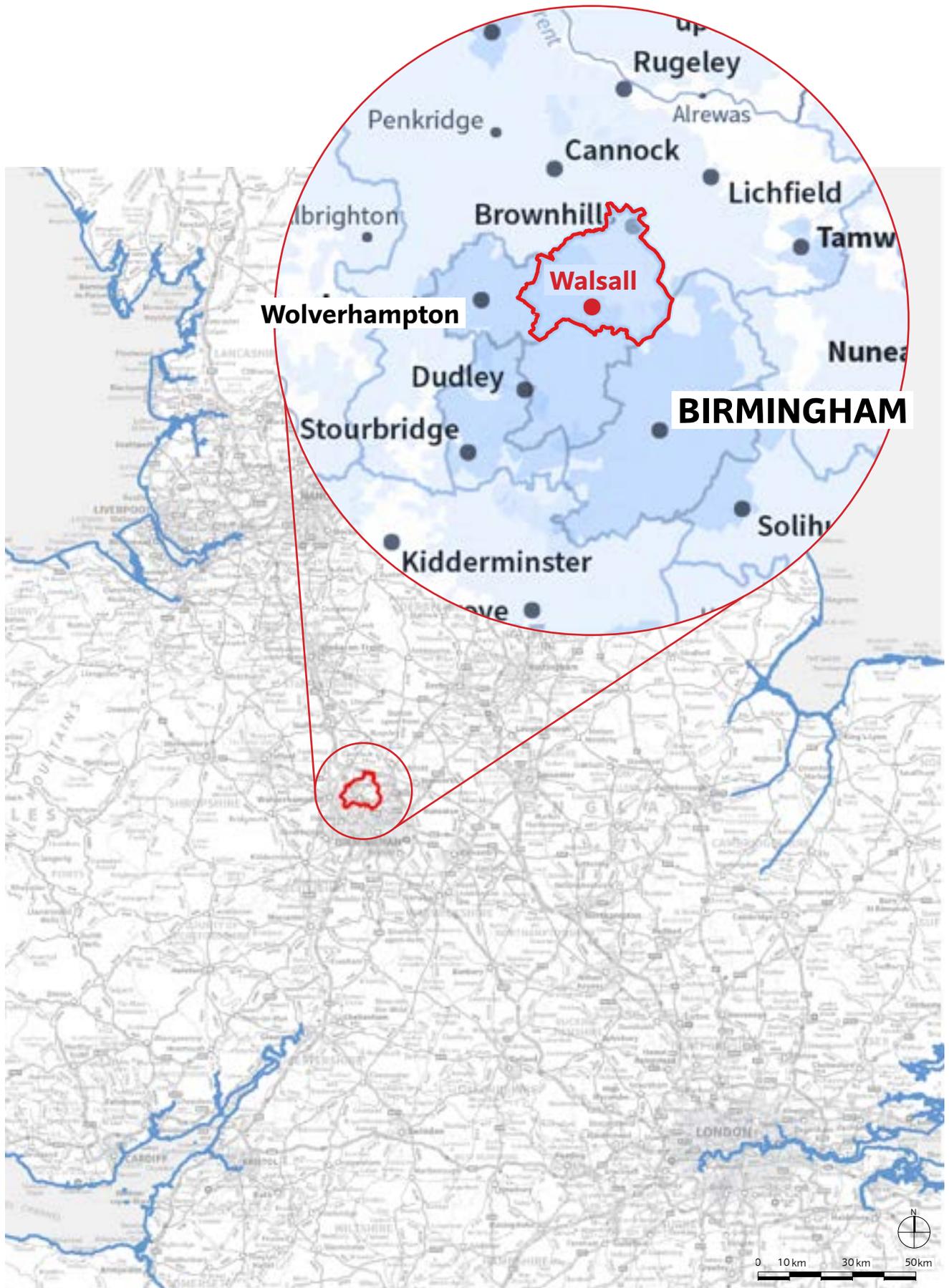
4.3.10 As a site of internationally important geology, the Black Country Geopark status will help the area become a tourist draw in its own right. There is the opportunity to promote Walsall and its natural and industrial heritage alongside Geopark initiatives and in partnership with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils and to reconnect local and regional communities with their natural landscapes through the study and conservation of the Geopark’s landscapes. Projects could include public events and the outreach, workshops, field trips and guided walks and tours to develop strong ties with schools and community groups and develop a team of ‘citizen scientists and historians.’

**4.4 SWOT summary**

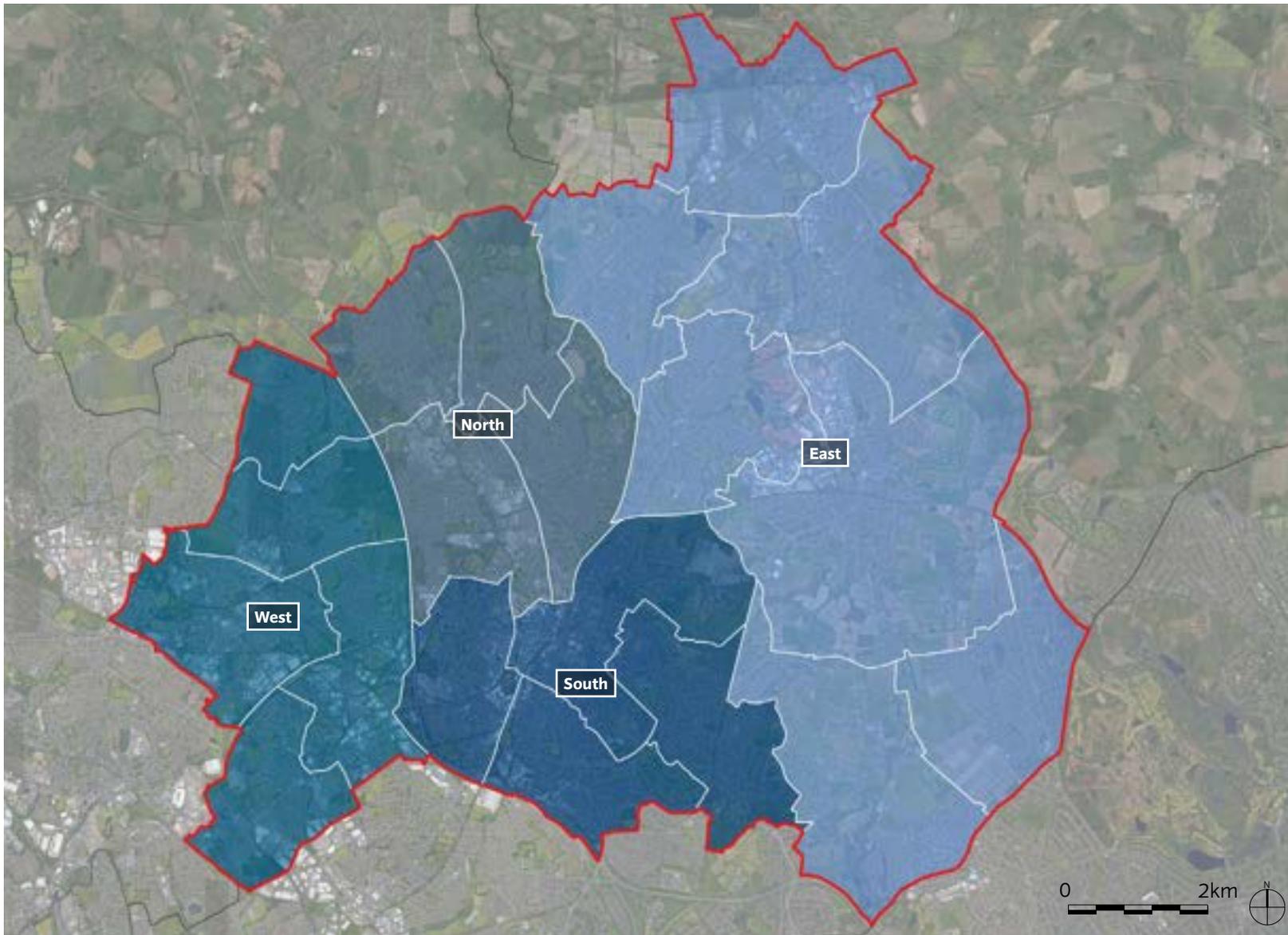
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich heritage and stories waiting to be told</li> <li>• Many key cultural and natural assets e.g. canal network, local nature reserves, museums and galleries</li> <li>• ‘Town of a hundred trades’ narrative to be explored</li> <li>• Diverse communities</li> <li>• Willing volunteer sector supported by existing initiatives</li> <li>• Appetite for heritage projects</li> <li>• Projects already underway such as the Towns Fund, Future High Streets and transport projects</li> <li>• NLHF priority funding and status</li> <li>• General readiness for investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor connectivity and cohesion across the borough both physically and intellectually</li> <li>• Barriers to access, physical, intellectual and cultural</li> <li>• Challenging sites and assets that may prove difficult to reuse</li> <li>• Land and property values/development returns</li> <li>• Scarce physical heritage in some areas</li> <li>• Insufficient capacity and resources</li> <li>• ‘Insular’ localities whether due to a historically recognised identity or a preference to ‘stay local’</li> <li>• Lack of draw to Walsall town centre and other areas</li> <li>• Sector weakened by Covid-19</li> </ul>

<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NLHF priority area</li> <li>• Partnerships with communities, groups and businesses to increase capacity, expand and support heritage initiatives</li> <li>• Understand, recognise and promote heritage stories and assets</li> <li>• Utilise unoccupied built heritage assets for new use drawing upon the knowledge and resources of the Building Preservation Trust</li> <li>• Work alongside community focused organisations such as Urban Hax, Creative Black Country, Creative Factory amongst other community associations</li> <li>• Incorporate and promote carbon reduction in heritage initiatives</li> <li>• Online presence/digital access to promote heritage and encourage participation</li> <li>• Location in wider Black Country, collaboration and involvement in wider initiatives, plans and projects</li> <li>• Leverage UNESCO Geopark status in initiatives for promotion and development of initiatives</li> <li>• Utilise heritage in the recovery from Covid-19 to create jobs and promote activities and greenspaces to promote health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Funding sources such as the Culture Recovery Fund, Digital Confidence Fund</li> <li>• Project development around Commonwealth Games Birmingham 2022</li> <li>• Project development with Big Local Palfrey and Mossley</li> <li>• Project development with Creative Black Country and the British Art Show in Wolverhampton in 2022</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some built heritage in poor state which will continue to deteriorate if they remain unoccupied</li> <li>• Loss of appeal of some areas for recreation and leisure</li> <li>• Non heritage projects can often take precedence for investment, funding and resource</li> <li>• Post Covid-19 uncertainty for the future of high streets and how people will want to engage with their environments</li> <li>• Loss of political support locally could weaken delivery</li> <li>• Current funding and resources are time limited</li> </ul>

**FIGURES**

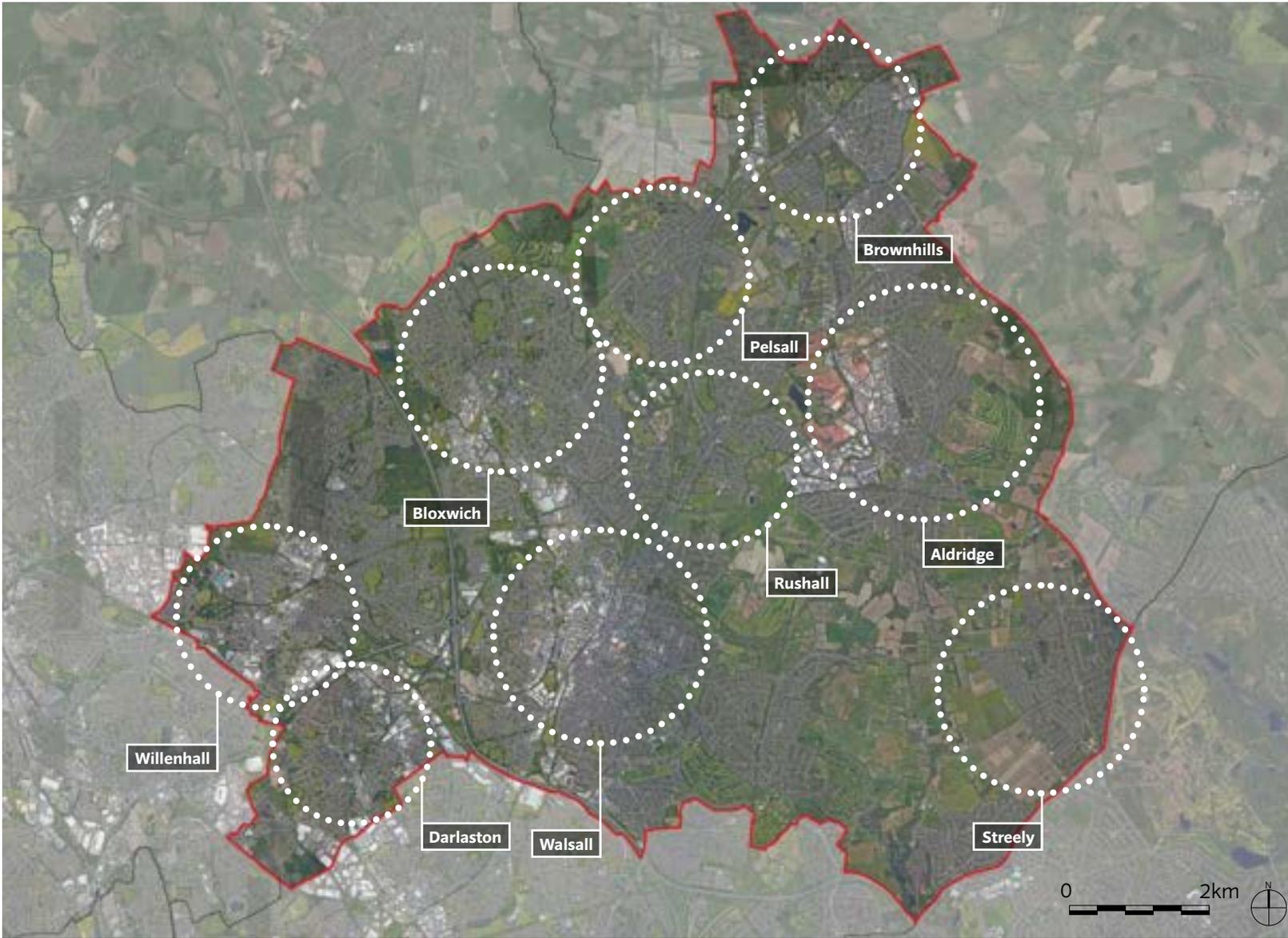


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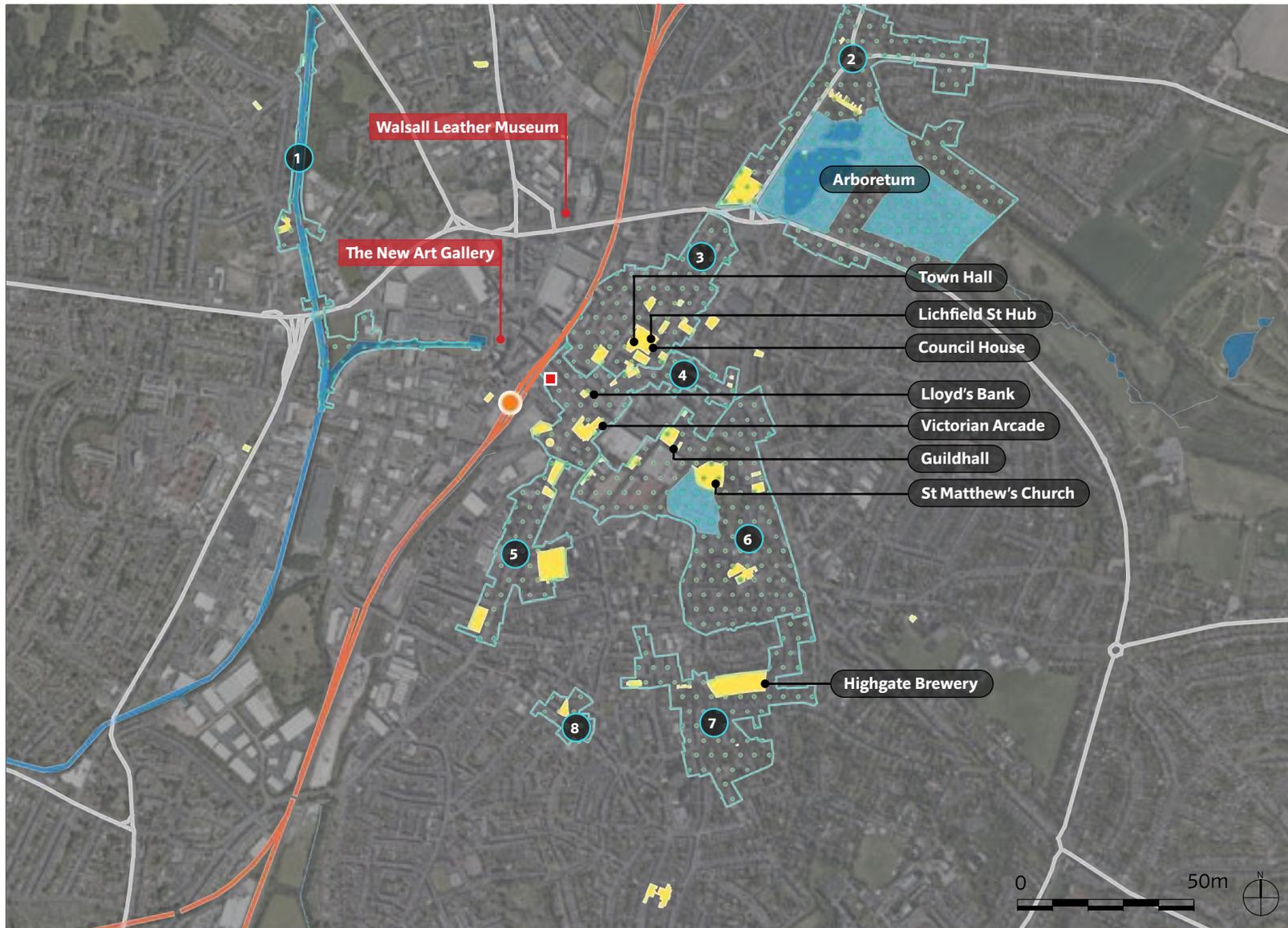
- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - North**  
Blakenall, Birchills Leamore,  
Bloxwich East, Bloxwich West
  - East**  
Aldridge, Walsall Wood, Brownhills  
and surrounding wards including  
Pelsall, Pheasey Farm Park, Rushall,  
Streetley
  - West**  
Darlaston North, Darlaston South,  
Short Heath, Willenhall North,  
Willenhall South
  - South**  
Walsall, Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck, St  
Matthews

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KEY  
 — Walsall Borough Boundary

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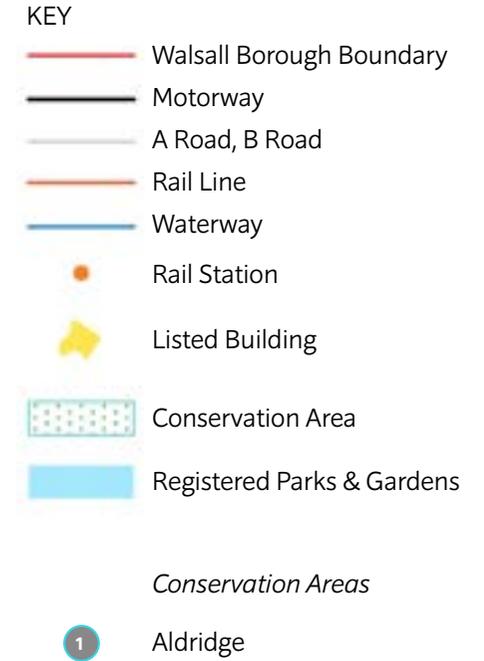


- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Motorway
  - A Road, B Road
  - Rail Line
  - Waterway
  - Rail Station
  - Listed Building
  - Conservation Area
  - Registered Parks & Gardens
  - Bus Station

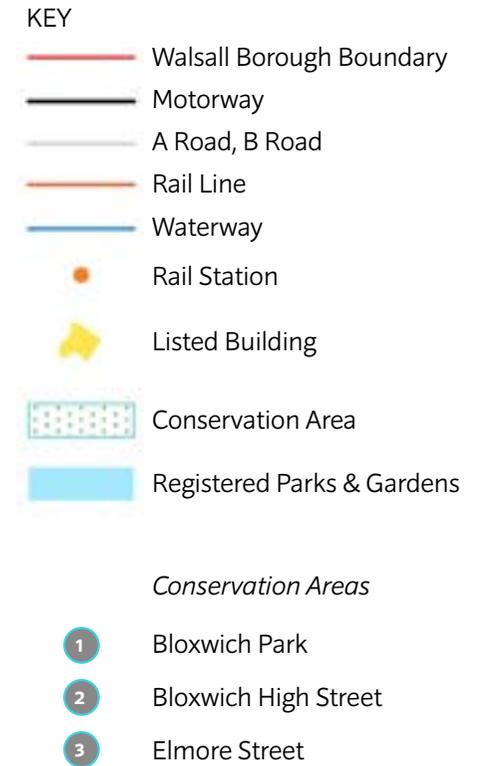
*Conservation Areas*

- 1 Walsall Locks
- 2 Arboretum
- 3 Lichfield Street
- 4 Bridge Street
- 5 Bradford Street
- 6 Church Hill
- 7 Highgate
- 8 Caldmore Green

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- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Motorway
  - A Road, B Road
  - Rail Line
  - Waterway
  - Rail Station
  - ★ Listed Building
  - Conservation Area
  - Registered Parks & Gardens



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FIGURE 7  
 BROWNHILLS  
 ASSETS AND ATTRACTIONS

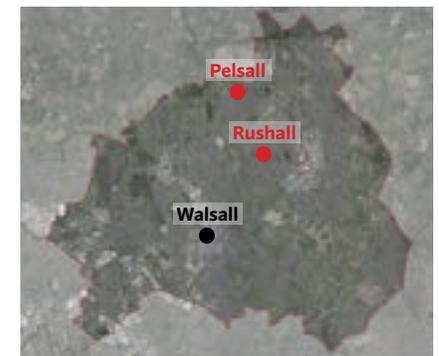
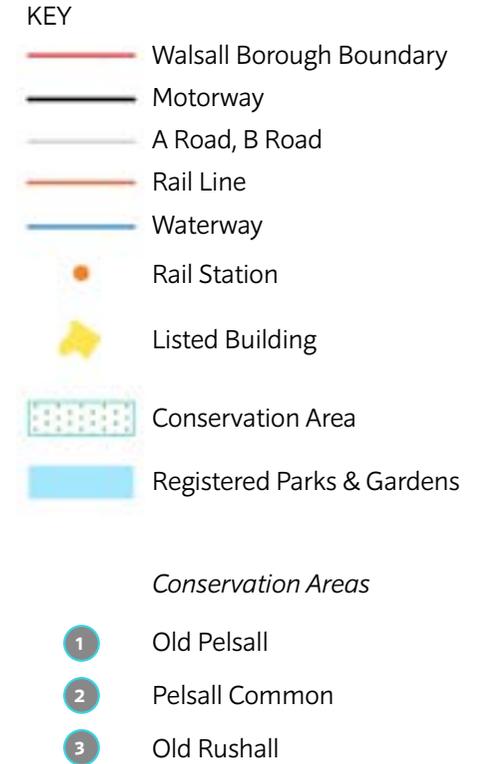


- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Motorway
  - A Road, B Road
  - Rail Line
  - Waterway
  - Rail Station
  - Listed Building
  - Conservation Area
  - Registered Parks & Gardens
- Conservation Areas*
- 1 Darlaston



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FIGURE 8  
 DARLASTON  
 ASSETS AND ATTRactions

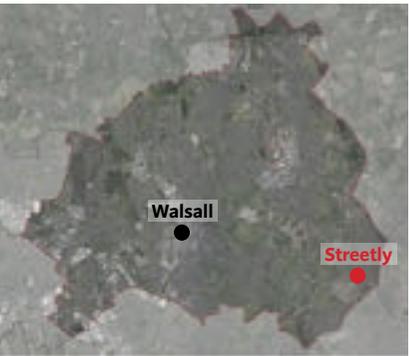


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FIGURE 9  
 RUSHALL AND PELSALL  
 ASSETS AND ATTRACTIONS

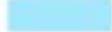


- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Motorway
  - A Road, B Road
  - Rail Line
  - Waterway
  - Rail Station
  - ★ Listed Building
  - Conservation Area
  - Registered Parks & Gardens
- Conservation Areas*
- 1 Great Barr



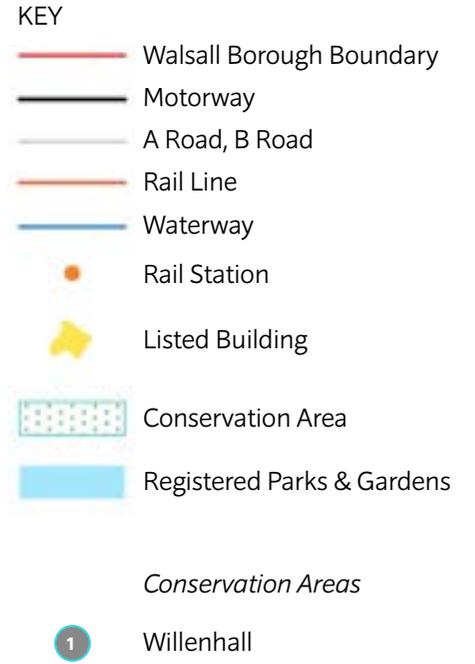
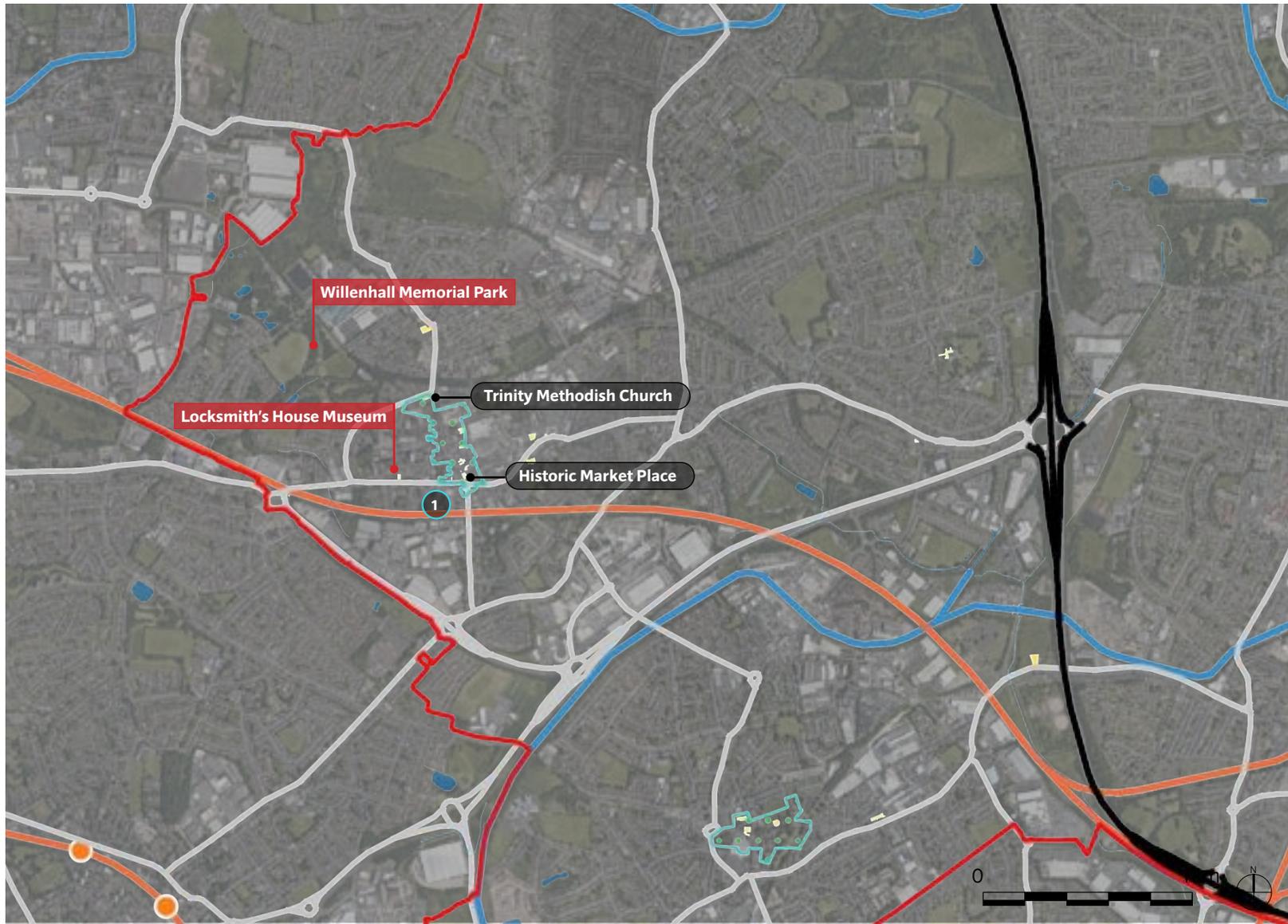
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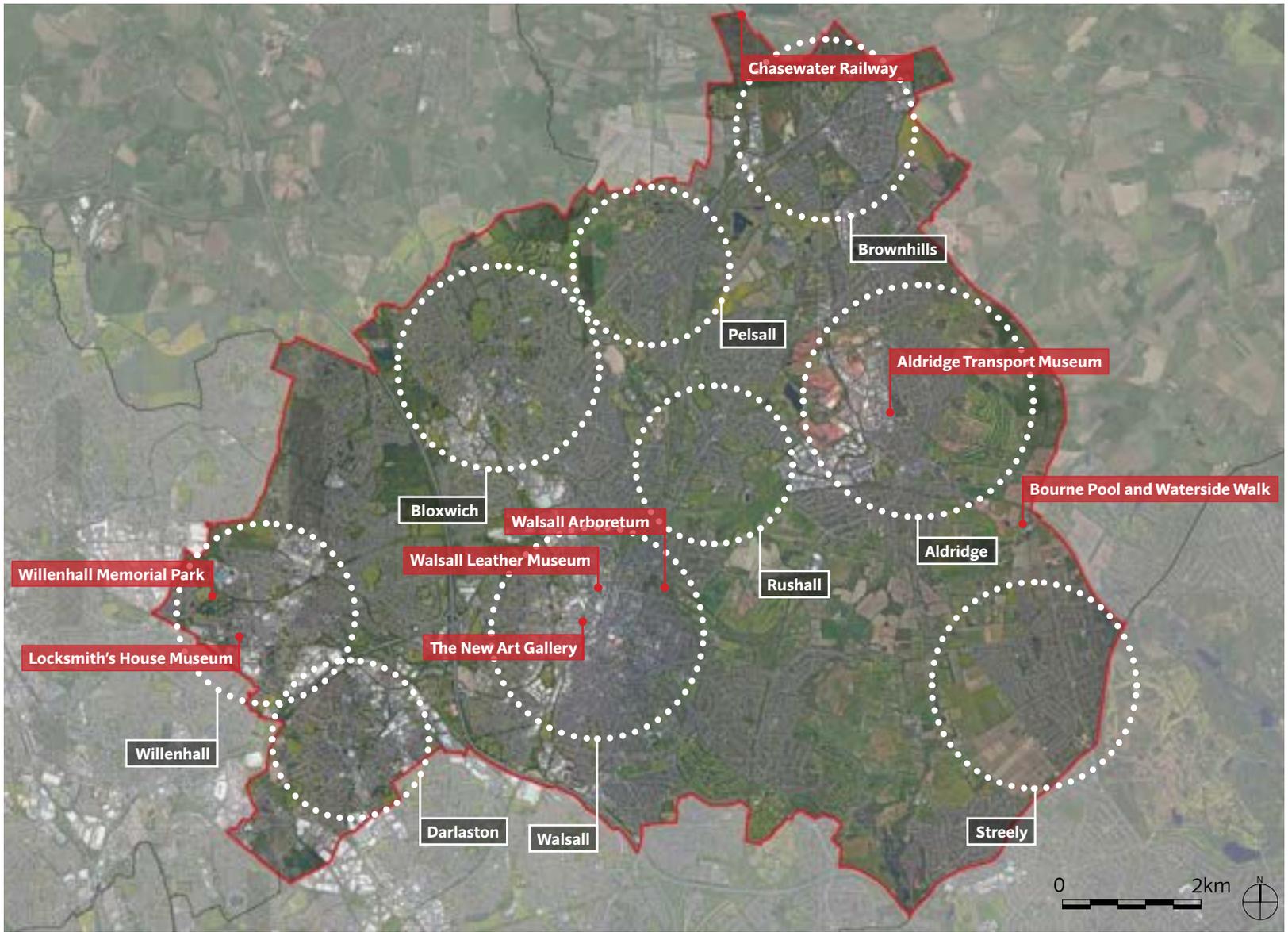
- KEY**
-  Walsall Borough Boundary
  -  Motorway
  -  A Road, B Road
  -  Rail Line
  -  Waterway
  -  Rail Station
  -  Listed Building
  -  Conservation Area
  -  Registered Parks & Gardens



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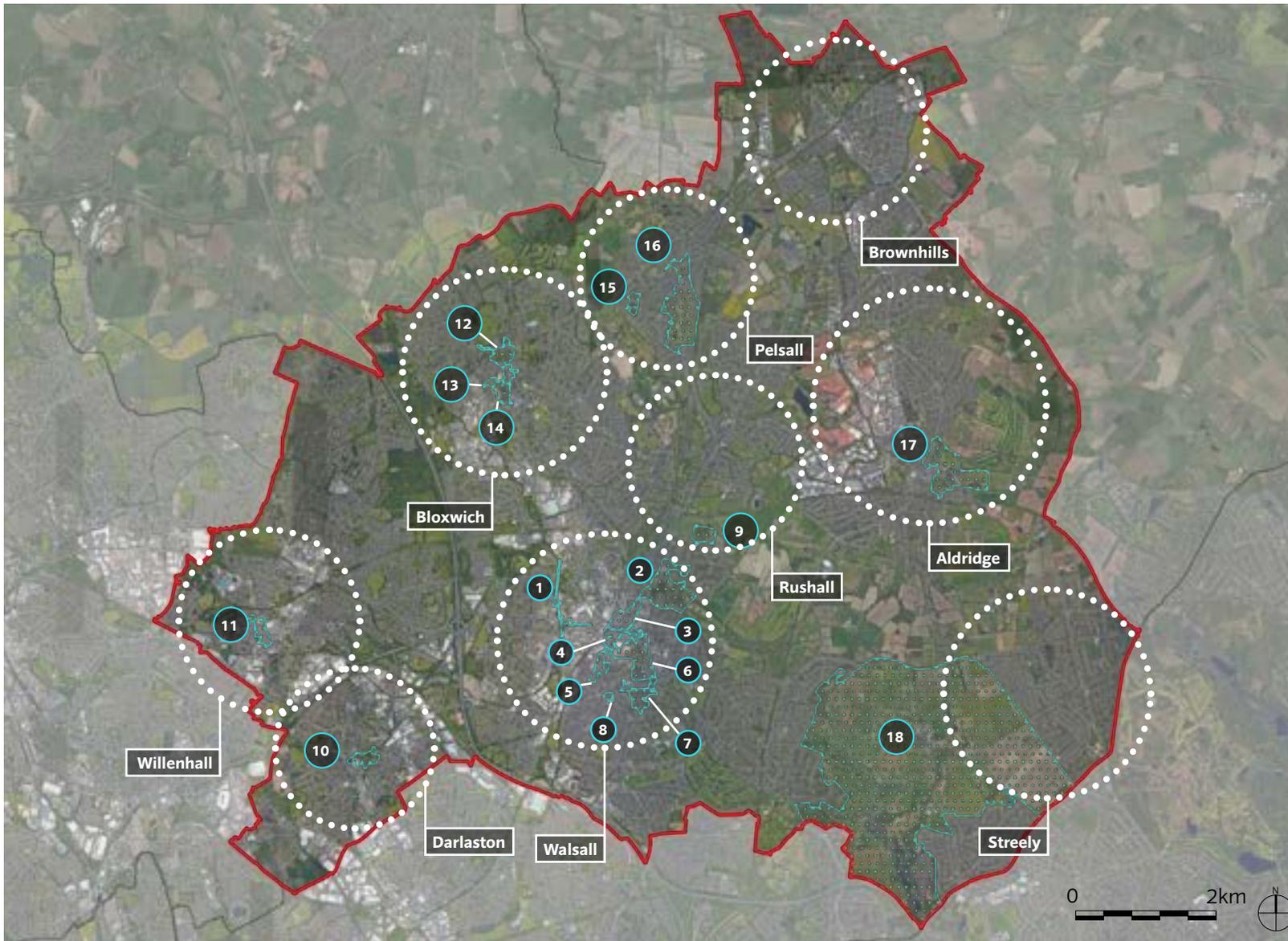


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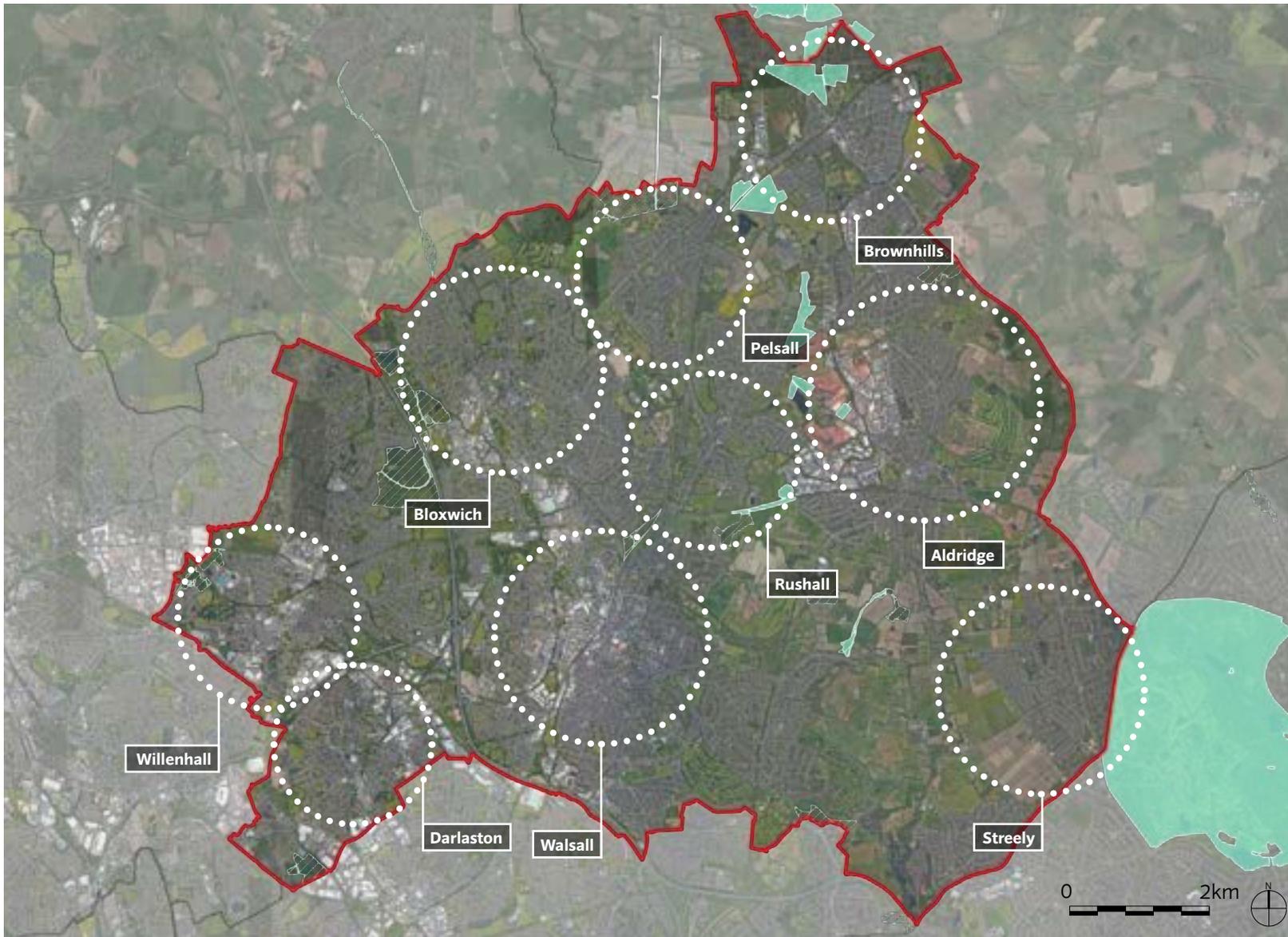
KEY  
 — Walsall Borough Boundary

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- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Conservation Areas
  - 1 Walsall Locks
  - 2 Arboretum
  - 3 Lichfield Street
  - 4 Bridge Street
  - 5 Bradford Street
  - 6 Church Hill
  - 7 Highgate
  - 8 Caldmore Green
  - 9 Old Rushall
  - 10 Darlaston
  - 11 Willenhall
  - 12 Bloxwich Park
  - 13 Bloxwich High Street
  - 14 Elmore Street
  - 15 Old Pelsall
  - 16 Pelsall Common
  - 17 Aldridge
  - 18 Great Barr

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- KEY**
- Walsall Borough Boundary
  - Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
  - Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

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## APPENDIX A – CONSULTEES

We would like to thank the following consultees for their time and valuable contribution towards the study:

- Benjamin Parker - Heritage Programme Officer, Walsall Council\*
- David Gill - Service Manager, Walsall Libraries (and Leather Museum), Walsall Council\*
- Devinder Matharu - Conservation Officer, Walsall Council\*
- Joe Holding - Senior Programme Development and Commissioning Manager, Public Health, Walsall Council\*
- Joel Maybury – Team Leader, Development Regeneration, Housing & Economy, Walsall Council\*
- Kaye Davies - External Funding and Business Development Manager, Walsall Council\*
- Liz Forster – Planning Policy Officer, Walsall Council\*
- Liz Stuffins – Service Development Manager, Healthy Spaces Team, Walsall Council\*
- Manjit Kaur – Leisure Operations and Project Manager (inc. archive services), Walsall Council\*
- Sarah Oakley – Voluntary and Community Sector Lead, Walsall Council\*
- Stephen Snoddy – Director, New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall Council\*
- Zoey West – External Programmes Manager, Resource and Transformation, Walsall Council\*
- Alan Bowley – Head of Clean and Green and Leisure, Walsall Council
- Catherine Lister – Collections Officer (Walsall Leather Museum), Walsall Council
- Catherine Yates – Collections Librarian, Walsall Council
- Dave Brown – Director of Place & Environment, Walsall Council
- David Herrington - Public Health Transformation Programme Manager, Walsall Council
- Helena Denham – District Manager for Libraries, Walsall Council
- Mark Lavender – Head of Programme Management, Walsall Council
- Neil Taylor – Director of Regeneration & Economy, Walsall Council
- Paul Gordon – Director of Resilient Communities, Walsall Council
- Philippa Venables – Director of Regeneration & Economy, Walsall Council
- Richard McVittie - Development Officer, Healthy Spaces Team, Walsall Council
- Simon Tranter - Head of Regeneration Housing & Economy, Walsall Council
- Architectural Heritage Fund
- Arts Council England
- Black Country Living Museum

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\*Walsall Council Heritage Strategy Working Group Members

- Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust
- British Property Federation
- Brownhills Community Association
- Canal and River Trust
- Creative Black Country
- Groundworks West Midlands
- Historic England
- Homes England
- Kiondo
- One Walsall
- Ryecroft Community Hub
- Urban Hax CIC
- Walsall Community Network
- Walsall for All
- West Midlands Growth Company
- West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust



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