

Draft Wednesbury Market Place Conservation Area Appraisal 2023

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Introduction

Background to the appraisal

This draft Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been produced by TDR Heritage on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Its aim is to review and further develop the existing appraisal for Wednesbury Market Place (adopted in 2013) in line with current guidance, and to take account of recent change.

Wednesbury Market Place was designated as a Conservation area in 1980 because of its special architectural and historic interest and covers an area of 3.041 hectares (7.514 acres). An appraisal of the area was carried out in 2013 and updated in 2017 in preparation for an application to Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme. The application was successful and this Conservation Area Appraisal was funded by Historic England as part of the HSHAZ.

This document is an assessment of the character and appearance of Wednesbury Market Place and its immediate setting in 2023. It sets out the historical development of the area, identifies and records the elements which contribute to the special interest of the area, and considers the extent of the conservation area in terms of its boundary. It also considers the condition of the area and sets out some principles and actions for its future management, providing material information for decision-makers for future development.

This Appraisal is based on the guidance set out in the first and second editions of Historic England's Conservation Area Appraisal Designation and Management Advice Note 1 (Historic England 2016 & 2019). It takes the form of written text and an appraisal map. In both respects every effort has been made to include or analyse those elements key to the special character of the area however, where buildings, structures or features have not been specifically highlighted, it does not necessarily follow that they are of no visual or historic value to the conservation area. This document is intended to be an overall framework and guide within which decisions can be made on a site-specific basis.

The existing boundary and proposed amendments to the conservation area are shown by the solid green and dotted lines on the Map provided in Section 3.

The planning policy context

National planning policy

At a national level, Sections 69-72 of the **Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** require Local Planning Authorities to determine '*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*' and to designate them as conservation areas where appropriate. Having designated the conservation area, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that those elements that form its particular character or appearance should be preserved or enhanced, especially when considering planning applications. Conservation Area Appraisals therefore define and analyse those qualities or elements that contribute to, or detract from, the special interest of the area and assess how they combine to justify its designation as a conservation area.

Local planning policy

In addition to national planning policy, Sandwell MBC has specific local policies which inform planning decisions and new development within its conservation areas. The most relevant are:

The Black Country Core Strategy (2011) Policy ENV2 ‘Historic Character and Local Distinctiveness’ which requires all development proposals to *preserve and where appropriate enhance* an area’s local character and special historic and townscape qualities and their setting.

The adopted Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2012) Policy SAD HE 2 – Conservation Areas which states that proposals for new build, alteration or extension within Sandwell’s conservation areas should respect their historic buildings characteristics and architectural styles including scale, grouping, materials and fenestration. It also states that proposals which will impact on the setting of the conservation area should demonstrate that they will preserve or better reveal the positive elements of the conservation area.

Summary of the special interest of the area

Wednesbury Market Place conservation area is of special interest for its largely late-medieval street pattern and concentration of 18th and 19th century buildings around a triangular market place. Although potentially with early origins, related to an earlier fortified settlement or ‘*burh*’ to the north of the town, the modern settlement developed between two key communication routes which led to important crossing points over the River Tame that were in use from at least the 13th century. Although the town did not receive a market charter until 1707, in the medieval period Wednesbury evolved as a place of manufacture and commerce, servicing a succession of early extractive industries, and with activities focussed around the triangular market place. Its growth was facilitated by improved communication routes, notably in the late 18th century, when many of the extant buildings were constructed, which is reflected in a high concentration of 18th and 19th century town houses and commercial properties in the town.

The survival of the historic layout of the town, and the survival and adaptation of the buildings and their plot structure, also has special interest for their potential to provide information about the development of the town and the form and use of the buildings over time, as the relationship with the roads and the tight-knit 18th, 19th and early 20th century retail frontages document the evolution of commerce in the town. The Market Place also has historic and communal significance as a site of commercial and civic interaction for hundreds of years.

In addition, Wednesbury has high potential for below ground archaeological remains dating from at least the medieval period, which is particularly rare within the Black Country due to the high level of industrial activity and modern re-development across the region. In particular, previous excavations have shown that, despite the 18th century development of the town, evidence from the Wednesbury pottery industry, which was focussed in the south and south east of the Market Place, and other small scale industries, survive below ground.

General Character, Location and Uses

Location and Setting

Wednesbury is a market town in the West Midlands, approximately 10 miles north west of Birmingham and 6 miles south east of Wolverhampton (Figure 1). It sits around 156m above sea level on a plateau of sandstone and the South Staffordshire Coalfield, firmly within the ‘Black Country’- an area of intense industrial development in the 18th and 19th centuries. Wednesbury is

one of the six towns of Sandwell Metropolitan District, and is located in the north of the Borough, approximately 3 miles north of West Bromwich. The sprawling conurbation of the Black Country, a mixture of commercial, industrial and residential post-war development, define the immediate setting of the area and the town falls within the 'Wednesbury and Hill Top Historic Landscape Character Area' (SD13). Two miles north of the conservation area is junction 9 of the M6 and a regionally important major retail park. The River Tame passes to the north, east and south of the town.

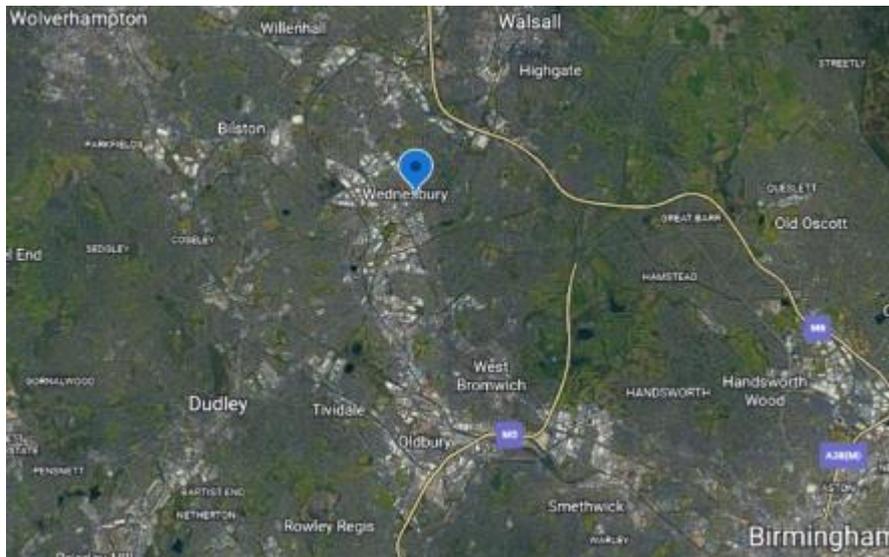


Figure 1 Location Map. Google Earth.

At the heart of the town is the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area, bounded by the A461 Orbital road to the north and west, a major transport route through the Black Country. This road bypasses the town centre and, in the 1960s, separated the modern town from the earliest known settlement at Wednesbury to its north, which seems to have been focussed around a 13th century manor house and the parish church of St Bartholomew's. The southern boundary of the conservation area is defined by late 20th development in the form of a supermarket, carpark and residential development south of Russell Street. The residential streets of Riddings Lane, Wharfdale Street and Addison Terrace form the eastern boundary.

The core of the conservation area is formed by a principally late-medieval street pattern formed by Upper and Lower High Street with a high concentration of 18th and 19th century town houses and commercial properties of local historic and architectural interest. The town itself developed around a triangular market place at the confluence of roads which were of local and national importance for industry and communication from the late medieval period. The town centre is larger than the conservation area and extends approximately 0.5 miles southwest, with a cluster of civic buildings and amenities along the Holyhead Road and a Metro Line station beyond this.

The conservation area includes a mix of retail, commercial and leisure properties with some residential accommodation to the upper floors. The retailers are predominantly independent and there are a number of cafes, pubs, restaurants and take-aways. The area is mainly visited during the day with Tuesday (market day) and Saturday the busiest shopping days. The night-time economy is concentrated around the pubs and a couple of restaurants/take-aways. At the core of the conservation area is the market place which forms the focal point of the town both physically and culturally, including for civic events such as memorial services and the Town's annual Christmas tree.

In terms of forces for change, Wednesbury faces economic challenges typical of many post-industrial towns, which are particularly apparent in the Black Country. These include higher than national average levels of deprivation and a lower economic base which has resulted in higher vacancy rates for retail premises, and a backlog of repair and maintenance on properties in the conservation area. The impact of these factors on the special character of the conservation area is explored further in section 2B: Sensitivity and Capacity for Change.

Historic development and interest

Early occupation

Place name evidence suggests that there was an early settlement in the vicinity of Wednesbury from at least Saxon times, possibly located around Church Hill, a flattish-topped hill lying close to the River Tame and at the meeting point of early routeways. The name 'Wednesbury' is believed to be derived from 'Woden's burh', *Burh* being Old English for a 'stronghold or fortified site', and there has been speculation that the church of St Bartholomew may have been built on the site of a shrine or temple, dedicated to the pagan god Woden.

Although the early settlement has traditionally been associated with Ethelfleda, a member of the Anglo Saxon royal house, who constructed fortresses against the Viking invasion across the midlands, there is no physical evidence for one having been built at Wednesbury. However, several 19th century antiquarian accounts of earthworks around the site of the Church of St Bartholomew and Church Hill suggest that the settlement may be considerably earlier and be prehistoric in origin, and represent an Iron Age hillfort.

Despite its uncertain origins, by 1086, Domesday Book recorded *Wadnesberie* as 'One of the more considerable villages of a thinly populated and economically backwards area' with a population of around 140, with land and one mill.

Medieval development

Archaeological evidence suggests that the settlement of Wednesbury developed along Church Hill, close to the church of St Bartholomew (NHLE 1342678) and the site of its early manor house to its north. Both of these buildings are believed to have been constructed by at least the 13th century, but have now since been either demolished or largely reconstructed.

Communication routes were fundamental to the development of Wednesbury and it is likely that the town continued to develop as a result of its proximity to important crossing points of the River Tame to the south. The primary roads through the town appear to have been established by the 13th and 14th centuries and there was a bridge at Finchpath to the south of Wednesbury by 1225, carrying the main Birmingham - Wolverhampton road over the River Tame. In the 13th century, *Wysti* Bridge, later known as Hydes Bridge, carried a road to West Bromwich, and a route to Walsall also existed by the mid-14th century (Figure 2). The surrounding area was part of the Royal forests of Cannock Chase, the boundary of which is thought to have been close to the present day high street, and ran along Hydes Road to the River Tame.

Despite there being no known medieval market charter, excavations in the market place area indicate that the triangular market place, occupying the space between these key roads, was occupied by the 14th or 15th century with archaeological evidence suggesting that there were medieval yards and buildings fronting onto the market place by this time (MBL2613). By 1421 the

settlement had further expanded to the north east of the market place, with the construction of a manor house known as Oakeswell Hall (which was demolished in the 1960s) (MBL2714).

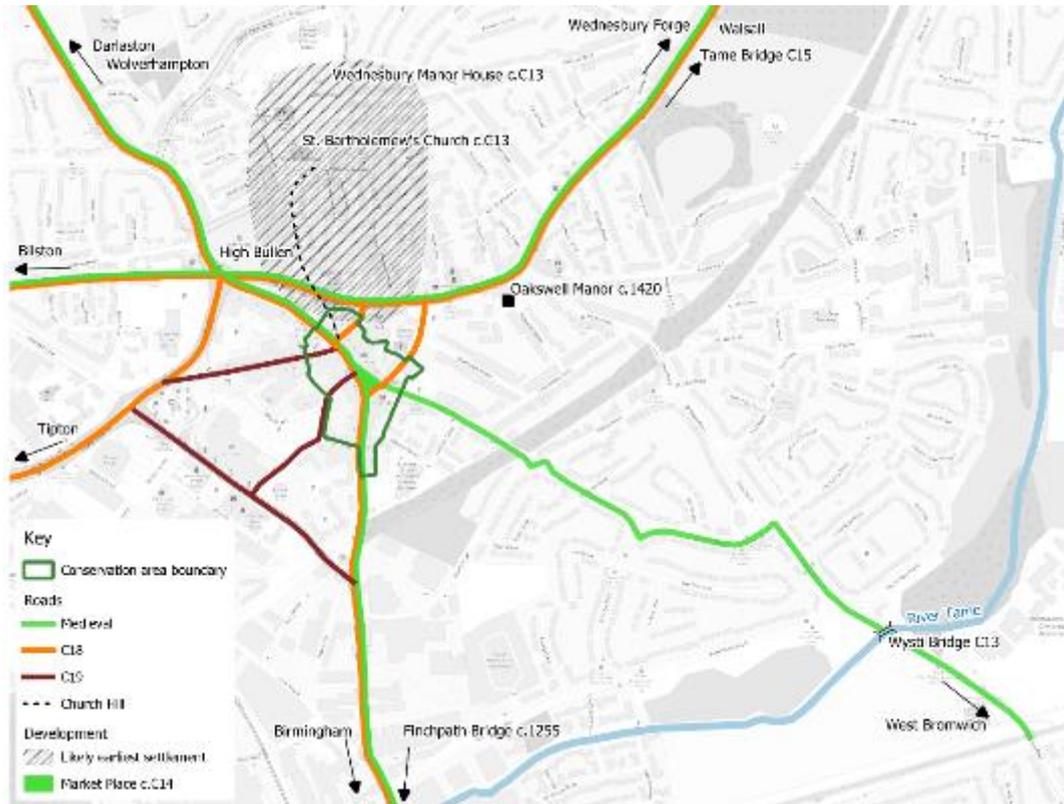


Figure 2 Early road pattern and development of the settlement.

Wednesbury's geology was also a factor in the town's early development. Nearby deposits of clay, sandstone, iron ore and coal meant Wednesbury had some of the earliest industrial activity in the Black Country, with coal pits and ironstone mining recorded in the vicinity of the town by 1315. As industry became established in the area, Wednesbury grew into a modest sized settlement and Subsidy Rolls (taxation records) show that by the 14th century the town had approximately half the number of tax payers of nearby Walsall and was comparable in size to Darlaston and Bentley. Wednesbury also had a pottery industry from the early 14th century which produced 'Wedgebury Ware'. Documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that production was mostly sited in the area to the south and south east of the market place and continued over a relatively long period. To date, only one 17th century kiln has been found - in excavations in the market place (MBL2614) – but other production sites have been identified within the town centre, including to the rear of 48-50 Lower High Street, which were operating from the 15th -17th centuries (ESD838).

Similarly, Manorial water powered mills in the vicinity of Wednesbury had been turned over to iron production by the 16th century and became an important site of industrial activity for the next 400 years. By the late 16th century/ early 17th century, Wednesbury Forge, 2 miles northeast of the town, was a sophisticated operation and an increasing volume of goods was being exported from the site, using the network of established transportation routes through the town.

18th century growth

By the early 18th century Wednesbury was rapidly changing, industrially and economically. Its local, shallow coal pits had been replaced by deeper mines as supply attempted to keep up with growing demand, and a number of collieries had been established close to the town, just outside the

conservation area boundary. Further east, Wednesbury Forge had expanded to become an integrated factory, as substantial enterprise required numerous supporting industries. This had a substantial impact on the development of the town, particularly in terms of its diversification and expansion into manufacturing and industry, and during the 18th century Wednesbury emerged as a centre of saw making, transitioning later in the century to gun-barrel making.

The fortunes of the 18th century town were also impacted by the granting of a formal market charter to Wednesbury in 1707. Although it seems likely that an informal market had been in operation for several centuries, the charter gave the town right to hold two annual fairs and a weekly Friday market. In recognition of this new status, a market house, situated close to the present-day clock tower, was erected in the market place in c1709 and was operational until the early 19th century, by which time it had fallen into disrepair and was demolished.

By the 1720s, the road south from Wednesbury was in a state of disrepair due to the high volume of traffic, particularly due to carrying ironware and coal to Birmingham. In 1727 Lower High Street/Bridge Street was improved and turnpiked, retaining the movement of traffic through the town centre, and encouraging further commercial development of the town.

Later in the century, as industry in the Black Country expanded, transport routes between the key settlements and industries in the area continued to improve. In 1766 the Wednesbury to Bilston road was turnpiked (now A41), increasing the volume of traffic into Wednesbury town centre as coaches travelling to and from Shrewsbury and North Wales began to use this shorter route. Shortly after, in 1769, the first phase of the Birmingham Canal was completed, terminating approximately one mile south of the market place. It linked the Wednesbury coalfields to Birmingham industries, and significantly increased the volume of coal which could be transported out of Wednesbury.

These changes simultaneously increased the prosperity of industrialists and workers in the town, while reducing heavy freight on the roads, and corresponded with further developments in the town's commercial offer, particularly in terms of accommodation and services for passengers travelling through the town by coach. The wealth generated from these developments is reflected in a significant and comprehensive programme of property building in the town throughout the 18th century, although the medieval road pattern of Lower and Upper High Street remained largely unchanged.

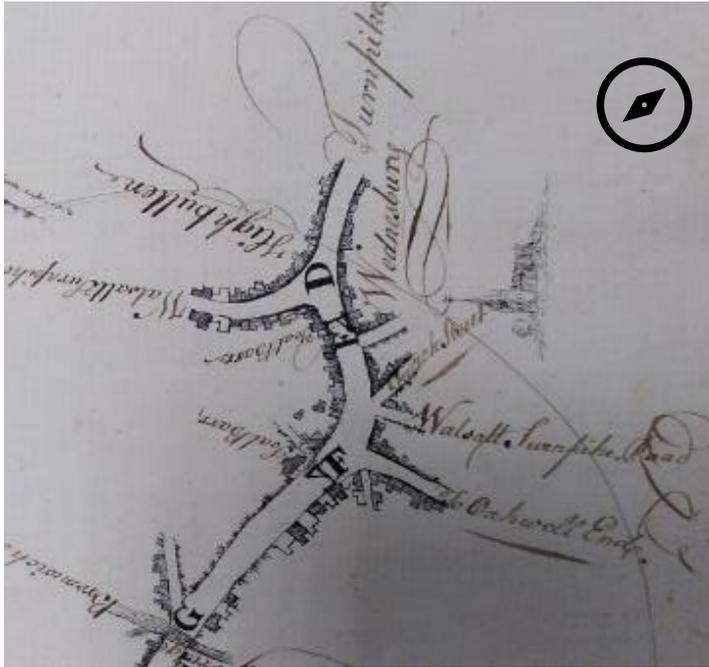


Figure 3 Turnpike map, 1771. Sandwell Archives reference 608107.



Figure 4 Parish Map 1799. Conservation Area boundary in green. Sandwell Archives MAP/487.

By the end of the 18th century Wednesbury had an established form which is still recognisable in the streetscape today. A parish map of 1799 shows Lower and Upper High Street, Church Hill, Walsall Street, Spring Head and Ridding Lane (see Figures 3 and 4). The Market Place, labelled 'cross', suggesting that it was used as a corn market, is shown with a structure, presumably the Market Hall. The plots shown on the 1799 map adjacent to Market Place (see 216 and 262) appear to span several frontages/properties and may have influenced the way larger buildings later developed around Market Place and Lower High Street.

John Wesley's 1745 pamphlet "Modern Christianity exemplified at Wednesbury" highlighted the dual function of many properties in the town, which residents referred to interchangeably as homes or shops, and generally comprised commercial ground floors and accommodation above.

The 19th century town

A coaching town

From 1808 the main London to Holyhead mail route began to pass through Wednesbury town centre, further increasing demand for coaching inns and hotels as well as trades such as tack and nail makers. 'Tacker's Well' (MBC3111), situated at the foot of Church Street, was an area where nailers were located and the town offered a number of inns and hotels to accommodate and serve food to travellers and those attending markets. The Talbot Hotel occupied a prominent corner plot on the market place - an inn was reportedly here from the 16th century and was rebuilt by wine and spirit merchant John Taylor Duce in the 1870s - and other prominent coaching inns in the early 19th century market place included The Green Dragon (8 Market Place) - from which two coach services a day left for Birmingham in the 1820s; The Turks Head (25-26 Lower High Street) - which had coaches leaving three times a week for Birmingham; The George Hotel (1 Upper High Street); The George and Dragon Hotel (40 Lower High Street) and The Golden Cross, which was licenced as a beer house in 1834. Several of these establishments had 18th origins.

In 1826 a new road, Telford's London to Holyhead Road (the Holyhead Road), was opened to the south of the town, by-passing Wednesbury's town centre. Long distance coaches traversed this route, as did regional coaches from Shropshire and Staffordshire towns, and new commercial premises developed along the new road to service the coaches.

Serving a growing population

During the second half of the 19th century the town centre continued to expand and the character and appearance of the town centre began to change. Until the early 19th century, a number of the commercial buildings in the town centre also accommodated civic functions, with Petty Sessions being held in the Market Cross building before its closure in 1824 and at the Turk's Head Inn. In terms of new development, Union Street was possibly laid out as a new commercial street as early as 1802.

By the mid-19th century the town centre was surrounded by large industrial sites. Old Park ironworks, 1 mile north of the market place employed 3,000 workers and the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company (1836-1980), which became the town's largest employer, operated factories to the south west of the conservation area. As the town developed, drinking establishments in the town centre remained popular, but increasingly served residents and local workers, the scale of this function is reflected in there being four licenced establishments on Upper High Street, four on Lower High Street, five on Market Place and one on Walsall Street by the late 19th century.

At the same time, a number of new places of worship were built within or just beyond the conservation area to serve the growing population. A new parish of St John's was created to the south of the conservation area and a church (with a capacity of 1000) and churchyard were built in 1844-45 (MBL3182). Nonconformist worship had been prevalent amongst the workers of the town since the time of John Wesley and a number of nonconformist chapels were also constructed, including a 250 capacity congregational chapel behind Lower High Street and Russell Street, adjacent to St John's church; a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and school on Spring Head (MBL4958) (now Spring Head car park); and a United Free Methodist chapel and hall on Riddings Lane (MBL4959). With the exception of the United Free, where the brick façade is still standing, many of these were demolished in the 1980s.

Educational needs for the expanding town were also met in the form of the British and Foreign Society School, which opened on Lower High Street in 1820, and moved to Russell Street in 1851. Following the 1870 Education Act, a new Board School was opened to replace it with new premises in Lower High Street. The site was extensive and by 1886 it accommodated 740 pupils, as well as houses for staff.

In the middle of the 19th century, the plots fronting the Market Place, particularly on the north side, were subdivided, rebuilt or refaced, possibly to meet a demand for more shops. Properties developed to the west of the Market Place and Lower High Street, with Russell Street and a smaller passageway (later The Shambles) connecting to the rear of the properties or outbuildings behind (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Tithe map 1846. Sandwell Archives MAP/489.
Conservation Area Boundary shown in green.

From the mid-19th century the construction of the Great Western Railway and Staffordshire Line curtailed development of the town to the south-east of the Market Place (Figure 5) and new building became concentrated to the west, particularly along the Holyhead Road (Figure 6) and around the new the passenger and freight rail stations further south. Links with other Black Country towns were further enhanced in the late 19th century, when cheap travel, in the form of trams, began to pass along the High Street and through Market Place (Figures 6,7 and 8), and enabled an even bigger catchment to visit Wednesbury.

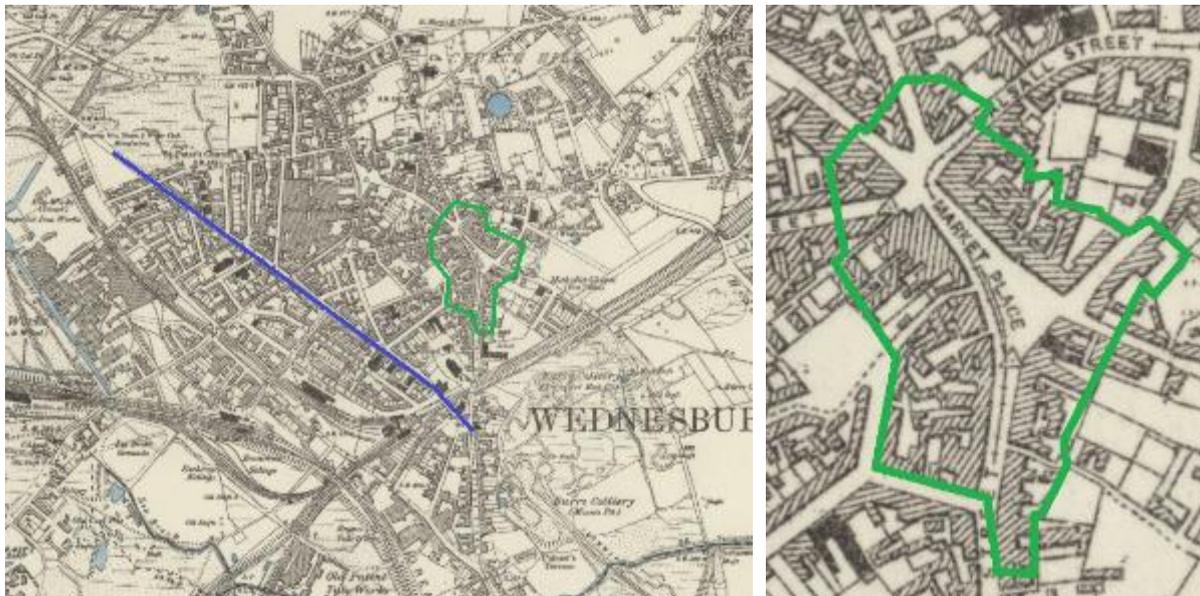


Figure 6 Conservation Area (green) and Holyhead Road (blue). First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1884-1888) Staffordshire Sheet LXVIII.NW. National Library Scotland.

The early 20th century town

Located between clusters of civic buildings and schools around the Holyhead Road and the northern part of Spring Head and Walsall Street, the market place, with its weekly market, remained a focal point and meeting place for the town in the early 20th century. C.W.D. Joynson, Mayor of the Borough, designed and built the commemorative clocktower in 1911 and new public conveniences were opened on the Shambles around this time. From 1918 part of The Talbot was leased by the Wednesbury Labour Exchange.

Wednesbury's extractive industries had been superseded in the late 19th century by heavy industry, particularly tube-making, and its factories were significant in manufacturing artillery during the First World War. The town's resulting economic prosperity in the early 20th century, alongside the development of new and exciting forms of entertainment, is also reflected in developments in the market place. In particular, the buildings around the Market Place began to develop into more recreational uses. The Gaumont Cinema opened on Walsall Street in 1915 and Upper High Street had a cluster of recreational buildings including a cinema and Hippodrome (Figure 9).



Figure 7 Postcard of Market Place, c.1914¹. Sandwell Archives.



Figure 8 Postcard of Market Place, c.1915. Sandwell Archives.

There was also a Picture Theatre on Earp's Lane (between Church Street and High Street) and a public baths on Walsall Street. By the middle of the 20th century there was also a Bowling Green and Billiards Hall on Church Street (Figure 9).

¹ I. Bott, *Wednesbury in Old Photographs*. 1994. Sandwell Archives.

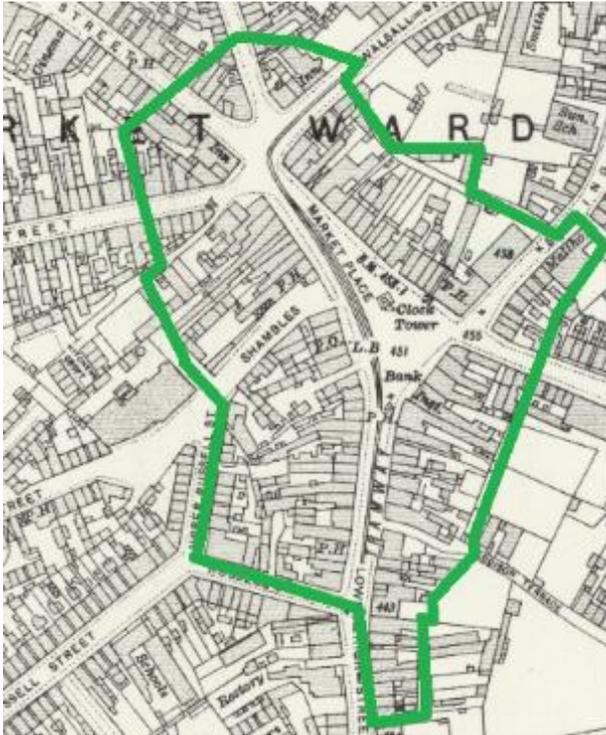


Figure 9 Ordnance Survey 1919 Conservation Area shown in green. Staffordshire LXVIII.1. National Library Scotland.

In the mid-20th century the conservation area continued to have a commercial character and a regular market in the Market Place (Figure 10). The 18th -19th century buildings continued to dominate although new designs such as the Burton's (1937) and Golden Cross pub by W.S. Clements (1949) added a more modern character to the high street.



Figure 10 Market Place, 1950. Bott, *Memories of Wednesbury*, 2004. Sandwell Archives.

Late 20th century regeneration

In the 1960s the town centre was altered to accommodate the rapid increase in motor car use in the post-war period. In particular, Union Street was redeveloped and buildings to the rear of properties on Upper High Street were demolished to create the Shambles Car Park. The George, an 18th century coaching inn on the corner of Upper High Street and Union Street was demolished and replaced with

a modern building (now the William Archer) along with a row of shops on the south side of Upper High Street.

Most significantly, the Northern relief road (A461), which was built in 1969, physically cut off the town centre from its oldest parish church and diverted traffic away from the Market Place. However, although the volume of traffic using the roads changed, it had little impact on the street pattern.

In the 1970s-80s, the prosperity of Wednesbury declined as heavy industry closed and unemployment rose. Land vacated by closing industries was repurposed for commercial development and in the 1970s the market was moved from the market place to an indoor purpose-built site at the west end of the Shambles. The commercial fortunes of the town fell still further as, in the late 1980s/early 1990s, an out-of-town retail park was built beside the M6 and Wednesbury followed a national trend of changing consumer habits that focussed shopping away from town centres to out of town facilities.

Towards the 21st century there was an attempt to reconnect and reanimate the town centre, with the Midland Metro opening in 1999, reconnecting the town to Wolverhampton and Walsall using the old railway line. In 2007 Morrisons supermarket opened to the west of Russell Street, changing the character of the town between the conservation area and the Holyhead Road. The supermarket car park replaced the purpose-built indoor market of the 1970s and the market was relocated to open air stalls at west end of the Shambles before, in 2022, being moved back to a permanent home in the market place.

Map showing the key periods in the area's development

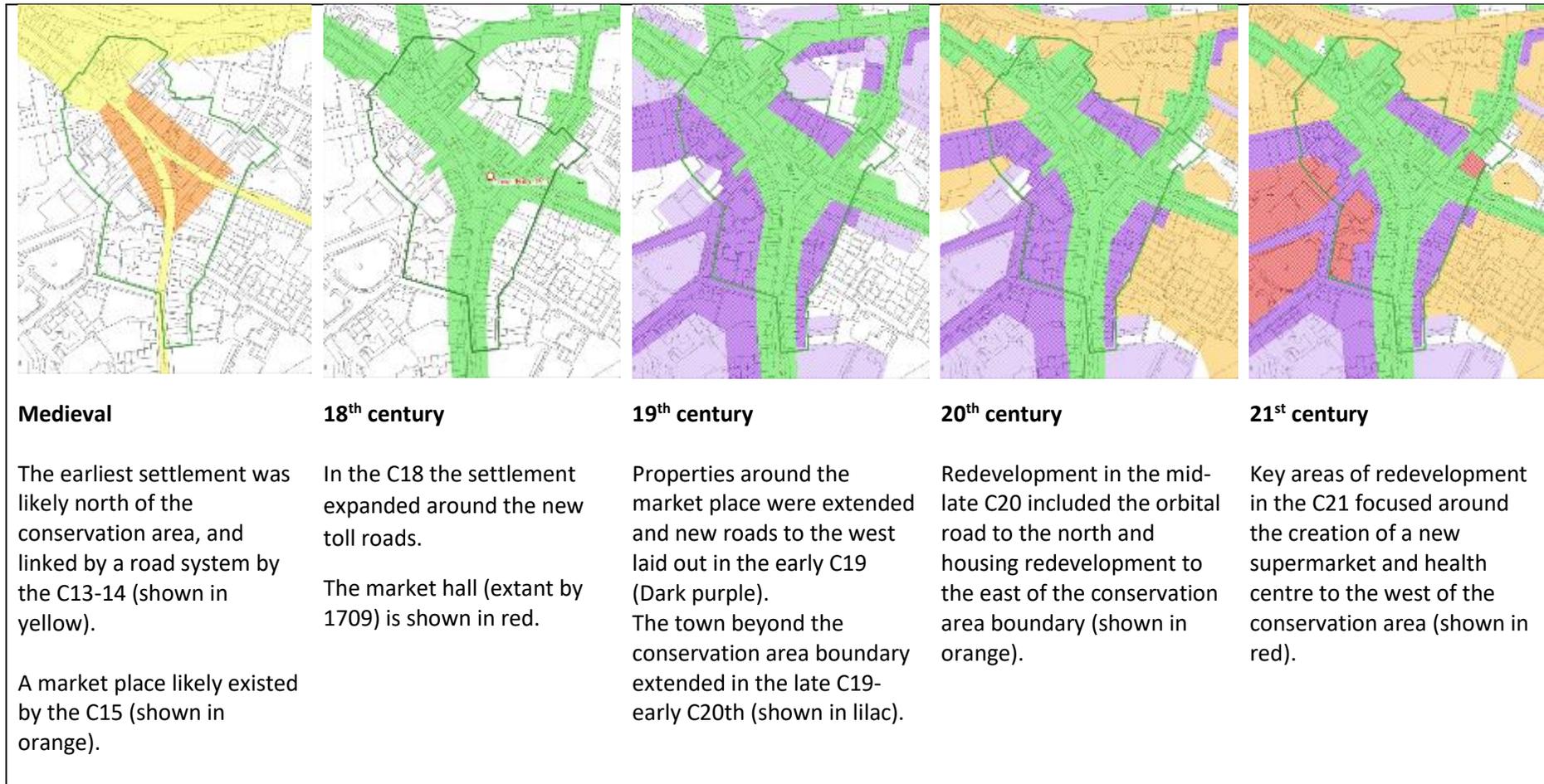


Figure 11 Illustration of the key periods of development and redevelopment which give the conservation area its character. Conservation area boundary is shown in green.

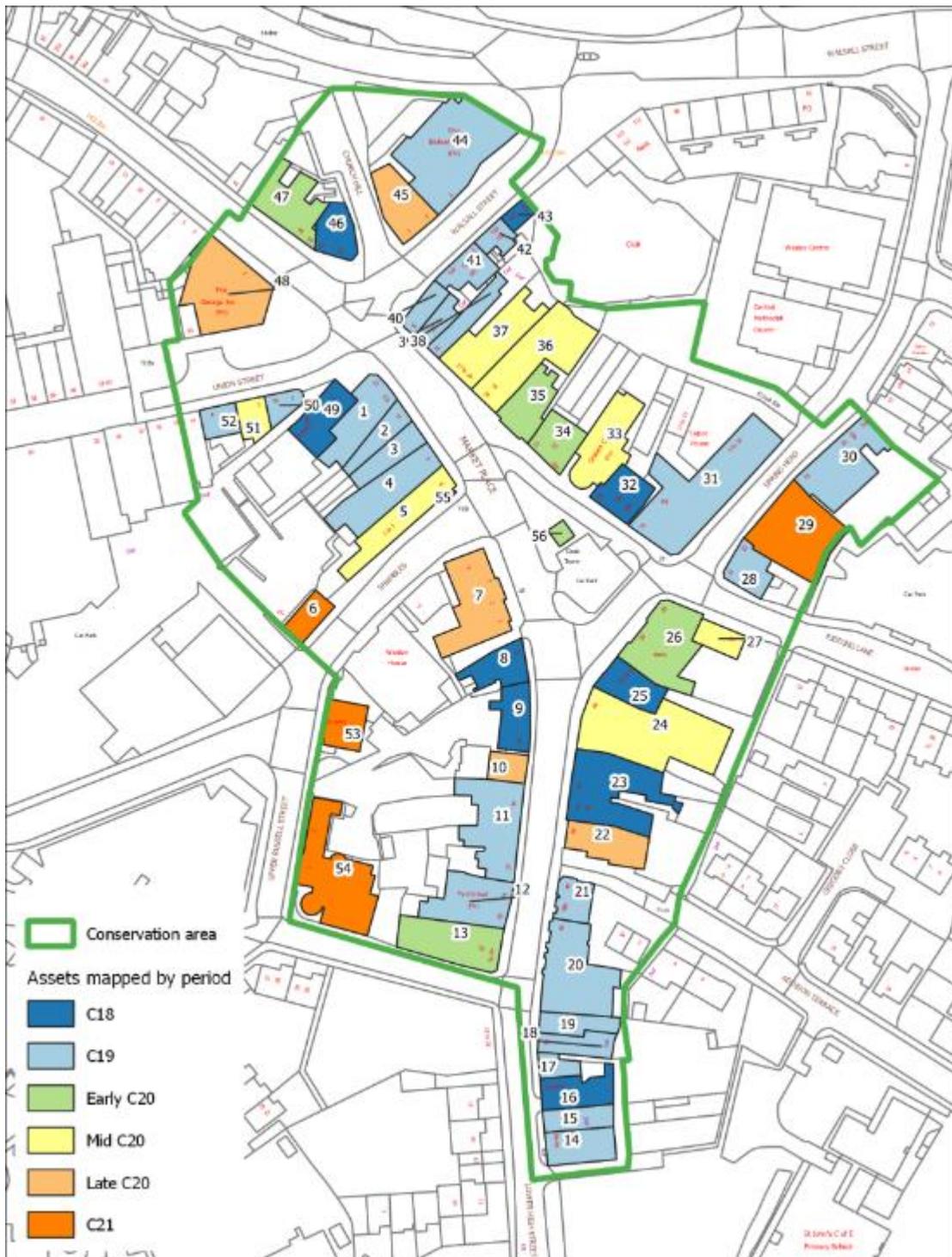


Figure 12 Predominant period of construction of assets in the conservation area. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey Licence No 100023119.

Architectural interest and built form

Townscape and form

The Wednesbury Market Place conservation area has a predominantly **commercial character**, of late 18th / early 19th century date. A mix of late 18th, 19th and 20th century buildings front the Market Place and Lower High Street and provide the main architectural interest in the area.

Throughout the conservation area, buildings are predominantly of two and three storeys, and many have frontages onto the street with long one or two storey service ranges behind. They provide a continuous street frontage and contribute to the character and feel of the conservation area, with a height and scale that takes account of the topography of the streets (Figure 13A). On Spring Hill, the street frontage is formed by a former malthouse with inserted shop fronts (Figure 13B) and Market Place, particularly on the north side, is characterised by its variety of 19th and 20th century commercial buildings (Figure 13C).

Corner buildings are significant in the conservation area and communicate a strong relationship between the historic street pattern and the development of properties along key thoroughfares. 28-30 Market Place, The Talbot building, 51-52 Upper High Street, 8 and 13 Market Place and 22-24 Lower High Street all have significant frontages onto two streets.



Figure 13 Built form of historic properties Lower High Street showing the roof line reflecting the topography and incline of the street (A), Spring Head (B), Market Place (C)

Public houses and former inns/hotels are some of the most prominent buildings in the conservation area and are represented by some of its key buildings, including 9 Market Place, which retains the form of an 18th century coaching inn (Figure 14), and the former Talbot Hotel (and outbuildings to the rear) which was rebuilt in the late 19th century as pub and spirits house. The Bellweather on

Walsall Street retains its original use and some of the character of a typical Black Country pub with a central entrance leading to a 'two-room drinker', typical of the early 19th century (Figure 15).



Figure 14 Former George Inn, side elevation viewed from The Shambles.



Figure 15 The Bellweather. Google Streetview.

The conservation area also retains a **civic feel** through 20th century commemorative assets including the Clock Tower and horse troughs and functional structures such as the K6 phone box, police box and post box.

Architectural Styles

The buildings which make the most significant contribution to the special character of the conservation area, are typically late 18th-early 19th century in style, with classical symmetrical façades with parapets and plain windows, originally timber sashes, with typical detailing including stone lintels and keystones (Of which 31-33 Market Place is the best example, Figure 61).

Part of the area's special character also comes from the variety of mid-late 19th to mid-20th century styles which give the area a lively commercial character, more typical of Black Country towns (Figure 16). Styles include fairly plain buildings reliant on decorative brick details for architectural interest (the terrace on Spring Head, chambers on Walsall Street, 12-13 and 14 Market Place) and an Edwardian terrace on Upper High Street reminiscent of the Birmingham Free Style/Gothic Revival with mock-tudor gables. Other visually distinctive styles include the Italianate Gothic Talbot Hotel and the West Bromwich Building Society, as a typical Neo-Georgian Edwardian bank (L in Figure 13C). Notable mid-20th century styles within the townscape include the inter-war pub, The Golden Cross, and the Art-Deco Burton's building (17 Market Place).

There are two earlier, probable **18th century vernacular buildings** (or 19th century rebuilding) which are characterised by low, two or one and a half storey, domestic scale properties. These may have originated as nailers cottages, or represent similar small-scale cottage industries, and serve as a reminder of the development of the settlement (Figure 17).



Figure 16 19th and 20th century styles, Market Place.



Figure 17 Vernacular style, Upper High Street. Google Streetview.

Building Materials

The predominant building material in the conservation area is red or brown brick. Red brick was a dominant building material in the Black Country by the 18th century, reflecting the use of the indigenous red clay of the surrounding landscape and its use for building. Late 18th century buildings probably had brick frontages (such as 31-33 Market Place and 1 Union Street).

By the early 19th century structural brickwork was often rendered, and this characterises Lower High Street particularly. As many of the properties on Lower and Upper High Street date from the late 18th-early 19th century it is likely the area developed with a mix of exposed and other rendered facades. Rear elevations and service extensions remain exposed brick (Figure 18).

Many of the 19th century buildings which form part of the 18th century ranges along the Market Place and High Street are rendered or painted white/cream to fit with the 'Regency era' style of the earlier buildings (Figure 19), and are now an important part of the character of these streets.



Figure 18 Rear of properties along Lower High Street



Figure 19 Rendered and painted brickwork typical of 19th century frontages

19th century brick boundary walls, usually at the rear of properties, are also part of the historic character of the conservation area and an identifiable characteristic of Black Country towns (Figures 20-22).



Figure 20 Wall, North of Shambles Car Park



Figure 21 Hitchin's Croft passageway



Figure 22 Outbuilding, rear of Talbot House, Spring Hill

Roofs

Roofs in the area are predominantly of slate, although many along Lower High Street are not visible behind parapets. Roofs are most visible along the north side of Market Place and Spring Head, and are slate on 19th century and tile on 20th century buildings. Roofs are generally plain with notable exceptions of 19th century gabled properties on Upper High Street and Talbot House which have decorative ridge tiles (Figure 46).

Historic Features

Windows

There are some surviving early to mid-19th century timber sash windows, varying between 2/2 to 8/8 panes, typically with thin glazing bars (Figures 23-28).



Figure 23 8/8 pane sash window, 32 Lower High Street



Figure 24 22-24 Lower High Street



Figure 25 22-24 Lower High Street



Figure 26 26/6 sashes, 12 Market Place.



Figure 27 28-30 Market Place



Figure 28 46 Upper High Street

Other window styles of note include canted bays to upper storeys of buildings on the west side of Market Place, and square timber bay windows to the first floor of 26 Market Place (Figures 29-31).



Figure 29 10-11 Market Place



Figure 30 26 Market Place



Figure 31 13 Market Place

Doors and entrances

There are a few remaining historic doors and entrances in the conservation area which add to its character and interest. 118 Walsall Steet is unusual in retaining a six panel door (fashionable 1740-1810) and decorative consoles and canopy above (Figure 32). 30 Market Place retains a three panel timber door, double fan light above and dripstone with decorative keystone (Figure 33). The former Burton's building (18 Market Place) has its original 1930s entrance, including terrazzo step, wooden door and panelling (Figure 34). Date stones at the base of the pilasters read 'This stone was laid by Arnold James Burton 1937' and is a rare surviving detail.



Figure 32 118 Walsall Street



Figure 33 30 Market Place



Figure 34 Burtons, Market Place

Entrances and gates to side passages are also important reminders of historic access routes to properties behind the street frontage (Figures 35-36). 56 Lower High Street is the only example of a coach entrance in the conservation area, and is a rare survivor of a feature which would have been common in the 18th-19th centuries (Figure 37).



Figure 35 21 Market Place



Figure 36 55 Lower High Street



Figure 37 56 Lower High Street

Architectural Detailing

Many of the buildings in the conservation area retain aspects of their original detailing which contribute to the area's special interest and character.

Some of the 18th century buildings have a brick dentil course under eaves, others have a plain string course below the parapets. 43 Lower High Street has retained an end pilaster, a detail which is missing from the rebuild of number 42, the left hand portion of the building (Figure 39).

A number of the 19th century buildings on Market Place have incorporated heavy quoins (a classical motif)- notably number 23 (Figure 38), which is a small and compact building, in comparison with number 16, which has grander proportions.



Figure 38 23 Market Place



Figure 39 43 Lower High Street

The conservation area also includes limited examples of polychromatic brickwork and glazed panel detailing, typical of later 19th century buildings, and which sometimes bear clues to the original use of the building. 10-12 Market Place has three different decorative brick patterns, incorporating chain motifs (Figure 44), blue brick quoins and glazed white bricks (Figure 40), and number 13 has yellow brick decorative panels (Figure 43). The glazed tile pilasters at the Turks Head (Figure 42) and ceramic red tiles above the fascia of Talbot House (Figure 41) relate to their original use as hostelryes and are a rare survival of a once common decorative feature on Black Country Pubs.



Figure 40 11 Market Place



Figure 41 Former Talbot Hotel



Figure 42 Pilaster, former Turks Head



Figure 43 13 Market Place



Figure 44 10 Market Place



Figure 45 55 Lower High Street



Figure 46 Decorative Ridge tiles, Upper High Street

Shop fronts and signage

The conservation area has very few surviving historic shop fronts: those that do remain are mainly 19th and 20th century in character and are situated on Upper High Street and the western side of Lower High Street. This may reflect the fact that historically Lower High Street had a higher concentration of inns and public houses rather than shops. Most are single or double bay shopfronts with a side entrance, although 38 and 22-24 Lower High Street and 51 Union Street are notable exceptions with double bays and a central entrance. 49 Upper High Street is unusual as the only curved glass shopfront. The most common historic shopfront feature to survive are timber pilasters (Figures 48-49), visible particularly on Upper High Street, the west side of Market Place and Lower High Street. Stallboards are timber or more typically glazed tile, although again there are few survivors.

The only shop front to have an 18th century feel is number 1 Union Street, with bow windows to either side of a central entrance (Figure 47).



Figure 47 1 Union Street.



Figure 48 51 Upper High Street.



Figure 49 22-24 Lower High Street.

There are some relict examples of historic shop signage which adds character to the conservation area. These include a terracotta cartouche above the central first floor window of 25 Lower High Street (Figure 50), a terracotta band with blue painted lettering (Figure 51), a modest, hand painted timber sign to the rear of 1 Union Street (Figure 52) and gold stencilled sign at 1 Union Street (Figure 53).



Figure 50 (Former) Turks Head Hotel 25-26 Lower High Street



Figure 51 Duce & Sons Brewers, 27 Market Place



Figure 52 Chemist, Rear of 1 Union Street



Figure 53 Former Outfitters, 13 Market Place

There is a ghost sign at 28 Market Place (Riddings Lane elevation) which shows the former use of the building as the offices of the regional Express and Star newspaper. Signage such as this is rare in the conservation area but adds considerable character to buildings and views into the conservation area from Spring Head towards the Market Place (Figures 54-55).



Figure 54 Express & Star painted sign, 28 Market Place, 1967. Bott, *Memories of Wednesbury*, 2004. Sandwell Archives.



Figure 55 Ghost sign, 2023.

Positive Contributors

Most of the buildings in the area help shape the character of the conservation area, however the main groups of buildings which make a positive contribution are late 18th century commercial buildings and public houses. Assets which make a strongly positive contribution to its special character are shown in Figure 56. These include two nationally designated and 12 locally listed buildings and structures, which all contribute significantly to the areas historic or architectural interest. Other buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the area include those which maintain their historic form or scale, despite instances of loss to their historic character or integrity.

Where the loss of features or change has affected this character, buildings which have retained the commercial character of the conservation area but without enhancing or negatively impacting on its special interest, have been characterised as making – at best - a neutral contribution to the area. Overall there two properties (8 The Shambles and 1-2 Walsall Street) which have a negative impact on the character of the area. 8 The Shambles is discussed in section B: Sensitivity and Capacity for Change.

Nationally important buildings in the conservation area

The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) currently includes two buildings within the conservation area which have been nationally designated for their 'special' architectural and historic interest.



Figure 57 Clock Tower. Image Credit: Clinton Felicio.

The Clock Tower (Gr II, NHLE: 1077119) is located in the centre of Wednesbury's Market Place. It was paid for by a public subscription raised to celebrate the coronation of King George V. The tower was designed by local architect Charles William Davies Joynson (1862-1943) who had been mayor of Wednesbury in 1898-1900 and was an Alderman from 1925 and it was built by local contractors. The lower section is red brick laid in Flemish bond and there is a Baroque style upper section in sandstone.

The tower has a strong visual presence in the Market Place and provides an important focal point of civic pride in the town. It contributes positively to the setting of the buildings lining the Market Place and views into and out of the conservation area.



Figure 58 31-33 Market Place

31 - 33 Market Place (Gr II, NHLE: 1287437) fronts the eastern side of Market Place as it turns towards Lower High Street. It is a three storey, four bay late 18th century town house with a modern shop front to the ground floor. It is constructed in brick with stucco dressings and a slate roof. It retains detailing such as 6/6 pane sash windows and stucco lintels with chamfered false voussoirs.

It has architectural interest as a relatively intact survivor of a building type which would have been common around the Market Place and is the best example within the conservation area. It has group value in form and style with adjacent properties and others within the Market Place, and frames views into the Market Place from Lower High Street.

Table 1

Asset	Local List Description	Contribution to character of the conservation area
1 & 1A Union Street		
	<p>A three storey Georgian townhouse with shop units to the ground floor. The property has two elevations facing into Market Place, a two bay frontage with canted bay windows to the ground floor, and three bays to the other elevation with a 19th century shop front with pilasters and stallrisers.</p> <p>It is constructed in common brick laid in Flemish bond with original 6/6 timber sash windows on the upper floors with bracketed moulds to the first floor.</p>	<p>The building has architectural interest as a good survivor of a classically proportioned C18th townhouse. It has townscape value as a prominent building in the historic commercial centre of Wednesbury, and historic interest as a reminder of the development of the settlement in the C18 following the charter of 1709 which allowed weekly markets in Wednesbury. Combined with its immediate neighbours at 13 Market Place, the property has group value.</p>
2 Union Street		
	<p>A Victorian two storey property with shopfronts to the ground floor and office/storage above, perpendicular to the Market Place.</p> <p>The building is constructed in smooth red brick laid in English garden wall bond with stone banding, below deep dentilated eaves. The upper floor has tripartite timber sash windows. The corner shop front has a chamfered window pane to maintain the street profile, and retains a large, possibly 1960s fascia.</p>	<p>The building has group value as an important building in the Market Place conservation area, and contributes to the mix of 18th and 19th century buildings at the commercial centre of Wednesbury</p>
20, 21 & 22 Spring Head		

	<p>A two storey C19 building of brick construction occupying a prominent corner plot.</p> <p>It has saw toothed courses to both the ground and first floor, dentilated eaves of blue engineering bricks and decoratively carved stonework to either end of the original lintels. In addition, numbers 20 and 22 retain their original 2/2 timber sash windows (these have been subsequently replaced with UPVC to number 21)</p>	<p>The building is of historic interest, serving as a reminder of the development of Spring Head, which 1st edition OS mapping shows was historically occupied by a tight cluster of buildings that have subsequently been demolished. The building is of architectural interest with No's 21 and 23 retaining their original architectural features, including saw tooth string courses marking the ground and first floor, a dentilated string course to the eaves and decoratively carved stone to either end of the lintels.</p>
<p>26, 26a & 26b Market Place</p>		
	<p>A late C18th three storey building constructed in rendered brick with a slate roof.</p> <p>The building has three bays with two shop fronts to the ground floor. The first floor has square bay timber windows which match the timber posts either side of the right hand shop unit.</p>	<p>The building has historical interest as a former Georgian townhouse dating from around 1780 and later subdivided into three units. The right hand shop unit retains large display windows on glazed black tiles and is of interest as a little altered shop front. The building is one of the oldest building in Wednesbury Market Place, and although has lost many original features retains aspects of its character and makes a positive contribution to the historic streetscape.</p>
<p>27/28 Market Place</p>		
	<p>A late C19 two storey building of terracotta brick construction with modern shop fronts to the ground floor. The building retains all of the original timber casement windows to the first floor which are in a Gothic Revival style with pointed brick arches and decorative brick surrounds. Between each window is decorative brickwork arranged in small squares and above them is a terracotta band with the original 'JOHN TAYLOR DUCE & SONS'. There is also decorative terracotta tiling across each elevation.</p>	<p>The building has architectural merit and retains much of its original decorative features and detailing. The architectural detailing and its prominent position on a corner plot give the building a dominating presence and high townscape value. The building has historical associations with a notorious local spirit merchant, John Taylor Duce, who demolished an Elizabethan public house in order to construct this building. The earlier building featured in the colliers and miners riots of August 1824 when a company of regulars from the</p>

		Staffordshire Yeomanry were mounted in the public house yard to control rioters, making the site historically interesting.
30 Market Place		
	An early-mid C19th, 3 storey building of brick construction. It retains all original 2/2 timber sash windows to the first and second floors, all of which have moulded stone architraves. The windows to the ground floor are also original 8/1 timber sashes. The ground floor is stone and has classical architectural detailing including three stone Doric columns.	The building displays an important aspect of the area's social and economic development in that it has been in continuous use as a bank since its construction. In addition, the building has high architectural merit with a largely unaltered principal elevation and classical detailing which make a positive contribution to the largely unaltered streetscape of Market Steet.
34-39 Lower High Street		
	A group of four late C18th , three storey buildings of brick construction. To the ground floor, there are later added late 19th century shop fronts which, as a group, mostly retain their timber console brackets, pilasters and moulded timber stallrisers as well as decorative mullions. To the first and second floor there are original 8/8 timber sashes with painted skewed stone lintels and key stones.	The buildings have architectural interest and merit, being good examples of largely intact historic shop fronts which make a positive contribution to the Market Place conservation area and allow for a better understanding of the area's economic and social history
46, 47, 48 and 49 Upper High Street		
	A row of five late C19th/early 20 th three storey buildings of brick construction with slate roofs and shop units to ground floor. The buildings are in smooth red brick with string courses and original 2/2 timber sliding sash windows. The units alternate between gables with timber panelling and large dormer roof windows with casements. Some of the ground floor shop units are original, but all	The row has architectural interest in terms of its quality of design and the retention of many of its original features, including to the shop fronts. Together the buildings contribute positively to the setting of the streetscape leading into the market place and the appearance of the conservation area.

	have retained their timber pilasters and fascia with console brackets and dentil work	
56 Lower High Street		
	A two storey brick built former house incorporating a former coach entrance to a rear yard. The building has two bays with a central door which has a stucco semi-circular head and key stone. The adjacent coach entrance has a decorative blue brick arch in headers with a stucco keystone and timber double doors. The windows are now boarded but also retain decorative stucco lintels, as does the pediment.	The building is a good example of the C18th-early C19th brick building style and retains many original features. The retention of the coach entrance has historical interest. It also has group value with a number of buildings along Lower High Street which collectively retain much of the medieval street form. Makes a particular contribution to the street scene of the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area.
8 - 13 Market Place		
	A row of C18-19th three storey buildings with shop units to the ground floor, primarily built of brick with contrasting brick finishes to the upper floors including string courses. Numbers 8 and 10 have decorative polychromatic brickwork and bay windows. Number 12 is plain in design but retains 6 over 6 sash windows. The eaves are articulated with brick dentil work and sandstone banding. The shop units at ground floor are predominately timber with some original details such as pilaster and console brackets. Number 13 retains decorative chimney flues.	The row has architectural interest and displays quality materials. The units have group value as a playful, eye-catching part of the streetscape leading to the Market Place. They are likely to retain the original footprint of the medieval settlement and despite some loss of features these properties make a positive contribution to the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area.
The Turks Head, 25 & 26 Lower High Street		

	<p>The Turks Head is a two storey public house of brick construction. It has a steep central gable which has stone banding and coping stones. To the first floor there are three windows which, although modern replacements, retain their decorative terracotta architraves and aprons. Above the central window is a terracotta cartouche which reads 'THE TURKS HEAD HOTEL'. To the ground floor are two pilasters with highly decorative faience tiling which flank a modern frontage.</p>	<p>The buildings use, and retention of the decorative terracotta and faience give the building architectural interest and merit, and it remains one of the most unique buildings on Lower High Street giving it a good townscape value.</p>
<p>K6 Telephone Box, Shambles</p>		
	<p>A rare surviving example of a K6 telephone box designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1935-6 and known as 'the Jubilee Box' due its commemoration of the coronation of King George V, which is signified by the crown above the 'TELEPHONE' sign. Bright red in colour, it has a cast iron frame with a teak door, glass panes and concrete base.</p>	<p>The box is one of the last surviving examples of the K6 telephone box in Wednesbury and, although it appears to have lost some of its glass panes, is almost completely intact. The K6 is 'one of Britain's most recognisable pieces of industrial design'. Due to the high numbers of K6 boxes still in existence in the UK a representative number have been nationally designated to reflect their importance and architecturally iconic design.</p>

Other structures of interest

However, other assets which have historic interest and make a significant positive contribution to the character of the conservation area include:

- **32-33 Lower High Street** which is vernacular in scale and possibly of the early 18th century, although two modern shop fronts have been inserted and the roof and windows are modern.
- **48-48a Lower High Street** which, although substantially altered, retains some 18th century character.
- **R&J Discount Warehouse** on the Shambles, dates to 1908 and is the former engine house to Wednesbury Corporation's electricity generating works. Although the building has lost most of its original features, including its fenestration, and sits just outside the conservation area, it adds interest to an otherwise degraded Shambles, providing historic and visual interest to views out of the area.
- The **phone box** on the Shambles, which is a curious mid-20th century brick structure now in use as a bin store. Although in poor condition it retains its original window and door and decorative features (Figures 60-61).
- An **EIRR 1990s pillar post box** which is located outside the Post Office on the corner of Market Place and Spring Head.



Figure 60 Police Box, Shambles.



Figure 61 Police Box, Side Elevation, Shambles.

- **Two early 20th century horse troughs** (now used as planters) on the corner of Union Street and Upper High Street which have historic interest. They were donations to the town from Alderman John Hadley and, although not in their original location (they were moved from outside the urinals on High Bullen when the Northern Orbital road was built), the troughs enhance the streetscape and bring interest to the open space at the junction of Union Street and Upper High Street (Figure 62).
- A metal **Commemorative First World War bench** next to the Clock Tower (Figure 63).

There are no other buildings or assets that may warrant inclusion upon a register of local or national heritage assets.



Figure 62 Horse trough, Union Street



Figure 63 Bench, Market Place

Spatial analysis

The conservation area is formed by a series of tightly knit buildings which form a relatively dense pattern of settlement. Development is focussed around a triangular market place - a classic example of a medieval market place that evolved between the intersection of, and along, key thoroughfares. Despite much change over time, it has retained its overall character of a compact commercial centre. The streets remain closely aligned to the historic routeways (now Lower and Upper High Street and Riddings Lane) which pass through the area. Its buildings are arranged with their frontages facing onto the highway and, although these vary in width and scale, there are relatively few interruptions to the overall streetscape and there is an overall sense of a continuous and coherent late 18th/early 19th century historic commercial area.

Streets and open space, parks and gardens and trees

Historic surfaces

There is a mix of paving throughout the conservation area, with very little surviving historic paving. These include Staffordshire blue diamond paviours (Figure 64) on the east side of Market Place and smooth blue brick pavers adjacent to buildings on Upper High Street. Recent public realm work has reinstated traditional materials which have some historic resonance with the town, without being an accurate reinstatement. Elsewhere, the paving is modern in character and includes areas of red brick herringbone with contrasting blue header bricks.



Figure 64 Blue diamond paving, Market Place

Open Spaces

There are two key areas of open space in the conservation area, formed by the triangular market place and Union Street.

The market place is the largest open space and provides a focal point for this part of the town. It is enclosed by 18th 19th and some 20th century buildings and its wide medieval form is fundamental to the character of the conservation area and adds significantly to their setting of the buildings which surround it. The space has an important relationship with historic routes leading off the market place. The long, gently curved space creates a series of views, rather than a single vista.

At the east end of Union Street, at the junction with Upper High Street, is a modest area of open space in front of the William Archer pub. The early 20th century horse trough planters and several trees are a focal point and overall the space makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. The space provides important views up Walsall Street, and provides opportunities to view the historic buildings on Union Street, Upper High Street and Market Place, particularly corner buildings.

The main contribution of the two car parks in the conservation area is to provide important views of the rear of 18th and 19th century commercial buildings, particularly service ranges and extensions.

Table 2 summarises the contribution of open spaces to the character of the conservation area.

Table 2

Image of open space	Name/location	Contribution to character

	<p>Market Place</p>	<p>Positive. Focal point of conservation area. Shape likely unchanged since medieval period.</p>
	<p>Union Street</p>	<p>Neutral. Open space to view historic buildings surrounding and racking roofline down Market Place. Otherwise modern in character.</p>
	<p>Rear of Lower High Street/south side of Shambles</p>	<p>Positive. Enables views of rear of C18th-19th properties and service buildings on Lower High Street.</p>
	<p>The Shambles car park</p>	<p>Negative. Some important views of rear of C18-19th properties and rare surviving sections of C19th boundary wall, but overall has a modern character and issues which detract from overall character.</p>

Trees and Green Space

With the exception of Union Street, the townscape is devoid of deliberate planting, and although the greenery which is visible is generally positive, it is not a key contributor to the area's character. Table 3 provides an audit of trees and green space and an assessment of their contribution to character.

Trees and green space just outside of the conservation area also have a positive contribution to the area's character. Views north east up Spring Head are enhanced by a small lawn and Magnolia tree on the west side in front of the Central Methodist Church and beyond to mature trees screening Spring Head Carpark, lining Walsall Street and within the Memorial Gardens. They positively frame the significant buildings on this street and provide a more landscaped and municipal feel to elsewhere in the conservation area.



Figure 65 Trees and green space within the conservation area

Table 3

No on map	Image	Location	Comments	Contribution to character
1		North side Shambles	Fairly mature trees abutting pavement and boundary wall of carpark behind	Negative
2		South side Shambles	Deciduous trees on private land set back from the road surrounding car park. Taller than surrounding buildings, screen adjacent health centre.	Neutral
3		East end of Union Street	2 young trees and planters part of public realm	Positive
4		North side of Riddings Lane.	Possibly only visible garden in the conservation area. Enclosed within historic boundary walls. Views of key buildings behind.	Positive

5



Path leading off east side of Lower High Street.

Grass verge to north side of path. Little altered historic route leading towards Addison Terrace visible on the First Ordnance Survey map.

Neutral

Setting and Views

Several views looking into, through and out of the conservation area make an important contribution to its character and appearance and illustrate elements of its historic and architectural interest. Table 4 provides a summary of the key views and their contribution.

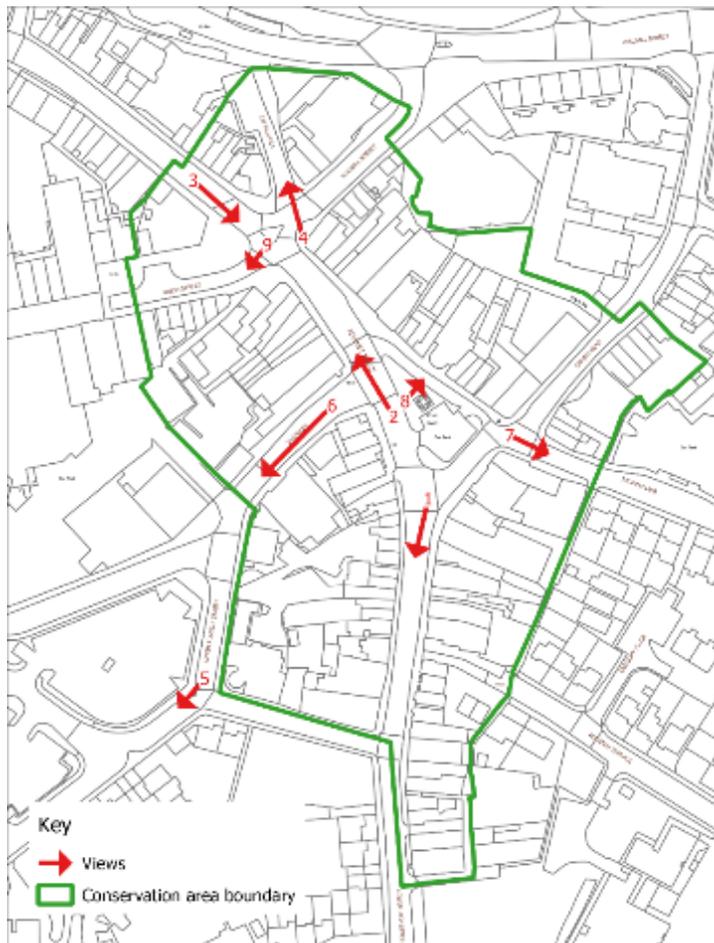


Table 4

Image	Direction Description of contribution to character
	<p>Views out of Market Place: Looking south from Market place down Lower High Street.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows buildings maintaining the 18th century street form and roof line • Shows the important topology of the street down towards the Tame Valley
	<p>Views out of Market Place: Looking north along Upper High Street.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows the scale and proportion of the 18th century buildings • Underlines the form and character of the space within the town occupied by the central historic market place • Incorporates the Clock Tower as an important visual focal point
	<p>Views into the Market square: Looking south from Upper High Street.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows the importance of corner buildings which retain historic features • Provide visible rooflines and architectural detailing which add to the historic character of the streetscape
	<p>Looking north along Church Hill: View of St Bartholomew's Church spire (NHLE 1342678).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows the historic thoroughfare between the town and the parish church - the likely site of the earliest settlement at Wednesbury • Retains a key sight-line between the historic market place and spire



Vistas out of the conservation area:
Looking south west along Russell Street
towards the Holyhead Road.

- View towards cluster of designated assets
- Shows the Holyhead Road, an important spur road which redirected traffic from the conservation area in the 18th century



Vistas out of the conservation area:
View from the top of the Shambles out of
the conservation area across the
Staffordshire plateau.

- Shows the topography of the Black Country and the historic importance of Wednesbury's location on high ground.



Vistas out of the conservation area:
Riddings Lane looking east towards expanse
of green space at Sandwell Valley Country
Park.

- Shows Wednesbury's elevated position.
- Rare view of woodland from a highly urban area.



Groups of buildings:
East side Market Place

- Lively townscape resulting from number of stylistically different 19th and 20th century frontages.
- Retain scale and form of historic shopfronts.



Groups of buildings:
Union Street

- 1 and 1A have group value as 18th and 19th century buildings with a harmony of colour palate, materials and styles, with detailing such as hipped roofs and sash windows.
- Together they frame the entrance to Hitchin's Croft.

Several historic buildings located outside the conservation area boundary also make a positive contribution to its setting and views into and out of the area:

- **St Bartholomew's Church.** NHLE 1342678, Gr II. Important views of spire from within the conservation area serve as a reminder of the development of the settlement.
- **Wednesbury District Library,** Hollies Drive. NHLE 1077099, Gr II. The library frames views looking out of conservation area from Spring Head. (Figure 66)
- **Former Gaumont Cinema,** Walsall Street. Local list. The building adds to the historic character of Walsall Street and frames views into the conservation area from the A461. (Figure 67).
- **Telephone Exchange,** Camp Hill. The rear of the 1936-7 telephone exchange is visible from the Shambles Car Park and adds interest to the view south out of the conservation area. It serves as a reminder of the growth of the town between the Market Place and the Holyhead Road in the 20th century. The building is not currently on the Local List but is likely to meet the criteria- the very similar Telephone Exchange in Tipton has been recommended for inclusion.



Figure 66 Gr II Listed Library viewed from Spring Head.



Figure 67 Locally listed former Gaumont Cinema, Walsall Street.

Archaeological designations

The conservation area is identified as being within an Archaeological Priority Area within The Black Country Historic Landscape Character Assessment with *a road system that had probably largely been established in the medieval period* (Section C.7.68). The APA *has the potential to contain below ground archaeological remains (in less disturbed areas) which could provide insight into the location and development of Wednesbury in the medieval period*. Although it is acknowledged that *The settlement has been subject to significant post-medieval and modern development which is likely to have impacted upon any archaeological remains present* (Section C.7.69).

Nature designations

There are no nature conservation designations in the conservation area or proposed extensions.

Audit of Assets

An audit of the heritage assets in the area, including all buildings, structures and street furniture is presented as a gazetteer in appendix 1.

B. Sensitivity and Capacity for Change

Condition of the area

Wednesbury Market Place conservation area is listed on Historic England's 2022 Heritage At Risk Register. The condition is recorded as 'very bad' but with an improving trend and low vulnerability.

An assessment of the condition of the historic buildings in the conservation area was carried out as part of the production of this appraisal. None of the historic assets were considered to be in *very poor* condition overall however 8 properties were assessed as *poor* (Figure 68). The Gaumont Cinema, which sits just beyond the current boundary, is a prominent vacant building in a very poor state of repair and negatively impacts views into and out of the conservation area in its current condition.

Of the visible roofs only one was considered to be in poor condition. Unsurprisingly buildings of 19th century construction were more likely to have roofs assessed as *fair*. 15% of buildings had *poor* rainwater goods, mostly defective downpipes leading to visible signs of damp brickwork or rendered walls and parapets or gutters blocked with vegetation.

10 properties had doors and windows in poor condition, including decayed timber frames and missing and boarded openings. Of these over half were Locally Listed and the poor condition of doors and windows negatively impacted the special character of the important buildings. Their poor condition also made it more of a risk that historic (mainly sash) windows would be replaced by modern alternatives, further eroding the special character of the area.

A fifth of properties were assessed as having walls in poor condition. This was often related to defective rainwater goods leading to peeling render or brickwork with signs of disrepair. Some parapets were particularly poor and risk being lost or rebuilt, which would further erode the 18th century character of the roofline particularly in Market Place and Lower High Street.

Only 5 properties had shopfronts in *poor* condition however many buildings which make a strongly positive or positive contribution to the special character of the conservation area have shopfronts in 'fair' rather than 'good' condition. Consequently, the overall feel of the retail streetscape is one requiring maintenance and the repair and reinstatement of traditional features.

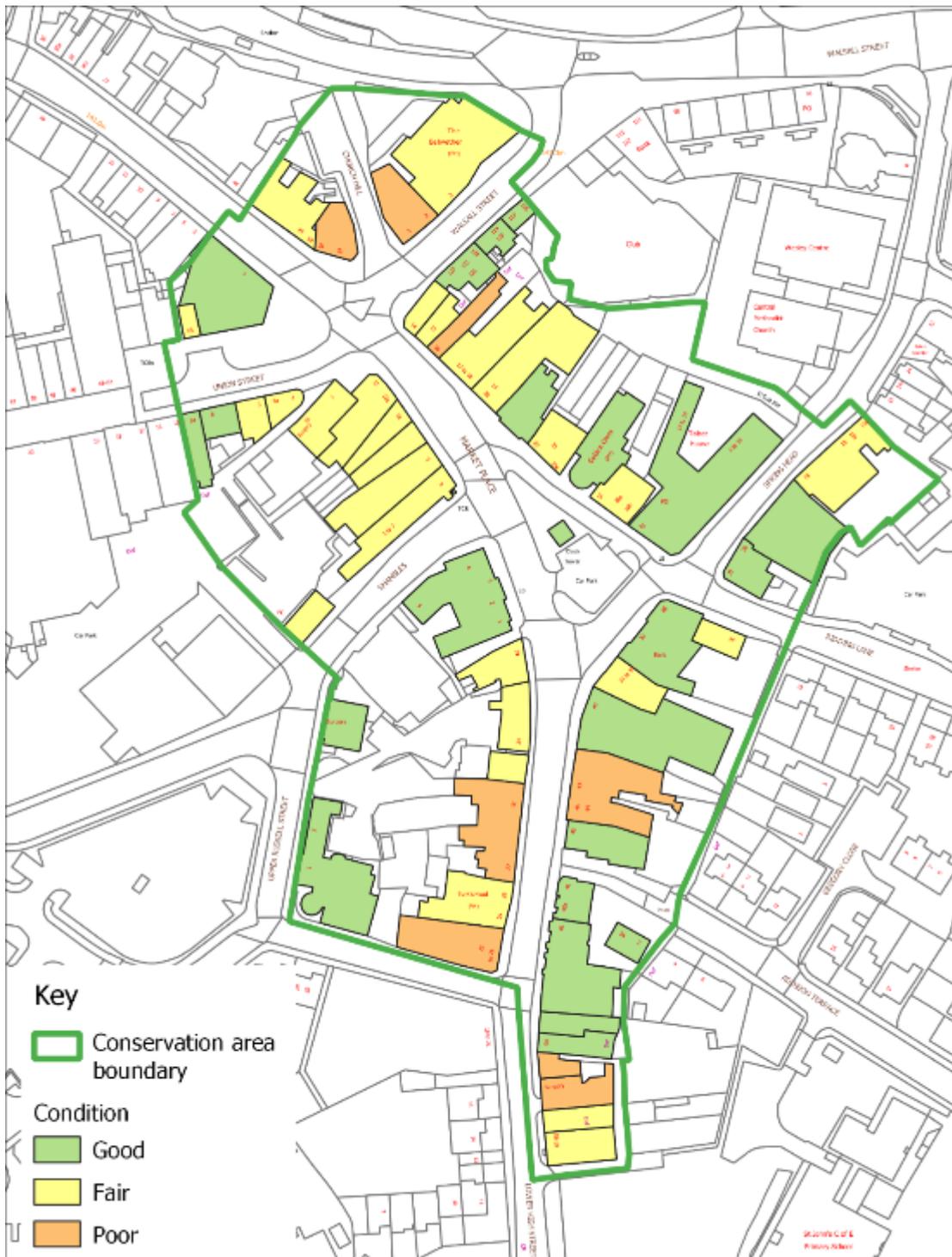


Figure 68 Condition of assets within the conservation area. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey Licence No 100023119.

Vacancy and underuse

10 buildings had vacant ground floor premises at the time of assessment (January 2023). Some of these appeared to be short term vacancies which, while temporarily impacting the overall feel of the area, are unlikely to place the buildings at risk. However, there are some examples of long term vacancy or underuse affecting properties which have architectural qualities which contribute to the special character of the area and which are deteriorating, notably 26 Market Place, 2 Union Street and 55 and 56 Lower High Street.

It is harder to assess upper floor vacancy, but most properties appeared to have some upper floor use. At least a third of upper floor use appeared to be residential and 11% commercial. Others appeared to be used for storage or potentially underused. Wednesbury has a low economic base and the current declining trend in use of commercial and office space is likely to continue to place ground floor units and upper floors at risk of vacancy and consequently disrepair.

In insensitive alteration

The overall quality of the area has been eroded by insensitive alteration, with 15% of properties having high levels of alteration and almost half with a medium level of detrimental change. Most of the ground floor shop frontages no longer have historic material and re-fronting to upper floors and facades has also eroded character. There are many examples where inappropriate replacement windows have been introduced, particularly replacing 6/6 or 8/8 paned timber sash windows with 2/2 Upvc frames. Very few historic doors survive, many have been replaced with plastic doors which have a residential rather than commercial character and negatively impact on the look and feel of the area.

Gap sites

There is a gap site between the Jubilee Health centre and 22-24 Lower High Street (which extends into Russell Street) which has a poor appearance and general feel of neglect. It is used mainly for ad hoc off street parking, despite being laid out as with a disabled parking bay and being an access route to the rear premises of Lower High Street (Figure 69).



Figure 69 Gap site Russell Street. Google Streetview.

There is a gap site on the eastern side of Upper High Street (the Grapes Public House until demolition in 1967, Figure 70) which sits just outside the north west boundary of the conservation area. This has a negative impact on views out of and into Upper High Street, detracts from the special character of the area, and breaks the continual line of properties lining the street.



Figure 70 Gap site, Upper High Street

Public realm

Work carried out in 2021-2 has significantly improved the general appearance of the public realm in the market place. However, elsewhere in the conservation area the street surfaces are a mix of materials, textures and colours. Lower High Street looks tired with tarmac and contrasting header bricks both in need of repair and renewal in places (Figures 71-73). Church Hill has a particularly poor appearance. Curb sides are in a poor state of repair in some areas, notably Lower High Street and Russell Street.



Figure 71 Paving Russell Street



Figure 72 Degraded public realm, Lower High Street



Figure 73 Paving Market Place

Open spaces

The Shambles Car Park currently makes a negative contribution to the special character of the area due to its poor visual appearance and visible presence of antisocial behaviour.

Hitchin's Croft has similar problems with fly tipping, graffiti and a poor street surface. This is a key pedestrian route and has some good surviving historic brickwork but is currently let down by its visual appearance (Figures 74-75).

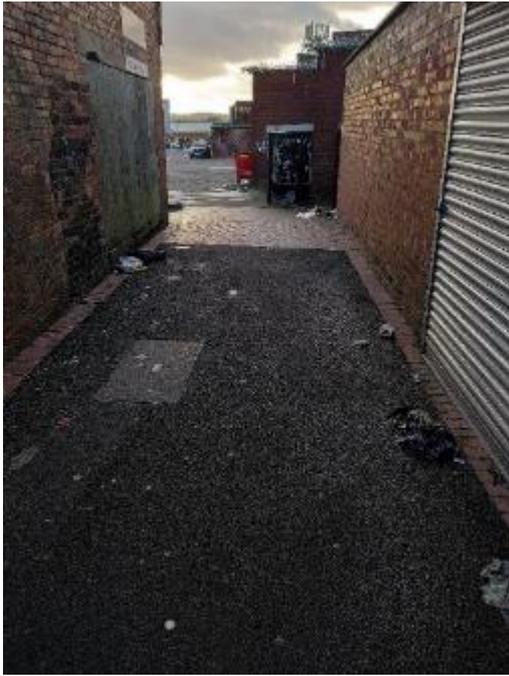


Figure 74 Hitchin's Croft facing south



Figure 75 Hitchin's Croft facing north

Poor or unsuccessful infill

The partially built premises on The Shambles (Figure 76) detracts significantly from the surrounding streetscape, and is a key contributor to the Shambles feeling neglected and underutilised. It is highly visible from both The Shambles and the car park behind, also negatively impacting views into and out of the conservation area. The building replaced early 20th century public conveniences which contained Edwardian detailing or quality of materials.



Figure 76 Left: Unfinished building, The Shambles, 2022 and Right: the Edwardian public conveniences it has replaced, 2011. Google Streetview.

The refronting of the rear of number 8 Market Place (facing on to The Shambles) is visually confusing and also impacts negatively on the feel of the street (Figure 77).



Figure 77 Rear extension of 8 Market Place, facing onto The Shambles.

Traffic and parking

Private car use is the dominant transport method experienced in the conservation area. Due to the Orbital route, the majority of traffic does not pass through the conservation area. However, the Orbital Road provides a clear barrier and adds to a feeling of enclosure particularly on Walsall Street/Church Hill, which is also noisier as a result.

Lower High Street, Market Place and Upper High Street can be busy at peak commuting and school pick up times. This adds a sense of vitality rather than congestion and has a neutral impact on the conservation area. Short stay parking and loading bays are laid out along all streets in the conservation area except Union Street. This adds a sense of constriction and enclosure at times, but is an intrinsic part of the commercial character of the area.

The car parks generally have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area due to their poor visual appearance.

Shopfronts and signage

Numerous properties display unsympathetic and poorly designed fascia and other signage. Common issues are:

- Shopfronts- particularly pilasters and fascias - in a poor state of repair (Figure 79)
- Prevalence of poor-quality materials
- Oversized fascia and lettering, not in keeping with the scale of the building and covering historic detailing
- Little design unity across shopfronts on the same building or with group value
- Inappropriate colour schemes which detract from the colours/detailing of the historic building
- Shopfront windows with an abundance of signage leading to a cluttered feel
- Use of external roller shutters, which creates an atmosphere of abandonment and impacts the areas sense of vitality in the daytime

Signage on buildings just beyond the conservation area boundary also has the potential to impact the look and feel of the area, such as that on Russell Street (Figure 78) which impacts views towards the historic frontages of Lower High Street.



Figure 78 Signage Russell Street



Figure 79 Poor quality signage, Lower High Street.

Minor changes resulting in loss of architectural detailing

Materials and detailing make an important contribution to the historic character of the conservation area and include locally distinctive styles and features, as well as providing evidence for the development and use of the area. Loss of these features through minor changes has affected many areas, often through the insertion and replacement of historic shopfronts and fenestration in the past. At both an individual and wider level, their loss has a significant cumulative negative impact on the conservation area.

Vandalism and antisocial behaviour

Buildings which are vacant or in a poor state of repair have attracted antisocial behaviour including graffiti, fly tipping and uncontrolled postering/advertising. This adds to the run-down character of the conservation area and enhances the feeling of neglect.

Lighting

Whilst most streets in the conservation area have adequate street lamps, Hitchin's Croft, a key pedestrian route between Union Street/High Street and The Shambles Car Park is currently unlit, leading to it feeling neglected and unsafe.

Summary of key issues

The main problems and pressures that have been identified in the conservation area are:

- Erosion of special character through loss of historic features and materials
- Poor presentation of The Shambles due to unsuccessful infill development
- Inappropriate signage detracting from special character
- Poor condition and presentation of many buildings and backlog of maintenance
- Low economic base resulting in higher vacancy rates
- Long term vacancy of some key buildings both within and just outside the conservation area which impact to the area's special character

- Commercial and residential redevelopment in the area between the conservation area and the Holyhead Road (particularly the Town Hall complex of historic buildings) results in the town feeling disjointed and two areas of historic significance disconnected
- Poor presentation of Hitchin's Croft including inadequate lighting
- High volume of traffic at peak times, balancing requirements of pedestrians, businesses and shoppers in a way which enhances the historic environment.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to the Conservation Area

The key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the conservation area have been summarised below. Recommendations for their future management are covered in the Conservation Area Management Plan (Section X).

Strengths

The conservation area has clear links with the past: The buildings and form of the Market Place conservation area have strong physical and documentary associations with the development of the settlement and its overall historic form has avoided significant encroachment from new buildings. This allows the conservation area to continue to be experienced as a historic settlement, and to be 'read' and understood in its landscape, historical and social context.

21st century development has respected the scale and form of the historic buildings: Generally modern development maintains the scale and form of the area, such as 40-41 Market Place, Woden House and 19A -19B Spring Head.

The conservation area maintains a commercial character: The buildings continue to be used for a variety of commercial and retail purposes, reinforcing the understanding of how the settlement developed.

The conservation area retains a local identity: A low number of chains/national businesses and a higher volume of independent businesses gives the Market Place a strong local identity which resonates with the historic character of the town centre.

Wednesbury has benefited from recent investment in the built environment: Public realm improvements, new outdoor market stalls, and active travel infrastructure have renewed the appearance of the town centre.

Weaknesses

Vacancy of some key buildings: Long term vacancy of some key buildings both within and just outside the conservation area negatively impact the area's special character.

Streetscape lacks cohesion: The current streets surfaces are a mixture of materials, textures and colours which means the conservation area feels disjointed and unconnected. Open space at the east end of Union Street is particularly cluttered with street furniture.

Poor presentation of open spaces: Car parks and Hitchin's Croft particularly compromise the special character of the conservation area as they attract anti-social behaviour including fly tipping and graffiti.

Proximity to superstore and out of town retail: There is a large supermarket just outside the conservation area boundary which affects the economic viability of the independent businesses

which struggle to compete with a national retailer. There is also a retail park 1 mile north of the conservation area which draws footfall away from the town centre.

Diversity of commerce: There is a concentration of several business types, particularly hair dressers, barbers and beauticians which total 12 within the conservation area. Although this reflects current demand and changing habits of the high street, it reduces the retail offer and impacts the resilience of the town centre. Although the high incidence of independent retailers is considered positive to the character of the CA, the lack of major retailers is a weakness to the overall health of the town centre.

Lack of understanding of the special qualities of the settlement: There is little information about Wednesbury's historic importance readily available in the town for residents, building owners and visitors. Although many residents and visitors are aware it is a historic town, the Conservation Area status is little known or understood. This has led to some previous work to buildings and boundaries being less than sympathetic to some of the key characteristics of the area.

Threats

Loss of original features: The character of the conservation area continues to erode as key features such as historic windows, shopfronts and facades are replaced and vacant buildings degrade.

Poorly designed development which is out of context: The town centre includes some examples of buildings which were renewed or rebuilt from the late 20th century onwards, some of which are of unexceptional or poor design and construction and pose a threat to the special character of the conservation area. Key issues include the use of an unsympathetic palette of materials, poor choice in the scale of development and a failure to conform with the visual characteristics of the streetscape.

Unfavourable economic conditions: Independent businesses are particularly vulnerable to an economic downturn, declining trends in high street retail and increasing costs of energy and commodities. Wednesbury's high concentration of local retailers means the risk of vacancy and high turnover of premises is increased.

Maintenance backlog: Many buildings and some areas of public realm are in poor condition due to lack of maintenance. Over time this could accelerate decay and loss of historic features and the conservation area's special character.

Opportunities

Increased consumer confidence resulting from recent investment: The town centre improvements to the public realm and relocation of the market place creates a more sustainable hub to the town centre and could boost Wednesbury as a shopping destination and bring renewed interest in development and further investment.

Growing population of the town: Over half of the proposed housing growth areas for Sandwell in terms of the number of dwellings to be provided through the Site Allocation Development Delivery Plan are located around the Wednesbury Town Centre area. This could boost footfall to the town centre and create more demand for retail and services.

Active travel improvements may bring new visitors to the town: New cycle and bus routes could boost visitor numbers to the town centre and provide opportunities for new business and services.

Develop design guidance for owners and developers based on the key characteristics of the settlement: A user-friendly guide outlining the ways in which alterations or new development could retain and enhance this significance should help guide future work.

3: Conservation area boundary

Reviewing the boundary

This conservation area appraisal has found that the existing conservation area boundary covers an area that represents the special historic and architectural interest of the historic town centre. This includes the Medieval core of the town and market place (identifiable through its street pattern) and contains features that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area that are desirable to preserve.

However, it has also considered the extent of the conservation area, and if there are opportunities to amend it. As a result, several potential extensions to the current boundary have been identified and considered, as outlined below (Figure 80).

Reducing the boundary to remove the buildings which have a negative impact on the special character of the CA has been briefly considered. However, the current boundary reflects well the medieval street pattern which is fundamental to this special character and therefore no reduction is recommended. The CAMP may help reduce the negative impact of particular properties and areas within the CA over time.



Figure 80 Proposed boundary extensions. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey Licence No 100023119

Extension 1: Upper High Street

The current conservation area boundary stops abruptly at its northern boundary on Upper High Street. This street is an important part of the Medieval layout of Wednesbury with a largely unchanged form as far as High Bullen, where it now ends at the A461 ring road. Despite some late 20th century residential and office infill which dilutes its character, the rest of the street, particularly on the west side, contains a number of historically and architecturally interesting buildings which continue the special character of the conservation area as a dense commercial settlement with a range of 18th-20th century buildings.

Contribution to character

1. Part of the largely unchanged late Medieval street pattern of Wednesbury
2. Continues and enhances views into and out of the conservation area, maintaining scale and roofline (Figure 81)
3. Contains some notable historic buildings including:
 - **Lamp Tavern** (MBL5411)- Mid 19th century pub heavily altered in the early and mid- 20th century and now a restaurant. Retains original cellars and some character features of a Black Country pub and although largely rebuilt, a rare survivor of a once common building type along this street.
 - **31-34**- 20th century buildings with reproduction late 18th/early 19th facades/historic features including quoins, lintels, parapets, roundel, rainwater goods. Early 20th century style timber shopfronts, possibly retaining some original features (Figure 82).
 - **Webbs Funeral Directors**- Historic interest as a local family business trading from the same site in over 100 years. Retains a number of architectural features and an interesting commercial/light industrial character, now rare within the conservation area (Figure 83).
 - **37**- prominent 19th century survivor with some remaining features including chimneys and ridge tiles and reinstated timber shopfront (Figure 84).
 - **35-36**- Early 20th century Art Deco style building in poor condition but retaining original detailing and adds character to the street.
4. Modern infill (44-45) is positive and adds to the character of adjacent buildings. Number 44 (Teddy Grays) has cultural significance as a Black Country retailer.
5. The current use of the buildings reflects its historic role as a commercial centre with a number of independent, locally run grocers, barbers, services and cafes.

Benefits of inclusion

- Encouragement to retain historic features
- Influence over gap site development
- Encouragement of improved signage and general appearance which would enhance the buildings and overall feel of the street
- Discourage inappropriate change of use/redevelopment

Recommendation

The area up to and including the former Lamp Tavern on the west side is **recommended for inclusion** as per the boundary suggestion in Figure 80. This would be an extension of 0.620 hectares (1.532 acres) to the current conservation area.



Figure 81 Views south from Upper High Street towards Market Place



Figure 82 Buildings and shopfronts, Upper High Street



Figure 83 Funeral Directors, Upper High Street



Figure 84 East side Upper High Street

Extension 2: Former Gaumont Cinema

The Gaumont Cinema (MSD5538) opened in 1938 on the site of the 1915 Picture House. It was designed by cinema architects WE Trent, W Sydney Trent & HL Cherry. The cinema was renamed Odeon Cinema in 1964 and then Silver Cinema in 1972. It was closed in 1974 and was converted into Walker's Bingo Club which operated until 2010. The building is recommended for local listing for its historical interest and retention of much of its historic characters and features. It brings considerable interest to Walsall Street and frames views out of and into the conservation area.

Contribution to character

- Key early 20th century building with landmark qualities in the town (Figure 85)
- Demonstrates the community life of Wednesbury which is not currently represented within the conservation area
- Frames views into and out of the conservation area

Benefits of inclusion

- Opportunity to encourage redevelopment which will enhance the conservation area and preserve the special interest of the cinema

- Including public realm on corner of High Bullen is an opportunity to enhance an area of green space in keeping with that at the other end of Walsall Street (Figure 88).

Recommendation

The area up to and including the junction with the High Bullen is **recommended for inclusion** as per the boundary suggestion in Figure 80. This would be an extension of 0.143 hectares (0.353 acres) to the current conservation area.



Figure 85 Former Cinema, Walsall Street.

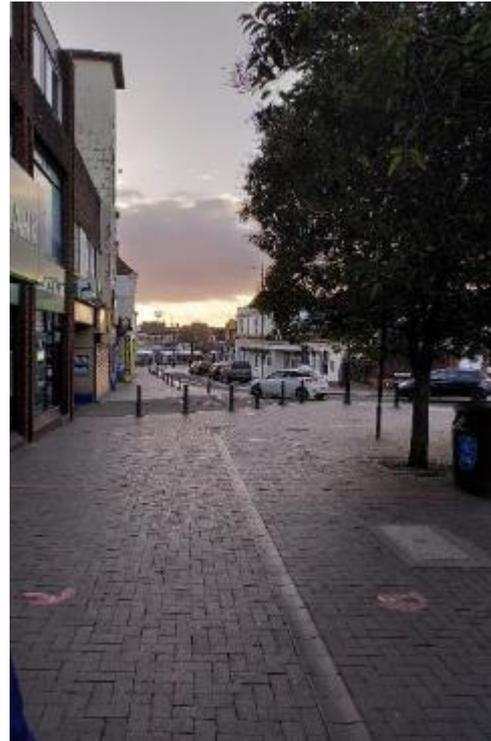


Figure 86 View into conservation area from top Walsall St. Tower of former cinema on L

Extension 3: Spring Head

A short extension to the current eastern boundary of the conservation area would bring the rest of the south side Spring Head street within the boundary. Numbers 14-15 are modern infill and do not contribute to the special character of the area, but numbers 12 and 13 add to the 19th century character of the street (Figure 87-88).

On the north side of Spring Head, the Central Methodist Chapel (1967) designed by architects Hulme, Upright and Partners, is also a candidate for inclusion as a distinctive mid-20th century addition which enhances views into and out of the conservation area and has communal significance (Figure 89).



Figure 87 Numbers 12, 13, 14 and 15 Spring Head.



Figure 88 Historic features, 12 Spring Head.



Figure 89 Spring Head, Central Methodist Chapel.

Contribution to character

- Continues the historic street pattern from the Market Place towards Walsall Street
- 2 19th century brick buildings with many surviving, good quality architectural features including brick pilasters and parapet (number 13) and sash, dormer and bay windows (number 12).
- Number 12 displays some typical 19th century Black Country decorative features from local materials including blue brick plinth and smooth red brick arches.
- Number 12 is another important corner building, with an impressive frontage turning Wharfedale Street. It is likely a former pub, which serves as a reminder of the prevalence of these buildings in the town centre in the 19th century.
- Sweeping vistas from Wharfedale Street across the Black Country

Benefits of inclusion

- Encouragement to retain historic features
- Encouragement of improved signage and general appearance which would enhance the buildings and overall feel of the street
- Discourage inappropriate change of use/redevelopment

Recommendation

The row from 12-15 Spring Head is **recommended for inclusion** as per the boundary suggestion in Figure 80. This would be an extension of 0.089 hectares (0.219 acres) to the current conservation area.

Extension 4: Holyhead Road and Masonic Lodge

This proposal would greatly increase the size of the conservation area. Part of the identified special character of the current area is the medieval street pattern and dense commercial centre around the market place. The Holyhead Road developed as a later spur road from the 18th century as the turnpike road was built to bypass the town centre. Whilst it is an important part of the history of the town, its later development gives it a different character to the market place conservation area with much wider streets and 19th century civic buildings on a grander scale to those found clustered around the High Street and Market Place. The focal buildings of the Museum and Art Gallery, Town Hall, Adult Education Centre and former Post Office are all nationally or locally designated for their distinctive characteristics and would not necessarily benefit from inclusion in the conservation area. Russell Street, which is proposed as the connecting route between the current boundary and Holyhead Road, has been redeveloped with a large supermarket (east) and residential, including a high rise block (west), which do not contribute to the special character of the area. There is a site line between Russell Street and the Holyhead Road which is captured as a significant view for the conservation area.

Similarly, the Masonic Lodge is locally listed for its special historic and architectural interest as a 19th century chapel of unusual stone construction, atypical of the regional nonconformist style. The Lodge is located within modern development and its setting does not have a visual relationship with the existing conservation area.

Contribution to character

- Charts the development of the town around a significant road in the mid-19th century
- A rare surviving 19th century chapel which serves as a reminder of the importance of non-conformism in the town

Benefits of inclusion

- Opportunity to encourage better links between the Lodge and Holyhead Road and the Market Place – making the town feel more cohesive
- Discourage inappropriate change of use/redevelopment

Recommendation

The historic buildings in this area are already protected through national or local designation, and much of the surrounding character has been lost. Whilst conservation area designation may influence the quality of future development in this area and provide an opportunity to link the Lodge and Holyhead Road to the Market Place in a more cohesive way (preserving and enhancing sight lines for example), including this area would greatly increase the size of the conservation area and may 'dilute' its quality. This area is distinct in character to the current conservation area and if it were to be included it is recommended it form a separate character zone.

On balance the area is **not recommended for inclusion**.

Extension 5: Brunswick Terrace and Squires Walk

Brunswick Terrace runs north from the Orbital Road. It was laid out in the 19th century, appearing on the 1846 tithe map as a field boundary.

Contribution to character

- The topography of the street is pronounced, leading from the conservation area up towards the church via Reservoir Passage.
- Likely part of the early settlement which developed to the south of St Bartholomew's Road, with high potential for below ground archaeology.
- Of most interest is a boundary wall running along Squires Walk. It is locally listed as a rare example of 'Pockstone' walling- a material made in the 18th and 19th centuries during wildfires which reduced parts of the surrounding coal fields to cinders and produced hardened (mainly clay) material, known as 'Pockstone'. The wall has later blue brick capping. This was used extensively for boundary walls and road paving. The wall serves as a reminder of the industrial character of Wednesbury alongside its development as a commercial centre.
- Number 3 is a terrace of 19th century houses similar in style, material and detailing to those found within the conservation area
- Numbers 5-6 Walsall Street, which turn the corner of the Terrace (number 5 is called The Squires) can be considered part of the 19th century character which must have characterised Walsall Street before the development of the Orbital Road. Number 5 unusually retains a front garden and boundary wall.
- Residences at the northern end are grander, early 20th century buildings in a different style and form, with gable ends and canted bays. Few historic features survive.
- A stretch of high boundary wall in red brick with blue hogs back caps is a rare survivor of typical 19th century walling found in the Black Country. It is similar to that found to the rear of The Talbot on Spring Head.
- Views between the conservation area and Brunswick Terrace are obscured by 93-98 Walsall Street, a 20th century three storey retail and office block.

Benefits of inclusion

- Brings a site of likely early settlement with high potential for archaeology into the conservation area
- Encouragement to retain historic features
- Discourage inappropriate change of use/redevelopment

Recommendation

Whilst number 3 and numbers 5-6 and Squires Walk wall in particular may contribute to the historic character Wednesbury, this area is bisected by High Bullen and does not have a visual relationship with the rest of the conservation area. It's residential character is distinct from the commercial character of the Market Place conservation area, however it was not considered to have sufficient interest to merit a separate character zone. Local listing is deemed appropriate for the wall and the topography, which is perhaps the most significant feature relating to the current conservation area, is unlikely to change. These areas should also be considered as areas of High Historic Townscape Value within the Black Country Plan.

On balance, **this area is not recommended for inclusion.**

Future action

There may be merit in exploring whether Brunswick Terrace, Squires Walk, Hollies Drive and the buildings along the north side of Walsall Street between these streets have sufficient interest for designation as a separate conservation area due to the high survival of good quality 19th and early 20th century residential and civic buildings.

4. Conservation Area Management Plan

Purpose

The successful long-term management of the Market Place conservation area depends on management that respects its special character and helps address known weaknesses and threats to this character. This Conservation Area Management Plan has been developed as a means of bringing together the various tools available to ensure that the special character and quality of the Market Place conservation area is retained and enhanced. It aims to help guide future positive management of the conservation area, both in terms of planning measures and the strategic planning framework, and through the identification of a series of 'Management Principles' for Sandwell Council and stakeholders to help guide future work.

It builds on the conservation area appraisal carried out in 2023 (Section A) which outlines the historic significance, character and heritage values of Wednesbury Market Place, including the various aspects – built, natural, historic and archaeological - which together create a sense of place within the settlement and which combine to justify conservation area designation of the area for its special character and interest. The appraisal also sets out the current key problems and pressures that may impact on the area (Section B) and affect its special qualities.

Principles for the Future Management of the Conservation Area

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats outlined in Section B of the conservation area appraisal have been developed into the following overarching principles to help guide the future management of Wednesbury Market Place conservation area in a way which will protect and enhance its special character.

1. Ensure that future development in the area considers the characteristic materials, form, height and scale of the buildings in the town centre, including the siting of buildings within historic plot boundaries.
2. Protect and enhance significant views and vistas through, into and out of the conservation area.
3. Discourage further loss of historic features by encouraging owners and occupiers to understand their importance and incentivising maintenance and good design.
4. Improve the appearance of the townscape through decluttering the public realm and ensuring future repairs/renewal of street furniture, surfacing, lighting and signage is standardised and in-keeping with the look and feel of the Market Place.
5. Enhance urban greening by removing trees and vegetation which have a negative impact and prioritising planting which has a positive impact on character.

Tools for future management of the conservation area

Existing Planning policies

Existing policies effecting the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area are contained within the **Black Country Core Strategy** (2011) and the **Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADDPD)** (2012). These documents form part of Sandwell MBC's Local Development Framework and guide planning decisions. Relevant policies are outlined below.

The Black Country Core Strategy

The Black Country Core Strategy was formally adopted in 2011 and sets out the strategic planning policy for the four Black Country Local Authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton), including a vision and objectives to guide future development and growth in the Black Country in the period up to 2026. The Core Strategy seeks to protect and enhance distinctive assets in different centres and makes specific reference to the markets in Wednesbury (Section 4.41).

Policies of particular relevance to the management of the Wednesbury Market Place Conservation area include:

CEN4 Regeneration of Town Centres which states development for retail, office, entertainment and leisure will be permitted, where they are of an appropriate scale that reflects the size and role of the town centre. Of particular importance is to encourage new convenience development and support proposals to extend or refurbish existing stores where they are well integrated and to serve to anchor the centre as a whole. Individual retail developments of up to 650 square metres net for convenience goods and 500 square metres gross for comparison goods will be considered appropriate. The use of upper floors will be encouraged to accommodate relevant town centre uses.

CPS4 Place-Making which requires development to demonstrate a clear understanding of the historic character and local distinctiveness of an area and show how proposals make a positive contribution to place-making and environmental improvement. It requires new design to be influenced by context and heritage in order to enhance local character.

ENV2 Historic Character and Local Distinctiveness which states that all development should aim to protect and promote the special qualities, historic character and local distinctiveness of the Black Country.

TRAN4 Creating Coherent Networks for Cycling and Walking which states that where possible, existing transport links should be enhanced and links extended to serve new development.

Site Allocations Development Delivery Plan Document

At a Borough-wide level, the Site Allocations and Development Delivery Plan Document (SADDPD), adopted in 2012, covers key policies which are in place to protect the distinctive landscape, individual buildings and the archaeology of Sandwell. The SADDPD specifically identifies the historic centre of Wednesbury as an *'Area where local distinctiveness and character should be enhanced and protected'* (13.39).

HE1 (Listed Buildings) safeguards and encourages appropriate enhancement of listed buildings and their settings and resists demolition.

HE2 (Conservation Areas) requires that development affecting conservation areas should preserve or better reveal the positive elements of the conservation area.

HE5 (Archaeology and Development Proposals) recognises the importance of recording, preservation and evaluation of archaeology.

HE3 (Buildings and Structures of Local Historic/Architectural Importance) relates to buildings of local significance which do not meet the criteria for statutory listing. It requires proposals for alteration, extension or change of use to clearly demonstrate positive contribution towards the architectural or historical significance of the building or structure. Demolition is resisted unless it can be demonstrated no viable use can be found or that the proposal has substantial public benefit.

HE 6 (Areas of Townscape Value) requires proposals for change within these areas to firstly identify the significant elements of the area and ensure proposals will make a positive contribution towards these components.

SAD DM2 (Poster Panels) states poster advertising may be appropriate in predominantly business parts of conservation areas and Areas of Townscape Value though care will be needed in how they are accommodated.

SAD Policies DM10 (Shop Front Design) and **DM8 (Design and Installation of Shop Front Roller Shutters)** require that applications for the installation of shop fronts respect the scale and character of shops and the street scene and that historic and good quality elements are retained.

The SADDPD was initially intended to guide development within the Borough until 2021. The Local Authority are currently preparing a new Sandwell Local Plan which is scheduled for adoption in 2025. The Draft Sandwell Local Plan will be published for consultation in Autumn 2023. Until the new Local plan is adopted, the SADDPD, along with the Black Country Core Strategy, continue to be the statutory Local Development Documents.

Planning Measures

In addition to Local Planning policies, the Planning Acts give powers to Local Planning Authorities to deal with issues affecting the historic environment and its proactive management. The key relevant measures include:

POWER	STATUTORY BASIS	PURPOSE
Amenity of Land Notice	s.215 Town and Country Planning Act 1990	To require an owner or occupier to carry out works to improve the external condition of a building or land if its neglect is adversely affecting the surrounding area.
Urgent Works Notice	For listed Buildings: s.54 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 For unlisted buildings: s.76 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	To allow a local authority to directly carry out works that are required urgently to make an unoccupied listed building weather-tight and thus prevent further deterioration. To allow a local authority to directly carry out works that are required urgently to make an unoccupied, unlisted building weather-tight and thus prevent further deterioration.
Repairs Notice	s.48 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	To allow a local authority to specify to the owner works it considers reasonably necessary to secure the future of a listed building. If the repairs are not carried out, the power can lead to compulsory purchase of the building.
Compulsory Purchase Order	s.47-48 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	When all other measures fail, to allow the local authority to compulsorily acquire a listed building in order either to repair it itself or sell it on to be restored by a buildings preservation trust or other new owner.
Planning Enforcement Notice	s. 172 Town & Country Planning Act 1990	To remedy a breach of planning control
Listed Building Enforcement Notice	s.9 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990	To remedy a breach in listed building control

Restriction of Deemed Consents Discontinuance notices	Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England Regulations 2007) Regulation 8	Discontinuance Action is when a local planning authority serves a notice (a discontinuance notice) under Regulation 8 requiring that the displaying of advertisements with deemed consent be discontinued.
Area of Special Advert Control	Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England Regulations 2007) Regulation 20	This is where a local authority defines an Area of Special control in order to have more control over advertisements
Removal of permitted development rights – Article 4 directions	Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015	Allows local planning authorities to remove certain permitted development rights by issuing an ‘Article 4’ direction. This provision means that a planning application needs to be submitted for work which does not normally need one.

A Framework for Design & Maintenance Standards

Based on the potential threats identified in Section B of the Conservation Area Appraisal, Sandwell MBC have developed the following framework to support design and maintenance standards in the conservation area.

Wednesbury Market Place Conservation Area Design Standards

Planning applications will be determined with particular reference to the contents and findings of the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area Appraisal and the Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation (BCHLC). Accordingly:-

1. New build and development should seek to:

- **Be of good quality design which takes account of its historic context:** Any partial or complete new build is expected to be of good quality design and construction and positively enhance the quality of Wednesbury's historic townscape. Development should use a sympathetic palette of materials and a scale of development that maintains the historic character of the street and particularly the 2-3 storey, narrow fronted buildings that provide the distinctive character of this historic market town.
- **Reinforce and enhance historic street patterns:** Any partial or new build should retain or, where lost, reinstate Wednesbury Market Place's historic street patterns, ensuring street frontages are continuous, and avoiding presenting the backs of buildings and servicing arrangements to established public routes and spaces, retaining or reinstating continuity with the historic streetscape.

2. The retail areas will be expected to have:

- **Good quality shopfronts and signage:** Any changes to shopfronts or signage will be in accordance with policy and ensure that signage, alterations or replacement shopfronts use materials and a scale proportionate to the building. Internally illuminated shop front signage will not generally be considered to be acceptable.
- **Security measures,** where required, should be designed so as to be inconspicuous; retail units be expected to have internal security fittings which are invisible externally and avoid concealing historic details. Shutters should be either grille or punched with a high degree of visibility.

3. Where relevant, proposals for alterations to buildings within the conservation area will be expected to:

- **Retain or, where lost, reinstate architectural detailing:** any new proposals for shopfronts or changes to windows or doors will be expected to restore historic detailing where possible and use traditional materials and techniques for new work and repairs.

4. The positive reuse of historic buildings will be encouraged by:

- **Considering high quality proposals positively:** The sensitive reuse of partially or completely vacant buildings will be encouraged in order to increase usage of buildings and tackle any underlying character of neglect. In retail and commercial properties, the emphasis will be on

retaining, economic activity at street level where viable, but the more effective use of upper floor space will be encouraged. Any wholesale change of use will be expected to retain the character and appearance of the area.

5. Work to the Public Realm will be expected to:

- **Maintain historic and new areas of paving:** ensuring that utilities, repairs and new work in the conservation area reinstate the high-quality new paving on a like for like basis.
- **Support the replacement of unsympathetic paving with traditional paving and designs:** ensuring that any future alterations or updating of the paving scheme/pedestrianised zones in the conservation area reinstate high quality new materials.
- **Consider signage and street furniture:** ensuring that proposals for new or replacement signage and street furniture are sited in locations sympathetic to the historic character and appearance of the area. Any new elements will use the palette of recent work through the HSHAZ and designs established to develop a cohesive appearance and sense of continuity across the conservation area.

Wednesbury Market Place Conservation Area Maintenance Standards

‘Maintenance’ is work that is necessary to protect the fabric of a building and keep it weatherproof. It does not include any work to put right significant problems, or work needed to bring a building in poor repair back to good condition. Carrying out active annual maintenance prevents the onset of serious structural problems which may need expensive repairs in the future. Some maintenance works will be required annually. Others, such as the clearing of gutters and vegetation, may need to be undertaken several times a year. Typical tasks include:

- regularly inspecting buildings to check their condition and identify any problems that need attention;
- making sure that gutters are free of debris and are in working order
- replacing slipped roofing tiles or slates, to stop rainwater getting in
- repainting timber windows and doors at least every 5 years
- repointing walls and clearing plants growth such as ivy or vegetation from the base of walls.

Putting the Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) into Practice

The Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) will be used in conjunction with Sandwell Local Plan Wednesbury Market Place Conservation Area Appraisal and the Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation (BCHLC) to ensure sensitive interventions to conserve, repair and enhance the historic fabric of Wednesbury Market Place.

The Council will use the CAMP to:

- Provide the basis for the proactive management of the conservation area through informing future Council policy formulation and decision making;
- Act as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, use of planning powers and exercise of the Council’s duties under the Planning Acts, as a result of its companion status to the Conservation Area Character Appraisal;

- Fulfil the Council's statutory duty in regard to s.71 and s.72 of the Planning (LB&CA) Act 1990;
- Illustrate the local planning authority's commitment to have regard to government policy for conservation area management
- Promote the protection of the Historic Environment through available planning processes.
- Clearly illustrate the Council's commitment to strong measures and actions for protecting and enhancing Wednesbury Market Place conservation area.

The following table outlines the key actions and responsibilities for putting the CAMP into practice.

CAMP Aim 1: Address known threats to the conservation area		
<i>ACTION</i>	<i>ACHIEVED THROUGH</i>	<i>TIMEFRAME</i>
Ensure consistent decision making across all Council services to ensure special regard is paid to the significance of the town's historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent use of relevant Local Planning Policies and Planning Measures to address known threats 	2023-2033
Secure quality development that respects the character of the Wednesbury Market Place conservation area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) Consistent use of the 'Framework for Design and Maintenance standards' contained within the adopted CAMP at section 3.3 	2023-2033
Actively enforce the reversal of unapproved detrimental actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of statutory powers where available through Planning Measures (see table 1, Section 3.2) 	2023-2025
Tackle the neglect and dereliction of historic buildings and poor presentation of open spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of statutory powers available through Planning Measures (see table 1, Section 3.2) 	2023-2033
Improve quality, safety and connectivity of pedestrian routes through the conservation area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of statutory powers available through Planning Measures (see 3.2 above). 	2023-2033
CAMP Aim 2: Support the maintenance, repair and enhancement of the public realm in the conservation area		
<i>ACTION</i>	<i>ACHIEVED THROUGH</i>	<i>TIMEFRAME</i>
Ensure a cohesive approach to future public realm improvements in the conservation area or its setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently use the adopted palette and designs for the HSHAZ in new work; Support the replacement of unsympathetic paving with traditional paving and designs: ensure that any future alterations or updating of the paving scheme/pedestrianised zones in the conservation area reinstate high quality new, materials. 	2023-2033
Improve quality and presentation of open spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove vegetation which negatively impacts character Encourage urban greening where it enhances the character of the CA or its setting 	2023-2033

CAMP Aim 3: Engage the community in managing and promoting the value of Wednesbury's historic environment		
<i>ACTION</i>	<i>ACHIEVED THROUGH</i>	<i>TIMEFRAME</i>
Engage building owners and tenants within any newly adopted CA boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to building owners and tenants informing them of the CA, sharing the CAA and CAMP and signposting to available support 	2023-2024
Ensure the Community and local business stakeholders have a role in monitoring and promoting actions that will enhance conservation area management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets Manager and Conservation Officer continue regular dialogue 	2023-2026

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