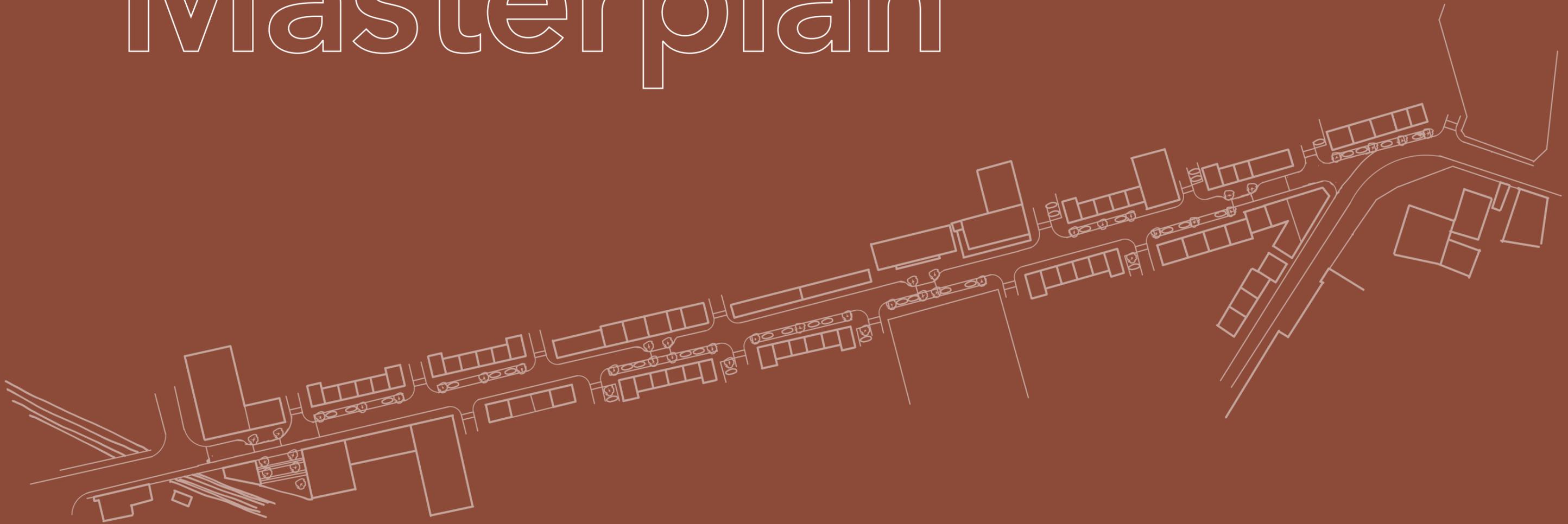


Rolfe Street Masterplan



Project Team

Client	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
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This document is to be read in conjunction with reports from the project team.

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Revision History

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2426-A-RP-230110-Rolfe Street Masterplan-PM-02

Revision	Date	By	Checked	Note
01	20.12.22	DS	LG	Draft Issue
02	10.01.23	PM	DS	Issue for SMBC Internal Consultation



1.0 Introduction

This masterplan has been produced by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to set out a vision for the future of the Rolfe Street area of Smethwick, part of the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor.

Building on the work of the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework (2022), the masterplan seeks to provide a clear direction for the reinvention of the Rolfe Street area, giving strong guidance for future development.

The masterplan envisages a distinctive, well designed community being created in this well connected and attractive location. This will build on the nationally important history of the site, and the success of recent development at Port Loop and Galton Locks.

A framework is provided for the key urban design principles that should be followed at Rolfe Street, having been consulted on with local stakeholders. A series of distinct Character Areas are identified to help further guide development.

A design code is provided establishing the detailed principles development should follow. This illustrates how current planning policy, locally adopted policy, and national and local good practice guidance can be combined with a respect for the history of the area to create a unique sense of place at Rolfe Street.

2.0 Context & History

2.1 Location and Context

Rolfe Street is located at the western end of the Smethwick to Birmingham corridor. The corridor is Birmingham and Sandwell's canal district, the historic link between Birmingham and the Black Country and a cradle of the industrial revolution. Today the corridor is one of the most significant areas of brownfield urban renewal in Europe, with potential to deliver 4,000 new homes. Transformational change is already underway with new neighbourhoods at Port Loop and Soho Loop, and the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital nearing completion.

Rolfe Street is highlighted as one of the primary strategic sites in the **Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework** (February 2022), a collaboration between Sandwell and Birmingham Councils, the West Midlands Combined Authority, and others. The document is non-statutory in Sandwell but will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Rolfe Street Masterplan builds upon and sits alongside the Framework.



Location within the West Midlands



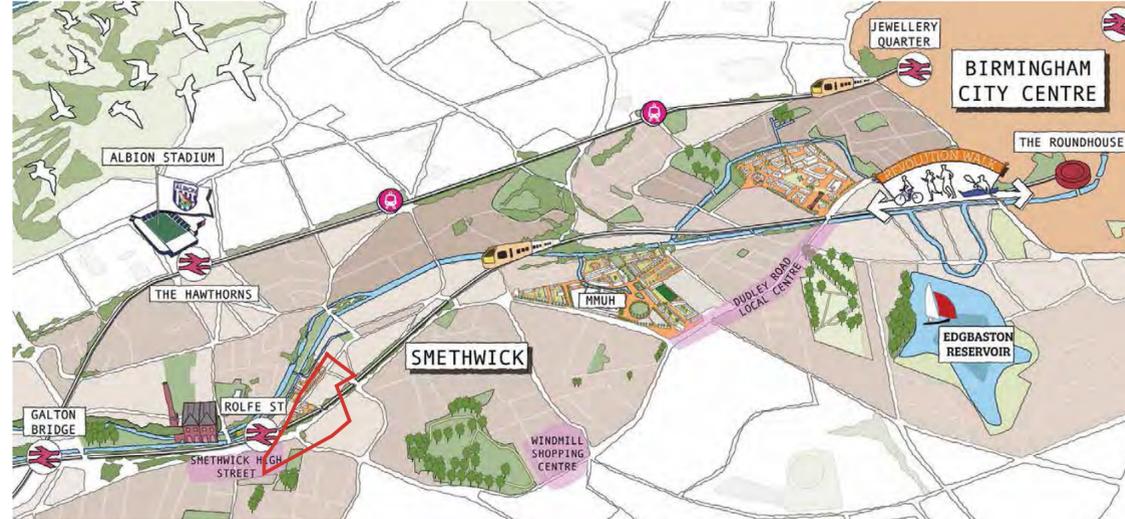
Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor

2.2 Planning Policy

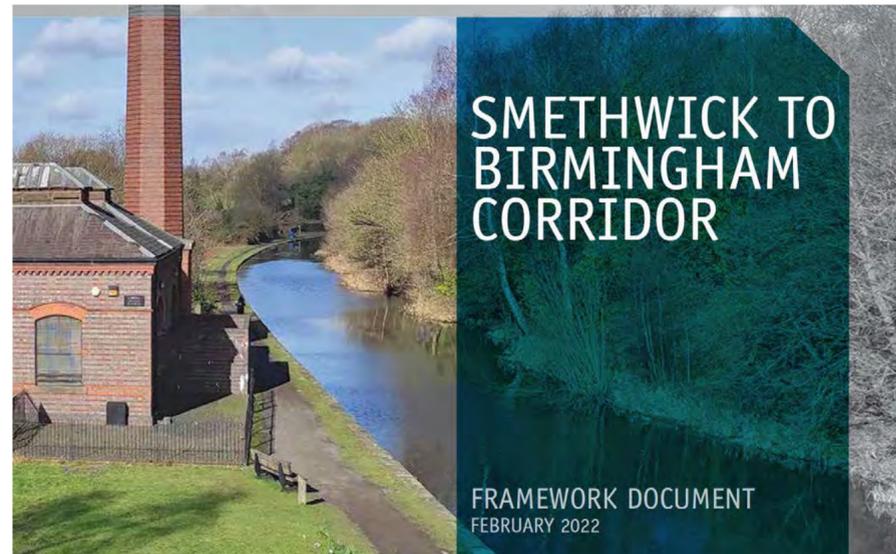
The **Black Country Core Strategy** (2011) sets out the spatial vision, objectives and strategy for future development in the Black Country up to 2026. It identifies regeneration corridors of which Oldbury-West Bromwich-Smethwick is one.

Sandwell Site Allocations and Delivery DPD (2012) adds further detail to the Core Strategy's regeneration corridors. The plan states that the focus for new housing within the next few years will be within the Smethwick area of the Oldbury-West Bromwich-Smethwick corridor. The DPD estimated a residential capacity of 400 units for the 8.6ha Rolfe Street site, formally allocating it for residential development. However there has been little change in the area since that time.

With Rolfe Street being predominantly industrial in nature, piecemeal development for residential development is now not considered suitable, with a more comprehensive approach seen as the most efficient solution to delivering a high quality residential community, as outlined by this masterplan.



Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework (extract)



Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework



Rolfe Street Masterplan Site in 2022

2.2 Public Transport & Active Travel

Rolfe Street is exceptionally well connected. Half hourly trains take 5 minutes to get to Birmingham New Street, and 20 minutes to Wolverhampton. The New Main Line canal offers an off road cycling link to Birmingham City Centre, there are high frequency bus connections to Dudley and Birmingham from Smethwick High Street, and the Midland Metro's Handworth Booth Street stop and The Hawthorns railway station are both around 15mins walk away.

As part of the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor, cycling and walking improvements will be made to provide better connectivity, as illustrated adjacent. In addition, Rolfe Street Station has been identified by Sandwell Council as priority location for a Mobility Hub, following the model proposed by Transport for the West Midlands, integrating rail and bus with cycle storage, West Midlands Cycle Hire and e-mobility, to provide a 'last mile' solution to the wider area.

2.3 Sustainability

In summer 2019 the West Midlands Combined Authority set a target of the region becoming net zero carbon by 2041. Sandwell Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020–2041 sets out Sandwell's plan for achieving the 2041 target. Residential emissions are cited as a key target for improvement.

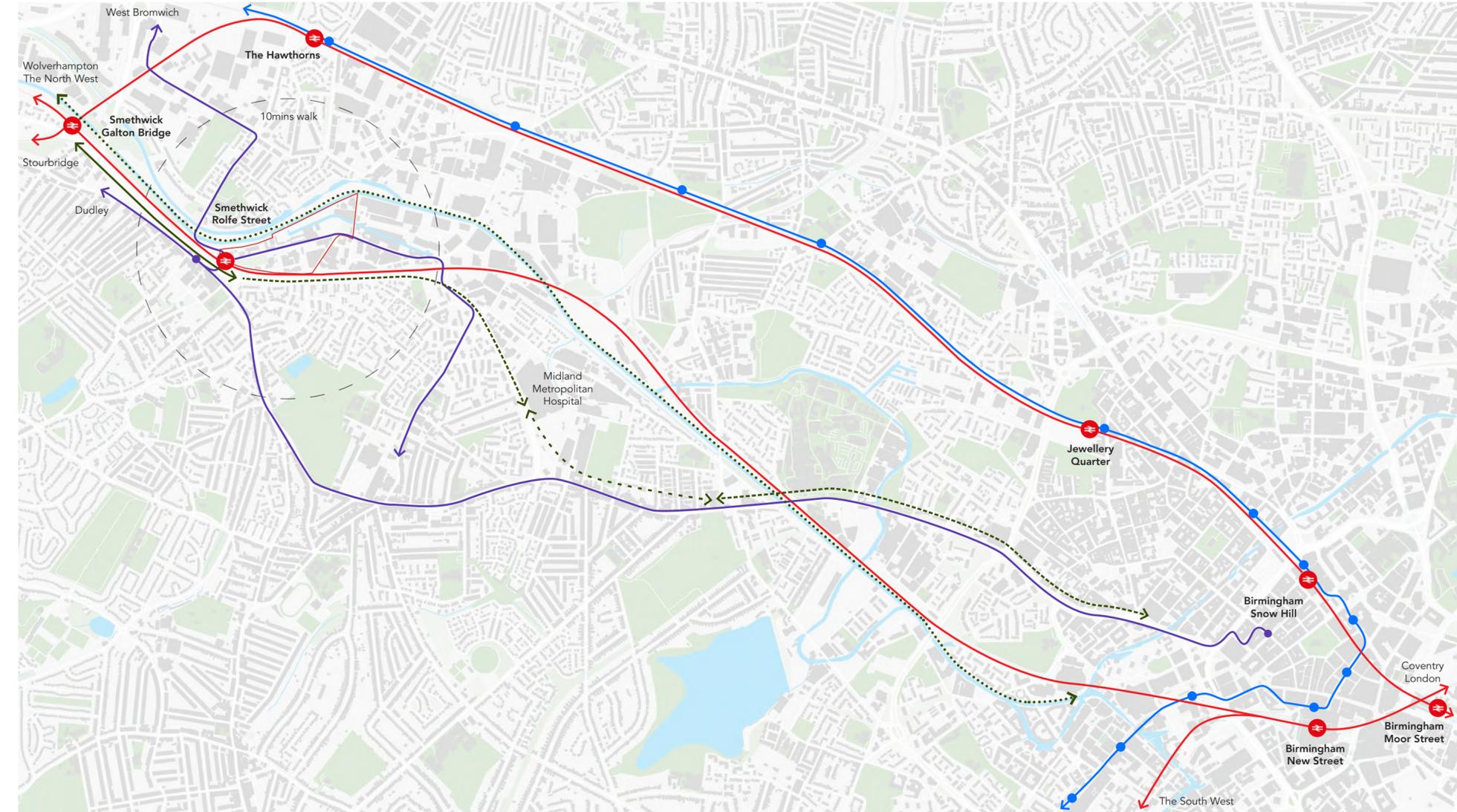
At Rolfe Street, there should be a clear hierarchy to the energy strategy in future planning applications:

- Use Less Energy – improved building efficiency
- Supply Energy Efficiently – utilising low carbon solutions
- Use Renewable Energy – adopt on site generation

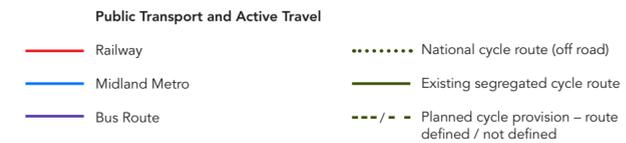
Solutions such as shared heat pumps and Passivhaus principles should be brought forward at Rolfe Street, to meet the Government's net zero homes strategy.



Integrated cycle storage – Triangle, Swindon



Public transport and active travel



2.4 Site History

The history of the Rolfe Street area of Smethwick is tied closely to the construction of the Birmingham Old Main Line canal in 1768–69, of which Rolfe Street is the summit. Formerly fields and scattered farms, industry grew alongside the canal. The Old Main Line's summit quickly became congested and suffered from a lack of water. The Smethwick Engine and associated Engine Arm was constructed over an earlier feeder in the 1790s to alleviate this, but it was insufficient, leading to the construction of the low level, arrow straight New Main Line by Thomas Telford in 1829–30. The Engine Aqueduct was constructed to carry the Engine Arm over the New Main Line.

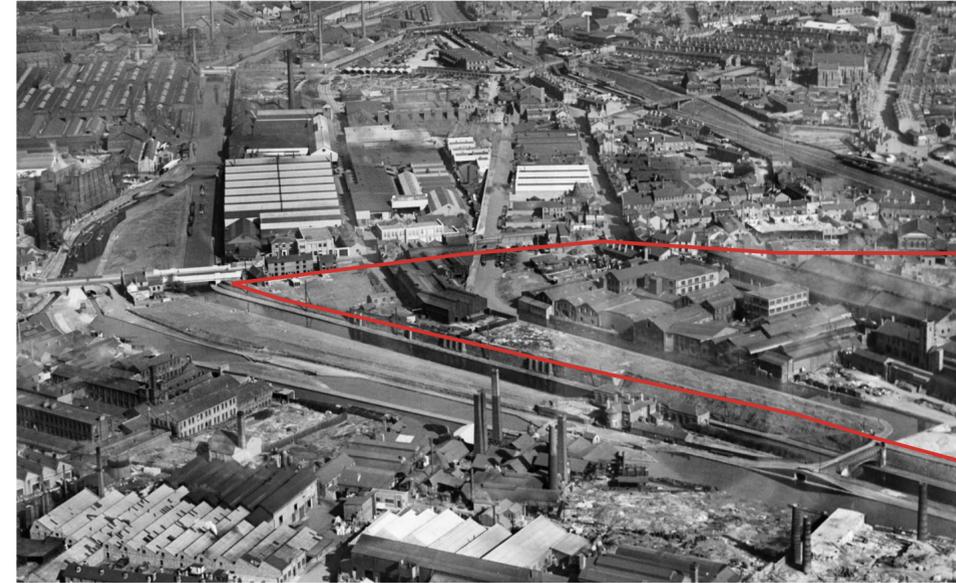
Together with the later railway, these canals, centred on the Aqueduct, form one of the UK's most important records of the rapid technological development in transport infrastructure in the 18th and 19th centuries, spurred by the industrial revolution in the Black Country.

The cutting of the New Main Line galvanised development of the masterplan area which rapidly industrialised, including the construction of the Crown Forge on the Enterprise Centre site. Residential development followed to the south, serving workers in industry, which became known as the New Village. This included commercial buildings on Rolfe Street and Smethwick High Street, and Holy Trinity Church. Rolfe Street became the centre of Smethwick, including a theatre and the public baths, moved to the Black Country Living Museum in the 1980s.

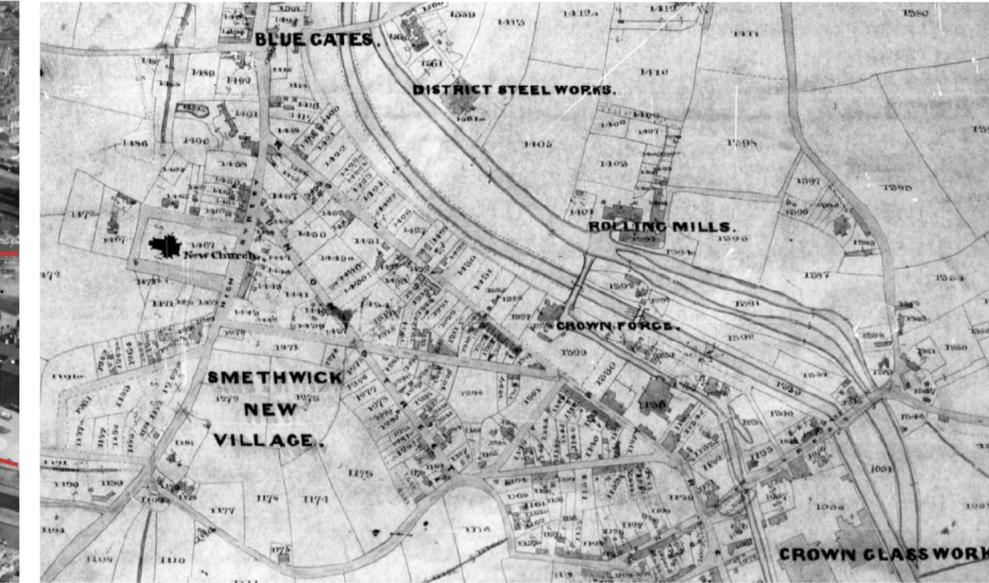
Construction of the railway led to the decline of Rolfe Street as a high street in favour of Smethwick High Street, and the decline of heavy industry alongside the canal. Industrial sites were sold to the public sector, including the former Crown Forge which became a yard for the Smethwick Corporation in the 1890s, the Fire Station in 1910, and Rolfe House, built for housing firemen, in 1933.

By the late 1930s the housing to the south of the site began to be replaced by industry, with the Drop Forge being constructed between Hill Street, Rolfe Street and New Street. This was followed in the 1960s by the demolition of the remaining homes to the west of Hill Street, the re alignment of Cross Street into Buttress Way, and construction of light industrial premises. Since then, there has been little development within the masterplan area.

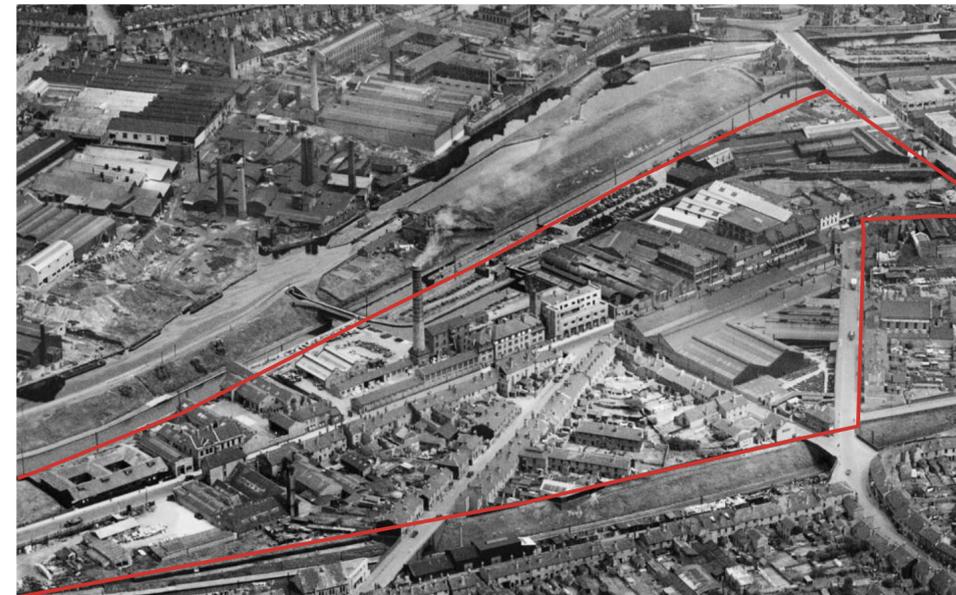
The site history is explored in more detail in the Rolfe Street Heritage Assessment by Donald Insall, December 2022.



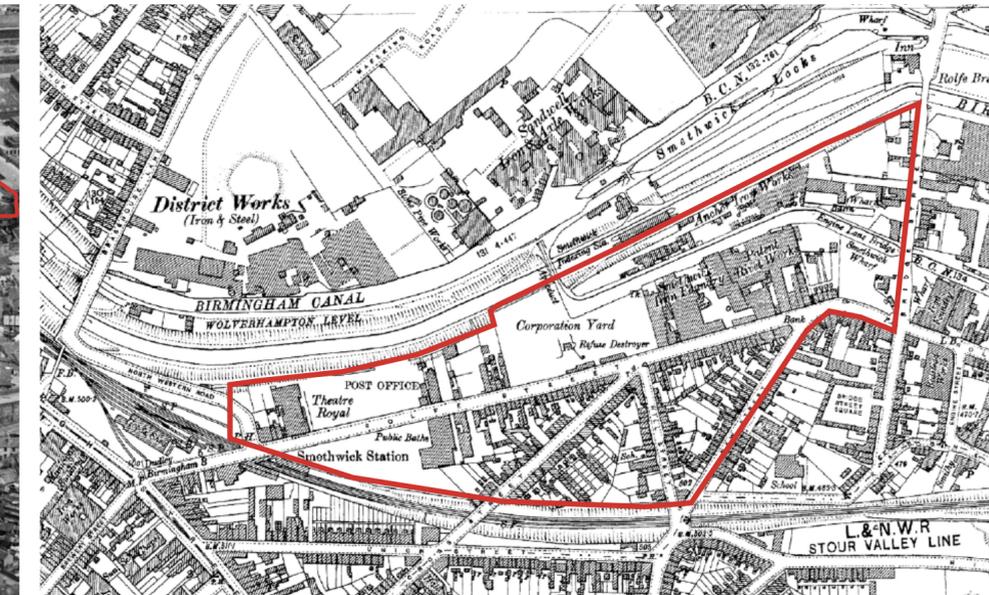
Aerial photograph of masterplan area, 1934



1839 Tithe Map – presence of Crown Forge



Aerial photograph of masterplan area, 1946



1904 Ordnance Survey Map – Industrialisation, Construction of Corporation Yard, Residential Development

2.5 Heritage Significance

Rolfe Street includes a large number of buildings and structures of significance. The most important of these is the Grade II* listed Engine Arm Aqueduct. The retaining wall to the former Corporation Yard, Grade II listed, is an early example of reinforced concrete construction.

Assets previously recommended for local listing include elements of the former Corporation Yard, including the warehouse Block 300, and the warehouse frontages to south side of the Engine Arm. These sit primarily within the Smethwick Summit, Galton Valley Conservation Area.



Engine Arm Aqueduct from the New Main Line (Grade II* listed, SM)



Block 300, Corporation Yard (Enterprise Centre)



Retaining wall to the Corporation Yard along the New Main Line (Grade II listed)



Warehouse frontages to the Engine Arm

- | Heritage Designations | Heritage Assets |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Smethwick Summit, Galton Valley Conservation Area | Retaining Wall to Corporation Yard |
| Smethwick High Street Conservation Area | Engine Arm Aqueduct |
| Scheduled Monument | Top Lock |
| Listed building or structure | Middle Lock |
| Previously recommended for local listing from the Audit of Heritage Assets within 'Smethwick Summit Galton Valley, Smethwick, Conservation Area Appraisal' (Upson, Kirkham, Cox and Potter 2002) | Bottom Lock |
| | Smethwick Engine |



2.6 Heritage Characterisation

A series of heritage character areas have been identified. These have informed this masterplan's character areas. They include:

- **Historic High Street:** a cluster of civic and public service buildings reflecting the former status of Rolfe Street as a high street
- **Eroded High Street:** where buildings contributing to the high street character have been lost
- **Industrial Backlands:** the area around Buttress Way with detracting character
- **Canalside Industrial:** area with strong connections to the canal
- **Canals:** the historic canal infrastructure, now a green corridor

These character areas are explored in more detail in the Rolfe Street Heritage Assessment by Donald Insall, December 2022.



Former Fire Station on Rolfe Street



67 and 68 Rolfe Street

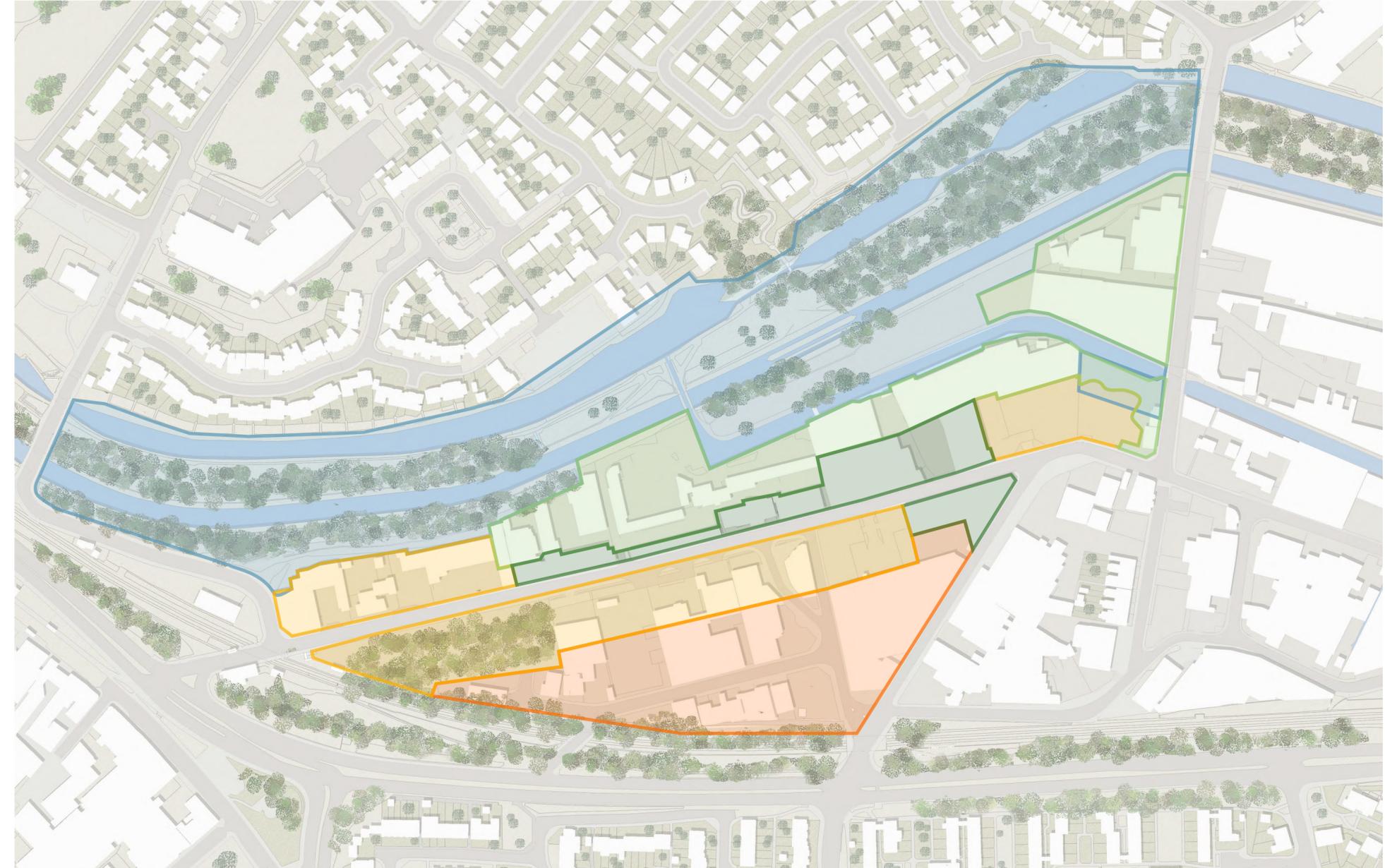


16 Rolfe Street



Commercial building frontages to Bridge Street

Heritage Character	
	Historic High Street
	Eroded High Street
	Industrial Backlands
	Canalside Industrial
	Canals



Heritage Character

2.7 Constraints & Opportunities

Primary constraints at Rolfe Street are the busy and narrow Rolfe Street and New Street bisecting the site, the railway line, and changes in level of about 1–2 storeys in a number of locations. The existing industrial nature of the site presents an environment unsuitable for a high quality residential community, including HGV movements and noise pollution. There is much informal and fly parking including across the full width of pavements making streets feel hostile and inaccessible. The canal and heritage assets make a positive contribution, lending a strong sense of place and a green corridor for recreation. Pedestrian links to the canals are very poor, there is no access across the aqueduct from the site except via a convoluted route alongside the Engine Peninsula with no surveillance.

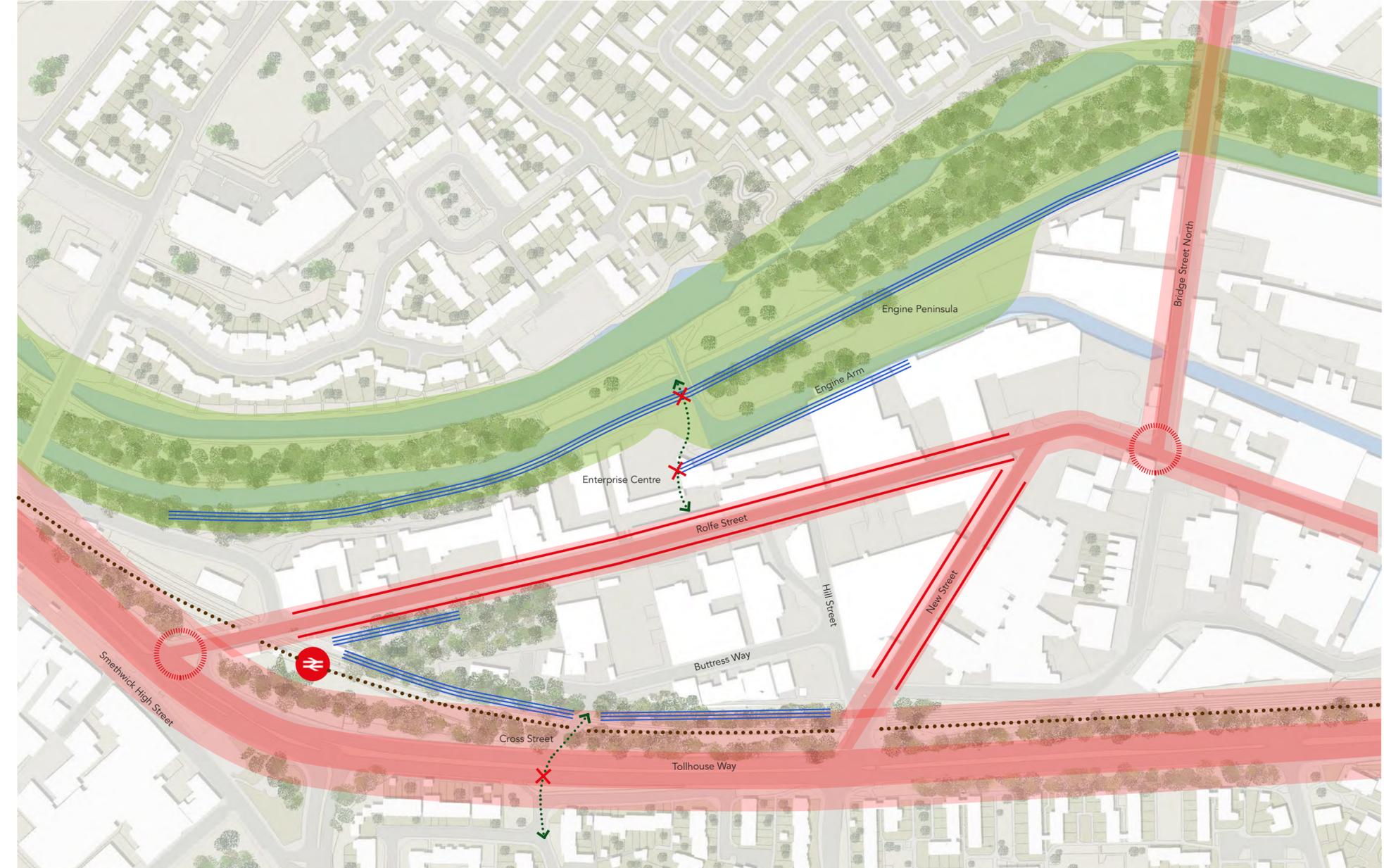


Traffic and informal parking along Rolfe Street



The New Main Line from the Engine Arm Aqueduct

Constraints	Opportunities
Heavy traffic, noise and barrier to pedestrian movement	Canal as green corridor
Existing crossing without pedestrian sequence	Heritage assets
Narrow street with informal parking	Station with excellent access to Birmingham New Street (3min) and other destinations
No pedestrian access	Significant level change
Significant level change	Railway line
Railway line	



Constraints and Opportunities

3.0 Vision & Place

3.1 A Sense of Place

The Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework sets out the principles the Council wish to build upon at Rolfe Street:

- A place that is aspirational, where people want to live now and into the future
- A healthy sense of place, heritage and natural beauty maximised
- A green corridor, with green new neighbourhoods
- An active travel exemplar, well connected
- A strong sense of community

Our vision is for Rolfe Street to be an aspirational place where people want to live, a place that has a unique character which fosters a strong sense of community. This will be achieved through maximising the nationally significant history of the site, a history that connects Rolfe Street to the critical role the Black Country played in the industrial revolution. It will be underpinned by high quality architecture, streets and spaces.

Our Vision for Rolfe Street



A place that's Smethwick: an exemplar for the past and future of the Black Country



A historic place: heritage at the heart of a new community



An aspirational place: high quality family homes for all



A connected place: a zero carbon mobility hub, heart of a cycling network



A green place: new public spaces for a new community, the canal as a green lung



A key site in the history of the industrial revolution



Community at Port Loop, Smethwick's history of making



High quality, canalside family homes: Port Loop, Birmingham



Heritage at the heart of a new community – Kelham, Sheffield

3.2 A Heritage Armature

Historic buildings are arranged primarily along the north site of Rolfe Street, forming an armature that gives a very strong sense of place, and a link back the historic high street. Retaining and refurbishing these buildings, alongside new development that maintains the historic building line, will enhance that sense of place and create the primary identity for Rolfe Street. Roof forms, materiality and scale should reflect that of the retained buildings, with a strong and consistent use of red stock brick and blue brick, and highly varied roof forms and heights.



Heritage armature along Rolfe Street



Heritage armature along Rolfe Street



Celebration of heritage, Salford Central



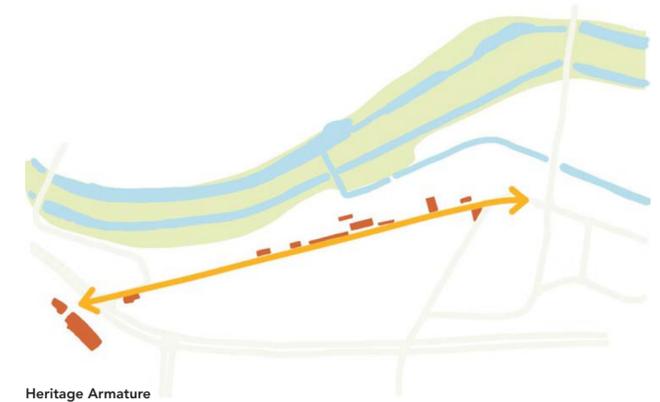
Vision – a new community, anchored by heritage

4.0 Urban Design Framework

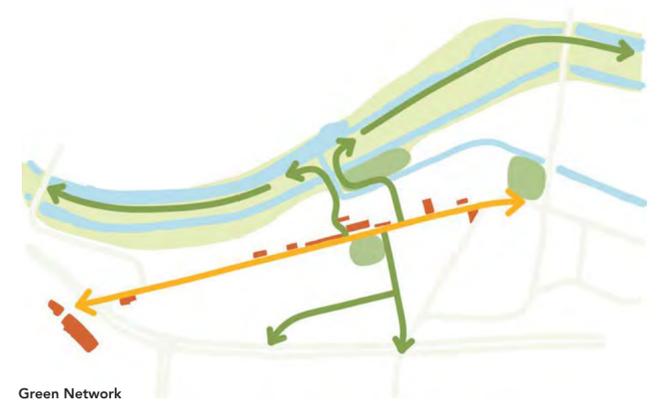
4.1 Key Moves

Building on the retained heritage armature, Rolfe Street should remain the primary axis, providing principal movement through the site and linking to the station, Smethwick High Street and the Midland Metropolitan Hospital. Either side of Rolfe Street new connections should be made to the canals, and across Tollhouse Way, retaining existing street alignments.

New public open spaces should be provided at key nodes, including at the Engine, Engine Peninsula, and at the heart of the site alongside the Fire Station and Rolfe House. Residential development should follow a clear grid, building on the existing primary streets.



Heritage Armature
Rolfe Street, the primary axis, provides a strong sense of place



Green Network
A network of squares, parks and green streets, connecting to the canal and Tollhouse Way.



Flexible Grid
A regular grid of residential streets, reflecting historic alignments



Illustrative masterplan

4.2 Open Space & Public Realm

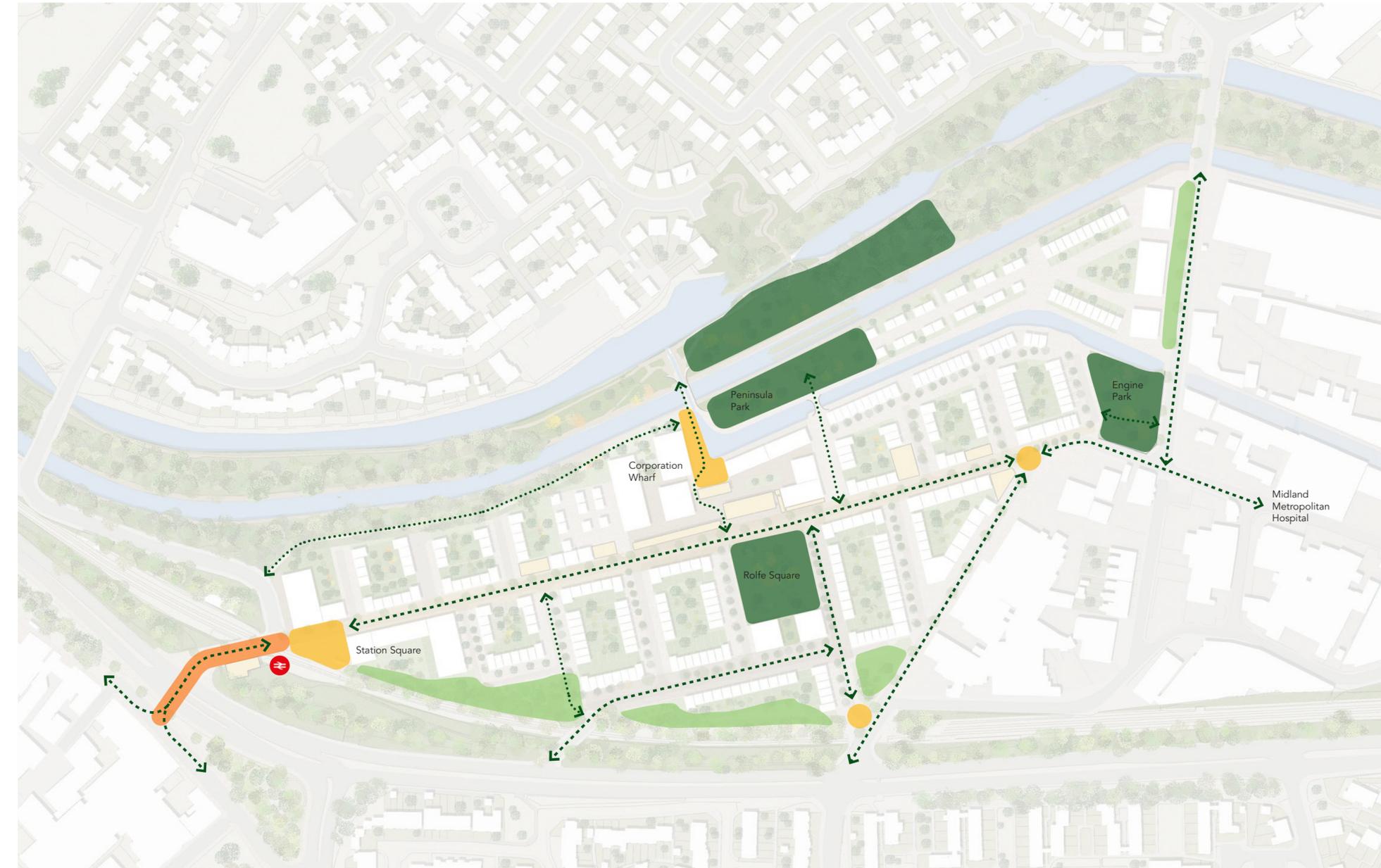
Open space and public realm will be essential to creating a high quality community at Rolfe Street. A new square would provide a welcome at Rolfe Street Station, with enhancements made to the connection to Smethwick High Street. The key asset of the Engine Aqueduct should be at the heart of another principal public space, with a quieter character, anchoring the former Corporation Yard.

New green spaces should take advantage of the existing landscape at the Smethwick Engine and the nose of the Engine Peninsula, both of which would be less suitable for development due to form and heritage value. In addition, it will be important to provide a new public open space at the heart of the site, Rolfe Square, creating a sense of identity and a formal space for play.



Public space and community, Port Loop

- Open space, public realm and connections**
- Principal points of arrival
 - Public open space
 - Landscape buffer to New Street and Railway
 - Priority area for enhancement of pedestrian experience
 - Existing streets requiring public realm enhancement
 - New pedestrian connections to be provided



Open space, public realm and connections