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Economic Strategy and Action Plan (ESAP)

Cabinet Draft

December 2022



Walsall Council



IMPROVE
outcomes and
customer experience



IMPROVE
employee satisfaction
and engagement



IMPROVE
service efficiency
and performance



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Executive Summary

Ambition and Opportunity

Walsall Borough is a place with many natural, built, people and economic assets. It is also a place with justifiable ambition and optimism for the future.

This strategy proposes a way to unlock these many assets and to deliver a happier, healthier and more economically prosperous Borough for all its residents.

Whilst addressing the clear regeneration challenges in Walsall town centre, the strategy recognises the many towns and communities which make up a very diverse Borough. It aligns Walsall with central and regional government investment priorities and is designed to address the most pressing socio-economic challenges facing the Borough.

Children and young people can and will be supported in their educational journeys and into better higher skilled employment. Further and higher education, combined with more integrated schools and college-based skills programs, will prepare them more effectively for their working life.

A healthy economy requires a healthy population, and this sector is a key focus for Walsall Council. We recognise that good housing, economic opportunity, a vibrant sense of community and access to green and amenity spaces are all key to delivering this. Importantly, these basic underpinning rights are most crucial in ensuring that even the most

disadvantaged in our Borough can lead full and productive lives. This strategy, designed in harmony with other key education, health, environment and business initiatives of the Council will enhance our ability to deliver against this agenda.

This strategy enables a step change in our partnership working with our diverse business community. Key existing employment sectors such as health care, manufacturing, logistics, and construction will be further supported and critical new industries of the future such as low carbon and green tech (particularly in the fields of construction, mobility and housing) and digital and creative will all see new investment.

Finally, this strategy is focused on delivering our brownfield asset sites into use for social and economic benefit, as sites for future employment, for the provision of education resources and for housing.

A strategy for all and for the long term

The Strategy's key interventions are designed to work most effectively as a combined package. Employment, education and skills, health, housing and the environment are intertwined and mutually dependent.

Walsall is a significant economy within the context of the Black Country, but it has the potential to grow more and in a way that will benefit all residents and businesses in the Borough.

Walsall has an opportunity to make better use of its key assets – its geography, connectivity, anchor institutions, brownfield sites, canals, competitive industrial sectors, and capable willing stakeholders.

However the ESAP will only be effective if it recognises that it must truly serve the interests of everyone, including those who are most vulnerable. The well-being of the population as a core goal is as central to this strategy as economic growth.

This strategy looks to meet and exceed the needs of Walsall's present population and its future residents. Whether it is education and skills aims, sectoral support, quality housing, a focus on the low carbon agenda or improving the quality of our green spaces, waterways or air, these measures are designed with ensuring the long term health of our Borough.

This Economic Strategy and Action Plan is designed to allow Walsall the opportunity to:

- Plan with the long term needs of the Borough at the forefront of our minds
- Remain focused on the needs of those most vulnerable in our society
- Maintain flexibility to respond to new and emerging challenges
- Make most use of the combined capacity and expertise of partner institutions and the private sector
- Use all the policy and fiscal levers available – devolution, town deals, central government funding, investment zones, enterprise zones, and planning flexibility – to deliver growth and prosperity
- Understand truly the wealth of the city and who benefits – not only in the centre but across the Borough's diverse and vibrant communities

An evidence-based strategy for the next decade

Our 10 year strategy is founded on robust and independent evidence.

We have consulted widely with key stakeholders, including businesses and community groups. This has enabled us to identify five key challenges facing Walsall Borough.

KEY CHALLENGES:

01

Town Centre

We continue to see great potential, growth and innovation in Walsall Town Centre and across all of our district centres but, in conjunction with the Town Centre Masterplan, further investment needs to be made in both the built environment and in driving the daytime and nighttime economies in the heart of our Borough and across its whole geography.

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Jobs and Skills

Job creation has been robust across the Borough over the past 10 years and appears to be bouncing back from Covid. Challenges remain around low paid employment and there is a need for a greater investment in skills to drive the productivity, resilience and health of our business community.

03

Brownfield Sites and Enabling Infrastructure

The Borough has a compelling asset in its brownfield development sites. In order to bring these into use for both business and housing there is a need to work ever more closely with private developers and public sector partners to address historic issues of land contamination and to ensure new transport and communications infrastructure is provided where and when it is needed.

04

Net Zero

The opportunities from a transition to a lower carbon economy are substantial for Walsall Borough and significant public and private sector investment is out there if we get this right. To unlock this however we will need to work closely with skills providers in key areas such as construction, housing and transport.

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Housing and Public Realm

Walsall stands to benefit from the growing workforce in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. If we are to capitalize on this then investments will need to be made in better housing, an enhanced culture and leisure offer, amenity and green spaces and improved transport infrastructure. This strategy is part of addressing the public realm investment challenge that this entails.

Walsall is committed to the resources and partnerships needed to deliver change

In addition to the five challenges, this strategy considers how public, private and third sector partners can work more effectively with each other.

This strategy proposes establishing an Economic Strategy board (in addition to the Town Deal board) and tasking it with delivering the key actions of this strategy. Whilst this board will be Council led it is recognised that there is a greater role that business can and wants to play. This will be enabled by governance arrangements that seek to fully empower the voice and resources of our valued business community.

Our procurement practices will be revisited to ensure that they best deliver optimal economic and social outcomes, maximise the opportunities for local businesses within Walsall's public sector supply chain and to grow jobs, skills and wealth in Walsall.

This strategy recognises and addresses resourcing as a key issue. Walsall Borough continues to work very closely with our valued regional partners such as the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Black Country LEP, the West Midlands Growth Company and WM5G. We do however recognise that nothing can replicate the impact of people resource employed in Walsall and solely focused on improving the social, economic and environmental performance of the Borough. To that end this strategy envisages a greater allocation of people and capital resources in key delivery areas such as regeneration and development, business support and skills, inward investment and town centre animation.



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Town Centre

Walsall Town Centre has so much potential, and this strategy seeks to deliver on our ambitions for this key urban asset. The Town Centre Masterplan and the Connected Gateway are key elements of that, but an ambitious broader suite of measures is now envisaged to animate activity in the town centre and to materially grow its leisure and culture offer.

01 Town Centre

The Challenge

Like many town centres across England, Walsall faces the challenges of responding to changes in retail, work and leisure patterns combined with the dislocation of emerging into a post COVID economy.

Footfall, particularly in the evening, is well below historic levels and has contributed to negative perceptions around anti-social behaviour, in turn further limiting residents' use of the town centre outside core hours.

Given the above we recognise a need to invest and improve the built environment of the town centre, including with more green infrastructure. This alone will not be enough. There is a need to create more activity in the town centre, more reasons for people to engage once again with the heart of our Borough.

The Solution

- 01 **A programme to re-animate the town centre via increased permanent culture and leisure facilities combined with a curated program of events to appeal to all demographics within the communities of our Borough. This approach will also be replicated across the other key urban centres of the diverse Borough to enable the participation of all our residents.**
- 02 **Part of this will be series of revived outdoor markets, pop-up retail offers and performance spaces within the town centre but also at other key sites including the canal basin.**
- 03 **Making smart use of Council owned or controlled assets where a strong community leisure or cultural offer and benefit can be evidenced.**

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Jobs and Skills

Walsall has been steadily closing the employment gap with the wider West Midlands since 2010, but challenges remain on wages and skills. Our focus therefore must now move to better, rather than more, jobs.

02 Jobs and Skills

The Challenge

Walsall's strategic location on the M6 and its availability of scarce brownfield employment sites continues to make it an appealing prospect for distribution centres and other logistics businesses. These historically have mainly offered lower skilled and lower paid employment.

Whilst these are an important part of the employment mix, Walsall now seeks to attract, grow and retain more businesses and investment in higher-wage and higher-skilled sectors of the economy.

Walsall Council recognises that Walsall's children, young people and wider population must be given the skills, training and support to be able to participate in the anticipated growth across the diverse sectors of our economy over the next decade. Support for those most in need as well as apprenticeships and skills pathways must therefore be a key focus for us over the coming years.

The Solution

An integrated skills, apprenticeships and business support package is proposed as part of this strategy:

- 01 **Walsall Learns – a further expansion of vocational and apprenticeship training to build on existing lower skills interventions and to curate and establish higher level skills bootcamps and working together with a range of private sector industrial and service partners.**
- 02 **Walsall Builds – working with local and regional partners on Modern Methods of Construction to grow this key sector, build on existing business and knowledge assets within the Borough and to deliver in-borough projects from housing to education provision to commercial development.**
- 03 **Walsall Makes – a new investment prospectus targeting manufacturing and higher-value logistics investment opportunities and development sites across the Borough. Walsall has a proud heritage of delivering products and services that national and international markets need. This approach will ensure that our excellent businesses have all the advice and support they need to thrive and grow.**

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Brownfield Sites and Enabling Infrastructure

Walsall's brownfield sites can be a significant driver of future prosperity. The Borough's strategic location as well as access to the wider West Midlands labour pool is attractive – but unlocking these sites is challenging.

03 Brownfield Sites and Enabling Infrastructure

The Challenge

Walsall, compared to our neighbours, has an enviable distribution of brownfield sites. These are a rare and valuable resource situated in the heart of the major West Midlands conurbation.

Walsall has successfully attracted significant public and private investment to some of these sites, transforming them into engines of our economy. However, many remain vacant and under-developed and have significant logistical barriers to their economic use.

Many of these sites are privately owned, necessitating the council playing a facilitating role where control has not been possible.

The Solution

More resources will be provided to allow for greater and deeper dialogue with potential long term strategic partners and investors to address the complex needs of each site on its merits:

- 01 **Capital and people resources will be deployed to increase joint ventures and other innovative partnership delivery and funding models between the council and developers to share the risks of site remediation, preparation and redevelopment, be that for housing or employment.**
- 02 **Resources will be identified to compile and promote an investment portfolio for opportunities across the Borough. Part of this resource will be used to proactively reach out to engage with key national and international investment partners.**
- 03 **Market leading connectivity will be a priority within this strategy. Working with key partners such as WM5G, Walsall will aim to become a vanguard 5G Borough, offering scale-up opportunities for industry, adopting a ‘connectivity as standard’ smart city Borough wide approach, promoting gigabit fibre and exploring the use of the canal system for a Neutral Host Operator.**

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Net Zero

Net zero will play a significant role in the UK governments policy and funding priorities. Walsall has a 'moment in time' opportunity to capitalise on the growth of the low carbon construction, retrofit and transport sectors.

04 Net Zero

The Challenge

Walsall Borough has already committed to becoming a vanguard low carbon Borough and to reach net zero by 2041. Detailed plans to achieve this ambitious target are presently in formulation and are being informed by this Strategy.

UK Government and private sector funding is increasingly focused on net zero and sustainability. The challenge is to present a compelling argument for Walsall receiving some of that investment in what is an increasingly noisy and competitive marketplace.

Whilst Walsall has some key business and skills assets relevant to the transition to a lower carbon economy, there is a pressing need to for a step-change in investment and support in the Borough's business and skills base if the benefits of a low carbon future are to be realised.

The Solution

The Borough's carbon emissions are evenly spread across transport, housing & consumption, and industrial processing. These align well with the opportunities open to Walsall Borough:

- 01 **We will, through our procurement policies and housing association partners, aggressively support net zero growth sectors such as offsite construction and housing retrofit.**
- 02 **The Council and key public sector anchor partners are all pursuing an increased ambition on electric vehicle adoption. This extends to a wider regional dialogue on the transition to electric public transport.**
- 03 **We are committing to work closely with our manufacturers and logistics businesses on the greater adoption of new technologies and processes, and the skills required for these, that will allow them to meet and exceed carbon targets. We will work with existing firms in the automotive supply chain to help grow their business as the West Midlands establishes market leadership in the sector.**

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Housing and Public Realm

Walsall aims to be an even better place to live. Given its position and excellent connectivity to the rest of the West Midlands, there is clear scope for new housing development.

05 Housing and Public Realm

The Challenge

Walsall, in common with many other post-industrial regions, continues to experience considerable socio-economic challenges. Notably these are around health, housing, education and skills and mobility. These challenges are particularly profound in the West of the Borough.

Housing development would provide a positive use for many brownfield sites, but challenges persist around land remediation (due to previous industrial processes) and low market values.

There is a key opportunity in the private rental sector, but this has proved harder to deliver as most public sector funding has focused on the affordable and social housing part of the market.

The Solution

Walsall has performed well in attracting housing investment and has strong partnerships with housing providers committed to the local market and the local community.

- 01 **This strategy proposes the identification of further people and investment resource from WMCA, Homes England and DLUHC to allow the development of a wider range of strategic partnerships and innovative new models that can deliver even the most complex sites. This convening or partnership resource is particularly key, given the fact that often the Council does not control these development sites.**
- 02 **This strategy commits to maximising public realm improvements in other urban centres informed by the learning s within Walsall town centre. This will include the curation of increased event related activity to stimulate demand.**
- 03 **This strategy looks to build on new railway station development and improvements to Jn 10 of the M6 by improving connectivity within Walsall. This will include more measures for low carbon and active travel as well as a regional dialogue re bus routes in and around the Borough.**

Introduction – an innovative approach

A strategy in a time of uncertainty

The 2020s commenced with two of the most profound challenges for the UK in recent decades; Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The shape of the economy as we start to emerge from these events remains unresolved. Conflict in Ukraine, cost of living pressures and supply side constraints add a further layer of challenge and uncertainty.

Many of the structural changes to the economy that were already drivers of economic development in the 2010s have accelerated. Digitalisation and automation; decarbonisation and a fresh focus on the green economy; and attracting, retaining, and developing young talent in the face of acute demographic challenges, are three key examples.

COVID and the UK's new trading relationship with the EU have added complexity and further challenge to local economies.

For the Borough's communities and businesses there are increasing considerations around:

- Public health and wellbeing being much more prominent alongside economic growth and productivity challenges.
- Remote working runs counter to previous growth assumptions based on high density and urban agglomeration, albeit we have yet to see how this will play out.

- Changing behaviours on where we want to live, work, shop, and how we spend our leisure time – including a premium placed on space, safety, and green active living, and an emerging trend away from acquisition of material goods towards 'experiences'.
- The importance of foundational sectors, core workers, local supply chains, and the logistics of making complex urban living and natural eco-systems work effectively.
- Supporting those communities and households particularly impacted by the crises – whether in health and care, employment, or financial terms.

There are uncertainties around the extent of 'devolution' and the possible impact of policies designed to 'level up' parts of the UK.

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WALSALL COUNCIL
ECONOMIC STRATEGY
AND ACTION PLAN (ESAP)

Evidence base and voice of stakeholders



Walsall Council

The evidence led approach

Before outlining the strategy, it is necessary to understand where Walsall is now as a Borough in socio-economic terms. It is also key to understand whether key metrics were heading in a positive or negative direction.

A foundational part of the ESAP work therefore was to construct a comprehensive evidence base, the highlights of which are presented separately (Annex 2).

The evidence base is derived from:

- ONS and other official sources of data
- Real-time data, including Google Mobility
- A comprehensive suite of current and past strategies and plans
- Academic research on emerging economic sectors

The strategy is also the result of extensive stakeholder consultations with public, private and 3rd sector institutions as well as standing boards and committees. *These are listed at Appendix 1 for information but not to be disclosed as part of the publication of the Strategy.*



Key trends from the data

01 Overall

By most conventional metrics, Walsall has significant socio-economic challenges. This masks considerable geographic variation, from East to West.

04 Crime

There are both real and perceived challenges. Data points on this seem a little contradictory but efforts to reduce crime in the town centre appear to be working, and measures to increase footfall and activity should drive further improvement.

02 Employment and income

Employment has grown rapidly since 2014. The focus should now be on ensuring a full recovery from Covid, and on driving up wages through the development of better jobs.

05 Housing

Walsall's housing stock is generally in need of improvement – even in the most prosperous areas housing quality is just in line with UK average.

03 Skills

In order to fill these jobs, Walsall needs a skills offer which is tailored to emerging high-value industries in areas of existing specialism. It also needs to drive engagement with this offer.

06 Livability and health

Walsall has the potential to be much more livable – with a greater focus on amenities near to where people live. Active travel and better access to parks and the natural environment. should also improve health outcomes.

SWOT analysis of Walsall's current position

Strengths

- An enviable geography and well connected – M6-M5 interchange, M6 as an arterial route, a key part of the fast-growing Greater Birmingham and West Midlands conurbation
- Ready supply of brownfield development sites - rare in the context of major UK conurbations
- Niche expertise in growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing, logistics, construction
- There is a strong cultural memory and pride in the heritage of Walsall Borough and its towns. This can be leveraged to support bold place-making actions

Challenges

- Socio-economic data remains challenging particularly in the East of the Borough
- Quality of housing needs improvement
- Walsall town centre is seeing reduced footfall and activity
- Skills attainment are, when compared to UK averages, low
- Road congestion is (in places) acute and public transport has not recovered to pre-Covid levels
- Lack of major business clusters anchored by global players and a well-defined innovation ecosystem

Opportunities

- There is strong stakeholder appetite for Walsall Council vision, leadership and joint working
- Strengthened anchor institution collaboration could be transformative if there is buy in to the ESAP
- The under-exploited blueway (canal) infrastructure
- A diverse array of skills providers from Wolverhampton University to Walsall College, from independents to social housing providers
- Socio-economic data should underpin the case for greater financial investment and support

Threats

- Crime and anti-social behaviour represent an existential threat to the borough
- Competition for investment
- Poor positioning context – a lack of a clear Unique Selling Point (USP) or strategic clusters at scale
- There is a perception that issues such as the town centre and anti-social behaviour require critical intervention

What are the residents of Walsall saying?

The **We Are Walsall 2040** consultation exercise provides clear feedback.

Priority areas

- Increasing and improving housing stock
- Education and skills
- Economic opportunity
- Investing in built environment & green spaces
- Safety and security
- Meeting the climate challenge – “9 in 10 think it is important for organisations and people to work together to reduce impact on the environment”
- Town centres – whether in Walsall itself, Aldridge, Bloxwich, Willenhall, Brownhills or Darlaston, there is a desire for a more independent and diverse retail experience

**WE ARE
WALSALL
2040**

Key recommendations from WAW 2040

Regeneration

With the need for regeneration and investment given as the key reason for a lack of advocacy for the borough as a place to live, it is clear this is a top priority.

More specifically this falls into several areas, with one being the desire for more shops, restaurants and leisure activities and the belief these will make towns more pleasant for visitors.

Cleanliness and upkeep is another theme which any regeneration should include. The level of litter and fly tipping, as well as maintenance of parks, should all be priorities for improvement. These changes will be effective for both the attractiveness of the area as well as residents' wellbeing.

Investment in the area should also consider environmental impacts, and aim to make Walsall more sustainable. Residents think this can be done with better recycling, less waste, and a shift to eco-friendly transport.

Crime and Safety

Crime is given as a key cause of residents' reluctance to recommend the borough. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, along with better policing, is given as the main change residents would like to see in 18 years.

It's clear that residents often feel unsafe, so improving street lighting and adding CCTV would help put more people at ease.

Police presence is also cited specifically as something which needs improving to help people feel safe, and to try and deter antisocial behaviour and crimes.

Residents also want to feel more sense of community in the borough, which in turn would make the area feel safer as people get to know their neighbours and the police who serve the community.

Opportunities and Security

With half of Walsall residents disagreeing that children and young people in the borough have bright futures and opportunities to learn, play and grow, it's clear that this needs addressing.

A lack of activities for young people is one reason for these thoughts, so investment should focus on giving young people more to do, whether this is outside spaces, vocational courses or things like a gym or theatre.

The majority of residents believe it is difficult to find jobs in the area, and feel their financial security and resilience need improving. Regeneration itself should aim to create opportunities to boost people's feelings of security, through creating new jobs.

In addition to feelings of security helping people's mindset, it is also key that green spaces and the environment itself are protected, so any regeneration should also focus on protecting these and making them good places for residents of all ages.

What is Walsall's business community saying?

Stakeholder engagement with Council led boards, business associations, institutions and employers have delivered a clear message.

There is a widespread willingness to work more closely with Council and other public sector partners, possibly through the creation of new structures.

Opportunities for private sector inward investment into the Borough can be communicated more effectively.

Brownfield sites are seen as critical to building the business base but take a long time to be made available. Private sector partners are ready to work innovatively with the Council to bring these to market more quickly.

The condition of the town centre and other parts of the Borough's public realm are a major concern.

Crime and anti-social behaviour is a concern, both in terms of the actual recorded data as well as in terms of perception.

Most see the geographic position of the Borough and its connectivity in terms of road and rail networks as an under-exploited asset.

There is an opportunity to work more extensively in partnership with employers and skills providers on the higher-level skills agenda.

The low carbon agenda – particularly skills in electric mobility, low carbon construction and housing retrofit – is seen as important.



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WALSALL COUNCIL
ECONOMIC STRATEGY
AND ACTION PLAN (ESAP)

Priority Actions

- 01 **Town Centre**
- 02 **Jobs and Skills**
- 03 **Brownfield Sites and Economic Infrastructure**
- 04 **Net Zero**
- 05 **Housing and Public Realm**



Walsall Council

PRIORITY ACTIONS:

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Town Centre

Reimagining the town centre

The Council's existing Town Centre Master Plan is an ambitious approach to address physical town centre challenges.

This can act as a catalyst for new types of business and community ventures – reshaping the role the town centre plays in the wider borough.

The Connected Gateway initiative is one of the catalytic interventions taking place as part of this plan.

The reimagining of the public realm in the town centre is the remit of the Town Centre Master Plan. This strategy explores the opportunities for economic development created by these physical changes.

Shopping centre decay is common challenge facing many town and city centres across England – with many shopping centres similarly built adjacent to transport hubs.

Some have focused on providing a different purpose for shopping malls – for instance creating community hubs, free or discounted office space for SMEs or leisure opportunities. The Connected Gateway project is seeking to follow this path and is learning from best practice elsewhere.

Successful town centres need active curation. This is a considerable task involving both programming and accessing a wide range of funding support. To succeed it needs a consortia of local voices and to be coordinated locally.

Walsall Council is committed to convening and supporting such active curation.

The Town Centre Masterplan admits that retail will have to shrink. Building on the Town Deal Active Public Spaces scheme, there is the opportunity to increase green amenity and well-being space as well as **a need to undertake a major programme of green infrastructure to break up the 'hard' landscaping of the present central area of the town.**

Over time the 'over-sized' town centre's top and bottom have become disconnected. **A re-envisioned, curated and thriving mixed local crafts and foods market fit for the 2020s and beyond could connect the centres and provide a differentiated offer that can thrive.**

Making smart use of Council owned or controlled assets where a strong community leisure or cultural offer and benefit can be evidenced – particularly those in need of restoration and with the scope for a dynamic cultural or creative purpose – is an important opportunity and will be pursued.

PRIORITY ACTIONS:

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Jobs and Skills

Addressing the skills problem

Only 27.2% of Walsall residents (46,900 people) have an NVQ4+ or higher, compared to 28.8% in the Black Country and 42.8% across England.*

* Source: WMCA Adult Education Budget Planning draft – Sept 2022

Higher level (3-5) skills bootcamps will be curated by the Council with key skills providers and a range of private sector employers across Walsall's main employment sectors. These will include advanced manufacturing, offsite construction, green skills and retrofit, health & life sciences, food technology and others.

These skills initiatives will seek to better link our schools, colleges and skills providers in an aligned partnership that together delivers against the emerging skills requirements identified in WMCA Adult Education Budget Planning Draft include carbon emissions reduction, retrofit, building conservation, advanced manufacturing, energy efficiency, recycling, supervisory logistics and EV maintenance.*

The Sector-based Work Academies Partnerships (SWAPs) will continue to be supported as early-stage pathways along the skills journey. They will continue to be reviewed to ensure they are delivering the required employment outcomes.

By working more closely with targeted employers Walsall attract more engineering and skilled apprenticeships to the Borough, forging partnerships with institutions from across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

As part of this work there will be a clearer communication of the Council's proposition as a curator or convenor of skills offers. This initiative is responding to a real demand from employers.

Linking apprenticeships and skills programmes for the local population to site development and inward investment proposals is an increasing priority for the Council. It helps address social issues and also increases the cultural competence of the workforce.

Walsall Council will also make more use of WMCA's strong appetite, under the skills devolution deal, to support Walsall FE college and Wolverhampton University's Walsall campus joint initiatives with employers re higher level skills programmes, boot camps and in work progression swaps.

Doubling down on the future construction industry

Walsall already has an Accord Housing off-site construction facility and Walsall College's recently opened construction campus.

Walsall will aim to conclude a strategic partnership with the WMCA around its Strategy for Advanced Manufacture in Construction. This will open up options for significant innovation funding and sector-based inward investment.

Selecting a small number of brownfield sites for development using offsite construction and modern methods of construction (MMC) will further stimulate sector interest and activity in Walsall.

Walsall Council will closely work with existing providers of offsite construction in the Borough to facilitate their expansion, both in terms of skills development, site availability, accelerated planning assistance and access to capital.

Demand for retrofit is growing significantly. Walsall has an enviable opportunity to develop the skills and SME base to service this key need arising from national net zero policy and targets.

Walsall Council will convene and oversee an offsite construction task force with the aim of materially growing this sector over the term of the ESAP. This is an area where the Borough can demonstrate genuine, clear competitive advantage.

Walsall Council will support this taskforce with a targeted package of skills development, start-up and business support specifically tailored to offsite and modern methods of construction.

There are also significant opportunities to retrofit thermal envelopes to social housing flats. This is already occurring in the Borough but will be further supported by the Council as it provides skilled jobs and, through enhanced building performance, helps alleviate issues of fuel poverty.

A higher-value, more discerning approach to logistics and distribution

The logistics industry is important to Walsall, and it will always have a natural advantage given proximity to Birmingham and the M6 coupled with relatively low land values.

Walsall Council is aware of the challenge of delivering higher-wage, good quality jobs in the logistics sector. The Council is committed to respond to this by targeting higher-value and more sophisticated logistics operations.

There is, for example, the potential for a greater role for machine learning, immersive technologies and drones within the logistics landscape.

This strategy argues that the increasing scarcity and value of brownfield sites in major conurbations presents an opportunity for Walsall. A package of planning, skills and capital support will be developed with WMCA involvement to pitch to the logistics sector opportunities around an advanced logistics hub.

An advanced hub can work with local HE/ FE providers to establish demonstrator or pilot facilities designed at positioning Walsall as a hub for a more productive and value-added logistics sector.

Future logistics facilities will invest in cleaner vehicles fueled by hydrogen and CNG – creating fleet management and maintenance jobs – and autonomous vehicles, both within warehouses and (as regulations evolve) in the wider supply chain.

Birmingham has ambitious plans for road segmentation for autonomous vehicles which will align well with any test-bed facilities developed at a Walsall based advanced logistics hub.

Understanding the importance of the health sector

A healthy economy requires a healthy population. Walsall's health sector is tasked with delivering health outcomes but in so doing represents one of the Borough's largest sectors employing over 4000 people and with a £210m + supply chain.

There is a key role for the economy to play in addressing inequalities in our society. Walsall Council, our NHS and private healthcare partners, and our wider partners in housing, education, skills and business are committed to improving opportunities for those most vulnerable in our Borough.

Walsall, as part of the WMCA, is committed to good work and good employment practices through initiatives such as THRIVE. **We will continue to examine and challenge our own supply chains to meet best practice in maintaining supported and healthy working environments.**

The health and social care sector is also an important economic sector for Walsall Borough. It employs over 4,000 people at a range of skills levels, has a supply chain representing an annual spend of over £100m, and provides a wide range of employment opportunities.

To reflect the importance of this key sector to our economic prosperity now and in the future, it is intended that there be a close working relationship between the delivery mechanism for the ESAP and the Health & Wellbeing Board.

Links between the health sector, health outcomes and our actions on active travel, resilient communities, low carbon programs and the Boroughs amenity and green spaces will be strengthened to recognize and reinforce the mutual benefit of a more holistic approach.

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Brownfield Sites and Enabling Infrastructure

Brownfield development sites are key latent economic assets

Viable well-connected brownfield development sites are an increasingly scarce assets in UK conurbations. Using a range of tools to make brownfield sites viable is key to Walsall's performance over the next decade.

Walsall has a wealth of brownfield sites with potential for development, as shown on the adjacent map. There is strong appetite for such sites in the Black Country when they are configured to market need and made financially viable.

There are opportunities for large-scale brownfield site JVs and partnerships between the Council and major developers. There are a number of successes delivered using this approach, but more resources are needed to widen and deepen these partnerships.

Phoenix 10 in the Enterprise Zone at Jn10, the JV between Walsall Council & Homes England with remediation paid for by the WMCA Land & Property Investment Fund, and the Lovell JV at the former Caparo Industries site all offer useful learnings.

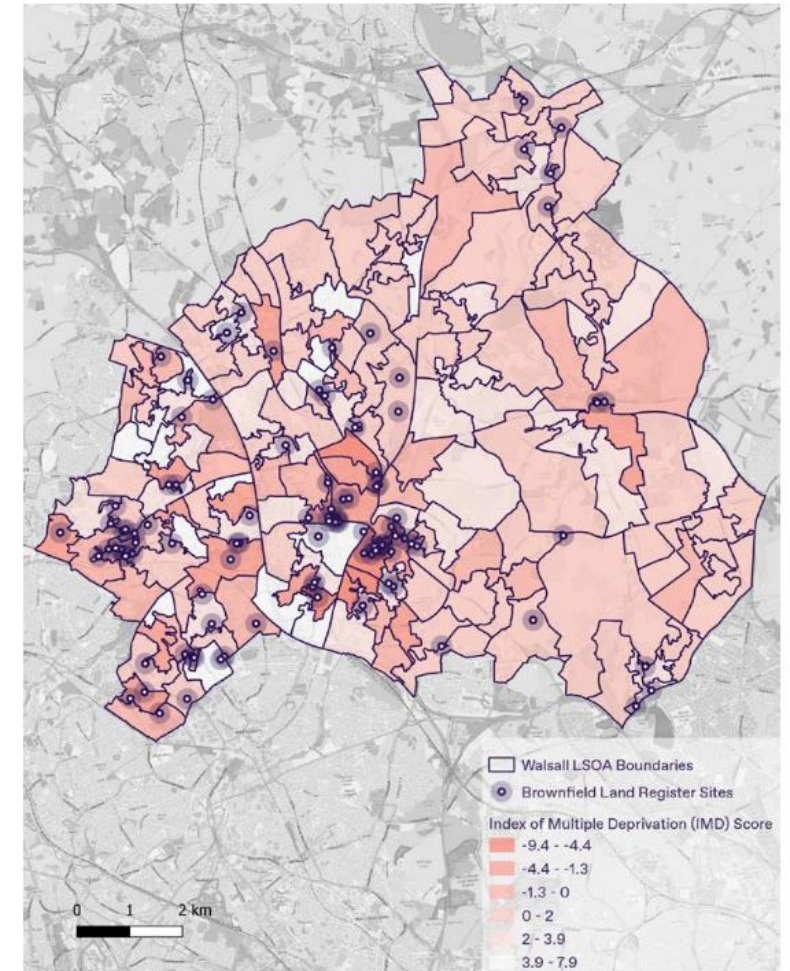
Similarly, the Council has taken a partnership building approach in the development of specific places.

For instance, the Willenhall Framework Plan which was put in place to coordinate housing growth and wider development of the town over a ten-year period.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities to go further and faster on brownfield site development. Many of Walsall's sites are close to the M6, and recent brownfield developments tend to have focused on logistics and distribution as well as housing.

Increasing land values open up a moment of opportunity to be more ambitious – focusing on regeneration opportunities that will genuinely engage local communities and create higher-value jobs. This will require engaging with a wide range of investors and potentially new ways of working.

Walsall Council will invest further in the marketing of the Borough's portfolio of brownfield assets as more investors see the value of these undeveloped assets.



Development briefs can be an effective means of procuring desirable socio-economic outcomes

Walsall Council's economic strategy envisages a more socio-economically aligned brownfield site regeneration agenda. In instances of Council control, development briefs can be a useful tool to deliver such outcomes.

Development briefs are widely used by Local Authorities across the UK and by a range of anchor institutions. Whilst they are not formally part of the planning regime, they have the potential to set the terms of engagement and give investors confidence that the local authority is willing to support them in delivering projects. Where appropriate (and it is not envisaged on all sites) development briefs should be aligned with the key tenets and outcomes envisaged in the Local Plan.

In the case of brownfield employment sites, key outcomes which can be delivered include apprenticeships, skills programmes and contributions to local infrastructure.

In the case of brownfield housing developments these outcomes will include the nature and sizing of the housing provision, the carbon efficiency of the housing, the use of local expertise in offsite construction, skills and apprenticeships and contributions to local public realm and infrastructure.



Gigabit broadband and 5G contribute to Walsall's attractiveness as a destination for inward investment

Walsall Council will play a key role, working alongside WMCA and WM5G, to create the conditions for large scale investment in connective infrastructure across the Borough.

Walsall has an opportunity to accelerate all forms of connectivity across the Borough. Such commitment to smart city solutions, enhanced fibre and 5G can deliver improved outcomes for businesses, the standard of service demanded by residents and enable the digital delivery of council services, healthcare and support for those most vulnerable in our Borough.

The West Midlands is home to the UK's largest urban test bed and density of 5G accelerators. These range from remote healthcare, assistive technologies to enable people to live independently in their homes, predictive maintenance on housing stock, skills delivery, to helping small businesses close the productivity gap.

Walsall will work with regional partners to compile a portfolio of assets and interventions to position us as a Smart Borough. We believe that there is substantial public and private investment capital looking for such a clear signal from the public sector.

The canal network in the Borough will be explored to assess its suitability as a route for the accelerated deployment of fibre as a backhaul network for 5G rollout.

The Connected Gateway project and other initiatives in the town centre will be accompanied by targeted interventions in broadband connectivity to ensure that both the public and digital realm improvements in the town centre move in lock-step.

Walsall will work with developers of all types of housing to examine the potential to build connectivity as standard into all new housing developments. Steps will also be taken to address areas of digital exclusion to ensure that the most vulnerable can participate in the digital economy.

PRIORITY ACTIONS:

01

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Net Zero

Use net zero to create jobs and prosperity

Net-zero is coming, and Walsall will embrace this sizeable opportunity. Public and private transport in the Borough will increasingly be electric. Housing stock, be it social housing or privately owned will be designed to emit less carbon. At the same time, the UK faces a massive skills gap to deliver this transition.

There are national shortages of housing insulation and retrofit specialists, ground and air source heat engineers, EV charging installers, commercial building energy efficiency specialists (BREEAM) and in the manufacturing of lower carbon technologies (including drivetrains for electric vehicles). **Skills to develop these will be promoted and supported under this strategy and as part of Walsall Council's commitment to be a net zero carbon Borough by 2041.**

Walsall is uniquely well placed in the West Midlands to deliver these services – with a long-standing heritage as a home of engineering expertise, the base of Homeserve, the presence of LoCal homes and with Walsall College building programmes re vocational training in many of these areas.

Walsall College's Advanced Electric Vehicle Technology Centre (AEVTC) due to open in late 2023 is a perfect focal point around which to base an ecosystem of EV skills and an associated EV infrastructure supply chain cluster.

There is a real opportunity for Walsall to export these skills – to the rest of the Black Country and the wider West Midlands.

Walsall Council's economic strategy will support the growth of these low carbon exemplar innovation and skills hubs.

The Council will also provide these hubs with pilot test sites to enable practical demonstrators that can be used to attract new investment and to establish the narrative of Walsall as an emerging low carbon exemplar, a Borough who is serious about leading the West Midlands to a lower carbon future.

Walsall's emerging low carbon assets will be a key part of our wider push to increase inward investment across the Borough.

Walsall's opportunity to become a low carbon housing exemplar

With low and zero carbon housing providers and suppliers and a growing complementary skills programme, Walsall has an opportunity to build a leading position in this huge growth market.

The low carbon agenda is a key area of global policy emphasis and offers significant opportunities around job creation, improving the quality of housing stock across the Borough, creating new skills pathways and apprenticeships, supply chain growth, SME births and to address critical socio-economic challenges such as fuel poverty.

Existing providers of affordable and social housing providers in the borough have advanced plans for pioneering low and zero carbon developments.

The Borough is already home to innovative leaders in low carbon housing using modern methods of offsite construction.

Walsall will work closely with SMART Hub to improve access to central government funding for home upgrade grants, retrofit and respond to competition funding.

Specifically, this economic strategy will make the case to government for core program funding for a retrofit innovation hub for Walsall in conjunction with existing Borough partners in the construction, housing and skills sectors as well as the WMCA Energy Capital Partnership.

Walsall will build a program of activity around an industrial cluster building retrofit programme with WMCA ECP and aim to access funding from BEIS 'Repowering the Black Country' fund as well as private sector investors.

The retrofit programmes (residential and industrial) will be procured in such a way as to emphasise the need for apprenticeships and higher level skills development.

Energy and Transport opportunities

Walsall Council is developing an ambitious net zero roadmap. To support that there are substantial amounts of public funding and opportunities to leverage in multiples in private sector investment, particularly in areas such as energy and low carbon mobility.

There are a number of exciting opportunities available to Walsall on low-carbon energy and transport.

A local heat network using Walsall Manor Hospital as the anchor load can offer lower cost local energy for existing and emerging commercial and residential developments.

Minewater energy has the potential to provide low carbon cost effective energy to communities within the West of the Borough who are suffering fuel poverty.

National Express' Walsall depot will require significant EV charging infrastructure as the fleet transitions to electric. The required grid connection offers an opportunity for rapid charging of other freight fleets and co-located taxi fleets.

Walsall Council will build upon the low carbon partnership opportunities with Walsall College's Light Electric and Alternative Fuel (LEAF) Vehicle Training Centre.

Existing low carbon mobility plans will be updated to reflect what is a fast moving market that has reached a commercial tipping point.

The links between Walsall Council's EV strategy, plans around active travel, the establishment of clean air zones and wider improvements to the public realm and amenity green space are all linked and are being reflected in the sectoral support for low carbon initiatives and industries within this Strategy.

In aggregate these initiatives form a strong indicator of Walsall's drive to present itself as a vanguard low carbon Borough.

PRIORITY ACTIONS:

01

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Housing and Public Realm

Retain skilled people and attract commuters

The quality of housing and the wider built environment is linked to Walsall Borough's growth – in terms of both people commuting to Birmingham and people working locally.

Housing represents a real growth sector opportunity within Walsall.

Walsall Borough has a dual nature in many respects. Most notably this relates to socio-economic differences between the East and West of the Borough, as well as its role as a commuter town to Birmingham set against its position as a hub of economic activity with a deep social identity in its own right.

Regeneration of the town centre is part of a broader “pushing of the line” from East to West. This includes a focus on regenerating places like Bloxwich, Palfrey and Willenhall.

The Council recognises the value of long-term strategic partnerships and JVs with land developers and housing providers.

These partnerships will be sought out and encouraged as part of this Strategy, to create a housing mix that best serves the needs of future residents.

There will also be a focus on the complementary provision of new leisure, green and amenity spaces that such residents value.

Such projects can attract Levelling Up funding, and are consistent with projects already taking place as part of the Walsall and Bloxwich Town Deals. They also dovetail with a wider focus on the construction industry and green skills opportunities across Walsall Borough.

The council recognises that getting the shape, mix and quality of future housing right is critical for many aspects of Walsall's social and economic future as it is inextricably linked to outcomes in health, education and economic activity.

Housing as part of a larger strategic narrative

Walsall has the potential to be home to a widening professional class working in Birmingham, the wider West Midlands and London. The latter driven by the huge Government investment in HS2.

Walsall has a huge housing opportunity, building on the growing commuting narrative to Birmingham, London and other destinations.

Young professionals and working families in well-paid employment could be attracted by Walsall's housing offer; perhaps initially in the East of the Borough and Walsall town centre, but then gradually pushing West.

Providing a housing and lifestyle offer to this demographic will be a viable and significant opportunity and strategic priority for Walsall.

This demographic will expect and demand a wide range of sporting, cultural and leisure assets, green amenity spaces, clean and safe streets and would both appreciate and drive a diversified local, independent retail, food and craft offer.

Meeting the needs of this demographic would be a good opportunity to justify and enable impactful public realm, retail, cultural and leisure investments around the wider Borough.

Active Travel & Connectivity projects can better link Walsall town centre with Bloxwich high street and key employment sites such as Phoenix 10 and other key high quality employment sites being delivered through the Black Country Enterprise Zone. The current joint initiative with Canal Rivers Trust can be used as a pilot to inform instances of canal led regeneration elsewhere in the Borough.

The Council will look at small site planning applications, with a view to these being batched and fast-tracked for trusted providers.

Some of these sites offer opportunities for a skills and training offer tied to innovative guided self-build programmes bringing together the likes of WHG, LoCal and Walsall College.

Unpicking the housing conundrum

Strategies and approaches need to differentiate between affordable and social housing vs the private rental sector.

This strategy sees housing as a critical part of a wider place-making and economic strategy and not just on a home by home or site by site basis.

This strategy advertises Walsall's approach to its wider investment in place – cultural, leisure, creative and green assets – which, over time, will move the end values of housing units past the tipping point where availability of public grant subsidy is no longer the key driver.

A visible, curated and sustained investment in greening the town centre and a cluster of cultural, creative and leisure assets will positively impact on rental values.

The private rental sector

This is an area of real opportunity and growth for Walsall. This is more likely to occur initially in North, South and East of the Borough.

The Council will review its marketing and communication of these housing development opportunities and look to build on existing experience of partnership working with PRS developers and providers.

Darlaston and Willenhall station led regeneration will, in time, improve values, in turn making some marginal schemes more viable.

CPOs of key town centre sites such as Station Street and Saddler's Quay add complexity and time but will be required to materially change the shape of the town centre housing market. These can be looked at in the context of wider PPP and JV approaches

For the immediate future, low-end values mean that the private rental sector will be operating close to the upper end of the affordable and social sector.

Affordable and social housing sector

Land remediation costs associated with many brownfield sites, coupled with low final values, have made Homes England grant funding key to unlock the affordable and social sector.

Walsall's area of housing shortage is less acute in this sector but ongoing investment – particularly in carbon efficient homes using MMC – will be actively encouraged.

There is significant scope to grow the local supply chain with respect to carbon efficient housing development and even low carbon commercial property. The Council is committed to working with a range of partners to grow this portion of the property market whether through new builds or the retrofit or wrapping of existing stock.

Delivering the Economic Strategy and Action Plan

Delivering the Walsall Economic Strategy and Action Plan

Through this strategy Walsall Council is committing to a stronger partnership approach to realising the opportunities available to the Borough.

There is merit in a greater, more meaningful and sustained voice and role for business. **An Economic Strategy board would be a useful mechanism to deliver the ESAP. This could either replace or be a new iteration of the present Economic Board. This is an opportunity to create a significantly increased voice and role for business.**

UK Government wants to work at scale. For that reason, **Walsall will put further resources in its working relationships with WMCA and the emerging Birmingham – Wolverhampton – Coventry economic axis.**

Town centre changes, public realm improvements, brownfield opportunities, site acquisitions and disposals, skills, and cultural creative initiatives will all be part of a more concerted communications strategy.

Procurement is a key tool to ensuring the most socio-economically beneficial outcome. Walsall Council will review its existing procurement approaches with a view to better delivery of strategic priorities.

There are opportunities to remove barriers to investment. **The Council will invest in more transparent and better communicated site investment opportunities.**

Best economic value considerations will take more account of wider socio-economic impacts.

Such an approach – alongside partnership working with key long-term investors - will allow for more effective site accumulation in the centre and ensure strategic regeneration opportunities are not missed.

Delivering the Walsall Economic Strategy and Action Plan

The ESAP 2022–32 is a directional document. It will flex as to emphasis throughout that 10 year journey.

Walsall Council commits to our work and the work of our many delivery partners being communicated transparently and laid open to the scrutiny of the citizens, businesses and institution of the Borough.

Creating a Portfolio of Exemplary Projects

The ESAP suggests significant new initiatives across housing, brownfield sites, sectoral innovation and skills. These are all investment opportunities for strategic public, private and 3rd sector capital.

Walsall Council will make the opportunity to invest in Walsall as easy and as attractive as possible. This will be achieved through greater transparency, enhanced communications strategies, partnership working, and a more aligned approach to planning and procurement.

Construction of a comprehensive investment deck and online investment portal, based on the Borough's brownfield assets but also with supporting financial and investment data on Walsall, will be an early action arising from the Strategy.

A proactive and aspirational communications strategy is critical to stimulate belief

Perception can be as important as reality. This is very evident around issues of crime and anti-social behaviour.

The interventions of the ESAP and the Economic Strategy board can stimulate a better future for the Borough, but people have to know about them, have to believe in them and have to see their voice represented in them. This starts with the Council and key partners.

A more effective dialogue during the period of COVID, coupled with the consultation process of We are Walsall 2040, has created a positive moment of opportunity in terms of communication and trust. The ESAP looks to build on this.

Appendices

- 01 **Stakeholder Consultation**
- 02 **Evidence Base**

Appendix 01

Stakeholder Consultation

Included here for information but not to be released as part of the strategy itself

Stakeholder consultation

Council Led

Walsall Council – Executive Officers (multiple departments)
 Walsall Council - Elected Members
 Walsall Economic Board
 Walsall Town Deal Board
 Walsall Employment & Skills Board

Regional Governance

West Midlands Combined Authority (multiple departments)
 Economic Intelligence Unit, Black Country Consortium
 Black Country Chamber
 Black Country Asian Business Association
 Black Country Consortium
 West Midlands Growth Company
 West Midlands Police
 WM5G
 Active Black Country

Business Community

Road Haulage Association
 Midland Chilled RAC
 Jhoots Paharmacy
 ZF Lemforder
 FSB
 Midcounties Cooperative
 Camirus
 Barhale
 Fortel
 JC Payne
 Birchills Automotive
 West Midlands House

Housing

Walsall Housing Group
 Green Square Accord / LoCal Homes
 Lovell Homes / Muse Regeneration

Education & Skills

Walsall College
 Wolverhampton University Walsall Campus
 The Vine Trust

Voluntary Sector, Communities & Health

Walsall Community Network
 One Walsall
 Walsall Healthcare NHS
 Walsall Children's Alliance

Appendix 02

Evidence Base

Included here for information but intended to be designed into an individual document and published separately

Socio-economics – employment and income

Employment levels were rising rapidly pre-pandemic, but fell more rapidly during the pandemic and failed to recover.

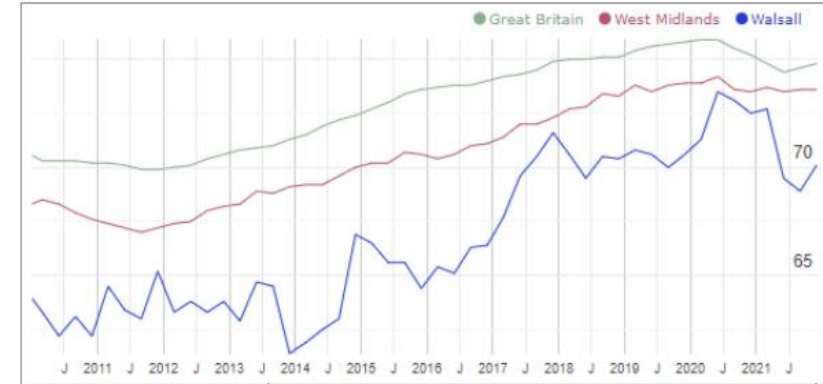
By 2020, Walsall had almost closed a sustained and persistent gap in employment levels below the average for the West Midlands. This is a massive success story.

Employment dropped markedly following the winter lockdowns in 2020/2021 but has since started to rebound.

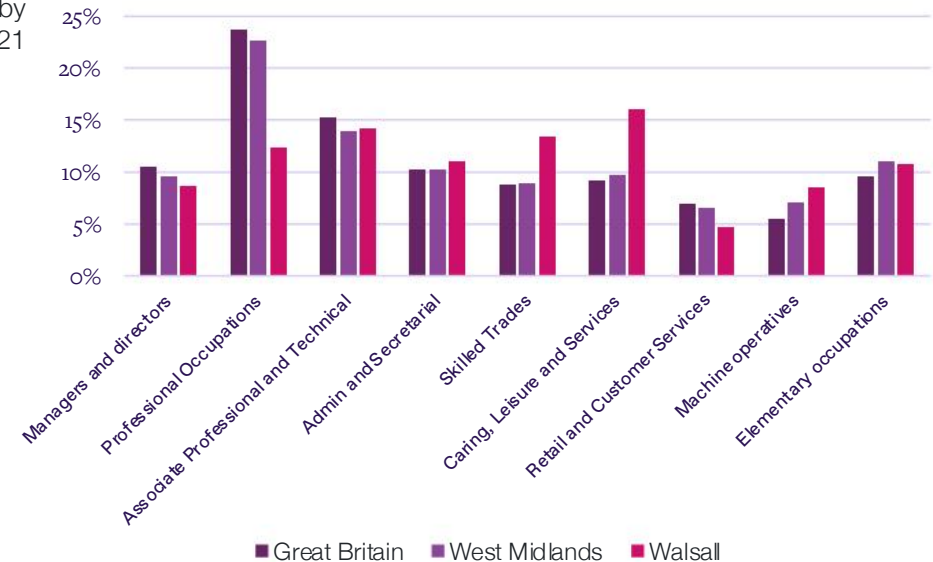
This follows a pattern seen in many other parts of the UK where the employment base is primarily made up of jobs which cannot easily be done from home – as demonstrated by the job mix in Walsall.

A key question will be whether the above average growth seen between 2014 and 2020 can be recovered.

Employment rate in Walsall, Jan 2010-Jan 2022



Employment by occupation type, 2021



Socio-economics – employment and income

Wages lag behind national averages and real incomes were already falling in the most deprived parts of Walsall before the cost of living crisis – affecting young families more than older people.

Walsall's median gross salary was approximately £3,000 below the English average in 2008, with this gap widening to reach £5,000 in 2018.

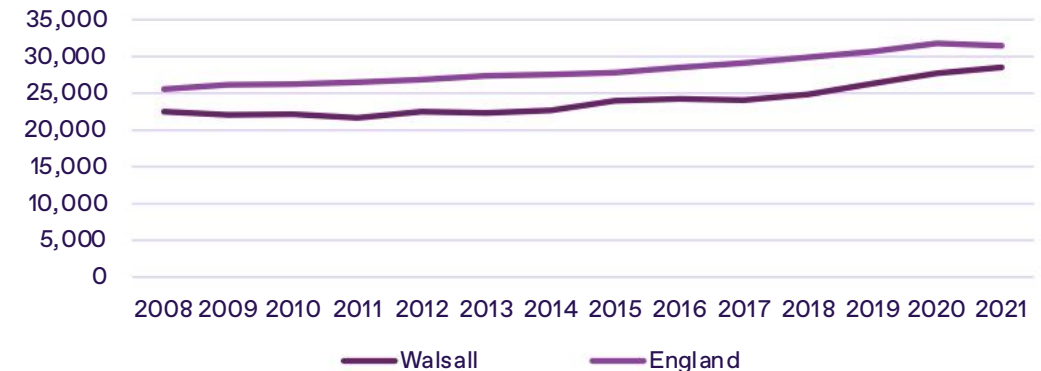
This gap has somewhat narrowed, with a particular jump between 2020 and 2021. This may reflect the labour shortages which have taken place in lower-skilled occupations, disproportionately affecting the caring, leisure and services sectors which forms a greater than average share of the Walsall workforce.

Narrowing this gap could be one of the key objectives of Walsall's strategy – seeking to raise the median annual wage income to at least meet the West Midlands average by 2033.

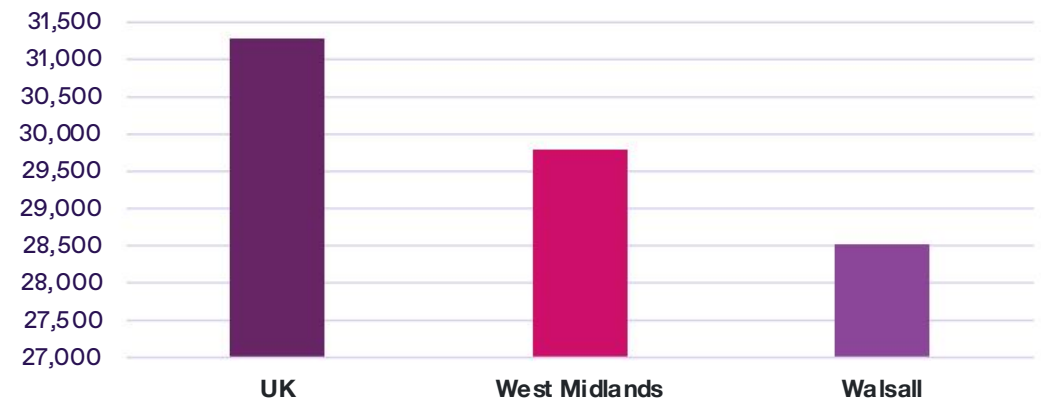
This could be achieved by changing the nature of jobs being created and retaining more skilled people in the borough to fill them.

In doing so, it would provide an improved income for families which the Index of Multiple Deprivation shows to be more vulnerable to lower incomes in Walsall than the national average.

Median annual gross pay (£)



Median gross annual pay (£), 2021



Socio-economics – skills

Walsall must address a skills gap. The proportion of residents with NVQ4+ is falling. Walsall College produces graduates with relevant vocational skills, but they can struggle to find jobs in the borough – and so they move elsewhere.

Walsall is 16 percentage points below the English average for residents with qualifications at NVQ4 or above.

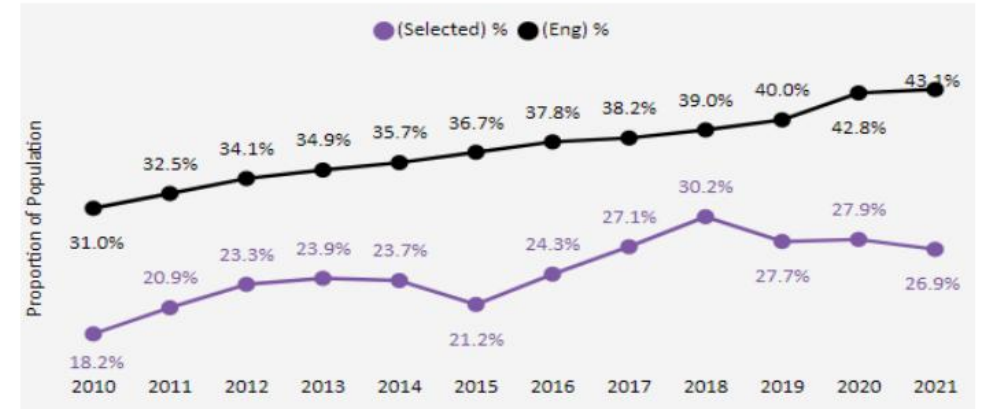
There was a marked improvement between 2015 and 2018 – with the NVQ4+ rate in Walsall increasing by 9 percentage points.

Since then it has fallen back by 3 percentage points, whilst the average in both the West Midlands and England has continued to rise.

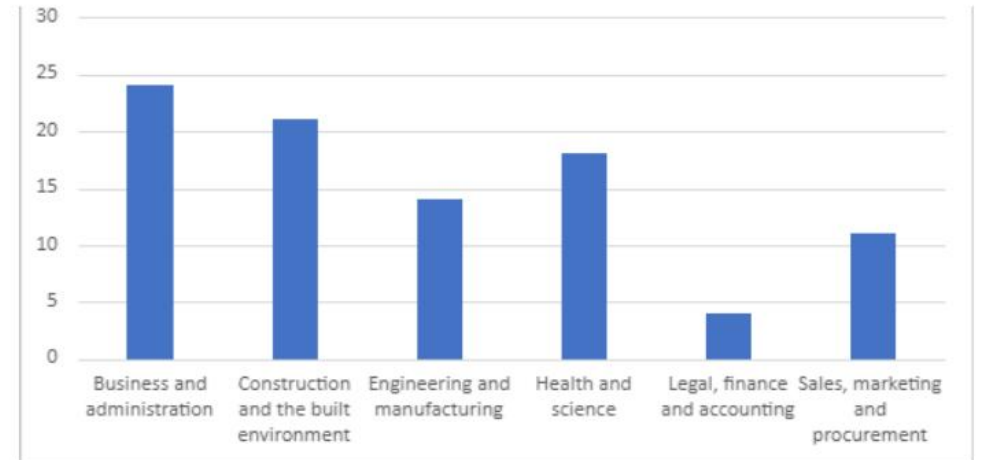
Walsall has the capacity in place to produce highly skilled people through vocational training – with Walsall College offering no less than 92 apprenticeship programmes.

Key challenges include finding the skilled jobs for learners after graduation and attracting people from around the borough into the town centre to study (due to poor public transport and perceptions around crime).

NVQ4+ aged 16-64 compared to England



Apprentice programmes available at Walsall College



Socio-economics – output and productivity

GVA per head is low in Walsall, which is lagging behind both surrounding local authorities and the national average. GVA per head figures fell between 2017 and 2018 and again during the pandemic.

In 2020, in comparison to the three other local authorities within the Black Country, Walsall had the lowest GVA per head, at £16,100.

When looking at the change in GVA per head over time there is a trend of slow growth, aside from three periods of decline.

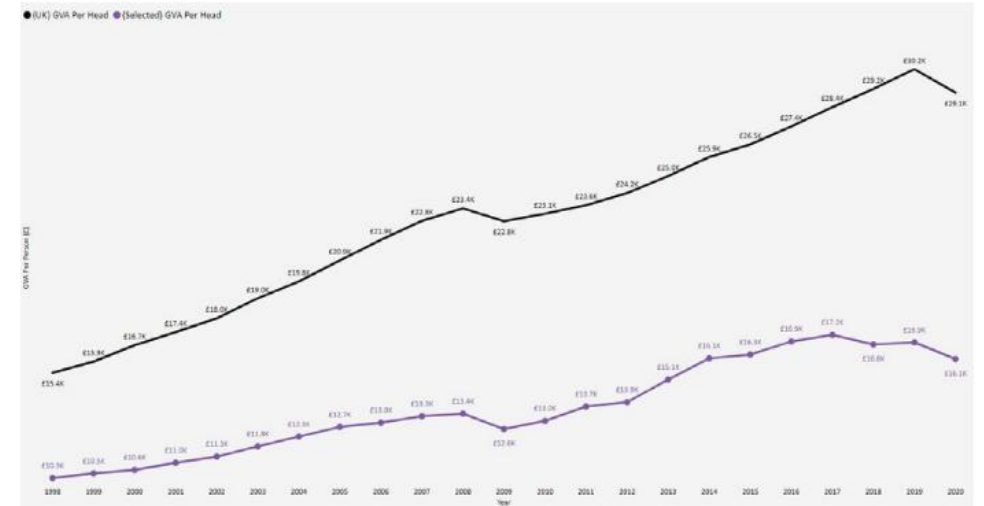
The decreases between 2008 to 2009, and 2019 to 2020 are matched within UK wide trends (relating to the financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic respectively). However, the decrease between 2017 and 2018 contrasts a UK-wide period of growth.

Overall, Walsall performs significantly worse than the UK average in terms of GVA per head. Therefore, boosting GVA per head is a key challenge for Walsall as we emerge from the pandemic.

Walsall GVA per head in comparison to other local authorities in the Black Country



Walsall GVA per head in comparison to the UK average



Source: The Black Country Intelligence Hub

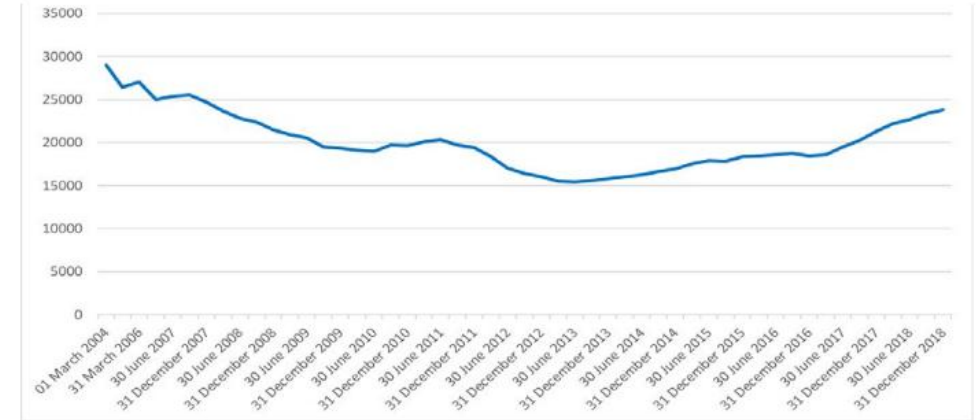
Socio-economics – crime

Walsall's crime rates have been increasing since 2013 following a long period of decrease. Incidents of recorded crime, and particularly violent crime, have increased since the pandemic.

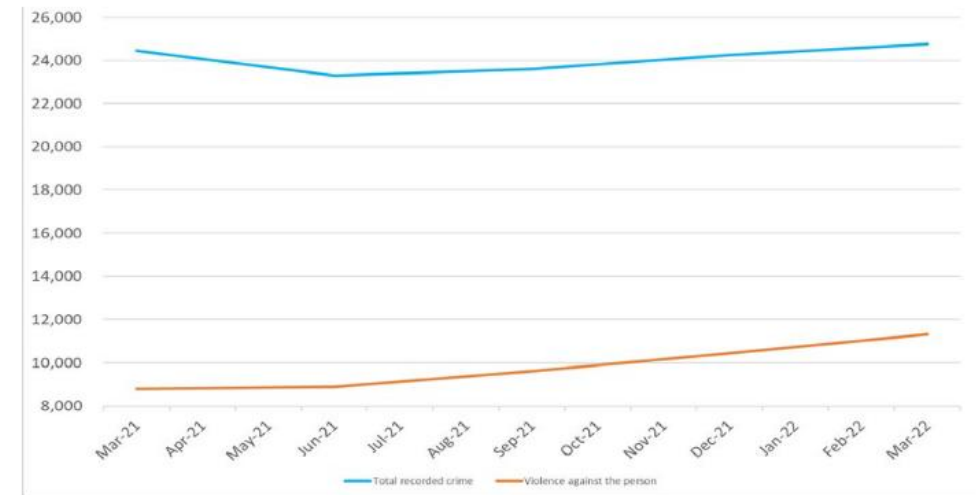
Walsall's crime rate had been in decline between 2004 and 2010, with further decrease until 2013. The number of incidents of crime have since increased by 8209 incidents between September 2013 and December 2018. This is a 52.6% increase.

Concerningly, since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, incidents of violent crime against the person has risen, worsening perceptions of Walsall as being a dangerous place.

Total crime in Walsall



Recorded crime in Walsall between 2021 and 2022



Source: ONS

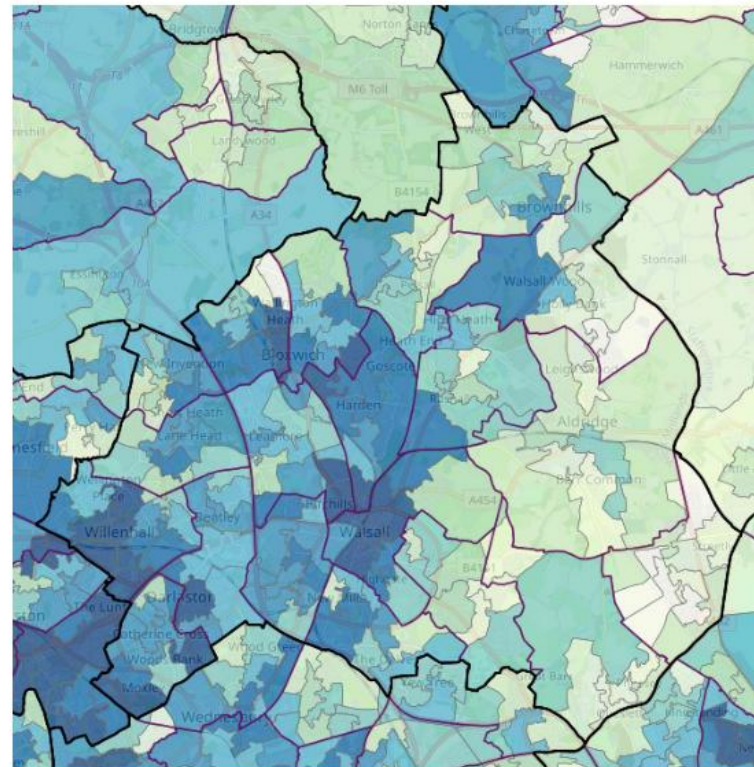
Socio-economics – crime

In relation to crime levels, there is a stark and long-standing East to West divide in Walsall.

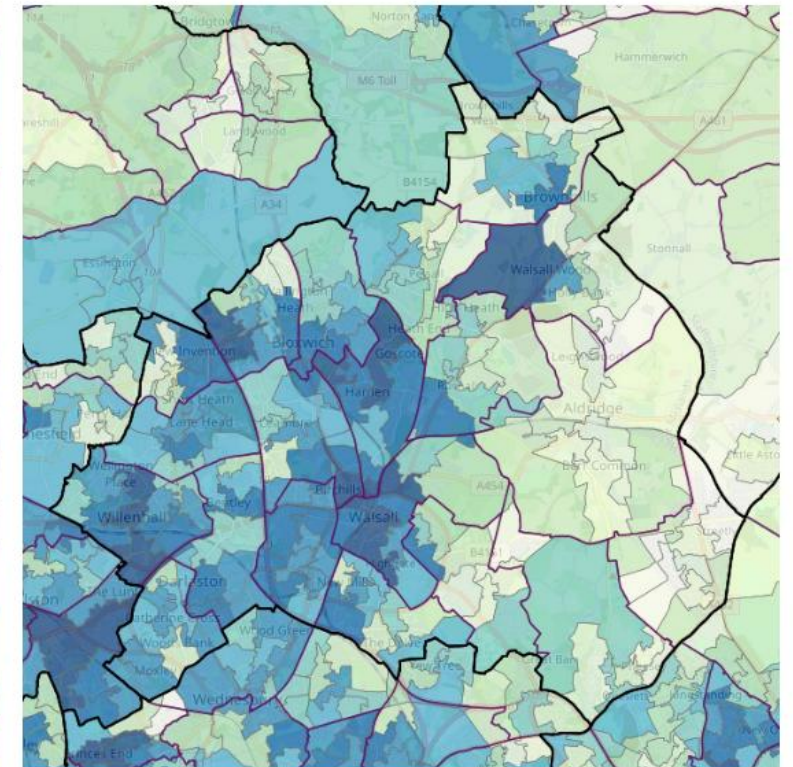
Crime is heavily and persistently concentrated within specific areas, shown on the maps in blue below. Walsall Town centre has high rates of crime alongside the wards of Blakenell and Willenhall South.

There is a stark division in crime between the east and the west of Walsall, with the exception of an area of high crime in the ward of Aldridge North and Walsall Wood which has worsened between 2015 and 2019. When comparing the two maps, it is clear that crime rates are persistent, worsening and long-standing.

2015



2019



Source: Indices of Deprivation

Socio-economics – liveability

Walsall's housing stock has grown consistently since 2001. Instead, the issue lies with the quality of existing housing stock.

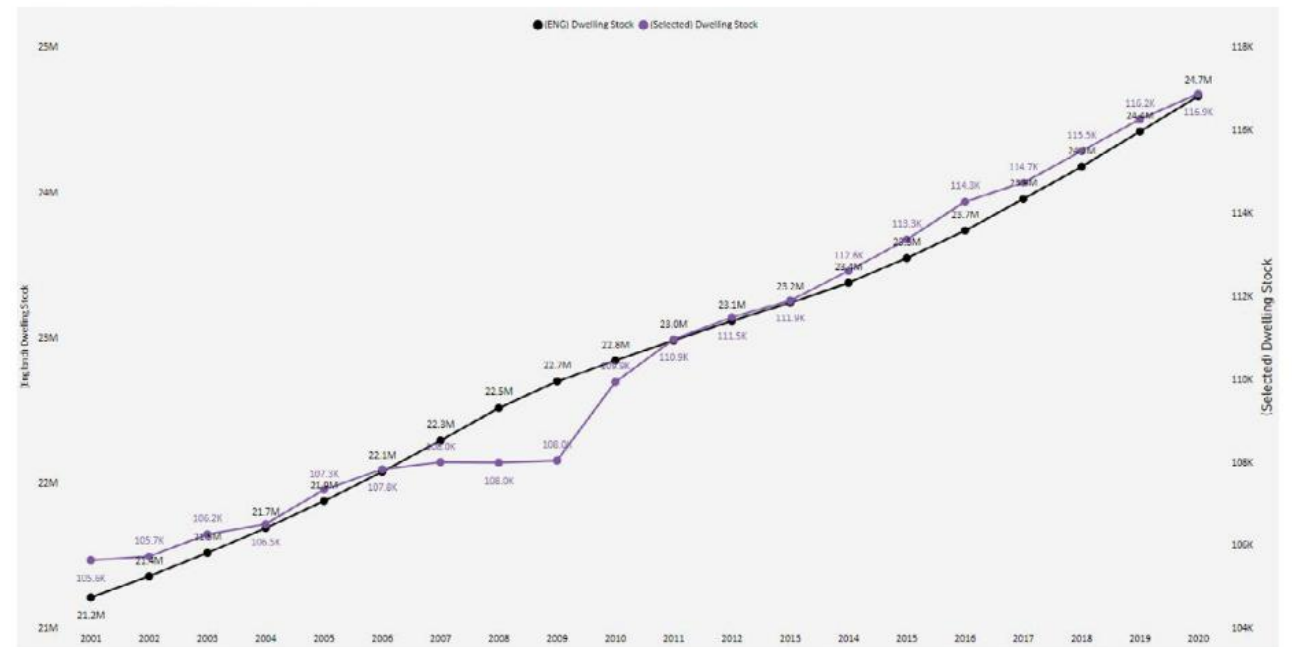
Walsall's dwelling stock has grown in line with or above the UK average since 2001, albeit with a decrease between 2006 and 2011. Between 2019 and 2020 alone there was a 0.5% increase in dwelling stock. This is a success for Walsall, which should be maintained moving forward.

There is a perception that housing quality in Walsall is poor. Issues surrounding housing quality are substantiated by the Index of Multiple Deprivation data.

In 2015 – the year when low-level data was most recently available – 20.07% of homes in Walsall failed to meet the Government's Decent Homes standard. This is higher than the English average of 19.4%.

In comparison to the immediately adjacent boroughs, Walsall performs better than Sandwell (21.88%) and Wolverhampton (21.47%), but worse than Dudley (19.37%).

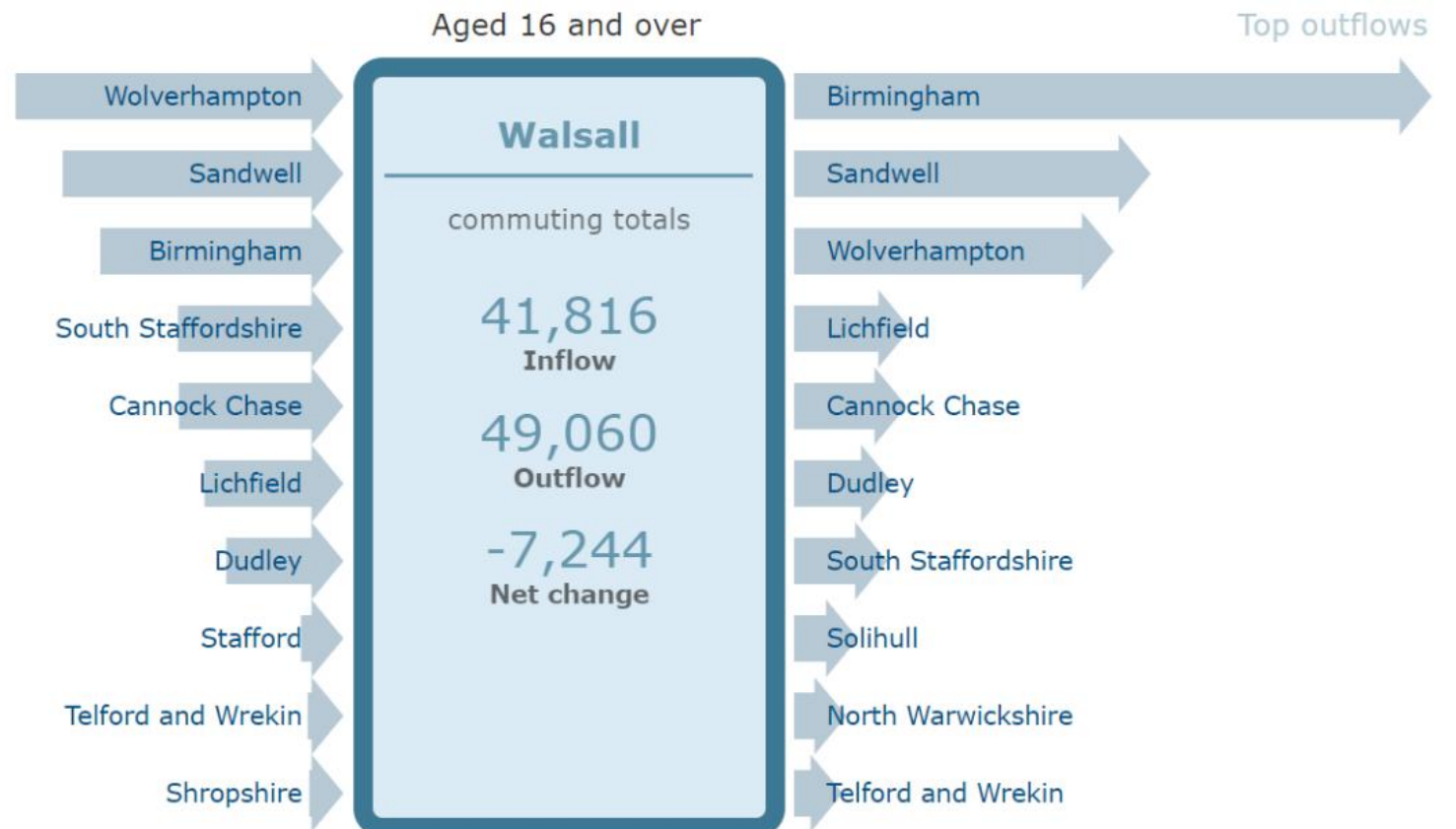
Walsall dwelling stock in comparison to the UK average



Source: The Black Country Intelligence Hub

Socio-economics – commuting patterns

There is a clear and consistent pattern of commuting into Birmingham, which seems to persist throughout economic cycles. There are challenges around public transport infrastructure which constrain this.



Source: Census 2011

Socio-economics – the bottom line

01 Overall

By most conventional metrics, Walsall is a “deprived” place. This masks considerable geographic variation, from East to West.

02 Employment and income

Employment has grown rapidly since 2014. The focus should be on ensuring a full recovery from Covid, and on driving up wages through the development of better jobs.

03 Skills

In order to fill these jobs, Walsall needs a skills offer which is tailored to emerging high-value industries in areas of existing specialism. It also needs to drive engagement with this offer.

04 Crime

There are both real and perceived challenges. Data points on this seem a little contradictory but efforts to reduce crime in the town centre appear to be working, and by increasing evening footfall this could be further improved.

05 Housing

Walsall’s housing stock is in overall poor condition – even in the most prosperous areas, housing quality is just in line with UK average. There is a significant opportunity to improve this – creating jobs and drawing in new residents in the process.

06 Livability and health

Walsall could be much more liveable – with a greater focus on amenities near to where people live and work to improve the natural environment. This could also improve health outcomes.

Business growth – sector strengths and specialisms

Walsall's economy has to date maintained historic strengths in manufacturing, and its location has benefited the logistics sector.

Sector Sample

- Manufacturing
- Transportation and storage
- Water supply, sewerage, waste management, and remediation activities

Specialisms

- Manufacture of leather and related products
- Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations
- Manufacture of rubber and plastic products
- Manufacture of basic metals

These are high-level sectors of the economy where business density is greater in Walsall than it is elsewhere in the West Midlands or England.

These are niche areas where business density is greater than both the West Midlands and England.

There is a case that automotive transmissions should also be included here – potentially not picked up due to data issues.

Business growth – future opportunities and risks

More so than any other, the manufacturing sector is on a “burning platform”. Increasing automation, coupled with growing cost pressures mean that without intervention job losses are likely in this sector through to 2040.

In order to turn this around and deliver growth, economic growth in Walsall needs to outpace the UK average by 2.75 percentage points between now and 2040.

The Black Country LEP’s economic model suggests that this can be achieved through investing in the remediation of brownfield sites and boosting the rate of investment by firms in Walsall.

The pipeline of projects currently in development will go some way to helping Walsall deliver on this vision – for instance with Phoenix 10 expected to deliver 1,100 jobs and the remediation of other IMI/James Bridge Copper works sites bringing several thousand more.

It is pivotal that Walsall capitalizes on these investments – using the new space to generate new investment and jobs, whilst demonstrating the business case for further investment.

Scenario	Do Nothing		High Growth	
	Change	Growth	Change	Growth
Advanced Manufacturing	-5,000	-38%	6,300	48%
Building technologies	600	10%	2,600	45%
Business services	3,800	16%	15,500	64%
Environmental technologies	-100	-8%	300	23%
Health	3,000	21%	6,900	48%
Public sector	-300	-2%	3,700	25%
Retail	-100	-1%	6,200	31%
Sports	1,000	40%	1,400	56%
Transport technologies	400	4%	6,100	58%
Visitor Economy	0	0%	1,600	35%
Total	3,200	3%	51,500	46%

Source: Oxford Economics Forecasting Model

Business growth – internationalisation and trade

Walsall's economy is poorly exposed to international trade – with exports as a percentage of the total economy running at around a third of the UK average. This suggests opportunities are being missed for Walsall's manufacturers and service providers.

Some of Walsall's most successful industries are in highly exportable sectors – particularly advanced manufacturing. They may not be exporting for myriad reasons, including:

- A lack of competitiveness
- Dependence on a small number of customers (such as JLR for automotive supply firms)
- A lack of awareness or confidence

Extensive academic evidence suggests that exporting makes firms more competitive and profitable. Working with local manufacturers and DIT to expand the international customer base of firms in Walsall could reap dividends.

The following table shows the breakdown of exports and imports by EU and Non - EU trade for the Black Country and the local authorities in 2020 (figures are in millions):

	Dudley	Sandwell	Walsall	Wolverhampton	Black Country
Exports - EU	£287	£429	£307	£308	£1,331
Exports - Non-EU	£219	£319	£157	£747	£1,442
Exports Total	£506	£748	£464	£1,055	£2,773
Imports - EU	£405	£637	£326	£344	£1,712
Imports -Non-EU	£465	£677	£304	£736	£2,182
Import -Total	£870	£1,314	£630	£1,080	£3,894
Balance	-£364	-£566	-£166	-£25	-£1,121

Source: Black Country Consortium Economic Intelligence Unit

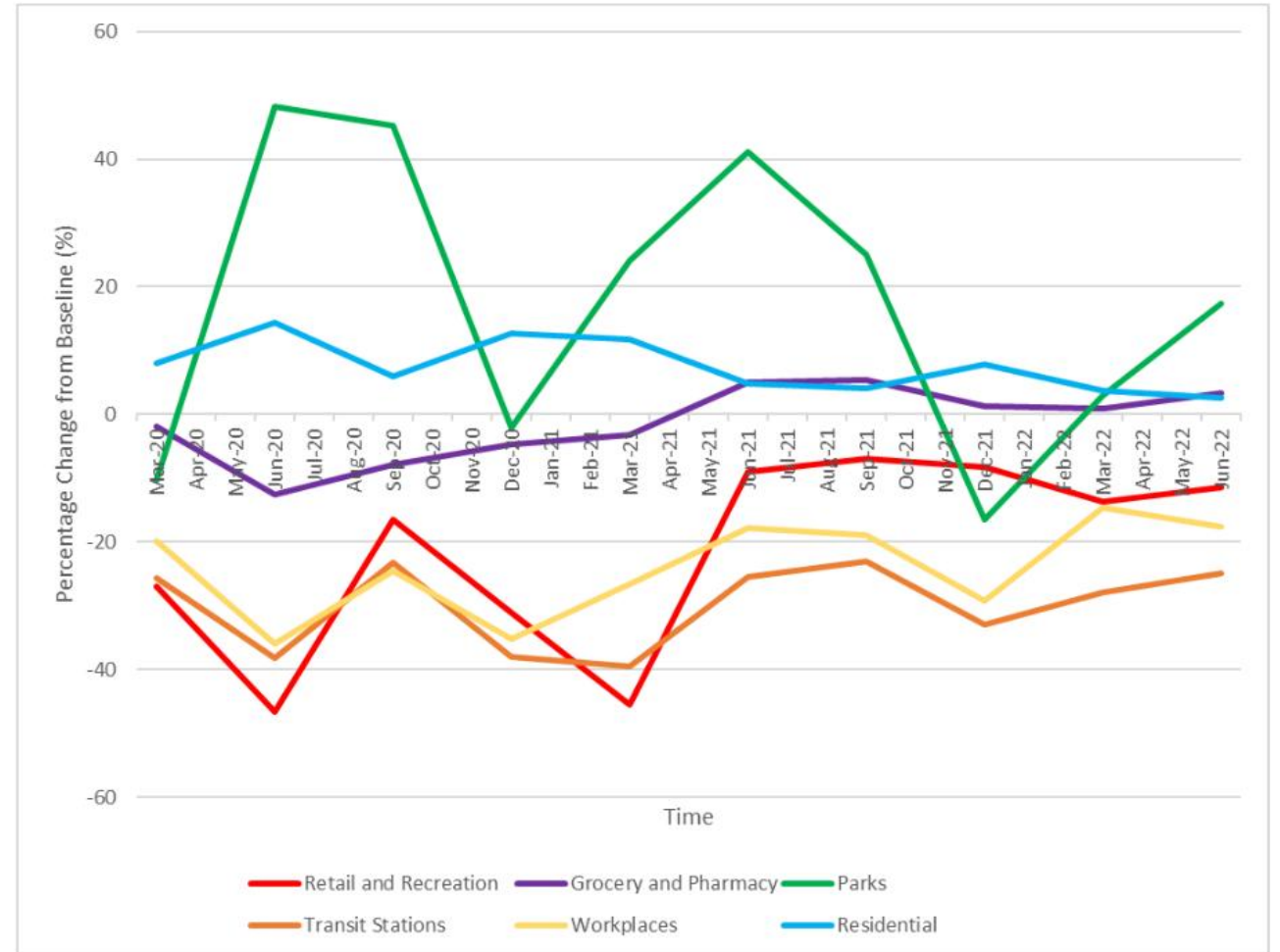
Covid-19 recovery and town centre vibrancy

Covid-19 has had an enduring impact on community mobility.

Walsall experience shifts in footfall broadly in line with national averages – people spent more time at home, and parks became significantly more popular during summer months when compared to a pre-Covid baseline.

The retail and leisure sectors reached a new equilibrium of around 10% lower footfall than pre-Covid in June 2021 – and footfall rates have been stagnant since.

Footfall in workplaces and public transport remains persistently around 20% below pre-Covid averages – presenting challenges for office space demand and for fare revenue.



Source: Google

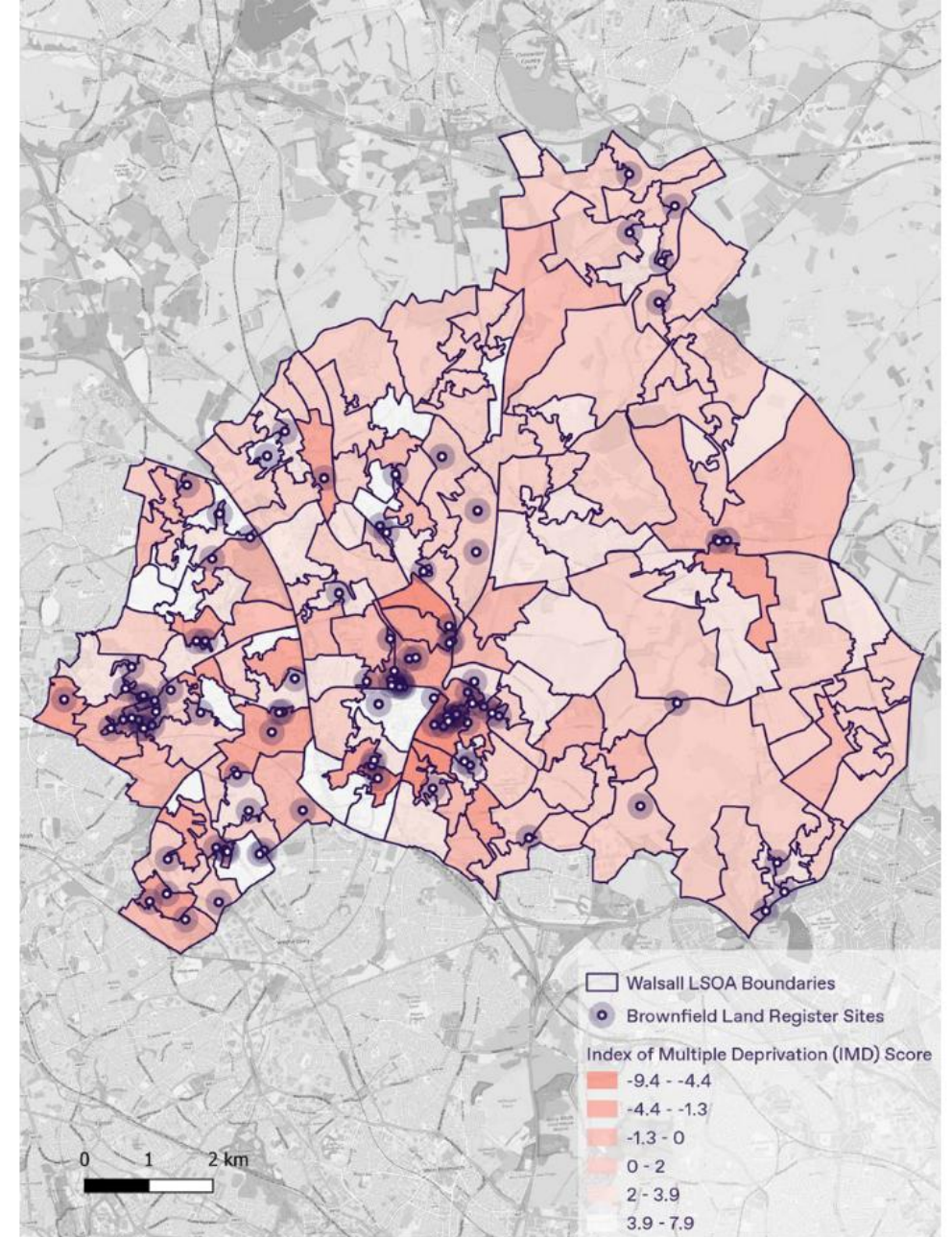
Brownfield sites

There remains massive potential for brownfield development to drive wider regeneration.

Walsall has dozens of brownfield sites with potential for development, as shown on the adjacent map.

These overlap with some of Walsall's most deprived places.

Many of these are close to the M6, and recent brownfield developments tend to have focused on logistics and distribution.





Walsall Council
