

Location and Context

Character Area is sandwiched between the Coventry-Bedworth railway line and the western section of Coventry's inner ring road. The Character Area is predominantly residential with many amenities including a number of schools.

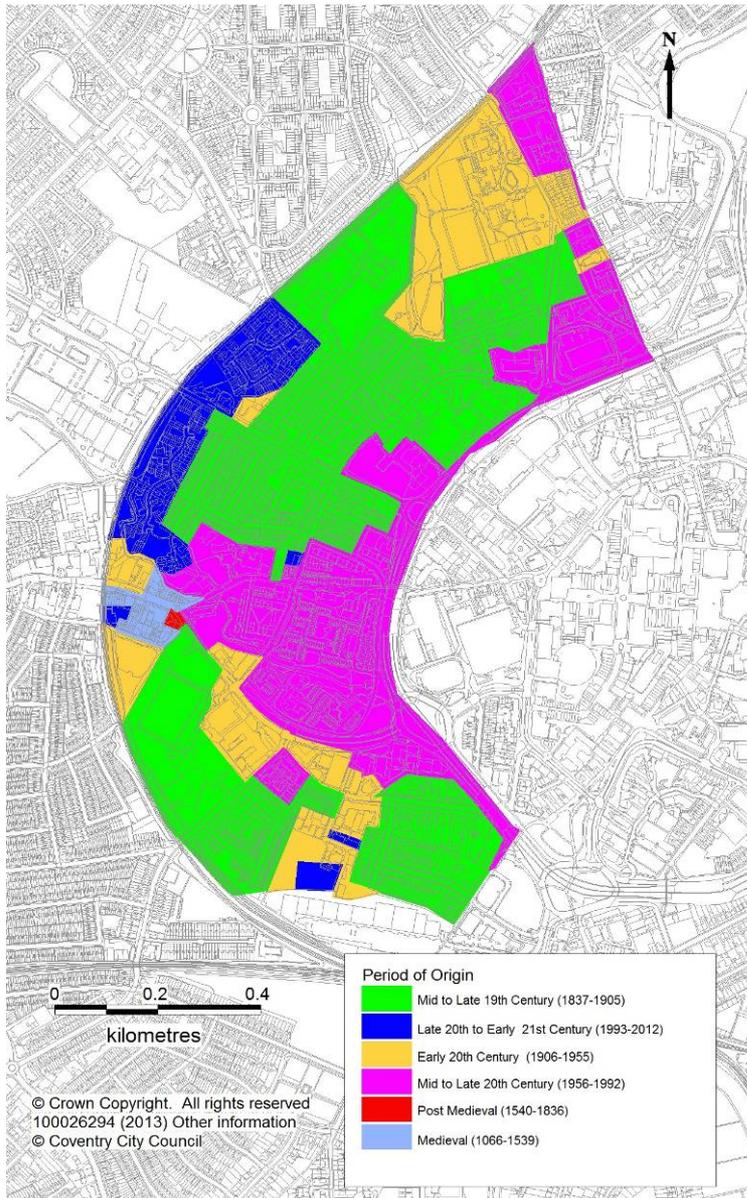
Heritage Designations in the Character Area

Scheduled Ancient Monuments: 1
 Archaeological Constraint Areas: 14
 Listed Buildings: 10
 Locally Listed Buildings: 40
 Conservation Areas: 3
 Registered Parks and Gardens: 0

Historic Development

There may have been some occupation of this area during the Saxon period and archaeo-environmental evidence points to coppicing of woodland to the east of the Character Area during this period. By the late medieval period Spon End, Upper Spon Street and Spon Street had become one of the principal routes to and from the city. Plots of land by the roadside were developed and several 15th Century listed timber framed buildings still remain today despite extensive redevelopment, as well as the remains of the 14th Century Chapel of St. James and St. Christopher. Significant medieval buildings which have not survived include an inn called 'The Cock' or 'Sign of the Unicorn' which was probably constructed in the 15th century and was demolished between 1936-1949, and a mill dating to at least the 15th century. Burton's Mill was located where the River Sherbourne passes by Upper Spon Street. Another medieval mill, known as Hill Mill and Naul's Mill, was located in the north of the Character Area on the Radford Brook. This was a fulling mill and dated from the 12th century. It was demolished between 1888 and 1905 but gives its name to the Conservation Area that covers this part of the city. Other settlement evidence comes from documentary references to Crow Moat, a moated manor house which was located north of The Butts. It was still occupied in 1416 but may have gone out of use by the mid-16th Century.

Documentary evidence indicates that by the 16th Century, if not earlier, much of the land to the north and south of Spon End was enclosed. Apart from the redevelopment of building



plots along Spon Street and Spon End, the landscape probably changed very little until the 19th Century. At this time there was rapid expansion of the city due to the success of the ribbon weaving and watchmaking industries. The 1849 Tithe Survey of the parishes of St. Michael and Holy Trinity describes much of the eastern third of the Character Area as 'land within the town', suggesting that it was settlement by this date. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1:2,500 scale) of 1888 which depicts terraced housing, including new development along Radford Road, Radford Street, Middleborough Street and Grosvenor Road, and some amenities such as schools and cricket pitches. Much of the land in the west of the Character Area remained agricultural. Between the late 19th Century and 1914 these areas were gradually in-filled with streets of terraced housing to house workers in the emerging cycle

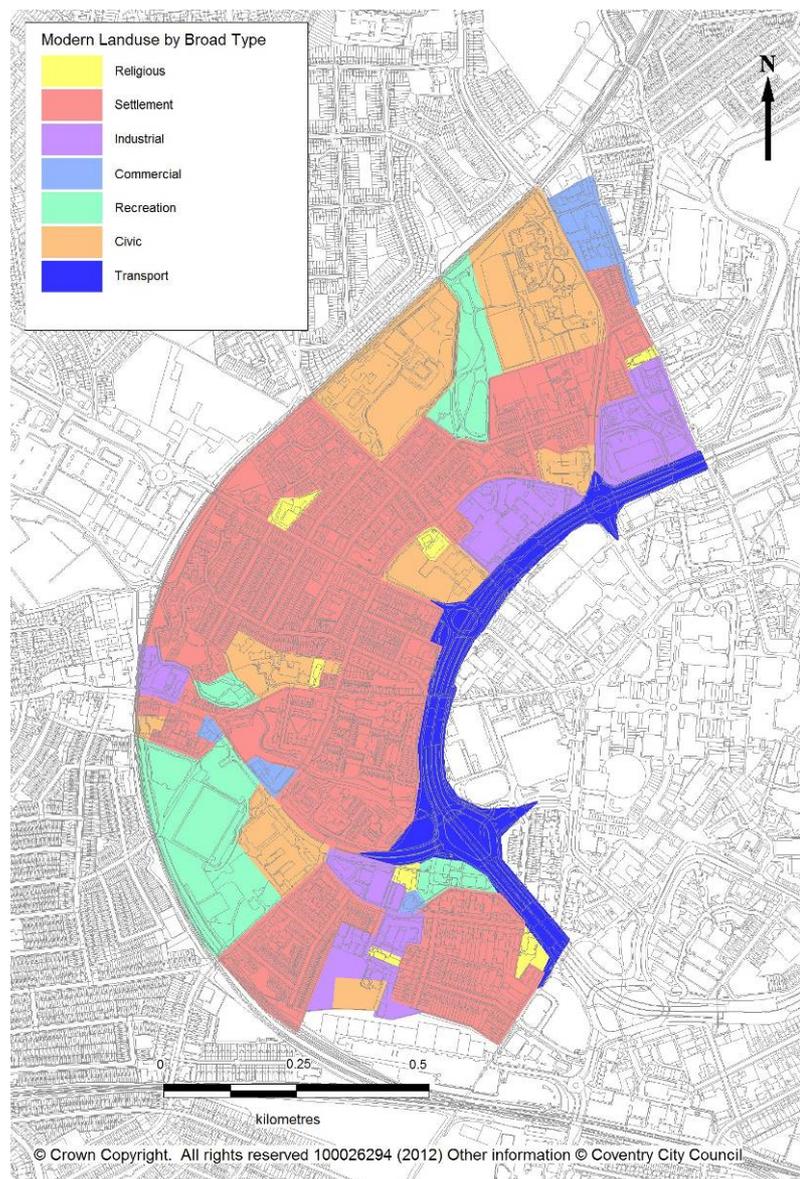
and car industries. By 1905 much of the Character Area was given over to residential use. In contrast to other residential areas in the city centre there was much less industry integrated with the housing, although a large gas works was present to the north of Upper Hill Street and a machine tool works east of Upper York Street. Much of the street layout remains the same today, with the exception of roads affected by the development of the ring road (on the eastern border of the Character Area and the Butts Road area) and also the area between the River Sherbourne and Upper Spon Street. The 19th/early 20th Century housing located to the south of Upper Spon Street was demolished and comprehensively re-developed by the City Council from the 1950's onwards, principally with flats in a mix of low level blocks and high-rise tower blocks which remain today.

Modern Character

Despite being located next to the city centre, the Character Area is segregated by the ring road, which creates a highly defined boundary. The division is exacerbated by particularly poor access links from one side of the ring road to the other at this location. The Character Area is further isolated by the rail way line to the west. Consequently, the Character Area feels very distinct from its surroundings.

The Character Area incorporates the Spon End Conservation Area, which includes a number of 14th and 15th Century listed buildings and several later locally listed buildings such as the 19th Century Spon Gate School and the Malt Shovel Public House. The Conservation Area is bordered to the west by 'The Arches' railway viaduct which is also locally listed. The character of Spon End, which has developed gradually over hundreds of years, contrasts with much of the surrounding area, which was deliberately planned, laid out over a relatively short period of time and consequently is homogenous. It comprises housing built between circa 1850 and 1900. Much of the northern part of the Character Area is covered by the Naul's Mill Conservation Area which incorporates large areas of 19th Century housing. The properties comprise small terraced houses with a small

set-back from the pavement and small gardens to the rear. Some of the terraces are up to 24 houses long and are very uniform in design. They are arranged in a grid pattern with houses backing on to each other and built to the corners of the street. The front gardens of the properties are bounded by low brick walls. Pavements are narrow with no grass verges or trees and cars are parked along the streets. The houses have decorative features including bay windows, recessed front doors, dentified brick features under roof eaves and plainly styled door and window lintels. Some of the houses, such as those of Norfolk Street, also have sizable rear workshop wings that would have been used for watchmaking. The



housing along the Holyhead Road and Barras Lane is grander with extensive terracotta detailing on the front elevations. The narrow, straight streets and uniform architecture create channelled views.

More recent developments built between 1950 and 1975 are the result of comprehensive re-development programmes. Early developments like the 1950's Wellington Gardens are low-level and low density, built of pale brick with copper roofs and are set within generous lawned areas. Contrastingly, the Spon End estate next door is built of concrete and is of a far higher density with far less green space.

In general, this Character Area comprises of dense housing with little provision for green space in the residential areas. This area is well served with amenities including many of schools, shops, places of worship and sports grounds.



Middleborough Road near Naul's Mill Park.

Geology and Topography

The Character Area overlies sandstone to the north and argillaceous rocks (sedimentary rock formed by clay deposits) with sandstone and conglomerate to the south. There is an alluvium deposit along the course of the river which comprises of sand with clay and gravel. The topography gradually rises from 85m to the south of the Character Area, to 100m above sea level to the north.