



## 03 | Spatial Audit

## 03 | Spatial Audit

This section analyses the various urban components of Solihull Town Centre including; heritage, public realm, land use, activities and movement. The section aims to provide an evidence base which informs and underpins development of the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan.

### 3.1 Heritage

Patterns of development over time as recorded in the historical mapping show a number of fixed points (St Alphege Church) and considerable change in the development of the Town Centre over the last two hundred years. Dating back to the 12th Century, Solihull originated as a small, successful market town, which flourished until the 14th Century when it suffered ongoing decline due to poor harvests and competition from other towns. Solihull continued as a quiet village until the 18th Century, when the introduction of turnpike roads and more importantly the railway in the mid-19th Century stimulated new growth. This improved transport network helped to establish Solihull as a successful commuter town, providing an attractive place to live for wealthy professionals working in Birmingham.

Figure 3.1 opposite illustrates the evolution of the town from a traditional village high street to a significant town; demonstrating visually, how the development of the town's movement networks over time have influenced land use arrangement and created physical barriers for pedestrians and cyclists:

#### Solihull 1789

This image illustrates how the extent of the settlement is largely contained along the High Street and Warwick Road, demonstrating the traditional linear character of its market town origins. The High Street terminates at Malvern Park where St Alphege church forms the eastern edge of town.

#### Solihull 1945

This mapping illustrates how the introduction of the railway in the mid-19th Century now forms the southern edge of town, with Solihull Train Station located just to the west of the town centre and connected via Station Road. The arrival of the railway caused a significant change in the town's character as it opened access for commuters to Birmingham which commenced a period of suburbanisation. Due to the station location, settlement and activity in the town centre has over time shown a gradual shift away from St Alphege Church and further west. New settlement has expanded into Malvern Park, which has also merged with Brueton Park creating a linear green space on the eastern fringe of the town centre.

#### Solihull 1999

Solihull again underwent considerable change over the last 50 years, evolving from a wealthy suburban neighbourhood into a commercial centre. This evolution comes as a result of Solihull's accessible location at the centre of the national motorway and rail network, and its close proximity to Birmingham International Airport. It was over this fifty year period that Solihull's population grew substantially, advancing the town from Solihull Rural District to Solihull Metropolitan Borough created in 1974. This image illustrates the impact of the introduction of Lode Lane to the west of the town centre and also the conversion of the Lode Lane and Blossomfield Road junctions into roundabouts. Land to the south of the railway becomes Tudor Grange Park with the town expanding south into the countryside. Interestingly a large area in the heart of the centre is now void due to the construction of the new Touchwood Shopping Centre. In addition, a large area of housing has been removed to the south of Warwick Road and replaced with Mell Square shopping centre, which retains the historic street pattern. The mapping also shows the development of a number of large scale blocks located to the north and south of the town centre, which are poorly integrated and further fragment the previously tight urban grain.



View of St Alphege Church from the High Street.



Solihull 1789



Solihull 1945



Solihull 1999



Solihull 2013

**Solihull 2013**

Lastly, the latest mapping shows Solihull as it is today, following the development of Touchwood which forms the new heart of the town centre.

- Settlement
- Parkland



Solihull School (founded 1560)

Figure 3.1: Charting Solihull's historical evolution



### 3.2 Solihull Conservation Area

Solihull Conservation Area is located at the heart of the town centre and roughly follows the High Street and Poplar Road as indicated in Figure 3.2. The conservation area contains all of the listed buildings within the study area which foster the historic character associated with Solihull. These include:

- The Church of Saint Alphege (Grade I Listed);
- War Memorial to the front of the Church of Saint Alphege (Grade II Listed);
- A cluster of 15 listed buildings along the eastern end of the High Street (Grade II and Grade II\* Listed);
- The Roman Catholic Church of Saint Augustine of Canterbury, located on the corner of Herbert Road / Station Road (Grade II Listed); and
- A cluster of 5 listed buildings located to the north of the Warwick Road/Poplar Road junction (Grade II Listed).

Other notable listed buildings just outside of the study include: parts of Solihull School (Chatwin Building and Bradford House, Grade II Listed) which front onto Warwick Road, just north of the study area; and The old Grammar School (Grade II\* Listed) located at the Park Road/New Road Junction.

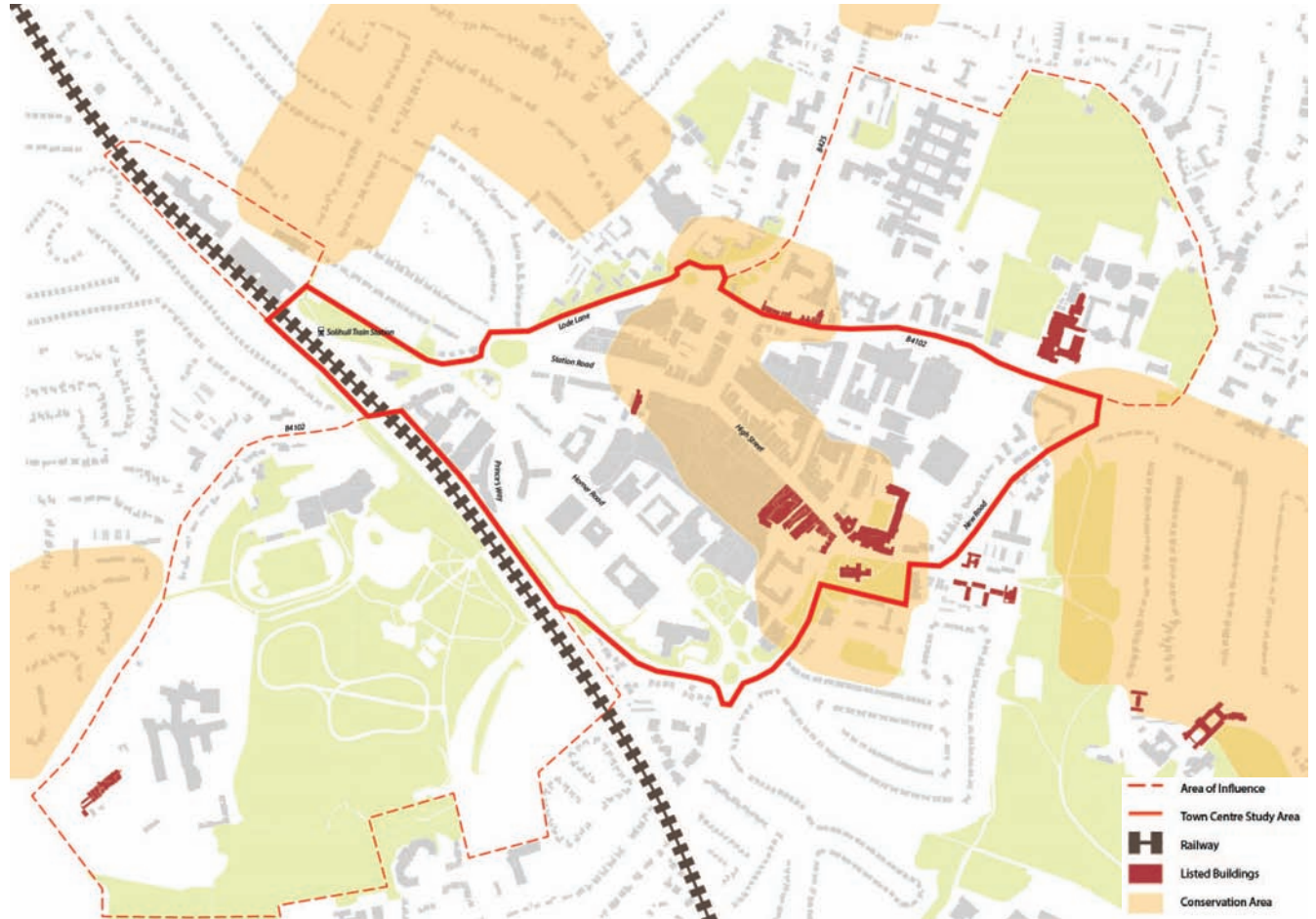


Figure 3.2: Solihull Town Centre Heritage and Conservation Plan

### 3.3 Gateways and key frontages

Gateways and frontages are instrumental in helping to determine the character of a place and the ability to navigate through it. They signify the key arrival points into a town and provide key landmarks which aid wayfinding and emphasise the hierarchy of a place.

Perhaps surprising for a town of such quality and heritage, Solihull's main gateways are currently characterised by large scale infrastructure such as the Lode Lane/ Princes Way roundabout, Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout and Church Hill Road / Princes Way roundabout which dominate in scale compared to the surrounding context. This presents a missed opportunity in terms of creating a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town. In addition, key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists include Solihull Train Station and the underpass which connects Tudor Grange Park and Princes Way. These areas fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull, particularly in terms of the station, which feels extremely remote from the town, and is relatively poor in terms of environmental quality.

There is a marked contrast between the quality of frontages within the internal town centre (such as the High Street) and the outward facing town centre viewed from the surrounding ring road. Frontages associated with the main High Street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafés and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town. Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and quite often do not overlook the street; this is particularly evident along Princes Way which is characterised by tall vegetation and backs of existing office buildings. This has the resulting effect of creating an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull, creating a negative perception which is at odds with the town centre core.

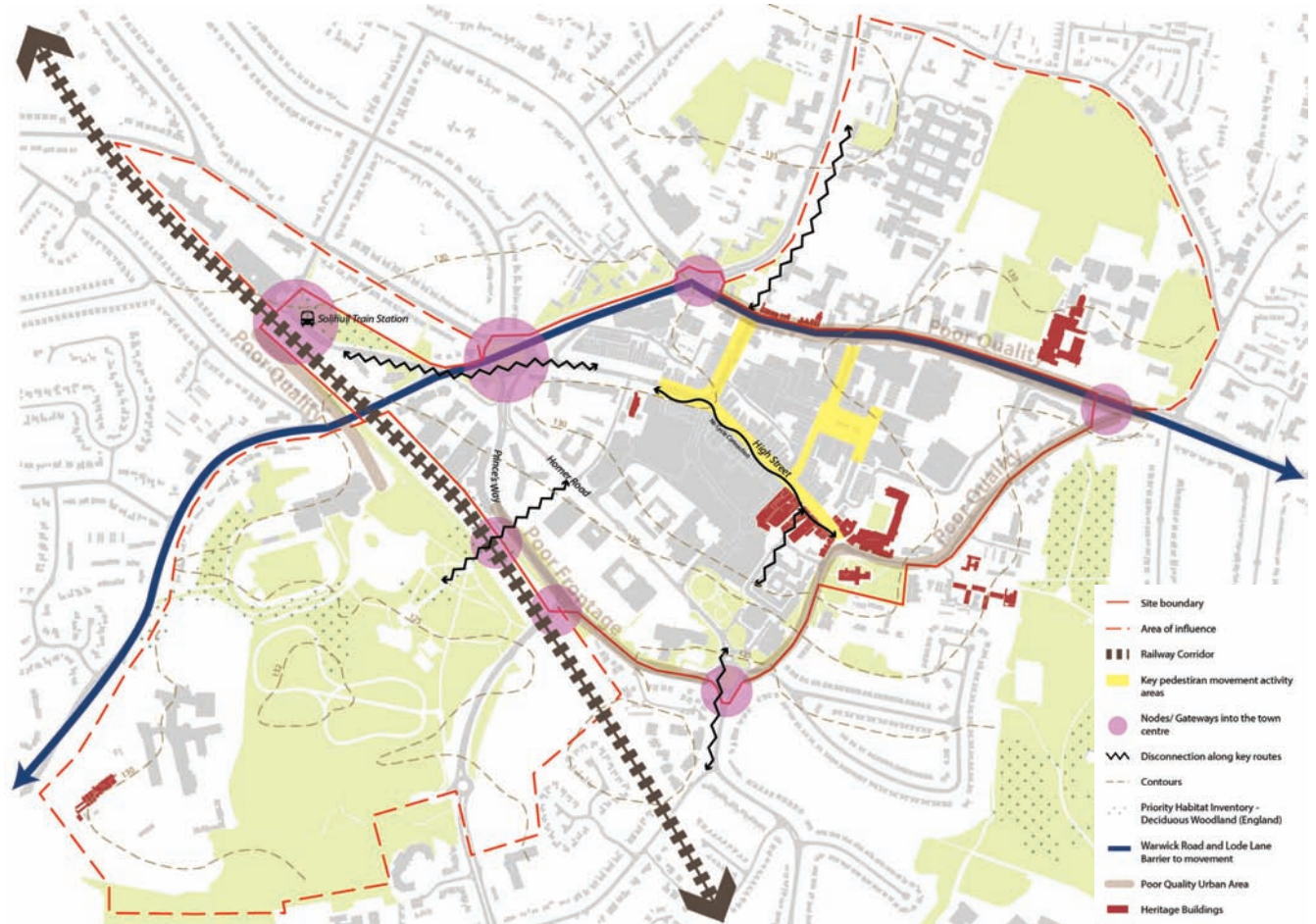


Figure 3.3: Solihull Town Centre Spatial Appreciation Plan

## 3.4 Public Realm and Open Space

### 3.4.1 Public Realm

Solihull Town Centre provides a variety of public spaces, which support a range of different functions. Some like the eastern entrance to Touchwood (Manor Walk) accommodate quieter, more reflective uses; whilst others such as Mell Square and Library Square are more geared towards activity and public events.

- Mell Square is the main public square within the town and is a large formally arranged rectangular space, which incorporates street trees, planters, lighting, bollards, benches and litter bins. To the centre of the square sits a large Costa Coffee Shop, approximately 163sqm in size, which provides a large outdoor seating area. Whilst the space experiences a large volume of footfall, the layout and relatively poor quality of the public realm mean it is currently underutilised and is not representative of Solihull's high quality town centre. In addition, the large volume of street furniture and trees combined with the layout means that the potential uses of the space are restricted despite its large size.
- Library Square provides spaces for seating and events adjacent to the library. Whilst well maintained and overlooked by the library café, this space is relatively underutilised, perhaps due to the shade cast by surrounding buildings and the characterless facades defining the north of the space, which is as a result of the space fronting onto the back walls of Touchwood Shopping Centre. The space provides opportunities to introduce other complementary uses such as an outdoor gallery, which could introduce colour and draw people into the space.
- Manor Walk Square successfully contrasts modern stainless steel street furniture with a formal layout

and heritage style planting (clipped box hedges) and provides a more reflective space than Solihull's other public spaces. Whilst successful the space could be improved through increased seating provision.

- The High Street is pedestrianised and was formerly the main retail spine through the town centre. Over time however, the retail emphasis has shifted as a consequence of Touchwood Shopping Centre. The positive feel of the High Street is due largely to the vibrant and high quality uses located to either side, which offer a positive café culture and attractive heritage architecture. Whilst the High Street does benefit from a wide range of street furniture, the often contrasting styles (stainless steel, cast iron and wood) and sheer volume of elements give the public realm a rather cluttered feel. In addition, the dated and low quality concrete pavers do little to respond to the historical buildings and conservation area.

### 3.4.2 Open Space

Solihull town centre benefits from being in close proximity to two large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park; and Malvern and Brueton Park;

- Tudor Grange Park – Located adjacent to the southern edge of the town centre, this Green Flag Park incorporates a children's play area, skate park, outdoor gym, cycle track and pitch and putt course. Located adjacent to the Leisure Centre and Solihull College, the main access to the park from the town centre is via the underpass to Princes Way.
- Malvern and Brueton Park – Located to the east of the town centre is designated as a Green Flag Park and incorporates ornamental and sensory gardens, tennis courts, children's play area, picnic area and walking trails. The park is also a designated nature reserve, characterised by mature woodland.

By improving accessibility to these parks and encouraging people to use them, they offer the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and make Solihull Town Centre a more attractive place to live and work.

Despite the close proximity of these large green open spaces, there is very little soft landscaping within the town centre itself and access to the parks is at present poorly signposted and visually disconnected.

Within the town centre itself there are a number of smaller green spaces including:

- Jubilee Gardens - Located to the northern edge of Homer Road (adjacent to Solihull Registry Office), this south facing space has the potential to become a popular and well used destination for workers and shoppers. However, the park is relatively underutilised and lacks suitable facilities such as seating, bins and shelter for people to access and use the space through varying weather conditions and changing times of day. In order to improve this space, new user friendly facilities could be introduced and improvements made to the relationship between the park and the buildings immediately surrounding it. Links could also be improved between the park and; Library Square, the Hotel, Tudor Grange Park, and the Council Offices.
- The setting of St Alphege's Church provides an attractive green edge to the town centre and complements the historic nature of the High Street.
- At the eastern edge of the Lode Lane/Station Road roundabout is an area of green space consisting of mature trees and vegetation which provides a green buffer between the town centre and the roundabout. Located at a key gateway into the town centre, this space provides little function and has the potential to be greatly improved as an urban park or be consolidated into the surrounding urban fabric to complement nearby land uses and create frontage onto Lode Lane.



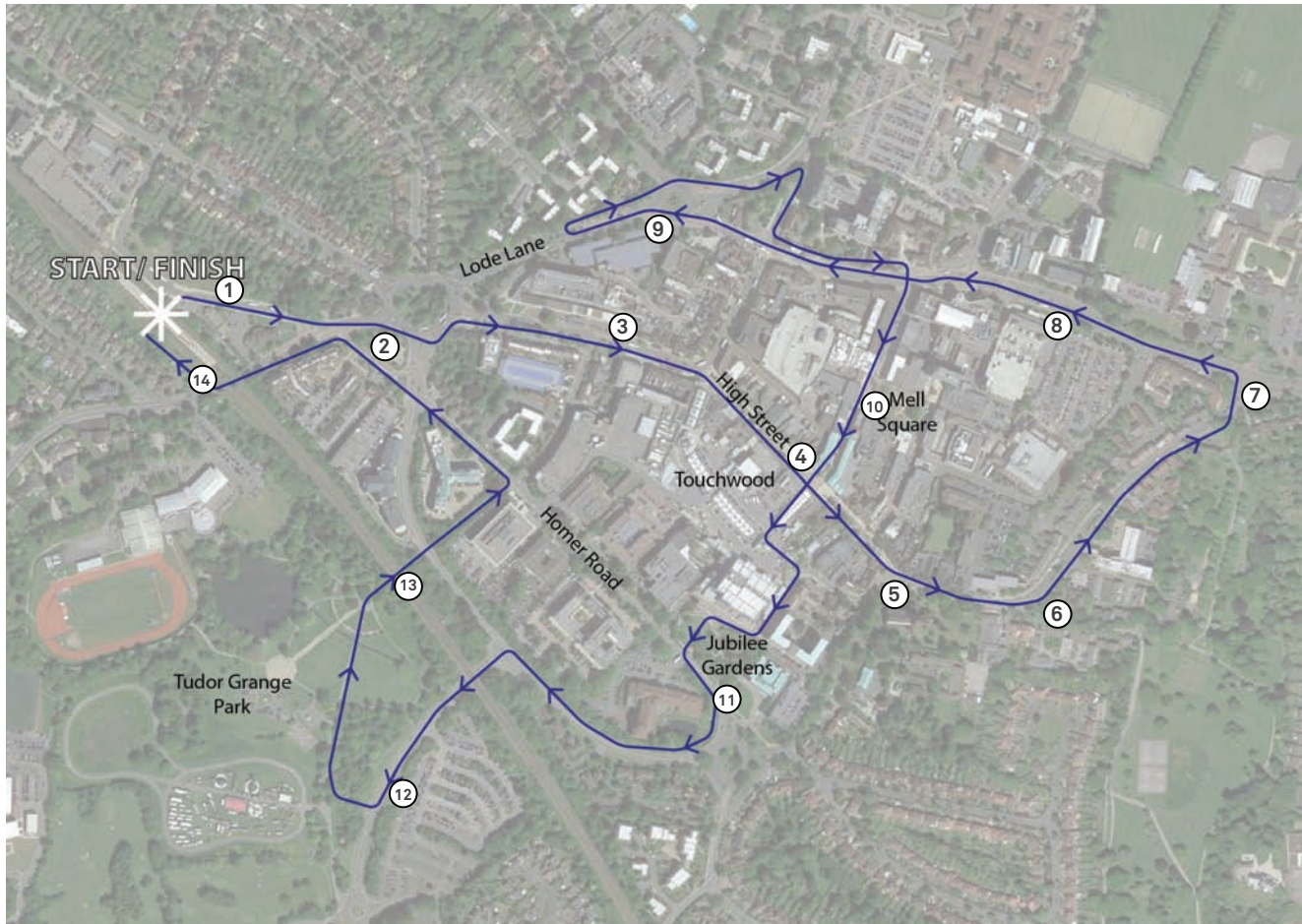


Figure 3.4: Solihull Town Centre photographic survey plan



Bus interchange outside Solihull Station: despite its important function as a key gateway into Solihull the current quality of public realm outside the station is relatively poor. The area has poor pedestrian and cyclist connectivity to the town centre and limited wayfinding facilities.



View looking towards Blossomfield Road roundabout from Station Approach: The approach to the town centre from the five arm roundabout at Blossomfield Road has poor pedestrian and cycle connectivity and doesn't provide a positive gateway into Solihull.





3 Station Road looking west towards Blossomfield Road Roundabout: Has recently undergone improvements as part of the Solihull Gateway Project, including upgraded public realm and improved pedestrian priority.



4 View of the High Street with local markets: The High Street has an outdated public realm with cluttered and mismatched street furniture.



5 View of Church Square, outside St Alphege Church: An attractive historical setting, although there are limited places to stop and appreciate it. A large amount of street furniture is located at the entrance of the High Street, which can form a barrier to pedestrians.



6 View of the western pedestrian and cycle route between the town centre and Malvern and Brueton Park: The park is psychologically disconnected from the centre, however this could be improved visual connection through enhanced wayfinding and public realm to strengthen links with the town centre.



7 Northern entrance into Malvern and Brueton Park: This formal entrance into the park is grand, but some consultees thought that the entrance could be improved through enhanced signage for further emphasis.



8 Frontage along Warwick Road: Photo shows both multi storey and ground level car parking along Warwick Road. This creates a poor frontage to Warwick Road and a negative pedestrian experience.

**Figure 3.5: Photos of the public realm and open space in and around Solihull Town Centre. An analysis of these spaces is provided, which builds on the findings produced from the Solihull Town Centre Public Realm Framework (2014).**





9 Lode Lane Car Park: A multi-storey car park at the Warwick Road and Lode Lane roundabout, which provides poor frontage onto this important corner.



10 Mell Square: Has a dated and relatively low quality public realm. While it provides seating and performance space, these are not placed in appropriate locations to facilitate activity.



11 Jubilee Gardens: Feels isolated from the town centre and is at present somewhat under used and under exploited as a key green space within the town.



12 Monkspath Hall Road Car Park: A ground level car park which doesn't provide frontage or onlooking to Monkspath Hall Road and lacks character and connection with Tudor Grange Park.



13 Railway underpass connecting Tudor Grange Park and Solihull Town Centre: the underpass can present safety concerns particularly in the evening, due to poor lighting and little overlooking.



14 Pedestrian connection to Solihull Train Station on the southern edge of the railway line: A poor quality urban space with limited wayfinding facilities, which can present safety concerns.

### 3.5 Use and Activities

The historic development patterns described within Section 3.1 have ultimately shaped the land use patterns present within the town centre. This is characterised by large single use areas, which have little interaction between uses and form obvious character areas, as illustrated within Figure 3.6. Whilst this provides positives in reducing potential conflicts between differing land uses, it fails to recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses can provide, which can include greater promotion of walking and cycling, enhanced vitality and development of an area's unique identity.

At present, land uses are generally divided as follows:

- The retail core at the centre of the town, to both sides of the High Street, and extending north towards the B4102. This area encompasses the existing Touchwood Shopping Centre, Mell Square and the High street.
- The commercial area centred along Homer Road and includes National Grid's Metering Head Quarters, Solihull Immigration Centre, Solihull Police Station, Paragon House and The Holiday Inn Hotel.
- A commercial area located along the Lode Lane/ Warwick Road junction which includes the Premier Inn Hotel, The Courtyard, plus a number of solicitors practices.
- A number of civic uses are located throughout the town centre including St Augustine's Catholic Church which provides an attractive frontage onto Station Road and St Alphege's Church which provides a striking terminus

to the High Street, and is a key landmark within Solihull. As previously stated within Section 3.2, Solihull Train Station is located on the periphery of the town centre to the west of Lode Lane, which makes it feel isolated from the town due to the existing infrastructure.

- There are currently very few residential areas within the town centre, and they are generally located on the periphery of the town. A relatively modest residential area is located along New Road and is mainly formed of terraced housing with the exception of a number of apartments located off George Road and Deerhurst Court sheltered apartments at the New Road/Warwick Road junction.



Entrance of Touchwood Shopping Centre



The Courtyard commercial development on Warwick Road



Tudor Grange Park





St Augustine's Catholic Church



Commercial buildings along Homer Road



Figure 3.6: Solihull Town Centre Existing Land Use Plan

### 3.6 Movement

There is no doubt that Solihull is currently dominated by the car; with 79% of people arriving by car despite the town centre being the most accessible place in the borough (Solihull Connected Green Paper, 2015). In addition 42% of commuters into the town centre are travelling less than 5km but walking and cycling combined account for just 7% of the current number of trips being generated.

Solihull's town centre is defined and bounded by an inner ring road formed from Lode Lane, Warwick Road, New Road and Princes Way. Created originally to alleviate traffic congestion within the centre, the ring road also acts as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement, effectively disconnecting the town centre with its surrounding areas.

The same is also true of Solihull Train Station, which is currently disconnected from the town centre by the ring road and requires people to cross a number of busy roads and major junctions; further compounded by a lack of signage, poor legibility and lack of clear sightlines to the town centre. At present, Solihull suffers from relatively low usage of the train station compared to other modes, despite its frequent services to Birmingham and London.

The main bus interchange is located opposite the station entrance on Station Road, and provides connections to the town centre and beyond. Whilst functional, its current layout has led to conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians, which has been further compounded by the poor quality public realm. Overall, the current station environment doesn't feel welcoming and fails to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists with narrow footways and no designated cycle route.

Despite the majority of the town centre being just five minutes' walk (400m) from the centre of the High Street, the

town centre currently has a disconnected and staggered network of pedestrian and cycle routes into and out of the town. This is particularly evident in the poor connections that exist between the north and the south of the town, due largely to the sloping gradient and terracing of buildings. This has led to routes into the town centre often being stopped short at the outer edges, severed by buildings, rail lines and major roads. The few routes that do exist, such as the pedestrian route between the Solihull Immigration Office and the Holiday Inn Hotel are often poor quality, not overlooked and feel unsafe.

In comparison, east-west connections for pedestrians are relatively good, due largely to the pedestrianised High Street and Mell Square, which provide a safe vehicle free environment. Furthermore the internal connections provided by Touchwood, are high quality, sheltered from the weather and well integrated with other routes.

Provision for cyclists within the town centre is relatively poor, with current cycle routes disconnected, sporadic and mainly limited to main roads, away from key desire lines. In particular, cyclists are prevented from using the main pedestrianised routes such as the High Street, forcing them onto the more hostile main roads, and reducing the incentive to cycle. In addition, there is also a distinct lack of cycle parking throughout the town station and at key destinations, particularly Solihull Train Station.

As Solihull continues to grow over time, there is a risk that new development could potentially increase the number of cars and therefore exacerbate congestion. Therefore it is imperative that the masterplan provides opportunities to increase accessibility for sustainable travel and improve the environment to encourage greater pedestrian, cycle and public transport use.



Mell Square



Warwick Road





Homer Road



Solihull Train Station on Station Approach



Figure 3.7: Solihull Town Centre Movement and Access Analysis Plan

### 3.7 The future of Solihull Train Station

Located on the periphery of the town, Solihull Station is currently not representative of Solihulls or the Borough's future ambitions. The Solihull Town Centre Masterplan provides opportunities to evaluate the current offer and investigate opportunities to better integrate and modernise the station in the future.

This future proofing of the station is extremely important given the projected increase in the number of passengers using the station in the coming years. At present approximately 1.6 million passengers use Solihull Station each year, or around 2,500 per day. This figure reflects annual growth of 16.5% in the three years since 2011/2012. Applying longer term growth forecasts from Network Rail a 49% passenger volume growth to 2023 and 114% growth to

2043 is predicted. For Solihull this would mean an increase to 3,800 passengers per day in 2023 and 5,500 in 2043. The case for a radical change in the station offer is therefore obvious.

The table below provides a brief summary of existing issues and potential future opportunities associated with either the refurbishment of the current station, or the potential to relocate the station to a new centralised location.

Point of analysis	Train Station Location Comparison		
	Existing station	Existing station with potential refurbishment	New station relocated to a more centralised location
<b>Connectivity to the town centre</b>	The station is currently situated on the periphery of the town centre with poor connectivity to the centre, due largely to the barriers created by major roads and junctions, and also poor existing wayfinding /legibility.	Whilst refurbishment will not resolve the issue of the stations peripheral location; better signposting and upgrading of key routes and crossings between the station and the town centre could go some way to improving legibility and wayfinding.	Relocating the station to a more centralised location provides opportunities to improve connectivity with the town centre, through the use of clear, direct links to Touchwood and the High Street. This could be further supported through the use of signposting and a clear route hierarchy to aid legibility.
<b>Gateway to the town centre</b>	The current station does not match the quality of the town centre or the ambitions of the Borough for UK Central in terms of creating a principal gateway between the National Rail Network and Solihull Town Centre.	Refurbishment of the station could vary in terms of scale and potential cost. A refurbished station could deliver a more attractive gateway into the town centre in terms of it's aesthetic appearance and also its scale.	Relocation could provide opportunity to create a new, bespoke station which responds to its surroundings and acts as an important new landmark within the town centre. A relocated station also provides opportunities to support new mixed use development, helping to put the station at the heart of the town.
<b>Visitor / passenger experience</b>	The current station is not particularly welcoming to pedestrians and cyclists and has the feel of a suburban station, with little in the way of facilities. In addition, there is no formally allocated space for pick up and drop off.	Refurbishment of the station could provide opportunities for improving visitor and passenger experience, through improvements to capacity, public realm and station facilities.	A relocated station could significantly improve visitor / passenger experience by shortening the distance to the town centre, providing opportunities for new mixed use development around the station and providing new, modern facilities in an attractive setting. A relocated station would offer the opportunity to improve links between Monkspath Hall Road, Homer Road and the High Street.
<b>Connectivity with public transport</b>	The current layout of the station and associated transport interchange can generate congestion in and around Station Approach which impacts upon buses, taxis, cars, pedestrians and cyclists.	Refurbishment of the station could look to improve the station environs, however there is little scope to reconfigure the interchange in any significant manner.	A relocated station would require the re-routing of bus and Sprint public transport network and the creation of a new modern multi-modal interchange facility. Sprint routing options have been considered as part of the TP2 Movement Studies. Associated integrated public transport changes would require significant highway modifications but could greatly improve general town centre connectivity within core developments within a 5 minute walk of sprint and local bus services.



### 3.8 Key Opportunities & Constraints

The table to the right provides a summary of the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats outlined within section 3.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A high quality town rich in heritage.</li> <li>Frontages associated with the main High Street are relatively high quality and provide a varied and positive street frontage with numerous cafés and a varied built form which reflects the historic nature of the town.</li> <li>Solihull town centre benefits from being in close proximity to two large public parks namely Tudor Grange Park; and Malvern and Brueton Park.</li> <li>Existing market reputation and high quality of living.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of outward frontage resulting in an insular facing town, which fails to promote itself to people arriving into Solihull.</li> <li>Solihull's main gateways are currently characterised by large scale infrastructure.</li> <li>Key arrival points for pedestrians and cyclists fail to convey the quality and vibrancy associated with Solihull.</li> <li>The train station feels remote from the centre, and has a relatively poor environmental quality.</li> <li>Frontages along the ring road are generally of a lower quality and do not overlook the street.</li> <li>There is very little greenspace within the town centre core and access to parks is at present poorly signposted.</li> <li>The town is characterised by large single use areas, which have little interaction.</li> <li>Limited residential offer in the town centre.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train Station has the opportunity to create a 'front door' to Solihull which demonstrates the inherent quality of the town.</li> <li>Build on it's reputation as an affluent town.</li> <li>Build on Solihull Town Centre's existing variety of public spaces, which support a range of different functions.</li> <li>Improve accessibility to surrounding parks to encourage people to use them.</li> <li>Increase the residential offer in the town centre.</li> <li>Recognise the potential benefits which complementary mixed land uses provide.</li> <li>Support the wider Borough ambitions outlined by UK Central.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market considerations for demand and viability.</li> <li>Environmentally and socially responding to a changing demographic; elderly, youth and young families.</li> <li>Responding to the competitive nature of similar towns in the wider context.</li> <li>Responding to climate change and the push for sustainability.</li> </ul>





TOILET  
ST. PIERRES

TORONTO

STARDUST  
COFFEE  
U.S.

Caffè  
NERO