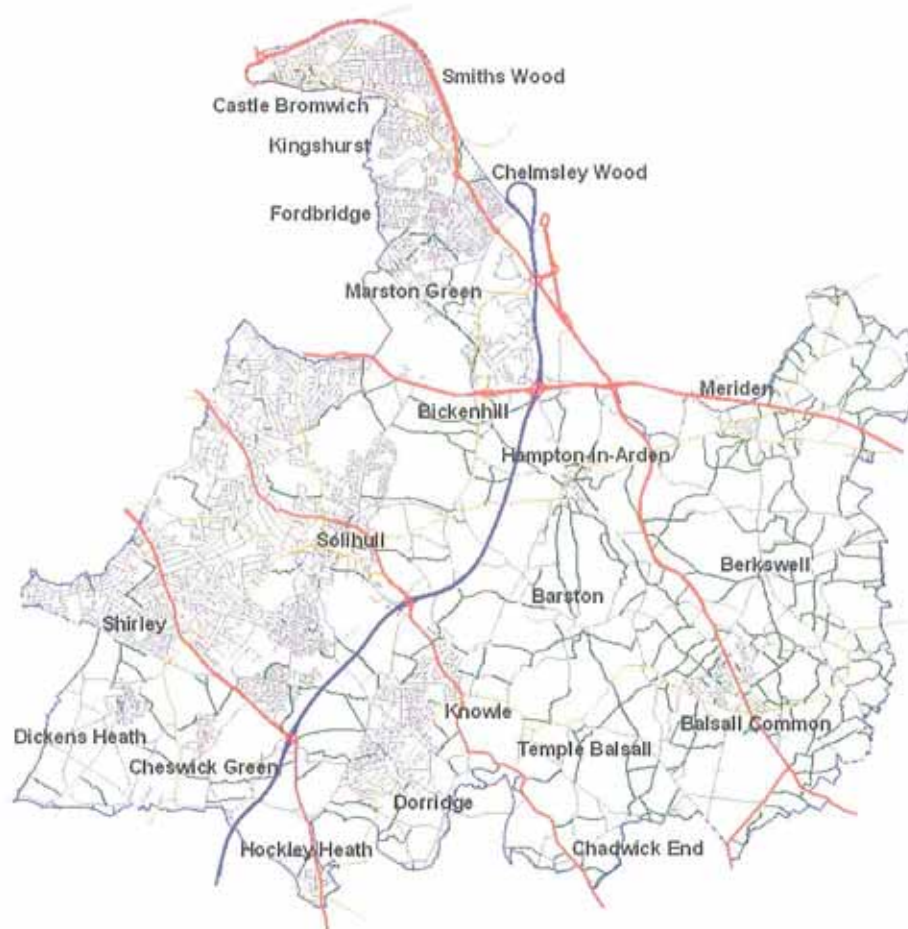


3. Background

3.1 Introduction to Solihull

- 3.1.1 Situated at the southerly edge of the West Midlands conurbation, the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull borders Birmingham in the north and west, Worcestershire in the south and west, Coventry to the east and Warwickshire in the south.
- 3.1.2 Much of the Borough's population of 206,000 centres in the north on the communities of Castle Bromwich, Chelmsley Wood, Fordbridge, Kingshurst and Smith's Wood and to the south in the towns of Solihull and Shirley.
- 3.1.3 Also in the Borough are the villages of Knowle, Balsall Common, Dorridge and the smaller rural villages of Barston, Catherine de Barnes, Cheswick Green, Hampton in Arden, Hockley Heath, Meriden, Tidbury Green, and Temple Balsall. The most notable new community in the Borough is just to the west of Shirley, where the new village of Dickens Heath has been built.
- 3.1.4 The Borough is bordered by the M6 and the M40, whilst the M42 divides the urban centre of the Borough from the rural south and east. Similarly, the A45 divides the south from the north of the Borough. Due to its location between the two conurbations of Birmingham and Coventry, many people's perception of Solihull is that of an urban area, however, almost two-thirds of the Borough's area of 17,832 hectares is greenbelt.
- 3.1.5 The plan below shows the relative location of towns and villages in the borough as described above. The plan additionally shows the extent of the registered rights of way network (shown in green) available within the borough.



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3.2 *Solihull's countryside*

- 3.2.1 The large proportion of Solihull's countryside plays an important role in shaping its image and character. It provides an attractive setting for many of the towns and villages and its accessibility is important in enhancing the quality of life enjoyed by the Borough's residents.
- 3.2.2 Solihull's countryside also plays an important role in a wider strategic planning sense. Its designation as greenbelt restricts the outward expansion of the West Midlands conurbation and prevents it merging with the City of Coventry.
- 3.2.3 Of particular significance is the narrow band of green belt known as the 'Meriden Gap', located between the eastern edge of Birmingham and Solihull and the western outskirts of Coventry. This area has the

potential to provide excellent opportunities for recreation for local people as well as the surrounding urban populations. The rights of way network could play an important role in providing sustainable access to facilities as well as offering a recreational facility in its own right.

- 3.2.4 With increasing personal mobility there have been greater demands on the countryside for informal activities such as walking and horse-riding, but also for more formal sporting uses. These developments have not had a detrimental impact on the countryside but have tended to draw more people into the countryside by car. Inconsiderate parking and damage to verges can affect local people and cause complaints from residents

3.3 *Public rights of way*

- 3.3.1 The majority of Solihull's 131 miles (211 km) of recorded public rights of way are situated in the less populated areas of the Borough. In addition there is an urban network of rights of way that is not currently recorded on the definitive map and statement. The size of this network is at present unknown, however it is possible that the Lost Ways Project as outlined in section 6.1.6 may assist in rectifying this situation.
- 3.3.2 Nearly all the routes recorded on the definitive map are public footpaths; there are currently only 7 miles (11 km) of public bridleway within the Borough. The proportion of the network recorded as public bridleway is therefore 5% - much lower than the national figure of 17%.
- 3.3.3 The promotion of recreational walking has increased in recent years, and has been supported with the development of a range of short walks within many of the Boroughs parks. These walks form the basis of a series of led walks undertaken throughout the year by Solihull Striders and Strollers and Discovery Walks in association with the Park Ranger Team and Primary Care Trust. Together these form an

important resource to encourage walking in the borough and make walking accessible to individuals who may not have had the confidence or experience to enjoy many of the more rural routes available in the borough. It is our intention to build on and expand the good work that has gone before by renewing the range of walks literature promoting short and medium length circular walks based on village locations across the borough. This work will be taken forward in partnership with Local Parish and Town Councils, and the Primary Care Trust and will see the publication of walks leaflets promoting circular countryside walks of up to 19 miles (30 km). This work will support similar initiatives developed by the Solihull Cycling Steering Group (SCSG) in partnership with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to support and promote cycling in the borough. Under the brand 'Cyclesolihull' the SCSG have produced 12 circular cycle route leaflets which are supported by weekly cycle rides throughout the summer.