

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**To be read with Brief for Artists**

### **Art Track: Metro Art Programme**

#### **Wednesbury to Brierley Hill extension line**

#### **Dudley borough context**

Dudley has a rich cultural and industrial heritage and is often referred to as the historic capital of the Black Country, a name derived from its industrial past of coal mines and blast furnaces used for iron and steelmaking. The area was one of the early centres of the Industrial Revolution due to its unique geology, generating wealth from coal and limestone mining, glassmaking, iron & steel. It was also formerly known for nail making, chain & anchor manufacturing and engineering works. The towns of Dudley, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, Halesowen and The Lye are situated within the borough.

A range of high quality and varied attractions now contribute to its historic landscape and heritage value, including Dudley Castle which dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and was recorded in the 1086 Domesday book; the internationally renowned Zoological Gardens housing some of the world's rarest and most exotic animals; and the open-air Black Country Living Museum and Dudley Canal Trust which has a sixteen mile canal network.

The Dudley borough is predominantly urban in character, but also contains extensive green space and natural assets and reserves - 18% of the land belongs to the green belt; 14% is public green space; and the area is home to ten sites of special scientific interest, two national nature reserves and seven local nature reserves. The Black Country Global Geopark was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in 2020, in recognition of its natural and cultural heritage.

Today Dudley is home to a diverse range of successful, national and internationally significant businesses; 9,940 businesses in total - providing 117,000 employment opportunities for residents in the borough. The current population stands at 321,600, with steady growth set to continue up for the next 20 years. By 2040, the population is expected to have grown to over 350,000.

Dudley is currently in the midst of an exciting new chapter in its history, with 'Regenerating Dudley' set to bring £1 billion investment into the borough. A number of major projects have already started on site in Dudley Town Centre and look set to pave the way for better opportunities, greater transport links and a more attractive place to live, work and do business. These projects include the Metro Extension; Dudley Transport Interchange; construction of the Very Light Rail Innovation Centre, the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology and the extension of the Black Country Living Museum – all of which have secured funding from a range of sources including West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), Dudley MBC, The Marches LEP and the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

For more information on Dudley's regeneration visit: [www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk](http://www.regeneratingdudley.org.uk)

A summary of recent trends in Dudley demonstrate that:

- The **Population** is growing, with over 16,000 more residents since 1999. The current population of 321,596 is projected to carry on growing over the next 20 years, surpassing 350,000 residents by 2040;
- The **Economy** has been growing as highlighted by an increase in GVA year on year since the last recession in 2009. Economic output (GVA) for 2018 stood at £5.4 billion, an increase of 3% compared with the previous year, with approximately 15% from its manufacturing base;
- **Productivity** has been significantly lower in the area over the last decade compared with the national rate. GVA per worker in 2018 was £44,455 in Dudley compared to £50,022 regionally and £56,387 nationally;
- **Business density** is comparatively low in Dudley. The number of enterprises per 10,000 of the population has been consistently lower in Dudley than regionally or nationally since 2010, and the gap between Dudley and these comparator areas is increasing. In 2019, whilst business density was 300 in Dudley, this was lower than 360 and 407 in the West Midlands and UK respectively;
- **Skills levels** among the workforce are lower than the regional and national averages and there is comparatively lower educational attainment. The proportion of the working age population with NVQ Level 4+ qualifications has been consistently lower than West Midlands and UK levels since 2010 and currently stands at 24.7% for Dudley. There has been greater fluctuation in the proportion of the population with no qualifications in Dudley over the last decade, however since 2015 the proportion with no qualifications has been much higher in Dudley than regional or national levels - in 2019, this stood at 16.4% for Dudley versus 10.2% regionally and 7.9% nationally.
- **Wage rates** are higher for residents than the workplace, suggesting a number commute out of the area for higher-skilled opportunities. Whilst the earnings gap generally had been falling from 2014 onwards to just under £13 in 2018, this started to increase again in 2019 and the difference in hourly wages is now £32.90 (median earnings for full-time workers in Dudley were £530.40 in the workplace in 2020 rather than £563.30 for residents).
- **Visitor numbers** are decreasing and footfall is shrinking within the Town Centre – the three year rolling average number of day visitors to the area was 4.5 million (2017-2019), generating a total value of £117 million, however this was lower than the previous average (2016-2018) which was over 5 million visitors generating £169 million.

## **Context of Metro Stops**

### **Brierley Hill Terminus Stop**

This is the proposed terminus stop for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension and is located in the town of Brierley Hill adjacent to Asda Food Store and within walking distance of the High Street shops and Market Hall. Nearby, the Art & Design department building of Dudley College situated in a dramatic deconstructivist style and a Buddhist temple situated in a converted modernist building. Other notable civic buildings include the Library on High Street, a Health Centre on Venture Way, and the town's landmark Civic Hall.

### **Merry Hill Stop**

The Metro track follows from the terminus by crossing Venture Way and over the canal via a new bridge/viaduct towards the Merry Hill Metro stop. This is located high above the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, passengers will connect to it via a stair and lift tower.

### **The Waterfront Stop**

This Metro stop is located immediately outside of Waterfront entrance which is a large 1990s Waterfront Office complex built on the former site of the huge Round Oak steelworks that closed in 1982. The renowned Waterfront is built in a postmodern style and with axial symmetry designed by Trevor Brown of Level 7 Architects and set out around the canal widened to form a marina.

Disembarking from the Metro stop, the path leads to bustling offices, bars and restaurants and to the Resonance Music Institute.

### **Pedmore Road Stop**

Situated at low level, this stop, is situated in a mixed use residential/industrial area transecting the Pensnett Canal. The Saltwells National Nature Reserve, formerly a saline spa lies close by and is now a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Geo-Park attracting visitors from across the UK and internationally.

### **Canal Street Stop**

This stop lies within the DY5 Enterprise with industrial estates and opportunity sites on either side. Access to and from the stop is from the Canal Street side, leading to Stourbridge Road and residential areas nearby.

### **Cinder Bank Stop**

Aptly named, this stop is surrounded by area that is still an industrial heartland with many factory units nearby; a huge constructivist style relief by Bews and Gorvin celebrates industry past and present, accompanied by a bronze heroic worker figure. Also close to Netherton, where parts of the *Titanic*'s large deck anchor were famously assembled. The stop is at a lower level than the road and roundabout sculpture.

### **Flood Street Metro Stop**

This will be located opposite the soon to be re-aligned New Mill Street and will look onto Dudley's newly built Duncan Edwards Leisure Centre and a salamander sculpture symbolising both industry and renewal (part of Dudley's Coat of Arms). There will be a pocket park located here and the Metro track will then follow the existing Dudley by-pass (Duncan Edwards Way).

### **Dudley Interchange Stop**

This stop provides level access to the heart of Dudley town centre and will sit close to the new Bus Station soon to be re-built and renamed the Interchange. This stop lies close to the 1960s Churchill Shopping Precinct and to the pedestrianised Market Square /Castle Street retail core.

### **Dudley Castle Stop**

This stop is situated in Castle Hill surrounded by new developments on its east side including the Very Light Railway research centre and the famous Dudley Zoo and Gardens attraction on its west side with Dudley Castle within its grounds. From the stop platform, a new ramp and stair access will lead down to a new public plaza bounded by Zoological Drive, allowing pedestrian to access a range of local and town centre attractions and amenities including the new Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology (IOT), the renowned open-air Black Country Living Museum and then along paths across Castle Hill woods, walkways towards Wren's Nest, through Peggy's Meadow and other meadowland to Dudley Canal and Tunnels Trust beyond.

### **Tipton Road Stop**

This Stop is next to the Castlegate Retail and Business development area incorporating the Showcase cinema and a Percent for Art funded Monument to the Dudley-born film director James Whale, of Frankenstein fame. Close by is the Guest outpatient hospital.

### **Birmingham New Road Stop**

This Stop is between the two Boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell. Nearby, in one direction lies the large Thomas Dudley iron foundry, and in the other direction protected by a wide verge there is an easy walk alongside the main road to the Dudley Canal and Tunnels Trust, a key attraction offering boat trips to the famed limestone caverns, part of the Black Country Global Geo Park.