

# Case Study: Kidderminster

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20<sup>th</sup>-century non-domestic buildings and public places in  
Worcestershire



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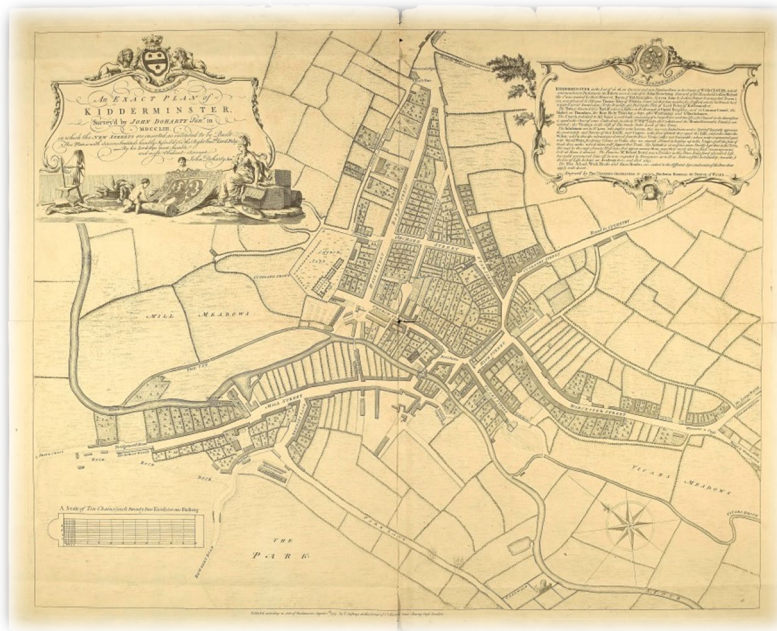
## Adding a new layer

20<sup>th</sup> century non-domestic buildings and public places in Worcestershire

## Kidderminster

**Pre-20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The origins of Kidderminster are thought to pre-date the Norman Conquest, which as the place-name suggests, may have been ecclesiastical in function. By the time of Domesday, a small market town was recorded along with several outlying settlements. Kidderminster continued to develop throughout the medieval period as both a market and a cloth-weaving town. Cloth weaving was the prelude to what would later establish the town as an international industrial powerhouse in carpet manufacture. In terms of location and resources, Kidderminster, set in the lower Stour Valley, was well-placed for industrial development. The river was diverted, divided and canalised at some undated point, although it is possible this process began during the medieval period, establishing the hydrological system that would power mills as part of the expanding industrial infrastructure. Kidderminster's civic status was further cemented in 1636 when King Charles I granted a Royal Charter, thereby creating a borough that had a measure of self-governance (Tomkinson and Hall 1985, 4–5). The earliest surviving map of Kidderminster is the Doharty Map that dates to 1753. This captured the town on the cusp of its major expansion as a centre for carpet weaving.



18th-century suburban expansion.

Kidderminster in the early industrial age: a medieval town in transition.

The medieval origin of Kidderminster is still evident in the sinuous roads and burgage plots recorded on the map, however, what is also clear is the beginnings of suburbanisation, with its straight roads and regular plots: a morphology that is distinct from the seemingly less ordered medieval expansion. The later 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century expansion of Kidderminster continued this trend. As more carpet manufacturers established ever bigger factories, the heart of the town was remodelled as a carefully planned industrial zone with new retail and services to support the expanding population of workers and their families that moved into new suburbs of terrace houses. Kidderminster retained its function as a market town throughout its industrial

heyday. It is this later 19<sup>th</sup>-century economic peak and town plan that set the framework for Kidderminster as it entered what would become another period of large-scale transition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **1900–1918**

The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the town extend its residential suburbs to house the ever-growing population of factory workers. New suburbs continued to be built following the established morphology of 19<sup>th</sup>-century development established by the land and property enterprises. The core town area was not radically altered during this time although there were some exceptions that led to the redevelopment of established industrial areas. The Tomkinson Carpet Manufactory, for example, built what would become one of the largest carpet mills, at Churchfields. The building was opened in 1902 and stands as, perhaps, the most prominent of very early 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings still extant in the town. Its design was, at least outwardly, that of the established 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial form. This process of suburban expansion and the limited redevelopment of some industrial areas was a trend that continued up until the commencement of World War One.

One of the key developments that straddled the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was the creation of Brinton Park on part of what was historically Sutton Common. The first iteration of the Park resulted from the landscaping of 23 acres of land that was presented to the Borough of Kidderminster on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1897. The land was gifted by John Brinton and supported by the philanthropy of Richard Eve. The addition of a further 6¼ acres in 1906, opened on 12<sup>th</sup> May of that year, established the extent of the Park although it has continued in its evolution throughout its subsequent history. Many buildings and features have come and gone, however, the Park has remained the principle focus for outdoor recreation in Kidderminster and, as of 2019, is benefitting from a Heritage Lottery Fund project to restore and enhance its landscape: celebrating its history in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context. Despite its many changes, Brinton Park remains one of the most complete, surviving landscapes of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Kidderminster. Notable buildings and structures that remain extant are the Bandstand (1934), the Sons of Rest Pavilion (1938/55) and the Richard Eve Memorial (1902). Less distinctive buildings include those of the plant nursery and both the original and replacement toilet blocks. All these utility buildings may lack aesthetic value, yet they contribute towards the narrative history of the park.

The townscape of Kidderminster retained much of its late-19<sup>th</sup>-century form during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main drivers for change appear to be in developing industries, which resulted in some limited expansion and remodelling of existing industrial buildings to accommodate the needs of the business. The Castle Motor Company was one example of a new business that was, at the time, part of the leading technological development in motor transport. Founded in 1907 originally as a repair workshop and supplier of any make of vehicle, by 1919 the company began to produce its own vehicle under the 'Castle' brand. A great success, it was unfortunate that demand outpaced the manufacturer's capacity to produce enough vehicles and so in 1922 that business closed with the buildings being converted to accommodate a carpet manufactory.

## **1918–1939**

The social impact of World War One was huge, both in terms of human cost and the subsequent economic effects. The aftermath of the war led to a distinctive shift in the provision of social housing to meet the needs of families affected by the war. There was, however, a wider trend that resulted from the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act that recognised that many of the mass-built, urban 'workers' homes of the

previous century were not conducive to health and wellbeing. Plans were put in place to demolish or redevelop areas of what would become known as 'slum housing' and provide new areas of lower density, larger homes that were far better equipped with, amongst other improvements, internal toilets and private gardens. The first social housing (a total of 40 units) developed in Kidderminster were built in 1920 on Hurcott Road and Gheluvelt Avenue, precipitating over the course of five decades, a large new suburb on the eastern side of the town.

Development during the inter-war period was not limited to improvements in domestic accommodation. Across Kidderminster, new public buildings were completed; notably in the areas of public health, recreation, civic duty and education. Key examples of extant buildings from this period include The Public Baths (1931); the Fire Station (1929) and Harry Cheshire County Secondary School (1939), which has since been transformed into Baxter College. The town centre underwent its first phase of 20<sup>th</sup>-century 'modernisation' during this period with the widening of Blackwell Street; a project instigated and delivered by the Kidderminster Corporation. Recorded as Black Star Street on 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century maps, Blackwell Street is a road of likely medieval origin that up until the early 1930s was a narrow way fronted by tall tenements and shops. The widening scheme resulted in the demolition of all buildings on the south-eastern side of the street to accommodate the widened carriageway. A new terrace was then constructed and named Towers Buildings with the project completed by 1934. This fine range of buildings provided new office and retail spaces, completely transforming Blackwell Street. The Telephone Exchange, operated by the General Post Office (1939), was built, perhaps fittingly, (although not without a hint of irony) on the site of demolished tenements that included the birthplace of Sir Rowland Hill adjacent to the northern boundary of Towers Buildings. Construction of the Telephone Exchange represented an age when there was a growing demand for new infrastructure for communications and other critical services.

Another structure that dominated views across the town for over 50 years was the Gasometer. Built in 1931 at the eastern end of Mill Street, the large gas holder was a receptacle for 'town gas', a by-product refined from coal that was increasingly in demand following the adoption of domestic gas appliances. The Central Cinema (built in 1931) that stood on Oxford Street until 1985 was a larger and more modern cinema and theatre that complemented the existing playhouses and picture houses scattered throughout the town centre. The only extant part of the building is the small retail annex that survived demolition. Currently occupied by a general store, the building displays details of the subtle Art Deco style that was used for The Central, being a common design palate used in cinemas of the period.

## **1939–1945**

In common with many other urban centres, activities in Kidderminster during this period were dominated by World War Two effectively bringing development and redevelopment to a halt. Established industries were realigned to contribute towards wartime production needs, for example: aeronautic, munitions and equipment necessary to support the infrastructure of war. Kidderminster's established industries contributed comprehensively towards the effort, engaging in all aspects of military production. This required little structural change with most factories adapted internally. The exception was at Summerfield, a small outlying hamlet to the south of Kidderminster. Here, ICI constructed a munitions factory in 1940. Several buildings from this period are extant including a pill box that guards the northern approaches along the A449. The site has evolved since the 1940s but continues to operate in the defence industry.

## 1945–1983

The post-war townscape of Kidderminster is one that, without question, underwent some of the largest-scale alterations to what was, still, an urban centre largely defined by 19<sup>th</sup>-century expansion and remodelling of an established medieval urban form. It is no exaggeration to state that redevelopment of the town during this period was strategic in its aims. Chief amongst the changes were construction of the ring road and the redevelopment of large parts of the town centre, notably: The Bull Ring, The High Street, between Vicar Street and Worcester Street and construction of the ring road, that between 1965 and 1983 imposed radical change upon large parts of the historic townscape<sup>1</sup>. The slow decline of carpet manufacturing was a long-term issue; however, the pace of decline increased during the 1960s and 1970s, with smaller manufacturers merging with larger firms or closing. There was a gradual shift towards retail and services that saw remodelling of the town centre with construction of the Swan and Rowland Hill shopping centres followed by pedestrianisation of Vicar Street, High Street and Worcester Street. This trajectory continued through the latter years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with large retail units opening on land formerly associated with carpet factories.

It is against this backdrop of cycles of decline and regeneration that 20<sup>th</sup>-century character areas and buildings that are distinctive can be presented for assessment. The regeneration of previously regenerated 20<sup>th</sup>-century places, in tandem with the demolition of 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings has become a significant indicator of change since 2000.

## Areas of distinctive 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings and setting

The following examples are places or groups of buildings that convey a particularly strong sense of 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture and principles of spatial planning. The individual buildings may not be considered significant in a national context, but within the context of Kidderminster they present a measure of significance that is a result of their setting to which, of course, they also contribute. This approach has proven to be particularly helpful when assessing 20<sup>th</sup>-century heritage in Kidderminster, given that many (not all) distinctive buildings arose out of programmes of urban regeneration and therefore their setting remains of equal significance. In addition, there are individual buildings that are set within earlier streetscapes or amongst 20<sup>th</sup>-century suburbs that have been identified as candidates for inclusion in the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record. These are listed in the table at the end of this section.

### Castle Road

**Description:** The eastern end of Castle Road (between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and the junction with New Road) is a streetscape that has an overall distinctive historic character dominated by early 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings, although the presence of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Caldwell Tower adds a further historic dimension and to some degree a counterpoint to the broad façade of the former Brinton's works, built in 1929 and therefore a contemporary of the Fire Station, which was completed in the same year. The Castle Locks building retains the façade of the former Public Baths, built in 1931.

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<sup>1</sup> The rapid pace of change in Post War Kidderminster has been subject to extensive criticism and debate, including by Brooks and Pevsner in their 2007 revised *The Buildings of England: Worcestershire*. Although some criticism, i.e. the severing of Church Street from her Parish Church, is more universally acknowledged, there is now growing appreciation that significance cannot be based on aesthetic alone and that social spaces and function, as a reflection of their time and as a product of policy and design-driven change, are also worthy of consideration.



**Materials, scale and massing:** Looking at the buildings, both individually and as a collective, reveals further elements that combine to present a coherent character. Red brick is the dominant construction material with yellow sandstone used for various architectural details. The Fire Station and former Public Baths share similarities in massing and are both set back from the road whereas the former Brinton factory is set adjacent to the pavement. This variation results in a streetscape that at no point seems overwhelmed or hemmed in; an experience that is further enhanced by the relatively low height of the buildings that do not exceed those typical of contemporary urban terrace housing. Caldwell Tower is, by contrast, predominantly faced with red sandstone. This distinction is, however, subtle in the context of the streetscape with the assembled buildings all displaying a colour and texture that is complementary to the setting.

**Significance of the setting:** Essentially, this is a largely intact early 20<sup>th</sup>-century streetscape that represents a period when Castle Road was created following the alignment of a lane that serviced Caldwell Manor. The road provided improved access between the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century suburb, developed by The Kidderminster Freehold Land Society and The Woodfield Estate Land Society, and New Road that itself facilitated access to several carpet factories. The late 20<sup>th</sup>- to early 21<sup>st</sup>-century evolution of Castle Road has not radically altered the established streetscape, which has a signature character defined by its civic and industrial buildings. The Fire Station was completely remodelled during the late 1980s with the façade and training tower retained as the only original components. This approach was repeated with the Brinton's factory site, which was demolished behind the façade and replaced by a Tesco supermarket. The former Public Baths were also extensively remodelled as part of their conversion to residential use. Castle Road is effectively a streetscape of historic 20<sup>th</sup>-century facades with, paradoxically perhaps, the medieval Caldwell Tower being the only complete, non-domestic building in situ. The Kidderminster branch of *Age UK* and a detached house that was once connected with the Public Baths are the only other 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings along this section of Castle Road; both are, however, set back from the street frontage and screened behind mature conifers.



The view towards the west from the New Road junction.



The former Public Baths.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** Castle Road is a, perhaps rare, example of where a significant heritage asset is complemented by its (relatively) modern setting. The morphology, similar building materials and architectural form present a coherent character that marks out Castle Road as a significant example of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century development of Kidderminster that was a result of its industrial, and therefore economic, success. A journey from the eastern end of Castle Road towards its western junction with Woodfield Crescent illustrates this clearly in the build environment. Important industrial and civic buildings are bounded by the River Stour and Canal, beyond which Castle Road

continues into one of the major late 19<sup>th</sup>-century suburbs that was established as a direct result of the carpet manufacturing industry. The significance of Castle Road is therefore, in part, defined by its place in the historical narrative of industrial and post-industrial Kidderminster. It also provides a focal point for the wider suburban and (further east) industrial core of the town where there is a clear measure of indivisibility between those elements at various points along the road and between buildings. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century morphology of this area has been retained; this despite major redevelopment having taken place behind the streetscape. The lack of infilling between the buildings has contributed as much towards the overall sense of place and significance as has retention of the façades. The space between the buildings contributes directly to their setting and this has benefitted the setting of Caldwell Tower, which has not been overwhelmed by 20<sup>th</sup>-century development. Plans to relocate Kidderminster Fire Station to a new site will of course release a significant area of land with the potential for redevelopment. The risk here is that any partial or wholesale loss of the Fire Station building will result in both the loss of a key 20<sup>th</sup>-century building, and also harm to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century streetscape and the setting of Caldwell Tower. There is a clear argument for maintaining the trajectory of redeveloping in respect to the existing streetscape, which can deliver wider benefits whilst protecting the historic townscape character of Castle Road.

## **Blackwell Street**

**Description:** Blackwell Street is a wide main street framed by the impressive Towers Buildings (1934) and the Swan Centre multi-storey car park (1969). A range of pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings are extant at its northern extent opposite the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Red Man pub. An historic routeway of possible medieval origin, the streetscape is nonetheless dominated by 20<sup>th</sup>-century character spanning a period from 1934 to 1970. In terms of style, the upper storey façade of Towers Buildings closely resembles that of a Georgian terrace with six-over-six panel sash windows, grouped into sets of three, separated by slightly projecting vertical pilasters that define the separation between each unit. The first-floor façade is altogether more indicative of 1930s style, with large, nine-panel windows, once again arranged into sets of three for each of the units. At street level, the variety of modern styles and materials reflects the diverse range of retail businesses and food outlets. Despite this, there is nonetheless uniformity to the overall range due to the intactness of the upper storeys. North of Towers Buildings stands the former Telephone Exchange, now converted to apartments. Its brick and sandstone façade also conform to Georgian stylistic details with a symmetry that might be typical of a grand townhouse. The Swan Centre shopping parade is predominantly red brick with a similar mix of styles at street level, although it is noteworthy that Fosters Jewellers has retained its original signage and street front façade. The first floor has narrow window lights arranged in pairs with painted render above. The multi-storey is largely precast concrete with a red brick central tower that houses the stairwell and lifts. The multi-storey is decorated with narrowly spaced, vertical pediments. Stylistically, this references a perpendicular form in a modernist context.

**Materials, scale and massing:** Towers Buildings are faced with yellow sandstone ashlar blocks with red brick used on the non-public facing elevations. The Swan Centre is a mix of red brick with painted render, weather board and ceramic tile settings for individual shop fronts. The car park is a substantial structure constructed from pre-cast concrete with a central brick tower. To the north, the brick-built Telephone Exchange stands opposite the remaining 19<sup>th</sup>-century shops and tenements. The multi-storey car park is set back slightly from the roadside, which not only helps to mitigate its dominant size, but also opens views along the streetscape. There is a degree of uniformity in the colour palette and relationship between the sandstone of Towers Buildings and the concrete of the multi-storey, perhaps a result of weathering.



**Significance of the setting:** Blackwell Street is similar to Castle Road with its character defined by its 20<sup>th</sup>-century form and buildings rather than its deeper historic origins. Towers Buildings and the multi-storey car park are substantial structures that enclose, although do not entirely overwhelm, their streetscape setting, principally perhaps because the 1930s widening created an open boulevard. This is enhanced further by the set back of the multi-storey and the gap for its entrance that provides a west-facing opening for light. Sunlight flooding into the street through this opening both lights and complements the sandstone façade of Towers Buildings.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** Blackwell Street justifies inclusion as both a place with significant 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings and a streetscape defined by its 20<sup>th</sup>-century character. In terms of character, the buildings that line the street represent a period of construction that spans from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, it stands as a material record of an historic urban centre that has evolved from streets of small independent shops into shops with large showrooms, restaurants and offices, before then becoming part of the transport infrastructure of a shopping centre occupied by a mix of independent and chain stores. Its 21<sup>st</sup>-century function is once again being redefined with conversion of the former Telephone Exchange into residential apartments. The substantial width of the street is also notable as there is scope here to retrofit urban green infrastructure, particularly although not exclusively, street trees that would, along with other benefits, enhance the boulevard character of the road.



The west facing aspect of Towers Buildings.



The east facing aspect of the Swan Centre and multi-storey car park.

## **The Police Station and Mason Road**

**Description:** Kidderminster County Police Station and twenty-four Police Houses were designed by County Architect, Captain L. C. Lomas and built by A. H. Guest Ltd, opening in April 1955. The Station is reminiscent of a Georgian terrace, perhaps, in keeping with other civic buildings of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (for example Kidderminster Telephone Exchange) and is constructed of brick with sandstone dressings and a pitched, pan tile roof. A contemporary recreation ground at the rear of the Station was sold off for residential development in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the Station and housing have survived intact.

**Materials, scale and massing:** The Station and houses are all principally constructed from the same pale red brick and concrete roof tiles. The Georgian-style architecture of the Station is not carried through to the housing, which is more typical of mid-century social housing. The houses are semi-detached and set

back from the road with small front and rear gardens, again typical of the period. The Station is set well back from the junction of Blakebrook, Habberley Road and Mason Road and is a substantial landmark.

**Significance of the setting:** The Station has, since 1955, been refurbished and extended at the rear. However, its front and side elevations remain largely unaltered. The same can be said of the houses that have retained their coherent appearance, with the exception of replacement windows. The overall setting is therefore still largely comparable to how it must have appeared in 1955 and the assemblage of buildings creates a highly distinctive and coherent 20<sup>th</sup>-century character.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** The significance of the Police Station and its associated housing is notable across several themes. The area was developed from former farmland and therefore, unlike parts of the urban core of Kidderminster, its designers had fewer spatial constraints to contend with. Overall, there is a sense of space, despite the scale of the police station building. The architecture, its style and use of uniform materials, contributes towards the coherent character. Both the police station and housing have been updated with replacement windows and other detailed changes. This, however, has not diminished the overall character, perhaps because, unlike earlier distinctive historic architectural periods, 20<sup>th</sup>-century design has some measure of extra capacity to absorb replacement features and materials. Finally, there is a cultural significance to the place. This can, of course, be argued for each of the character areas discussed in this case study, however, here there is a distinctive crossover between civic and social housing. The provision of accommodation and sports and recreation facilities for police officers and staff carried a social value that has since been devolved. The housing has gradually been sold on the open property market, yet the relationship is still evident in the buildings and character of the area.



The south facing aspect of the former police houses.



Kidderminster Police Station.

## **St Chad's Church and Burcher Green Retail**

**Description:** Construction of the Comberton Estate marked the first major eastern expansion of Kidderminster into a landscape of former enclosed heath and farmland, largely associated with Comberton Farm. Built between 1952 and 1955, the estate created 580 new homes with associated shops, community and amenity facilities (Tomkinson, Hall 1985, 24). The shopping parade was collectively named Burcher Green, not as might first be thought in relation to an existing place-name, but in recognition of F.D.H. Burcher who, amongst many achievements, was Mayor of Kidderminster in 1955 and later the Chairman

of Housing and Redevelopment Committees (Tomkinson, Hall 1985, 119). St Chad's Church was completed in 1956 and a small area of community greenspace was created immediately east of the church, thereby completing the community focus of the Burcher Green area. The church and shops, with first floor accommodation, are arranged around a smaller green and service road. The greenspace east of the church is enclosed on the north and south sides by bungalows that front onto the green. The overall planform is very similar to that of a regular farmstead with two courtyards. The buildings and their respective functions have remained intact. Changes have taken place in occupation of the retail units; however, the range still includes a grocery shop and post office.

**Materials, scale and massing:** Materials are typical of those widely used in mid-century social and private housing. The brickwork is a mix of tones grouped within a brown and buff colour palette. This variation in tone, albeit limited, creates a certain patterning that is of some aesthetic value and notably contrasts the much more uniform colour of later 20<sup>th</sup>- early 21<sup>st</sup>-century red bricks. There is a block of new housing to the immediate south-west of the shops that illustrates this contrast well. Roofs are clad in dark brown pantiles, in common with that of contemporary housing elsewhere on the estate. The main entrance to the church and the shopfronts are all rendered and painted white. Windows appear to have been replaced, being of a more recent UPVC construction. The front gable of the church (also the main entrance) is largely made up of glazed panels. Below this, the main entrance door and its flanking windows have been replaced with dark brown UPVC that does not complement the original white window frames and paintwork. Brown UPVC windows have been fitted throughout other parts of the building. There is a small bell tower with a pantile roof and open tracery of the same geometric pattern as that of the glazed front gable. The buildings, irrespective of function, are collectively similar in height and scale so that not even the church dominates the group. There is a clear sense of space between the shops and church and, therefore, a relatively well-established visual connectivity with the setting. Surfaces are a mixture of hard tarmac, interspersed with ornamental trees, and concrete paving with areas of amenity grass. Perhaps the most striking aspect is the symmetry evident in the arrangement of the buildings, with the church forming the centre of what was clearly designed to be a hub of the community.

**Significance of the setting:** The main approach to Burcher Green is from the south-west along the tree-lined Somerleyton Avenue. The church provides a distinctive focal point flanked by the two ranges of buildings that house the shops. The lower roofline of the bungalows, located behind the shops, contributes towards a sense of open space around Burcher Green, despite the relative proximity of other housing. One result of this arrangement is that the buildings of Burcher Green define the skyline, adding further distinction to the visual focus of the area. The north-eastern aspect of Burcher Green and the 'green' is largely concealed when approached from either direction along Claines Crescent. This, perhaps, emphasises the impact of encountering what is a well-designed open space, framed by the bungalows and the rear elevation of the church. The mature ornamental planting complements the setting both in terms of creating filtered views and contrasting the otherwise neutral colour palette of the streetscape.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** Community hubs, such as Burcher Green, have become a recognisable part of both social and private housing estates. In planning terms, they were and still are designed to fulfil a need to provide essential local shops, a place of communal gathering, be that a community hall or church, and some form of recreation, which often included a family pub. In the social context, they fulfil, at least in part, the need for a community focus not just for organised gatherings, but also the casual encounters when shopping or visiting the fish and chip shop. The construction of large

residential estates created communities that were, at least on foot, much more detached from their historic town centres. Public transport services offered a solution, but the experience of visiting shops and local services on foot in a place that felt, in essence, like a village centre was an essential part of day-to-day community life. Not all estate centres are the same and Burcher Green lacks a pub (The Cavalier is located 600m to the north-east). There is a fish and chip shop close to the shops, but it is detached from Burcher Green on a separate cul-de-sac and appears to be a later conversion of a one-time domestic property. The group value of Burcher Green is defined by its largely intact 1950s character (other examples in Kidderminster are being partly redeveloped) and the balance achieved in the original design that created a symmetry and spatial arrangement which is both aesthetically pleasing and functional as a communal centre.



The west-facing approach to Burcher Green community centre  
Image: © 2020 Google

## **Other, less intact, examples of estate community hubs**

### *Canterbury Road Shopping Parade*

This is the only surviving element of what was a much larger area of community buildings that included two places of worship (Our Lady of St. Pius X Catholic Church and St. John's Church Hall) and The Cooper's Arms pub, and is part of Habberley Estate built between 1956–9 for the provision of social housing. All the community buildings have, in recent years, been demolished and replaced with new private sector social housing, therefore leaving only the shopping parade intact. Were this not the case then, without doubt, the group could have been ascribed as a highly significant example of 20<sup>th</sup>-century estate architecture and character.





The north-facing aspect of Canterbury Road shopping parade.

### *Marpool Shopping Parade and Playing Field*

The shops in this example are set back from the road, adjacent to a large recreation ground that includes an area of formal play equipment. A contemporary pub, The Roundhead, was until recently located just north of the shops. The site has now been converted to residential development. Social housing began to be developed in 1927 at Marpool Place (approximately 400 metres to the south-west) and by the mid-1960s a large estate of private housing expanded into an area of former allotments and farmland. The shops and recreation ground are contemporary with this phase of development.



The east-facing aspect of Marpool Shopping Parade.

### **Brinton Park**

**Description:** The park was established in 1887 when carpet magnate, John Brinton, gifted 23 acres of land he owned in Sutton Common to Kidderminster Corporation. Brinton spent £3,000 on landscaping works prior to the formal presentation on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1887 (Park 2008, 1). An additional 6 acres of land adjacent to Sutton Road was acquired and added to the park in 1906. Several structures and buildings have been added and removed during the park's 132 years of history. A monument to the Liberal politician, Richard Eve, which was also a drinking fountain, was unveiled on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1902. A set of ornamental gates providing a grand entrance to the park followed shortly in 1905. The original kiosk was destroyed by fire in 1890 and not replaced until 1896 when a new kiosk and bandstand were opened. The bandstand remained in use until it was replaced by a more enclosed structure in 1934. The new bandstand was sited in a part of the park where the topography creates a slight amphitheatre

effect with the bandstand at the lowest elevation. The finished result would have improved both the view and acoustics for the audience. Other notable early buildings included a wooden, 19<sup>th</sup>-century ‘cabbies’ shelter’ that was removed to the park from the Bull Ring and used for storage until the late 1990s when it was demolished. The Sons of Rest Pavilion, adjacent to Sutton Road, opened in 1938. The ‘Four Winds’ shelter, an appropriately named four-bay open structure located at the centre of the park, was home to the popular Mrs Butcher’s Little Candy Shop during the 1930s (Park 2008, 5). The shelter remained until 2004 when it was demolished. A red brick, possibly 1930s, toilet block still stands at a central location with a second, 1960s example: the sole surviving building associated with a later group which included a kiosk and paddling pool. The park was, perhaps, at its peak during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century before entering a period of slow change from the 1980s. This began with a reduction in areas of shrubbery and associated landscape features, the removal of some historic buildings and the paddling pool, which had itself replaced an earlier ornamental pool. Despite this apparent decline, the park has continued to be well-used and has seen some investment in formal play facilities. It is also a landscape comprised of features from all stages of its evolution, as a park, as well as those inherited from its earlier incarnation. The park has been a recent beneficiary (2019) of Heritage Lottery funding to support a major enhancement and restoration project: Brinton Park – The People’s Park. The project will provide a significant uplift for what is a major and valued heritage and recreational asset in Kidderminster.<sup>2</sup>

**Materials, scale and massing:** The surviving buildings within the park are a diverse assemblage of utilitarian and ornamental architecture. None are substantial and therefore they nest within the park, punctuating the space, creating viewpoints and leading the eye, but never dominating their setting. The bandstand is painted render and, broadly, Art Deco in its form and decoration. The Richard Eve monument, despite it’s early 20<sup>th</sup>-century construction, is of English Baroque and, perhaps, could be considered ‘high Victorian’ in style: finished in terracotta, glazed and decorated tiles. The two toilet blocks are respectively red brick with a pitched, tiled roof (1930s block) and grey brick with inset panels and a flat, felted roof (1960s block). The Sons of Rest Pavilion is of red brick and tile, similar to the 1930s toilet block. The original park office is perhaps the most substantial building, again of red brick and tile. It borders the park and area set aside as a plant nursery, which incorporates several glasshouses in situ. The ornamental gates at the main entrance have survived, but not without some loss of decoration and alteration. Other landscape features of the park, such as the iron boundary fence, a flight of concrete-cast steps leading to Park Lane and retaining walls built of rock remain largely intact. The original bowling green and its associated buildings have been replaced with a small, 5-a-side football pitch. The adjacent tennis courts remain intact next to a skateboard park. The network of roads and paths remain intact. Two of the pre-park footpaths that provided links across Sutton Common between Sutton Common Road (now Sutton Park Road) and Park Lane were retained as part of the park’s access.

**Significance of the setting:** The park was intended as a gift to a town that was rapidly developing as a result of its 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial success. As such, the park was created at what was the south-western fringe of Kidderminster. Within a few years of its opening Brinton Park was subsumed into the rapidly expanding suburbs that defined the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century evolution of Kidderminster from its legacy as a post-medieval market and cloth weaving town to a burgeoning

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.brintonpark.com/>



powerhouse of carpet manufacturing and engineering. Notwithstanding the importance of the suburbs, perhaps the most important part of the setting is the town cemetery, which has earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century origins with later expansion that took in land previously also part of Sutton Common, adjacent farmland and part of the valley and pool associated with Blake Brook. Together, the cemetery and park constitute a substantial area of designed landscape with a diverse assemblage of mature broadleaf, coniferous and specimen trees. They remain the most distinctive areas of public open space in Kidderminster.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** As with all designed landscapes, establishing significance is reliant on understanding the value of the total assemblage of features, their topographical and visual setting, and their wider physical and social setting. Brinton Park is symbolic of a philanthropic desire to reward a population, many of whom were employed by the benefactor, and was a direct result of industrial success. The park has been a cornerstone of recreational open space in Kidderminster and, to a greater extent, remains so to this day. It is unfortunate that many of its most distinctive and unique buildings have been lost as a result of neglect and vandalism. Nonetheless, those that remain contribute towards the character and narrative of the park's landscape and social history. Brinton Park is a unique example in this case study because it has received grant funding that will deliver much needed conservation and enhancement. However, in the longer-term it would be advantageous to consider Listing the individual structures (if not the entire park) in order to set a framework for future sustainable management of Brinton Park's material heritage.



North-east view of the Richard Eve monument, bandstand and 1930s toilet block.



The 1930s bandstand – audience view.



The main gates seen from the south-west.



The view north through the 1906 extension with the now grown-out former hedgerow boundary visible on the right.

## **St John's Primary School and Baxter College**

**Description:** Originally, this was a group of three distinctive school complexes, yet all linked both spatially and within the context of both education reforms set out in the Education Act, 1921 and the comprehensive education system that developed during the late 1960s. In 1937, 26.32 acres of farmland was compulsorily purchased from Blakebrook Farm, Habberley Road with work beginning in November 1938. The Harry Cheshire Modern School opened in October 1940 (Tomkinson, Hall 1985, 24). It was effectively two linked schools designed to accommodate 960 boys and girls in separate wings that nonetheless mirrored one another in terms of facilities, rooms and spatial arrangement. In 1965, the Department of Education and Science issued a Circular (10/65) that set out a requirement for the reorganisation of existing Secondary schools into a new Comprehensive system, which included an option for introducing Middle Schools. This document was of significance as it quickly led to the construction of St. John's Church of England Middle School in 1969 followed by St. John's Church of England Infant School in 1971 (Tomkinson, Hall 1985, 156). The final stage of reorganisation came in September 1972 when the Harry Cheshire schools were amalgamated into a mixed school, becoming Harry Cheshire High School. This arrangement remained in place until September 2002 when, after a period of declining performance, the High School was reformed becoming Baxter College. Following further restructuring, St. John's Church of England Middle School closed on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2007 becoming amalgamated with Baxter College, with the Infant school becoming a Primary school. Additional buildings have been added over time and there have been some alterations to the external spaces and facilities as part of the merger and general upgrades. Nonetheless, the original form of all three schools is largely intact and they are set within extensive green space with mixed sports and play facilities.

**Materials, scale and massing:** The former Harry Cheshire School is predominantly of red brick construction with a brown pantile roof cladding and, very recently, replacement composite windows. During the site visit to take photographs (21<sup>st</sup> February 2019) the school caretaker confirmed that the 1930s metal-framed windows had only been replaced in 2018. The school was planned with a highly symmetrical form indicative of its original function as two separate schools, albeit structurally linked. Following amalgamation in 1972 a new detached sports hall, theatre, detached science block and sixth-form block were built. Subsequent and quite recent additional buildings have been constructed, partly to replace demolished "mobile" classrooms, erected in the late 1940s, but also as part of the modernisation and expansion of facilities. Both the former Middle School and First School are of broadly the same design palette and construction phase,

and it is likely they were designed as a package. They are of buff-coloured brick construction with sloping, felt-clad roofs and aluminium windows that appear to be largely original. The façades and some window settings are clad with panels finished in painted timber or plaster. As with Harry Cheshire High School, there have been several additions and alterations to both schools although both have retained much of their original form.

**Significance of the setting:** The entire complex of schools is set within a substantial area of greenspace that has retained much of its open and historic character despite the recent expansion of facilities and the addition of the Wyre Forest School on the north-eastern part of the site. Some elements of the former Blakebrook Farm that were retained as part of the landscape setting of the schools, have also survived intact to the present day. These include the mature standard trees lining the main approach to Baxter College (the original access to Blakebrook Farm) and sections of former hedgerows that have now grown out to form mature tree belts. The main approach is of considerable length (340 metres from its junction to the entrance of the school) comprised of a wide tree-lined avenue that eventually reveals the impressive, symmetrical façade of the school's main reception entrance. Extensive amenity grassland with interspersed, mature, mixed broadleaf and coniferous trees – a setting evocative of mature parkland – define the soft landscape of the setting. Within this setting, the whole complex is set back from the site boundaries and roads, which has resulted in a very open character and long-range views for the setting of properties along Blakebrook and Habberley Road. The southern and western boundaries are more enclosed, being associated with private rear gardens for properties along St John's Avenue. Overall, the scale of the site is such that it has a strong influence on the wider residential setting without dominating that space, due to the limited number of associated buildings close to the boundaries.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** It is perhaps the scale, unity and setting of the schools that is most striking and significant in the wider suburban setting. Blakebrook is notable for its largely intact late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century assemblage of houses that are stylistically diverse yet unifying when the streetscape is viewed as a whole. Most properties on Blakebrook are set back from the road, some by a substantial margin. This has given space to trees planted in front gardens, allowing them to mature, which has, in-turn, created a parkland-type character along the roadway and has become an extension of the semi-parkland character that defines the setting of the schools. Similarly, the northern aspect of the schools' setting creates the sense of a settlement edge with properties fronting onto Habberley Road. It is also important to note here the association between the schools and Kidderminster Police Station (see this report) given that both complexes are adjacent and both benefit from cumulative aspects of their shared setting. As a complete assemblage, the schools support a substantial community of children and staff and the scale of the complex, as a whole, is impressive. This is best appreciated on foot walking across the site, which could be likened to a small settlement or more practically a university campus. The buildings throughout remain, despite some upgrading and extension, highly distinctive examples of 20<sup>th</sup>-century school architecture and design principles. The scale of the site has enabled the schools to expand as they have adapted to change without the need for redevelopment. Therefore, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century evolution of English state education is well-represented here and is worthy of recognition.





Baxter College (Formerly Harry Cheshire High School) main façade (left) and its setting looking southwest.



The former St John's Middle School (left) and St John's Infants (now Primary) School (right).

## **Murals: Worcester Cross to Worcester Road Ring Road**

**Description:** Kidderminster's inner ring road was commissioned as a solution to relieve traffic congestion through the town centre. The project comprised five stages, or sections, of which four were completed. Construction of Phase One began in August 1965 and concluded with the opening of Phase Four in April 1983. Stage Three, the link between Worcester Cross and Stourport Road, was opened in August 1973 and differed from the other phases insofar that its elevated route provided a strong visual backdrop to the town centre. A wide, terraced footway was constructed parallel to the new dual carriageway. This provided pedestrian access from the town centre (via a new subway at Worcester Cross) to Aggborough; a new suburb that also included the Kidderminster Harriers football ground and Kidderminster College. Construction of the new road also required the realignment of the northern section of the existing Hoo Road, which ran along a top of the terrace high above the dual carriageway and footway. The west-facing elevation of the terrace presented a substantial cliff-like aspect of between one and several metres in height, and therefore an opportunity to create a substantial work of public art. Douglas H. Smith was appointed as the consultant landscape architect to plan and design early stages of the project along with Jack Stewart, the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, who was particularly keen that the finished result should make a bold artistic statement (Loftus 2019, 2). The sculptor William Mitchell had risen to prominence during the 1960s for his work that centred on the creation of large-scale installations using, in addition to other materials, concrete shaped with fibreglass moulds (Pereira, 2013). Mitchell developed a style that was rooted firmly in mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century modernism, inspired by abstract design. He had worked on several notable, architectural projects that included Quayside Tower, Birmingham (1965); The Three Tuns public house, Coventry (1966); Story of Wool Sculptural Mural at the International Development Centre, Ilkley (1968) and the Sculptural Wall, London Road, Manchester (1968) and was therefore well-suited to the task.

William Mitchell Design Consultants were invited to tender and were duly commissioned to design and deliver a sculptured mural in concrete to run the entire length of the terrace, a distance of approximately 320 metres. The main engineering contractor, George Law and Company brought considerable expertise of working with concrete to ensure the project was successfully delivered. The mural presents Mitchell's signature style to great effect and even included a water cascade as one of the moulded panels. The overall finish was pale buff in colour and created a striking backdrop that was visible across the town centre and Stour Valley.



Examples of two decorated panels and the main repeated pattern (centre).

**Materials, scale and massing:** The wall is constructed of moulded concrete panels that were cast in situ, using fibre glass moulds. There is a repeating pattern of four abstract designs punctuated with several panels that each present a different abstract design and one panel that had the additional function of a water cascade. Most are of similar abstract geometric form with the exception of one panel, located about midway along the installation that, while still abstract in nature, conveys an impression of organic material evocative of tree roots and hanging vegetation (Loftus 2019, 4).

**Significance of the setting:** The overall sense of scale is, of course, best experienced from the perspective of the pedestrian. Whilst it is monumental, there is a sense of space and proportion that gives perspective to the repeating patterns and texture and draws the eye to explore the vertical topography of the work. Soft landscaping works included amenity grass, a mixture of broadleaf and coniferous (mostly pine) trees. The trees are now reaching a phase of maturity so that, in places, they both overhang and overshadow the wall due to an apparent lack of management. One curious design feature is the bench seats set at the base of the wall. These face towards the dual carriageway offering a view only of passing traffic and not the murals. It is understandable given that to see the wall would require the seats to have been set back close to the fence that separates the carriageway from the footpath margin. Notwithstanding these practical constraints it nonetheless creates a jarring dichotomy between public and public art.

**Overall statement of significance and recommendations:** The significance of this structure can be justified from several perspectives. Perhaps the most obvious is that there is simply nothing similar elsewhere in Kidderminster or Worcestershire. Therefore, there is a rarity value that must be considered. In terms of William Mitchell's cannon of works, it is one of several examples that survive across the Midlands but is possibly unique in terms of its sheer scale. The installation in Kidderminster also differs in that it is an expression of Mitchell's work that defines the urban townscape character of its own setting. It is perhaps a

more subtle example of Mitchell’s signature design, but is no less striking in texture, scale and the grammar evident to the pedestrian observer. Many of Mitchell’s installations are now Listed. These examples are in populous settings where his work is the centrepiece of its space or the defining characteristic of the building it adorns. It is the conclusion of this report that William Mitchell’s installation along Stage 3 of Kidderminster Ring Road is of both local and national significance and should consequently be considered for Listing.

## **Other examples of 20<sup>th</sup>-century public art**

### *Worcester Cross Traffic Island*

This formed the northernmost point of Stage 3 of the Ring Road. The island is a large interchange managing both road traffic and pedestrians from four converging routes. Pedestrians access the interchange via subways that emerge into an open courtyard. When opened in 1973 this area included soft landscaped beds, seating and a public toilet block. The ramped and stepped approaches to the subways were finished in a mosaic of tiles with a design of concentric circles. From the central courtyard, each exit was designed with a mosaic panel above the subway entrance, symbolic of the main destination for each route. The footway leading to the railway-station side of Comberton Hill, for example, was finished with a mosaic of railway signals and a section of track. These have suffered from weathering and damage exacerbated by poorly affected repairs. Less abstract compared to William Mitchell’s murals, the mosaics nonetheless add to the mid-century modernism evident in the public art associated with the ring road.



The four panels now in a poor state of repair.



## Other distinctive 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings

The following table presents additional candidates that should be considered examples of important 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings, within the social context of Kidderminster, that should be considered for accession to both the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record and, in most cases, the Local List. The criteria for assessment echo that employed in Wyre Forest District Local Listing documents, itself informed by Historic England guidance for Local Lists:

1 = Age 2 = Architectural interest 3 = Social and communal value 4 = Associated with famous people 5 = Rarity 6 = Historic associations 7 = Landmark

Name	Location	Qualifying Criteria							HER Ref	Listed	Description
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
St Oswald's Church Centre	Broadwaters Drive SO8410 7798								To be added	No	1971 church hall, now serving as a church. The original church (dated 1964) was demolished in the 1980s due to subsidence.
Evangelical Church	Greatfield Road SO8214 7593								To be added	No	Built in the 1930s of red brick with later additions and replacement windows.
Offmore Farm Church and Church Hall	Tennyson Way SO8496 7673								To be added	No	An Evangelical community church and church hall built in 1979.
St. Peter's Community Church	Meredith Green SO8148 7430								To be added	No	A joint church and community hall opened on 30 <sup>th</sup> September 1955.
Kidderminster Baptist Church	Franch Road SO8196 7778								To be added	No	Opened on 8 <sup>th</sup> May 1971.
St Cecilia's Church	Hoo Road SO8352 7497								To be added	No	A red brick-built church opened in 1963 and

Name	Location	Qualifying Criteria							HER Ref	Listed	Description
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
											converted from a redundant infant school, originally built around 1920.
Franch Village Sports and Social Club	Franch Road SO8192 7818								To be added	No	Opened on 6 <sup>th</sup> June 1908, the club and its associated bowling green was a gift from local carpet magnate Michael Tomkinson.
The Cavalier Pub	Tennyson Way SO8507 7674								To be added	No	Built during the late-1960s and now the last functioning pub associated with a social housing estate.
Kidderminster Harriers Football Club	Hoo Road SO8357 7585								WSM71899	No	Multi-phase stadium of mostly 20 <sup>th</sup> -century construction. Likely to be redeveloped soon.

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