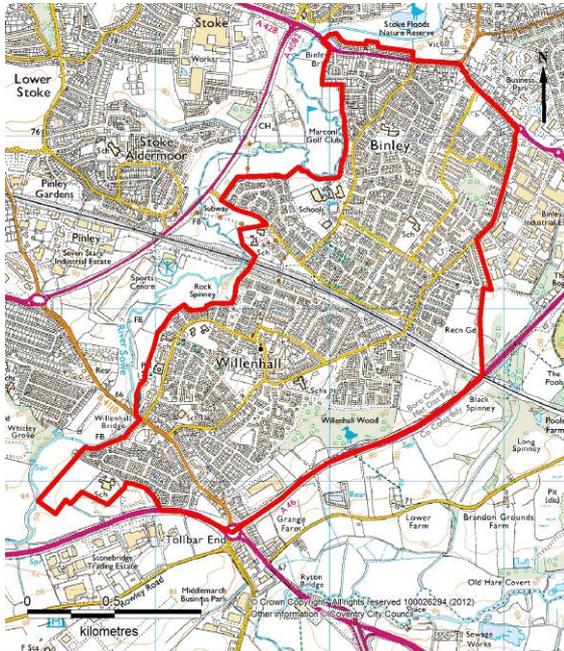


**Location and Context**



An area of predominantly residential development located on the southern edge of the city and divided by the West Coast main railway line. There is relatively poor accessibility to the city centre due to the presence of the Sowe River along the western boundary of the character area. The A46 Coventry by-pass is situated immediately to the southeast and an industrial estate to the east.

**Heritage Designations in the Area**

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments: 1
- Archaeological Constraint Areas: 11
- Listed Buildings: 2
- Locally Listed Buildings: 4
- Conservation Areas: 0
- Registered Parks and Gardens: 0

**Historic Development**

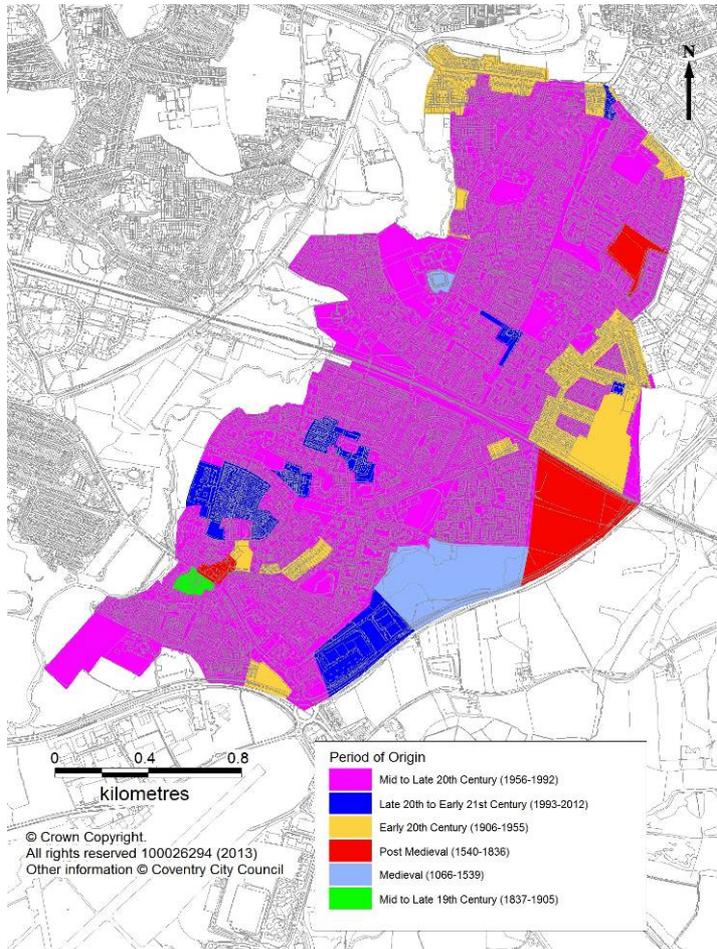
We know from documentary sources that there was a manor at Willenhall from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century onwards taking its name from the Willenhall family. The Manor was owned by St. Mary's Priory in Coventry and a chapel of ease dedicated to St James existed here from the 2<sup>th</sup> century close to what is now Gunton Avenue. To the north was Ernesford Grange which was owned by the Cistercian Monastery at Combe Abbey, the site of the grange and its moat can still be seen off Princethorpe Way. The remainder of the Character Area was



*17<sup>th</sup> Century cottages on St. James' Lane*

probably a mix of common land, agricultural enclosures, open fields and woodland in the medieval period. Some of the medieval woodland survives today at Willenhall Wood. By the 15<sup>th</sup> Century the village of Willenhall was centred around the junction of London Road and St. James' Lane. Between the junction and the bridge over the River Sowe were several cottages, the village tithe barn, and the Priory's 'chamber'. Further cottages were

located along the south-western stretch of St. James Lane, (then called Newton Lane), towards the site of the chapel.



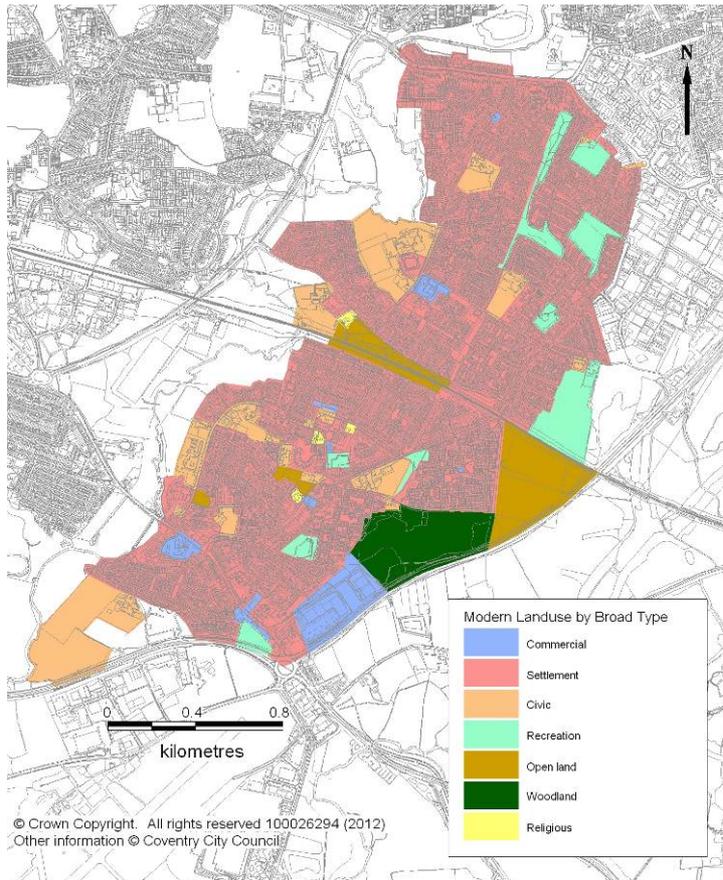
The north-eastern stretch of St. James Lane, towards Binley, was called Wood Lane. The turnpiking of London Road in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century seems to have encouraged building along the road to the south of the old village and by 1801 the population stood at 126 people. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the area was largely covered by enclosed fields belonging to the interspersed farmsteads of Stone House Farm, Upper Farm, Chapel Farm and Binley Grange. Between 1918 and the late 1930s about a hundred houses were built in the area of St. James Lane and London Road, while several large workers hostels were built in the area during World War II. In 1950 Coventry Corporation began to develop Willenhall Wood as one of its three new self-contained communities on the outskirts of the city. The nucleus of the development, contained a

shopping precinct', communal buildings, and the new parish church of St. John the Divine designed by Sir Basil Spence. This new development covered the area of the Willenhall Hall Farm and the 17<sup>th</sup> Century gabled stone farmhouse was demolished. A few chestnut trees from the avenue leading to the farm were left standing in Robin Hood Road.

Two of the housing estates at Willenhall completed in 1960 were among the first in England to be laid out on 'Radburn' lines, a design which keeps traffic and pedestrians completely separate. Vehicular access is by roads along the back of properties while the front of the houses open-out onto a green space and are accessed by footpaths.

By the late 1960s much of the area south of the railway line had been developed and the remaining area was built upon in stages up until the 1980s (including the redevelopment of the hostel sites), although there are some small pockets of very late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing also.

A few buildings from the old village survive along London Road. At the corner of St. James Lane are two pairs of cottages, which are now rendered, but were probably originally timber-framed and dating from the 17th century. Stone House Farm, just south of the former parish boundary, is one of the older buildings which still stand on the south-west side of London Road.



## Modern Character

The suburban area comprises of a mix of predominantly semi-detached houses and terraces with some detached houses and small apartments. Although there is some variation in architectural style and street pattern within the character area, all of the properties are built on small plots set way from roadside with small front gardens. Within the character area are pockets of very distinctive housing layouts, such as the 'Radburn' style housing, but generally the streets comprise of long, curving roads with curved and sometimes multi-headed cul de sacs. The area is characterised by small pockets of housing of homogenous style located next to housing of a contrasting style. Generally, many

of the houses include garages. Overall, the housing is condensed but there are pocket parks squeezed between some properties, particularly in the south of the Character Area. Some trees are present, usually on the corner of roads. Integrated within the suburban area are schools, churches and sometimes a small shop or garage.

## Geology and Topography

This area overlies mudstone with a sand and gravel drift geology. The land rises from 75m above sea level in the northwest of the character area to 90m in the southeast.



*1960s/1970s residential development, Yarningale Road, Willenhall*