

West Midlands State of the Environment

Sustainable places

A healthy environment is good for people and the places where they live. It can improve their health, their wellbeing, their relationship with their local community, even their local economy. A sustainable place is one where the needs of people and communities, the use of resources and production of waste and emissions are balanced so as not to compromise its future needs.

Pressures on people's local environment and the environmental infrastructure are mounting. The population of the West Midlands has been predicted to grow from the current 5.5 million to 6 million with a housing requirement of 397,900 new homes by 2026. We are working with local authorities and communities on local plans to maximise benefits to the environment and reduce the risk from flooding.

We need to maintain the current quality of our environment and act to improve it so everyone enjoys clean air and water, and a diverse environment in which to thrive.

At a glance

- The most unfavourable local environments as measured by the Environmental Quality Index occur in the region's urban areas, including Sandwell, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent and Walsall.
- These unfavourable environments are often in places with the most deprived communities as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- The Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that 27 per cent of West Midlands Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs - areas of approximately 1500 people) are in the worst fifth of nationally deprived communities and 14 per cent in the least deprived communities (source: Communities and Local Government).
- There are 3379 LSOAs in the West Midlands of which 21 per cent have no access to green or recreational space (source: Natural England). The LSOA with the most access is at Sutton Park (88 per cent accessible space) but the average across the region is 3.9 per cent area of LSOA with accessible space for example natural habitats, parks, footpaths, and cycle ways.
- Household recycling rates have increased from around 10 per cent in 2001/02 to 36.6 per cent in 2008/09. This level is still below average for England (37.6 per cent). However, the West Midlands sent the least percentage of municipal waste to landfill at 32.5 per cent.
- There were 61,486 fly-tipping incidents in 2008/09, with an estimated clearance cost of £3.4 million. 57 per cent of incidents involved household waste.
- The Environment Agency deals mainly with the larger illegal fly-tipping incidents – termed as 'big, bad and nasty' Most of these multiple illegal dumps bigger than a 'tipper load', often involve

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organised crime, and include drummed hazardous waste. Nationally there 676 incidents in 2009, with approximately seven per cent of these in the West Midlands. Offenders that were prosecuted received a range of penalties including custodial sentences, curfew orders, seized assets, and with an average fine of £6000.

- Over 2,000 pollution incidents were reported to us in 2009 in the West Midlands. The most frequent premises types recorded for the worst incidents (categories 1 and 2) were agriculture and waste management.
- The UK is using resources equivalent to 3.4 planets. Based on consumption the West Midlands has an ecological footprint value of 5.02 global hectares per capita (gh/c) compared with a UK average of 5.3 gh/c. This compares with a global biocapacity of two global hectares per capita (source: Ecological footprint: Global Footprint Network).
- Around 118,000 properties in the region are at risk from flooding; that's around four per cent of properties. 68 per cent of these properties (80,000) are residential properties.
- Around 21,000 residential and commercial properties are at 'significant' risk from flooding which is the highest category. This means they have a greater than 1 in 75 year chance of flooding.
- In 2007/08 the Environment Agency sustained 94 objections to planning applications on the grounds of flood risk. Five applications were eventually approved against our advice.
- There are 1,700 sensitive infrastructure sites in floodzone 2 (risk of 1 in 1000 year chance of flooding) including one hospital, over 300 power and gas stations, 43 care homes, 128 health centres and 35 emergency response centres.
- We now provide free flood warnings by telephone to 27,800 homes and business in the West Midlands.

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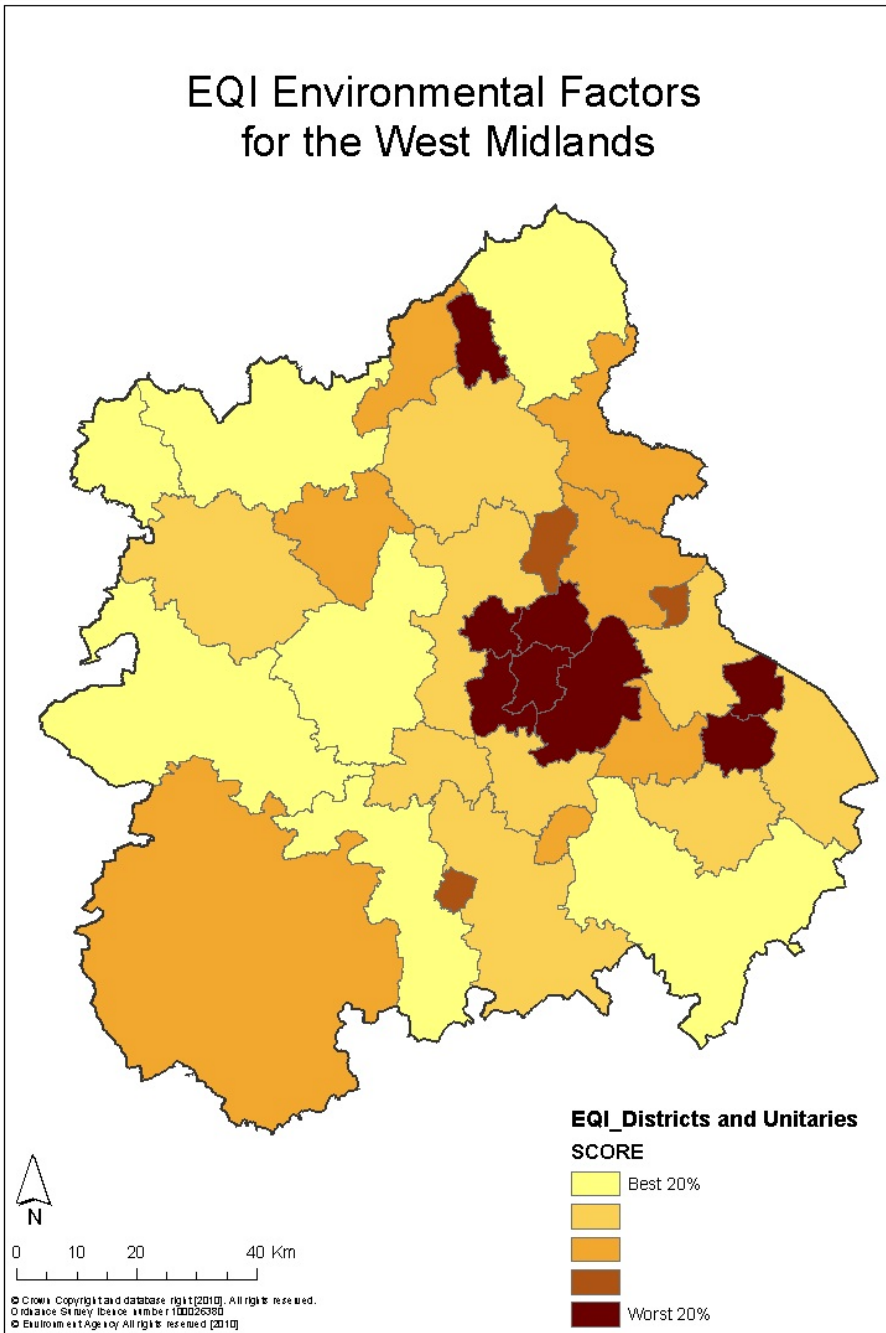
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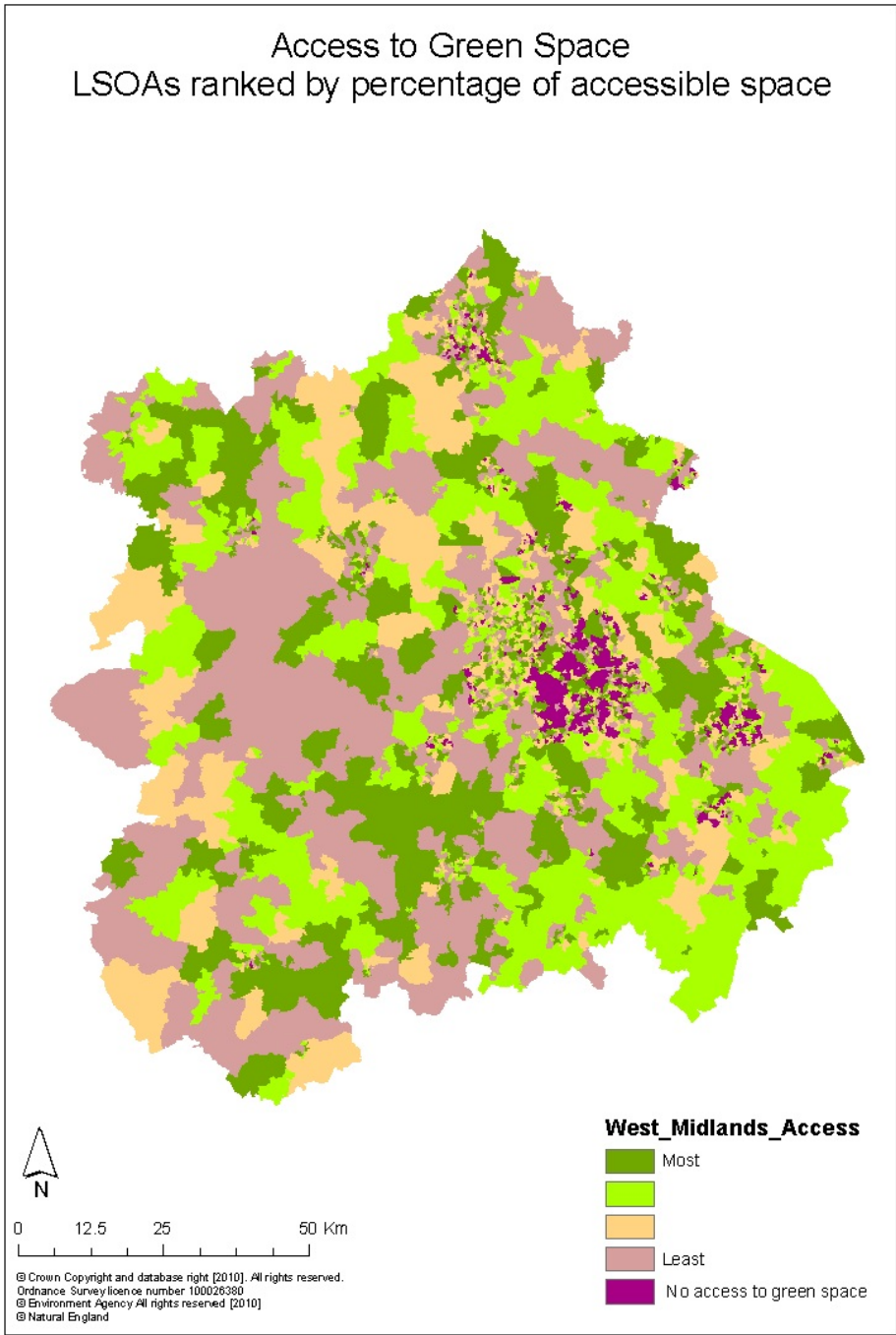
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Data and trends

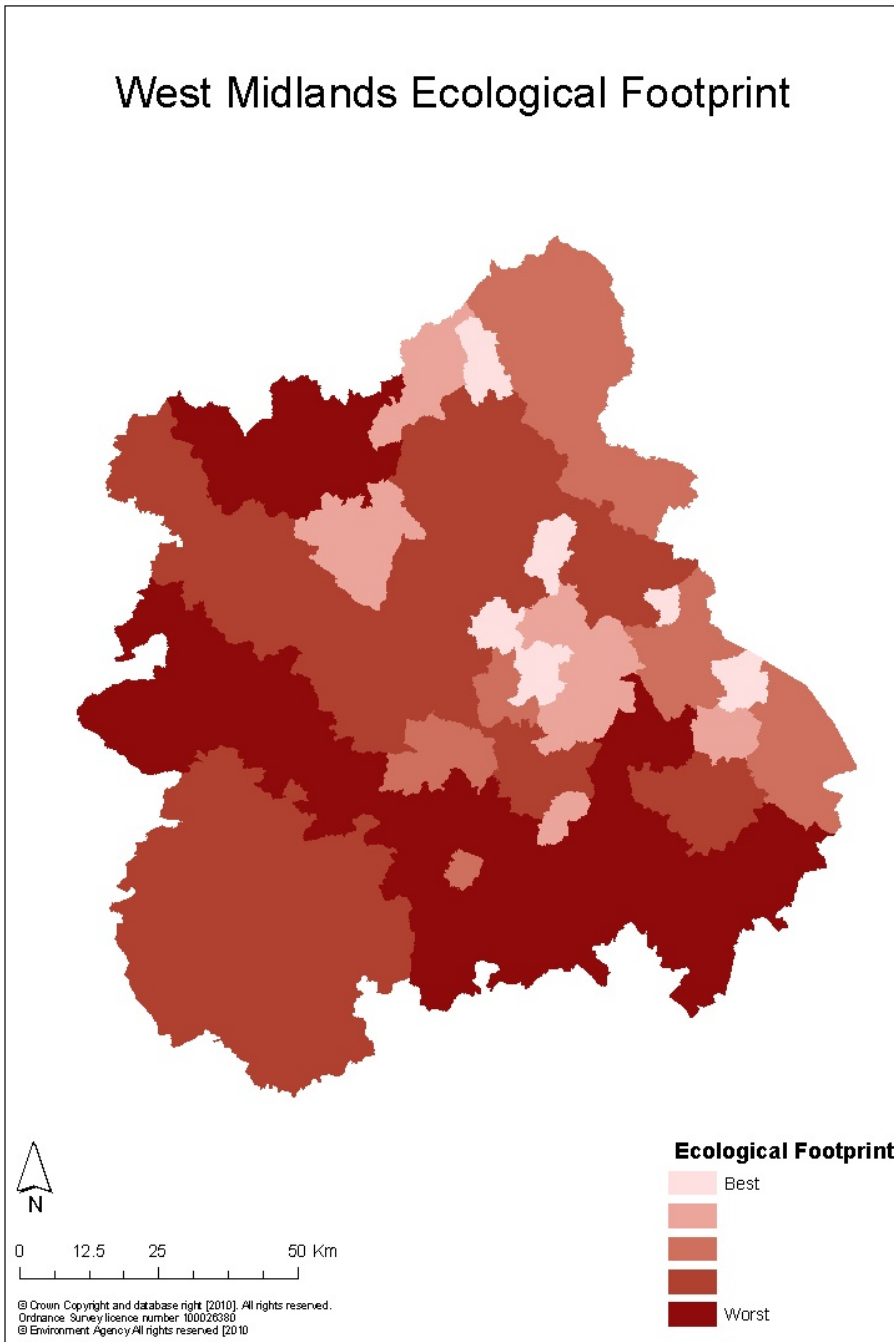
The map below illustrates the Environmental Quality Index depicts the ranking of districts into five categories combining eight environmental factors. These are air quality, derelict land, flood risk, fly tipping, green space, proximity to regulated sites, river water quality and semi-natural habitats. Our urban areas particularly Stoke on Trent, Coventry and the West Midlands conurbation have the worst environments.



The map below displays LSOAs ranked according to the percentage of accessible space within them and put into five categories. Accessible space includes natural habitats, parks, paths and cycle ways. The LSOAs with the least amount of space are situated within our largest towns and cities.



The ecological footprint map below shows how much productive land and sea is needed to provide the resources, such as energy, water and raw materials, we use in our everyday lives. It is based on consumption, the amount of resources used per person including food and goods imported from abroad. The emissions generated from the oil, coal and gas we burn are calculated, and how much land is required to absorb our waste. The information is available at the district level and has been ranked into five categories.



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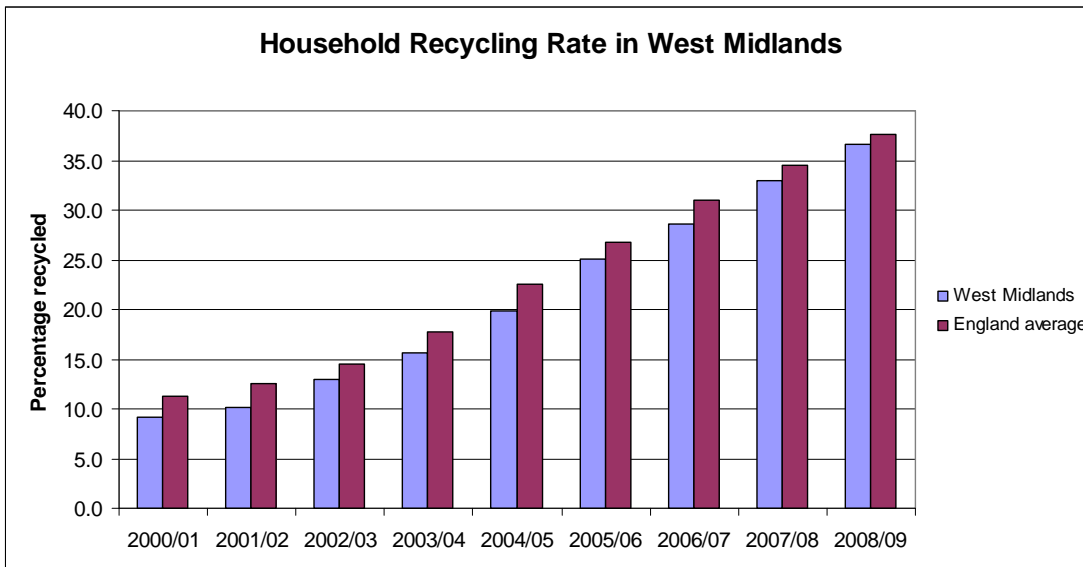
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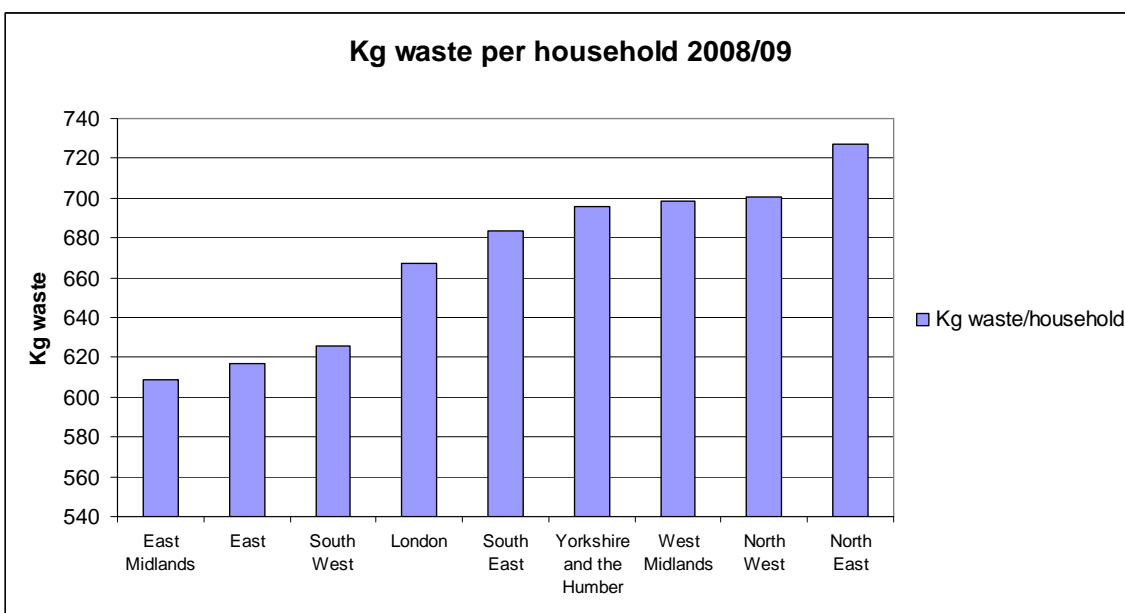
Overall, rural areas tend to have higher values because goods and services cannot be obtained locally. West Midlands has an ecological footprint value of 5.02 global hectares per capita (gh/c) compared with a UK average of 5.3 gh/c. This compares with a global biocapacity of two global hectares per capita, the amount of biologically productive land and sea needed to regenerate resources used. This means each person is using more than twice the resources that can be provided sustainably by the planet.

The following graph shows a steady improvement of household recycling rates in this decade although still under the target of 50 per cent. West Midlands recycling is below the national average.

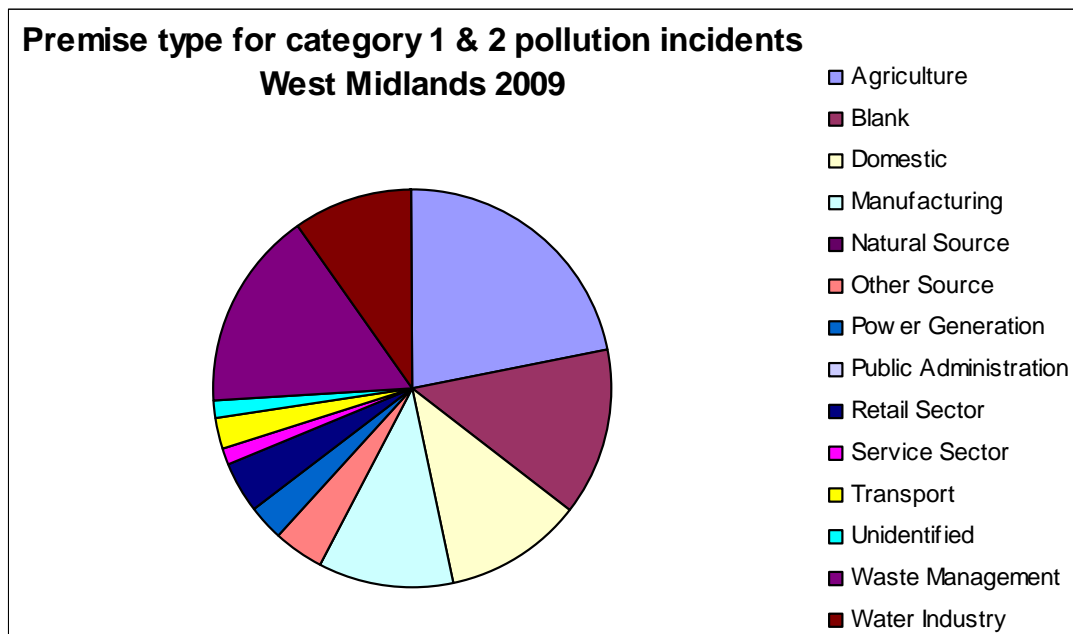


Source: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Number of dwellings, from CLG Council

West Midlands has the third highest quantity of residual waste per household sent to landfill as shown below.



The chart below shows there are many different premises responsible for pollution incidents with the most impact on the environment. Waste management and agriculture premises are the most frequently reported sites.



Our role

The Environment Agency is a regulator, operator and influential adviser on the environment in England and Wales. Our interest in planning and the built environment focuses on where these impact on key environmental services – such as water resources and quality, energy use, waste management, biodiversity and flood and coastal risk management – and on people’s quality of life.

- We seek to ensure land-use planning processes address environmental challenges, particularly at an early stage by influencing strategic plans.
- We are a statutory consultee for environmental assessments and sustainability appraisals that are part of land-use planning in both England and Wales.
- We will use the planning process to encourage developers to take watercourses out of culverts, provide wider social and economic benefits to local communities through our flood risk schemes.
- We develop partnerships to offer environmental opportunities and achieve regeneration through the master planning process, influence others to introduce environmental enhancements through development, for example, clean up of contaminated sites and use of sustainable drainage.

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