

DRUIDS HEATH TOWERS (AREA 4)

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The tower blocks of Druids Heath are a distinctive landmark when arriving into Birmingham from the south using the Hollywood bypass from the M42 and arriving at the Maypole island as well as when leaving Birmingham along the A435 heading out of the city through Kings Heath and heading towards the same Maypole island. They are also dramatic when using Bells Lane with its sloping nature dissected the estate as it runs from the Maypole island to Parsons Hill, Kings Norton.

The 14 towers that remain, three of which are due to be demolished in the near future in Autumn 2023, are the remaining tower blocks of the original 16 that were built by Bryant in a project titled the Druids Heath Development. Moundsley House was demolished in the early 2000s and Heath House was demolished around 2020-21. The three due to be demolished are part of five scheduled to be demolished as part of regeneration plans for the estate (<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/five-tower-blocks-druids-heath-15239113>).

They are 13 storeys tall, accommodating 50 one and two bed flats, with the towers constructed rapidly using Large Panel System (Bison Wall Frame system) with an erection period of just 9 weeks with eleven people employed constructing 4.5 flats per week and total time for superstructure of 18 weeks.

The development designed between the city architect and Bryant saw a residential site of 120 acres creating 2,000 homes of a density of 20 per acre for nearly 8,000 people. The project architect notes that the layout had been designed with a fringe of tall blocks of flats on the south and east boundaries to make 'the greatest use of surrounding open areas, without impinging on the privacy of the adjacent Hospital Board grounds' (1965 Official Opening Ceremony guide).

The towers are a dramatic landmark, being so numerous and so out of keeping with the surrounding landscape. While previous tower blocks nearby at Millpool Hill (built in 1957) were demolished, the towers of Druids Heath have remained in a cluster to this day sitting at the boundary with Worcestershire. There is a dramatic photo from 1985 on the University of Edinburgh Tower Block website that shows that even up close the dramatic collection of towers provides a landmark image (<https://www.towerblock.eca.ed.ac.uk/development/druids-heath>).

Some of the photos I have taken show the emerging view of the blocks when leaving Kings Heath on the A435 near to Cocks Moor Woods Leisure Centre. Others, in contrast, show the view from Worcestershire and the dramatic oddity of the towers when seen emerging from the countryside. The towers can be viewed by zooming in from a number of viewpoints if you know where to look on the skyline, their distinctive clustering creating a dramatic landmark. The view from Moseley Rugby Club on Billesley Common for instance shows them clustered together.

The towers are landmarks, historically of their time and their ambition, and contrast dramatically with the surroundings, being so different in form. Sited on the higher ground, they provide a landmark for those aware of them, while the first time viewer wonders why there are so many.

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