Woking, Surrey: the nature and importance of places

Case study: Woking, Surrey – what shapes the character of a place?

Woking is a large town in Surrey, 45km south west of central London. It has

always been a well-connected place. Woking is situated on the Basingstoke

Canal (which opened in 1794 to allow barges to travel from the docks in East

London to Basingstoke) and is located on the mainline railway from

Portsmouth to London Waterloo (the station was built in 1838 and today takes

just under 30 minutes to reach London). Today, the town is situated between

the A3, M3 and M25. All of these connections mean that Woking has a large

commuter population.

Woking has many exogenous factors which connect it to other places. It was

home to a large aircraft manufacturing plant during World War I because of its

proximity to Brooklands Aerodrome. Today, Woking is home to the McLaren

Group, which develops Formula One racing cars, and also several other large

multinational corporations and NGOs: Capgemini, Petrofac, Ambassador’s

Theatre Group, SABMiller and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF).

Woking has a multicultural and multi-ethnic population and this is partially due

to it being the location of Britain’s first mosque, which was built in 1889.

Woking’s global connections are reflected in frequent festivals and several

areas characterised by international restaurants and cultural centres.

Woking has some interesting cultural connections. HG Wells wrote ‘War of the

Worlds’ in Woking and several locations in the novel are found in the area

surrounding the town. There are several pieces of public art and a heritage trail

which commemorate this connection. The Lightbox gallery houses

contemporary art collections and a local history museum, which celebrates one

of Woking’s ‘famous sons’, Paul Weller of The Jam. It is thought that the song,

‘Town called Malice’ was written about his teenage years in Woking.

Key term:-

**Exogenous factors** are external influences on a place's identity. They are caused by a place's relationship with other places.