ASHBY CANAL (TO SNARESTONE)
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL
AND STUDY

SEPTEMBER 2001

North West Leicestershire District Council
PREFACE

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that Conservation Areas are kept under review (Section 69(2)) and that local planning authorities in exercising their planning powers, pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas (Section 72). Having regard to these requirements and the advice contained in the English Heritage guidance notes 'Conservation Area Practice' and 'Conservation Area Appraisals', the District Council produced a draft Appraisal/Study of the Ashby de la Zouch (to Snarestone) Conservation Area in March 2001.

The draft document was the subject of consultation and publicity over a six week period between 5 March 2001 and 16 April 2001. Having considered the various representations and recommended amendments the District Council’s Executive Board of 18 September 2001 resolved that subject to the amendments outlined in the Executive Board report the Conservation Area Appraisal/Study document be adopted as supplementary planning guidance to the policies of the North West Leicestershire Local Plan.

As supplementary planning guidance the Conservation Area Appraisal/Study document whilst not having the same status as an adopted plan policy may be taken into account as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
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1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Conservation Areas are defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance” (Section 69(1)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). In June 1992, North West Leicestershire District Council designated as a Conservation Area the remaining watered section of the Ashby Canal within its administrative district. The Conservation Area (Map 1) stretches northwards from Gopsall Wharf (Bridge No. 58) - the boundary with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council - to the present terminus of the Canal to the north of Snarestone village.

1.2 This Appraisal/Study document aims to fulfil two key roles. The Appraisal outlines the historical development of the settlement and defines the special interest, character and appearance of the built and natural environment within and surrounding the existing Conservation Area boundaries. The Study identifies future opportunities for the preservation and enhancement of the Area. (The numbers in bold in the text refer to an associated plate/photograph).
2. AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE ASHBY DE LA ZOUCH CANAL

2.1 In 1794, an Act of Parliament was obtained for the construction of the Ashby de la Zouch Canal from the Coventry Canal at Marston Junction (Bedworth) to Wadlands Wharf in Ashby Woulds, along with branches to limeworks at Ticknall and Cloud Hill at Breedon (Hadfield, 1994, p93). The Canal; a broad gauge navigation; was a relative latecomer amongst the Leicestershire canals and represented a truncated version of a scheme initially proposed in 1781 to extend to the River Trent at Burton (Hadfield, 1966, p147). The primary aim of the Ashby Canal Company was to facilitate the opening up of the western section of the Leicestershire/South Derbyshire concealed coalfield to extend its market beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

2.2 Work commenced on the construction of the Canal in autumn 1794 and by early 1798 the navigation was in operation from Ashby Woulds to Market Bosworth - passing through Moira, Donisthorpe, Oakthorpe, Measham and Snarestone. As work had progressed on the Canal’s construction, there proved to be an escalation in costs and this led to the branches to Ticknall and Cloud Hill (also serving the coalpits around Lount) being replaced by horse-drawn tramways which focused on the canal basin at Willesley (Holt, 1996, p20). The tramways were in operation by 1802 (Holt, 1996, p20).

2.3 The Ashby Canal was opened in its entirety to Marston Junction in April 1804 (Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, 1990). The Canal was constructed on
the contour principal and there was only one lock on the entire length of the navigation; a regulatory lock at Marston Junction (Bedworth).

2.4 With the opening of the Ashby Canal, Francis Rawdon Hastings (the 2nd Earl of Moira) began the development of coalpits on the Ashby Woulds. The Earl, also built the Moira Furnace which operated sporadically between 1804 and 1811 (Cranstone, 1985, pp10-14). At Measham, the entrepreneur Joseph Wilkes constructed his canal warehouses in double sized bricks alongside Town Bridge.

2.4 In 1845, the canal was purchased by the Midland Railway Company. Such action was commonplace in this period and often meant the decline of a canal in the hands of its main competitor. A clause in the Act of sale obtained by the Coventry Canal Company ensured, however, that the Ashby Canal was maintained in a reasonable commercial order (Hadfield, 1966, p212).

2.5 By the end of the nineteenth century, however, maintenance was allowed to fall off and in 1918, mining subsidence caused a breach in the Canal at Moira. In 1919 a new section was built, although increasing subsidence along with rising maintenance costs, led to the closure in stages of sections of the Canal; in 1944, the 2.5 miles from Moira to Donisthorpe were closed and in 1957, a further 5 mile section from Donisthorpe to Ilott Wharf was abandoned. In 1966, a final mile of closure truncated the Canal to its present terminus at Snarestone.

2.6 The remaining 35 km (21.75 mile) watered stretch of the Canal was designated a Cruiseway under the 1968 Transport Act and is managed by British Waterways as part of the connected inland waterway network. In December 1990, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council designated that part of the Ashby Canal running
through its administrative district - Burton Hastings to Gopsall Wharf - as a Conservation Area (Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, 1990).

3. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING POSITIVELY TOWARDS THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Character Statement

3.1 The remaining watered section of the Ashby Canal within the District of North West Leicestershire for the most part meanders through an open agricultural landscape as it follows the line of the 300 foot contour. Snarestone is the only settlement on the route.

3.2 The canal has a towpath along one of its flanks for much of its length and cuttings and embankments are features of the navigation as a consequence of its construction on the contour principal. There is one tunnel; at Snarestone; and bridges, both turnover and passover, cross the canal throughout its route. Many of the bridges were given names as well as bridge numbers; for example Pares Bridge (Bridge No. 59) and Varnham's Bridge (Bridge No. 60). The remaining aqueducts on the Canal - at Shenton and Shackerstone - are located within the administrative district of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

3.3 The individual features considered to have a positive impact on the character of the Conservation Area are shown on Map 2.
3.4 There are three structures in the Conservation Area which are included on the list of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest; all at Grade II as being buildings of special interest. The listed structures are:

- The northern and southern entrances to the 229 metre (250 yard) long Snarestone Tunnel (1). The tunnel passes below Main Street in the village.
- Bridge No. 60 - Varnham's Bridge - a single arched bridge which provides access between agricultural fields to the north east of Snarestone Lodge (2).
- Bridge No. 61 (turnover bridge) - some 200 metres to the south-west of the Canal terminus (3).

Plate 1: Southern Entrance to Snarestone Tunnel
Plate 2 : Bridge No. 60 (Varnham's Bridge)

Plate 3 : Bridge No. 61 (Turnover Bridge)
3.5 There are four unlisted principal buildings or structures which are considered to contribute positively to the architectural or historic interest of the Canal:

- A row of nineteenth century cottages to the south-eastern side of Bridge No. 59 (Pares Bridge) (4).
- Bridge No. 59 (Pares Bridge) - a single arched bridge - which provides access from Measham Road to the nineteenth century cottages (4).
- The abutments to the former bridge some 100m to the north of Pares Bridge. The bridge carried the Nuneaton and Ashby Joint Railway over the canal. The Railway opened in 1873 and closed as a through route in 1964 (5).
- A brick lined former dry dock some 80 metres to the south-east of Snarestone Lodge (6).

Plate 4: Nineteenth Century Row of Cottages and Bridge No. 59 (Pare's Bridge)
Plate 5 : Bridge Abutments : Former Nuneaton to Ashby Joint Railway

Plate 6 : Former Dry Dock to South-east of Snaresstone Lodge
Building Materials and Local Details

3.6 The bridges spanning the canal were built either in fine coursed rubble with string courses and copings (Bridge No. 60) or in red and brindle blue bricks with stone dressings (Bridge No. 59). Bridge No. 61 appears originally to have been constructed of coursed rubble, but has subsequently been re-built in brickwork.

3.7 The tunnel at Snarestone, which is brick vaulted, is on a concave plan with a depressed arch over the canal. The northern and southern entrances are of rusticated and vermiculated stonework with string courses (7).

The Archaeological Significance and Potential of the Area

3.8 The Canal by reason of its means of construction and its remaining built features represents a significant industrial archaeological resource from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Boundary Treatments and Ground Surfaces

3.9 The boundaries to the Canal are largely of mature hedgerows reinforced in sections by timber post and rail fencing.

3.10 Between Gopsall Wharf and the southern entrance of Snarestone Tunnel, the towpath is largely of crushed gravel, although there are sections of brick pavings in the vicinity of Pares Bridge. The towpath between the northern entrance of Snarestone Tunnel and the terminus is largely grassed over (8).
Plate 7: Northern Entrance to Snarestone Tunnel

Plate 8: View Northwards from above the Northern Entrance to Snarestone Tunnel
The Contribution of Natural Elements

3.11 Much of the length of the Canal is rich in aquatic and waterside flora and fauna. The watered length of the Canal is scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Relationship Between the Area and the Surrounding Landscape

3.12 The collieries and industrial uses the Ashby Canal was constructed to serve were largely concentrated at the northern end of the navigation in the Ashby Woulds and at Measham. South of Illots Wharf, the Canal generally meandered through an open agricultural landscape and therefore, there is no significant evidence of industrial development adjoining the canal within the Conservation Area.

3.13 Snarestone was effectively 'by-passed' with a tunnel some 229 metres (250 yards) in length passing under Main Street (formerly Long Street). However, as the tunnel had no towpath all horses would have had to be taken across Main Street and the route that was taken remains in use as a public footpath.

3.14 The stretch of the Canal running northwards from Gopsall Wharf to Snarestone Tunnel is largely level with or above, the surrounding countryside affording good views over the agricultural landscape. The route of the former Nuneaton and Ashby Joint Railway runs parallel to the canal on this stretch and its remaining embankments are visible above the hedgerows lining the navigation. At the southern approach to Snarestone Tunnel, the disused goods shed at the former Snarestone Station is visible as a landmark to the north-east.
3.15 The Globe Inn Public House is the only prominent landmark visible in the village of Snarestone on this southern approach as the Canal enters the cutting to Snarestone Tunnel (9). On the northern approach to the Tunnel, Snarestone village is largely obscured from view as the cutting and mature trees and hedges contain views within the navigation (10).

3.16 Views are largely contained by mature hedgerows within the Canal on the remaining stretch northwards from Snarestone Tunnel to the canal terminus (11). At the terminus, the chimney of the Grade II listed Snarestone Pumping Station of 1891 is a prominent landmark to the north-east on Quarry Lane (12). The Pumping Station, now converted to a dwelling, was constructed by Hinckley Urban District Council to pump water to Hinckley some 14 miles distant (13).

Plate 9 : View Northwards towards the Southern Entrance to Snarestone Tunnel
Plate 10 : View Southwards towards the Northern Entrance to Snaresone Tunnel

Plate 11 : View Northwards towards Bridge No. 60 (Varnham's Bridge)
Plate 12 : View Northwards towards the Canal Terminus from Bridge No.61

Plate 13 : Former Snaresstone Pumping Station, Quarry Lane
4. FACTORS HAVING A POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE AREA

Environmental Factors

4.1 The Ashby Canal provides a leisure resource for pleasure cruising as well as for other recreational pursuits such as walking and angling. At present these pressures appear to have been absorbed. It is important, however, in the future that these pressures are not allowed to undermine the character of canal in relation to its industrial archaeological resource and its natural environment.
5. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Planning Policies

5.1 The Ashby Canal falls within open countryside as defined in the Local Plan and any development proposals will be subject to Policy S3 of the Plan. The Local Plan also addresses the designation of the watered section of the Canal as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Policy E25 indicates that development will not be permitted which adversely affect the Site of Special Scientific Interest unless an overriding national need can be demonstrated and in the case of such a site of ecological interest, there is no other site suitable for that particular purpose.

5.2 Any proposals for development would also be determined having due regard to Policies E10 and E11 of the Local Plan which place an emphasis on the conservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area. In this regard it should be emphasised that the omission of any particular feature or space in the Conservation Area Appraisal should not be taken to mean that it is of no interest. Proposals affecting listed buildings will be considered having regard to policies E13, E14, E15 and E16 of the Local Plan.
Repairs to Historic Building Fabric

5.3 With regard to the repair of existing built fabric, the District Council operates a discretionary historic buildings grant scheme which makes available grant aid for private individuals in relation to the repair of listed buildings and buildings which are considered to contribute positively to the character of a Conservation Area. Full details of the scheme (which has a limited budget) are available from the Planning and Environment Division. A similar scheme is operated by the Historic Buildings Section in the Environmental Management Department at Leicestershire County Council.

5.4 Where any historic buildings become subject to long term vacancy or neglect, the District Council will attempt to work with owners/prospective purchasers to secure the long term future of any building. The District Council does, however, have more formal powers in the form of Urgent Works Notices and Repairs Notices to require that repairs be undertaken to listed buildings and other buildings of architectural or historic merit in Conservation Areas.
6. APPENDIX : POLICIES OF THE NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN IN RESPECT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

POLICY E10

Development will not be permitted within Conservation Areas, or where it would affect the setting of such areas, which would:

(a) Be detrimental to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area in terms of:

(i) scale, proportions and massing;
(ii) layout, grouping and setting;
(iii) detailing and materials of construction.

(b) Be detrimental to the setting of buildings which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

(c) Result in the loss of open spaces or important views within, into and out of the Conservation Area.

(d) Result in the loss of particular features which contribute positively to character and appearance of the Conservation Area, including:

(i) Walls and other means of enclosure;
(ii) Ground surfaces;
(iii) Natural features (such as trees and hedgerows); and
(iv) Features of archaeological interest.

(e) Be detrimental to environmental quality in terms of:

(i) Traffic generation;
(ii) Noise and other forms of environmental intrusion.

POLICY E11

Consent for the demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will not be granted unless:

(a) It can be demonstrated that the condition of the building makes it impracticable to repair, renovate or adapt to any reasonably beneficial use for which planning permission would be given; and

(b) There is clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain the existing use of the building, or to find a viable and acceptable new use or uses.

In the case of buildings which make little or no contribution to the character and appearance of their conservation area, demolition will not be permitted unless redevelopment of the site or the creation of an open space would make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area concerned.
POLICY E12

Replacement or alteration of existing shop fronts within Conservation Areas, or where they would affect the setting of such areas, will only be permitted where:-

(a) The existing shop front is of insufficient quality to warrant its retention; and

(b) The replacement or alteration is of a design which is appropriate to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

POLICY E13

Consent for the demolition of a listed building will not be granted unless:-

(a) It can be demonstrated that the condition of the building makes it impracticable to repair, renovate or adapt to any reasonably beneficial use for which planning permission would be granted; and

(b) There is clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain the existing use of the building, or to find a viable and acceptable new use or uses.

POLICY E14

Change of use of a Listed Building will only be permitted where no detrimental effect is likely to arise from the proposed use on the character or appearance of the building or its setting.

POLICY E15

Alterations or extensions to Listed Buildings will not be permitted which are detrimental to the special architectural or historic interest of the building or to its character or setting.

POLICY E16

Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect the setting of a Listed Building, in terms of scale, massing, form, siting, design or materials of construction.

POLICY E17

Where a historic byway makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the surrounding landscape, development which would significantly diminish that contribution, or otherwise detrimentally affect the setting or amenity value of such byway will not be permitted.
POLICY E18

Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect the character or appearance or setting of historic gardens included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, and identified on the Proposals Map.

POLICY E19

Development will not be permitted which would affect a scheduled ancient monument or other nationally important archaeological site, as shown on the Proposals Map, or subsequently recognised, or its setting or amenity value. Where known sites of county or local significance are affected, planning permission may be granted in terms which would allow preservation in situ, or, where this is impractical, by investigation and recording.

In areas of archaeological potential, planning permission will not be granted without proper evaluation of the archaeological implications of the proposed development.

POLICY E43

Outdoor advertisement consent will be granted where the proposed advertisement respects the interests of amenity and public safety.

In assessing the likely effect of proposed advertisements on such interests, regard will be had to all material factors, and in particular :-

(a) In the case of amenity, to the general characteristics of the locality, including (where relevant) the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural of similar interest; and

(b) In the case of public safety, to the effect of the proposal on all aspects of pedestrian or vehicular safety.
7. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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<th>Author/Editor</th>
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<td>The Moira Furnace: A Napoleonic Blast Furnace In Leicestershire</td>
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<td>A History of Leicestershire and Rutland</td>
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Map 2: The Individual Factors Considered To Have A Positive Impact On The Character Of The Conservation Area.