Trent and Mersey Canal within Cannock Chase District Conservation Area Appraisal

Draft

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1. **Introduction**

This document seeks to provide a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation of the Trent and Mersey Canal as a Conservation Area through a written appraisal of its character and appearance – what matters and why. It is intended as a guide upon which to base the form and style of future development in the area as it continues to evolve.

The Trent and Mersey Canal Conservation Area was designated on 6th May 1988 by Staffordshire County Council in conjunction with the District Councils and runs throughout Staffordshire. The section running through Cannock Chase District is marked on Plan 1. The boundaries of the Conservation Area generally follow the boundaries of the Canal and its towpath, but extend in places to include adjacent buildings and groups of historic and architectural interest which are broadly linked historically or in character with the Canal. The Canal was completed in 1777 and is of outstanding industrial archaeological importance, being the first of the major inland waterways which were to form the basis of the nation’s principal transport and communications system in the late 18th and first half of the 19th Centuries.

The Conservation Area covers Brindley Bank Pumping Station in the north of the District, follows the Canal southwards extending around the Anglican Old Chancel and St Augustine’s Church in their churchyards with St Augustine’s Field, runs to the east of Rugeley town centre, including the former Old Mill/Canal warehouse, and on again to include the group of cottages at The Mossley and Old Brewery Cottages in the south.

There are seven listed buildings in the Conservation Area: the Pumping Station and St Augustine’s Church are Grade II*, the Old Chancel, with its listed churchyard cross and tombstone, the Viaduct and Canal bridge no. 64 are all grade II.

**Summary of Special Interest of the Trent and Mersey Canal Conservation Area:**
- Its long history as an inland waterway still evident in its winding linear layout following the contour with associated buildings and structures
- Its diverse building types and buildings/groups of individual interest
- Its predominantly quiet ‘green’ character with ‘nodes’ of activity at crossing/access points
- Its extensive tree cover with significant specimens and groups

The survey work for this Appraisal was carried out in 2009.

2. **Planning Policy Context**

Government policy recognises the importance of effective protection for all aspects of the historic environment through legislation and policy guidance. The Planning

The Government is responsible for compiling a List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest of national significance. There are three grades of listed buildings to give an indication of relative importance, Grade I, II* and II; 94% of listed buildings are Grade II.

The Local Authority is responsible for designation of conservation areas where appropriate, and for formulating and publishing proposals for the preservation or enhancement of these areas. A conservation area is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. The effect of designation is broadly to bring demolition of buildings and work to trees under planning control and to restrict ‘permitted development’ rights which permit certain works to take place.

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (2004) sets out a framework of policies seeking to protect and enhance the historic environment. It highlights the need to identify, conserve and enhance the region’s diverse historic environment and manage change in such a way that respects local character and distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of a place may derive from more than its appearance, its buildings and the spaces between them, and include historical associations and the local environment. Defining character or special interest includes understanding and assessing the value of the area, both in its parts and as a whole.

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011 explains the planning strategy within the County, including broad policies to preserve and enhance the special character, appearance and interest of conservation areas. It states that any new development within or adjacent to a conservation area should protect its special qualities and respect the scale, height and form of older buildings.

Cannock Chase Local Plan 1997 contains detailed policies B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 relating to listed buildings, archaeology and new development in and adjacent to conservation areas, and C15 protecting trees. In relation to the Canal Policy B4 (iii) aims to protect the character of the canal by ensuring appropriate development, Policy TR3 encourages recreation and tourism, and Proposal BP4 supports partnership working on environmental enhancement works. Since September 2007 the policies have been saved until they are replaced by policies in The Local Development Framework.

The emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document contains policy areas on the Historic Environment, Attractive Town Centres and Delivering a sustainable Local Transport Network. These policies support enhancing the role of the Canal through appropriate management and as a sustainable transport corridor.
This Conservation Area Appraisal is a background document to the Local Development Framework. It has the status of a material planning consideration providing a basis for development control decisions.

3. Development History

The Trent and Mersey Canal was built as a cross-country canal through the North Midlands and completed in 1777. It was engineered by James Brindley as part of his 'Grand Cross' plan to connect the principal rivers of England by linking the rivers Thames, Severn, Mersey and Humber by inland waterways. It runs for 93 miles from the Trent Navigation at Shardlow to the Bridgewater Canal at Preston Brook, and was also known as the Grand Trunk Canal. It makes connections with the Coventry Canal, Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, the Shropshire Union Canal's Middlewich Branch, the Weaver Navigation, the Caldon, and the Hall Green Branch, which connects to the Macclesfield Canal.

The canal cost £300,000 to build but saved money and benefited the local economy as trips costed over two thirds less by canal at that time compared to transport by road. Staffordshire had no navigable rivers to use as an alternative means of transport, so the Canal was important in the transportation of goods such as coal and pottery, enabling smoother and quicker transport than the alternative rough roads. In Rugeley the coal mines were connected to the Canal by tramways linked to wharves, and the Canal raised the profile of the town and increased its prosperity.

By the 1860’s the canal trade started to decline due to competition from the North Staffordshire Railway Company for commercial traffic, being a cheaper and quicker means of transport. By the 1860’s the Canal had lost much of its business, and over the next hundred years there was a steady decline in commercial traffic. In 1948 the Canal was nationalised and since 1963 has been under the control of British Waterways, a public body which exists to maintain and develop the Canal and the inland waterway network to fulfil its economic, social and environmental potential. Today it is leisure traffic that helps to maintain the Canal as a functioning transport link, together with residential boats. The Canal corridor is a valuable asset for walking, cycling and angling.

North section: Brindley Bank Pumping Station/River Trent Aqueduct to Station Road (B5013) bridge shown on Plan 2: The Canal enters the District near Brindley Bank Pumping Station which was built by the South Staffordshire Water Works Company in 1907. This Edwardian pumping station is a grade II* listed building containing a 105’ long steam pumping engine and was most recently used as the South Staffordshire Water Museum. It is an imposing and substantial red brick building with terracotta dressings and a slate roof, built in ‘Tudor/bethan Revival’ style (a style of architecture reviving Elizabethan, Jacobean and Tudor elements). It stands within an informal landscaped setting adjacent to the waterworks cottage. The Pumping Station was converted to electric pumps in 1969 when the boiler plant to the rear was removed and the chimney was demolished. Originally built in a rural location the site now stands on the north-west edge of the built-up area of Rugeley, though still separated from it by some open space, preserving a degree of its open setting. A disused wharf which used to
be connected to the Pumping Station by a tramway lies at the bottom of the slope below the building and now forms a wide bend in the Canal, full of reeds. The Canal provided easy access to supplies of coal. Other wharves existed at intervals along the Canal and by the mid-19th Century there were twelve wharves along the Rugeley section. Historic maps indicate the existence of cranes in some places, such as here at Brindley Bank, giving a flavour of the former busy industrial nature of the Canal corridor which is perhaps hard to imagine today. The ‘Bloody Steps’ that run down from the Pumping Station to the Canal towpath at Brindley Bank were connected with the murder of Christina Collins in 1839. She had set out by canal boat to travel from Liverpool to London, but near Rugeley she was attacked and drowned. As her body was pulled from the water her blood ran down the flight of steps and the spot is still rumoured to be haunted to this day. Two boatmen were convicted of her murder and hanged at Stafford, and her body was buried in the graveyard at St Augustine’s Church.

Milepost 34 at Brindley Bank is a 1984 replacement for an original post. The Trent and Mersey Canal Society have reinstalled many lost mileposts. The original 1819 cast iron mileposts were made in Stone and assisted in the collection of tolls.

A group of old houses, including a canal side cottage with a datestone of 1841, sit north of the churchyard on the west bank of the Canal. This group originally formed part of the Churchdale House Estate, and there is believed to have been a cobbled yard and wharf for the use of the Estate. These are outside but adjoin the Conservation Area.

The remains of the old Church of St Augustine are grade II listed and sit in an enlarged graveyard that abuts the Canal. The Early English tower is intact, and the Norman and Early English north aisle arcade connects with the chancel and north chapel, which contain memorials to the Weston family. First mention of a church in Rugeley was in 1189. It was extended and then replaced with a new church in 1822, due to the state of the much altered old one which had become too small for the growing town. The Church is at the northern extremity of the town centre, close to the site of former historic buildings such as Rugeley Grammar School dating from 1567 and the medieval tithe barn which stood until 1649. The remains of the Church stand in the green setting of the churchyard amongst some fine mature and young trees. Within the churchyard stand two further listed structures: the stone table tomb of sisters Elizabeth Cuting and Emma Hollinhurst dating from 1696, the slab carved in semi-relief with two effigies depicted in linen shrouds; also a churchyard cross dating from the late 14th Century comprising the lower part of a plain stone shaft set on a square base and step, and known as a ‘weeping cross’, with a kneeling place for penitents hollowed out at one corner of the base.

Between the Church and the Canal stands Church Croft, an elegant Georgian house, thought to have been built in 1800. Its grounds have since been developed with modern housing. The house was the residence of the Palmer family and birthplace of Dr William Palmer, the ‘Rugeley Poisoner’.

On Station Road are several Cannock Chase Heritage Trail information boards with further historic information about the Churches and Canal.
Central section: Station Road (B5013) bridge to Love Lane railway viaduct shown on Plan 3: Rugeley’s current Parish Church of St Augustine of Canterbury, built 1822-23 with 1904 additions in a Perpendicular Gothic style, is a grade II* listed building that replaced the medieval Parish Church on the opposite side of Station Road. It is built in ashlar masonry (blocks of dressed, cut, squared and finished stone) with slate roofs. The church stands in a green churchyard bounded by low stone walls and contains some fine mature and young trees. In the churchyard are the graves of Christina Collins and John P. Cook, one of the victims of the ‘Rugeley Poisoner’. Its tower dominates the surroundings. Behind the Church is St Augustine’s Field, a community owned playing field and open space run by a local charity, which creates an important open green area between the Canal and the town centre and contributes to the setting of the listed Church.

Milepost 33 is a 1984 replacement for an original post.

The old house and converted Canal warehouses near Leathermill Lane bridge have been sensitively restored. The residential accommodation and traditional red brick Canal bridge form an attractive gateway to the town centre from the Canal. The bridge is one of three similar which cross the Canal in the District, all narrow hump-backed examples with a single low semi-circular arch.

The derelict canal side mill, built in 1863, shown in Fig.1, is a prominent 3 storey building that is currently underused and in need of repair. It is named on the 1887 OS map as Trent and Mersey Mill, and the gable fronting the Canal still has a date plaque and the remains of the steam powered lifting gear connected with its use as a corn mill. It is considered to be a locally important canal building which could satisfactorily be given a new use. An ancillary cottage stands beside it, helping to enclose the yard.

The substantial grade II listed railway Viaduct which crosses the Canal was built in the mid 19th Century. The single span structure is made of rough stone with a brick lined semi-circular arch, dramatically skewed. It has rusticated stone voussoirs (wedge-shaped blocks forming the arch) and a rolled stone cornice (top moulding). The railway was constructed to carry Cannock’s coal to the Trent Valley and connected Rugeley with Walsall, Wolverhampton and Birmingham. A branch line served Leahall Colliery (now the site of The Towers Business Park) and the concrete bridge, built in the 1950’s, but now truncated, still crosses the Canal south of the Viaduct.

South section: Love Lane railway viaduct to Lea Hall Road (A51) shown on Plan 4: Standing beyond the Conservation Area boundary the Power Station dominates the skyline and can be seen along the whole length of the Canal. It is a coal fired power station, commissioned in the 1960’s, and its output is enough to meet the needs of half a million homes. It is a major town employer, and the chimney has recently been replaced beside the four massive cooling towers. The Power Station shared a site with Lea Hall Colliery which supplied its coal via a conveyor. Rugeley ‘A’ Power Station was closed in 1995 and is being redeveloped, Rugeley ‘B’ opened in 1972 and is still in use. Lea Hall Colliery was the first colliery planned and sunk by the National Coal Board. In 1954 two shafts were begun and sunk to a depth of 396 metres through eleven seams of Cannock Chase coal. The Colliery first produced coal in 1960 and closed in 1990. Its
Fig. 1 Canal elevation of The Old Mill, Mill Lane

Fig. 2 Mossley Tavern and Cottages
Fig. 3  The former Mossley Wharf

Fig. 4  Milepost 32
site, along a significant length of the Canal, is being redeveloped as The Towers Business Park.

The Mossley Wharf was once a large transit point between horse-drawn wagons and the mines. The Mossley Tavern and workers cottages extend between Armitage Road and the Canal and were built following the introduction of the wharf, the buildings are typical of the design and construction used in the District in the 19th Century, shown in Fig. 2. Numbers 67-71 Armitage Road existed by 1840, and were angled at the entrance to the coal wharf, possibly as a check office and home of a wharf supervisor. The adjacent cottages have a date stone reading ‘Mossley Place 1850’, and The Mossley Tavern, now much altered, probably dates from about that time. These buildings face Armitage Road and back onto the Canal, adjacent to the second red brick canal bridge, Bridge 65. This is a little altered hump-backed bridge of the late 1760’s. Once it led to farmland, but groups of cottages were built on both sides of the bridge when a horse drawn tramway began bringing coal from Brereton Hayes Colliery to The Mossley Wharf in the 1820’s. The earliest cottages built over the bridge have now been replaced with modern houses. Behind the cottages at the Mossley is the infilled former coal wharf, now a triangular reed-filled space, shown in Fig. 3. Despite having been subject to a certain amount of cosmetic alteration, the buildings at The Mossley together retain strong group value.

Bridge number 64 is the third traditional late 18th Century red brick canal accommodation bridge and is listed but currently disused, being inaccessible and overgrown. It is another hump-backed bridge with stone copings (cap stones) and corner piers, and once led to Leafields Cottages and farmland until made redundant by the building of Leahall Colliery in the 1950’s (it was accessible from Armitage Road until the 1980’s).

Tramways such as the ‘Ginny Wagons’, built in 1810, ran from Brereton Levels down through Brereton village across Main Road to the canal basin (later called the Talbot Basin (the Earls Talbot family controlled the Brereton Collieries). At the end of the 19th Century a tunnel was built under Main Road in the village which enabled the steam powered rope haulage system to be extended to the Basin, used until 1922 when canal trade declined. The tunnel was then used as a pedestrian underpass and only filled in in 2003. The old basin has been dry since the removal in the 1920’s of a hump-backed bridge on the Armitage Road, which linked it to the Canal, and is outside the Conservation Area.

Milepost 32 is a 1983 replacement for an original post and is shown in Fig. 4.

The Old Brewery Cottages on Armitage Road adjacent to the Canal form a mainly intact example of early 19th century housing provided by an employer for his workers as an integral part of a small industrial enterprise. A map of 1820 appears to show the site in use as an iron foundry, including the land occupied by 143, 145 and 147 Armitage Road, however by 1834/5 the premises had become a brewery. The siting may have benefited from the transport links provided by the Canal. The cottages today remain much as built in the early 19th century. The Canal leaves the District just before the modern road bridge carrying Rugeley By-pass.
The County’s Historic Environment Record indicates areas of potential importance in increasing knowledge of the history of the town. Archaeology may exist anywhere within the boundaries of historic towns and has the potential to help understand origins, development and growth, therefore any development proposals involving the disturbance of ground within the Conservation Area will need to be accompanied by an archaeological assessment as part of a Heritage Statement to accompany the planning application.

4. Townscape Character Appraisal

Location and Landscape Setting

The Trent and Mersey Canal runs for a distance of just over 2 miles (3.6 km) through Cannock Chase District along the contour of the south bank of the River Trent, on ground gently rising from the valley to the forest and heath of Cannock Chase to the west. The historic market town of Rugeley lies roughly halfway between the County town of Stafford and the cathedral city of Lichfield, and the Canal runs along the eastern edge of the town. Beyond the Canal to the east stands Rugeley Power Station with its landmark cooling towers, and further east run the River Trent and West Coast mainline railway. Waterways and routeways follow the contours between the Chase and the River, features which have determined the historic layout of the area.

Spatial analysis

The Canal Conservation Area comprises a predominantly linear landscape feature with little variation in topography as it passes through the District. The width of the Canal and its towpath is fairly uniform throughout. The Canal is crossed by seven substantial bridges, both road and rail, all but two still in use. Access to the Canal for pedestrians and cyclists is available beside all the working road bridges.

North section: As the Canal enters the District from the north after flowing across the Aqueduct over the River Trent it makes a 90 degree bend in front of an area of higher ground, Brindley Bank, which rises five or six metres above the Canal. From there the land on both frontages becomes generally level and the Canal curves gently as it meanders through the District without the need for locks. The northern section of the Canal is abutted by residential gardens all along the west bank with open country on the east side, then gardens abut the east side too. It has a spacious, semi-rural/suburban setting and a sense of containment is mainly provided by mature trees along the boundaries.

Central section: The central section running past Rugeley town centre as far as Leathermill Lane is bounded either by gardens or the green space of St Augustine’s Field to the west and modern industrial units on Power Station Road to the east, then residential and commercial properties on both sides near the town centre. This section has a more urbanised setting, though still with significant tree groups in places, and fencing and large buildings closely abut the Canal boundary. Love Lane runs south from Leathermill Lane beside the Canal on a bank about two metres
higher which helps to contain the waterway at this point. The Canal turns beneath the substantial Viaduct and modern bridge, after which views open up again.

**South section:** The southern section after the railway Viaduct is bounded by residential gardens and part of Armitage Road to the west and the developing Towers Business Park, with a small residential frontage development near the Mossley, to the east. Ground levels here are mostly at Canal level apart from tree-planted banking within the Towers site, and again the waterway has a more open, semi-rural/suburban feel with tree cover dominant.

Within the Conservation Area boundaries the pumping station and churches stand as significant buildings within their own large green spaces, partly screened in views from the Canal by mature trees. The substantial three storey Old Mill in the central section which stands on the Canal bank together with its adjacent cottage, is prominent in views at this point, as is the imposing structure of the Viaduct.

**Character Analysis**

Townscape is the feature which distinguishes the special interest of a Conservation Area from the merits of individual buildings within it, including the inter-relationship between buildings and spaces. It derives from appearance, history and historical association, and its nature and quality may vary within the area. Examples are noted to illustrate features and are not intended to be comprehensive.

The Canal Conservation Area is defined by its well planted appearance, with buildings standing in a mature landscape. Some buildings within the Conservation Area are individually distinctive in design, form and materials, recognised by their listed status. Those relating most closely to the construction and operation of the Canal tend to be unified by their traditional red brick construction and close proximity to the waterway.

The Pumping Station, Church and cottages retain their original uses; the Old Chancel largely stands a ruin and the Old Mill is in low key use (car repairs) and dilapidated condition. The waterway itself remains in use as a transport route, though for leisure purposes rather than commercial, and is a valuable asset to the area.

**North section shown on Plan 5:** The northern section of the Canal is mostly rural in character. To the eastern side is the flat floodplain of the River Trent with arable fields between the River and the Canal which add to the rural feel. Some mixed woodland areas of oak, alder and ash at intervals, thinning to a hedgerow with mature and young trees, borders the east side of the Canal. The West Coast Main Line railway embankment and Rugeley bypass (A51) can be seen in the distance. The western side of the Canal is bordered by a raised escarpment that runs through the gardens of houses that sit on the bank above the Canal. Brindley Bank Pumping Station is visible through the trees. Some good willows, sycamore and a line of pine trees stand at intervals along the waterway, together with other mixed groups of trees, however there are significant stretches at the rear of properties on Albany Drive and Old Eaton Road with little or no tree cover and where consequently the
visual impact of garden decking etc is much greater and the environmental and ecological value is lower. Tree Preservation Orders cover some of these tree groups. As the Canal approaches the Station Road bridge the bank descends nearer the water level. Further significant trees stand in the churchyard around the Old Chancel, including cedar, yew and oak, and in the garden of Church Croft.

**Central section shown on Plan 6:** The central section of the Canal is more built up and runs past Rugeley town centre. The eastern edge of the canal north of Leathermill Lane is bordered by industrial premises separated from the Canal by a mixed hedge, sparse and gappy in places, with some trees. A high conifer hedge stands at the rear of Tannery Close which screens the industrial property but has an overbearing visual impact on the Conservation Area. South of Leathermill Lane is a caravan park, several houses and a large open site with a derelict abattoir. A bank topped by a hedgerow with a few gaps and Love Lane separate these properties from the Canal. The western side of the Canal, north of Leathermill Lane bridge, accommodates St Augustine’s Church, St Augustine’s Field and residential properties, including converted canal warehouses. Commercial premises, a derelict mill and modern houses line the bank south of the bridge. A good stand of mature sycamore, lime, holly and ash trees along the Canal and a fine group of trees in the Churchyard, including plane, copper beech and yew, make a strong positive contribution to the Conservation Area. A well-shaped horse-chestnut at the rear of property in Queen Street forms a good feature of this section of the waterway. A Tree Preservation Order covers the willows at the rear of properties on Phoenix Close and trees within St Augustine’s Field. Pedestrian access to the towpath is available by Leathermill Lane Bridge and Love Lane near the Viaduct.

**South section shown on Plan 7:** The listed railway Viaduct dominates the southern part of the Canal at this point and creates a definitive boundary line. This stretch of Canal runs through the urban area but has a more tranquil appearance due to the established vegetation along the banks. Hedging and a high earth embankment covered with young tree planting separates the developing Towers Business Park from the eastern side of the Canal, the embankment continuing beyond The Mossley behind a significant group of very mature and massive poplar trees, interspersed with cherry, ash and oak. There are views of the Power Station cooling towers and the recent Business Park development through the trees. A new pedestrian access leads down to the towpath from Wheelhouse Road. Beyond Wheelhouse Road Bridge the Business Park development stands closely beside the Canal boundary screened by a 10m landscaped buffer of young mixed native tree and shrub planting. Behind Leahall Business Park a high conifer screen has an overbearing visual impact. Boundary fencing along this stretch is mostly metal palisade fencing which has a harsh appearance. The western side of the Canal is bordered by Armitage Road from The Mossley for most of its length with areas of housing and commercial premises. On the south side of the Viaduct extensive mature tree growth on the former railway embankment creates a green interlude, and there is also a small pocket of flat land beyond the housing near The Mossley with several isolated trees including a good ash rear of houses on Armitage Road. Further south a significant group of mature poplars, willow, sycamore and birch trees in gardens rear of properties on Armitage Road (south of Wheelhouse Road), willows near Brewery Cottages and groups of
willow, ash, birch and alder separating the Canal from Armitage Road all make their contribution. Tree Preservation Orders cover a poplar at The Mossley, limes at Wheelhouse Road, poplars rear of Leahall Business Park and an ash rear of a dwelling in Regency Court.

**Trees and hedges:** The mature trees and hedges which line the Canal corridor and soften the individual buildings create a continuous strong positive green feature, having both visual and environmental value, see Fig. 5. Conservation Area status places protection over all trees within its boundary, though many of those which bound and overhang the Canal are growing on land beyond the boundary, so unless they are covered by separate Tree Preservation Orders or are growing directly on the bank are beyond the scope of its protection. Some trees and groups which make a particular contribution to amenity along the edges of the Conservation Area are covered by Tree Preservation Orders. The green Canal corridor also has an important ecological role as a wildlife route, including bat foraging area. Waterbirds and other wildlife make use of the corridor which forms a rural route through the urban area. Trees also help to segregate the tranquillity of the Canal corridor from the surrounding activity and traffic. Views of nearby buildings and landmarks are possible between the trees, with more open views through bare deciduous trees in winter, the branch structure itself continuing to add visual variety. In some places the tree canopy joins overhead to create a green tunnel. In most places it is more intermittent allowing outward and inward views but still softens the visual impact of the surroundings, so where it is wholly missing buildings and ancillary structures on the banks seem particularly visible and intrusive. The tree and hedge cover make the Canal a pleasant and attractive place to be, and many householders have created seating areas by the water. There is interplay of light and shade from the overhanging trees which adds to the tranquil atmosphere. Where management of existing trees requires their careful removal, perhaps due to decay or over-maturity, appropriate replacement planting will be the key to maintaining the character and appearance of the Conservation Area into the future. Some of the more important trees and tree groups, as well as the significant gaps, are highlighted in the character analysis sections.

**Bridges:** There are three traditional hump-backed brick bridges crossing the Canal. One is listed (Bridge 64, near Wheelhouse Road), a further one (at The Mossley) is a little altered original and a third (at Leathermill Lane) has been partly rebuilt. The bridge at The Mossley has been strengthened with metal supports on the south side. The listed bridge once led to cottages and farmland east of the canal which was developed as Leahall Colliery in the 1950’s when the bridge became (and remains) redundant. Some of the bridge structures show evidence of wear on the underside from ropes pulling horse drawn barges, such as on the bridge at Leathermill Lane. There are two modern concrete road bridges (carrying Station Road and Wheelhouse Road). The railway crosses the Canal on a listed stone arched Viaduct, and there is a disused concrete railway bridge adjacent which carried the colliery branch line. The bridges frame views along the Canal corridor, and the traditional ones create attractive reflections in the water.
Fig. 5  The Green Corridor in the South Section

Fig. 6  Access to canal by Love Lane Bridge with poor surfacing and gradient
Fig. 7 Well made footpath surface and canal edging in the Central Section

Fig. 8 Green “weld mesh” type fencing along the footpath rear of the Towers Business Park
Sound and light: Traffic noise intrudes at various locations, also the sound of passing trains in the north section where there are more open views across fields to the mainline railway and By-pass. Otherwise the soft sounds of canal boats, lapping water and birds predominate. Illumination is limited to light spill from adjacent street lighting and from a few industrial units and some garden lighting. The Canal is essentially a dark corridor, favouring wildlife such as bats.

Building materials

The most characteristic building material in the Conservation Area is the dark orange-red brick used for the canal bridges, cottages and Old Mill. The churches are built of white sandstone, as is the listed railway bridge. The brick bond used for the canal bridges and Old Mill is English bond – alternate courses of all ‘headers’ and all ‘stretchers’ on each row. This is considered to be the strongest bond because no continuous vertical joints are formed in the brickwork. It was popular where structural strength was considered important. The cottages at The Mossley are built in Flemish bond – alternate ‘headers’ and ‘stretchers’ on each course. This is a decorative bond introduced in the 17th century for more important buildings and by the 18th century was used increasingly for smaller buildings. Its greater economy in the use of brick (the proportion of ‘stretchers’ is greater) made this bond popular. The brickwork of most of the cottages at The Mossley and Brewery Cottages has been painted or rendered in light colours. Staffordshire is well endowed with clay suitable for brick and tile making, and local brickyards operated into the 20th century. The modern buildings adjacent to the Canal are built in Stretcher bond, widely used today for the construction of cavity walls, where all the bricks are ‘stretchers’, except for a ‘header’ in alternate courses at the quoin.

Traditional roof coverings in the Conservation Area include red and blue clay tiles and blue slate. Such materials give a texture and liveliness not found in artificial materials and are to be valued. There are small paneled cast iron window frames still visible in Brewery Cottages. Some remnants of cast iron rainwater goods also remain.

The public realm

The Canal towpath is accessible to the public from various points along its length beside the road bridges. At Wheelhouse Road a new fenced and surfaced access path has been created recently in conjunction with adjacent new development on The Towers, improving accessibility at the south end of the Canal which previously was very limited. Elsewhere some of the access points would benefit from improvements to surfacing and gradient, such as the area shown in Fig. 6. The central section of towpath is generally surfaced with a ‘Bredon gravel’ type, self binding finish, and it varies in width. A well made section is shown in Fig. 7. In the north and south sections the path has a more natural finish appropriate to its rural character, but is inclined to be muddy. Beneath the older canal bridges there is a surface of stone setts to withstand more intensive use.
Street furniture includes mileposts, benches and signage, with British Waterways/Council information boards at intervals giving brief historical and tourist information. Mostly this is focussed on the central section of Canal. There are three replica cast iron mileposts along the Canal, reinstalled by the Trent and Mersey Canal Society in the 1970’s and 1980’s. The original 1819 cast iron mileposts were made in Stone and assisted in the collection of tolls. One south of The Mossley reads ‘Shardlow 32 miles’ and ‘Preston Brook 60 miles’.

The waterway has a variety of edging along its length including stone blocks near Leathermill Lane, modern metal sheet piling in many locations and coir rolls between Leathermill Lane and The Mossley. The latter seek to provide a more natural edge whilst resisting wash from boat traffic and encourage regrowth of vegetation. In a few areas there appears to be just a natural turf edge however this is being eroded by boat wash and will soon need repair. The Canal corridor has been the subject of several improvement schemes in the past – in the north section a scheme to improve the edging and towpath, benches and tree/hedge planting took place in the early 1990’s; the central section was similarly improved in the early 2000’s. The southern section of the Canal remains to be considered for similar improvements, which should aim to preserve its character. In the north and south sections there appears to be less human activity than in the central section, though with regular use by walkers and anglers.

Visitor moorings exist mainly along the central section of Canal close to Rugeley town centre, with occasional boats moored at other locations. The frequent passing of colourful canal boats brings great vitality and a sense of long tradition to the Conservation Area.

The setting of the Conservation Area

Historically the Canal largely ran through open countryside with scattered cottages, apart from the central section close to the town where a tannery, gas works and the Trent and Mersey Mill (noted as a flour mill in 1882) stood nearby during the 19th century. Other warehouse buildings once stood upon the banks. Southwards The Mossley formed the focus of a settlement of cottages, with some limekilns, and there was a further similar group around the wharf and basin at Lea Hall.

In a linear Conservation Area the surroundings and setting to either side have potential to make a very significant impact on its character and appearance. The presence or absence of trees and hedges, the close proximity of open countryside or urban development, the quality and condition of adjacent buildings and curtilages, including boundary treatment and an array of garden landscaping, all have an impact on the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Views out of the Canal Conservation Area are extensive in places and more limited by mature tree growth and higher ground levels in others. In particular, views of the St Augustine and Old Chancel Church towers though the trees near Station Road, and the spire of Sts Joseph and Etheldreda’s Church nearer the town centre add interest and a vertical dimension. The four cooling towers of Rugeley Power Station form a
landmark in views, particularly from the south section of the Canal. Otherwise there are attractive views along the Canal corridor as it turns between the trees framing boats, bridges etc.

Today the northern section of Canal has a suburban or semi-rural setting, running mainly between modern residential property with gardens and open countryside. The central section has an urban setting with commercial or residential development on either side as it passes the edge of the town centre then the south section reverts to a suburban or semi-rural setting, bounded by residential property with gardens and the landscaped Towers Business Park.

5. Loss/Intrusion/Negative features

The character and appearance of a Conservation Area can easily be eroded as a result of unsympathetic alterations and development and the decay or removal of characteristic features. Modern development, though ‘of its time’ is not always sympathetic to character and appearance, but conversely copying ‘historic’ architecture may not be the best solution. Through careful design new buildings can respect, complement and enhance the architectural character of an area. Fine buildings of any type, style and age can enhance the visual environment and contribute to a sense of community.

Modern infill development, residential and commercial, occupies significant lengths of Canal frontage in some locations, and though almost all is outside the Conservation Area it has a visual impact on its setting. The more recent development has sought to better respect its canal-side location, for example, as The Towers has developed east of the south section of the Canal, buildings have been required to present a more attractive elevation to the Canal, with a significant soft landscaping zone and restrictions on outside storage, so that generally the view from the towpath is more attractive than some other sections of the Canal, such as the rear of industrial units on Power Station Road.

The cumulative effect of many minor alterations to older residential properties can also have a negative effect. Special architectural interest is very vulnerable to the process of modernisation, much of which is permitted without the need for any planning permission and the result can be loss of diversity and subtlety, affecting character and appearance. The recovering of roofs, removal of chimney stacks and other architectural details and the replacement of traditional timber windows in artificial materials and to non traditional designs can have a similar impact. The loss or decay of distinctive local features, such as those noted in this Appraisal, can detract from special architectural and historic interest. Remaining features often tend to be the remnants of what once existed in the area. Bearing in mind that these are the very features which helped to create the distinctive character and appearance in the first place, their vulnerability is evident. The upgrading of property does not have to be at the expense of historic fabric and character, conversely retention of appropriate detailing reinforces special interest. The Conservation Area is fortunate in retaining buildings and structures of architectural and historic significance.
Keeping historic buildings in use is the key to keeping them in a good state of repair. Restoration of the Old Mill and improvements to the boundaries of properties facing this central section of the canal will be encouraged to improve this gateway to the town centre. Any potential for bringing the listed bridge back into some use or making it accessible will be considered.

The visual impact of the huge range of domestic paraphernalia in gardens abutting the Canal is quite significant from the towpath and the presence of planting can help to soften its impact on views along the Canal. Open storage in commercial yards is visible in some places, so permissions for recent commercial developments have sought to control the extent of open storage with screen fencing, planting and in some cases prohibition. There is also currently lightspill into the Canal corridor from certain sites which is having an observable effect on bat activity. New tree and hedge planting, particularly in areas where little exists, and a sensitive approach to any lighting will be encouraged.

Along the Canal corridor much boundary treatment is good, with hedgerows or traditional railings, and also modern green ‘weldmesh’ type fencing to some of the industrial units which is appropriate to give a secure but attractive finish, see Fig. 8. In other places however fencing, such as metal palisade, is poor, and would benefit from replacement with a more suitable secure and attractive alternative or at least planting up to provide better screening. The electricity substation at Leathermill Lane bridge could be shielded from view with fencing or hedging next to the towpath entrance to camouflage its obtrusiveness. The new housing estate access road at The Mossley has a standard metal crash barrier fronting the Canal (in the middle of the hedgerow) that looks out of place. Replacement with a hedgerow and wooden bollards would be a visual improvement, or at the very least it could be painted green.

Towpath surfaces in some locations would benefit from repair or resurfacing in a similar manner to the good existing sections, with care taken in the north and south sections to preserve the rural feel. Notice boards and street furniture would benefit from an update to enhance the attraction of the area to visitors and encourage boaters to stop and visit Rugeley, in conjunction with proposed enhancement of pedestrian links to the town centre.

A Management Plan will be prepared following from this Appraisal which will seek to address the detailed issues raised.

6. Community Involvement

A report will be taken to the Council’s Cabinet seeking approval for consultation on this Draft Appraisal document. Occupiers of all properties in the Conservation Area, local ward councillors, Rugeley Town Council, The Landor Society and technical consultees will receive publicity about the Document, inviting comments. Copies will also be sent to British Waterways, The Inlands Waterways Association and the Trent and Mersey Canal Society for comments. A copy will be published on the Council’s website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk At the end of the consultation period representations received and proposed changes to the draft in the light of those
representations will be reported back to the Council’s Cabinet. The Council will then adopt the amended Appraisal.

7. Boundaries

The boundary of the Conservation Area follows the boundaries of the Canal corridor with extensions to cover nearby significant buildings and groups. The boundary has been reviewed during preparation of this Appraisal and one change is considered necessary at this time – to exclude from the Conservation Area a small area of modern infill housing in Church Croft Gardens, which it presently cuts across, would make more sense of the boundary in this location.

8. Enhancement Opportunities/Recommendations for Management/Planning Policy Guidance

A specific responsibility is placed upon Local Planning Authorities to take account of the character of a Conservation Area when exercising their duties. The local distinctiveness of particular areas is greatly to be valued and needs to be reinforced in order to maintain diversity, attractiveness and historic continuity. Unless or until financial support is available as grants for building works or environmental enhancements the main opportunities for enhancement of the Conservation Area are through the Development Control process and in conjunction with British Waterways. This Appraisal makes recommendations on what it is desirable to preserve, and how, and sets out broad principles for enhancement which may be further developed within a Management Plan for the Conservation Area:

**Recommendation 1:** Consideration of planning applications will be informed by the detailed descriptions of character contained in this Appraisal, particularly the features of interest and the areas which would benefit from improvement. There will be a general presumption in favour of preserving buildings and features identified in this Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

**Recommendation 2:** Proposals affecting the Conservation Area must be advertised and account taken of representations in determining each case.

**Recommendation 3:** Future development should take account of the special interest of the area as set out in the Appraisal. New development will need to acknowledge the relationship of buildings to spaces and the waterway frontage and reflect existing architectural detailing, including colour, texture and range of materials. It should also respect existing trees. Any opportunities for enhancement of areas highlighted as having a negative visual impact would be welcomed.

**Recommendation 4:** Traditional materials should be used in all building repair works and both hard and soft landscape elements treated sensitively:

- Where repair works fall within planning control the use of traditional materials for routine repairs will be required, and elsewhere encouraged.
• The repair/retention of original chimney stacks and pots, ridge tiles and other architectural details will be encouraged.
• Re-roofing should use traditional tiles or slates rather than artificial substitutes. Where necessary, window replacement should match the original design and glazing pattern.

Recommendation 5: Opportunities for public realm improvements will be pursued which should include a consistent approach to street furniture and reduction of clutter, with the inclusion of appropriate and suitably sited trees. Environmental and boundary treatment improvements in key locations will be sought, including management of existing planting as appropriate. Owners of property adjacent to the Canal will be encouraged to carry out appropriate tree planting. The Council will work with British Waterways to ensure that vegetation along the Canal is managed to strike a balance between the needs of the functioning waterway and attractive environmentally rich surroundings. Improvements to towpath surfacing and waterway edging in appropriate locations will be sought. The character of the Canal will be respected, in particular the semi-rural character of the north and south sections, with minimal street furniture and appropriate towpath surfacing and waterway edging. Care should be taken that, in encouraging public use of the waterway, its benefit to wildlife is not reduced.

Recommendation 6: The Council will undertake to work with property owners and British Waterways to seek satisfactory solution of issues adversely affecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In particular, the potential of the Old Mill and the listed canal bridge will be explored.

Recommendation 7: Opportunities to improve pedestrian/cycle links between the Canal and Rugeley town centre including enhanced access to the towpath at key locations will be pursued. Also improved boat mooring facilities to encourage boaters to stop and visit the town and other local facilities will be encouraged. New residential development on the Power Station site (in Lichfield District) would benefit from pedestrian links to the Canal, providing residents with an attractive route to Rugeley town centre.

Recommendation 8: Opportunities to enhance the setting of the Conservation Area and views in and out will be pursued. New development visible from the Canal corridor will respect its character including appropriate boundary treatment and planting, with use of ‘sustainable lighting’ to avoid increasing light levels within the dark corridor. Occupiers of properties close to the Canal corridor will be encouraged to avoid lighting which spills into the corridor to avoid adversely affecting wildlife. Lighting of new development close to the Canal should be designed to avoid light spill into the Canal corridor. Lighting of existing properties bordering the Canal will be encouraged to follow sustainable principles.
9. Useful Information

Further advice is available on the content of this Appraisal from the Planning Services Team, Cannock Chase Council, Civic Centre, PO Box 28, Beecroft Road, Cannock, Staffs WS11 1BG.

The principal sources of historic and local information referred to are:

- Rugeley Library Local Studies Section Clippings Files
- Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Record
- Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Plan draft List of Buildings and Features of Importance and Interest within the Parish (2005)
- Public information boards along the Canal (some provided by the Trent and Mersey Canal Society)
- Websites:
  - www.heritagegateway.org.uk
  - www.imagesofengland.org.uk
  - www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/trent-and-mersey-canal
  - www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/site/heritagetrail/trent.html
  - www.staffspasttrack.org.uk/exhibit/archivesmillenium/1700-1800.html
  - www.tmc-mileposts.co.uk