



The Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area Appraisal

August 2015

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Introduction

1.1. Definition

1. A Conservation Area is defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Section 69 (1) of the Act imposes a duty on the local planning authority to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, and to designate those places as conservation areas. Designation helps to ensure that an area identified for its architectural and historic significance is managed and protected appropriately.

1.2. Purpose of Appraisal

- 1.2.1. A conservation area appraisal is a means of identifying and assessing the special architectural or historic character of a place. The Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area is an extensive linear conservation area, and was first designated on 18 September 1984 by the Borough Councils of Newcastle-Under-Lyme and Stafford, South Staffordshire District Council and Staffordshire County Council. At that time a joint Conservation Area document was produced, covering the whole of the Staffordshire section of the Canal. The Norbury Junction Conservation Area was designated as a conservation area in 1970 by Staffordshire County Council, prior to the active process of canal corridor conservation area designation by many local authorities. As Norbury Junction forms a key part of the character of the Shropshire Union Canal, the Norbury Junction Conservation Area will now form part of the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area.

1.2.2. Under section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is a requirement of local planning authorities to update conservation area appraisals regularly, and designate further areas as necessary. Local councils are now reviewing their sections of the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area independently. The purpose of this appraisal is to assess and define the special character and appearance of the Stafford Borough section of the Shropshire Union Canal, and to identify any threats or future threats to the area's character and integrity.

1.2.3. Appraisal ensures that the local authority, developers, property owners and the local community are aware of the area's special character when drawing up and assessing proposals for change.

1.3. Effects of Conservation Area Designation

1.3.1. The conservation area appraisal will be adopted as a "material consideration" in the planning process and will be used by the local planning authority when considering the effects of any proposed development affecting the conservation area, including its setting.

1.4. Certain works in a conservation area require consent:

1.4.1. Planning Permission is required for the demolition or substantial demolition of an unlisted building within a conservation area.

1.4.2. Works to trees: Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, even if the tree is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), must notify the local planning authority and allow six weeks before commencing work. This gives the local planning authority the opportunity to make a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) if the tree is considered to be important.

1.4.3. Permitted Development Rights, i.e. those works of alteration or extension that can be carried out without planning permission, are slightly different in conservation areas. Some conservation areas are covered by Article 4 Directions, which restrict certain Permitted Development Rights, for example the installation of uPVC windows or satellite dishes. These are specific to each conservation area, and are in place to ensure the special historic and architectural character is protected.

1.5. Community Involvement

- Stafford Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement sets out to ensure that all sections of the community and interested parties have a reasonable opportunity to engage with plan-making and planning application processes. A public consultation took place between 7 October 2015 and 20 November 2015 and a public exhibition was held at Norbury Village Hall on 26 October 2015. Letters were sent to all properties within and bounding the conservation area and to key stakeholders and other interested parties, inviting comment. The draft appraisal was made public via the Borough's website, and in paper form at the Council offices. All representations were then considered and some minor amendments made to the text of the appraisal and proposed boundary revisions.

1.6 Planning Policy Context- National Planning Policy Framework policy relevant to the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area

- National planning policy is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 12 relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment and paragraphs 127-141 are relevant to the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area.
- Historic England's *Good Practice Advice (GPA) notes 1,2,3* (2015) is the national conservation guidance to support the NPPF policies and supersedes PPS5.

1.6.1 Local Planning Policy relevant to the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area

- Local planning policy is contained within The Plan for Stafford Borough (adopted 2014). Section 12 *Environment* contains policies relevant to the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area: Policies N8: *Landscape Character*, N9: *Historic Environment* and paragraphs 12.45-12.56.

2. Summary of Special Interest, the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area

2.1. The Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area is considered to be of considerable industrial archaeological significance as the last of the major trunk waterways to be built in the Canal Era of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, both nationally and locally. It was first designated on 18 September 1984 as a means of preserving and enhancing the special architectural and historic interest that has been retained since its creation.

2.2. This appraisal defines the special architectural and historic interest of the Stafford Borough section of the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area as it stands today.

2.3. The key elements of the Stafford Borough Section of the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area are summarised as follows:

- A 'modern' canal built between 1827-1835 marking the end of the major canal development in Britain, and the last major work to be undertaken by its originator and engineer, Thomas Telford
- A typical 'Telford' canal, notable for many pioneering feats of civil engineering: deep rock cuttings, high embankments, and aqueducts
- A wealth of single-span brick and stone road and accommodation bridges, all but two contemporary with the canal and listed at grade II.
- Historic canal side buildings including farms and canal side pubs
- A variety of surviving historic surfaces, especially under bridges, including sandstone copings and brick paving.
- Groups of associated industrial buildings strategically located close to the canal, such as the Cadbury's Factory at Knighton and Coton Mill at Gnosall, reflecting the importance of the canal for industry.

- Surviving wharfs and boatyards: such as at Norbury Junction, Shebdon and High Onn, providing focal points of the canal community, past and present.
- Local details such as distinctive early 19th century cast iron mileposts and other canal ironwork features such as bridge plates and strapping posts.
- A predominantly rural canal setting characterised by enclosed cuttings, open agricultural landscape, and canal side communities and settlements providing exceptional scenic interest.
- Long reaching views out over rolling countryside peppered with dispersed farmsteads and small villages.

3. Historical Development

- 3.1** The canals of Staffordshire are numerous and extensive. Historically important, due to the geographical setting and mineral wealth of the County, Staffordshire is at the centre of the national canal network devised by James Brindley to transport heavy and fragile commodities ranging from coal to china. The earliest canals in the country built by Brindley include the Trent and Mersey and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, both of which run through Staffordshire. During these early years of canal building in the 1770s, civil engineering was still in its infancy and canals typically followed the contours of the landscape, for cheapness and ease of construction, using locks to negotiate changing land levels.
- 3.2** By the 1830s the approach to canal construction had evolved and the emphasis on speed had become much greater. With heavy competition from the railways, new straight and level canals were built at a huge cost in terms of civil engineering works. One of the finest examples of this new conception of canal was the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal which ran from Nantwich to Autherley Junction at Wolverhampton, passing for most of its length through Staffordshire. This canal was considered a 'modern' canal and it was the last major work to be undertaken by its originator and engineer, Thomas Telford, marking the end of the major canal development in Britain.
- 3.3** The Shropshire Union Canal is an amalgamation of four separate canals, built by three different canal companies and spanning the whole of the 'Canal Age'. The first was the Chester Canal built between 1772 and 1779, and linking Chester to Nantwich. The canal was a commercial failure and its fortunes only rescued by the construction of the Ellesmere Canal from Ellesmere Port to Chester, which was completed in 1795; these two companies amalgamated in 1813 and a further branch from Middlewich opened in 1833 to serve the potteries. A radical proposal for a link to the Midlands was proposed and the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal received its Act of Parliament in 1826. Completed in 1835, the canal ran for 39 miles from the junction of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Autherley Junction to the Ellesmere and Chester Canal at Nantwich.

3.4 The Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal linked the Midlands by a direct route to Ellesmere Port on the River Mersey and shortened the route by 20 miles and 30 locks. It was the intention of Telford to show that an improved canal could compete with the railways and with the emphasis on speed of conveyance, a route was chosen which could allow goods to travel from Birmingham to Liverpool in 45 hours. The trade for which it was constructed comprised predominantly of iron, general merchandise and coal and coke, as well as building materials, lime and limestone and road materials.



Figure 1 Plan of the Birmingham & Liverpool Canal through Shelmore Wood

3.5 Construction of the canal was fraught with difficulties, and the costs of purchasing the land rose dramatically throughout the project. Lord Anson of Norbury Park refused to allow the canal through his land in Shelmore Wood which necessitated expensive deviations from the intended route and resulted in the construction of Shelmore Great Bank between Norbury Junction and Gnosall. Taking over 5 years to complete, due to delays caused by the constant slipping of marl, the bank was not finished at the time of Telford's death in 1834, and was the last section of the Shropshire Union to be completed by engineer William Cubitt six months after Telford's death. It was on the 2nd March 1835 that the first boat navigated the 39 miles of the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal.

3.6 The Canals of the 18th and 19th century were revolutionary not only in accelerating the transport of goods, but also in providing a new arterial pattern divorced from the roads that had continually influenced economic and social development from Roman times onwards. The considerations that determined the course of canals were new, and in the same way that the railways produced their Swindons and their Doncasters, so the canals generated new centres of settlement. Stourport on Severn in Worcestershire as a town created by the canals is a phenomenon unique in England, but nevertheless Norbury, together with Fradley and Haywood, is an example of a canal junction sited in what had been open country. When the canal was wholly open in 1835 Norbury Canal Junction developed as the most active point along its course. This is where the main line was joined by the branch that ran westwards to Newport and Shrewsbury, providing a link to Shropshire and Wales beyond.



Figure 2 1st Edition OS Map 1881 showing a stretch of the Forton and Norbury Locks at Oulton

3.7 The Newport Branch line was built at the same time at the Main Line, dropping down to Wappenshall on the Shrewsbury Canal via a flight of twenty three locks. Within the Stafford Borough, the branch line travelled as far as Forton to the southwest of the Borough, through seventeen locks known as the Forton and Norbury lock flight.

3.8 Throughout the next ten years competition with the railway companies ensured close working of the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal with neighbouring canals, particularly with the Ellesmere and Chester Company. In 1845, the year of 'railway mania', the two companies merged and one year later combined with the Shrewsbury Canal to form the Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Company (SUR&CCo.), the intention being to convert the Main Line into railways. The proposal never materialised, thanks largely to the involvement of the London and North Western Railway Co. (LNWR) who leased the canals in perpetuity from the Shropshire Union in 1847. The LNWR were happy to see the main line canal continue to operate and draw trade away from its arch rival, the Great Western Railway Co. through whose territory it ran.



Figure 3 Norbury Parish Tithe map of 1837 shows The Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal as it cut through Shelmore Wood. The Junction of the Main Line Canal with the Newport Branch Line can be seen to the SE of Norbury, prior to the development of the Norbury Junction settlement.

3.9 The canal continued to work profitably throughout the 19th century and up to the First World War however, from then on, canal traffic went into rapid decline. In 1922 it was bought out entirely by the LNWR, along with the rest of the Shropshire Union network, and remained open despite an Act in 1944 to close it. Nationalised in 1947, the canal continued to carry commercial traffic up to the late 1960s. The Newport Branch was abandoned by the L.M. & S Railway following an Act of Parliament in 1944 and, despite remaining intact for the following twenty years, was sold off in sections by the British Transport Commission in the 1960s and the majority of the stretch backfilled.



Figure 4 Blakemere Bridge (No.2) c.1980s a former accommodation Bridge on the Newport Branch

3.10 Since the 1960s the canal has grown in popularity as a pleasure cruising waterway and in 1968 was declared a ‘Cruising Waterway’ which assures its maintenance by the former British Waterways Board, now the Canal and River Trust (CRT), to standards prescribed in the 1968 Transport Act.

3.11 Today Britain’s canals are enjoying a new lease of life, with popular and growing leisure use by walkers, cyclists and boaters. There is substantial pressure for additional moorings, often on a large ‘marina’ scale, whilst a waterside location is popular for both residential and commercial developments. Recognising and respecting the special historic character and appearance of the canal and its setting is therefore as important as ever.

4 Location, Setting and Topography

- 4.1** The Former Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal section of the Shropshire Union stretches for 39 miles from Atherley Junction, near Wolverhampton to Nantwich, Cheshire, passing through the counties of Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. The canal corridor within the Stafford Borough runs from Wheaton Aston Brook at the border of South Staffordshire, north through to Knighton Wood at the Staffordshire/Shropshire border, passing through the parishes of Church Eaton, Gnosall, Norbury, High Offley and Adbaston.
- 4.2** The Shropshire Union Canal was designed to follow as direct a route as possible, and the canal runs through open pasture land with cuttings occurring as the ground rises. It differed from earlier canals in taking the most direct route to its destination, rather than following the contours of the landscape like other Borough canals, such as the Trent and Mersey and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canals.
- 4.3** The canal is notable for many pioneering feats of civil engineering. A series of deep cuttings, high embankments and aqueducts form the principle features and at Gnosall, Cowley Tunnel cuts through solid Bunter sandstone at the north and marlstones of the Keuper series to the south. These feats of engineering form a pronounced, man-made topographical feature in western Staffordshire, and a visual and historical contribution to the landscape.
- 4.4** The settlements at Norbury Junction and Gnosall Heath, with sites of former industry, boat yards, pubs and cafes, and residential dwellings, create a slightly more urban setting to the canal, but otherwise the scenic interest is exceptional as long stretches of canal cut through an open rural landscape of fields and pasture-land, punctuated with heavily wooded-cuttings. A number of isolated farmsteads and small villages can be seen from the canal emphasising the rural setting.

4.5 Many of the long stretches of the canal feel isolated from the surrounding landscape, with access to and from the towpath limited to the road bridges. The sense of isolation is particularly acute in the midst of the many wooded cuttings which have an almost pre-historic feel in some parts. The peace and tranquillity of the waterway however, does create an atmospheric and intriguing solitude and part of the special character of the canal directly relates to this rural isolation.



Figure 5 Open landscape combines with heavily wooded cuttings at Castle Cutting north of High Onn

4.6 As one of the most popular cruising canals in the country, the waterway is host to many canal boaters and both permanent and temporary moorings provide a welcome and colourful contrast to the detachment of the isolated stretches. Where the canal passes through villages, settlements and wharfs, a sense of activity is experienced both on and off the water and despite the loss of former industry, the canal survives as a popular tourist attraction which adds a vibrance and vitality to the setting of the canal.



Figure 6 Canal boats add a colourful contrast to the isolated setting of the canal



Figure 7 Heavily wooded cuttings are a feature of the Shropshire Union Canal-
looking south from Wood Eaton Bridge

5 Buildings and Structures of the Shropshire Union Canal

5.1 Canal Channel

The fundamental structure of the canal is the channel itself, or 'The Cuts'. The Shropshire Union Canal was excavated using picks and shovels and lined with puddled clay, a mix of sand and clay that forms a water-tight seal. In some parts, the channel is reinforced with a masonry lining, generally at bridges or wharfs, and modern galvanised sheet steel is used in places to support the sides of the channel and reduce water loss. Whilst the northern section of the canal that runs through Cheshire is a wide waterway, built to carry large wide-beamed barges known as Mersey Flats, the southern section is known as a narrow canal, constructed for use by smaller gauge, traditional narrow boats of 7ft beam. There is an overall uniformity to the width of the canal channel with some narrowing through bridges and stop gates, and widening around wharfs such as at High Onn and Shebdon Wharf.

5.2 Cuttings and Embankments

The Shropshire Union Canal is a modern or 'engineered' canal, designed to pursue as straight a course as possible achieved at the expense of costly engineering works of embankments and cuttings, constructed to maintain the level. The scale of the engineering works along the Shropshire Union is evident in the number and scale of the cuttings and embankments; Woodseaves Cutting is 1 mile long and 90ft deep, Knighton Bank is 1 mile long and 50ft high, Grub Street Cutting is almost 2 miles long and the cutting and tunnel at Cowley near Gnosall extends some 75 metres. Using the then new techniques of cut and fill, the spoil from the cuttings would be used to make the embankments.

5.3 Locks and Gates

There are no locks along the Stafford Borough section of the Shropshire Union Canal, however stop gates, which are of similar construction to lock gates, can be found in some parts, mostly at narrows and bridges. Canals contain large volumes of water which is often carried above the level of the land. Stop gates are used to control water levels by sectioning off long stretches of canal, particularly at embankments, as a precaution against the failure of the canal and subsequent flooding of surrounding lower-lying land. The stop gates also allow for the draining of canal sections for repair and maintenance. An example of a stop gate can be seen at Shelmore Embankment where the canal channel narrows at the approach to the embankment. At the other end of the embankment is the site of the other stop gate where the channel narrows again before entering Norbury Junction Wharf.



Figure 8 Stop gate at Shelmore Embankment

5.4 Weirs and Sluices

To regulate water levels and combat changes in levels, weirs and sluices are constructed at strategic places along a canal, providing an outlet for excess water levels, often into an adjoining watercourse. A large sluice is found just south of Norbury Junction, allowing for water level control from Shelmore Embankment, and into and out of the wharf.



Figure 9 Sluice at Norbury Junction Wharf

5.5 Bridges, Aqueducts and Culverts

5.5.1 The canal had to accommodate existing roads and properties, and as a result is peppered along its route with a number of road bridges, and ‘accommodation’ bridges, which allowed farmers to move their livestock and property owners to gain access their land. The bridges on this canal are of fine proportions, built of brick or stone with stone copings and many of the brick bridges to the south of the conservation area show evidence of former white-wash. In the tradition of the Telford era, all bridges display carefully engineered curves and simple robust detailing, some being enhanced with stone string courses or brick dentils. Modest bridges are traditional single span, elliptical arched bridges whilst the much larger bridges have semi-

circular arches. High Bridge (No.39) north of Norbury Junction has an unusual 'arch within an arch', the lower arch being a later addition and acting as a strengthening buttress.

5.5.2 Where the canal towpath changed from one side to the other, 'turnover bridges' were constructed, with ramps to either side for the horses to cross. Bridge 26 on the Shropshire Union is an example of a turnover or 'roving' bridge found to the north of High Onn Wharf. Cowley Double Road Bridge (No.31) is a possibly unique bridge with a wide carriageway divided into two farm tracks by a stone wall.

5.5.3 In the 20th century modern concrete slab bridges often replaced or encased historic brick or stone canal bridges. Shebdon Bridge (No.44) is the only example of a modern bridge along this stretch of the Shropshire Union, replacing a former brick built bridge.



Figure 10 High Bridge (39) displays an unusual double arch



Figure 11 Roving Bridge no.26 north of High Onn Wharf

5.5.4 On many of the road bridges, historic surfaces have now been replaced with tarmac, whilst on the accommodation bridges surfaces remain untreated and, in some cases, are completely overgrown with vegetation. Iron strapping posts can be found to many of the bridges, designed to protect the bridges from tow rope wear and often becoming worn too. The ironwork has been maintained to a high standard but still shows evidence of tow rope wear.



Figure 12 Iron strapping posts show evidence of tow rope wear

5.5.5 Bridge plates on the Shropshire Union Canal are simple, oval-shaped cast iron plates with black numbers on a white background. Some have been replaced with a modern variant although where new bridge plates have been introduced, the established palette of black and white is used.



Figure 13 Cast iron bridge plates

5.5.6 Aqueducts were a key feature of an ‘engineered’ canal, built to carry a waterway over an obstacle such as a road, valley or other waterway. The Shropshire Union Canal includes the impressive aqueducts at the Shebdon and Shelmore Embankments. The aqueducts at Shelmore Bank are grade II listed stone, barrel vaulted structures and a single aqueduct is found at Shebdon Wharf carrying the canal across the road.

5.5.7 Culverts are usually simple structures designed to carry the canal over rivers, streams and tributaries. There are several 19th century brick culverts along this stretch of the Shropshire Union which carry the canal over small streams and brooks, the other watercourse often providing an overflow outlet for weirs and sluices.



Figure 14 The grade II listed Shelmore aqueduct at the NW corner of Shelmore Wood

5.6 Towpaths and Surfaces

5.6.1 The canal presents a relatively natural appearance within the landscape for much of its length, as the engineered water's edge has gradually become softened by vegetation. Canal edges are predominately grassy although some sections have been coped with sandstone or later concrete replacements, usually on the approach to and beneath bridges.



Figure 15 Softened canal edging and grassy towpaths are characteristic features of the Shropshire Union Canal.

5.6.2 Towpaths are generally unsurfaced and of grass, which contributes to the rural character of the canal. In areas of higher footfall, a single track path has been carved through the grass or concrete pavement exists. At Knighton, to the north of the conservation area, towpaths are of gravel, and blue engineering bricks or concrete slabs edge the canal, giving this section of canal towpath a more ‘used’ feel.



Figure 16 Towpaths are generally untreated although some sections have been treated with gravel or concrete

5.6.3 Beneath bridges, towpaths are typically unsurfaced with canal edges coped in historic stone or the later replacements of diamond-cut brick or criss-cross cast concrete. Some brick paver surfaces can be found at Roving Bridge (26) and Parks Bridge (27), although these are exceptions.



Figure 17 Examples of brick paving surfaces at bridges 26 and 27

5.7 Building Methods and Materials

5.7.1 Red and blue brick, and ashlar sandstone is the predominant building material for bridges, the brick laid in a traditional English Bond. Historic sandstone copings remain in some sections, most notably on the approach to bridges, and aqueducts are of stone. Traditional lime mortar was used at the time of construction and much of this is retained. Many bridges and the aqueducts have the remains of a white wash still visible, most likely a lime-wash applied possibly to protect the surfaces of the bridges but more likely to improve visibility in dark or dim light conditions. Render has been used on some buildings and bridges, although this is a later addition to original brick.

5.7.2 Red and blue brick is used for canal side buildings and slate is the traditional roofing material within the conservation area. Dark brown, red and blue brick are used for the maintenance buildings at the dry dock in Norbury Junction and an orangey-red and buff brick is found at Waterfront Cottages.

5.7.3 Stone is found to some window lintels and cills and windows are traditional timber sash, cantered bays or side opening casements to dwellings. Good examples of industrial cast iron multi-light windows remain at the maintenance buildings and warehouse at Norbury Wharf, and Coton Mill at Gnosall Heath retains a number of delicate and decorative cast-iron windows.



Figure 18 Multi-light, iron framed windows

5.8 Buildings and Structures

5.8.1 Canal architecture is typically simple and unpretentious, using local vernacular materials and styles. The canals revolutionised the landscape of 18th and 19th century Britain and introduced a whole new transport industry, supporting merchants, boatmen, warehousemen, lock-keepers and lengthmen. Once agricultural landscapes were transformed with the introduction of new buildings to accommodate the industry. This included new building types, such as warehouses, wet and dry docks and lockkeeper's cottages, but also familiar buildings such as cottages, smithies, stables, inns and mills, either serving the canal, or taking advantage of the new transport route



Figure 19 Simple vernacular architecture forms are seen at the wharf building at Shebdon and former warehouse at Norbury Junction



Figure 20 The former lock-keepers cottage and Superintendents house at Norbury Junction are examples of canal-related buildings

5.8.2 Apart from the regularity of bridges, the built environment of the Shropshire Union Canal tends to occur in dense clusters at settlements, where groups of historic buildings give an urban character to this, otherwise rural, canal. Both Norbury Junction and Gnosall Heath are such settlements, which grew from the coming of the Shropshire Union Canal, and both display good examples of buildings that have been influenced by the canal, its industry and its people. The former lock-keepers cottage and superintendent's house at Norbury Junction are examples of domestic buildings which relate directly to the canal, and the Boat Inn and Navigation Inn at Gnosall Heath are good examples of canal side inns.



Figure 21 The Boat Inn and the Navigation Inn at Gnosall Heath

5.8.3 Wharfs tended to be located close to existing towns and, as areas of activity, attracted the developments of canal side buildings such as at Gnosall and Norbury. Other wharves appear in isolated, rural spots such as at High Onn which retains its warehouse as a distinct reminder of former industrial activity.



Figure 22 Warehouse at High Onn Wharf

5.8.4 Despite the attraction of industry and development to the new transportation network, the Stafford Borough section of the Shropshire Union Canal remains largely rural in character. As Norbury Junction and Gnosall Heath developed as key canal settlements, buildings on a grander scale, and of a more elaborate architectural style, grew up alongside the much simpler buildings. The maintenance yard buildings at Norbury Junction and Coton Mill at Gnosall Heath display interesting architectural features, in terms of both functionality and style. Other industry along the canal was dispersed within the agricultural landscape, as at the Cadbury Factory at Knighton where the impressive 1920s chocolate factory and wharf interrupts an otherwise rural landscape reminding us of the influence of the canals on industrial transportation.

5.8.5 Unique buildings, including tiny lobbies for banksmen or lockkeepers simply to protect them from the weather, are often found along canal navigations. Small-scale, simple brick structures survive along the Grub Street Cutting and at Knighton where it contrasts with the much larger-scale Cadbury Factory on the opposite side of the canal.



Figure 23 The Cadbury Factory at Knighton

5.9 Mile Posts and Signs

The canal used the established systems of mile posts to identify distances from the beginning and end of the route from Autherley to Nantwich and to Norbury Junction. The distinctive cast iron mileposts, almost all of which survive, are of a uniform design and painted black and white. There are 9 mile posts located within the Stafford Borough section of the Shropshire Union Canal, all grade II listed.



Figure 24 Mile marker at Grub Street

6 Buildings, Spatial Analysis, Setting and Views: Wheaton Aston Brook to Little Onn Bridge

- 6.1** This appraisal begins at the southern part of the conservation area within the Stafford Borough, at the border of South Staffordshire. Beginning at Wheaton Aston Brook, the canal moves north to Little Onn Bridge. Hawthorn lined embankments carry the canal into and out of the wooded cutting of Ryehill and a fine series of brick and stone bridges punctuate views down long straight stretches of water.
- 6.2** The first bridge reached travelling north is Shushions Bridge (no.21), a modest accommodation bridge of red and blue brick with stone copings and string course. No longer in use and heavily overgrown, Shushions Bridge was previously white-washed and some white-wash remains to the lower section. Views to the north and south encompass open fields, setting this section of canal within the rural landscape.
- 6.3** Continuing northwards the canal passes through Ryehill Bridge (No.22), a road bridge of good proportions. Formerly known as Slab Bridge, the bridge is of red and blue brick with tall jambs and an impressive skew-arch with a three-course blue brick detail. Slab Bridge Cottage lies to the west, beyond the bridge, and is a red brick, early Victorian building with a garden sloping down towards the canal creating a scenic waterside feature. Views north from the bridge herald the beginning of the Ryehill Cutting, an attractive cutting wooded with sycamore trees
- 6.4** Enclosed within the Cutting is Ryehill Cutting Bridge (No. 23), an overgrown accommodation bridge which forms part of a public footpath. Formerly Ryehill Bridge, the bridge is a simple red and blue brick bridge with stone copings. Views to the north and south from the bridge are of the heavily wooded Ryehill Cutting which gives this stretch of canal an enclosed, tunnel-like feel.
- 6.5** A mile post marks the exit from the Cutting as the surrounding landscape opens up once again to a rural hinterland. Passing by the village of Little Onn, this stretch of canal is sealed by Little Onn Bridge (No. 24), a simple red and blue brick elliptical arch bridge with sandstone copings and string course.



Figure 25 Shushions Bridge and Ryehill Bridge

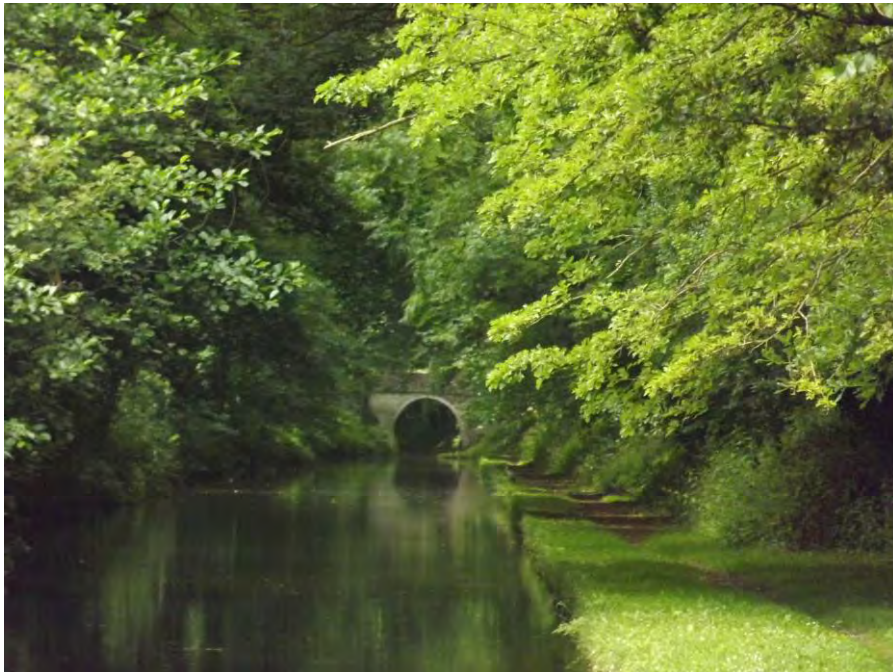
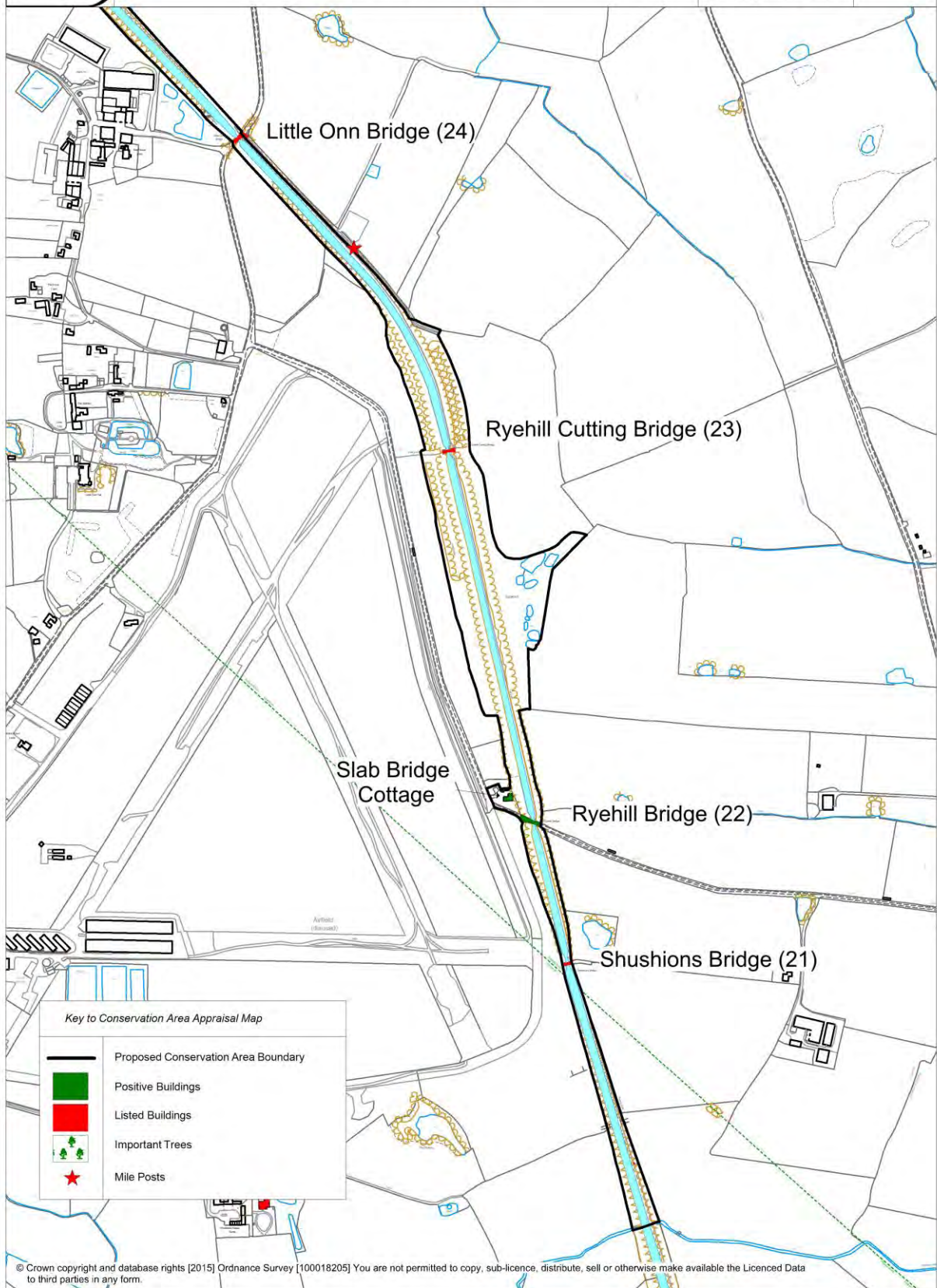


Figure 26 Views north towards Ryehill Cutting Bridge



Figure 27 Ryehill Cutting Bridge and Little Onn Bridge



7 Little Onn Bridge to Castle Cutting Bridge

- 7.1 From Little Onn moving northwest, the canal moves over and through a series of short embankments and cuttings as it maintains a level course through the surrounding countryside. Reaching High Onn Bridge (25) and High Onn wharf beyond, this cluster of canal side buildings and moorings create a picturesque setting after a long and isolated canal stretch.



Figure 28 Wharf buildings at High Onn Wharf



Figure 29 The former Cadburys milk processing building and High Onn Bridge

7.2 The original wharf at High Onn, with red brick warehouse and farm, was built in the 1830s by Lord Talbot. The warehouse has a shallow pitched roof with projecting eaves and retains much original fenestration. The wharf building to the south of High Onn bridge dates from the 1920s and was used to process milk for the Cadbury's Chocolate factory at Knighton to the north of the conservation area.

7.3 North of High Onn Wharf is Roving Bridge (26). The bridge represents a good example of a turnover bridge, which allows the canal towing path to change from the east to the west side. The bridge is of red and blue brick with stone copings and brick skew arch with dented brick detailing. The bridge shows evidence of former white-wash.



Figure 30 Brick detailing to Roving Bridge No.26

7.4 Beyond the turnover bridge is a particularly isolated section of the canal which cuts through both open fields and small wooded areas. Parks Bridge, formerly Innage Bridge (No. 27) and Parks Barn Bridge, formerly Oscote Bridge (No.28) are modest stone accommodation bridges no longer in use and isolated within the canal landscape. Openness characterises this section of the canal as it passes through rolling countryside with far reaching landscape views.



Figure 31 Openness characterises the landscape Looking south towards Parks Barn Bridge

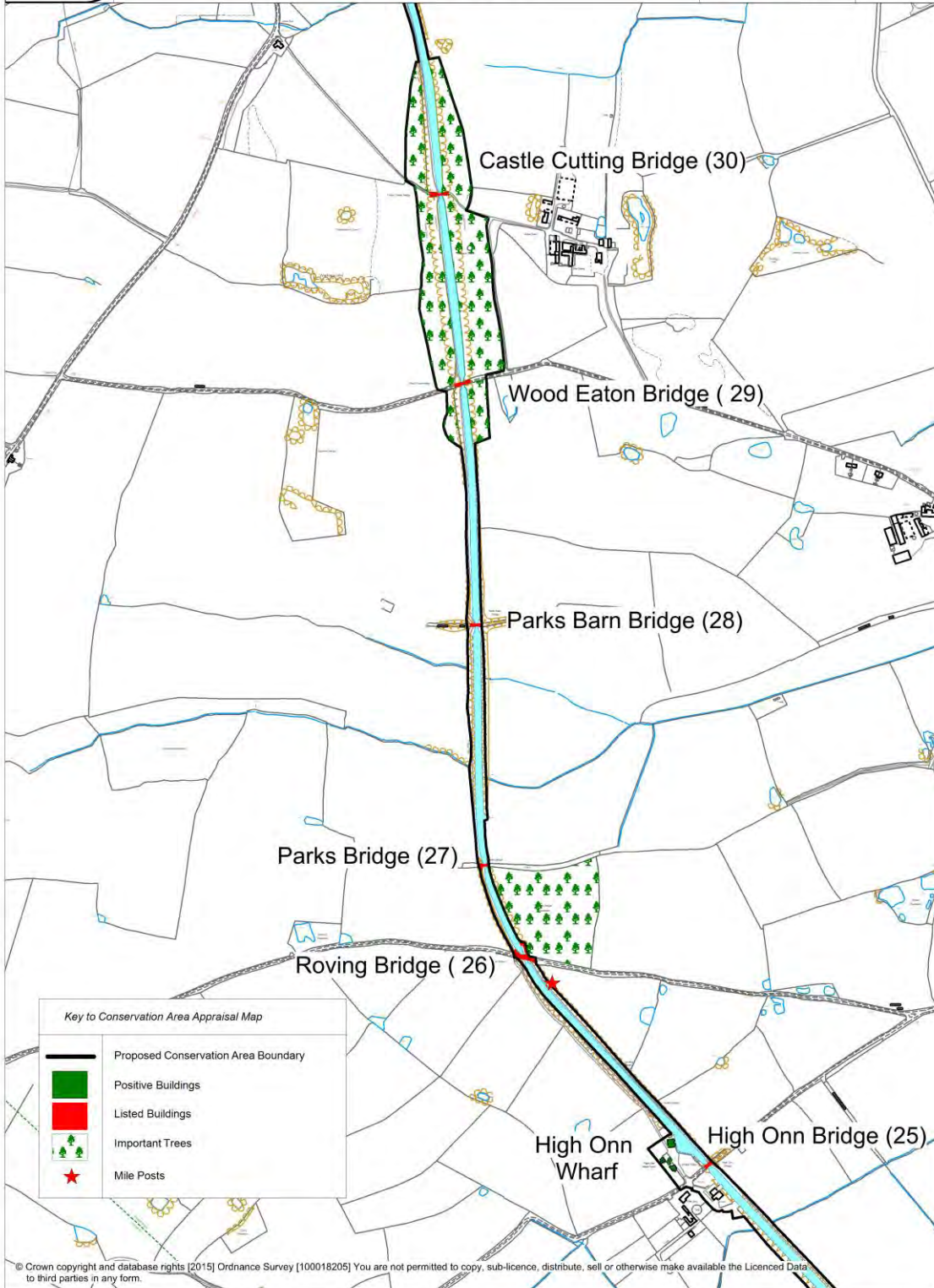


Figure 32 Parks Bridge No. 27 and Parks Barn Bridge No. 28

7.5 Wood Eaton Bridge (No.29) marks the entrance to the narrow and heavily tree-lined Castle Cutting. Originally known as Broad Lane Bridge, this stone road bridge carries Broad Lane from the village of Wood Eaton across the canal. As the canal enters the cutting, the isolated and enclosed character returns, contrasting with the openness of the previous stretch.



Figure 33 Wood Eaton Bridge marks the entrance to Castle Cutting



8 Castle Cutting Bridge to Boat Inn Bridge

8.1 Within the depths of Castle Cutting lies Castle Cutting Bridge (no. 30), a road bridge of slightly larger proportions than Wood Eaton Bridge. Of stone construction and with a semi-circular arch, the bridge curves as it carries the road over the canal, serving as an access route to Wood Eaton Manor.



Figure 34 Castle Cutting Bridge and Cowley Road Bridge

8.2 The landscape opens up as the canal leaves the cutting, the small farming hamlet of Cowley characterising this section with farmsteads on both sides of the canal. Cowley Double Road Bridge (no. 31) is an unusual accommodation bridge with a wide carriageway divided into two farm tracks by a stone wall of a later date, most likely built as an accommodation bridge to serve the nearby Cowley Farm. Cowley Bridge (no.32), just further north, carries the road across the canal and up past what was Manorhouse Farm and is now Upper Cowley Farm. Both bridges are of stone with modest proportions and are elliptically arched.



Figure 35 Cowley Bridge and Cowley Tunnel

8.3 Beyond Cowley Bridge a series of narrow and heavily wooded cuttings carry the canal northwest towards Gnosall and Cowley Tunnel (No. 33). The only tunnel on the canal, Cowley Tunnel stretches for approximately 70 metres through a geologically unstable cutting, and marks the approach to Gnosall from the south. Telford originally planned a tunnel of over 600 metres in length however it was opened out during construction after dangerous faults were found in the sandstone rock.

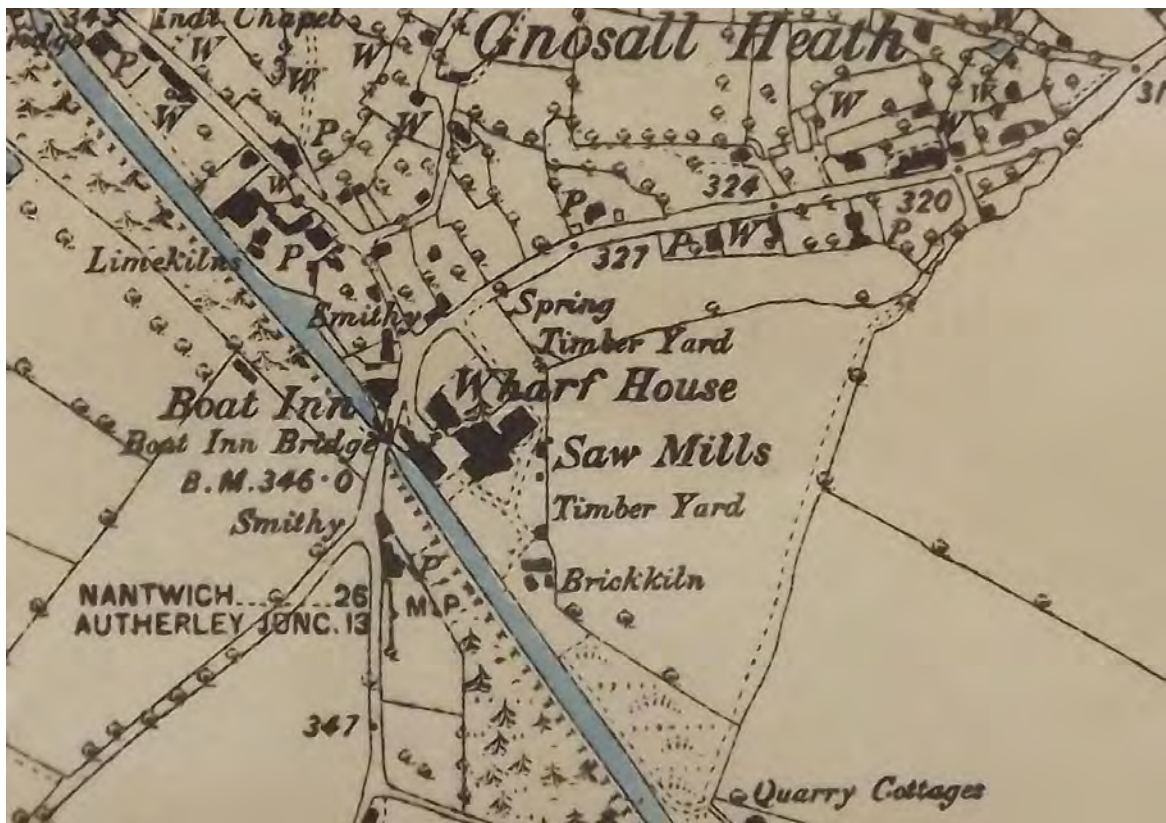


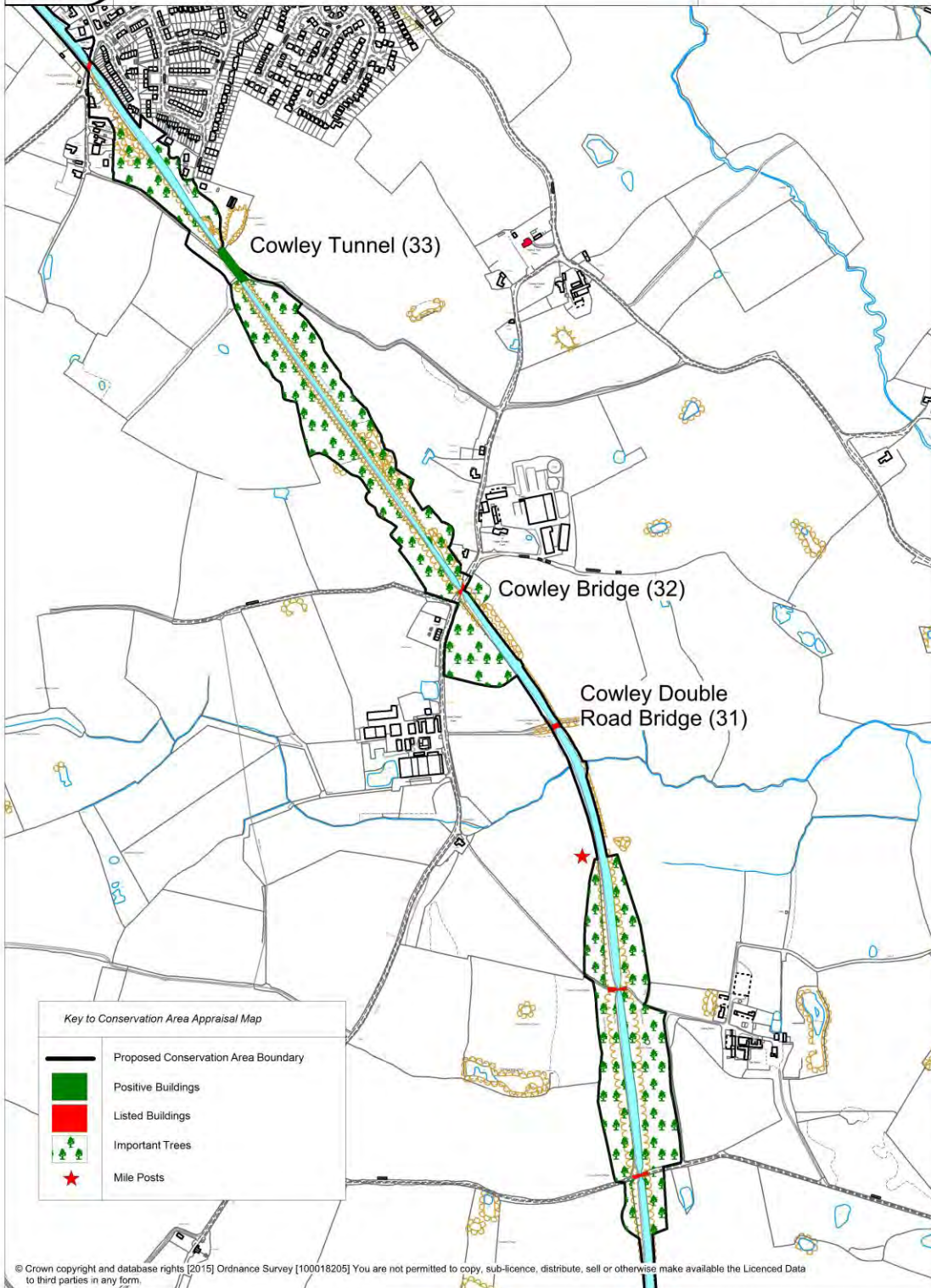
Figure 36 1st Edition OS Map 1891 shows the former canal side industry at Gnosall Heath

8.4 Beyond the Cowley Tunnel the canal continues through a wooded cutting, opening out as it enters Gnosall Heath to the southwest of the village of Gnosall. The settlement of Gnosall Heath developed around the construction of the canal and this stretch has a distinctly urban feel. Former canal side industry of saw mills, timber yards, brick works and lime kilns characterised this section of the canal historically, however all have since been demolished and replaced by modern housing.



Figure 37 The Boat Inn and Boat Inn Bridge at Gnosall Heath

8.5 Boat Inn Bridge (No. 34) is a modest stone road bridge framed on the eastern side by the Boat Inn canal side pub. Originally called Boat Inn Bridge, it became known as Pave Lane Road Bridge briefly in the early 20th century before reverting back to its original name in the 1920s. The Boat Inn abuts the eastern side of the canal and is thought to have been a farm workers cottage extended during the construction of the canal to form part of the canal system, possibly as a horse changing post for the Flyboat.



9. Boat Inn Bridge to Machins Barn Bridge

- 9.1 As the canal moves through the village of Gnosall Heath it passes below the Newport Road (A518) and the Newport Road Bridge (No. 35), formerly Coton Bridge. Just north of the bridge the canal is flanked on both sides by historic buildings. To the west is the Navigation Inn, a 19th century boating inn, and to the east Coton Mill abuts the canal, surviving as an example of a steam mill built for the production of flour. Built in 1833, the mill ceased production prior to 1914 and was used as a warehouse during the 1950s. Attached to the mill, with its front façade to the main road is the former grocers shop.



Figure 38 Newport Road Bridge



Figure 39 The Navigation Inn to foreground with Coton Mill and former shop beyond (c.1950s)



Figure 40 Coton Mill abuts the east side of the canal

9.2 Past Gnosall the canal passes into a wooded cutting through Bridge 35a, a stone railway bridge with steel supports which carried the former Shropshire Union Line of the LNWR and is now a footpath. Views are enclosed up to and beyond Plardiwick Bridge (No.36), formerly Leak Bridge, and this section of canal once again has a distinctly isolated feel.

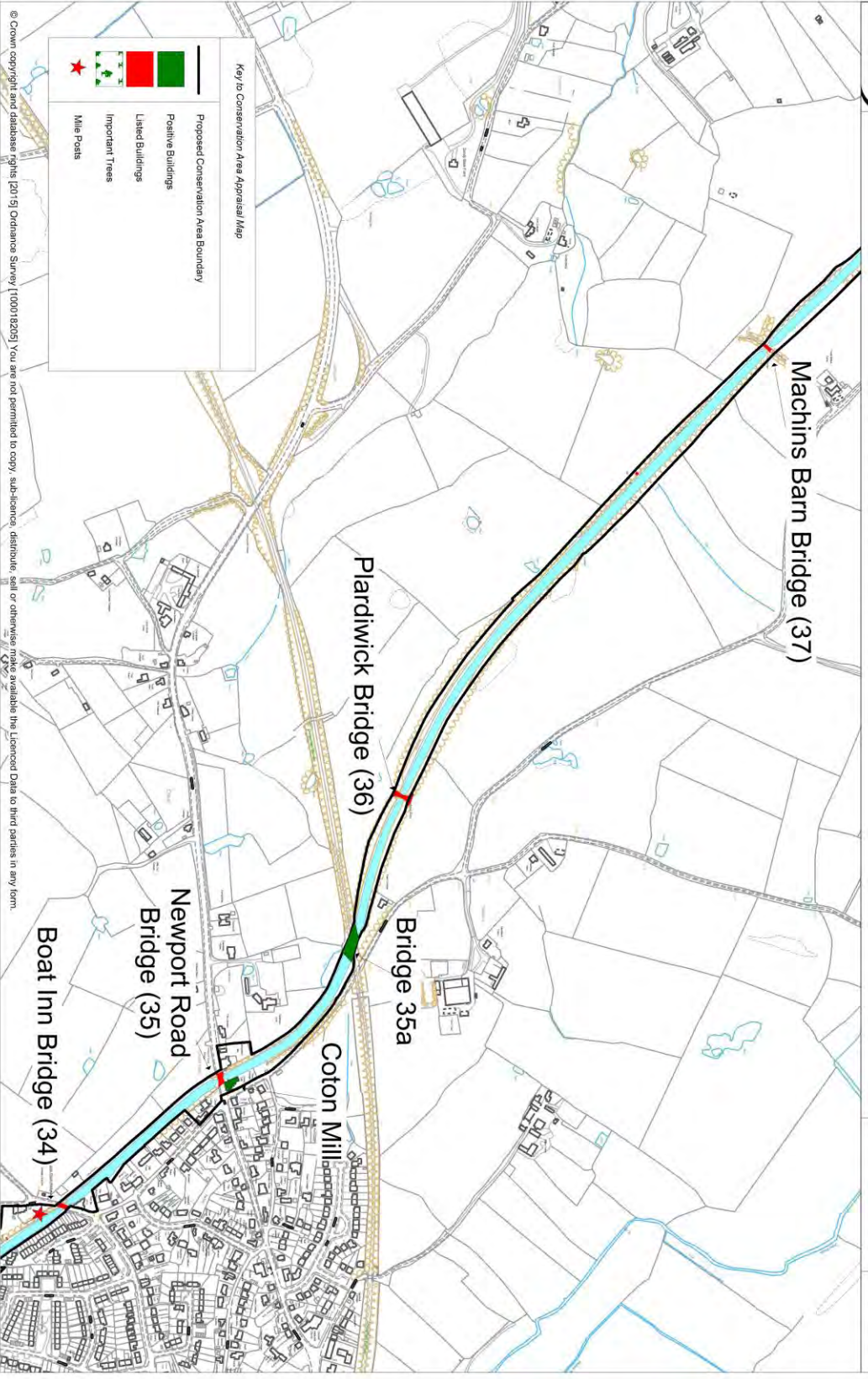


Figure 41 Plardiwick Bridge

9.3 The canal emerges from the cutting to pleasant views out to open countryside, this long stretch of openness provides a notable contrast to the enclosure of the cutting. The long, open views are pleasantly interrupted by Machins Barn Bridge (No. 37). Originally Barn Bridge, this small-scale, stone accommodation bridge is currently only accessible from nearby Barn Farm.



Figure 42 Machins Barn Bridge



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10. Machins Barn Bridge to Norbury Junction

10.1 Beyond Machins Barn Bridge open landscape once again dominates and views open out to the east and west. A stop gate marks the entrance to the Shelmore “Great” Bank embankment which cuts through Shelmore wood and runs for over a mile to Norbury Junction. A source of much trouble to the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction canal Company and its engineer, Thomas Telford, the Shelmore embankment was constructed because Lord Anson refused to allow the canal through his game reserves at Norbury Park. Instead of taking the navigation on the level it had to be taken along an embankment 40ft high around Shelmore wood



Figure 43 The approach to Shelmore ‘Great’ Bank

10.2. Occasional views can be glimpsed over surrounding countryside through the trees and hedges which flank the embankment to the west, whilst enclosed views of Shelmore Wood predominate to the east.

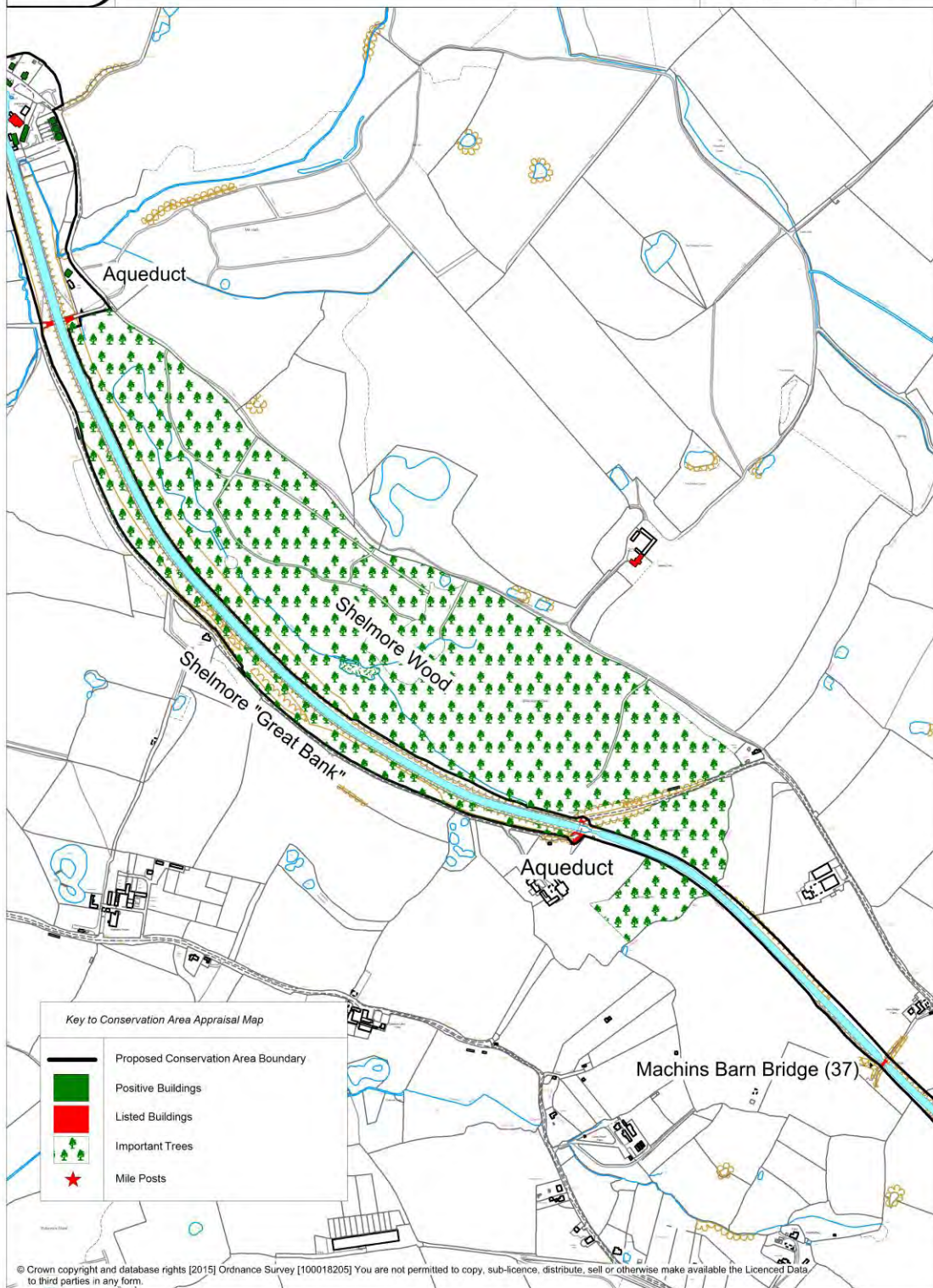


Figure 44 1st Edition OS mapping shows the extent of the Shelmore Embankment as it passes through Shelmore Wood

10.3 At the northwest and southeast corners of Shelmore Wood two stone barrel vaulted, grade II listed aqueducts carry the canal over the Norbury Road. Photographs from the 1950s show the aqueducts were previously white-washed.



Figure 45 Photograph from the 1950s shows the white-washed aqueducts



11. Norbury Junction and Newport Branch

11.1 As the canal emerges from the embankment, moorings line the canal on the approach to Norbury Junction, a settlement which owes its existence to the construction of the canals, and its name to the construction of the Newport branch of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal. The branch was opened in 1833 and linked the Birmingham & Liverpool with the Shrewsbury Canal at Wappenshall, leaving the main canal at Norbury, hence the term Junction. Today Norbury Junction is a busy wharf and boat centre with an established leisure boat community.



Figure 46 The wharf at Norbury Junction



Figure 47 Junction Bridge (No.38) on the Main Line Canal and Junction Bridge (No.1) on the Branch Line

11.2 At its peak Norbury Junction was a great entrepot, with strong links to the midlands and northwest canal network. Built out of commercial interest with the facilities required for the maintenance and repair of boats, Norbury Junction also provided services to the narrow boat crew, their families and horses. Existing historic buildings are testament to this with many surviving functional buildings, including the former British Waterways Board (now the Canal and River Trust) maintenance yard. In addition to the yard there is small cluster of dwellings, the modernised Junction Inn and a former warehouse, now converted to a shop and café. Adding to the group of buildings are two stone bridges; Junction Bridge (No.38), which takes the road over the Shropshire Union canal, and Junction Bridge (No.1), a towpath bridge which takes the towpath of the main canal over the Newport Branch and marks the beginning of the former branch line.



Figure 48 The junction of the Newport Branch with the Main Line of the Shropshire Union

11.3 The top lock of the Newport Branch has been widened to form a covered dry dock, and for much of its length the Newport Branch Canal has been backfilled and incorporated into the agricultural landscape. The path of the former canal navigation, including the rise and fall of the lock flight, is still visible in parts and safely recorded on the Staffordshire Historic Environment Records.

11.4 The section of the Newport Branch within the conservation area runs from Norbury Junction to Oulton. Parts of this stretch are still in water, with aboveground remains of former lock chambers visible. Two out of the original three canal bridges along this section remain intact, Partons Bridge (No. 3) and Oulton Bridge (No.4). These stone bridges are of the same design and materials as those along the Main Line, linking this section of the branch line architecturally to the Shropshire Union Canal.



Figure 49 Parton's Bridge and lock chamber to former lock no.5

11.5 Beyond Oulton Bridge, little else of the backfilled canal survives and the view out of the conservation area to the west across corn fields, bears little resemblance to that of the former canal navigation.

11.6 The Shropshire Union Canal Society was formed to protect and enhance the canals of the historic Shropshire Union system and there has been some interest in recent years by the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust, to restore the Newport Branch and make it navigable once again.



Figure 50 View from Oulton Bridge in 1962 looking east towards lock No. 7



Figure 51 Oulton Bridge and lock chamber to lock no.7



Figure 52 View out of the conservation area to the west is across corn fields and bears little resemblance to that of the former canal

11.7 Public buildings in Norbury comprise of the Junction Inn public house and Norbury Wharf Tea Rooms and boat hire. Junction Inn, although much modernised and extended, is a mid-19th century canal side Inn which provides a pleasant waterside setting. On the opposite side of the wharf the tea rooms are housed in the former wharf warehouse. This single-storey brick building is contemporary with the canal, is of painted brick with a slate roof and retains some historic cast iron windows. In addition to operating a tea room/café, the building acts as a chandlery and reception for boat hire. Both buildings offer outside public space for eating and drinking and provide pleasant waterside space for visitors and residents alike.

11.8 The complex of maintenance buildings still function as a maintenance depot and yard for the Canal and River Trust (CRT), and there remains an active industrial feel to the yard. The buildings include a mid-19th century boat workshop and former smithy, which now serves as a depot. The workshop is listed grade II and retains double sliding wooden doors to the north side, a large chimney and some original, multi-light, cast iron windows. A further row of linear buildings were added to the complex during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and these now house offices for the CRT. All of the yard buildings are predominantly blue brick with some brown/red brick, laid in English Bond with hipped slate roofs.



Figure 53 The boat workshop at Norbury Wharf



Figure 54 The former smithy and depot at the maintenance yard

11.9 The dwellings of Norbury Junction greatly contribute to the setting of the conservation area and observe a uniformity of scale and design. Materials are consistently brick, and roofs are of slate or tile. There is little that is planned about the arrangement of the buildings, but it is this absence of a plan that is testimony to the gradual development of the site from the opening of the canal in the 1830s, through to the completion of the settlement by the 1890s. The earlier 19th century buildings tend to face the canal giving them a strong visual relationship with the waterway, whilst the later 19th century dwellings face away from the canal.

11.10 Sited opposite the wharf is a row of three 19th century cottages. Ferndale and no.4 Junction Road are brick built with slate roofs, set back from the road in their own grounds, and hold prominent positions opposite the wharf. Ferndale is the former canal superintendent's house built c.1881 in a typical late Victorian period style. The house retains two-over-two sliding sash windows and two bay windows with stone lintels and cills. Slightly grander in scale and design than the other buildings of the settlement, the east and west side elevations have been rendered and have external chimney breast mouldings and substantial stacks and pots. No.4 is the former horse keeper's house built next to the modernised Wharf Cottage, the original, purpose-built stables for canal horses. Both buildings date to the 1870s and Wharf Cottage is now run as a bed and breakfast.

11.11 Waterways Cottages is a group of six semi-detached, late-19th century houses forming a linear row along Junction Road. Completed in 1889 as housing for canal workers and their families, the houses are of brick with Staffordshire blue clay roof tiles and simple gabled roofs with substantial chimney pots and stacks. Facing away from the canal, the houses create a pleasant linear view when approaching Norbury Junction from the south. Further south along Junction Road is Brook Cottage, a brick and tile cottage with modern painted render. Pre-dating the canal, and dispersed from the rest of Norbury Junction, Brook Cottage forms part of the settlement pattern established by the late 19th century.



Figure 55 Ferndale, No.4 and Wharf Cottage

Figure 56 Waterways Cottages

11.12 Further dwellings are found adjacent to the Newport branch. The original lock keepers cottage is a grade II listed building built by the time the Newport branch was opened, prior to the mainline, in 1833. The single storey red and blue brick building is of a distinct design, typical of Telford's canal buildings with an overhanging slate roof and large chimney stacks. The front of the building faces the canal, displays a three window polygonal bay and has been extended slightly to the rear. Numbers 1 and 2 Canal Cottages are two semi-detached houses dating to the late 19th century, with two over two sash windows and a single bay. Of red brick with slate roofs, the houses have a large central chimney stack and blue brick segmental arched lintels.



Figure 57 Canal Cottages

11.13 The maps below show the historic development of Norbury Junction. All extant buildings at Norbury Junction are visible from the 1881 map, with the addition of Waterways Cottages built in 1889 and appearing on mapping by 1901. The historic street and settlement pattern of Norbury Junction can therefore be traced back to at least the late 19th century.



Figure 58 Norbury Parish Tithe Map 1837



Figure 59 1st edition OS Map of Norbury Junction 1881 prior to the building of Waterways and Canal cottages

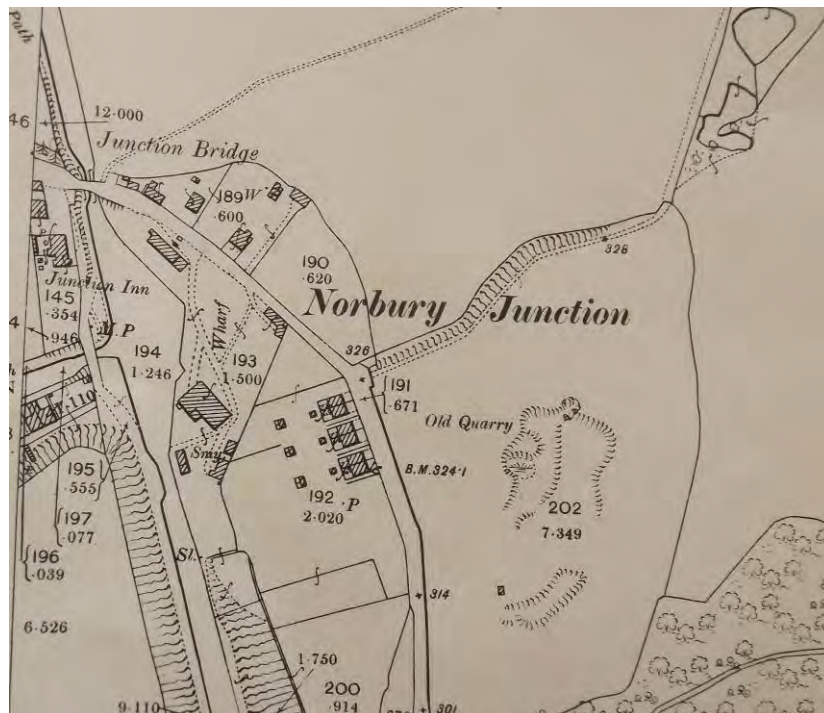
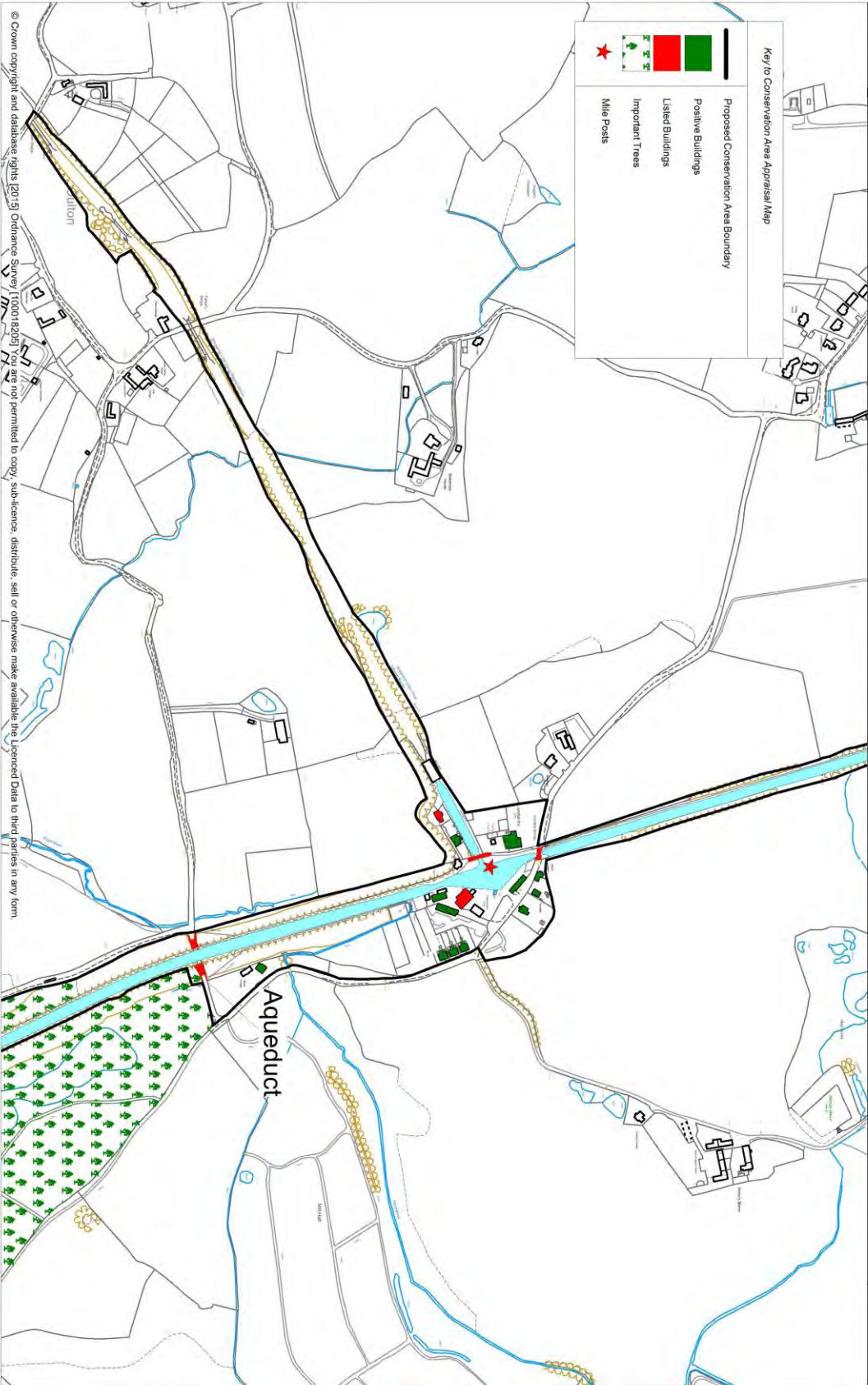


Figure 60 2nd edition OS map from 1901 showing Waterways and Canal Cottages



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12 Norbury Junction to Grub Street Bridge

- 12.1** Between Norbury Junction and Grub Street Bridge, the canal maintains a straight course until it reaches the Grub Street Cutting where it makes an uncharacteristic diversion around Rue Hill. The setting is predominantly rural, and the course of the canal and towpath is predominantly through enclosed cuttings, punctuated by a series of impressive bridges. Views are enclosed and canal character is once again of rural isolation contrasting with the bustle of Norbury Junction.
- 12.2** High Bridge (No.39) is a large brick built bridge with a semi-circular arch and enormous jambs which carries the Newport Road over the cutting. Displaying stone copings and buttresses, the bridge has been part rendered and has a brick strainer-arch inserted between the jambs as a strengthening solution. A distinct 'miniature' telegraph pole sits within the top section of the 'arch-within-an-arch' which, despite being a modern addition, adds character to the bridge.
- 12.3** Grub Street Cutting is a deep and impressive earthwork, densely wooded and extending for almost 2 miles. Repeated slipping of the soil during construction eventually forced Telford to reduce the angle of the cutting sides with earth removed from the cutting, creating prominent spoil banks. Double Culvert Bridge (No.40) lies deep within the cutting in a particularly isolated position. Slightly smaller in scale than High Bridge, the bridge is of brick with stone copings and cast iron structural supports have been used.



Figure 61 The densely wooded Grub street Cutting

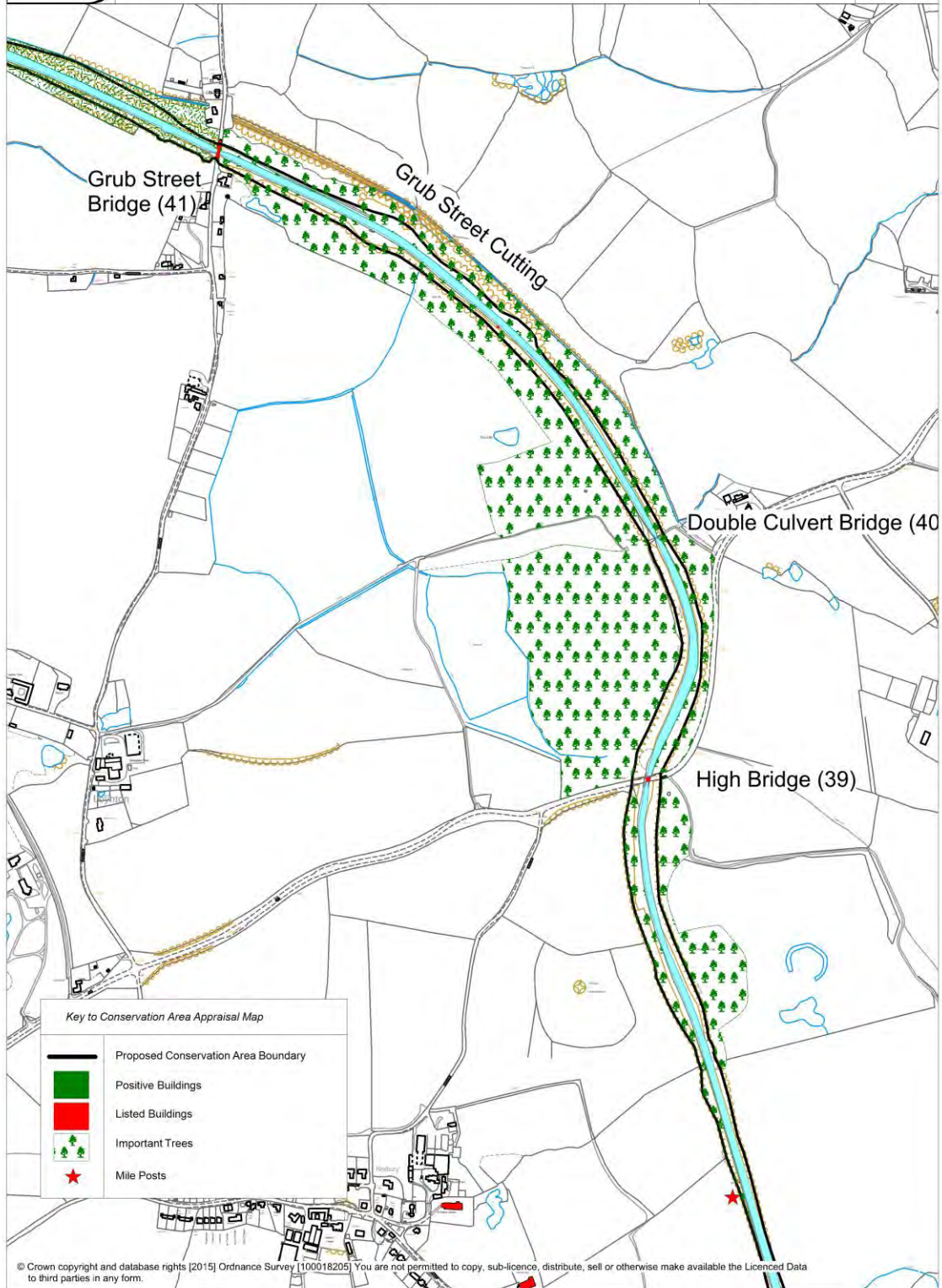
12.4 At the far north of Grub Street Cutting the dense woodland starts to thin upon the approach to Grub Street Bridge, a modest-scale brick bridge which carries the road up to High Offley.



Figure 62 High Bridge (No.39)



Figure 63 Double Culvert Bridge (No. 40) and Grub Street Bridge (No. 41)



13 Grub Street Bridge to Shebdon Wharf

13.1 From Grub Street, the canal passes by the village of High Offley to the north and views open up to far reaches of open countryside. Upon the approach to Old Lea Bridge (No.42) sits the isolated canal side pub, The Anchor, an old boatman's pub formerly known as 'Lily Pascal's'. Built at the same time as the canal in the 1830s, the little changed pub was also known to boatmen as The Newhouse, and has been in the same family for over 100 years. To the rear of the pub the old stable buildings are retained.



Figure 64 The Anchor Inn



Figure 65 Old Lea Bridge No. 42 and Bullocks Bridge No.43

13.2 Old Lea Bridge and Bullocks Bridge (No.43) are both small-scale, elliptical arched bridges; Old Lea Bridge has a skew arch which typifies many bridges along the Shropshire Union Canal. Of red and blue brick with stone copings, both bridges show evidence of former white-wash.



Figure 66 North of Bullocks Bridge views are open and dotted with narrowboats

13.3 From Bullocks Bridge en route to Shebdon Wharf, views are predominantly open, dotted with clusters of trees and groups of narrowboats, which continues the rural canal atmosphere. A group of canal side cottages form part of a small settlement adjacent to the canal with Shebdon Bridge (no.44) beyond; this modern concrete bridge replacing the former brick bridge.



Figure 67 Canal side cottages

13.4 Shebdon Wharf stands above a country lane in proximity to the road which carried agricultural goods to be transported by water. The Wharf here was once busy and still has evidence of a winding hole. The approach to the Wharf is picturesque, the view taking in moored canal boats and a surviving single storey red brick wharf building.

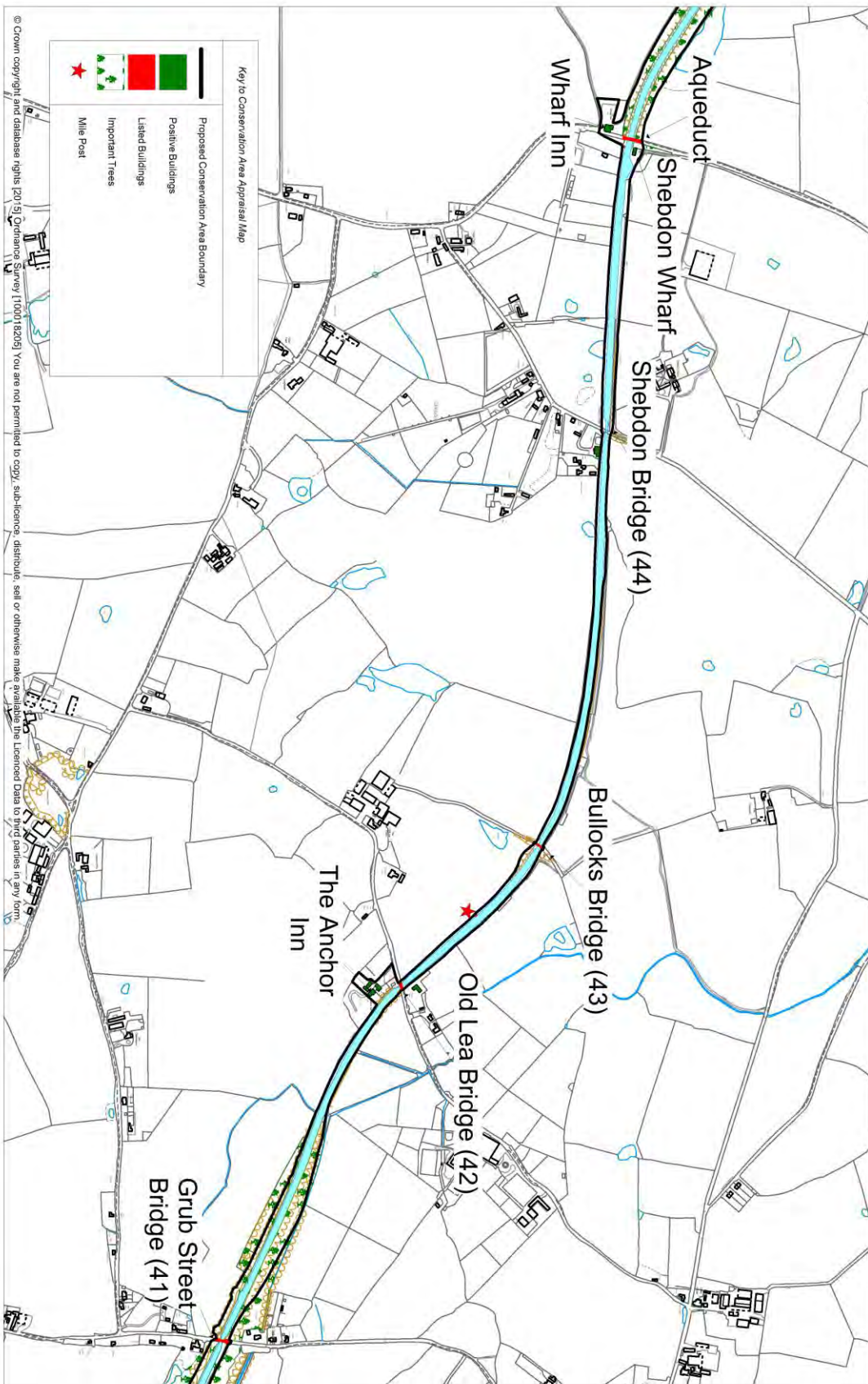


Figure 68 Shebdon Wharf and winding hole

13.5 Below the towpath at Shebdon Wharf is the Old Wharf, a 19th century canal side inn. Formerly known as the Wharf Inn, the building was in use as a pub until 2013 and has now been converted to a residential dwelling. Of painted white brick with a hipped and tiled roof, the Old Wharf occupies a prominent position along the country lane which takes the road under the canal through the Shebdon Aqueduct.



Figure 69 The Wharf Inn in the early 1900s



14 Shebdon Wharf to Knighton Wood

14.1 Beyond Shebdon Wharf the aqueduct carries the canal over the road and a mile post marks the beginning of the Shebdon Embankment, a notable earthwork which stretches for approximately 1 mile and sits at 50ft for most of its length.



Figure 70 Shebdon Wharf

14.2 At the northern end of the Shebdon Embankment is the unexpected Cadburys Factory at Knighton. Built in the early 1920s, the factory was used for the production of chocolate, and conveyed its products to Bournville in Birmingham by boat. It is thought to be one of the last buildings to be constructed for the conveyance of goods by canal and its monumental Art Deco tower forms an impressive waterside feature. The introduction of this building into the otherwise rural landscape reminds us of the functional purpose of the canal and its industrial heritage.



Figure 71 Cadburys Factory and wharf at Knighton in the 1930s

14.3 The Newport Road Bridge (No.45) lies just beyond the factory and marks a change in bridge building material from brick to stone. Knighton Bridge (No. 46) has a skew arch and Black Flats Bridge (No.47) is the final bridge on the stretch of the Shropshire Union Canal within the Stafford Borough. Views of Knighton Wood are afforded as the canal heads out of Staffordshire to continue its course through Shropshire and beyond.



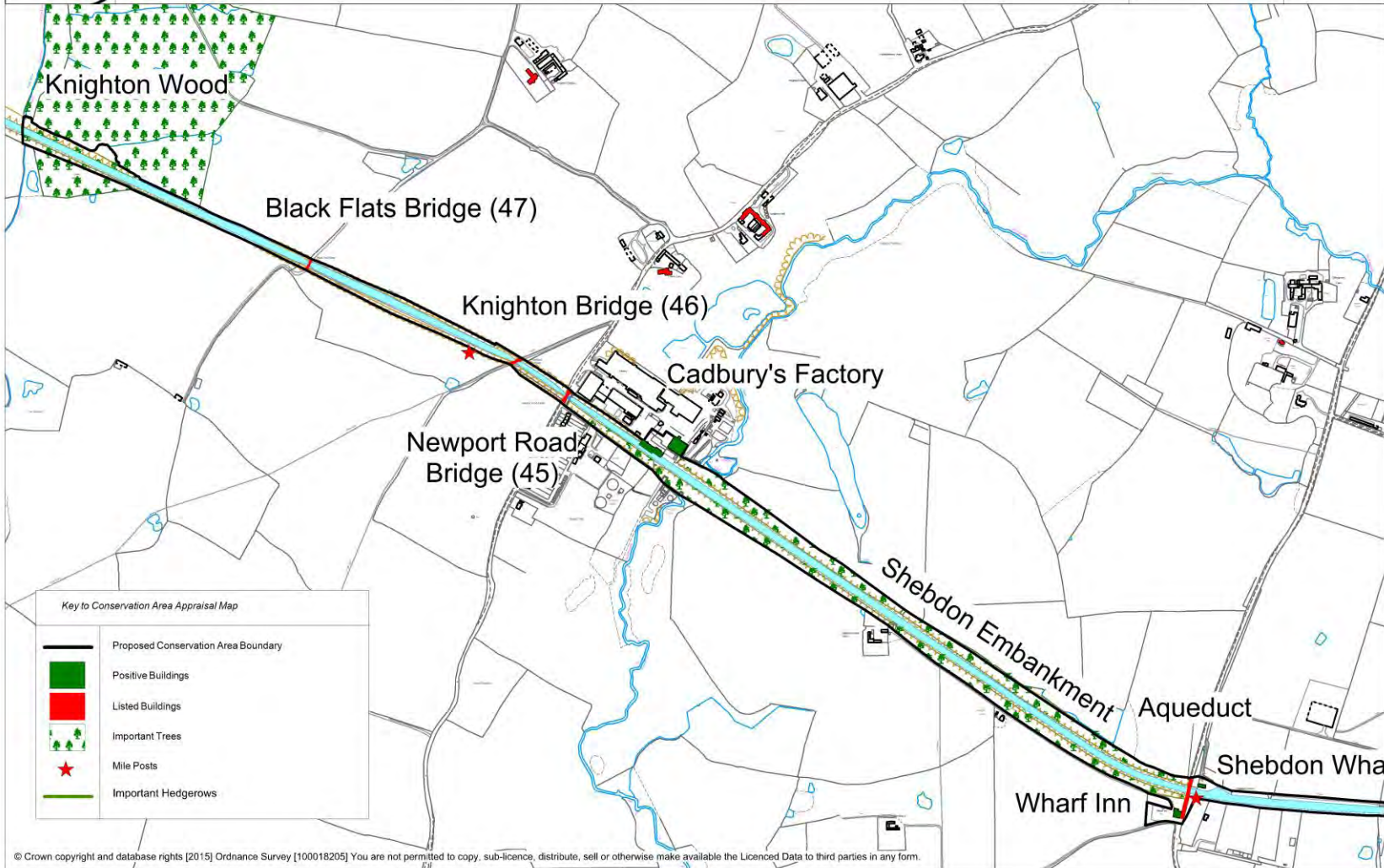
Figure 72 Newport Road Bridge



Figure 73 Knighton Bridge and Black Flats Bridge



Figure 74 View to the far north of the conservation area at Knighton Wood



15 Key Positive Characteristics

Built Character

Canal structures

- Canal cut of straight edged form with a natural appearance to canal edge
- Brick aqueducts, high embankments and cuttings
- Early 19th century brick or stone road and accommodation bridges with stone copings and bands, varying in scale from small scale elliptical arched to larger scale semi-circular arched.
- A variety of brick-built canal-side settlement buildings
- Cast iron early 19th century mileposts
- Canal wharfs and boatyards such as Norbury Junction and Shebdon

Building Types

- Groups of associated early 19th century industrial buildings including a mill, warehouses and maintenance yard buildings
- Two-storey 19th century dwellings including detached and semi-detached former canal workers houses
- Typical Telford single-storey lock cottage at Norbury with distinctive octagonal window and chimney stack
- Associated canal side inns
- Dispersed, individual buildings
- Early 20th century factory building and associated wharf at Knighton

Architectural Styles and Features

- Simple vernacular canal architecture of brick structures with tile or slate pitched roofs

- Robust, single span canal bridges with elliptical, semi-circular and skew arches
- English Brick Bond to canal bridges
- Cast iron, multi-light windows with brick arched lintels
- 2 over 2 vertically siding sash windows and cantered bays with stone lintels and cills
- Substantial chimney stacks and pots

Building Materials and Colour Palette

- Red and blue brick and stone with sandstone copings as seen at bridges
- Sandstone and diamond-style coping stones to canal edges at bridges and wharfs
- Red, blue and brown brick at maintenance yard, associated canal dwellings and lock keepers cottage
- Lime mortar and lime-wash to canal bridges, some white painted brick work
- Slate and Staffordshire blue roofs
- Render painted in off-white or dark cream

Spatial Analysis

Public Realm

- The canal towpath is accessible to the public, with most road bridges providing routes on to and off the canal.
- Towpaths are mostly grassed and in some parts are muddy and difficult to access in places.
- The canal navigation is popular with leisure boaters and boat hire is available to the general public.
- A number of canal side pubs provide outdoor, public space within the setting of the canal and Norbury Wharf is accessible to the public.

Open Spaces

- Open countryside with surviving hedgerows and trees, creating an attractive setting for the canal and a rural feel

Boundary Types

- The canal is characterised by important natural boundaries; in open landscape hedgerows form important boundaries to the surrounding countryside and densely wooded cuttings are bounded and enclosed by thick walls of trees

16 Negative Aspects that Impact on the Character of the Conservation Area

16.1 New or replacement road bridges in the 20th century tended to be modern concrete slab bridges. Shebdon Bridge No.44 is an example of a 20th century concrete bridge which interrupts the rhythm of the otherwise historic bridges along the Shropshire Union navigation.



Figure 75 Shebdon Bridge no.44

16.2 Traditional iron bridge plates are characteristic on the bridges of the Shropshire Union. Some bridges have had bridge numbers painted directly onto the brick or stone of the bridge which is uncharacteristic and is to be avoided.



Figure 76 Painted bridge numbers are uncharacteristic

16.3 For the most part, the bridges along the Shropshire Union Canal are in reasonably good condition and the majority of historic fabric has been retained. Some bridges and structures, however, have been repaired in the past with cement that is unsuitable for the porosity and absorbency of the original brick or stone and lime mortar, resulting in sacrificial decay to the brick or stonework. Apart from the physical damage this has caused to these structures, the visual effect is one of a patchwork of repairs obscuring the character of the bridge which is gained in part through its materials.



Figure 77 The use of cementitious materials can cause stone or brick to sacrificially decay

16.4 Vegetation growth is evident to some bridges, most notably those that are little used or disused, or in areas of dense tree coverage. Vegetation can damage the historic fabric of structures potentially leading to later repair and structural problems.



Figure 78 Vegetation growth to bridges can damage historic fabric and lead to structural problems

16.5 Some areas within the canal conservation area have a negative visual appearance which detracts from the overall character of the conservation area. The area around Norbury Wharf has an excessive number of advertising signs and table umbrellas which give a visually cluttered feel to this section of the conservation area. The approach to the maintenance yard at Norbury Junction also has a cluttered feel, with areas of large industrial bins and waste visible.



Figure 79 Some parts of the conservation area have a cluttered appearance

16.6 The alteration of main facades on some historic buildings has had the effect of masking a degree of architectural character and this creates a negative impact on the visual appearance of the conservation area. The Junction Inn has been much altered to its front elevation with the introduction of a ground floor extension with a flat roof, modern replacement windows in newly created openings, and rendered brickwork.



Figure 80 The Junction Inn today and prior to alteration in the early 1900s

16.7 Some sections of tow path, typically along the more densely wooded canal cuttings, are excessively muddy making access along these stretches particularly difficult. Areas such as these would benefit from a tow path enhancement scheme.



Figure 81 Some sections of tow path are excessively muddy making access difficult.

17 20th and 21st Century Development Affecting the Setting of the Conservation Area

17.1 Development does not necessarily have a negative impact on the setting of the canal in some circumstances. However due to the extensive rural character of the Shropshire Union Canal, development would be inappropriate in some areas of open countryside, as here the rural character is very well preserved and contributes to the unspoilt setting of the conservation area.

17.2 Some buildings in the conservation area have been subject to development where little consideration has been given to appropriate design form, including roof structure and materials, which can create an anonymous feel in the conservation area. This is evident in Norbury Junction where examples of flat roofs have been employed for which there is no historic precedent, the effect being a dilution of historic character. An extension to an office building in the maintenance yard at Norbury Junction has been constructed using ill-matching modern bricks laid in Stretcher Bond, and the extended, low sloping roof, is out of character with the softer brick and low roof pitch of the historic buildings. Modern brick pavers and metal railings have also been used creating a characterless appearance to this part of the conservation area.



Figure 82 An extension to a maintenance yard building and modern railings is out of character with the conservation area

17.3 Scale also has an impact on historic character. Where buildings are sited close to the canal and are tall in scale, this can have an overbearing effect on the setting of the canal conservation area, particularly where smaller historic structures such as bridges are present. At Gnosall Heath modern three storey development at Waterside Court has visually dwarfed the Boat Inn and Boat Inn Bridge in significance.



Figure 83 Modern canal side development can often dwarf smaller historic buildings and structures

17.4 Positioning of buildings is also a key consideration. Historically many buildings had their main façade fronting directly onto canal and many canal-associated buildings are sited directly adjacent to the water's edge, giving them a distinct visual relationship to the canal. Alternatively they are set at right angles, such as with farm buildings. Where buildings are set at angles or 'turn their backs' from the canal this can create an alien intrusion by the introduction of siting patterns not historically found within the conservation area, again diluting character.

17.5 Some late 20th century housing and housing estates create a suburban appearance, out of character with the canal and compounded by heavily domesticated garden areas that front onto the canal and intrude on character. This is compounded by the use of close-boarded plank fencing and metal railings that divide properties, breaking up the flow of the space visually, and creating a cluttered appearance.

17.6 Materials also impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. Replacement uPVC windows on canal facing elevations can harm character and obscure historical detailing, as can large paned glass windows with horizontal openings. uPVC conservatories to the rear of modern properties can have an overbearing and cluttered effect, and solar panels and roof lights fronting the canal cause a visual intrusion and draw further attention to development that is not sympathetic to the character of the conservation area.



Figure 84 uPVC windows with horizontal openings are out of character with the conservation area

17.8 Paving materials can also have a negative effect on the conservation area. Modern brick pavers, concrete slabs and tarmac are non-traditional canal side materials and give a much harsher appearance when compared to the traditional brick pavers and stone copings. Concrete copings have also been used along some sections of the canal and some have been painted white which is an uncharacteristic feature of the canal conservation area.



Figure 85 Modern paving materials can have a negative effect on the conservation area

18 Successful Development that Contributes to the Character of the Conservation Area

- Development that is successful in terms of contributing to and sustaining the character of the conservation area can be found at the Canal and River Trust Visitor Centre at Norbury Junction. Consideration has been given to scale, design form, roof type, height, materials and detailing, creating a successful new build close to the canal without damaging the setting of the conservation area.
- The design of the building represents several key characteristics of the grade II listed former lock keepers cottage, located nearby at the junction with the former Newport Branch Line. The storey height reflects that of the lock keepers cottage, as does the hipped and octagonal roof type, red and blue bricks laid in a traditional Flemish Bond, and the slate roof with a chimney stack which reflects local detail.



Figure 86 The Canal and River Trust headquarters at Norbury Junction reflects the hipped and octagonal roof styles of the lock keepers cottage

19. Protecting the Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

19.1 Policies for the protection and management of the historic environment through the development management process are set out within NPPF Paragraphs 127 through to 141, and the Plan for Stafford Borough sets out policies for the protection and management of the historic environment through policies N8 and N9 and paragraphs 12.45 to 12.56. These should be used in conjunction with this appraisal to guide or assess any future development within the Shropshire Union Canal conservation area.

19.2 Other organisations, such as the County Council Highways Authority, and statutory undertakers also have their own commitments to protect the character and appearance of the conservation area in the exercise of their duties.

19.3 To manage and protect the special historic character and appearance of the conservation area in the exercise of these policies and duties:

- The existing special historic character and appearance of the conservation area and all features identified as Positive should be retained and reinforced.
- Further works that harm the significance of the area, identified in this appraisal, should be avoided.
- *'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment'* in the *Planning Practice Guidance* (2014) and *Good Practice Advice (GPA) notes 1,2,3* (Historic England, 2015).

- 19.4** Existing and emerging design or conservation guidance published by Stafford Borough Council and English Heritage guidance should be consulted where relevant, such as *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice* (English Heritage, 2006), *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape* (English Heritage, 2006), *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage, 2008), *Streets for All* (English Heritage, 2004), *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (English Heritage, 2011).
- 19.5** Some works that could harm the character or appearance of the conservation area can be carried out under “permitted development rights”, which means that home owners do not need to apply for planning permission. Owners are nevertheless encouraged to take heed of the special historic character and appearance of the area when carrying out these works.

20 Recommendations for Future Management

- Changes that come into force through the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 will enable the creation of national Listed Building Consent Orders, enabling certain repair works to be carried out without the need for listed building consent. This may speed up the repair to listed bridges in the conservation area and improve their overall condition. The creation of the Canal and River Trust in 2013 from the former British Waterways, and the emphasis on the importance of heritage should enable more sympathetic works generally in the future, avoiding further harm through, for example, unsympathetic repairs, alterations or replacements.
- Some development within the conservation area has had a negative effect on the visual amenity of the conservation area. Consideration must be given to appropriate design form, materials and scale, to echo the character of the historic buildings within the conservation area.
- Piecemeal replacement fences of properties that back onto the canal break up the space visually and introduce a modern intrusion on character. Owners should be made aware of the importance of protecting and enhancing the character of the conservation area and guidance should be provided to owners, to ensure any future development is in keeping with the character of the conservation area.
- The setting of the conservation area varies considerably along its length, and includes historic settlements, modern suburbs and some small industrial areas, as well as valuable stretches of open space and woodland. The location of development needs to be carefully considered to protect important views and the existing landscape that enhance the significance of the conservation area.

- Development visible from the conservation area can have a negative impact on the setting of the conservation area. Consideration must be given to the setting of the conservation area and the appropriateness of the location and siting of new buildings as well as their material and scale.

21 Boundary Revisions

- To the southwest of Ryehill Cutting Bridge, it is proposed to adjust the boundary line to exclude an area of field to the west of the cutting as this area has no special visual features to warrant its inclusion.
- An area of ground is currently included to the south of former Cadburys milk processing building. There is no evidence in the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record to suggest there is any historical relationship between this area of land with the canal's conservation area development so it is proposed that this is excluded from the conservation area.
- The Boat Inn and The Navigation Inn, at Gnosall Heath are not currently included in the conservation area. It is proposed to include these buildings as they have connections to the canal as historic canal side inns.
- It is proposed to include Coton Lodge and Madeley's Cottage to the east side of the canal on Mill Lane in Gnosall Heath. Coton Lodge is an attractive Victorian house directly adjacent to the canal with well-preserved architectural character, and Madeley's Cottage relates historically to the house as a former outbuilding. Formerly known as Coton Villa, and built on the site of the Rose and Crown public house, Coton Lodge was built in the 1850s by William Wilder, a farmer from Plardiwick, who had built Coton Mill and the Navigation Inn 20 years earlier. Coton Lodge and Madeley's Cottage form part of this canal side group of historic buildings which cluster at the Newport Road Bridge and as such contribute to the architectural and historic character of the canal.

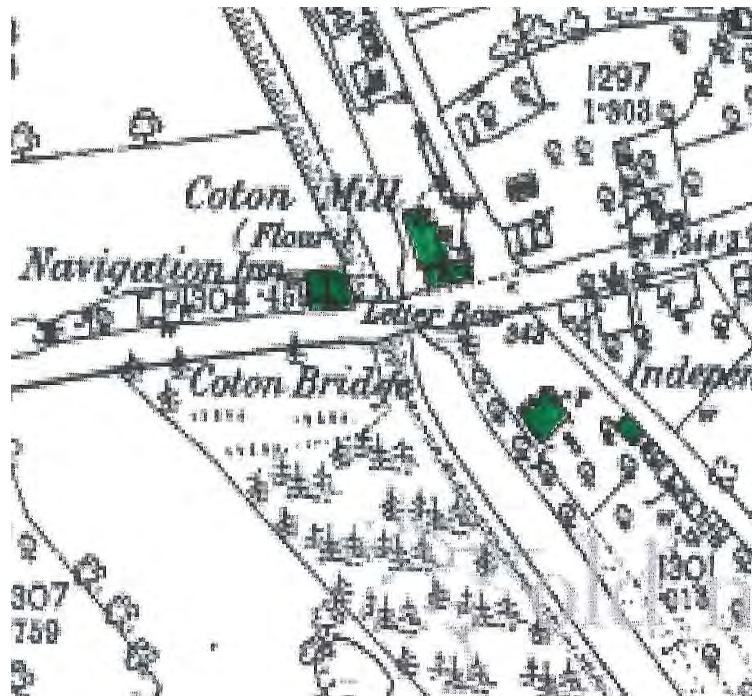


Figure 87 The Navigation Inn and Coton Mill shown with Coton Lodge to the south of the Newport Road



Figure 88 Coton Lodge

- It is proposed that the current Norbury Junction Conservation Area, designated in 1970, be de-designated and designated within the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area as the settlement relates directly to the character and history of the canal.

- At Norbury Junction, a linear adjustment of the boundary is proposed along Junction Road to the southeast of the conservation area. This section has no direct relationship to the canal conservation area and does not contribute to the architectural or historic significance of the canal. As it stands, the boundary line cuts through a section of woodland and field and it is proposed to adjust this to follow the contours of the road.
- To the north of Norbury Junction, it is proposed to exclude a section of field to the northeast of the settlement, and two areas of field to the northwest including the property, Blakemore View. These fields form part of the wider agricultural landscape character of the surrounding area and setting of Norbury Junction but are arbitrary to the historic canal character of the conservation area. Blakemore View is a mid-20th century dwelling built in a style of its time and does not contribute architecturally or historically to the canal settlement of Norbury Junction.
- It is proposed to extend the boundary to the west of Norbury Junction to include a section of the disused Newport Branch line. This section of the canal forms a significant historic connection to Norbury Junction and retains evidence of built canal structures, including intact bridges and former lock chambers.
- At Shebdon wharf it is proposed to adjust the boundary to include the area of land to the west of the Old Wharf (former Wharf Inn). The land is connected to the Old Wharf and forms part of the immediate boundary to the building.

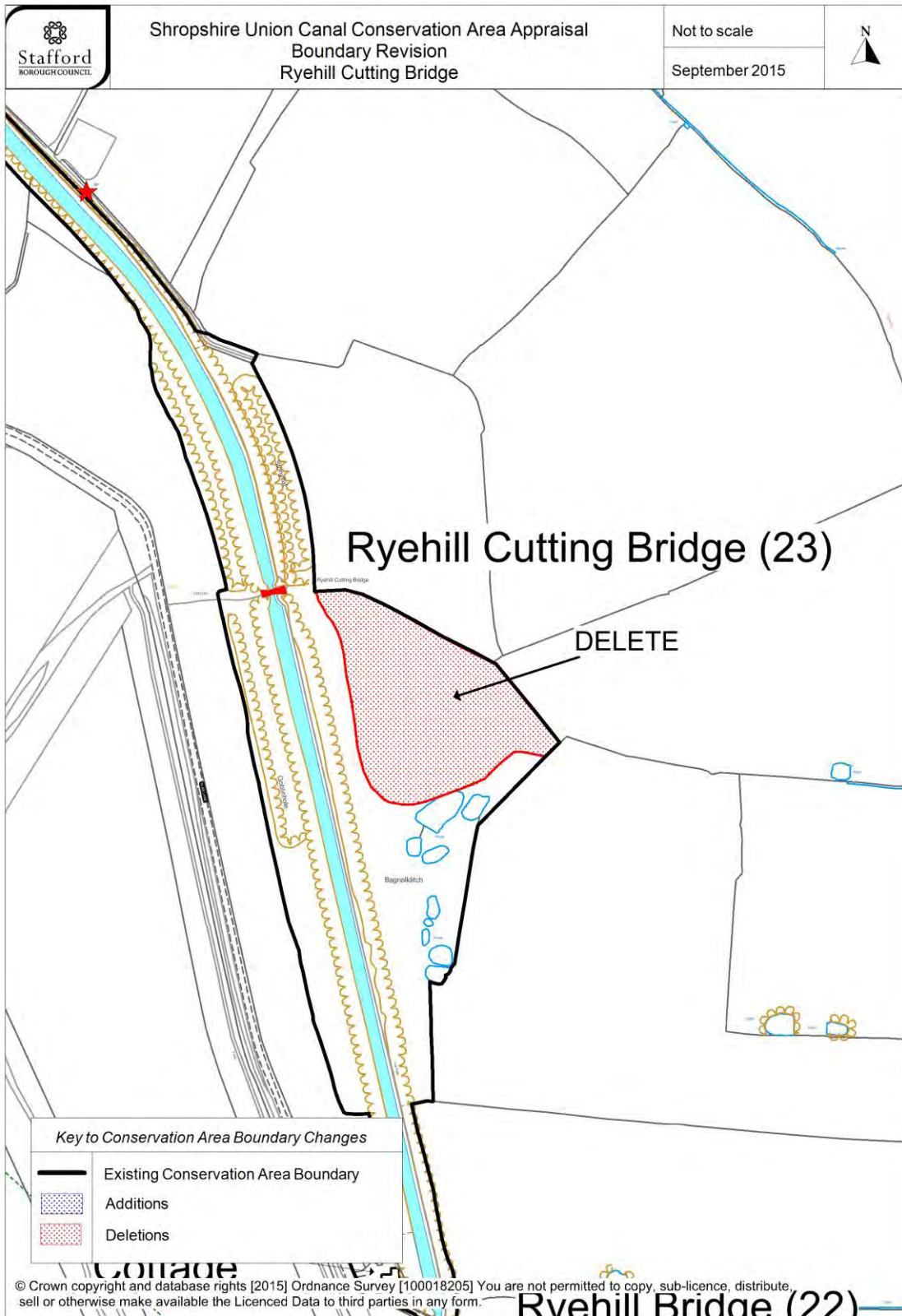


Figure 89 Proposed boundary revision, Ryehill Cutting Bridge

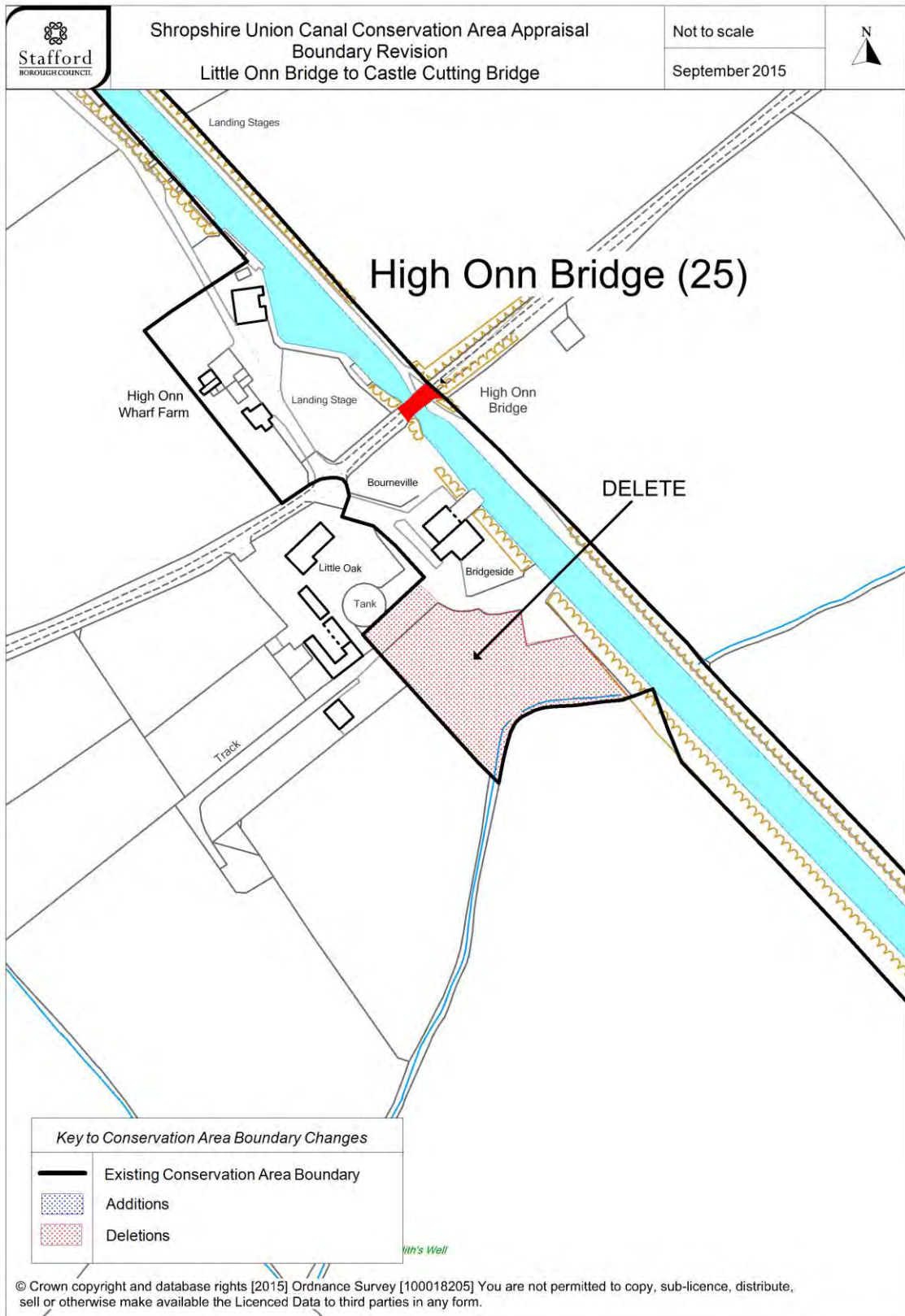


Figure 90 Proposed boundary revisions, High Onn



Figure 91 Proposed boundary revision Boat Inn

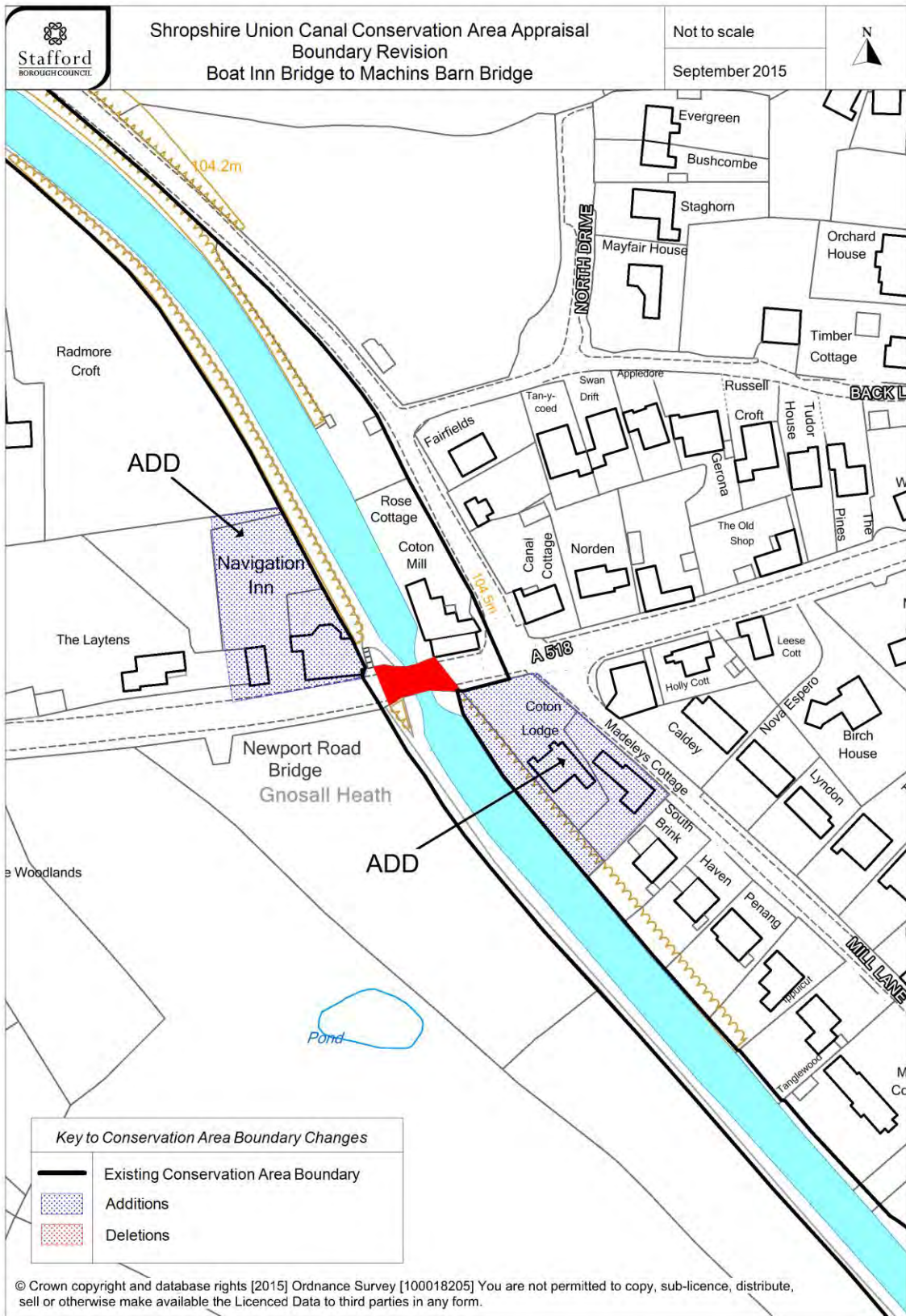


Figure 92 Proposed boundary revision Gnosall Heath

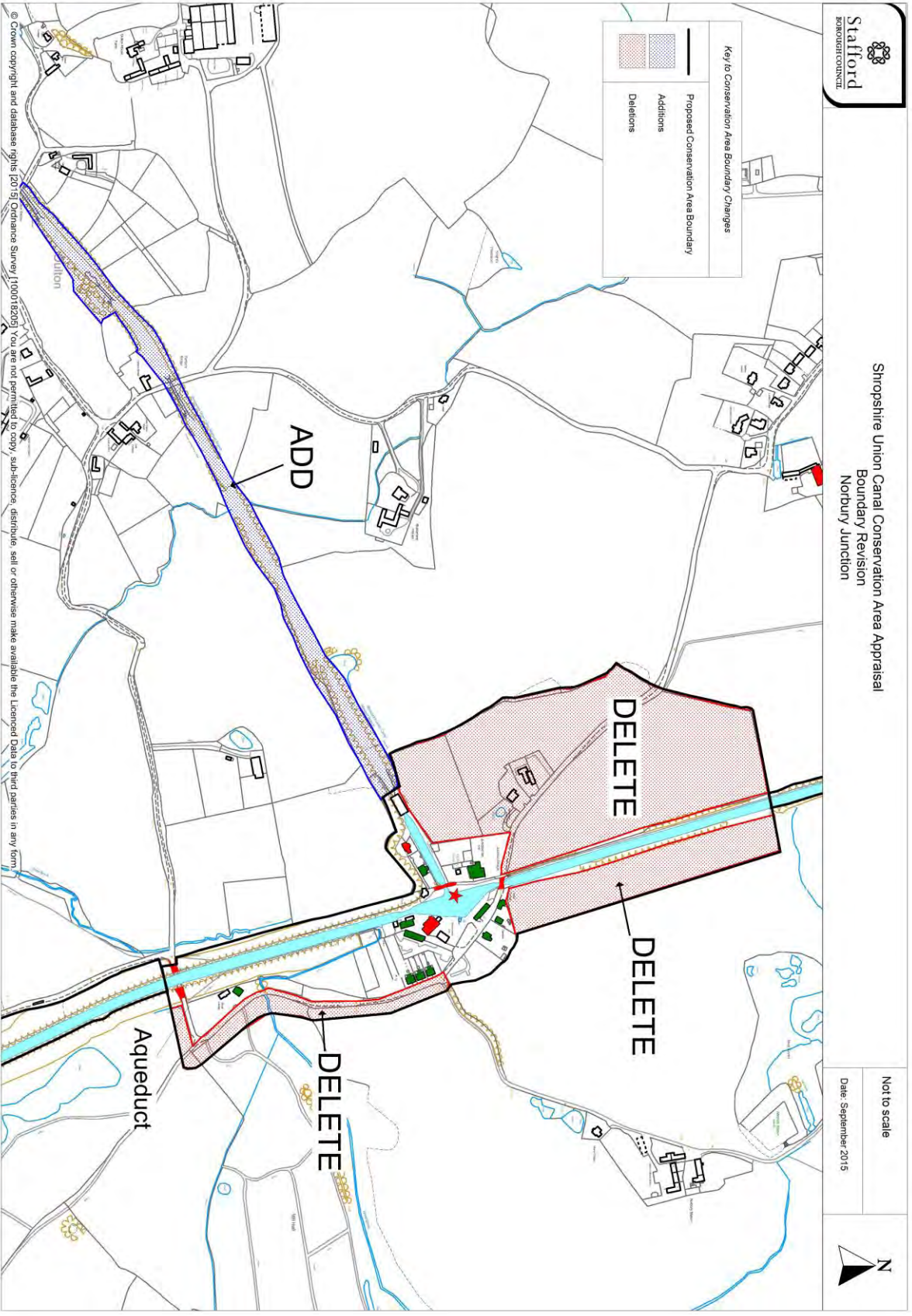


Figure 93 Proposed boundary revisions Norbury Junction

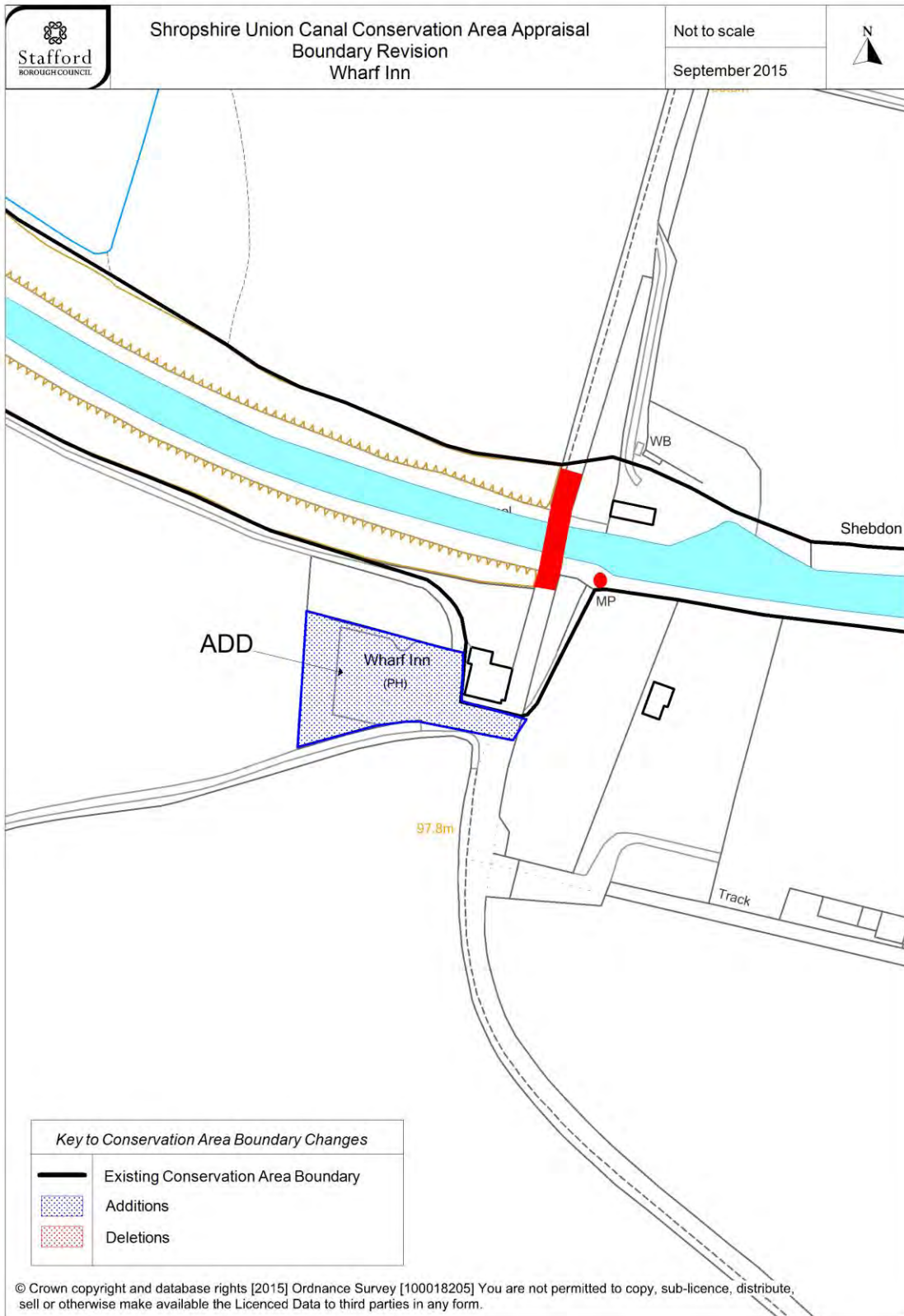


Figure 95 Proposed boundary revision, Old Wharf (former Wharf Inn), Shebdon

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Further Information

For List Descriptions of listed buildings contained within and surrounding the conservation area please access the National Heritage List [Online] Available at: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
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