

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Worcester
and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area**

Cabinet

10th July 2019

**Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for the Worcester and
Birmingham Canal Conservation Area**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Adam Kent
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Ruth Bamford
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	No
Non-Key Decision	Non Key

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory duty under s69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate any areas which they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas. The Council has a further duty under s71(1) to formulate and prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas.
- 1.2 A Draft Conservation Area Appraisals has been prepared for the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area. The character appraisal identifies the factors and features which make an area special, based on an in-depth assessment of an area's buildings, spaces, evolution and sense of place. The Conservation Management Plans provide a strategy for the management of the conservation areas in a way that will protect and enhance its character and appearance.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Cabinet supports the draft Worcester and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet approves a four week consultation process with local residents and other interested parties. The result of this consultation will be reported back to cabinet in due course.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The cost of producing and consulting on the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan will be met by the existing Strategic Planning Team budget.

Legal Implications

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- 3.2 The Council has a statutory duty under s69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate any areas which they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas. The Council has a further duty under s71(1) to formulate and prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 There is a statutory requirement under section 69 of the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990, that Local Planning Authorities from time to time consider whether there are further parts of its area which should be designated as conservation areas. In addition the Council has a further duty under s71(1) to formulate and prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas.
- 3.4 The Character Appraisal identifies the factors and features which make a conservation area special, based on an in-depth assessment of an area's buildings, spaces, evolution and sense of place. The Management Plan then provides a strategy for the management of the conservation area in a way that will protect and enhance its character and appearance.
- 3.5 The Worcester and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area (CA) was originally designated in June 1987). The CA covers a 4.5 mile stretch of the Canal within Bromsgrove District from Tardebigge to Astwood Lane and the border with Wychavon District. For much of its length the CA is the width of the Canal and its towpath, but it does extend out at various points to incorporate areas largely connected to the Canal.
- 3.6 Construction of the Canal commenced in 1792 at the Birmingham end, and it was built in phases as funds permitted, finally arriving at Diglis Basin in 1815. The Tardebigge New Wharf was opened in 1811, after tunnelling through the rock from the Old Wharf. The land to the south of the 'new' Wharf drops away considerably and initially it was proposed to construct a lift. Finally it was decided to use locks, and a flight of 30, the longest in Britain, dropping the level of the Canal 220 feet over 2 miles to Stoke Prior. The tunnel at Tardebigge and this flight of locks were examples of 'heroic' canal construction where canals went against nature rather than around it, as the early 'pioneering' canals had done.
- 3.7 With the railway boom of the 1840s, canal revenues began to fal, this led to proposed mergers with other Canal and Railway companies, but it was not until 1873 that the W&B was merged with the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal Company and became the Sharpness New Docks Company or SND. The canals were still in commercial use until the Second World War, a fact highlighted in the book 'Narrowboat' by LTC Rolt, an account of travelling around the canals of the Midlands at the beginning of the War. Rolt together with Charles Hadfield and Robert Aickman formed the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) in 1946, the

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inaugural meeting being held at Tardebigge. The IWA campaigns for the preservation of Britain's waterways. BritishWaterways was set up in 1963 to run the canals, and this role has now been taken over by the Canals and Rivers Trust. The use of the canals for leisure purposes has flourished since the second half of the 20th Century.

- 3.8 The setting of the CA is predominantly rural with occasional views of Bromsgrove, along a greater part of the upper stretch of the canal there is a strong sense of enclosure, with views obscured by hedgerow. In contrast the section between Stoke Wharf and Stoke Works is more developed, although historically this was the location of the John Corbett Salt Works. Despite this the countryside feels close at hand. The Canal forms a continuous green corridor for its entire length, and is a haven for wildlife including ducks, swans and a heron, as well as being heavily stocked with fish.
- 3.9 Within the CA there is a high survival rate of original canal related structures including locks, bridges. Lock keepers cottages as well as the two main wharf complexes at Tardebigge and Stoke Prior. A significant number of buildings and structures within the CA are listed and many of the others are of local importance as they are tangible evidence of the historic workings of the Canal. The predominant building material is brick with some bridge copings and locks edges being finished in stone. The towpath surfaces are generally an earth track, sometimes embedded with stones, running through grass.
- 3.10 The special interest of the Canal can be summarised as follows;
- For most of its length it covers just the Canal and towpath. It expands out at various points to incorporate canal related development, in addition to the historic hamlet at Stoke Prior.
 - In the context of the Midlands the W & B Canal is of considerable architectural, historic and scenic interest. The influence of canals was phenomenal, completely revolutionising industrial transportation
 - The W & B Canal is an example of a heroic canal, cutting through the landscape rather than going around obstacles.
 - Many of the original features of the Canal including wharves, warehouses and associated buildings, bridges, locks and lock keepers cottages, have been retained
 - A high proportion of the canal related structures are listed, including the locks in the Tardebigge Flight, bridges and canal related buildings, underlying their historic and architectural importance.
 - The Canal's long sinuous form cuts a swathe through the rural environment, notably the stretch from Tardebigge to Stoke Wharf which

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has changed little since it was constructed at the beginning of the 19th century.

- The curving course of the Canal adds significant visual interest and provides constantly changing vistas, including at certain points views of Bromsgrove.
- Canalside trees and hedgerow form boundaries along the canal especially on the towpath side resulting in an enclosed setting to the canal in places. The lack of traffic noise, and the sounds of running water and birdsong reinforce the rural setting.
- The Inaugural meeting of The Inland Waterways Association was held at Tardebigge.
- The use of the canal today is largely for leisure purposes, including, walking, cycling, fishing, in addition to boating. It is, however, a well-used leisure resource. It is easily accessible with access points from all the road bridges and various footpaths onto the towpath.

3.11 Although the Canal is in good condition, is well maintained by the CRT, and there is a high survival rate of canal related structures, there are some issues which potentially threaten the character of the Canal. These include;

- The pressure for development on sites outside of the CA but clearly within its rural setting.
- The loss of some architectural detail to the historic canal related buildings.
- Poorly designed extensions, some attached to buildings outside the CA, but within its setting.
- The need to formally identify the large number of canal related buildings and structures of local importance so that their significance is recognised in future planning decisions.
- Improved promotion of the Canal as a leisure resource.

3.12 The attached Conservation Management Plan identifies strategies to protect and enhance the character and significance of the CA by addressing the issues identified in the appraisal. The proposed action points are in accordance with national policy guidance, local policies and follow on from the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

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- 3.13 There are not considered to be any customer/equality or diversity implications. The consultation will be in line with the published consultation processes for planning identified in the Statement of Community Involvement

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 There are no associated risks with this report

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Worcester and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Management Plan

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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