

**The Conservation Area Designation**

From its junction with the Coventry Canal close to Bedworth the Ashby Canal travels northeast for about 7 miles through the town of Hinckley. It then continues north through largely rural countryside for a further 15 miles until it reaches its terminus at Snarestone. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council designated that part of the canal running through the Borough as a Conservation Areas in December 1990. This was followed in June 1992 by North West Leicestershire District Council who designated the remaining watered section of the canal as a Conservation Area from the boundary with Hinckley and Bosworth Council to the present terminus north of Snarestone village.

**1 Ashby Canal Conservation Area Statement**

- 1.1 The Ashby Canal is of considerable industrial archaeological interest. Despite its inception at a time of immense industrial activity, the canal is noted for its visual charm, meandering peacefully for most of its length through the quiet pastoral landscape of Western Leicestershire with very limited hints of the coalmines and heavy industry that prompted its creation.
- 1.2 Many stretches of the navigation possess all the attractions of a natural river rich in aquatic and waterside flora and fauna. The upper length of the canal running from Carlton Bridge has been scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- 1.3 The canal has many interesting archaeological features including over fifty single arch bridges, two aqueducts and a tunnel under the village of Snarestone. The canal is also a valuable recreational facility used for boating, fishing and walking. The towpath, parts of which are used extensively by ramblers, is included on the definitive map of public rights of way.

**2 The Historical Development of the Canal.**

- 2.1 Although the Ashby Canal was a comparative latecomer amongst the Leicestershire navigations, it represents the three dimensional language of earth, timber, stone, brickwork and cast iron that tells the story of the development of the art of canal civil engineering. It reflects the development of the "cut and fill" technique which has been evolved during the early age of canal construction and was part of the canal legacy passed onto the builders of railways and to those engineers who construct motorways today. To appreciate the works of the waterway engineers and understand the magnitude of their achievement with the rudimentary means available at that time, the locks, tunnels, aqueducts, canal bridges, wharves, warehouses, and canal keeper's cottages must be protected.
- 2.2 The expansion of trade in the eighteenth century with its increasing demands for water transport in a country that at that time was virtually without metalled roads, led to the development of an increasing number of river and canal navigation projects.
- 2.3 The first proposal for the Ashby Canal was made in 1771 when a waterway was suggested to run from the River Trent at Burton to join with the Coventry Canal at Marston near Bedworth. There was an increasing need for transport to exploit the

coal reserves at Ashby Wolds and lime from quarries north of Ashby de-la-Zouch. It was proposed that the route of the canal should be through rural Leicestershire and the coal mining areas of Measham, Donisthorpe and Moira to Ashby Wolds and then through a series of locks to a summit level rising 139 ft after which it would descend to a junction with the River Trent. Here the canal would then divide into four branches linking further coal mine and lime working areas at Staunton Harold, Ticknall, Cloud Hill and Coleorton. However it was not until May 1794 that a much shorter proposal was adopted and passed by an Act of Parliament. This proposal was that it would run from the Coventry Canal for 30.4 miles with a series of tram roads and branch canals to feed the top end of the system.

### 3 **The Ashby Canal Engineers**

- 3.1 The first survey for the route of the Ashby Canal was completed in 1781 by Robert Whitworth although construction work on the canal itself did not commence until the autumn of 1794. The delay was because of the time taken to pass the Act of Parliament which was finally achieved under the direction of canal engineer William Jessop. The principle engineers for the initial canal work were Robert Whitworth senior and his son Robert. However in May 1797 Robert Whitworth junior reported as ill and both he and his father's employment were terminated and a local man **Thomas Newbold** was appointed as engineer. He was also subsequently replaced by William Crossley who was employed in 1822 to survey the coal tolls
- 3.2 **William Jessop** born 1745 was the son of a shipwright who became a great canal engineer whose career was linked with and was greatly influenced by the James Brindley school of canal engineers. He was apprenticed to John Smeaton at the age of 14 and later became his assistant. John Smeaton was the first man to call himself a civil engineer and the builder of the Calder and Hebble Navigation. At the age of 27, William Jessop set up his own business as a consulting engineer and was responsible for the construction of the Grand Junction Canal which linked the Midlands with London, the Cromford Canal in Derbyshire opened in 1801, and the River Trent from 1782 to his death in 1814. At the height of his career he was consulted on almost every canal project in England. Like Brindley, he favoured broad waterways rather than the narrow boat system and always provided adequate water supplies for his canals.
- 3.3 **Robert Whitworth** was also a renowned canal engineer who worked with James Brindley to survey the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which is also a broad waterway. Robert Whitworth was himself responsible for the Burnley embankment which for three-quarters of a mile carries the Leeds and Liverpool Canal 60 feet above the town of Burnley and was opened in 1796.
- 3.4 **William Crossley** was another nationally well-known engineer who had worked as John Rennie's assistant on the Lancaster Canal. John Rennie was one of the last great canal builders whose principle works were the Lancaster and the Kennet and Avon Canal and who applied a classical styled facades to his structures... William Crossley was also responsible for constructing the Macclesfield Canal opened in 1831 one of the last canals to be built in England.

## 4 **The Early History of the Ashby Canal:**

- 4.1 By early 1798 the length of the canal running from the Ashby Wolds to Market Bosworth was opened. Due to lack of funds, however, it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1804 that the canal was linked to the Coventry Canal. The first few years of its operations were not very successful. Coal which had been the principle reason for its construction was found to be of poor quality and as a result the canal shares collapsed from £113 to £10. Fortunately this was only temporary new mines in the Moira and Measham area produced coal of such high quality that for a short period it was in demand in southern England.' Dividends were not paid to shareholders, however, until 1828.

### **Railway Competition**

- 4.2 In 1846 the Ashby Canal was purchased by the Midland Railway Company for £110,000. This followed the normal strategy for expanding railway companies to buy out their canal competitors. The usual policy on taking over canals was to raise tolls, reduce maintenance to a minimum resulting in the waterways becoming uncompetitive. Fortunately the Ashby Canal, the Oxford Canal company and the Coventry Canal Company onto which all Ashby boats travelled had clauses in their conditions of sale which required the Midland Railway Company to maintain the canals in some reasonable semblance of commercial order.

### **The Decline of the Canal**

- 4.3 With the turn of the twentieth century difficulties arose due to mining subsidence and eventually the northern third of the canal was closed. Due to this subsidence, in 1919, a new section of the canal had to be excavated at Moira. By 1944 further subsidence coupled with rising maintenance costs threatened the whole of the remaining section of the canal. At this time the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company, the then owners of the canal, tried to pass its maintenance responsibility onto the Coventry Canal Company by offering to gift the canal at no cost. The offer was rejected and the railway company refused to give a substantial financial contribution towards the canals future maintenance and eventually the last 2.5 miles from Moira to Donisthorpe was abandoned. Continuing subsidence forced the closure of a further 5 mile section from Donisthorpe to Ilott Wharf in 1957 and in 1966 the final mile of closure reduced the canal to its present terminus at Snarestone village. The current length of the waterway stands at 21.75 miles.

Following nationalisation, the Ashby Canal has become the responsibility of British Waterways. The last commercial barges on the canal carried coal in 1970.

## 5 **The Canal's Construction**

- 5.1 Although the canal follows the 300 foot contour with a necessary winding route, in its day it was considered to be the fastest route to the Coventry Canal. The cut and fill method of construction adopted for the canal followed the principles set out by James Brindley during the construction of the Bridgewater canal whose course lay entirely in the valleys of the rivers Irwell and Mersey and was level throughout. The only locks on it were at Runcorn where it links to the tidal Mersey. Like the Ashby Canal it was

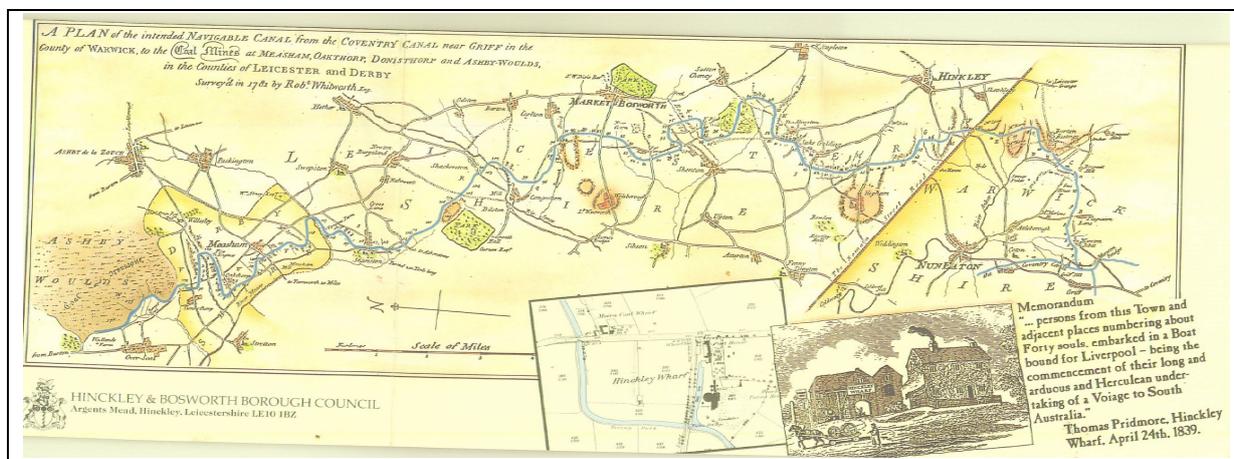
also constructed as a broad gauge canal accepting barges 14 feet in beam and 70 feet in length. It is interesting to note that Brindley subsequently decided to reduce the size of lock chambers to save water and money so they could accept boats 70 feet long but only 7 feet in beam. Thus the “narrow boat” of the Midland’s canal system was developed. Its maximum load was 30 tons which was too small to be economically viable as a transport vehicle.

5.2 James Brindley also developed the policy of avoiding heavy engineering works by routing canals along the land’s natural contours although this usually produced quite tortuous routes but was usually more economical than introducing locks and enabled shorter journey times. The canals of James Brindley and his followers are built in a simple functional style as are the associated warehouses, canal cottages, bridges and aqueducts. Most of the canals were built in the Midlands where good building stone is not available and brick was most commonly used for all structures.

5.3 The navigation was originally constructed as cheaply as possible to transport coal in large quantities rapidly to the Coventry Canal. The cross section adopted for the canal was saucer shaped with soft edges which soon became overgrown with vegetation giving it a natural river-like appearance. Only at a few intermediate stopping places and coal offloading points, such as the Hinckley or Market Bosworth wharfs, did it take on a more industrial hard edged appearance where brickwork lines the edge of the canal. Even where it now passes through the urban area of Hinckley due to that town’s expansion, it has retained its rural waterway character which it is important to retain. The canal has a towpath and hedge along one of its flanks for much of its length and cuttings and embankments are important features as a consequence of its construction on the contour principal.

## 6. The Route Adopted

6.1 The original route surveyed by Robert Whitworth in 1781 is almost identical to that finally adopted. The only important variation is the introduction of an aqueduct at Shenton village to shorten the route which originally was intended to loop northwards towards Market Bosworth. Although it followed the contours of the land, it still required the use of cuttings and embankments to accommodate natural undulations.



## **7 Setting of the Canal**

- 7.1 Despite its industrial ancestry, the Ashby Canal generally meanders through attractive open countryside passing few large centres of population. Even in Hinckley, the largest town it traverses, the impression is generally that of a semi rural navigation with green fields and hedgerows on either side.
- 7.2 The length of its navigation is characterised by its embankments and cuttings, which give rise to long views over rolling countryside. On some sections of the canal attractive views are contained within the confines of the navigation by mature hedgerows and copses which funnel views towards distant bridges and church spires.
- 7.3 Many sections of the canal possess the attractions of a river rich in aquatic flora and fauna. Waterside plants of particular interest include the Marsh Marigold, Orange Balsom Water Dropwort, and Pinclad Sedge. The richness of the canal's fauna is also impressive with over sixty species of mollusc found in the canal.
- 7.4 The waterway also has historic links with the past, passing close to the historic Battle of Bosworth site and Gopsall Hall, which in its day was one of the most lavish residences in the East Midlands. The former Ashby to Nuneaton branch railway built in 1873 follows a similar route to the canal and although the line closed in 1970 sections of the track and bridges still remain. The length between Shackerstone and Shenton has been acquired by the Shackerstone Railway Society which runs steam engines along the line.
- 7.5 Individual buildings, groups of buildings, particularly agricultural buildings, and the edges of settlements which can be seen from the canal, play an important role in its rural setting. It is important that these structures are carefully considered and where extensions or new buildings are proposed, they should incorporate traditional features such as steeply pitched roofs, plain facades and chimney stacks. They should also be of a simple form and detail which reflect the scale and appearance of traditional buildings. They should use facing brickwork, and not render, natural clay roof tiles or natural slate and not concrete tiles, timber windows and not plastic. Conservatories which are not traditional features should also be avoided where they can be seen from the conservation area. Important views of churches and other key buildings which are identified on the canal plans, should also be protected.

## **8 The Canal's Physical Features**

- 8.1 The Ashby Canal extends some 21.75 miles running northwards from its junction with the Coventry Canal at Marston Junction to its terminus at Snarestone. The canal was constructed on the contour principle, following the natural contours of the landscape rather than relying on major engineering works such as pound locks to achieve changes of level. Simple stop gates were used, however, whose function was to retain water should there be an embankment failure or an aqueduct collapse as happened in the 1950's at Shenton. There is now only one, now ungated stop lock on its entire length, at Marston Junction. The canal was built as a broad gauge navigation. However in 1819 the decision was taken to make the regulatory lock at

Marston Junction a narrow lock, although broad boats still continued to use the waterway within its limits.

### **The Bridges:**

- 8.2 **The Original Brick Bridges:** The most important historical features on the canal are the bridges which act as vehicular, pedestrian and animal crossing points. Within the Borough, with one exception of Bridge No. 20, which is built of local stone, all were constructed to a standard design. The arches and abutments were originally constructed of local red bricks and may not, in some cases, have had parapets. The tow path is also likely to have been routed over the end of the bridge and not under it, as at present, to maintain the width of the canal for boats. The bridges were refaced with blue brindle bricks after 1848 when the canal was taken over and the bridges became the responsibility of the railway company. The original red brickwork can still be seen on the underside of some bridge arches. In detail, the brick bridges consist of a 13.5 inch deep segmental arch which spans the canal with a single bull nose brick or half brick forming the outer corner. Above the centre of the arch, the parapets were constructed of a 2 course projecting string course and 8 courses of English Bond. These were capped with natural stone copings which now often display historic graffiti. The parapets followed a shallower curve which was buttressed by large brick piers which again were finished with massive stone copings. The current work to bridge 31 indicates that the interior of the bridge structure is of rubble construction. This standard small scale simple design has given the canal a unified appearance throughout its length which greatly adds to its rural character. Each bridge, like all bridges in the canal system, is numbered with a central cast iron plate and many have been given individual names.
- 8.3 Recent repairs and bridge replacements, however, have introduced discordant elements. Sometimes the brick parapets have been raised, red brickwork, concrete copings and even concrete structures introduced which are having a major detrimental impact on the appearance of the bridges. It is important that when they are damaged by canal boats or by modern vehicles at parapet level that the repairs follow the original design and use matching compatible materials.
- 8.4 To the north, beyond the Borough boundary, the appearance of the canal changes as the Snarestone tunnel and the bridges are constructed of stone. The canal currently terminates at Bridge 61 although there are plans to extend it to Measham. Work has already commenced and excavation work currently extends as far as the Snarestone Pumping Station.
- 8.5 **The Road Bridges:** Several of the bridges have been replaced in recent times with concrete structures spanning the canal. These structures, although sometimes faced with modern stretcher bond brick abutments, are out of scale and character with the traditional form of brick load bearing construction. Solid brick parapets have, in the main, been replaced with vertical galvanised railings which again detract from their appearance.
- 8.6 Of particular concern is Bridge No 31, near Dadlington. The traditional brick bridge was replaced around 1930. The new structure of this bridge consists of a series of

steel beams spanning between stone pad stones set into brick abutments on each side of the canal. The steels are linked with insitu concrete. The parapets have been formed from a series of horizontal steel tubes. The original design did not allow for the steel's expansion and major cracking of the brick structure has occurred which is leading to unstable parapets and reconstruction in the near future.

- 8.7 **The Turn Bridge, Shackerstone:** This is a crossover bridge that was needed wherever towpaths changed sides so that the horses could change sides without being unhitched.
- 8.8 **The Railway Bridge:** This magnificent structure lies just south of Shenton railway station and marks the point where the railway crossed the canal. It is constructed of massive steel beams which span the canal diagonally from brick abutment to brick abutment, each topped by immense stone copings. The scale of the structure is in sharp contrast to the single arch bridges of the canal construction period and represents a fine example of high Victorian engineering. Although the two tracks have been removed, a section of large timber sleepers still marks the route. It now forms part of the footpath that connects to Shenton Railway Station.
- 8.9 **The Snarestone Tunnel:** As the canal follows the 300 foot contour only one tunnel was considered necessary which is located at Snarestone, just beyond the boundary of the Borough. The tunnel which is brick lined but stone faced at its entrances, measures over 200 metres in length and passes under the village itself.
- 8.10 **The Aqueducts:** The canal has two aqueducts at Shenton and Shackerstone. Their construction followed relatively shortly after the first canal aqueduct to be constructed in the British Isles in 1761 which carried James Brindley's Bridge-Water canal over the Mersey and Irwell Navigations channel and towpath at Barton, but now demolished. All masonry aqueducts had to be capable of supporting and resisting the great weight of the canal and its puddle clay bed. This meant that they could not be built to any great height and that their side walls tended to burst outwards.
- 8.11 **The Shenton Aqueduct:** The original route of the canal at Shenton as can be seen on Robert Whitworth's 1781 survey map shows the waterway following the contour taking a long loop to the east which is the most economical route. However it was eventually decided to construct a high embankment and aqueduct which now has to be carefully monitored due to settlement.
- 8.12 A brick aqueduct was constructed whose structure spans the Shenton to Market Bosworth Road on an embankment over 6 metres in height. The structure itself is constructed of blue brindle bricks with stone copings over the parapets which flank both the canal and the towpath. If the embankment collapsed, timber stop gates, now no longer existing, set into the bank at both ends of the structure could be closed to prevent loss of water.
- 8.13 **The Shackerstone Aqueduct,** also built in blue brick, spans the River Sence with five narrow openings. Adjacent to this structure is the listed cast iron road bridge which carries the access road to the listed Shackerstone Railway Station nearby. The road bridge which was built later, in contrast, is constructed on red brick supports

with a cast iron open parapet and brick end piers. These would have been transported by the railway company.

- 8.14 **The Embankments** Although the area through which the canal passes is relatively flat, undulations in the land were inevitable. The differing land levels were accommodated by embankments and cuttings formed by the canal excavators. In places, these changes in level provide good views of the countryside and buildings, particularly churches and to distant villages, particularly churches. They add significantly to the character of the canal.
- 8.15 **The Cuttings** have the opposite effect and isolate the canal user from the countryside. Views are restricted to the canal and distant bridges become particularly important as visual features.
- 8.16 **The Double Ditches** The purpose of these features is not known although it runs adjacent to the towpath in many areas particularly along the northern section running from Shackerstone.
- 8.17 **The Overflows:** To avoid local flooding and damage to the canal banks in times of high rainfall and maintain the level of the canal, weirs were incorporated along the edge of the canal which drain into ditches or small streams. Most have been replaced in modern times by concrete structures although the original raised towpath passing point has sometimes been retained.
- 8.18 **The Wharfs:** Wharfs were the life blood of the canal. However due to the nature of the use of the Ashby Canal, there were few wharfs constructed on the waterway and little evidence of these features remain.
- 8.19 **Gopsall Wharf** near bridge no 58 on the northern boundary of the Borough was a coal off-loading point. It is marked by a visitor car park and a concrete edging to the canal which was constructed in the 1960's by the Boy Scouts.
- 8.20 **Bosworth Wharf:** An arm of the canal extended into the timber treatment factory at Market Bosworth until most was filled in as part of the recent re-development of the site with housing. Here the winding hole is located immediately to the south of bridge 42 which crosses Station Road. It is also known as Bosworth Wharf Bridge.
- 8.21 **Sutton Cheney Wharf** is located on its winding hole to the west of bridge 34 on Fenn Lanes. A New information centre and cafe has recently been constructed at the wharf that has become a major tourist centre.
- 8.22 **Dadlington Wharf** adjacent to Bridge 30 is a recent construction which has no historical importance. There is not a winding hole in the vicinity.
- 8.23 **Stoke Golding Wharf:** The original wharf at Stoke Golding is adjacent to Bridge 25 on Station Road. It has recently been further developed and now includes a cafe and a major extension to its canal side moorings. The original canal side cottage and associated buildings have retained much of their simple functional character.

- 8.24 **The Hinckley Wharf** adjacent to Bridge 16 on Nutts Lane is the largest wharf on the canal. It includes a fine complex of warehouses which have been converted into residential use. The nearby lake however has no connection with the canal.
- 8.25 **The Milestone Markers:** The recent introduction of these features which mimic the splay cut sleepers provided by the railway company have added greatly to the character of the canal... They mark the distance in miles from both Marston Junction and Moira. Although a fine replica, consideration should be given to their replacement in timber or the original stone form in the future. The original markers were removed by British Waterways although one is on display at the Waterways Museum. An original marker also stands between bridges 40 and 41 (Coton and Jacksons bridges).
- 8.26 **The Sheet Piling** has relatively recently been introduced by British Waterways to prevent erosion of the banks particularly on the outer face of bends. They provide a hard edge to the channel and are used by canal users as unofficial moorings. Unfortunately this has had a particularly damaging impact on the character and appearance of the canal. The sheeting is often left uncovered, sometimes as at Shenton it is protected by thick rubber sections, sometimes by hardwood timber strips and only occasionally by coir rolls which encourage reeds to grow that help to soften the edges.
- 8.27 **The Canal Bank Edge Protection** These were constructed by the Project Officer for the Ashby Canal. The Project Officer works for Leicestershire County Council and is based at They perform the same function as the metal sheet piling but are more sympathetic appearance to the character of the canal and are the preferred solution. However it should be backfilled and not left open to the canal as in some sections currently.
- 8.28 **Winding Holes:** These widenings in the canal enable boats to turn around. They are sited close to historically important setting down points on the canal
- 8.29 **The Canal Stop Gates:** The need to conserve water was paramount in canal construction. The Ashby Canal was no exception because although it follows the 300 foot contour, the countryside is not flat. At times its route is through cuttings and also along embankments. The potential collapse of embankments was recognised in its original construction and a series of stop gates were constructed to accommodate this risk. Although most have been lost with the introduction of sheet piling, the evidence of some remain, usually adjacent to bridges.
- 8.30 **The Boundary Hedges:** Their planting was implemented by the canal company to prevent animals gaining access to the canal. It is an essential feature which adds significantly to the canal's appearance and reinforces its rural character.
- 8.31 **The Towpath:** This is a muddy track often less than a metre wide. Although parts of it have more recently been surfaced with stone or gravel, it retains a natural appearance.

## 9 **The Boat Moorings:**

- 9.1 ***The Coventry Road Marina*** is the major boat mooring on the canal. It provides berths for over 200 boats. Facilities include a chandlery, a public house of a very modern angular design and a similar motel. This is a very important canal facility which draws tourists from a wide area. Although the buildings together form a large complex they have been concentrated close to the Coventry Road which has helped to considerably reduce their impact on the semi rural character of the canal as it passes through the urban area.
- 9.2 ***Sutton Cheney Wharf*** provides a low key alternative to the marina. A mixture of private and British Waterways funded canal side moorings have been provided centred on bridge no 34 where an informal stoned car park, cafeteria and small associated structures have been provided. The principle building is set well back from the edge of the canal and it is of a traditional appearance of brickwork and pitched roof. Its design sits comfortable with the waterway and the boats.
- 9.3 ***Bosworth Wharf Bridge (Bridge No 42)***: This provides the setting for canal side moorings close to the new residential development on the former timber treatment works. These moorings although improving the setting of the properties have been introduced along an improved section towpath which because of its increase width has given this formerly rural section of the canal a more urban appearance.
- 9.4 ***Shackerstone***: These moorings are of great benefit to the village. The boat residents provide additional customers for the Rising Sun public house and employment for a small boat repair company located adjacent to bridge no 52. They are also the principle attraction at the annual Shackerstone festival. However because of the sheet piling necessary to provide the permanent mooring facilities, this has had a negative impact on the rural appearance of the canal. Because of this it is important that these moorings are not permitted to extend further along both sides of the waterway.

## 10 **Canalside Buildings:**

- 10.1 Because of the nature of the Ashby Canal as a fast none stop transport system, very few buildings were constructed adjacent to the canal. Of these only those adjacent to the Watling Street crossing, Hinckley wharf and at Stoke Golding remain.
- 10.2 ***The Two Cottages on the Stoke Golding Wharf*** housed the families of the men who controlled the offloading of coal to the village. The two storey cottages are set at right angles to the canal but parallel to the road. They have a simple rectangular plan, flat frontages two stories high and steeply pitched slate roofs. The windows are timber casements set under segmental arches. These simple buildings add greatly to the character of the canal and it is important that future changes should not affect the appearance of their frontages that are visible to the public.
- 10.3 ***Port House*** at the end of the Hinckley wharf fronting Coventry Road is grade II listed. It is a three storey building with a shallow pitched hipped roof that is slate covered. The street elevation is particularly fine with a regular three window frontage of glazing bar sashes beneath stuccoed heads on all floors. The central panelled entrance door

sits within a wide round arched surround enclosing Doric columns. At the rear and attached to the principle building are former warehouses now converted into residential use and new buildings. It is important that a strategy and masterplan is developed to accommodate any further development or environmental improvements which respects its former use.

- 10.4 ***The Lime Kilns Public House*** stands a few metres from the Borough boundary where Watling Street (A5) crosses the canal. It is a simple double pile building which presents a two storey frontage to the street but three storeys to the canal and the rear car park. Because of its isolated location, it is a key landmark building highly visible from the north for some distance whose setting and simple functional appearance should be protected. Future extensions to the pub should be carefully designed to reflect its traditional qualities which include a steeply pitched roof, flat brick frontages, vernacular windows, segmental arches, and incorporate natural materials.

## 11 **Current Threats**

### **The Hinckley Urban Area**

- 11.1 The public towpath along the canal's western boundary on this stretch of the canal is particularly well used by recreational walkers, cyclists, residents and employees walking between the town and the industrial complexes to the southwest. It provides a valuable recreation corridor within the town and links the urban area to the rural areas of the Borough. Adjacent to most bridges are public access points to the canal towpath. These link both roads and public footpaths to the canal. The intersection of the towpath with Coventry road and Nutts Lane are the most important and well used access points onto this route.
- 11.2 The eastern edge adjacent to Coventry Road is even more intensively used by the public. It provides access to the 200 plus moorings at the Hinckley Marina, itself an important tourist attraction, and the canal-side public house and motel
- 11.3 Generally, in summer, views from the canal to the west are restricted by the towpath hedge in summer which extends to approximately two metres in height although its impact in winter when its leaves have fallen, is much less. This feature is broken in several places by the older industrial estates. Buildings on these estates generally face away from the canal. Elevations facing onto the canal are the rear or the sides of large unattractive sheds often set behind high security fencing. They are clad in unbroken metal sheeting or common brickwork and have few or no features of interest. This led to the encouragement of ivy, an evergreen plant, to develop within the hedge in an attempt to conceal the buildings behind, which has had a major detrimental impact on the hedge's rural character.
- 11.4 Even more recent very high factory developments, such as the Triumph factory on Normandy Way, have been permitted close to the canal with very limited planting protection. The Triumph factory and the warehouse opposite are examples of major buildings which have had a harmful impact on the rural quality of the waterway. From the north their industrial forms can be seen starkly against the skyline from a great distance being set in only sparse planting, they frame the canal's entrance into

Hinckley. This approach to development is totally unacceptable because of damaging impact they have on the setting of the conservation area.

- 11.5 These estates predate the declaration of the conservation area and national policy guidance Circular 8/87, PPG15 and all local plan policies on Conservation Areas.
- 11.6 Recent industrial estates, particularly adjacent to the A5 have to a much greater degree respected the canal conservation area and buildings are set well back from the edge of the canal incorporating good planting which will, over time, reduce their impact. It is important that all future development sites along the canal maintain a 30 metre margin to ensure the canal's semi rural appearance within the town is maintained.
- 11.7 Views from the canal to the east are more open. The sense of space and the wide vistas have been successfully retained since the declaration of the conservation area despite development having taken place along the canal during recent times. Where buildings have been constructed within the canal corridor, they have been restricted in height and visually separated to ensure their impact is limited. Designs of high quality have also ensured that these buildings not only make use of the attractive canal setting but also add to it. The Coventry Road housing which has a good mainly green margin to the canal, the marina public house and the Quality Inn which are of an interesting modern design and which are concentrated close to Coventry Road, a major urban route, are examples of structures that are of an acceptable design.

## 12 **Future threats to the canal**

- 12.1 The canal is a multi-functional resource. It can be a catalyst for regeneration, a contributor to drainage management, tourism, sport, leisure and recreational resource, a heritage landscape, and an open space and ecological. Although the canal infrastructure and bridges are significant components of the waterway's heritage, the character of the canal extends beyond the immediate waterway boundary to create along most of its route, a distinctive visual envelope. The impact of the works of landowners adjacent to the waterway can damage or sustain the quality of the historic canal fabric and its environment. The canal and towpaths can play an important role in providing travel choices for cycling, walking, freight and public transport. The towpaths provide a vehicle free environment to travel to school, work or home.
- 12.2 *The main factors affecting the growth of the leisure based marine industry are:*
- The condition of the canal itself
  - Accessibility by foot, road and water
  - The availability of facilities, services and attractions.
  - The image of the canal in terms of boating, walking and cycling conditions.

- 12.3 Canals are a community asset. The canal can be a tool in place making and place shaping, in attracting investment and improving the quality of life in areas undergoing change and regeneration. They can be used by communities for education, skills and training providing opportunities for volunteering, and health and well-being.
- 12.4 The canal is a form of open space. The canal and its towpath are an important wildlife corridor, a recreation and sport resource, accessible amenity in the urban area, provides access to the countryside, and is a visual amenity and a community resource.
- 12.5 The key issues to appraise and sustain the canal character are its distinctiveness, protecting future waterway restoration projects and the potential impact of major infrastructure projects on the character of the canal.

### **13 The Impact of Tourism**

- 13.1 From its inception until the last working barge traversed the canal in 1970, although there have been significant changes to the historic features, they have generally been sympathetic to the character of the canal. It had been constructed to move coal quickly from the mines around Ashby to the Coventry Canal. Its profile was saucer like with very soft edges because there was a very limited number of stopping points. Since then, the deliberate encouragement of its use as a leisure corridor has had a significant impact on its appearance even in the rural areas.
- 13.2 Motor driven boats with their higher speeds has caused the edges of the canal to be worn away. The introduction of new moorings, sheet piling, both timber and steel on bends and the construction of user friendly towpaths has had significant impact on the canal's rural character. The soft reed lined edges of the waterway seen in early photographs, have become hard edged and clearly defined. The impact of the existing sheet piling should also be reduced by introducing coir rolls and reed planting to soften its hard edged appearance. It is noted that British Waterways have changed their policy towards bank protection and now favour the use of timber edge protection which is welcomed. It is accepted that reasonable standards do have to be adopted regarding good walking surfaces, towpath width and stability, to make it available to the public, and sometimes this can unavoidably compromise the rural setting.
- 13.3 The Borough Council will work jointly with British Waterways and other interested parties to ensure the future maintenance, repairs, new features and the use of sheeting, particularly steel sheeting is carefully considered because the impact can be very damaging particularly in sensitive rural stretches.

### **14 Development Control Considerations**

- 14.1 Does development located adjacent or close to the canal involve:
- An impact on a significant canal structure
  - The effect on the views to and from the canal
  - An impact on the waterway landscape or character, features and its biodiversity

- Impact on the waterway habitats and protected species.

## 15 **Conclusions**

- 15.1 With the exception of recent development within the Hinckley urban area and Market Bosworth, there has been relatively little change within the majority of the Ashby Canal Conservation Area since the conservation area was designated in December 1990.
- 15.2 The character of the canal is derived from a combination of factors which have been identified in this appraisal. These factors include its setting, historical features of the waterway and impact of maintenance works to the canal itself as well as the quality and consistency of the canal architectural style, materials and detailing. When considering new development or extensions to existing buildings along the canal or nearby, it is crucial to understand, be aware of and work with these features if the special character of the Conservation Area is to be preserved or enhanced.