



INTRODUCTION

Reasons for designation

A Conservation Area is defined by S 277 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971 as an area "of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Conservation Areas are of many kinds and may vary from historic town and village centre to stately homes and their parklands, or sites of industrial archaeological interest.

The Stourbridge Canal is considered to be of industrial archaeological significance as the first of the branch or feeder canals linking nearby industrial areas to the newly constructed trunk canals in the later C18. The designated area also contains the substantial and historically significant remains of a much earlier attempt to create an artificial waterway, the C17 New Cut of the River Stour Navigation.

The meaning of designation

Designation of a Conservation Area draws public attention to its architectural and historic interest and emphasises the need for any new development either within or adjoining the area to be sympathetic to its character. Local authorities have certain additional powers of control in conservation areas: listed building consent is required for the demolition of most buildings and structures, and written consent is needed for the felling and lopping of all trees above a certain size.

Most of the land in the Stourbridge Canal Conservation Area is owned by the British Waterways Board. As a statutory undertaker it has wide powers of permitted development which exempt them from many aspects of planning control. The Board is, however, recognised to be a responsible land owner, keenly sympathetic to the waterways heritage in its care. Its Waterways Environment Handbook is a model guide to the sensitive treatment of an historic environment.

STOURBRIDGE CANAL CONSERVATION AREA

Nonetheless, land in other ownerships is included both in the Conservation Area and immediately abutting it throughout its length. The purpose of designation is to reinforce the work of the British Waterways Board in protecting the canal and its setting from unsympathetic pressures for change, while allowing it to adapt to meet modern amenity and recreational needs.

Future Action

Designation of a Conservation Area delineates the architectural or historic interest of an area. This is only a first stage which will be followed up by proposals from both local interests and the local authorities for the preservation and enhancement of the area. Discussions will be held with the British Waterways Board over such matters as tow-path clearance, tree felling and planting and the repair and maintenance of canalside buildings and features. Local people, amenity groups, canal users, the parish council and others are invited to come forward with suggestions for schemes which might be carried out for the benefit of the canal and its setting.

Policies for the control of development within or alongside the Conservation Area have been set out in the Local Plan prepared by South Staffordshire District Council. In accordance with previous practise special working arrangements will be established with British Waterways Board for consultation over development within their permitted development rights.

Stourbridge Canal Conservation Area

The Stourbridge Canal was one of the earliest "feeder" or branch canals built in the late C18 to connect a manufacturing district with the newly established and growing trunk canal network. It was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1776 to run from Stourbridge to a junction with the newly completed Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Stourton. The purpose of the canal, together with its branch to Black Delph near Brierley Hill where it was to be joined to the proposed Dudley Canal, was to provide a direct outlet for the coal and manufactured goods of the western part of the Black Country to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and to the River Severn.

Part of the canal, from Wordsley to Stourbridge and beyond is now in the West Midlands Metropolitan County. From the county boundary, that part remaining in Staffordshire was built, as were all the early canals, as a "contour" canal cut along the southern slope of the Stour Valley, without the need for expensive or dramatic earthworks. From Primrose Hill near Newtown to Stourton the river and canal diverge, the river meandering away to the north, the canal taking a more gentle and straight course gradually descending through four locks to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Stourton Junction.

In its eastern length, from the County boundary to Primrose Hill, where river and canal adjoin, the valley slopes are heavily wooded, and there are views into rolling countryside beyond. These views form the setting and backdrop to the Conservation Area. The tree clad mound of Primrose Hill is a dramatic landscape feature. From Newtown to Stewpony, the landscape is flatter; much land to the north of the canal has been quarried for sand and is now derelict, although fortunately screened by scrub growth from the canalside.

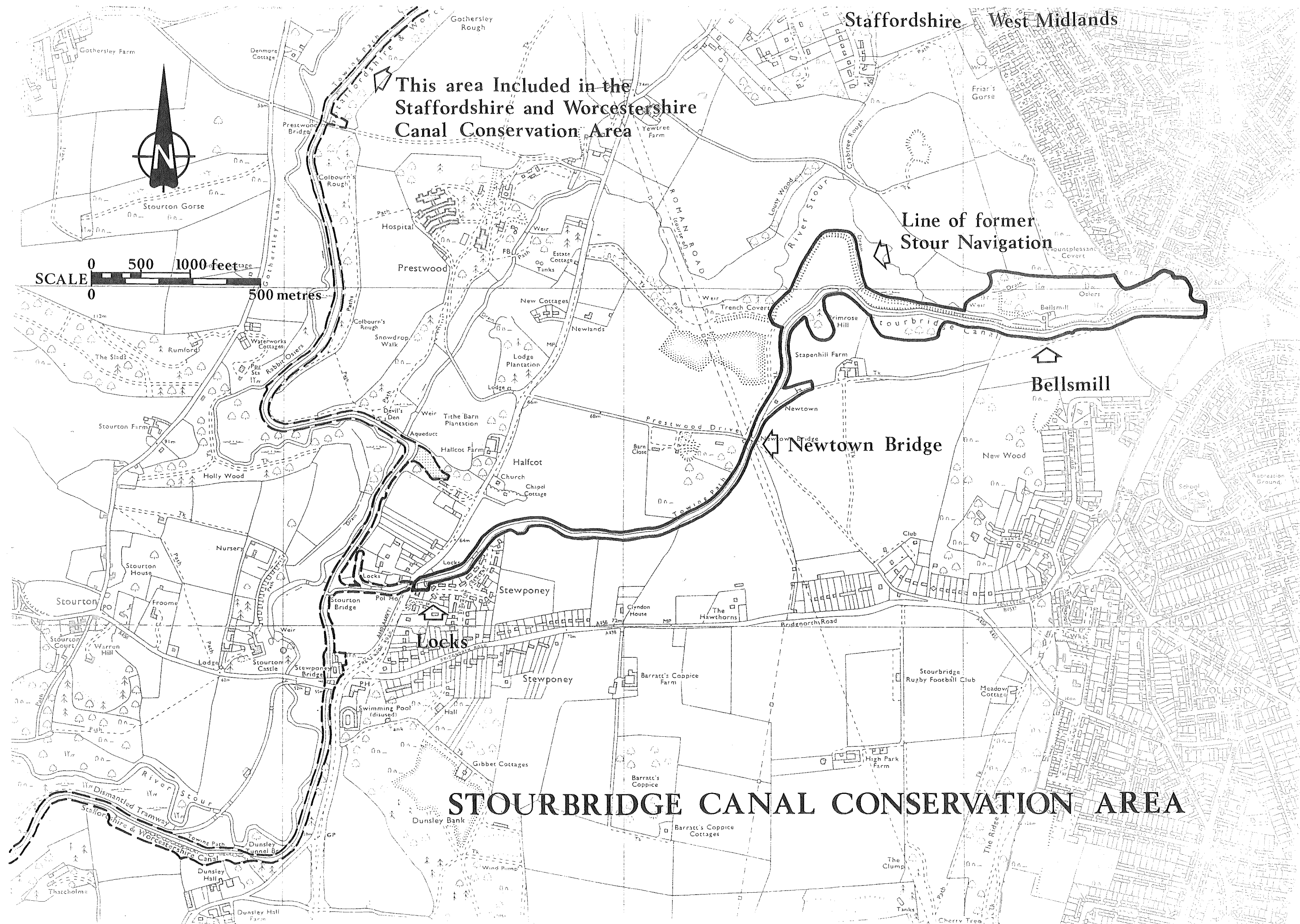
The Stour Valley throughout its length was the scene of much early industrial activity, especially iron working, both during and before the Industrial Revolution of the C18. Within the Conservation Area, Bell's Mill (known as Willett's Mill until 1824) retains part of the structure of an early C19 brick watermill, although its original function cannot now be established.

The industrial importance of the area in the mid C17 led to an early attempt to improve the River Stour and make it navigable from Stourbridge to the River Severn. Between 1665 - 1667, the engineer Andrew Yarranton was employed to excavate a new cut between Bell's Mill and Prestwood.

The cut was never commercially successful and was destroyed by flooding in the C17.

Nonetheless the line of Yarranton's cut, the direct predecessor of the Stourbridge Canal can still be traced throughout much of its length; from Bell's Mill to the significantly named Trench Covert it has been included within the Conservation Area. At Bell's Mill the cut was excavated against the sandstone ridge below the present canal, and is faced on the south side by bare rock. Beyond the weir it loops northward, and the line of its two grassy embankments is still a pronounced landscape feature.

The survival of Yarranton's cut and its more prosperous successor, the Stourbridge Canal make this part of the valley of considerable industrial archaeological significance. The protection and enhancement of their fabric and setting will be an important aspect of designation of the Conservation Area, and complement the work already achieved by designation of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Conservation Area.



Based upon the 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright Reserved.

Published by Staffordshire County Planning Department

on behalf of:-

Staffordshire County Council - South Staffordshire District Council

Available from County Planning and Development Officer,

Martin Street, Stafford ST16 2LE.