



## Oxford Canal Conservation Area Appraisal October 2012

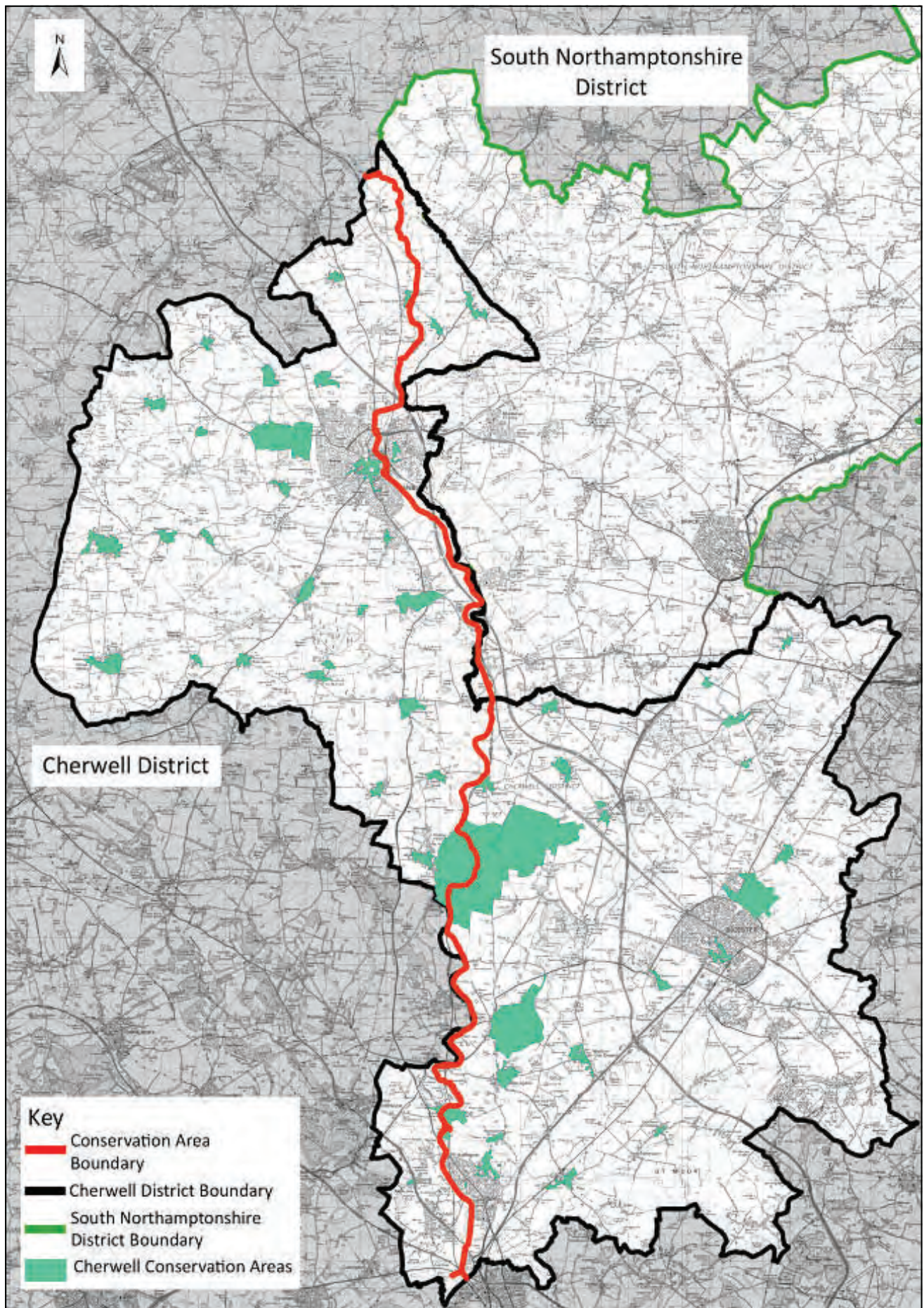


*Cherwell*  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

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## Abbreviations

SNDC South Northamptonshire District Council  
CDC Cherwell District Council  
CLP Cherwell District Local Plan 1996  
NCLP Non Statutory Cherwell District Local Plan  
GWR Great Western Railway  
BW (BWB) British Waterways is the abbreviated form of the British Waterways Board, 64 Clarendon Road, Watford, Herts WD17 1DA soon to become the Canal and River Trust, see British Waterways Board (Transfer of Functions) Order 2012 and the Draft Inland Waterways Advisory Council (Abolition) Order 2012.



# 1. Introduction and Planning Policy Context

1.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to identify *areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance* through an appraisal process and to designate them as Conservation Areas. Since 1967 some 9600 Conservation Areas have been designated in England, including 59 in Cherwell District.

1.2 The **purpose** of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is:

- to provide a clear definition of the area's special architectural or historic interest;
- to identify ways in which the unique characteristics can be preserved and enhanced;
- to justify the designation in terms of how important the canal is to the locality;
- to create a clear context for future development in accordance with conservation area policies in the Local Plan;
- and to provide a vehicle for engagement and awareness raising

1.3 This assessment and management plan aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the **Oxford Canal Conservation Area**, that section of the Oxford Canal where it runs through Cherwell District and a small part of South Northamptonshire District. It is not an attempt to stifle change. The aim is to strike a balance so that the interests of conservation are given their full weight against the needs for change and development. This document is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

1.4 This document should be read in conjunction with the Proposed Submission Draft Cherwell Local Plan (August 2012), and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.5 The appraisal was the subject of public consultation. The Parish Council, English Heritage, local residents and interested groups were asked to consider the document and contribute their views. It has since been adopted by the Council and is used to help determine planning applications and appeals within the Conservation Area and its setting.

1.6 This appraisal is different from the remainder of Cherwell's Conservation Areas in that it deals with a single man-made feature of one period in time and its associated infrastructure, rather than a village focussed around an early core with later development. Due to its historic interest and individual form of architecture, these are perceived to be characteristics that are worthy of protection. The canal dates from before the railways, and as such, had a great impact on the socio-economic development of the district, particularly Banbury. It now has a place in the recreation, culture, water management and tourism which brings people to the district.



*Iconic view of Haddons Lift Bridge 173, Bodicote looking south (above) and north (below)*

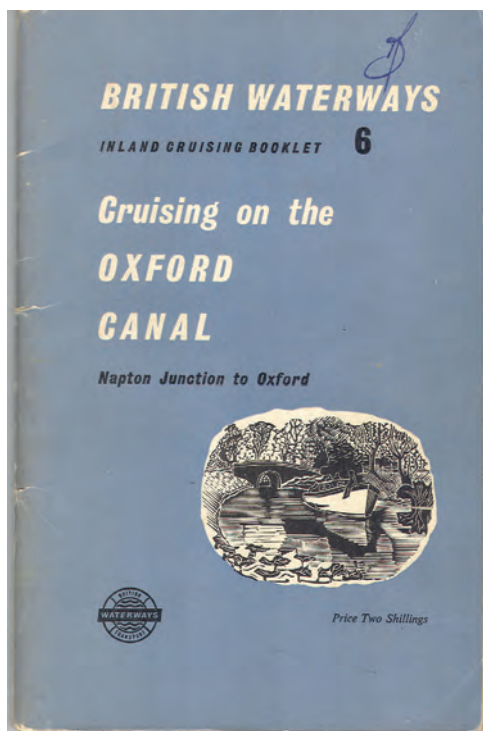


## 2. Location

2.1 The canal runs from Hawkesbury Junction with the Coventry Canal southwards to the middle of Oxford and junctions with the River Thames. The southern section of the summit level crosses into Oxfordshire and from the watershed it drops downwards towards the valley of the River Cherwell, which it follows to the Thames valley, and to Oxford itself.

2.2 The conservation area is mainly within the boundaries of Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire, apart from a section that crosses into South Northamptonshire near Aynho. The canal is the most rural of canals, for it passes through only two sizeable towns – Rugby and Banbury – on its circuitous route to the outskirts of Oxford, and even tends to avoid most of the villages as well.

2.3 The Oxford Canal is one of the most popular leisure canals in the country, passing through the beautiful countryside of the southern Midlands of England. It is alive for much of the year with pleasure boats of all shapes and sizes, its towpath also provides a well-used route for cyclists and hikers, and the surviving pubs along the route provide focal points for all those who use the canal and others from further afield.



Information booklet from 1956

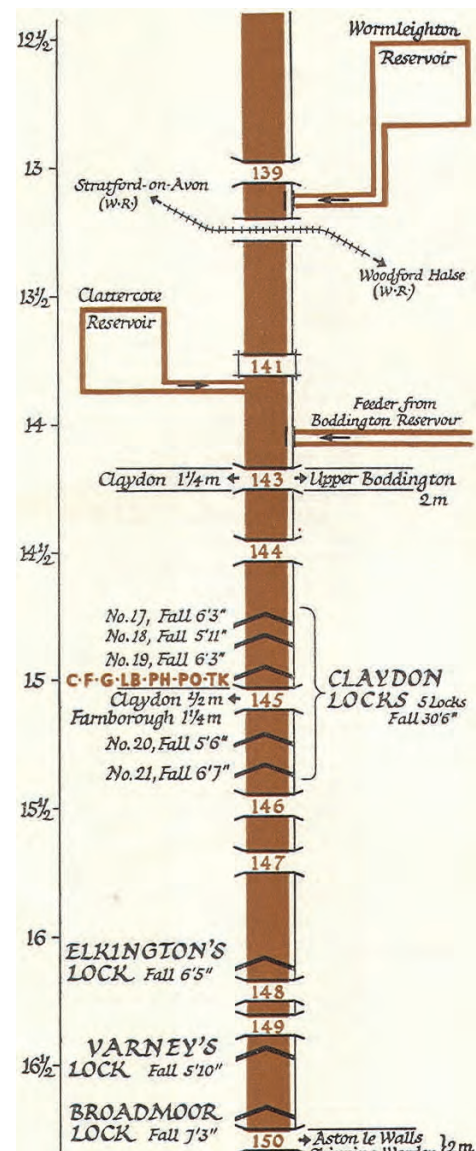
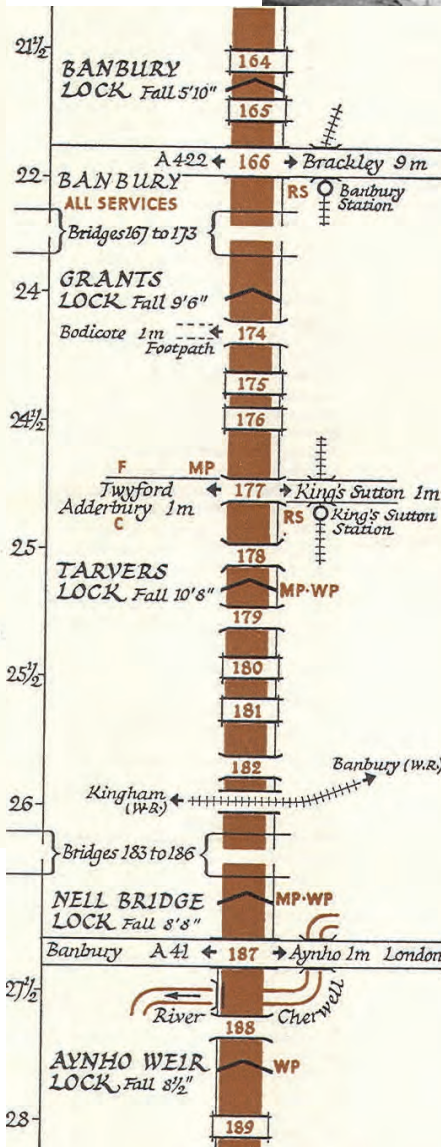
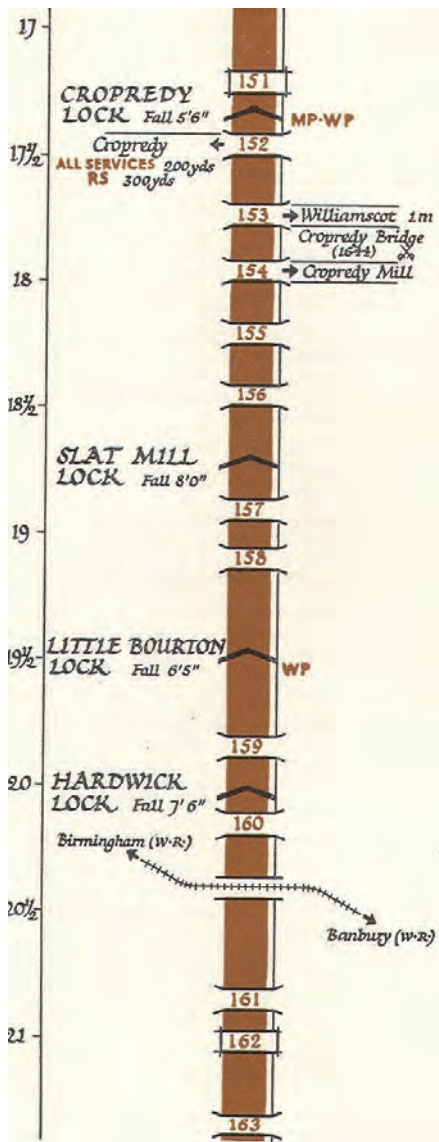


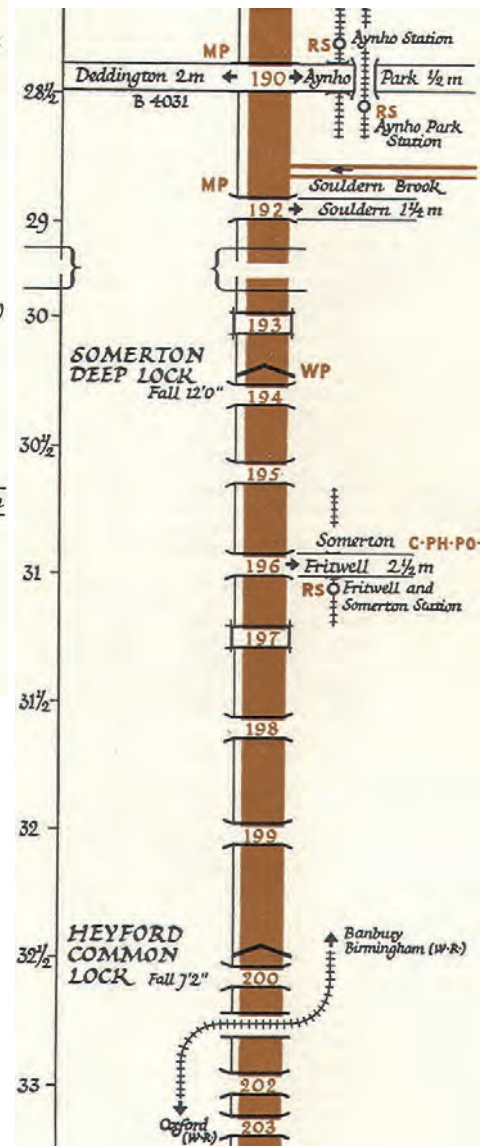
Fig. 2 (above and next 2 pages) This stylised plan is taken from the British Waterways Inland Cruising Booklet, first published after 1956 and shows the locks and bridges by number. The Conservation Area starts at Boundary Bridge 141 in the north and stretches as far as of bridge 233 south of the Dukes Cut.

The bridge numbers on this plan are those cited in the text, but there is evidence that historically other numbering systems have been used.

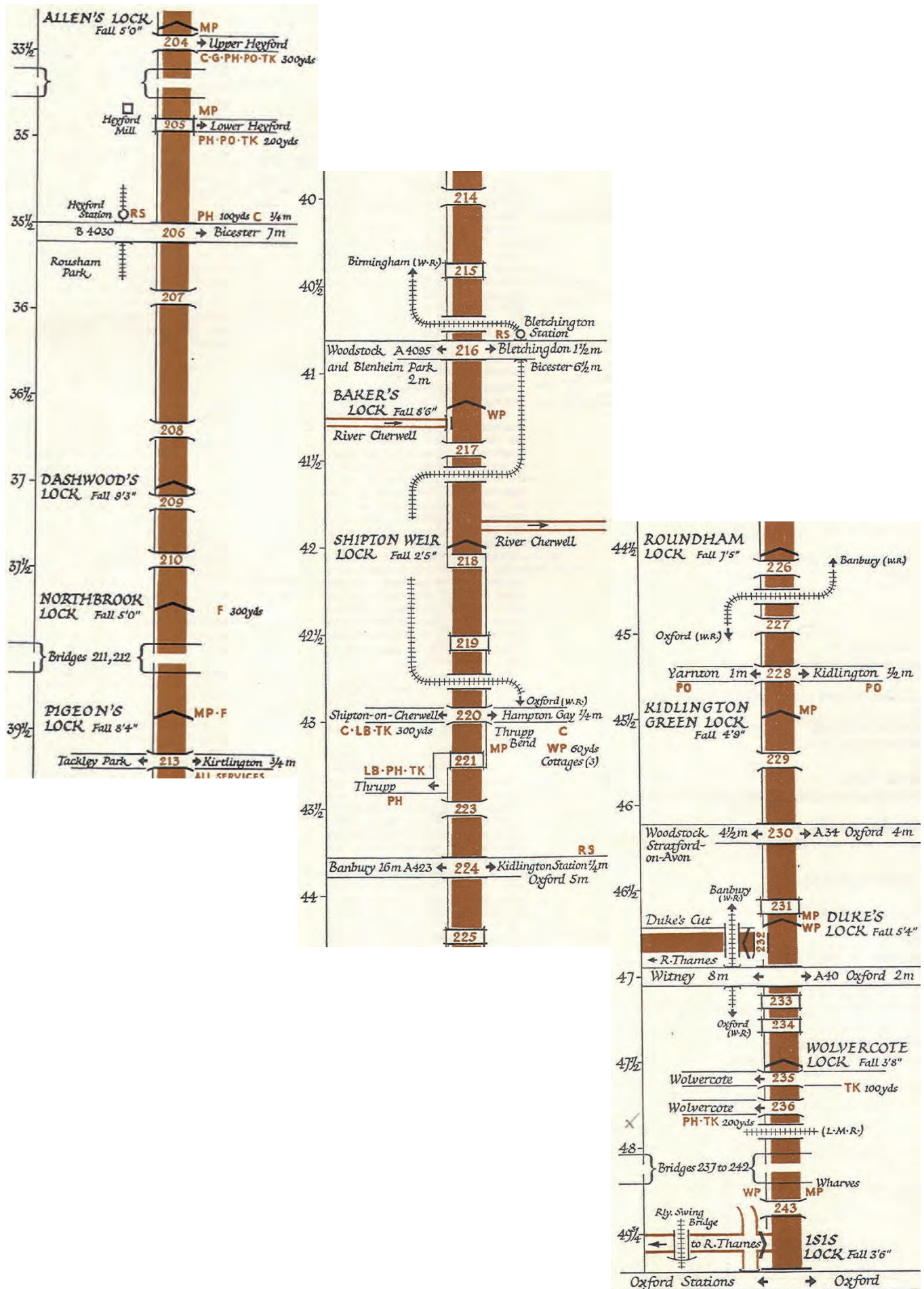




Tooleys Boatyard, Banbury  
between 1910 & 1930



Aynho between 1910 & 1930





# 3. Landscape and Local Architecture

3.1 The Oxford Canal follows the valley of the River Cherwell, which drains the land as it flows southwards to join the broad, low-lying vale landscapes of the upper Thames north of Oxford. The land rises and falls gently from the ironstones and mudstones of the north district to the limestones and clays of the south.

3.2 Although the Cherwell District has a complex topography, with steep valley sides and open upland areas rising to a height of around 200m in places, the canal follows the contours of the land: as level a route as possible, at least half of which lies below 80m. The valley is generally fairly wide and flat between the low undulating hills of the valley sides, with occasional raised terraces on which the settlements mainly lie. The scenery is pleasant, stretching back from the canal in rural areas with wide agricultural and pastoral fields, dotted with occasional wharf sites and associated canal buildings adjacent the canal. Immature woodland clusters in areas on the banks provide sporadic visual barriers which hide the canal from wider view.

3.3 The topography and geology of the district has led to settlements being sited on higher ground, in part to provide better drainage. Therefore, few rural settlements are within sight of the canal, with mill sites and their hamlets close to the river, and wharfs beside the canal. Banbury and Kidlington are the two urbanised areas which the canal touches, again reflecting the contoured nature of the engineering.

## Local Architecture and Materials

3.4 The variety of styles and materials used in the structures of the canal reflect the variety of materials in the local vernacular, though in general most of the older buildings are built of the local stone, ironstone in the north and limestone in the south, usually faced with worked or coursed rubblestone. The more common use of standard brick was probably mainly the result of the construction of the canal, and there are surviving brick kilns of some age at Twyford Wharf. A couple of slightly grander late-Georgian farmhouses are built of brick.

3.5 Most of the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century rural buildings are fairly humble in character, usually of 2 or 3 storeys and with simple detailing, including casement windows, wooden doors, and a variety of roof treatments, including thatch, stone slate, clay tile and natural slate.

3.6 Alongside several fine parish churches, there is another grand medieval building close to the line of the canal: the tithe barn of around 1400 built for New College, Oxford, next to the parish church and manor house of Upper Heyford.

3.7 The section of the canal through Banbury retained many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century canal-related buildings, including wharves and warehouses, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Redevelopment of the area in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has led to their loss, removing much of the town's original canalscape, but the scheduled monument of Tooley's boatyard retains its dry dock. The canal is now a popular tourist attraction within the town.

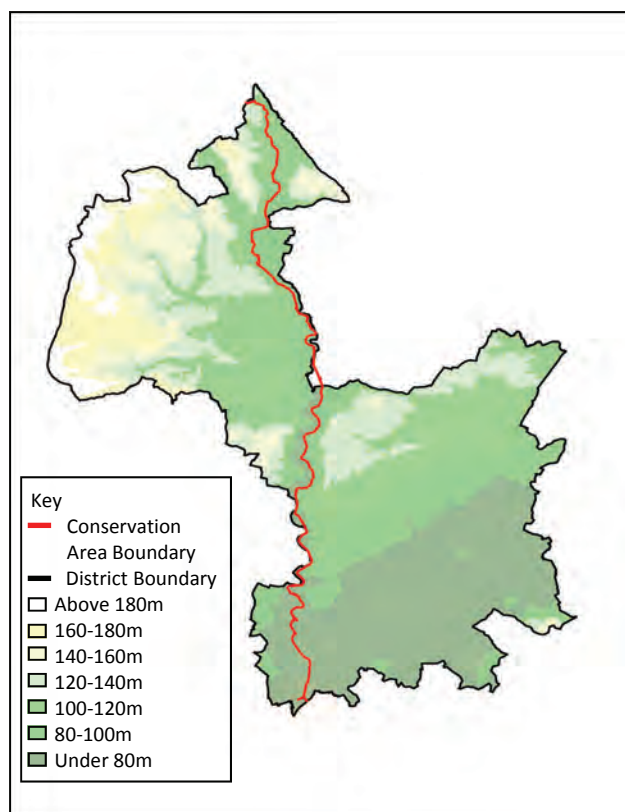


Fig. 3 Approximate topography of the district  
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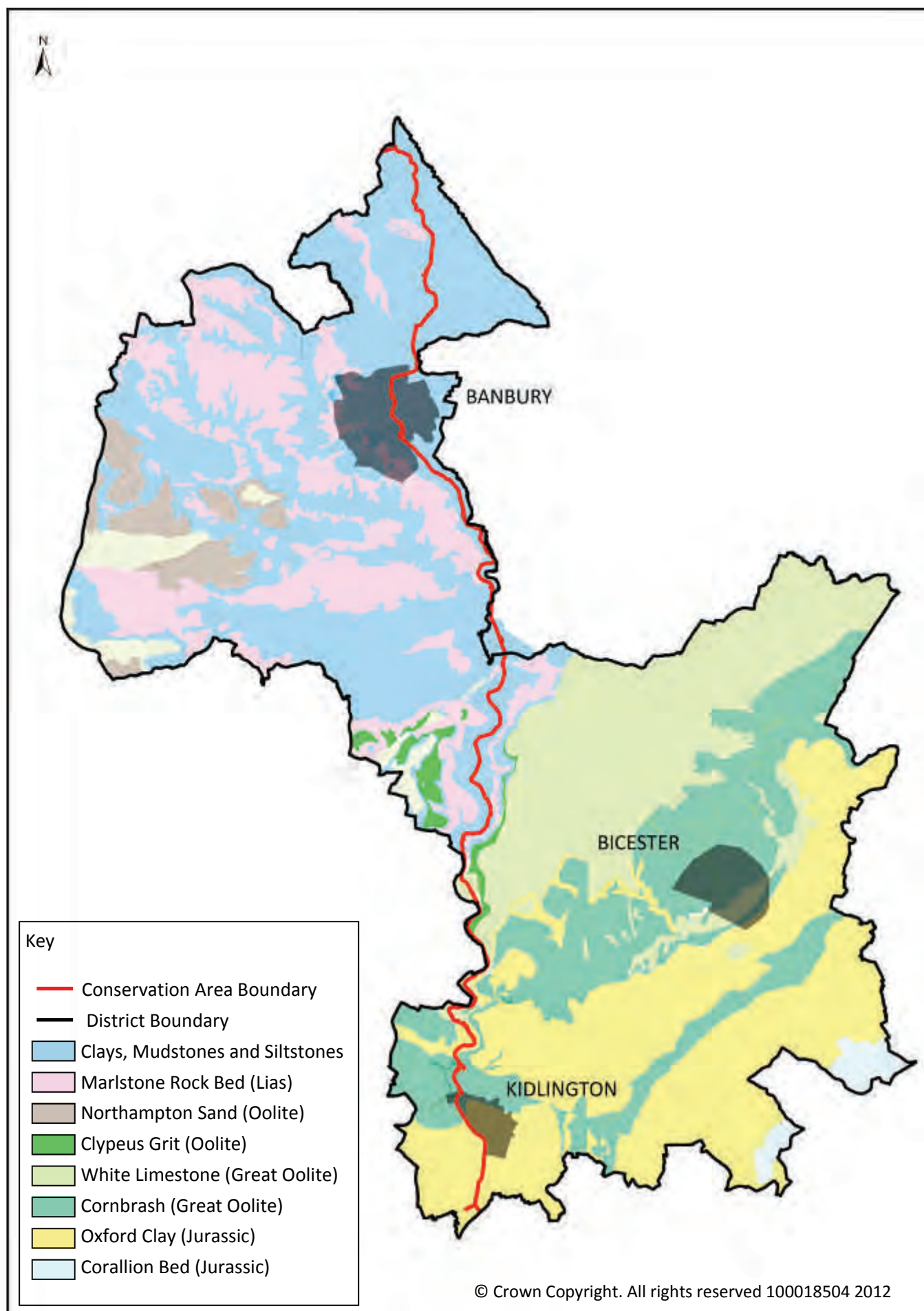


Fig. 4 Simplified Geology of the Conservation Area



## 4. Archaeology

4.1 Although a good deal of industrial archaeology from the time of the canal's construction and beyond still remains in certain areas of the district, due to the destructive nature of canal construction, it is unlikely that a good quantity of buried ancient archaeology has survived along the route. The construction a contour canal requires terracing to create the level line. This destroys the upper side of the sloping ground level and builds up the lower section, though only after a solid foundation has been created usually through excavation. As a result the buried archaeological resource would either be destroyed or buried beneath the embanked towpath.



*Ridge and furrow on south side of canal between Banbury and Aynho*

4.2 To either side of the canal itself, it is possible that more archaeological remains have survived, as few major changes appear to have been made to the rural landscape. This is certainly evident in the extensive medieval ridge-and-furrow field systems surviving within the later enclosures in close proximity to the canal.

4.3 Much of Banbury's industrial canal landscape has been redeveloped. Whilst there are some fragmentary standing structures there will be surviving buried archaeological deposits in some areas where redevelopment has not resulted in their removal. It is believed that the buried remains of the two main wharves in Banbury, Castle Wharf and the main Banbury Wharf, were protected when the Castle Quays Development was built by raising the general ground level of the new buildings. Due to the age of the works,



*Tooley's Boatyard dry dock © nbepipany.co.uk*

it is not known how much was found or removed during earlier redevelopment works. Tooley's Boatyard was retained and embedded in the Castle Quays development, including the dry dock, one of the oldest in the country.

4.4 It is possible that there are the buried remains of wharf buildings at Grimsbury Wharf to the north of the town centre, as well as a buried wharf inlet south of Bridge Street once accessed from Lower Cherwell Street. To the south of Bridge Street are the remains of several other wharves on the offside (west bank) of the canal and some associated standing structures, including those connected with the recently redeveloped former Town Hall Wharf.

4.5 Other possible significant canal-related remains could survive but few are well documented. For example, there appears to have been a side pond at Kings Sutton Lock probably installed as an experiment in saving water but subsequently in-filled. There was also a second wharf at Lower Heyford but its precise location is uncertain, though a house on the offside south-west of Mill Lane Bridge (205) has some similarities with a drawing of the wharf house.

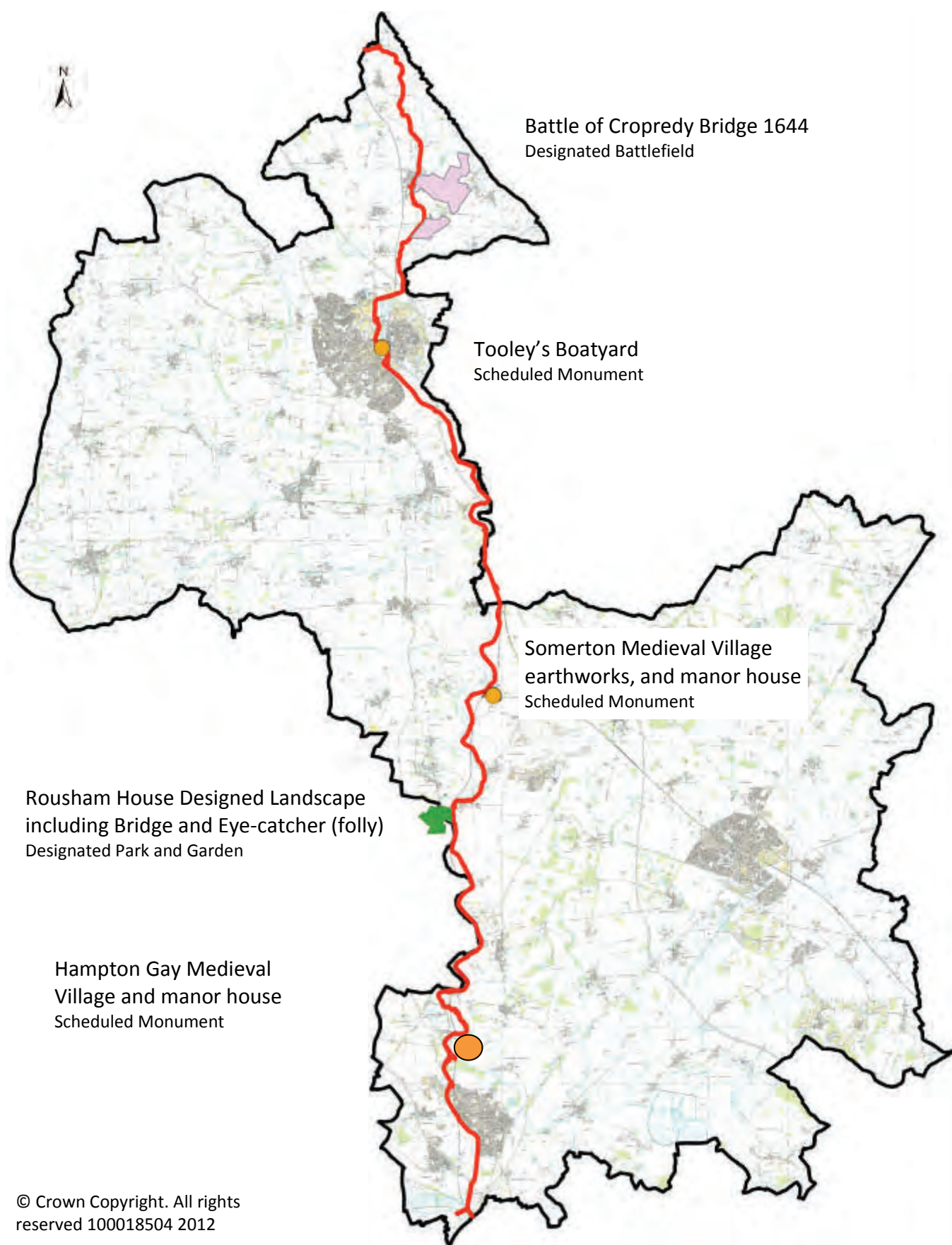


Fig. 5 Substantial Designated Heritage Assets adjacent to the conservation area



## 5. History and Development

The Cherwell valley forms a natural and historic routeway through the district. Its rural agricultural character was established during a time of relative prosperity in the medieval period, with inclosure occurring early in several parishes. The significant urban area in the valley is the market town Banbury, the canal passing through its former wharfage and industry with the coal load. Other smaller industries along the valley were water-related: corn mills and a paper mill, using leats or mill races taken off the river.

Although flat-bottomed boats found the river reasonably navigable, it was not until the late 1760s that the canal was proposed as part of the Grand Cross across England, linking rivers and waterways. This would eventually link London with Oxford, Liverpool, Hull and Bristol. Along this section of the Oxford Canal, the River Cherwell fed the canal, making it a more reliable waterway.

The Oxford Canal Company was the second of two companies created to enable this project. James Brindley, a former millwright (1716-1772), was hired as the Engineer and General Surveyor, having already worked on the Trent & Mersey Canal. Work began at the northern end of the route, and by 1771 ten miles had been completed. Brindley died the following year, and work slowed due to lack of ready funds. Banbury was reached by March 1778, with a wharf being established close to the site of the castle.



*Brass seal of the Oxford Canal Company*



*James Brindley 1770 © National Portrait Gallery*

Following a period of inactivity due to finances and slow work on other canals, work started again from Banbury in 1786, this time with James Barnes as resident engineer. The line was officially opened throughout on New Year's Day 1790. With the opening of the Isis Lock in 1796, the canal and the Thames were linked within Oxford, with an interchange wharf to change goods between the narrowboats of the canal and the river boats of the Thames.

While the canal construction clearly had an impact on the country's landscape and infrastructure, the wider benefits included the teaching of specialist building and carpentry techniques, spreading these skills throughout the country.

By far the most important cargo of the Oxford Canal was coal. The canals allowed the rapid expansion of the coalfields in the Midlands and the North-West. These had previously been hampered by poor transport links in comparison to the ones in the North-East, which sent coal by sea. Coal prices in Banbury and Oxford almost halved with the opening of the canal because it could be sourced from the coalfields to the north of Coventry and further afield. Whilst the fall in coal prices benefited most people, others were less happy with the impact of the canal. Even 1809, the loss of meadow land required for its construction was felt by some to have spoilt the countryside and it was thought that such actions would have a negative impact on agriculture.

The sinuous route of the canal, and the increased time and distance that this necessitated, was threatened by new canals in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A series of shortcuts were constructed in the northern section, cutting the overall distance from 91 to 77½ miles by 1834. Traffic in the section south of Napton declined slightly, and this part became primarily for local traffic and coal, although cheese from the Midlands to London still travelled along this route.

The major threat to the canals was the railways. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening of the LNWR and the GWR. Tolls were dramatically reduced to ensure continuity, but deliveries requiring reliability rather than speed, such as coal, still travelled by narrowboat. Although the gross tonnage being carried increased slightly, the income of the canal gradually fell as the railways took hold.

The advent of the car, and the glut of second-hand military trucks after the First World War had a major impact on the remaining canals. Traffic reduced drastically, maintenance standards fell. By the time Tom Rolt began his campaign to restore the inland waterways, there was only one regular working boat on the Oxford Canal: a weekly coal boat. Rolt's 1944 work *Narrowboat* indicates that the canal was a lonely place, and that repairs had not been undertaken in some time, as locks were starting to come apart.

The Second World War gave the canal a reprieve, being put under the control of the Ministry of Transport. As an independent company, the Oxford Canal managed to exert some emergency maintenance works before being taken over in 1942.

The British Transport Commission was created after the war, and the Oxford Canal was nationalised in 1948. Due to its poor condition and lack of use, the commission deemed it as being worthy of closure in 1955.



*Weir rebuilt in 1940 [86]*

The British Transport Commission was broken up gradually in the late 1950's, and most inland navigation came under the control of the new British Waterways Board (BWB). The works of Tom Rolt and Charles Hadfield had brought the canals to the attention of the public, who were keen to retain them. After more reports, by the powers of the 1968 Transport Act, the waterways were officially divided into those considered to be mainly commercial and those considered to be 'cruiseways', 'to be principally available for cruising, fishing, and other recreational purposes'; the Oxford Canal, already popular with recreational boaters, was naturally placed in that latter category. Since then the Oxford Canal has continued to be one of the busiest and most popular cruiseways in the country, so much so that in high summer during times of low rainfall, water levels can become problematic due to the sheer number of boats using the locks.



*1960s postcard showing south of Somerton Deep Lock depicting the canal as picturesque*



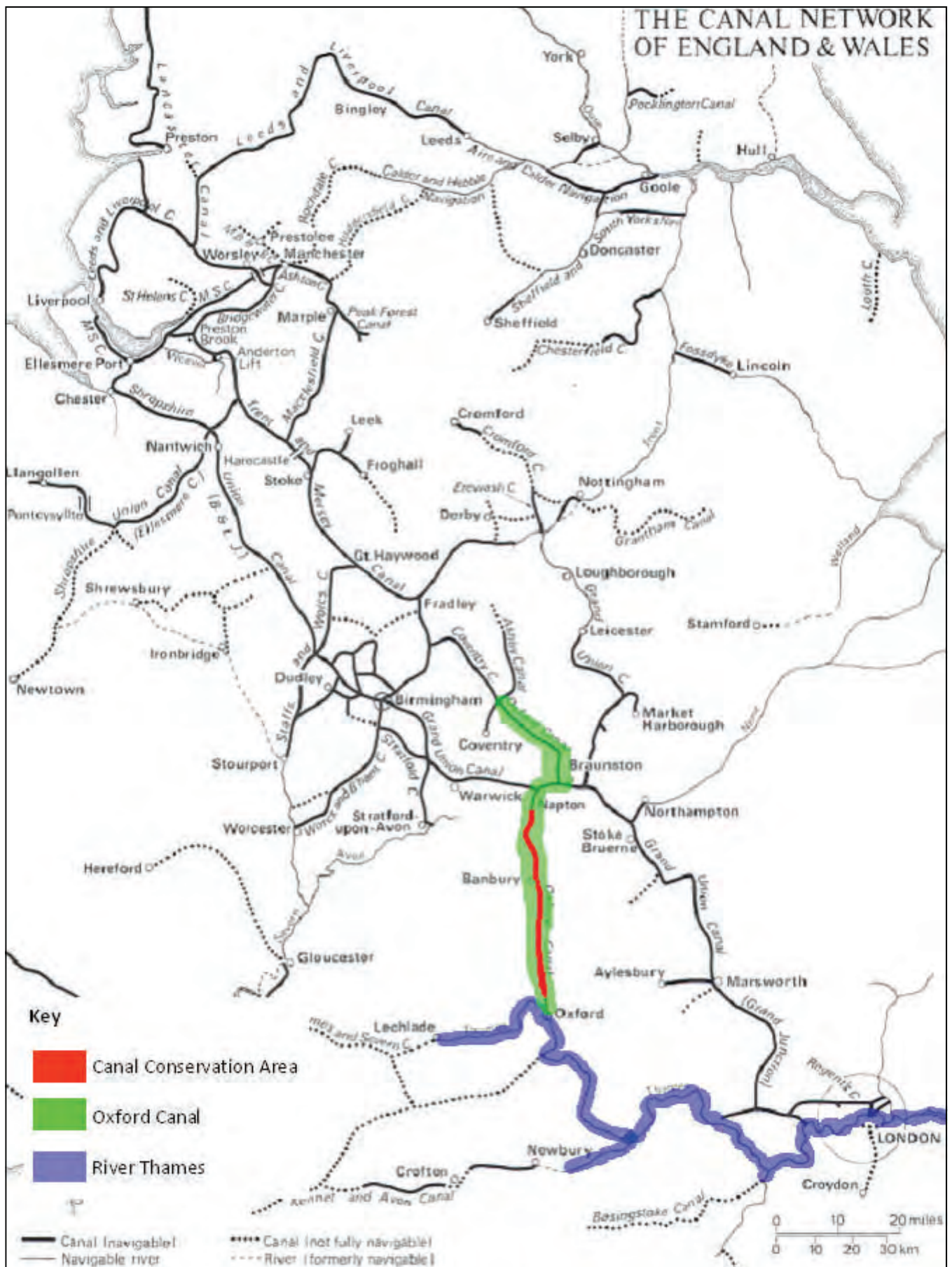


Fig. 6 The Canal Network of England and Wales at the end of the Grand Canal Project c.1790-1800

## 6. Architecture and Established Character of the Canal

### Engineering

6.1 As already stated, the Oxford Canal is a classic contour canal, utilising the existing landscape to minimise the amount of expensive engineering required in locks, cuttings, tunnels, embankments and aqueducts. It is one of the canals usually referred to in accounts of the historical development of canals.

6.2 All of Brindley's canals were of this type, due mainly to issues of costs rather than lack of engineering skills. He had demonstrated his engineering skills on earlier canals, such as the Bridgewater and the Trent & Mersey, and pioneered the construction of major aqueducts and tunnels. Even on the Oxford Canal, Brindley and his successors had constructed a major aqueduct at Brinklow and several tunnels; all of these, however, are on the Warwickshire section of the route, north of the conservation area.



*In several sections the towpath is on a bank between the canal and River Cherwell, as here near Enslow*

6.3 A meandering contour canal still required a great deal of engineering skill, in terms of choosing a level route and keeping it well supplied with water. Very rarely are no earthworks required. The Oxford Canal was mainly built on the sides of the valley, trying to avoid the flood plain as much as possible. As a result, the route lies across the slope, and a shallow terrace had to be formed for the canal.

6.4 This was achieved by digging into the upper part of the slope and using the spoil to build up the lower part, effectively creating a continuous embankment on the lower side. Throughout most of the route, the towpath runs along the top of the embankment, which appears to be built simply of re-deposited natural gravels and soil. This construction method has resulted in the towpath's inherent instability, requiring ongoing maintenance, which has not always succeeded in repairing the fault.



*Typical section of canal south from Nell Bridge: the towpath on the right is built up on a low embankment and the hedgerow is quite impervious*

6.5 There are no major engineering features along the canal, apart from those related with water supply and the adjacent river. In some quite long sections, the towpath runs along a tall embankment between the canal and the river below. Special engineering was required to raise the river level to match the canal on the level above Weir Lock (near Aynho); further south, the adaptation of the river for the navigation also proved challenging.

6.6 There are some sections of very shallow cuttings and some sections, such as at Clattercote in the north of the proposed conservation area, are on low raised embankments. However, the only significant cutting is just south of Somerton, and known to the company, perhaps ironically, as the Deep Cutting. Problems with the towpath through the cutting mean that the original canalside route has effectively been abandoned and it now climbs erratically up to and along the edge of the cutting instead.



## Water and Engineering

6.7 One of the core skills of a canal engineer was the utilisation of water. The canal had to provide ample depth of water throughout its length and throughout the year. At the same time, too much water could lead to considerable damage to the canal infrastructure.



*The ironically named 'Deep Cut' at Somerton*

6.8 This section of the Oxford Canal obtains most of its water from the Cherwell and its tributaries. The long summit level acted as a linear reservoir and was fed by several reservoirs; there was also a pumping engine near Napton on the Hill (Warkwickshire) with a navigable cut feeding the canal. Within the conservation area the summit level was fed by two feeders from reservoirs. A small pond near to Clattercote Priory was enlarged to create a larger reservoir; its owner, Thomas Cartwright, was one of the proprietors of the canal company. Curiously, the outlet stream from the reservoir seems to pass under the canal in a culvert and run into a larger tributary of the Cherwell.

6.9 To the east, another larger reservoir was built across the valley of that same tributary, close to the villages of Upper and Lower Boddington in Northamptonshire. The tributary still flowed from below the dam of the Boddington Reservoir on its natural course, but a separate feeder channel was carefully engineered to join the canal on the level just to the north of Claydon. Other streams have been diverted to join the canal on the level to the south of the summit, the most significant being the Hanwell Brook just north of Banbury, and the Souldern Brook south of Aynho.

6.10 In two places the Cherwell was directly 'tapped' for water. Above Aynho the river crossed the canal from east to west on an artificially created level; on the towpath side a high and long weir with sluices was formed to allow the river to drop back to its natural level, and the towpath crosses the top of this is a long brick bridge, presumably a later replacement for an earlier crossing. Immediately to the south of this crossing is Weir Lock, one of the unusual slender octagonal locks with a very shallow fall; some of the river water runs directly into the lock chamber, helping to feed the canal below it.



*Aynho Weir Lock*

6.11 For a mile, north of Shipton-on-Cherwell, the river Cherwell was adapted for navigation. The canal was locked down into the river at Baker's Lock and then left it again at Shipton Weir lock, the other shallow octagonal lock. Using the river in this manner helped with the water supply, but it caused problems for boats during times of flooding. Whilst maintaining sufficient depth of water in the canal was important, so was ensuring that it did not overflow and potential damage its banks. The by-washes around



*The towpath bridge over the Boddington Feeder north of Claydon looking south: it is probably original but not listed*

the locks help in this process, as do a series of other 'gauge' or overflow weirs spaced out at long and irregular intervals along the canal. These are usually, sited where the embanked towpath side of the canal is close to the river or one of its channels; some are on the offside.

6.12 Some of these overflow weirs and sluice systems now form a characteristic element in the canal-scape, though usually these appear to have been rebuilt in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the canal company; some are long, linear features along the side of the canal with culverts at their lower ends; others are more compact with both steps and sluices.

6.13 Because they are usually on the towpath side, most are protected by railings, generally of tubular steel rails threaded through cast concrete uprights, some of which are stamped 'OCC' – Oxford Canal Company. With the posts painted white and the rails black, they form an attractive part of the canal scene. One of the rebuilt sluice systems, to the south of King's Sutton, is dated 1940, indicating that improvements were being made in the emergency period at the start of the Second World War.

6.14 Relatively hidden elements of water management in the canal corridor are the many culverts taking streams beneath it; some of these may be original to the canal, but with their entrances usually repaired or rebuilt. Most are difficult to see because of vegetation and difficulties of access.



*Double arched culvert under the canal at the southern end of a shallow embankment near Clattercote*

## Locks

6.15 The development of the pound lock was one of the key breakthroughs in the development of canals, allowing far greater flexibility in their routes and allowing them to cross watersheds. The earliest forms known in England were built on the Exeter Canal in the 1560s. The standard lock with mitre gates had been well established by the time the Oxford Canal was constructed.



*Bourton Lock*

6.16 Locks allow the narrow boats to move up and down stream, coping with changes in water levels. The 'pound' is the stretch of water between the two lock gates, and rises and lowers as the water levels change to move the boat to the next section of the canal.



*Claydon Middle Lock, typical of those north of Banbury, with double gates at the tail*

6.17 Locks use a vast quantity of water. To minimise waste, they were made as narrow as possible, barely larger than the boats that use them. Due to its construction, the Oxford Canal uses only 28 locks which are well-spaced along its length, excepting the flight of five at Claydon.





*Varneys Lock, Cropredy*

6.18 The locks vary in their depth (the difference between the water levels at either end) considerably. The majority are 7-10 feet (2-3m); Somerton Deep is the greatest, at 12ft (3.6m), whereas the next lock north, Aynho Weir, is just 1ft (0.3m) deep.

6.19 The lock chambers are lined with brick and show the signs of being much-repaired. Some have stones set into the entrances to prevent damage to the remainder of the chamber. Due to continuous use, ongoing maintenance and repair, 20th century concrete and brick can be seen throughout the canal as patch-repairs. For the most part, this was due to reasons of economy and speed to enable the canal to keep functioning in its present role.

6.20 The wooden lock gates are standard ones with balance beams, the long arms projecting over the towpath which help to manoeuvre the gates and balance them in their sockets. All have single gates at their heads (upstream), but whilst the locks down from the summit level as far as Banbury Lock have double gates at their tails (downstream), further south the tail gates are singles. This is presumably related to the gap in the construction of the southern extension of the line, and the more limited resources available.

6.21 The locks have paired ground paddles (sluices in the chamber walls) at the head above the top gates, all the gearing being on concrete posts that probably relate to a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century refurbishment. The lower gates have gate paddles.

6.22 Most of the locks have bypass weirs (by-washes) on the offside, usually open but with a few partly culverted. The by-wash at Grant's Lock, south of Banbury, seems to go under the lock-keeper's cottage, and that at Claydon Top Lock at the northern end of the area possibly once powered a waterwheel associated with the blacksmith's shop at the company's small repair works.

6.23 Where there are bridges across the tails of the locks, there are usually steps down to the towpath as well as a horse ramp on the towpath side, and boarding steps to canal level on the offside. The retention of these features is a neat touch to remind users of the canal's historic association with horse power.



*Banbury Lock*



*The tail of Somerton Deep showing the single lock gates of locks south of Banbury*



*Somerton Deep is one of the few locks to have a lock keeper's cottage*

6.24 Whilst only seven of the locks in the proposed conservation area retain their lock-keeper's cottages, most have some form of rectangular enclosure spanning both sides of the canal. To the north of Banbury these are often walled in the local ironstone, contrasting with the otherwise ubiquitous brick used for construction elsewhere on this section of the canal.

6.25 At Claydon Top Lock is a collection of canal company maintenance buildings, possibly original, and there is also a large warehouse on the offside at King's Sutton Lock. Many other ancillary buildings by the locks, such as stabling or stores, are either ruinous or have been demolished.

6.26 The unusually shaped octagonal locks at Aynho Weir and Shipton Weir are much wider than others on the canal, and are the shallowest locks on the main line. This is probably to do with their shallow falls and because they are positioned immediately below where the canal and the Cherwell meet on the level. Above Aynho Weir the river crosses the canal, and Shipton Weir marks the point where the canal diverges from the river again after being part of it for about a mile. The additional area allowed for by the shape of these locks presumably ensured an adequate amount of water would be available for the next pound as boats locked through them, and also may have acted as a safety reservoir in times of high river levels.

6.28 The lock on the Duke's Cut link to the Thames north of Wolvercot has single gates at either end but there is some evidence also to indicate that there was a third gate a few metres up from the tail gate, presumably designed to deal with shorter craft to save water. The lock was designed to rise or fall either way depending on river levels.

6.29 The locks are numbered from the start of the canal in Warwickshire and all are named. Their origin of their names, like those of the bridges, are either geographical or relate to some family or individual; whilst most of these people were probably local farmers, it is quite probably that some were long-serving lock-keepers.



## Bridges

6.30 One of the most important defining features of the Oxford Canal are its bridges. The lift bridges in fields have become the iconic symbols of the canal, despite being built as cheaply as possible to save money. The bridges distinguish the canal from the similarly sized and equally winding River Cherwell in open views of the valley. Along the route of the conservation area there are only a handful of bridges across the river that pre-date the construction of the M40, yet there were ninety-five built across the canal.

6.31 Across a river, bridging points were generally dictated by geographical factors, such as the existence of a ford, or an area of shallows. Quite often these natural river crossing points would influence the lines of prehistoric trackways and later routes and possibly attract settlement; a bridge would then seem a sensible improvement. In the Cherwell valley, however, most settlements are sited well above the flood plain and away from the river. A canal, as well as being a transport artery in its own right, can become an obstacle to existing routes, together with splitting up established fields. It was the responsibility of the canal companies to rectify the matter by building the necessary bridges to maintain the course of a road or path and to provide enough 'accommodation bridges' to link the fields on either side.

6.32 On the Oxford Canal, the bridges were either fixed bridges of brick or stone, or moveable timber lift-bridges. As the canal was passing through generally flattish fields, the bridges needed to allow adequate head room over the 'cut' and the towpath to allow the boats and their tow horses through. Ramps were needed at either side of the crossing to achieve this.



*Diminutive lock tail bridge at Allen's Lock, Upper Heyford*



*Lift bridge 170, Banbury*

6.33 Typically, to save costs, the canal was narrowed at the bridging point, and the bridges were also usually built to cross at right-angles to it, no matter what the alignment of any existing road or track; this allowed the bridges to be smaller, if more 'hump-backed', thus saving on costs. The resulting narrow 'bridge-hole' was also a convenient place at which to close off a section of the canal with stop-planks slotted into vertical grooves in the sides of the canal bank for maintenance or following an accidental leak.



*High Bush Bridge, between Lower Heyford and Northbrook*

6.34 This simple type of canal bridge had been perfected by Brindley on his earlier canals, and no doubt was the type of structure which the builders of the first part of the Oxford Canal were trained how to build when taken to look at canal construction in Staffordshire. The 'hump-backed' masonry bridges were mostly of a similar design; each consisted of a single arch, usually segmental but sometimes elliptical, protected by a drip-mould. The wing walls of the abutments were built with a slight inward 'batter' and curved slightly outwards to terminal pilasters.

6.35 Most of these fixed bridges were built of brick, which was a reasonably cheap and available material. Just under a third of them were built instead of locally quarried stone, and three are mainly iron. Excluding the railway bridges and the modern road bridges, there are 54 fixed bridges across the canal in the conservation area.



*Langford Lane (Bridge 224)*

6.36 Although it is possible that the bridge bricks were made in local kilns such as at Twyford Wharf, it is more likely that the majority of these were made in Warwickshire and transported down the canal. The bricks are mainly hand-made but most of these bridges have been patched, repaired and in some cases, effectively rebuilt. There is a mixture of grey-blue bricks and drip moulds for the arches, and repairs undertaken in hand- and machine-made engineering brick. It is possible that some burnt-ended headers were used for effect in the original brickwork; however, most of these appear to be the result of later patch repairs. Similarly, it is possible that many of the present brick coping stones to the bridge parapets are replacements. It seems that where there is a broad projecting band course, roughly following the angle of the main bridge deck between the top of the arch and the base of the parapets, this is also probably the result of repair or rebuild, the brickwork often being of the grey-blue sort.

6.37 The stone bridges were presumably built of locally derived stone and probably indicate separate build contracts for individual lengths of the canal. These are faced in well-coursed rubblestone but generally have ashlar springers and voussoirs beneath a drip-mould; their arches are topped by simple but elegant ashlar keystones. None of the stone bridges have a band course at deck level beneath the parapets.



*Relatively poor stonework at Yarnton (Bridge 228)*



*Better quality stonework: relatively unaltered of bridge 207 near Heyford Wharf*

6.38 In general, the stone bridges seem to have lasted better than the brick ones, and have suffered less repair and rebuilding. However, the various repairs to the brick bridges do form part of their architectural character. In contrast, the concrete rendering of several bridges, probably dating from the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, does detract from their aesthetic appeal and such treatment cannot be good for the long term survival of their brickwork.





*Allen's Lock (Bridge 204), Upper Heyford*

6.39 Some bridges deviate from the general built form. There are two bridges across the tails of locks which are too narrow to accommodate a towpath: one, in stone, at Nell's Bridge Lock (Bridge 187) and the other, in brick, at Allen's Lock (Bridge 204). North of Banbury, the unnamed Bridge 149 crosses the canal at an angle and has an elliptical arch. To achieve this angle of direction, the brick arch is a 'skew arch', which requires much more careful and expensive brickwork. The outward ends of the skew brickwork are expressed in the stepping out of the courses of the voussoirs (wedge-shaped stone forming the arch curve).



*Bridge 149, Cropredy*



*Abutments of former lift bridge 169, south of Banbury*



*Lift bridge 193 in the raised position  
½ mile (800m) from Somerton Deep Lock*

6.40 It is the lift-bridges or draw-bridges on the southern Oxford Canal give it much of its visual and architectural character. Whilst picturesque features within the landscape, they were not popular with the working boats; because they were once quite vital to the farmers and other local people, they were usually left in the 'down' position, which meant that boat crews had to spend a great deal of their time dealing with them. A large number of them were removed between the 1950s and 70s. Now the surviving ones are generally left open due to modern agricultural practices and canal usage. Together they form the largest collection of such bridges surviving in the country. Within the conservation area there are 18 surviving lift bridges, clear evidence of 11 others, and possible indications of two more.

6.41 The most northerly on the canal (Bridge 141) is a few yards outside the boundary of the conservation area, in Warwickshire, but close enough to impact upon it visually. There are the abutments of two removed bridges to the north of Banbury and a replaced modern version above the town's lock, but the rest are all on the part of the canal extended southwards at the end of the 1780's.

6.42 There are many different types of drawbridges and the Oxford Canal's are quite distinct. Typically the canal was narrowed at the bridge into a brick or stone lined bridge hole to save costs. The bridge consists of a timber-framed boarded deck attached to a diagonal pair of heavy balance beams extending over the offside abutments. In addition, there are iron rods on either side of the bridge and a fairly ephemeral railing. Beneath the beams and attached to the top of the abutments are interlocking segments of cast-iron gearing. Normally, the weight of the beams ensures that the bridge deck is in the 'up' position.



*Bridge 189 [94]*

6.43 The lift bridge design is very simple but quite effective, and visually distinctive, especially when the bridges are well maintained and painted in the corporate black and white colour scheme. They do require periodic replacements, a process often neglected for as long as possible in the period before the waterway began to flourish again. The bridge by Banbury Lock was removed in 1975 but replaced by a modern hydraulically operated one when the Castle Quay shopping centre was built. The modern lift bridge at Thrupp is electric powered. Mill Lane Bridge in Lower Heyford is a modern version made of aluminium which replaced an earlier iron version installed early in the 20th century.

6.44 Complete bridge replacements are rare; where bridges have proven to be inadequate for modern traffic, the majority have been widened or bypassed. At Lower Heyford and Nell's Bridge a new bridge has been added immediately alongside the older one and the original bridge at Enslow Wharf has been bypassed completely.

6.45 Most of the bridges have names, the origins of which are often unknown, but usually relate to villages on the route, as well as the names of local farms and families from the past. None have name plates, but virtually all of the surviving bridges have cast iron bridge plates of historical style but of unknown date.

6.46 The numbering sequence in use begins at the northern end of the canal but appears not to be the original one. It generally ignores railway bridges, so may predate the construction of the railways; it also seems to ignore the shortening of the northern end of the canal in the 1830's, and was certainly in use by the 1880's and the first editions of the large scale Ordnance Survey maps.



*Earlier numbering scheme evident in the key stone of bridge 206*

6.47 Modern bridges have numbers in the sequence, usually suffixed by an A. Usually, it is the bridge after an existing one that gets this suffix: a new bridge after Bridge No.123 would be given the number 123A. However, in several cases the bridge numbering on the Oxford Canal is awry, with a number and suffix assigned to a bridge in front, rather than after, in the sequence.

6.48 Some of the brick bridges have inset stone plaques which may have related to earlier bridge numbering. Two original stone bridges, separated now by a railway bridge, are Lower Heyford (Bridge No.206) and Cleeve Bridge (Bridge No.207); they have the numbers 7 and 8 respectively carefully carved into their keystones. Similarly, at least two other bridges seem to have remnants of carved three figure numbers beginning '15' in their keystones. Most keystones, however, are too weathered to have any surviving numbers.



6.49 Other more unusual bridges include a much repaired but original one (Bridge 142) across the main feeder from the Boddington Reservoir; the unusual brick-built viaduct of several arches taking the towpath across the Cherwell where it crosses on the level above Weir Lock near Aynho; the rather elegant Nadkey Bridge (Bridge 172) which was rebuilt with brick abutments, a shallow segmental arched deck, supported on cast-iron girders, and iron hand rails; and the elegant arched steel of Horse Bridge (Bridge 217), presumably a replica of an earlier one, across the Cherwell where it joins the canal below Baker's Lock. It was built in 1907



*Nadkey Bridge 175*

6.50 There are also other bridges of varying types across the canal, including several railway bridges, mainly of very simple steel girder construction. In all cases the present girders and the decking date to 20<sup>th</sup> century improvements, but parts of the brick-faced abutments are primary to the construction of the railway line. There are some elegant mid-1930's rubble-faced but concrete road bridges on the northern outskirts of Oxford across the canal and the city's northern by-pass crosses it and the adjacent railway line of a tall and airy reinforced concrete viaduct. The M40 bridges of the late-1980's are far more utilitarian structures. Modern pedestrian bridges occur mainly in Banbury, associated with the modern shopping centre.



*Drinkwaters's Bridge 231: a replacement of the original*



*Bridge 202, Upper Heyford [119]*



*M40 bridge north of Banbury [46]*



*Shipton lift bridge in the closed position*

## The Architectural Style of the Canal

6.51 Excluding structures such as bridges and locks, the buildings along the line of the canal that are directly related to it vary in design and there is no sense of a company house style. This absence of a corporate design is typical of the early canals, which were functional rather than stylish modes of transport. They were built to carry goods and reduce carriage costs; passengers were extremely rare and it was only with the arrival of the railways in the 1830's and 40's that corporate styles for transport concerns became desirable.



*Cottages at Thrupp*

6.52 Some of the canal buildings on the line of the Oxford Canal, such as the stone-built cottages on the canalside at Thrupp, were probably already standing and simply acquired by the company. New buildings were confined mainly to a handful of lock keepers' cottages and some wharfage buildings. The majority of these were built in brick with simple detailing and functional plan forms.

6.53 Six lock keepers' cottages survive. Apart from the cottage at the junction between the canal and the Duke's Cut, the others are built parallel to the lock chambers on the towpath or offside as dictated, presumably, by the lie of the land. All of the cottages are brick with a plain gabled slated roof. The exception is the one at King's Sutton, which has an original stone façade. Individual detailing varies, though apart from King's Sutton, all have dentilled eaves; windows are usually timber casements, window heads vary in design, including segmental heads and flat arches of rubbed brick, and some cottages have first-floor band courses and others do not. They have been altered slightly over the years: a few have been extended, one rendered and another painted white. The evidence suggests that, despite



*The stone faced brick cottage at King's Sutton Lock*

slight differences in detail, they were all built to a simple and similar plan. Each seems to have started off as a plain two-bay plan with similar accommodation on two floors. At ground floor level there was a doorway and a single window in the front elevation, with two matching windows above. Each had a chimney stack at one gable end.

6.54 The two cottages at Somerton Deep and the Duke's Cut were built to a slightly higher quality of design than the other ones, but only in that they had windows with chamfered brick surrounds and vaguely Tudor Gothic four-centred heads. Apart from the cottages at King's Sutton and the Duke's Cut locks, the others were extended by one bay, leaving the original doorway in the centre of a symmetrical three-bay facade. Additional outbuildings have also been added to the rear and side of some of the cottages, but their basic character remains intact despite some decorative finishes.

6.55 These cottages are of fairly humble design, and built using the typical local materials. However, they did have a simple regularity of scale that would have set them slightly apart from the local farm buildings, especially given their direct association with the canal. There are small groups of buildings at other places along the canal, usually at the wharfs.



*The lock keepers cottage at Little Bourton, little altered since being extended (single storey to the right)*



6.56 The wharfs were built both by the canal company and by private stakeholders. Their layout often seems to utilise and reinforce pre-canal property boundaries. For example, at the former Langford Lane wharf by Kidlington occupies a triangular plot of land between the canal and the lane and the buildings are laid out along the edges of the available space; its position on the towpath side could be related to the availability of land, or the fact that the wharf also served the small town of Woodstock, a few miles to the west.



*The cottages at Kidlington Wharf*

6.57 At Langford Lane, the buildings are mainly of rubblestone and include a terrace of two-storey cottages, originally thatched but rebuilt after a fire with lower-pitched slate roofs. Similarly, at Thrupp, the main canal settlement in the proposed conservation area, most of the buildings are of rubblestone as well, though some clearly pre-date the canal itself and were associated with the large formerly manorial farm and mill.

6.58 Other canalside buildings were also evidently in existence before the canal and many of these were never taken over by it, especially the several farms and a couple of mills close to it. In some cases, a new building has been added by or near the canal within an existing farmstead to take advantage of it.

6.59 The best surviving wharf is that at Cropredy, which retains many of its buildings as well as its basic layout, still partly walled. This has the one building of architectural extravagance surviving on this section of the canal: the three-bay brick-built and hip-roofed wharf house, which retains a bay window extension overlooking the cut. It is possible that this building might also have spent a short time as the Navigation Inn. There is a surviving gateway to the wharf to the south, built or rebuilt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as other brick buildings probably once used for



*Aynho Wharf*

stabling and warehousing. It now retains its links with the canal by being used in part by a local canoe club.

6.60 The busiest traditional wharves are at Aynho, Lower Heyford, Enslow and Thrupp. These retain a handful of much altered older buildings but have been modernised to meet the requirements of a 'cruiseway'. Thrupp is the most canal-orientated settlement on the route and has an interesting collection of buildings of varying dates, both pre- and post-dating the canal. Some of the former commercial buildings appear to have been adapted for residential use; all are distinctly vernacular in character and mostly built of the local rubblestone.

6.61 There are also occasional canalside buildings built or adapted for smaller and more isolated wharves along its route. At Twyford, for example, there are surviving remains of large brick kilns that could date to the early days of the canal. At the diminutive Souldern Wharf the farm probably predates the canal but there is a small warehouse building on the offside with a 'taking-in' doorway at water level that clearly is associated with it. A good group of simple canal buildings survives at Claydon Top Lock; there is no lock-keeper's cottage, but on the offside is a collection of maintenance buildings, including the former forge, still in use.



*Cropredy Wharf*

## Minor Historic Features

6.62 Unfortunately, few minor historic features such as mooring rings, rubbing strakes on bridges, or historic signage remain along the canal. This is likely to be due to the low-key maintenance programme contrasting with over 200 years of constant use.

6.63 Five stone milestones or mile-markers were identified in the conservation area. Others may be awaiting rediscovery under vegetation. The markers were all plain rectangular stone uprights with indents to take the missing cast-iron mileage plates; these were fixed with four leaded dowels and the indents for these survive. Milemarkers were a commercial feature of the canal, as most cargoes would be charged by the mile. Where they do survive, they are an important reminder of the canal's commercial history.

6.64 Bridges seem not to have been fitted with iron or timber strakes to prevent too much wear on the corners of the masonry in the bridge arch. This may be because most bridges were on fairly straight sections of the canal, although the large extent of brick repairs to the bridge arches in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century could have removed much of the damage caused by towropes; similarly, relatively limited traffic and the use of powered craft in the 20th century may have led to little additional wear.



*Surviving milestone: devoid of its plate*



*Distance marker*

6.65 The canal boundary is usually marked by a thick and overgrown hedge on the towpath side and often left open on the offside. In some sections the towpath hedge has been replaced by modern fencing, or removed completely. There is evidence of stone walls at many of the locks, often repaired in brick. Much of the fencing around weirs is 20th century steel tubular rail threaded through concrete posts. On the towpath there are triangular sectioned cast-iron posts embedded into the ground, usually 200 yards on either side of a lock or flight of locks. These have the letters 'DIS' cast into them, short for 'distance'. Whoever passed the marker first on the approach to the lock had priority over a boat coming the other way; this seems to have applied initially to the faster 'fly boats' who paid higher tolls. It is unclear what date these posts are but they could date to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

6.66 Within Banbury, much of the older towpath boundary is made up of fragments of brick wall, though this is incomplete and virtually removed entirely north of Bridge Street. On much of the offside, private and public wharves ran down to the canal bank and there are some remnants of brick boundary walls between them.



*A mix of old and new features at Cropredy*





*A handful of commercial boats still ply the canal*

### Canal Craft

6.67 Whilst the tranquillity of the broader setting and the intrinsic historic interest of its infrastructure are both very important elements of its character and significance, it is the boats that use it that give the canal its purpose. The days of horse-drawn and later powered working boats have long gone, although there are a handful of narrowboats that do provide services and goods along the canal. These are mainly for other boat users, except for the 'cheese boat' which can often be seen tied up in Banbury. There are also occasional maintenance boats to be seen.

6.68 Two main types of craft now use the canal, virtually indistinguishable as their functions are interchangeable. These are the cruising craft, the majority of which are hired, and the semi-permanent or permanent 'live-aboards'. Both craft are usually residential designs based on the parameters of the traditional working narrowboats of the past. The main difference is the variety of colour schemes and individual touches in the individually owned boats. There are, of course, smaller craft and day craft as well, including kayaks and canoes, mainly in the summer months.



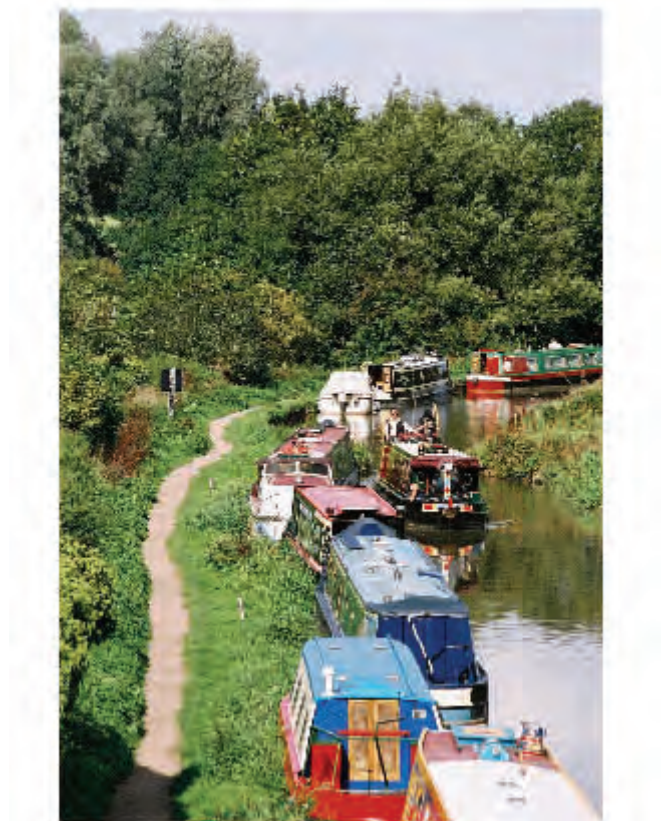
*The canal at Cropredy is still a hive of boating activity*



*A British Waterways dumb barge with a balance beam for a lock on board*



*Live-aboards at Thrupp*



*The colourful boats contrast with the vegetation*



## Key Views

6.69 In a more typical Conservation Area, the identification of key views is an important part of any appraisal. In this linear Conservation Area, the views into and out of the canal zone are virtually endless where there is no towpath hedge or woodland.

6.70 In the rural sections, the natural view points along the canal itself are up and down the canal. Such views, usually framed by a hedge on one side and open country on the other, can be very rewarding, and there is usually a good focal point to the view. This can often be one of the main bridges, or even a simple bend in the line of the cut, and there is always the hope of seeing a moving narrowboat.

6.71 Where there is public access across them, the bridges over the canal offer the opportunities for views into the distinctive, almost secretive, world of the canal from the wider world beyond its banks. Conversely, there are views from bridge parapets out from the canal and over any hedgerows. Often there is a gateway in the towpath hedge even at accommodation bridges, again allowing views through.



*Lift bridge 186 close to Nell's Bridge Lock*



*Views of the canal incorporate the towpath, hedges and open countryside beyond*



6.72 Away from such bridges views from the line of the canal vary, mainly according to the condition of the towpath hedge. For much of the length, the quickset hedge is tall, overgrown and impenetrable, even in winter when it loses most of its leaves.

6.73 Just occasionally, there are sections of towpath where there is either no hedge at all or a lower modern fence, and the views across the valley are then panoramic, matching those usually prevailing over the offside bank. The longest stretch without a towpath hedge is from the bridge at Souldern Wharf (Bridge 192) to south of Heyford Common lock.



*Langford Lane Wharf, Kidlington, with live-aboard narrowboats and a former canal outbuilding*



6.74 There is a succession of fine views on the offside of the canal throughout, apart from some sections that are well wooded. As well as the wider view there are interesting features closer to the bank, especially, in the northern section of the conservation area, the large areas of medieval ridge and furrow. Generally, the views to either side of the canal in the rural areas are terminated in the distance by the higher ground of the valley sides, but they can be extensive where there are no trees or tall scrub in the way. The distance depends on the position of the canal from the valley sides as it meanders down the valley trying to keep to the same contour for as long as possible.

6.75 Whilst most of the villages along the route of the canal lie well away from it and the flood plain, occasionally their chimneys and roof tops can be seen, the latter mainly covered in slate and tile but with the occasional ones with thatch or Stonesfield slate tilestones. Occasionally, church towers form viewpoints in the scenery, such as those of the Heyfords or Somerton especially, though none can match the spire of King's Sutton church on the Northamptonshire side of the county boundary. A less attractive landmark of similar dominance is the tall chimney of the redundant and semi-ruinous cement works near Enslow.

6.76 Apart from where public roads or paths cross the canal, views into the canal zone are less distinctive or remarkable. For most of its route, the line of the canal is very indistinct from the surrounding landscape, usually seen as just another hedgerow in a well-hedged valley. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the canal from the equally sluggish and meandering River Cherwell. It is only the regular procession of bridges interrupting the hedge line that helps to pick out the canal – and especially the distinctive black-and-white painted lift bridges.



*View to the church at Kings Sutton*



*Peace and tranquillity of the rural landscape (above) sits well with the pace of daily life on the canal (below)*



## Landscapes and Biodiversity

6.77 Much of the length of the Oxford Canal is rich in aquatic and waterside flora and fauna and the route of the Oxford Canal has considerable biodiversity value. These have national, regional and local levels of protection. At a national level there are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), with a variety of designations both statutory and non-statutory along the entire length of the canal.



*Fauna near Somerton*

6.78 In the southern section the Oxford Canal passes into the Oxford Green Belt. The Green Belt designation is land which is protected in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (Sec. 9) in order to check unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas, safeguard the countryside from encroachment (neighbouring towns merging), preserve the setting and character of historic towns, and assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. The protection of the Green Belt helps to create popular areas for people to access the countryside and enjoy the quiet and solitude away from lively towns whilst acting to help protect the character and appearance of the Oxford Canal.

6.79 The Oxford Canal runs through a very attractive, largely rural landscape which was designated an Area of High Landscape Value in the Cherwell Local Plan (1996). This is a non-statutory designation which the Proposed Submission Cherwell Local Plan 2012 proposes to replace with a more general policy which seeks to conserve and enhance the character of the wider landscape. The particular value of the Oxford Canal and its setting is recognised in the supporting text.



*Riverbank vegetation near Cropredy*

6.80 Of particular significance to the Conservation Area is the Conservation Target Area (CTA) which identifies the most important areas for wildlife conservation in Oxfordshire and where targeted conservation will have the greatest benefit in the delivery of the Oxford Biodiversity Action Plan (2006). The Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxfordshire is hosted by Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum (ONCF). Initiatives which constitute part of the delivery of the CTA may be considered part of the mechanism to promote the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Areas character and appearance.

6.81 In addition, due to its location along the River Cherwell Valley and its aquatic and rural character the canal zone is host to a number of protected species.



*The farming landscape is apparent when seeing the canal in its wider context*



## Positive & Negative Factors

### Positive Contributors

6.82 Because the proposed Conservation Area is tightly focussed on the canal itself, virtually every structure directly or indirectly associated with it makes an impact and a contribution to the area and its setting. It is preferred that these are protected, especially in the less altered rural stretches. The more modern structures make less of a positive impact than their more historic counterparts, but they are still a contributory factor in the canal's history.



*Tarver's Bridge*

### Bridges

6.83 All the bridges on the canal make a positive contribution to it, whether or not they have any intrinsic historical or architectural value. This is because each bridge represents the interface between the canal and other forms of transport as well as the historic divisions of earlier field systems. In addition, each bridge is a focal point for views along the line of the canal.

6.84 Many of the bridges are of intrinsic historical value and many are listed; some others are not due to their lack of national significance. The remainder will have a degree of protection from the conservation area designation, making them part of a designated heritage asset. Some examples stand out as being candidates for a local register of undesigned heritage assets, such as the 1930's road bridges near Kidlington, which are striking features and exemplar versions of their type in this area.

### Engineering Infrastructure

6.85 All of the engineering infrastructure of the canal is of intrinsic historical importance as part of this pioneering piece of civil engineering, no matter how much they have required repair and maintenance over the past two and a half centuries. With this designation, it is hoped that more sympathetic maintenance could be sought for those structures which have suffered.



*Aynho Lock elevated towpath*

### The Rural Setting

6.86 It is accepted that the original character of the canal has been lost, due to its change from an industrial carriageway to a leisurely cruiseway. However, the rural setting of most of the canal and the intimate relationship between it and the River Cherwell also positive factors that enhance the conservation area. Apart from a derelict cement factory, the ongoing flood prevention scheme, and the M40, there is little in the setting that harms the current character of the canal.

## Negative Contributors

6.87 Identifying negative factors can be problematic, as those factors are already in existence. Therefore, they could be thought of as areas for improvement.

### Rural Sections

6.88 The rural sections of the canal are relatively tranquil and pass through countryside scenery. Occasionally the canal passes historic villages constructed in a local architectural style and through already designated conservation areas. The architecture and engineering are all 'low key', matching the typical and non-dramatic scenery of the Cherwell valley.

6.89 There are few buildings that seriously detract from the character of the canal, apart from the derelict cement factory to the south of Enslow. The concrete repairs to many of the original brick bridges does detract from their appearance. Other buildings require simple yet regular maintenance to bring them up to an acceptable standard, and would then be considered to be positive features.



*Town Hall wharf, Banbury - in need of some maintenance*

6.90 The main negative factor is noise from the traffic on the M40 motorway. The earthworks of the motorway are now fairly matured and have been colonised by vegetation, meaning the scale of the engineering is not really visible from within the proposed conservation area, except at the bridges. However, during most of the day the incessant roar of its traffic seriously impacts on the tranquillity of the valley, especially from just north of Banbury to a mile or so to the south of Somerton.

## Urban

6.91 The historic character of the canal zone within Banbury has already been largely eradicated to the north of Bridge Street and fragmented to the south of it. The main negative factor in the southern section is the poor condition of many of the surviving buildings and the unwelcoming nature of the towpath.

### The Condition of the Tow Path

6.92 The towpath of the Oxford Canal has been causing concern for many years but British Waterways (BWB) have made real efforts to improve it in the last 20 or 30 years. However, the path is built up on a fairly unstable embankment in parts and can be very muddy and uneven. It is unsuitable in many stretches for bikes, and use of bikes could, in fact, make matters worse.



*The informal nature of the towpath is a visual asset but in practical terms this can reduce its usability in adverse weather conditions*



## Potential Threats

### Tow Path Repairs

6.93 The towpath requires constant maintenance and there could be a wish to rectify matters more permanently. However, the only way this could be done would be to create a hard standing with a metalled, tarmac or gravelled surface. Whilst such surfaces are acceptable for the sections of moorings, such as on the Thrupp Wide, in the rest of the rural stretches of the canal they would be obtrusive and impact adversely on the 'soft engineering' character of the canal.

### Rural Residential

6.94 Pressure for development is a constant threat to any rural area, which has to balance the requirements of local people and potential new residents against the appearance of the area. Whilst potential development would mainly involve the existing settlements along the route, which are usually at a distance from the canal itself, there may still be pressure for developments at 'brown field' sites nearer to the canal, such as the industrial units at Enslow Wharf, the former concrete factory near Enslow, and several areas near to Kidlington. All development should be carefully considered against the existing policies at both councils.

### Urban Development

6.95 It is assumed that there will be more potential for development in Banbury, especially opposite the Castle Quay centre and in the area to the south of Bridge Street, both immediately adjacent to the canal. The northern approach of the canal into the town still retains its historic and semi-rural atmosphere, and is well used by walkers, cyclists and boaters, providing access to the local parks and countryside. Any potential development should be restricted to the west side of the canal in this section. Redevelopment of the southern section should ideally be aimed at revitalising the area. However, careful high-quality design solutions would be required to prevent pastiche or warehouse-type structures which are often typical of redeveloped waterfronts.



*View south from Somerton Deep showing the decayed state of the towpath*

### Development of Marinas

6.96 There are several successful marinas on this section of the canal, catering for the growing needs of recreational boating. Two of these, at Aynho Wharf and Lower Heyford, are fairly large and in a rural setting, but they have no adverse impact on the character of the canal. Similarly, there are also some smaller ones on the line that are also more positive than negative in their impact. It is strongly suggested that any future development of marinas in the rural areas be very carefully designed and quite limited in their capacity. Otherwise they will be obtrusive and inappropriate. It is further recommended that large marina development should be within urban areas, such as Banbury or Kidlington.

### Restoration

6.97 There is a danger that the ongoing philosophy of repairs to the canal infrastructure and its buildings, presently undertaken on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, could change. The danger of restoration as opposed to repair is that it can be potentially damaging to the appearance of the area if undertaken in an inappropriate manner. The Oxford Canal has never had a real house style that can be recreated, excepting its simplicity of form. Over its life time there has seldom been adequate resources to undertake comprehensive repairs to any of its structures. This fact is a key element in the distinctive appearance of this particular waterway and ideally this simplistic and traditional form of preservation should be encouraged above the comprehensive remodelling of the canal.

## 7. Route Assessment

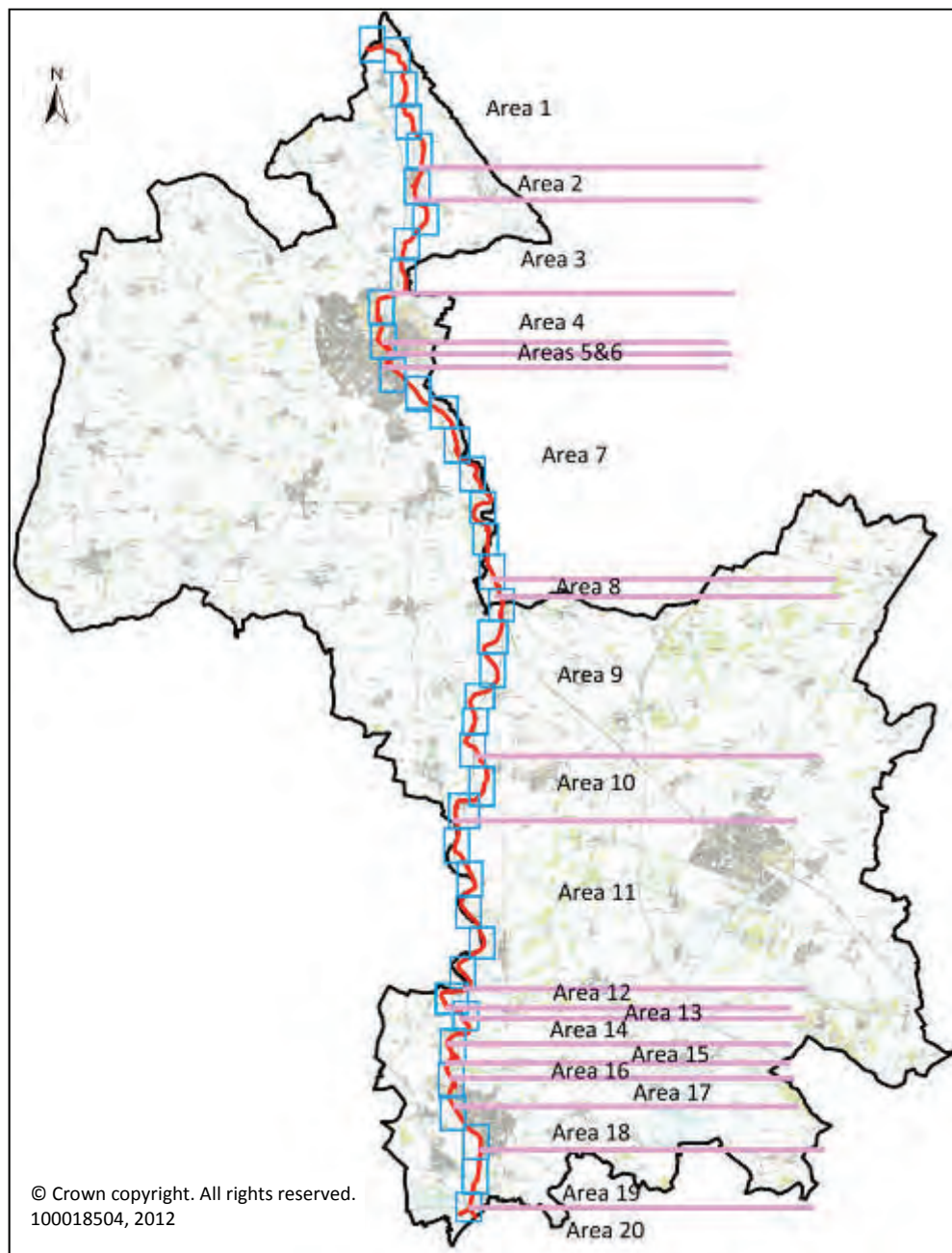


Fig. 7 Route Assessment map with locations of map sections

### 7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The conservation area is a long winding zone that starts high up on the watershed between the tributaries of the Thames to the south and the Warwickshire Avon to the north. It mainly runs down the valley of the River Cherwell and ends in the northern suburbs of Oxford, in the low-lying meadows by an arm of the River Thames. Apart from passing through Banbury, it is almost entirely rural, and indeed, quite isolated, until it meets the outer suburbs of Oxford. For much of the route, the general character of the canal and its setting is very

similar, with just some subtle variations; this consistency and calm within the landscape of the route forms a very important part of its distinctiveness.

7.1.2 The canal is punctuated by bridges along its length. Due to the linear nature of the designation, the views along the canal towards the next bridge are key elements of the conservation area, especially from a boat or on the towpath.



## 7.2 Route Assessment Area 1: Boundary Bridge (Bridge 141) to ex-Bridge 151, north of Cropredy

7.2.1 The northern end of the area is about 120m above sea level and starts near the canal's summit level. This is in the northernmost tip of Oxfordshire, less than a mile from where it and the adjacent counties of Warwickshire and Northamptonshire meet.

7.2.2 Despite the height above sea level and the fact this is the canal's summit level, it runs in a fairly flattish area bounded by taller hills to either side – Stoneton to the north-east and Windmill Hill to the south-west – giving the impression that it is in a valley setting. Historically, this provides one of the easiest crossings through the Cotswolds ridge.

7.2.3 The focal point at this end of the proposed conservation area is the first of the distinctive lift bridges for which the Oxford Canal is renowned, although Boundary Bridge (No.141) is actually just a few yards over the county boundary in Warwickshire.



*Positive landmark: Boundary Bridge in Warwickshire*

7.2.4 The canal passes fairly close to the village of Claydon, which is not visible from the canal; this sets a precedent for the rest of the conservation area, as the sinuous line of the canal generally stays away from the villages. The occasional sound of a train on the main line between Oxford and Birmingham can be heard, and the line is a constant companion to the canal throughout due to the similar land gradients required for both.



*Positive landmark: Tow path bridge over leat*

7.2.5 Close to Claydon, the canal drops down over 30 feet (9 metres) from its summit level in the leisurely Claydon flight of five locks. At the top lock is a small canal workshop, housed in buildings that could date back to the late-18th century and the construction of the canal. There are also ruins of stabling, but no lock-keeper's cottage.



*Positive landmark: workshop at Claydon Top Lock*

7.2.6 Above Elkington's Lock is a small boatyard on the offside with an inlet, a large covered dry-dock, a brick building and modern moorings lit by replica Victorian street lamps. By the lock of Oathill Farm, the elegant late-18th century farmhouse seems to ignore the canal alongside it, turning a blank gable and exterior chimney to the feature.

7.2.7 Elkington's Lock is the first of three widely spaced locks which take the canal down to Cropredy. On the offside through this section are well-preserved traces of medieval ridge and furrow, especially fine near the isolated Verney's Lock. Traces of this continuing on the towpath side can sometimes be seen through the gaps. Above



*Positive landmark: Elkington's Lock and Oathill Farm*

Broadmoor Lock, which once had a lime kiln, is a relatively modern covered slip, and, nearer to the head of the lock, a narrow inlet with one floating and one sunken barge; here too is a small concentration of 'live aboard' boats on the offside.

7.2.8 At this point the towpath is on the eastern side of the canal and remains so until Nell Bridge Lock to the south of Banbury. For most of the remaining length of the canal the towpath is flanked by a tall and thick hedge which virtually eliminates any general views through it on that side.

7.2.9 In this section the views over to the large fairly level but rolling fields on the offside, set both for arable and pastoral farming, are sometimes obscured by tree and scrub. After the bottom of the flight the canal is briefly quite straight as it goes over a shallow embankment with an attractive belt of mixed woodland on the opposite bank which hides the hamlet of Clattercote, with the remains of its Gilbertine priory, from the canal.



*Varney's Lock: ridge and furrow can be seen to the east beside the towpath, while the hedgerow to the west prevents outward views across the valley*

7.2.10 Only in areas where there has been some deliberate removal or thinning of the towpath hedge are wider views possible, apart from the occasional gap, for example, those by bridges crossing over the canal. In this section of the canal, the derelict embankment of the railway line just a short distance away to the north-east is virtually invisible, as are the sheep pastures in between. Conversely, on the opposite, or offside, of the canal the views are often panoramic, terminated by the hills at the valley side.



*Boatyard north of Broadmoor Lock*

7.2.11 Below Broadmoor Lock the tall towpath foliage on one side and the overgrowth and occasional tree on the offside bank in front of the rolling fields give the canal the appearance of a peaceful river. On the offside, the medieval church tower of Cropredy is visible in the distance. Although fairly modest in height, it is the only individual landmark of note in this section of the canal, and is visible from the canal to the north and the south of it.



*View south to Cropredy with the tower just visible in the distance*



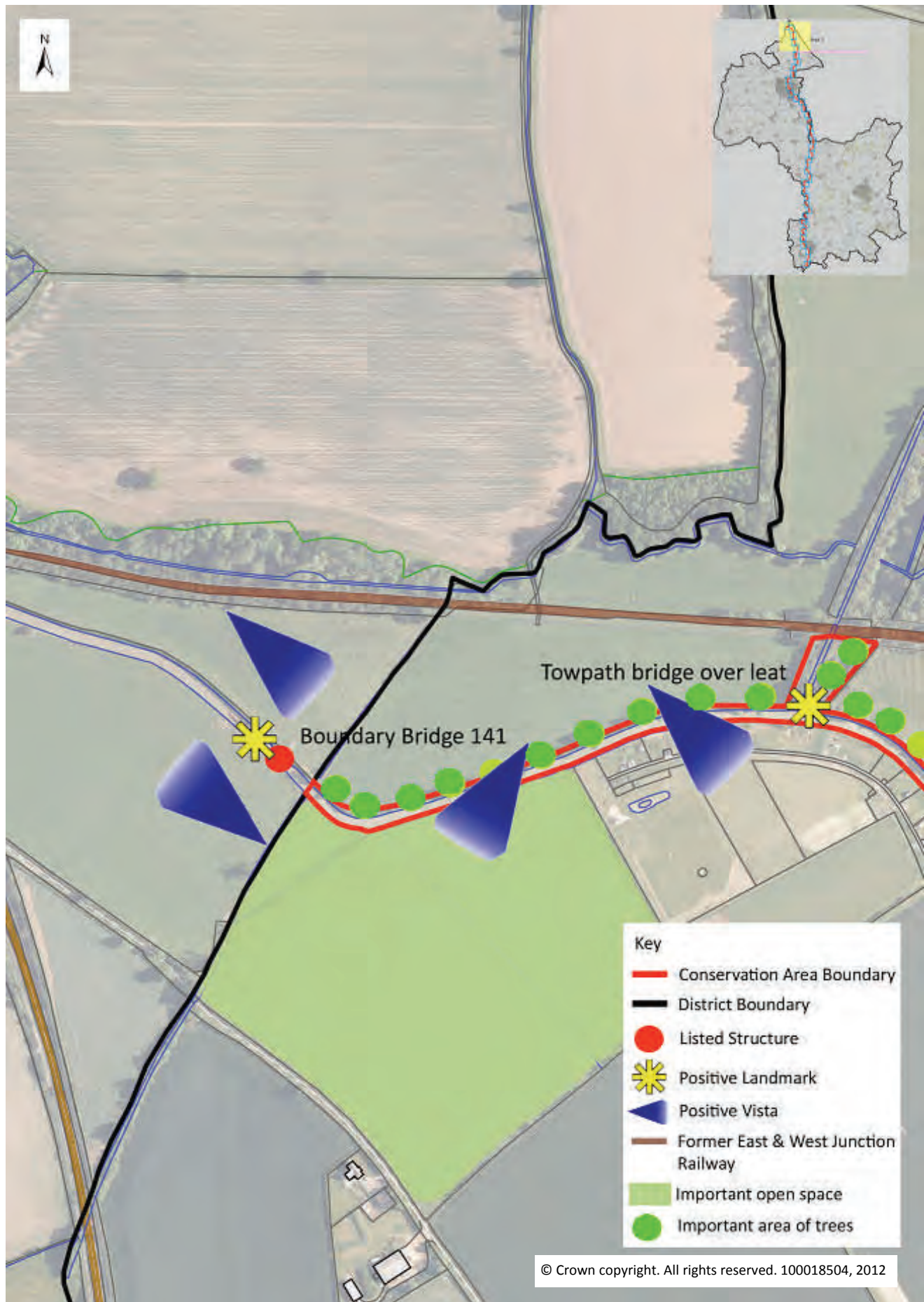


Fig. 8 Route assessment area 1: Boundary Bridge (Bridge 141) to ex-Bridge 151, north of Cropredy



Fig. 9 Route assessment area 1: Boundary Bridge (Bridge 141) to ex-Bridge 151, north of Cropredy