

The Canal Conservation Area (CA12)

Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals
Adopted by Planning Committee – 8th september 2011

First designated 1989; 19.2 hectares

Summary of Special Interest

In the context of the Midlands, the Worcester and Birmingham Canal is of considerable architectural, historic and scenic interest. The influence of canals was phenomenal, completely revolutionising industrial transportation and thus having a profound effect on the location of industries. The impact on Worcester of the canal, from its completion in 1815, was no less spectacular. The ports of Lowesmoor and Diglis quickly became important focal points for the city's industry. These basins, and the land around them and linking them, owe much of their recent history to the canal, as does the city as a whole.

- Its significance as part of the late 18th and early 19th century canal network;
- Its importance as a historic record of the most dominant pre-railway freight transport network;
- Its major contribution to the growth of Worcester in the 19th century;
- Its present-day use as a popular leisure resource for pleasure boaters, walkers, cyclists and anglers;
- The historical and architectural interest of Diglis Basin and Lowesmoor Basin;
- The special interest of the area's older structures, three of which are grade II listed buildings; a number of other historic buildings are visible just outside the boundaries of this conservation area;
- The special interest of the canal's ten locks and six 19th century bridges, including the brick railway viaduct;

- Views to St Andrews spire, Worcester Cathedral and other landmarks;
- The changing setting of the canal as it progresses from city centre to urban/rural fringe;
- Canalside trees and hedgerows;
- Its role as a wildlife corridor into the city;
- Local details that collectively and individually give the conservation area a distinctive identity, e.g. lock name signs and the Severn junction finger post.

Principal Conservation Issues

- Loss of original architectural details of some historic buildings;
- Tree management;
- Screening of modern development by trees and hedgerows;
- Preservation of setting and views;
- Building maintenance and repair;
- Intrusion/incursion of domestic garden areas onto canal side;
- Creation of moorings;
- Intrusive canal-side development and finishes;
- Building and sites of negative impact;
- Litter and graffiti.

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Character Area 1 – Diglis Basin (Map 1)

The layout of the canal at Diglis Basin remains much as it was in 1815. Several pre-1820 buildings, especially on the east side of the inner basin, were demolished in the 1970s, but some key buildings remain. These have been much altered for new uses though a few are still in a very poor state of repair.

The necessity of providing extensive wharfage for bulky commodities such as timber and coal ensured that much of the land at the Basin remained open throughout its history and it followed that the premises that grew up around the basins were well spaced out. The basin area is widely permeable to pedestrians and cyclists, three swing bridges allowing public exploration of the site, the boats and the large sheets of water.

Original buildings have a small scale, two storeys at the most and typical of the early 19th century, a good bit smaller than the new residential developments to the north and south.

Canal related features of significance

- Machine Office;
- Three swing bridges;
- Barge Locks Nos.1 & 2;
- Lock Cottage and outhouses;
- Dry dock, Danks' Warehouses, Severn Carrying Company Stables, Stableman's House, Chemical Manure Company Works, all of which have been substantially redeveloped;
- Anchor Inn;
- Basins and side pond;
- Finger post on river bank.

Key assets and characteristics:

- Moored boats, including wide river craft;
- Open sheets of water;
- Canal related businesses;
- Seasonal boating activity;
- Views of cathedral, and both up and down the River Severn;
- Junction with River Severn;
- Surviving blue brick quadrant under lock gate balance beam (Barge Lock No.2);
- Robust new paving in traditional materials.

Negatives:

- Poor state of repair of some key buildings, including the listed lock house;
- Loss of architectural detail, including historic metal crane;
- Side pond is overgrown and appears neglected.



Character Area 2 – Diglis Basin to Sidbury Bridge (Map 1)

The first length of canal is, in effect, an extension of the main basin at Diglis and is uncharacteristically broad, narrowing to pass under Mill Street Bridge. The Royal Worcester Porcelain factory had an important relationship with Diglis Basin while, to the north, Albion Mill is the only surviving mill on the canal-side. Developments, old and new, flank the canal. New residential development on canal-sides face the canal but 19th century and later industrial developments turn their backs.

Albion Mill, (now converted to residential use) also known as Townsend's Mill, is a former steam powered flour mill dating from the 1840s. Despite having been reduced in size from its original eight storeys, it remains an impressive focal point on the canal-side and across the city.

The northern stretch of canal leading to Sidbury Bridge runs through an enclosed 'cutting' part of which is fronted by revetment walling faced in 19th century engineering brick with bands of glazed headers.

Canal related features of significance

- Broad initial stretch;
- Albion Mill;
- Cutting with brick revetment walls.

Key assets and characteristics:

- Mix of old and new canal-side development;
- Prevalence of brick;
- New residential development relating to the waterside;
- Moorings on both sides south of Mill Street bridge.

Negatives:

- Sidbury Bridge (No.3) obscures northward views of Kings Head Lock;
- Traffic noise from Sidbury and Commandery Road.



Character Area 3 – Sidbury Bridge to Lowesmoor Terrace Bridge (Maps 1 and 2)

This length of canal, despite its urban setting, has a much less industrial feel than Diglis Basin and Character Area 2. Immediately to the north of Sidbury Lock (Lock 4) stands The Commandery. The towpath following the east bank is unusually wide and enhanced by a grass verge between towpath and canal, with canal-side trees and rushes. Though the mixture of residential and commercial/industrial development either side is generally architecturally unremarkable, this part of the canal has a human scale and a safe, well-used and pleasant atmosphere.

North of Bridge No.5 the towpath crosses to the west side on a modern steel bridge and the urban character returns, with bulky retail sheds and modern ramps and steps.

Between Lowesmoor Bridge and Lowesmoor Terrace, the canal is bounded on its east bank by the brick entrances to the retort houses of the early Gas Works. Although an isolated feature, this brings to mind the former industrial character and use of the canal and is worthy of retention. Similarly to the south, Bridge No.6, a former road bridge now rebuilt as a foot-bridge, retains the remnants of the original stone and brick piers. The piers and caps of the former railway bridge are close by.

Canal related features of significance

- Lock 3 (Sidbury) and Lock 4 (Blockhouse);
- Lock house at Lock 4;
- Small boat-yard between Bridges Nos.4 and 5;
- Abutment piers at Cromwell Street foot-bridge (No.6);
- Wall of former Gas Works.

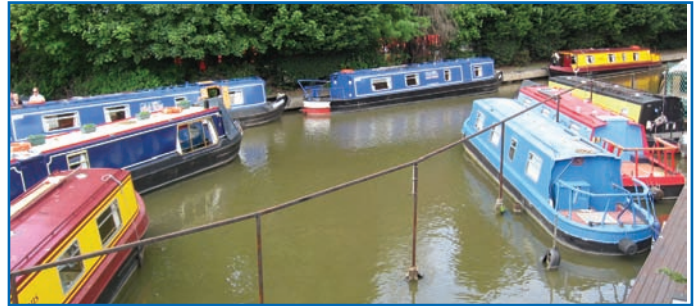
Key assets and characteristics:

- The Commandery enhances the setting of Sidbury Lock;
- East bank between Sidbury Bridge and Blockhouse Lock lies within Sidbury and Fort Royal Conservation Area;
- Westward views into the city;
- Brick clock tower east of Lowesmoor Bridge (No.8) is a local landmark;

- Sense of enclosure between tall canal-side industrial buildings;
- Presence of wildfowl (including stainless steel ducks artwork);
- Occasional waterside beds of rushes.

Negatives:

- Unremarkable canalside architecture (except what falls into Sidbury and Fort Royal Conservation Area);
- Some canal-side industrial buildings in poor condition;
- Graffiti under bridges.



Character Area 4 – Lowesmoor Basin (Map 2)

Lowesmoor Basin lacks the nautical charm of Diglis Basin, in spite of the fact that many pleasure craft are moored here. Most of the original wharfs have been filled in since the 1950s and are currently occupied by unremarkable office and business units. Nevertheless, a small number of interesting historic buildings have survived, most notably the Portmaster's House at the vehicular entrance to the basin and a small group found along Lowesmoor Terrace. Here the Bridge Tavern provides a fine intact example of the use of buff terracotta facings.

Canal related features of significance

- Portmaster's House;
- Basin Bridge over arm into basin;
- Large half-round copings to walls in Westbury Street, in stone and blue clay;
- Winding hole opposite entrance to basin.

Key assets and characteristics:

- Moored hire boats in basin;
- Historic buildings in Lowesmoor Terrace;
- Overlooked by brick railway viaduct;
- Good access to shops and services;
- Western boundary of basin area is contiguous with Lowesmoor Conservation Area.

Negatives:

- Loss of part of original basin;
- Loss of architectural detail.



Character Area 5 – Railway Viaduct to Bridge No.13 (Gregory’s Mill) (Maps 2 and 3)

North of Lowesmoor Basin, the fine brick viaduct carries has a significant impact as a landmark. Beyond this, the west side of the canal is notable for areas of late 19th century terraced houses and two significant green open spaces, Flagge Meadow playing fields and the park alongside Chestnut Lane. Back gardens of the Arboretum streets generally abut the towpath but terraced houses in Wolverton Road present an attractive rhythmical façade to the canal.

On the east side, between the railway viaduct and Lansdowne Road, the canal is bounded by allotments and an orchard, on open land which slopes down to the canal edge and is overlooked by the substantial and imposing Regency stuccoed villas of Lansdowne Crescent.

The pleasantly open setting quickly disappears as the canal begins to swing north-east between the corrugated iron fencing of the football ground on the west bank and the embanked industrial land on the east, once the site of a brick and tile works.

Canal related features of significance

- Lowesmoor Railway Viaduct (Bridge No.10);
- Distinct eastward bend in canal at Football Ground.

Key assets and characteristics:

- Overlooked by railway viaduct at southern end;
- Areas of architecturally cohesive 19th century terraced houses on west bank including part of Shrubbery Avenue Conservation Area;
- Canalside open spaces: allotments on east bank, playground and Flagge Meadow on west bank;
- Eastward views to villas in Lansdowne Crescent;
- Views along Southfield Street and Lower Chestnut Street;
- Wolverton Road housing fronts canal;
- Part of east bank is contiguous with boundary of Lansdowne Crescent and Rainbow Hill Conservation Area;
- Presence of wildfowl;
- Occasional waterside beds of rushes.

Negatives:

- Graffiti under bridges and on Football Ground fence;
- Litter beside towpath;
- Dereliction on industrial site opposite football ground;
- Boundary fence to football ground is unsightly and perhaps threatening.



Character Area 6 – Bridge No.13 (Gregory’s Mill) to Bridge No.17 (Blackpole) (Maps 3 and 4)

Here the open, almost rural, feel of the canal takes hold. Until well into the 20th century, this long stretch of canal was flanked on both sides by open meadow and pastureland. Today, the setting of the canal, even the open space to the north, is no longer rural but composed of modern housing and a large expanse of flat sports fields.

Two pairs of locks, Gregory’s Mill and Bilford, and two 19th century bridges are the only canal features of note in this part of the canal which is generally uneventful but tranquil. It has a leafy atmosphere and, being further from the city centre, is less well-used and less marred by litter and graffiti than earlier stages. The canal and towing path are raised above the Barbourne Brook and adjacent land at the bend and this is a place where views down to the west may be seen.

The most significant feature is the open setting on the north side arising from the Perdiswell Sports Grounds which are not very well screened from view by hedgerows or trees. This allows open views across the playing fields, once the site of an aerodrome in World War 2. Here also, on the north side, the level of the bank drops to within a few inches of the water.

Canal related features of significance

- Gregory’s Mill Bottom Lock (Lock 5);
- Gregory’s Mill Top Lock (6);
- Bilford Lock Bottom Lock (7);
- Bilford Lock Top Lock (8);
- Residential mooring close to Lock 8;
- Bridges Nos.13, 14, 16 and 17 (all early 19th century);
- Bridge 16 (Ivy Bridge) has the remains of a WW2 sentry box on the upper level;
- Winding hole by former lock house adjacent to Lock 7.

Key assets and characteristics:

- Rural character;
- Dense canalside hedgerows (part);
- Pleasant 'typical' canal views of locks and water;
- Open space of Perdiswell Sports Grounds (west side) affording long views;
- Grass verges;
- Presence of wildfowl;
- Occasional waterside beds of rushes;
- Tranquil atmosphere.

Negatives:

- Modern mooring at end of a garden, between Gregory's Mill Lock (Lock 6) and Bridge No.14, is out of character with canal design and materials;
- Break in canal-side greenery between Bridge No.14 and Bilford Lock on west side revealing the lighting poles at the Household Recycling Centre;
- Poor state of repair of 19th century brick bridges.



Character Area 7 – Bridge No.17 to Blackpole Lock (Warndon Business Park) (Maps 4 and 5)

In contrast to the open semi-rural setting of the lengths of canal before and after Blackpole, this short, almost straight stretch of canal has an industrial feel reminiscent of its earlier stages - although here canal-side development is distinctly modern. Large industrial and commercial premises spoil the environmental quality of this stretch of canal. On the north side there is the former Cadbury's works, served by both the canal and the railway, but now subdivided into multiple industrial units. There is a small wharf beside a windowless two storey building, recently a commercial boat-yard but now part of a ready-mix cement works.

Glimpses of warehouses on both sides of the canal and the background noises from traffic on Blackpole Road, manufacturing production and the occasional train passing overhead add to the industrial atmosphere. Nevertheless the canal itself, fringed by rushes and hedgerow planting, still retains a rural presence.

Canal related features of significance

- Brick railway bridge (No.18);
- Modern wharf (west side).

Key assets and characteristics:

- Modern industrial setting on both sides of canal;
- Canal-side greenery and beds of rushes.

Negatives:

- Noise of traffic and from industry spoil prevalent quiet atmosphere;
- Electricity sub station and tall industrial buildings on north side intrude upon semi-rural atmosphere.



Character Area 8 – Blackpole Lock to A449 bridge (No.22A) (Maps 5,6 and 7)

Above Blackpole Lock the countryside begins to open up again. This section of canal, furthest from the city centre, has a distinctly rural feel but it is marred by the sound of traffic on the A449 and a line of pylons on the north side. The towpath is generally wide and there is dense greenery on either side, especially approaching the city boundary. On the north side, an almost continuous hedgerow grows right at the water's edge. Gaps in this frontage allow views to countryside to the north. Beds of rushes contribute to the rural setting. Blackpole Lock, Tolladine Lock and two 19th century bridges add to the historic interest of this part of the canal which is generally peaceful.

Canal related features of significance

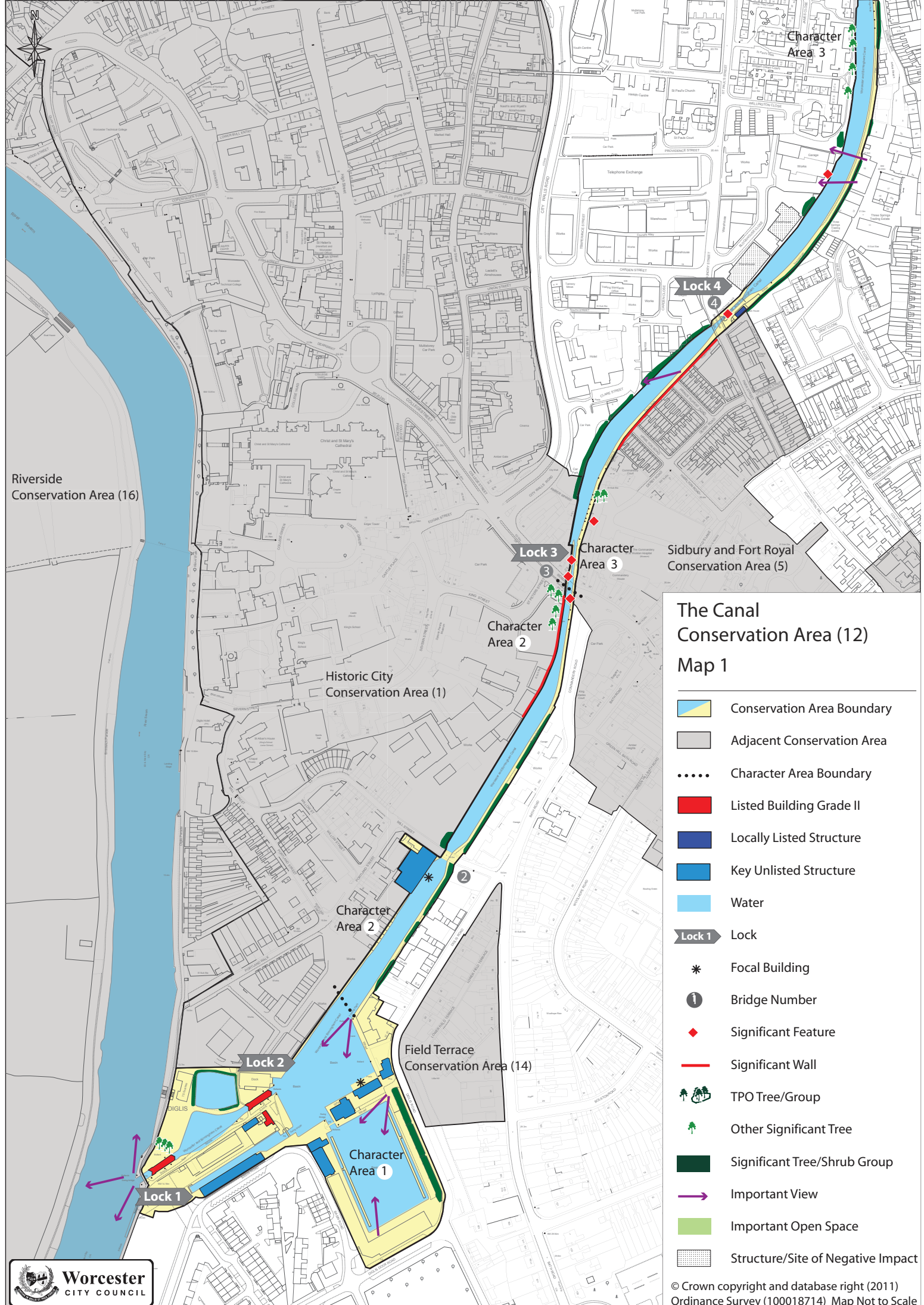
- Blackpole Lock (Lock 9);
- Narrowing of canal at site of former bridge;
- Rad Meadow Bridge (No.21), and Tolladine Bridge (No.22), both 19th century and in brick;
- Tolladine Lock (Lock 10).

Key assets and characteristics:

- Wide towpath with occasional grass verge;
- Canal-side copses;
- Rural views to north;
- Presence of wildfowl;
- Occasional waterside rushes.

Negatives:

- Noise from A449;
- Litter on southern bank in vicinity of caravan site;
- Noise and smells from Warndon Business Park;
- Poor state of repair of 19th century bridges;
- Electricity pylons intrude upon rural views.



Riverside Conservation Area (16)

Historic City Conservation Area (1)

Character Area 2

Field Terrace Conservation Area (14)

Character Area 1

Character Area 2

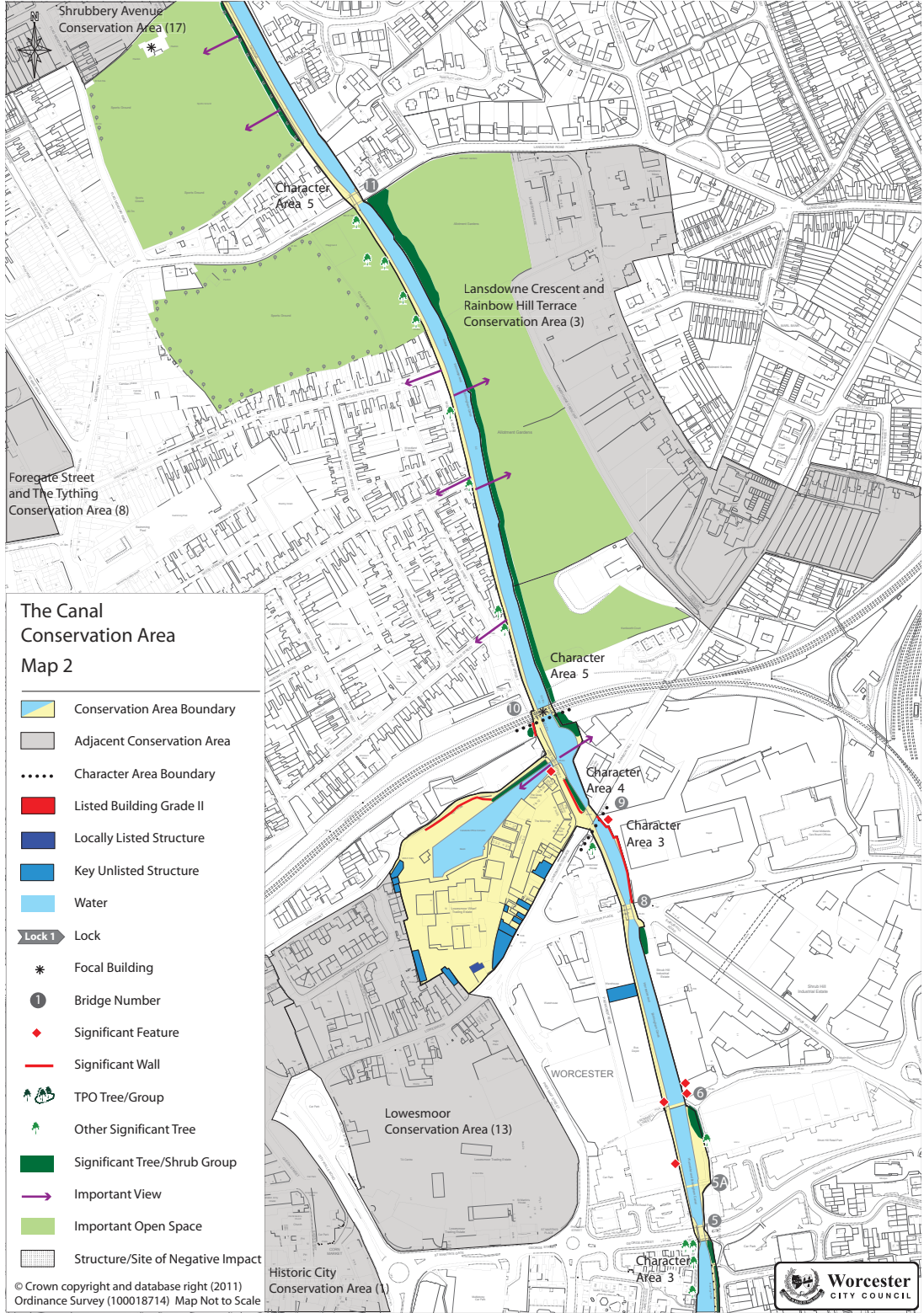
Character Area 3

Sidbury and Fort Royal Conservation Area (5)



















Character Area 3

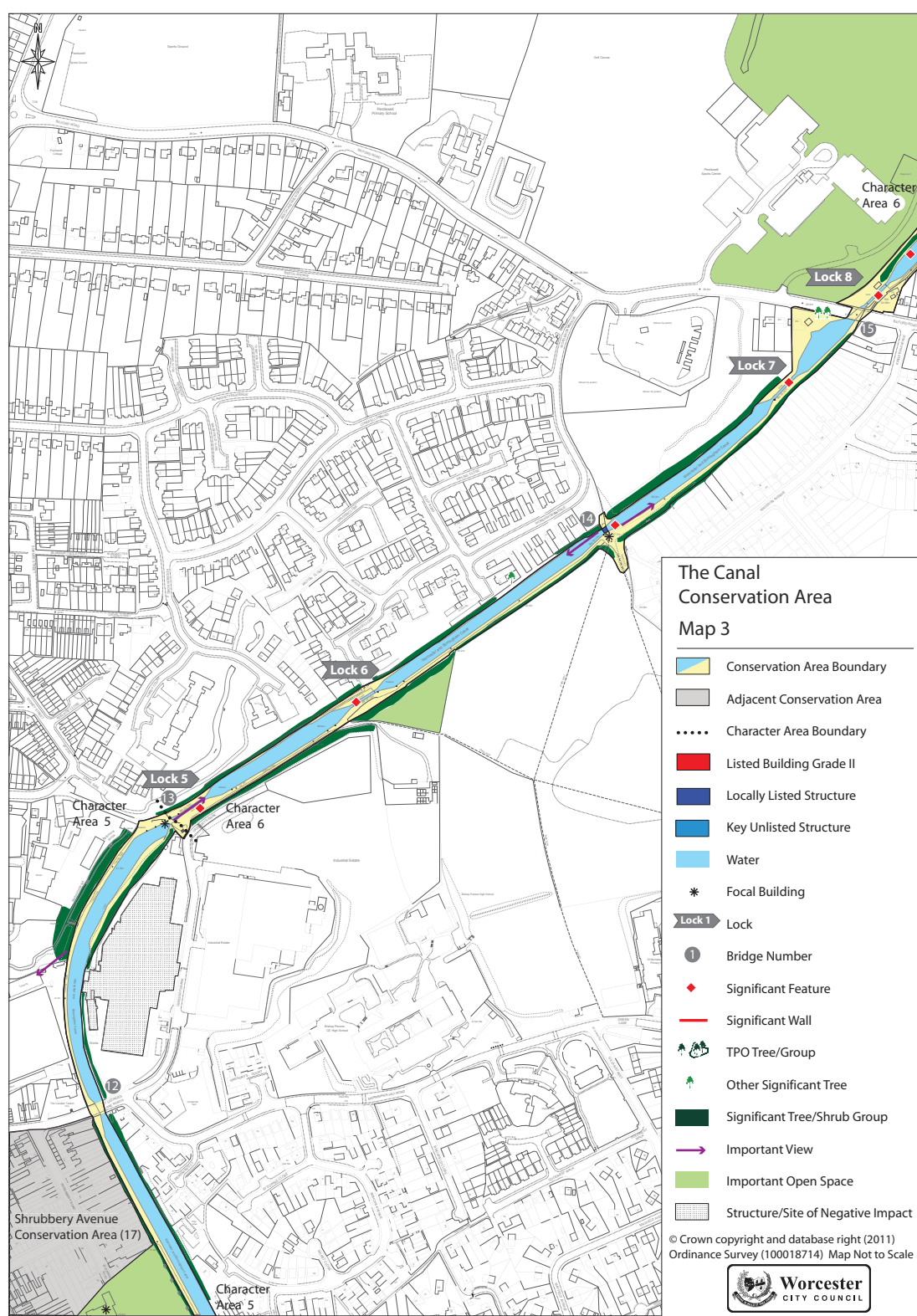
The Canal Conservation Area (12) Map 1

- Conservation Area Boundary
- Adjacent Conservation Area
- Character Area Boundary
- Listed Building Grade II
- Locally Listed Structure
- Key Unlisted Structure
- Water
- Lock
- Focal Building
- Bridge Number
- Significant Feature
- Significant Wall
- TPO Tree/Group
- Other Significant Tree
- Significant Tree/Shrub Group
- Important View
- Important Open Space
- Structure/Site of Negative Impact





















The Canal Conservation Area Map 2

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Adjacent Conservation Area
-  Character Area Boundary
-  Listed Building Grade II
-  Locally Listed Structure
-  Key Unlisted Structure
-  Water
-  Lock 1
-  Focal Building
-  Bridge Number
-  Significant Feature
-  Significant Wall
-  TPO Tree/Group
-  Other Significant Tree
-  Significant Tree/Shrub Group
-  Important View
-  Important Open Space
-  Structure/Site of Negative Impact

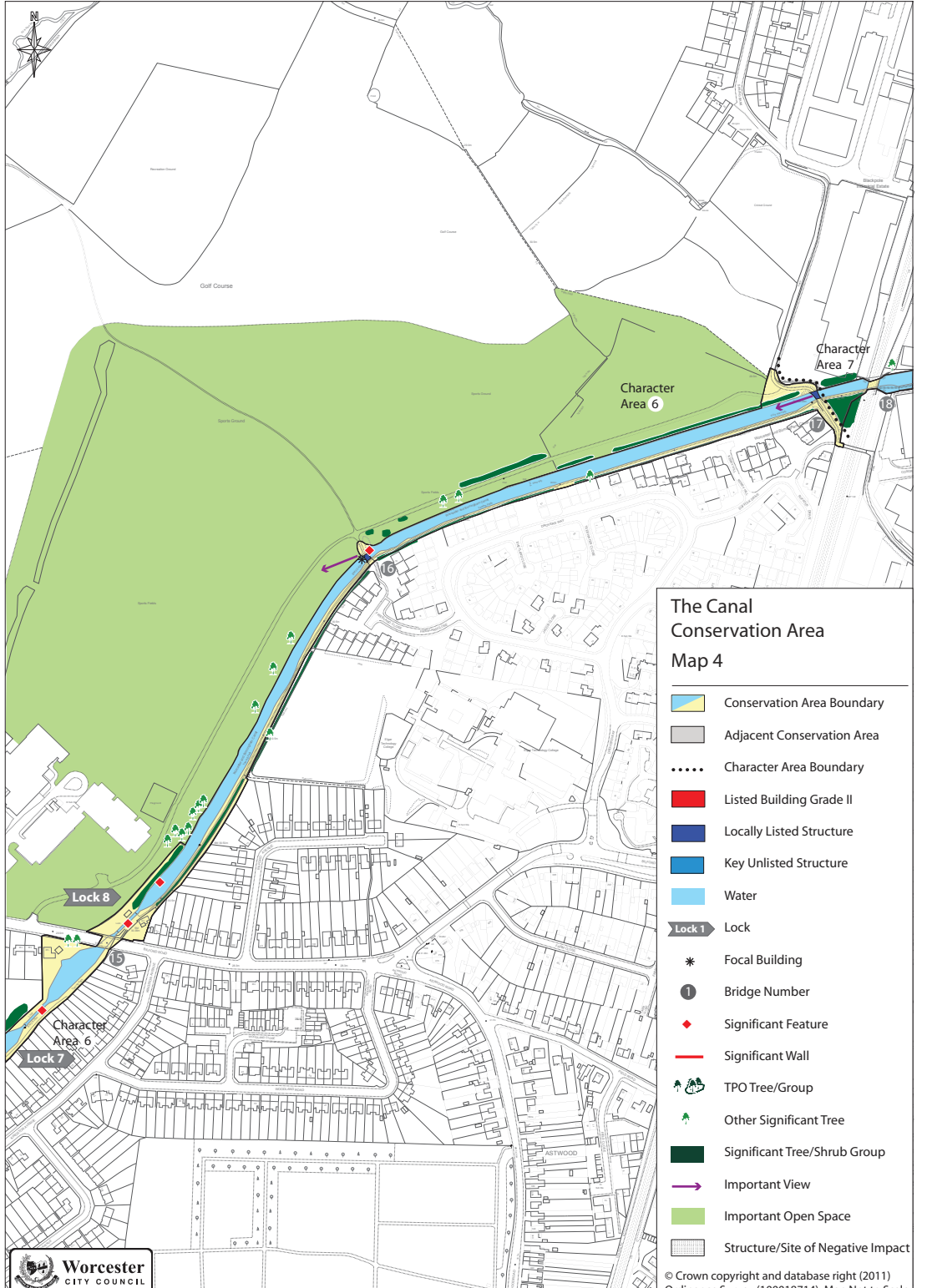


The Canal Conservation Area Map 3

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Adjacent Conservation Area
-  Character Area Boundary
-  Listed Building Grade II
-  Locally Listed Structure
-  Key Unlisted Structure
-  Water
-  Focal Building
-  Lock 1
-  Bridge Number
-  Significant Feature
-  Significant Wall
-  TPO Tree/Group
-  Other Significant Tree
-  Significant Tree/Shrub Group
-  Important View
-  Important Open Space
-  Structure/Site of Negative Impact

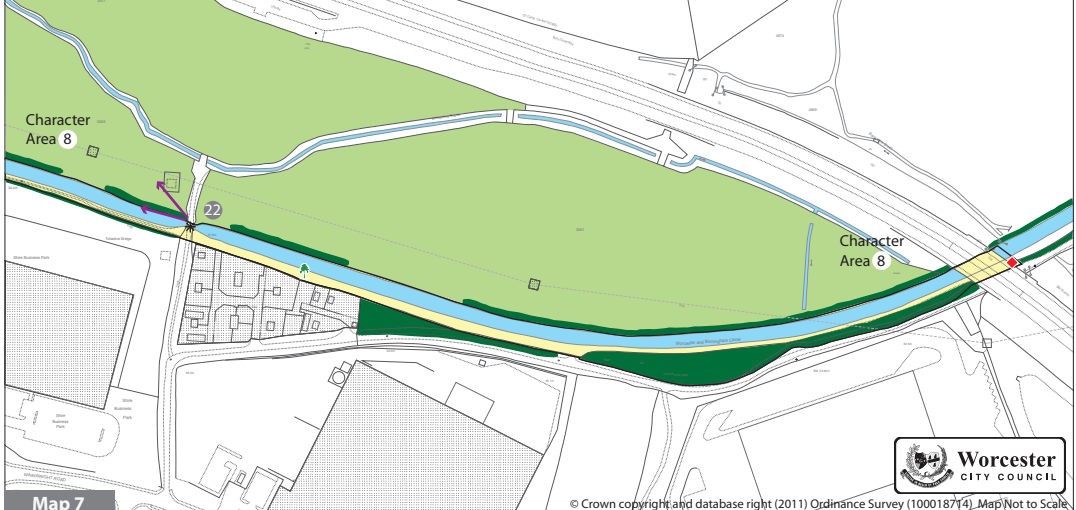
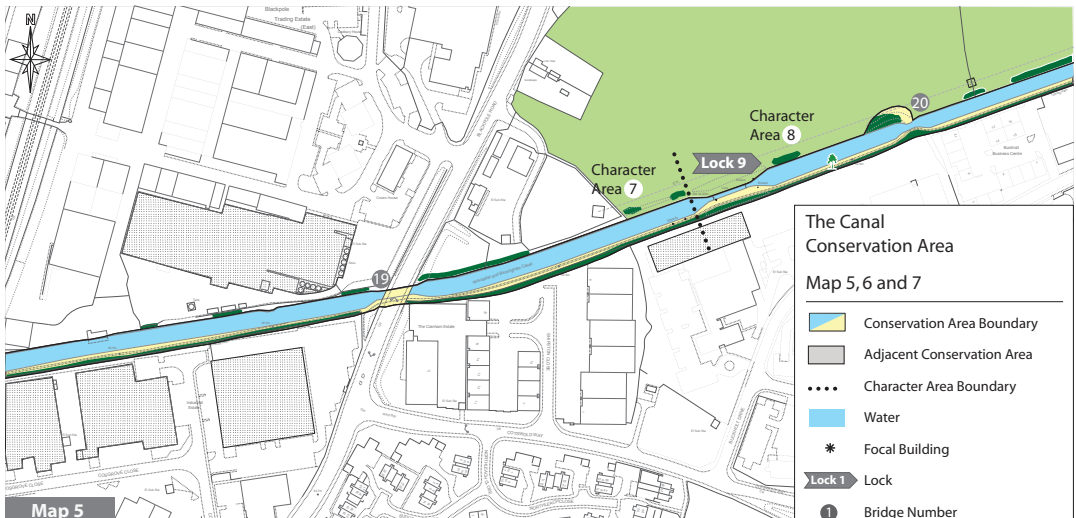
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Ordnance Survey (100018714) Map Not to Scale





The Canal Conservation Area Map 4

- Conservation Area Boundary
- Adjacent Conservation Area
- Character Area Boundary
- Listed Building Grade II
- Locally Listed Structure
- Key Unlisted Structure
- Water
- Lock
- Focal Building
- Bridge Number
- Significant Feature
- Significant Wall
- TPO Tree/Group
- Other Significant Tree
- Significant Tree/Shrub Group
- Important View
- Important Open Space
- Structure/Site of Negative Impact



The Canal Conservation Area

Map 5, 6 and 7

- Conservation Area Boundary
- Adjacent Conservation Area
- Character Area Boundary
- Water
- Focal Building
- Lock 1
- Bridge Number
- Significant Feature
- Significant Wall
- TPO Tree/Group
- Other Significant Tree
- Significant Tree/Shrub Group
- Important View
- Important Open Space
- Structure/Site of Negative Impact