



Wigan Local Plan

**Canalside Development and
Improvement**

**Supplementary Planning
Document**

April 2019

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Introduction

- 1.1 The borough's canals, and adjacent land and buildings within the canal 'corridor', have benefited from some significant investment, development and improvement over the past 30 years, as the positive benefits of canalside regeneration have become widely accepted. Examples of this include the new Bickershaw development and marina at Leigh and the Wigan Investment Centre at Wigan Pier. Surfacing improvements have been carried out along parts of the towpath, through partnerships involving Wigan Council, the canal owners and others. The canals provide a significant opportunity for investment, development and improvement as part of the wider regeneration strategies set out within the council's adopted Core Strategy, its Economic Prospectus and town centre masterplans.
- 1.2 Despite the previous investment, the full potential of the canals, not just for development, but for recreation, leisure and the associated health and wellbeing benefits, access and sustainable transport has not been fully realised. This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will help to realise this potential through securing good design, promoting accessibility and by emphasising the importance of the canals as a resource.
- 1.3 The SPD sets out the key design principles for new developments which are adjacent to, or have a close relationship, to the canals within the borough. It provides advice to developers on what is expected in all new canalside developments and how developments can be best integrated with the canal. The document will also help to ensure that new developments take full advantage of their unique canalside locations to secure the maximum benefits and to take full advantage of the canal resource.
- 1.4 The SPD highlights broad areas of opportunity for development and investment within the borough alongside its canals, which are identified within the adopted development plan and the Draft Allocations and Development Management Plan. As well as development opportunities, it also identifies other opportunities for improvement to support a range of recreational activities within the canal corridors.
- 1.5 The Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance on the following development plan policies:
 - Replacement Unitary Development Plan - Policy EV3F (The River Douglas, Canal Network and other water features)
 - Core Strategy - Policy CP10 (Design)

- Other Core Strategy policies and policies in subsequent development plans.



Figure 1 Leeds Liverpool Canal - Top Lock

Background

2.1 The borough's canals provide many benefits:

- The towpath network provides a car-free environment for cycling, horse riding and walking, and forms part of a sustainable travel network. The canal corridor forms a key component of the borough's 'Greenheart' and the council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- Canals support biodiversity, provide corridors for wildlife movement and are an important part of an area's green infrastructure. In urban areas such as Wigan and Leigh, they help with urban cooling and carbon reduction as part of green corridors within urban areas.
- Canals can help to mitigate flood risk by acting as a channel for surface water run-off.
- The canals support a range of leisure and tourist attractions, including waterside pubs and restaurants, which attract visitors and boost the local economy. They also provide a more valuable setting for new development, whilst many canalside buildings can be converted to support valuable new uses.
- Canals are an important part of our history. Within Wigan, the canals are closely linked to the industrial revolution, and the development of towns and villages such as Crooke. They are an important heritage asset and form key features within a number of the borough's designated conservation areas. A number of canalside buildings and features such as locks and lock gates are listed buildings with statutory protection.

2.2 There are over 40 kilometres of canal running through Wigan borough, comprising sections of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and the Bridgewater Canal. These help to create diverse environments and places with unique and interesting characters. The canal network is a fundamental part of Wigan's heritage and character as well as being integral to the future regeneration of areas such as Wigan Pier Quarter and Leigh Waterfront. Canals are a really important asset in regeneration as well as being a major opportunity for recreation, tourism and creating green corridors.



Figure 2 Towpath improvements at Wigan Pier

- 2.3 The canals run through densely developed urban areas and areas of open countryside. The urban areas include Leigh town centre and the iconic Wigan Pier area, which are both priority areas for investment and regeneration. The Leeds-Liverpool canal passes through more open areas including the Douglas Valley in the west of the borough, and the popular Wigan Flashes, which are an important part of the borough's Greenheart. The canals are linked to and crossed by numerous Rights of Way.
- 2.4 The Leeds-Liverpool Canal is owned and managed by the Canal and River Trust, whilst the Bridgewater Canal is owned and managed by the Bridgewater Canal Company. Land adjacent to the canals is owned by a variety of private owners, Wigan Council and the above organisations.

THREE

Key issues

- 3.1 A number of key issues have been identified within the canal corridors, which affect the quality, accessibility and development potential of the canal network. Some can be addressed through good design and the planning process, whilst others are management issues for the canal owners and partners.
- 3.2 Historically, many buildings have turned their back on the canal and its towpath. This is particularly the case with industrial or commercial buildings where vehicle access has been the priority and direct access to the canal was not required. This has created blank elevations and unwelcoming environments along parts of the canal. An example of this is Welch Mill, close to Leigh town centre.
- 3.3 Wider economic changes and de-industrialisation have created some problems of dereliction and decay as it has proved difficult to fill previous employment floorspace in buildings close to the canal. An example of this is the substantial Eckersley Mill complex at Wigan Pier.
- 3.4 In some areas, access to the canal towpath is limited in terms of the number of through routes or access is restricted through man-made barriers, poor surfacing and a lack of crossing points. An example of this is The Loom development at Spinning Jenny Way, Leigh where a new footbridge is required to provide access to the canal towpath from the retail and leisure area. Signage to the canals from local centres and other destinations is limited and uncoordinated.
- 3.5 The wider connections to and from neighbouring areas along the canal network need to be promoted and improved, including links to West Lancashire, Salford, Chorley and Bolton. The network also needs to be well signed and linked to footpaths and cycle paths so as to open up opportunities for promoting health and wellbeing through exercise.
- 3.6 There are limited boating facilities and stopping points for leisure craft. Whilst the new Bickershaw Marina (Pennington Wharf) will provide valuable facilities in the east of the borough, there is an identified shortage of such facilities in other areas, including Wigan Pier, around Haigh Hall and along the Bridgewater Canal. Improved provision will help further promote the canal as a means of transport.
- 3.7 The quality of the towpath surface and infrastructure is mixed and this can prohibit use for access and recreation. Whilst some areas have been

resurfaced, such as the Wigan Pier Quarter, several of the more open towpath stretches require improvement to promote access for all, including people with disabilities. Barriers need to be removed and a more accessible design approach adopted, including accessible signage.

- 3.8 There are a number of vacant, underused and / or derelict sites adjacent to the canals. Redevelopment or refurbishment of these has stalled for a number of reasons, including commercial viability and complex ownerships and lease arrangements. Examples of these include the former BICC employment site at West Bridgewater Street, Leigh and the former 'Way We Were' warehouse complex at Wigan Pier. However, the council and the canal owners are now working closely with the owners of these sites to promote development.



Figure 3 Wigan Pier

3.9 Other issues affecting the canals, which are not unique to Wigan and are typical of post-industrial urban areas with canals across the North and West Midlands, include:

- Conflict between different users, including pedestrians, cyclists, anglers, canoeists and boat users. This is more of a problem on the busier sections of the canal or where the towpath is narrow.
- Problems of littering, graffiti and damage. This is more apparent in the urban sections of the canal where natural surveillance is low.

3.10 Many of these issues can be addressed through good quality, well designed developments that have a positive relationship to the waterways, and encourage greater access, surveillance and use of towpath areas. Section 5 of the document sets out the key planning and design principles that will help achieve this.



Figure 4 Mather Mill, Leigh under restoration

FOUR

Areas of opportunity

- 4.1 The main development opportunities along the canal corridor are identified within the council's adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and have also been identified within the Draft Allocations and Development Management Local Plan (Allocations Plan). It is anticipated that these areas will be formally designated within this plan or a subsequent local plan. The key opportunity areas are also highlighted within the recently prepared masterplans for Wigan and Leigh town centres. These areas are:
- Wigan Pier Quarter, covered by UDP Policy EM1H and Draft Allocations Plan Policy RP1. The area is designated for mixed-use, conservation-led regeneration and contains a number of development opportunities close to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal.
 - Leigh Waterfront, covered by Draft Allocations Plan Policy RP2. The area is to be developed as a high quality, sustainable part of Leigh and includes a number of important, historic mill buildings with a strong relationship to the canal.
- 4.2 Other development opportunities adjacent to the canal include:
- Mixed-use development at Westwood, Wigan
 - Potential employment development at Miry Lane, Wigan
- 4.3 The list of opportunities identified above is not definitive. Other canalside developments will be brought forward as opportunities arise to meet policy requirements and identified needs. Sites which provide good access to the canal towpaths can help to promote more sustainable patterns of development.
- 4.4 Some opportunities to upgrade the canal towpath are also identified at the eastern end of the Bridgewater Canal at Astley Green, along the Douglas Valley, from the DW Stadium through Crooke Village and Gathurst to the borough boundary at Appley Bridge, and at the 'Top Lock' area between Bridge 54 and Wigan Top Lock 65.
- 4.5 The canal corridors provide opportunities for increased leisure use, including Canoeing. In this respect, the Wigan Pier Quarter and Leigh Waterfront areas have potential to act as 'hubs' for leisure activities.
- 4.6 A plan showing the canal network and key opportunity areas is shown on the next page.

FIVE

Design principles

- 5.1 The borough's canal corridors have a strong character and identity, helping to create a 'sense of place'. Development proposals should reflect and enhance their positive character and the design process should be informed by an assessment of the existing landscape and townscape character of the area.
- 5.2 A comprehensive masterplan will be required for larger developments, which ensures that development proposals are considered in their wider context, and as part of the greater canal network. These masterplans should provide the framework for sustainable developments which make the most of their proximity to the canal.
- 5.3 Individual areas and development sites will need a specific design response, based on their individual character assessment. In general terms, there are a number of basic design principles which should apply to schemes which affect the canal network:

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1 - Respecting the canal. Developments should capitalise on their waterside location and promote natural surveillance of the canal through the siting, configuration and orientation of buildings and the use of appropriate boundary treatments. The use of close boarded fencing or blank boundary treatments / elevations to the canal should be avoided.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2 - Achieving the right scale of development - New developments should be of an appropriate scale and massing in relation to the local context and it should not overwhelm the canal. However, in the urban areas of Wigan and Leigh, larger mill buildings adjacent to the canal form part of the special character of these areas. In these areas, larger scale buildings, which reflect the historic mills, could be appropriate. The re-use of existing canalside buildings should be considered as part of the design process.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3 - Respecting the local context - The design, detailing and materials of new buildings should reflect and / or compliment the local historic vernacular and elements within the landscape. This contextual approach also supports high quality contemporary designs in canalside areas. The impact of development on the character of any listed building or conservation area needs to be carefully considered in line with national policy and the council's development plan policies.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4 - Improving public spaces - The towpath and its environs should be considered as part of the wider public space within the area, in terms of its design and future management.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5 - Improving access to the canal towpath - As far as possible, developments should create new or improved public access to the canal towpath, including through bridges or links to existing bridges where appropriate and new and improved crossing points.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 6 - Using sustainable drainage - Developments should use the opportunities afforded by the canal to support the development of sustainable drainage solutions, where appropriate.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 7 - Promoting biodiversity - Developments should incorporate features that recognise, protect and enhance the biodiversity and environmental quality of the canal corridor. This would include native planting and creation of appropriate habitats.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 8 - introducing public art - Developers should consider the installation of public art, where this will make a positive contribution to the character of the area and help to reinforce the 'sense of place'. This should be proportional to the scale of development proposed.

- 5.4 Developers are encouraged to hold early pre-application discussions, with Wigan Council, and the canal owners, to consider the range of planning issues, including practical considerations such as retaining the structural integrity of the canal walls during and after development. Relevant contact details are provided in Appendix B.



Figure 5 Access to towpath at Wigan Pier

Delivery

- 6.1 The regeneration and continued improvement of the canal corridors can only be delivered through positive partnerships, which will help these areas to reach their full potential.
- 6.2 In areas of development opportunities, these partnerships will involve the council, canal owners, willing developers, land owners and investors. Both the Canal and River Trust and the Bridgewater Canal Company will play a key role in encouraging positive developments to come forward, through their own land ownerships where applicable and through their role as facilitators of canalside development.
- 6.3 Within the Wigan Pier Quarter area, a formal partnership arrangement has been created to promote development over a 10-year period. Along with the Leigh Waterfront, this area has been identified as a priority for investment over the next 10 years.
- 6.4 Adopting the design principles and guidance within this document will help to improve the quality and sustainability of new developments close to the canals. The council and landowners will work with amenity groups such as the Wigan Access for the Disabled Committee to create more a more inclusive environment along the canal corridor.
- 6.5 Where it is necessary and viable, the council will seek developer contributions which improve the canal towpath, access to the canal, signage or improvement to adjacent areas, as outlined within Core Strategy Policy CP18. For example, development at The Loom and proposed development at West Bridgewater Street, Leigh will contribute towards a new footbridge across the Bridgewater Canal. This will provide better connections to the town centre from the south and improved access to the towpath from the north.
- 6.6 Local communities will play a vital part in maintaining and improving the canal corridors throughout the borough. Both of the canal owners have a number of regular volunteers who will continue their important role looking after the canals. The canals are part of a wider transport network and established boat user groups are also important partners in helping to maintain an efficient and attractive network.