

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area Appraisal

April 2013



Conservation Area Appraisals

The Council has prepared character appraisals for most of the Borough's conservation areas. They provide a useful record of the particular architectural or historical characteristics of each conservation area, identify the buildings which are most important from a heritage point of view and are helpful guidance in determining planning applications which may affect the character of the area. They are also useful in recording change that has happened over time and for making alterations that may be necessary to the boundaries of the conservation area. The preparation of each character appraisal follows a similar format and all are subject to public consultation before being adopted by the Council.

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area Definition and summary of special interest

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area is centred on the point where the Bridgewater Canal constructed in 1795 and the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal constructed in 1821, meet to provide a route from Wigan to Manchester. It lies along King Street and St. Helen's Road, to the west of the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area and to the south of Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area.

The special interest of the area arises from the canals and associated industrial buildings. The canals and their basins, either side of the bridge are of industrial archaeological interest. The former canal warehouse fronting the Leeds Liverpool Canal (Leigh Branch) to the west of Leigh Bridge on the north bank is also of special architectural and historic interest.

The commercial character of the Conservation Area is now based around King Street, which runs south from the town centre as far as Leigh Bridge, and south of the bridge continues at St Helen's Road. Overall there is a mix of residential and commercial properties, predominantly retail, including a large supermarket and several hot food take-away units. Residential dwellings are primarily focused along the

north and south banks of the Bridgewater Canal, with mid to late 19th century cottages on King Street and Wilds Passage.

Map 1: Leigh Bridge Conservation Area

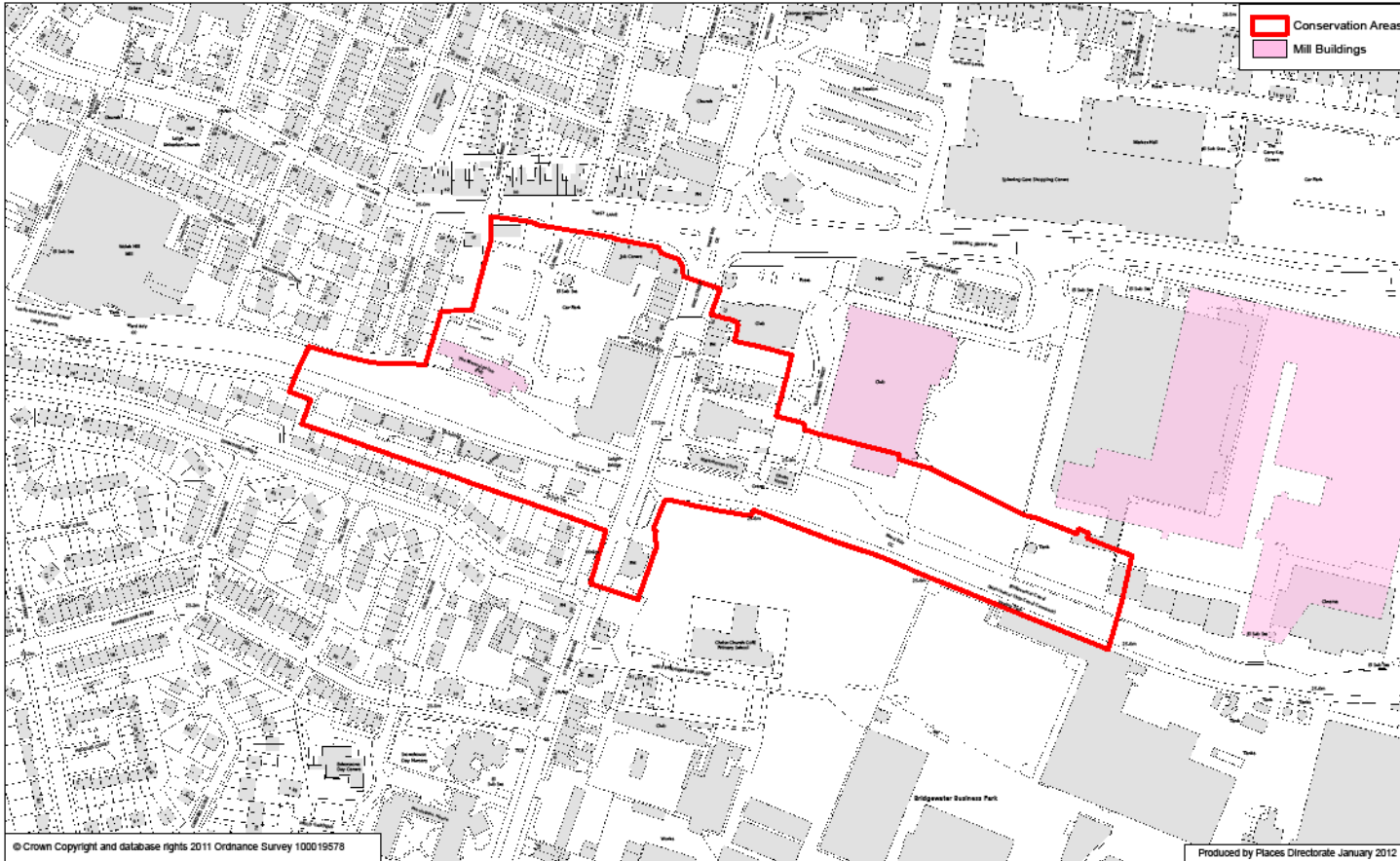


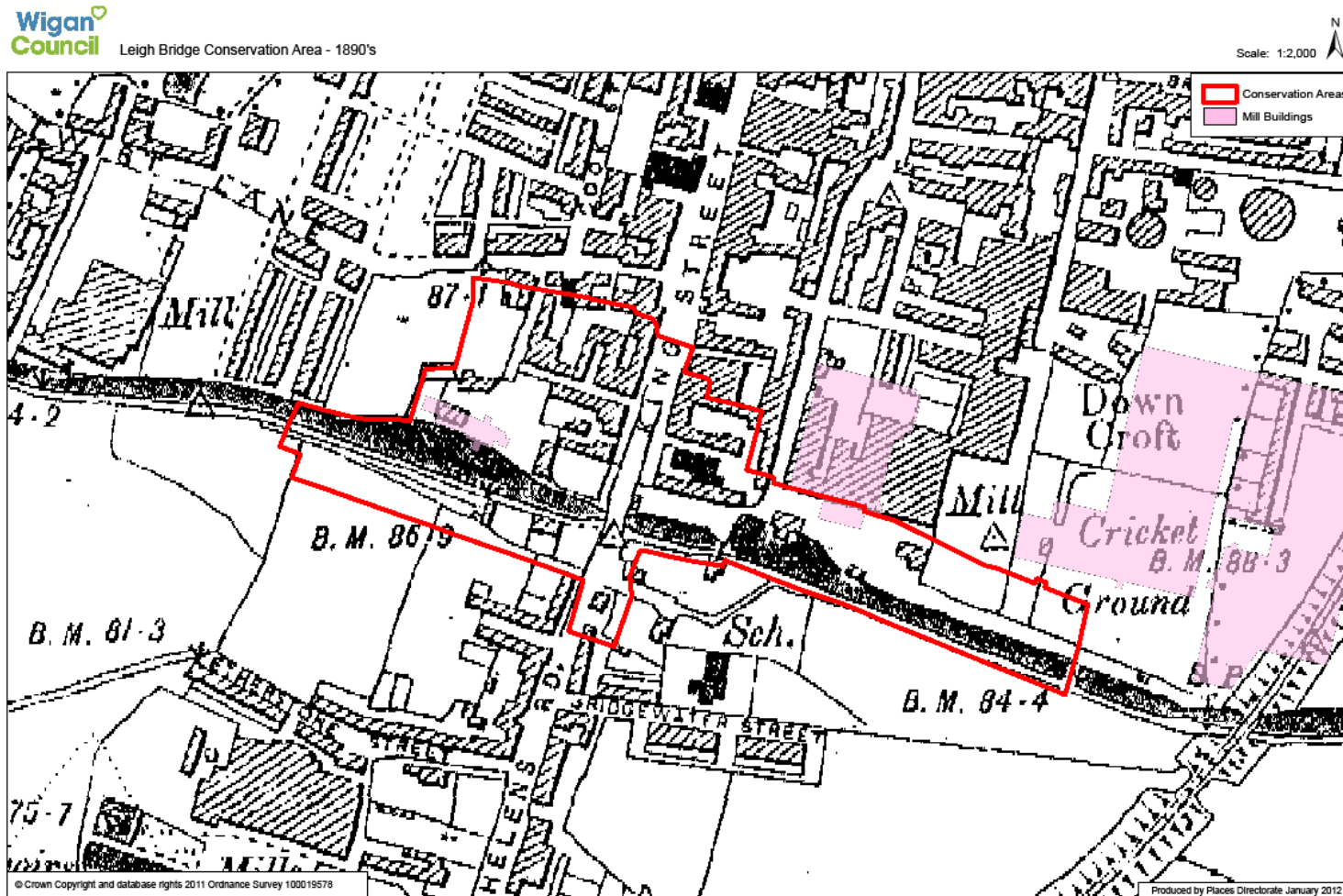


Photo 1: View from Leigh Bridge northwards towards the town centre showing the commercial character of the area



Photo 2: The northern edge of Leigh Bridge Conservation Area on the southern approach to the town centre

Map 2: Former mill and industrial buildings in 1890



Historical Development

The 1890 historic map of Leigh Bridge (map 2) shows a small cluster of mill premises located on, or close to the Leeds Liverpool and Bridgewater Canals. These were predominantly cotton weaving mills, and included Rose Mill and Pennington Mill to the north and south of the canal respectively. Of industrial interest was the former canal warehouse, now the Waterside Inn. The smaller stone proportion of the warehouse was built in the late 18th Century before a larger brick built addition in the late 19th Century. Directly opposite the Waterside Inn is the former site of the Mansley's Ropeworks which can be seen stretching down the canal bank in the 1920's map. The length of the building facilitated the making of rope and string. The ropeworks was established by the Mansley family which had been connected

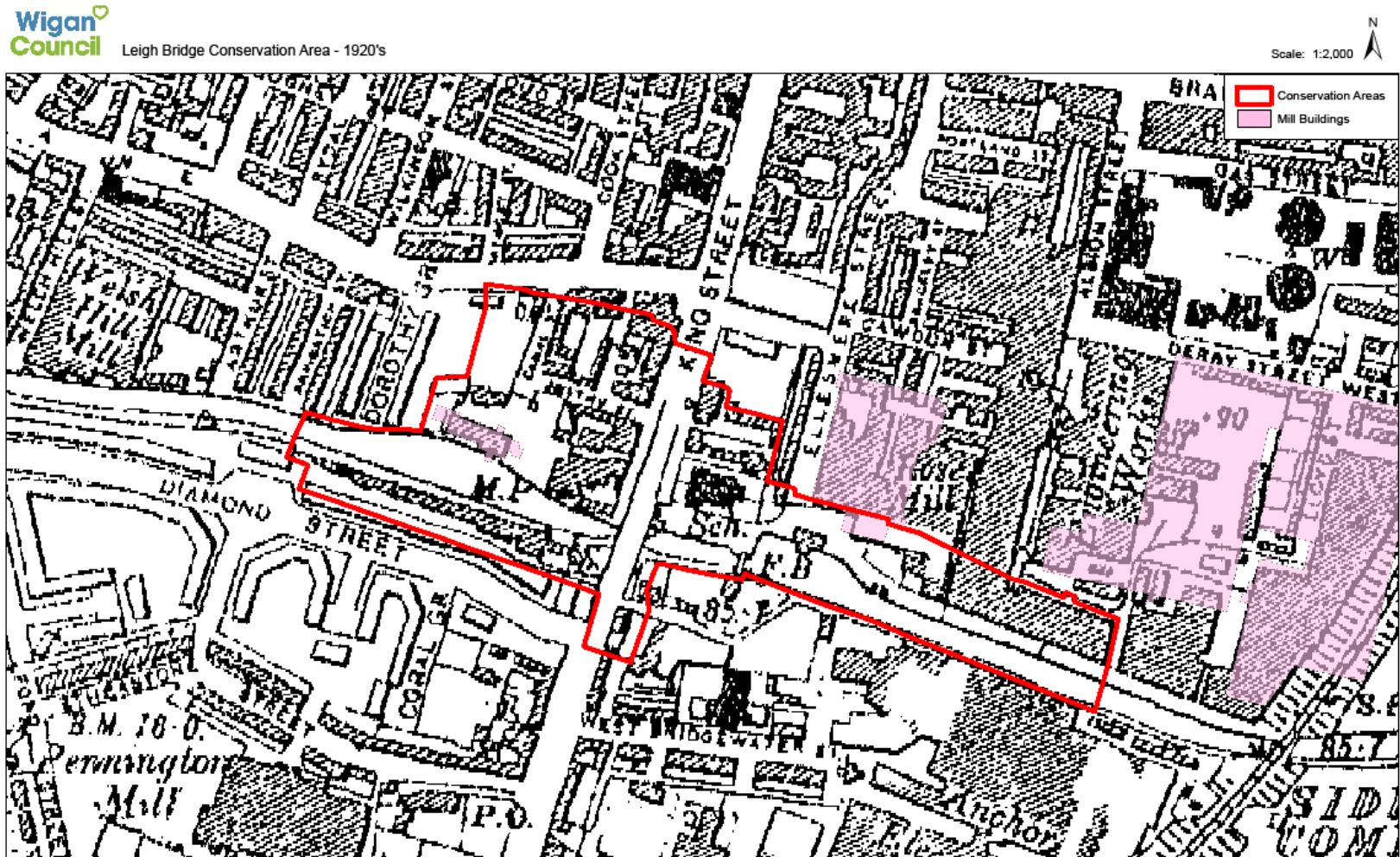


with rope-making in Leigh for over 150 years, meeting the demand initially created by the two canals. The ropeworks suffered from a number of fires and was eventually destroyed in an incident in 1982. It has since been replaced by the Ropewalk apartments.



Left: Photo 3: Former canal warehouse prior to conversion to the Waterside Inn 1890's. Above: Photo 4: The Waterside Inn today.


Map 3: Leigh Bridge in the 1920s

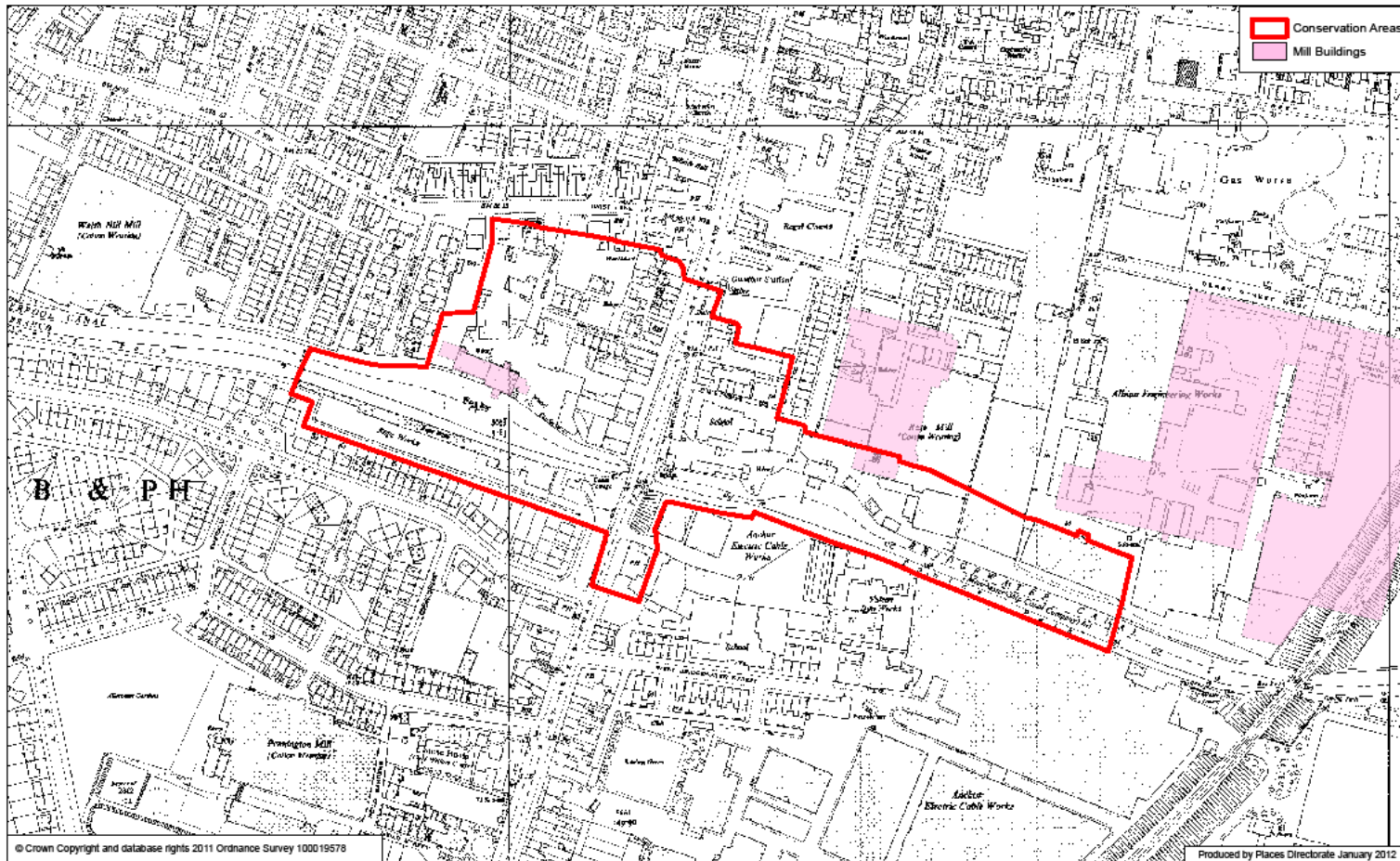


Map 4: Leigh Bridge in the 1950s

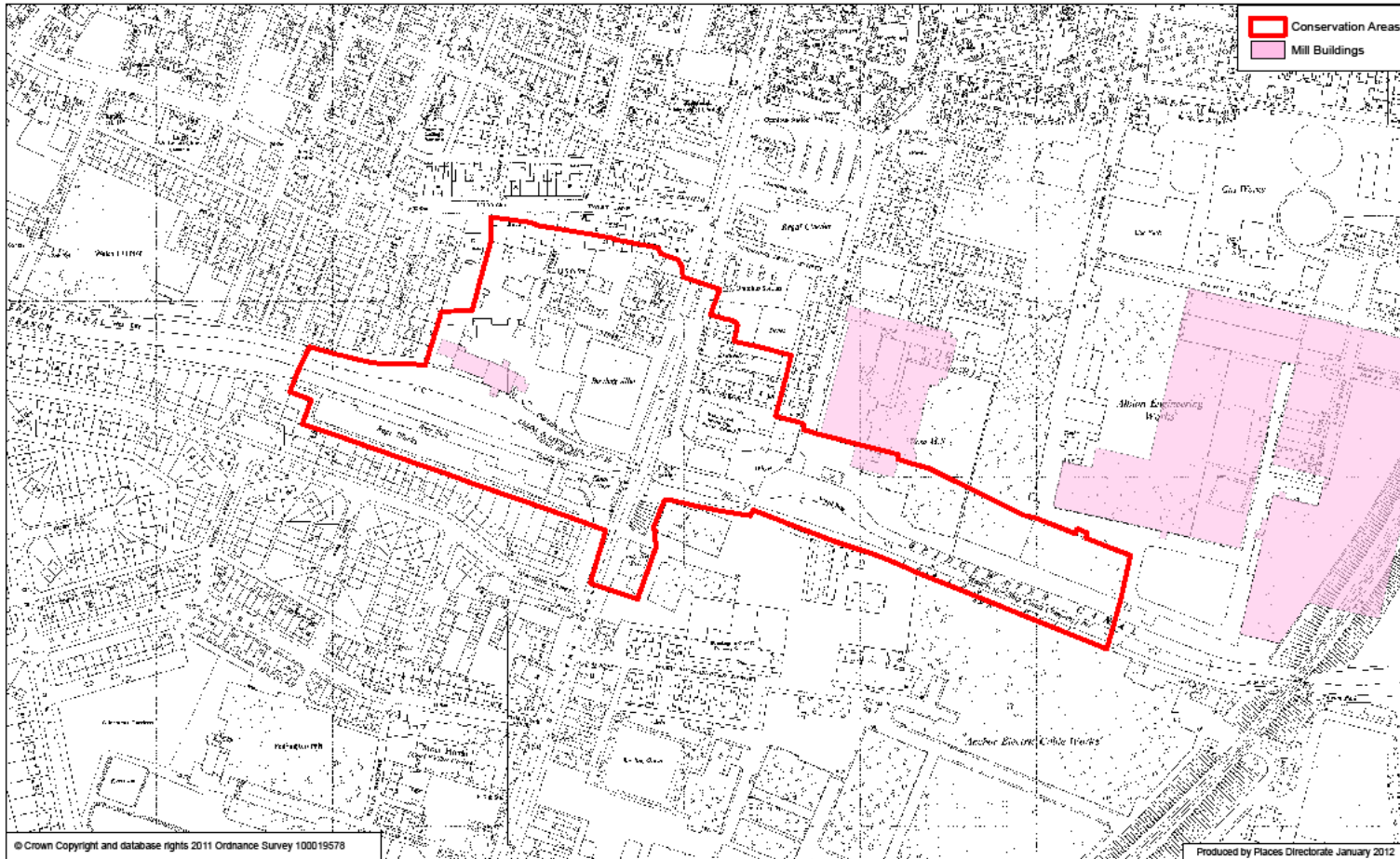


Leigh Bridge Conservation Area - 1950's

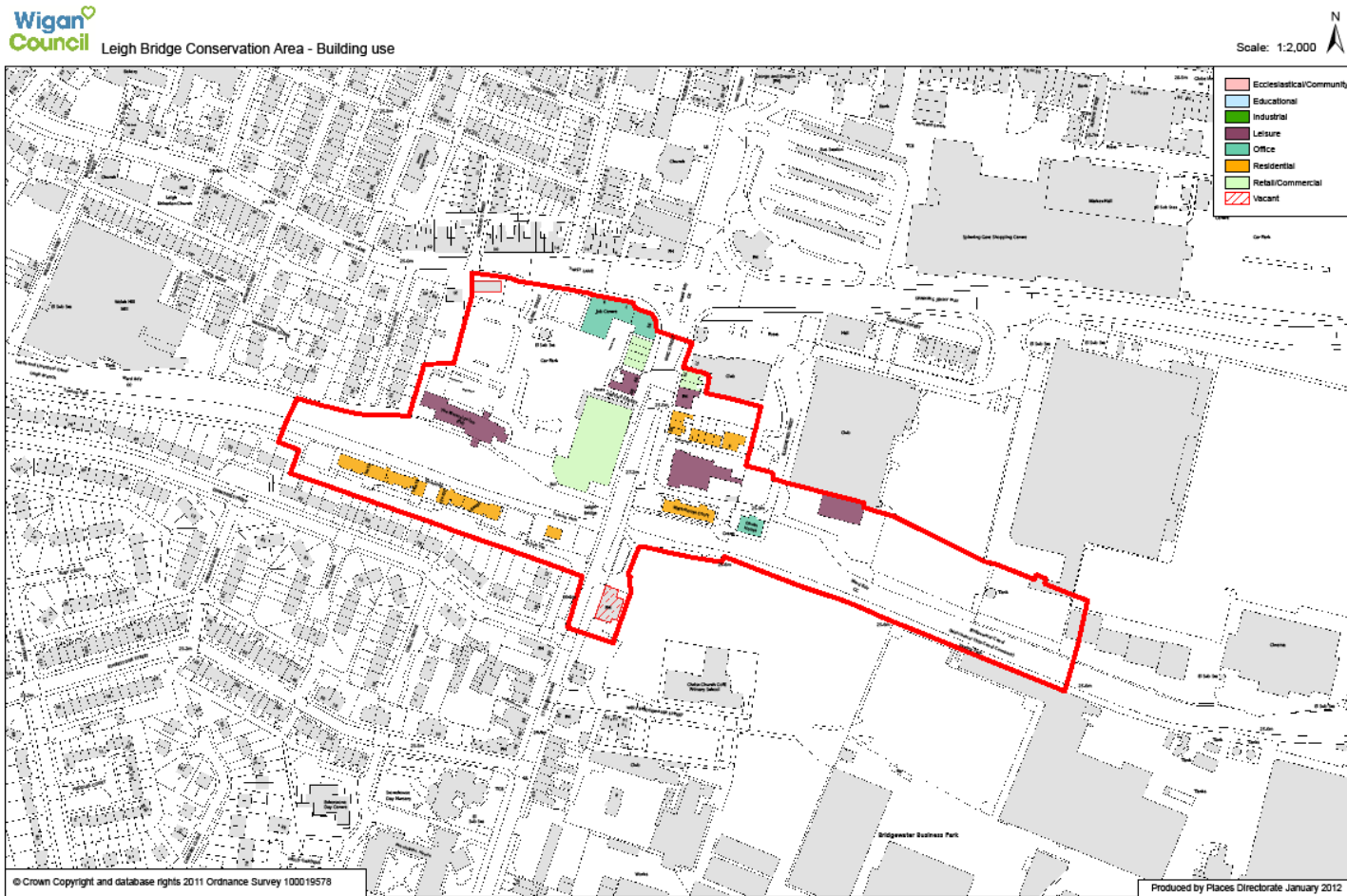
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Map 5: Leigh Bridge in the 1960s



Map 6: Building uses in the Leigh Bridge Conservation Area



Activities and uses

The canals provide an interesting and visually pleasant feature. Although no longer used for working freight, the canals have enjoyed a renaissance along with much of the rest of the national network, for leisure boating and residential craft, as well as fishing, walking and cycling. There are a small number of moorings on this part of the canal. Adjacent, historic canalside uses are still very much evident, such as the converted former canal warehouse now The Waterside Inn.



Photo 5: The view eastwards along the Bridgewater Canal from Butts Bridge



Photo 6: Private moorings on the Leeds Liverpool Canal (Leigh Branch) and the Bridgewater Canal

On King Street there are a range of shops and businesses clustered to the northern end nearest to the town centre. This is an area characterised predominantly by commercial activity, although there are small pockets of residential development, including the short terrace of former workers' cottages on Wilds Passage.



Photo 7: Commercial properties on King Street

There are also two former public houses; the Moonraker Hotel, which was recently converted into residential units, and The Bridge Inn, which is now vacant.

The former Moonraker Hotel (photo 9) is a visually dominant 3-storey late Georgian building with 4 gabled stacks and decorative corning to the eaves. There are stone quoins to the ground floor and decorative brick quoins to the first and second floors.

The Bridge Inn provides interest to the streetscene by virtue of its interesting architectural features including part timber gablets to the front elevation, 3 ridge stacks, slate roof and fenestration.



Photo 8: The Former Moonraker Hotel



Photo 9: The Bridge Inn

As well as Wild's passage there is a small block of terrace housing fronting and adjoining King Street, the Ropewalk building alongside the canal and a block of flats overlooking the canal on the north side. The Ropewalk has been designed to compliment the architectural style and detailing of the Waterside Inn on the north bank opposite. The 3-storey apartment block to the east of Leigh bridge also makes an attempt to incorporate architectural features which mimic canalside industrial buildings and warehouses.



Photo 10: Former workers' cottages at Wild's Passage



Above: photo 11: Houses on King Street

Below: photo 12: Apartments on the north side of the Bridgewater Canal, east of Leigh Bridge





Photo 13: Ropewalk apartments fronting the south bank of the Bridgewater Canal to the west of Leigh Bridge

Spatial structure – form, character and density

The Conservation Area is situated between King Street and the canals. The character of the area is one of contrasts with the canal providing a pleasant backdrop to the extensively built up commercial area of King Street. Relatively small in size, the conservation area as a whole is too cohesive to be divided into character sub-areas.



Photo 14: North from Leigh Bridge



Photo 15: Northwards from Leigh Bridge



Photo 16: Adactus Housing on the corner of King Street with Twist Lane

The character of the northern edge of the Conservation Area at Twist Lane and Spinning Jenny Way is informed by the town centre. There is an imposing frontage of buildings lining the street and turning the corner; a variety of building styles, types and heights; and commercial / business uses.



**Photo 17:
Aldi**



supermarket, King Street

The most visually pleasing new buildings within the conservation area are those along the canal-side, including the Ropewalk residential development on the south bank of the Leeds Liverpool Canal.

All buildings on the south side of the canal are set back from the towpath behind grass verges and semi-mature trees. This provides a quieter landscape setting than the bustling town and an area of valuable greenspace, which is not a particularly prominent feature within the Conservation Area.



Photo 18: Ropewalk housing development



Photo 19: New apartments and office block on the north side of the Bridgewater Canal

The apartment and office buildings to the north side of the Bridgewater Canal west of Leigh bridge abut the canal side. These replace former industrial buildings and an attempt has been made to mimic the style and building line of warehouses.

The Waterside Inn and former warehouse buildings on the northern bank front directly onto the canal side. There is no towpath on the northern canal bank.



Photo 20: North bank of the Bridgewater Canal with the Waterside Inn (with the Aldi supermarket in the foreground)

Buildings of townscape merit

Within the Conservation Area there is a variety of buildings of architectural quality, of townscape merit, which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area and add to the quality of the streetscene.

Numbers 1 to 5 Wilds Passage circa 1800 are of special historic interest in relation to the early industrial development of Leigh. No. 5 was a weaving master's house a 3 storey Georgian property, with a weaving shop on the top floor and the building is Grade II listed.



Photo 21: 1-4 Wild's Passage



Photo 22: No. 5, Wild's Passage

Of particular interest is **5 Wild's Passage**, a Grade II Listed former weaver's house and top-shop dating from circa.1800. The building is a 3-storey red brick premises in Flemish bond with a stone slate roof. The top floor is thought to be a single space which would have been a weaving shop. This is characterised by fairly large windows to the second floor to allow penetration of the maximum amount of light. Interestingly, it is the only remaining example of a specialised domestic weaving premises remaining in the Leigh area.

Numbers 1 to 4 were smaller vernacular style weavers' cottages with cellar loomshops and while much altered, the

group forms a unique survival from the Borough's early textile industry. Located behind this terrace, and at right angles to the main street, is Wild's Passage, a terrace of five cottages (photos 21 and 22). The red brick boundary wall in front of the cottages gives enclosure to the small front garden areas and provides an attractive feature with stone triangular copings.



Photo 23: Fit-4-Life Gym, former King Street Methodist School

The ornate terracotta former King Street Methodist School is a building of architectural value with terracotta detailing making a positive contribution to the special character of the

conservation area. This is a grand building, which forms an important landmark along King Street.

King Street – east side

The **former Moonraker Hotel** (photo 8) is a three storey mid 19th century building of architectural value contributing positively to the special character of the conservation area representing an important landmark along King Street. Despite the replacement of the original windows, it is a handsome brick building with decorative stone quoins, stringcourse, chamfered stone sills and lintels with key stones. Its height is augmented by four fine chimneys which are symmetrically placed on the gables. The property was recently converted into residential units and has undergone some alterations to the front façade, including re-painting and a new principal entrance.

73 and 75 King Street are two-storey shop units with accommodation above. The frontages of the two pizza shops are of reasonable quality, apart from the overly deep fascia board to number 73. The door to the upper floors is located between the two shop units. Despite the large advertisements and bright paint, this is an elegant building.

The three terraced houses at **81-85 King Street** (photo 24) are typical of the many workers' cottages in Leigh. These are mid-late 19th century brick built 'two up two down' properties. Although the original windows and doors have been replaced, and the facades rendered in pebble-dash, the simple

uncluttered form of the houses are still apparent. The traditional slate roof is intact as is the original brickwork evident to the side elevation fronting Wild's Passage.


Photo 24: 81-85 King Street



Map 7: Key buildings of local interest within Leigh Bridge Conservation Area



Leigh Bridge Conservation Area -Key buildings of local interest making a positive contribution to Conservation Area

Scale: 1:2,000 

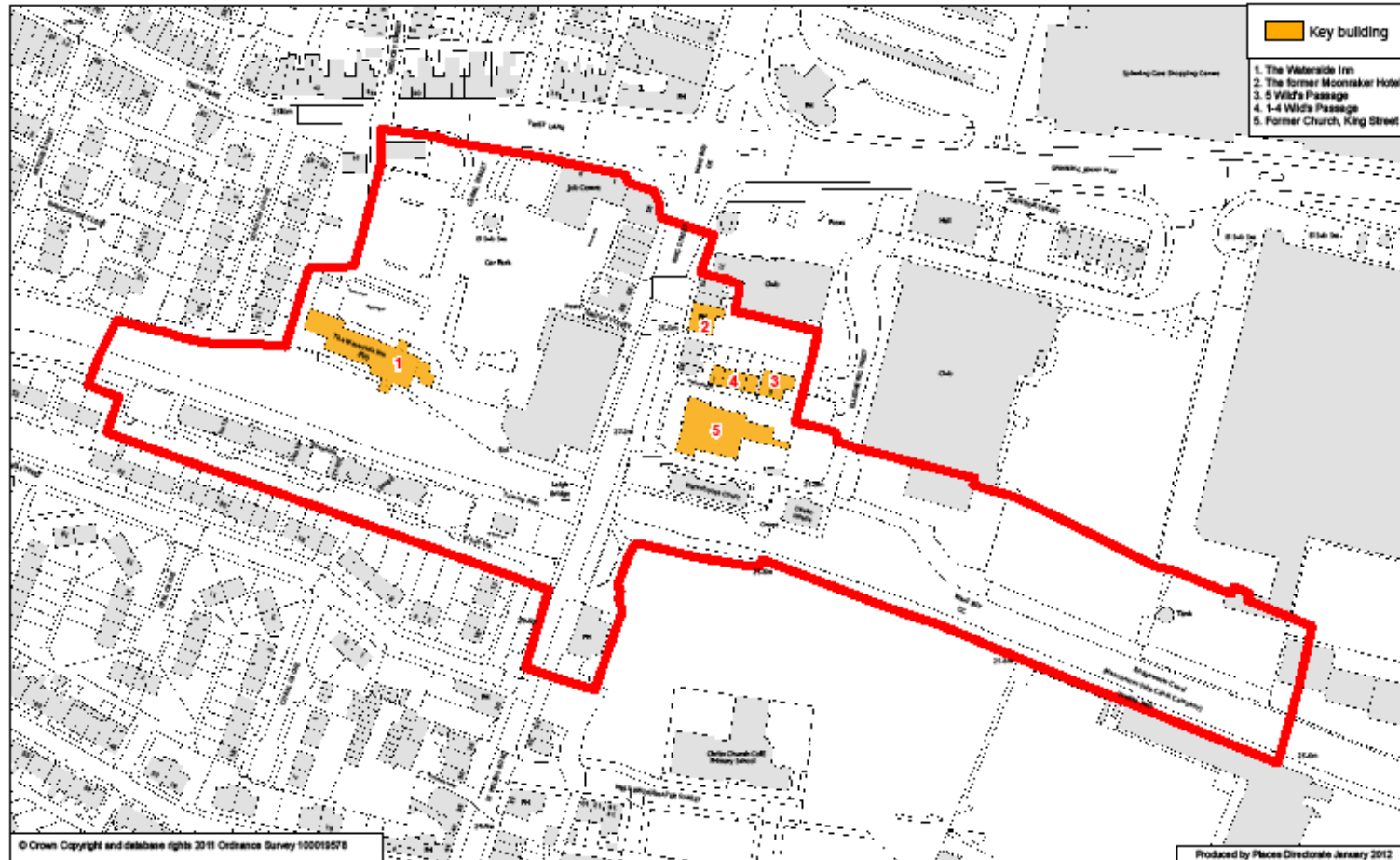




Photo 25:
Former King Street Methodist Church School

The most dominant building on the west side of the street is the **former King Street Methodist Church School**, which is currently used as a gym. Built in 1896, decorative traceried windows dominate the first floor. The asymmetrical façade also comprises a strong square tower with a steep roof feature and finial, and at ground floor level, a sumptuous entrance door and surround.

Twist Lane and King Street – west side

58-64 King Street is a low two-storey terrace of four shops with accommodation above, dating from around 1850. The roofline is plain, and a number of chimneys have been lost from the ridge. The terrace has unfortunately been much altered, and the signage at first floor level, including projecting signs, particularly detracts from their appearance. However, the buildings enclose the street well and, overall their contribution is positive.



Photo 26: 66-68 King Street

66-68 King Street is Denjo's Amusements (photo 26), a later Victorian building with a hipped roof and decorative segmental arches to the upper floor windows. To the ground floor, the modern aluminium door and window frames detract from the building, but again, its overall form and scale remain making a positive contribution to King Street.



Photo 27: Domestic Centre, Twist Lane

Located on Twist Lane is the **Domestic Centre** (photo 27) which was built in 1927 and is a fine early 20th Century building. Later used as the Leigh Youth Co-operative Project Centre, the principal elevation facing Twist Lane has a long facade, which helps to form the streetscape and partly enclose the large open space formed by the car-park behind. The two-storey building is notable for its attractive window openings with narrow stone keystones above, and stone sills below. The principal door is of interest including a rectangular fanlight, and rounded arched cornice above.

Right: photo 28: The Ropewalk

The canal corridor

A surfaced towing path is located on the south bank of the canal, providing a pleasant footpath for recreational and leisure use.

The Ropewalk residential development (photo 28) is located on the south bank of the canal to the west of Leigh Bridge. It comprises two blocks of flats fronting the canal. The blocks are long and narrow, standing at three storeys high. Set behind the towpath they respond well to the line of the canal and reinforce its linear nature. They also compliment the Waterside Inn on the opposite bank through matching scale, materials, detail and form.



On the northern bank of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal is the former canal warehouse building, which is now **The Waterside Inn**. The building is a late 1700s Grade II listed stone built warehouse with a late 1800 brick-built addition. The warehouses retain many of their original features including loading doors on each floor in bay three (front and rear), stone mullioned windows, and 2-storey canted bay window. The late 19th century addition demonstrates how much things had moved on in the intervening century. This three-storey structure is much deeper and taller, with a much wider roof-span. To the rear, a large projecting canopy sits over the loading doors. The eaves have dentilled brick detailing. The former warehouse buildings provide an interesting juxtaposition of 18th and 19th century industrial architecture.

Photo 29: Former Canal Warehouse (front elevation)



Photo 30: Former Canal Warehouse (rear elevation)



There are also remnants of past industrial activity on the Bridgewater Canal, including a small **lifting crane** which is sited on the former wharf located on the northern bank of the Bridgewater Canal, east of Leigh Bridge. As there are no locks on the Bridgewater Canal engineers had to devise a way so that sections of the canal could be blocked off to enable work to be carried out. Cranes were located at intervals along the canal's length to allow boards to be dropped into slots in the canal banks. One of the cranes still exists next to Leigh bridge on the canal bank, forming a piece of historic public art.

Photos 31 and 32: Crane lifting gear on the Bridgewater Canal



Leigh Bridge itself is a low canal bridge. Although not outstanding as a piece of architecture in itself, it complements its context well, providing a visually interesting built feature. The brick built bridge seen today masks the original stone structure beneath as evidenced in the photograph taken at the turn of the last century.

Below: photo 33: Leigh Bridge

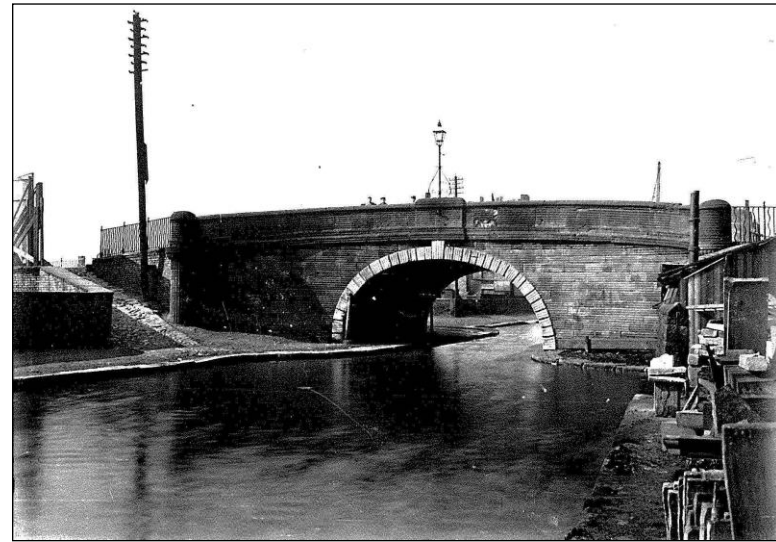


Photo 34: Leigh Bridge – early 1900s

Close to the bridge is the **Bridge Inn** (photo 35), located on the east side of St Helen's Road. The two storey building is rendered at the first floor, with red brick to the ground floor. Timbered gables provide detailing to the first floor. The building is currently unoccupied and on the open market. To the south of the building is a row of decorative wavy railings which extend beyond the conservation area boundary and date back to the early 1900s. The style of these railings provides interest to the area. Land surrounding this building is untidy and overgrown and detracts from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Photo 35: Bridge Inn Public House

Neutral or negative factors

The architectural quality of buildings to the east of Leigh Bridge is less significant. On the north bank, there are two modern red brick structures facing the canal: **Cavan House**, an office building, and **Waterhouse Court**, a block of flats (photo 36). Although they mimic the form, scale and height of the Waterside Inn to an extent, their overall design and use of materials is poor. This is reflected in the use of materials, noticeably the brick colour and the fenestration mismatch in upvc on the doorways and windows.



Photo 36: Cavan House and Waterside Court

The space around the buildings and the nearby car park are particularly featureless, with predominantly unimaginative hard landscaping, contributing little to the character of the area.



Photo 37: Canal House

Adjacent to the Ropewalk, **Canal House** is a modern construction using a buff coloured brick and a concrete tiled roof. It has a neutral impact but nonetheless retains the building line along the canal, although it is fenced off from the towpath. The adjacent hard standing car-parking area detracts somewhat from the character of the area

Turner House, at 56 King Street and 1-3 Twist Lane (the Job Centre building) is similarly neutral in its impact. The block has attempted to mirror the qualities of Edison's, on the opposite corner of Twist Lane, but cannot match it architecturally. However, the building maintains the scale and form of the streetscape, successfully completing this corner.



Photo 38: Turner House

Derelict and untidy land adjacent to the Bridge Inn detracts from the overall character and appearance of the conservation area.



Photo 39: Untidy land adjacent to The Bridge Inn

The **Aldi supermarket** (photo 40) building fails to acknowledge either the canal or the street, and its low, shed-like form does not relate in any way to the established traditional building types in vicinity, or the Conservation Area as a whole. It is perhaps the most negative factor in terms of its impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Photo 40: Aldi Supermarket from King Street / Leigh Bridge

The elevation facing the canal (photo 41) also detracts from the character of the Conservation Area. It also faces into a service yard, with air conditioning units in metal mesh cages. These form a further barrier between the building and the canal frontage.



Photo 41: Aldi Supermarket from the canal

Another contributing negative factor in Leigh Bridge Conservation Area is that of small-scale alterations which have been carried out to historic properties over time. These include the removal of original doors and windows; truncation and removal of historic chimneys; addition of satellite dishes; the painting of historic facades, and the addition of dominant advertisements to shop fronts and other buildings (photo 7 and 42).



**Photo 42:
Shop fronts
on King
Street**

In 2011 the development of a new retail park on the site of the former Barlo Radiator factory site on Spinning Jenny Way resulted in the loss of a of building that was important in the Conservation Area. It was an impressive 4 storeys high brick built factory building of 10 bays in length with a slate roof. Its particular significance was as the only major historic building surviving from the Harrison, McGregor and Co. Albion Ironworks. It was particularly prominent from Leigh Bridge and formed part of a sequence of large scale traditional buildings spaced out along the canal. These buildings include Mather Mill, Brooklands Mill and Butts Mill located in the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area.

The site is now a mixed use retail and leisure complex, opposite the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre. There is a 100,000 sq. ft. supermarket, seven screen cinema and four restaurants. The new development has a neutral impact upon the Conservation Area and although there has been the loss of traditional industrial premises, the design, scale height and massing and materials used for the retail park has made an attempt to blend in with surrounding premises and is sensitive to the character of the area.



Photo 43: Barlo Radiators site

Trees and green elements

The few grassy areas, trees and shrubs make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area by softening the built form and providing contrast. On the south side of the canal, there is a grassed verge to the towpath planted with numerous trees and shrubbery screening the Ropewalks. The towpath is surfaced with modern setts creating a user-friendly and more accessible path. The trees and hedges in the supermarket car park also help to soften and break up a space that is otherwise not particularly attractive (see photo 48).



Photo 44: Beer Garden at the Waterside Inn



Above: Photo 45 Trees on the canal towpath



**Photo 46:
South-side
of canal
towpath**



Photo 47:
Supermarket
Car Park -
hard
landscaping



Photo 48: Car
Park to rear
of Waterside
Inn softened
by tree
planting

Settings and Views

The canal corridor contrasts with the hard urban character of King Street, where there is no greenery to soften the streetscape.



Photo 49: View from Leigh Bridge westwards

Leigh Bridge provides the best views of the canal and its setting. From the slightly elevated position, one can see further and often enjoy longer views than those obtained from the towpath. The best view is looking west from the bridge along the canal (photo 51). It is framed by the Waterside Inn and the Ropewalk apartments, with trees and greenery in the distance as the canal curves out of sight.



Photo 50: View from Leigh Bridge westwards along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal



The view eastwards along

the Bridgewater Canal towards Butts Mill and Mather Lane Mills, as the canal curves into the distance (photo 50), is also an attractive one, albeit not quite as aesthetically pleasing as the view westwards. Nonetheless it provides a view of historical interest, with the large scale industrial mill buildings dominating the skyline.



Photo 51: View from Leigh Bridge eastwards

The view immediately eastwards from the top of Leigh Bridge, encompasses the modern office and residential development on the southern bank of the canal. In the distance, glimpses of mill buildings can be seen.

Another interesting view is from Leigh Bridge northwards towards the town centre (photo 51). This includes landmark buildings such as Eddisons, which is outside the Conservation Area boundary, and smaller retail premises at the forefront. In the distance, glimpses of key town centre buildings can be seen.



Photo 52: View from Leigh Bridge towards the Town Centre

The view south towards Leigh Bridge (photo 52) is also interesting with a clear view of the bridge as it curtails the view southwards. In the foreground are buildings of varying heights and scales.



Photo 53: View from the Town Centre towards Leigh Bridge

Public realm

The public realm around the Leigh Bridge is quite stark, with grey concrete flagging, and the heavy modern guard rails that approach the bridge painted in green (photo 54). The grey flags continue on the south side of the canal bridge, forming a wide pavement outside the Bridge Inn public house. Grey flags and tarmac predominate in the area.

on Leigh Bridge



Photo 54:
Guard rails

Photo 55: Tightly laid sets on the canal towpath



To the west of the Leigh Bridge, the canal towpath is surfaced in modern, tightly laid sets, and is a multi-use path which is frequented by walkers and cyclists. The canal towpath runs from the Bridgewater Canal at Bedford some distance

eastwards of Leigh Bridge within the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area. It continues its journey westwards where it joins the Leeds Liverpool Canal at Leigh Bridge and continues northwards into the centre of Wigan.

Issues in the Conservation Area

Strengths

Leigh Bridge was designated in December 1989 as a special industrial area.

- It was the first area in Leigh to become industrialised in the 1800s.
- The earliest surviving buildings in the area are Georgian and include the former Mansley's Ropeworks stone built 2 storey warehouse, which fronts the northern bank of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal; the former Moonraker Hotel on King Street and the former workers' cottages and weaver's house on Wild's Passage.

Weaknesses

- The cumulative effect of relatively small but inappropriate changes, including shop-fronts; advertisements and painted elevations.
- The loss of buildings important to Leigh's industrial history, and therefore the primary reason for designating the area as a Conservation Area, particularly the last surviving building from the Harrison, McGregor and Co. Albion Ironworks at the former Barlo Warmastyle Ltd works.

- Poor quality modern development.
- The loss of traditional street surfaces.
- Street clutter particularly signage.
- Litter, debris and graffiti.

Opportunities

- Development opportunities such as the former Bridge Inn on St. Helens Road and vacant land to the side and rear.
- Enhancement of the triangular area of untidy land abutting the Bridgewater Canal on the south bank, adjacent to the Bridge Inn.
- Although, there has been investment with respect to improving and enhancing the surfacing of the tow-path along the Bridgewater Canal, other areas in close proximity have suffered from a lack of maintenance and detract from the special character of the conservation area.
- Use an Article 4 (2) Direction to remove certain permitted development rights and prevent any further loss of important architectural features, such as windows, doors, decorative features, chimneys and traditional boundary

treatments, and allow greater control over alterations to properties within the Conservation Area

- Investigate the potential for a Heritage Lottery Fund Townscape Heritage Initiative, to promote conservation-led regeneration and target specific buildings for grant repair and refurbishment.

Threats

- The main on-going threat to Leigh Bridge Conservation Area is the present economic climate and the impact of economic decline which could lead to vacant or under-used buildings.
- Maintenance of properties and general management of the area as a whole needs to be on-going and enhancement works encouraged to ensure the special character of the conservation area is safeguarded.
- Constraints on public sector funding and other competing priorities for that funding, including other Conservation Areas in Leigh.

Conservation Area Review

As part of the appraisal process and SWOT analysis of the character of the area, its extent and immediate setting, the outcomes have resulted in considering whether the Conservation Area status is warranted for all or parts of the area.

Since the Conservation Area was designated on 20 December 1989, some of the original interest has been eroded by the cumulative effect of piecemeal change over time. Together with single examples of poorly designed development, notably the Aldi supermarket, some parts of the area are considered to be no longer special.

The following options are therefore proposed and will be considered during and following a 4 week period of public consultation:

Option 1: Retain the Conservation Area as designated with no boundary alterations.

Option 2: Revise the boundary of the Conservation Area to exclude development which has a negative impact on its character and appearance.

Option 3: Remove the Conservation Area designation from the area as a whole.

Option 1 - Keep the Conservation Area as it is with no changes to the boundary (Map 1).

The original boundary recognises the significance of the built environment and contribution of the Bridgewater Canal setting to the special character of Leigh Bridge. It took into account the historic development of the settlement and included sites which currently have a negative or neutral impact on the area.

Option 2 - revisions to the Conservation Area boundary

The boundary could be revised to exclude elements which have a negative impact on the area's character and appearance (see map 8). These include: the Aldi supermarket on King Street and the area of untidy land to the north of The Bridge Inn public house. Several other buildings within the Conservation Areas have been identified as having a neutral impact on the conservation area, including Turner House, The Bridge Inn public house, Cavan House and Waterside Court.

This option therefore, considers a significant revision to the current boundary and includes only the Bridgewater Canal and its significant canal-side buildings.

The Aldi supermarket building fails to acknowledge either the canal or the streetscene, and its low, shed-like form does not

relate in any way to the established traditional building types in vicinity.

The Bridge Inn public house is currently vacant and boarded up. Land surrounding this building is untidy and overgrown and detracts from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Another negative factor is small-scale alterations which have been carried out to historic properties over time. These include the removal of original doors and windows; truncation and removal of historic chimneys; the addition of satellite dishes and the painting of historic facades, together with advertisements to shop fronts.

The option to revise the boundary would retain only those buildings which front the Bridgewater Canal, namely The Waterside Inn on the north bank of the canal and the Ropewalk residential development opposite. These buildings have their own special historic industrial character along with the canals, which represent the social history of the area as well as providing a visually important setting.

Option 3 – Removal of the Conservation Area designation as a whole

Since designation 13 years ago, some of the Conservation Area's original industrial character has been eroded due to the cumulative effect of piecemeal change, and single examples of poorly designed development.

In addition to the issues raised in Option 2, it is also felt that the cumulative effect of relatively small-scale changes, including inappropriate shop-fronts (advertisements, paint colour), street clutter, including a proliferation of signage; litter and debris scattered on the banks of the Bridgewater Canal and graffiti on the arches of Leigh bridge itself. Other problems include the loss of traditional street surfaces and poor quality modern development.

Also, the loss of important industrial buildings, including the former Barlo Warmstyle radiator factory has resulted in the loss of an element of Leigh's industrial history.

The buildings (and their settings) which contribute positively to the character and appearance of Leigh Bridge Conservation Area are those which are statutorily listed, and protected in their own right for their architectural or historic interest. These include The Waterside Inn (former Mansley's Ropeworks buildings) and no. 5 Wild's Passage (a former weaver's cottage).

The Council's preferred option is to consider the removal of the conservation area status of Leigh Bridge Conservation Area.

Justification

As set out in the Committee Report in December 1989, Leigh Bridge was, at the time of designation, a very small scale industrial area, with a collection of 19th century industrial warehouses and canal rope-work buildings, small-scale commercial premises and workers' houses. Its character was very much that of a working class industrial area located beside the Bridgewater and Leeds Liverpool canals. Since designation permission has been granted for a number of new developments within the Conservation Area, including a supermarket, several canalside apartments, a new 3 storey office building and some of the existing commercial properties have been extended and altered. The supermarket development was approved in 2007 and replaced an earlier supermarket building. Whilst individually each of these decisions were seen to be acceptable, and although are not

substantial in number, cumulatively they have nevertheless had an impact on the Conservation Area.

Wigan Council must be able to justify all its designations in terms of the architectural and historic importance of each area. To allow designations that have lost their value to remain compromises the overall standards of all Wigan Borough's Conservation Areas and may have a detrimental impact in the future in terms of the weight that may be given to other Conservation Areas at planning appeals.

The status of Listed Buildings, archaeologically sensitive sites and protected trees in an area provides greater protection to those elements than Conservation Area designation does. In the case of Leigh Bridge, it is therefore more appropriate to use these other forms of designation and protection, rather than retain the Conservation Area status in an area which has lost a great deal of its historic architectural importance.

Criteria for de-designation are not set out in our policy. However, current English Heritage Guidance 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management' (Para. 1.14) states that:

'In areas designated many years ago original interest may have been so eroded by the cumulative effect of piecemeal change or by single examples of poorly designed development that some parts of the area are no longer special, and boundary revisions are needed to

exclude them. In some cases the conservation area designation may need to be re-considered.'

Furthermore, Section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that:

'It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas and section 70 outlines the process for designation, variation or cancellation of designations. '

If Conservation Area appraisals are to be consistent and comprehensive it is important to consider cases where de-designation might be appropriate, based on the evidence of what is on site today, not on what was present at the time of designation.

To lay down generalised policies relating to de-designation of Conservation Areas is unlikely to be beneficial. In many ways

it might adversely affect the process and restrict the ability to judge each case on its own merits.

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area has been appraised and comprehensively surveyed, with each building, space and setting considered in terms of its architectural or historic interest. This process ensures that each area that is proposed for inclusion warrants designation.

When this process was undertaken in Leigh Bridge it was considered that very few of the buildings or open spaces in the area were of sufficient interest to justify a designation. Having regard to these considerations and the impact of the development that has been permitted if the Council were considering the area afresh then this area would be unlikely to be proposed for designation. As such de-designation of the area should be considered.

De-designation is the Council's preferred option owing to cumulative changes which have taken place over time resulting in the special interest of Leigh Bridge being eroded.