

REGENT'S CANAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Regent's Canal Conservation Area was designated by the London Borough of Hackney in 2007. It comprises a unique linear green corridor that runs for almost 4km right through the southern part of the borough and provides important public amenity space both on the water and along the towpath. It is a place of ecological diversity that brings plants and wildlife into the heart of the city. As industrial transport has declined, wildlife has increased. Like all London's canals, the Regent's Canal and its basins were identified by the GLA in 2002 as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. The Hackney stretch of the canal is just a couple of miles of a 3,000 mile network of inland waterways that cover much of England. Canals are a public asset and they are managed on behalf on the general public by British Waterways.

The Regent's Canal in Hackney is well used by the local community, boaters and commuters who use the towpath for cycling and walking to work. Along some sections of the canal and on the basins are surviving 19th and early 20th century warehouses and industrial buildings, many formerly associated with the furniture and building trades, which dominated the canal-side wharves of Hackney at this time. There is great pressure on the traditional characteristics and uses of the canal. It is no longer used for freight and despite pleasure craft using the waterway, the industrial nature of the canal and adjacent buildings has been lost. A growing trend is the total or partial demolition of old factories and warehouses on sites beside the canal and their replacement with new housing developments. Often large in scale, as on the former Gainsborough Studios site adjacent to New North Road, these new developments are altering the character of the Regent's Canal and that of its immediate environs.



Fig. 1: General view of the Regent's Canal looking towards Queensbridge Road Bridge

It is a surprise to many, given current recreational use that the canal towpath was a private space until the late 1960s. Opening the canals was a national policy following on from the 1968 Transport Act. It was not until the 1970s that a decision was made by the borough council to open up the canal to the people of Hackney as an

aesthetically acceptable leisure link. The Greater London Council established the London Canals Consultative Committee under the chairmanship of Iltyd Harrington in 1966. The government took a few years longer to recognise the amenity value of the canal. In 1967 *The Regent's Canal – a Policy for its Future* was published by the Regent's Canal Group, a body composed of societies interested in the waterways in Paddington, Islington, St Pancras and Hackney, together with the London branch of the inland Waterways Association and the Civic Trust. In 1968 Westminster Council opened the first stretch of the Regent's Canal towpath from Lisson Grove to Regent's Park. The route between Islington Tunnel and Limehouse was completed in 1982 as the Canalway Project. Up to that date the canal through Hackney (as private property) had been isolated from adjacent housing areas by high wire fencing and other obstacles; much of the towpath was crumbling and falling into the canal and it was considered unsafe to allow public access immediately after the 1968 Transport Act.

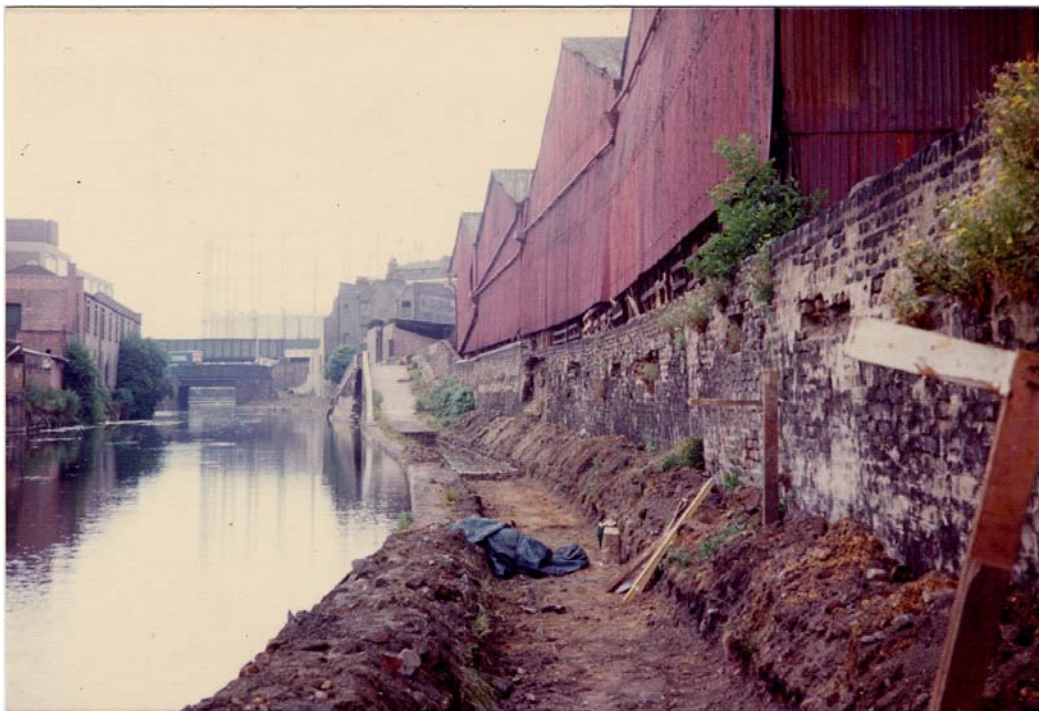


Fig. 2: The towpath in 1975

Although the Regent's Canal itself has altered little since its completion in 1820, once commercial traffic ceased in the 1960s, the industrial use of the canal almost ended. The associated timber and builders wharves and warehouses that have lined the banks and basins of the canal for almost 180 years are changing in nature. Some are disappearing, being replaced by new housing developments beside the waterway. Other smaller factories and former industrial buildings close to the canal are being turned into studios, restaurants and live/work units, although some factories such as that of Thomas Briggs near Rosemary Branch Bridge continue to trade. Research and assessment of the area's special nature undertaken for this appraisal, has enabled a detailed consideration of the boundaries of the Conservation Area to be undertaken and a better definition of the special character that the area encompasses.

1.1 What is a conservation area?

A Conservation Area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Conservation Areas are very much part of the familiar and cherished local scene. It is the area as a whole rather than the specific buildings that is of special interest. Listed Buildings within Conservation Areas are also covered by the Listed Building Consent process.

The special character of these areas does not come from the quality of their buildings alone. The historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries; characteristic building and paving materials; a particular 'mix' of building uses; public and private spaces, such as gardens, parks and greens; and trees and street furniture, which contribute to particular views - all these and more make up the familiar local scene. Conservation Areas give broader protection than listing individual buildings: all the features listed or otherwise, within the area, are recognised as part of its character.

Conservation Areas enjoy special protection under the law. Below are some of the key requirements for works in conservation areas:

- You will need Conservation Area Consent to demolish a building in a conservation area. LB Hackney will seek to keep all buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area.
- You must give six weeks notice, in writing, before any work is carried out to lop, top or fell a tree in a conservation area. You can contact the Council's Tree Officer for advice and help. For further details see our page on trees.
- You will need to demonstrate that any development proposal preserves or enhances the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Hackney has greater control over building work in Conservation Areas, including materials and detailed design.
- You may need to apply for planning permission for alterations or extensions that would not normally need planning permission, such as minor roof alterations, dormer windows or a satellite dish. If you are in any doubt about whether you need planning permission, you should contact the duty planner.
- Hackney also has greater control over the erection of advertisements and signs. For instance, Hackney has the power to control shop signs, posters or estate agents boards that would not normally need permission.

1.2 Location and Context of the Conservation Area

The Regent's Canal Conservation Area runs across Southern Hackney from Victoria Park in the east to Islington in the west and forms part of Regent's Canal which runs from Limehouse Basin on the Thames to Paddington Basin in the west. Within Hackney there are 21 hectares of canal, including the towpath and the grassy banks beside it. A number of existing Conservation Areas within Hackney and Islington lie adjacent to or very close to the Regent's Canal Conservation Area. These include Kingsland Road Conservation Area and Broadway Market Conservation Area in Hackney. In the adjacent borough of Islington, the Duncan Terrace and Colebrooke Row Conservation Area includes the canal and City Road Basin immediately adjacent to the Hackney borough boundary and the Arlington Square Conservation Area lies just to the north-west of the Rosemary Branch Bridge. To the east in Tower

Hamlets, Victoria Park Conservation Area includes the part of the Regent's Canal that runs through Victoria Park.

The Regent's Canal is a broad canal of between 40 and 60 feet, with a minimum width in the locks and bridges of 14 feet 6 inches. The locks are 72 feet in length. The two locks in the Hackney section of the canal (Actons and Sturts), were built as pairs of locks even though they do not all operate as such today. When it was first constructed the canal had earth banks but these were lined with ragstone walls in 1832. The ragstone is now covered with a thick capping of cement. The stone banking is still in place in certain sections of the canal, but elsewhere it has been replaced by steel caissons with concrete copings.

The majority of England's canals were built in the 18th century. The Regent's Canal, built between 1812 and 1820, was of later date and built to a much higher standard of construction and engineering technology. The provision of twin locks along the canal's length made for speedier journeys. Some trade was lost to the railways in the mid 19th century and after the First World War to the roads, but the canal remained a commercial waterway until 1950. By the 1950s much of the central and eastern sections were run down and derelict. The severe winter of 1962-3 when canals throughout the country were frozen for weeks, broke inland water freight forever, as cargoes transferred to the roads and never returned. From the 1960s onwards campaigning by groups such as the Inland Waterways Association, British Waterways and local amenity societies has done much to improve the canal as a leisure and environmental entity and to regenerate industrial and residential premises adjoining the canal. Throughout much of the length of the canal in Hackney, to both the south and north banks are extensive public housing estates, especially between Actons Lock and the Kingsland Basin.

The whole of London's canal network, including the Regent's Canal, is little used for commercial navigation although signs of revival have occurred, including LB Hackney conducting trials to move waste by water to the Edmonton Incinerator. On the canal in Hackney occasional pleasure barge trips run from Islington to the Limehouse Basin; canoe and boat clubs such as that at Laburnum thrive and privately owned craft pass through the borough on a regular basis, especially during the summer months. (Figure 3) There is the potential to re-instate some industrial use of the navigation; for transport of building materials and spoil for developments along the canal. The Mayor's draft Freight Plan seeks to encourage the use of waterways and rail in place of roads wherever practicable. Many groups have aspirations to bring the canals back to life and have regular navigation by boats.

The most significant changes that have occurred beside the canal are relatively recent. Since the late 1980s and especially since the mid-1990s there has been change in use of former industrial buildings beside the canal into residential accommodation. An example of this is the former Royle Card Factory beside Wenlock Basin which now comprises desirable waterside lofts (Figure 4). A tandem trend can be also observed, which has seen the demolition of semi-derelict and unused canalside industrial buildings and their replacement with new housing developments, on these Brownfield sites. This trend seems likely to continue. Market research has shown that waterside developments increase development values by more than 20% - it is therefore unsurprising that the Regent's Canal in Hackney is under pressure given the proximity to the City of London and the completion of the East London Line extension to Dalston by 2010.



Fig. 3: Laburnum Boat Club and Basin



Fig. 4: Lofts at the former Royle Card Factory, at the junction of the Regent's Canal and Wenlock Basin

1.3 Format of the Conservation Area Appraisal

This document is an “appraisal” document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides “a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

The Appraisal draws on advice given in *Understanding Place: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* (August 2005), and *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (February 2006), both by English Heritage.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Regent’s Canal Conservation Area. The canal itself is the key historic and heritage feature. It also includes more obvious aspects such as its open spaces, buildings, and architectural details, as well as an attempt to portray the unique qualities which make the area “special”. These include less tangible characteristics such as noise or smell, and local features which are unique to the area, such as the very special environment which is created by the canal itself, the unique ecological life in the water and on the banks, the surviving industrial features such as the locks and bridges, horse ramps, wooden canal side bollards and the character of the remaining wharves, warehouses and basins.

The appraisal is structured as follows. This introduction is followed by an outline of the legislative and policy context (both national and local) for the Conservation Area. Then there is a detailed description of the geographical context and historical development of the Conservation Area and a similarly detailed description of the buildings within it. This is followed by a “SWOT” analysis to clarify and summarise the key issues affecting the area. Appendix A contains historic maps of the Regent’s Canal Conservation Area. Further appendices contain supplementary information, schedules of the listed and locally listed buildings. Appendix C provides a bibliography. A map of the Conservation Area is included in Appendix A. A list of illustrations is included at Appendix D. Appendix E notes sources of further information.

1.4 Acknowledgements

Material within this Conservation Appraisal has been gathered from reports from British Waterways; DEFRA; CHUG (Canal in Hackney Users Group), The Regents Network, London Canals Committee, GLA information on the Blue Ribbon Network, LB Hackney Planning and through the consultation of documents at Hackney Archives Department. Comments received from British Waterways, Regent’s Network and The Creekside Forum during the Regent’s Canal Conservation Area Appraisal Consultation have been incorporated into the final appraisal.

2 PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 National Policies

Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that listed buildings are assessed against *national* criteria, with lists being drawn up by the government with advice from English Heritage. Conservation Areas, by contrast, are designated by local authorities on more *local* criteria, and they are therefore very varied - small rural hamlets, mining villages, or an industrial city centre. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general. By March 2007, the London Borough of Hackney had designated 26 Conservation Areas.

2.2 Local Policies

Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that “special architectural or historic interest” which warranted designation in the first place.

The Environmental Quality chapter of Hackney’s Unitary Development Plan of 1995 contains Policies EQ11 to 15, concerning the designation and control of Conservation Areas. The justification to Policy EQ15 explains that the existing historic areas within the Borough fall roughly in four groups, and as staff resources permit, the Council will consider the designation of further Conservation Areas, and the amendment of boundaries to existing Conservation Areas. These groups are:

- Town centres and village cores: with buildings of varying age and type that will also include Georgian and Victorian ribbon development; for example, Dalston Lane and Broadway Market.
- Residential areas: especially areas characterised by villas – a particularly well developed Hackney building type.
- Open spaces and their settings: for example, London Fields and Stoke Newington Common.
- Industrial Heritage: for example, the Regent’s Canal and Waterworks Lane, Lea Bridge Road.

The Regent's Canal Conservation Area falls into the third and fourth groups, as it constitutes a well-used public space with an important environmental landscape, and it also represents a unique industrial heritage both along the canal (including the locks, bridges, moorings) and in the industrial buildings beside the canal and in the canal basins.



Fig. 5 Industrial buildings (Canalside Studios) in Orsman Road

3 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

3.1 Archaeological Significance

There have not been any prehistoric finds within the Conservation Area although Stone and Bronze Age flint tools were found to the north in North Hackney and Stoke Newington. The Romans built Ermine Street through Shoreditch on the line of the Kingsland Road to link London to York. In excavations at the Geffrye Museum in 1993, a fourth century ditch was found running parallel with Kingsland Road.

3.2 Origins and Historic Development

The Regent's Canal was first proposed in 1802 by Thomas Homer, who was the owner of a fleet of boats operating on the Grand Junction Canal that carried coal and building materials into Paddington and took away horse manure to the country. The Regent's Canal was designed to connect the newly opened (1801) Paddington branch of the Grand Junction Canal (that extended to the Midlands) to the river Thames at Limehouse. This would mean cargo arriving by sea in London could be distributed throughout central and southern England by canal barge.

A sponsoring committee was established, led by Sir Christopher Baynes, and an initial survey was undertaken by John Rennie, a leading canal engineer. A number of problems arose before work could start on the Regents Canal and following the Regent's Canal Act of 1812, 'The Company of Proprietors of the Regent's Canal' was formed to build and operate it. The architect John Nash was one of the directors of the newly formed company and his assistant, James Morgan was appointed as the canal's engineer. He also performed the duties of canal architect and surveyor. It was Morgan who undertook most of the negotiations with landowners over the acquisition of land and dealt with all the contractors. Thomas Homer was appointed as Superintendent of Works, but in 1815 he was found to be embezzling funds and ceased to be involved in the project.

Much of the land on which the canal was built was undeveloped farm land at the edge of the built-up city. In Hackney, land owned by Peter de Beauvoir and leased to the speculative builder William Rhodes was cut through just south of the 16th century Balmes House (by this date an asylum). The engraving of Balmes House, at the southern end of the De Beauvoir Estate, shows the canal as it was in 1830. Others who provided land in Hackney for the canal included William Rhodes, Nathaniel Lee Acton and Mr Sturt, and the Clothworkers' Company. Sturt and Acton are amongst the original landowners whose names are commemorated today in the names of locks that lie in the Hackney stretch of the canal.



Fig. 6: Balmes House in 1830

The first section of the canal from Paddington to Camden was excavated from 1814 and completed by 1816, with the remainder, including the Hackney section, built between 1816 and 1820. The canal was opened on the 1st August 1820 with a grand opening ceremony that included a gun salute at City Road Basin. The cost of the canal was £772,000, almost twice the original estimate, but it was an immediate success with over 120,000 tons of cargo carried during the first year of operation. By 1830 the canal was carrying 500,000 tons of goods each year – a level that remained fairly constant until the late 19th century. Well into the 20th century, in 1929, 700,000 tons of freight was carried on the canal. Throughout its active life coal was one of the major cargoes on the canal, along with timber.

As traffic on the canal increased so too did the number of industrial premises that began to appear along the banks of the canal and in its basins. Gas plants were amongst the first occupiers of canalside sites to take advantage of cheap transportation of the vast amounts of coal needed. The Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company took a large site in 1821 (located where Haggerston Park now stands), and formerly connected to the canal by the Haggerston Basin, which was filled in 1967. Another works owned by The Independent Gas Company existed by 1829. Greenwood's Map of 1827 shows the Imperial Gas sites and also how undeveloped this part of Hackney was when the Regent's Canal was first constructed. Fields, market gardens, nursery grounds and undeveloped land, especially to the north of the canal, were prevalent. Only the area south of the canal, especially between Kingsland Road and what is now New North Road had any extensive building development.

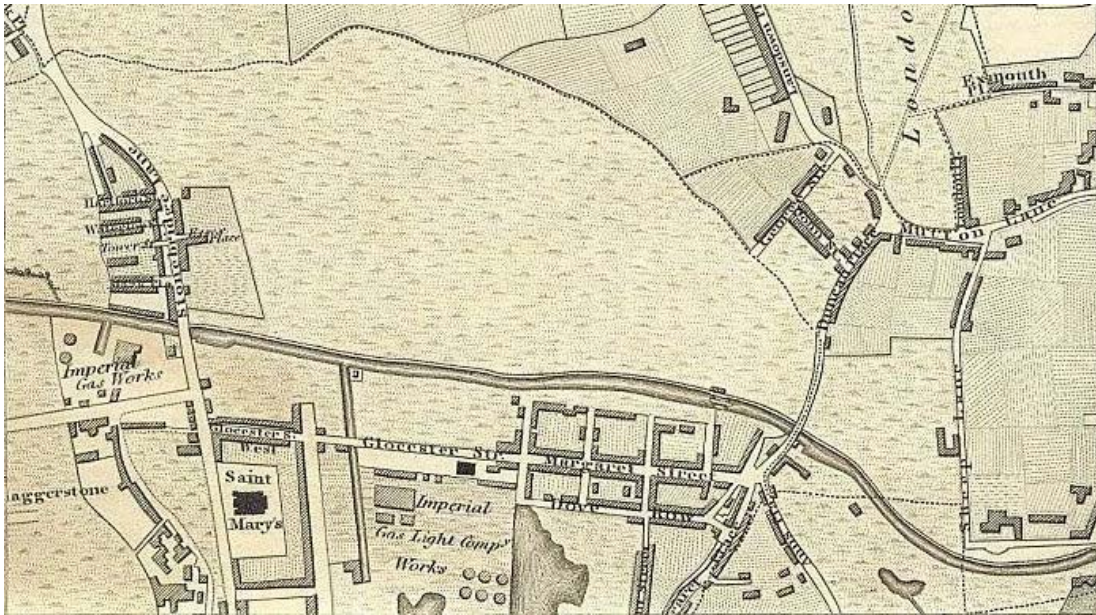


Fig. 7: Greenwood's Map of 1827 showing Gas Works in Haggerston

As building development proceeded space for factories adjacent to the canal to expand was restricted and enterprises manufacturing such goods as candles, rubber goods, soap and cotton that were common in Hackney in the 1860s were displaced by the 1890s. The canal side sites were often associated with the timber and building trades. The principal goods carried on the canal through the 19th century were coal, timber, ice and horse manure. Transporting ice was important for the canal, and as late as 1862 permission was granted to individuals to collect the ice that formed on the canal, much of it stored in ice houses. The coal from northern England was transported to several canal side gas works where it was burnt to create gas for lighting, before the invention of electricity. The timber was largely used for building and the burgeoning furniture trade operating in Hackney, especially in South Shoreditch.

In 1927 the Regent's Canal Company bought the Grand Junction Canal and the Warwick Canals, the merged entity becoming known as the Grand Union Canal in 1929. At that date the canal was still carrying 700,000 tons of goods every year. In 1948 the canal was nationalised, but by that time its use for commercial traffic was rapidly declining and by the 1960s commercial barges on the Regent's Canal were a rare sight. Horse-drawn barges stopped in 1956, following the introduction three years previously of motor tractors to pull the boats.

In 1964, it was accepted by the government that commercial activity on the Regent's Canal was almost at an end and three years later the Grand Union Canal was classified as an amenity waterway. Pleasure traffic was at first restricted due to the limited opening hours of the manned locks. But by 1974, all locks on the canal had been altered to become user-operated at all times when lock keepers were made redundant.

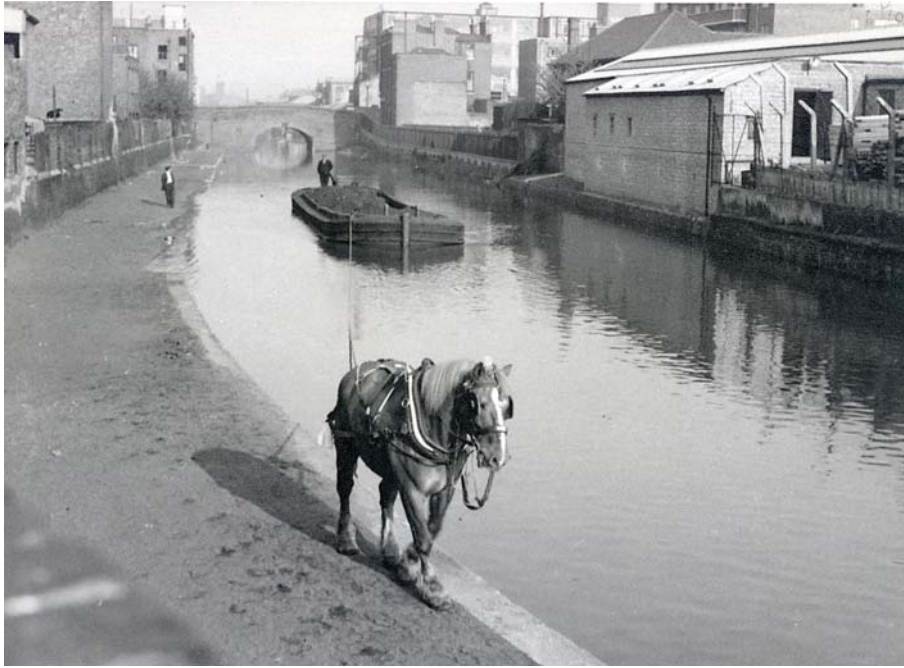


Fig. 8: Horse drawn coal barge in the early 1950s



Fig. 9: A tractor pulling a barge at Actons Lock in the early 1960s. Open Timber sheds to rear

3.3 Geology and Topography

The London Borough of Hackney is located on a mixture of gravel, clay, brick-earth and alluvial deposits. Alluvium lies along the Lea and under Hackney Marsh. Brick-earth can be found below Stamford Hill and Clapton Common, bounded on either side by tongues of London clay, which extend a little to the south of Hackney Downs. Towards the centre and the west are beds of Taplow gravel, covering much of the remainder of the parish, except the area around Well Street Common and Victoria Park, which is on flood plain gravel. The highest point in the area is at Stamford Hill, the most northerly part of the Borough, which reaches 25 metres above sea level. From here, the land falls southwards to the valley of the Hackney Brook, which now lies in a culvert below the northern boundary of Abney Park Cemetery, and to the east, to the River Lea.

The geology of the Regent's Canal Conservation Area is primarily Hackney Gravel with some London Clay. The ground rises gently from the east near Actons Lock where it is about 15 metres above sea level.

4 THE CONSERVATION AREA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

4.1 The Surrounding Area and Setting of the Conservation Area

The Regent's Canal Conservation Area lies in the London Borough of Hackney, which itself is some five miles to the north of the River Thames. The eastern boundary of the Borough is formed by the River Lea, which meanders in a southeasterly direction from Tottenham down to the Thames at Canning Town. To the west lies Finsbury Park and Highbury, and to the south, the City of London. The principal settlements are Stoke Newington, Clapton, Hackney and Shoreditch.

The Regent's Park Conservation Area lies towards the south of the borough and passes through parts of Haggerston and De Beauvoir Town. At the eastern end it begins at the borough boundary with Tower Hamlets, adjacent to Victoria Park. From there it runs westwards the whole length of the canal as far as the western side of Wenlock Basin, where the Islington border begins and to the Narrowboat PH on the northside of the canal. The majority of the Conservation Area it is bounded to the north and south by the various wharves and plots lying immediately adjacent to the canal. At a few places, notably at Kingsland and Wenlock Basins the boundary follows around the basin and includes the plots and sites on the streets adjacent. The entire length of the navigation within the Borough is included within the Conservation Area. For full details see the map of the Regent's Canal Conservation Area.

4.2 General Description of the Conservation Area

The Canal Landscape

This part of appraisal looks at the various sections of the canal as it runs from Victoria Park in the east to the Islington border in the west. It describes the visual characteristics of individual stretches of the canal as it passes through Hackney and identifies the most important historic structures and sites in terms of history, current use and character.

From Victoria Park to Cambridge Heath Bridge

The borough of Hackney begins at the eastern edge of Victoria Park and runs to the north of the canal towards Mare Street in the west. The south side of the canal is within the LB Tower Hamlets and contains many brick-built semi-occupied warehouses that rise straight from the water in a 'Venetian' manner. Copious wild plants and greenery have overgrown the canal bank on these sites and contribute to the 'green' nature of this section of the canal and make it very attractive. However some of the vegetation on the off-side such as buddleias can potentially damage the brick walls and also impact on the width of navigation in the channel. These warehouses are potentially redevelopment sites, and change of use or new-build on these historic sites will alter the nature of the canal. This section of the canal sweeps gently and this adds to the picturesque nature of the scene.



Figs. 10 & 11: Industrial buildings in Tower Hamlets with overgrown foliage

From the late 19th century much of the site on the Hackney side of the canal between Victoria Park and Mare Street was occupied by Cunningham's Timber Wharf beside which was a privately owned square basin known as Northiam Basin. To the west of Northiam Basin was a stone wharf. The tiny Northiam Basin was used to unload timber and stone from barges.

In this section of the canal are a number of indentations along the towpath which are for horse ramps, and the sloping structure is still more or less intact below the water (see Figure 12). The purpose was to allow horses that fell into the water a means of escape back to the towpath.

Unfortunately, Northiam Basin was in filled during 1976 and the bridge over the basin removed. The corner coping stones of the basin are visible on the towpath today (Figure 12). During the late 1970s and early 1980s low rise housing was built on the sites of the former wharves and basin. Today the shrubs and trees planted in the gardens of these houses (which border the towpath) add to the high quality environment along the canal.



Figs. 12 & 13: View towards Victoria Park with former entrance to Northiam Basin on the left and a site of a horse ramp

At Mare Street the towpath goes beneath Cambridge Heath Road Bridge and the railway line and it is a somewhat dark and isolated place with lots of graffiti and a slightly threatening air. At the corner of Andrews Road and Mare Street are a group of interesting mid- to late Victorian mansion flats above shop premises, called Victoria House (Nos. 5 -11 Mare Street). They are locally listed.

Cambridge Heath Bridge to Actons Lock

This section of the canal lacks trees and is separated from the road by high iron railings. Any new trees ought to be planted at the back of the towpath or within landscaping on the off-side. Although perhaps not as attractive as other parts of the canal, it is well used especially at weekends when the crowds from Broadway Market spill onto the towpath. Within this stretch of canal only the north side is within Hackney, but there are interesting canal-side industrial remnants along parts of Andrews Road – some run down, but including the Beehive Works (a working iron foundry) on the site of a former timber yard and the adjoining warehouses beside the canal. These warehouses (Nos. 50-53 consecutive), now a little altered to the canal-side elevation, are the former Ashmore's Furniture Works depicted below in a watercolour by local artist c.1930. The front elevation to Andrews Road is well preserved and attractive. Opposite there are a number of locally listed houses at nos. 35-38 Andrews Road.



Figs. 14 & 15: Ashmore's Furniture works in 1930s and the surviving building in 2006

Further along Andrews Road towards Broadway Market are a variety of former warehouses dating from the 19th century to the 1950s that have been converted into offices and apartments. Here too is Andrews Wharf, a new white block of stylish contemporary live/work units which looks across the road towards the canal.

The Tower Hamlets side of the canal is dominated by gas holders (a reminder of an industry that used to be prevalent throughout the Hackney section of the canal). Some good warehouse conversions exist towards the Cat and Mutton Bridge in LB Tower Hamlets.



Fig. 16: South side of Andrews Road with Beehive Foundry to left and former factory/warehouses

Actons Lock to Queensbridge Road Bridge

The Cat and Mutton Bridge lies at the end of Broadway Market and from the bridge canal access takes you westwards to Actons Lock, one of two locks within the Hackney section of the Regent's Canal. A new five storey gated development is planned for the site in front of Debdale House, on Union Wharf, a former timber wharf (see Figure 9). Due for completion in 2007, Union Wharf will have 25 flats and a canal side restaurant overlooking Actons Lock.

Acton's Lock is named after William Lee Acton, the landowner on whose land this section of the canal was built. The Regent's Canal has a series of double locks throughout its length. Actons Lock is a broad lock capable of taking two narrowboats side by side or a single wider boat. Until the mid-1970s, the lock keeper actually opened the locks, but they are now self-operated. Actons Lock is a popular spot for fishing and walking and one of the busiest sections of the canal towpath, especially since the regeneration of Broadway Market in recent years. From 1922 to the death of Priscilla Woods in 1985, the lock cottage was occupied by members of the Woods family, the lock keepers for most of the 20th century. Since that date the cottage and adjoining office have been renovated and sold.

Beyond Actons Lock there is a long section of cobbled road (Regent's Row) beside the towpath, an interesting survival of the early road that was built beside the canal soon after 1820. It runs for the entire length beside the canal from Actons Lock to Queensbridge Road Bridge. The cobbled road is substantially complete except where repairs have been undertaken and setts replaced by tarmac. It is unusual for a cobbled street of this length to survive in any urban area and even rarer in London. It is a unique feature and possibly worthy of Listing.



Fig 17: Actons Lock cottages

The canal at this point is straight and open. On both the north and south sides are extensive public housing estates. The estate to the south is screened from the canal by mature sycamore trees planted at the estate boundary.



Figs. 18 & 19: Actons Lock and Regent's Row beside the towpath

The main characteristic of this part of the canal is residential and it is one of the most open sections of the canal within Hackney (See Figure1).

Towards Queensbridge Road on the south side of the canal is some low-rise housing, including the award-winning Gloucester Square (1989) by Levitt Bernstein and the new development on the site of Adelaide Wharf completed in 2007 designed by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris. These developments are on the site of the former gas works and Haggerston Basin which was filled in 1967, soon after the gas works closed.

Haggerston Basin lay just to the east of Queensbridge Road (then called Great Cambridge Street). The long and narrow basin was dug during the 1820s soon after the Gas Light & Coke Company took the site and both are depicted on Greenwood's Map of 1827 (Figure 7). Coal was barged up the canal and into the basin where it was unloaded to be burned in huge furnaces called retorts to make gas. The gas was distributed by pipes to houses and businesses, especially from the 1840s when more and more middle class homes were connected. The gas was stored in a huge gasometer 75 feet high and 195 feet in diameter. The basin and the works are clearly shown on the Goad Insurance Plan of 1891. Gasworks were huge new visual features in central Hackney, the most striking elements being the retorts where coal was loaded and heated to produce gas, and the vast gasholders, where it was stored. They worked day and night and the locale around these huge industrial centres was often polluted (no gardens would flourish within a quarter of a mile of them) and had a stench of gas. There was also the risk of explosions. The gas works remained on the site until 1964. In 1964 the borough council created Haggerston Park from the waste land left over from the gas works. At the same time they drained the basin and filled it with soil. At Haggerston Park the high brick walls surrounding the old basin survive and through the centre of the park the line of the canal is visible where a sunken garden follows the canal's path.

Queensbridge Road Bridge to Kingsland Road

Queensbridge Road Bridge has an elliptical arch and dates from 1840. It is one of two bridges (the other being Haggerston) on the Hackney section of the canal to be statutorily listed Grade II. Westwards from the bridge the canal becomes more mixed in character with surviving industrial wharves to both the south and north banks. Brunswick and Columbia Wharves survive in Laburnum Street, but the adjacent Kent Wharf has been replaced by new housing beside Queensbridge Road Bridge.



Figs. 20 & 21: Brunswick Wharf and new developments past Laburnum Basin

Haggerston Bridge dates from 1816-20, when the canal was built. It is listed Grade II. Immediately after the bridge there is a long straight stretch of canal which is very open with trees planted beside the towpath. On the south side of the canal is Laburnum Basin, the home of the Laburnum Boat Club which has existed for over 20 years providing canoeing and other water-based activities for thousands of Hackney children. It is a short basin that previously served a large gas works located on Laburnum Street.

The new Bridge Academy occupies the large site east of Laburnum Basin overlooking the Regent's Canal. Designed by Building Design Partnership, it will be completed in 2007. It replaces Laburnum School. During the 1980s Laburnum schoolchildren worked with Freeform Arts on a public art project that created extensive mosaics which still embellish the canal walls of this stretch of the canal. Unfortunately graffiti and vandalism have damaged many of the plaques and a restoration or removal programme is now needed if they are to contribute to the overall nature of the Conservation Area (Figure 21).



Fig. 22: Samuel House on north side of canal west of Haggerston Bridge, note mosaic plaques

The land to the north of the canal is dominated by housing, including large brick-built blocks of pre-World War II public housing such as Samuel House. Adjacent to Samuel House, the Overdraught PH lies boarded and empty. Towards Kingsland Road Bridge the back gardens of houses back onto the canal towpath.

In character, this section of canal is fairly bleak and recently (2004) has been targeted by Groundwork East London in their *Hidden Corners* project, which aimed to improve safety and rejuvenate parts of the Regent's Canal between Queensbridge Road and Wharf Road. By improving fencing and enhancing the planting at five bridges, it blocked public access to the corners of the bridges and improved the safety of walkers and cyclists. Art work and information panels were included at each bridge and seats repositioned away from the bridges for added safety.



Fig. 23: Kingsland Road Bridge, showing improvements to bridge corners

Kingsland Road to Whitmore Bridge including the Kingsland Basin

The Kingsland Road Bridge is a typical Regent's Canal bridge with a short section of the original cast iron railings on the south-eastern bridge approach. It was restored during the 1990s and is locally listed. Dalston City Partnership worked with British Waterways and LB Hackney during the 1990s to undertake major improvement works along the Hackney stretch of the Regent's Canal, including the installation in 1994 of 'Canal Markers', a lighting sculpture placed on the Kingsland Road Bridge (designed by Freeform Arts).

On the north side of the canal westwards from the bridge are a number of new build developments (including Baltic Place) which overlook the canal and form part of the first site on the eastern side of Kingsland Basin. Baltic Place and the building adjacent to it are early 1990s developments, although stylistically they look somewhat earlier. The Sheldon Building, beside the bridge, is a refurbished 1960s office block that has been turned into residential units. These are amongst the earliest new build developments/refurbishments on the basin and although popular with residents are of no particular design interest. They did however pave the way for other proposals and helped to start regeneration around the Kingsland Basin. The area around Kingsland Basin is still in the process of change. Until recently much of the area was derelict or underused but now it is subject to great development pressure. New housing adjacent to the basin has varied greatly in architectural style, with little overall clarity in vision for the future of the basin. Today the pressure to intensively develop the western side of Kingsland Basin threatens to destroy the historic characteristics that make it unique to London's canal side industrial heritage. It is important that the 'open' nature of the western side of the Kingsland Basin is preserved in any new developments.



Fig: 24: New developments between Kingsland Bridge and the entrance to the Kingsland Basin

Kingsland Basin

When the Regent's Canal was completed in 1820, it initially formed a boundary between the more industrial areas to the south where industries such as furniture making were well established and the middle-class speculative estates that were emerging in central and northern Hackney. But within five years industrial premises, wharves and factories were built beside the Regent's Canal. Kingsland Basin, dug out during the mid-1820s, took commerce and industry further north along Kingsland Road, deep into what was soon to become De Beauvoir Town.

Kingsland Basin was built to the south of the planned De Beauvoir Town between 1822-7 and forms part of the estate leased from the family in 1821 by the speculative builder William Rhodes, who developed the area. It was Rhodes who undertook the excavation of the basin which was originally called Shoreditch Basin. By 1830 the De Beauvoir Estate had granted sixteen leases for new wharves on both sides of the basin. At first the wharves had few built structures on them, apart from a long building on the northern boundary of Hertford Wharf and a whiting works near the canal. Throughout the period 1830-50, when De Beauvoir Town was being built, the basin allowed for the easy import and storage of materials for the development and therefore few buildings were needed. Originally along the Kingsland Road frontage there were high brick walls protecting the goods stored on the wharves of the basin; a practice no doubt directly copied from the massive walls protecting the East and West India Docks from theft of high value goods. The Kingsland Basin was from the outset associated with the timber and building trades. Today the builders' merchants Travis Perkins, occupy No. 305a Kingsland Road, a mid-20th century timber depot, and Union Wharf East, a builders open storage depot behind attractive stucco walls erected in the 1930s. This was built when Travis Perkins were first associated with Kingsland Basin during the 1930s.



Fig. 25: Entrance to the Kingsland Basin in 1950s (iron pedestrian bridge now removed)

The opening of Haggerston Station in 1867 aided industrial development in the area (the station closed during the Second World War after being bombed). During the second half of the 19th century the trades carried out in the wharves were mainly associated with furniture manufacture and building trades. The 1870 OS Map identifies the nature of the wharves around the basin. They included a timber wharf, two brick and tile wharves, two stone wharves, a coal wharf, a lime and cement wharf, a whiting wharf, three manure wharves, Union Wharf, Quebec Wharf, Reliance Wharf, Commercial Wharf, a foundry and other commercial buildings.

Twenty years later in 1891, the Goad Insurance Plan shows four manure wharves on the western side of the basin, a brick wharf, a firewood wharf, builders' merchants wharf, two stone wharves, a lime wharf as well as a coach factory, a beer bottling plant and a refinery for antimony. By the 1930s there were timber wharves, a number of Council run stone and reliance wharves, furniture manufacturers and builders' materials yards. There was also a whiting works where large lumps of chalk were sold to rub on doorsteps and clean windows. Extensive timber sheds were erected at Union Wharf West in the 1920s by J Kennedy & Company, some parts of which survive today. During the 1950s and '60s after canal transport declined the basin was largely taken over by open yard industries.

Kingsland Basin is one of the largest canal basins in London. Until ten years ago, much of the area was derelict, but it is now under great development pressure. Today a few wharves on the eastern side of the basin are still operating as builders' yards, but the majority (Baltic Wharf, Benyon Wharf, Kings Wharf, Commercial Wharf and Quebec Wharf) have been redeveloped into residential units overlooking the water. These developments have generally abutted right to the waterside following a pattern set by Quebec Wharf (Listed Grade II). Quebec Wharf (No. 315 Kingsland Road) was built in 1878 as a granary for the North Metropolitan Tramways Company who employed a 'fleet' of over 1200 horses to pull trams. In 1877, the company stopped hiring horses for their trams from the London Greater Omnibus Company and made a decision to own and stable all their own horses. As well as building

stables at all their termini, the company needed to construct a forage warehouse where they could store and distribute grain for the horses.

Between late 1877 and 1878, W. Boyce, builder was erecting the granary (being paid in total £8250) and by September 1878, the Regent's Canal Company began delivering grain to the building. After the demise of horse-drawn transport the building was used for storage – first by the LCC until 1946; then by an oilcake and oilseed company from 1948-60 and from 1963 by Evans, Gray & Hood, wholesale spice merchants - hence the buildings popular name of the Spice Warehouse.

It is the most important historic building on Kingsland Basin and rises four full storeys plus an attic to the basin. It is built of stock brick, with bands of red brick. It has a 4 storey wooden projection from the first floor and above. The building was listed in the mid-1990s. It has been well restored and recently was converted to contemporary apartments.



Fig. 26: Two views of the refurbished Quebec Wharf (Spice Warehouse)

The majority of sites along the eastern side of the basin and the eastern side of Kingsland Road have been developed, although some opportunities still remain. Notable sites that might become available in the future include the Travis Perkins depot. The most stylish new developments on the eastern side of the basin are Benyon Wharf and Kings Wharf, with interesting use of glass and steel.

Most of the western side of the basin fronting Hertford Road is awaiting redevelopment and a number of large schemes have been proposed for the site. It is important that any new development takes notice of the qualities of the basin and respects the character of the surviving buildings. On this side of the basin, there is a much more open feel, with many open yards and the buildings that do exist generally erected beside the roadside, rather than the waterside. This is a unique quality and

one that should be preserved. The wharves on the western side of the basin were open for most of the 19th century with just a few buildings within the sites; this was due to the nature of the goods stored there which were mainly stone, timber and manure.

The frontages along Hertford Road were built-up during the period 1890-1910. Hertford Road retains an enclosed Victorian wharf-side townscape, with functional brick buildings, small windows and remnants of lifting cranes and pulleys. One of the most interesting and attractive buildings is No. 32a, a two-storey warehouse building. Built from stock brick, it has cast iron windows and original lifting supports above the loading bays. The red brick window heads have long keystones associated with the Queen Anne style. It was built in 1896 to the designs of Robert Dixon, an architect from Finsbury Park. Adjacent to the warehouse is the Old Ivey PH at No. 32 Hertford Road, which was built for the brewers Watney Mann in 1935, to the designs of AW Blomfield.

During the 19th century, Norway Wharf (Nos. 18-20 Hertford Road) was a timber wharf with some structures (probably open timber sheds) on the northern boundary. In 1901, the current structure was built on the Hertford Road frontage to the designs of the architects Meakin & Archer. Norway Wharf is a two-storey brick warehouse with small cast iron windows and divided into two equal halves by a centrally placed gateway leading into the wharf. It is enlivened architecturally by the use of blue industrial brick to the door and window surrounds and at base of the structure. It is a building that has potential for reuse and is characteristic of the industrial nature of the buildings all along Hertford Road.



Fig. 27: Norway Wharf (Nos. 18-20 Hertford Road)

No. 16 Hertford Road (grade II listed) forms a solid wall along Hertford Road (Fig. 28) and was constructed as a stable building in 1895 soon after two wharves were combined in 1890. The street number refers to a large plot and comprises the former Hertford and Crown Wharves. The former Crown Wharf contains an early structure built sometime between 1843 and 1872. This three-storey building may have always

been stables (over 50 horses of the North London Metropolitan Tramways Company were stabled on the west side of the basin in 1872, before the company erected Quebec Wharf), but was definitely rebuilt in 1899-1900 to provide multi-storey stables. The stone paved ramp, complete with cobbled surface and raised setts to assist horses in ascending the incline is a relatively rare survival of this period (Fig. 29). The incoming barges brought coal for distribution from the basin and the outgoing barges took the horse manure from the stables. From the 1960s until the mid-1990s the site operated as a ready-mix concrete manufacturing works.



Figs 28 & 29: No.16 Hertford Road (former stable buildings)

CHUG (Canals in Hackney Users Group) administers the basin and runs the residential moorings that occupy much of the water. They also run a small wildlife area towards the canal-end of the basin. At Kingsland Basin a unique grass species grows, *Paspalum Pasplodes* (Victory Grass) whose seeds were imported in cargoes of timber originating in Latin America. Over the last twenty years through the efforts of CHUG the basin has become an interesting and attractive place in what is generally one of the most deprived parts of Hackney. It is important that any future development of the basin should include the provision of moorings for the residential boating community that contribute much to the vitality, colour and ambience to this part of the Regent's Canal. The Kingsland Basin has been identified as an Area of Special Landscape Character. The canal basins of Hackney (Kingsland and Wenlock) provide a unique still water habitat which has the ability to support a greater aquatic life (plants and invertebrates) than the water of the canal which is under constant disturbance by passing boats.



Fig 30: View into Kingsland Basin from the bridge, showing Benyon Wharf containing 53 live/work lofts

From Hertford Road, De Beauvoir Crescent runs adjacent to the north side of the canal towards Whitmore Bridge. A number of empty wharf buildings and a factory lie on the plots between the canal and the road. The most important of these is Bankstock Buildings.

Bankstock Buildings, (Nos. 42- 44 De Beauvoir Crescent) is a five-storey factory designed in Art Deco style, built in 1938-9 for Commercial Structures Ltd. of Leyton, a building firm who specialised in reinforced concrete. At Bankstock Buildings reinforced concrete pillars support wide-span floors. It is built in stock brick with narrow bands of yellow faience tiles. The Crittal steel windows are most attractive and the corner tower is very 1930s in feel. It was designed by the architect Robert Sharpe, best known for the Blue Bird Garage in the King's Road (now the Conran Bluebird Restaurant). The first occupants were Carreras, cigarette manufacturers. It is one of Hackney's most important buildings in Art Deco style. At present it is occupied by Camelot Projects, awaiting refurbishment.



Fig. 31: Bankstock Buildings, De Beauvoir Crescent

Adjacent to Bankstock Buildings and around the corner in Whitmore Road beside the bridge are a group of two-storey cottages (Nos. 54-58 Whitmore Road and No. 30 De Beauvoir Crescent). They appear little altered from the 1830s. The corner building rises to three-storeys and was possibly built as a Public House.



Fig. 32: Nos. 54-58 Whitmore Road

On the south side of the canal from Kingsland Basin to Whitmore Bridge there are a number of restored wharf buildings fronting onto Orsman Road including Canalside Studios (Figure 5) and Tuscany Wharf. An extensive new development of live/work units called Kleine Wharf (Nos. 8-14 Orsman Road) is under construction.

Orsman Road itself contains some important buildings, especially Acme Studios for artists at Nos. 11-33, a 1930s brick and concrete built factory, originally occupied by Players Cigarettes and built in Art Deco style. It has sweeping front bays and distinctive fenestration. Overall Orsman Road has a tight narrow enclosed feel and is full of interesting smaller industrial units and factories, many of which have been restored for studios. With the development of Kleine Wharf it is likely that other canal side sites may be redeveloped, altering the character of this part of the Conservation Area.



Fig. 33: Kleine Wharf, Orsman Road

More than any other section of the canal, the area between Kingsland Road and Whitmore Bridge demonstrates its formerly industrial nature and the varied roles of canal-side buildings. The surviving wharves, warehouses, factories and other industrial buildings impart a feeling of what the canal was really like – an industrial working artery that ran through Hackney, providing employment for hundreds of people. Many of these factories and wharves have found new uses, especially in Orsman Road; others are empty waiting for developers to clear the sites.

On Kingsland Basin the listed Quebec Wharf has been immaculately restored and successfully incorporated into the redevelopment of the basin. It is important for the industrial heritage of Hackney that as many as possible of the empty and underused wharf buildings are refurbished and incorporated into sympathetic and appropriately scaled new developments. Openness is an historic characteristic of the western wharves of the Kingsland Basin and all proposals for redevelopments should consider this and aim to incorporate the surviving low-rise late Victorian buildings on the west side of the Kingsland Basin.

Buildings of special quality and importance elsewhere in this section of the Conservation Area are the Art Deco factories in De Beauvoir Crescent and Orsman Road.

Whitmore Bridge to New North Road Bridge

Whitmore Bridge was constructed in 1820. From Whitmore Bridge the canal sweeps south-westward towards Rosemary Branch Bridge. Beyond the towpath to the north side are the tower blocks of De Beauvoir Estate. In front extensive landscaping down to the canal creates a green public space that blends well with the towpath below.



Figs. 34 & 35: View westwards from Whitmore Bridge

Just before the bridge lie long stretches of the original canal walls which are well-preserved. Behind the wall is the large Victorian factory and warehouse of Thomas Briggs (No.1 Branch Place) which has been manufacturing furniture since the C19th.



Figs. 36 & 37: Thomas Briggs Factory and Rosemary Works by Rosemary Branch Bridge

On the opposite bank of the canal adjacent to the Rosemary Branch Bridge, stands Rosemary Works with early advertising painted on the brick wall that rises from the canal. The building is now an independent primary school.

Both of these industrial buildings are of high quality and form an attractive cluster with the Rosemary Branch PH and the Southgate Arms (both of which are within LB Islington's Arlington Square Conservation Area). From Rosemary Branch Bridge all the land to the north of the towpath is in the borough of Islington. The towpath is in Hackney, as is all the canal and its wharves lying to the south as far as the eastern side of Wharf Road beyond Wenlock Basin.

The Rainbow Pipe (now very faded) spans the width of the canal just after Whitmore Bridge. It is a sewage pipe that the council decided not to reroute underground due to cost and it was painted bright colours by CHUG.

A number of low-rise buildings dominate the south side of the canal from Rosemary Branch Bridge. These include the Crown and Manor Boys Club and some undistinguished public housing at Avebury Court. However just before New North Road Bridge is the Gainsborough Studio site. It is one of the largest redevelopment sites on the canal in Hackney and is located on the south side east of New North Road. The original building was constructed as a power station around 1900, with London's third tallest chimney, which was demolished in 1940 as a potential marker for Nazi bombers.



Fig. 38: Gainsborough Studio in the late 1930s

Between the wars it was the location for the famous Gainsborough Film Studios, the centre of the British film industry, with well known movies such as *The Lady Vanishes*, *Oh Mr Porter* and *Fanny by Gaslight* made there during the 1930s and '40s. From the 1950s the building was in light industrial use and also used by Kelaty Ltd. as an Oriental Carpets Bonded Warehouse. Permission was eventually given to demolish the studios in the 1990s.

However due to pressure from the theatrical world, the developers retained the historic studio (in Poole Street to the rear of the development) and the architects Munkenbeck and Marshall designed complementary blocks around a new square with a riverside walk. The tallest new block adjacent to New North Road rises to 14 storeys, taller than any nearby buildings. A striking giant blasted steel head depicting Alfred Hitchcock (who directed many films here) by the sculptor Anthony Donaldson adorns the central public square. Altogether 176 apartments and 77 live/work units were built between 2001 and 2002. There are also offices, a health centre, and a gym. In 2004 it won a RIBA award for housing design.



Fig. 39: Sculpture of Alfred Hitchcock at Gainsborough Studios



Fig. 40: Canal side of Gainsborough Studios

In summary, the section of canal between Whitmore Bridge and New North Road is varied. Largely residential on the north side of the canal before Rosemary Branch Bridge, it has an openness because of planting towards the canal, near the De Beauvoir Estate. Around Rosemary Branch Bridge are several important Victorian warehouse buildings and there is high quality new building on the site of the former Gainsborough Film Studios.

New North Road Bridge to Wenlock Basin

New North Road Bridge was the first reinforced concrete tramway bridge in England, built in 1912 on the Hennibique system. Francois Hennibique (1824-1921), constructed the first building with a complete reinforced concrete frame. He set up a branch office in London in 1897, with LG Mouchel in charge of design. At the beginning of the 20th century, most reinforced concrete work was done by specialist firms of this sort, since few engineers had sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge of new methods of construction. The bridge at New North Road was designed by the borough engineer and erected by the contractors Higgs and Hill.



Fig. 41: New North Road Bridge

Beyond New North Road there are a series of low-rise buildings beside the canal fronting onto Eagle Wharf Road. It was here that Henry Grissell set up the Regents Canal Iron Foundry in the 1840s by the side of the canal in Eagle Wharf Road. The most famous cast ironwork to come out of the foundry was the façade of the Floral Hall at Covent Garden (now relocated to Borough Market). In the 1890s Henry Rifle Barrel Engineers made explosives at Eagle Wharf. In the 1930s there were sawmills, paper manufacturers, a bedstead factory, Goldberg's wood warehouse, an engineering works and beside Packington Street Bridge was Pilkington's glass cutting factory and warehouse.

There is a self-storage unit at No. 48, a Vodafone telephone exchange and office and at No. 46, the Archive and Research Centre of the Museum of London Archaeological Service. Much of the western end of Eagle Wharf from opposite Sturts Lock as far Packington Road Bridge has in last twenty years been extensively refurbished with many factory buildings now being part of Holborn Studios, one of London's major film locations and photographic studios. *The Commissary*, a bar and

restaurant with a large conservatory overlooking the canal and extensive outdoor seating is part of Holborn Studios and is an attractive and sensitive conversion of an industrial building.

Sturts Lock, Eagle Wharf is also home to six offices in converted canal barges and some residential narrow boats. At present these are under-occupied. Business barges on the Regent's Canal are a new idea promoted by British Waterways London in an attempt to regenerate small business use beside the canal. Informal business/residential barges (Richard Branson started his record business from a residential barge) have existed on the canal for many years, but this is the first attempt to legalise them as work units. Any location proposed for barges should be carefully assessed to ensure that the navigation is not restricted.



Fig. 42: Eagle Wharf in the 1960s looking eastwards



Fig. 43: Eagle Wharf in 2006

Opposite Eagle Wharf lies Sturts Lock, where there used to be a pumping station which regulated water levels on the canal. As the land level rises from east to west along the canal's course, water had to be pumped up from below Sturts Lock to City Road Basin to maintain the water level. Recently the former lock keeper's cottage and pumping works and an adjacent Victorian warehouse, originally used to store and maintain canal barges, have been renovated and converted. The warehouse (4 Union Wharf) was converted into five mews houses with glass roof top conservatories and terraces overlooking the canal.



Fig 44: Sturts Lock looking eastwards towards Gainsborough Studios

Packington Road Bridge is unique as the only pedestrian bridge on the canal in Hackney. Beyond the bridge on the Hackney side of the canal is the huge white Art Deco former Royle's greeting card factory which has recently been converted into stylish live/work units. But although the buildings are of large scale because of the proximity of Wenlock Basin they do not seem to overshadow the canal or produce a feeling of enclosure.



Fig. 45: Royle Building



Fig. 46: Looking south along Wenlock Basin

Beside the towpath opposite Wenlock Basin are a number of restored canalside buildings (all in LB Islington) that hug the towpath. They include the Narrowboat PH.

Wenlock Basin

In 1825 John Edwards started construction work on what was to become Wenlock Basin. The privately owned Wenlock Basin was opened at first by accident in August 1826, when the dam across the entrance gave way and water flooded into the new basin, causing a 13 inch drop in the level of the water in the main canal. The accident caused water traffic to stop until heavy rains restored the normal level. In 1832 John Edwards Vaughan, the son of the original owner, extended Wenlock Basin to a total length of 360 yards. It runs parallel to and just east of the City Road Basin in Islington. Wharf Road Bridge built in 1830, leads into Wenlock Basin.



Fig. 47: Wenlock Basin in 1974

During the 1960s and early '70s Wenlock Basin was little more than a polluted dumping ground (see Figure 41). In the early 1970s some of the privately owned Wenlock Basin was filled in, making it much narrower. In 1974 the basin was extensively landscaped and cleaned. It is now a site where ducks and geese breed.

The entrance was used for residential moorings, a use that continues today, and Wenlock Basin is one of the few sites on the eastern section of the Regent's Canal where houseboats can be permanently moored. There are three residential moorings sites on the canal in Hackney - at Sturts Lock, Eagle Wharf run by Holborn Studios; in Kingsland Basin run by CHUG and at Wenlock Basin run by a private residents association.

Wenlock Basin was originally flanked by the Wenlock Iron Works and cardboard and drug factories. Today large numbers of the old premises have been successfully converted into residential apartments. Planning permission has been granted for a new development of residential and workspace units at the head of the basin. Some of the best industrial buildings around the Basin are located along Wharf Road, between Wenlock Basin and City Road Basin. Nos. 44 – 48 Wharf Road is an early 20th century printing works.

4.3 Plan Form and Streetscape

As a long linear corridor the Regent's Canal Conservation Area does not really have a defined streetscape. It is fortunate in possessing a large amount of public open space beside the canal. Not only does this green space provide amenity and recreation facilities but it is a significant ecological resource within the borough. New building developments which are mostly residential may lie adjacent to the canal but do not really engage with it. Many such as the Royle Building and the new Adelaide Wharf have uninteresting waterfronts (car parks) or plain sheet piling. Others such as Gainsborough Studios have underused open space near to the canalside but perhaps should have included the possibility of arriving by boat and having private temporary mooring facilities.

The wharves and factories beside the canal generally face the roads immediately behind the canal on each side. The Conservation Area takes in properties in roads adjacent to the wharves and basin (see Map of Conservation Area). These streets vary in width and style depending on their location.

4.4 Views, Focal Points and Focal Buildings

The most important views within the Conservation Area are along the canal itself. Certain stretches of the canal are more attractive than others, especially the curving stretch from Victoria Park to Mare Street, the part of the canal opposite Eagle Wharf, and the views into Wenlock Basin and Kingsland Basin.

Focal points include Actons and Sturts Locks and the bridges.

The most important buildings and views that act as focal points are -

- Sturts Lock
- Actons Lock

- Briggs Furniture Factory, adjacent to Rosemary Branch Bridge (north side)
- Gainsborough Studios
- New North Road Bridge
- The Royle Building
- Houseboats at the entrance of Wenlock Basin
- Holborn Studios, Eagle Wharf
- Quebec Wharf, Kingsland Basin

4.5 Landscape and Trees

One of the special qualities of the area is derived from the 'hidden' nature of the canal as it winds its way through Hackney. The surrounding townscape rises behind the canal, but high canal walls and trees that screen the view give it a secret quality. Some sections of the canal side have become planted with shrubs and trees. Sometimes this was intentional but often, especially where adjoining warehouses and wharves have become neglected, nature has been allowed to seed itself. Such informal and dense planting provides important wildlife habitats and is far less common on sectors of the canal where new build has developed.

Trees line the banks at certain points along the canal, especially beside the housing estates on the south side of the canal west of Actons Lock and on the north side beside the De Beauvoir Estate. New trees should be encouraged in all new developments on the canal. Some sections of the towpath are somewhat neglected but provided good habitat for invertebrate species.

4.6 Activities and Uses

Historically the Regent's Canal Conservation Area was a transport facility and a place of wharves, warehouses and industry. Notable industrial uses in the section that passes through Hackney were several large scale gas works and many wharfs and open sheds that stored timber and building materials. Factories produced furniture, metal goods, small arms, glass, drugs, cardboard and chemicals. In the Kingsland Basin grain, spices and building materials were warehoused. The Regent's Canal was also the site of a lost trade - the movement of horse manure that was exported along the canal from manure wharves to the countryside around London, where it was used to fertilise the soil for agriculture.

Almost all of these traditional industrial uses in the Regent's Canal Conservation Area have now ceased. There are a few surviving factories, (Briggs at Rosemary Branch Bridge, and the Beehive Foundry in Andrews Road manufacturing ironwork) but many former industrial buildings have fallen into disuse. Today many wharves and industrial buildings have been converted into studios for the creative and artistic industries that flourish in southern Hackney. Of particular note are studios and galleries along Eagle Wharf Road, Wharf Road and Orsman Road. This is not simply a late 20th century phenomenon, but dates from the 1930s when a former power station on the canal became the Gainsborough Studios, the heart of the inter-war film industry in Britain.

Many wharves formerly used for storing goods have been reused for housing, not just recently but from as early as the 1930s when the LCC and Hackney Borough

Council were looking for sites on which to build public housing. However these brownfield sites are today being developed at a much more rapid pace. People like to live by water and continued development of canal side sites is likely given the need for new homes in London in the 21st century.

One of the major uses of the canal today is as a place of recreational activity. From dog walking, canoeing, fishing, running, cycling and pleasure boat cruising - it all happens on the Regent's Canal. This is a remarkable change, as until the 1980s public access to the Hackney section of the Regent's Canal was not possible. The importance of the canal as a public open space for leisure should not be underestimated. More frequent use has also reduced the threat of crime on the towpath. Fear of using the canal will be unlikely to re-emerge with more and more people living and working beside the water and using the canal as a commuter route to work.

5 THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.1 Building Characteristics

There is no prevailing building form in the Regent's Canal Conservation Area due to the wide variety of industrial and factory buildings within it. Some of the surviving wharves and yards, especially in the Kingsland Basin, are open in nature, containing few buildings as they were constructed for the storage of building materials. Some brick built pubs and factories with attractive detailing exist within the Conservation Area, but the aesthetic quality generally gives way to the practical nature of these former industrial buildings. Bankstock Buildings, the Royle factory in Wenlock Basin and some of the buildings in Orsman Road have Art Deco elements. A few Victorian factory buildings are extremely attractive; these include some of the buildings near Rosemary Branch Bridge, those along Andrews Road and some of the surviving structures in the Kingsland Basin. Certain groups of canal side wharves as at Eagle Wharf are pleasing as a whole. There are also a number of interesting small cottages at Wenlock Road and the former lock-keepers' cottages adjacent to the towpath.

The prevailing building material is London stock brick with slate roofs. In many of the early 20th century factories reinforced steel is employed.



Fig. 48: Refurbished Lock Keepers Cottage and Pumping Works at Sturts Lock

There are a number of new building developments within the Regent's Canal Conservation Area. Almost all of these are on former wharf sites on the off side of the Canal, where there is no public access by towpath. Housing development along canal banks can have a detrimental effect on the biodiversity of the waterway corridor. It also destroys the habitats of reptiles, causes shading which reduces aquatic plant growth, and increases light pollution which affects bats and moths, while hard surfaces adjacent to the water cause run-off into the canal. Measures

such as the provision of brown/green roofs, the incorporation of bat and bird boxes and roosts and considerate planting schemes can help mitigate the impact of canalside development, not just residential, on ecology. Unmanaged water run-off can also have a detrimental effect on the water quality as much run-off from roads and car parks contain oil and hydrocarbons from fuel.

However there are many potential sites for new development in the Conservation Area. Several of the former local authority estates in Haggerston are likely to be replaced within the next 10 years and this will free much land that lies next to the canal for redevelopment. Other wharves and empty factories face demolition. Where new development is to be fitted into an existing or potential gap site on the canal much thought ought to be given to the massing and scale of the development and its relationship with the water.

5.2 Listed buildings

There are relatively few listed buildings within the Conservation Area. They include two bridges over the canal and the important former granary and the stable buildings at Kingsland Basin. These are all included in a list in Appendix B.

5.3 Buildings of Local Significance

There are number of “locally” listed buildings in the Conservation Area. These are buildings which make a contribution to the character of the Conservation Area and which Hackney Council consider to be of local significance due to their age, architectural detailing or because of some unusual feature. They mainly date to the 19th century and include a wide range of buildings including churches, public houses, schools and terraced buildings in commercial uses. Individual features, such as good quality shopfronts are also “locally” listed. These are all included in a list in Appendix C.

5.4 Buildings of Townscape Merit

Apart from the few listed and locally listed buildings, a large number of unlisted buildings in the Conservation Area have been identified as “Buildings of Townscape Merit”. These are usually well-detailed examples of mainly late nineteenth century commercial premises, which retain their original detailing. There are also a number of 1930s factories with typical Art Deco style. Of particular importance in the Regent’s Canal Conservation Area are the waterside wharves, factories and industrial buildings. The locks with their machinery and the former lock-keepers cottages are also of importance.

As such, they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and any proposals to alter or demolish such buildings will be strongly resisted by the Council (in accordance with the guidance contained in PPG 15 and Policy EQ13 of the UDP). Together, these buildings provide the cohesive and interesting historic townscape which is necessary to justify designation as a Conservation Area.

6 “SWOT” ANALYSIS

The Regent’s Canal Conservation Area is a complex architectural and landscape environment. It is not simply for its buildings that it should be preserved and cherished, but for its aesthetic qualities as a ‘green corridor’ that passes through a densely built-up area of southern Hackney. Trees, wildlife, flowers and the water itself all contribute to the pleasures of recreation on the canal. Cycling, pleasure and dog walking, fishing, water based activities such as canoeing, rowing and pleasure boat trips mean that the Regent’s Canal in Hackney is extensively used for leisure pursuits especially in summer. The canal is tranquil and peaceful and a haven for wildlife, such as birds, insects, bats and smaller mammals such as voles, shrews and hedgehogs. The towpath provides important foraging ground for these creatures. Surviving 19th century industrial buildings, some of which are listed, some Art deco factories and more recent residential accommodation beside the canal have created a very interesting mix. Large numbers of buildings have been identified within this appraisal as making a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area (Buildings of Townscape Merit). However, a number of negative features have impacted on the quality of the Regent’s Canal historic environment, some of which would be reversible given the necessary funding and commitment.

6.1 Strengths

The most positive features of the Conservation Area are:

- Good survival of the original industrial elements of the canal system (lock gates, machinery, mooring bollards, basins and turning areas)
- Original bridges and high quality replacement bridges some of which are listed
- Variety in boundary treatment contributes to the character (high walls, railing and buildings)
- The extensive views along the canal especially the winding view from Victoria Park to Cambridge Heath Road, the views towards Acton’s and Sturts Locks; from Whitmore Road Bridge towards Rosemary Branch Bridge; and into Kingsland Road Basin and Wenlock Basin from the Regent’s Canal
- Important and extensive recreational public space for all members of the community for activities such as walking, running, cycling, fishing, boating and canoeing
- Lots of trees and low level vegetation beside the towpath and the off-side of the canal
- Unique building heritage of towing by horses. On the corner of the brick bridges there are cast iron rubbing strips to protect the brickwork from being damaged by towing ropes. Over the years the tow ropes have worn deep grooves in the iron strips, and these are an interesting features that tells a story of the past life of the canal (Figure 49)



Figure 49: Deep grooves in the cast iron rubbing strips made by ropes of horses

- The absence of motorised vehicle on the towpath contributes to the calm, tranquil and slower pace that the canal provides
- Numbers of locally listed buildings
- Large numbers of Buildings of Townscape Merit, all creating a cohesive canal hinterland
- Good survival of 19th and early 20th century factories, wharves and warehouses of architectural quality in some sections of the canal
- Good quality and design on the Art Deco factories
- Some modern developments of high quality
- The survival of individual wharves, especially along parts of Eagle Wharf and on the west side of the Kingsland Basin.
- An enclosed green atmosphere, especially where the tall walls of canal side wharves and warehouses still survive and where trees line both sides of the canal. This blots out the noise and urban bustle of city streets and provides a tranquil space beside the water
- The unique industrial heritage of the wharves and basins and streets immediately adjacent to the Regent's Canal

6.2 Weaknesses

The negative features of the Conservation Area are:

- Derelict and run down factories and wharf buildings requiring repair
- Poor quality of some industrial buildings and warehouses beside the canal
- Lack of ground floor active uses, including retail, adjacent to the canal
- Extensive graffiti on many historic buildings and features of the canal including bridges, locks and boundary walls
- Mosaics and other artworks (Rainbow Bridge) allowed to fall into disrepair
- Some poorly designed large scale developments beside the canal which fail to integrate with or relate to the canal
- Very few Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area
- Loss of architectural features on canal side buildings
- Lack of maintenance of the towpath which in parts is poorly landscaped and not well kept
- Fear of perceived crime on the towpath
- Inappropriate lighting in places (too bright/poorly positioned for wildlife and too dark under bridges for pedestrians)
- Potential conflicts between various users such as cyclists and pedestrians and boaters and anglers, given the narrowness of the towpath and numerous activities taking place on and along the canal
- Anti-social behaviour in some areas.

6.3 Opportunities

The following points are “opportunities” which the London Borough of Hackney or private owners could implement, subject to the necessary funds being available:

- Repair and reuse historic buildings for mixed and residential use
- Encourage new residential developments that respect the scale and setting (in both height and massing) of the buildings historically seen on the canal
- Encourage new developments on the off-side of the canal that relate appropriately to the canal
- Encourage more restaurants and pubs along the canal
- Encourage pleasure and leisure boat trips
- Remove the graffiti that disfigures many buildings and tackle anti-social behaviour with more patrol and ‘designing-out crime’ initiatives for new developments
- Introduce trees where possible on new developments beside the canal while not endangering the navigation or canal structures
- Properly maintain the green verges beside the towpath
- In some places bushes and trees have colonised the off-side of the canal in front of disused buildings. These should be managed to promote the canal corridor for wildlife, whilst preserving the integrity of the transport system
- Redevelopment of some of the older public housing estates in Haggerston may open the south side of the canal to the public
- To promote the use of the canal to carry freight which would result in the canal being brought back to life

- Opportunity to influence the positive credentials of developers in considering their impact on the local environment both aesthetically and in creating new habitats for wildlife
- Re-organising the Kingsland Basin mooring to promote a more dynamic usage of the basin.

6.4 Threats

- Over development of the canal side sites for new residential developments
- Too many barge offices mooring permanently beside wharves
- Inappropriate mooring arrangements such as in Kingsland Basin restricts dynamic and efficient use of the water
- The over sanitisation of the canal due to new build that will change the character of the canal
- Wildlife will diminish if 'offside' wilderness areas are not preserved
- The wharves on the west side of Kingsland Basin losing their open quality
- The potential demolition of architecturally interesting historic buildings such as Acme Studios
- Neglect of some of the council owned parks and open spaces that lie beside the canal
- Change of use and loss of historic public houses (as at the Overdraught PH)
- Conflicts between different users can result in accidents and aggressive behaviour due to the narrowness of the towpath
- Increased development means an increased pressure to sanitise the area and install lighting both for decorative purposes and functional to make a dark corridor feel safer. More light means greater intrusion on the environment and these should be discouraged or where required for safety reasons should be sensitively designed low level lighting that will not discourage the use of the canal corridor by bats.

7 CONCLUSION

Much of the special character of the Regent's Canal Conservation Area is derived from an industrial past that has created a somewhat unusual building typology. Industrial users had a functional relationship with the canal, with wharves and storage areas located beside the canal. Many 19th and early 20th century industrial buildings rise sheer from the water, especially on the offside of the canal, or from brick walls beside the towpath. This tends to create a sense of enclosure and darkness, with tall brick canal and basin side buildings facing adjoining streets until recently the norm. The backs of the buildings lie adjacent to the canal. The visual appearance of these buildings was secondary to their function and canal side windows tended to be small and grilled at lower level to prevent thefts and draw-bridge openings animated the elevation.

What has happened to the canal over the last forty-five years has reversed this historic characteristic. Changing the use of existing warehouses to live/work units and developments of new build housing altered this completely. The visual attractiveness of the canal and the desire for waterside living means all new buildings overlook the canal. From being a 'secret' place behind tall walls and largely hidden from the general public, the canal has changed into an amenity and green asset to all who use it for recreational purposes or for those who live beside it. In many ways this is a good thing as it has opened up this once private space to become a public asset. The key to successful redevelopment of sites along the canal will be to accommodate the desire for views of the water and respecting the design and scale of the surviving buildings of the industrial past, whilst conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of this green corridor.

Height of new buildings is a major issue, not just aesthetically but because of the danger of tall buildings casting shadow onto the water and causing damage to the ecosystem. Developers must consider the impact on the canal of loss of sunlight and overshadowing. The openness or enclosure of sections of the canal should be respected as this contributes to the varying character along its length. Conservation of the existing character and careful and sympathetic enhancement should be the rule. The character of the canal emanates from its traditional uses and the buildings associated with it. The loss of wharves and warehouses should be prevented if possible with conversion to residential use, which has occurred with buildings at Sturts Lock, Eagle Wharf and Quebec Wharf. Conversion of industrial buildings is preferable not only on aesthetic but also on energy grounds.

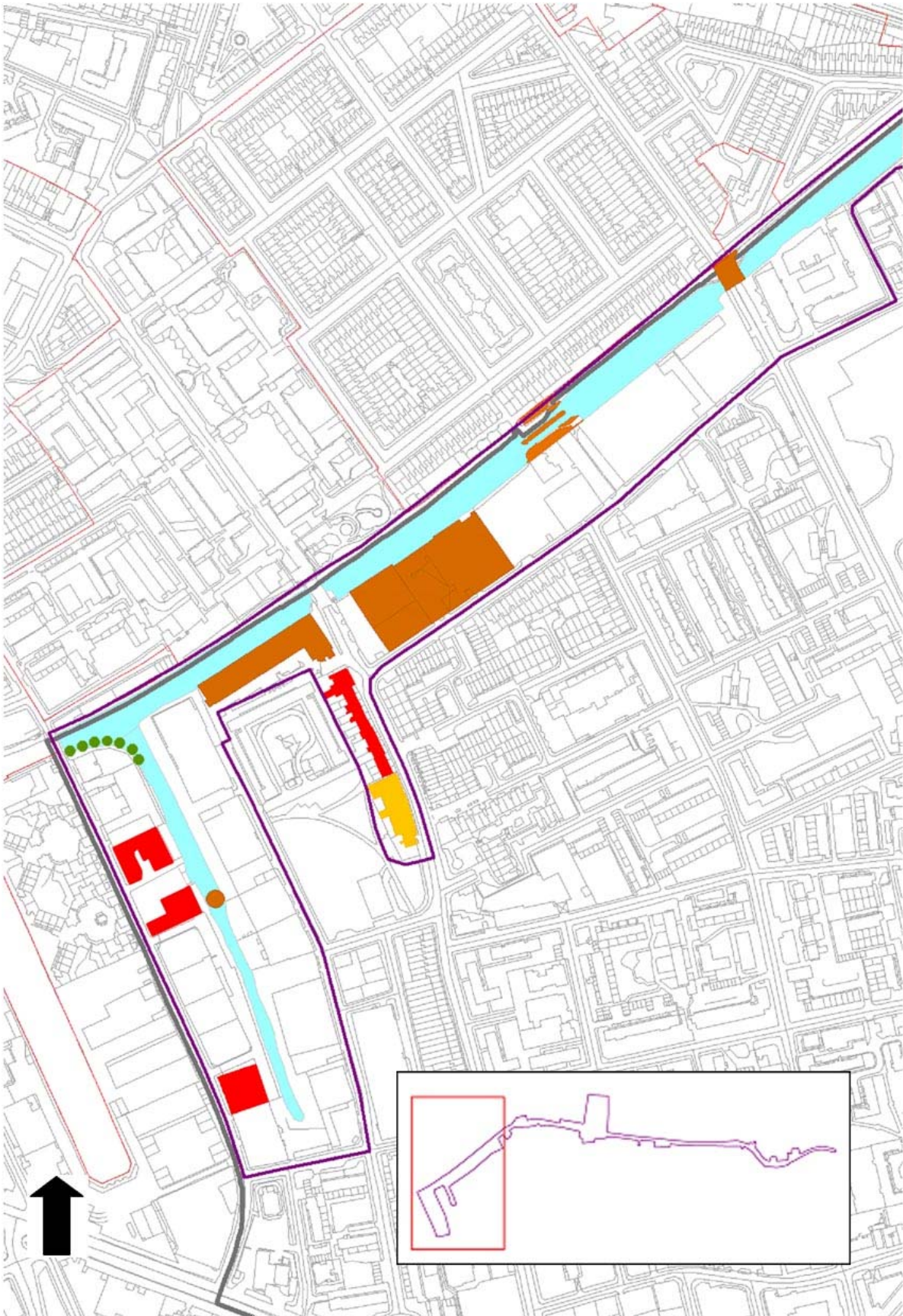
The waterway itself has much potential both as a leisure asset and as a commercial route – for goods and possibly commuters. The Blue Ribbon Network policies in the London Plan require buildings 'to integrate successfully with the water space in terms of use, appearance and physical impact'. This requires a high quality of design for all waterside development and encourages built form on a human scale that will encourage use of waterside spaces by all. What most people will recognise as the special quality of the Regent's Canal Conservation Area is the water itself; the towpath and the quietness of this green corridor which passes through some of the more deprived areas of Hackney. It provides everyone with recreational opportunities; the likelihood of spotting wildlife and the calm of watching the water. The Regent's Canal in Hackney is a real public asset to the borough, but perhaps more importantly it still retains an essence and the visible remains of an industrial past that has all but disappeared elsewhere.

MAP OF REGENT'S CANAL CONSERVATION AREA

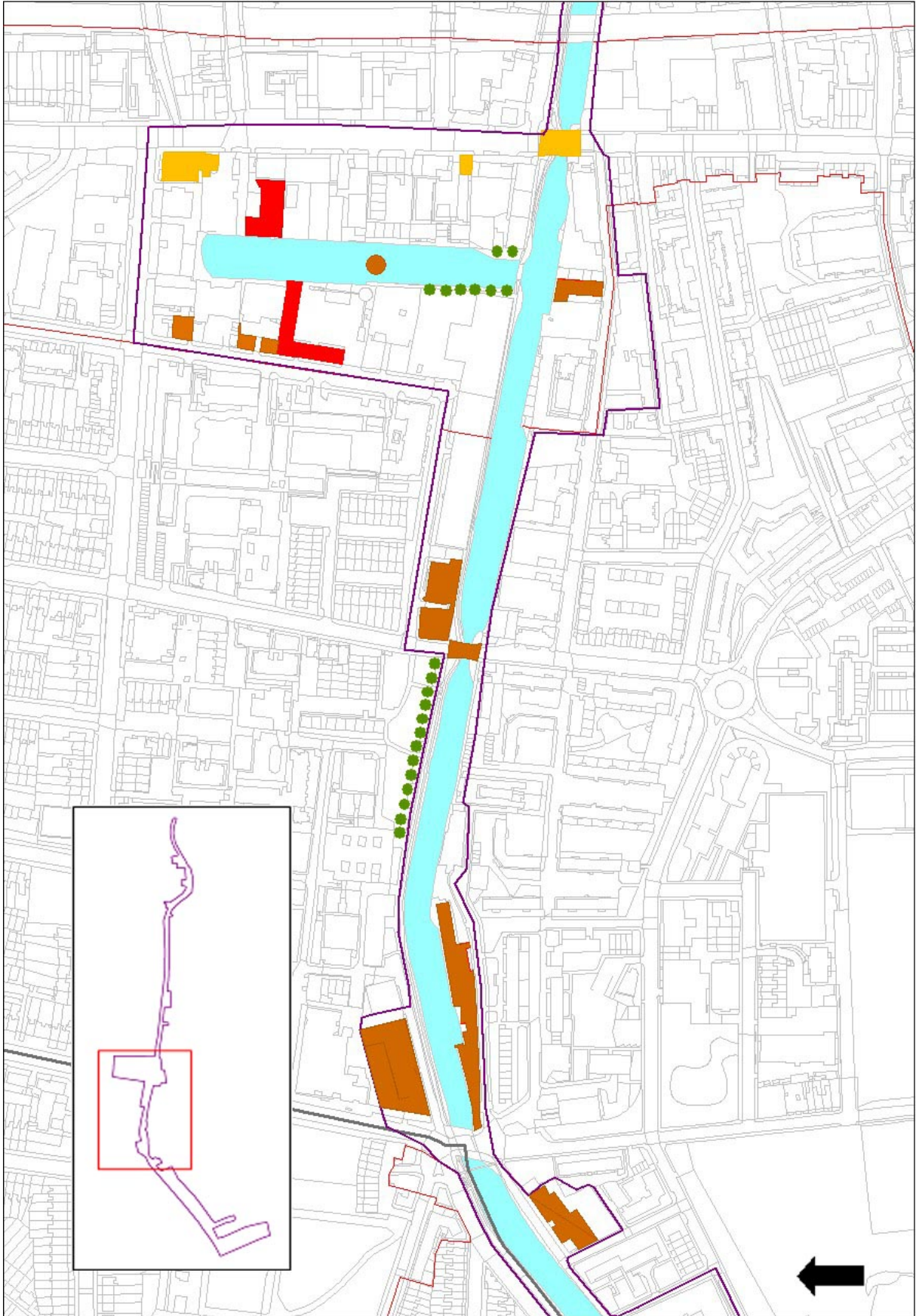
Key:

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Buildings of Townscape Merit
-  Focal Points
-  Important Tree or Tree Groups
-  Boundary of Adjacent Conservation Areas

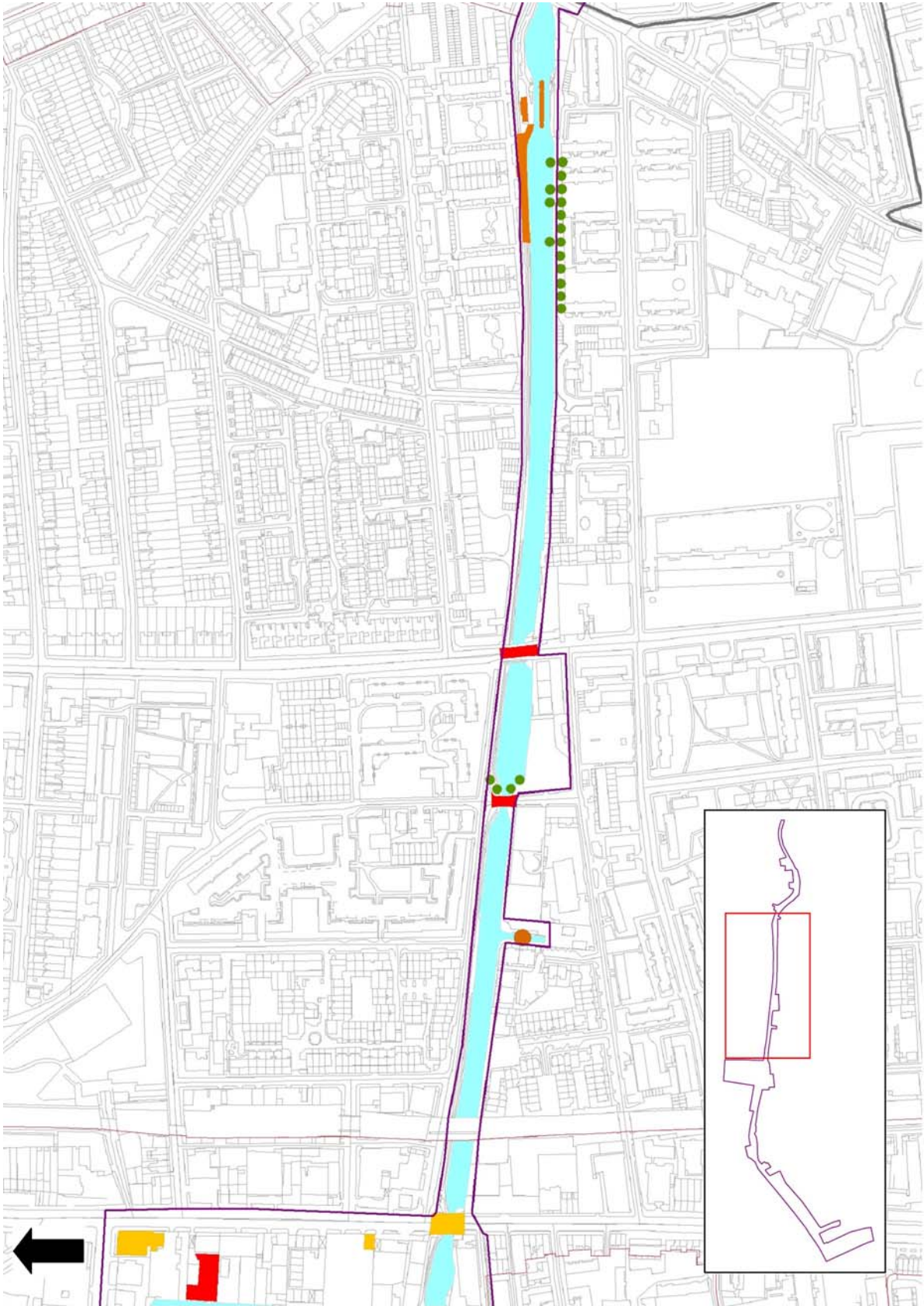
Regent's Canal Conservation Area Map 1a



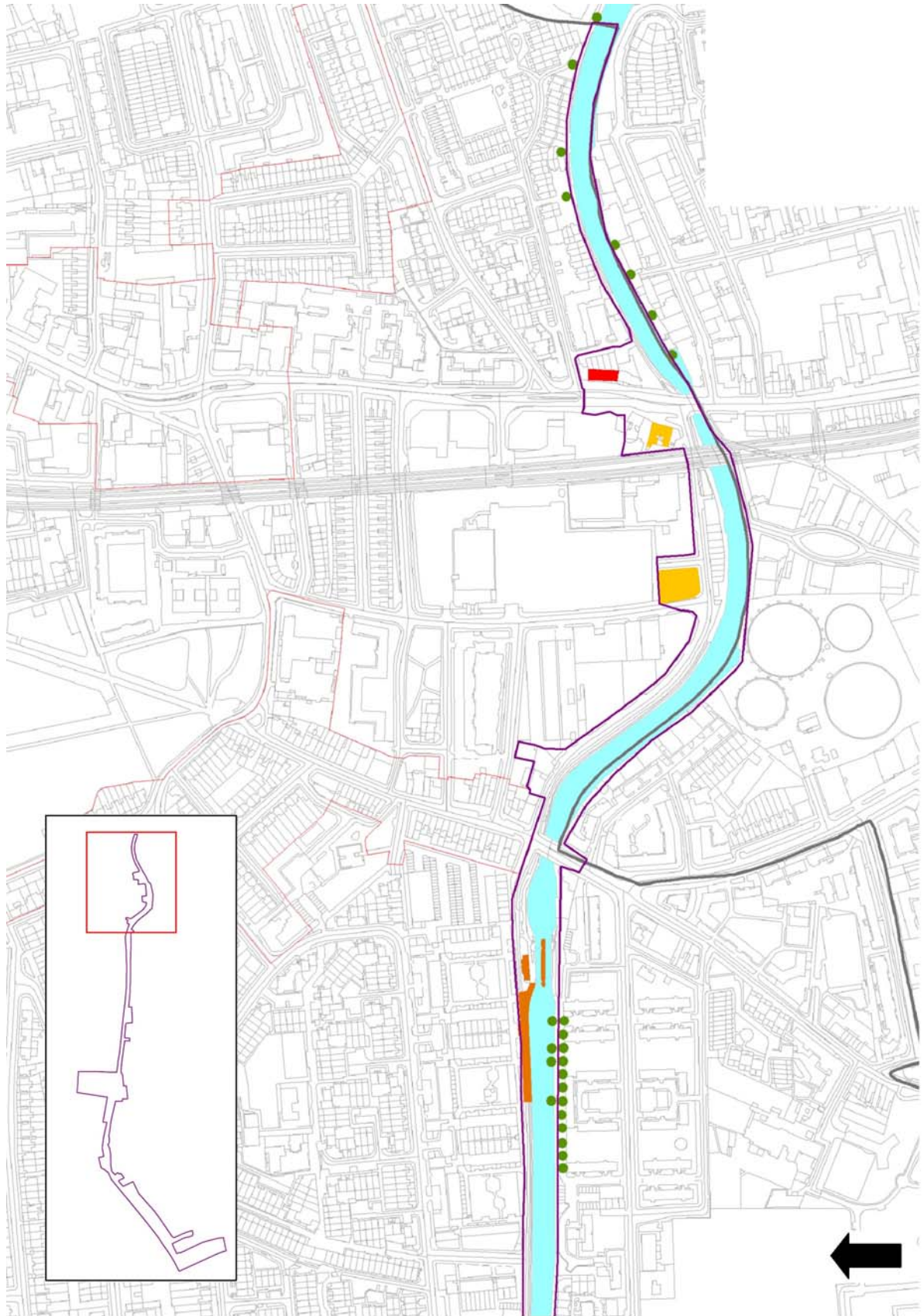
Regent's Canal Conservation Area Map 1b



Regent's Canal Conservation Area Map 1c



Regent's Canal Conservation Area Map 1d



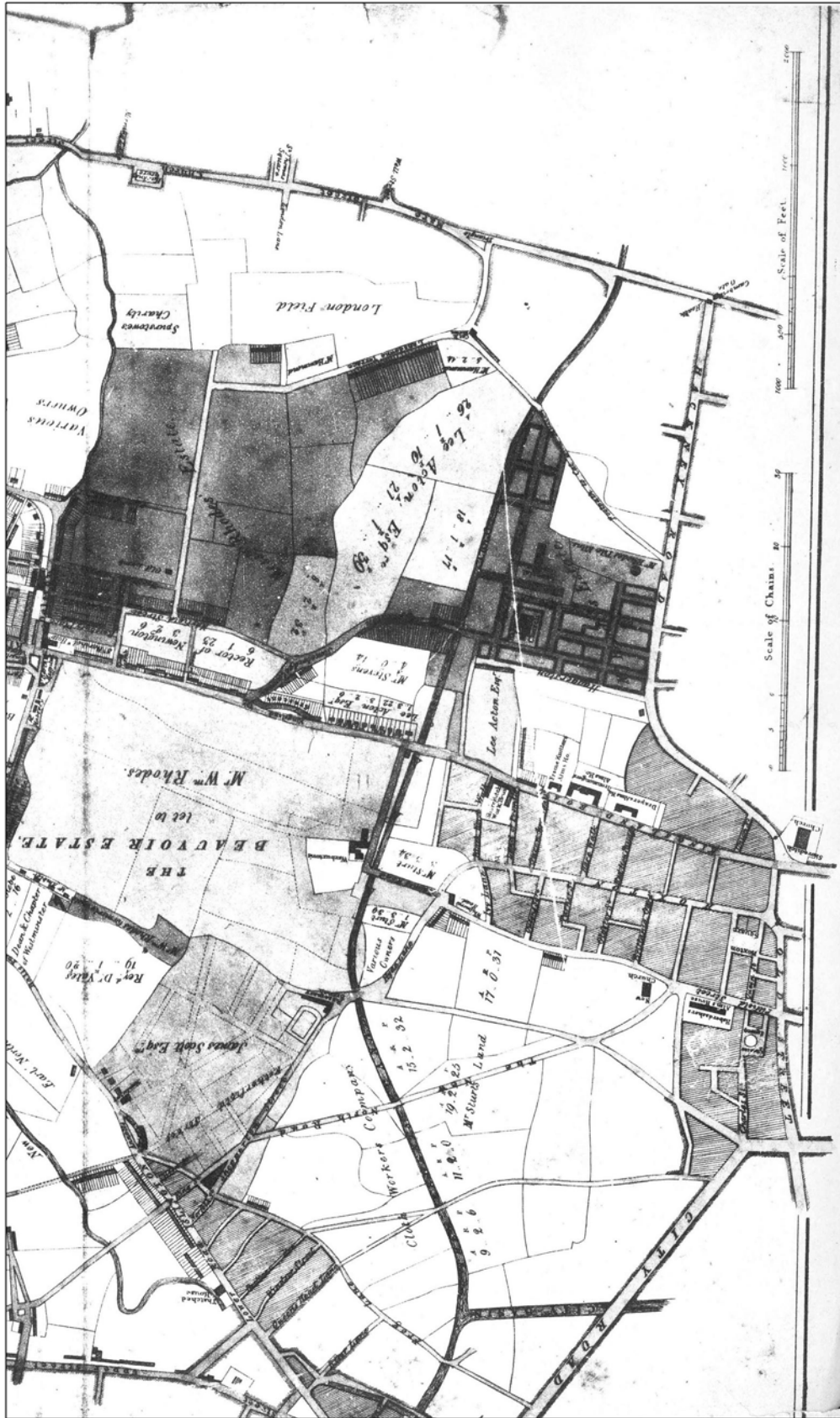
APPENDIX A

HISTORIC MAPS OF THE REGENT'S CANAL CONSERVATION AREA

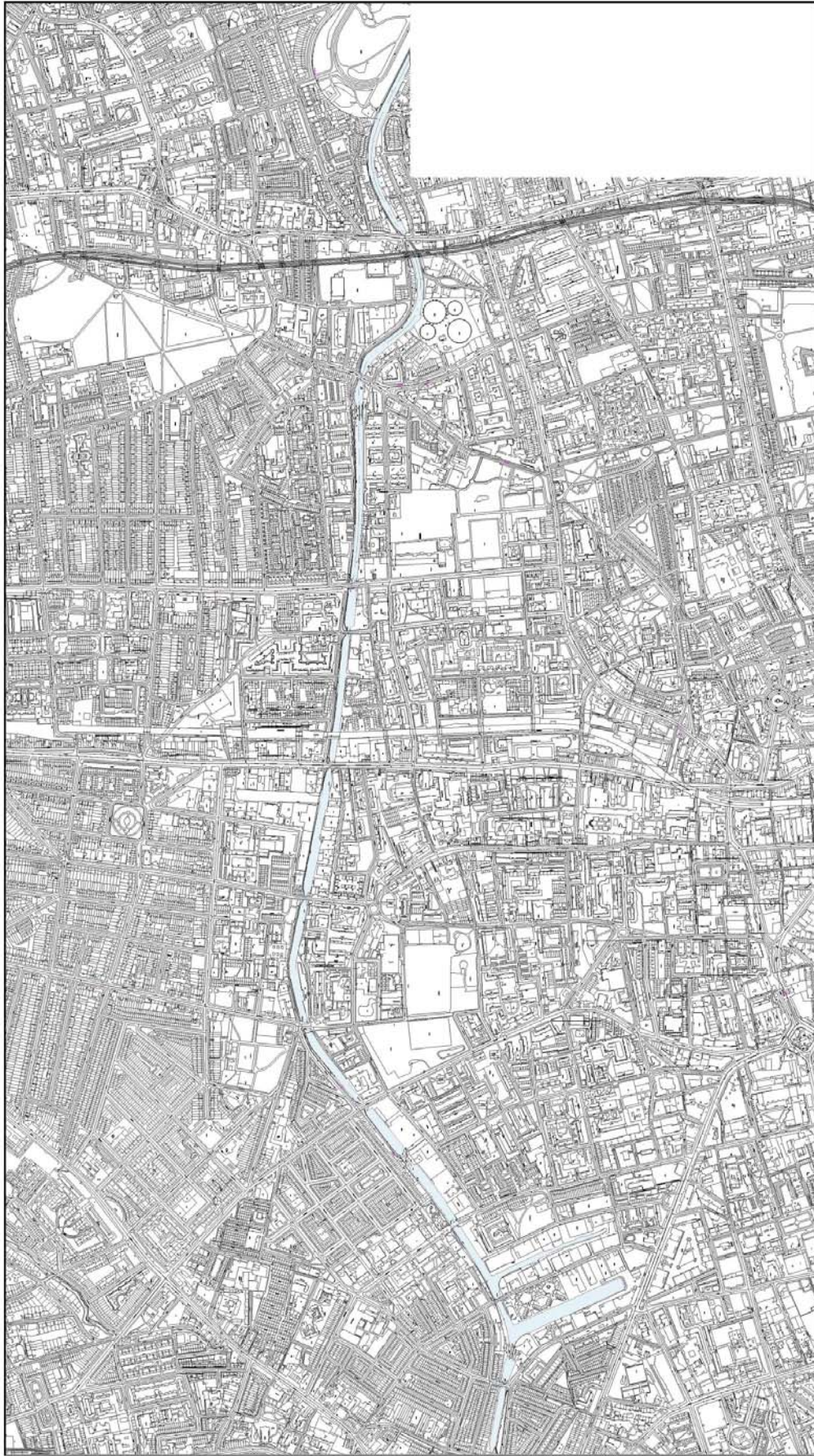
Map of Area in 1800



Map of 1821



Contemporary OS Map



Aerial View of Conservation Area



APPENDIX B

SCHEDULE OF STATUTORILY LISTED AND LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

Statutorily listed buildings (Grade II unless specified):

Haggerston Road
Haggerston Bridge

Hertford Road
Nos.16 and 16A Multi-storey stables and setted ramp, c1895 and c1899, with some late C20 modifications.

Kingsland Road, Kingsland Basin
No. 315 Quebec Wharf (also known as the Spice Warehouse) Former Granary with attached boiler and engine house, office and dwelling house.

Queensbridge Road
Bridge over the Grand Union canal

Wharf Road:
No. 16 (mid C19th factory building)
Nos. 44 to 48 (even), (large mid C19th 3 –storey building)

Locally Listed Buildings

Locally listed buildings are those which are on the Council's own list of buildings of local architectural or historic interest. The Council's policy (EQ20) in the Unitary Development Plan is to retain the character and appearance of these when determining planning applications.

Andrew's Road
Nos. 35-38 (consec)
Beehive Works

Baring Street
No. 55 (The Baring Arms PH)

De Beauvoir Road
Nos. 106-110 (even)
Nos. 114-120
No. 116

Kingsland Road
No. 283
Bridge over Regent's Canal

Mare Street
Nos. 5-11 (Victoria Buildings)



Fig. 50: Nos. 5-11 Mare Street (Locally Listed Building)

Buildings of Townscape Merit

Apart from the few listed and locally listed buildings, a large number of unlisted buildings in the Conservation Area have been identified as “Buildings of Townscape Merit”. These are usually well-detailed examples of mainly late nineteenth century commercial premises, which retain their original detailing.

On the Regent's Canal

Actons Lock

Actons Lock former lock-keepers cottage and office and Lock House

Stretch of cobbled road in Regent's Row

Sturts Lock

Sturts Lock cottage and associated buildings

Laburnum Basin

Kingsland Basin

Wenlock Basin

Whitmore Bridge

New North Road Bridge

Packington Foot Bridge

Hertford Road

Nos. 18-20 Hertford Road

32A Hertford Road

Bankstock Buildings, Nos. 42-44 De Beauvoir Road

Andrews Road
Nos. 50, 51, 52 & 53

Branch Place
No. 1 (Rosemary Works)

Southgate Road
Briggs Furniture Factory,

Whitmore Road
Nos. 54, 56, 58A, 58

Wiltshire Row
Crown & Manor Boys Club

Orsman Road
Canalside Studios,
Tuscany Wharf
Nos. 11-33, (Acme Studios)

De Beauvoir Crescent
Bankside Buildings

Eagle Wharf Road
Holborn Studios,

Wenlock Road and canal side
Royle Building

APPENDIX C

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APPENDIX D

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Fig. 46: Looking south along Wenlock Basin

Fig. 47: Wenlock Basin in 1974

Fig. 48: Refurbished Lock Keepers Cottage and Pumping Works at Sturts Lock

Fig. 49: Deep grooves in the cast iron rubbing strips made by ropes of horses

Fig. 50: Nos. 5 – 11 Mare Street

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APPENDIX E

FURTHER INFORMATION

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The Victorian Society

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For the "Care for Victorian Houses" leaflet, etc.

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For an excellent range of technical advice leaflets

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