

8.0 LEIGH BRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA

8.1 Definition and summary of special interest

Leigh Bridge Conservation Area is located to the west of the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area, and just to the south of the Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area.

The character of the Conservation Area is informed by the main thoroughfare of King Street, which runs south from the town centre as far as Leigh Bridge, and continues as St Helen's Road to the south of the bridge. The road intercepts the Bridgewater Canal, which runs roughly east-west through the area on a straight axis.

8.2 Activities and uses

Although no longer a working freight transport route, the canal is now used by walkers, anglers and cyclists. On the water itself are a small number of private boats. The historic canalside uses are still very much evident, for example, the converted warehouse, and the disused mill to the eastern corner of the Conservation Area.

Several shops and businesses are located on King Street, nearest to the town centre. Two pubs, the Moonraker Hotel and The Bridge Inn, are situated on either side of the bridge, as is characteristic where the canal intercepts the main roads. Residential use occurs in the form of the terraced houses fronting and adjoining King Street, the Ropewalk building, and a purpose-built block of flats overlooking the canal on the north side.

An important use in the area was the Kwik Save supermarket, and its closure has led to a loss of vitality of this part of the Conservation Area. However, plans for the redevelopment of this site are under way.

8.3 Spatial structure – form and density

The spatial structure of the Conservation Area hinges on the intersection between the main road and the canal. Although the character of each of these elements is distinct, the area as a whole is too cohesive to be divided into character sub-areas. The character of the town centre informs the northern edge of the Conservation Area through the following elements: frontage of buildings lining the street and turning the corner; variety of building styles, types and heights; commercial/business land use. The fine grain, in terms of plot sizes, is continued here along the main street.

To the left of King Street, the buildings on Canal Street and Smithy Street were cleared to accommodate the former supermarket and its associated car park. Despite the loss of historic structures, the space is well defined by the surrounding buildings. The block to the right of King Street is more intact, although infill development has taken place near the canal. Further east is the fine structure of the disused mill. The land in between is fairly nondescript.

With the exception of the former supermarket, the buildings by the canal relate to it well. The most successful ones are those which are long and narrow, for example, the Ropewalk. On the south side of the canal, buildings are set back behind the

towpath. On the north, there is scope for buildings to come right up to the canal side.

8.4 Detailed character analysis

Buildings of townscape merit

King Street – east side:

The Moonraker Hotel is three storeys high, and dominates the adjoining terraces. Despite the replacement of the original windows, it is a handsome building. Its height is augmented by four fine chimneys which are symmetrically placed on the gables.

75 and 77 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 of Pizza Olivera. The door to the upper floors is located between the two shop units. Despite alterations, this is an elegant building.

The three terraced houses at 81-85 King Street are typical of the many workers' cottages in Leigh. Although the original windows and doors have been replaced, and the facades pebble-dashed, the simple form of the houses is still apparent. Located behind this terrace, and at right angles to the main street, is Wild's Passage, a terrace of five cottages. The red brick boundary wall in front of the cottages is especially attractive.

Of particular interest is 5 Wild's Passage, a weaver's house and topshop dating from c.1800. The building is fairly plain in

character, and built of red brick 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. As such, it is the only example of a specialised domestic weaving premises remaining in the Wigan area.

The most dominant building on this side of the street is the current Fit-a-Life Gym. Built in 1896, the appearance of the building is very ecclesiastical in character, with tall traceried windows lighting 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 c.1850. The roofline is plain, and a number of chimneys have been lost. 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.

66-68 King Street is Denjo's Amusements, a later Victorian building with a hipped roof. The modern door and window frames detract from the building, but again, its overall form and scale remain, making a positive contribution to King Street.

On Twist Lane, the Domestic Centre of 1927, latterly the Leigh Youth Co-operative Project Centre, faces the street with a long facade, again helping 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 keystones, and especially the door, fanlight, and shaped cornice above.

Canal corridor:

A towing path is located on the south bank of the canal, providing a pleasant footpath. The Ropewalk 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, defining it without dominating it. Adjacent to the Ropewalk, Canal House is unremarkable in itself, but retains the building line along the canal, although it is fenced off from the towpath. The adjacent car-parking area detracts somewhat from the character of the canalside.

Opposite the Ropewalk the Grade II listed Waterside Inn is a former canal warehouse. The lower stone section is late 18th century: features include 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 roofspan. To the rear, a large projecting canopy sits over the loading doors. The eaves have dentilled brick detailing.



Leigh Bridge itself is a low canal bridge of the typical form. Although not outstanding as a piece of architecture in itself, it complements its context adequately. Close to the bridge is the Bridge Inn, located on the east side of St Helen's Road. The two storey building is rendered at the first floor, with a red brick ground floor brick. Timbered gablets provide detailing to an otherwise fairly plain and unassuming building.

Neutral or negative factors

The architectural quality of the buildings to the east of Leigh Bridge is less good. On the north bank, two modern red brick

structures face the canal, i.e. Cavan House, an office building, and Waterhouse Court, a block of flats. Although they mimic the form of the Waterside Inn to an extent, their overall design and use of materials is poor. The space around the buildings and the nearby car park are featureless, adding very little to 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.

The former Kwik Save supermarket building, now demolished, was perhaps the most negative factor in terms of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The building failed to acknowledge either the canal or the street, and its low, shed-like form did not relate in any way to the established building types in vicinity. The elevation facing the canal detracts from was blank, and faced into a service yard, with a boundary wall which formed a further barrier between the building and the canal. It was a very good example of how not to design a canalside building.

Another negative factor is the alterations which have been carried out to the historic buildings, including: removal of original doors and windows; truncation and removal of historic chimneys; addition of satellite dishes and other accretions; rendering of historic facades. The large TK Max advertisement sign on the gable of 85 King Street also detracts from the streetscape.

8.5 Trees and green elements

The grassy areas, trees and shrubs are vital to the character of the Conservation Area. For example, the beer garden of the Waterside Inn is grassed and contains some young trees, enhancing the canalside. On the other side of the canal, the towpath is surfaced with modern setts along this stretch, making it more accessible.

The trees and hedges in the supermarket car park help to soften and break up a space that is otherwise not particularly attractive. The canal corridor contrasts with the hard urban character of King Street, where there is no greenery to soften the streetscape.

There is a case to be made for additional planting, using appropriate species, where it would help to screen those elements that detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

8.6 Settings and views

Bridges provide 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 in the Conservation Area is from Leigh Bridge looking west along the canal. This view is framed by the Waterside Inn and the Ropewalk, with trees and greenery in the distance as the canal curves out of sight.

8.7 Public realm

The public realm around the Leigh Bridge itself is quite stark, with grey concrete flagging, and particularly the heavy modern guard rails that approach the bridge. The grey flags continue on the south side of the canal, forming a wide pavement outside the Bridge Inn. Elsewhere, tarmac surfacing predominates the area. Street clutter is not so much of a problem here as in the town centre.

To the west of the Leigh Bridge, the canal towpath here is surfaced in modern, tightly laid setts, reflecting the heavier and more concentrated usage of the path here than to the east of the bridge, and within the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area.

There is one instance of historic surfacing, which is the irregular cobbling on the private approach to the cottages on Wild's Passage.

8.8 Conservation Area boundary review

No revisions to the existing boundary of the Leigh Bridge Conservation Area were considered desirable.

