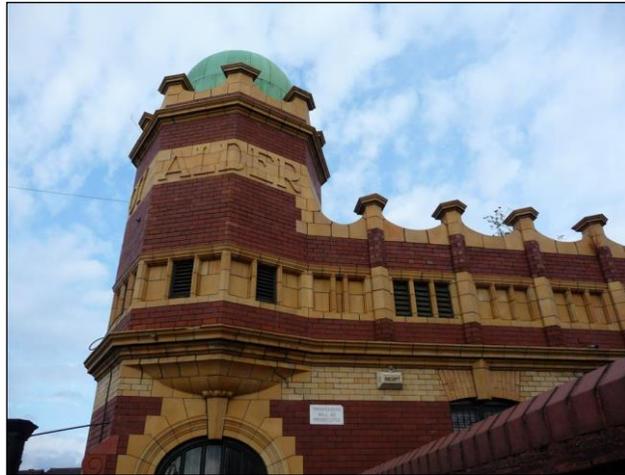


# Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area Appraisal

June 2012

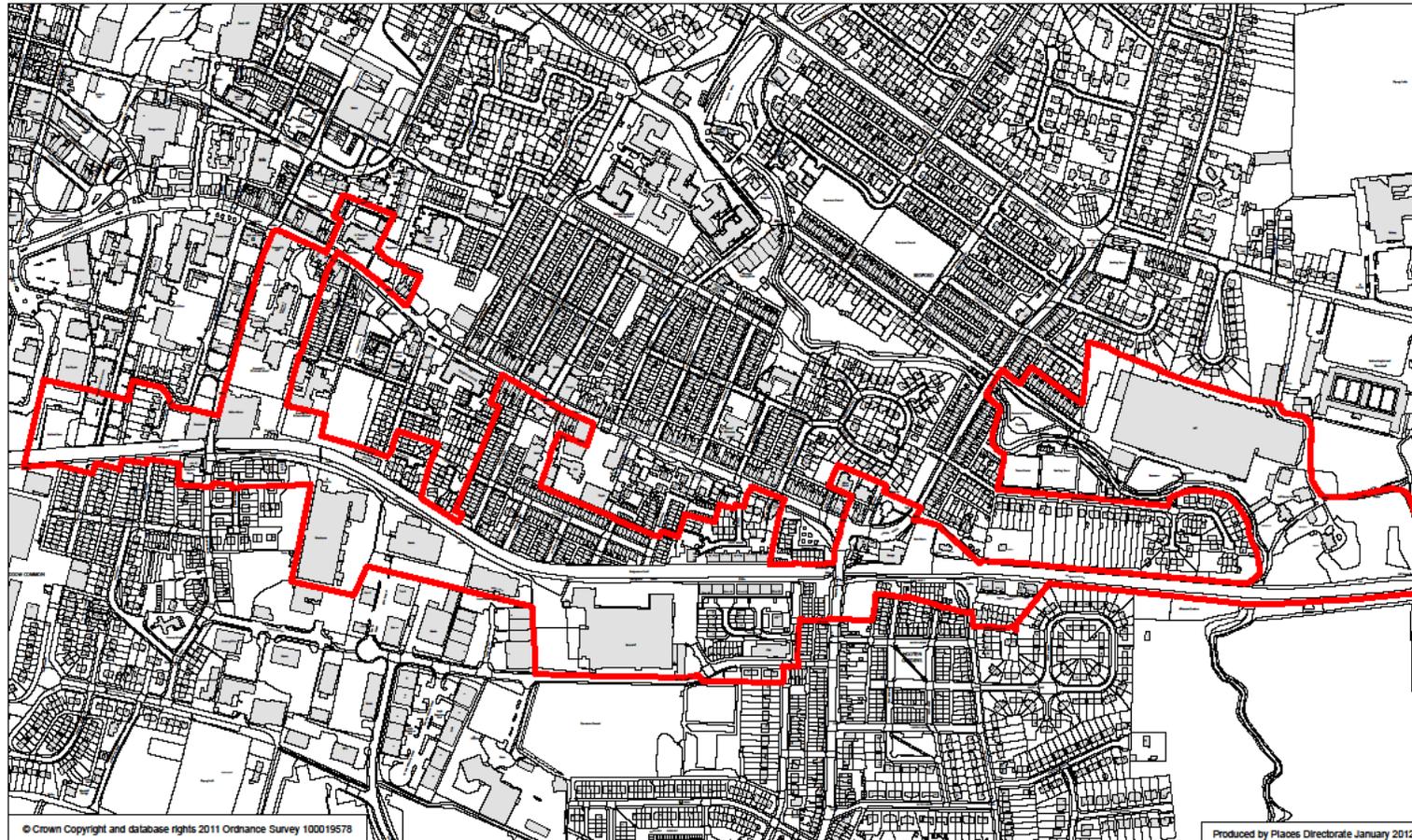


## Conservation Area Appraisals

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

Comments are invited on this draft appraisal. They should be sent to [planningpolicy@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@wigan.gov.uk) or by post to Planning Policy, Places Directorate, Wigan Council, PO Box 100, Wigan WN1 3DS by 5pm on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012. There is also an exhibition and drop in session at Leigh Library on 27<sup>th</sup> June and 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012 from 2pm – 7pm. If you require any other information about the appraisal please contact Jason Kennedy on 01942 489233 or by email on [j.kennedy@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:j.kennedy@wigan.gov.uk)

# Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area



**Map 1: Map of Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area**

## Definition and summary of special interest

The character of the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area is that of a late 19th century industrial community. The area stands to the east of the Leigh Town Centre within the historic township of Bedford, and is by far the largest of the four Conservation Areas in Leigh. As well as the major historic, industrial, archaeological and landscape feature formed by the Bridgewater Canal, the Conservation Area contains a concentration of listed buildings. These include industrial buildings relating to Leigh's silk and cotton textile industries, and include Grade II\* listed Leigh Spinners, Mather Lane Mill, Butts Mill and the former mill office at Alder Mill.

The special interest of the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area derives from:

- its significance as part of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century canal network and its importance as a historic record of the most prevalent pre-railway method of freight transport network;
- the historic and architectural interest of the canal;
- its valuable contribution to the growth of Leigh during the 19th century;

- its associated structures and views of the focal points such as the church spires and the mill towers and chimneys.

Shops existed in the area (from at least 1641), as well as a fair, and an inn (landlords of the Bull's Head are recorded from 1792) at Butts. As well as agricultural production, coal-mining in the northern part of Bedford and domestic linen and muslin weaving formed the basis of the local economy.

Following the success of the Bridgewater Canal from Manchester to Worsley, the Duke of Bridgewater extended it to Leigh in 1795. Until this happened, the area was largely rural in character with a small settlement in the Butts area. The canal links to Liverpool via the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal provided Leigh with raw materials, and markets for the end products. This stimulated the growth of the textile industry in Bedford. The canal also provided water for the steam power, a technology which dominated in the mid-19th century.

The increasing need for labour in the mills led to the expansion of housing, for example, along Warrington Road, Chapel Street, Rothay Street and Severn Street. New churches were also built to serve the increasing population.

In the 1840s engineering was brought to Leigh with the setting up of the Bedford Foundry. Originally manufacturing

household articles it later branched into farm machinery. Harrison and McGregor set up in competition with the Bedford Foundry in 1872, making an improved combine harvester which won the company international repute.

At the same time, coal began to be an important industry, particularly in Westleigh. As the coalfields of Wigan began to be worked out towards the end of the century, the Leigh coalfield was looked on as its successor, and coalmining became the largest user of labour after the textile industry.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the textile industry contracted, whilst the traditional materials were replaced by the use of man-made fibres: silk ceased to be woven in 1926 and cotton in 1972.

The decline in textiles and mining was compensated to some extent by the growth of engineering. From having a population of about 40,000 at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Leigh expanded to a population of almost 50,000 in 1951, but since then there has been a slow decline as the traditional industries have died out.

The severe decline of the textile industry from 1945 has led to the demolition of a substantial number of mills. Cleared sites have generally been redeveloped for housing.



**Photo 1: The Bridgewater Canal at Bedford 1905**

### **Activities and uses**

The Bridgewater Canal was the seat of large-scale industry (textile industry, coal mining, iron works) in Leigh owing to technological advances made during the Industrial Revolution. The area includes numerous buildings of high architectural quality, the majority of which date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including the impressive multi-storey mills, such as Mather Lane Mills, Butts Mill, and Leigh Spinners. At a distance, these form a striking skyline visible for miles around Leigh, and can be seen from the West Coast main

line, the Manchester-Wigan railway line, the M6 motorway and the A580 East Lancashire Road. There are only a handful of the original mills remaining along the Bridgewater Canal as several of the mill premises and their sites have been cleared for housing development, including Pendle Court where Pendle Mill once stood. Mather Lane Mill and Butts Mill (in part) are currently vacant and on the open market.

Whilst individual industrial premises have been lost to residential development, the uses and activities fronting the Bridgewater Canal remain predominantly industrial.

From 1875, many of the terraces on Chapel Street included purpose-built shop units, and the area has retained its function as a secondary shopping area within the town. Other uses that have survived are the churches and pubs, which remain focal buildings within the area.

Following the decline of the industries in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century residential use has become more and more prominent, with a considerable amount of housing infill appearing in and around the industrial areas, particularly along the canal itself.

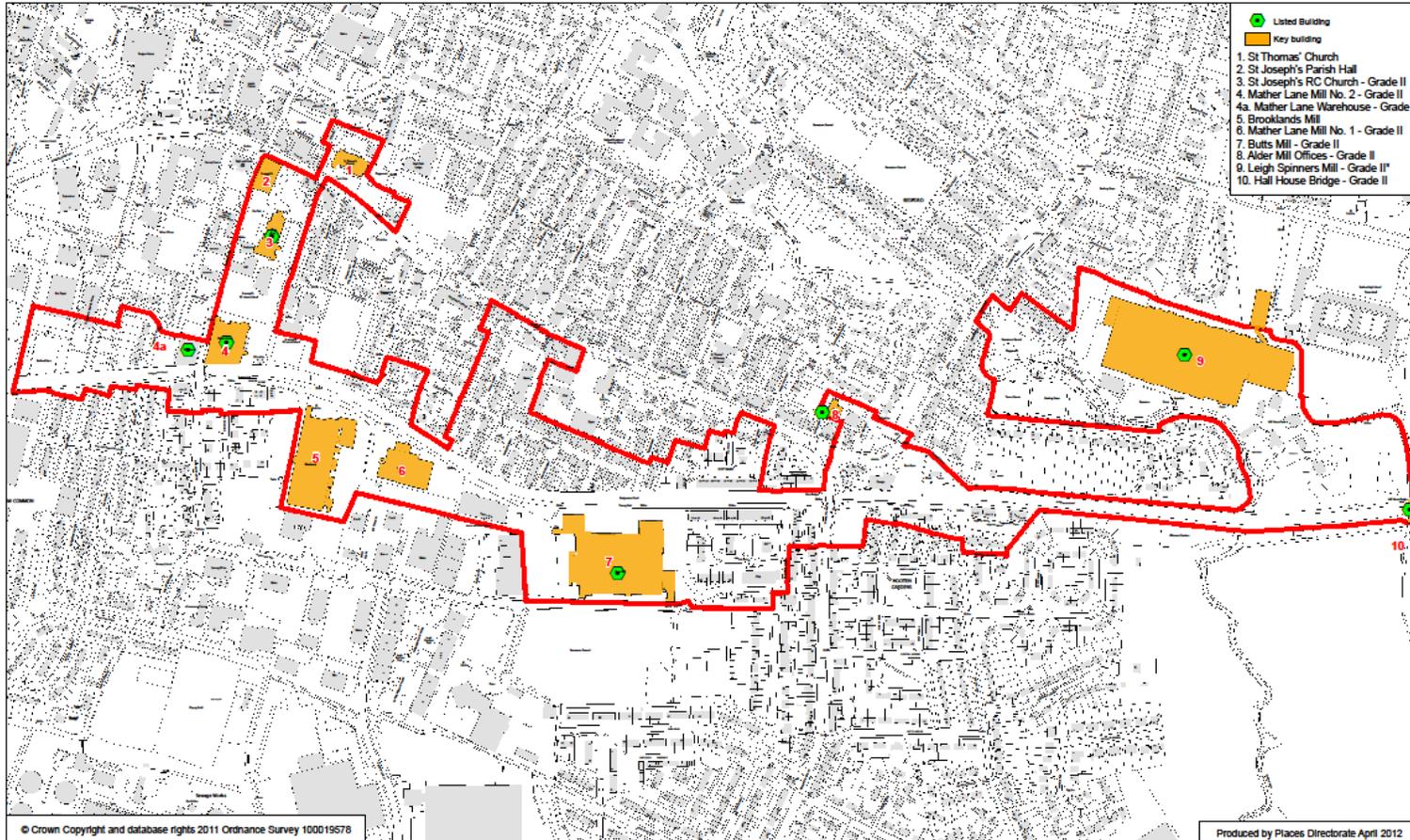
### **Spatial structure – form and density**

The Bridgewater Canal forms the heart of the Conservation Area, from Bedford Basin in the west to Hall House Bridge to the east. The canal is a linear space, curving gently through townscape which ranges from dense areas of built up

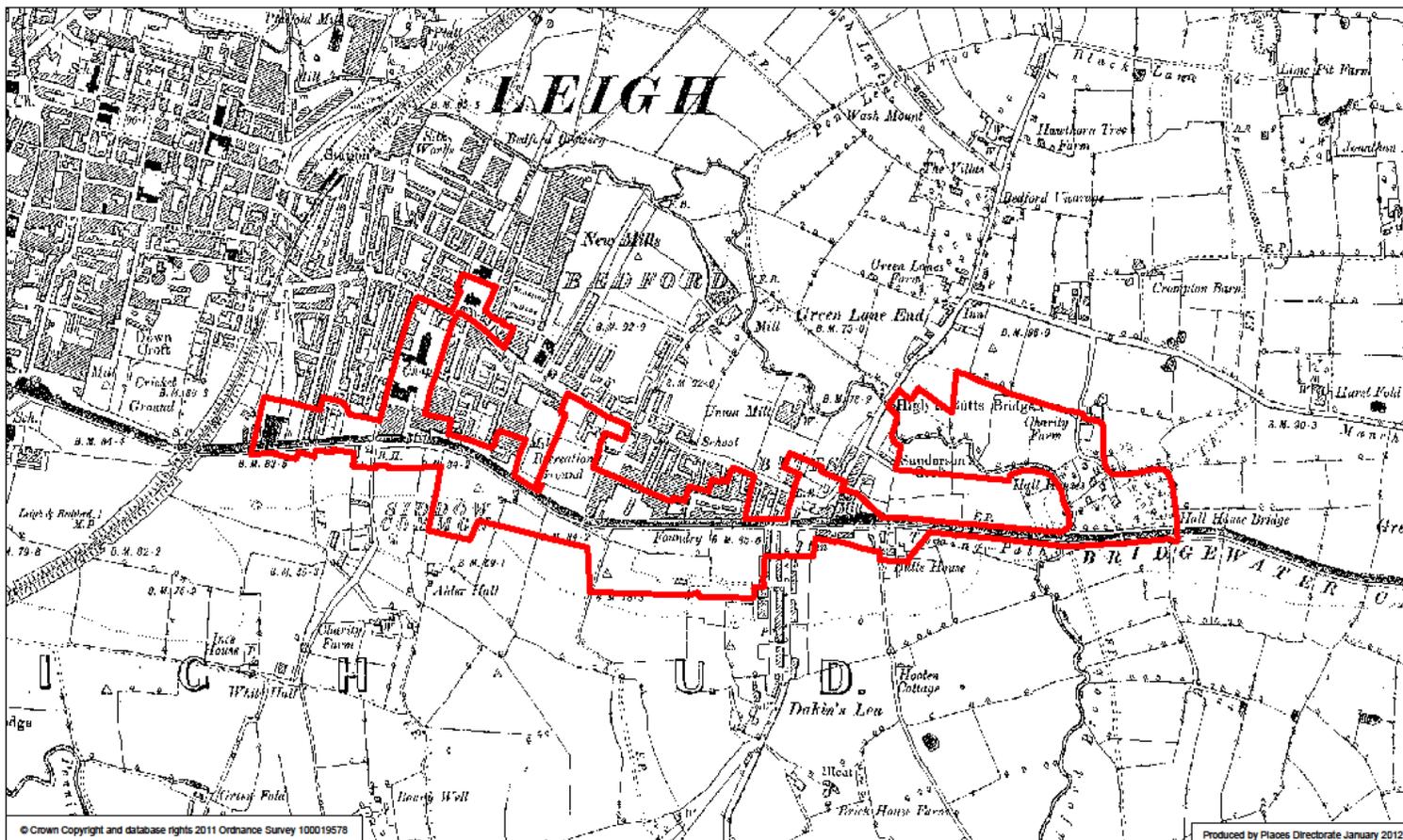
development nearest to Leigh town centre towards the open fields to the south of Hall House Bridge. The Ordnance Survey map of 1849 shows the area around the canal was mainly undeveloped. The south bank in particular was mainly fields, and the only building of any note at this time was the Bull's Head Inn.

On the north side, Chapel Street was fairly well built up in 1849, and a small settlement around the Butts was evident.

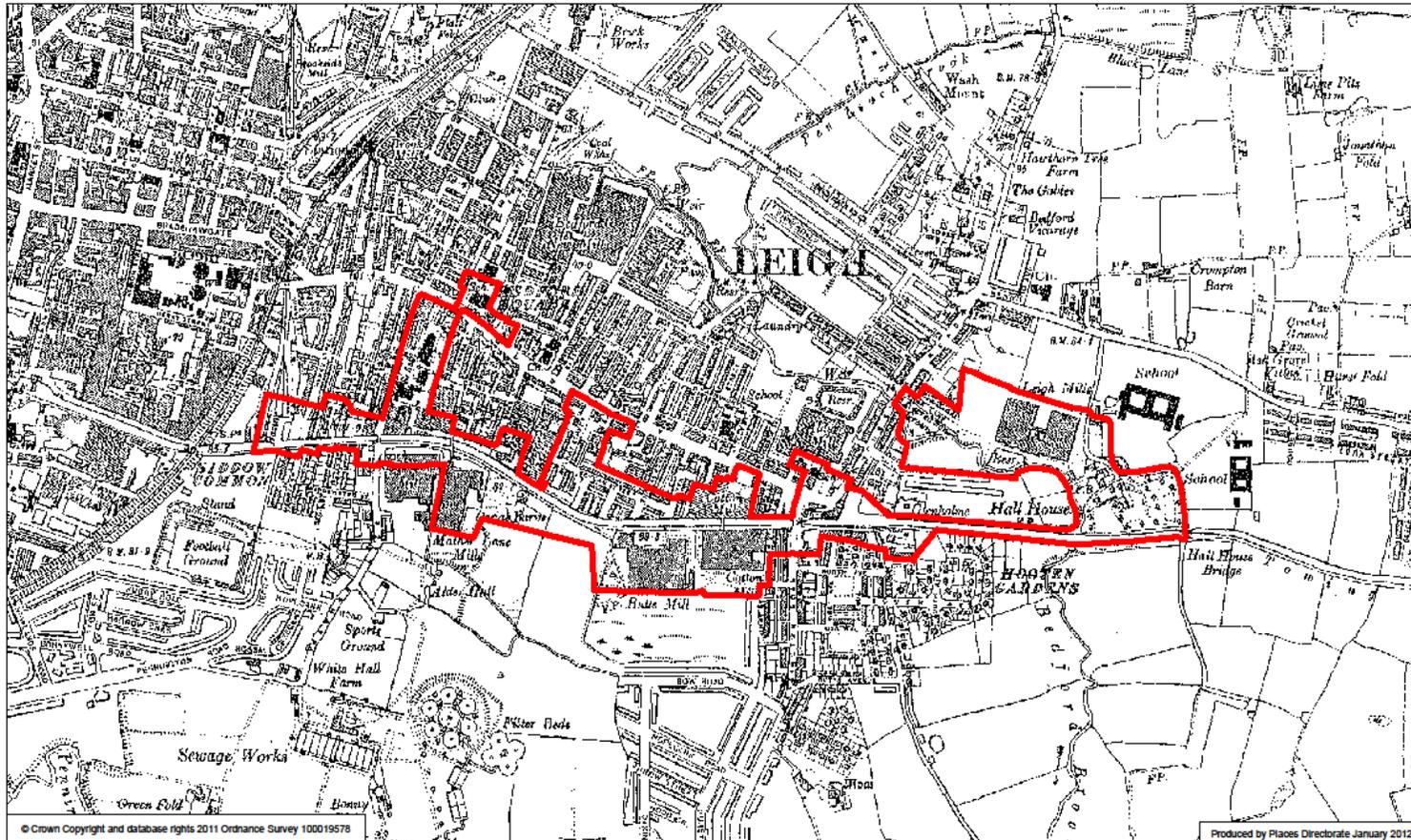
Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century a number of industries appeared, including silk and cotton mills, limekilns and brickfields. By 1893, Mather Mill and Stanley Mill had been constructed, and a large brickfield occupied the land where Butts Mill was later built.



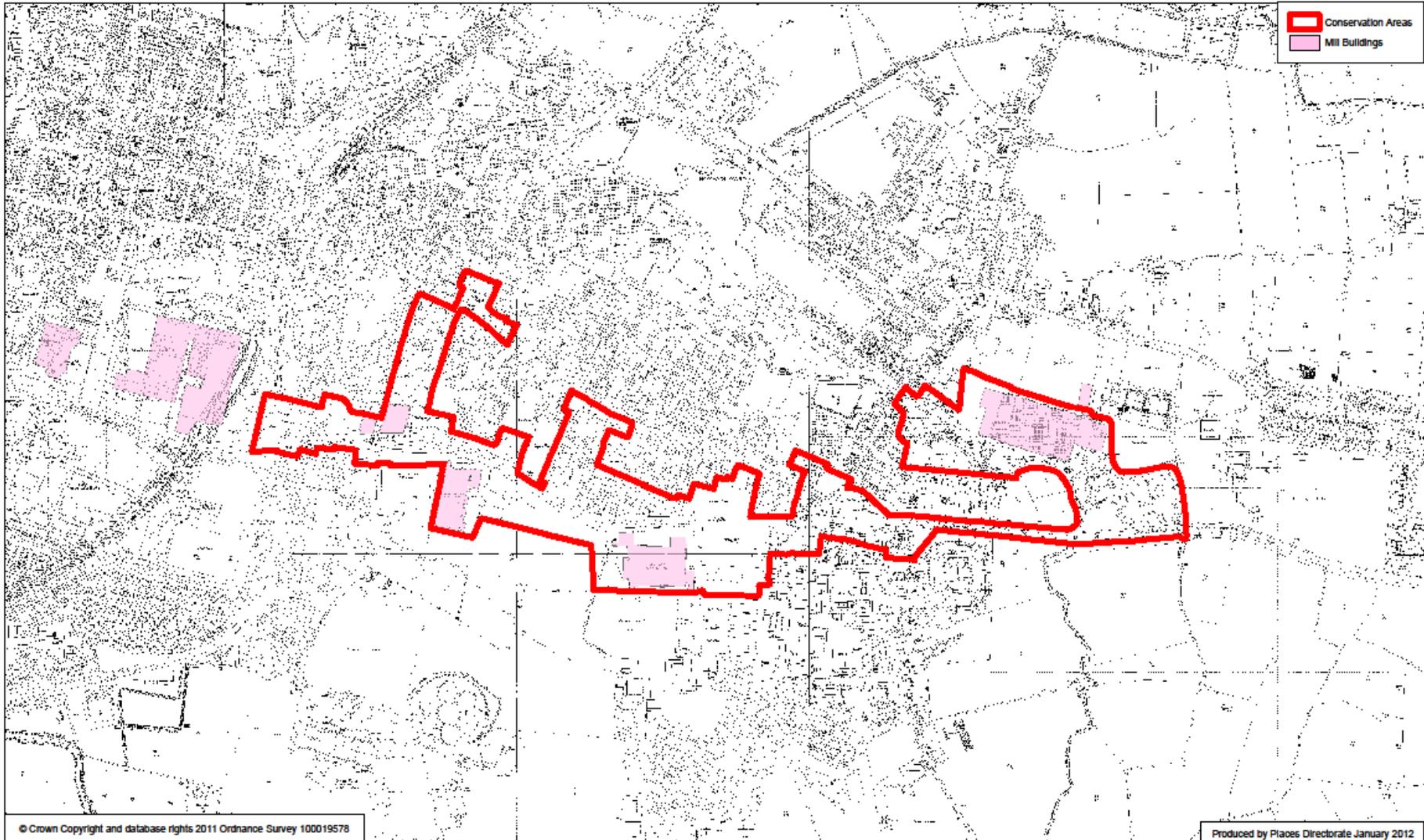
Map 2: Buildings of architectural and historic interest



Map 3: The Bridgewater Canal in the 1890's



Map 4: Mill buildings along the Bridgewater Canal – 1920's



Map 5: Mill buildings – 1950's

## General Character of the Conservation Area

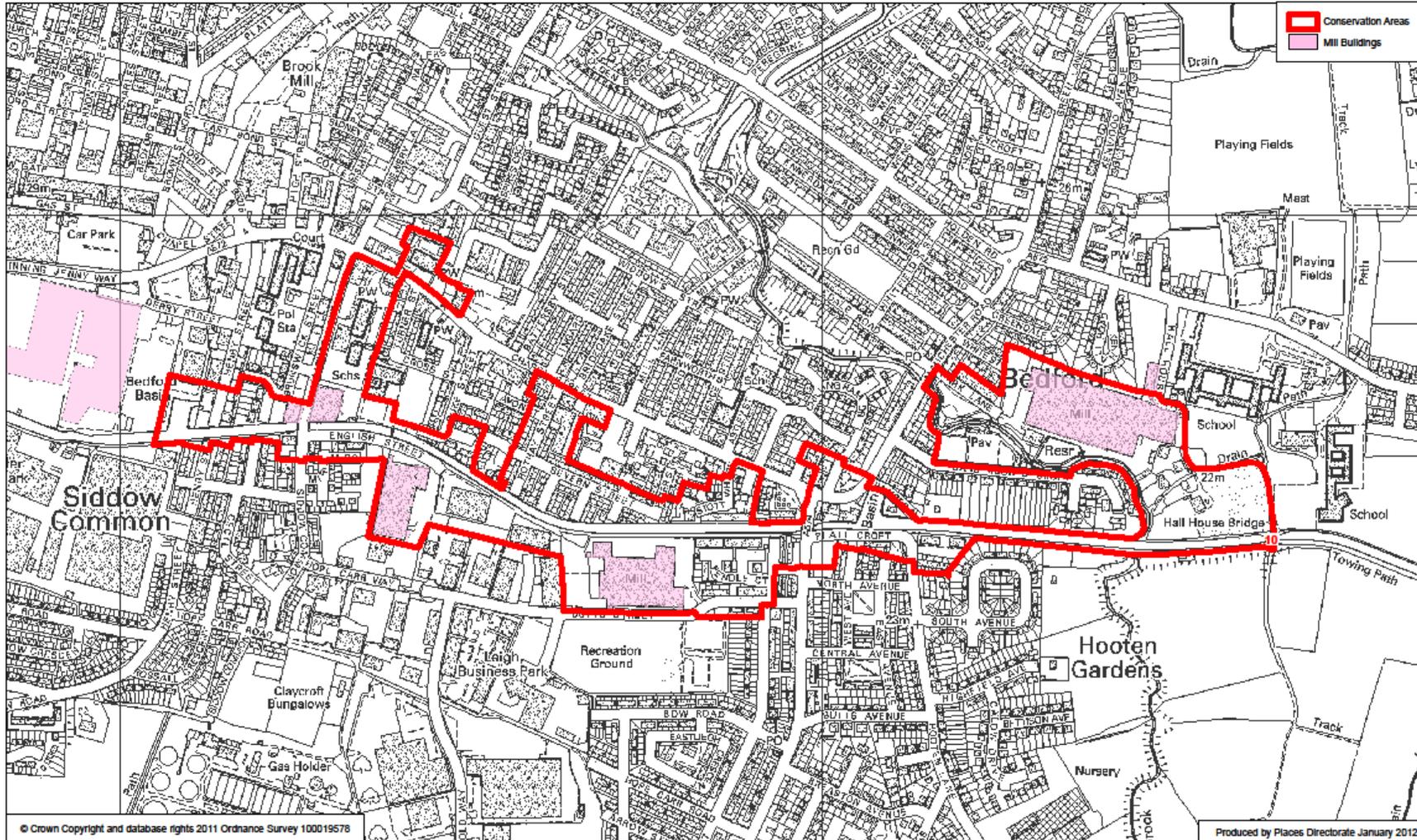


**Photo 2: Bridgewater Canal corridor showing winding gear to the bottom left**

The Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area is very much an area of contrasts. The canal corridor is long, narrow, and very tranquil, with grassy banks, and an unmade tow path. The western end of the conservation area is characterised by trees and abundant wildlife. The mill buildings provide a stark contrast to the canal, being utilitarian, dominant and often very dramatic. Their bulk is quite striking against the flat, open ground of their surroundings. Several mill buildings remain in the area and are shown on Map 5.

**Photo 3: Mill Buildings alongside the Bridgewater Canal**





Map 5: Existing Mill Buildings in the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area



**Photo 4: Chapel Street, Leigh**



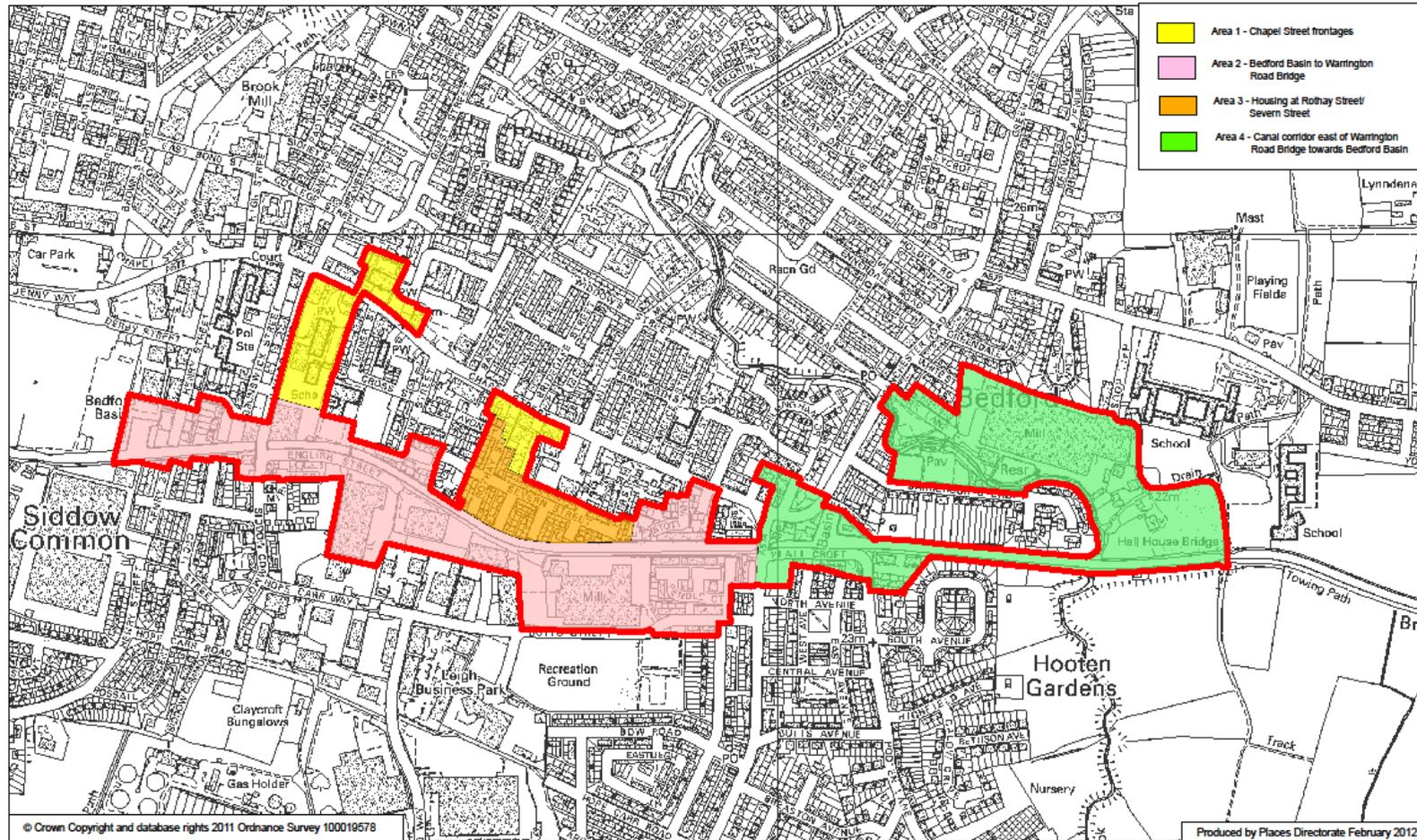
**Photo 5: Approaching Mather Lane Bridge**

Chapel Street and the housing areas are very different in character, and have more in common with the densely developed parts of the town centre.

### **Detailed character analysis**

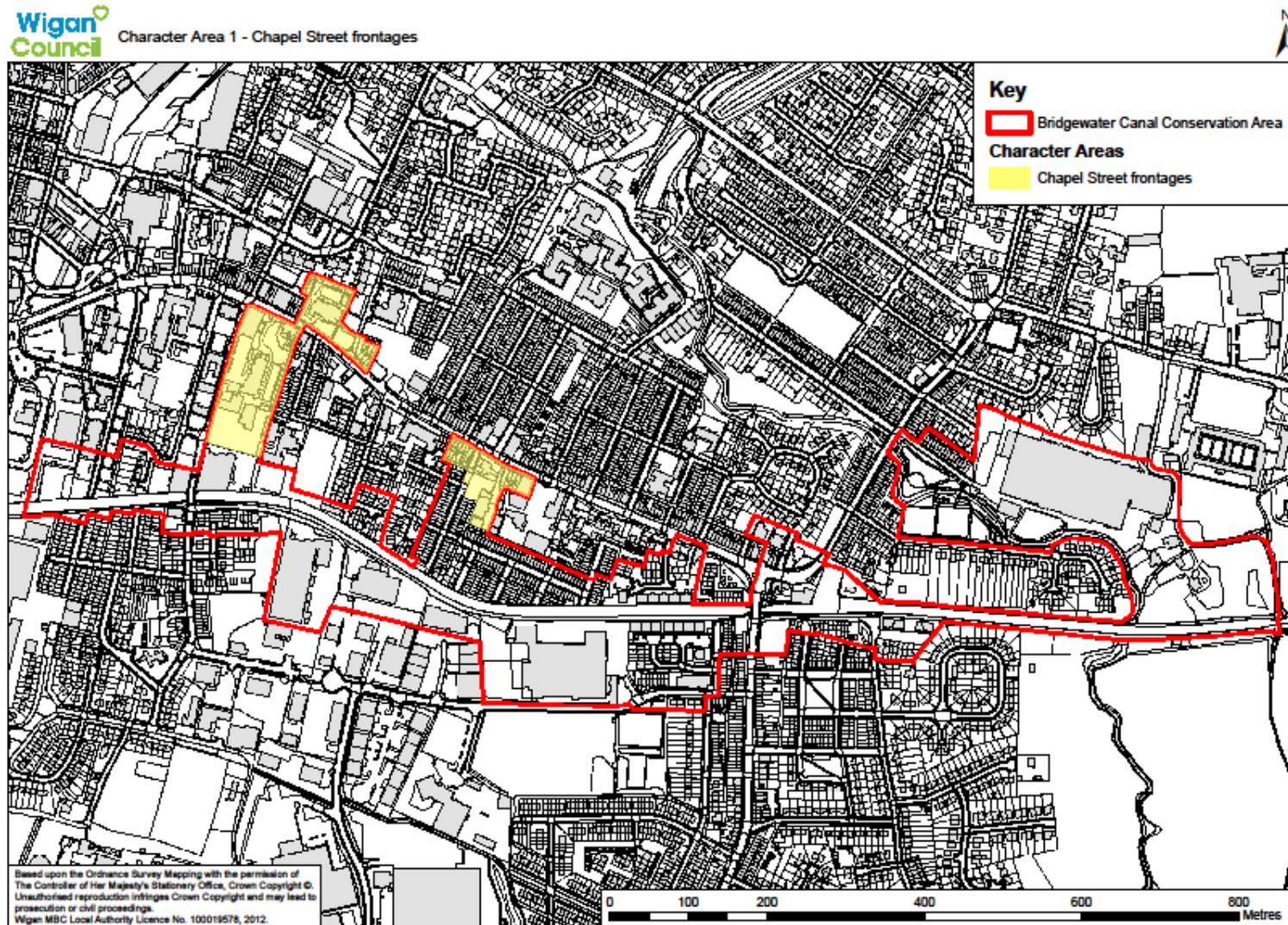
The Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area can be divided into four character areas as follows:

1. Chapel Street frontages
2. Housing at Rothay Street/Severn Street
3. Canal corridor from Bedford Basin to Butts Bridge
4. Canal corridor from Butts Bridge to Bedford Brook



Map 6: Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area Character Areas

# Character Area 1: Chapel Street frontages



Map 7: Character Area 1



**Photo 6: Chapel Street frontages**

The character of Chapel Street is defined by two and three storey buildings which are commercial in nature and several prominent ecclesiastical buildings. Chapel Street is situated to the east of Leigh Town Centre. Only a limited number of properties on Chapel Street are included in the Conservation Area reflecting the degree to which the 1960s and 1970s development has conflicted with the historic character of the area.

**Buildings of townscape merit**

Within the character area are several buildings which contribute positively towards the character and appearance of the conservation area by virtue of their architectural quality.

These include a mix of buildings such as churches, mills, dwellings and commercial properties, including public houses. Along Chapel Street are several ecclesiastical buildings which, contribute positively to the character of the Conservation Area by virtue of their architectural detailing, quality materials and grand scale.



**Photo 7: St Thomas' Church, Chapel Street**

On the north of Chapel Street, **St Thomas' Church** (1906-1910, R B Preston) sits in its own grounds and provides a very pleasant green space within the urban environment. The building is constructed of bright red Accrington brick with red Triassic sandstone details. The window tracery is in a decorated curvilinear style. With its height and robust form, the southern entrance tower forms a landmark feature. The picturesque lych-gate, erected as a Second World War memorial, is a very attractive feature set within a high brick wall which fronts the pavement. Set behind the church is the former vicarage. The vicarage is a good example of the

Queen Anne revival style, complete with gabled roof, barge boards, 'flying' truss features, and the distinctive windows of the period.



**Photo 8: St. Thomas' Vicarage**



**Photo 9: 99-103 Chapel Street**

**99-103 Chapel Street** is row of three sizable two-storey houses facing the street. Dating from the 1890s, these are good examples of higher status housing in Leigh with small gardens at the front and bigger plots to the rear. Built in Accrington brick they include architectural detailing such as paired ground floor sash windows, panelled doors and attractive door surrounds. The hipped roof is plain, apart from the chimneys which complement the overall design.

**Photo 10: St Joseph's Church**



but the fine elevation is partially screened by tall trees. From Mather Lane the west elevation is impressive and dominates the car park. In the space behind the church to the south, is St John's School.

On the south side of Chapel Street stands the Grade II listed **St Joseph's RC Church** (1855, J Hansom). Constructed of



Coal Measures Sandstone in Gothic Geometrical style, the building is set well back from the adjoining streets within its own grounds. Curved

railings announce the presence of the church on the street,

**Photo 11: The Standard Mower Public House**

Adjacent to the church is the **Standard Mower Public House**, whose name recalls Leigh's agricultural machine industry. The building has a long frontage to Chapel Street, with Jacobean transomed and mullioned windows and a pedimented roof feature. The grand door surround has curved fluted pilasters and a pediment that repeats that of the roof feature. But for these decorative features, the pub remains essentially domestic in scale and is very much in keeping with the rows of terraced houses in the vicinity but nonetheless makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. Next door to the pub, the shop at 94

**Chapel Street** is of a similar scale and has a good quality timber shop front and surrounds.



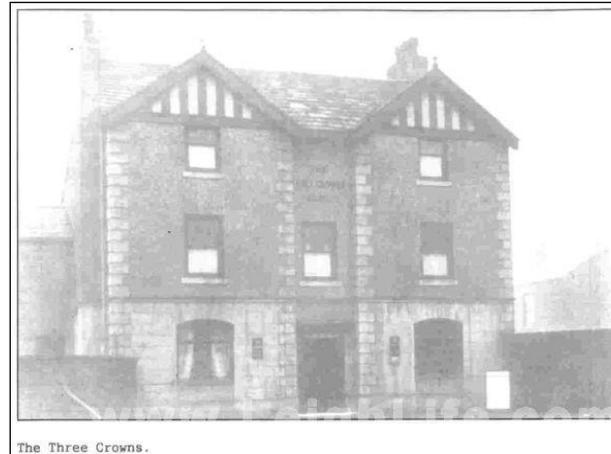
**Photo 12: 94 Chapel Street**

To the east of the church lies **St Joseph's Hall**, which is an attractive building constructed in 1925. The central recessed section of the street frontage is in Portland stone with Gothic curvilinear tracery detailing. The building is not listed in itself, although is subject to listed building controls by virtue of being a curtilage building to St Joseph's Church.



**Photo 13: St**

**Joseph's Parish Hall principal entrance on Chapel Street**



**Photo 14: The Three Crowns Inn, 1900**



**Photo 15: The Three Crowns Inn, Chapel Street**

Moving south-east along Chapel Street is cluster of buildings ancillary to the **Three Crowns**. The pub dates from the late 18th Century, with alterations. This building originated as Naylor's Fold Farmhouse, reflecting the rural origins of the area. Notable features include, its sandstone slate roof and timber framed sash windows to the first and second floors.

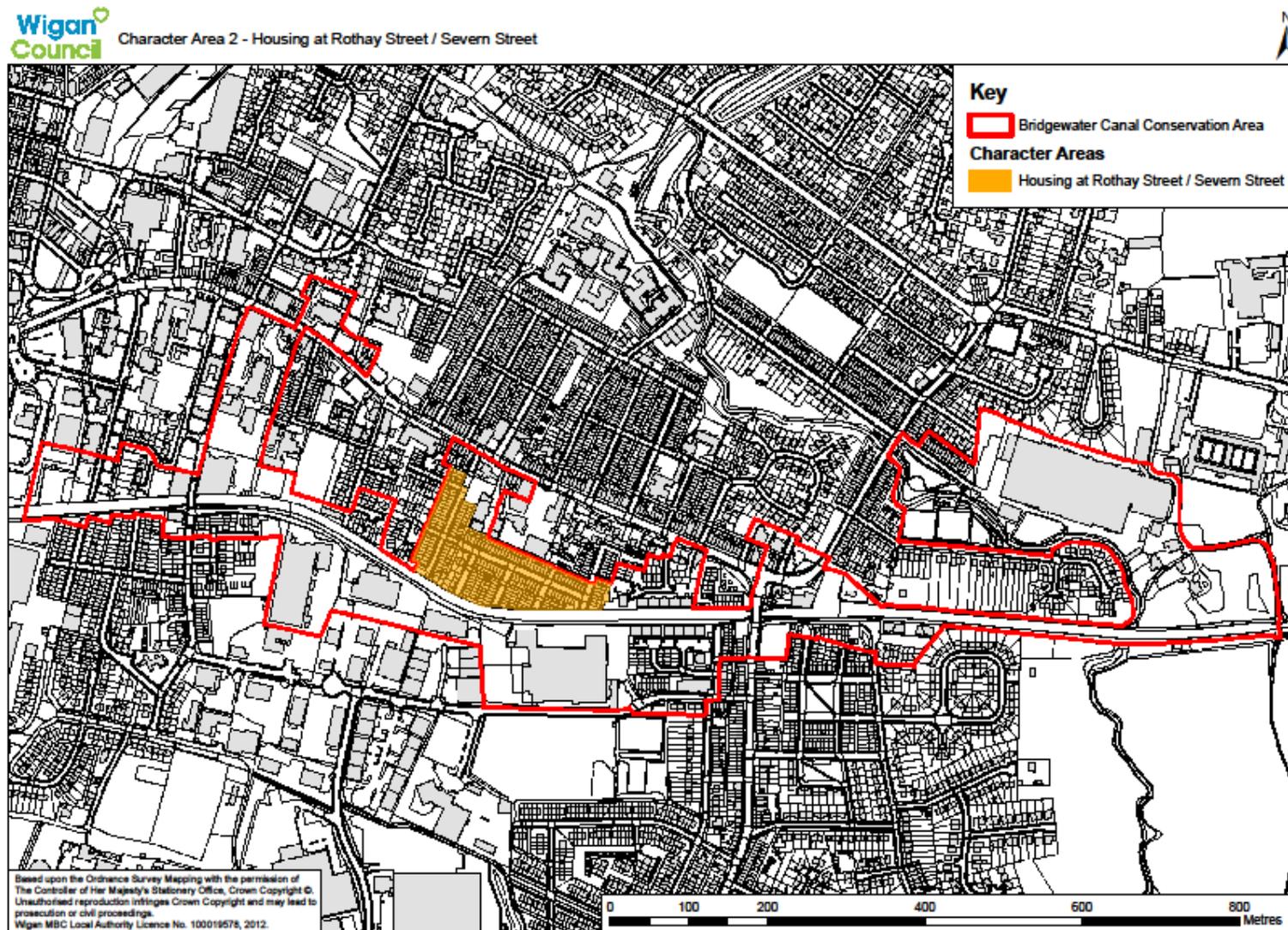
### **Neutral or negative factors**

In general, the buildings in the Chapel Street sub-area are in good condition and well maintained. The fact that only very small parts of Chapel Street have been included has meant that only buildings of good quality appear in the character area. The most negative factor is the alterations that have been carried out to the historic buildings, which are not in keeping with their character and appearance. These include replacement windows, doors and advertisements on commercial properties.

Alterations to façades include the use of inappropriate materials and the introduction of modern shop fronts with extensive fascia signs, and the rendering or cladding of elevations. These alterations have been unsympathetic to the traditional character of the street. As a result, only two sections of Chapel Street have been included in the Conservation Area, namely, the churches and the land around them, and the cluster of buildings around the Three Crowns Inn.

The car parking areas next to St Joseph's Church and the adjacent school are neutral. They could benefit from upgrading in terms of materials and, possibly, some planting to complement the pleasant open spaces of the churchyards.

## Character Area 2: Housing at Rothay Street / Severn Street



Map 8: Character Area 2

## Character Area 2: Housing at Rothay Street/Severn Street

The grid of former workers' housing formed by Rothay Street and Severn Street is concentrated in a small area between Chapel Street and the canal. This is a densely built up area of red brick terraced housing built to the back-of-pavement, with yard or garden space behind. The form of development is typical of the Victorian grid-iron development that was very prevalent in Leigh at the turn of the 20th Century, to provide housing for the mill workers.



Photos 16 and 17: Examples of 20<sup>th</sup> Century terraced housing on Rothay Street, Leigh



### Buildings of Townscape Merit

The terraces of workers' houses were developed in 1903 and are considerably plainer than the houses on Chapel Street. Nonetheless, they are distinguished by often subtle variations in window and door details.

Rothay Street has a number of properties with tripartite sash windows, divided by stout mullions with the wider central sash having a single vertical glazing bar. Above the windows are segmental brick arches. Some of these houses have segmental arched double reveal door openings.



**Photo 18: Severn Street**

On Severn Street, No's 51-56 incorporate wide single sash windows with a wide pane and two narrow margin panes. Elsewhere, single sashes of standard width with two lights to each pane prevailed. All the sash windows in the area have concealed weight boxes and are recessed behind the outer skin of brickwork. In some cases, decorative brickwork is present at the eaves.

### **Neutral and negative factors**

The loss of group character amongst the houses due to the use of inappropriate design and materials has a neutral impact upon the character and appearance of the

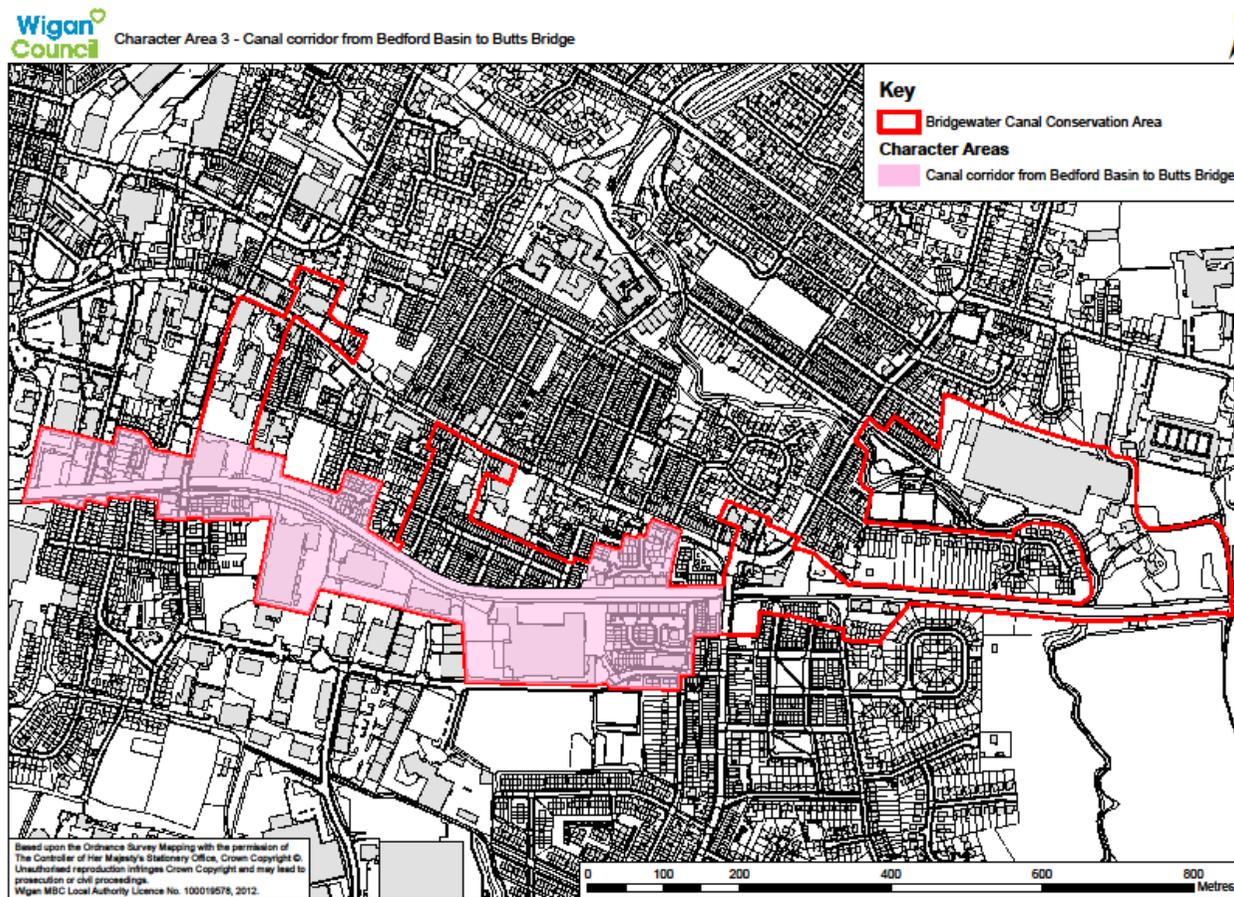
Conservation Area. Windows and doors are essential to the character of Victorian and Edwardian housing and there are examples where the original items have been removed and modern replacements installed. The size and shape of the openings have also been changed on some properties, which disrupt the unity of the terraces. Stone and brick details and window lintels have in some cases been replaced with plain brick faced steel beams.



**Photo 19:  
rendering to  
properties**

There are also several properties that have been rendered masking the Accrington Brick beneath. Similarly, the use of concrete tiles and other modern roofing materials instead of Welsh slate is visually disruptive, having a negative impact on appearance and overall character of these properties.

## Character Area 3: Canal Corridor from Bedford Basin to Butts Bridge



Map 9: Character Area 3

### Character Area 3: Canal Corridor from Bedford Basin to Butts Bridge

#### Definition of the character

This character area takes in a long stretch of the canal from **Bedford Basin** to **Butts Bridge**. It contains the majority of the mill buildings that are located within the Conservation Area. The area is characterised by industrial premises (Mills) and residential properties. Many of the residential properties are new apartments on the sites of former mill premises.



**Photo 20: Housing which occupies the site of Pendle Mill (left) at Butts Bridge**



**Photo 21: Canal side Housing development**



**Photo 22: Bedford Basin**

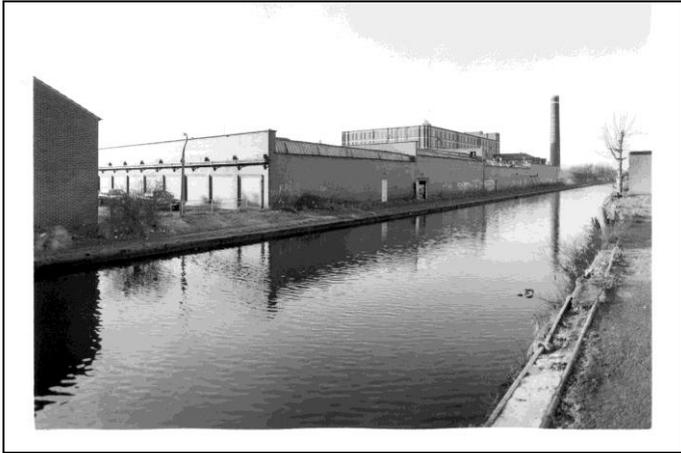
Bedford Basin is still a focus for boating activity. A number of canal boats are typically moored in Bedford Basin. The basin was built much later than the canal itself in 1858, and was the terminus of a colliery railway running to the Atherton Collieries at Howe Bridge. Little evidence remains today of what must once have been a very busy railway which ran along Church Street to The Avenue, Orchard Lane and Leigh Road before joining the Bolton to Kenyon railway near Howe Bridge.

The towpath to the south bank is surfaced and the canal side buildings are set back behind it. On the north bank, by contrast, buildings are built much closer to the canal providing immediate enclosure to the space.

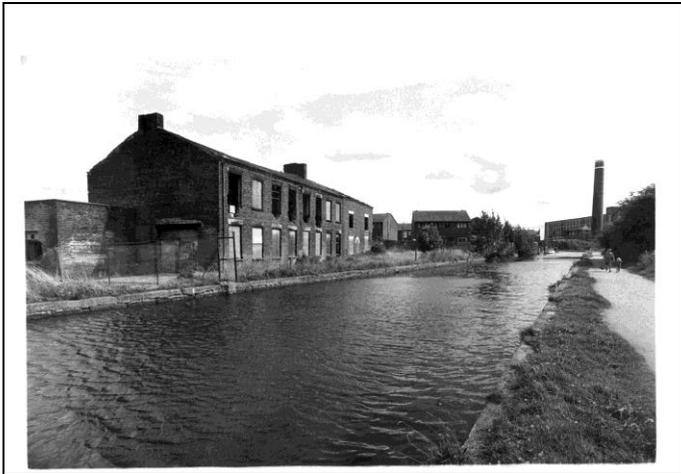
Most of the spaces left vacant by demolition of the mills have gradually been infilled by modern housing such as at English Street and Duke Street. The quality of these developments is indifferent and they have a neutral impact on the character of the Conservation Area. The area where Pendle Mill formerly stood, adjacent to Butts Mill, has also been redeveloped for housing. Again, the quality does not compare to the former historic buildings in terms of design and materials. The most successful examples are the long, narrow blocks which face onto the canal, located at the eastern end of the character area by Butts Bridge. These buildings acknowledge the canal and provide enclosure.



**Photo 23: New housing along the Bridgewater Canal**



**Photo 24: Pendle Mill**



**Photo 25: Stanley Mill**

## Buildings of Townscape Merit



**Photo 26: Mather Lane Mill 2**

The mill buildings along the Bridgewater Canal are of significant historic and architectural significance. Dating from the late Victorian era, they demonstrate an important aspect of architectural thinking at the time, where mills and warehouse buildings were well designed and executed. Industrial buildings had previously been considered beneath the notice of the professional architect, but this was to change during the late Victorian period.

Mills and warehouses at the time were functional and designed to express strength, simplicity and capacity.

Chimneys in particular could be made to be magnificent objects.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century polychromy was introduced to brickwork on textile mills evident with the use of contrasting colour brick bands as on Butts Mill. The use of colour was inspired by European, and particularly Italian examples. The aim was to heighten the potential impact of a building and British geology could readily supply a variety of coloured bricks and stones. The arrival of the railway system allowed these materials to be supplied throughout the country at reasonable cost. Mill owners took an increasing interest in the outward appearance of their premises, which served as an advertisement and symbol of an enterprise's success and probity.

Added to this was the growing wealth amongst businessmen and mill owners, allowing them to commission architects to take on their projects. Industrial pursuits merited the attention of the leading architects and thinkers of the day and fashionable styles were increasingly applied to industrial buildings.



**Photo 27: Butts Mill chimney**

Clearly chimneys were very important to the function of the factory. During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century they had been relatively short, but became higher during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in order to increase the draught and disperse smoke from the furnaces high up in the air. However, flat surfaces generated a lot of wind resistance at height, and so the circular cross-section chimney provided the solution. Chimneys were visible, obvious landmarks, and so reflected changes in popular taste.

Internally, the mills are remarkable for their vast floor areas and their scale was achieved using metal frame construction. They dwarfed anything that had gone before, for example, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century warehouses which are now the Waterside Inn in the Leigh Bridge Conservation Area. Earlier mills had a fenestration pattern of an almost equal width of brick pier to window opening. Later mills displayed much larger windows, with a higher proportion of glass to solid wall. **Butts Mill**, for example, uses very tall windows separated by very narrow brick piers.



**Photo 28: Butts Mill, Leigh – showing the large tall windows**

**Mather Mill Lane No. 2** and its associated warehouse are built right up to the canalside and they form a pleasing composition with the adjacent Dick Mather Bridge to the west. The buildings are contemporary, dating from 1882. To the west of the bridge is Mather Lane warehouse, a 2/3 storey building with three storeys facing the canal. **Mather Lane Mill No.2** is particularly notable for the use of continuous cast-iron



**Photo 29: Mather Lane Mill No. 2**

posts of square section, expressed on the exterior through six storeys, and the early use of concrete floors in 1882. The design of the mill is classical, resulting in a severe and monumental structure. The red brick façades, however, have a rich, mellow tone. The constant presence of grass and greenery along the canal also helps to soften the impact of these utilitarian buildings.



**Photo 30:  
Mather  
Lane Mill**

Across the canal and a little further east stands **Brooklands Mill** built in 1891-3 and otherwise known as **Mather Lane Mill No. 3**. Also built by Bradshaw and Gas, the mill is notable for its severe classical style and for the massive horizontal rectangular windows subdivided by a single cast iron mullion. Special features include the Italianate dust flue cover and the decorative water tower.



**Photo 31:  
Side elevation  
of Mather  
Lane Mill**

To the south elevation of the mill and facing the canal are the carding sheds. These lie parallel to the canal but set at an oblique angle to the main range of the mill.

Several features of the mill are unusual for its date, including the square plan, flat roof, and partly internal engine house. The architects were known as an innovative and technically gifted practice, and Mather Lane Mill is one of their more important mill designs.



**Photo 32: Butts Mill**

Grade II listed **Butts Mill** built in 1904-7 is more decorative than the earlier mills, making extensive use of contrasting yellow brick bands and Byzantine details in terracotta,

especially at the towers. The Butts name panel at the top of the main elevation shows the great attention to detail. It has yellow brick bands, white bricks that form the Butts name, and stone corncicing. It should be borne in mind that it is virtually impossible to see these elements from the ground, demonstrating that little expense was spared in the construction. Butts Mill was meant to have been a double mill, but the second block did not get built. The western elevation of the mill was left conspicuously blank as this is where the second block would have been added. The boiler house is currently on the local Buildings at Risk register.



**Photo 33: The Foundry Inn, Chapel Street**

The **Foundry Inn** is distinguishable from residences in the area only by its double-fronted design and the ornamented

door surround. To the ground floor are paired sash windows with shafted mullions, which are similar to those of the higher status terrace of houses near St Thomas' Church. The name of the pub recalls the presence of the Bedford Foundry on the adjoining site.

**249 and 251 Chapel Street** form a handsome visual stop at the northern edge of the junction. They are notable for their gabled roofline. The timber-work to the shop front at No. 249 has been retained but sadly, a domestic door and windows have been installed where the display windows would have been.

#### Neutral and negative factors



**Photo 34:**  
**Mather**  
**Lane Mill**

Vacancy or under use of the mill buildings is a particular issue in the area. Mather Lane Mill No. 2, for example, is partly occupied but clearly does not generate enough revenue to keep the building in good repair. Finding viable uses for such large and specialised buildings is very difficult in this location. Similar buildings in city locations are frequently converted for 'warehouse' apartments, but Leigh appears unlikely to be able to support the quantity that would need to be provided, by virtue of the size.



**Photo 35: Canal Towpath by Butts Mill**

Although the towpath is in many ways a very pleasant area, it has an air of neglect and can feel quite lonely in places. The pathway from the canal through to Butts Mill is strewn with rubbish and dumped items, and looks particularly unsightly and unwelcoming to the pedestrian. Re-use of derelict

buildings in the area and the promotion of the canal corridor for its leisure opportunities would help to make the area more attractive.

Although the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century terraced houses on Severn Street are of historic and architectural interest, the curtilages of these buildings abutting the north side of the canal area are messy and incoherent.



**Photo 36: Housing abutting the north side of the canal at Severn street**



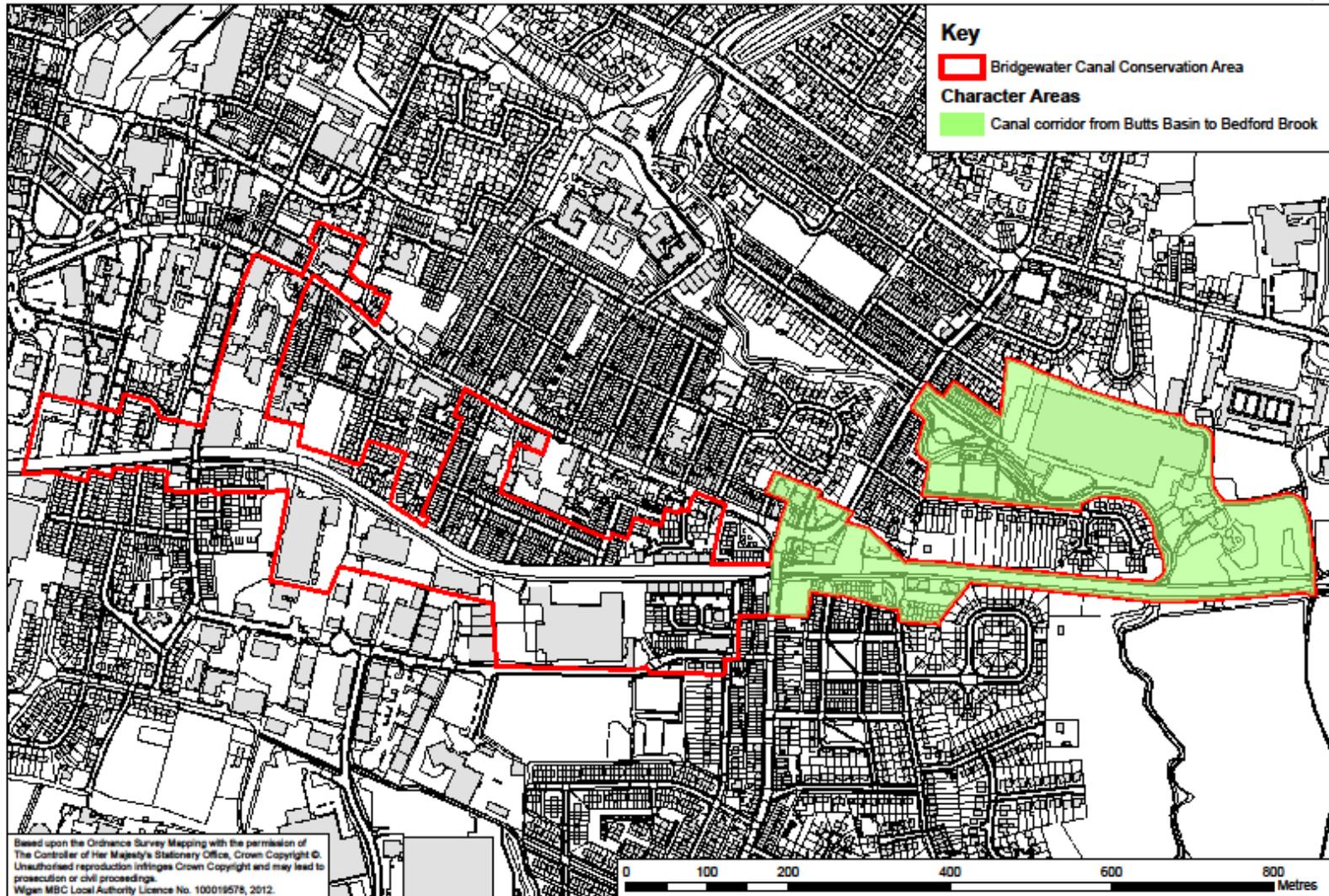
**Photo 37: Low rise development around Bedford Basin**

Other parts of the character area have a neutral impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and would benefit either from upgrading or screening. Examples are the disused car park to the west of Butts Mill and the area next to Mather Lane Mill No. 2 belonging to St John's School. The lack of enclosure and relatively poor quality low-rise buildings between Brooklands and Butts Mill and around Bedford Basin, require sympathetic redevelopment.

## Character Area 4: Canal corridor from Butts Bridge to Bedford Brook



Character Area 4 - Canal corridor from Butts Basin to Bedford Brook



Map 10: Character Area 4

#### **Character Area 4: Canal Corridor from Butts Bridge to Bedford Brook**

##### **Definition of the character**

Bedford Brook was another important source of water that influenced the location of the mill buildings. This character area is characterised by a mix of industrial and residential land uses and dominated by the large double spinning mill - **Leigh Spinners**. Despite the encroachment of later housing development around the mill, the area retains a surprising rural character. Hall House Lane, for example, is narrow, unmade and lined with tall hedges. Between the brook and Sanderson's Croft is a bowling green, which contributes to open space and greenery. The brook itself is mostly hidden from view and twists and meanders in contrast to the man-made structure of the canal. It is important as a wildlife corridor and, where it can be seen, adds to the rural feel of the area.

This character area contains the stretch of canal to the east Butts Bridge to Hall House Bridge. Moving away from the dense urban character of the settlement around Butts Bridge, the setting of the canal corridor becomes more sub-urban, and eventually moves out of the built up area into the countryside at the edge of Leigh.

Within this character area is an area known as **The Butts**. This area is fairly typical of the kinds of settlements that grew up around important junctions, in this case the junction of

Warrington Road and Manchester Road. Again, the pubs are early survivors, characteristically clustered round the bridge to take advantage of passing trade on the roads and the canal.



**Photo 38: Butts Basin**

The area around Warrington Road is visually pleasing, being enclosed by mid-19th Century cottages to the west and the Bull's Head pub to the east. The junction of Chapel Street and Manchester Road has also largely retained its enclosure, although its quality is diluted by the 20th Century housing development to the immediate north west of Butts Bridge.

Generally, the scale of the buildings here is noticeably smaller than those located in Leigh Town Centre. **Butts Basin** provides an area of open space reminiscent of a village green, which softens the urban environment.

### **Buildings of Townscape Merit**



**Photo 39: The Bull's Head, Warrington Road**

Dating from the 18th Century, the **Bull's Head public house** is a vernacular building, simple in character with very little decoration.

**14-28 Warrington Road** is the oldest terraced housing in the Conservation Area, dating from around 1850. The terrace is

constructed of handmade brick, with severe classical detailing in the form of a moulded capital stone at the base of the brick arch above the door. 14 and 16 Warrington Road are three storey properties and designed as such to deal with the rise in ground level at the bridge. No. 14 has an elliptical arched underpass, to the canal side, which is now blocked. Unfortunately, this pair of semi-detached properties has been spoiled by unsympathetic application of render, but their value to the streetscape remains.

Despite unsympathetic alterations, these plain, modest buildings retain the typical character of tight development around important junctions. The view back from north of the bridge across the upper floors and chimneys of these cottages shows them to their best advantage, with a row of robust chimneys contributing very positively to the street scene.



**Photo 40: The Wheatsheaf Inn**

To the north of the bridge, the L-shaped Wheatsheaf turns the corner onto the Manchester Road, enclosing and defining the junction. The western elevation is set back slightly from the road. Similar to the Bull's Head, the **Wheatsheaf Inn** is domestic in scale and vernacular in character, with very little in the way of ornamentation.

**249 and 251 Chapel Street** form a handsome visual stop at the northern edge of the junction. They are notable for their gabled roofline. The timber-work to the shop front at No. 249 has been retained but sadly, a domestic door and windows have been installed where the display windows would have been.



**Photo 41: Alder Mill Office**

At the end of Clyde Street the **office wing of the former Alder Mill** can be glimpsed. Built in 1907, the office is an elaborate brick building with a blue brick plinth, yellow brick bands and yellow terracotta dressings. Above the door rises an octagonal corner feature with cupola set back behind a parapet which echoed that of the mill water-tower. Also of note are the elaborate cast-iron gates and piers with moulded Art Nouveau decoration. Unfortunately, this building has been divorced from its context by the loss of the mill. Nonetheless, its architectural individuality makes it a valuable component of the Conservation Area.

The former **Wesleyan School**, Forth Street, now a gym, is located just next to the Alder Mill Office. It forms a strong visual stop at this corner of the Conservation Area.

**Photo 42: Former Wesleyan School**



**Photo 43: Former Alder Mill**



**Photo 44: Butts Basin at Butts Bridge with Alder Mill in the background**



**Photo 45:  
Butts Bridge**



**Photo 46: Approaching Butts Bridge with apartments on the left**



**Photo 47 (below left): Leigh Spinners**

Built close to Bedford Brook, **Leigh Spinners Mill** constructed in 1911-1923. Leigh Spinners is the most monumental and complete spinning mill with engine intact surviving in Greater Manchester from the last generation of cotton mill building. Listed Grade II\*, it is a double spinning mill designed by Bradshaw, Gas & Hope, who also designed the Mather Lane Mills. Materials are red brick with buff brick banding and dressings. Today the mill is surrounded by low rise modern industrial buildings which detract from its setting. The best close range view of the mill is now from Sanderson's Croft, where its setting is enhanced by **Bedford Brook** in the foreground.

The Conservation Area includes the terrace of houses on Park Lane, which form the main approach to the mill. Although unfortunately altered, the row is a good example of the early 20th century housing in the area.

In this character area, the greatest concentration of buildings around the canal is at the western end, close to Butts Bridge. **Butts Basin** is picturesque with moored boats. On the south bank of the canal is Platt Croft, a quiet residential area. Set back behind the towpath, the houses give a sub-urban feel to the canal corridor. The Italianate villas at Waltham Gardens provide visual interest in the area.

Regency Wharf is a modern development facing the canal. Although of neutral architectural quality, the choice of red brick blends in well with the characteristic materials of the Conservation Area.

From this point onwards, the canal becomes very rural in character. The gardens of Sanderson's Croft on the north bank are well screened by trees and foliage.



**Photo 48: Hall House Bridge**

**Hall House Bridge** is located at the far south-eastern corner of the Conservation Area. Built in 1795 and Grade II listed, the bridge is contemporary with the canal. It is a low, elegant, brick and stone bow-plan, humped canal bridge.

There are several large detached dwellings within the vicinity of Hall House Bridge.

**Photo 49: Coaching House**



**Photo 50: Hallbrooke House**





**Photo 51: Hall Houses**

To the south of Leigh Spinners along Hall House Lane is a small collection of residential properties, including the 18<sup>th</sup> Century **Hall House Farm**, **Hallbrooke House**, the **Coaching House** and **Hall Houses**, all of which contribute positively towards the character and appearance of the conservation area by virtue of their traditional features, including slate roofs, stone walling, wedge lintels and stone quoins.

### **Neutral and negative factors**

Unsympathetic alterations to dwelling houses are the most negative factor in the area and include replacement of traditional windows and doors with upvc.

### **Trees and Green Elements in the Conservation Area**

The Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area is characterised by considerably more open space and greenery than the other three Conservation Areas in central Leigh.

The church yards of St Thomas and St Joseph are especially attractive with trees, plants and grassed areas. Adjacent to St Thomas' Church is a small park which leads through to a children's play area. The park is planted with flowering cherry trees and provides a very pleasant natural space within the built up area.



**Photo 52: Trees at St. Thomas' Church**



**Photo 53: Greenspace at St. Thomas' Church**



primary school; and the hard standing parking area to the rear of Waltham Gardens.

**Photo 54: Canal towpath towards the eastern boundary of the conservation area**

The canal towpath towards Bedford is unmade with grassy banks, trees and shrubs. To the south and east of the conservation area boundary are open fields which provide a wider rural aspect and setting, and interesting views across the south Lancashire plain.

Other open spaces are not as attractive. These include car parks or hard-surfaced spaces which detract from the character of the area, such as, the area to the west of Butts Mill; the 'play' area next to Mather Lane Mill belonging to the

## Settings and views

Key landmarks are the church spires and the towers and chimneys of the mills. For example, an excellent view of the tower of Leigh Spinners Mill can be had looking north-east from the junction at the Butts.



**Photo 55: Leigh Spinners is a key landmark building in the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area**



**Photos 56 and 57: eastern edge of the Conservation Area**



The

Bridgewater canal is notable for the views it provides to the rear of commercial, industrial and residential properties. There are many contrasting views from the canal itself, including ever changing urban, suburban and rural views. Some are confined by development or greenery, others extend further afield. Important areas of open space include that located at the entrance to Bedford Square and Bedford Park, in addition to the open wooded character of Hall Houses, close to Leigh Spinners.

Also of importance is the extensive panorama southwards from the canal at the eastern end of the Conservation Area at Bedford.



**Photo 58: View of Butts Mill eastwards**



**Photo 59: View eastwards from Butts Basin**



**Photo 60: View of Mather Lane Mill and Mather Lane Bridge**



**Photo 61: View of Bedford Basin at the western edge of Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area**



**Photo 62: View eastwards towards Hall House Bridge**

## Public Realm

The predominant surface treatment of the pavements is tarmac with concrete kerbing. The lighting columns are the 'hockey stick' kind. Chapel Street suffers the greatest amount of visual clutter in terms of traffic signs, traffic lights, guard rails, and other street furniture.

There are more substantial remnants of older surfacing, including the stone setts on English Street, adjacent to the canal at the Dick Mather Bridge, and at the entrance to Brooklands Mill. Some of the original surfacing of the canal towpath itself survives along the stretch between Butts Mill and Butts Bridge. Elsewhere, the towpath is un-surfaced, which gives an informal air to this pleasant public space.



**Photo 63:**  
Remnants of  
original  
cobbled  
surfacing to  
the  
foreground of  
Brooklands  
Mill



**Photo 64:** Cobbled stone surfacing along the Bridgewater Canal Towpath



**Photo 65: Cobbled surface on English Street**

**Photo 66: Cobbled surface at Alder Mill offices**



**Photo 67: Un-made towpath on Bridgewater Canal**

**Photo 68: Towpath along Bridgewater Canal**



### **Conservation Area boundary review**

Following survey analysis, no revisions to the existing boundary of the Bridgewater Canal Conservation Area are considered necessary. As well as the major historic, industrial, archaeological and landscape feature formed by the Bridgewater Canal, the Conservation Area contains a concentration of important listed buildings.

The waterfront setting of the industrial and residential properties makes a positive contribution towards the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.