Proposed development at ellesmere wharf

Heritage assessment

GARRY MILLER
Historic building consultancy

Proposed development at ellesmere wharf, ellesmere, shropshire

Heritage assessment september 2014

GARRY MILLER
Historic Building Consultancy

Crosby House, 412 Prescot Road, Eccleston Hill, St Helens, Lancashire WA10 3BT
Telephone: 01744 739675, 07803 100995
garrymillerhbc@gmail.com
© Garry Miller 2014

Contents

1: Executive Summary	4
2: Planning Context	5
3: Location	7
4: The Heritage Assets Affected	8
5: The Canal Yard Group	10
6: The Former Canal Warehouse	34
7: The Ellesmere Conservation Area	38
8: Assessment of Significance	42
9: Assessment of Impact	45
Appendix 1: Principal Source Material	50
Appendix 2: Garry Miller Historic Building Consultancy	50

Cover image: Beech House, built circa 1806 as the offices of the Ellesmere Canal Company

1: executive summary

This assessment supports proposals for a multi-use development on a greenfield site at Ellesmere in north Shropshire. The site lies to the south of the town and adjoins an important junction of the former Ellesmere Canal: directly opposite are the former offices and maintenance yard of the Ellesmere Canal Company, built around 1806, probably to designs by their engineers William Jessop and Thomas Telford. This group of five buildings, four of which are designated Grade II*, is of outstanding national importance as the best-preserved example of its kind in Britain. The proposed development also lies within the setting of a three-storey Grade II-listed warehouse – also probably by Jessop and Telford but now disused and considered at risk – that is the sole surviving remnant of a canal wharf that lay immediately south of Ellesmere town centre. The application site also adjoins the locally-designated Ellesmere Conservation Area, specifically a character zone centred upon the short canal branch between the wharf and Canal Yard.

The Ellesmere Canal dates from the canal boom of the early 1790s and was intended to link the Severn, Dee and Mersey rivers and thus connect the East Wales and West Midlands manufacturing towns with the port of Liverpool. The intended network was ultimately never completed, with little built after 1805. In that year it was decided to construct the canal offices at the heart of network overlooking the junction of its branches to Llangollen, Whitchurch and the wharf at Ellesmere. An elegant late Georgian brick structure of country house appearance, the offices are in stark contrast to the industrial structures of the adjoining, and probably contemporary, maintenance yard, where the company's boats were built, repaired and serviced. These comprise an exceptionally early example of a dry dock, a huge blacksmith's and joiners shop and a timber store, with a small cottage completing the group.

This assessment has been produced, in accordance with national planning guidance governing the historic environment, to identify the significance of the heritage assets affected and the impact of the proposal upon this significance. The Canal Yard buildings are of exceptional national importance for their architectural and historic interest as the country's best-preserved example of a canal maintenance yard and for their associations with Jessop and Telford as figures of national renown. The Ellesmere Conservation Area is of county-wide importance for its special character, with the Canal Yard buildings making a key contribution to its canalside character zone.

While the intrinsic architectural and historic interest of the heritage assets will be unharmed by the development, their setting will be affected, in particular that of the Canal Yard. This harm must be balanced against the substantial public benefits of the proposal, which involves a multi-million pound investment designed to boost Ellesmere's economy, create employment and increase tourism. Furthermore the proposal will enhance the significance of the heritage assets by heightening awareness of their importance, and will enable them to contribute, through increased tourism, to the economic vitality of Ellesmere.

2: PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 The site

The application site lies approximately one kilometre southwest of the centre of Ellesmere in north Shropshire, close to Ellesmere Wharf, the canal basin of the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal (originally the Ellesmere Canal). While currently in agricultural use, it has recently been confirmed as a potential development site additional to those already cited in Shropshire Council's Local Development Framework.

2.2 Proposed development

The applicant, Formal Holdings, is seeking planning consent from Shropshire Council for a multi-use leisure development including hotel, 188-berth marina, leisure complex, pub/restaurant, cabins and touring caravans.

2.3 Adjoining heritage assets

A number of designated heritage assets lie within the setting of the proposed development. Immediately northeast of the site, on the opposite bank of the canal, are five listed buildings (four Grade II* and one Grade II) in the boatyard of the Canal and River Trust, originally the maintenance yard and offices of the Ellesmere Canal Company; approximately 400 metres northwest of the latter is a disused warehouse at Ellesmere Wharf, listed Grade II; and the development site adjoins the Ellesmere Conservation Area designated by Shropshire Council. The proposal will therefore affect the setting of these heritage assets.

2.4 Relevant heritage policies

Given its impact upon the heritage assets, the proposal will therefore be determined in the context of relevant national and local planning policies governing the historic environment. National guidance is contained within Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*, March 2012); local policies are established by Section CS6 (Sustainable Design and Development Principles) of the Shropshire Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy (March 2011).

These and other related guidance are examined in Section 9 of this report (Assessment of Impact).

2.5 Heritage assessment/methodology

Paragraph 128 of the NPPF states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. Garry Miller Historic Building Consultancy has been appointed by Formal Holdings to produce this heritage assessment to evaluate the significance of the heritage assets affected, and the impact of the proposal upon them. The methodology employed was as follows:

1. Background research using readily-available sources, identified in the text, to place the Canal Yard and warehouse in their historical context, and an exterior photographic survey of the buildings and their setting (Sections 5 and 6)

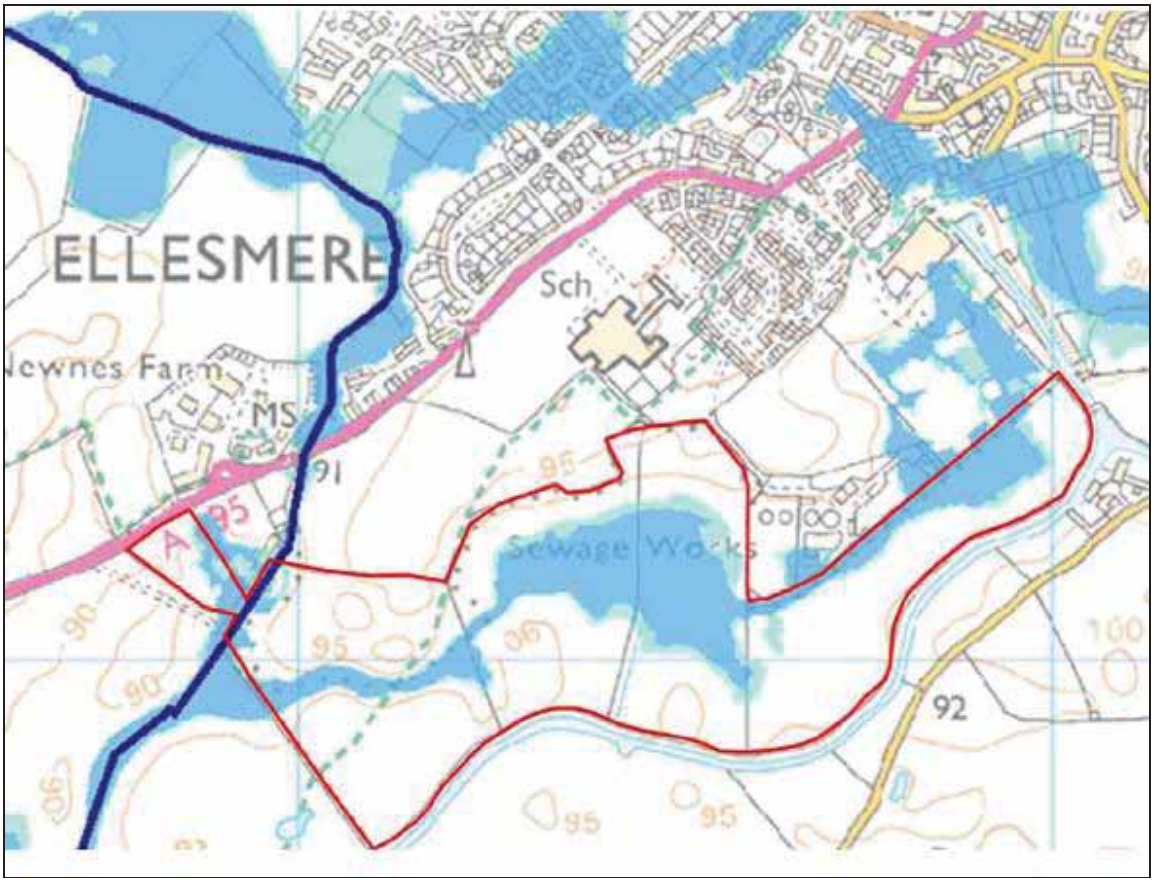
2. Analysis of the character of the Ellesmere Conservation Area, based upon its Conservation Area Appraisal, and of the contribution made by the canal-related buildings (Section 7)

3. Evaluation of the significance of the Canal Yard group, canal warehouse and Ellesmere Conservation Area (Section 8)

4. Evaluation of the impact of the proposal upon this significance (Section 9).

3: LOCATION

The location of the proposed development is a greenfield site approximately one kilometre southwest of the centre of Ellesmere, a small town in north Shropshire. It is currently in agricultural use as grazing land and forms part of the extensive open countryside surrounding the town. The application site lies southeast of the A495 Oswestry road and its southern extent is defined by the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal and its short arm northwestwards to Ellesmere Wharf. The location of the site, in relation to Ellesmere town centre, is shown on Map 1 below.



Map 1. The application site, relative to Ellesmere town centre (Roberts Limbrick Architects)

4: THE HERITAGE ASSETS AFFECTED

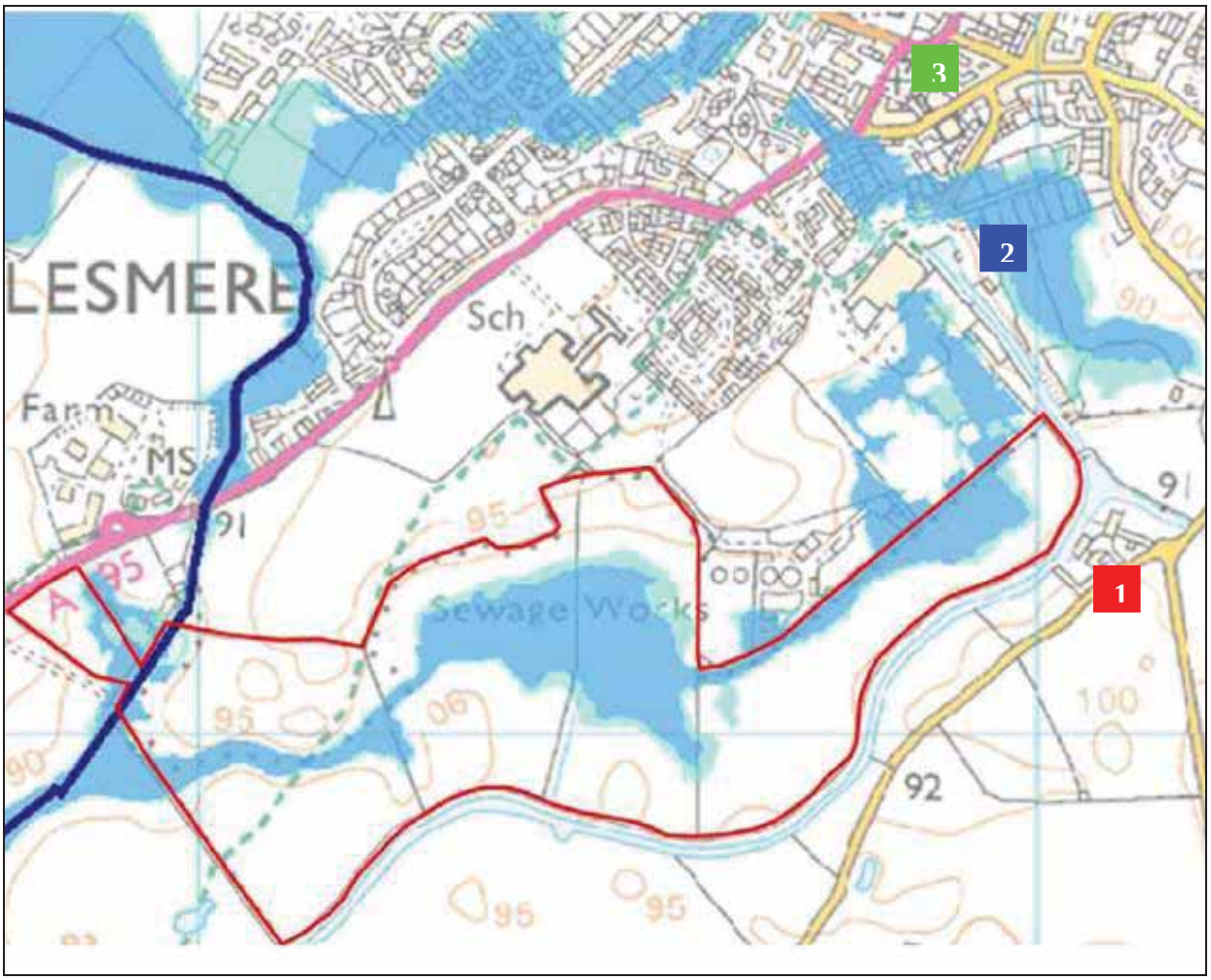
The proposed development lies within the setting of the following heritage assets:

1 **The former canal offices and boat maintenance yard** built circa 1806 by the Ellesmere Canal Company. Standing directly opposite the application site, it is a large historic group of high national importance as the best-preserved of its kind in Britain, with four of its five buildings Grade II* listed

2 **A former warehouse,** approximately 400 metres northwest of the latter, built by the Ellesmere Canal Company circa 1806 at its canal wharf south of the town centre. Designated Grade II, it is long disused and considered by Shropshire Council to be a building at risk

3 **The Ellesmere Conservation Area**, designated by Shropshire Council for its special character and architectural and historic interest. The canal area lies within its boundaries, a detailed map of which appears on Page 38.

The location of the heritage assets is shown on Map 2 (following page). The merits and character of each is thereafter examined individually in Sections 5, 6 and 7.



Map 2. Location of the heritage assets affected by the proposal

5: the canal YARD group

5.1 Historical context

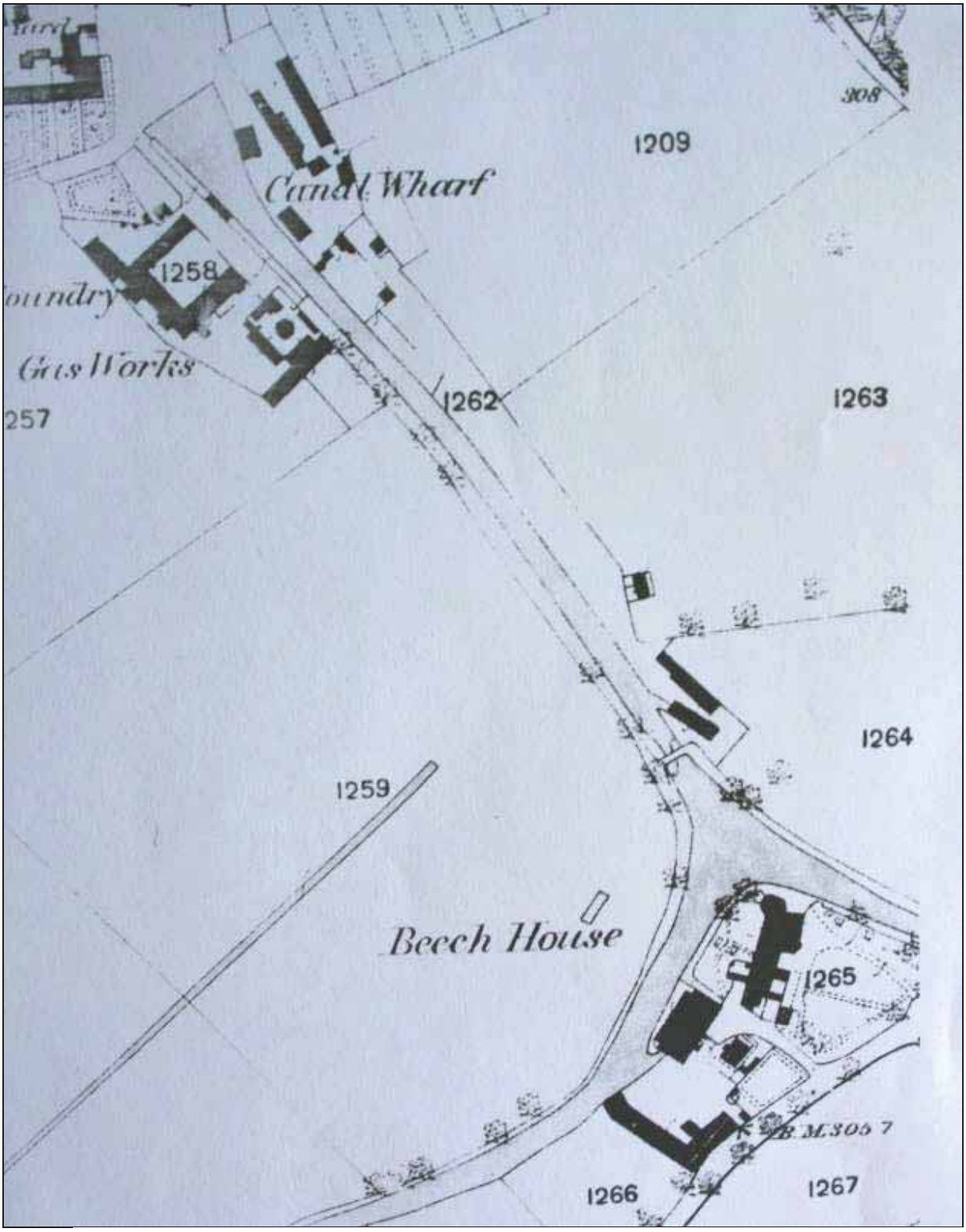
The Ellesmere Canal was created amid the canal boom of the early 1790s. It was intended to link the Severn, Dee and Mersey and thus connect the industrial centres of eastern Wales and the West Midlands to the port of Liverpool. The project was launched in 1791 and the Act of Parliament for its construction approved two years later. The canal company appointed the eminent civil engineer William Jessop (1745-1814) as its consulting engineer, assisted by the then relatively-unknown Thomas Telford (1757-1834), county surveyor for Shropshire, as general agent. Its first branch, to Llanymynech, was opened in 1796, the northern section between the Mersey and Dee the following year and the branch to Chirk in 1805. Little work took place thereafter and ultimately the canal was never finished as intended due to rising costs and insufficient commercial traffic. However it generated spectacular feats of engineering in the form of Telford's cast iron aqueducts at Chirk (1801) and Pontcysyllte (1805), which are of international importance. Locally, the canal generated the economic revival of Ellesmere, where its wharf became the new commercial focus of the town. The project was however dogged by financial difficulties, leading to amalgamation with the Chester Canal in 1813; arrival of the railways brought further competition, and in 1846 the canal was assimilated into the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company. Gradual decline in the later 19th century and thereafter resulted in the closure of all but its northern branch from Ellesmere Port to Chester in 1944.

1. The Canal Yard group, looking southeast with Beech House in foreground

5.2 Development of the Canal Yard and Wharf

The Canal Yard and offices were built around 1806, strategically sited at the centre of the network alongside a T-junction formed by the intersection of three lines, west to Llangollen, east to Whitchurch and ultimately the Mersey, and the short branch north to the canal basin at Ellesmere Wharf. Overlooking the junction were the company's offices – known as Beech House – which doubled as an administrative centre and private residence for key personnel. Alongside was the maintenance yard where boats were built, repaired and serviced and lock gates and other equipment manufactured. Today, the group represents, in the words of the National Heritage List for England, *'the best-preserved complex of its type in Britain.'* The buildings are all likely to have been designed by Jessop and Telford in their role as project engineers. At the end of the Ellesmere branch, a wharf was constructed which became in the 19th century the town's industrial and commercial hub. Here was sited not only canal warehouses but also an iron foundry and timber yard established by the Earl of Bridgewater, first chairman of the canal company and principal landowner in Ellesmere, to serve both the navigation and his agricultural estates. A coal wharf and gas works were also developed. By the mid-1870s, both Canal Yard and wharf formed densely-built industrial nuclei at each end of the Ellesmere branch as shown by the 25-inch mapping surveyed in 1874 (Map 3, following page) with a further boat house and dock, now gone, between them.

2. The canal junction, opposite Beech House, where the company's offices and maintenance yard were located; looking north towards Ellesmere town centre



Map 3. Enlargement of 1874 25-inch OS mapping showing the industrial nuclei which developed at both ends of the canal's short Ellesmere branch

5.3 Elements of the Canal Yard

The Canal Yard contains five listed buildings, all built circa 1806 and probably designed by Telford and Jessop:

1. **Beech House, the former canal company offices** (Grade II*)
2. **The Stables, Stores and Dry Dock** (Grade II*)
3. **The Blacksmith's and Joiner's Workshop** (Grade II*)
4. **The Timber Store** (Grade II*)
5. **1 Beech House,** a separate cottage (Grade II)

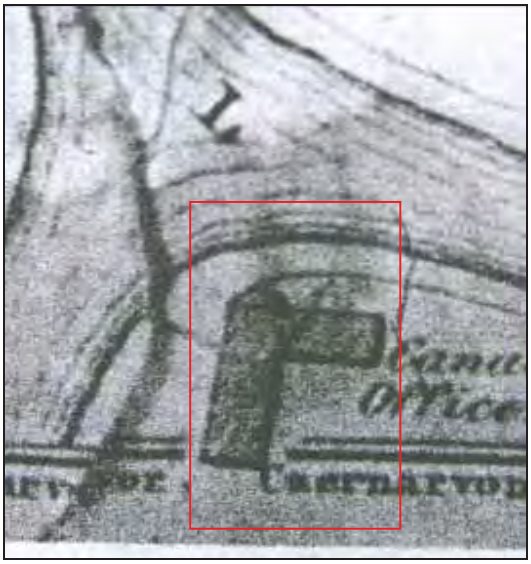
Figure 1. Elements of the site (based on 1874 25-inch OS mapping)

5.4 Beech House

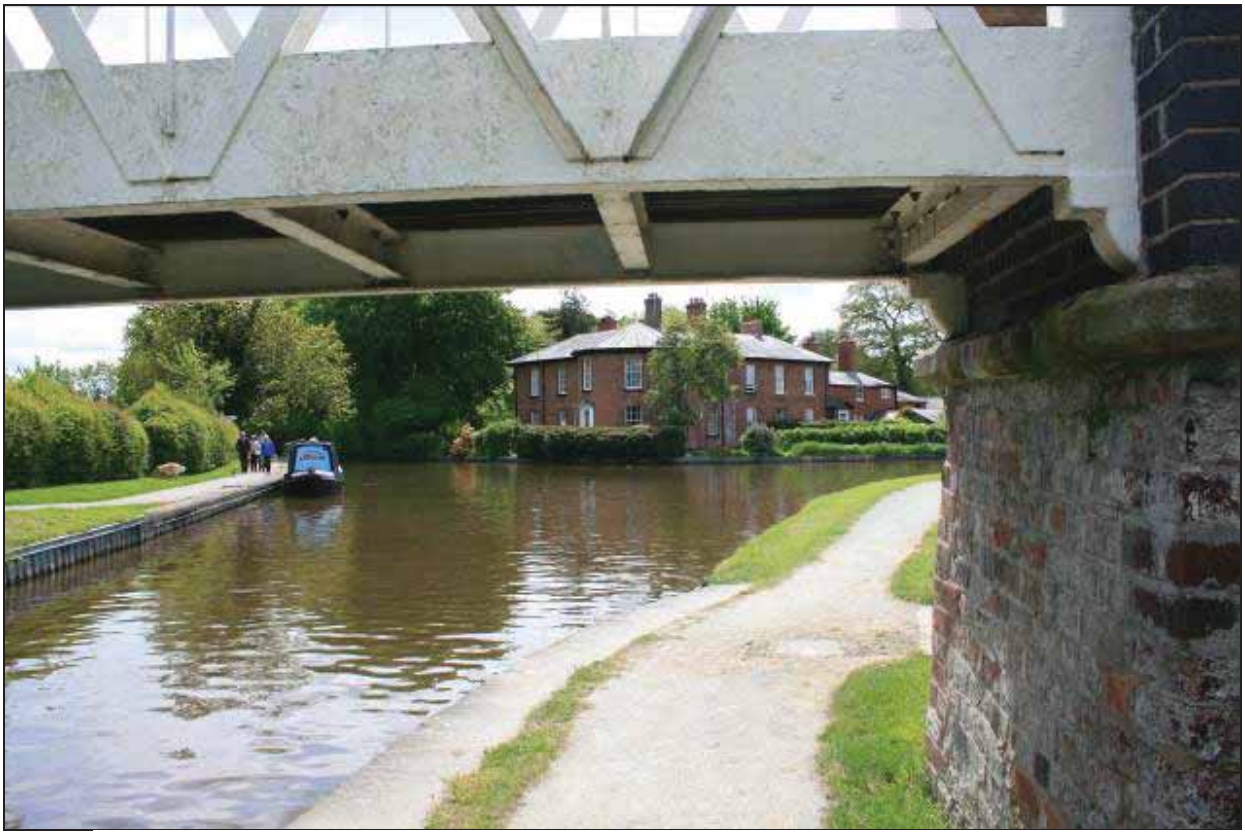
This is the most prominent element of the group, occupying a striking position at the junction of the three routes. The site was chosen as being *'the most central point in the Navigation'* and an 1805 announcement of its construction stated it would provide a committee room, offices for accounts and plans, and apartments for the resident accounts agent and engineer. Map evidence (following page) suggests the building was considerably enlarged between 1835 and 1874, with a service block and stables and coach house added. In 1861, it was the residence of canal inspector Thomas F Robertson, 44, and his family. Beech House is a substantial but restrained L-shaped building whose appearance is more that of a late Georgian country house than offices, with elegant sash windows, pedimented doorways, hipped roof and a rotunda-like projection fronting the canal that contained the committee room. This distinctive feature and the north and west elevations are prominent in public realm views from the canal towpath (Plates 3, 4 and 5) and much further afield (see Plate 27). In contrast, its east-facing façade (Plate 6), with pedimented and fanlighted main entrance and bay window, is largely screened by perimeter planting along Birch Road, the rural lane which forms the eastern boundary of the site.

National Heritage List description of Beech House:

Canal office, now flats. 1806 adjoining William Jessop's and Thomas Telford's Ellesmere Canal; later additions and alterations. Red brick; hipped slate roofs, splayed to semi-circular projection at north-west corner; prominent ridge stacks. Main block of 3 x 2 bays with semi-circular projection to rear right corner and projection with slightly later attached service wings and outbuildings set back to left. 2 storeys with painted dentilled eaves cornice. East front: 3 windows; glazing bar sashes with gauged heads except for late C19 canted bay to lower left. Central entrance; pedimented doorcase, 6-paned double doors with wreathed and radiating fanlight. Semi-circular projection has 5 glazing bar sashes to first floor and 4 to ground floor with pedimented doorcase in second bay from left, several of windows blind. The committee room of the canal company was on the ground floor of the semi-circular projection overlooking the 3 branches of the canal. HISTORY: This fine example of a canal office is prominent in views of this notable and historically important canal yard, the best-preserved complex of its type in Britain. It was very probably built to the designs of Telford and Jessop, canal engineers being traditionally responsible for a wide range of structures from the trim (lettering and mileposts) to locks and keepers' houses. All canal companies had maintenance yards for work on boats, locks, paddle gearing and other aspects of the working fabric of inland waterways.



Map 4 (left): Beech House as depicted by John Wood's map of Ellesmere, 1835. Map 5 (right): the building depicted by the 25-inch OS mapping of 1874. Comparison suggests Beech House was substantially enlarged between these dates



3. Beech House viewed from the White Bridge to the northwest

4. North front showing the rotunda containing committee room

5. West elevation facing the canal showing low service block that is probably of 1835-1874

6. Façade of the building, to Birch Road, is largely concealed by planting

7. Rear of Beech House showing stable block, also probably a later addition

5.5 The Stables, Stores and Dry Dock

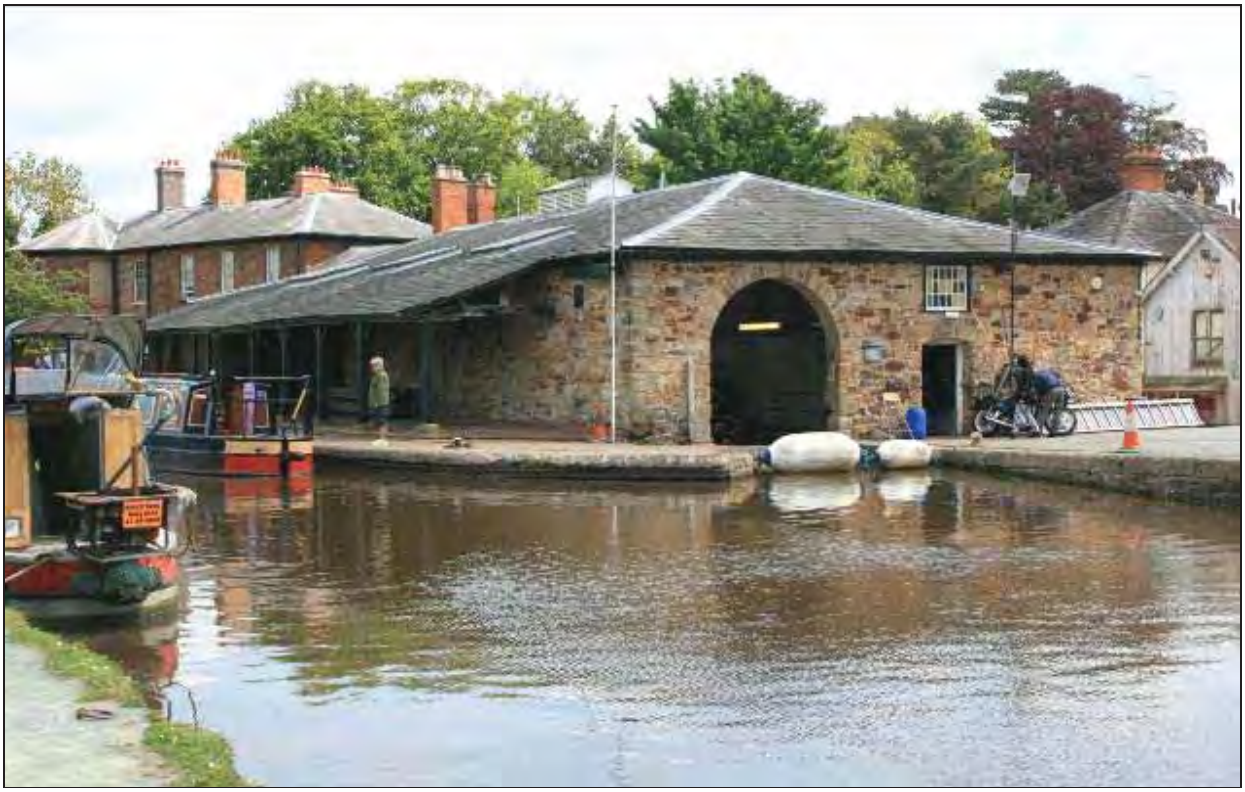
A large, rectangular stone building of functional appearance, it contains an outstandingly early covered dry dock where boats were built, repaired and maintained. The building directly fronts the canal, where its distinctive feature is a low sloping canopy supported by an arcade of hefty timber posts; the wall beneath has several blocked openings to the full-height dry dock within. Boats entered the latter via a round-arched opening in the building's south wall, and above the dry dock is an impressive sequence of kingpost trusses braced to the outer walls (Plate 12). The stables and stores lie to the rear of the dock.

National Heritage List description of the Stables, Stores and Dry Dock:

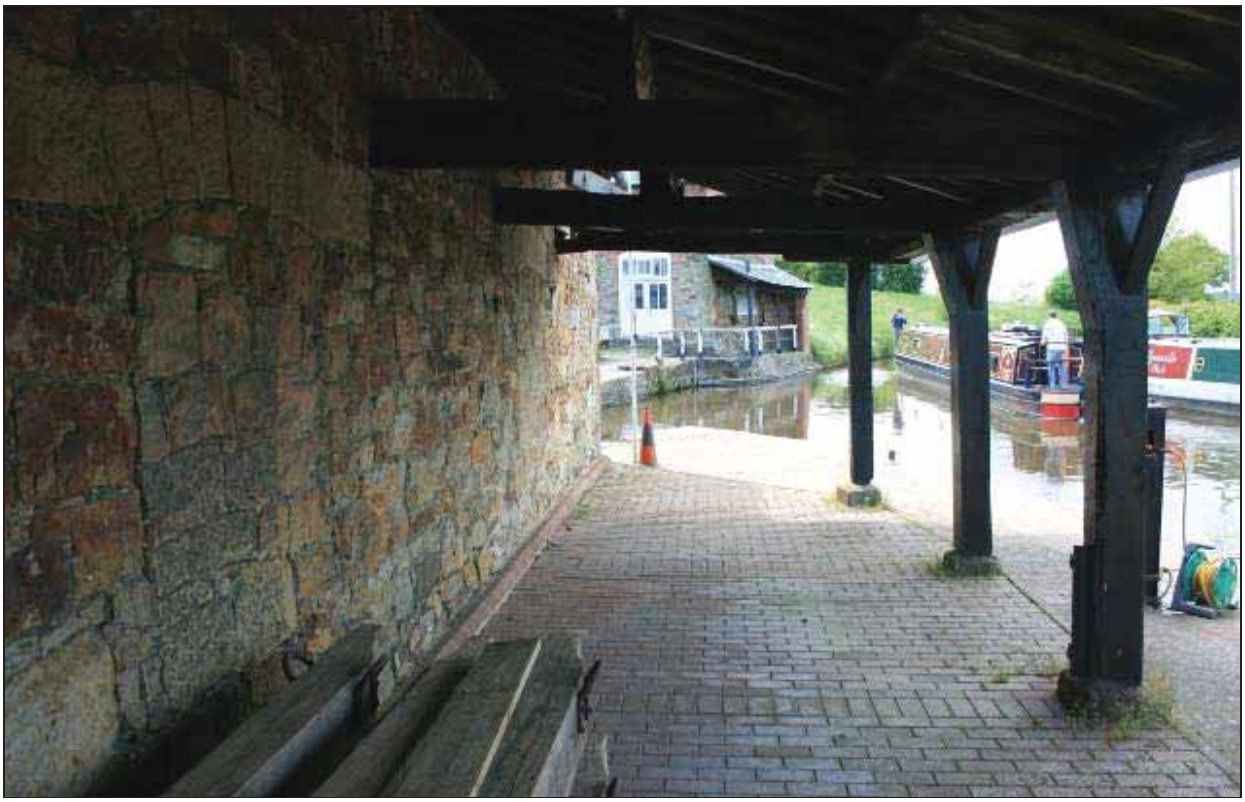
Circa 1806 adjoining William Jessop's and Thomas Telford's Ellesmere Canal with minor later additions and alterations. Roughly coursed sandstone rubble with sandstone dressings; hipped slate roof. Long building on canal side of canal depot with dry dock at south-west end. 2 storeys. 6 horizontal sliding sashes directly below eaves and 4 with segmental heads to ground floor. Segmental-headed boarded doors to left and right with 3 wide segmental-headed double doors to right of centre. Round-headed arch to south-west end gives access to dry dock. Open lean-to supported on wooden posts to canal side. Rectangular ventilated louvre to ridge has weathervane in shape of narrow boat. INTERIOR: Dry dock has king-post roof with raking struts from walls to tie beams on canalside. Stone sett floor with mooring rings surrounding dock. In the dock boats were formerly built, repaired and 'indexed'. To empty the dock of water a temporary dam was built across the entrance by dropping 'stop-planks' into iron-shod grooves. The water was then drained out, the boat coming to rest on baulks of timber in the now-dry dock.

This range, with its attached covered dry dock for the manufacture and repair of canal barges, is of great significance in relationship to the canal industry, for it comprises one of the key functional buildings in what is now acknowledged to be the best-preserved canal workshop site in Britain. The dry dock, which has access direct to the canal, comprises an exceptionally early example of such a structure. Dry docks were first employed in the naval dockyards, the introduction (based on Swedish precedent) of the first wide-span roofs to enable the protection of ships under construction not taking place until the first decade of the 19th century. This covered dry dock predates the grade I and II covered slips at Devonport and Chatham, partly no doubt on account of the fact that its much narrower span did not present a major engineering challenge.*

It was very probably built to the designs of Telford and Jessop, canal engineers being traditionally responsible for a wide range of structures from the trim (lettering and mileposts) to locks and keepers' houses. All canal companies had maintenance yards for work on boats, locks, paddle gearing and other aspects of the working fabric of inland waterways.



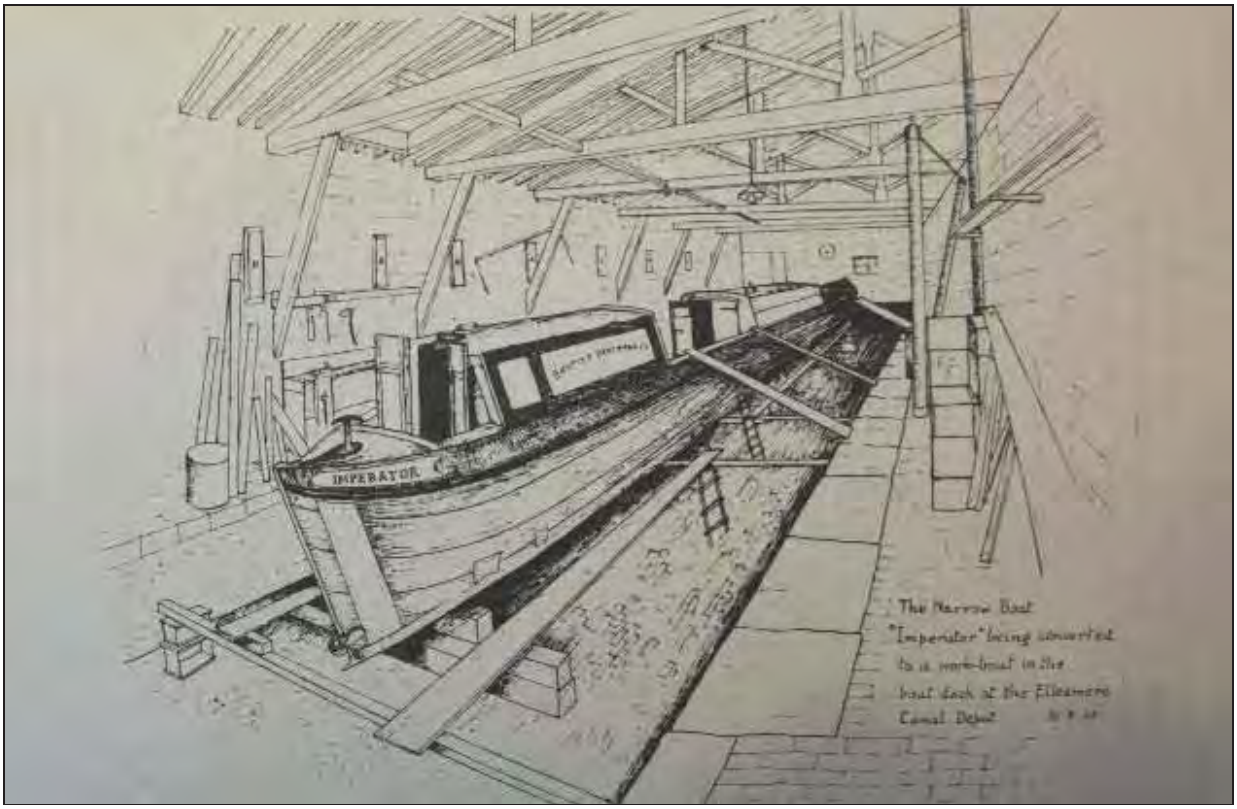
8. The Stables, Stores and Dry Dock, looking north from the towpath



9. Looking south from beneath its distinctive canopy; blocked openings visible in dry dock wall

10. The arched boat entrance in south wall of the Dry Dock

11. Interior of the Dry Dock, looking south to its arched entrance



12. Interior showing braced kingpost trusses, drawn in 1952 (from Wilson, 1975)

13. The storeyed east side of the building, formerly stables and stores

5.6 Timber Store

This building is located at the east end of the site, facing the canal across an open yard that was formerly the site of a huge overhead crane. It is a structure of contrasting styles and materials; the frontage is plain and functional, open on the ground floor and weatherboarded above; the sawshop extension to the front and lean-to on left are later additions of humble appearance; the hipped roof however is symbolic of a prestigious building; and the rear is formed by a high stone wall to the rural lane of Birch Road. Between it and the adjoining Blacksmith's and Joiner's Workshop is a narrow brick structure that contained a steam engine which powered the workshop.

National Heritage List description of the Timber Store:

Timber store. Circa 1806 adjoining William Jessop's and Thomas Telford's Ellesmere Canal. Sandstone ashlar, with front of weatherboarded timber frame and brick bay to right; hipped asbestos sheet roof. 2 levels with wooden dentilled eaves cornice. 3 windows on first floor, C19 three-light casements to left and right with C20 three-light casement to centre. Open to ground floor in 4 bays with wooden posts supporting upper level. Later C19 single-storey sawshop range projecting from and closing right bay, with sliding doors to front and glazed sides. Early C20 lean-to to left, with three half-glazed sliding doors. Brick bay to right formerly housed steam engine. Interior: king-post roof; belt-drive gearing in loft. Tracks leading from building formerly took coal trucks to steam-powered engine in open ground-floor area of building. This had been adapted from a locomotive engine, the cylinder and piston being mounted vertically, and generated power for working the machinery in the depot.

This building survives as an important functional part of the best-preserved canal workshop site in Britain. It was very probably built to the designs of Telford and Jessop, canal engineers being traditionally responsible for a wide range of structures from the trim (lettering and mileposts) to locks and keepers' houses. All canal companies had maintenance yards for work on boats, locks, paddle gearing and other aspects of the working fabric of inland waterways.

14. The Timber Store, with distinctive hipped roof

15. The rear wall fronting Birch Road

5.7 Blacksmith's and Joiner's shop

A huge, tall range which occupies the full width of the south end of the site, between the canal and Birch Road, and at right angles to the Timber Loft. It is here where the lock gates, gearing, signs and other canal company equipment were manufactured. The earliest portions are of stone, forming a high two-storeyed range to the east and an originally single-storey arm to the west: the latter was later heightened in brick and has weatherboarding to the yard elevation. Its gable above the canal is a prominent feature from the towpath (Plate 17) as are the round-arched windows and contrasting stone and red brick of the south elevation (Plates 18 and 19). Another conspicuous feature, in both near and distant views is a long, narrow-glazed dormer above the eastern range. To Birch Road, this part of the building presents gable crowned by a broken pediment, a treatment which denotes the high status of the building and of the site in general. Here, the massing of the buildings evokes a near-urban impression of industrial strength (Plate 20). Within the yard, the west gable of the workshop is also pedimented, but partly masked by the heightening of the adjoining range. Overall the building is exceptionally well-preserved with an interior notable for the survival of its belt-drive and 19th century fixtures and fittings (see listing description, Page 27)

16. The Blacksmith's and Joiner's Shop, showing east (left) and west ranges

17. Distinctive half-hipped roof of its 19th century extension above the canal

18. Rooflines and arched windows of the south front, as seen from the towpath

19. Near view of the south elevation showing stone and brick contrasts

20. View from Birch Road, showing gable pediment, long dormer and brick steam engine bay

National Heritage List description of the Blacksmith's and Joiner's shop:

Blacksmith's and joiner's shop. Circa 1806, adjoining William Jessop's and Thomas Telford's Ellesmere Canal, with later additions and alterations. Roughly coursed sandstone rubble with red brick dressings; the right-hand workshop heightened and rebuilt to front in painted timber frame with red brick infill, with to the right a lower weatherboarded range finishing in a 2-storey bay of sandstone rubble with brick first floor; slate and corrugated iron roofs, half-hipped to canal end.
PLAN: Left-hand (upper) range has ground-floor blacksmith's shop, with on its right external stairs to the first floor which has a pattern store to the right and a joiner's shop to the left. Right-hand (lower) range comprises workshop, heightened from the original single-storey structure in late C19, with to the right end a ground-floor paint shop and a first-floor mess room.
EXTERIOR: 2 storeys with dentilled eaves cornice to left (upper) part on both sides and on rear to right (lower) part. All windows except where mentioned have late C19 industrial glazing with lapped glazing set in thin vertical glazing bars. Upper part has tall round-arched windows, with late C19 industrial glazing, on both floors to side facing yard with continuous line of windows in roof lighting joiner's shop above. External wooden steps lead to open-gabled timber projection over round-headed boarded door on first floor; rectangular overhanging projection to right with glazing bar sash to front. Lower range has continuous run of half-glazed sliding doors to front with wide segmental-headed door to right, two segmental windows above and small segmental-headed window to mess room above. Three wide roof lights. Rear has round-headed barred windows to both ranges and stacks in bottom of roof slope. Walkway with slate roof on canal side to right-hand end, with 16-pane sashes above.
INTERIOR: Belt-drive gearing throughout, some boxed in and all powered by the engine house attached to the Timber Store (qv). The interior is notable for the retention of fixtures and fittings, mostly of later C19 date. Blacksmith's workshop has workbenches along southern wall, cupboards on north and west walls, forge with trough and metal shields, bending slab and fixed industrial machinery including drill and lathes. Joiner's shop has retained C19 cupboards, including pigeon hole cupboard on east wall and extensive boxing to machinery which includes workbenches and sawbench; roof has timber principals with wrought-iron tension rods. Pattern shop has racking with many C19-20 patterns for castings. Workshop has timber roof and a late C19 overhead crane comprising a trussed beam; workbench, and four pieces of fixed machinery; matchboard partitions with extensive glazing to corner office. To far right, next to canal, is a first-floor mess room with matchboarded walls, fixed benches, clothes pegs, cast-iron range and stone sink.
An exceptionally well-preserved C19 workshop range, one of the best in the country and comprising part of the best-preserved canal workshop site in Britain. It was very probably built to the designs of Telford and Jessop, canal engineers being traditionally responsible for a wide range of structures from the trim (lettering and mileposts) to locks and keepers' houses. All canal companies had maintenance yards for work on boats, locks, paddle gearing and other aspects of the working fabric of inland waterways.

5.8 1 Beech House

The smallest member of the group, this whitewashed brick cottage is located in the centre of the site and largely screened from public realm view by surrounding buildings and planting (Plate 21). Its pyramid roof is however prominent in views from the towpath (Plate 22). This building may have housed either carpenter William Nunnerley, 67, or retired carrier John Tilston, 66, who were resident on the canal site at the time of the 1861 census.

National Heritage List description of 1 Beech House:

Cottage. Circa 1806 adjoining William Jessop's and Thomas Telford's Ellesmere Canal; later additions and alterations. Painted brick; pyramidal slate roof. Square plan with single-storey lean-to to left. 2 storeys. 3-window front; C19 segmental-headed casements to upper and lower left with blind square openings to centre and right on first floor; wide C20 metal window to lower right. Central hip-roofed porch with recessed half-glazed door. Red brick ridge stack to centre and integral stack to back wall, both with dentilled capping.2 segmental-headed horizontal sliding sashes on first floor to left return. Included for group value.

21. 1 Beech House is largely hidden from public realm view

22. Pyramid roof of 1 Beech House is prominent from the canalside

5.9 Other elements of the group

Outside the yard are other structures and canal furniture which contribute to the interest and character of the site. Chief of these are two bridges, both undesignated: the White Bridge (Bridge 59; Plate 23), which lies to the northwest of the group, and Red Bridge (58; Plate 24) to the east, a brick structure which carries Birch Road over the waterway. In addition there is the signpost indicating the three branches of the canal (Plate 2) and the remains of gearing presumably associated with the vanished former boat house and dock (Plate 25).

23. The White Bridge, looking north from the junction

24. The Red Bridge, looking west

25. Gearing probably associated with the former boat house and dock

5.10 Setting and views

The Canal Yard group is experienced in a setting which has changed little in the two centuries since the waterway was constructed. This unchanged backcloth of open countryside is important to visual appreciation of the buildings, as it frames the site and enhances, through contrast, its industrial character. This is evident not only in views along the towpath (Plate 26) but also further afield, especially from Birch Road to the north (Plate 27). The application site, which directly adjoins the towpath of the canal's western branch and part of the wharf branch, thus plays an important part in establishing this setting. This role is made clear in elevated views from Bridge 58 (Plate 30) and also from the east beyond Beech House (Plate 29) where it forms an attractive backcloth to the building. Of the buildings themselves, excellent views are obtained from the towpath adjoining the development site, where their varied interest and character can be appreciated looking east across the canal, the tranquil setting and country house aura of Beech House giving way to the industrial functionality of the Canal Yard in kinetic views. Northwest views from the yard itself (Plate 30) and glimpses through hedgerows on Birch Road (Plate 31) place the buildings against the background of the town beyond, although this has been compromised by intervening new development.

26. View of the group from the canal's western branch, looking east; application site on left

27. Distant view of the group from Birch Road, with application site indicated

28. The application site, viewed looking west from Bridge 58

29. View northwest across the canal to Beech House with the application site beyond

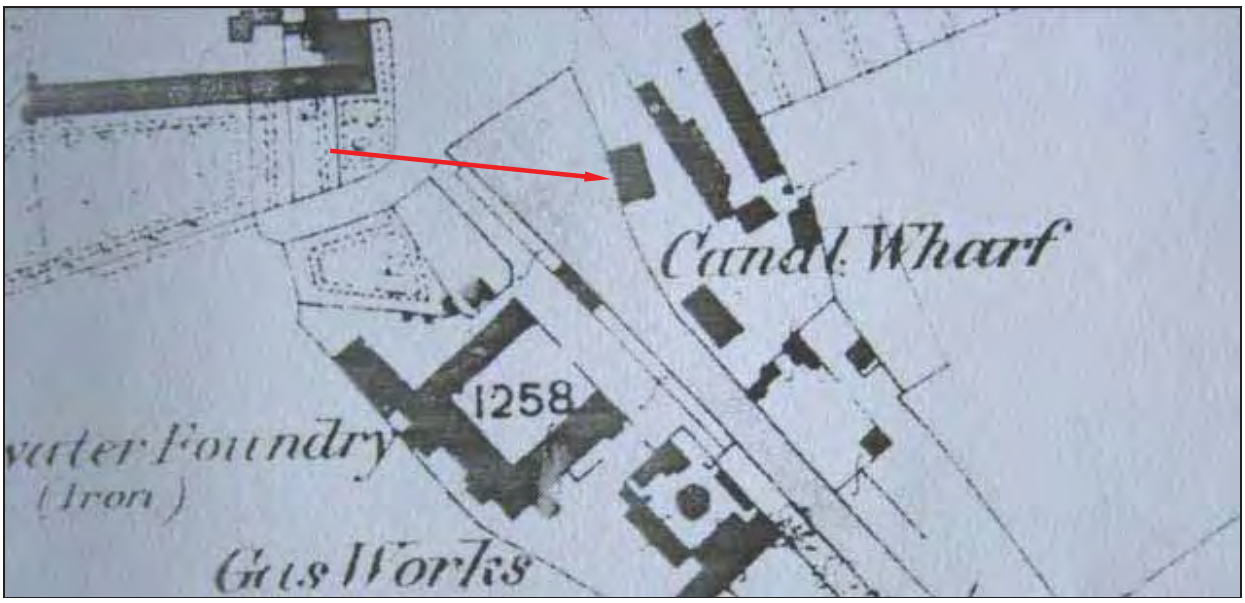
30. View across the canal to the application site from the Dry Dock building

31. Northwest view from Birch Road across to the application site, with the workshops on right

6: THE FORMER CANAL WAREHOUSE

6.1 Description

This building is the sole remnant of the wharf and industrial hub that developed around the canal's Ellesmere basin in the early 19th century. Although it is spatially divorced from the Canal Yard group, all share group value as they lie within each other's historic setting. This is the survivor of two warehouses which originally stood on the wharf, where a former timber yard once lay to the east. Long disused and now boarded up, the warehouse is a forlorn and neglected sight, but still makes a strong visual impression – its painted Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company sign is prominent both near and afar – as it towers above the canalside and provides a contrast of scale with terraced houses in Wharf Road nearby (Plate 39). The building is conspicuous too in distant views from the north (Plate 36) although ironically it is its boarded openings which attract the eye.



Map 6. The warehouse, indicated on the 25-inch OS map of 1874

6.2 Setting

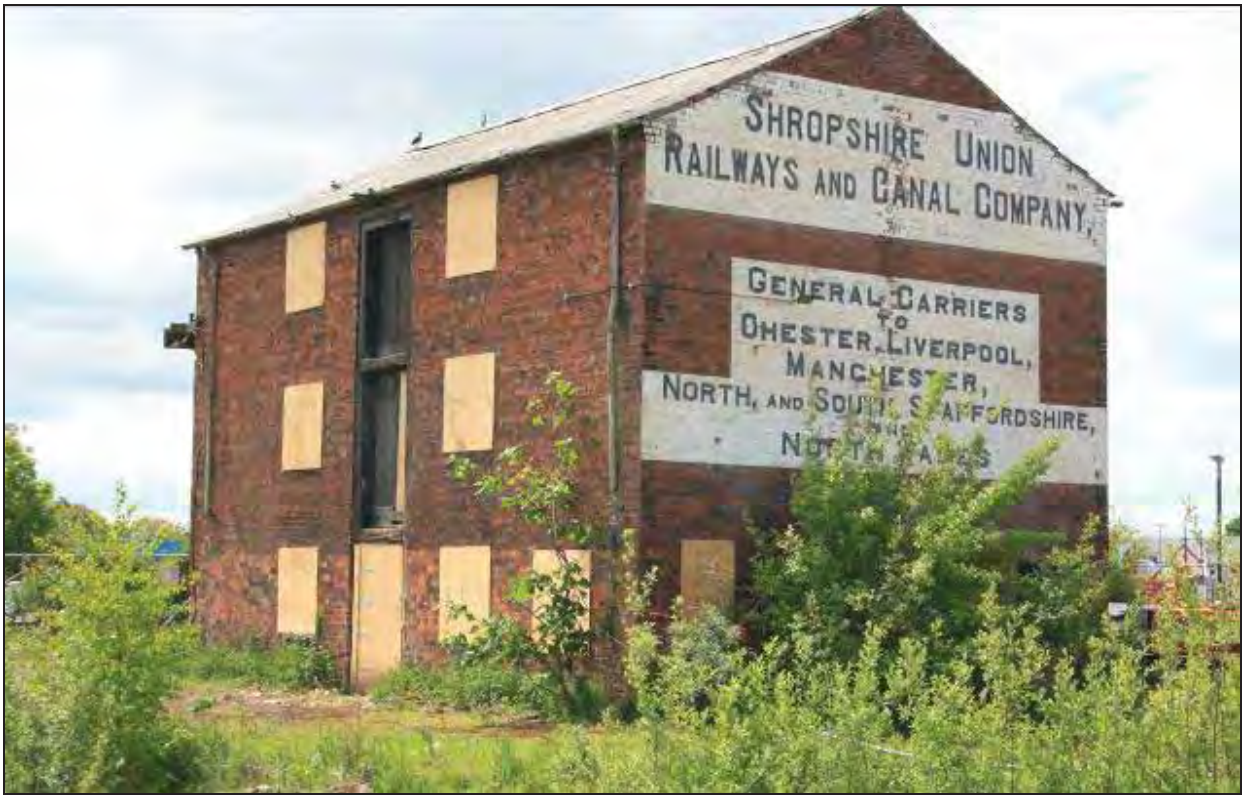
Most of the historic character of the wharf has been lost, with the warehouse remaining as the principal monument to its former role. While the west side of the wharf has been redeveloped as a new Tesco store and associated car parking, the east (site of the former timber yard) lies overgrown (Plate 35).

National Heritage List description of the Canal Warehouse:

Canal warehouse of the Shropshire Union Canal (Llangollen Branch) . Early C19 with later alterations. Red brick; 3 storeys, each upper storey having a central loading door which is flanked either side by a segmental headed window; gabled end to north has a plain doorway with later wood gabled porch; the ground storey with blocked doorways on west side alongside canal; plain eaves; slates. Later C19 loading canopy on south gabled end.

32. The warehouse, looking southeast from the wharf

33. West elevation to the wharf



34. The building looking southeast

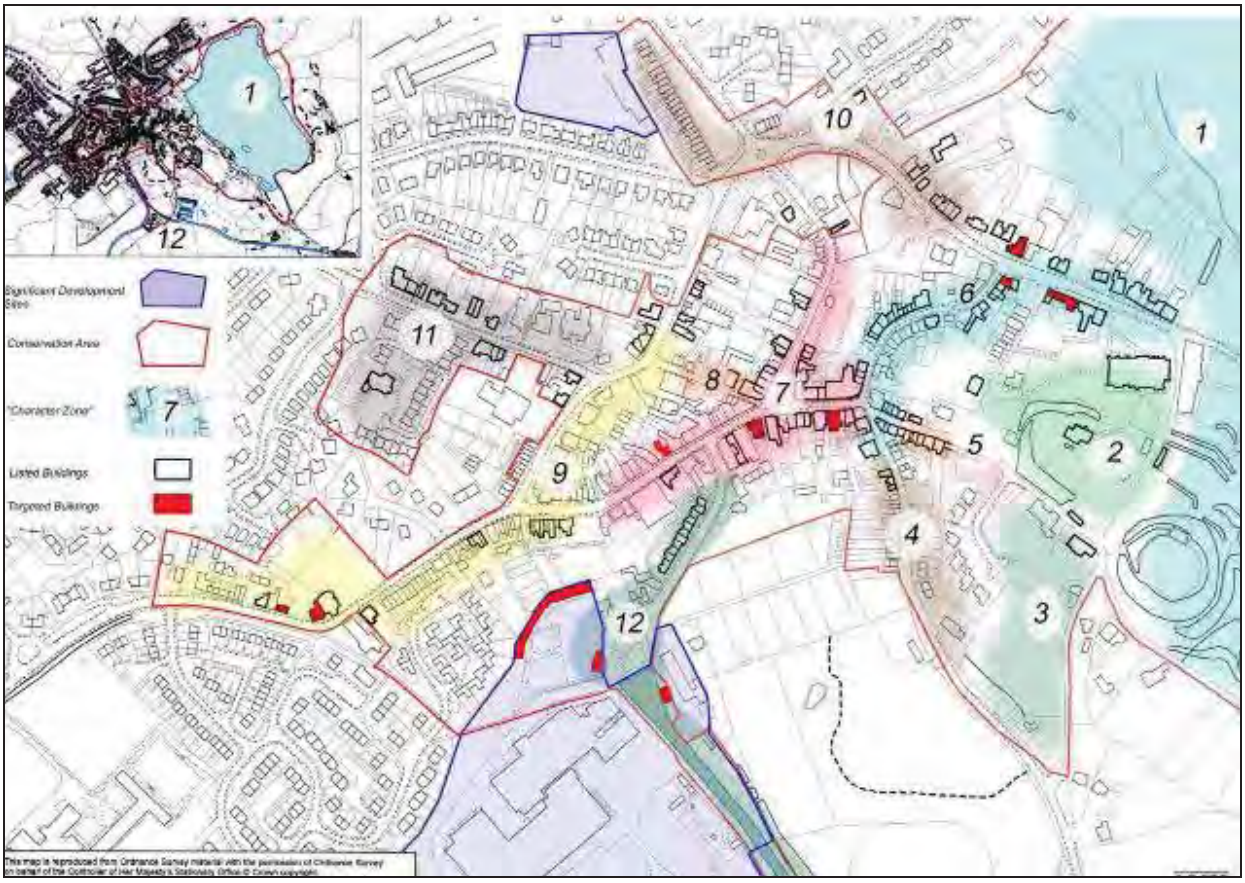
35. The warehouse viewed from across the site of the former timber yard

36. The warehouse seen from the north, on Birch Road

7: THE ELLESMERE CONSERVATION AREA

7.1 Designation

Conservation Areas are defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as areas of *'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'*. They are distinguished by their architecture, landscape and history, creating an attractive environment that is often the product of several different eras, and usually contain listed buildings. The Ellesmere Conservation Area was designated by the former North Shropshire District Council in 1976, and extended in 1985.



Map 7. The Ellesmere Conservation Area and the character zones within. Area 12 comprises the canal and related buildings of the wharf and maintenance yard (Shropshire Council)

7.2 Historical Context

Established close to the largest of north Shropshire's lakes, Ellesmere's long history and varied fortunes are expressed in its built environment. A town of Saxon origin, its medieval prosperity and status – expressed by a Norman church and castle – was followed by 15th-16th century decline, with a further revival due to dairying in the 17th century. A subsequent slump in the town's fortunes was relieved by the Ellesmere Canal, with modest prosperity ensuing and the wharf area emerging as the town's industrial and commercial focus. The canal's subsequent decline in the face of competition from the railways in the second half of the 19th century has thereafter been mirrored in the town's economy.

7.3 Character

The Conservation Area covers the ancient heart of the town, where a tightly-wound medieval street pattern survives, contrasting with open spaces to the east around the Mere and Castle Hill and later suburban growth beyond the ancient core. Shropshire Council's Ellesmere Conservation Area Character Appraisal states that the town's long development is reflected in its built environment, which demonstrates a rich variety of types and styles. Consequently, 12 individual character zones have been identified. The canal forms the spine of one of these zones, Character Area 12, designated *Beech House and Canal Workshops, Shropshire Union Canal and Wharf and Wharf Road.* Its qualities are summarized thus by the Appraisal:

> *Closely-grouped brick, stone and timber-framed buildings framed by mature trees at busy canal junction in open countryside. Canal has strongly rural character and brings countryside into the centre of the town. Views to sharply-defined S edge of town in rural setting marred by derelict creamery and sewage works. Opportunity to enhance and reinvigorate Wharf area as part of creamery site redevelopment, but character threatened by wrong type of redevelopment.*

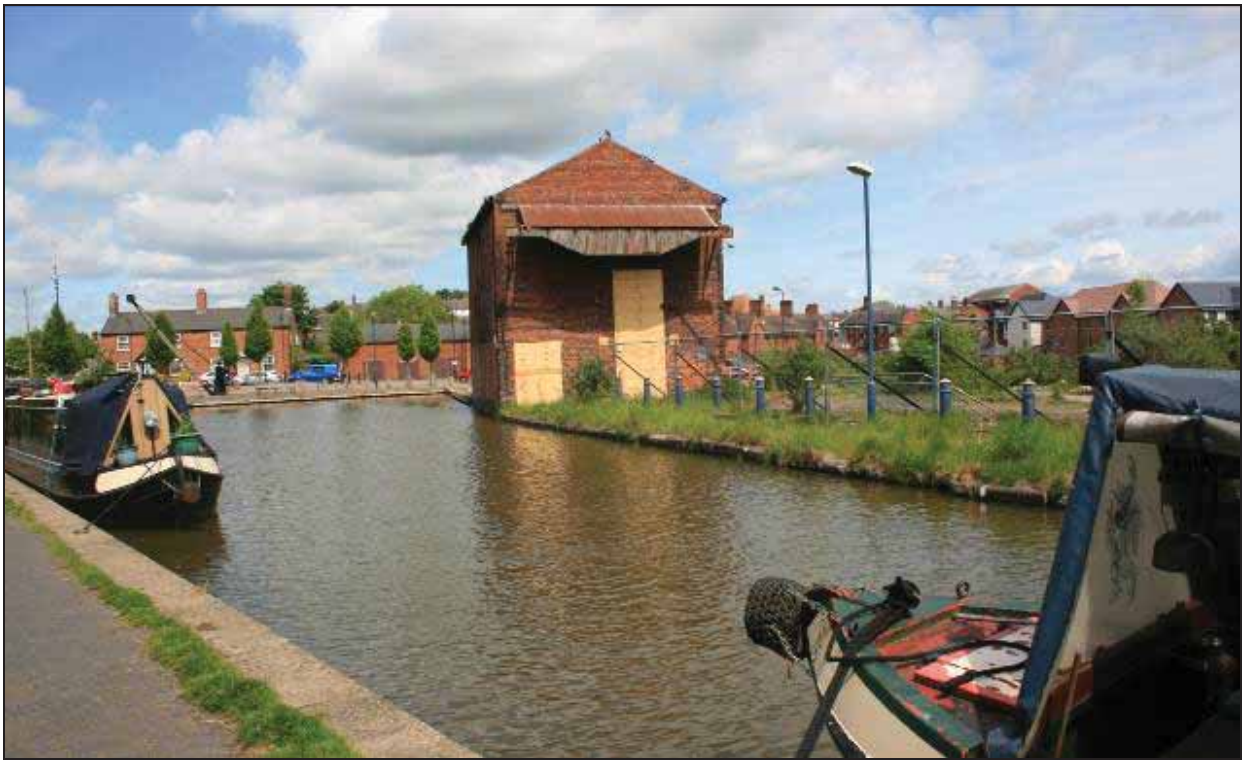
The canal and its buildings also play a background role in two other character zones, those of Love Lane, a narrow, sloping lane defined by sandstone walls (Character Area 3) and Birch Road, (Character Area 4) where the densely-built centre gives way to open countryside. From both, distant views of the canal and buildings are obtained (e.g. Plate 27)

7.4 Role/visibility of the application site

The application site contributes at two levels to the setting of the Conservation Area. In a wider sense, it assists in establishing Ellesmere's setting and character of a small town amid extensive north Shropshire countryside. More locally, it embodies the 'strongly rural' setting for the canal character zone. This is reflected in views not only around the canal, but in those further afield (e.g. Love Lane and Birch Road) which contrast town and surrounding countryside. However, from the tightly-built heart of the Conservation Area, the retail/commercial zone along High Street/Cross Street/Scotland Street (Plate 37), the site is obscured by buildings although a small portion is marginally seen in views into Wharf Road from Scotland Street (Plate 38).

37. The heart of the Conservation Area, looking southwest along Scotland Street

38. Looking down Wharf Road from Scotland Street, with peripheral view of the site in distance



39. View north towards the canal warehouse and houses of Wharf Road

40. The canal 'brings the countryside into the heart of the town': looking north along the Ellesmere branch that forms the spine of character zone 12

8: ASSESSMENT OF significance

8.1 Objective/methodology

Paragraph 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

> '*The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.'*

A means of establishing the heritage interest and value of historic buildings such as the Canal Yard group and warehouse is to apply the criteria used for listing purposes, which are:

- **Age and rarity:** most buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most built between 1700 and 1840
- **Architectural interest:** through architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship and also important examples of particular building types and techniques
- **Historic interest:** encompassing buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history, or close historical association with nationally-important people or events
- **Group value:** especially where buildings are part of an important architectural or historic group or are a fine example of planning (such as squares, terraces and model villages)

Using these criteria, the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposed development will be evaluated in this section. The contribution made by their setting will also be considered, because setting can enhance the significance of a heritage asset, whether or not it was intended to do so. The NPPF Glossary defines setting as:

> *The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may*

make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

8.2 Significance of the canal group

The canal group is of outstanding significance in terms of national heritage as, in the words of the list description of Beech House, a '… *notable and historically important canal yard, the best-preserved complex of its type in Britain.'* This significance has been formally recognized by Grade II* designation of Beech House, the Stables, Stores and Dry Dock, Timber Store and Blacksmith's and Joiner's Workshop, which confirms they are buildings of particular importance. The fifth element, 1 Beech House, while designated Grade II, still makes an important contribution to the value of the group via its historical connections and contrast of size and scale with its larger neighbours. The high national significance of the buildings naturally cascades to make them of importance to Shropshire and locally to Ellesmere: here, they make a positive contribution to the special character of the Ellesmere Conservation Area generally, and to its canal character zone (Area 12) in particular. The buildings both individually and collectively fulfill all the listing criteria detailed above, as important monuments to the canal age, especially the boom of the 1790s, and for their associations with important figures such as Telford and Jessop. Individually, as well-preserved examples of their type, they are significant for their rarity and architectural interest, the rationale for which is set out in the National Heritage List descriptions. Collectively, the buildings present a rich and fascinating variety and contrast of function, materials, size, scale and massing, with the elegant, country-house appearance of Beech House, overlooking the tranquil canal junction, contrasting with the industrial functionality of the workshops beyond. Of huge importance to the significance of the buildings is their setting, at a strategic junction of the canal amid open countryside little altered in the two centuries since the navigation was constructed. This setting is experienced in both positive views of the group at close quarters from the towpath and from a distance in the surrounding fields beyond. Views of a quite different character are obtained from Birch Road, where the high stone walls and elevations of the workshop and timber store tower above this narrow rural lane and instill an almost-urban impression of industrial strength.

8.3 Significance of the Canal Warehouse

Grade II listing of the warehouse formally establishes this as a building of high significance in national terms for its special architectural and historic interest. This cascades to make it of high importance to Shropshire and to Ellesmere, where it contributes importantly to the canal zone of the Conservation Area. Its individual merits are similar to those of the canal group. It embodies the canal boom era of the late 18th - early 19th centuries and possesses strong architectural interest as a good example of a canal warehouse of this period. Its historical interest lies on both national and local levels: via its connections with the canal age and with Jessop and Telford as important figures within it, and as the survivor of the wharf which generated Ellesmere's economic revival in the early 19th century. The loss of

all other wharf buildings serves to emphasize the building's rarity. The warehouse's historical connections with the Canal Yard means that although physically separate, a strong group value exists and the buildings form part of each other's setting. While the canalside setting of the warehouse is still of huge importance to our appreciation and understanding of it, much historical context has been lost along with the other buildings. However the entire gamut of the building's significance is placed at risk by its disuse, which, with the passage of time, presents the threat of further deterioration and possible loss.

8.4 Significance of the Ellesmere Conservation Area

While Ellesmere Conservation Area is a locally-designated heritage asset, its significance extends beyond the town to Shropshire as a county, for its architectural and historic interest and special character. This character is embodied in the town's ancient form, setting and historic buildings, and is protected by Conservation Area designation. Within its boundaries, 12 zones of distinctive character have been identified, one of which is focuses upon the environs of the former Ellesmere Canal. The Canal Yard group and warehouse play highly-important roles in this zone as they are fundamental to its special interest and character. In addition to their own individual and collective architectural and historic interest, the buildings also feature prominently in important views within this character zone, and also in outward views from some of the neighbouring zones. The application site thus makes an important contribution to establishing the rural of the town.

9. IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

9.1 Objective

In the context of relevant national and local planning policies, this section will examine the impact of the proposal as follows:

- Upon the Canal Yard group and its setting
- Upon the canal warehouse and its setting
- Upon the character and setting of the Ellesmere Conservation Area

9.2 Relevant policies

Locally, Section CS6 (Sustainable Design and Development Principles) of the Shropshire Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy (March 2011) aims to ensure that development:

> *Protects, restores, conserves and enhances the natural, built and historic environment and is appropriate in scale, density, pattern and design taking into account the local context and character, and those features which contribute to local character, having regard to national and local design guidance, landscape character assessments and ecological strategies where appropriate;*

It goes on to state:

> 4.81 *The quality and local distinctiveness of Shropshire's townscapes and landscapes are important assets. They have a direct impact on quality of life and are an important influence on the local economy in terms of attracting investment and boosting Shropshire's image as a tourist destination. The Council will ensure new development complements and relates to its surroundings, not only in terms of how it looks, but the way it functions, to maintain and enhance the quality of Shropshire's environment as an attractive, safe, accessible and sustainable place in which to live and work. Regard should be paid to urban characterisation and historic environment assessments.*

4.82 *There are a substantial number of heritage assets in Shropshire, which are of significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest. Such assets require careful consideration and management in accordance with national guidance where change is proposed.*

Nationally, guidance is established by Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*, March 2012). Paragraph 131 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

Paragraph 132 states that *'great weight'* should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset, and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; that significance can be lost through development within its setting; and that as heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a Grade II listed building should be exceptional; substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including Grade II* buildings, wholly exceptional. Paragraph 133 states that where a proposal will lead to substantial harm to, or total loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss; or all of the following apply:

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable use of the site
- No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation
- Conservation by grant funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

Paragraph 134 states that when a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

In terms of setting, Paragraph 137 states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to better reveal their significance, and proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.

Further guidance on setting is given by English Heritage's *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* (March 2010), which remains relevant in terms of applying the NPPF.

Paragraph 116 states: *'The setting of a heritage asset can enhance its significance whether or not it was designed to do so.'* Paragraph 114 states: *'The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration; by spatial associations; and, by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each. They would be considered to be within one another's setting.'*

The importance of unaltered settings – such as that of the Canal Yard – is emphasized by *The Setting of Heritage Assets: English Heritage Guidance* (2011), which states (2.4):

> *The setting of some heritage assets may have remained relatively unaltered over a long period and closely resemble the setting in which the asset was constructed or first used. The likelihood of this original setting surviving unchanged tends to decline with age and, where this is the case, it is likely to make an important contribution to the heritage asset's significance.*

Regarding the effect upon setting by new development – relevant in terms of the present application – Paragraph 121 of the HEPPG states:

> '*The design of a development affecting the setting of a heritage asset may play an important part in determining its impact. The contribution of setting to the historic significance of an asset can be sustained or enhanced if new buildings are carefully designed to respect their setting by virtue of their scale, proportion, height, massing, alignment and use of materials. This does not mean that new buildings have to copy their older neighbours in detail, but rather that they should together form a harmonious group.'*

Also relevant is Paragraph 178, which states:

> '*The main issues to consider in proposals for additions to heritage assets, including new development in conservation areas, are proportion, height, massing, bulk, use of materials, use, relationship with adjacent assets, alignment and treatment of setting. Replicating a particular style may be less important, though there are circumstances when it may be appropriate. It would not normally be acceptable for new work to dominate the original asset or its setting in either scale, material or as a result of its siting. Assessment of an asset's significance and its relationship to its setting will usually suggest the forms of extension that might be appropriate.'*

9.3 Impact upon the Canal Yard group

The fabric of the buildings, and hence their intrinsic architectural and historic interest, will be unharmed. The proposal will however impact upon their setting, which makes a key contribution to their significance, as at present the group is experienced as an isolated industrial nucleus amid open countryside. However the masterplan has been modified

during the various design stages to reduce the scale of this impact. Initial designs involved buildings of substantial mass and height grouped immediately opposite the Canal Yard in a manner which, despite the site's lower ground levels, visually challenged the predominance of the heritage assets, especially the buildings of relatively low height, i.e. Beech House and the Dry Dock. The current plan now seeks to retain a sense of the open nature of the land opposite, by:

- Adjusting the siting of the hotel so it is gable-on to the Canal Yard group and hence minimizing its visual impact
- Creation of a green area directly opposite the Canal Yard group, where parking areas and tennis courts will site at a lower level, canal group and will be seen as an open green space opposite the group
- Retention of the tall hedgerow opposite the Canal Yard, which will assist in screening the new development

While the earlier proposals were considered to represent a high scale of harm to this setting (as reviewed in the initial Heritage Assessment, June 2012), that of the current revision is considered to be moderate. This must therefore be weighed against the public benefits the proposal will bring (see 9.6 below).

Map 8. Current masterplan, with the Canal Yard indicated (Roberts Limbrick Architects)

9.4 Impact upon the Canal Warehouse

The proposal will affect the historic setting the warehouse shares with the Canal Yard group. However the degree of harm will be reduced by the distance separating the warehouse and the application site. In the context of NPPF 134, this harm is considered to be less than substantial and must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In terms of the warehouse's 'at risk' status, while the proposal will not directly remedy this situation, it has potential to heighten awareness of the building, and of its significance, by promoting its historic association with the Canal Yard. This may ultimately attract tourism and economic development that could enable the warehouse to be put to an optimum use which will ensure its preservation.

9.5 Impact upon the Conservation Area

The proposal represents a substantial development adjoining the Conservation Area boundary. Although its built environment and intrinsic historic character will be unaffected, the proposal will impact upon the Conservation Area's setting. However, given the local topography and tightly-built nature of the town centre, the greater part of the Conservation Area will be visually unaffected: the proposal will impact mainly upon the canalside character zone (zone 12). On balance therefore, the proposal' is considered to represent less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area, and this must be weighed against its public benefits.

9.6 Summary and Conclusion

Although the intrinsic architectural and historic interest of all the heritage assets will be unharmed by the proposal, their setting will be affected. This report has demonstrated how this setting makes an important contribution to the significance of the Canal Yard group, the Ellesmere Conservation Area and the Canal Warehouse. In the case of the Canal Yard group its impact will be moderate, but the scale of harm to the other heritage assets will be less than substantial. This impact must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which in this case are substantial: a multi-million pound programme of investment which is designed to boost Ellesmere's economy, create employment and increase tourism. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity to showcase the Canal Yard group as a heritage hub of outstanding national importance, and thus heighten public awareness of its significance as the country's best-preserved example of a canal maintenance yard. An important factor in this regard is the creation of a canal bridge linking the new development with the Canal Yard, which will increase not only public accessibility but also appreciation and understanding of its heritage assets. This will effectively enhance the significance of the Canal Yard buildings and enable them, through increased tourism, to contribute to the economic vitality of Ellesmere.

APPENDIX 1: PRINCIPAL SOURCE MATERIAL

OS 25-inch mapping of Ellesmere, 1874
Census returns listing Ellesmere canal office, 1861
Edward Wilson, *The Ellesmere and Llangollen Canal* (1975)
John Newman and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Shropshire* (2006)
Edward W Paget-Tomlinson, *The Complete Book of Canal and River Navigations*
Shropshire Council, *Ellesmere Conservation Area Appraisal*

Appendix 2: Garry Miller HISTORIC BUILDING CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is an architectural historian who has spent more than 35 years studying buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. Among the many positive reviews, it was described as *'scholarship as its best'* by *Country Life* (June 2003), and *'well analysed and presented'* in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); the work was extensively referenced in the revised *Buildings of England* volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire (2006). Research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to a future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings. His specialism are the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment, and his area of operation extends throughout the North West, North Midlands and North Wales. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice.