Historical Context

One of the most notable features of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal is its locks and tunnels. There are no less than 5 tunnels on the canal ranging from the mere 106 yard tunnel at Edgbaston, Birmingham to the massive 2726 yard tunnel at Kings Norton. Within the Conservation Area the Tardebigge Flight comprises a total of 58 locks, each of which must be painstakingly traversed in the challenge to meet the River Severn at Diglis Basin in Worcester. Challenges have been a characteristic of the history of this canal, not only from an engineering aspect (the canal involves a drop of 475 feet) but also politically. It took three major attempts and a substantial change of route before Parliament passed the Act which would allow construction to start. The first surveys were commissioned by the proprietors of the Stourbridge Canal in 1783, but it was not Until 1815 that the first cargo made its way to Worcester. A period of relative tranquillity in the history of the canal began. However, it was barely 26 years later when the Birmingham-Gloucester Railway opened and signalled the gradual decline of the canal as a mode of freight transport. This century the canal has experienced more turbulence as the canal changed ownership to the Sharpness New Docks Company, was closed, reopened and nationalised before the last canal-borne coal shipment reached Worcester in 1960. It has only been from the beginning of this decade that the function of the canal has changed to accommodate other uses, the most significant of course being recreation and tourism. Increasing awareness of the canal as a recreational resource and the need to preserve and enhance the environment has led to the designation of this as a Conservation Area in 1987. The setting of the canal is as important as the canal itself and must be protected from insensitive development. Some canal-side buildings are listed in their own right as buildings of architectural or historic interest, for example the Old Engine House, Plymouth House and the Wharf buildings at Tardebigge. But for unlisted buildings in the Conservation Area special controls apply. These regulations are outlined in this leaflet.

What is a Conservation Area

Conservation areas are designated by the District Council as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which the Council considers desirable to preserve or enhance. Designation gives additional planning controls, but the success of measures to protect and enhance an area depends on there being community support, particularly from property occupants. It is the special quality and interest of the area, rather than the merit of individual buildings that is the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. It may be the group value of listed buildings, their relationship to each other, property boundaries, archaeology, spaces and landscape between the buildings and their materials and craftsmanship that are important. The interest often extends beyond the physical character since the social and economic history is usually instrumental in how the area still appears today.

Conservation Planning Policy

Planning policies effecting how the Council will deal with development proposals will be included within The Local Development Framework. Any policies affecting conservation areas will be produced in consultation with the public.
"Roses and Castles" is the name given to the traditional folk decoration of narrowboats, originating from inland waterways in Britain. For canal people it was perhaps one way in which they could express creativity and escape from the often harsh and cramped conditions of family life on a canal boat. The theme of castles may have originated from the highly decorative metalware which the boats transported, or even dreams of better living conditions. The roses and sometimes daisies may just have come from simply missing a cottage garden.

"TARDEBIGGE NEW WHARF" was originally an old canal community where housing was provided for employees. Boats and canal equipment were repaired in adjacent workshop buildings. The site also has more recent historical significance. A plaque commemorates the meeting of Tom and Angela Rolfe with Robert Aikman in 1946, who met to found a campaign to save Britain's waterways from neglect and dereliction.

"THE TARDEBIGGE FLIGHT" which is the longest flight of locks in England, begins its descent towards Worcester at Top Lock Cottage by lock 58 and finishes at Lock 29. This is a particularly interesting section of the canal retaining its unique character with fine views across North Worcestershire. Along the flight the canal cottages, bridges and locks display original features such as paddle gearing and balance beam quadrants. Local materials were used for construction including blue brick paving and bullnose coping from the Black Country and sandstone from nearby quarries. The length from locks 28 to 23 is known as the Stoke Flight.

"PLYMOUTH HOUSE", built in 1812 was formerly an old inn known as the 'Plymouth Arms'. It is said that the inn’s closure was due to the drowning of drunken leggers in the nearby tunnel.

"LOCK 58 (c.1812-1813)". By this lock there is a side pond and sluice. Lock 58 is the top lock of the Tardebigge Flight and is also the deepest at 15 feet against 7 feet for the others.

"THE OLD ENGINE HOUSE" formerly used to back pump water from the nearby Tardebigge Reservoir (level with Lock 50) up to the summit level above Lock 58 and until 1915, a Newcomen-Watt beam engine was in operation here.

"TREES AROUND TARDEBIGGE RESERVOIR" include oak, hawthorn, poplar, elm, field maple and silver birch. Willow carr (copse) is found along the marshy eastern shore. The reservoir is rich in birdlife with both breeding and over-wintering fowl. The aquatic habitat includes yellow iris, flowering rush, amphibious bistort and skullcap.

"THE CONSERVATION AREA along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal includes the canal and related buildings and structures. A detailed map showing boundaries is available at the Council offices.

"Canal Boat Art"

"Trees in a Conservation Area"

Trees can make a significant contribution to the character of Conservation Areas. You must give the Council six weeks notice in writing if you want to carry out work on trees, which are more than 7.5 centimetres in diameter (measured 1.5 metres above the ground). Non-compliance with this provision is an offence under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. These provisions are only a summary and full details of the exact legal wording can be obtained from the Council.

"Key"

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