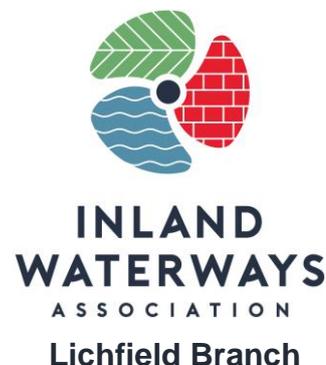


North Warwickshire Local Plan Examination

Matter 9, 'Category 1' settlement allocations

Position Statement by the Inland Waterways Association (Lichfield Branch)



Policy LP39

Site H2 Land to north-west of Atherstone off Whittington Lane

Introduction

1. The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) was founded in 1946 and is a membership charity that works to protect and restore the country's canals and river navigations. IWA is a national organisation with a network of local branches and volunteers who work with navigation authorities, national and local government, and a wide range of voluntary, private and public sector organisations for the benefit of the waterways and their users.

Purpose

2. This Position Statement is based on IWA's Draft Submission Local Plan Response Form of 28/1/2018.
3. Its purpose is to explain to the Inspector how damaging this allocation could be to the canal's heritage, environment, amenity and economy unless substantial mitigation is required from the planning allocation stage through to the detailed access, layout and design stages.
4. It also responds to the following matters in the Inspector's Issues and Questions (INSP5A):
5. 9.12 Allocation H2, Whittington Lane
 - (a) What is the significance of the phrase 'allocated for future growth' in the policy?
 - (b) Are the masterplanning requirements in Local Plan paragraph 14.23, 14.14, (and for allocation H7) consistent?
 - (c) Is there suitable evidence to indicate the effects of the allocation on heritage assets and their setting, in particularly the incorporation of listed buildings at Whittington into a service centre?
 - (d) Notwithstanding discussions on matter 7 and 10, as with other allocations are criteria 2 and 3 sufficiently precise so as to secure appropriate infrastructure provision?
 - (e) What effect would allocations H1 and H2 have on local character and distinctiveness?

The Coventry Canal

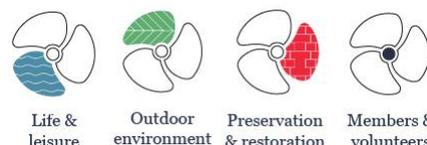
6. This is a greenfield site in open countryside extending for over half a mile along both sides of the Coventry Canal.
7. The Coventry Canal is nationally valued for its historic structures, as a green corridor for wildlife, and for its amenity and recreational uses, providing leisure boating, walking, angling, cycling and nature conservation benefits to the area. It attracts tens of thousands of visits each year from local people and holidaymakers from home and abroad and is a major component of Warwickshire's tourism industry. The canal towpath is open to the public and provides an accessible footpath and cycle route as part of a long

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distance network of interconnected waterways now extensively used for leisure boating.

8. This section of the canal enjoys a pleasant rural environment that enhances its attractiveness for recreational use. It includes Lock 8 and Lock 9 of the Atherstone lock flight and Whittington Road Bridge 46, each of which is a Grade II Listed Building. The longer level pound between Lock 9 and Lock 10, which is just beyond the site boundary, is a popular daytime and overnight mooring for its attractive and tranquil countryside setting.
9. The rural environment of the canals plays a vital role in attracting and sustaining the recreational and tourism use of the whole canal system which helps fund its maintenance and contributes to the local visitor economy. The income from boating and angling activities helps support local businesses and provides a major part of the funding necessary for the Canal & River Trust to maintain the canals for public use and enjoyment.
10. Major built development in the countryside adjacent to the canal system damages the rural setting of the canals that contributes to their heritage interest, wildlife, amenity value and recreational use. Intrusive built developments alongside the canals and loss of attractive countryside views diminish their amenity value, tourism potential and economic benefits.
11. The attractive countryside setting of this section of the canal will be largely lost by these proposals. Whilst the canal corridor will provide an amenity for the new residents, its overall value to the local community and the visitor economy would be diminished if the development is visually intrusive.
12. As well as damaging the heritage, amenity, recreational use, tourism and economy of the canal, IWA considers that this site would also be scenically intrusive, create urban sprawl, involve unsustainable loss of agricultural land, and discourage recycling of more sustainable brownfield sites within the conurbation. The site is not well situated in relation to Atherstone and would require major investment in new road infrastructure to connect it with the town centre and would also require one or more new bridges over the canal which could be visually intrusive and damaging to the setting of the Listed locks and bridge.
13. IWA considers that the overall housing allocation for the Borough is excessive, that it should not be expected to cater for Birmingham and Coventry overspill to the extent suggested, and that a less damaging and more accessible and sustainable location for the balance of housing provision required should be considered. Removal of this site would still leave allocated sites more than sufficient to meet the future housing growth requirements of the Borough's present population and any reasonable increase from net inward migration.
14. However, if this site goes ahead then IWA considers that there should be a broad buffer zone along both sides of the canal without built development, forming a continuous corridor of open amenity land to help preserve and enhance the canal environment. This corridor could encompass Public Open Space, parkland, woodland, wildflower meadows, sports fields, children's play areas and informal recreation space.

Modifications Necessary

15. This allocation should be deleted from the plan, or limited to the land east of Whittington Farm.
16. Failing that, there should be a clear commitment to protect the recreational and heritage corridor of the Coventry Canal from the adverse effects of the development. This can be done by including an additional requirement for H2 that:
 - 8 housing will be set back behind a broad buffer zone along both sides of the Coventry Canal, forming a continuous corridor of open amenity land to help preserve and enhance the canal

environment. This corridor can encompass Public Open Space, parkland, woodland, wildflower meadows, sports fields, children's play areas and informal recreation space.

MIQ Comments

(a) Future Growth.

17. If "allocated for future growth" this suggests the site is not needed within the early years of the Local Plan so it should not be allocated at this stage, but reconsidered in a future Plan Review, given that Local Plans are now expected to be reviewed every 5 years.

(b) Masterplanning.

18. The preparation of, and consultation on, a Masterplan should be a requirement before any allocation is made, given the major heritage and landscape impacts and the expensive infrastructure requirements of this site.

(c) Heritage Assets.

19. The Coventry Canal is an undesignated heritage asset, but is of equal value to the country's other historic canals, many of which have been designated as linear Conservation Areas. NWLDC has previously undertaken to assess the Coventry Canal for CA designation (2004) and the Local Plan Inspector's report (2005) agreed this should be pursued, although separately from the Local Plan process. However, this was not done; not because of any lack of justification but due to the Council's lack of officer resources (NWBC verbal evidence to Examination 26/2/2019). A Heritage & Conservation Officer has recently been appointed and the necessary work to take forward Conservation Area status for all the canals in the Borough (Coventry and Birmingham & Fazeley) should now be given priority.
20. Meanwhile, it is considered that, along with due recognition of the two Listed canal locks and canal bridge within site H2, masterplanning should recognise the CA equivalent value of the whole canal corridor and the importance of its rural landscape setting.

(d) Infrastructure.

21. Satisfactory road access to this site and its integration with the existing settlement would be impossible to achieve without major new infrastructure including a new road connection to the A5 requiring a bridge over the West Coast Mainline railway and one or more bridges over the Coventry Canal. Securing government support for funding for such infrastructure has for many years now been difficult and slow with no guarantee of that improving. Developers are also increasingly reluctant to fund necessary infrastructure that might affect their accustomed high profits on housing developments. That part of the site west of Whittington Farm should not be allocated unless and until there is a definite and agreed plan for what major infrastructure is needed and a credible and reliable plan for how it will be funded.

(e) Local Character.

22. The impact of H2 on the local character and distinctiveness of the Coventry Canal and its currently attractive rural landscape setting has been described above. An insensitively designed housing estate could be devastating to the canal's environment with consequent damaging impacts on its economy. An enforceable masterplan with a broad public open space, parkland, amenity and recreational corridor providing a buffer zone along the canal would alter its setting but in acceptable ways that would mitigate the loss of its present local character and distinctiveness.