

Trent and Mersey Canal



*Conservation
Area*

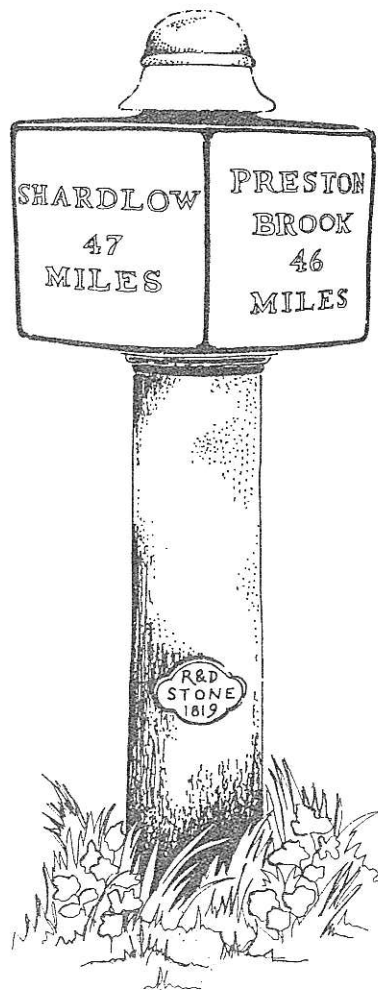
IMPORTANT NOTE

Some of the information contained in this document identifying listed buildings or about town planning law affecting buildings and trees in conservation areas has changed since the date of publication. You are advised to check the current position with either the relevant District Council Planning Department or the County Planning and Economic Development Department **BEFORE CARRYING OUT ANY WORKS**

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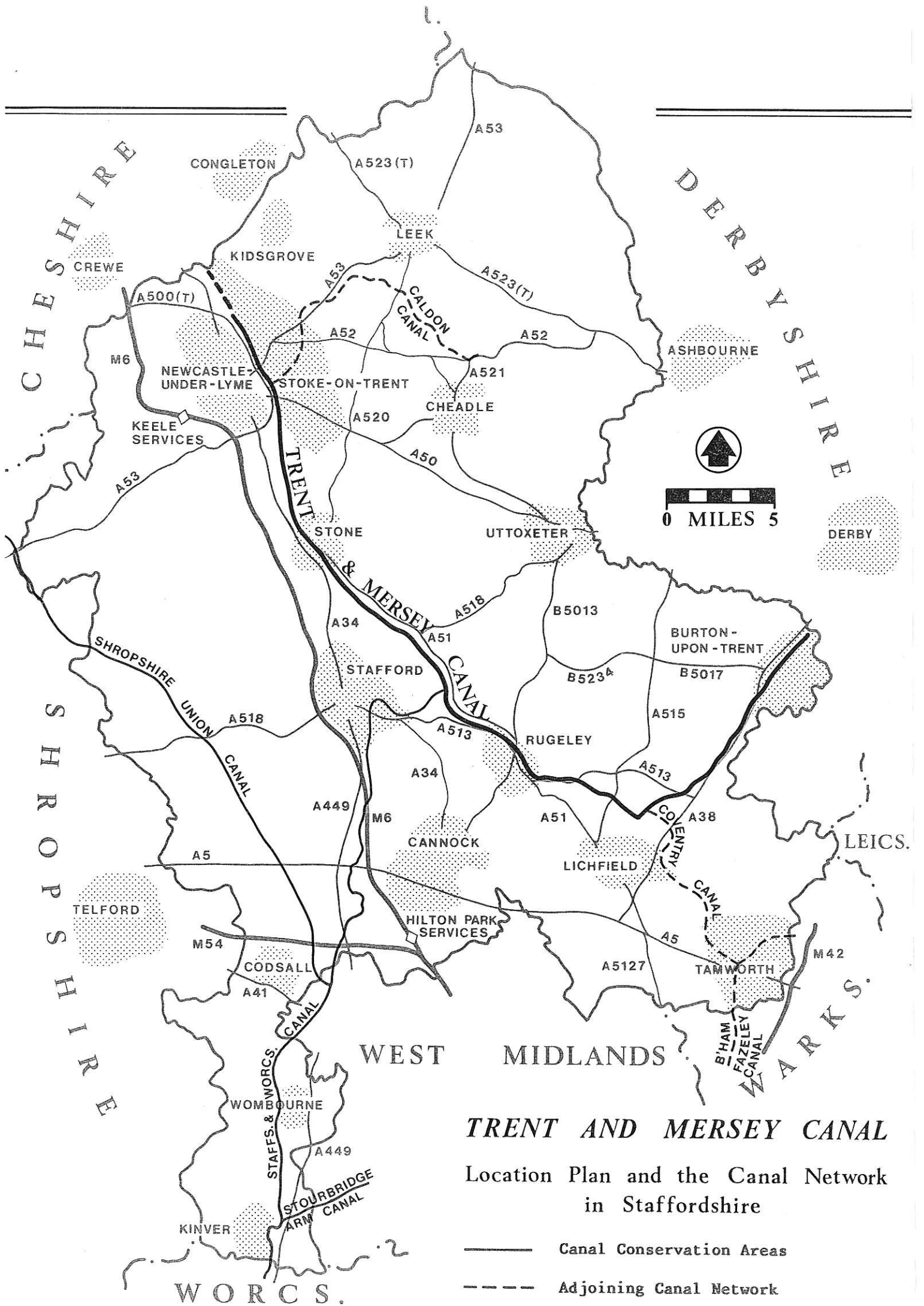
THE CITY COUNCIL OF STOKE-ON-TRENT,
THE BOROUGH COUNCILS OF NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME AND STAFFORD,
THE DISTRICT COUNCILS OF CANNOCK CHASE, EAST STAFFORDSHIRE AND
LICHFIELD, STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Trent and Mersey Canal



STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DESIGNATION NO. 83.

DATE OF DESIGNATION 6TH MAY, 1988



TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL

Location Plan and the Canal Network in Staffordshire

- Canal Conservation Areas
- Adjoining Canal Network

Trent and Mersey Canal Conservation Area

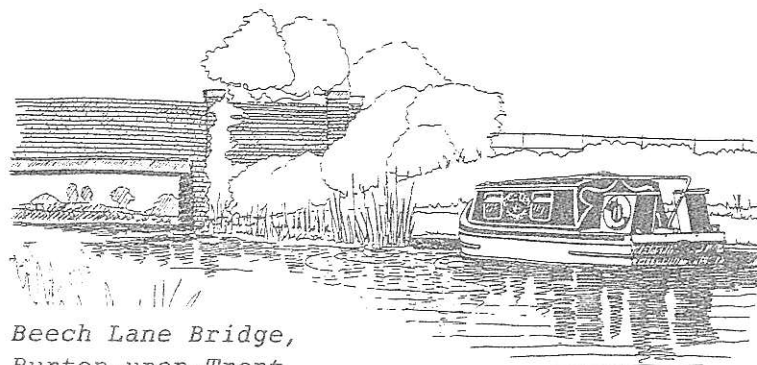
Reasons for designation

A conservation area is defined by S277 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 as an area "of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Conservation areas are of many kinds and may vary from historic town and village centres to stately homes and their parklands, or sites of industrial archaeological interest.

The Trent and Mersey Canal is of outstanding industrial archaeological importance, both nationally and locally. It was the first of the major inland waterways which were to form the main arteries of Britain's canal network, the nation's principal transport and communications system in the late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries. It was essential in promoting the rapid development of Britain as the first industrial nation by providing efficient transport for raw materials and manufactured goods. The Trent and Mersey was also the first canal to be begun in Staffordshire, in 1766. It had a dramatic effect on the development and prosperity of trade and industry in the county.

By 1790 England had a network of canals linking the navigable sections of the Rivers Mersey, Trent, Severn and Thames. It became known as the "Grand Cross". The principal junctions of the Grand Cross are both on the Trent and Mersey Canal in Staffordshire, with the Coventry Canal at Fradley and with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Great Haywood. Staffordshire thus became the hub of the entire canal system.

On its completion in 1777 the Trent and Mersey Canal was the greatest civil engineering project yet carried out in England. Its construction involved a variety of major works, most notably the cutting of five tunnels. Two of these were in Staffordshire. The longest of them all, James Brindley's Harecastle Tunnel, was the single greatest achievement not only of the entire canal project but also on a national level. It was a notable first: the first major transport tunnel to be constructed in England; for some time it was also the longest. Thomas Telford's new tunnel, built alongside it, is an equally impressive feat of engineering.



*Beech Lane Bridge,
Burton-upon-Trent*

Many other features of great historic interest survive along the Trent and Mersey in Staffordshire. There are a considerable number of the original locks and bridges, warehouses and other canalside structures, including at Stone one of the earliest examples of a covered dock. These make an important historical and visual contribution to the rural and urban areas through which the canal passes. Together with the canal as a whole they constitute a major part of Staffordshire's heritage which merits the special protection afforded by conservation area status.

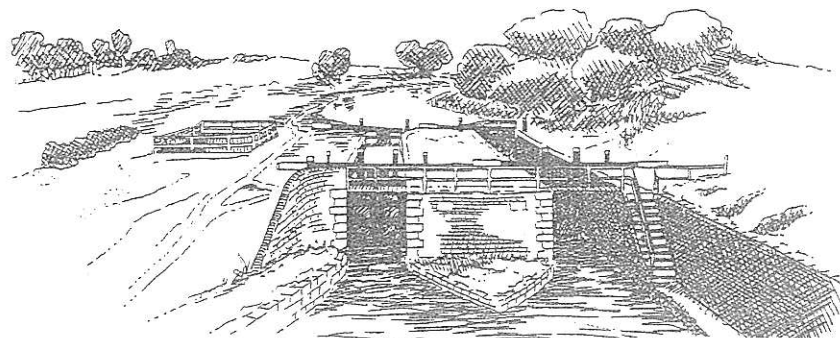
The meaning of designation

Designation of a conservation area draws public attention to its architectural and historic interest and emphasises the need for any new development, either within or adjoining the area, to be sympathetic to its character. Local authorities have certain additional powers of control in conservation areas : listed building consent is required for the demolition of most buildings and structures, and written consent is needed for the felling and lopping of all trees above a certain size.

Future action

Designation of a conservation area delineates the architectural or historic interest of an area. This is only a first stage which will be followed up by proposals from both local interests and the local authorities for the preservation and enhancement of the area. Discussions will be held with the British Waterways Board over such matters as towpath clearance, tree felling and planting and the repair and maintenance of canalside buildings and features. Local people, amenity groups, canal users, parish councils and others are invited to come forward with suggestions for schemes which might be carried out for the benefit of the canal and its setting.

Policies for the control of development within or alongside the Conservation Area have been, or will be, set out in the Local Plans prepared by the relevant District Councils. In accordance with previous practise special working arrangements will be established with the British Waterways Board for consultation over development within their permitted development rights.



Pool Locks, Kidsgrove.

History

Surveys for a waterway between the Rivers Trent and Mersey, linking the ports of Hull and Liverpool, were made as early as 1755. Road transport was slow, difficult and expensive, but a canal would provide much cheaper and more efficient carriage for raw materials and finished goods, thus promoting the development of Staffordshire industries and mines, and the Cheshire salt fields. In 1758 James Brindley, the great pioneer of canal construction, began to survey a route.

In December 1765 a meeting was held at Wolseley Bridge near Rugeley, of 'the Company of Proprietors of the Navigation from the Trent to the Mersey'. They included the Duke of Bridgwater, important Staffordshire landowners such as Earl Gower of Trentham and Thomas Anson of Shugborough, major manufacturers notably Josiah Wedgwood and Matthew Boulton of Smethwick, and many other local landowners, merchants and manufacturers. Wedgwood was a particularly important advocate of the canal, a major investor in the company and its treasurer. He regarded the construction of the canal as vital to the development of his pottery business, since it would provide an import-export route bringing in raw materials and taking out his wares to the markets of the world. In 1766 he bought the Ridge House estate at Cobridge, and built his home, Etruria Hall, potbanks and Etruria Works, alongside the canal.

On 14th May 1766 "The Navigation from the Trent to the Mersey Act" was passed. The waterway was often referred to by Brindley and others, as the "Grand Trunk Canal", for it was expected that there would be many branch canals from it; the first, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal (now also a conservation area), was authorised on the same day. Brindley was appointed Surveyor General, and his brother-in-law Hugh Henshall was Clerk of Works. Wedgwood cut the first sod at a ceremony near Brownhills in the Potteries to inaugurate construction on 26th July 1766. Work began at once at both ends of the Harecastle Tunnel and at Wilden Ferry in Derbyshire, where Cavendish Bridge at Shardlow now stands.

On 24th June 1770 the first completed section of canal was opened from Wilden Ferry on the navigable River Trent to Shugborough. The section to Stone was opened on 12th November 1771 with such exuberant celebrations that a bridge and lock collapsed owing to the repeated firing of a canon. On 27th September 1772 Brindley died, and Henshall took over as surveyor. In October 1772 the section to Stoke-on-Trent was finished, and the Cheshire section was completed in 1775.

Final completion was delayed by great difficulties encountered in constructing the Harecastle Tunnel, the principal engineering work of

the canal. The tunnel attracted great attention. In a 'History of Inland Navigation' published in 1769 it was said that "gentlemen come to view our eighth wonder of the world". It was not finally opened until 1777. Pleasure boat trips through it were arranged. A contemporary wrote : 'The procession was solemn; some enlivened this scene with a band of musick; but we had none; as we entered far, the light of candles was necessary, and about half-way, the view back upon the mouth was like the glimmering of a star, very beautiful".

The canal had cost approximately £300,000 to construct. Its effect was dramatic. The Company had promised a carriage cost of 2s. 6d. (12.5p) per ton, compared with 9s. (45p) by road, but actual costs were even lower, one quarter of the rate by road. Costs of raw materials and finished goods were thus dramatically reduced, stimulating rapid industrial development in the areas served by the canal. An observer commented "In a few years after it was finished, I saw... the value of manufacturers arise in the most unthought of places, new buildings and new streets spring up in many parts of Staffordshire, where it passes; the poor are no longer starving... and the rich grow steadily richer. The market town of Stone... from a poor insignificant place is now grown neat and handsome in its buildings, and from its wharfs and busy traffic, wears the lively aspect of a little sea port". The head office of the Trent and Mersey Canal Company was in Stone, at Westbridge House (now demolished).

The Trent and Mersey Canal was the only route between the Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool until the 1830s. In 1789 the link to Birmingham via Fradley Junction was opened. Traffic was, not surprisingly, very heavy. It was mostly, but not entirely commercial. Some passengers were carried, and in 1798, during the Irish Rebellion, the canal was used to carry troupes en route for Ireland.

Unfortunately the Harecastle Tunnel soon proved to be a very serious bottleneck. It was narrow, only 9 feet wide, so could only take traffic in one direction at a time. There was no towpath : boats had to be 'legged' through, and on average the journey took about 2 hours. In 1807 plans were made to duplicate the tunnel or to bypass it altogether. A survey by the engineer John Rennie clearly showed the need for something to be done.

In 1823 an Act of Parliament authorised the construction of a second tunnel. Work began in February 1824 to the designs of Thomas Telford; it was completed in 1827. The new tunnel was much wider and had a towpath, so could be navigated much faster. Telford made a number of other improvements to the canal, including straightening some sections and duplicating locks.

In the 1840s the railway boom began, and it became increasingly clear that competition from the railways could not be fended off indefinitely. In 1847 the Trent and Mersey Canal Company merged with the North Staffordshire Railway Company. The Railway intended to keep the canal working, as a 'feeder' for its own traffic. However, by the 1860s the railways were beginning seriously to affect canal trade generally. A gradual decline in commercial traffic along the Trent and Mersey Canal continued through the 19th and 20th centuries, dwindling to very little in the 1960s. The canal was nationalised in 1948, and on 1st January 1963 the British Waterways Board took control.

The Trent and Mersey Canal now has a new lease of life, with growing leisure use. Nevertheless there is still some commercial traffic. Johnson Brothers, a member of the Wedgwood Group, has four ceramics factories along the Caldon Canal, a branch of the Trent and Mersey completed in 1777. Three purpose-built boats are used to transport wares between Hanley and Milton, collecting and delivering en route, with occasional journeys along the Trent and Mersey to Midwinter of Burslem and the Wedgwood factory at Barlaston. Thus there is still a strong association between Wedgwood and the canal system which the group's founder so ardently supported.

Physical Features.

The Trent and Mersey Canal now runs from Derwent Mouth on the River Trent to Preston Brook on the Bridgewater Canal. 49 of its 93 miles are in Staffordshire. It enters the County from Derbyshire at Clay Mills near Burton-upon-Trent in the east, and leaves it at the Cheshire border near Pool Lock, north-west of Kidsgrove. As with most early canals its route generally follows the contours of the landscape along the valley of the River Trent, in places running close beside it, in order to minimise construction difficulties and costs. As a result its course meanders, with many twists and bends. Later canals, such as the Shropshire Union Canal, were to follow as straight a course as possible for speed of travel.

The canal has a variety of bridges, generally constructed of brick but some are of other materials such as the cast iron bridge at Shugborough. Most follow the standard hump-back arched pattern, but there are a few interesting variations such as the Newcastle Road Bridge in Stone with its separate arch for the towpath. Locks occur singly or in groups, sometimes associated with a bridge. They are of the standard narrow type for single boats, designed for speed of use and to reduce water requirements, taking less time (and water) to fill. Some of the cast iron mile posts giving the distances to Preston Brook and Shardlow at the ends of the canal survive. They were made in Rangeley and Dixon's Foundry in Lichfield Road, Stone 1819-1820. Other notable structures include cottages, warehouses and boatyards, and of course the Harecastle Tunnels.

Staffordshire
Moorlands

City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Newcastle
Borough

Stafford
Borough

East Staffordshire
District

Cannock
Chase
District

South
Staffordshire
District

Lichfield
District

Tamworth

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Index of Sections

Large scale plans showing the boundary of the designated area may be inspected at the offices of :-

City of Stoke-on-Trent,
Department of Planning &
Architecture,
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Unity House,
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East Staffordshire District
Public Services Department,
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Staffs. DE14 2EB

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