

Appendix 22

(- 1996)

Analysis of Property along the Grand Union Canal locally

Description  
of Canalside Property  
between  
Hunton Bridge, Nr Watford  
to  
Leighton Buzzard, Beds  
by  
Phillip John Plato

As a result of the comments in Section 4.2 of my Proof of Evidence, and the fact that the Local Authority admit to not having carried out a detailed survey of the canal for reasons of cost, before proposing their new policy on mooring locations, some field work has been conducted to determine the nature of land beside the Grand Union Canal and its suitability or otherwise for mooring facilities. The following techniques were used:

- 1 An aerial survey by private light aircraft along the Grand Union Canal from Leighton Buzzard to King's Langley on various occasions and on 3 October 1995 to take photographs.
- 2 A detailed study along the towpath of the Grand Union Canal, made by myself on bicycle from Kings Langley to near Leighton Buzzard over a distance of 23 miles on 10 October 1995
- 3 Consultation with Mr. Chris Mitchell, the local manager for British Waterways of the Grand Union Canal, who has conducted similar work in the past.
- 4 Consultations with various land agents and surveyors acting for land owners of property adjacent to the Grand Union Canal in the Dacorum area. These included Connell Wilson at Hemel Hempstead, Gooch & Wagstaff in London, Stimpsons Commercial Dept in Watford and individual land owners or company surveyors such as those at B& Q.
- 5 Consultation with Mr. Geoffrey Bunyan, who conducted a survey of the canal for Dacorum District Council in the mid 1970's when employed by the Local Authority as a Planning Officer.
- 6 Application of local knowledge by myself as a resident of Dacorum.
- 7 A desktop study of various local maps around the canal including the relevant Ordnance Survey Map & the Nicholson Guide to Waterways South.

There are various photographs that have been taken during the course of this exercise, which are shown in appendices numbered 23 & 24 also related to this proof. The photographs are numbered, and are shown separately, with all photographs taken at ground level being referred to hereafter as "photograph number.....", (see Appendix 23) and all aerial photographs being referred to by an "aerial photograph number.....". ( See Appendix 24 ) These photographs are also marked on a map included in appendix number 25 , identifying where the photograph was taken, and to what stretch of the canal it refers to.

## Appendix 22

### Page 2

I have collated this information which is presented below in the form of a description of the Grand Union Canal from Kings Langley to Leighton Buzzard, where I have attempted to identify locations along the canal that might satisfy the Council's policy and to compare such sites to my own company's location. Certain sites have received specific detailed examination and further details of such sites is given in Appendix 26.

1.0 In commencing this appraisal of land along the Grand Union Canal, starting by Hunton Bridge, which is close to the boundary of Dacorum Borough Council, I observed 2 sites, which are presently not in use and which I investigated for potential canal side development.

1.2 The first site is behind a disused nursery, opposite the Fina petrol station. I contacted the land agents for this site, namely Stimpsons Commercial, and their details are appended to this document. See Appendix 26. Unfortunately, upon closer investigation the site would not appear to be practical for provision of mooring facilities. Its location on a bend in the canal, makes it unsuitable for linear moorings and in addition, one would require access through third party land for either linear or off line moorings. In addition it is valued at a level that would make any such development uneconomic. I was advised by the agents, that the owner was seeking to sell either the disused nursery comprising 1.3 acres (which has no canal frontage) for circa £425,000 or to sell the nursery site and the canal frontage site totalling 4.6 acres (3.3 acres without any planning consent) for offers in excess of £750,000. At such a price, even if the access problem could be overcome, and planning permission obtained, it would not be a viable development.

1.3 The second site is on the A 41 close to lock number 73. See photo No 1 in Appendix 23. The site is presently disused and was investigated by myself some time previously, when it was being advertised for sale privately. The notes of my conversation with the owner, Mr. Brazil, are appended to this document in Appendix 26 and again unfortunately, this site would not appear to be capable of development for mooring facilities. It is too small to accommodate a basin and could only therefore accommodate a small number of linear moorings. However, its location on the tow path side, and its close proximity to lock 73, together with the very short distance to lock 72 would give rise to operational problems that would render such a mooring proposal as unacceptable to British Waterways. Furthermore, there are likely to be objections from the Highways Department to vehicle access off the busy A 41 given that the site entrance is on a bend near the bridge that crosses the canal at a point in the road where the A 41 reduces in width from dual carriageway to single carriageway. This site is not wide enough to accommodate a mooring basin being approx. 400 feet long by 80 feet wide. Even if the Highways access problem and the proximity to locks were not an issue, it would only provide linear moorings for 7 boats maximum. However, as it is on the towpath side, the reality is that too many problems exist to enable moorings to be created here. The site was being offered for sale at £50,000 without planning permission.

1.4 Above lock 72, I observed some residential boats mooring on an informal and unauthorised basis on the towpath side. The opposite side is overgrown and does not offer vehicle access. There were some boats moored on the offside, but these appeared to be on private/end of garden type moorings. see photo No 2.

Appendix 22  
Page 3

1.5 Continuing north above Bridge 162, I observed another area where boats were moored informally on the towpath side. See photo No 3. The land opposite is owned by Rickmansworth Water Company and displays signs that this is private property - no mooring.

1.6 Moving north towards lock 71, the land on the towpath side is in agricultural use and was recently ploughed and there is a large drainage ditch running the full length of the large field next to the towpath. Aerial photograph number 1 in Appendix 24 illustrates this.

1.7 The land opposite accommodates the railway line and there is no clear vehicle access to this land and the bank is very over grown.

1.8 As I approached the M25 flyover bridge, I observed a number of boats moored beneath the motorway bridge itself. I could see a space in the distance near the village of Abbots Langley, where there were cars parked by the side of a small road, and I suspect that these vehicles belonged to the owners of the boats moored under the motorway bridge. There was little provision for running services and facilities to this location and it was extremely noisy, given the high volume of traffic from the motorway. See photo No 4.

1.9 Continuing north, the land on the off side was being used for grazing cattle. See photo No5.

1.10 Approaching bridge 159 there was a large industrial building belonging to Astra, where there was no space to the rear of the building or the works yard, which could service a small linear mooring.

1.11 Continuing north, under 2 bridges, and past lock 70, there were a number of industrial buildings on the off side and the nearby winding hole, would render linear moorings inappropriate at this location and there is insufficient space behind the industrial units anyway. A short distance north is the Home Park mooring site operated by British Waterways on the off side, which was full. See photo No 6.

1.12 The land opposite is a course fishing lake and there is a large ditch on the towpath side. Private houses and a large factory then take up the land on the off side bank (see photo No 7) along to bridge 158. This and the text from the previous 4 paragraphs is illustrated in aerial photograph number 2.

1.13 After this bridge, is a lock known as 69a where the towpath changes sides. There are numerous private residences and allotments on the offside and the location of bridge 157 and a winding hole would make mooring impractical and in conflict with the residential use. See photo No 8. The canal then moves into King's Langley, where industrial buildings and offices are on either side of the canal, which has very steep banks along this stretch. The canal is lost from view between the surrounding land uses as is illustrated in aerial photograph number 3.

1.14 As one moves north, the land on both sides of the canal rises above the level of the canal itself. The banks are very overgrown. See photo No 9. There is no easy way to gain access to the off side and there appears to be mixed prevailing land uses on both sides for industrial, agricultural, and residential use. I observed the Machtech vehicle breakers yard on the towpath side before coming to the railway bridge .

1.15 Just before this railway bridge I saw a large lake of water, which at first was hidden behind the hedge running beside the towpath. This lake is not connected to the canal. Furthermore, the level of this lake appears to be lower than the water level of the canal.

1.16 Continuing north, out of Kings Langley, there is a small mooring facility on the off side, see photo No 10, which is utilised for an organisation known as the " reach out project " providing canal trips for disabled and disadvantaged people.

1.17 The towpath changes to the other side just outside of Kings Langley, (see photo No 11) and the canal has a number of locks behind the nearby office/industrial developments which come down to the canal edge. Continuing north, I observed several boats being used for residential purposes on the towpath side. The offside is heavily overgrown and inaccessible. See photo No 12. Just past Apsley station, there are a number of bridges and locks in close proximity, with industrial buildings on both sides of the canal. The towpath changes sides again, see photo No 13. Just past lock 65, is the British Waterways Apsley Yard, on the towpath side. Further along , on the offside, is the large Sainsbury's/Homebase retail park which backs onto the canal for some distance. There is provision for short term visitor mooring for up to three boats only here. See photo no 14.

1.18 At bridge number 153, the towpath crosses over again and there are still no easily identifiable areas for mooring given the density of industrial uses (see photo No's 15 & 16) and the profusion of locks and bridges. The canal is somewhat lost amongst these land uses, as illustrated in aerial photograph number 4 attached.

1.19 As one moves north out of Apsley, one can observe that the canal bank on the offside is overgrown and the land appears to be inaccessible and contains a wooded area. See photo no 17. Continuing along, I could see some industrial activity behind the overgrown wooded area on the offside, see photo no 18, and just before bridge 151, and I could see the B & Q retail store, which has canal frontage that might provide mooring facilities. See photo no 19. I have spoken with Mr. Paul Miller, who is a Senior Project Manager for B & Q and he represents his company all over the country in respect of their property interests. He has advised me that they would not wish to encourage long term or residential mooring at this location as he perceives there to be a conflict between this activity and that of his firm.

1.20 As I continued up the canal in a northerly direction, I passed the junction with the river Gade and entered an area of spacious urban parkland known as Boxmoor. On the day of my appraisal of the canal by bicycle, there was a stoppage in the canal between bridges 151 and 150 where British Waterways were repairing damage to the canal Bank, which is of a soft edge type along this area. The canal bank on the offside is not suitable to moor against along this stretch. See photo No 20.

1.21 The land on both sides also appears to be public open space, and is used in part for a cricket pitch, with land on the towpath side displaying notices as being owned by the Boxmoor trust. This would not appear to be a practical or appropriate location for either a mooring basin or long term linear moorings. The emergence of the canal into this open space, is illustrated in aerial photograph number 5 & photo No 21.

1.22 As one moves north, and approaches bridge 149, there are numerous residential dwellings, with land coming down to the canal side. See photo No 22. Consequently, offside moorings could not be accommodated here. I did observe a number of boats moored casually on the towpath side along this stretch of canal.

1.23 Once passed bridge 148, I observed 22 boats moored at intervals, on what appears to be an informal basis and there does not appear to be any facilities for these moorings. The close proximity to Boxmoor station and the main roads, is possibly the reason why these boats are moored where they are. I could not ascertain who owns the land on the offside, though I observed there was a sports ground with a rugby pitch, and I suspect that it may be public land. See photo no23. Clearly, the owners of these boats had no nearby car parking and would need to have access across this open/sports ground land, in order to gain access to their boats. The noise from passing trains and the apparent open nature of the land on the offside, did not promote the site as one which should be regularised for long term moorings. Indeed, just past these boats I observed that the land by the offside then displayed "no mooring" signs indicating a previous or prevailing conflict between private land owners and boaters around this area. See photo 24.

1.24 Passing under the railway bridge, there is a large trout farm lake on the towpath side and approaching Winkwell, the bank on the offside is overgrown. At Winkwell, I observed the activities of Middlesex and Herts Boat Services and the residential moorings on the offside, which have recently been the subject of a planning application. There is not enough space to accommodate any more moorings than the 6 recently granted planning consent. See photo No 25. However, I also observed one boat moored on the towpath side, beyond the Winkwell dock area and as I moved up the canal, I observed that the land is primarily used by residents of the Bourne End area. However, on the offside, I observed an area accommodating 18 boats, which had a sign displaying the Anchors Boat Club. See photo 26. This did appear to be a formal mooring facility, but I could see no provision for sanitation, water, or electricity to any of these boats on the offside.

1.24 Contd

I understand from British Waterways, that this is an approved long term linear mooring facility, though it does not officially cater for residential boats. It is known locally as the Buttons mooring and with the exception of 1 space at the time of my visit, appeared to be full. I was further advised by British Waterways, that this site had been considered for residential moorings, though the congestion on this stretch of the canal, together with the fact that introducing residential boats would involve moving prevailing non residential boats, all of who have owners with an interest in the Anchors Boat Club, made this proposal somewhat impractical.

1.25 I later observed lakes on both sides of the canal for some distance as I moved further northwards and I understand that these lakes, which are not connected to the canal, are a natural phenomenon which developed from the river Bulbourne, and made this area important for growing watercress. Consequently, this area is known for its watercress beds and is an attractive local area. It is mentioned in the tourist information and the leaflet produced by Dacorum promoting the canal walk between Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead and would appear to be an inappropriate location for mooring facilities, notwithstanding the fact that there is no easy way of connecting the lakes to the canal. The last 3 paragraphs are illustrated in aerial photograph number 6 attached.

1.26 As one moves away from the Bourne End area, the land on the offside, is overgrown, (see photo no 27) and then is used for a sewage or water treatment works. The obnoxious effluvia would render this area up to and beyond lock 57 as inappropriate for mooring of any kind. The general area is shown in aerial photograph number 7.

1.27 Approaching Berkhamsted, the land on either side of the canal is predominantly used for residential purposes, with private gardens extending up to the canal bank with a lot of well established trees and vegetation. See photo 28. At bridge 143, the towpath crosses over, and one can observe that there are a number of residential and commercial premises whose land backs up to the offside of the canal. See photo No 29. These include a restaurant, which has created a mooring for visitors only. Similar short term visitor mooring facilities are provided by the Esso filling station. See photo No 30. The distances between locks is short as one moves into the town of Berkhamsted itself, with there being no space on the offside for creation of linear mooring facilities due to the prevailing land uses occupying the land right up to the canal edge. Please refer to aerial photograph number 8.

1.28 There is a prevailing offside mooring and boat yard facility known as Bridgewater Boats, providing boat hire services. The profusion of residential boats mooring on both the towpath side or against amenity land on the offside through Berkhamsted and Northchurch, is documented elsewhere in this proof of evidence and prevailed during my appraisal of the canal in general. The land on either side of the canal is highly developed through the town itself. See photo numbers 31 and 32. The density of development around the canal as it goes through Berkhamsted and Northchurch is illustrated in aerial photograph number 9.

1.29 There is an area of land on the offside, opposite public amenity land, before lock 55, near the train station, which could have provided facilities for a linear mooring . However, at the time of doing this appraisal, I observed the land was being developed for residential purposes and the building was taking place very close to the canal edge. See photo 33. This development would also mean that there would be no provision for car parking for residential boats, even if space for linear mooring facilities could be found along the rear of the site when the present building is finished. This does however, pre-suppose that the owners of this new residential development would agree to such moorings outside their rear windows.

1.30 The area of land between locks 53 and 52, is routinely used by boaters and there are visitor mooring sites for temporary short term mooring. However, many of these spaces have been used as long term mooring for residential boaters. The land on the offside, known locally as "canalfields" provides public open space, car parking for the nearby private tennis club and bowls club And there is a large child's playground nearby. The land on the towpath side is to be the subject of a large development known as Kingsgate for a new Waitrose supermarket. There is no space for provision of a basin and the continued use of the offside for long term moorings, will restrict or prevent genuine short term moorings for boats who are visiting Berkhamsted.

1.31 Moving north up the canal, the river Bulbourne runs roughly parallel to the canal on the towpath side. Various private residences have gardens up to the canal towpath and beyond lock 52, I observed a small industrial estate on the offside, though there does not appear to be sufficient land to accommodate services for a linear mooring scheme. See photo No 34.

1.32 On the opposite side, which is also the towpath side, I have observed there to be an area of land which is presently in industrial use and which is being offered for sale. The land has significant frontage to the Grand Union Canal, (see photo 35) and represents approximately 5.37 acres. I have contacted the agents, namely Gooch and Wagstaff, who have advised me that the land is available for £2.5 million. Copies of the agents' details are appended to this document.( see Appendix 26 ) The price of this land would render it uneconomic for development as a marina. Any proposal to create linear moorings along this stretch would also pose operational problems for the nearby lock and would need to address the problem of vehicle parking and access to the moorings, as well as the site being on the towpath side. The reality is that such a site is clearly more valuable for alternative commercial development, and as such is unlikely to be used for development in the provision of canal moorings. Further along this stretch of canal, is an industrial area on the offside, running between North Bridge Road and the canal. It would appear as though residential mooring or even non residential mooring, would be inappropriate on the offside, as it would require access and facilities behind the industrial buildings, which came very close to the canal edge. See photo number 36. There was however, at the time of my analysis of canalside property, a disused factory, with 0.33 acres of land which was being offered for sale by the agents, Connell Wilson. I have spoken with the appropriate surveyor in this firm, Mr. Chris Parks, and I was advised that the freehold site was under offer and that the site had been offered for sale at £300,000. This site would not be suitable for development as a basin anyway due to its limited size, and would require another land use or source of income to justify this capital expenditure simply to provide a modest mooring facility for between 4 to 6 boats.

1.32 Contd.

Consequently, it is not feasible that this site, or others along this stretch would be developed for moorings. Shortly after this industrial estate, past the new household waste site, is a new housing development, where the properties come down to the canal edge. See photograph number 37. Moving into Northchurch, prevailing residential gardens extend down to the canal side, see photograph number 38, making provision of moorings impossible.

1.33 As the canal moves out of Berkhamsted and Northchurch, there are various land uses either side of the canal. Please refer to aerial photograph number 10.

1.34 Continuing north, as one moves into the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, I have observed an area of land on the offside, between the railway line and the canal, near bridge 138. See photo 39. This site does not appear to be of sufficient size or of the appropriate shape to accommodate a mooring basin, and any linear mooring proposal, would have to address the fact that there is insufficient car parking space, and access to the site would be very close to the hump back bridge on a lane which is very narrow and is the lane leading from Dudswell up to Norcott. Furthermore, the land is in agricultural use, and was observed by me earlier in the year for grazing cattle. Its location in the AONB, and its limited potential for linear mooring makes the development of this site into moorings unlikely.

1.35 The canal towpath again crosses over at bridge 138, and beyond lock 47, the canal moves into more open countryside. See aerial photograph number 11. The land on the offside, would appear to offer an opportunity for the development of a basin, though unfortunately, this site is also in the AONB, and the level of the site is lower than the canal water level which would create technical problems for the construction of a basin. This is in fact the site which adjoins my company's property which is the subject of this appeal. See photo number 40. The rear of the motor dealership next to the application site is shown in photo 41. It has been proposed that a linear mooring behind the motor dealership could be developed and British Waterways feel that they can create a residential offside path, without access through the motor dealership. This proposal is contested and opposed by the occupants of the motor garage premises (see letter from Evans Halshaw BMW in appendix 9) and was not processed by British Waterways, in preference to seeking an off line mooring in the application site. Clearly, this proposal would also be in the Chilterns Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and would require modification or removal of some of the well established vegetation and trees which landscape the motor dealership premises. Furthermore, car parking would have to be found nearby.



1.36 Beyond lock 46, is a permanent linear mooring facility on the offside, and a private marina known as Cow Roast on the towpath side, which is full (see photo No 42) and I understand from BW, that there is a waiting list that some people have been on for over 4 years, in order to obtain a mooring at this location. This stretch of canal, up to the next lock number 45, is the summit of the Grand Union Canal, and a considerable length of this section was cut into the surrounding countryside. See photo 43. The banks to the canal are often steep, particularly as one approaches Tring, and the level of land on either side is frequently higher than that of the water level of the canal, in some places by 30 feet. This would create technical difficulties in the creation of a basin and most of this land appears to be in agricultural use. This stretch of canal is also used by Berkhamsted boys' school for training of the rowing crews. Consequently, it would not be appropriate to establish linear moorings, which would clash with the rowing activities that take place on this section. These technical and operational problems are acknowledged in the report by Dacorum officers to the Policy Committee dated 26 September 1995.

1.37 Beyond bridge 133, is the British Waterways Bulbourne workshops on the off side. (see photo No 44) The towpath has crossed over again and the canal has now moved into open countryside, and the bridges across the canal, are invariably to serve the local lanes or B class roads. Beyond the Bulbourne workshops is the Bulbourne Junction with the Wendover arm of the Grand Union Canal. The canal is now well established in open countryside. See aerial photograph number 12.

1.38 From this point there are a number of locks in rapid succession by the reservoirs, which would render provision of any linear mooring as impractical. See photo 45. Furthermore, the lack of vehicle access and the absence of other facilities nearby such as shops, would not encourage such a use.

1.39 Within a short distance, one reaches another junction with the Aylesbury arm known as the Marsworth Junction. There is a British Waterways boat yard at this location. See aerial photograph number 13 and photo No 46.

1.40 Beyond the Marsworth Junction, there is a short stretch with towpaths on either side. I observed a formalised British Waterways mooring for approximately 10 boats, with 5 additional boats moored on the opposite side on an informal, possibly unauthorised basis. See photo 47. The provision of facilities in the village of Marsworth, has doubtless encouraged boats to moor at this location. However, there is not much room to expand this facility further. The recent application by British Waterways for residential mooring consent at these moorings, has been made to regularise a prevailing use, and is indicative of the shortage of suitable locations for such moorings. From this point, the canal becomes somewhat isolated and passes through peaceful stretches of countryside with good views of the Chiltern hills over to the East. See photos 48 & 49 and aerial photo 14.

1.41 Farmland is on both sides of the canal, and appears to be in prevailing agricultural use, and approaching bridge number 126, there is a small boat lay by operated by Dunstable and Beds Boat Club. See photo No 50 & aerial photograph number 14 . Beyond bridge 126 is the Grebe Canal Cruises facility at Pitstone wharf. See photo No 51.

1.42 There are then eight locks to be negotiated before coming to Grove on the outskirts of Leighton Buzzard. Between these locks, the canal is surrounded by open countryside, see aerial photographs 16, 17 and 18 attached, and there is little in the way of facilities or roads to provide a convenient access or provision of any mooring facility. This situation does not improve until approaching the Grove area on the outskirts of Leighton Buzzard.

1.43 The possibility of mooring facilities on the Wendover arm and Aylesbury arm was also considered. The Wendover arm is only partially navigable and is rather narrow, with overgrown banks, and is located along the border of the Chilterns AONB. I understand that British Waterways feel that it might be possible to create a small linear mooring at New Mill, though various technical problems would need to be addressed. Furthermore, I understand that the whole question of restoration of the Wendover Arm has yet to be finalised and funding for the project is still awaited. There is also a short stretch of canal on the Aylesbury Arm of approximately one mile, which is within the Dacorum area. The Aylesbury arm, whilst navigable, is narrow, and there are 16 locks on the arm, making movement of boats tedious. Clearly to travel in both directions involves negotiating 32 locks. There did not appear to be land readily available for the development of off line mooring basins near to facilities such as shops and bus routes, and the creation of linear moorings appeared impractical . Furthermore, the development of moorings that are not accessed directly onto the main canal line would not be as desirable for canal boat owners.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In order to identify those locations along this 23 mile stretch of the Grand Union Canal, where either linear or off line basins can be sited, it is necessary to consider various factors.

One needs to consider a number of issues quite apart from simply identifying locations on the age of urban areas from a map of the canal.

One must first consider the technical and operational problems associated with mooring on the canal. Namely, for linear moorings, they must be located away from locks, bridges, bends and winding holes.

One must then consider that any linear moorings should be on the off side. The towpath itself is a public right of way along this stretch of canal, and is promoted as part of a continuous walk from London to Birmingham and the mooring of boats on the towpath side, spoils the amenity of the canal for all canal users. Mooring on the towpath side also jeopardises security for residential boats.

**Summary & Conclusions contd.**

The lack of land in British Waterways ownership beside the canal itself, (between 3 to 6 feet ) necessitates use of third party land on the offside.

This land must then be able to provide nearby car parking and facilities for refuse collection and the sanitary station. Ideally, it should also be located near to other facilities such as shops, bus routes, and train stations.

Sites for off line basins, clearly need to be purchased from third party land owners, and such sites must have vehicular access and be of sufficient size and of an appropriate shape, to accommodate a mooring basin. There are also certain engineering prerequisites, which are outside the scope of this appraisal.

From the various inquiries I have made of land by the canal and my appraisal of the land from both the ground and the air, I can conclude that along this 23 mile stretch of the Grand Union Canal, the number of sites that fulfil all these criteria are very limited.

Those that exist are either currently being put to a more valuable land use, or the owner does not wish to accommodate moorings and confer rights over his land to canal users. If the site is for sale, it invariably commands a price that would render it uneconomic for canal side mooring development. I was unable to find any other site that compared as favourably as our own, for the provision of canal moorings on this 23 mile stretch of canal. I was concerned that the prerequisite in the Council's new mooring policy for basins to be located outside the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty would hinder this new policy from resolving the very problem that it identified and is endeavouring to resolve.