
AWSWORTH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

**Great Northern Line
Local Area of Special Character
SUPPORTING EVIDENCE REPORT**

OCTOBER 2019

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Great Northern Line Local Area of Special Character

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of this **supporting evidence report** is to succinctly assess and describe the development and key characteristics of the Great Northern Line Local Area of Special Character (GNLLA), the character and appearance of which the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to conserve and enhance especially through **Policy BED 2** in the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Using recognised methodology, it summarises the distinct appearance and history of the area, illustrating key physical features and characteristics which gives the area its special identity. Through preparing a character assessment document, the existing character of the area can be documented and described.

It has two main roles:

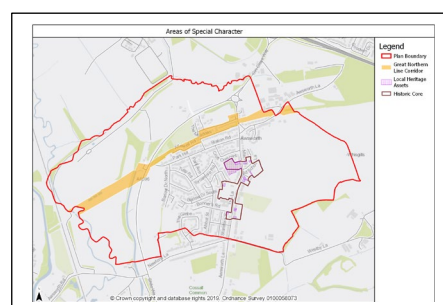
1. Support policies in the Plan and
2. To be used by developers and architects to help them understand the local character, which will contribute to creating sensitively designed proposals to preserve the area's feel and appearance.

Methodology Used

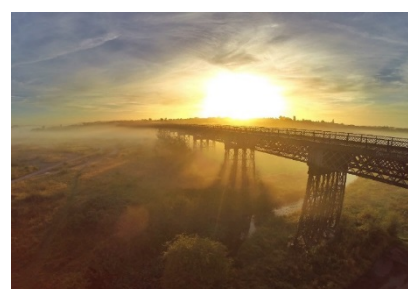
It has been carried out according to guidance from Planning Aid which has produced a pro forma and guidance specifically aimed at groups preparing a character assessment to support design policy within a neighbourhood plan. This provides a recognised and structured approach to identifying and classifying the distinctive character of a settlement or neighbourhood area. A copy of this best practice pro forma and guidance can be found at https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1271765/how_to_prepare_a_character_assessment.pdf

The proforma breaks character down into the following 9 distinct categories:

- Layout, Topography
- Spaces
- Roads, Streets and Routes
- Green and Natural Features
- Landmarks
- Buildings and details
- Streetscape
- Land Use
- Views



Illustrative photos are also provided. A larger map showing the location of the GNLLA can be found below & at Figure 10 - Local Areas of Special Character - in the Submission Draft Plan.



Layout, Topography and Spaces - Relationship of road, space and buildings.

The relationship between the former rail line and the landscape is largely determined by the prescriptive requirements of railway engineering, in particular, the power and speed of the trains. They define the alignment of the railway relative to the landscape. It is the relationship between these now mature civil engineering works and the natural form of the land that creates the distinctive character of the GNLLA.

The proposed GNLLA follows the line of the former Great Northern Railway. It is, therefore, relatively thin and stretches for 1.5 kilometres across the full the width of the Parish in a broadly east-westerly direction.

Opened in 1878, the rail line was built as part of the Great Northern Railway's 'Derby and Staffordshire Extension', from Nottingham to Derby. It last carried traffic in 1968.

The construction drove the Great Northern Railway to an ambitious act of engineering that has left its mark, and had a massive physical, economic and social impact, on both the village and the Parish as well as the wider area. Much of the general form and built form of the GNLLA corridor and adjacent streets has changed relatively little since the late 19th century and is recognisably the same as that shown on the 1880 OS map.

Although some modern development has been allowed along the site of the former embankment between Meadow Road and Barlows Cottages Lane, the line is easily discernible and a significant amount of physical evidence can still be seen. Aerial photographs show how much of the original line remains. For many years the railway line effectively formed the northern limit of the village's expansion and still does so along much of its length.

The most obvious relic is the impressive Grade II* Listed Bennerley Viaduct which marks the route's western extent. The eastern limit is marked by the embankment near the Gate Inn.

Much of the central section can still be found or traced between the Bypass and Gin Close Way, including the site of the old station at Shilo Rec (opened 1st November 1880).

Other important historic structures also survive, including the old Station House (1892), the adjacent site of the level crossing gate, Barlow's Cottages (1874) and Naptha House (c1878).

Much of the route is characterised and surrounded by long stretches of generally attractive countryside, some rich in wildlife and plants, with the marshy ground of 'The Blob' (an important refuge for over-wintering bird species) immediately to the south of the viaduct, particularly remarkable. These open spaces make a strong contribution to its character and appearance.

Immediately north of the viaduct is the expanse of the previously developed but long-derelict land formerly occupied by the Bennerley Coal Disposal Point (BCDP). The main site lies wholly within the Parish, as does the southern part of the long access road from the A610 (known locally as the 'concrete road').

Much of the former railway line is a cycle/walking route, which adds to its value and enjoyment.

The combination of the natural beauty and bold man-made structures still provides a drama for residents and people visiting the Parish. The collection of the Bennerley Viaduct and other important surviving structures from the former railway combined with the generally attractive surrounding countryside forms a coherent and outstanding historic railway landscape of local if not national significance.



The **Great Northern Line Local Area corridor** viewed from the east showing:

(towards bottom left) the end of remnant embankment near the Gate Inn where it enters Awsworth Parish to run close along the northern edge of Awsworth village;

grass field north of Main Street to be developed for housing with Gin Close Way cutting across the line of the former railway at right angles;

mature trees lined along the north side of Meadow Road with newer houses along Barlows Cottages Lane and Barlows Cottages in white;

Shilo Recreation Ground football pitch; the well-wooded triangular area of Shilo Pocket Park; the curving Awsworth Bypass beyond which is the old Nottingham Canal;

wooded end of embankment with line of Bennerley Viaduct extending west to cross over the active Midland Main Line railway; beyond which is the line of the Erewash Canal and the built area of Cotmanhay (at top of picture).



Looking north to Awsworth



Looking east from Cotmanhay to Awsworth

Roads, Streets, Routes - Roads, pavements, footpaths, cycleways, bridleways etc.

Most of the GNLLA corridor has existing or planned provision for cycling and walking. This comprises the route officially known as the 'Great Northern Railway Path'.

The GNRP generally follows the route of the former railway through the Parish. However, where the path joins Awsworth Lane the official route follows (Lower) Main Street, parallel but a little way to the south of where the railway originally ran, rejoining the old line route west of Gin Close Way, where it then follows Meadow Road to Shilo Rec. The middle section between the Bypass and Gin Close Way has paths along all of its length. To the south the GNRP uses Meadow Road as far as the Rec. An alternative route can also be taken using Barlows Cottages Lane along the north side of the corridor where a path links back to the old embankment past the rear of the Station House and onto the Rec. From where the GNRP continues along the route of the old railway, to the south side of Shilo Rec and Shilo Pocket Park, before meeting and crossing the Bypass by means of a pedestrian / cycle central refuge.



Green space looking east from Shilo Rec



Station site at Shilo now part of GNRP

Between Gin Close Way and Awsworth Lane, Public Footpath 14 runs along the north side of the corridor which forms the southern part of a proposed housing site. Just south of Naptha House the GNLLA corridor crosses the route of the Erewash Valley Trail which runs north to south. The trail incorporates Bridleway 17 which runs northwards to link with other parts of the local Rights of Way network. To the south the bridleway passes through Nottinghamshire County Council's Green Estates Site NCC 4 'Awsworth By Pass Creative Conservation Area'. The old canal towpath provides a parallel alternative route south to Newtons Lane in Cossall.

West of the Bypass, approved and funded plans for Bennerley Viaduct will reinstate the line in the form of an ambitious new cycling / walking route to Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, as a continuation of the Great Northern. Railway Path. This will allow a link to the walking / cycle route which already follows the former rail line into Derbyshire.

Sustrans, Railway Paths Limited, Friends of Bennerley Viaduct, Nottinghamshire County Council, Broxtowe Borough Council and the Parish Council are all actively supporting the development of further extensions to the cycle/walking route across the viaduct. This will involve a new link path between the Nottingham Canal towpath and viaduct along the line of the former railway.

Green and Natural Features - Trees, woods hedges, ponds etc

The GNLLA comprises a long thin largely green space that runs in a gently sweeping curve along the route of the former railway. While there are mature trees along much of the corridor these are more limited along the eastern section. The slopes of the abutment near the Gate Inn are covered by hawthorn scrub woodland with open grassland on the former track bed. This embankment extends eastwards out of the Parish towards Kimberley and forms part of Nottinghamshire County Council's Green Estate Site NCC1 'Kimberley Dismantled Railway' which is also a designated Local Wildlife Site.

Westwards as far as Gin Close Way the corridor comprises an open grass field which is due to be developed for housing. By contrast the line of the former embankment north of Meadow Road possesses numerous mature trees between Gin Close Way and Shilo Rec. The southern edge of the Rec is also marked by mature trees on the former cutting which ran alongside Awsworth Station's Derby-bound platform. Further west the wooded area of Shilo Pocket Park includes the Great Northern Railway Path and a short way to the north, at slightly lower level, a parallel path follows the route of an old branch line. At the western edge of the park these two paths join and ramp down to meet the Bypass where the road can be crossed to the Naptha House access road from where the old Nottingham Canal can be reached.

Nottingham Canal is a designated Local Nature Reserve and the northern-most section of the canal which is still in water lies within the GNLLA. The part of the corridor between the Bypass and canal also has good tree cover which extends to the north as Naptha Wood and south along the canal and Bypass. This part of the corridor forms the northern end of NCC's Green Estate Site NCC 4 'Awsworth By Pass Creative Conservation Area', a Local Wildlife Site.

Between the canal and viaduct is a hay meadow (southern part within the corridor) rich in plant and insect species (such as Marsh fragrant-orchid and Broad-bodied Chaser Dragonfly). Further west scrub woodland covers the steep slopes which mark the Bennerley Viaduct embankment, other scrub grows alongside and under the structure itself. A rare remnant of wet-woodland survives to the north east side of the viaduct. To the west of which are 3 former lagoons now home to Great Crested Newts and several species of Dragonfly.

West of the Nottingham Canal the corridor, which includes the viaduct, forms part of an extensive area designated as a Local Wildlife Site. This area of acknowledged wildlife importance occupies about a quarter of the Parish. It includes the derelict Bennerley Coal Disposal Point site and access road to the north and the Erewash Washlands to the south. The river originally marked the Parish's western boundary but opencast coal restoration reinstated the watercourse further west closer to the Midland Main Line.



Wet Woodland



Naptha Wood



Marsh fragrant-orchid

Landmarks - Recognisable local features

The most obvious relic is the (Ilkeston) Bennerley Viaduct which marks the corridor's western extent. Built between May 1876 and November 1877 the impressive, lattice, wrought-iron bridge is the single most prominent feature in the Parish. More than half of the structure stands in Awsworth. At 443 metres (almost ¼ mile) long and 18 metres (60 feet) high this 'Iron Giant' strides south west of the village crossing the floodplain, straddling the River Erewash and Midland Mainline Railway before the line crossed the nearby Erewash Canal. The first commercial traffic passed over the viaduct in January 1878 which was officially opened on the 1st April 1878.

Referred to by D H Lawrence as 'The Black Bridge', the now disused 16-span viaduct offers wide views over and along the Erewash Valley. Long threatened with demolition, this iconic structure survived opencast coal extraction which ravaged much of the valley washlands. Its heritage value is now fully recognised and protected as a Grade II* Listed Building.

Much of the central section can still be found or traced between the Bypass and Gin Close Way, including the site of the old station opened in 1880 along the southern edge of Shilo Rec. The line last carried passenger traffic in September 1964.

Other important historic structures also survive. Of particular note and charm are the old Station House (1892), the adjacent site of the most northerly level crossing gate which marked the station's eastern end, as well as a row of cottages (Barlow's Cottages, 1874) fronting Barlows Cottages Lane. Originally 5 cottages (now 4) built to replace nearby cottages demolished to make way for the new railway. Built in the style of railway cottages it is probable that at least some were occupied by railway workers.

Further west, Naptha House (c1878) was sited at the Naptha and Ammonia Sulphate works, which were extended in 1878 to include a new branch line and a loading stage on the Nottingham Canal.

The character of these buildings and structures are different from the surrounding ones reflecting their age and association with the railway line. Some retain their original features.



Station House from trackside



Barlows Cottages north of the line



Gate Inn lies close to the GNLLA



Front of Station House

Buildings and Details - Type, storeys, age, materials

A key feature of the railway GNLLA corridor is the rate of survival and the absence of alterations of many of the line buildings and structures, some of which retain their original 19th features and details. This adds greatly to its local value and distinctiveness.

Bennerley Viaduct is the most significant structure in the GNLLA corridor. It spans the Erewash Valley where marshy ground combined with the risk of subsidence from underground coal and iron ore workings prevented using a traditional, heavy, brick-arched viaduct. The ingenious solution was a lightweight structure of wrought-iron latticework trestles resting on slim brickwork piers or pads. With no real foundations the entire structure is held in place by gravity alone. Some 500,000 hand-driven rivets hold the structure together. It is one of only two surviving rail viaducts made of wrought-iron in the UK.

Buildings are typically constructed of red brick and slate tiled roof. However, the old Station House is unusually built of blue engineering bricks which gives it a distinctive look, especially combined with the metal window frames and small individual glass panes. This building has been sympathetically extended using matching brickwork and roof tiles. The house sits below the level of the former railway line to its south side and the adjacent level crossing.

Barlows Cottages have been much gentrified in recent years, which means that the whole frontage has been rendered / painted so masking the original red brickwork. Numbers 1 and 2 form a single dwelling. Although some of the roof slates are modern replacements they at least present a uniform colour across the row. Fortunately, the original date stone survives (Barlows Cottages 1874).

Naptha House has also been extended, rendered and painted so as to mask the original red brick though some detail can still be discerned and the slate roof retained. Although the cottages and Naptha House have lost some of their original integrity their value remains in the form of their historic significance and association with the Great Northern Railway.



Bennerley Viaduct towards Awsworth



Naptha House



One of the 3 lagoons



GNR Path east to Shilo Rec



Midland Main Line

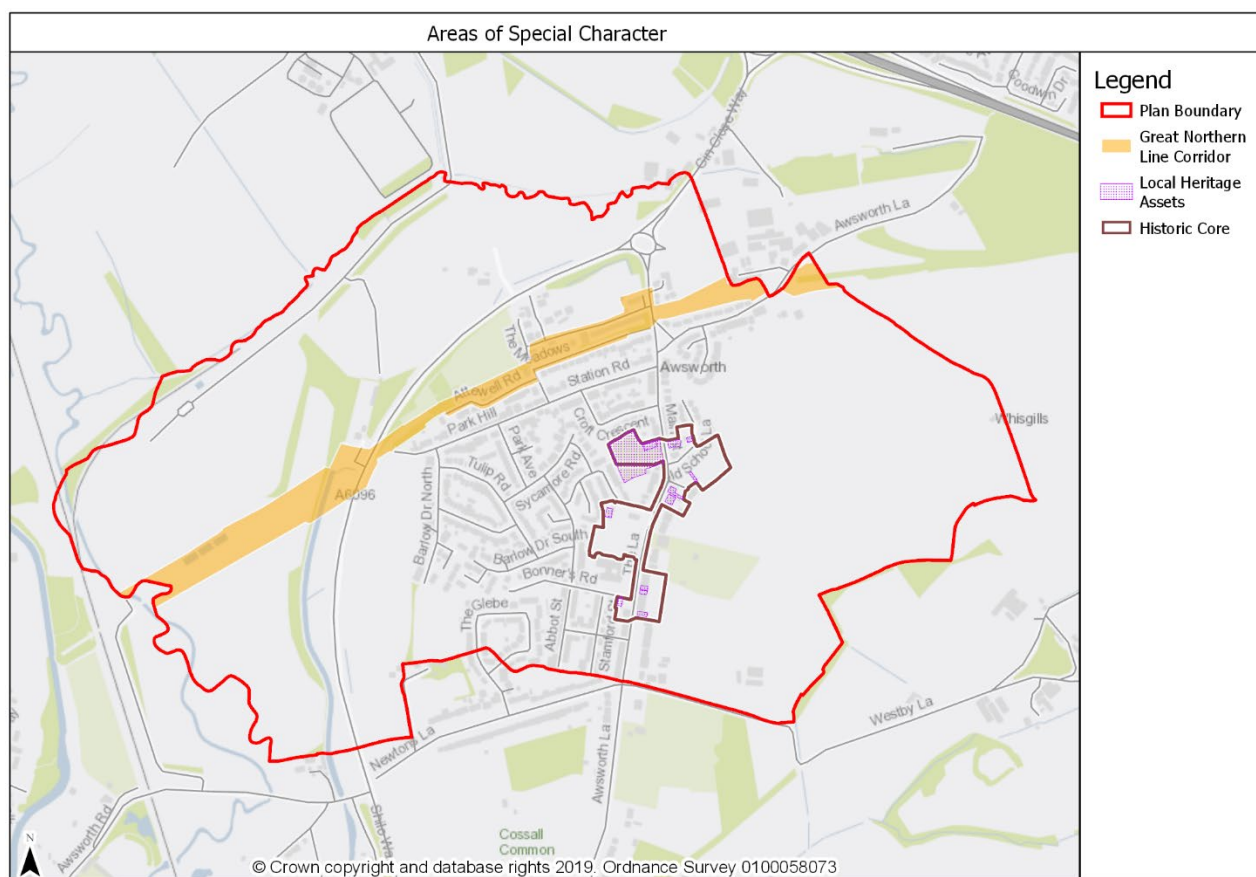
Streetscape - Lamp posts, benches, signage, boundaries

This is somewhat limited and mainly comprises scattered lamp posts and signage. To the east a metal finger post direction sign near the Gate Inn indicates the route of the 'Great Northern Railway Path' where it enters the Parish and descends the embankment at Awsworth Lane. At the top of the embankment steps is an interesting railway artefact in the form of a small hand-propelled rail car.

In the central section several benches are located close along the line of the former railway station at the southern edge of the Shilo Rec. Further west a single bench is provided on the ramped approach to the Bypass.

An illustrated board situated at the south east corner of the Rec near the main entrance explains the history of the Shilo area, including the railway heritage. A new metal display board explaining the story of Bennerley Viaduct stands at a viewing point off the Nottingham Canal.

The approved restoration project for Bennerley Viaduct provides a good opportunity to consider the provision of more seats and in particular explanatory boards relating the Great Northern Line's history and contribution to the Parish and wider area.



Land use - Residential, leisure, commercial, retail, community etc.

The area is primarily characterised by open spaces with limited development. There is some constrained development linked with the former railway including most notably the Bennerley Viaduct, the former station house and rail-side cottages. The line formed mainly of high embankments has acted to largely constrain the northward expansion of the village. Only in more recent years has new housing been built north of the route. In The Meadow there are several bungalows, some of which replaced older buildings. It was the early 2000s when some two dozen new houses were built on the northern part of the former embankment close along Barlow Cottages Lane.



Embankment at east end of corridor GNLLA



View east along line from Gin Close Way



Unsympathetic development



GNLLA corridor south of Meadow Road



Site of old station southern crossing gate



Site of northern crossing gate

Views - Important views into and out of the area

The combination of the natural beauty of the area and bold man-made structures provides for attractive, and in some instances, dramatic long and close distance views especially over the western part of Awsworth Parish.

Of particular note are the splendid long views from the 60 foot high deck of Bennerley Viaduct both up and down the Erewash Valley, especially those to the south towards Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station and into Leicestershire. This vantage point also affords views of Newthorpe on higher ground further to the north east.

To the immediate north of the viaduct is the flat expanse of the former Bennerley Coal Disposal Point while to the south the route of the River Erewash meanders across the open floodplain to Newtons Lane where it leaves the Parish.

Views across the valley are more constrained by topography. Nonetheless, striking views are also possible of the western edge of Awsworth village straddling the valley's eastern flank, the buildings elevated above and beyond the tree-lined Nottingham Canal and Bypass.

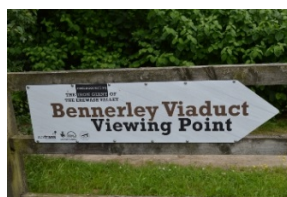


View east along deck of Bennerley Viaduct across the Erewash Valley floodplain towards old Nottingham Canal and Awsworth village on the skyline

Old rail car now a bench



North to viaduct



Sign board



Erewash flows south



South along MML



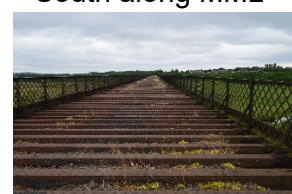
The Blob



Nottingham Canal



Near Gate Inn



Over 500 girders

Key detracting features

That the grain and legibility will be further eroded or indeed lost especially by unsympathetic development. Further loss of the corridor to development threatens the integrity of the route. Regretably, planned new housing development at Gin Close Way will require part of the corridor to be built upon. However, this may allow public access to more closely follow the original route of the line in this area. This could usefully incorporate Public Footpath 14 as it heads to Gin Close Way if it is done carefully. Also, it may be possible to reflect the rail heritage in the development in some way, for example in street names or explanatory display boards.

The loss of original materials and details. Mainly damage through inappropriate alterations to traditional residential buildings. Note however that the old Station House is a good example of sympathetic restoration and extension. Likewise, loss of traditional slate roofing materials and unsympathetic replacement materials.

This potentially includes neglect; allowing the route to become overgrown and the consequent lack of public access. However, off greater concern is vandalism (such as arson) and anti-social behaviour through illegal use of off-road motorbikes and quadbikes, which is a perennial problem on and adjacent to the corridor giving rise to physical damage, public safety issues and can also deter visitors to the area. The extensive area of derelict land at Bennerley is a magnet for such activities. Restoration of the viaduct will hopefully help encourage people to respect the area. Re-use of land at Bennerley for a 'Country Park' or similar allowing informal public access would also enhance the GNLLA.



Burnt-out vehicles



Derelict land



Off-road bikers



New housing

The erosion or loss of significant views and into, out of and through the area. In this respect the key requirement is to protect views of and from the landmark Bennerley Viaduct.



View north of Bennerley Viaduct with Bennerley Coal Disposal Point land behind (edged red). Nottingham Canal alongside Shilo Way (A6096 Awsworth Bypass). Western edge of Awsworth village to right with Shilo Rec & Pocket Park between built area & Bypass.