

Heritage Impact Assessment for Proposed ‘Access for All’ at Dalneigh, Caledonian Canal, Inverness.

1.0 Introduction

This assessment looks at the impact of a proposed access path to the canal on the physical and visual heritage of the canal immediately south of Muirtown Locks. (Fig 1). This assessment is based on desk based research and a field reconnaissance survey conducted in December 2016.

2.0 Justification

Although there are five existing access routes onto the canal south towpath from Fairfield Road to Tomnahurich Swing Bridge in Inverness (see Table below), a distance of approximately 2km, only Fairfield Road and Tomnahurich Swing Bridge offer ‘access for all’, the gradient of the others being prohibitively steep for some of our users including those reliant on wheelchairs. Therefore, we wish to offer safe access for all our users.

Existing access onto the Caledonian Canal south towpath, Inverness
Fairfield Road
Dalneigh Playing Fields
New Dalneigh housing
Bruce Gardens
Tomnahurich Swing Bridge (A82)

Linking the proposed access to an established tarmac path across the playing fields will reduce by 600m the walk from the playing fields to the towpath, and takes advantage of the established path that links to the local amenities of Dalneigh (See Figs 3 and 4).

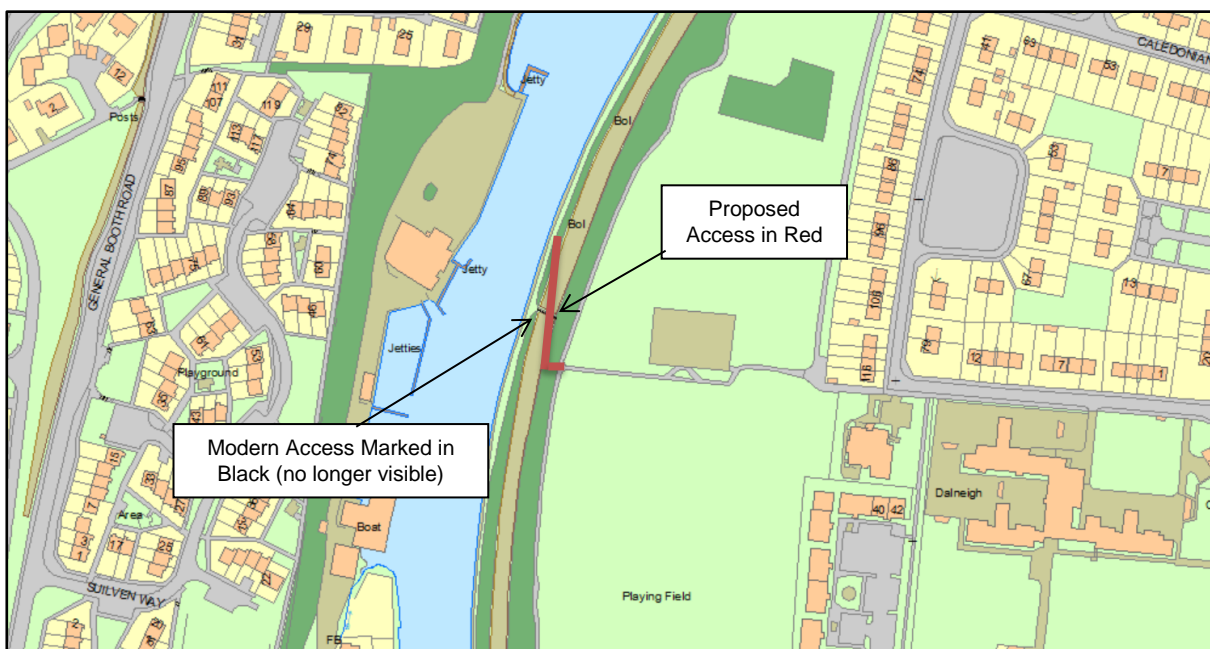
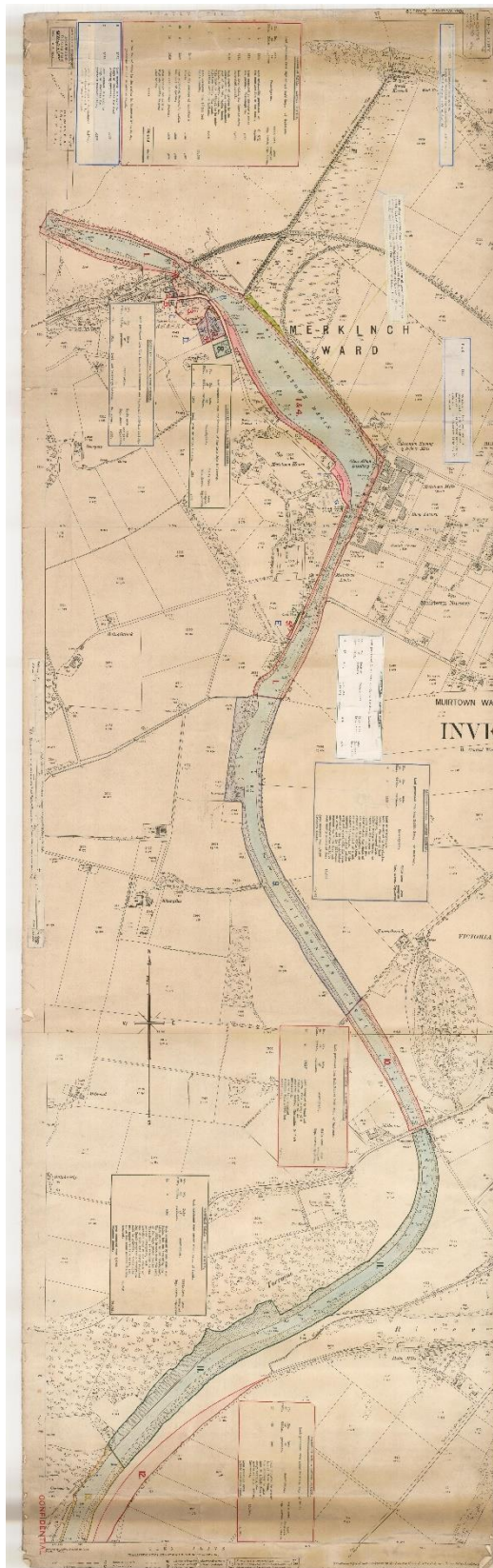


Fig 1. Location plan of proposed access which also shows the modern access stairs of which there is little or no physical evidence.



3.0 Physical Impact

Scottish Canals considers that it is highly unlikely that there would be archaeological remains within the embankment that could be impacted upon, as the steepness of the embankment would preclude the construction of buildings. This is borne out by map research.

None of the maps listed show any signs of structures at the location of the proposed access route, except the canal embankment itself. Historically there have been access paths terminating at the bottom of the embankment such as the path from Planefield Cottage, but no evidence of access continuing up the embankment (OS Plan of 1874).

The current OS map shows a set of stairs cut into the embankment, however during the field reconnaissance survey on 5/12/2016, the only evidence of these putative stairs were possible shallow hollows in the embankment that may correspond to the treads and riser components of stairs, however there were no visible signs of the access stairs themselves. Scottish Canals staff who have worked this section of the canal for 30 years do not recall access stairs at this location. Historically Scottish Canals have annotated access points and rights of servitudes on OS plans, the 1903 OS plan of this section of canal has no such annotations (Fig 2).

The canal bank is also heavily vegetated and therefore the ground will be heavily disturbed through the process of bioturbation; further reducing the likelihood of archaeological remains. Some small trees, scrub and ground vegetation will need to be removed in order to construct the access.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that it is unlikely that there are archaeological remains buried within the embankment, and that the ground disturbance associated with the installation of the new proposed access track will be limited to the earthen embankment of the canal.

4.0 Visual Impact

Visually the access track will be largely screened by the vegetation that already grows on the canal embankment. Therefore, the principal visual elements that define the canal, i.e. those that are seen to the north and south of the proposed access, which include the towpath, lock flight, canal in water, and historic bollards, will not be impeded (Fig 5 and 6).



Fig 3. View of canal embankment from the playing fields. This is also the location of the start of the access to the canal.



Fig 4. Another view of canal embankment from the playing fields. This is also the location of the start of the access to the canal.

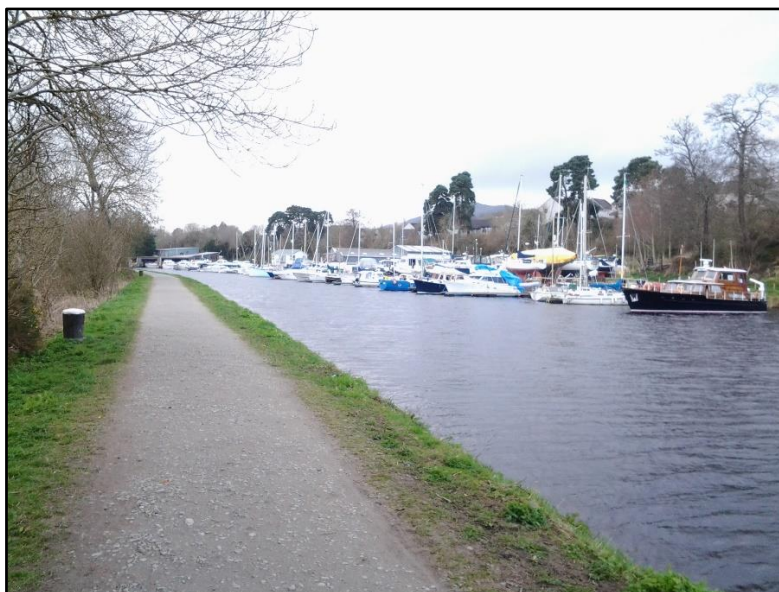


Fig 5. View looking South. The proposed access track will merge with the existing canal path at the location of the furthest bollard, but will not impact on the bollard, nor impede the significant views along the canal.



Fig 6. View North. The new access path will join the South Towpath at this location.

5.0 Conclusion

There are established access points to the Caledonian Canal between Muirtown Lock Flight and Tomnahurich Swing Bridge to the south, but unfortunately they do not cater for people with impaired movement as the gradient is too steep. The establishment of an access track will allow ease of access to these users and reduce the detour needed to be taken from the Dalneigh Housing Estate and amenities to the towpath.

The physical and visual impact on the historic features of the canal is minimal, and is outweighed by the community benefits that the access will bring.

Appendix 1. Maps Consulted in this Study

Inverness-shire (Mainland), Sheet XII (includes: Daviot And Dunlichity; Inverness And Bona)
Survey date: 1868-70 Publication date: 1874

<http://maps.nls.uk/view/74427036>

Inverness-shire - Mainland Sheet XII (includes: Daviot and Dunlichity; Inverness and Bona)
Publication date: 1906 Date revised: 1902

<http://maps.nls.uk/view/75832282>

Inverness-shire - Mainland Sheet XII.NW (includes: Inverness and Bona)
Publication date: 1932 Date revised: 1929

<http://maps.nls.uk/view/75632375>

Inverness-shire - Mainland Sheet XII.NW (includes: Inverness and Bona)
Probable Publication date: ca. 1947

<http://maps.nls.uk/view/75632372>

NH64 (includes: Inverness / Inbhir Nis)
Publication date: 1950

<http://maps.nls.uk/view/91626627>