

5.1 G. Canal Corridor

Character Area Assessment

Location

This character area follows the route of the Shropshire Union Canal eastwards from the City Centre, stretching for over 1.3km between Brook Street in the west and Tarvin Road in the east.

Sub-Areas

The area has been divided into four sub-areas:

- **G1. Union Terrace** – the canal and adjoining land between Brook Street and St Oswalds Way.
- **G2. Seller Street** – a predominantly residential area to the south of the canal, between St Oswalds way and City Road.
- **G3. City Road Bridge to Hoole Lane Lock** – a mixed-use corridor of canalside apartments and commercial/leisure uses operating from converted warehouses, including the former Steam Flour Mill.
- **G4. Water Works** – between Hoole Lane Lock and Chemistry Lock, taking in Boughton Water Tower and an area of terraced housing on the north side of the canal.



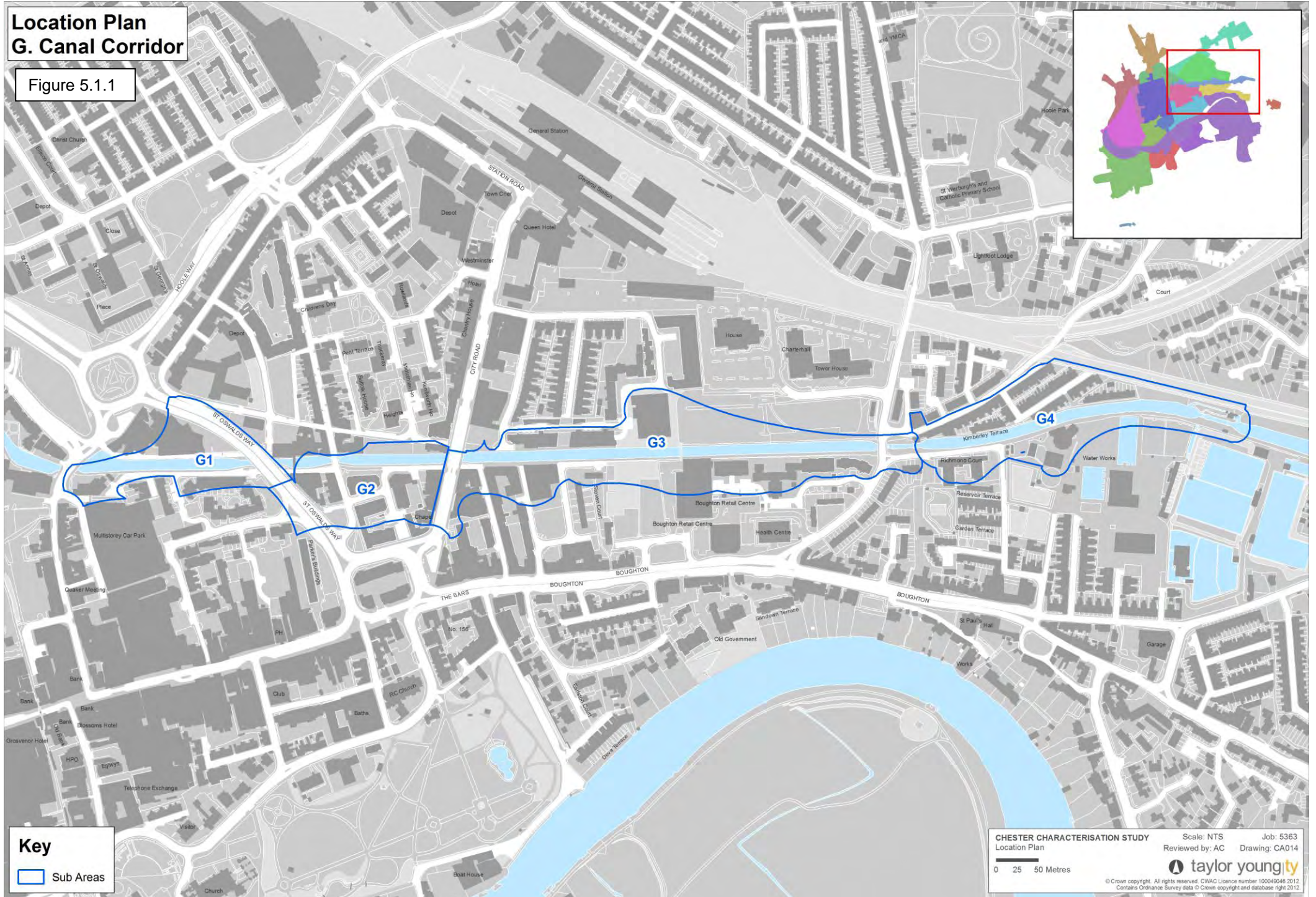
Canal Side (G1)



City Road Bridge to Hoole Lane (G3)

Location Plan G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.1



Key
□ Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Location Plan
Scale: NTS
Reviewed by: AC
Job: 5363
Drawing: CA014
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Historical Development

The Shropshire Union Canal in Chester incorporates the older Chester Canal. This was completed in 1779 to provide access to the port from the salt mines at Nantwich, in response to the perceived threat of the Trent and Mersey Canal and the growth in the city of Liverpool. It was a broad canal, designed with locks which were suitable for broad beam barges. This canal initially had a tenuous existence. The Chester Canal was intended to serve the salt industry of Cheshire, linking the River Dee to Nantwich. However, a planned branch to Middlewich was not built and failure to reach an agreement with the Dee River Company caused delays. In 1795 the construction of the Wirral section of the Ellesmere Canal linked the Chester Canal to the River Mersey and made the canal profitable. After a merger in 1846 Chester Canal became the oldest part of the Shropshire Union Canal network. Profitability was maintained, to the extent that the Chester Canal remained open when other parts of the Shropshire Union Canal network closed in 1944. The canal remains popular today for pleasure boaters.

The development of the canal resulted in the industrial expansion of the city centre eastwards. Major industrial developments such as the Leadworks and Steam Mill located along the canal as it provided an efficient means of transportation for raw materials. The Steam Mill, built in 1785, is significant because it was the first steam powered canalside flour mill.

During the 19th Century, the lead industry became one of Chester's major industries. Chester Shot Tower is located on the site of the former Leadworks and was built by Walker, Parker and Co in 1799. It is the oldest of the few remaining shot towers in the UK and was one of the earliest built to manufacture lead shot using the method pioneered in the 1780s by the Bristol inventor William Watts' musket. Shot produced here was used in the Napoleonic Wars. The Leadworks closed in 2001 and the most of the remaining buildings, with the exception of the listed tower, were

demolished around 2004 to make way for regeneration of the area. A small park by the canal on part of the former site was opened in 2006.

Boughton has always been important as a source of water supply to the City and the water treatment works here have been treating water from the River Dee for over 150 years. Boughton Water Tower is situated close to the springs that served both the Roman fortress and the medieval abbey and town. In Roman times water from the springs at Boughton was carried into Chester along a series of clay, lead or elm pipes.

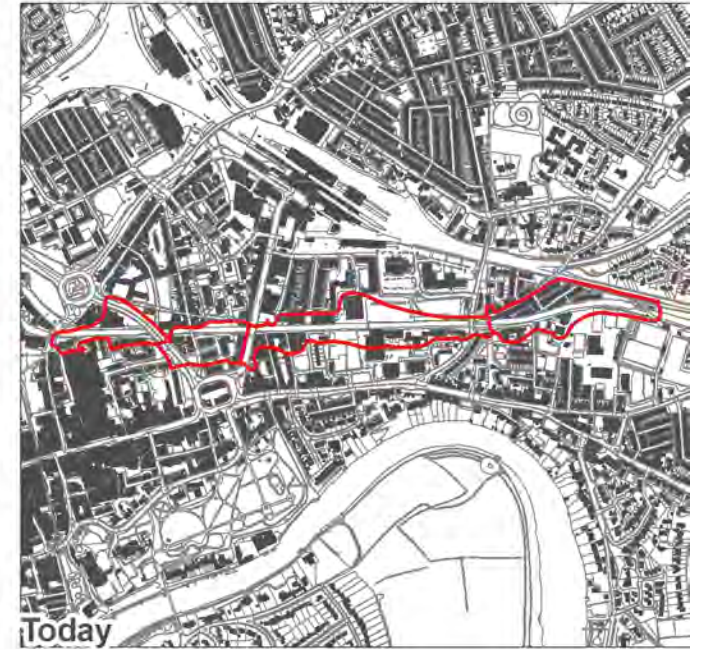
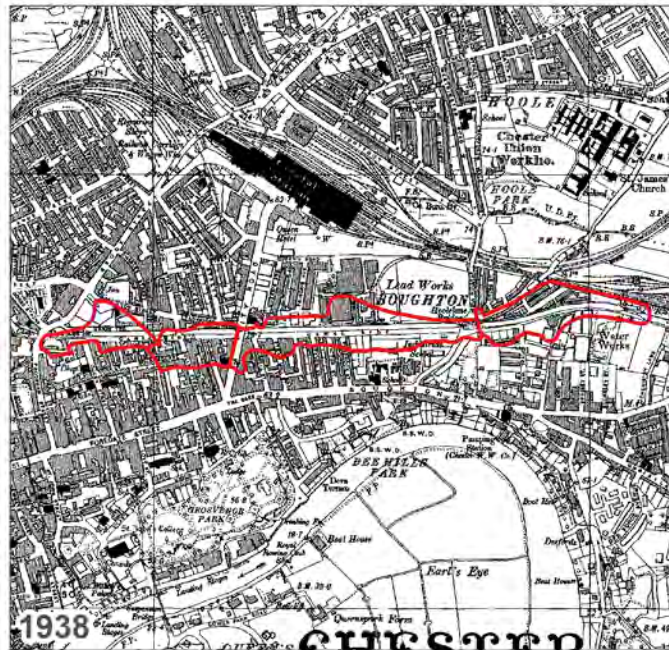
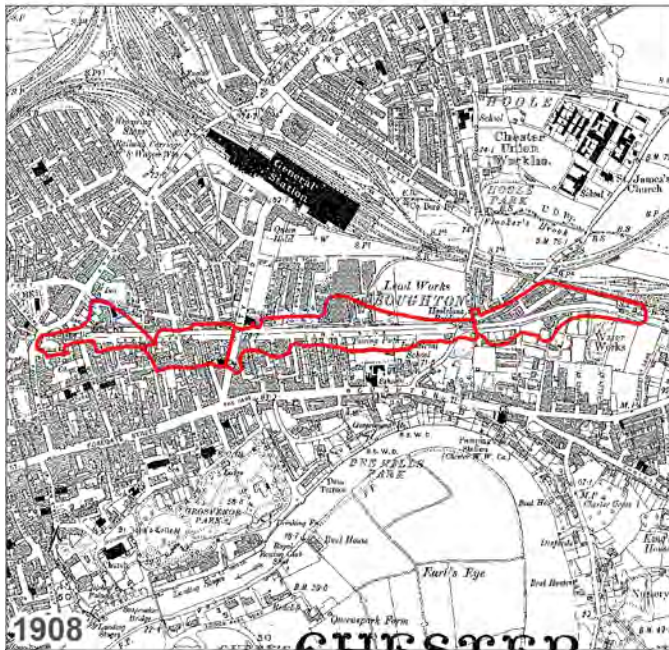
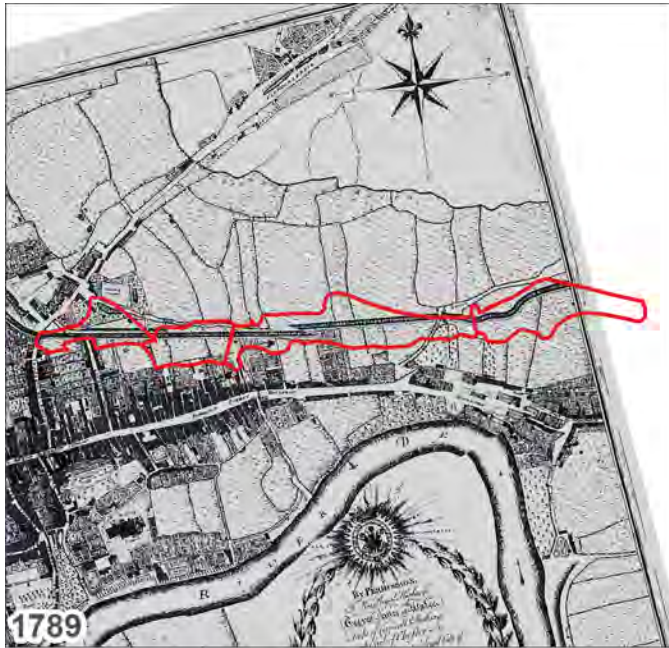
Development of these major industries was supported by dense terraced Victorian housing for industrial workers. This can be seen on Seller Street, as well as in surrounding streets to the north and south of the Canal Corridor.



Former Gaumont Cinema viewed from Cow Lane Bridge (1930s)

Historical Development G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.2



Land-uses

Residential development is the predominant land-use within this character. Leisure uses are also strongly represented, reflecting the canalside setting and its recreational value.

A number of modern apartment schemes have taken place along the canalside in recent years, particularly along the south side, including around The Square, Wharton Court. On the north side, there are also two large residential blocks south of Shot Tower Close, overlooking the canal. More traditional terraced housing is concentrated in sub-area G4, along Hoole Lane and Watertower View, and along Seller Street.

A variety of retail and leisure uses can be found along either side of City Road, as well on ground floors of properties along the canal towpath. Key leisure uses in the area include a bingo hall, gymnasium and hotel.

The former Milns Seeds Warehouse (now branded, incorrectly, as the 'Steam Mill' - the true Steam Mill is actually on the opposite side of Steam Mill Street) has been converted into office and commercial space.

Urban Form

This character area has a strong urban form, with buildings along both sides of the canal providing a strong sense of enclosure and containment to the space. The urban grain is more fragmented along the northern side of the canal where areas of landscaping and surface car parking provide breaks in the built form. On the southern side, although the building line varies, buildings are generally set a comfortable distance back from the water's edge providing a generous towpath and public realm area.



Buildings set well back from canal edge

Views north or south are restricted by the built form along the canalside. The principal views are therefore in east and west directions along the length of the canal. Boughton Water Tower and Chester Lead Tower are both city-wide landmarks that are evident from many parts of the city and are strong features along the canal. City Road bisects the area and rises above the canal providing a good viewing platform in both directions. The red brick bulk and chimney stack of the Mill Hotel & Spa dominates the view east along the canal from the Brook Street end. A view of the Cathedral is possible looking west along Bold Square.

There are a series of contemporary apartment developments along the canal's edge, including around The Square and Wharton Court. These developments relate well to the water, with active frontages providing natural surveillance of the towpath. Their scale and massing relates well to the historic former Milns Seeds Warehouse (now branded the 'Steam Mill') and adjoining former warehouse.



A modern apartment development overlooking the canal

The strong built form breaks down towards the eastern end of sub-area G3 and the area develops a more open character. There is a large vacant site (former St Paul's Nursery School) and a significant length of frontage on the northern side of the canal is taken up by surface car parking. The area has unrealised potential although the Shot Tower site is under redevelopment (though stalled at the time of writing) for a mixed-use residential and commercial scheme. Boughton Retail Centre backs onto the canal providing an unattractive frontage along this section of the towpath.



Boughton Retail Centre




Canalside development (sub-area G1)

Urban Form
G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.3



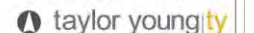
Key

 Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Figure Ground – G. Canal Corridor

Scale: NTS Job: 5363
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Townscape Character

The area as a whole lacks a unifying townscape character with no single style or age of property dominating overall. That said, most buildings, particularly along the canal frontage, are typically of a larger scale, reflecting the industrial heritage of the canal itself.

Residential development comprises a mix of both contemporary three to five storey apartment blocks together with smaller scale Victorian terraces such as those along Seller Street (G2) and along Water Tower View and Hoole Lane (G4)

The long curve of terraces along the eastern side of Hoole Lane (G4) is a strong townscape feature but the narrow street is dominated by traffic and parked cars. The Water Tower looms large in the background of the houses. Properties back onto the canal behind small rear gardens providing visual interest and surveillance of the towpath. The character develops a more semi-rural quality as one travels eastwards beyond the Water Tower.

In terms of materials, the use of red-brown brick predominates. Buildings are typically more functional in their appearance, displaying none of the vernacular revival elements found elsewhere in the City.

The Square (G2) is a contemporary development of six blocks of apartments, predominantly four storeys high accessed off Seller Street. It has a strong urban character with buildings set to either back-of-pavement or with low boundary walls and minimal soft landscaping.

There is a fine three-storey terrace on City Road within the study area. This includes a variety of red-brown brick and cream render with interesting details such as decorative brickworks, window surrounds and, notably, an early, colonial-style veranda.



Terraces along Hoole Lane



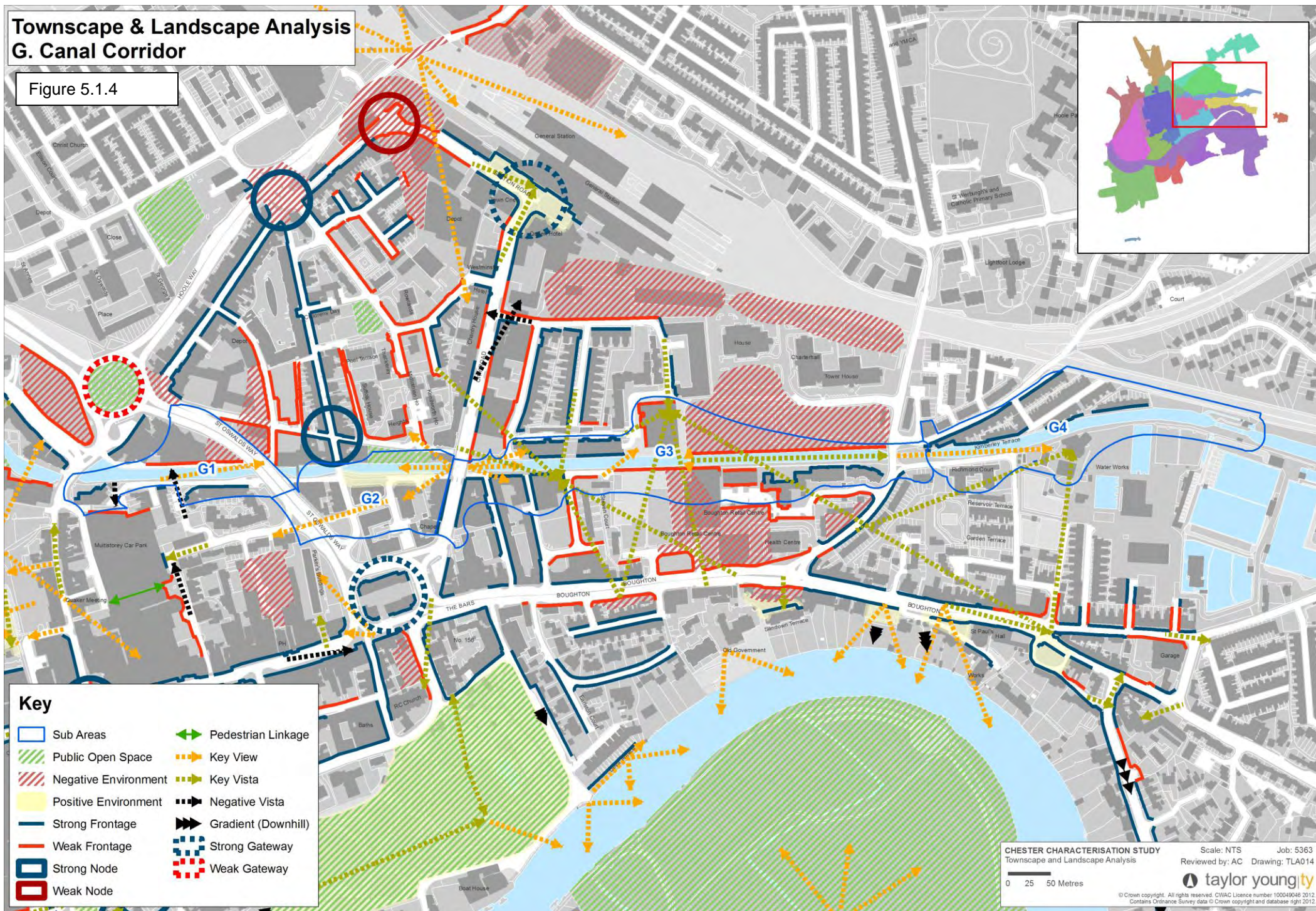
City Road

G. Canal Corridor: Typical Materials and Details



Townscape & Landscape Analysis G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.4



Key

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Sub Areas | Pedestrian Linkage |
| Public Open Space | Key View |
| Negative Environment | Key Vista |
| Positive Environment | Negative Vista |
| Strong Frontage | Gradient (Downhill) |
| Weak Frontage | Strong Gateway |
| Strong Node | Weak Gateway |
| Weak Node | |

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Townscape and Landscape Analysis

Scale: NTS Job: 5363
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Landscape Character

The canal itself is an important recreational route and is well used by pleasure boats and pedestrians as a car free route into the City centre. On the whole, the character of this section of the canal is essentially urban, although it develops a more open, rural character further east.

The quality of the public realm along the canal is good, especially between Seller Street and City Road, where surfaces are decoratively paved and planted boxes help to soften the urban feel of the area. The towpath itself is treated with tarmac. Leadworks Lane Park, on the north side of the canal, is the area's only area of public open space. It provides a welcome contrast to the strong built form and provides valuable public access to the water's edge.



Leadworks Lane Park

Designated Heritage Assets

This character area straddles the boundaries of two conservation areas. The eastern section (G1 & G2), stretching from Brook Street to City Road Bridge, falls with the City Conservation Area. The remaining section (G3 & G4), are covered by the Boughton Canalside conservation area.

The area contains some important listed buildings associated with Chester's industrial past, including the Grade II* Shot Tower, built in 1799 primarily to provide lead shot for the Napoleonic Wars. Some of the canal infrastructure, namely Chemistry Lock and Cottage and Hoole Lane lock, also have listed status.

- **English Presbyterian Church of Wales** (Grade II, 1864)
- **Chapel House of the Presbyterian Church of Wales** (Grade II, 1880)
- **Former Milns Seeds Warehouse, Steam Mill Street** (Grade II, 1785)



- **Former Steam Mill, west of Steam Mill Street (Grade II, 1897)**



- **Chester Leadworks and Shot Tower, Leadworks Lane (Grade II*, 1799)** – the rest of this site was being redeveloped but at the time of writing this redevelopment has stalled.



- **Hoole Lane Lock (Grade II, 1775)**



- **Chemistry Lock (Grade II, 1775) and Lock Keeper's Cottage (Grade II, 1800)**



- **Boughton Water Tower** (Grade II, 1853) and **Control Room** (Grade II, 1913)



Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Five un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit of been identified in the area.

- **G2a: 31 Bold Square** – a three-storey Georgian townhouse.



- **G2b: 29-31 City Road** – a three-storey Georgian style terrace with stone surround sash windows.



- **G2c: City Road Terrace** – a three-storey Victorian terrace with decorative brickwork and a colonial-style timber veranda.



- **G3a: Old Harker's Arms** – a four-storey Victorian warehouse along the Shropshire Union Canal.



- **G4b: Former Mission Chapel** – an Arts and Crafts style former chapel adjacent to the canal.



Key Detractors

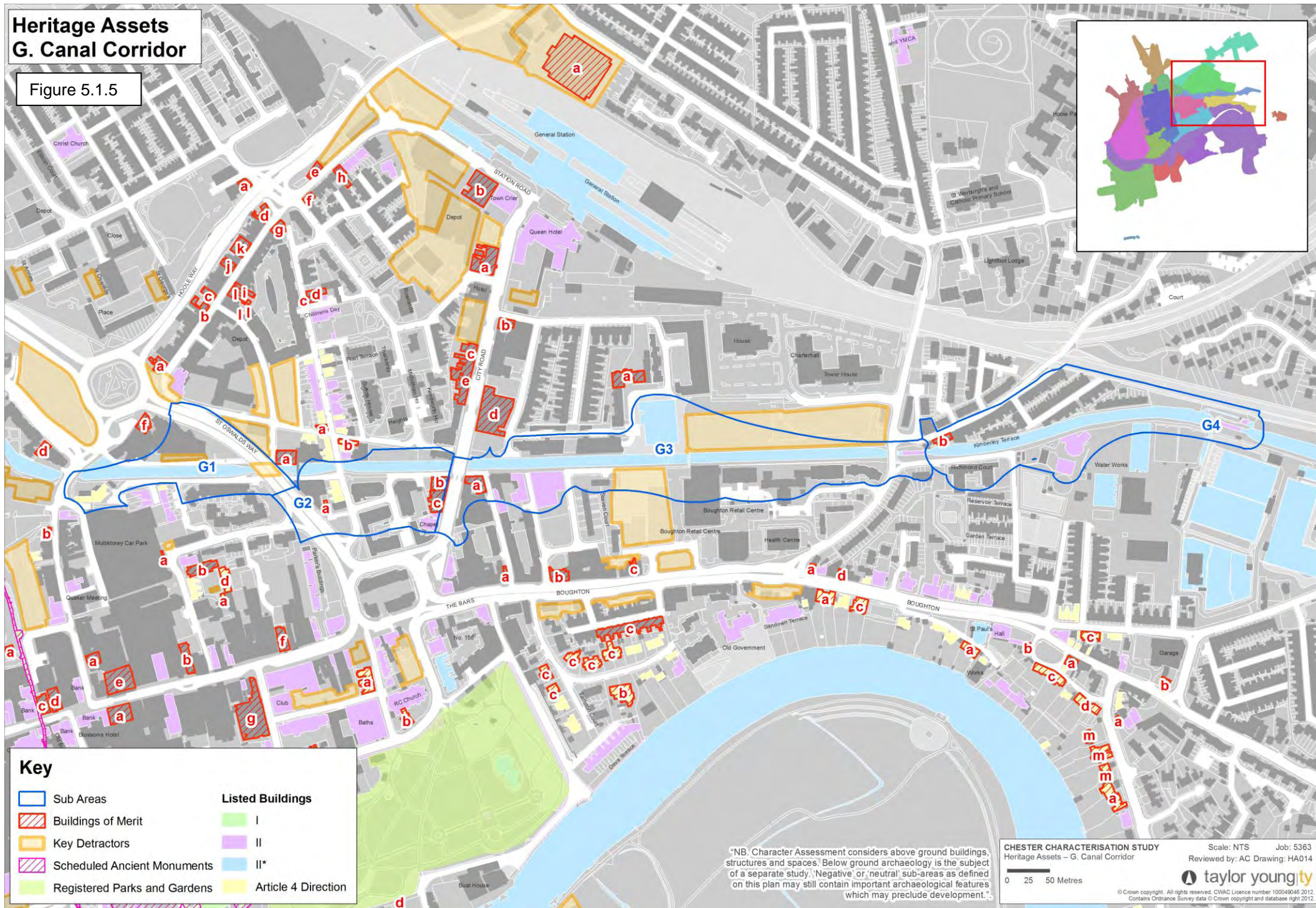
The two main detractors that have been identified in this area relate to instances where the rear of properties back onto the canal, presenting dead frontage to the waterfront. This is the case with the bingo hall in area G2 and also with Boughton Retail Centre (G3). However, these examples are atypical of the area, where most buildings address the canal in a positive way.

The third detractor is the vacant site of the former St Paul's Nursery School which has been included primarily due to the poor boundary treatment along the canal's edge rather than the appearance of the site itself (the site also appears as a detractor in the adjacent area Q).

The surface car park on the north bank of the canal, opposite Boughton Retail Centre, is included as it occupies a significant length of canal frontage and represents a poor use of this high profile site and disrupts the urban form.

Heritage Assets G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.5



"NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development."

Summary: Character Assessment

In summary, the character assessment for the sub-areas is as follows:

- **G1. Union Terrace: Positive** – a pleasant canalside area close to the city centre.
- **G2. Seller Street: Positive** – comprising mostly of contemporary apartments but including a historic row of terraces along Sellers Street and the elegant English Presbyterian Church of Wales and Chapel house.
- **G3. City Road Bridge to Hoole Lane Lock: Critical** – includes the Grade II former Steam Flour Mill and the Grade II* listed Shot Tower.
- **G4. Water Works: Positive** – predominantly Victorian housing but including the Grade II listed Water Tower.



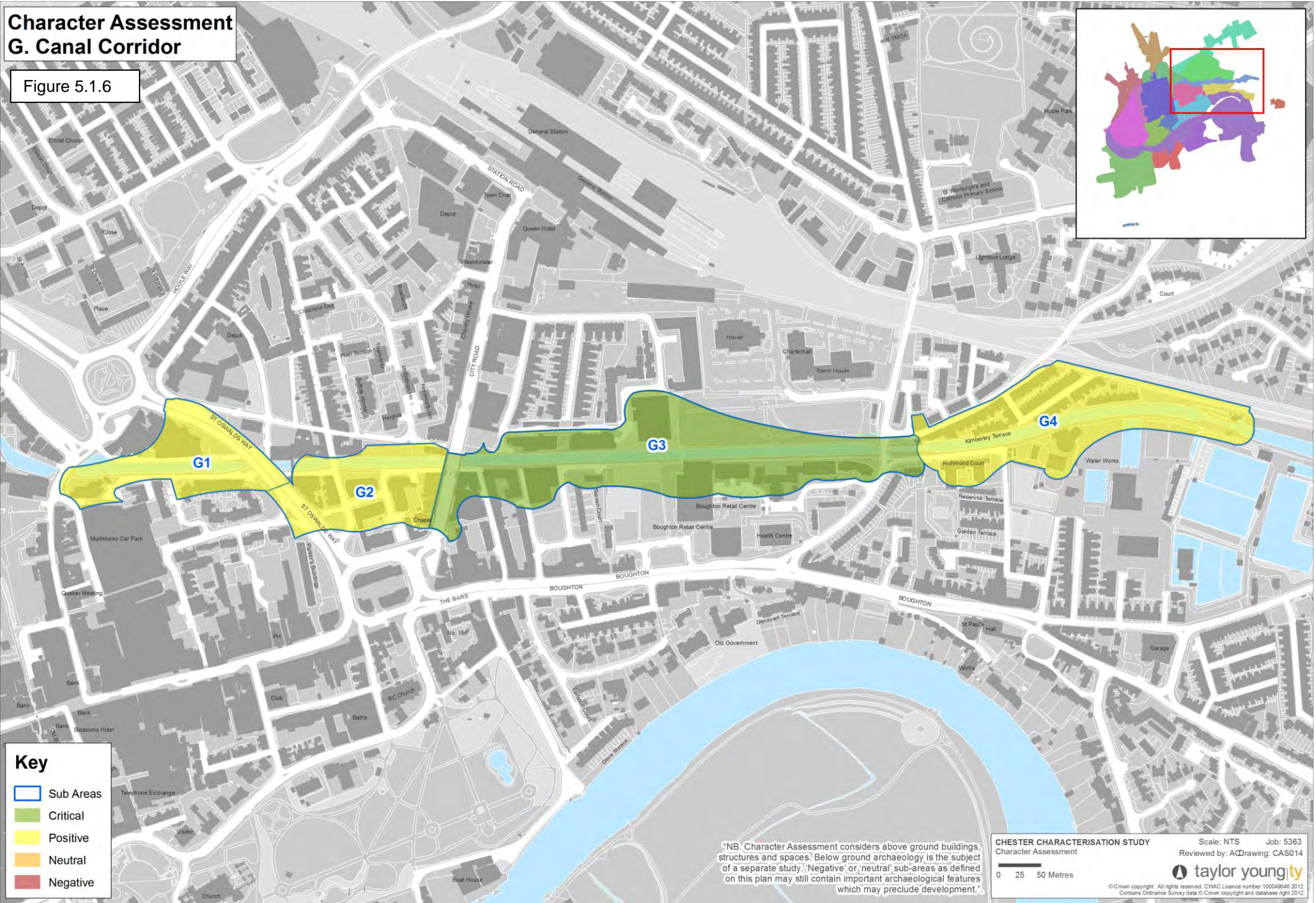
Character Statement

“An important recreational corridor, leisure destination and link to Chester’s industrial past, with a legacy of restored Victorian warehouses and industrial infrastructure, exemplified by the Former Steam Flour Mill and Boughton Water Tower. This area is characterised by high density contemporary living accommodation and workspace in a waterside setting. It has strong urban character and built form, with buildings of a scale which gives them presence along the water’s edge”



Character Assessment G. Canal Corridor

Figure 5.1.6



Key

- Sub Areas
- Critical
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

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CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Character Assessment

Scale: NTS Job: 5363
Reviewed by: ACDrawing: CAS014

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Management and Policy Recommendations

Conservation management has been generally successful here. Historical buildings have mostly been well preserved, with new uses being found for old industrial buildings. A number of buildings however would benefit from refurbishment or selective alteration. New development has generally made some effort to reflect the area's history and townscape in its form and appearance. The canal corridor has benefited from its inclusion within a number of conservation areas. There are, however, vacant sites and 20th century development on some sites (especially in G3) that do not reflect the importance of the canalside. Elsewhere there are a number of external environments alongside the canal that would benefit from an improved public realm (i.e. the detractor site on the northside of the canal in sub-area G1 and the road underpass in this area).

Capacity to Accommodate Change

The vacant canalside sites in sub-area G3 currently detract from local character and offer the opportunity for new canalside development. Elsewhere the high density of existing development offers few opportunities for significant new development.

Design Principles for New Development

New development on the vacant canalside sites should follow these design principles:

- A strong frontage to the canalside is paramount. Whilst this may not necessarily be the front of the building the frontage needs to be well articulated and have a large number of windows, and ideally a door, facing the canal.

- The buildings should be of a significant scale and massing, in response to existing historic canalside buildings. A domestic scale will not be appropriate here. Canalside buildings need to be at least three storeys in height and in a terrace or block form.
- The canalside buildings should front the canal directly with a back-of-pavement form. The space between the building and the canal requires a high quality public realm treatment with a hard, urban form, having consistency with adjacent edge treatments. This should either allow pedestrian linkage, on the towpath side, or allow private or public access up to the canal edge, on the other side.
- Views of the Water Tower, Steam Mill and former Milns Seeds Warehouse and Shot Tower should be respected by the new built form.

