



Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

**Melksham Link Waterway,
Pedestrian and Off-road Cycle Routes**

**Scoping of Environmental Studies in support of an
Application for Planning Permission**

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Introduction

This Scoping Report has been produced by the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust (WBCT). It sets out how WBCT will identify, describe and assess the impacts of the proposed Melksham Link, if it receives the necessary consents, would be likely to have on the environment and indicates how these could be avoided, reduced or modified.

Planning Policy Context

The Wilts and Berks Canal was abandoned early in the last century. In some areas it has reverted to farmland and in some cases has been lost under subsequent development. However, the WBCT has been formed with the objective of reopening the canal. The line of the canal has a presumption of protection in the current structure plans of the County and Unitary authorities along its length. It is anticipated that this protection will continue in the updates of this plan.

WBCT are required to apply for permissions under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 for any section of the canal that needs significant work and intends to apply for planning permission for the Melksham Link.

The local planning context is given by the West Wiltshire District Council Leisure and Recreation DPD policy WR3.

Environmental Impact Assessment

WBCT have been advised that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the scheme will be required. This EIA would set out the possible effects, both harmful and beneficial, that the scheme could have on the environment. When these effects have been assessed, the ways by which any impacts that are viewed as being significant can be minimized would be put forward. The results of this work would be provided in an Environmental Statement (ES) that would be submitted with the application.

EIA Scoping

Scoping is the process by which the EIA and the various topics it covers are to be assessed. WBCT have set this information out in this Scoping Report which will be sent to the Wiltshire Council (west) planning team for a scoping opinion in accordance with the Government's EIA Regulations. The Report will provide the planning authority and other consultees with information on the scope of the EIA so that they can raise any concerns or suggestions about the Melksham Link scheme or on the scope of the assessment. Responses will be taken into account in planning and carrying out the EIA.

Description of the Melksham Link Scheme

Overall, the objective of the WBCT is to restore the navigation between the Kennet and Avon Canal to the River Thames at Abingdon via Swindon

together with the link north from Swindon to the Cotswold Canal. Whenever possible the objective is to restore the historic line of the canal but where this is not possible it is to develop new canal infrastructure as close as possible to the historic line. The restoration of the Wilts and Berks is a long term project as and when land access is agreed, funding is secured and the necessary consents obtained.

The scheme described in this Report is one stage in this process.

It is the development of a new section of canal between a junction with the Kennet and Avon Canal (K&A) at Semington, Wiltshire and where it joins the River Avon in Melksham, Wiltshire, including part of the channel of the Avon to just upstream of the town weir, Figure 1

The main components are:-

- Excavation and construction of a new broad canal which will be either within shallow cutting or close to existing ground levels. In open countryside, the water surface width will be about 15m with a navigable width, for boats drawing 1m, of 9m. Navigable width will be 7m through Berryfield village and at bridges.
- Design standards comply with British Waterways requirements and will be subject to their approval. Typical canal cross sections are shown in Figure 2 .
- Excavation and construction of 3 new locks between Semington and the River Avon. These will be to the same dimensions as the Kennet & Avon Canal. 23m long 4.3m wide and will allow boats up to 22m long x 4.25m beam to navigate to the centre of Melksham. Typical cross section figure 3.
- Excavation and construction of a narrow lock adjacent to the existing Melksham weir. This lock will be 23m long by 2.3m wide. This is the standard width of the Wilts & Berks Canal locks and will allow the normal 2.1m beam narrow boats to navigate the restored canal.
- Construct a new weir on River Avon near Challeymead bridge and undertake limited dredging to provide a navigable width of channel to the existing weir.
- Construct 2 new highway bridges and a number of pedestrian bridges.

For ease of description and because different environmental issues may be involved, the Scheme has been sub divided into five components.

1. 610m of canal within shallow embankments from the junction with K&A at Semington including a farm accommodation bridge and footpath diversion along the line of the disused railway embankment.

It expected that an application will also be made for the excavation of a marina and the development of associated boat servicing and leisure facilities. Entry to the marina for boat traffic will be from the new section of

the Wilts and Berks Canal as shown in Figure 1. It is understood that the marina may be the subject of a separate planning application, including a specific Scoping Report, depending on the approach adopted by the land owner and potential developer of the marina

2. 900m of canal within shallow cutting and the construction of a new lock to the south of Berryfield village. This will include a new culvert beneath the canal to carry a minor local watercourse and a new footbridge for the existing local footpath and a winding hole downstream of the lock.
3. 600m of canal through Berryfield village to just north of Westbrook farm. This includes the conversion of the existing access crossing to the village to non-vehicular access, the creation of a canal park, an aqueduct (subject to Environment Agency approvals) to carry the canal over Berryfield Brook, new fixed bridges and road access to Berryfield village.
4. 900m of canal to a new junction with the River Avon. This will include two new locks, a boat refuge and winding hole, new foot bridges for existing local paths and a farm track for field access and canal maintenance.
5. Use of the River Avon for boat traffic from the new junction to the potential new north Melsham junction for the Wilts and Berks canal to the north of King Georges playing field. This will include the construction of a weir to raise the level of the river at low flows by 0.5m which will incorporate a fish pass, the provision of moorings near Town Bridge and, retaining the existing weir and sluice gate. Construct a new narrow lock and hydroelectric turbine on south side of existing weir..

The route will pass close to the existing local nature reserve and great care will be taken, in consultation to local wildlife interests, to ensure that disturbance is minimal.

As may be noted, each component includes environmental enhancement works and in addition landscaping, planting and ecological enhancements will be included to integrate the new canal within the landscape. In particular it is anticipated that all material excavated to develop the canal will be used in the construction and/or landscaping processes removing the need to remove materials from site.

Although consultation and decisions have yet to be made on some elements of the Scheme, for example, the changes to the access routes through the village of Berryfield, they have been included within the EIA at this stage and are addressed within this Scoping Report where appropriate.

Scoping Methodology

This Scoping Report is structured in four parts, in addition to the scheme description and content given above. It will consider impacts both during the construction phase and the operation phase of the proposed canal.

A summary of potential environmental impacts identified to date, but before mitigation, has been included as Appendix A.

1. Water and Ecology

The likely impact of providing water for canal operations together with impacts on the River Avon, Berryfield Brook and other watercourses (field drains) and the wildlife they contain and support will be considered. This will include any changes to river flows, channel morphology and any potential changes to the flooding regime and water quality.

The likely impact on the plants and animals on the farmland and hedgerows in the area will be considered. This will include any changes to habitats.

2. Land and Resources

The loss of agricultural land, which is minor with the exception of the marina, will be considered as will the impact on the landscape. There are no known archaeological resources in the ground but this will be confirmed. Similarly there is no known contaminated land but this will be confirmed together with the way in which any waste materials created during construction will be considered.

3. Human Activities

A range of issues will be covered. It is considered that the major impacts will be during the construction phase, although there will be permanent changes to the access to Berryfield village which need careful consideration as does the creation of the 'canal park' in the village. The development of the Scheme will create opportunities for both formal and informal recreation in the area. There is also the potential for the Scheme to provide an opportunity for others to redevelop the river frontage of the River Avon in Melksham.

4. Supporting Information

A habitat survey has already been carried out for the WBCT by Wiltshire College. It is attached as Appendix B. No significant impacts have been identified in this study. Further studies will be carried out if required by the planning authority in response to the Scoping Report.

Additional documents will be prepared as appendices to the ES. These are likely to include a sustainability statement, an energy statement and an environmental management plan together with other information if required by the planning authority and other consultees in response to this Scoping Report.

5. Sources of Information and Relevant Legislation

The sources of information are given in Appendix D and relevant legislation in Appendix E. These lists are not exhaustive and will be developed as the process proceeds.

Comments on the Scoping Report

This Scoping Report sets out how WBCT intend to undertake the EIA for this proposed scheme. Comments on the contents and coverage would be welcome together with advice on sources of baseline information that might be available to inform the assessment.

Comments should be sent to:

Justine Hanley
Wilts and Berks Canal Trust
PO Box 3630
Swindon
SN4 4AN



Figure 1: Map of Proposed Scheme

Will be inserted here

Figure 2: Typical cross sections of the Proposed Canal

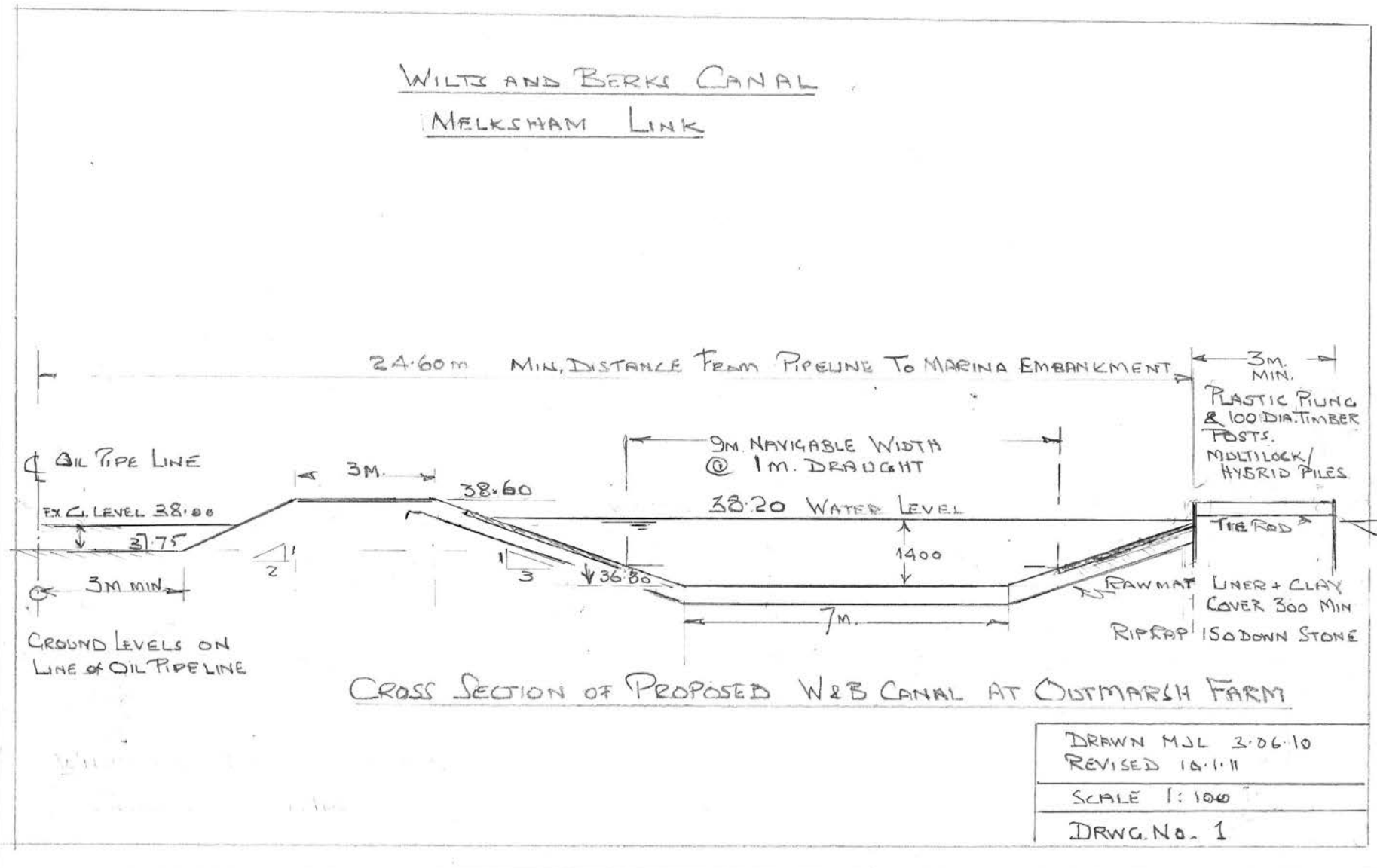
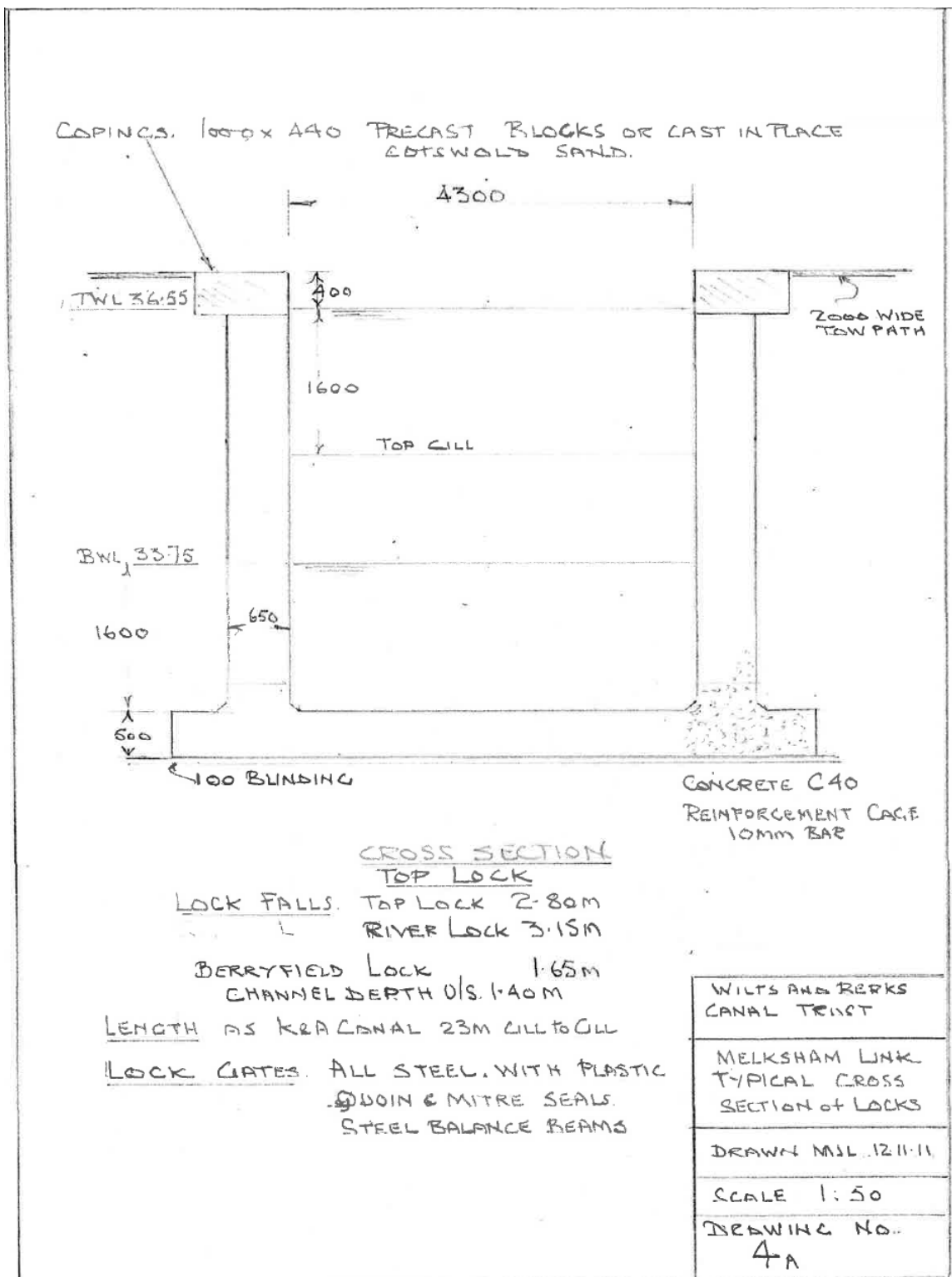


Figure 3: Typical cross section of Proposed Locks



Appendix A – Tables of Potential Impacts and Further Survey Requirements

Water and Ecology

EIA Topic	Construction	Operation
Flood Risk & Drainage	None anticipated	Additional water body in area as a result of the marina, and canal. Change to low flow water levels in the River Avon through Melksham None anticipated for canal
Surface Water	Diversion of brook and ditches Temporary loss of habitat	None anticipated
Water Abstraction	None anticipated	Effects of water abstraction for canal operations.
Water Quality	Turbid runoff to watercourses	Possible impacts on water quality in the marina, reconstructed canal and the River Avon.
Ecology	Temporary damage and disturbance to habitats and species	Beneficial opportunities for the habitat enhancement Potential impact of increased access on existing local nature reserve

Land and Resources

EIA Topic	Construction	Operation
Landscape	Impact of construction activities and traffic on the local landscape	Permanent addition of new features in the landscape of embanked sections of canal.
Cultural Heritage	None anticipated	None anticipated
Agriculture & Land Use	Temporary loss of agricultural land Temporary disruption to field drainage Temporary fragmentation of farm holdings	Permanent loss of agricultural land (marina canal route and towpath).
Contaminated Land	None anticipated	None anticipated
Waste Management	Transport of arisings on site – need for off-site disposal not anticipated	None anticipated

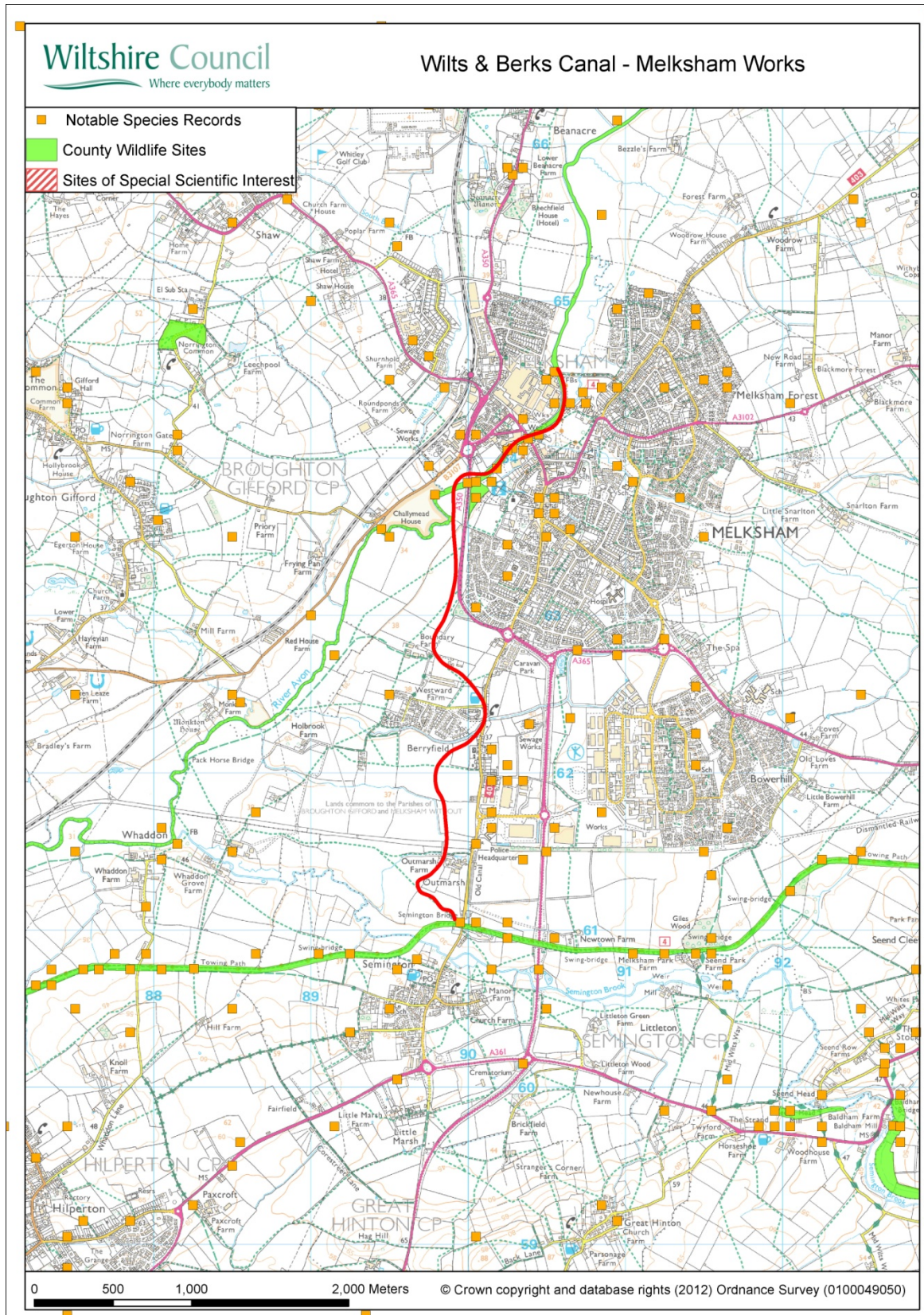
Human Activities

EIA Topic	Construction	Operation
Visual Amenity	Temporary intrusion of construction activity into views	Permanent addition of new views. Changes to low flow water levels in the River Avon through Melksham. Planting of controlled reed beds and extensive planting of trees and shrubs on offside banks of canal. Hedgerow planting alongside canal towpath.
Transport	Minor increase to traffic densities during construction. Disruption and diversion of local road network	Permanent change to the local road network in Berryfield. None anticipated from new marina in Semington village
Air Quality	Potential dust generation Exhaust emission from construction plant and traffic	None anticipated
Noise and Vibration	Noise effects from construction plant and traffic Possible temporary vibration from construction activities	None anticipated
Socio- economics	None anticipated	Potential benefit to local businesses from recreational traffic on the proposed canal. Potential opportunity for the redevelopment of the River Avon frontage in Melksham
Recreation and Amenity	Temporary footpath and bridleway disruption	Creation of canal park in Berryfield village Beneficial creation of new informal recreational opportunities Improved access to riverside footpaths in Melksham
Health and Safety	None anticipated	Potential risks from the introduction of the proposed canal into Berryfield village.

Appendix B: Results of Wiltshire College Phase 1 Habitat Survey

This information is contained in a separate document

Appendix C: Ecological Data Search



Appendix D: Sources of Information

Bristol Avon Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy, Environment Agency, 2005

Draft River Basin Management Plan - South West River Basin District, Environment Agency, 2009

Appendix E: Relevant Legislation

Water Resources Act 1991

Water Act 2003

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations 2003

Water Resources (Abstraction and Impounding) Regulations 2006 and 2009