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RUDYARD LAKE, LAKE ROAD, RUDYARD, STAFFORDSHIRE ST13 8XB

Heritage Statement to accompany proposed re-use of former lake trip boat as a static seating and interpretation area.



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Cover: Retired trip boat (“Honey”) when in service on the Lake.

INTRODUCTION

1. The writer was commissioned by the Rudyard Lake Trust to prepare a heritage statement as part of the documentation required for a planning application. The proposal is to use "Honey", a retired trip boat at the lake, as a static part of the visitor education facilities, to perpetuate the boat's historic interest (see below, paragraph 12). A detailed site visit was made on Monday, 20th June, 2022 in the company of Mr. Ray Perry.

2. This document is submitted in compliance with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, which says:

> "In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation."

THE HERITAGE ASSETS

3. The heritage assets concerned are:

- **The Rudyard Lake Conservation Area.**

4. The Rudyard Conservation Area, focused on the Lake, is a recent designation made in July, 2016. The current conservation area appraisal is a detailed and thorough one of the same date, by Mel Morris Conservation of Ipstones.

5. Having been built in 1797-1801 as a supply reservoir for the Caldon Canal, the Lake now belongs to British Waterways, but has been in the management of the Rudyard Lake Trust since its establishment in 1996. The current lease expires in 2067. The Trust's objectives are:

- To conserve for the public benefit the natural environment of Rudyard Reservoir and its surrounding area, including the flora and fauna of the area, and
- To advance the education of the public in the said area.

6. Rudyard Lake, three kilometres long, is 160m above sea level on a small tributary of the River Churnet. Its natural beauty was a happy by-product of its real purpose, and its "discovery" by the masses quickened in pace after the construction of a branch of the North Staffordshire Railway along the eastern bank in 1849.

7. At first, the full tourism potential of the Lake was held back by Fanny Bostock of Cliffe Park (c1797-1875), who disliked the excesses, both in the amount of tourists and their behaviour. Cliffe Park had been built in the 1810s to take advantage of the natural beauty and tranquillity of the

reservoir, so her objections can perhaps be understood. Miss Bostock was successful in stopping regattas, boat trips and races on the lake, although its fringes remained popular with walkers.

8. Fanny Bostock died in 1875, and most of the estate was eventually sold to the North Staffordshire Railway Company in 1903. Rowing boats, boathouses and a golf course quickly appeared. This signalled the start of the Lake's Edwardian heyday, when it lived-up to its moniker as "The Blackpool of the Potteries".

9. The increased use of motor vehicles after the Second World War, coupled with improvements in the standard of living, meant that people began to travel further for their holidays, and Rudyard Lake became gradually sidelined and overlooked. The closure of the North Staffordshire Railway alongside the Lake in 1964 was also a factor in the decline.

10. However, since the establishment of the Rudyard Lake Trust in 1996, there has been a remarkable turnaround and the Lake has witnessed renewed popularity. When the Trust was set up, the visitor facilities at the dam head comprised dispiriting portaloos and portacabins, and the Trust worked hard to provide facilities that would make the Lake a more appealing and welcoming destination. The basics were put in place in the Trust's early years, including a new toilet block and changing rooms in 2000, remodelling and extension of the nearby boathouse as a visitor centre in 2001 (upgraded 2015), and the new activity centre in 2003-5, which also includes office accommodation and a café.

11. Projects since the delivery of these key essentials have included the restoration of the Earl of Macclesfield's Boathouse in 2008, and an "orangery" style extension to the activity centre café in 2018.

- **Other "heritage assets" (non-designated) affected by the proposal. See Figure 1.**



Figure 1. Extract from Ordnance Survey 25", surveyed 1876-8 and published 1879, with annotations by the writer to show:

Blue dot: Approximate site of proposed stationary boat.

1. Former Trent and Mersey Canal boathouse, now visitor centre.

2. Outlet turrets on dam head. 3. Earl of Macclesfield's boathouse.

12. There are no listed buildings within the immediate setting of the current proposal, but there are a few structures worthy of note:

- **Dam head structures.** It is perhaps surprising that the damhead structures, designed by John Rennie, are not listed. The twin tower structures on the dam, built of rusticated ashlar and housing the outlet valves, are a prominent feature in relation to the application site and would be eligible for inclusion on a "local list". It is appropriate to consider them as a "non-designated heritage asset".
- **The Earl of Macclesfield's** boathouse may also be considered a "non-designated heritage asset". It is thought to date from the 1860s and is a local landmark on the water's edge. Its sympathetic restoration in 2008 involved substantial reconstruction and re-roofing.
- **The Trent and Mersey Canal boathouse**, now the Visitor Centre, is an attractive building but has been so heavily reconstructed that it does not qualify as a "non-designated heritage asset" in my opinion. It was a far simpler structure to begin with, of no architectural distinction. Nevertheless, it makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.
- **"Honey" (the retired trip boat subject of this application).** "Honey" was introduced to Rudyard Lake as a trip boat in 2004, but has an interesting and unexpected "back story". She was originally the diesel-powered captain's launch on HMS Obdurate, one of eight "O" Class Royal Navy Destroyers built between 1940 and 1942. All had names beginning with O, just as the eight "P" Class destroyers built at the same time had names beginning with P. "Obdurate" was sent to Inverkeithing for breaking-up in 1964, and "Honey" is therefore an evocative memento of a lost ship. As a vessel, she is "pretty straightforward, and would have taken ten men about a month to build."[1] The static retention as now proposed is purely to preserve the historic association, nothing else.

  Obdurate was launched in 1942 and was "home" to 175 men. She escorted Arctic and Atlantic convoys in 1942-44, being damaged by the Germans twice in that period. She was also notable for being involved in the Battle of the Barents Sea on 31/12/1942, when the German raiders failed to inflict significant losses on Convoy JW 51B, much to Hitler's annoyance. The Arctic Convoys arose from the Anglo-Soviet Agreement of 1941, by which Britain assisted Russia against invasion from Germany, and both pledged not to make separate peace with Germany. The convoys transported tanks, fighter planes, fuel, ammunition, raw materials and food.

- So the boat itself has a degree of historic interest, and in principle boats are eligible to be non-designated heritage assets, or even listed buildings. The "Cutty Sark" at Greenwich is Grade 1 listed, for example. "Honey" was only a simple ancillary vessel, not worthy of listing and probably not of sufficient interest to rank as a "non-designated heritage asset" either. Nevertheless, she may be considered as a modestly-positive attribute of the conservation area. Her trip-boat phase from 2004-2019 makes her part of the tourism heritage of the lake, as well as being a piece of British naval history. The boat is currently under tarpaulins near the site entrance.

[11] Pers. comm. Ray Perry, Rudyard Lake.

The reason for retiring the boat to a cradle is because her condition makes her no longer suitable to serve as a trip boat. Rot identified in the hull in 2019 can be repaired, but the repairs would not be to a "seaworthy" standard that would withstand use for trips. To fully replank her as a trip boat would cost an estimated £54,000.

THE PROPOSALS AND THEIR IMPACT

13. The proposal involves the construction of a steel cradle about 1.8 metres wide and about 5 metres long, bolted to a concrete slab on the reservoir bed. The cradle would hold the boat just above high water line, so that it would stand about three or four feet higher than when floating on the water. Only the upper part of the frame would be normally visible, as the concrete slab and lower part of the frame would normally be submerged. Part of the side of the boat would be cut away to allow level access to the deck.

14. I suggest that the following considerations are relevant in considering the merits of the proposal:

- The proposal is entirely reversible. "Making good" would involve removal of the slab and cradle, nothing else.
- The proposal will have no impact outside of its immediate area.
- The "nautical" theme of the proposal is in character with the area and the educational aims of the Trust.
- The proposal is sited among the main visitor facilities at the dam head, and as such will not interfere with the tranquillity and serenity of quieter parts of the Lake perimeter.
- There is not a great difference between floating the boat on the lake and mounting it upon a cradle. Although its static nature will be obvious, it will be only three or four feet above its level as a floating vessel. The particular circumstances justify its display and use in this unusual way.
- The proposal will make a modest but positive contribution to the sustainability and continued appeal of the site, by contributing to the stated aim of the Trust "to advance the education of the public in the [Rudyard Reservoir and surrounding] area".
- The wide diversity of Rudyard Lake's educational opportunities helps to ensure the broad appeal of the site and helps to secure maximum engagement with it. I was surprised at the breadth of the scope for learning history at the site, because of its links to:
    - Local landowners and their estates
    - The history of the canal system
    - The history of local industry and the pottery industry
    - The story of tourism development
    - The development of railways
    - The story of engineering and engineers
    - The story of boats and boatbuilding
    - Rudyard Kipling
    - History of the Industrial Revolution in general
- The trip boat complements other interpretative material at the Lake which is concerned with boating history, such as the display on boat history in the Earl of Macclesfield boathouse.

CONCLUSION

15. The proposal gives continued life to a small boat that saw action in World War II and later enjoyed a quieter life as a trip boat on Rudyard Lake. Her condition means that she can no longer serve that use without unreasonably high expense, and a replacement trip boat has now been provided.

16. The proposal to mount the boat on a cradle and use it as a seating and interpretation area is a very modest one, well integrated with the existing visitor facilities. It will have very little impact upon the character of the conservation area, and is not a type of development that could be considered incongruous. The boat itself has some historic interest and may be deemed to contribute in a "tangential" way to the special interest of the conservation area.

17. In the event (very unlikely, I believe) that the proposal is deemed to cause a small measure of "less than substantial harm" to the visual amenity of the conservation area, it could only be at the lowest end of the "harm" scale. In that event, I consider that there are material public benefits that would offset any such identified harm: the Rudyard Lake Trust operates for the public benefit, and the boat will help it sustain public interest and meet its adopted and recognised aims of educating its users.

Philip E. Heath, July 2022