

The Somersetshire Coal Canal

Restoration Plan - Baseline Assessment



Introduction

The Somersetshire Coal Canal opened for business in 1805 and for much of its life it was a highly profitable concern. The SCC was constructed as a narrow width, contour canal throughout its length. Its purpose was to transport coal from the pits of the Somerset coal field to a junction with the Kennet and Avon canal at Dundas Wharf. The route initially led from Dundas Wharf to the village of Midford, where the canal separated into a southern arm to Radstock and a northern arm to Timsbury and Paulton Basins.

The southern arm was sold to the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway in 1871 and now very little evidence of that route remains. However, the route to Midford and the northern arm carried on successfully trading until its eventual closure in 1898.

Since that time very little of the canal's northern route has suffered any significant redevelopment and the canal route now runs through an idyllic rural setting complete with some outstanding heritage structures, including the magnificent 22 lock Combe Hay flight.

The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society was founded in 1992 and has researched and documented the unique history of the canal, including the experimental, and ultimately unsuccessful, construction of a Caisson Lock at Combe Hay. It continues with this research programme while also carrying out regular vegetation maintenance and structural repairs to conserve the canal route and assets.

The Society's ultimate aim is to restore the northern canal route to water.

Some sections of the canal route are already used extensively by walkers, however, only a limited number of the historic tow path sections are open to the public. This means that long-distance footpaths such as the Limestone Link need to divert to other paths and roadways along its route. Opening the full length of the canal will provide a valuable and enjoyable long-distance walkway for public use.

Opening the full canal route will also provide significant biodiversity net gain by creating a continuous, ten mile stretch of waterway within an attractive rural environment. The remains of the two canal basins at Paulton and Timsbury are already in water and are a haven for wildlife, including ducks, moorhens, swans, frogs and damselflies.

In summary, the restoration of this highly prized public amenity which will open up a new long-distance route for walkers, provide a new rural waterway, with many associated business opportunities, retain and restore important heritage assets while at the same time significantly enhancing the biodiversity of the rural environment surrounding the canal.

This document outlines the benefits of restoration and provides a high-level mapped summary of the route and the challenges likely to be encountered during restoration. In most cases the assessments considered in this document are based upon observation and research of the historical record and will need to be confirmed by a more detailed site and soil surveys.

Restoration Policy

Canal restoration is always a long term project, relying as it does on Local Authority and public support, funding and landowner agreement. The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society's approach to restoration follows four key phases.

Works are expected to follow a 'string of pearls' approach where different sections of the route are at different stages of restoration at any one time. The four key phases are - - -

Protect

An essential first step is to ensure that the historic route, plus any necessary diversions, is protected from destruction or development using local planning legislation. This will involve working with the B&NES planning department on the Local Plan. Gaining support from B&NES and Parish Councillors along the route will also be important so that local decisions take into account the canal environment.

Conserve

It is important to prevent further deterioration of all canal bed and structures while working on more advanced projects elsewhere. Conservation typically includes vegetation management and protection of canal structures at risk of further deterioration.

Repair

There are a significant number of historic canal structures along the route that are in various states of disrepair. Some are in need of urgent attention to prevent their possible collapse. A programme of repair will be undertaken to rebuild these assets. The rebuilding of Midford Aqueduct, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is a good example of what can be achieved.

Restore

The restoration phase brings together one or more structures that have been repaired with a canal bed that has been returned to water. The Society's eventual aim is to restore the full length of the northern arm of the canal to Dundas Wharf to water.

And after restoration - - -

Maintain

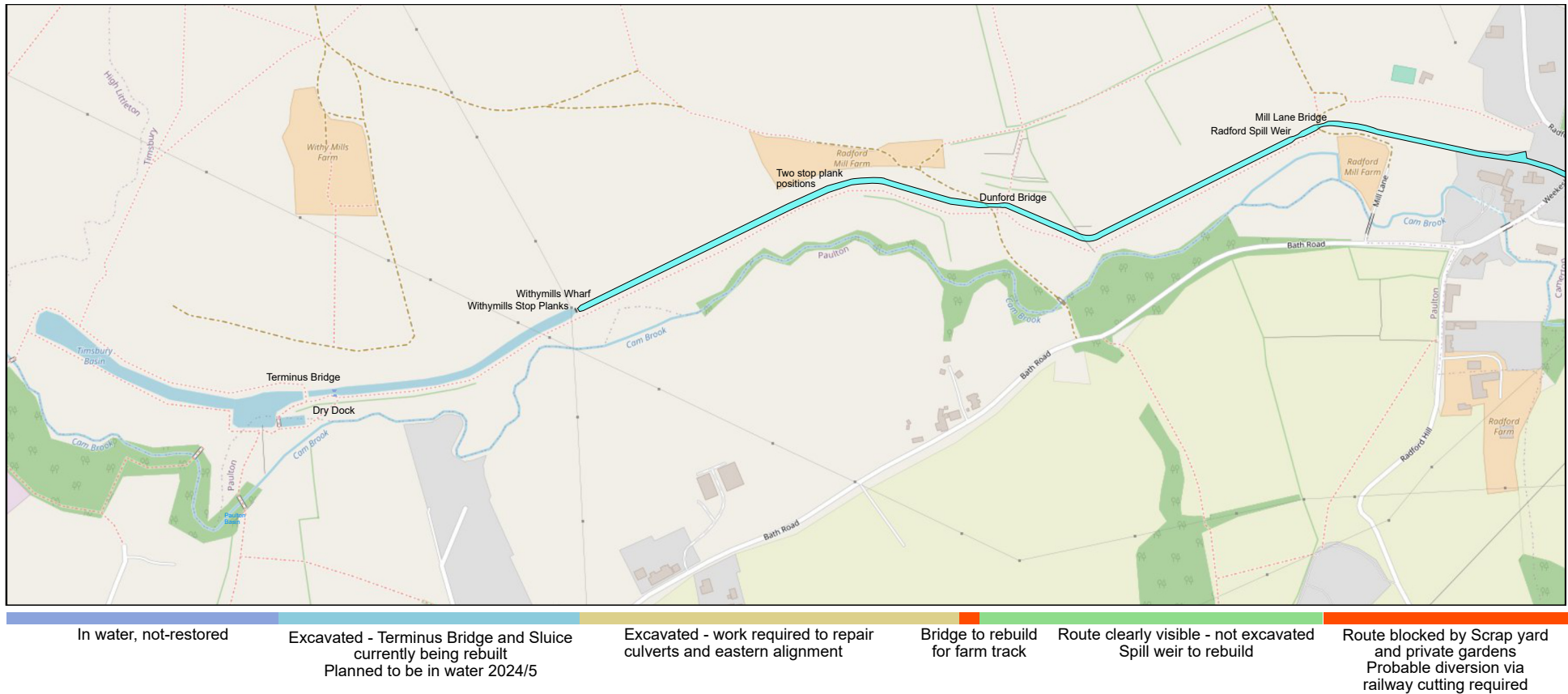
Restored sections of the canal will require ongoing vegetation control and the maintenance of structures and towpath where needed.

Map pages



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Timsbury Basin to Radford

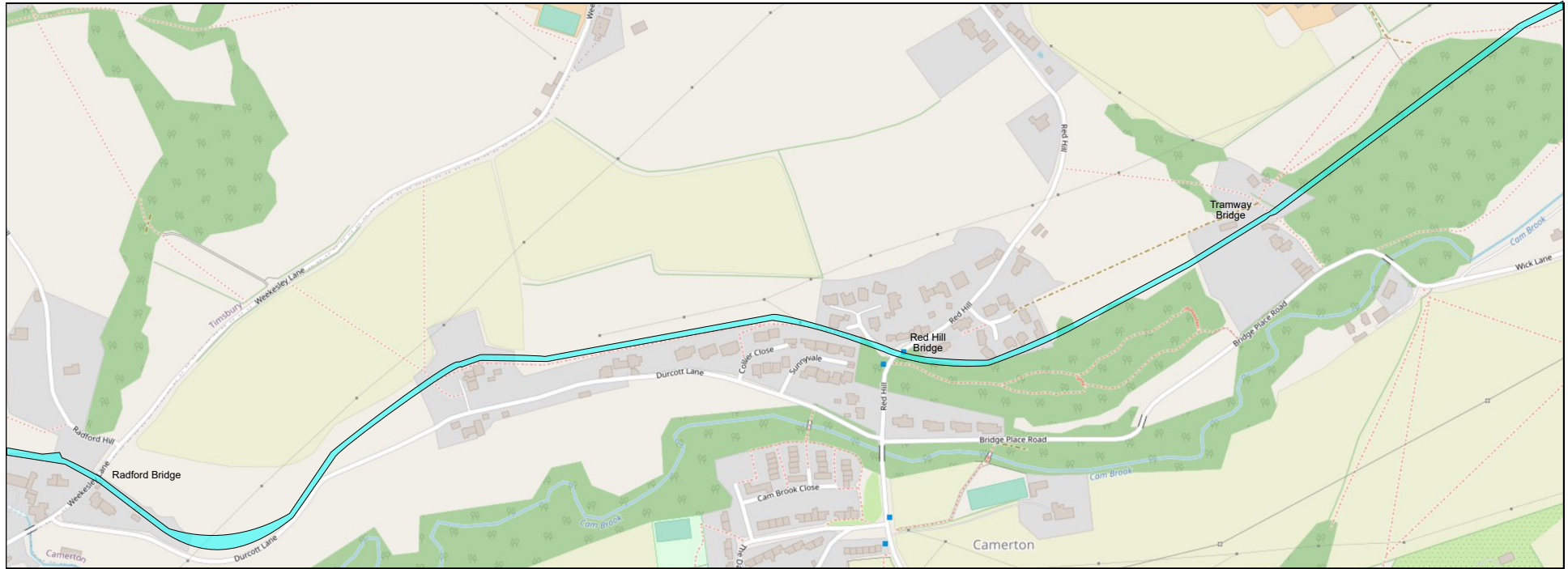


The Somersetshire Coal Canal terminates at Timsbury and Paulton Basins. Tramways from the north served coal mines in the Timsbury area and the southern coal mines were served by Paulton Basin. A three-boat-width dry dock leads off from Paulton Basin. A large wharf at Withymills served a colliery to the north and there was a further smaller wharf adjoining Dunford Bridge. Both basins are in-water, fed via a restored inlet weir from a small stream. The basins themselves are unrestored and are currently a haven for wildlife, they are also used as a water source for cattle for the farmer landowner. There are no current plans to restore these basins.

Recent restoration has excavated the dry dock and rebuilt the entrance bridge however the dock walls still need to be rebuilt. The adjoining stretch of canal to the east has been excavated and the bridge abutments of Terminus Bridge and an adjoining sluice are being rebuilt with the intention of returning this section to water in 2024/5.

A stretch of canal to the east of the Withymills stop plank position has been excavated but there remains work to be carried out to repair broken culverts under the bed, rebuild stop plank positions and ensure water tightness, particularly at its eastern end. Dunford Bridge will need to be rebuilt, a further section excavated and Radford Spill Weir restored. The route to the east of the spill weir represents a significant challenge as it is currently occupied by a scrap yard and then crosses private gardens before reaching a demolished road bridge. A diversion in cutting and a new road bridge should be considered as a possible solution to these issues.

Radford to Camerton



Route blocked by private gardens. Road bridge needed. Probable diversion via railway cutting required	Route not visible but across open farmland	Route visible but across private gardens	Route clearly visible across open farmland	Access road built on route. Bridge to rebuild under main road	Route visible in part. Development has encroached onto route. Small diversion to south should be feasible	Route mostly visible across farmland	New dwelling built on route and 20 Century spread of New Pit Batch has buried canal route. Diversion will be difficult due to steep slope of land to the north.
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The Camerton section will present an engineering challenge as the canal route passes through a village environment with historic mining remains.

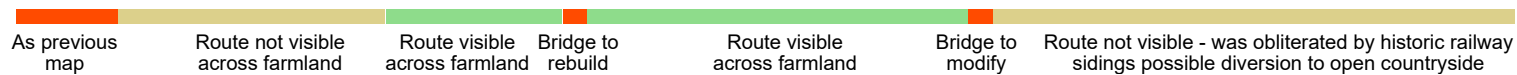
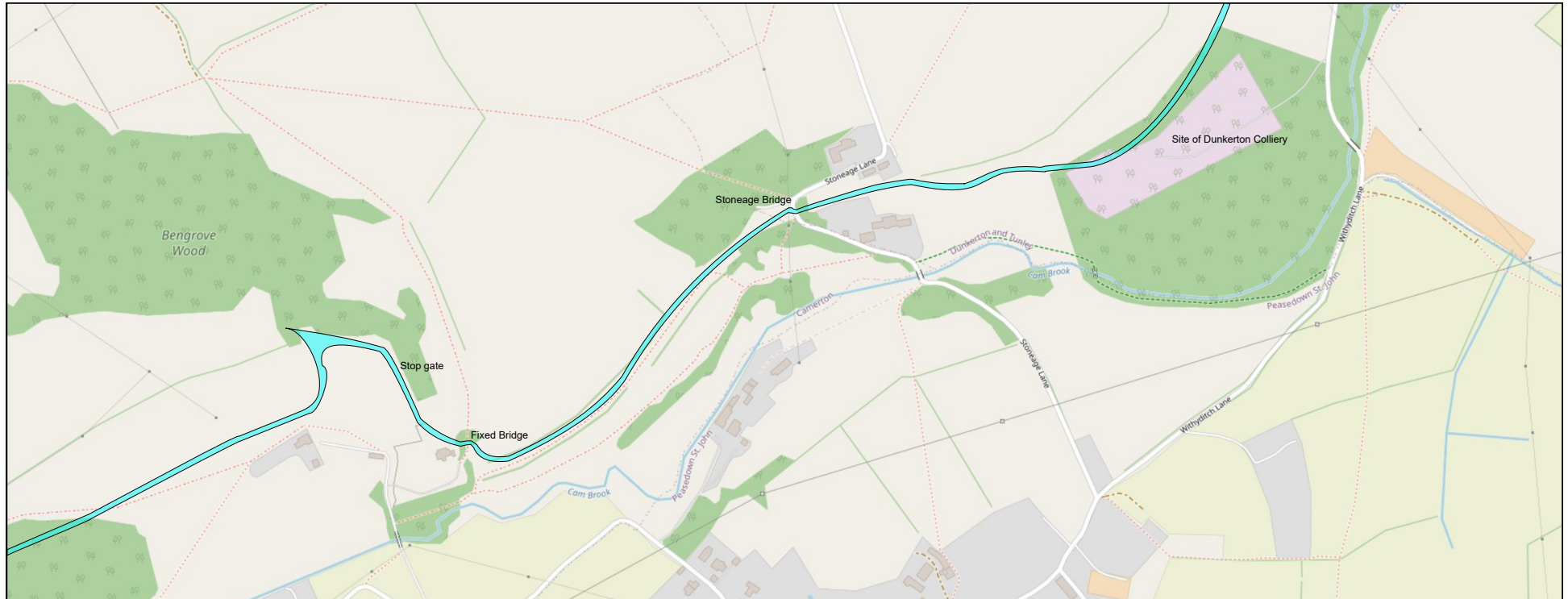
The route diversion proposed on the Timsbury to Radford map should continue with a new main road crossing at Radford Bridge, built to the north of the historic position. This relocation should avoid the need for a historic 'hump back bridge format'. The diversion should continue eastwards avoiding the new dwellings that have been built on the western end of Durcott Lane.

There follows a short stretch of visible canal through private gardens, landowner agreement here will be crucial as the steep slope of the land at this point excludes a diversion.

The route continues across open farmland before crossing the main road at Red Hill Bridge, there is no opportunity to divert the line at this point and levels will need to be considered. The access road to a small estate, 'Canal view', has been built on the canal route at this point, it is hoped that levels will allow this short stretch to be navigated by tunnel.

A new dwelling has recently been built on the canal route to the north of New Pit Cottages and a difficult diversion will be necessary. The coal batch of Camerton New Pit was allowed to spread across the canal in the 20th century, when the pit became served by rail. This is a major obstacle which cannot be avoided by a diversion due to the steeply sloping land to the north.

Camerton to Withydit



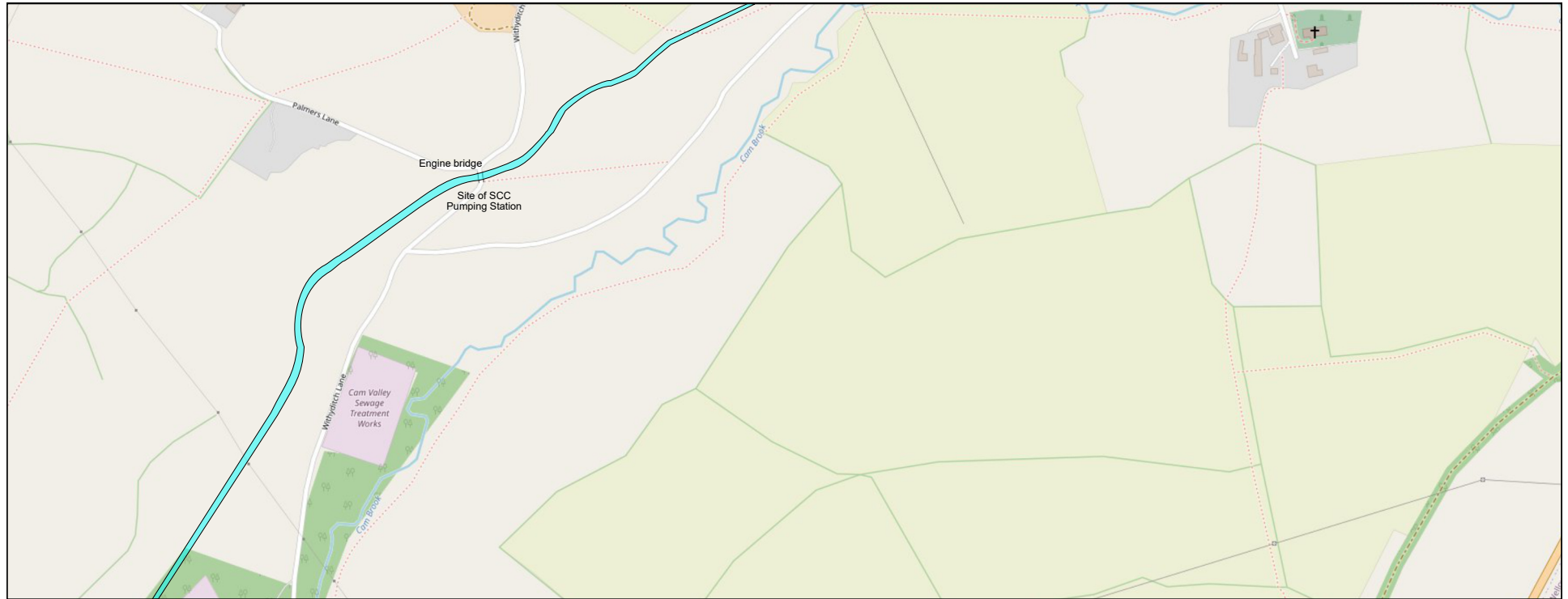
The canal route across farmland to the south of Bengrove wood has been ploughed out and the ground may have been infilled but there are no obstacles in its path.

The route from the fixed bridge to Stoneage Bridge is mainly visible across farmland. This section of the route was crossed and then joined by the GWR railway a short distance to the west of Stoneage Bridge.

Stoneage Bridge was rebuilt to allow GWR trains to pass through it in the 20th century and so may be available for reuse, levels and approaches will need to be reviewed.

After a few hundred metres, the route of the canal to the east of Stoneage Bridge has been significantly affected by the construction of extensive rail sidings to the north of Dunkerton Colliery in the 20th century. The colliery is now a scrap yard and the ground to the north of it has been regraded to a level that is now higher than the historic level of the canal. A new route should be determined across the regraded open farmland to the north of the existing scrap yard.

Withyditch



Route not visible - was obliterated by historic railway sidings Route not visible across farmland Bridge to modify Route not visible across farmland

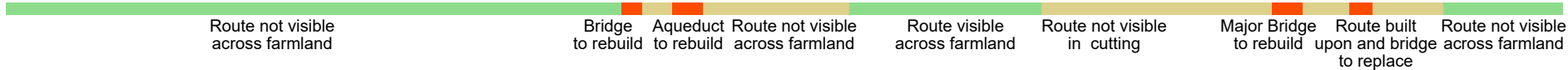
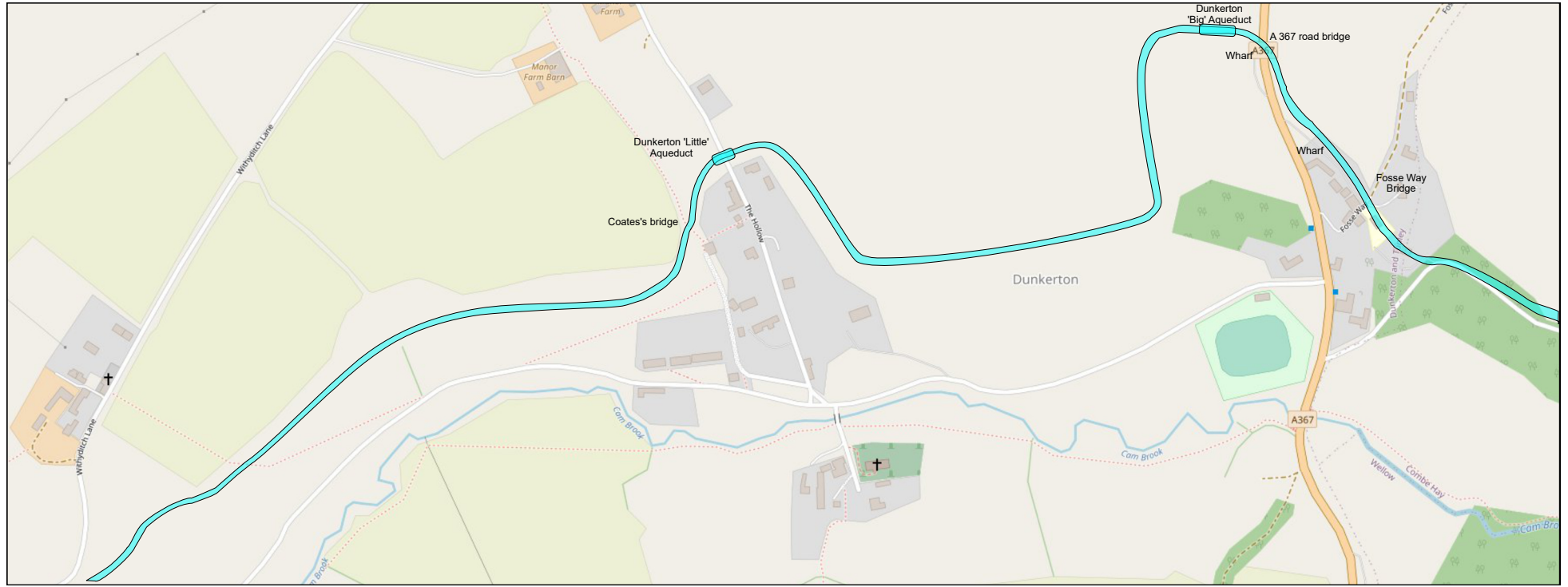
The route continues from the section of canal that was affected by the construction of the rail sidings for Dunkerton Colliery, the colliery closed in the 20th century. The route to Engine Bridge at Withyditch, and beyond, is across open farmland which has been filled and regraded and so levels will need to be reviewed.

The Engine road bridge was rebuilt to allow GWR trains to pass through it in the 20th century and so may be available for reuse, levels and approaches will need to be reviewed.

The SCC Pumping Station that supplied the canal with water through the later half of the 19th century was situated near to Engine Bridge. There are currently no remains visible as it would have been dismantled and because its position was below the current ground level. It drew its water supply from the Cam Brook to the south.

The canal route continues to the east across open farmland.

Withyditch to Dunkerton



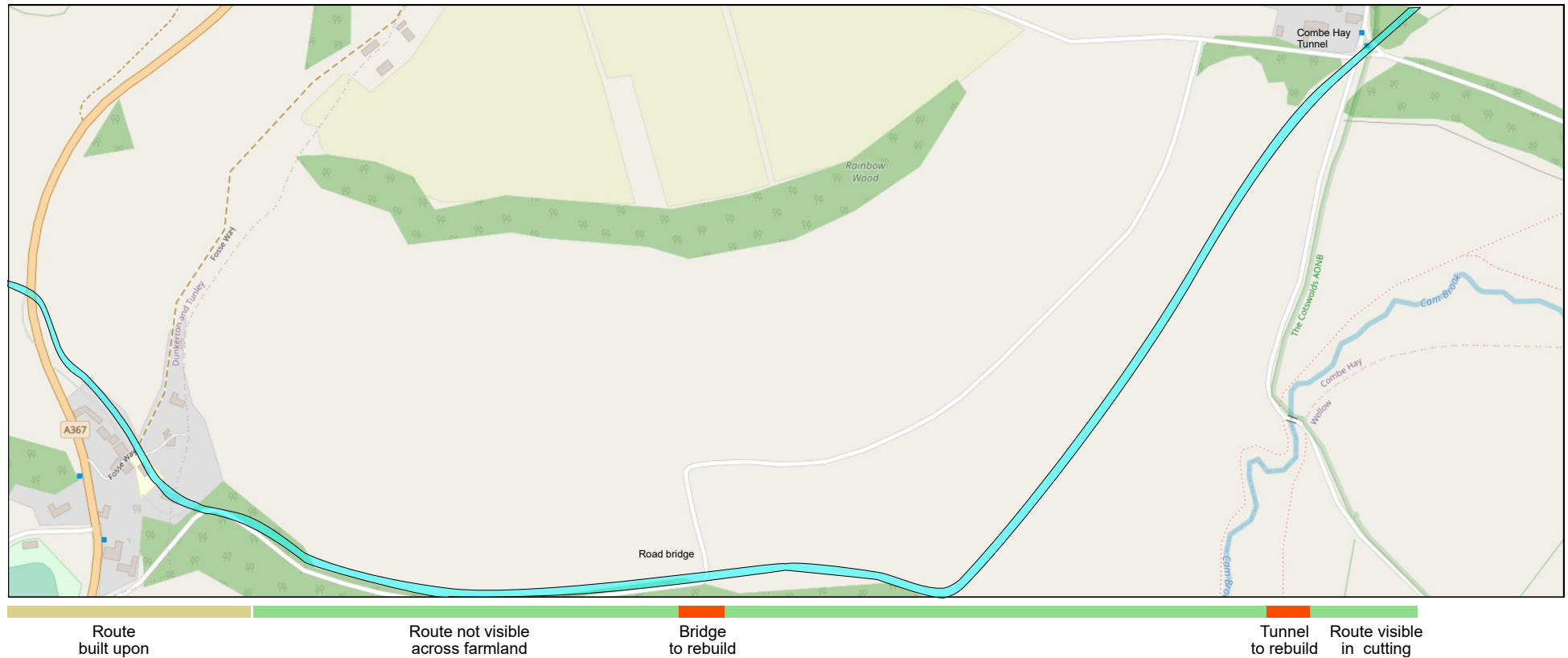
The first section of the route towards Dunkerton is across open farmland ending in a pack horse bridge, Coates's Bridge, the remains of which are still visible. To the east the canal passed across a high, stone built aqueduct which has been entirely demolished and will need to be replaced and the approaches restored.

The route continues south across farmland, where the route has been infilled, however a section of the west - east canal bed to the north of The Grange is still visible. The final length of the west - east section was crossed by the route of the GWR railway and is now infilled. The canal cutting to the north has also been infilled with a reducing slope leading to Dunkerton 'Big Aqueduct'. This structure is still in place and is grade II listed. It is mostly sound, although the canal formation across it will need to be reconstructed.

After the aqueduct the canal goes into a short tunnel, which used to run beneath the main A367 Radstock to Bath road. That tunnel is still in existence but the old road is now a short lay-by as the main road was diverted slightly to the east in the 20th century without continuing the tunnel. The tunnel will therefore need to be continued beneath the new, main road.

The canal continues behind a group of houses on land that is now used for car parking and gardens. A bridge on the Roman Fosseway will also need to be rebuilt. Some new-build has been constructed on the canal route which will need to be avoided by a small diversion. Due to the steep slope of the land at this point the extent of a diversion will be limited. A further small diversion to the north will also be required at the point where the road to Combe Hay was diverted into the path of the canal by the building of the GWR railway. An underground gas distributor pipeline crosses the canal path at this point.

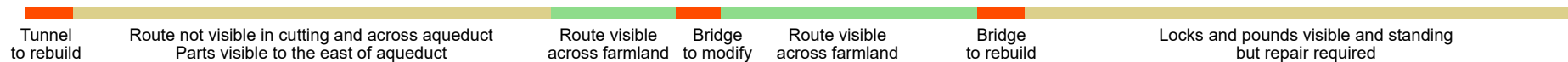
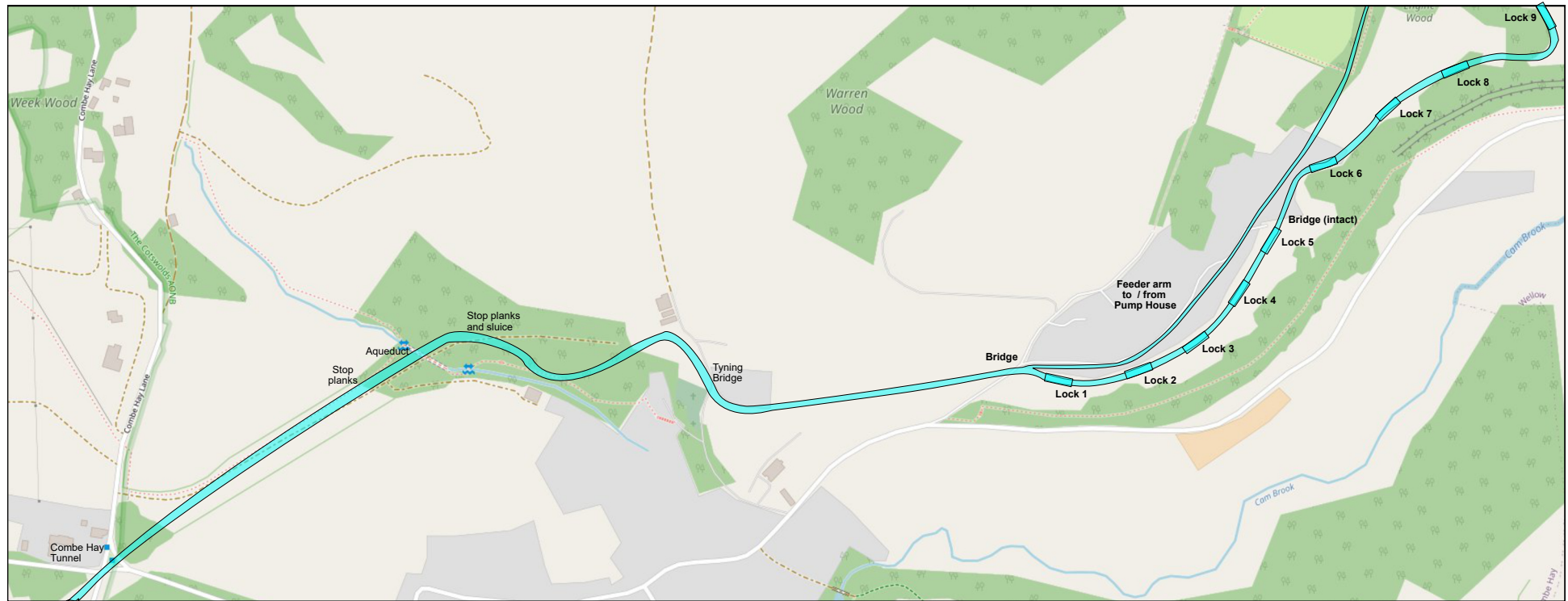
Dunkerton to Combe Hay



The route continues across open farmland, with only a short section currently visible, before crossing a lane and then continuing through further fields. A road bridge will need to be constructed where the lane crosses the canal route. The canal was originally built partly in a small cutting across the second section and this has since been infilled and used as farmland.

Near Combe Hay the canal entered a short tunnel beneath a cross roads. That tunnel was reused in the construction of the GWR railway, with the rail bed being laid several feet lower than the canal bed. The tunnel is intact and it should be possible to reuse it during restoration.

Combe Hay to Combe Hay Lock Flight



After exiting the Combe Hay Tunnel the canal carried on in a cutting before crossing the Combe Hay Aqueduct. This route was also used to construct the GWR railway but at a slightly lower level than the original canal bed. The cutting has since been partly infilled but the aqueduct is still mostly intact, albeit with its top scalped by several feet. A gravel track has been constructed between Combe Hay Lane and the aqueduct. The restored canal could pass beneath this track but a new bridge would be required at that point.

The canal continues across farmland to Tynning Bridge. This is a GWR bridge that might possibly be reused in the restoration of the canal. The canal then skirts a dwelling, the outbuildings of which may have encroached upon the canal line necessitating a small diversion into the adjoining field, before crossing more farmland to reach a missing road bridge at the entrance to Caisson House.

Immediately after crossing the roadway the top lock of the Combe Hat lock flight is reached. The flight is in generally good condition although the stonework has suffered from some frost damage and so sections of the walls will need to be repaired. The lock gates and ironwork are generally missing and the pound between locks 5 and 6 has been filled with water and used as an attractive garden feature.

There was a small feeder arm that left the main route above lock 1 and which led to the Combe Hay Pumping Station. This arm was used to carry coal to the pumping station and to return water raised by it from the Cam Brook to the upper section of the canal. The feeder arm is intact in parts but the middle section has been built upon.

Combe Hay Lock Flight to Midford



This section contains the majority of the Combe Hay Lock Flight. The locks and pounds from lock 1 to 10 and locks 12 to 15 are generally in good condition although the stonework has suffered from some frost damage and so sections of the walls will need to be repaired. The lock gates and ironwork are generally missing and the pounds are partially silted up.

The walls of lock 11 have collapsed and an embankment was built across lock 16 during the construction of the GWR railway. Locks 17 to 22 have been fully or partially infilled but their remains are, in part, still visible.

The canal arm that ran from below lock 19 to the base of the inclined plane is still visible. The remains of the terminus basin at this point are in good condition, although partly silted up. This arm was also used to provide water to the lower locks from a weir on the Cam Brook. The Combe Hay Pumping Station was supplied with water, via culvert, from here to feed the upper section of the canal. The detailed restoration design will need to address the water supply requirements of the upper canal reaches,

The canal continues, and is clearly visible, across farmland until it is crossed by another large embankment built during the construction of the GWR railway. Nearby is the remains of a spill weir that returned water to the Cam Brook by culvert. On the other side of the embankment the canal is visible and continues across farmland. It is crossed by Midford Accommodation 'pack horse' bridge, which is still intact but is in need of repair.

Midford



The route of the canal continues to the east of Midford Accommodation Bridge and is clearly visible across farm land. A short spur leads to the south and crosses the restored Midford Aqueduct. There was a transshipment basin to the south of the aqueduct which has been infilled in the distant past.

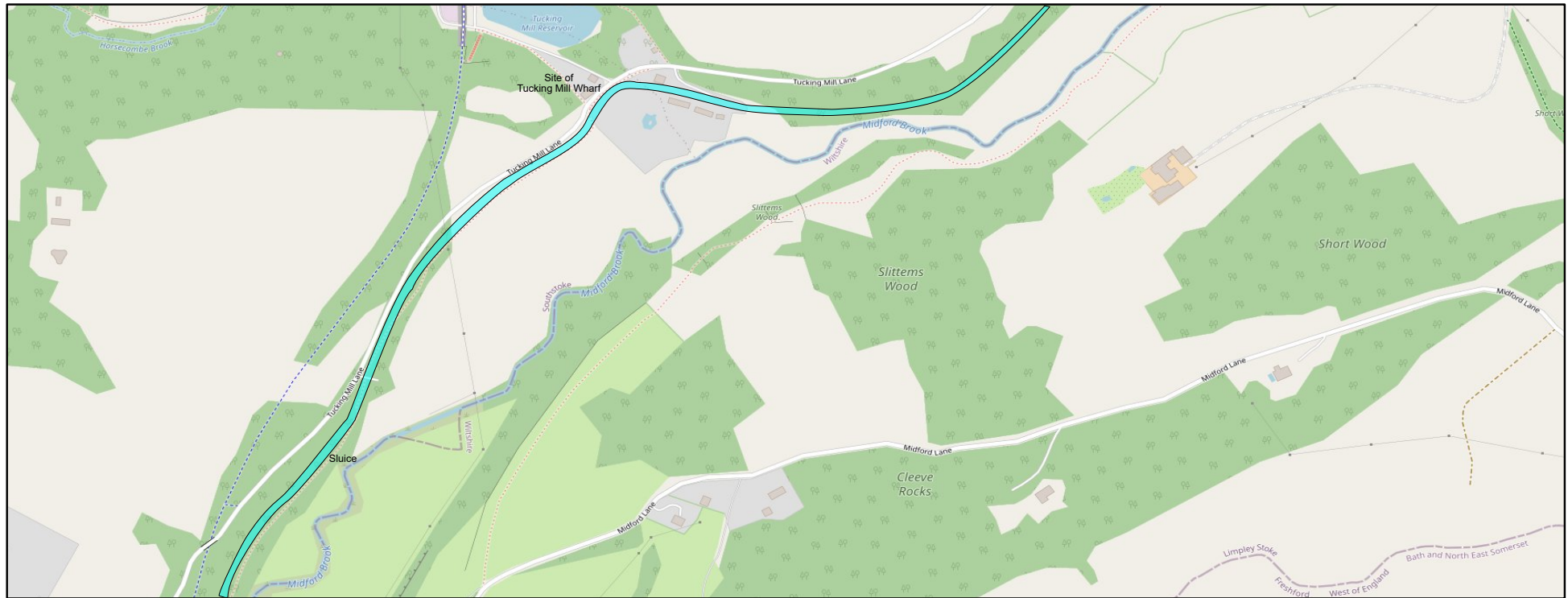
Two metal sewer pipelines cross the canal in this section, supported on piers.

The canal route passes under a steel road bridge and the arches of the Midford Viaduct of the Somerset and Dorset railway (now a cycle path). The route at this point passes through private gardens to the intact Midford Road Bridge beneath the busy B3110.

The SCC Weigh House would have been found immediately to the north of the road bridge. The weighing station has been demolished and the adjoining dwelling extended into a family home.

Continuing northwards the canal is clearly visible but has suffered from partial infill by stone and spoil that has slipped down the steep valley sides from the course of the Somerset and Dorset railway above.

Midford to Tucking Mill



Route mostly visible but some infill Access bridge to build Route mostly visible but partly infilled Route built upon, Bridge intact Route not visible across farmland

The route of the canal continues northwards to the site of Tucking Mill Wharf, and is clearly visible at most points. The remains of a large sluice culvert is visible beneath the towpath.

At one point along this stretch Wessex Water have constructed a sewage pumping station to the east of the canal line, which has been infilled at this point to allow access for maintenance. Wessex water will continue to require access to their equipment and so a new bridge crossing will need to be provided at this point.

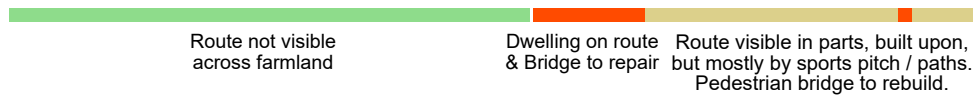
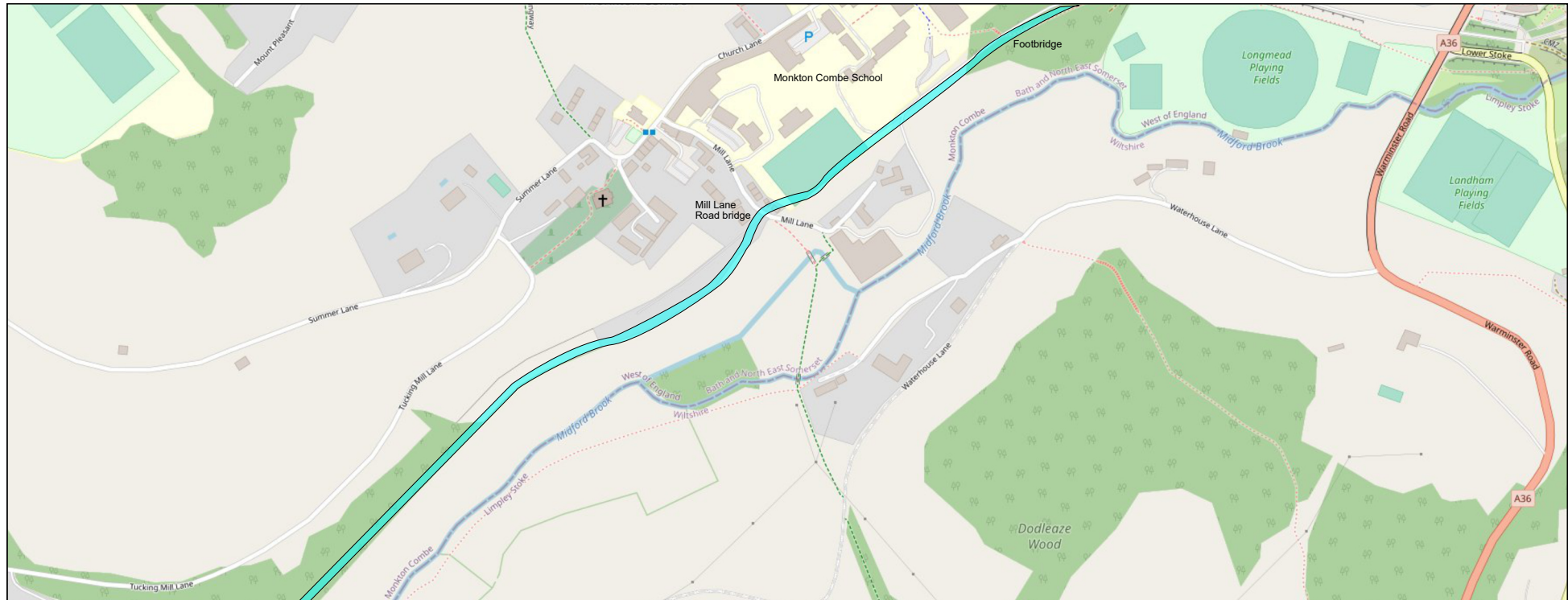
The top of a line of coping stones at Tucking Mill Wharf is still visible in a private garden just to the south of Tucking Mill Lane.

To the east of Tucking Mill Wharf the infilled route passes through a stone built canal bridge, which is intact but on private property, and beneath the driveway of a row of cottages.

After the cottages the route continues across open woodland on a steeply sloping hillside.

Note: the infill in this section may contain industrial waste products.

Tucking Mill to Monkton Combe



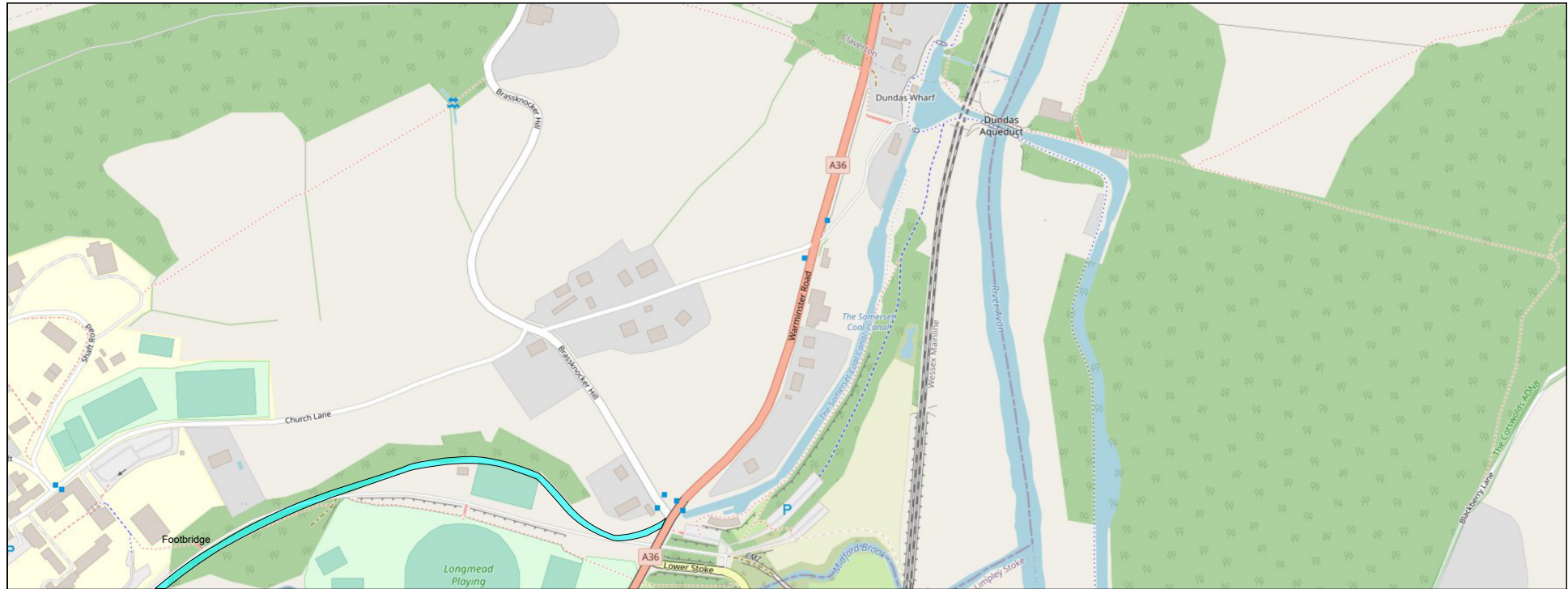
The canal route continues on open farmland until Mill Lane in Monkton Combe. The GWR railway was constructed on top of the canal route for part of the stretch leading up to Mill Lane but the embankment that supported the canal / railway is still intact. A dwelling house has been partly built on the canal route at the western end of the plot to the east of the lane and garages have been built on the west side of Mill Lane.

The Mill Lane road bridge has been demolished and so will need to be reconstructed.

To the east of Mill Lane the canal route crosses the grounds of Monkton Combe School, a private boarding school. The now-demolished GWR Monkton Combe station was constructed at this location and the course of the GWR railway followed the canal route for some distance to the east.

The canal route across the school grounds has been infilled or obliterated by the construction of the station and the railway and its line is no longer visible. The route has not, however, suffered from any more recent development and so a reconstructed route would be possible.

Monkton Combe to Dundas Wharf



Route visible in part but crossed by rail then road. Possible realignment of route and road. Pedestrian bridge to rebuild
 Route mostly visible across open ground
 Canal obliterated by rail / road
 In water commercially restored

The route continues eastwards through the school grounds. The route was initially crossed by the GWR railway, which has now mostly been reused as a roadway. To the east of a footpath that crosses the existing road the line of the canal follows the contours away from the roadway and is mostly visible with some infill for sports pitches and utility areas.

As the canal route nears the A36 the canal and rail / road route come together again and a short section of canal has been dug away by the railway when it was constructed at a lower level. To the east of this point a short section of the canal is still visible leading to the western portal of the canal bridge beneath the A36. The bridge tunnel itself is still intact and is used as a dock by a boat maintenance company and so restoration plans will need to provide an alternative location for this business.

The route of the canal between Dundas Wharf on the Kennet and Avon canal and the A36 road bridge has been restored to water and is operated commercially as moorings, complete with a public cafe. The restoration plans will need to consider relocating some of these moorings to allow an increase in through boat traffic. Consideration should also be given to the reinstatement of lock gates or automatic stop gates in the entrance lock chamber to manage water security between the SCC and the Kennet and Avon Canals.

The moorings on this short restored section are fully utilised and the cafe and associated canal businesses are very well used by the general public. The popularity of this section demonstrates the potential for public realm improvements that the restoration of the entire length of the northern arm of the canal can bring.

The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society

The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society is a registered charity (No 1207513) and an affiliated member of the Inland Waterways Association (No 0005276). The Society was first formed as a historical society in 1992. Responding to an increased public interest in the potential recreational and environmental benefits of restoring the northern arm of the canal to water, the Society expanded its objectives in 2002 to include the conservation, protection and restoration of the historic canal.

The Society's charitable objectives are:

- To advance the education of the general public in the history of the Somersetshire Coal Canal by carrying out historical research and by providing information in published documents and in public meetings.
- To promote the conservation, protection and restoration to a waterway of the physical and natural environment of the Somersetshire Coal Canal and its structures for the benefit of the general public.

The Societies work parties regularly perform conservation and restoration activities at various locations along the northern arm of the canal with the express permission of supportive landowners. Volunteers are very welcome to join these activities. For more details of how to join our work parties see our website www.coalcanal.com.

Members of the public can become members of the Society by emailing the Membership Secretary at membership@coalcanal.com or using the Society's website www.coalcanal.com.

You can also contact the Society by emailing:

- Chairman, Derrick Hunt, at chairman@coalcanal.com
- Secretary, Martin Turner, at secretary@coalcanal.com

You can view our ongoing activities on:

- Facebook: www.Facebook.com/CoalCanal
- Website: www.CoalCanal.com