

Pre-Planning Virtual Meeting with the Canal Trust

15th March 2021 at 5.30 pm

Present:

Ralph Barber, Tony Sellwood and Bob Hargreaves from the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust

Cllrs Mrs Howley, Mrs Marcovecchio, Mrs Duffield, Mrs Moseley, Mrs Wadley, Ms Birkan, Heathfield and the Town Clerk

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Mrs Draper and Mrs Gooch

A presentation was given on the proposed proposals and background of the organisation.

The plans include: picnic benches, wildlife and wetland areas, planting of trees and installation of bird and bat boxes, a car park including disabled parking and wheelchair accessible pathway for a 1.2 km circular walk, access for canoeing and paddle boarding. TRAC and the Scouts have been offered use of the site.

Councillors were given the opportunity to ask questions, which were answered as follows:

Is the whole route protected within the local plan? Yes. It is protected by all four councils (Forest of Dean, Tewkesbury, Herefordshire and Gloucester). A further query was raised regarding the Council's involved, and Mr Barber agreed to clarify.

The proposed site is in the middle of nowhere and local residents would not be able to get there by foot safely so will have to drive, therefore what is the point? The Trust are looking to develop the pub further and then there maybe potential access to the canal.

Why is the tunnel not being repaired as a priority? There are three tunnels in total, two of which are in good condition, but the Oxenhall tunnel has a collapse which will be a challenging and expensive engineering project.

There has been some good work done, but there has been a missed opportunity in Oxenhall by the lake where there is a long stretch where canal boats could have sited, but it's now overgrown and was nicer 20 years ago. A new site leader is being appointed and discussions will be taking place regarding work on this stretch, however, it is subject to land-owners' permission.

One of the comments raised during the initial planning consultation was to see a business plan, is one available? This is a very long-term project. If this planning application is successful, it is hoped to complete the project within a specific timeframe. The majority of projects rely on grant funding, so it's difficult to prepare a business plan.

Why did the planning application get withdrawn? Two reasons. First because Newent Town Council did not support the application and second was due to a very late request for information from the sustainability team.

Some Canal Trust projects have resulted in numerous trees being cut down and burnt and this has had a significant impact on the wildlife which has diminished. There would be no point having a circular walk if the area was barren and a different approach needs to be taken.

As part of the planning application, a 10 year landscape and environmental plan has been drawn up. Points raised will be passed on to the site leader.

Some people feel the station should be completed first. Why has the Trust agreed to complete the walk first? It comes down to money. The walk will be covered by the Trusts own funds. The station would be seven figures and funding would need to be sourced. The Heritage Fund has been closed due to the pandemic, but the Trust are still working on the station project and are currently having a model built. The project would not be dependent on S106 monies.

Concerns were raised regarding the water being stagnant and issues with flooding. There will be no flowing water. It will be initially filled and topped up from an abstraction site by Malswick House. The local authority has approved the flood risk assessment.

A comment was made regarding the canal by Lockkeepers Cottage and there being no obvious way out. Mr Hargreaves will look at this and pass it on to the site leader for options to be considered.

The Trust representatives were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 6.27 pm.