

To: Planning Strategy Team
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Our Ref: [REDACTED] **Your Ref:** **Date:** 24th May 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for consulting Gloucestershire County Council on the above matter. I have the following officer comments to make.

Transport Planning Comments

When we think of the restoration of canal routes and links we immediately think of cycling and green transport corridors. Stroud's canal heritage offers distinctive and vital opportunities to provide a blue green network for the benefit of people and wildlife. They appear to tick a lot of sustainable transport boxes and are waiting to be reinvented. The adopted Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan (LTP) policies PD2 and PD6, encourage sustainable travel and promote health and wellbeing. It envisages an expanded local and strategic cycle network, and measures to overcome walking and cycling barriers between new and existing sites, amenities, facilities and developments.

The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) recognises the huge value and potential of the canal corridors through Stroud district especially in terms of their existing and future roles as active travel corridors. Both National Cycle Networks 41 and 45 already use the canal towpaths and are highly valued by local communities.

It will be useful to consider how, in the context of Stroud, the canals can serve this new purpose in terms of full inclusivity, more people walking and cycling on the paths adjacent to them and, in addition, more from groups using wheelchairs, mobility aids, 'micromodes' such as segways and other small lightweight vehicles. There will need to be consideration of:

- the extent to which the canals are geographically aligned to enable significant trip transfer from the highway;
- what happens to connecting route capacities if the canal becomes a stronger trip magnet;
- how the lateral and access/ egress points function (or potentially function);
- where links can be made to public transport hubs;

- what happens if there is significant mode transfer in terms of user conflict and congestion. An LTP performance indicator (PI-8) target is to “to increase cycle use within the County by 50% from 2015 to 2031”. Combined with growth in population near to the canal corridors (south Gloucester and West of Stonehouse) this may manifest in very high usage;
- what can be done about the frequent pinchpoints;
- how this SPD, together with the Development Plan, can ensure that new land uses link with and support the revised purpose of the canal network;
- whilst the canal paths are potentially desirable routes, they also weave and alter in terms of their character throughout their extents. How much of Stroud’s canal network can reasonably be upgraded in terms of coherent routing and optimal widths for pedestrians/ cyclists/ fishing/ boating/ playing etc. to occur in the same space?; and
- can we look to this canal network to transfer some trips from e.g. the Chalford corridor and other highway routes which offer sub-optimal or dangerous conditions to non-motorised users? It will be important not to resort to the canal network as an alternative to improving road conditions.

The emerging LCWIP for Stroud explores opportunities to create and reinforce a safe attractive walking and cycling network and considers the canal corridors. It notes that in some places the canal may form the most desirable route. In others there is not the capacity – in terms predominantly of widths – for the canal to be the primary active travel route. Therefore routes such as the A419 (Stroud – Chalford) will still need attention to highway conditions, and with reference to the Inspiration Study.

The LTP identifies strategic transport priorities in the Stroud area to accommodate growth ambitions, including significant growth west of Stonehouse. The Connecting Places Strategy (CPS5) section of the LTP outlines several active travel improvements for the Stroud area in more detail. These are not committed schemes, but potential funding routes have been identified including routes aligning to, or linking with, the canal corridors through the district, such as:

- Strategic Park & Interchange hub scheme for M5 J13 / A419;
- Stroudwater Navigation to Gloucester & Sharpness Canal – Active Travel Route;
- Access improvements ‘Active Travel Route’ – B4008 between Little Haresfield (M5 J12) and Stonehouse corridor;
- Cycle access improvements to National Cycle Network, Route 45 Stroud;
- Cycle access improvements Stroud and Chalford;

The adopted Stroud District Local Plan 2015-2031 identifies several key development sites – particularly;

- West of Stonehouse where a strategic site is allocated with the aim of developing a new local centre; and
- Regeneration sites along the valleys east and south of Stroud.

Both these areas are also identified as key employment areas.

Core Policy CP13 (Demand Management and sustainable transport measures) states major developments should provide alternative travel choices to the car, and improve transport network infrastructure.

Policy EI13 requires an extended cycle network to be developed – particularly in Stroud and Cam & Dursley.

Essentially, these key development sites will benefit from, create demand for, and potentially help fund or deliver improvements to the canal corridor and connectivity to it.

The desirable width for canal towpaths is generally dependant on the number of cyclists, type of users and the constraints along the route. In most cases a minimum width of 2.0 metres will only be appropriate for very low usage by leisure cyclists at lower speeds. Where a higher volume of cyclists of all abilities are to be catered for significantly wider provision is required to allow safe passing of pedestrians and cyclists, in such instances the desirable widths should be 4 metres, however this should be subject to advice from Sustrans and GCC on the suitability of widths and quality of the facility. Consideration should also be given to any LCWIP and Gloucestershire's LTP.

The importance of catering for the mobility needs of a growing number of people living on canal boats, including overnight parking provision needs to be factored in. Parking needs to be provided to avoid canal boat dwellers parking along narrow lanes and on verges creating an obstruction and safety problems for the Local Highway Authority and to avoid conflicts with local residents. Another possible solution would be to secure CIL and use it on Traffic Regulation Orders to manage access on local roads and to invest in local car clubs and bike hire schemes that would be available to everyone.

This promises to be a highly valuable initiative with huge benefits for Stroud and people living and working there. GCC looks forward to supporting the delivery of measures agreed within the resulting SPD. Please let me know if you would like further background to some of the documents discussed here,

Ecology Comments

A lot of hard work covering many themes and aspects has gone into this draft strategy which is welcomed and needed. We hope this strategy will guide a high standard of future sustainable development, a gain for biodiversity and new strategic green/blue infrastructure for Stroud District.

Archaeology Comments

A general comment is that the historic environment doesn't seem to feature much in the strategy. Considering the historic importance of the canal and the reason for its existence, we would expect the historical significance and the past history should be a core part of the strategy particularly for heritage regeneration and tourism. We don't feel the importance of the historic environment comes through in the draft documents other than the odd mention of the Stroud Industrial Heritage Conservation area. We would be happy to engage more fully in this if there is an opportunity to.

Minerals and Waste Comments

To augment the emerging strategy's support for achieving positive change within a low carbon context, it is strongly encouraged that a commitment is made to achieving waste minimisation and greater circularity in construction by way of re-using excavated materials from future canal infrastructure projects on-site wherever possible. Furthermore, future projects involving new, or upgrade paths and bridges should try and utilise as much recycled material as is practicable possible. In addition, the innovative use of recycled materials (possibly even non-conventional building materials) should be particularly highlighted, where it can be shown a greater use of recycled materials would be employed than would ordinarily be expected.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Senior Planning Officer