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**Sent:** 26 May 2022 18:18  
**To:** \_WEB\_Canals Strategy  
**Subject:** Re: Canal Strategy  
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Dear SDC Officers and Councillors,

As a resident in the Stroud District, and Chartered Landscape Architect, I am writing to offer my comment and perspective as such on the canal strategy.

### **SDC's strategy is written with an urban design bias, with little recognition to landscape or ecology**

The Urban Designers, and graphic designers, who have been commissioned to undertake this strategy have clearly been enthusiastic in putting this strategy together, by which I mean I think they might have got a bit carried away, possibly an outcome of a very demanding brief for a complex, diverse, area of some scale. For a lay member of the public I think it is probably impossible to understand. I do think that this strategy has done the best it can to fulfil its brief in the most logical way but the important thing is it makes far too many assumptions, or has a distinct bias, that change is good and necessary across the board.

It begins by distilling 'Drivers' for change (Continuity, Connection and Clustering). It does claim to be sensitive to the intricacies of place, yet makes no mention to how landscape character or biodiversity would drive or inform the strategy, these disciplines should be the primary voices for the future or evolution of a place, following thorough survey. The landscape always tells us the story of what it is or can be, this should be what leads the way, not what humans have done to it in the last 150 years. I suggest this is due to a lack of input, influence or expertise from the broader disciplines of landscape architecture and ecology, if done well the ecological and environmental importance of this strategy would have come through.

For example in Area 10, the Eastern Upper Valley Canal Area of the canal strategy, a statement is made saying the canal could become a '*conduit for ecological enhancement and water management*' with the '*collaboration with...*' ...manmade... '*stakeholders*'. This section of the canal corridor is being and developing a conduit of this kind very well on its own. The strategy suggesting... '*This might be achieved through horticultural, engineering or green infrastructure interventions in this area for the benefit of the wider region.*' ...will only succeed in making this section of the corridor at best bland. If this broad brush, human centric and assumptive approach extending from the urban envelope of Stroud itself manifests, and the practicalities of bringing machinery to achieve this 'improvement' into such a sensitive site, will undoubtedly cause any landscape distinctiveness it has now, its rich biodiversity, remnant industrial heritage and any complex natural habitat that is clinging on here, to be eroded or most likely destroyed despite any good intentions.

The draft Canal strategy is out for consultation to check SDC have the strategy right. If this is the case and the public's views will be considered, why do they use 'will' in this statement?

***The restoration of the Cotswold Canals - the Stroudwater Navigation (7 miles/12km) and the Thames & Severn Canal***

*(29 miles/46km) - will see the connection of England's two greatest rivers; the Thames and the Severn for the first time in over seventy years.*

**SDC's Strategy is written with an assumption that change and restoration to all the canal corridor is needed**

Many of the claims the strategy makes to improvements that would be generated by orientating focus towards the canal are being achieved already. The work going on to canal infrastructure within the urban envelope of Stroud is welcome, improving accessibility, social enterprise and interaction, local economic opportunities. However, I think there needs to be much more emphasis in the strategy to how it adjusts and responds to the wider more diverse canal corridor.

An example of the assumption that change will be positive throughout appears in the placemaking priorities for Area 10 - Eastern Upper Valley Canal Area again *'that opportunities to harness the location of Sapperton for better public transport connections for residents who would use the canal towpath to then travel onwards to larger centres like Cirencester, Gloucester and Cheltenham'* is very far fetched. It's not clear which residents are being referred to, Stroud or Sapperton, however the village has lanes, footpaths and bridleways/cycle routes, some along the canal corridor, in an existing network. The needs of residents in Sapperton, or those reaching it from Stroud along the canal towpath, intending to get to Cirencester, Gloucester or Cheltenham, are for services such as a frequent reliable electric public bus system linked with a postal/delivery route that uses the existing roads, better pot hole management and appropriate speed restrictions. These smaller, less intrusive improvements would offer much greater efficacy in meeting the aims of the strategy to improve continuity, connectivity and clustering.

I have only glanced at a very complex piece of work, and do understand consultation has occurred. But I ask SDC, please don't allow this strategy to drive change for the sake of some limited objectives based on the assumption that the canal 'restoration' is what needs to happen throughout the whole Stroud canal system. Allow the valleys, topography, hydrology and wildlife a voice also, through full and proper survey, seek biodiversity net gain at every opportunity and let landscape quality override all stages of planning or design. This advice accords with central government's 25 Year Environment Plan's strategy for a Nature Recovery Network, the document Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services and the Environment Act 2021 (no less). SDC need to fully understand and comprehend this in their decision making and if they do, their initial objectives of creating safer, sociable communities, a resilient local economy whilst tackling climate change, will be met as very welcome side effects.

Yours faithfully,

