

Proposed Canal Strategy SHIPS (Ship Inn Project Stonehouse) Committee Response. 13th April 2022

Initial Comments and Observations.

1. SHIPS notes that there were approximately 500 responses to this district-wide survey. The Committee feels that this is too low a response rate to make any justifiable conclusions; and any strategy based on these findings would not be valid. It was disappointing to see the rejection of the results of Stonehouse Town Council's public consultation on the future of the Ship Inn Site at the meeting of SDC's Housing Committee on 5th April 2022. This town council-run consultation received more than 600 responses from the community (**9%**) but was judged a low turnout. The response rate to the consultation for the Proposed Canal Strategy amounts to **0.4%** - and this is for a strategy covering miles of canal over 20 years.
2. SHIPS notes that the response rate was affected by many factors, but one of the major factors was the complexity and difficulty in a responder being able to understand what was being asked and why. There were many posts about this on local Facebook pages and the community was left frustrated on how they should have an input to such an important project for Stonehouse.
3. SHIPS also believes that the strategy outlined in this proposal was hard for the community to understand and therefore being able to take part in providing a meaningful response was difficult. The documents are in a format not conducive to viewing in electronic format and indeed even when seen in the flesh are almost impossible to decipher.

In conclusion, SHIPS feels that this consultation is not inclusive, has not in any way engaged meaningfully with the public, and is deliberately complex in order to validate an already decided strategy without the inclusion of the views of the community that this council purports to serve. The above is bad enough. However, SHIPS has also learned that this consultation cost SDC in the region of £45K. Does the Council think that a survey costing approx £90 per respondent is good value for money?

Q1. Are these the right Drivers for Change? Have we missed anything you would like to add?

SHIPS would like to point out that the most important driver for change is community involvement at the start of any change process. Involvement of the local community includes not only consultation but also being given the power to effect their own change for the betterment of the whole of society. Members of a local community have a better appreciation of what is required in their area and should not be ignored.

Q.2 Do you agree with the number and boundaries of the 14 canal strategy areas? Do the areas and their profiles reflect your understanding of the different character and functions of places?

Agree -SHIPS is happy with the boundaries but is cautious about creating boundaries in a holistic solution.

Profiling : Continuity/Clustering/Crossings

Continuity - This is shown as 7 in the document. SHIPS' opinion is that 2 is more appropriate for the Stonehouse area

Crossings - This is shown as 8 in the document. SHIPS' opinion is that 6 is more appropriate for the Stonehouse area

Clustering - This is shown as 8 in the document. SHIPS' opinion is that 5 is more appropriate for the Stonehouse area

Q3. Do you agree with the key ways identified on the diagram and in the text in which each canal strategy area could be improved? Do you agree with the carbon reduction opportunities identified?

1. Overcoming the road barrier: road-space management measures along with the potential for more comprehensive public-realm measures along the road corridor in order to unite the canal corridor with the 'town', drawing together north/south communities across the canal. National Cycle Route 45 flanks the canal to a large extent, with only a brief relationship with the canal, but therefore has strong commuter capabilities.

SHIPS welcomes the recognition that the A419 has become a barrier between communities within the town. We would welcome an investigation/dialogue with the County Council to look for ways to reduce traffic and speed, and to make the corridor more pleasant for the community and visitors. SHIPS also thinks that a local community transport system should be made available creating routes through the town and industrial estate to the canal in order to allow the population to easily access local amenities and promote the High Street businesses.

Cycle usage in this area is high, but only among able-bodied riders. The canal towpath should be considered a major route for bicycle use, but should be made more navigable by wider vehicles to allow the use of specialised vehicles designed for disabilities. More signs should be installed to make it clear that the use of bells is encouraged to help avoid conflict between pedestrians and cycle users.

2. There is a generous canal margin to enhance habitat biodiversity and east/west connectivity between Eastington and Stonehouse.

Please refer to the above re tow path dimensions for specialised vehicles.

3. Strengthen movement links to/from/across/onwards from the canal, making them more consistent and legible.

Enhancement of routes north/south of the canal to make them more attractive to use.

4. New Stroudwater Station opportunity on promote new train station link on N/S route.

Very important for the local community and reduction of traffic in commuting.

5. Development sites along the canal (eg. Ship Inn site & adjacent site) to be considered holistically in context of unifying the town around the canal. Establish a positive and inclusive relationship with the canal along this stretch.

Stonehouse has voted on several occasions that the Ship Inn site should be made available for community use. This would be best achieved by gifting the land to SHIPS and allowing the community group, in conjunction with the local population and the Town Council, to decide on the best use of the land for the benefit of the community and the Town economically and directly.

6. Promote/signpost and improve interpretation for the varied routes between the town and the canal.

This should be done with a local sustainable/green transportation system.

Q4. Do you agree with the ingredients in general terms? Are there other ingredients you would like to identify?

The Ship Inn site is key to achieving success in Stonehouse.

The whole programme for the development is too long. The canal will be useable in less than five years. All of these things are achievable within that time frame if local communities are allowed to take control and contribute. This development should not be directed centrally by Stroud District Council but local areas should be allowed to establish steering groups and to work closely with SDC and all stakeholders to ensure that their stretch of the canal corridor directly benefits the surrounding community and wider area.

Q5. Do you agree that the canals strategy should be used as design guidance to support the delivery of adopted Local Plan Delivery Policy ES11? Would any changes to the canal strategy help to improve delivery of Local Plan canal policy?

Encouragement of local community ideas and proposals should be given a high priority in the decision-making process.

SHIPS Committee April 2022