

Response from Stonehouse Town Council to consultation on Stroud District Council's Stroud Canals Vision & Strategy

The following response was agreed at Stonehouse Town Council's Environment Committee meeting on 21st March 2022.

Initial observations are as follows:

1. The strategy maps out the plan for the next 20+ years for both the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and the Stroudwater Navigation/Thames & Severn Canal.
2. The consultation, on which the strategy document is based, received 532 responses from across the district, of which 101 came from Stonehouse, the highest number from all the canal areas included in the consultation.
3. The potential for the canal project to benefit Stonehouse economically, socially and environmentally was a key factor in achieving the National Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £8.9 million to complete phase 1B. Plans for Stonehouse must, therefore, be ambitious. Stonehouse must become a destination on the canal and the town's residents and businesses must benefit from the canal project.
4. Overall, greater attention needs to be given to Stonehouse in the Canals Vision and Strategy and consideration given to short and long term actions and improvements within the town to ensure it benefits from its proximity to the canal.

In commenting on the strategy, we were asked to address the following questions – our responses are in bold.

Drivers for change - the Canals Strategy identifies three overarching Drivers for Change by which the canal network can maximise its social, economic and environmental benefits.

1. Continuity – by providing a continuous accessible route, the canal can connect communities and create essential links between businesses, services and functions, and continuous green infrastructure as a spine through the district.
2. Clustering – people, activities and places can unite around the canal as a thoroughfare, an attraction, a centre of activity and unique recreational space. In this way, the canal can catalyse focussed activity as a new junction of trade and a centre for sociability and community.
3. Crossings – by creating a variety of local crossings and connecting activity on the banks of the canal, more strategic connections can be formed at a district level, which see people not only accessing the canal corridor but accessing a variety of district-wide opportunities and in doing so being able to cross socio-economic boundaries as well as physical ones.

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

We would like to see specific reference made to health & wellbeing and training & education included in 'Clustering'.

We note that carbon reduction is a focus of the strategy but no specific reference is made to this in the Drivers for Change. Under 'Continuity', specific reference could be made to the environment and the canal's potential with regard to carbon reduction, sustainability and climate change.

‘Crossings’ – we note that the barrier presented by the recently widened A419 is the biggest challenge to be overcome in terms of the canal in Stonehouse. As many crossings as possible are needed along this stretch and people must have a reason to cross at all points.

Canal Strategy Areas – in order to establish how these drivers can benefit each part of the canal network, the strategy breaks down the canal corridor into 14 canal strategy areas based on a layering of physical characteristics, function and policy. Each strategy area has been profiled against the drivers to identify the future role of each strategy area in helping to contribute to achieve the optimum benefits. For example, the areas identified at Stonehouse and Stroud have an important role to play in terms of the clustering of activities around the canal and crossings to town and village centres, whilst some of the more rural areas of the network have a stronger role in terms of continuity, providing links between places and providing corridors for wildlife. Each strategy area has also been profiled against sources of carbon generation (including actual parish data) to identify the most important sources to be reduced through future actions.

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?

Yes, we are happy with the strategy area that has been identified for Stonehouse. However, the profiling criteria do not reflect the current position in Stonehouse with regard to the three Drivers for Change: Continuity/Clustering/Crossings:

Continuity – Currently measured at level 7: Signposting & waymarking to and along the canal helps legibility, mainly serving travel and recreation. There is localised use of the canal for ecological and engineering purposes. Certain key destinations are connected by the canal and these locations have direct access to the canal. For other wider connections, other modes and routes are more favourable.

Apart from the towpath, the only public access to the canal, and more specifically the water for water-based activities is via the jetties near St Cyr’s Church (2 jetties on either side of canal). People park by St Cyr’s Church and walk to these jetties to access the water. Signposting is limited.

We believe that level 2 more accurately reflects the current position: *Use of the canal is localised and generally for single specific purposes (eg. recreation only). The canal allows for good ecological continuity but access for recreation and travel compromises this. Where the canal provides any greater ecological or engineering resource, this interrupts the continuity for other purposes such as travel or recreation.*

Crossings – Currently measured at level 8: A variety of vehicular, pedestrian and cycle, with green infrastructure crossings, are spread along the corridor, corresponding to activity located either side of the canal, the river and the railway. Use of, and activity along, the canal is encouraged by the regular use of crossings. Community’s and business’s sustainability and biodiversity and ecological networks are improved for being connected to the wider district.

There are a number of crossings in Stonehouse but these crossings only lead to other local locations – there is no continuity or cohesion of purpose or any holistic linkage of these crossings. Aside from the history boards, there is a lack of constructive/meaningful/informative/directional signage.

We believe that level 6 more accurately reflects the current position: *A variety of canal crossings are mainly located at key settlement locations along the corridor. Although these major*

north/south thoroughfares bypass activity located at the canal, or within the corridor a series of more local crossings, some dedicated pedestrian and cycle crossings and including dedicated ecological and historic crossings provide alternative (but less legible) ways to link north/south.

Clustering: currently measured at Level 8: *The canal is an integrated part of the place and easily accessible. It is the reason for a lot of the activity that occurs here but this tends to be for a single specific reason (eg. tourism/recreation/housing). Planned (sic) for development is proactive in integrating the canal for a variety of purposes and built form and open spaces respond positively to the canal.*

This is a level we would aspire to but the only focal points/places currently open to access/gather on the canal in Stonehouse is the green space at St Cyr's Church & land at Wharfedale Way (limited by fencing).

We believe that level 4 more accurately reflects the current position:

The grouping of buildings and/or spaces at the canal gives rise to localised areas of single use. These can vary from employment clusters, concentrations of houses, to areas of particular natural interest. In some cases a focus of activity is due to features/engineering of the canal itself, such as a lock or mooring location.

Placemaking Frameworks – each canal strategy area has a placemaking framework diagram identified. This summarises the key role and character of the area as identified by the profiling and identifies ways in which the area could be improved to fulfil its role within the canal network. The framework also suggests types of interventions likely to be required in each area – taken from the following groups: Movement (**M**); Urban Form (**U**); Uses & Activity (**A**); Infrastructure & Utilities (**I**); Green infrastructure & biodiversity (**G**); Events & Programmes (**E**).

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
Crossings: M U A E

Broadly agree and welcome the focus on the importance of overcoming the physical barrier created by the A419. We believe the focus needs to be on maximising the number of crossings and creating circular loops (footpaths/cycle path/road/ railway) between crossings to fully connect Stonehouse with other communities along the canal corridor (eg. Leonard Stanley/Kings Stanley/Ebley – footpaths/cycle path/tow path); Stroud (footpaths, tow path, cycle path, railway); and further afield (eg. Painswick via Cotswold Way/ Nailsworth via cycle path). Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities.

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

Clustering: AIG

Broadly agree. Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities but note that sites are limited along the canal in Stonehouse and regeneration opportunities should focus on benefiting the maximum number of residents and visitors.

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

Continuity: MUE

Clustering: MUAIE

Broadly agree. Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities.

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

Clustering: UAE

Crossings: MAE

Broadly agree. Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities.

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.

Continuity: MUA

Clustering: AGE

Broadly agree. Also note that the Stonehouse Town Council public consultation on the Ship Inn site was strongly in favour of community use for the site as well as its strategic importance in connecting the Stonehouse and Bridgend communities. Encourage consideration to be given to the potential presented by the holistic development of 11-acre Wyatt's Field (land opposite Avenue Terrace and adjacent to Bond's Mill) to enable Stonehouse to become a destination on the canal and to allow scope for future holistic growth. Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities but note that sites are limited along the canal in Stonehouse and regeneration opportunities should focus on benefiting the maximum number of residents and visitors.

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

Continuity: MUAE

Broadly agree. Also encourage a focus on creating circular loops – see answer 1 above. Broadly agree with carbon reduction opportunities.

Ingredients of Future Place – the strategy includes a catalogue of more specific ingredients to help deliver the positive change required. These are set out within the following groups: Movement **(M)**; Urban Form **(U)**; Uses & Activity **(A)**; Infrastructure & Utilities **(I)**; Green infrastructure & biodiversity **(G)**; Events & Programmes **(E)**. For each canal strategy area, a series of ingredients are identified, and colour coded, for delivery within 5-year time periods. These are intended to support the deliver of each of the place-making frameworks.

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

Now: KK – Varied events on vacant sites/space

Agree – Ship Inn site is ideal location for suggested uses.

B: Signposting, Navigation & Trail finding

Agree – Encourage respectful use of the canal ... identify areas where towpaths could be widened to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists.

0 to 5 years: GG – Our canal: strategic community building/community engagement

HH – Social prescribing

JJ – Canal branding & Marketing

U – Canal Hub: Cultural & Social

Q – Public Art

Agree – all these elements are fundamental to building the canal in Stonehouse as a destination. However, we would also move Z (Canal Hub: Connecting with Nature), L – (Walking on water: accessing the water without a boat) and W (Floats my Boat) from the 5 to 10 years' time slot, into this timeframe as these elements are also crucial as a foundation for what Stonehouse can offer residents and visitors. There should be more urgency regarding the location of the canal hub in Stonehouse and in terms of boating facilities & accessing the water for paddleboarders and canoeists etc. Leaving this until the 5 to 10-year timeframe is too far in the future.

5 to 10 years: A – Natural wayfinding: canal-side parks/linked green space

L – Walking on water: accessing the water without a boat

O – Canal Gateways and Landmarking

C – Lighting

Z – Canal Hub: Connecting with Nature

W – Floats my Boat

Broadly agree but would make the following observations: O should be overarching the whole project from start to finish and with reference to C, great care should be taken to balance personal security with the potentially adverse impact of light pollution on wildlife and the opportunity to experience dark skies.

10 to 15 years: Y – Multi-functional, Canal-side Public Realm

V – Diversify Activity

X – Linking Canopy

K – Connecting the Banks

M – Future Canal Building Interfaces

H – Prioritise Active Travel

The foundations for all these elements need to be put in place much sooner than 10 to 15 years' time. If that is the plan, the strategy needs to make this clear. As it stands it reads as though these elements will not even be considered for 10 years and that will be too late to integrate most of them into a coherent plan that realises their full potential.

15 to 20 years: G – Accessible Townscape

F – Fewer Cars: More People

J – Reclaim Roads

Same comment as above. Ideally, by the time we reach 15 to 20 years, the strategy should be something along the lines of ‘Care & Maintenance of finished project’. In any event, the bones of these elements need to be planned in way in advance of 20 years into the future.

Supplementary Planning Document: we would like to use the strategy to help shape future development along the district’s canals, which requires planning permission. In order to do so, the strategy will need to be adopted as a supplementary planning document. Supplementary planning documents help to explain how planning policies set out in adopted local plans will be delivered. In this case, SDC would like to use the canal strategy as design guidance to supplement Policy ES11 of the District Local Plan (adopted 2015). The council is currently producing a new Local Plan, which has been submitted for examination. The emerging policy ES11 is substantially the same as the adopted Local Plan policy. When the new Local Plan is adopted, the Council would like to use the canal strategy to supplement the revised Policy ES11.

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?

Broadly agree with the following observations: there is nothing in the policy that directly references climate change, carbon reduction, sustainability, circular economy, renewable energy.