

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 27 May 2022 00:00
To: _WEB_Canals Strategy
Subject: A point of view re. the Chalford and Eastern Upper Valley Canal areas...

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Dear Canals Strategy Team,

I am writing to offer a point of view specifically in relation to the Chalford and Eastern Upper Valley Canal areas...

I live in Stroud itself these days and, broadly speaking, I am excited about the improvements and opportunities that might follow from this project for the Stroud end of the valley. (It brings to mind attractive canal redevelopments in parts of London - around Broadway Market in Hackney; or north of Kings Cross, for example.)

I am extremely concerned, though, that in apparently thinking mainly in terms of utility, interconnectivity and seeing the canal system as a whole, Stroud District Council seems, so far, to be overlooking the real value of assets in its care at the other end of the valley. I will try to be as brief as I can in making a couple of points in relation to this...

1). I was lucky to grow up partly in the valley between Frampton Mansell and Oakridge. I am now in my late 30s, having spent much of my adult life in Madagascar. And it is only now, upon returning to the UK and settling in the Stroud area (via the Dart Valley area in Devon), that I have realised how incredibly unusual it is, in this part of the UK, to have fragments of near-pristine wildness on one's doorstep. I imagine you will be receiving feedback raising concerns about biodiversity. The first point I wanted to emphasise is that the preservation of biodiversity and the preservation of wildness are not necessarily the same thing. No doubt the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust would have frameworks that would assist in minimising or offsetting damage implied to natural habitats in, for example, any alterations to the towpath between the A419 in Chalford and Sapperton. (A full environmental impact assessment would, of course, also be necessary.)

But in the event that such alterations could be approved of from a conservation point of view (I have no idea if this is likely or not), I want to stress that even a minor tinkering with the towpath could still absolutely wreck the magical, otherworldly feel along that part of the valley. Its scruffiness, relative inaccessibility and being *out of reach* of urban development are all key to this. 'Wildness', in the OED at least, is defined as "the quality in scenery or land of being in its natural state and not changed by people". There is very, very little of this left in Gloucestershire.

2). Following on from the above, really, I wanted to make a positive case for what you might call a kind of radical *non-intervention* in that part of the valley --which, far from obstructing, could be seen as a jewel, a cornerstone in a vision of the canal system as a whole that maximises diversity. I was struck by something I read somewhere (possibly in the 'Document B') in which the Eastern Upper Valley area is discussed in terms of "inheriting regional acclaim". One of the things that has changed in that valley since I was small is its growing number of nature reserves. In parts of Madagascar not far from where I was living you see the same phenomenon - except that in national parks I have visited there as a tourist, there is a big focus on 'treading lightly'. (I.e. capping existing access routes and keeping humans at a certain distance from

unspoiled landscape in order to encourage it to flourish.) I have seen the same on the Dartington Trust Estate in Devon - where whole tracts of riverside habitat are fenced off near Totnes, and beautiful illustrative maps have been added here and there for the public. You will see where this is heading...

...could something similar be envisaged more formally for the Chalford and Eastern Upper Valley Canal areas, as part of the Council's vision as a whole?? Ie. far from *increasing* connectivity and choice in travel modality on the towpath west of where the canal meets the A419 in Chalford, instead, harnessing the natural potentiality of this part of the canal and working with local communities and relevant partner groups towards making it a zone of special interest *precisely on account of its wildness*, according to the above OED definition.

(Meanwhile for mountain bikers there is already a picturesque road meandering west from Chalford as far as Bakers Mill - and then up to the amenities of Frampton Mansell and Sapperton.)

Work could be undertaken to improve accessibility of a different kind for this stretch of canal... with illustrative maps signposting wildlife, say, and other 'light-touch' educational infrastructure - especially benefiting children, able-bodied elderly visitors, social prescribers promoting mental health. The rare tranquility of this stretch of towpath would always be central to its appeal.

I feel strongly that defending every inch of the wildness that makes that part of the valley so special - rather than incrementally eating into it - is an essential part of any forward-thinking vision truly worthy of regional acclaim.

With very best wishes,

