

**From:** [REDACTED]  
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I am interested in the current proposals for the future direction of canal management, particularly as they affect the canal above Chalford. All the way from the mouth of the Stroudwater Canal, and up to and including Chalford itself, the waterways pass through a largely developed and industrial landscape. Beyond Chalford, this disappears and woodland and water meadow take over. The canal ceased to be navigable beyond Chalford around the time of the First World War, and during the last century the area has rewilded itself, creating an extraordinary and prolific ecosystem. This green corridor, hugely diverse, links and interacts with the many nature reserves between Chalford and Sapperton: it is a vital part of the jigsaw. It needs an extremely light touch. Too much well-intentioned 'improving upon nature' would cause more harm than good.

The remains of the canal, its ruined locks and beautiful simple bridges, form a contrast to the plants which grow in such profusion. The spiritual and psychological benefits of being surrounded by such a landscape cannot be overstated. The combination of the abandoned waterway with plants, birds and animals already makes the walk along this stretch of towpath an extremely popular one, for both locals and tourists, so it is difficult to believe that any further 'branding' (as referred to in 'Document A') needs to take place.

It is alarming to read among the plethora of sometimes mutually contradictory aspirations in the proposals that there is a wish to reconnect the Thames and Severn by means of this canal. Apart from the fact that the canal is famous for having leaked, and never having been particularly successful (water supply was always a problem above Chalford), any re-engineering of the area would devastate what has become an exemplary and beautiful example of biodiversity, and turn an active carbon sink into a mega carbon source, quite apart from its devastating effect on wildlife populations – Roger Mortlock of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust says that we 'have less than 10 years to turn around declines in wildlife'. We know that flying insect numbers have declined by 60% since 2004, that many species of birds are in decline. Wildlife has to deal with climate change, but also with habitat destruction, which is what making the canal navigable would involve, to say nothing of the constraints imposed upon animal and bird life by the activity along a maintained waterway.

There is a general feeling that the strategy documents are opaque and off-putting. Most of them seem to be written in rather impenetrable jargon, which makes the meaning obscure (I hope not intentionally so). Two points in particular struck me as I struggled to make my way through them. Looking at 'Document A', with its 15-year plan for what is referred to as the 'Eastern Upper Valley', I was rather puzzled to find a mention on lighting in the section 5-10 years. Surely some mistake? (Quite apart from its being totally unnecessary, artificial lighting is known to disrupt behaviours of birds and insects.) In the 'Summary of Public Online Survey', it was surprising to find your meticulous pie charts were based on the responses of a total of only nine people. Hardly statistically significant. However, I was encouraged by your statement:

1 Firstly, the canals of Stroud District are engineered waterways that flow through a river catchment basin comprising a diverse range of landscape characters. The watered canals, canal banks, rivers and adjacent landscapes are multi-layered habitats that contribute to widespread, biodiverse and interrelated territories

sustaining fauna and flora. Recognising this aspect of the canal network is vital to sustaining, enhancing and supplementing different habitats throughout the District alongside their many people- and engineering-related functions.

