

From: [REDACTED]
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To: WEB Canals Strategy
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Response to canals strategy doc

Categories: Canal Strategy 2022 response

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To whom it may concern,

We are writing to express our concerns about the proposal to make the stretch of Thames and Severn canal navigable.

You will be aware of the report produced by the Friends of the Frome that details the destructive impact that would be the result of such a project. The report references existing SDC policy policy ES6 which addresses biodiversity. ES6 states 'The council will support development that enhances existing sites and features of nature conservation value (including wildlife corridors...),and that all developments will enable and not reduce species ability to move through the environment in response to predicted environment change, and to prevent isolation of significant populations of species'.

It also references the Environment Act 2021 in which the government outlined its mission to 'halt the overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological network', and states that 'this mission statement is not embraced in the Draft Strategy which if implemented would result in the loss of species and habitats associated with the stretches of canal that extend through Chalford and Sapperton. This would be an unacceptable biodiversity loss.'

The report also reminds us that 'The Environment Act 2021 contains provisions for the protection and improvement of the environment, including biodiversity net gain (BNG), the latter is an existing policy requirement in the National Planning Policy Framework which Stroud District Council is required to implement. The Environment Act mandates this requirement. The objective of BNG requires the biodiversity value attributable to a development to exceed predevelopment biodiversity values by at least 10%. With its current high biodiversity value, it would be impossible to deliver the governments' mandatory biodiversity value in relation to the development of the areas of high nature value associated with the canal in Chalford and Sapperton. The only way offsite compensatory habitat of sufficient biodiversity value could be created would be to construct an adjacent canal and leave it to rewild itself for a century.'

We are at a loss to understand why this proposal is even being considered and what is to be gained from it. Even if the canal were to be made navigable, if it managed to hold water this time, if the huge engineering projects that would be necessary to link this stretch of canals with other could be afforded and carried out, if the infrastructure necessary to support the canal could be imposed on our tiny, narrow valley, what would be gained? We already have an area of extraordinary beauty and diversity which attracts locals and visitors keen to enjoy the peace and tranquility of an area rich in wildlife. Were the canal to be made navigable, what would be

added to this? Some boats? But at what cost? The destruction of a 90-year-old eco-system; invaluable environments for wildlife; peace and tranquility; the carbon sequestration of the trees in the valley etc etc . I appreciate that the canal lobby is a powerful one but whatever the perceived gains of this proposal, the losses would be irreparable at a time when protection (not destruction) of our environment is and should be everyone's number one priority. To quote the Friends of the Frome report again, 'The proposals outlined in the Draft Strategy will drive biodiversity downwards not enhance it, consequently they contravene national nature conservation legislation and policy.' And I would add to that, that we have a moral obligation to protect our diminishing wild spaces for the good of both wildlife and humans.

Thank you in advance for considering our response

Kind regards

