

**Transcript of an article which appeared on the front page of the
Staffordshire Newsletter on 12 February 1998**

MULTI MILLION POUND CANAL SCHEME FOR TOWN CENTRE

Boat comes in for tourism

Exclusive by Julie Curry

Ambitious plans to re-open a stretch of canal leading right into the heart of Stafford have been revealed to the Newsletter.

The Stafford Branch Navigation Heritage Trust wants to re-open a 1.5 mile stretch from Bridge 101 at Baswich – known as St Thomas's Bridge – into the county town via the River Sow.

The multi-million pound stretch would bring in an estimated 8,000 boats a year, giving a huge boost to tourism and the local economy.

The route roughly follows the line of a cut which was closed and filled in 1939. Then, the industrial coal-carrying canal was served by a 'port' of basins where supermarket Tesco now stands.

If the proposal is successful, the new branch will terminate in a 'head of navigation' next to the Asda development. The route would include a small aqueduct over the River Penk.

"This is a canal restoration scheme which has been set up with the aim of restoring navigation between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal and Stafford town centre via the River Sow," said Bob Bowden, secretary to the trust.

"The point we would like to reach is where Asda is proposing to build its supermarket, and we have asked Asda if they would include mooring posts within the development."

Asda has asked for more details, including the volume of boats likely to use the stretch. British Waterways estimates 8,000 a year.

"The line already exists. We only need the link at St Thomas's bridge end – the depths and bridges are adequate," said Keith Boardman, a leading Stafford architect and trust board member.

"The costs – compared with other canal restoration schemes, are negligible," said Mr Boardman, who also chairs Stafford Common Lands committee. Funding would come from Europe and, hopefully, the National Lottery.

Mr Boardman anticipates a giant tourism boost for Stafford. "It's one of the busiest stretches of waterway in the country for leisure boaters, but Stafford town has always been just too far away from the terminus. At most it will take 20-30 minutes to reach Stafford from the main line," said Mr Boardman.

But Mr Boardman has harsh words for the civic chiefs. Bids to include the scheme in the Stafford Borough local plan process were unsuccessful.

"We have agreements from all the statutory authorities in principle. The only party that doesn't want to know is Stafford Borough Council."

However, Dave Pinnock, director of development for the council, said any scheme to boost tourism would be welcome.

Transcribed: David Jones 2013.

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