

SRL PRESENTATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (14 MAY 2004)

Compiled and transcribed by

David Jones

A meeting was held between representatives of the SRL and the EA on 14 May 2004 at the EA's Central Area Office, Fradley Park, Lichfield. Its purpose was to seek the advice and expertise of the EA, discussing the feasibility of restoration and identifying relevant factors.

Representing the SRL: David Jones (Chairman), Bob Bowden (Secretary) and Robert Aspey (Committee Member).

Representing the EA: Marion Hinton (Planning Liaison Officer), Dave Watson (Team Leader, Flood Defence), John Beckett (Development Control Officer), Dave Gribble (Environment Protection Officer), Andrew Crawford (Biodiversity Technical Specialist), Emma Broad (Biodiversity Officer) and Scott Jackson (Placement Student).

The following **three** documents were issued by David Jones for the SRL and formed the basis of the Presentation given to the Environment Agency.

Document 1

RIVER SOW NAVIGATION / STAFFORD BRANCH

Meeting with Environment Agency Friday 14 May 2004

3.00 pm. Environment Agency Offices, Lichfield

Purpose of the Meeting

- To seek the advice of the Environment Agency concerning the **feasibility** of restoring and reopening the Sow Navigation / Stafford Branch Canal to navigation.
- To identify and discuss the factors that would influence restoration.
- To identify any measures that need to be incorporated into this restoration project.

Since the Navigation fell into disuse in the 1930s, there have been a number of changes, in addition to the infilling of the Lock Pound and Basin, and the demolition of various structures at the junction with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal

(Roving Bridge, Aqueduct and Lock). River levels and the water table have been lowered, and the course of the river has been altered.

The original navigation led directly from the lock chamber into the River Sow. Boats would now leave the lock chamber and turn right into the River Penk, before turning left into the River Sow.

Proposal

To restore navigation on the River Sow from the original head of navigation (Green Bridge in Stafford town centre) to its original connection with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Baswich (near Bridge 101, St Thomas' Bridge), a distance of about 1½ miles.

(Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 127: from SJ 923 230 to SJ 945 228).

This would involve:

- Rebuilding the roving bridge at the junction with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal,
- Rebuilding the narrow lock chamber and the lock pound linking the canal to the river,
- Re-constructing a weir with an adjacent sluice to maintain a minimum depth for navigation,
- Some dredging of the river (to provide a minimum depth for navigation without raising existing water levels).

It is envisaged that boats would moor on the river only at designated sites.

It is recognised that there it may not be possible (or desirable) for boats to use the SRL throughout the year. The normal cruising season for boats is usually from mid-March to the beginning of November. Outside of this period many waterways are closed (or partly closed) for maintenance, and there are restrictions on the use of many rivers in times of flood.

It is also recognised that there may have to be some restriction on the number of boats locking down into Stafford, in a similar manner to that which operates on the Montgomeryshire Canal.

Issues

The main issues are **feasibility** and **cost**.

- Reconciling navigation with flood defence. Any scheme will need to integrate with flood defence work on the River Sow and the River Penk,
- Quality of water,
- Environmental impact,
- Providing an amenity that would require little maintenance,

- Land ownership,
- Funding,
- Engaging local support.

Does the EA have a hydrological computer simulation model to test the feasibility of the idea?

This would possibly give information about:

- Any build-up of silt and frequency of dredging,
- Whether river bank modifications are required,
- Any impact on flooding,
- Whether water levels would be more stable and so contribute to improved water management.

Document 2

STAFFORD RIVERWAY LINK (SRL)

(Incorporating The Stafford Branch Navigation Heritage Trust)

Aims and Objectives

To promote the restoration of the historic river and canal waterway linking the county town of Stafford to the national waterways network for the benefit of the community and all interested groups.

- To further the preservation, conservation and restoration of the SRL, and to promote and stimulate public interest in protecting its wildlife and respecting its history.
- To raise funds, organise publicity and encourage other activities to promote this objective.

Benefits

The main benefits of the Stafford Riverway Link concern

- leisure.
- tourism.
- the environment.
- economic regeneration.
- heritage.

The Link would

- **Provide a destination and focus** from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal into Stafford and offering moorings for boaters. The Link would give boaters the opportunity of staying in Stafford, exploring and using the local facilities, so **attracting new income into the local economy**.
- **Create a key leisure and social facility for Stafford** and give a focus to local regeneration. It would improve the quality of life by encouraging a wide range of leisure activities, including fishing, boating and photography. The towpath, where possible, will enable cycling, walking and have wheelchair access.
- **Add tourism value** by creating a destination and new facilities with full access for the disabled. As well as boaters and their crews coming into Stafford, riverside scenes and presence of boats in the town centre will act as a magnet for visitors and tourists, which in itself will encourage job creation and economic regeneration.
- **Enhance the local environment** through the protection of and improvement to the natural features of the area. Nature conservation will be an important feature of the Stafford Riverway Link. Creation and management of wetlands can develop a high conservation value. Rivers and canals are valuable green corridors, especially through urban areas, allowing the movement of animals and spread of flora and fauna.
- **Make the area much more attractive for investors** and create new opportunities for commercial, leisure and, possibly, residential development in an urban waterside environment.
- **Complement wider regeneration schemes** allowing integrated planning between the various local initiatives.
- **Generate new employment opportunities** in the leisure industry through on-site activities and within support services. Initially there would be short term construction jobs.
- **Raising awareness of the rich industrial heritage** of Stafford. The Stafford Riverway Link is part of our industrial heritage. It is a Link that has been lost for 70 years. As such, it is a valuable education resource for the whole community, enabling a wide range of subjects to be studied, from industrial history to biology and environmental science.

This combination of values is of considerable appeal and would significantly enhance the County Town of Stafford as a place in which to live, work, visit and invest.

Document 3

STAFFORD: THE HEART OF THE CANAL COUNTY

A VISION OF THINGS TO COME

The Stafford Riverway Link would restore the connection of the attractive County Town of Stafford with the National Waterways Network. This would immediately raise the profile and prestige of Stafford as the County Town. One only has to look at the regeneration of Birmingham's waterfront to see the enormous benefit to that City.

People from all over the country, and indeed all over the world, travel along England's wonderful waterways. Thousands of them cruise contentedly past Stafford, a mile or two off their route, and hardly realise that Stafford exists. Should Stafford be content with this scenario? Is Stafford, perhaps, missing out?

The Staffordshire Tourist Information leaflet *Staffordshire: The Canal County* paints a superb, very attractive and tempting picture of the wealth of opportunities for leisure and entertainment offered by the canal system in Staffordshire.

It promotes the flora and fauna and wildlife, walking or cycling the quiet towpaths, fishing, boat trips, eating out, festivals and events, visitor attractions and places of interest to visit.

Canal boaters, in private boats or hire boats, enjoy all such benefits as they cruise serenely past the hidden charms of one of the finest county towns in England. If the historic Riverway Link was restored, many if not most of these tourists would want to take time out to visit Stafford, visit the shops and attractions, and perhaps have a good night out in the town. Having discovered Stafford, who knows how many of these visitors might plan to spend more time exploring all the benefits the town has for the tourist to enjoy?

The word will spread among boaters, that Stafford is the place to visit for a really pleasant break. Their friends and families will see photographs, and so the profile of the town will grow. Perhaps they will feel that Stafford is just the sort of town to move to, maybe open a business, settle down and raise the kids! Stafford has so much to offer - but it is hidden away from all those tourists passing by.

The stretches of the two canals that pass near to Stafford are quite remote, and for many miles there is nowhere to shop, unless a bus is caught - and if one is paying good money to go boating, one doesn't want to travel by bus and struggle back with heavy bags to carry. There is only a limited amount of shopping that physically can be carried on public transport.

In any case, there are alternative places that have taken advantage of their position, they have made special efforts to encourage and welcome the boats and so benefit

from the lucrative financial input into their local economy: for example Stone (promoted as *the Canal Town*), Great Haywood, Penkridge and Brewood.

There are over 2000 miles of interconnected navigable waterways in England, linking together many of the most interesting and attractive cities and towns in the country. Stafford has no place in all this, and yet its present isolated situation could so easily be remedied.

At present, visitors travelling along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal (part of the very popular Four Counties Ring Circuit) almost certainly give Stafford a miss, as the town is no longer connected to the main waterways network.

And visitors travelling along the Trent and Mersey Canal have no reason to take a detour from Great Haywood Junction along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and head into Stafford. You just cannot get into Stafford by boat. Stafford is not part of the wider National Waterways scene. But it could be.

Imagine, if the leaflet describing Staffordshire as *The Canal County* could, one day, be changed to include: *Stafford - the heart of the Canal County*.

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