

G9 - Telford & Wrekin Council Position Statement regarding the Shrewsbury & Newport and Canals project 10 October 2016

Evidence Document submitted by Telford & Wrekin Council post Submission

Telford & Wrekin Council wishes to submit this document to examination, with reference to the council's response to Matter 4.7 of the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) and the Regulation 19 representations made relating to Shrewsbury & Newport Canals project.

10 October 2016

G9

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan

Telford & Wrekin Council Position Statement regarding the Shrewsbury & Newport and Canals project

10th October 2016

This statement clarifies why the Council has not specifically identified the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal in a separate policy or on the policies map. The council will refer to this statement at the TWLP EiP in relation to Matter 4.7 - Should the Local Plan make explicit reference to the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals project?

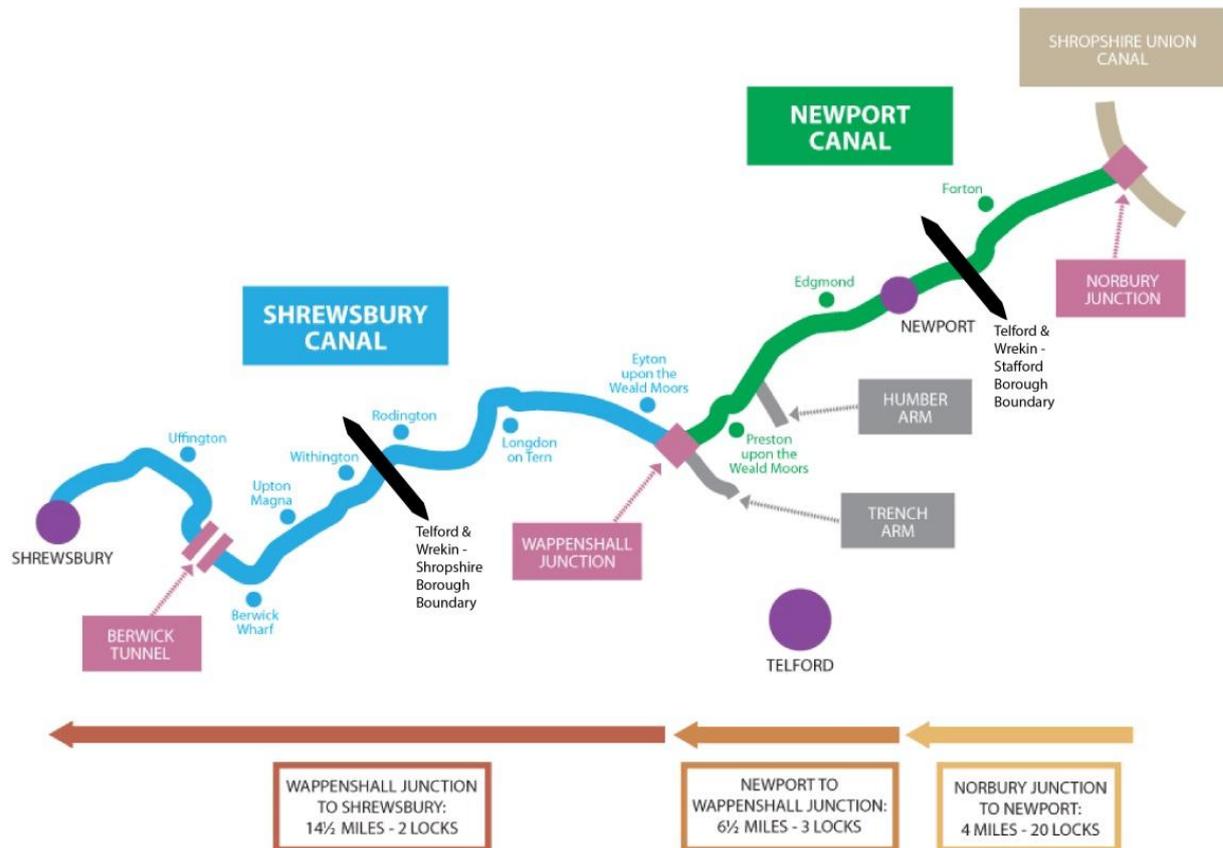
The Council received 49 representations at the Regulation 19 Publication stage of the Local Plan asking for the inclusion of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal on the policies map or to have a policy specifically referring to it and claiming the Plan is unsound on this basis. In particular the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal Trust's representation seeks identification and protection of the Canal's route and proposes modifications to both policy and explanatory text.

This paper has been prepared in advance of the Examination in Public to inform the inspector and representors who wish to see the canal identified in the Local Plan why the Council does not support this.

Canal Route:

The Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust shows the route of the canal to be some 25 miles (or over 40km) long and mostly runs through open countryside. Figure 1 outlines roughly the stretch of the former canal route within the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

Figure 1 Route of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal (source: <http://cms.snct.co.uk>)



The vast majority of the Canal route has been abandoned or filled in and blended into the landscape and is now mostly devoted to other uses, in particular farming operations, but also built urban uses in Shrewsbury and Newport and other recreational/leisure uses. Remnant sections of the Canal also have significant biodiversity and ecological value.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF includes “canals” in the definition of open space¹. It is therefore appropriate to consider canals as green infrastructure.

For example, paragraph 73 of the NPPF states that “*access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities*”.

At paragraph 114 it advises that “*local planning authorities should set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure*”.

Telford and Wrekin Local Plan Submission Version

Policy EC12 refers to leisure, cultural and tourism development and sets out criteria to support development for tourism and leisure activities and includes reference to canal restoration in the explanatory text at paragraph 4.3.2.8.

Telford and Wrekin Core Strategy (2007)

The current Core Strategy acknowledges the benefits arising from the potential restoration of the Canal in tourism and leisure terms as well as local employment opportunities in paragraphs 9.42 and 9.49.

However the Inspectors’ Report into the Core Strategy recognised in para 3.64 that “Policy CS7 is highly restrictive of new housing development in rural areas and offers little prospect for ‘enabling development’ to help fund regeneration works to the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals. The locations concerned (Longden on Tern, Long Lane, Wappenshall and Preston on the Weald Moors) represent settlements which do not currently have the level of services and facilities necessary to support new housing development and which are in any case too close to Telford to serve the outer rural area as potential service centres. ‘Enabling development’ in these locations would undoubtedly conflict with the settlement strategy incorporated into the Core Strategy.

This policy approach has not changed in the emerging Local Plan. Policy HO 10 of the Local Plan Submission version states that, “the Council supports a limited amount of infill housing” in five named settlements and “elsewhere in the rural area residential development will be strictly controlled”.

The amount of housing required to generate funding the restoration would be significant and therefore in conflict with both the existing Core Strategy and the emerging Local Plan.

¹ Refer Annex 2: Glossary

Constraints

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - The Newport Canal SSSI is designated for its range of submerged and broadleaved plant communities which are one of the best examples in Shropshire, a narrow continuous fringe of swamp and in some places more extensive areas of fen habitat. Any proposed restoration of the SSSI to part of a navigable canal would be highly inappropriate since it would destroy the botanical interest for which the site was designated. Natural England considers any changes to the canal structure within the SSSI as an 'operation likely to damage' the SSSI interest features. Explicit consent from Natural England would need to be sought for any changes to the canal structure within the SSSI.

Species/Habitats. The Strine Brook which runs adjacent to the remaining canal sections has historically supported populations of water vole (a UK Protected Species and Species of Principle Importance for Nature Conservation under Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006). Water vole can use ponds and remnant canal sections as well as flowing water courses. Water voles are sensitive to physical disturbances (including vibration), predation and flooding of burrows by altered water levels and their presence if confirmed on the remnant canal sections or on the Strine Brook close by would be a constraint to reinstatement.

Much of the historic canal route west of Newport runs through largely agricultural land without any physical signs of the historic canal. The Strine brook remains close by and remains broadly suitable for water voles – surveys and appropriate sensitive working methods (possible including avoiding sheet piling in places) would be required. There are a few remnant sections and small ponds present which would also require surveying for great crested newts – if the species were found to be present then works would require a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence from Natural England and amalgamating such remnant sections and ponds into the restored route may not be possible.

There are also areas of woodland and the deep managed field drains in the area around Kynnersley Drive and Aqueduct Plantation which serve to drain agricultural land within the Weald Moors. There are multiple trees and water bodies here and the woodland is of some ecological value. Negotiation of this part of the route would require full ecological surveys including an extended phase 1 habitat survey, great crested newt surveys, water vole surveys of the field drains and pools and bat roost assessments of all trees to be removed. If the woodland and ponds here were shown to meet the definitions under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) as a habitats of principle importance then loss of these resources would need to be avoided.

Urban constraints. Through Newport the historic canal route is physically constrained by built development on both sides and the Strine Brook to the north and the crossing point of Chetwynd End and Lower Bar is a particularly narrow point. It is not clear how a new canal route could be established through the centre of the market town of Newport while giving the SSSI sufficient stand-off to protect its interest features and leave it unaffected and without impacting the Strine Brook and its associated water vole population to the north of the historic route. It is assumed that bringing any restored canal route into the centre of Newport would be integral to its success as a well used route and a tourist attraction but it is difficult to see how this could be achieved given the physical constraints present.

Physical constraints. Physical restoration of canal lengths depends on the topography, ground conditions and whether remnant sections exist. The Longden on Tern Aqueduct (which is grade 1 listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument) being the first canal aqueduct constructed from cast iron by Thomas Telford. An aqueduct, or similar infrastructure, is required here to manage a crossing of the River Tern.

Road crossings are also required notably at Marsh Green where it is necessary to cross a road to continue south and before the route reaches Rodington. Whilst at Rodington further infrastructure would be required to cross the River Roden. From Rodington the route continues south and passes out of the borough into Shropshire Council's administrative boundary.

As the Canal route passes through both the Strine Levels and Weald Moors drainage issues are a significant consideration. Cllr Eric Ashcroft of Tibberton & Cherrington Parish Council who was the responsible officer for the Strine Drainage Board on behalf of Severn Trent Water suggested that if there is an intention to restore the canal, then alternative measures need to be implemented to replace the drainage function of the canal route.

In addition to the above the Strine Internal Drainage Board has submitted the following comments:

"The Strine Internal Drainage Board is concerned about the implications of a project to rebuild the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals near Telford. Redevelopment would inevitably include part of the canal now functioning as the Telford Northern Interceptor Channel, which carries surface water drainage and sewer over flows from a significant area of Telford. The channel has a vital function in containing often fast flowing and high volume storm water runoff away from the Strine drainage district and on into the River Severn. These types of flows would be incompatible with navigation of the channel by canal boats, therefore it's reinstatement as a canal will almost certainly require the construction of a replacement drainage structure to serve this purpose.

"Future development in Telford will stretch the capacity of the current drainage system around Kynnersley & Eyton, even with the installment of SUDS & attenuation features. We cannot therefore see how the redevelopment of the canal network here could bring anything but considerable addition cost and added pressure to the existing drainage infrastructure. As the Strine IDB acts as the Lead Local Flood Authority for land in its area the IDB would strongly object to the diversion of any of these flows into rural watercourses in the board's operation area.

"The Strine IDB does not therefore feel that it is appropriate for the canal's redevelopment to form part of Telford & Wrekin's local plan unless significant assurances can be made as to what will replace its drainage function; and how it is proposed to cost in items such as the compulsory purchase of land to install an alternative drainage structure."

The need to maintain water levels in the canal, especially during dry weather periods could necessitate the abstraction of ground water in an area that has already been recognised as under pressure. The Environment Agency has plans to restrict ground water abstraction within the borough and as such would be unlikely to support additional abstraction for such a project. A report produced in 2003 by Atkins² on behalf of the Canal Trust suggests the need for a supply of 30 mega (million) litres per day to maintain appropriate canal levels. When compared with a total estimated demand of 4.43 megalitres per day from committed and allocated development contained within the Local Plan this would put considerable additional pressure of existing water sources of water supply. The operating supply is on top of the 340 mega litres Atkins estimate it would take to fill the canal. It should be noted that post abandoned in 1944 there has been a considerable increase in the level of development locally therefore it can't be assumed that sources of water used to 'top up' the canal then are available for use now.

The route largely crosses agricultural land in private ownership over which the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan would have little influence and where there is little proposed additional development and no allocated sites

Conclusions

The Council acknowledges that the reinstatement of canals could deliver additional visitors to the area and supports their reinstatement in principle (para 4.3.2.8).

Despite the general benefits, it must be stressed that there are many significant and potentially insurmountable barriers to the restoration of the Shrewsbury Newport Canal. Such schemes must be considered on their own merits on a scheme by scheme basis. This will allow for detailed assessments and relevant consultations to be carried out.

Potentially the most significant restriction on re-opening the canal length as a navigable canal is the presence of the Newport Canal SSSI which must be protected and the physical narrowness of the canal corridor through the town makes it difficult to see how a new canal route could be accommodated while maintaining the SSSI sections.

The likely existence of protected species and habitats is also an important consideration requiring complex and expensive costs associated with surveying the habitats, ponds and watercourses present along the historic route and for the development and implementation of a range of mitigation measures.

There are also likely to be issues concerning the routes impact on farming operations and the potential loss of productive agricultural land and resultant compensation.

A variety of road and river crossings in the form of viaducts and aqueducts are also likely to be required as well as infrastructure to negotiate changes in levels, topography and ground conditions. Additional infrastructure will also be required to compensate for the drainage function ascribed to the abandoned canal line.

² Shrewsbury & Newport Canals: Feasibility of Restoration Study (2003), <http://cms.snct.co.uk/reports>

The cost for restoration of the whole route is excessive. By the trust's own reckoning the whole project would cost £86m to complete based on the findings for a high level study carried out by consultants Atkins in 2003. It is expected that project costs will increase significantly as a result of:

- Inflation in construction costs;
- Detailed engineering studies, pre-construction studies and final construction costs;
- Un-costed items such as land purchase and water supply; and
- Accounting for typical levels of project risk and optimum bias, separate from contingency costs (this is typically around 25% and 44% of overall budget within large highways projects)

Assuming that large part of funding will come from development around the area, this will require a lot of development in the rural area to raise funds to cover such costs. This is a similar position taken by the Inspectors who examined the Telford & Wrekin Core Strategy.

Restoration of the canals definitely raises various concerns and the Council is of the view that schemes which relate to their restoration will be considered on their individual merits. This provides various bodies to comment on detailed proposals once full assessments have been made.

Although the Canal trust has firm aims and aspirations to restore the length of canal in Telford and Wrekin, there are significant feasibility and cost issues including reconstruction of locks, bridges and aqueducts, which mean there is little realistic prospect of it being fully restored within the current plan period. Policy EC12 does not preclude its restoration or any associated regeneration schemes, but provides positive support to appropriate development that makes the best use of canal assets. The reference in the explanatory text (at para 4.3.2.8) to canal restoration in general if not specifically to this long term, extremely ambitious restoration project goes as far as it can and the Council is satisfied that explicit reference either on the policies map or text is not required.