

BISLEY-WITH-LYPIATT PARISH COUNCIL

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Stroud District Council
(For Attention of Senior Planning Strategy Officer)
Ebley Mill
Stroud
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30th October 2006

Dear Madam

The Cotswold Canals Design Framework.
The Industrial Heritage Conservation Area Review.

Thank you for your letter dated 31st August. We have carefully considered the implications of the Cotswold Canal restoration project as a generality but have mainly focussed our attention on that part of the canal which passes through the Oakridge Ward. This is the section which abuts the Chalford boundary at Ashmeads/Three Groves Wood and runs east to the Sapperton Tunnel West Portal. Additionally because of the unspoilt nature of this part of the canal we have considered the aspects of waterway restoration and industrial heritage preservation as one.

The Canal Restoration to Brimscombe Port

The part of the canal running parallel with the A419 from Stonehouse to Brimscombe Port runs through contrasting scenery, some open country, 19th century mill buildings (some restored viz Ebley Mill) Canal infrastructure buildings, new housing developments and unattractive industrial premises.

Ideally we believe as many as possible of the original buildings should be preserved and utilised either for commercial or residential purposes.

New buildings need to be designed with this background in mind ensuring there is a harmonious fit. Existing enterprises established in warehouse/factory sheds should be encouraged to upgrade their facilities in keeping with the overall plan.

At all costs linear ribbon development of anonymous apartments/flats or houses must be prevented, and there must be open areas giving easy access and visual amenity to and from the canal.

New and replacement buildings should be of contemporary design and excellent quality meeting the highest environmental standards. They must integrate with their surroundings and landscape.

All parts of the canal and its immediate surroundings form part of the flood control and retention for this valley from Chalford west, including all the villages through to Stroud and on to the Severn. With climate change and unreliable weather patterns bringing possible problems from the hills (east) and predicted rise in sea levels bringing problems from the west we would like to feel that the restoration will take this issue into account. A point of particular concern is that the existing main sewer runs alongside the canal and river.

Apart from the canal period buildings there are important and tangible reminders of the canals heritage for example the bridges, sluices, handling equipment and the locks. We assume the restoration plan allows for these to be retained as they are, if not restored, to their original form. Concern was felt about the intrusion of modern safety barriers/signs and equipment that might be forced upon the environment when at present there are few.

At present erosion and silt is a particular problem in certain areas of the valley, exacerbated by the current pattern of short but very intense rainfall, this needs to be allowed for in the restoration plans.

The Golden Valley.

This section of the canal is dewatered and taken over by nature. It is the only part of the canal that is genuinely wild. The quality of birdsong is remarkable. It is peaceful and is maintained as a Nature Reserve by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Siccaridge Woods is a triple SSSI. There are no buildings other than a very few converted cottages. Some historic ruins remain also.

Currently in spite of recent heavy rains there is no water running in the Frome until Bakers Mill. This poses the question about water to feed the summit, the infrastructure and the environmental impact required to make it available there, and the source.

The key question therefore is whether the restored canal is to proceed peacefully through this AONB up to the Sapperton Tunnel with little or no access, or if some form of associated development is to be allowed. Generally the hilly nature of the surrounding countryside and the narrow approach road with few passing places would prevent the construction of major servicing facilities or housing/commercial development without major works totally incompatible with the setting.

The Parish Council's view in short is:

To recommend this section of the canal be preserved as a tranquil part ideally much as it is now, restoring only the corridor of the canal and tow path in the Golden Valley section.

Reason: To maintain the special natural diversity and wilderness of this section, and preserve the landscape.

No new building or infrastructure to be permitted excepting possibly a very limited expansion of facilities at Daneway. We welcome and support the plans for the preservation of wildlife habitats. The Council will be aware of the protected species such as dormice which inhabit this area, birds such as the kingfisher and hobby, and flowers such as the unusual masses of lily of the valley, it is essential that such refurbishment as is necessary must be kept to the canal itself and towpath corridor ONLY, and must not intrude into wildlife corridors running alongside.

Reason: To preserve the special environment that exists in the valley.

Strict controls to be enforced governing the environment, litter, pollution from vessels, sewage disposal and fuelling.

Reason: To reduce the environmental impact of the restoration.

The canal to be constructed as originally built, with sloping (not vertical) sides.

Reason: To preserve wildlife access to the water.

The use of concrete should be discouraged.

Reason: The impermeability to water pressure from the underground springs could present unknown problems as with the railway line during its refurbishment in 2002/3.

Locks to be restored in a traditional manner to enable manual operation.

Bridges - Whitehall Bridge (1782)/Daneway Bridge/Bakers Mill Bridge to be maintained at existing span.

Reason: To preserve as part of the amenity.

All canal associated relics to be preserved.

Reason: To preserve as part of the amenity.

The towpath to remain unmetalled.

Vehicular access to be limited, with no parking at the bottom of the valley.

Reason: To preserve the particular environment and seclusion which exist through this valley. No new access routes to be created for the reconstruction phase of the canal otherwise the integral quality of the landscape and its wildlife will be destroyed; (see scar in the landscape created by railway works)

Great consideration must be given to the type and size of the machinery used in the work in order to minimise their impact on residents and wildlife.

No modern signage, lighting or barriers to be permitted.

In summary whilst we support the Canal Restoration project which we believe will offer advantages to Stroud District we urge a sympathetic approach to design and the preservation of the Golden Valley section as a place of rural secret beauty to be appreciated by residents and visitors (boating or otherwise) alike.

Yours faithfully

Richard Bryant
Chairman
Bisley-with-Lypiatt Parish Council