

# STROUD CANALS VISION AND STRATEGY

## **General Comments:**

It would be helpful to have some context for the review. What was the brief given to DHUD, can we see the Invitation to Tender for this review project. Did DHUD undertake any local research, site visits, consultation with communities? I am not sure whether you can provide this information or whether you need a formal FoI request, if the latter please let me know.

I might also question whether DHUD, as specialists in urban design are really the most appropriate partners for a predominantly rural area.

The aims are stated to be “maximise its social, economic and environmental benefits”. How are these benefits assessed or measured, volume versus quality? In particular, what assessment was made that correlates maximum benefits with maximum use? Also, were the conflicts between the benefits addressed, i.e. economic versus environment versus social. For interest, was the aim to maximise use arrived at in consultation with the constituency?

## **Drivers of Change:**

The drivers of change are presumably ‘clustering, continuity and crossings’. There is nothing to say why these should be drivers of change and it is not always obvious. The ‘drivers’ appear also to have been considered in isolation from the surrounding area and community, ignoring the larger picture.

Critically, these drivers of change are entirely dependent on the premise that the drivers for change are correct, in particular that maximising use of the waterways should be the primary aim.

## **Canal Strategy Areas:**

The areas seem somewhat arbitrary, perhaps relating to population density rather than any intrinsic value of a particular segment.

It is not entirely clear whether the profile criteria are based on current assessment or future ambition?

For Lower Gloucester and Sharpness segment the impact of WWT doesn’t seem to be given adequate prominence. As a major national attraction and certainly the largest by visitor numbers in Stroud District, the WWT radically impacts the needs of the area if looked at as a combined segment. It is important that surrounding areas are given proper consideration rather than merely viewed as part of the WWT area.

## **Carbon Reduction Opportunities and Environmental:**

There seems to be an implication that travel on water is environmentally better than travel by road. Whilst this may be true at present, the increase in use of electric cars may well tip the balance in the future. Travel by water is not necessarily environmentally friendly, for example use of diesel engines on boats. This is probably not of great relevance as the likelihood of travel by water, other than for leisure, becoming significant in the SDC area is not a very likely prospect.

Importantly, any increase in the use of waterways for leisure will have a direct correlation with an increase in road traffic to points of access, whether direct or to a park and move hub, with all the network implications that follow.

There is reference to waterways providing sequestration of carbon. Waterways may provide a temporary carbon sink but are not a long term solution.

Travel – for Lower Gloucester and Sharpness segment there is reference to minimising the need to travel. Assuming that this is aimed at visitors to the area it is hard to see how this statement can support the aim to increase visitor numbers. To use the waterway for travel it is necessary to travel to a point of access, whether direct or ‘park and move’ hub. In reality, ‘park and move’ hubs are unlikely to have a significant benefit where use of the waterways requires use of leisure equipment – I have yet to see anyone carry a kayak on a bus!

Travel – reference is made to cycle tracks. In respect of the towpaths, with increasing numbers of visitors, it will be essential to provide some division between pedestrians and cyclists – difficult to see how this can be resolved without major expense and compulsory land requisition. In respect of cycle tracks on and off the local road network, the track record of considering infrastructure needs in conjunction with housing developments in the area is particularly poor and shows no sign of improving for the major developments planned.

Ecosystems – was professional input obtained for the impact assessment? The statements made appear to be rather bland with no explanation of how individual ecosystems will benefit.

**Supplementary:**

The report provided by DHUD is not ideal as a consultation document. Quite aside from the obvious legibility questions, the documents are drafted in what can best be described as ‘consultant speak’ and to most of us normal humans come across as meaningless jargon. After attempts to analyse what the documents say, it appears to me that the documents actually say very little – although doubtless cost us taxpayers a considerable sum. If SDC are genuinely intending to consult constituents might it be better to communicate plans in a language understandable to all?