

Restoration of the Barnsley and Dearne and Dove Canals.

Background Notes

Introduction

These notes give a summary of recent progress and the outcomes of the Feasibility Study. They need to be read in conjunction with the Report's Executive Summary and ideally the Main Report. For any further information or assistance please contact the Consortium members listed at the end.

The Barnsley Canals Consortium

The Barnsley Canals Consortium is an informal grouping of organisations interested in restoration of the canals. Membership of the Barnsley Canals Consortium is open to all organisations and groups who have a stakeholder interest in the Barnsley and Dearne & Dove Canals. A distinctive grouping of local authority officers, riparian land owners and voluntary organisations has resulted. Members include:- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Inland Waterways Association (IWA), Royston and Carlton Community Partnership, Walton Parish Council, Environment Agency, UK Coal, Calder Navigation Society and the Barnsley Dearne & Dove Canals Trust (formerly the Barnsley Canals Group). The current chairman of the Barnsley Canals Consortium is John Openshaw, a Barnsley Council officer and formerly of the Royston and Carlton Partnership.

The Consortium produced the brief for the canal restoration study. On behalf of the Consortium, the Barnsley, Dearne and Dove Canals Trust raised the necessary funds from various sources. After going out to formal tender, the consultants Atkins (www.atkinsglobal.com) were appointed to carry out the study. It is the report of this study which is now to be formally launched.

The Feasibility Study

The study looked into the viability of restoring a navigable waterway between the Aire & Calder Navigation near Wakefield and the Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation near Swinton. This would create the missing Yorkshire Waterways Link, between the waterways of South and West Yorkshire and form a Yorkshire waterways cruising 'ring'. The study considered a route for restoration of the canals to navigable standards, the environmental & economic benefits of restoration, and the opportunities for tourism along the waterway corridor. The study concluded that the Barnsley and Dearne & Dove Canals are capable of restoration and reconstruction and that there are economic, environmental and social benefits from doing so.

There is one unique feature of the proposals. If the link were completed to the wide beam standard of the original canal, it provides the only feasible non-tidal, inland one-week duration canal cruising ring in the country, and in a sense its nearest rival is currently the Norfolk Broads. This attribute would be attractive to boat hirers and users, as wide beam craft are able to offer accommodation standards generally considered superior to that which traditional narrow boats provide.

The Recommended Route

The restoration line follows the original line of the canal wherever possible, but both canals have been largely abandoned for over 40 years, and development in the intervening years means that restoration of certain parts of the line is not feasible. To complete parts of the link some significant structures are required. The way forward now is to get the

recommended line or an agreed alternative, into each council's forthcoming Local Development Framework (the replacement for Local Plans). The current situation is that officers in both Wakefield and Barnsley Councils are minded to include the proposed restoration line in their council's Frameworks, and it is hoped will then be pro-active in preserving the best line and getting the greatest benefits from the restoration for their districts. Rotherham officers have identified problems with the line in their area, and have suggested that an alternative line should be examined. This process has started, but it is unlikely to have resulted in an outcome before the launch.

Issues

1. The works involved in this restoration are probably one of the more ambitious canal restorations currently being promoted. The proposals indicate that more than just renewing the line is planned. A considerable length of new canal is proposed. Consequently the costs identified in the report are significant. However, it must be realised that the costs are 'contractors' prices, and the reality is that some will be work will be carried out by volunteers, sections will be funded by adjacent development and with committed local authority involvement lower cost alternatives may be possible as development opportunities are grasped. The restoration of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal took place over many years and in a similar way to these other complex schemes, the restoration of the Barnsley and Dearne and Dove Canals can be expected to take at least 30 years.
2. The environmental benefits of having a gradually increasing restored length of managed waterside habitat are also stressed in the report. The canal always linked communities along its line and to return the line of the canals to those communities will provide many opportunities for enhanced access to what is in effect a linear park for walkers, cyclists, those interested in fishing etc. In addition, there are the benefits to wildlife of the linear corridor.
3. The study recommends some early wins with some sections potentially being restored by volunteer effort and requiring limited funds. It also stresses the importance of getting the line into greater use as a linear route. These linear uses exist already in part - the Transpennine way uses some lengths of the old towpath - but there is a considerable amount of work that can be done in furthering this aim.
4. It is very early days in restoration terms, but there will be some 'landmark' structures in the form of the aqueducts and new lock flights needed to complete the links along the line. These will probably be tourist attractions in their own right.
5. At a future date a key decision will be needed on what 'beam' the canals will be reconstructed. The first new structure will present this problem and set the scene for the remainder of the canal. Constructing to narrow beam reduces costs substantially, but will rule out the unique wide beam use of the ring attractive to boaters. Much of the English canal system is narrow and probably the greatest proportion of boats on the network is narrow beam, but it will be a difficult decision.
6. In progressing the proposal, other restorations have highlighted the need for an employed person to act as a focal point and coordinator of efforts. The study recommends this as a way forward.
7. The Yorkshire coalfield communities that both canals pass through, continue to need the boost from reconstruction and regeneration that a scheme like this could promote over a lengthy period.

General advice on local matters:-

John Openshaw. Tel: - 01226 773475.

Engineering and technical matters arising from the feasibility study etc. -

Mike Silk. Tel: - Home: 01924 373866; Work 01904 735265. Mob: 07939 917894

Or

Malcolm Macaskill. Tel: - Home 01977 - 703874. Mob: - 07761 645673.