

Report on Ashby Canal Landscape Partnership

a) Background

The Ashby Canal Landscape Partnership (ACLP) was created after a review of the Ashby Canal Conservation Area (p.1297/3c refers). A meeting of the ACLP had been held on 27th August to discuss a bid for funding from the Lottery Landscape Partnerships grant scheme for an area centred on the Ashby Canal, and this had led to a meeting of potential partners on 16th November. I represented the PC at the latter meeting.

British Waterways is to become a charity, all being well by Spring 2012. This will bring a new approach to funding, new working methods and a requirement to involve the public and other partners in a wide range of activities.

b) Landscape Partnerships grant scheme

The proposal and grant scheme were outlined by Nick Ireland of British Waterways, who would be the lead partner in the bid. The Landscape Partnerships scheme could award grants of £250k-£2m, with a requirement for only 10% of the project costs to be met by the partners. The partnership should involve regional, national and local organisations with an interest in the area, community groups and individuals.

The programme would be based on a portfolio of projects which together would provide long-term social, economic and environmental benefits for the rural area. The proposal must identify an area of countryside between 20 and 200 km² in area that has a distinctive landscape character and is recognised and valued by local people.

Successful schemes will be focused in an area of distinctive landscape character, be primarily for public benefit, not private gain, and deliver evenly across all of the following four programme outcomes:

1. Conserving or restoring the built and natural features that create the historic landscape character.
2. Increasing community participation in local heritage.
3. Increasing access to and learning about the landscape area and its heritage.
4. Increasing training opportunities in local heritage skills.

c) Ashby Canal proposals

It was envisaged that an initial bid be prepared for submission in January 2012, with bid development taking place in 2012-13 if the proposal passed the initial screening process.

A number of options were suggested and discussed. The grant could not be used to fund repairs to bridges, which was unfortunate as this was the most urgent problem on the Ashby Canal, and surprising in view of programme outcome (1) above. It was noted that the corridor might be drawn 10 km wide along a 20 km length of the canal.

There was general agreement that the bid should focus on improvements to public access to the Ashby Canal Corridor, and the historical development of the canal and railway and their effect on the landscape. Although the canal was an important link from Coventry to the coalfield in historical terms, and to the National Forest in modern tourist terms, the general view was that the proposed bid would need to focus on the landscape of the rural part of the canal. LCC had independent funding proposals for the extension from Snarestone to Measham, and it was agreed that the new proposal would focus on the existing canal.

I suggested that the restoration of Help out Mill to working order for the generation of electricity would be environmentally friendly and involve the restoration of wetland habitats. I also suggested that the creation of new wildlife refuges to conserve the biological interest of the SSSI section of the canal would be desirable, given the expected increase in boat traffic when the extension was built. Mrs

Cullen (Clerk to Shackerstone PC) and I described the current RoW improvement programme to the east of the canal, and expressed strong support for the idea of extending this work to the west. Mrs Cullen drew attention to outline proposals from the Crown Estate to develop tourist facilities in the Gopsall area.

The location of major recreational facilities around Market Bosworth was reviewed, as were the restoration of Market Bosworth Station and associated developments on the Sedgemere site. Proposals for major development at the MIRA site might allow the creation of a cycle track along the former railway line, linking to the Weddington Trail and improving the major Sustrans Route 52.

There was cautious support for the proposal, and a feeling that it should be possible to put together a viable bid. It was agreed that additional potential partners would be contacted, with a view to compiling a list of potential component schemes.

I recommend that Carlton PC expresses an interest in this project, sends a representative to future meetings, and considers potential schemes for consideration. Project proposals might include landowners, neighbouring PCs, or other organisations, but should include projects suitable for volunteers, education and public involvement.

C J Peat
Parish Clerk
16.11.2010