

COTSWOLD CANALS CONNECTED UPDATE – REGENERATING CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE FOR EVERYONE

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. On 24th April 2018, the then Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded us £842,800 as Development Fund, enabling us to work towards submitting a further Delivery Stage bid, in the order of £8.9 million, by a deadline of 24th April 2020.
- 1.2. The project would see restoration of a 4-mile length of canal connecting the national waterway network at Saul Junction to the already restored 5 mile section running from Stonehouse to Thrupp. This would make Stonehouse and Stroud canal towns once again.
- 1.3. The project would also bring significant biodiversity, economic, leisure and health and wellbeing benefits.
- 1.4. Whilst Development funding does not automatically guarantee a Delivery stage pass, the then HLF was clearly sufficiently impressed to award funding. Provided the project looks certain to deliver its outcomes to budget, there is no reason why the further bid should fail.

2. THE COTSWOLD CANALS CONNECTED PROJECT – PROGRESS

- 2.1 The Project Team consists of 9 distinct teams, of which 7 are led by volunteers. These teams are:

- Archives
- Community Engagement
- Engineering
- Environment
- Fundraising
- Land
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Sustainability
- Volunteers

The following gives an indication of the depth and breadth of work undertaken by these teams in preparation for a Delivery Stage Heritage Fund (HF) bid, but it is by no means exhaustive:

- 2.2 Archives

- 22 volunteers working, mainly at Gloucestershire Archives, transcribing, summarising, cataloguing and photographing the canal records
- Pilot website set up
- Conservation Plan produced (specific HF requirement)
- Documents assessed for conservation
- Activity Plan for outreach activities being drawn up.

- 2.3. Community Engagement

- Consultation undertaken at 5 key locations January - March

- Programme of 16 activities and further consultation completed March – June
- Engagement with over 4,000 people, including target beneficiary groups
- Draft Activity Plan drawn up.

2.4 Engineering

- Conservation Plan produced
- A38 Crossing – scheme solution in final design by GCC. Current target start date is Oct 2019
- Ocean Railway Bridge – Option report received from Network Rail. Mainline rail closure currently booked for Easter 2021
- M5 Crossing – Outline designs being drafted and discussions with Highways England underway
- Option to utilise a “generic” bridge deck design at Stonepitts, Whitminster and Bond’s Mill is now looking feasible
- Detailed positive discussions with various landowners underway for both permanent and temporary access requirements.

2.5 Environment

- Conservation Plan produced
- Protected species survey complete
- Habitat Condition Assessment complete
- Pursuing Environment Bank and Building with Nature Accreditations
- Biodiversity areas being designed.

2.6 Fundraising

- £4 million grant obtained from Highways England. Due to its grant conditions, this is likely to be spent outside the HF funded project, but still has the effect of reducing the final cost by £4m. Depending on final costs, this should mean a much lower fundraising commitment and a lower HF ask
- £506,000 raised from other sources
- Full time fundraiser now in post with CCT.

2.7 Land

- We are working to make sure that all ‘necessary’ and ‘desirable’ land can be obtained by agreement. Good progress is being made with one notable exception.

2.8 Monitoring & Evaluation

- Will be developed from the Canal & River Trust’s new Outcomes Measurement Framework

- Both primary and secondary baseline data being collected
- Aims are to produce a Health Impact Assessment, and an Economic Prosperity Forecast (with the assistance of GFirst)
- Each team is required to draw up means of assessing environmental impact, enabling a whole project assessment.

2.9 Sustainability

- Latest indications are that the restored canal will be financially viable in its own right
- These assumptions are being checked by a voluntary 'sense checker'
- Work is underway on the final Sustainability Plan
- 4 of 6 Activity Plans have been submitted to the Community Engagement Team.

2.10 Volunteering

- The HF approved budget expects volunteers to contribute hours to the value of £444,900 during the Development stage. At the end of May, this figure had already reached £444,600, underlining the tremendous commitment of volunteers to the project
- Towpath and channel clearance carried out west of A38 over two winters
- Bridge and lock inspections completed
- New Sunday work party working near Bond's Mill Estate
- Ongoing vegetation management and towpath repairs to keep volunteers occupied and engaged
- Working with Stroud College, Gloucestershire College, Royal Agricultural University, University of Gloucestershire, Ruskin Mill College and William Morris College to identify opportunities
- Working with NHS formalise Social Prescribing.

2.11 In addition, individuals look after Budget and Risk. Risk is managed by the functional teams, which escalate high-level risks to the Project Risk Register. Legal, Surveyor, Health & Safety and Finance support are provided in-house by SDC.

3. TIMETABLE

3.1 The next project milestone is the HF mid-term review, scheduled for October. The HF will be examining deliverability, risk, likely costs, changes from the original bid and any perceived gaps.

3.2 Depending on the outcome of this review, the intention is to submit the final Delivery Stage Lottery bid either in November or February. The HF has already indicated a preference for February, but the decision will be partly predicated on Network Rail's critical path for Ocean Railway Bridge.

- 3.3 The intention is to present a further report to the Strategy & Resources Committee before the final bid is made; seeking its approval to do so.

4. GOVERNANCE

- 4.1 The Development Stage is overseen by a Project Board, with a membership comprising:-

Chief Executive (SDC)	CCT Company Secretary
Leader/Chair of S&R Committee (SDC)	Stroud Valleys Canal Company Chair
Chair, Environment Committee (SDC)	GCC representative
Interim Director of Resources (SDC)	Canal and River Trust representative
Cotswold Canals Trust (CCT) Chair	

The Partnership Agreement between these bodies is in the process of being reviewed to accommodate the Delivery Stage of the project

5. FINANCE

- 5.1 The cash elements of the Development stage are as follows:-

Heritage Fund grant:	£842,800 (£250,803 paid)
Fundraising:	<u>£302,700</u>
	£1,145,500
Spent:	£368,198 (to end of April)
Committed:	£587,458
Remaining:	<u>£189,844</u> (inc £70,000 contingency)
	£1,145,500

Note: The contingency will be used on staff costs if the bid is submitted in February.

- 5.2 There is a period of approximately 4 months between bid submission and an HF decision. Spend during this 'interregnum' is ineligible for HF grant assistance; thus SDC will have to carry this cost, expected to be in the order of £86,000.
- 5.3 The HF-approved budget also assumes that £574,800 will be provided by partners as 'in kind' contributions. Inevitably, some of this will have to be in the form of 'paid for' services, as the total cannot otherwise be achieved. With income of £175,000 from GCC and £60,000 from Canal & River Trust during the Development period, SDC's maximum exposure should therefore be £339,800.

As 'in kind' contributions do not attract HF grant, we are spending in other categories first. It is thus not yet possible to determine the actual anticipated SDC spend.

6 PHASE 1A UPDATE (Thrupp to Stonehouse)

- 6.1 The canal is now navigable between Stonehouse Ocean and Bowbridge Lock; a distance of 6.6 km. Provided water supply technical issues can be overcome, a further 1.75km upstream of Bowbridge to Canal Ironworks will soon be added.
- 6.2 Repair work needs to be carried out at Dudbridge Lower Lock, where restoration in 2012 was inadequately specified. This work was carried out by contractors, but should not be a problem in future as lock restorations are now carried out by volunteers.
- 6.3 Tasks completed since my last report include restoration of the Brewery Wall in Stroud and the access ramp at Eagle Mill Close, Bowbridge (funded by Stroud Town Council) and additional landing stages, complete with lowered ends which facilitate canoe use.
- 6.4 SDC volunteers maintain the Thames & Severn Canal (East of Stroud centre) and CCT volunteers maintain the Stroudwater Navigation (West of Stroud).
- 6.5 I reported last year that no invoice had been received for completion of the works at Wallbridge Lower Lock. The Final Account for this work remains in contention and may well go to arbitration. In the meantime, certified payments totalling £147,222 have been made.
- 6.6 In essence, this work would have been funded by a £140,000 s.106 payment from Newland Homes, in respect of its consented application for a residential development at Cheapside. As this is not now going ahead in that form, this payment will not now be forthcoming.