

Subject: Avon Navigation Scheme
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**Lead Member/
Portfolio Holder:** Councillor M Cargill

Summary

This report sets out the findings from the Avon Navigation Scheme (ANS) study which was commissioned by Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Warwick District Council and Avon Navigation Trust (ANT). The study also suggests next steps.

Recommendations

- (1) That the study setting out a high-level assessment of environmental and the socio-economic impacts of the proposal to extend the Avon Navigation Scheme from Stratford (Alveston) to Warwick is noted; and**
- (2) That at this stage no further work is undertaken to progress the scheme other than to work with Warwick District Council to promote improved footpath/cycleway access along the Avon corridor between Warwick and Stratford.**

NB – The associated appendices are attached as an electronic supplement

1 Background/Information

- 1.1 The Core Strategy 2011 to 2031 provides a strategic basis for delivering the ANS. Policy CS.24 encourages “increased access and the use of canals and navigable waterways including the provision of moorings and marinas where it respects and works with the natural features and functions of the watercourse”.
 - 1.2 On the 5 June 2017 The Cabinet considered a report which identified a list of potential projects which The Cabinet is asked to consider whether further more detailed work is undertaken to take them to ‘shovel ready’ status.
 - 1.3 In this report five projects were identified as having the potential to be progressed to ‘shovel ready’ status. One of the projects, Upper Avon Navigation, supported by the Avon Navigation Trust (ANT) was a joint initiative between Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils working with ANT to open up the Upper Avon for navigation between Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick and connect to the Grand Union canal forming the ‘South Warwickshire Waterway’.
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- 1.4 A report compiled by ATI Projects, who had been commissioned by the Council to undertake an analysis of infrastructure projects, included the following commentary:-

By opening up the Upper Avon to navigation and with further investment in the canal basins in Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick, this would add value to the Warwickshire Ring.

It would extend South Warwickshire's existing tourism offer to UK and overseas visitors by encouraging less adventurous barge holidaymakers to make day trips or undertake the shorter South Warwickshire Ring as part of a longer stay in South Warwickshire. Marketing Birmingham Ltd reports that Trip Advisor ratings show a high level of top quality visitor feedback for UK narrowboat holidays which is seen as a high quality holiday product - yet figures indicate that waterways-based holidays remain 'under-appreciated' by core overseas markets. This project presents a new opportunity to add to the existing international tourist reputation of the two world famous medieval market towns.

A new approach to waterway holidays could be adopted which would attract longer stays in Warwickshire and enhance the visitor experience beyond the popular tourist venues of Warwick Castle, Shakespeare's Birthplace and the RSC Theatre. This could include provision of a more flexible and 'tourist friendly' offer e.g. 'door-to-door' journey capability; fully serviced on board provision; language translation for basic boat hire familiarisation; integrated on-board/off-board packages to encourage wider contact with other tourist venues across the county.

However, the summary also recognised some potential issues as follows:-

- Infrastructure costs of project – new locks and Warwick connection to Grand Union Canal
- Possible resistance from landowners e.g. Charlecote Park (NT) and Warwick Castle
- Feasibility and cost of new canal link at Barford
- Environmental impact on Upper Avon
- Local reaction to increased water traffic.

The report proposed the following next steps:-

- Gain 'in principle support' from potential Council stakeholders with approval to proceed further.
- Engage with a wider stakeholder group e.g. Shakespeare's England; CRT; community groups; riverboat operators; landowners to gather interest and understand main drivers and challenges.
- Commission an 'Opportunities Review' in support of the Technical Feasibility Study for the Upper Avon (Halcrow) which would provide a funding plan, along with evidence of the added value to South Warwickshire, its businesses and communities of opening the Upper Avon to navigation and establishing the new 'South Warwickshire Ring' Project.

- 1.5 At the meeting on the 5 June 2017 (minute 81), The Cabinet resolved: -

(1) *That the list of priority projects identified above (Upper Avon Navigation, Studley Enterprise Centre, Wellesbourne Innovation*

Campus and Priory Square Regeneration), together with the two low impact transport schemes outlined above be agreed; and

(2) *That further work be undertaken to develop the projects identified to a 'shovel ready' state.*

- 1.6 In January 2018 the Council (SDC), working in partnership with ANT and Warwick District Council (WDC), commissioned Peter Brett Associates (PBA) to prepare a socioeconomic report of the Avon Navigation Scheme (ANS) which had formerly been identified as the Upper Avon Navigation project.
- 1.7 To help facilitate the work of PBA a steering group was formed which included representatives from SDC, WDC, ANT and the Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT).

2 Socioeconomic Study

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The study examines the potential socioeconomic and environmental effects of the proposed ANS between Warwick and Alveston Weir. It investigates the relationship between an established navigation and the policy and programme responses it may stimulate.
- 2.1.2 The study (attached as **Appendix 1**) describes the infrastructure and other improvements to establish the ANS. It reviews the socioeconomic context of the area to gain an understanding of the local economy. It sets out the policy context and summarises the consultations which have taken place with a variety of stakeholders and this has helped inform the understanding of the anticipated social and economic effects which a proposed navigation scheme would have.
- 2.1.3 To complement the study a high level environmental review has also been carried out and this is attached as **Appendix 2**. This review assesses the likely effects on the surrounding landscape, visual amenity, heritage assets, ecology, water quality and hydrology.
- 2.1.4 The Proposal will allow for navigation beyond the existing navigable length of the river by powered craft including narrow and wide beam boats. The ANS therefore refers to opening up navigation from beyond Alveston to Warwick and onto the Grand Union Canal. Likewise, it would allow for boats travelling through the Grand Union Canal to access the River Avon via the Edmondscote aqueduct. The scheme itself extends approximately 14 miles and would likely consist of some 13 locks dependant on the route options, with around four of these locks positioned as a flight to reach the Grand Union Canal. The development of the navigation scheme would allow the formation of the South Warwickshire Ring.
- 2.1.5 The navigation has been considered as four separate reaches which is consistent with a previous report undertaken by Halcrow in 2013 commissioned by ANT. Each of these reaches is described in the report.
- 2.1.6 The socioeconomic indicators surrounding the ANS are analysed in the report, using data from WDC and SDC, within a 1 mile radius from the River Avon. The analysis comments on tourism, water based activities, geography, demographics, economic labour market, housing and health & wellbeing.
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2.1.7 In relation to tourism growth the study comments that the ANS would help attract additional visitors in the form of boat users and scope for increased public access to the river.

2.1.8 The assessment does not consider the uplift in land or property values in the vicinity of the river but comments that waterway development elsewhere in the UK has shown an increase in the value of surrounding land or properties.

2.2 **Consultation**

2.2.1 The consultees were selected and agreed by the steering group and covered 41 businesses, community organisations, residents associations, clubs, Parish Councils, SDC and WDC.

2.2.2 The report provides a detailed analysis of consultation feedback identifying areas of support, concerns, possible mitigation and implications for the ANS design and delivery.

2.2.3 In summary, two consultees saw the ANS as a positive development but 95% of those consulted had concerns about the scheme. However, the report sets out potential mitigations, particularly to address concerns raised by Warwick Castle, Charlecote House and Charlecote Mill. The report also recognises that through careful design of the navigation the concerns raised by stakeholders can be mitigated and/or managed.

2.3 **High Level Environmental Review**

2.3.1 The High Level Environmental Review report supports and informs the socioeconomic assessment. A summary of the main points arising from the review is incorporated in the ANS study. The environmental review includes an analysis and implications for ANS design and delivery on the landscape, heritage, ecology, water quality and hydrology.

2.4 **Economic impact**

2.4.1 The total economic impact shows that the active travel construction would generate a local area uplift of £0.19 million in additional GVA (Gross Value Added) to the local economy whilst marinas construction would generate an additional local area uplift of £0.96 million.

2.4.2 The longer term operational impacts show an increase in the number of day and overnight trips by 3% and 6% respectively, supporting up to 291 net operational jobs in the local area. This would stimulate £7.02 million in GVA to the local economy.

2.5 **Total costs**

2.5.1 The study sets out a schedule of costs for each element of the ANS. In total the cost would be between £27.7 million and £29.6 million to deliver depending on the route chosen. It is estimated that the construction would support up to 138 additional short term jobs and related GVA of up to £3.9 million. Additional active travel and associated infrastructure (active travel element, including optimism bias, equates to £2.09 million, construction of Marinas £7.31 million) has the potential of extending the benefit to the wider population.

3 **Options available to The Cabinet**

3.1 To note the study from PBA and take no further action.

3.2 To commission further work to progress the project in full.

3.3 To agree the following recommendations:-

- 1) That the study setting out a high-level assessment of environmental and the socio-economic impacts of the proposal to extend the Avon Navigation Scheme from Stratford (Alveston) to Warwick is noted; and
- 2) That at this stage no further work is undertaken to progress the scheme other than to work with Warwick District Council on a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to promote improved footpath/cycleway access along the Avon corridor between Warwick and Stratford.

4 Members' Comments

4.1 Members' comments incorporated in the report.

5 Implications of the proposal

5.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications

5.1.1 There are a number of legal challenges which would need to be addressed if the ANS is progressed including the possibility for the use of compulsory purchase powers to acquire land/property.

5.2 Financial

5.2.1 There is currently no budget available to undertake any further work in relation to this project.

5.3 Environmental

5.3.1 The report from PBA explores and analyses the environmental impact of the ANS as mentioned in section 2.4 of this report.

5.4 Corporate Strategy

5.4.1 This ANS project has been identified as one which had the potential to progress to 'shovel ready' status and it supports Key Objective 1 of the Corporate Strategy 2015-2019 'A flourishing local economy', in particular the aim to maximise the benefit of the local tourism industry.

5.5 Analysis of the effects on Equality

5.5.1 The proposals contained in this report do not have any adverse equality effects. However, if further work is undertaken to progress this project a more detailed analysis would need to be undertaken.

5.6 Data Protection

5.6.1 There are no data protection implications to the report.

6 Risk Assessment

6.1 Consultation has shown that the ANS is an extremely contentious project and carries a high degree of reputational risk for the Council. There are clear benefits that the project would generate but these are outweighed by the financial commitment that would be required if the Council agreed to progress the entire waterways infrastructure at this stage.

- 6.2 The Council does not have any budget set aside for this project and is currently seeking to progress other initiatives which may also require funding. Therefore, other funding sources would need to be explored in order for this project to progress.
- 6.3 However, an incremental approach may be less contentious and would be less costly. This could take the form of developing an active travel corridor as described earlier in this report. This work is less costly and would generate substantial benefits attracting cyclists, walkers and possibly small businesses.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The socioeconomic study shows that the ANS would generate significant economic benefits. However, there would be a number of environmental challenges to overcome, local opposition to the project and it would require significant financial investment.
- 7.2 The option of developing an active travel corridor would be less contentious, less costly and would generate significant benefits as highlighted in the study. In addition, the development of a cycleway between Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick would enhance the Council's objectives for developing more cycle friendly routes. Consequently, the option to enter into discussions with Warwick District Council with a view to developing a collaborative Supplementary Planning Document would appear to be a reasonable next step.

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Background papers:

None.
