

**Grantham Canal Parks Strategy Action Plan (prepared by Peter Brett Associates LLP),
April 2017:
Comments to the Canal and River Trust from Pedals (Nottingham Cycling Campaign)**

Introduction

Pedals very much welcomes these ambitious proposals and the various interlinked themes set out in para 1.1.1. of the Action Plan, especially those of building up the Grantham Canal Park as an East Midlands Asset, and that of “a connected and care for environment, building on the area’s high quality environment and biodiversity as a natural and visitor asset and developing an expansive green infrastructure network, linking the region’s urban and rural areas through active travel and recreation links”.

We are particularly pleased to see that expanded and improved active travel routes feature prominently in the proposed actions, and are keen that these should be developed in coordination with other active travel route improvements in the vicinity and hinterland of the project, for mutual benefit, including extensive benefits to both individual and public health, as well as for tourism and economic development.

This coordination should include both improved accesses and connections and, as a group focusing primarily on Greater Nottingham, we consider that this is particularly important in the West Bridgford / Gamston area, part of section 1 from the A52 to the A46 (but also including the towpath sections west of the A52) to encourage more people from that urban area to enjoy the high quality environment of the Grantham Canal on foot and by bike.

The connections should include improved links to and from the proposed foot-cycle bridge across the Trent between Lady Bay and the Trent Lane / Trent Park area, a project of particular importance to Pedals and the other local groups represented on the Bridge Steering Group and which recently had a very positive meeting on 24 August 2017 with Cllr. Jon Collins, the Leader of Nottingham City Council. In our detailed feasibility study work on this project over the last 3 years we have been working closely with officers of the City and County Councils, as well as Rushcliffe Borough Council, and also Sustrans in view of their extensive wider experience of planning and implementing such projects, and helping to secure funding.

Detailed comments (*in italics, beneath relevant extracts from the Action Plan*)

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Regional Positioning: Grantham Canal Park as an East Midlands asset

RP2: Develop summary Grantham Canal Park ‘position & ambition’ statements for each Local Authority, identifying strategy implications for each area including: core economic, tourism, environmental housing and other issues; canal and GCP proposals; prospective timescales; funding requirements; assessment of contribution to wider Local Authority policy objectives, and quantitative impact.

Detailed improvements for active travel routes, including upgrading of existing towpaths, and new route stretches, should be an integral part of these wider statements, and should take on board detailed user feedback.

RP3: Support for the Trent Link articulated in the planning, transport and other policies of Rushcliffe Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council.
Develop consistent wording for planning and other policy documents to be launched 2017

We very much welcome the proposed inclusion of a new active travel route as part of the development of the new Trent Link between the towpath east of Bassingfield and the east end of the Holme Pierrepont Water Sports Centre. This will connect directly with various other routes including in particular the riverside path on the south bank of the Trent much of which forms part of both the Trent Valley Way and Route 15 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network, and, from late 2017, with the new multi-user path being developed by Nottinghamshire County Council on the former railway between Cotgrave Country Park and Holme Lane on the west side of Radcliffe on Trent.

This new link would also add to the other links serving the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust Skylarks Nature Reserve, nearby, helping to promote more walking and cycling to and from this increasingly popular major site.

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Canal Restoration: bringing navigation back to the Grantham Canal

A schedule of the improvements involved in restoring the Grantham Canal has been developed in preparing this Strategy. This has brought together available information from various sources including the Trust and Grantham Canal Society assessments of requirements at different points along the canal. It details identified requirements for: bridge replacement and improvement (including road, accommodation and footbridges); lock repairs (including weir removal, renovation, paddle gear work and gate repairs); feeder and reservoir repairs; relining of the canal; dredging along the watercourse; towpath improvements; embankment improvements; as well as the various elements associated with construction of the Trent Link.

Towpath surface improvements are particularly needed on the section between Gamston and the road between Cotgrave and Stragglethorpe.

We also wish to see towpath improvements replace the present series of barriers, especially those of A-frame and K-frame design which are particularly awkward for most pedal cyclists and wheelchair users. Where access controls are really needed they should take other forms including (staggered) bollards or offset barriers with rather larger spacing to make it easier for cyclists to ride around them, even if they have to slow down.

Signing improvements could include signing of destinations reached along and off the towpaths, and have destinations which are consistent with those of other pedestrian and cycle routes, local, regional and national. Signing, as well as surfaces, must be well-maintained.

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Links in the Chain: focussing activity at key locations to promote interest, increased use and build sustainable businesses

Visitor and tourism destination development is a central part of the strategy, driving marine and on-land activity and vital in establishing the Grantham Canal Park as a regional proposition.

This will build and further extend the attraction of existing destinations such as the Vale of Belvoir, Belvoir Castle and Holme Pierrepont. It will also promote development of business services and facilities to capture the economic benefit from the increased profile afforded by the establishment and then subsequent development of the Grantham Canal Park. The establishment of visitor-focussed gateways at the main points of access to the Grantham Canal Park is firmly focussed on attracting visitors and interest from a regional catchment and beyond.

Working with the programme of canal restoration, inclusion of these integral elements of the Grantham Canal Park provides a major opportunity to reinforce the Vale of Belvoir's tourism role at the same time providing a major stimulus to the development of Grantham and Holme Pierrepont as visitor hubs.

Holme Pierrepont with its Water Sports Centre and Country Park would be an excellent choice for the establishment of visitor-focussed gateways at the main points of access to the Grantham Canal Park, particularly in view of its good riverside path and other active travel access links and its proximity to the proposed foot-cycle bridge between Trent Lane / Trent Basin and Lady Bay, West Bridgford, reinforcing the potential for the active travel links associated with the Canal project having even wider benefits in terms of facilitating access from a much larger part of Greater Nottingham than just the West Bridgford urban area. Both the Trent Valley Way and Route 15 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network pass through the Holme Pierrepont area.

LC1: Establishment and Development of Gateways

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2. Tollerton Beacon

The canal is culverted at the A52 at Tollerton, where the canal enters Nottingham before proceeding towards the City Centre with a surfaced towpath alongside. The point where the canal emerges east of the A52 forms the northern boundary of the Gamston site. Some 27,000 vehicles pass this point daily, 9.9 million annually. A tall landmark is proposed, consistent with the branding adopted for the Grantham Gateway, visible to passing motorists and raising its profile in communities in West Bridgford. A 'gateway' at this point will announce the western entry to the Grantham Canal Park.

It is vital that the communities west of the A52 are engaged in the design of the gateway and ensuring local community access to it. While it would need to be determined, its most likely location would be on the Gamston side of the A52. A sequence of tasks similar to that for LC1 is envisaged. As public realm with few opportunities for related development it is suggested as a project in the short term.

Many towpath users access the towpath towards Cotgrave from the road between Gamston and Tollerton, including those who come by car, use the car park opposite the towpath access, just east of the A52, and then walk. It would help, as part of the improvements plans, both for the existing safer crossing arrangements across the A52 (Gamston-Lings Bar Road) nearby to be better signed and otherwise publicised, along with their access routes. These can be quite difficult to find, especially for approaching through Gamston and the rest of the West Bridgford urban area. Improved crossing arrangements, including better publicity and

signing, might also help to reduce the number of people using the car park mentioned above.

We would strongly endorse the statement that “It is vital that the communities west of the A52 are engaged in the design of the gateway and ensuring local community access to it” and would go further and state that there should be access and signing improvements along the whole of the canal between the Trent and the current access east of the A52 (Gamston-Lings Bar Road).

This particularly includes the need for a much safer, more convenient and attractive crossing of Radcliffe Road (A6011) between the south-east corner of Lady Bay and the towpath on the west side of Gamston. This is now very awkward and intimidating for users, even abled-bodied pedestrians and virtually impossible for cyclists. This is a major intimidating barrier and must be drastically improved as it now strongly discourages use of the nearby stretches of towpath and particularly crossing between them.

Plans for access improvements at this site should be closely coordinated with Highways England plans for changes in road layouts in the vicinity, including the major changes to the layout of the Gamston roundabout, and the plans they are considering for a new shared path on the west side of the A52 along the Gamston-Lings Bar Road. This could help to improve access to the gateway from Edwalton and Tollerton in particular, as well as more generally from the whole West Bridgford area, including the major new housing developments around Sharp Hill and Melton Road.

3. Holme Pierrepont marina and surrounding area

The third ‘gateway’ would be associated with the northerly entrance to the Grantham Canal Park. It would have a clear focus on the marine function of the canal and its link to the Trent. Development would be linked to completion of the Trent Link and comprise: mooring and other facilities for canal and other vessels; café and leisure facilities; pathways and potentially operational links to established sporting and other facilities at Holme Pierrepont; links to the towpath and on to riverside walkways; clear signage and branding consistent with the other Grantham Canal Park ‘gateways’.

This third gateway will be incorporated into the design of the Trent Link. As with the other gateways, its concept should be linked to the heritage and developing role of the area. Local communities (potentially including Radcliffe on Trent) and Holme Pierrepont user groups should be involved in its design and development.

As mentioned above, Holme Pierrepont with its Water Sports Centre and Country Park would be an excellent choice for the establishment of visitor-focussed gateways at the main points of access to the Grantham Canal Park, particularly in view of its good riverside path and other active travel access links and its proximity to the proposed foot-cycle bridge between Trent Lane / Trent Basin and Lady Bay, West Bridgford, reinforcing the potential for the active travel links associated with the Canal project having even wider benefits in terms of facilitating access from a much larger part of Greater Nottingham than just the West Bridgford urban area. Both the Trent Valley Way and Route 15 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network pass through the Holme Pierrepont area.

LC2 Canal Community Plans

Canal restoration and promotion of the Grantham Canal Park will lead to increasing interest and visitor numbers in the communities along the canal. In larger communities - Cotgrave, Cropwell Bishop, Redmile Harby & Hose and others – as well as smaller settlements, canal

restoration will generate demand for improved links, including greenspace links, to the canal among local residents. Higher footfall and use of the towpaths by cyclists and others will also generate local business opportunities. The canal's potential needs to be fully recognised in relevant community development strategies or settlement level plans.

We agree that towpath and other access improvements will stimulate more use by cyclists. They are also likely to stimulate demand for further active travel access improvements, thus further stimulating demand for relevant businesses including cafes, bike hire and bike repair.

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A connected and cared for environment: Building on the area's high quality environment and biodiversity as a natural and visitor asset; developing an expansive green infrastructure network, linking the region's urban and rural areas through active travel and recreation links

Over time, Grantham Canal Partnership and its member organisations have protected the line of the canal and its surrounding countryside through consistent green infrastructure policy designations. This forms a solid platform for a coordinated greenspace and environmental initiative stretching the length of the canal, linking communities to the canal, and linking the canal to regional path and cycle path networks.

While we much welcomed the various towpath surface improvements made in the 1990s but these have often become very worn and certainly need renewing, upgrading and extending, including improved connections to other routes and networks.

While it is anticipated that some of the green infrastructure links will emerge from Canal Community Plans as they develop, there will also be a requirement for consistent improvements at key points where strategic paths connect with the canal or where access between the canal and features of attraction of interest require improvement. Accessibility considerations will also be critical in ensuring existing and new communities have strong pedestrian links to the canal, and this will be particularly pronounced at either end of the canal and where it passes larger settlements.

A consistent approach to the design of shared use paths linking communities to the canal is vital in aiding interpretation and orientation as well in developing a consistent brand image for the Grantham Canal Park. Maintenance of new and existing paths and the vegetation around them will be critical in encouraging their increased use for recreation and active travel.

We very much agree that there will also be a requirement for consistent improvements at key points where strategic paths connect with the canal or where access between the canal and features of attraction of interest require improvement.

It is important to ensure that existing and new communities have strong cycle as well as pedestrian links to the canal, and this we agree that this will be particularly pronounced at both ends of the canal and where it passes larger settlements.

Good maintenance as well as a consistent high quality shared path design, including a well-drained hard surface, will be essential, to help ensure that these new attractions are well used and enjoyed. A good width, of at least 2 metres and preferably 3 metres, where space permits, can help assist comfortable and safe shared use.

Good maintenance should include maintenance of signs, to ensure they are clearly visible and not obscured in late spring and summer by the growth of vegetation, and not swivelled around so that they mislead path users rather than helping them.

Improved signage, including more advance signs, is particularly important where the towpath crosses busy roads with fast traffic, e.g. between Cotgrave and Stragglethorpe, west of Cotgrave Country Park. Hollygate Lane can also be an awkward road for towpath users to cross, at least when travelling east, and improved signing would help here as well.

Path design should avoid the use of awkward barriers, especially those of A-frame and K-frame design, or other access controls which make it very difficult for pedal cyclists and wheelchairs users to negotiate. They also make it very difficult for owners of tricycles and bikes with trailers, etc.

CE1. Developing Supportive Policy

Design Guide for canal links

CE2. Integration of towpath and community pathways

See above comments.

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CE3. Addressing Major Barriers to Access

The Grantham Canal Park should primarily be of benefit to those in canalside communities, including Nottingham and Grantham residents. The A52 and A1 are major barriers to direct pedestrian and cycle access to Grantham and Nottingham via the canal. The costs associated with improving canal access at these points are likely to be considerable. Early identification of potential options is required to identify practical solutions in the medium to long term, or opportunistically associated with prospective junction re alignments or carriageway upgrades in the future.

Finding solutions to overcome major access barriers is of great importance for pedestrians and cyclists and should include good signing and other publicity of safer crossing and their approaches, major and minor.

CE4. Emphasising strategic connections

Ensuring high accessibility to points of interest and connections with other strategic cycling and walking infrastructure is important in the development of the Grantham Canal Park as a regional asset e.g. at the junction of the Viking Way and Sustrans Route 15 with the canal at Woolsthorpe, ensuring stronger and greater variety of links with Cotgrave Country Park, or in enhancing accessibility where appropriate to sites of ecological significance such as the Kinoulton March and Canal SSSI. This is an action which could proceed swiftly following completion of the design guide.

See above comments, especially the introductory comments and those relating to Holme Pierpont.

CE5. Develop pathway maintenance agreements

Establishment of maintenance arrangements (using existing templates) will ensure quality is maintained and encourage increased use. Alongside traditional LA funding, the potential capacity of voluntary organisation or social enterprises should be considered

Good maintenance will be essential, to help ensure that these new attractions are well used and enjoyed, in safety and in comfort.

Conclusion

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss any of these comments in more detail at your convenience.

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6 September 2017