

Cabinet

17<sup>th</sup> July 2018

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

**Ward(s) affected:**

Radford, plus others on the route of the Canal

**Title:**

Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group of the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) on the Canal and Canal Basin

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Council holds a 99 year long leasehold interest from 1<sup>st</sup> February 1995 in the Canal Basin St Nicholas Street from the Canal and River Trust under the terms of two head leases both dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 and in turn is responsible for the day to day management and operation of the Canal Basin

At their meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017, following a referral from Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) considered an item on the Canal and Canal Basin. Members heard from representatives from the Coventry Canal Society, the Coventry Canal Basin Trust and The Tin Music and Arts (based at Workshops 1-4 Canal Basin). At that meeting it was resolved that the Board request that a Task and Finish Group be arranged to facilitate improvements to and better use of the Canal and Canal Basin.

The Task and Finish Group met with stakeholders and Cabinet Members and visited the Canal Basin and the Canal. This enabled them to identify recommendations which were accepted by the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) at their meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

**Recommendations:**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) Coventry City Council work closely with the Canal and River Trust to review the use of the Canal and Canal Basin to create a clear vision and aspiration for the increased use of the Canal and Canal Basin in Coventry.
  - a. The review should recognise the cultural and heritage contribution the canal has and can in future make to the City.
  - b. The review should maximise the public health potential and contribution the area makes as a lung of the City, which is recognised as part of the Council's Green Space Strategy.

- c. The review should assess the current use of all of the buildings at the Canal Basin to ensure that they are appropriate to the renewed vision and aspiration for the Canal and Canal Basin in Coventry.
  - d. The review should involve all partners and organisations with an interest in the Canal and Canal Basin.
  - e. The review should consider transport connectivity between the Canal Basin and the City Centre.
- 2) Cabinet Members should meet with representatives of the universities, and other health and sports related organisations in the City to maximise the contribution to improved health outcomes the Canal can make.
  - 3) Coventry City Council consider “quick wins”, such as changing the long stay car park at Leicester Row to a short stay, improved signage to the Canal Basin, improved lighting, and the removal of the wall at the entrance to the Canal Basin on the junction of St. Nicholas St and Leicester Row, to improve ease of access.
  - 4) Coventry City Council work closely with the Canal and River Trust to address issues of cleanliness and maintenance, as well as formally recognising the contribution made by the Coventry Canal Society to this work.
  - 5) Coventry City Council support the Canal and River Trust in getting local businesses located on the Canal side involved to support the work in increasing the use of the canal and the Canal Basin.
  - 6) Coventry City Council formally recognise the appointment of an Elected Member to the West Midlands Canal and River Trust Board of Trustees.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

Briefing Note - [Briefing note - Recommendations from the Canal and Basin Task and Finish Group.](#)

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

This report hasn't been considered by Scrutiny, but the Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3) considered a briefing note containing the above recommendations at their meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018, which were accepted with the addition of recommendation 1) e (their minute 50/17 refers).

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:** Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group of the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board on the Canal and Canal Basin

**1 Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The Council holds a 99 year leasehold interest from 1<sup>st</sup> February 1995 in the Canal Basin St Nicholas Street from the Canal and River Trust under the terms of two head leases both dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 and in turn is responsible for the day to day management and operation of the Canal Basin.
- 1.2 At their meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017, following a referral from Scrucro, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board considered an item on the canal and the Canal Basin. Members heard from representatives from the Coventry Canal Society, the Coventry Canal Basin Trust and The Tin Music and Arts (based at Workshops 1-4 in the Canal Basin).
- 1.3 At that meeting it was resolved that the Board request a Task and Finish Group be arranged to facilitate improvements to and better use of the Canal and Canal Basin.
- 1.4 The Members of the task and finish group were agreed to include Councillor McNicholas, Councillor Hammon and Councillor Bally Singh.
- 1.5 In addition, Cllr Auluck from the Board and Cllr Mal Mutton, representing Radford Ward, where the Canal Basin is situated, were also members of the task and finish group.
- 1.6 Members of the task and finish group were minded that any recommendations would need to be taken in the context of no financial resource and limited officer resource.

**2 Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 1.1 Option 1- Do Nothing
- 1.2 Members considered that doing nothing would result in the canal and the Canal Basin not meeting it's potential, which in the context of Coventry being an ambitious city was not a viable option.
- 1.3 Option 2 – Use the information gathered by the Task and Finish Group to identify recommendations for recommendations to Cabinet.
- 1.4 Members considered that this was the preferred option and identified recommendations to facilitate improvements to and better use of the Canal and the Canal Basin
- 1.5 The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) recommend to Cabinet that:
  - 1) Coventry City Council work closely with the Canal and River Trust to review the use of the canal and the Canal Basin to create a clear vision and aspiration for the increased use of the canal and the Canal Basin in Coventry.
    - a. The review should recognise the cultural and heritage contribution the canal has and can in future make to the city
    - b. The review should maximise the public health potential and contribution the area makes as a lung of the city, which is recognised as part of the Council's Green Space Strategy
    - c. The review should assess the current use of all of the buildings at the Canal Basin to ensure that they are appropriate to the renewed vision and aspiration for the canal and canal basin in Coventry.
    - d. The review should involve all partners and organisations with an interest in the canal and canal basin.
    - e. The review should consider transport connectivity between the Canal Basin and the City Centre

- 2) Cabinet Members should meet with representatives of the universities, and other health and sports related organisations in the city to maximise the contribution to improved health outcomes the canal can make.
- 3) Coventry City Council consider “quick wins”, such as changing the long stay car park at Leicester Row to a short stay, improved signage to the Canal Basin, improved lighting, and the removal of the wall at the entrance to the Canal Basin on the junction of St. Nicholas St and Leicester Row, to improve ease of access.
- 4) Coventry City Council work closely with the Canal and River Trust to address issues of cleanliness and maintenance, as well as formally recognising the contribution made by the Coventry Canal Society to this work.
- 5) Coventry City Council support the Canal and River Trust in getting local businesses located on the canal side involved to support the work in increasing the use of the canal and the Canal Basin
- 6) Coventry City Council formally recognise the appointment of an Elected Member to the West Midlands Canal and River Trust Board of Trustees.

### **3 History and context<sup>1</sup>**

- 3.1 The canal was built primarily to transport coal from the pits at Bedworth, Coventry and Nuneaton to the rest of the Midlands and beyond. The Coventry Canal Company was formed in 1768. The full length from Coventry to Fradley was opened in 1789. The Canal Basin was opened in 1769 and expanded in 1788.
- 3.2 The Coventry Canal was a vital trade artery for many years. In particular, it was part of the Birmingham-London route via the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, Coventry Canal, Oxford Canal, and River Thames. The Coventry Canal paid a dividend right up to 1947, and remained navigable to the present day.
- 3.3 Although industry adjoining the canal was booming, the actual use of the canal for the transportation of goods had declined through the 20th century, mainly due the closure of the north Warwickshire collieries which the canal had been built to serve.
- 3.4 It was nationalised in 1948 being operated first by the British Transport Board and then by the British Waterways Board, the forerunners of British Waterways. In 2012 all of British Waterways' assets and responsibilities were transferred to the Canal and River Trust.
- 3.5 In 1957, Coventry Canal Society was established to promote the proper use and maintenance of the canal, and to protect its interests.
- 3.6 Many of the buildings and the site at the Canal Basin were restored between 1993 and 1995. The Canal Bridge, Canal House and the warehouses are grade II listed buildings.
- 3.7 The canal and surrounding area from the Canal Basin to Hawksbury Junction is designated as a conservation area.
- 3.8 Coventry's Green Space Strategy is in the process of being refreshed and the canal will be considered as a “blue corridor” as part of the strategy. The strategy recognises that currently the benefits of green and blue corridors in the city are not being maximised.

### **4 Visit to the Canal**

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/6098/coventry\\_canal\\_conservation\\_area\\_appraisal\\_4\\_july\\_2012](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/6098/coventry_canal_conservation_area_appraisal_4_july_2012)  
<http://covcanalsoc.org.uk/>  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canal-and-river-network/coventry-canal>

- 4.1 Alan Dyer, Chair of the Canal Basin Trust gave a tour of the Canal Basin Warehouse, which is owned by the Canal and River Trust and leased to the Canal Basin Trust. The warehouse is an historic building which has been restored and extended by the Canal Basin Trust. It is used by local artists and has about 40 residents at any one time. Representatives from The Ludic Rooms (an arts studio based at the warehouse) also contributed to the discussion.
- 4.2 David Moore from Valley Cruises gave a brief introduction to his business of canal cruises. It is an important, yet overlooked contributor to the tourism offer in the city, including bed space.
- 4.3 Elaine Tierney, Chair of Trustees for The Tin Music and Arts, gave an overview of the work and aspirations of The Tin Music and Arts, especially around training young people in music technology.
- 4.4 Representative from the Canal and River Trust talked about their plans for the future, including recruitment of volunteers to increase capacity and to improve the perception of the canal. They have been water and boat focused but realise they need to address issues about the towpaths as well. They have seen investments in Birmingham pay off with increased usage.
- 4.5 Resources are always an issue and upkeep is costly so they need to prioritise. There is also a strategic, as well as an operational aspect to the canals, in terms of sustainable transport, green space, public health etc.
- 4.6 Key issues identified
- 4.7 All partners at the meeting were given the opportunity to raise their issues and concerns. The main issues raised were:
  - 4.7.1 Activity issues
    - Footfall – there are plenty of people who walk past the Canal Basin, so access is not an issue, but they do not come into the Canal Basin
    - There needs to be specific reason for people to come, not just reliant on passing trade
    - Parking capacity
    - Engagement with the local community
    - Strategic joined up approach by all partners – clear vision for the area
    - Links to the City of Culture as a cultural and heritage asset for the city
    - General awareness, brand visibility, raising the profile
    - Engagement with the traders
  - 4.7.2 Infrastructure issues
    - The visual appeal of the entrance, poor signage, unwelcoming entrance, boarded up buildings, that it looks shut
    - Dredging
    - Access to the towpath to make it convenient to the community
    - Condition of the arts trail and storyboards
    - Litter and overgrown vegetation
- 4.8 Members of the task and finish group were hoping to meet with representatives of the traders based at the Canal Basin. However, unfortunately, it was not possible to arrange a mutual time to meet.

## **5 Meeting with the CAN project**

- 5.1 Helen Cuthill from Coventry University and representatives from The Tin Music and Arts talked about the plans they are developing for the building owned by the Canal and River Trust. The building is the first building from the public access to the Canal Basin.

- 5.2 The plans include developing the ground floor to a flexible space, including a print room and community arts activity. A quick win will be to put art work on the hoardings to make the area look more inviting, interesting and open.
- 5.3 The university would lead on the costs and rent a third of the space for the print studio. The model will be self-sustaining. The Tin Music and Art's role would be co-ordination and use of the building.
- 5.4 This would be part of a vision for the Canal Basin to be a creative hub for the city, with a combination of cultural, business and commercial focus.

## **6 Canal Trip**

6.1 Members of the task and finish group went on a journey from the Canal Basin to Swan Lane on a canal boat. The Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services and the Director of Project Management and Property Services also attended.

6.2 Members were able to experience the canal from the water, which gave a different perspective on the canal. Members identified several issues as part of the visit.

### **6.2.1 Canal issues**

- The water by the banks is quite shallow - more visitor's moorings as well.
- The canal is a cul-de-sac – therefore there needs to be a reason for boaters to come down into the Canal Basin. If the canal feels and looks safe and attractive it gives a reason to come down.
- Vegetation narrows the navigable water.
- Vegetation on the towpath can put walkers off.
- Work has been done to clear the canal of rubbish and vegetation, it can only be done from the water, which adds to the complexity.
- There is a programme of dredging by the Canal and Rivers Trust, but the timetable isn't necessarily available.

### **6.2.2 Canal side issues**

- There were a lot of dog walkers on the tow path, but no dog waste or litter bins
- Lighting at night time could be an issue for safety
- The condition of some parts of the towpath could put users off
- The arts trail is looking sorely neglected, which has the potential to be a real asset as part of City of Culture 2021
- The canal seems more accessible where newer residential developments have been built that open onto the canal.

### **6.2.3 Canal Basin issues**

- Lack of information for visitors to the Canal Basin especially signage and how to get to other locations in the city.
- Complexity of landownership and responsibility.
- Most of the freehold of the land at the Canal Basin is owned by the Canal and River Trust.
- The Council holds a 99-year leasehold interest from 1<sup>st</sup> February 1995 in the Canal Basin St Nicholas Street from the Canal and River Trust under the terms of two head leases both dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 and in turn is responsible for the day to day management and operation of the Canal Basin
- The Council, acting as the tenant of the leases dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 is responsible for the granting of sub-leases to third parties of the commercial offices workshops and the retail outlets.

## **7 Liaison with the Canal and River Trust**

- 7.1 The Canal and River Trust (CRT) are a charity that are responsible for protecting and managing the canals in England and Wales. The areas are split into regional partnerships, the Coventry canal coming under the West Midlands Partnership.
- 7.2 The CRT are responsible for the water and towpath of the canal in Coventry and are also the landowners of part of the canal basin.
- 7.3 The Chair of the task and finish group had several meetings with the Chair of the Partnership and the Waterway Manager to discuss some of the issues that had come up as part of the task and finish group.

## **8 Comments from Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services and Director of Highways and Infrastructure**

- 8.1 Improvements to Junction 1 of the ring road are included on the long list going to Cabinet in March, but will be dependent on funding availability.
- 8.2 Issue with the car park on Leicester Row could be easily resolved, transferring from a long stay to a short stay to encourage visits to the Canal Basin, as well as improved signage and some linked publicity to the Canal Basin.
- 8.3 The Council has control of those buildings that the Council holds under the terms of the two long leases within the Canal Basin i.e. Coventry Telegraph offices. The smaller retail units would have a natural change of use as the rest of the site changed.
- 8.4 The Council could consider looking at offering alternative accommodation for any current occupiers of the Canal Basin who may need to move premises.
- 8.5 The Council could look at a partnership arrangement with residents who live along the canal for bin emptying arrangements. Installing bins is not the issue, the cost of emptying them is.
- 8.6 There needs to be some corporate recognition of the work that the Coventry Canal Society do in clearing out the canal.
- 8.7 Lighting could be an issue on some parts of the canal and the impact on wildlife. The canal would not have traditionally been lit, however lighting might be more appropriate in some stretches of the tow path than others.
- 8.8 Enforcement powers could be used to address fly tipping but would need to have evidence to prosecute. There could be the possibility of some communication with member of the public on this issue.
- 8.9 Access is not just an issue at the Canal Basin. There are points of access along the canal, which could be improved. There is the potential for partnerships to improve access, tied in with 2021, with the Ricoh and Arena Park. S106 funding from Courtauld's has been used to make improvements to the towpath previously.
- 8.10 A partnership of organisations associated with the canal in Coventry could be a useful organisation
- 8.11 The Directors welcomed Cllr McNicholas' appointment to the West Midlands partnership of the CRT.

## **9 Comments from Cabinet Members**

- 9.1 On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2018, a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration, Cabinet Member for City Services and Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport was held to brief the relevant portfolio holders on the progress of the task and finish

group and to enable the Cabinet Members to make comment on the emerging findings of the group.

- 9.2 Overall the Cabinet Members were supportive of the general approach and findings of the Task and Finish Group. The main concern was with resources and capacity to deliver anything additional to current Council commitments under the two long leases.
- 9.3 The Cabinet Members were supportive of closer links with the Canal and River Trust, and will be happy to work in partnership, but were clear that the Council would not be taking on any of their duties or responsibilities, particularly in relation to cleansing and maintenance.
- 9.4 The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration was clear that the main issue in realising the potential of the Canal Basin is the location on the outside of the ring road. For it to be fully successful there needs to be access links with the City Centre.
- 9.5 The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration also highlighted the limited resources and capacity for development projects in the city. The current round of Growth Funding has been allocated, with no clear picture of whether any future funding will be available.
- 9.6 The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration also suggested the potential of links with the creative industries to widen the appeal of the location.
- 9.7 The Cabinet Member for City Services was open to changes to car parking and working with CRT to improve signage, but mindful that there needs to be something to sign post people to.
- 9.8 The Cabinet Member for City Services also recognised that proposals for Junction 1 of the ring road were on the “long list” of capital projects, but that there were other projects with higher priorities for the limited funding available.
- 9.9 The Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport recognised the potential of the canal and basin as a public health asset, but also recognised that public safety issues, such as poor lighting and inaccessibility, could discourage use of the tow path.
- 9.10 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Sport also offered to arrange a meeting with Public Health officers to discuss health issues related to the canal.
- 9.11 The Deputy Cabinet Member also pointed out future development happening in the location, particularly student accommodation and plugging into that market.

## **10 Results of consultation undertaken**

- 10.1 There was no formal consultation that took place as part of the task and finish group, however as mentioned above, Members heard evidence from stakeholders involved in the canal and Canal Basin.
- 10.2 Despite best efforts Members were unable to meet with the traders based at the Canal Basin within the timescales.
- 10.3 Since the completion of the task and finish group there has been engagement with local residents about the use of the Canal Basin, as part of the CAN project.

## **11 Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 11.1 There are no required timescales for the implementation of this decision, however the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board will require a progress report in 12 months' time.

## **12 Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Resources**

### **12.1 Financial implications**

There are no quantifiable financial implications of the recommendations however the identified quick wins are likely to have a one-off cost to implement and potentially on-going costs to maintain. These quick win proposals will require Cabinet Member approval and will have to be considered in more detail and with regard to the already noted limited resources and capacity to deliver.

### **12.2 Legal implications**

Any variations to the terms of the two head leases dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 as a consequence of the recommendations herein contained will require officers to obtain an appropriate delegated authority in particular as a consequence of any change of use that may be agreed between the Council and the Canal and River Trust

Officers may be required to negotiate terms with existing occupiers in respect of any relocation to alternative premises

Officers will be required to satisfy the requirements to secure best value under the provisions of Section 123 Local Government Act 1972

Officers within Legal Services, Place Directorate will be required to prepare negotiate and complete any document with the Canal and River Trust or existing occupiers

Any changes to the pricing tariff at Leicester Row Car Park as referred to in this report would require completion of a formal variation pursuant to The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

## **13. Other implications**

### **13.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

These recommendations if accepted will contribute to the Council Plan, contributing to:

- Globally connected – promoting the growth of a sustainable Coventry economy
- Supporting businesses to grow
- Developing the City Centre
- Arts, sports and cultural opportunities

- Locally Committed – improving the quality of life for Coventry people
- Create an attractive, cleaner & greener city
- Improve health and wellbeing

- Delivering our priorities – with fewer resources
- Making the most of our assets

### **13.2 How is risk being managed?**

The key risks associated with the proposals are to do nothing. Without the support of the Council and the Canal and River Trust, the canal and basin will continue not to meet its potential. There are a significant number of organisations that are invested in the success of the canal and basin, but have struggled to maintain a coherent joined up approach to the issues, with the two main land owners at the location.

Other risks associated with the proposals are about raising expectations. Resources available to support the proposals are limited. The recommendations are based on pooling resources and working together to make best use of limited resources available.

### **13.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

There may be impact on the organisation, in terms of capacity of officers to implement the recommendations. There should be no additional financial implications associated with the recommendations, but they will require officer time.

### **13.4 Equalities / EIA**

The wards closest to the canal basin and canal (Radford and Foleshill) are some of the most deprived in the city. This means residents living near the canal are more likely to experience higher levels of disadvantage associated with economic and social exclusion as well as health inequalities. Therefore, the health benefits of accessing a “blue corridor” for activity will be felt by those in some of the most deprived wards of the city.

### **13.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

Implementing the recommendations will have a positive impact on the environment by improving and increasing access to a “blue corridor”. The green spaces alongside the canal will be improved and have greater access, improving the look of the environment in this part of the city.

### **13.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

These recommendations should have positive implications for partner organisations, many of which, mentioned above, have been involved in providing evidence to the task and finish group.

Partners involved, received the recommendations positively when they were presented to the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board meeting, to which they were invited. They expressed their support for partnership working to address some of the long-standing issues they had identified as part of the task and finish group.

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Graham Clark	Lead Accountant – Business Partnering	Place	14/6/18	19/6/18
Rob Parkes/ Julie Sprayson	Property Lawyers, Legal Services	Place	14/6/18	15.6.18
Andrew Walster	Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services	Place	31/5/18	20/6/18
Councillor J O'Boyle	Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration	-	22/6/18	26/6/18

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