

BRITISH WATERWAYS ADVISORY FORUM

Waterway Restoration – a discussion paper for the BWAF, October 2005

This paper considers the following aspects:

- **Funding Opportunities**
- **Communication Strategy**

- **Summary of the period 1995-2002**

There is no doubt that the period 1995 – 2002 was one of outstanding success in waterway restoration.

Government policy for the first time endorsed the contribution that restored waterways could make to the overall achievement of government policy. This was set out in published documents – *Waterways for Tomorrow (2000)* and *Scotland's Canals – An Asset for the Future (2002)*

AINA, BW and IWAAC all produced reports and plans for future restoration possibilities in 2001 and 2002.

7 major restorations (eg Forth & Clyde Canal), new builds (eg Ribble Link) or major refurbishments (eg Kennet & Avon Canal) were completed. These were achieved through collaboration between BW, partners in the public, voluntary and (some times) private sectors.

The restorations were also driven by a hitherto unparalleled availability of lottery funding complemented for most of the period) by the new Labour government's enthusiasm for regeneration given practical expression through the wide ranging powers and funds of the RDAs. European funding also made a significant contribution.

To achieve the 7 major restorations completed a total of £190 million was invested with about 48% coming from lottery funds, 39% from RDAs and local authorities and 4% from the voluntary sector.

At the same time, the massive climate of support for the larger projects gave impetus and fresh hope to some of the smaller or more marginal projects. For instance much work was done to secure the line of the Lichfield Canal when the M6 Toll was constructed.

- **Summary of the period 2002-2005**

There is continued significant support for waterway restoration. It remains an unchanged part of government policy.

However, available public funding is decreasing. Lottery funds have declined as the public spend less on lottery tickets. Still more lottery spend will be

siphoned away for the Olympics in the lead up to 2012. (NB this may present some opportunities specifically for the restoration of Bow Back Rivers). European funds are declining as the focus of spending has turned towards improving the infrastructure of new members of the EU.

As a working example of this, HLF now consider funding in the order £10 million for a waterway restoration every five years to be at the upper limit of practicality whereas simultaneous grants from lottery funds of £20-30 million (eg Kennet & Avon Canal and Millennium Link and Rochdale Canal) were in place in the late 1990s.

In 2004, BW published an update of its previous thinking on future restoration – *Waterways 2025 – our vision for the shape of the waterway network*. This listed, more formally than before, 23 restoration projects split into three 'priority' phases over the next 20 years. Of the 11 projects listed as Priority 1, (ie prospects for completion in the next 10 years) at least 5 are currently making good progress, 4 are still medium term prospects and 2 are encountering difficulties. Good progress is still therefore demonstrably possible, but requires more effort for the same outcome.

BW's publication of *Waterways 2025* aroused controversy in the waterways community. Although it had the merit for BW of being clear about where it would focus its scarce resources, for many waterway interests it caused concern that projects outside the BW list would become impossible because partners would not support them. BW has recently announced its intention to review *Waterways 2025* in consultation with other supporters of waterway restoration. This discussion with BWAF is a preliminary to that review.

➤ **The future**

BW believes, as do most waterway bodies, that it is important to maintain the momentum behind waterway restoration – even more so as the funding climate will continue to be difficult for the next five years at least.

As well as its review of *Waterways 2025*, BW proposes that consideration should be given to building a *Waterway Restoration Alliance* (working title only) in which all interested parties combined to promote the concept of waterway restoration to an agreed plan and with (as far as possible) pooled resource and effort and a common message. Under this umbrella, individual bodies could then promote single restorations or programmes of restoration for themselves.

This would allow the importance of waterway restoration to be strongly promoted but avoid any blight that might spring from BW's specific endorsement (or not) of a scheme. Thus any one scheme would have the endorsement of one (or often more) of the WRA's members.

There may be many other ideas which will surface in discussion, but we believe it is vital to harness the collective effort and talent of the waterways movement to compete for ever more scarce resources.

British Waterways, October 2005