



Response to Public Consultation on the proposed Riverside Corridor

31 January 2021

The Society canvassed its members for views on this important project proposal. The responses covered a wide range of issues, with both positive and negative comments and numerous suggestions for revision.

The position of the Stratford Society

As it stands, the scheme is too ambitious and should be scaled back to comprise a meaningful environmentally-focused project for the north side. The aims should be to improve access and recreational opportunities for local people and to connect into the existing infrastructure near Clopton Bridge and the gyratory.

The proposed 500-space car park is too large and is not justified on transportation grounds, since it is too far out of town for access by foot without a dedicated park-and-ride system, but the scheme should provide a dedicated off-road cycle way into the town centre.

Although it has some positive features, we cannot approve this project in its present form. There is a lot more that could, and should, be done with this area of land that would enhance it, the town and the county for future generations.

It is vital that a suitable land management plan is adopted and work begun as soon as possible before some of the more valuable habitats deteriorate too much. It is strongly recommended that the Lench Meadows land be designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

Positive comments by members

- Overall an excellent project which I see as having potential to bring great benefit to both Stratford and its residents.
- I feel somewhat conflicted about this scheme, having read the wildlife report/assessment, which identifies the richness and diversity of the flora and fauna in the area. The phrase that stands out is that the area is a 'major wildlife corridor of county importance'. I enjoy walking there regularly and love it just the way it is, but can see that the area would benefit from a certain amount of management to enable the current species to thrive.

Reservations expressed by members

- The land COULD be better managed to the benefit of wildlife, but this is only a possibility and as things stand it seems an unlikely outcome of the proposed project. If the car park is greatly extended; if new and widened paths and cycle-tracks are created; if a new visitor centre with a cafe and restaurant plus a separate toilet block with changing rooms and cafe kiosk are built; if we have an adventure playground and mountain biking area, a maze, a viewing mound, and so on as in the current proposals, then the area left for wildlife will be much curtailed. It might perhaps still be possible to increase the diversity of habitats by careful management, but there will then be the danger of ending up with fragmentary habitats that are much too small to sustain sizeable and resilient wildlife populations for the decades to come.

- It would be much less disruptive to wildlife if the new visitor centre and other developments were located immediately adjacent to the existing Leisure Centre car park and, if absolutely necessary, that car park were extended in size or even developed as a multi-story or underground car park.
- I don't feel that a much larger Fisherman's carpark should be created, mainly to accommodate tourist traffic, when we all are being encouraged to use our cars less. The area should not be over-managed and over-manicured, and I sense that the majority of tourists who visit Stratford in 'normal' times want to visit the town and the areas of the river which are close by (the Rec, Bancroft and RSC gardens).
- In the summer weather of 2020 the current Fisherman's carpark was over-crowded and the grassy 'bathing area' full of visitors, many with paddle boards and canoes which completely took over that part of the river. When you add in the Avon cruise boats and the smaller hire boats turning round, I can't see that it's feasible to combine water taxis and swimmers.
- I would like to think that the swans and other birdlife could use the river without being overrun by human activity. Swans nested in the area just north of the Fisherman's car park last year in relative peace and quiet.

Negative comments by members

- I'm all for a sensible recreation-based improvement to the northern area but this scheme is over-ambitious. I have the impression that it is just another ill-thought-out opportunity to spend money for the sake of it.
- I contacted Ian Jelley (Director of Living Landscapes) at the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and he indicated that the project does have the blessing of WWT, but only if and insofar as the project really does deliver the promised net gains for wildlife. He said that changes to the Fisherman's Car Park need more planning, taking on board the views of the community.
- In the Society meeting in December, I was saddened to hear the land described as a 'monoculture' by the SDC representative, especially after the recent survey by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust showed the remarkable diversity of wildlife therein.
- It is the planned massive car park extension that is causing most concern to many people. It was clear from the presentations at the Society meeting that this concern is shared and that other organisations such as Stratford Climate Action have responded to the consultation by sharing their opposition to it.
- I remember it being said that Severn Trent were going to help with improving water quality, but I don't see how this can be permanently managed when there are flooding episodes, etc.
- At the presentation to the Stratford Society we were misled, I believe, into thinking that this area is somewhat of a wasteland, which is not the case. Those responsible for the proposed river corridor plan seem to regard the area as akin to the Rec – a flat expanse of nondescript land ready to be imposed upon and exploited for commercial gain. But it is obviously so much more.
- The use of electric-powered passenger boats as mentioned in the consultation is nonsense and raises a series of important questions about passenger boats on the Avon and the contracts awarded. Electrification seems to be the primary objective, which is inconsistent with industry standards. The Government Authority for all vessels over 12 passengers is the Maritime Coastguard Agency. They have no requirement for electrification because there are many other factors which override how a vessel should be powered.

- The proposal must have been conceived and the competition begun before the pandemic and its dereliction took hold. If economic recovery is the inspiration for the expenditure, as we were told it was, then there are far more compelling, indeed necessary, projects that the town should be looking at.

Recommendations by members

- One area that requires special attention is pedestrian connectivity between the two parts of Riverside, particularly in crossing the Banbury Road (A422). The route from the arched bridge to the crossing of the A422 and particularly the stretch between the marina and Crowne Plaza car park needs to be made more pedestrian friendly.
- Throughout the area there will need to be consistency of signage and public realm furniture to ensure that the entire scheme is read as a single entity.
- With our tourism industry having taken such a blow in 2020 I feel that the priorities now should be to help the town businesses recover, to improve the park-and-ride facilities, and to aim for more pedestrianisation. Many local towns, including Birmingham, have successfully pedestrianised their town centres.
- Let's concentrate on improvements to the town centre facilities to benefit both visitors and residents all the year round, and limit the management of the Lench meadows to just enough enhancement to enable the current flora and fauna species to thrive.
- I know there are issues about the responsibility for Lucy's Mill Bridge but I do feel that improving access for wheelchair users, etc. should be a priority to make it easier to cross the river at the southern end. These facilities are used all year round, whereas the Lench Meadows are mainly used by visitors in the summer and would certainly have been out of action in the recent flooding.
- The Leisure Centre car park seems a much better location to serve both the town and the path to Fisherman's carpark for those who want a peaceful walk by the river.
- The Warwickshire Wildlife report on the proposed river corridor project makes some important points. There are over 60 species of plant and 20 types of tree, notably a native Black Poplar, in this area, the existence of which should not be ignored. The site is one of the largest semi-natural sites and the largest LWS in the vicinity of Stratford. Due to its location, wealth of habitats and connectivity to other sites via the River Avon, this is one of the most important wildlife sites close to Stratford. I think that the site needs to be properly managed, with the pond in particular being restored from its present overgrown and neglected state.
- If the promoters haven't already engaged with the experts – WCC's Countryside Recreation team – then they should be encouraged to do so.
- It is unclear how the land and the proposed new facilities will be managed once the project is complete. Will there be a dedicated 'Park Ranger'? What will his or her responsibilities be? The danger is that after the building work has been completed, the maintenance and services will be neglected.

Compiled by Lindsay MacDonald (Deputy Chairman)