

CHESTER WATERWAYS STRATEGY

WORKSHOP - April 18th 2013

Group Discussion Notes

Contexts for Growth

Economic Investment and Development Areas Adjacent to Waterways

Question 1:

How can we maximise the waterways contribution to the development of Chester City Centre?

Group 1

- Start from waterways and work out rather than have splatter gun development proposals.
- Avoid housing developments wanting exclusivity.
- Consider vehicular access e.g. Northwich.
- Queens Park/Handbridge good opportunity for leisure activities.
- Bandstand, artists, Groves all licenced to deliver events etc.
- Old Dee Bridge has a locked gate which isn't used.
- Issues around the Old Port Square regarding gate accessibility and connections, e.g. environmental.
- Marina needed by the Cop for sea dwellers to come to Chester.
- Need more moorings as many are privately owned so need to be 'visitor' moorings.
- Need to have connectivity around Groves - meadows (salmon fishing development).
- Gorse Stacks, people don't moor as perceived as a 'no go' area.
- People moor at Christleton and Chester is seen / perceived as a dead end with nowhere else to go.
- Banbury good example where people moor - this could be Chester.
- Facilities issue e.g. Tower Wharf is mainly residential.
- Cop for marina.

Group 2

- GS1 / H3
- Crucial area
- Connectivity
- Access points
- Signage
- Lighting
- Safety Issues around canal
- Northgate locks difficult to navigate
- Walling space

- Old port - development opportunities
- Problems:
 - Overflow by path racecourse
 - How developments face canal
- Gorse stacks good site/interface for potential bus station
- Watkin Jones links to pocket park
- Use developments to enhance interface with waterways

Key points:

- 1) Improved lighting on canal towpath leading in to City and Tower wharf.
- 2) More information as to where the river and canal is from the City centre,
- 3) Provision of a run round bus to the River frontage – not everyone can walk that far.
- 4) Put in a tourist train like other tourist cities – which would go down to the river dropping off and picking up?
- 5) Increased access to Canal and River
- 6) Put in a proper improved navigation link between the canal and the upper reaches of the Dee

Group 3

- Canoe Trail down Dee through Dee Branch (headroom at high tide?).
- Move weir to make area look attractive.
- Limited access to river and canal and disjointed link with city.
- Central Business District visuals don't show waterways highlighted.
- Lost opportunities with developments but still some opportunities there i.e. back of bingo.
- Waitrose building bridge but bridge is enclosed – could be more open and inclusive.
- Planning intervention - more focus on investment in waterways.
- Is development brief for canal corridor? Problem is that visions don't get delivered on the ground.
- Lack of through traffic in places i.e. Tower Wharf and empty units.
- Marketing materials/visuals are important and should include focus on waterways.
- Scope for West Cheshire Ring.
- Scope for Farndon / Holt.
- Lots of good sites gone, need to make sure don't waste future opportunities.
- Could the Zoo manage a small hire boat for visitors?
- Northgate cutting should be exploited.
- Ship Canal: Peel Holdings manage this and some impediments to travel.
- Northgate locks staffed now, is good.
- Need for dialogue with Zoo and University.

- What happens in Chester is driven by conservation and heritage but often with industrial purpose.

Group 4

Strengths

- Excellent opportunities for waterfront access.
- Section 106 agreements for adjacent development to fund waterside improvements.

Weaknesses

- Weir tidal barrier reduces water use opportunities.
- Canal doesn't have a 'café culture' feel.
- Largely hidden from wider view.
- Rear views blocking canal from services etc.

Opportunities

- Canal's unfulfilled potential through city centre.
- Energy Centre 'plug and play' to reduce eyesore of services etc.

Threats

- Water quality is poor downstream, mudflats, debris is pulled upstream.
- Perception of 'no through route' for canal boats through city centre.
- Tower Wharf/Telfords Warehouse area feels isolated from rest of network.
- Boat trip – recreational opportunities.
- Difficulty of locks limits opportunities for canal access.
- Access around Racecourse and Roodee, how to improve large car park area.
- CG1 – opportunity to gain river access.
- The water asset should drive surrounding development not vice versa..
- Canal through centre is enclosed and oppressive.

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Contexts for Growth

Economic Investment and Development Areas Adjacent to Waterways

Question 2:

What short, medium and long-term actions can you envisage to deliver this potential?

Group 1

Short term actions

- Public realm improving connections e.g. de-vegetation , lighting.
- Increase number of moorings.

Med/long term actions

- Brownland developments will sterilise areas.
- Marina at Cop.
- Marketing.
- Lock in weir

Group 2

1) Put in an underground car park by the little 'Roodee car park. Use the space as green leisure and recreation which could stage events.

2) Suggestion for a Marina (may be permanent or finger moorings) and a camping site near the Zoo along side the SU canal.

3) Put in a walkway / cycle bridge across river at Huntingdon to provide a Riverside walk.

4) Put in suitable interpretation on the Handbridge side to draw attention to the old snuff mills and workings.

Group 4

- Microparks – short term gain
- Open up the canal corridor
- Forward facing development achievable
- Open up the river - roodee park – opportunity for greening up?
- Starting point water rather than land in development terms

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Contexts for Growth

Social and Recreational Use of Waterways

Question 1:

Can you identify strengths and weaknesses of current use on and next to the river and canal?

Group 1

Weaknesses

- Difficult to get from canal to river, no clear navigational route or information.
- Lock required around Dee Mill.
- Anti social behaviour.
- Lighting.
- Overcrowding on river around Groves.

Strengths

- 3 different rowing clubs.
- Regattas.
- Triathlon clubs.
- Health benefits 'the blue gym' proposal.
- Sailing club.
- Canoeing club.
- Groves popularised during summer.
- Access been improved.

Group 2

- Groves very positive
- Park/Roman gardens
- Nature reserve being developed by zoo ecologists, free to access, MBNA funded
- Bicycle links
- Meadows present opportunity
- Castle Drive
- Bridge
- Ferry defunct, could be reinstated?
- Sandy Lane services mixed, coffee shop, something new for users, better service
- Upgrade towpaths
- Heritage interest canals
- Festivals to increase vibrancy
- Regular programme of events – better publicised and linked to commercial sector

- Direction/links weak

- Riverside access issue
- Tidal / Debris cleansing problematic
- Aerial cable car ??
- Lack of places to dwell on canal
- Wayfinding / signage / publicity potential

Strengths

- 1) Proposed nature reserve near the Zoo
- 2) Riverside walk around Chester waterways – needs improving
- 3) Towpath walk cycle route Chester to Ellesmere Port and the National Waterways Museum, Cheshire Oaks.
- 4) Waterside band stand.
- 5) Development of Tower Wharf

Weaknesses

- 1) No fully functional safe navigation between the Canal and the Upper reaches of the Dee.
- 2) A roman heritage trail could be extended down to the river by way of interpretation as there is little information of Chester as a key Port in Roman times.
- 3) Reinstate old Ferry
- 4) The Dee lock needs to be put into operational order and re landscaped with the inclusion of a lock landing pontoon. To be the start of the riverside walk to the weir.
- 5) Provide better facilities for boats to moor on the River – floating pontoons
- 6) Better access to River Bank.
- 7) Debris in River
- 8) Tide gauges needed on the tidal Dee that can be seen by boaters to assist with navigation.
- 9) Lack of Café's, eating out places outside under large umbrellas, places for people to walk, sit and enjoy the activity on the River.
- 10) Vegetation Management all around Chester's waterside areas – neglected and has been for many years. River can't be seen from Riverside walk by the Race course.

Group 3

- Lots of activity in Groves, but not elsewhere.

- Guided Boat trips i.e. along canal to Ellesmere Port and on key days i.e. Race Days.
- Lack of visitor moorings.
- Conflict of interest on river – canoe/rowers/boats etc. Needs to be managed.
- Access is a big issue, on river and canal.
- Llangollen is developing a canoe strategy and will promote it to all groups re access.
- Purpose built access with parking.
- Event programme for Waterways.
- Waterways Festival i.e. wrapped around raft race, make use of temporary facilities already used at this event. Raft race would move to August to fill low events calendar if necessary.
- Sustrans Bridge still on hold – would be good if it went ahead.
- Healthy walking network potential – a waterways trail for walkers and cyclists.
- Cycle hire – hope to install in station, promote it.
- Unrealised ambition landing stage upriver.

Group 4

- No dedicated walk along waterway network. Lack of circular route disjointed.
- Volunteer lockkeepers help and encourage access/use, extend this.
- Staircase locks are limiting for canal users.
- Connectivity through centre is disjointed especially poor at Tower Wharf.
- 2 tier high/low tide.
- Existing infrastructure is its strength, positive!
- Best rowing river in UK – destination for clubs (weir helps regulate except at high tide).
- Water quality downstream is poor.
- River is at capacity for recreational use at weekends / peak times.
- Upstream section of Upper Dee is very high quality water recreation / sport – Chester Regatta?
- Good quality fishing opportunity to edge of racecourse area.

CHESTER WATERWAYS STRATEGY – WORKSHOP

Contexts for Growth

Social and Recreational Use of Waterways

Question 2:

What actions would you undertake to improve the social and recreational use of the waterways?

Group 1

- Community sports centre connected to rowing clubs.
- Events could be stretched upstream.
- Interpretation in telling the stories of the waterways.
- Dwell time for walkers and cyclists.
- Opportunities for fishing to be less divisive.
- Salmon - stories around this.
- Lock in the weir (long term).
- More information on navigational routes.

Group 2

- Events
- Canal side events
- Tower wharf festival
- Canalside markets artisan cow lane
- Marketing, water circuit leaflets map
- Fish counter as attraction in own right
- Fish pass with canoe access
- Integrated solution electric station-wier-counters
- Fish less
- Interpretation of wildlife
- Visitor info on groves
- Use lock keepers to sign post and distribute leaflets

Group 4

- River / canal policing.
- Volunteer lockkeepers.
- Weir to enable full access up river.
- Destination for recreational water users – rowing clubs, canoeists etc.
- Slipway, water access at Roodee.
- Feasibility of weir tidal coastal work to assess impact on recreational use etc.
- Cross regional connectivity.
- Portage points to encourage canoeing.
- Consider improvement of recreational cycle access – route through city centre.
- Interpretation.

CHESTER WATERWAYS STRATEGY – WORKSHOP

Contexts for Growth

Value of Waterways to Visitor Economy

Question 1:

What makes a waterway vibrant and successful and how can Cheshire West and Chester maximise the potential of its waterways for the visitor economy?

Group 1

- People
- Identify specific sites for improvements.
- No strategy for development (CWAC).
- No packages / products offered.
- Maximise signage.
- Good example Liverpool 1 connects to the Docks so amphitheatre / Dee House should link to Groves / river.
- Walking.
- Events.

Group 2

1) Increased boating activity

2) Gongoozlers watching boats traverse through locks i.e. Bancroft Basin Stratford, normally gets over 200 people from all over the world taking photographs.

3) Holding National and International events using the waterspace. i.e. Round Wirral – Canoes, Raft race, Boat Festivals

4) Holding large charity outside leisure events

5) Provide the Facilities for people to use the land area adjacent to the waterway to walk, sit, eat, watch and digest the surroundings enjoying quality leisure time and put a bit of money into the local economy.

6) Waterside facilities available during late evening i.e. eating out.

7) Quality lighting for late evening use

Group 3

- Develop marketing.
- Apps / social media. Use Free wifi city as a strength to develop communication.
- Increased waterways presence on Chester website.

- Big areas for audience potential i.e. racecourse/meadows make use of it i.e. Giants parade on water.
- Evening economy and lighting and security
- Walking / cycling routes – market them and make them obvious.
- Mooring space.
- Market Chester as a base for waterways tours.
- Waterways Festival.
- Beach at Groves.
- Festival in August, move raft race
- Perception that boats not safe in Chester on canal so won't stay overnight.
- Security / lighting etc.
- Opportunity Stoak bus to Cheshire Oaks could moor there needs marketing.
- Need flexible way of hiring boats.

Group 4

- Access and linkages / connections.
- Waterside activities – shops, cafes, markets - needed!
- Events, boat rallies, festivals.
- Reasons to linger and dwell on the river / canal. Reason to visit.
- Slipway access.
- Mooring facilities.
- It is a head of navigation therefore it needs to be a destination – a reason to visit.
- Maintenance and management.

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Contexts for Growth

Value of Waterways to Visitor Economy

Question 2:

What specific actions could be undertaken to reconnect with and realise the full potential of Chester's waterways?

Group 1

- Walkway connections.
- Maximise signage.
- Develop packages/products for marketing.
- Colour coded maps currently being mainly used by cyclists need to be used by walkers.
- Canoe hire.
- Telling the stories e.g. people come for the Roman promote river through this.
- More events including winter and evenings
- Horse drawn canoe trips.
- Connect racing and offer as part of a package.
- Market Chester waterways as a package.
- Stratford upon Avon as an example of good exploitation.
- Market public footpath to Eaton Hall (not accessible for disabled).

Group 2

1) To work towards installing a lock in the old mill race which would be the key to providing Chester with a vibrant waterside regeneration akin to many other cities around the UK and internationally – this is proven tried and tested practice.

2) To collate data from CRT on the benefits of increasing boat movements for Waterside regeneration schemes around the UK – facts and figures. This information will be the driver when we start to talk about the economic value it should bring.

Group 4

- Volunteer blue badge guides.
- Mecca Bingo – potential as marina?
- Link attractions – river, canal, cathedral, rows/shopping/historic centre, racecourse, zoo.
- Water taxis.
- Cable car.

General Comments

- Centre of Excellence for watersports provision:
 - Paddlesport – canoe, kayak, racing, slalom
 - Rowing
 - Stand up paddle boards
 - Sailing
 - Open water swimming
- Requires base and access points linking up resources
- Create an A4 triple fold leaflet highlighting the canal and river, with a clearly marked cross city walking route, linking the two. To be displayed at visitor attractions, hotels and marinas. Cut back undergrowth obscuring the view of the river from the Riverside Promenade (Roodee, racecourse and Old Port). Install pontoons below the weir to enable visitor moorings to be available at lower states of the tide. Ensure there are enough volunteers to man Northgate Locks, seven days a week during the boating season, to encourage more boaters to visit Ellesmere Port. A lock adjacent to the weir needs to be wide enough to accommodate river boats. Long term – a barrier installed in the canalised section of the Dee, would allow a usable depth of water to be retained below the weir, revitalising the Old Port and Handbridge section of the river.
- The main route from the canal and the centre of town is at Cow Lane bridge. Could this piece of infrastructure be improved? Currently there is a step up off the canal and there is a drop into the tesco roundabout. Surely this would be a quick win to improve the usefulness of this important access corridor for cyclists. If cyclists want to leave town by this route, Frodsham street is one way...how does a bike park on the corner near the bridge?