

The Canal Returns to Stroud

Opportunities and Challenges

Report of
Stroud Civic Society Conference
25 January 2003



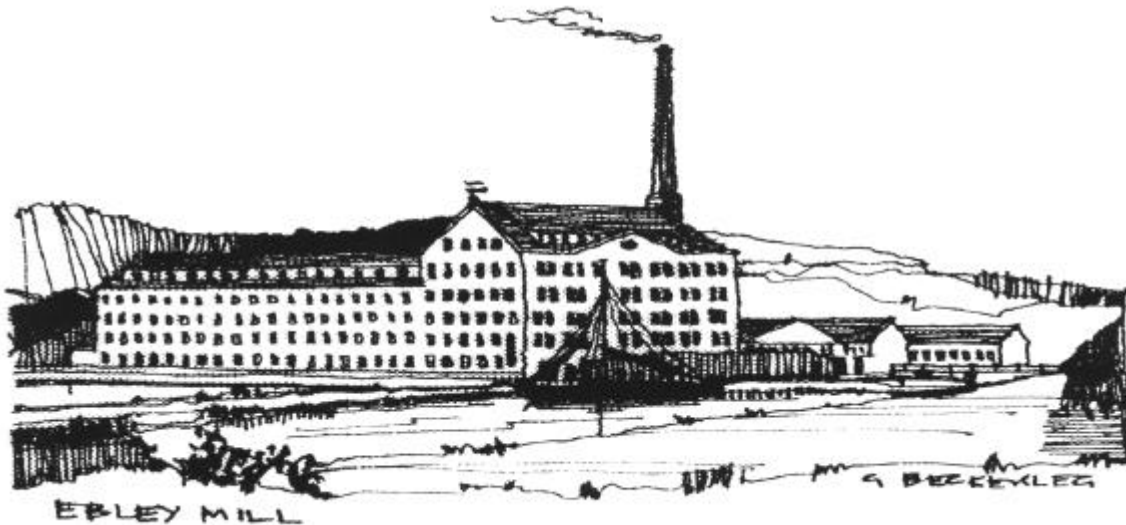
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Introduction

Stroud Civic Society organised the Canal Conference to discuss challenges and opportunities for the Stroud area presented by the restoration of the Thames and Severn Canal and the Stroudwater Canal where they pass through Stroud. The conference discussion formed the basis for a report by the Civic Society as a framework for future for action by the Civic Society to support the canal restoration.

To start the conference, six challenges were presented:

- Will Stroud look on the restoration of the Canal as something special for the town?
- Are there any sites beside the Canal that should be protected?
- Should the Canal be conceived as a long linear park for leisure and recreation?
- What new business and job opportunities could the Canal generate?
- What sort of canal-side development is necessary to fund the restoration and is appropriate for Stroud?
- Will local people have the required training and skills to take up those jobs?



Stroud Civic Society would like to thank the speakers, facilitators, panel members and all the others who so generously gave their time to support the day. Particular thanks are due to the four sponsors of the event:

- Stroud District Council
- Stroud Town Council
- British Waterways
- Waitrose Stroud

The Canal Returns to Stroud

A Summary of the Proceedings

Introduction

This summary is based on the consultation and ideas emerging from the Civic Society conference on *The Canal Returns to Stroud: Opportunities and Challenges*, held on 25 January 2003. It sets out the objectives, challenges, and a coordinated vision for the Canal restoration.

Key Objectives

- **Any development should emphasise high quality design and material.**
- A vibrant and vital focus for activity, with restaurants, cafés, housing and commerce complementing Stroud Town.
- **A ‘landmark’ bridge, creating a new umbilical link between the Town Centre and Canal, and new ‘gateways’ to the Town.**
- Boats as a focus for activity, with moorings or a marina and waterside facilities.
- **‘Access For All’ to the Canal ‘linear park’ for leisure and recreation.**
- Implement wildlife and culture ‘corridors’ linking to the River Frome and art/cycle trails in the Stroud Valleys.
- **A partnership, working around a shared strategic vision, with the statutory regional and local authorities and voluntary groups.**
- A masterplan to coordinate development.

Challenges

- Achieving partnership working, drawing together different groups in Stroud.
- Creating sufficient value through private sector development to support investment in the Canal, heritage protection and a high quality public realm.
- Site assembly to ensure coordinated development, if necessary through compulsory purchase powers.
- Promoting employment potential of the Canal.
- Ensuring heritage and environment character of the canal in and around Stroud is retained.
- Ensuring continued participation within the community.
- Combining need for affordable housing with high cost development requirements.

The Way Forward

- *Encourage a Stroud Development Group linking key local players.*
- *Complement work of British Waterways and Cotswold Canals Trust by considering the wider canal corridor.*
- *Identify key canal-side heritage sites, ownership and priorities for development.*
- *Highlight development objectives for key sites.*
- *Seek the creation of a masterplan drawn up by professionals but driven by a charismatic champion.*

The Canal Returns to Stroud:

Opportunities and Challenges

Conference Report

Conference Presentations

Opening

Councillor Sybil Bruce, Chairman, Stroud District Council

Juliet Shipman, Chairman, Stroud Civic Society

Securing Appropriate Waterside Development

Dr Nicholas Falk, Director, Urban & Economic Development group

Stalybridge – Canal Regeneration

Rick Malone, Stalybridge Town Manager

Stroud: Canal Metropolis of the Cotswolds?

Tim Mars, Consultant, former Head of Policy at the Civic Trust

A District Council Perspective

Nigel Riglar, Head of Regeneration and Culture, Stroud District Council

Workshop Sessions

- A) The Canal in Stroud
- B) Linking the Canal to the Town
- C) Our Canal – Our Jobs

Panelists

John Marjoram

Mayor, Stroud Town Council and Councillor, Stroud District Council

Nigel Studdert-Kennedy

Councillor, Stroud District Council, Cabinet Member for Culture, Development and Regeneration

Bruce Hall, MBE

Chairman of the Cotswold Canals Trust

Andrew Stumpf, BSc (Hons), DipM, C Eng., MRINA, MCIM

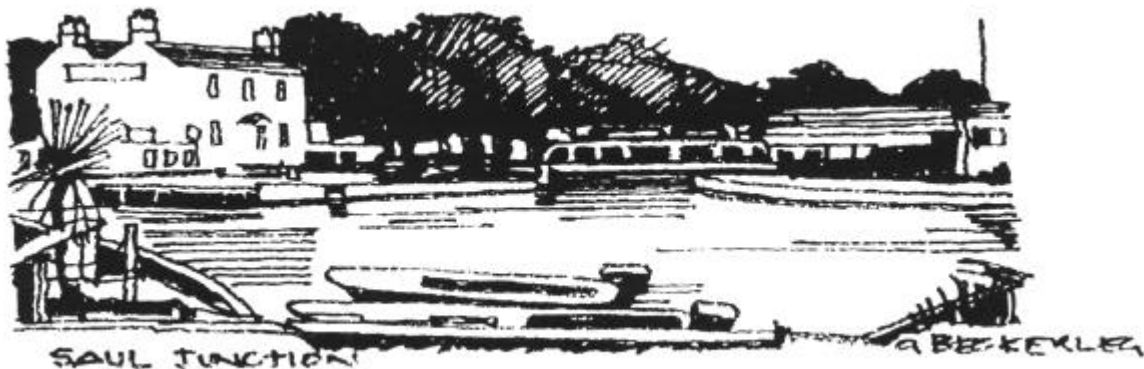
Regeneration Programme Manager, British Waterways

Andrew Watton FRICS

Principle Andrew Watton & Partners

Conference Coordinator & Report

Alison Brown, Consultant Planner, Buchanan Partnership



Conference Presentations – Summaries

Securing Appropriate Waterside Development **Nicholas Falk**

We are building on previous work, such as the Cheapside conference held by Stroud Town Council and the brief we have prepared for Cheapside.

Living waterfronts have an historic tradition stretching back to the middle ages, for example: merchants houses in Amsterdam; the waterfront Southwark; the industrial heart of Bristol. Waterfronts were the market places of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 20th century the canal ‘magic’ has been the focus of some exciting regeneration schemes e.g. Sowerby Bridge and Brindley Place in Birmingham.

Water plays a key part in the ‘urban renaissance’ that encourages people to live in city centres. The key factors are: active waterfronts – such as Barry Docks, mixed uses – such as Paddington Basin, and a strong master plan – for example Newcastle Quayside, now the focus for the Tall Ships Race.

What is master planning about? It can overcome obstacles and identify vast areas of under-used land. For example the master plan at Bristol Templemeads identified problems of mixed ownership and railway land. The challenge was to knit the area into the urban fabric. A master plan provides an agreed basis for development between the authorities and developers.

There is considerable potential for development in Stroud at Cheapside – the area between the Town Centre and the Canal that has not realised its full potential. Its development should be set in the context of the wider area to make the railway less of a barrier. The water frontage would provide a catalyst to creating a high quality development. Experience elsewhere has

indicated that proximity to water can add up to 18% in property values.

Stalybridge – Canal Regeneration: The Big Vision **Rick Malone**

Stalybridge was known as the ‘impossible regeneration’ and I will explain how we achieved the impossible.

The Huddersfield Narrow Canal through Stalybridge opened in 1811 but its benefits were soon overtaken by the railways. Industrial decline set in, followed by dereliction, and in the 1960s a 200m length of canal was filled in. By 1999 Stalybridge was a typical run-down market town with poor quality buildings, derelict industrial buildings and 1960s precincts. It made its name as the film-set for a play set in the 1940s in Yorkshire!

Our success in regeneration has been partnership and funding – based on the common goal of restoring the canal. Volunteers played a tremendous part in the work, for example in digging out the canal. A company was formed, the Huddersfield Canal Company, between British Waterways, Tameside and Oldham Councils, and Kirklees Volunteer Bureau, which reported to the Government Offices of the North West. We also formed the Stalybridge Development Group which was supported by 6,000 local people.

Our success was built on the following:

- An ambitious strategic vision and master plan.
- Partnership and a strong organisational structure.
- Persistence, determination and understanding of the historical context.
- Use of CPO powers.

We had to realign the canal to follow the river because development on the Delta site had taken place along the original canal route. We created a new continental square beside the canal near the town centre, with cafés, bars and restaurants that has transformed the town.

We won a Civic Trust award for Town Centre Vision, and Tesco moved into the area, unusually building a one-off design. We are now 5 years into a 10 year programme, and the project has so far cost £75m of which £35m came from the public sector, mainly ERDF funds, with 65% from the private sector. We are in partnership with a housing association building starter homes for young people.

An historic mill was restored, the site was cleared and created 4.5 acres of developable land for residential development. The Corn Mill has included a mix of renovation and contemporary new build. Future schemes include Longlands Mill, Stalybridge West, Staly Market Hall, Stokes Mills, Knowle Street, the Post Office and many other projects costing a total of £150m for an estimated injection of £8.5 million. Consultation throughout the process has been the key that transformed our town.

Stroud: Canal Metropolis of the Cotswolds?

Tim Mars

Historical introduction

I am going to briefly explore the history of the Stroud Canals, as a stepping stone to the future vision. When it was built the Stroudwater Canal was a commercial success, but the Thames and Severn Canal was a comparative disaster. There was a problem with water shortage at the top level, and reliability was so poor that it was cheaper to sail via Lands End. The Canal was only commercially successful during the wars with France which made the southern routes unsafe, but commercial prospects were soon overtaken by construction of the Great Western Railway. The headquarters of the Thames and Severn Canal was at Brimscombe Port, but was demolished in 1962.

Why was a port needed at Brimscombe? The Thames and Severn barges were different dimensions to the Severn trows, and the port provided a transshipment facility in a 700 ft x 250 ft basin. Brimscombe Port was the canal metropolis of the Cotswolds, although eventually narrow boats undertook the whole journey.

A trip through Stroud's development sites on the Canal

There are some exiting development sites along the Canal. These include:

Wallbridge: the left hand wall is part of the old Stroud brewery – this is an attractive but small site.

Bell Hotel and the former Graham's yard: this used to be the old Thames and Severn yard – a large retaining wall runs through the site.

Cheapside frontage: there is a narrow development site along the north side of the Canal where it passes Cheapside, wildlife area proposed.

Between Dr Newton's Way and the railway viaduct: there is a landfill site here – a possible marina but again quite small.

Fromeside Industrial Site: site is fully used but leaves a poor impression.

Butts: indifferent buildings which do not have a canal-side orientation.

Basin: potential for a basin where people can moor boats, creating a mixed use development with 24-hour use.

The entirety of the Fromeside and Butts site must be redeveloped to take full advantage of the canal-side frontage. This could be enclosed development around water with mixed uses, restaurants and cafés, giving 24-hour life.

There are major differences between Stroud and Stalybridge, because the Canal in Stroud is several steps down from the town. We can build a canal-side environment in Stroud but we cannot integrate in the same way as Stalybridge.

There however considerable potential for a new footbridge to provide a better pedestrian link between the Canal and the Town. Creating a bold statement – such as the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, would provide a landmark to connect the Canal to the Town. The bridge should start outside the Post Office, one of the few slots in the Russell Street frontage. Nobody knows who owns the Austin Montego which has been parked in the alleyway for about 3 years. A series of stairs and lifts would create a link through to Fromebridge Industrial Estate. We must have a way of pushing development forward in Stroud, otherwise there is a danger that Stroud will be bypassed in favour of Brimscombe Port.

The future will take effort, money and a shared vision, but *can* be achieved.

A District Council Perspective

Nigel Riglar

“I am an enthusiast who gets a buzz out of making things happen, and my goal is to turn practical ideas into reality”.

The Cotswold Canal Project is really exciting – a lifetime opportunity for Stroud and Stonehouse residents. Restoration of the Cotswold Canals is now number one on the national list of priorities for canal restoration, and is very likely to happen. We in the District Council aim to make sure that, through this process, the council can ensure the quality of restoration and regeneration that people want.

We are in the throes of adopting a Local Plan, but the preparation is taking a very long time – the draft plan includes policies to protect the line of the Canal, and creates a framework to allow the detailed planning to take place.

The District Council is a member of the Cotswold Canals Partnership. £1.25 million has already been raised for restoration of the Canal through developer contributions via Section 106 agreements, and the District Council has supported the Cotswold Canals Trust through annual grants of £20,000.

We are starting the planning process by drawing up a series of Interim Planning Statements that will serve as supplementary planning guidance (as we do not yet have an adopted local plan, these have to be called IPSs). The IPSs will establish the basis of development for the Canal corridor based on extensive community consultation. The work will include detailed master plans for key sites and is being coordinated by British Waterways.

The Canal restoration is the District Council's top priority for non-allocated capital expenditure from receipts of the sale of Council assets. We are also working in partnership with the Regional Development Agency, Gloucestershire County Council and the private sector, and will continue to support the Cotswold Canals Trust through our programme of grant aid to the voluntary sector.

There are tremendous opportunities – for example creating a ‘Cultural Canal’ celebrating the communities of the Stroud Valley – why should we not have the a 57 kilometre sculpture and cycle trail, the longest in the country? There are huge opportunities for skills training, for example in traditional local skills or new construction skills, and tourism benefits, which we can maximise through working with our local colleges.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – to achieve high quality of development, regeneration, skills development, and job creation. We have about 10–12 years to turn this into a reality.

Workshop Sessions

Linking the Canal to the Town

Facilitator: Martin Quick

Group 1

- Create a master plan, drawn up by professionals – should be driven by a charismatic champion!
- Partnerships and ongoing consultation are vital.
- Create sites for basins and a marina: upstream from the railway viaduct or below Wallbridge Lock could bring benefit to the Town.
- The River Frome is an important part of the waterside potential of Stroud.
- Integrate transport to bring people to Stroud, and to use the Canal facilities.
- Provide information and facilities to encourage access to surrounding areas.
- Introduce ‘the secret Cotswolds’ through cycle hire, links to cycle ways, good signage etc.
- Disabled access is important.
- Don't let Stroud become too gentrified! Affordable housing is still needed.
- **Keep the momentum going!**

Linking the Canal to the Town

Facilitator: Frank Smith

Group 2

- *Changing the Town to Benefit from Canal Re-Opening:* Improve physical links to improve perceptual barrier. The railway line blocks natural movement between Town and Canal, and the link is steep. Any link must be: safe – particularly from traffic; open – well lit and paved; inviting (e.g. not a tunnel). The idea of a *Concept Bridge* was proposed, and creation of a

Grand Entrance to the Town Centre, with lifts etc to the Canal.

- *Why would people want to go from the Town to the Canal:* Attractions should include: gardens, verges, restaurants, open-air seating, bars and a good canal-side pathway. The towpaths should link to the paths along the Frome banks to create a linear park with attractive walks. Greening the area with planted trees, verges and flowers. District Council should ensure good litter clearing and maintenance. Canal boats should be encouraged to moor to create an attraction near the Town.
- *How do we encourage boat owners to use facilities in the Town:* Provide berths below the Town including: bollards, a safe mooring point, steps to deck level, easily accessible water points, fuel points, waste disposal facilities, a chandler's shop, canal-side pub etc.
- *Pointers to the Town:* These should include: a bold map on the ‘quay’; an ‘information point’ of places to see; good signage on all routes; an open, well-paved walkway; good restaurants in the Town; good links from the quay. Ensure new development faces the Canal.
- *Need for an overall strategic plan:* Based on wide consultation, with users, providers, voluntary organisations, commercial interests etc.

The Canal in Stroud

Facilitator: Janet Gaskell

Group 1

- The Vision for Canal restoration should be led by a master plan to coordinate development.
- There should be a Local Development Group.

- The Vision group should be independent.
- The District Council should play a leading role.
- All partners should be involved – private, commercial, Canal, SDC etc.
- Preserving heritage – a coordinated presentation.
- Creating a new visual focus or landmark, e.g. a flying bridge.
- The Canal should be a sustainable amenity.
- Creating a wildlife corridor.
- Development should complement the Town Centre and not compete.
- The regeneration should be regional and not isolated.
- A planning policy for the Canal is needed (none in the Local Plan).
- Create waterside development in Stroud, e.g. a marina.
- Architecture of the very best quality – modern with canal themes, complementing Stroud's existing strong vernacular.
- Development should be bold and striking: a 1–20 year agenda.
- The whole site should be accessible by foot/car.
- Traffic should be integrated, e.g. leisure and business.
- Community safety must be paramount, with lighting, cameras and patrols. Secured by design.
- A vibrant, vital flagship for Stroud.
- **‘Dare and Dream’.**

The Canal in Stroud

Facilitator: Marta Cock

Group 2

What we'd like

- Good signing.
- Retain original buildings.
- Discover Stroud's strengths and maximise them.
- Sail the Stroudwater etc.
- Pubs, chandlers – mix within the area.
- Cyclists and walkers.
- Develop flats over old shops in Stroud.

- Industry as well as pleasure.
- Good transport access – feeder buses.
- Affordable housing.
- Local distinctive food.
- Access for people with disabilities.
- Boat Hire.
- Performance area.
- Maintain the views – in the town and of the town and countryside.

What we wouldn't like

- Pub & shop chains/multiples.
- Too many visitors.
- Fast food.
- Inappropriate development.
- Not just for recreation.
- Ebley-type development.
- 'Prissy'/theme park.
- Lots of car parks and tarmac.

Stroud's strengths: which we think we should capitalise on.

- We are artists and crafts people.
- We have small industries.
- Innovative.
- Rural town.
- Strong industrial heritage.
- Small & friendly.
- Working town.
- Fabulous views, valley approaches.
- Railway – empty Brunel Shed.

Weaknesses

- Lack of vision, will and ability to profit from experience.

We'd like to see

- Canal-side development which recognises the value of the river.
- Starter/small workshops.
- Visitor/Education Centre with guides and links to Museum, Canal Trust, Arts and Crafts movement.
- Something for kids – e.g. Brunel Shed and Thomas the Tank Engine.
- Affordable/starter homes.
- Cycle Hire.
- Access for people with disabilities.
- Lifts or some such to Town Centre.
- The views.

The Canal in Stroud

Facilitator: Jack Telling

Group 3

Development

- Redevelop the Butts/Fromeside site to provide canal moorings/ cafes etc.
- Promote Stroud's important buildings e.g. Sub Rooms, Shambles, Arts Centre, Canal HQ, Hill Paul.
- Retain and attract shopping to the Town Centre. Support 'pedestrianisation' but improve street furniture and surfaces.
- Link the Town by cycle routes to Stonehouse and Chalford.
- Understand user conflict for a restored canal, particularly in the Town Centre. Some areas may have to be designated 'angler' or 'cycle' free.
- Master Plan for development essential. Defer re-location of bus station prior to a Master Plan being prepared.
- Encourage good restaurants.
- Create a 'landmark' bridge linking Russell Street to the Canal.
- New development should be sympathetic to the Town but 'contemporary' – should not create 'replica mills'.

Environment

- 'Greening' is desirable – e.g. more trees, car parks landscaped, grassed areas beside the canal, strip opposite Fromeside as a green strip.
- New buildings could incorporate 'minimum energy consumption'.
- Care needed in the location of linear moorings.
- Improve 'Gateways' to the Town.
- Retain wide range of activities in the Stroud area.

Mill Heritage

- Heritage of the Five Valleys – retain existing buildings but remove peripheral 'tat' e.g. corrugated iron sheds.
- Space surrounding mills often poorly used – opportunities for better use.
- Mills used for craft workshops, starter units etc. Canal-side developments often result in higher rents and purpose built

'workshops' are often occupied by professionals etc.

- Mills used as 'heritage' centres/museums.

The Canal in Stroud

Workshop Facilitator: Barbara Brown

Group 4

- *Mills:* An essential part of Stroud's heritage, which should be preserved as working mills where possible. Good uses include: modern industry, archive centres, arts centres and sometimes conversion to housing.
- *Leisure Facilities:* Should include facilities such as cycle tracks and parks, moorings and possibly a small visitor centre / canal museum / tourist information centre. Canal seen as mainly a recreational resource.
- *Conservation:* Preserve unspoilt stretches of Canal, encourage wildlife and ensure ecological management of wetland. Create open spaces and grassland.
- *Development:* Create safeguards against over-development. Mixed-use complexes should include modest housing, craft workshops, artists' studios and small offices. Sites identified as small basins and small car parks desirable.
- *Traffic:* Limited use of the Canal for freight. Improved access to canal-side sites: e.g. by providing new bridges. Avoid traffic congestion, e.g. re-open Chalford Station as an access to the Canal.
- *Figurehead:* Create a master plan / working party headed by one person.

Our Canal – Our Jobs

Facilitator: Jenny Bailey

Group 1

- Over-arching planning forum required.
- Consultation forum for business interests. Re-jig Town Centre Partnership to take on this role. Partnerships bring in funding.

- Combine canal-side industry with environmental enhancement.
- Promote waterborne transportation of goods.
- Derive income from water extraction.
- Input from community – Stroud District Council – Cotswold District Council – Gloucestershire County Council.
- Another Community Planning Conference?
- Overall job strategy, use our fantastic historic heritage and skills base, link to schools, colleges and business community (entrepreneurs will emerge).
- Use old traditional skills and promote new ones.
- Restoration of canal should use local construction industry and engineering skills, keep contracts local (sustainable development).
- Renovation and re-use of canal-side buildings.
- Focus on industrial heart of Stroud Valleys.
- New buildings should face the Canal.
- Help small local businesses expand, relations and new business start ups.
- Opposition to relocation of Butts, make it face canal – open up and include it in canal development.



Panel Discussion



John Marjoram

Mayor, Stroud Town Council, Green Party
Councillor, Stroud District Council
John Marjoram, has been mayor of Stroud Town Council for 10 years.

My vision: Coordinated regeneration from Stonehouse to Thrupp – access for all along the length of the Canal.

Andrew Stumpf, BSc (Hons), DipM, C Eng., MRINA, MCIM

Regeneration Programme Manager, British Waterways

My Vision: Vibrant and vital. Canal that adds life to the Town, and adds to local pride. The Canal will happen, which will add to local pride and gives us an opportunity to look forward.

Bruce Hall, MBE

Bruce Hall is a retired head teacher who lives in Nailsworth. For the last 15 years he has been Chairman of the Cotswold Canals Trust, during which time the Canal restoration has become a priority project for British Waterways.

My Vision: Regeneration and a navigable Canal along its length. The aim is to create something we will all be proud of, and can tell our grandchildren what we have achieved. The mills and the Canal are the link to Stroud's heritage. We have already made progress, working with Gloucestershire County Council to create new bridges over the Canal, and the towpath is now linked to six long distance routes.

Nigel Studdert-Kennedy

Councillor, Stroud District Council
Cabinet Member for Culture, Development and Regeneration

Nigel Studdert-Kennedy is the District Council representative on the Cotswold Canals Partnership Project Board.

My vision: Teamwork: Stroud District Council's support for the project will not cease. I will not be able to move out of the District if it is a success.

Andrew Watton FRICS, Principle Andrew Watton

Andrew Watton has worked in the Stroud area for 25 years. Between 1980 and 1988 he built up a multi-branch practice covering residential and commercial property sales.

My vision: Regeneration that will make those of us from Stroud proud of the fact. The role of the estate agent is to be optimistic. This is larger than Stroud and people will come to Stroud because of the Canal.



Contact for additional copies of report and membership enquiries: Chas Townley, 4 Thompson Road, Uplands, Stroud, Glos, GL5 1TE. Tel: 01453 756547