IT'S CRUNCH DAY ON COUNTRY WAY

Lottery team weighs up funding for north Swindon's 'green lung'

by Matt Jackson

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THE architects of the Cricklade Country Way will watch nervously today while lottery judges run their eye over a £20m business plan.

Project manager Ken Oliver and his team have spent 18 months creating a blueprint for a green corridor between Mouldon Hill and Cricklade (see map right).

And during the next two days assessors from the Big Lottery fund will consider whether it merits a £20m capital boost and a further £900,000 revenue injection.

Mr Oliver said: "We have prepared as far as we possibly can and have used four consultants for the technical information.

"As well as that we have held at least four public consultations, to make sure that what we are proposing is in keeping with people's wishes."

The assessment visit will include a presentation and a brief tour of the site, where a canal cycle track and heritage railway could all run.

The project would restore 7.5km of the North Wilts Canal, 6km of railway from Mouldon Hill to Cricklade, and at least 15km of cycleways and footpaths.

A new visitor centre would be built, alongside a sports changing facility at Cricklade. Mr Oliver added: "It is called a blue and green corridor between Cricklade and Swindon and we feel there's a real need for it.

PREPARED Project boss Ken Oliver

"There has been rapid development of housing to the north of Swindon and it needs a green lung for people to breathe in."

Mr Oliver is also chairman of Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Trust, which is one of the seven partners on the committee.

The others include all the local authorities as well as Swindon and Cricklade Railway Trust.

Mr Oliver said: "We have worked hard for a long period to make this dream a reality. Last August we were awarded a £250,000 development grant by Big Lottery.

"The plan has been around for nearly 10 years in a basic form, and has an ultimate aim of linking the corridors up to the Cotswold Water Park and the River Thames."

But despite their preparations, the partnership will only find out if they have been successful in late September or early October.

The Cricklade Country Way is one of 23 schemes applying for a capital grant, and all will be assessed in a Lottery Review visit.

Mr Oliver said: "We have been through a lottery application before, and I can confirm that the assessors would make excellent poker players.

"We have got our presentation ready and we hope they will appreciate just how much effort has gone into getting the plan this far."