

Big Plans for Canal through Swindon - Martin Lane gets the latest new update on the developments...

The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust have big plans for re-instating a canal through the heart of Swindon. The restoration of the Wilts and Berks canal was originally part of a 17-year plan that would have seen the canal circumnavigate Swindon to the South. However just over 2 years ago Swindon Borough Council approached the Trust about returning the canal to the town. Over the coming 7 years the trust is hoping that the council's regeneration of Swindon will incorporate the return of a canal.

Earlier this year Halcrow, a large engineering company, completed a feasibility study on the scheme that gave backing to the proposals. The report examined transport and engineering issues as well as cost and water supply. The study predicted that the cost of the canal would be approximately £52 million which would be offset, upon completion, through generating around £6.8 million a year to the Swindon economy.



If everything goes according to plan, the residents of Swindon should see the canal return to the heart of the town almost 100 years after the original canal was abandoned. Swindon's industrial canal was closed by an act of Parliament in 1914, the day before the start of World War One. The heyday of the canal was during the first half of the nineteenth century, when coal was transported from the Radstock and Poulton mines.

(Above) The beauty of the canal and Roy Cartwright (below)



Roy Cartwright, (pictured left) who is the chairman of the Swindon branch of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust, says the canal will "bring wildlife back into the town and be an area for the residents to bring their

families." This exciting plan would link Swindon to over 60 miles of canal from Cricklade and Chippenham through to Abingdon and the River Thames. It would also provide an attraction to visitors and together with the Railway Village restore a part of Swindon's heritage that has been absent for so long. A canal would provide a place for boat owners, walkers, cyclists, fishermen and the general public to enjoy.

Although the feasibility study gave its backing to the canal, it also highlighted some concerns. It stated that "major service diversions and significant changes to the road transport network around the route and the wider borough would be necessary to accommodate the canal." The issue of traffic was a key factor that Mr Cartwright was keen to address, "there will be no canal before the road issues are resolved." However he hoped people would view the canal as part of the solution.



If you would like more about the history of the canal in Swindon and the plans for redevelopment visit the Wilts and Berks canal website www.wbct.org.co.uk or visit their shop near the town hall.

This feature was researched and written by Martin Lane, aged 22 years from Highworth, Swindon. Martin graduated from Southampton University last year and will be undertaking an MA in the Autumn. Martin also took the photographs for his piece hence all photos shown on this page are Copyright to Martin Lane.