

NOW SLOUGH AND SWINDON HAVE ANOTHER THING IN COMMON

Swindon Advertiser Monday, September 29, 2008



WATER CONCERN Swindon Council leader Rod Bluh in Faringdon Road, part of the route of the proposed canal; below, visitors from Slough met Swindon councillors to find out more about our canal plans

Picture: DAVE COX

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BOTH towns have been made famous by The Office but in the future Swindon and Slough could have another connection – a canal project.

On Saturday, councillors from Slough were given a guided tour of the proposed town centre route of the canal.

They were joined by local councillors, both for and against the scheme, and representatives of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust.

The ruling Labour group, which took control of Slough Council in May, are considering plans to link up the Grand Union Canal with the River Thames, and came to Swindon to see what had been done here.

James Swindlehurst, deputy leader of Slough Council and lead member for regeneration, said the trip was a good opportunity to share knowledge.

He said: "We are facing similar issues, although the gap we are looking to fill is shorter than in Swindon. It's good to see what has been done here and to find out how the public have reacted, as Swindon is much further down the line than us so we can learn a lot."

Trust member John Farrow led a walk along the canal, starting from Bevans Bridge, in the Wickistown development. The developers have to deliver canal infrastructure as part of their flood

Group comes to check out town's canal plans



alleviation plans and a canal hub is planned for Middle Wichel, with shops, restaurants and bars.

The party then walked along what is left of the canal, leading to Kingshill Road.

Here the suggestion is to ignore the old route of the canal but instead take it across, or under, Kingshill Road and cut through into Westcott Place then along Faringdon Road, through the

Railway Village, Fleet Street and out along Holbrook Way.

Coun Derrick Menzies joined the walk to represent Swindon's Labour group.

He said: "We support the idea of reinstating the old route but taking the canal through this route is just insanity – where is all the traffic going to go?"

The trust has said that it discounted the old route of the canal because it would have had to raise

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through back gardens and moving a number of services, including gas, telephone lines and sewers.

Coun Andrew Bennett, representing the Conservatives, said: "Yes, there are still questions to be answered and we can understand people's concerns about the traffic but we have to deal with the volume of traffic coming through the centre anyway. If we are trying to tempt people away from their cars then what better way is there than having an attractive canal?"

It is hoped that the restoration of the Wilts and Berks canal will be complete by 2025.

The section which is planned to go through Swindon would take about eight years. Swindon Council officers are still looking into the finer details of the project, which is expected to cost about £50m. Their findings will eventually be used to put the issue to a public poll. For more information go to the Canal Trust shop or to www.rhct.org.uk/swindon

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