

# Strategic review of Louth Navigation and realistic potential for restoration or regeneration

Abridged/edited from a presentation given by Patrick Moss, [www.MossNaylorYoung.com](http://www.MossNaylorYoung.com) at the Louth Navigation Regeneration Partnership (LNRP) meeting, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023

*Notes by LNT*

I want to talk about Waterway Regeneration and then what that means for restoration/regeneration of the Louth Navigation.

## Louth is not a dry canal

Partly to establish my credentials, I just want to mention some of the work I'm involved in. This month I was at Swansea seeing the culmination of many years work as a new section of canal was opened and in the photo you can see the water being let across what was a council's Highway Depot for 50 years. In the second photo is your water, you already have water, but at the moment it is just running down and doing nothing with it – *“that's something we want to change.”*

## What is 'restoration'?

What do we mean by 'restoration'? The dictionary says it is 'returning to a previous condition' which in canal terms can mean returning a previously used waterway to its former condition. But it can also mean enhancement of a non-navigable water for public benefit. (Two 'before and after photos' of a canal: first in the early 1970s with no gate, no water and everyone saying it was impossible to regenerate; and the second is 30 years later as that canal is full of water and in good use today.)

*“So, as you sit here thinking what you can do, don't forget that you can move mountains.”*

## Cycles in canal restorations

Canal restorations for leisure started in 1950s but really got going in the 1960s and 1970s. These were mostly reversing a 'neglect of maintenance' and the energy came from canal enthusiasts who wanted a network of waterways to be re-opened.

In the 1980s restorations slowed as the easy projects had been done. In the 1990s long-term projects came into to fruition and more complex schemes started, with over 100 miles and 130 locks re-instated nationally. In the early 2000s a glut of funds went towards some major schemes e.g. Huddersfield narrow canal, Rochdale, the Falkirk Wheel, and about 125 miles and 200 locks were restored. The Scottish Central Lowland canals raised £85 million pounds for their restorations but this level of funding has now finished.

The Chesterfield Canal is a good example of a complex scheme. It has a £5.5 million grant and 34 Legal Agreements with, for example, councils, landowners, sewage, water and gas bodies, Railtrack, etc., for a ¾ mile stretch near Staveley (and taking the total length to six miles).

*“Louth is in a very fortunate position; you will need a tiny fraction of that level of legal agreement. In many ways the Louth Canal is where those earlier schemes were, being much simpler.”*

## Future restorations

The canals that were once connected to the national canal system have now been restored – bringing the total to about 2,500 miles worth of waterway – no more can be done without huge

expenditure. Current schemes are more complex and the funds are drying up. Ten miles of canal restoration now costs around £100 million – high costs due to inflation and regulations. Some restorations continue but area slow.

*“The ‘new canal age’ is over.*

*But, cheaper local schemes with local benefits are coming to the fore. There is a national movement for restoration and there is a momentum.”*

So what can we achieve in the current environment?

### **What can we achieve?**

Smaller schemes are achievable in the current funding climate. That matters because your restoration scheme needs to go into the Local Development Plan and other policies, with political (and financial) support. Some restorations now are following the freestanding ‘railway preservation business model’ and are not linking up to the national network. Heritage Railways provide the track, the train, cups of tea and pieces of cake which they charge you for. Six of the seven canals our company is currently working on do *not* connect to the national network.

Chesterfield’s final 6-mile canal will be isolated. Swansea’s 2-3 miles when finished, isolated. The Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal will be opening 5-miles not connected to anything else. One project (The Gipping Navigation in Suffolk) is linking two popular destinations and an electric trip boat will connect the two; the Environment Agency is open to raising water levels. The Chesterfield Canal has opened two cafés and trip boats linked to each, all on an isolated waterway.

Without the big funding, how are such isolated schemes managing to get off the ground?

*“Communities are seeking community assets – something for them to be involved with, something that gives them amenity and funding agencies are seeking to fulfill their own objectives.*

*The funding agencies seek to fulfil their own objectives i.e. they may promote the interpretation of heritage, access to the countryside, social inclusion, job creation...*

### **What specifically does the Louth Navigation offer?**

- It already offers community benefits
- It offers potential for regeneration that is relatively cheap compared to other waterways
- Louth could achieve a lot with a restored waterway even with just social benefits– you do not have to get barges to Louth to start receiving benefits
- Early stages must stand alone – funders will want to know you don’t have to achieve the rest in order to get benefits
- Walking the Towpath – its already practical to get from one end (Louth) to the other (the coast at Tetney)
  - you don’t need a 2m-wide crushed stone path to do it
  - starting point – people to know *how* to do it
  - it promotes the canal and the regeneration proposals.
- Increased water activity at Louth – because Louth is very visible.
  - If it happens here its visible to a much bigger audience than if it happens half-way along

- 7-mile Level (Outfen to Tetney) – good stretch of water, can get activity on it now

## What do you need?

### 1) A 'coalition of the willing'

Formulated and formalised. There are things beyond the Louth Navigation Trust to do – your turnover is limited, your statutory powers are limited. A consortium can do far more.

An example/model could be the Stroud Valley Canals Company (SVCC):

- SVCC is a company limited by guarantee
- The key partners (district council, canal society etc) are on the board of SVCC
- It is the navigation authority for the canal
- It leases the navigation from the owners
- It can take a revenue by running the navigation
- It is not bound by local authority rules
- The Council manages the lottery money
- [Louth Navigation Trust would still run alongside]

### 2) Project manager/champion

- Need to appoint a Project Manager – eventually a funded post
- (Mention of George Rogers Project Manager at Chesterfield)
- S/he may start as a local authority project officer e.g. one day a week

### 3) To develop proposals

- Start with bite-sized chunks – projects that fit within the scope of what you can achieve quickly and economically
- Seek inclusion in Council Development Plans and Policies – which naturally leads on to inclusion in other policy documents

### 4) Raise funds

### 5) Involve people

- You need people talking and walking – all visibility and publicity will support the proposals
- Volunteering gets 'ownership' – not everyone is a canal enthusiast but still keen to help in community events
- Angling – leisure and potential social role (offender rehabilitation)
- Canoeing, paddle boarding, etc.
- Walking – need encouragement only. Waymarking, leaflets, signage on the banks. Promotion gets the navigation 'back on the map' and everyone talking about it
- Boats – private, hire, trips

*"This is an opportunity for you because restoration and funds are going to move towards smaller scale projects like this that are of local significance. The organisations that push that process, the Inland Waterways Association, for example, the Waterways Recovery Group, are going to be looking for navigations that can fill those kinds of criteria. So that when the funders ask for their opinion, they can say 'Louth – there's a good 'un'."*