

## **ATHERSTONE RESIDENTS' COLLATED GUCT CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Dated: xx October 2024

### **INTRODUCTION:**

This response has been collated by Atherstone Town Council (ATC) and represents the views of Atherstone residents that have requested that ATC collate and share their views with the GUCT consultation process. Views expressed here may also be communicated directly by residents to the GUCT consultation. The views expressed herein fall into the following categories:

- Lack of Publicity
- Impacts:
  - Environmental Impacts
  - Water Safety and Ongoing Monitoring
  - Economic Considerations
  - Impacts on Heritage
  - Social Impacts
  - Canal Usage
- Infrastructure
  - Flow Rates
  - Potential Water Shortages
  - Maintenance Considerations
- Route and Outfall Options
  - Coleshill Road Option
  - Golf Course Option
  - Alternative Options
- Benefits to Atherstone
- Conclusion

### **LACK OF PUBLICITY:**

Residents expressed concern at the perceived low number of residents that seem to be aware of the proposed GUCT project, suggesting that a greater effort on the part of the project team should be made in this respect. Some were worried that the GUCT project team have not disclosed enough detail regarding the project.

Some residents stated that friends that reside in areas surrounding Atherstone, such as Wood End and Hurley, have not been notified. Others stated that the proposed pipeline corridor goes through a graveyard in Hurley, yet Hurley residents seem to be completely oblivious to the project. Some residents feel that the project team had been deliberately vague in order not to disclose information to residents.

**IMPACTS:****Environmental Impacts**

The discharge of sewage into the canal in the centre of Atherstone will have a sewage discharge consent. Although treated, it is sewage and will have harmful parameters in it. Water companies are consistently breaking their discharge consents. There is no indication that the Atherstone discharge will be any different. Pollution by water companies is currently inherent and extremely damaging. In appropriate conditions found in canals, bacteria from the discharge may have the ability to double in number every hour to levels, causing a significant negative impact.

Locks have slack water periods when not in use where the water does not move making it ideal for bacteria proliferation. Sewage discharges also release greenhouse gases, which would contribute to detrimental global effect of such emissions.

Flooding of canals does occur if too much water is discharged. If land adjacent to the canal becomes flooded, it will be contaminated with sewage pathogens which are harmful to plants, animals and humans. It is a very expensive job to clean them up.

Climate change was another issue that residents raised. They expressed that water transfer schemes could become redundant if rainfall patterns change, meaning that all the negative impacts of the scheme would be felt whilst the aims of it might be short lived. One resident stated that Bedfordshire, the proposed destination for the water, has recently had its highest rainfall since 1836 and had been flooded for two weeks.

The consultation documentation regarding the water quality at the end point makes no mention of the effect of possible changes to the current water chemistry supplying the areas industry, which could have possible detrimental effects on processes and products. Additionally, changes in pH levels, hardness and salinity may affect processes such as refrigeration, where more water will be used to protect against corrosion, scaling, bacteria and fouling. Additionally, alien species can colonise other water systems if they are forced to move from current locations, to the detriment of destination locations.

Some residents expressed that it is incumbent upon water companies to remedy the high level of water leaks, before implementing a water transfer scheme, otherwise vast quantities of the water being transferred will simply be lost to leaks.

There are also concerns about disturbance of the canal's ecology. Local nature-lovers are thrilled that otters and water-vole are once again being seen in the canal and would clearly not wish them to be driven away. Residents fear that the effect on water balance and wildlife could be huge. They considered that phosphates and/or nitrates in the water will cause algae, taking oxygen out of the water. Consequently, fish will die and other wildlife will be adversely affected, including otters.

One particular resident suggested that a similar transfer project was proposed as a consequence of the 1976 drought. However, it was abandoned because of the potential harm to wildlife that would have resulted from the transfer of water from one area to another, due to varying mineral content in water, depending on specific geographical locations.

### **Water Safety/Ongoing Monitoring**

Residents raised concerns about the safety levels of the water, if the transfer were to be implemented. Given that the canal is used to pursue leisure activities, particularly by children, through Ruby's Yard, residents felt strongly that ongoing close monitoring of the water quality ought to be undertaken. These concerns were also shared by residents whose properties abut the canal and are worried about the flood potential and the detrimental impact that would have on their properties.

Atherstone residents have questioned how the sewage outlet will be monitored, especially when occasional sewage overspills already occur at Mancetter. It was also raised that Ofwat and the Environment Agency already lack capacity to carry out adequate monitoring and worry that this project increases the probability of further overspills.

Concern was raised that the prospect of further treatment works at Minworth brings with it the increased risk that the system will not cope, which is concerning to Atherstone residents.

### **Economic Considerations**

The diminished financial status of many water companies is concerning to some Atherstone residents. They worry that this could result in the GUCT not being carried out and implemented properly, which could have untold detrimental effects for Atherstone and its residents.

### **Impacts to Heritage**

Residents were concerned about the potential of alterations being made to historically valuable and significant canal bridges to accommodate the proposed changes. Moreover, it concerned some that the route from Minworth covers 34 Grade II listed assets, one Grade II registered park and garden and two scheduled monuments, as well as passing through so much greenbelt land.

### **Social Impacts**

Some residents are concerned about the potential negative effects on the communities that reside near the canal, as people do not want to live in, or visit, a sewage blighted environment. Such individuals include those who reside on the canal barges. Also, currently, there is a junior canoe club at Ruby's Yard. The young participants will be at risk from any sewage discharge into the canal.

Ruby's Yard is a valued and relatively new facility offering a range of exciting water-sport and other outdoor activities in a socially deprived part of the town, with a considerable focus on residents' physical and mental wellbeing. Even if it is bypassed, it seems bound to have its activities disrupted by the GUCT, and there is concern that new structures might impair the future of paddle-boarding and other water-based activities.

### **Impacts on the Canal Usage**

There is considerable concern regarding the impact on the canal and its usage. During the construction of the weir, it is assumed that there will be disruption to the narrow-boat traffic. Town centre traders benefit from the fact that Atherstone is a regular stopping-off place for canal tourists. Whilst it is expected this disruption would be of a temporary nature, it would still be impactful.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE:**

### **Flow Rates**

Concerns have been raised, regarding canal flow rates and the effect that varied flow rates from Minworth may have. Some were not content with the lack of detail in the consultation documentation regarding mitigations for storm overflow. They also considered that flow balance is important and lamented the potential effects that could come about should the increased water volumes being transferred under this proposed scheme flow down the locks, in the direction opposite to which is intended. How will this be monitored? Atherstone residents contend that there are discrepancies between Ofwat volume figures and those of Affinity.

The question of whether the lock structures will cope with the significant additional pressures placed upon them was raised as a concern. It was felt that more technical detail in this regard, would need to be shared, in order to allay the fears of some residents.

### **Potential Water Shortages**

Some Atherstone residents raised the issue that whilst there might currently be an abundance of water in the Midlands, relative to the South, there seems to be no appetite to build a reservoir to serve the South, which could be an alternative option to this project.

Further, residents asked whether the question has been raised as to how much water is actually needed locally, in the Midlands; especially given the amount of development and housebuilding in the area. How will the water be re-routed and will enough be left behind for local use? Whilst residents concede that modelling must have been carried out in order to inform a response to this question, they considered that it is simply guess work and cannot be relied upon.

## **Maintenance Considerations**

The practicalities of performing maintenance tasks on the pipeline, once installed underground, has alarmed some residents. They consider that it is inevitable that there will be leaks. They are concerned that this may result in long term, continuous disruption as ongoing access would be required in order to remedy leaks. They also questioned what the maintenance regime would be. Will it involve sensors? Further, they questioned how Affinity will ensure an improvement in leak reduction, rectification and management in order to ensure the project yields maximum efficacy.

## **PIPELINE ROUTE AND OUTFALL OPTIONS:**

### **Coleshill Road Option**

Residents were extremely concerned about the prospect of the proposed pipeline being located along the Coleshill Road. It was felt that the negative impact would be devastating. They anticipate that this impact would result from noise and dust pollution and have a significant impact on the day-to-day well-being of residents. It would result in house devaluation for those wishing to sell their house, increased costs relating to insurance premiums and remove access to safe parking of residents' vehicles and cause disruption to local businesses.

Work on the relevant stretch of Coleshill Road would not just affect access for the residents living on the road itself, but also a further 500+ households in the adjacent streets, whose only access is via this stretch of Coleshill Road. It also provides the only access for the well used allotments. It would also negatively impact companies wishing to make deliveries in the vicinity. Businesses located on Coleshill Road would also be negatively impacted. The convenience store offers one of only two post offices in the town, and the chip shop is very popular. Other businesses include a soft furnishings business and a pub. These negative effects are all compounded by the fact that they would be experienced for a prolonged period of time.

Further, Coleshill Road is a major commuting route. On the whole, houses on Coleshill Road and neighbouring streets have neither drives nor garages. Vehicles that normally park in Coleshill Road would struggle to find alternative parking in the vicinity.

The Coleshill Road option may affect property values and the price of home insurance premiums, making selling a house here impossible if there is an extended period of disruption. Will residents be compensated for these tangible losses?

Emergency vehicle access is critical, given such a large number of residents are dependent on access to a relatively short stretch of road. This could be particularly concerning for the largely elderly residents of Merevale View.

Coleshill Road has seen repeated closures already during recent months, probably more than any other road in the town, and possibly more than all the other roads, n

Atherstone, combined. Much of this related, ironically, to emergency work on the sewer which would need diverting as part of these works. The diversion route is probably suitable for people travelling further afield, but far too lengthy to be practical for locals.

### **Golf Course Option**

Some residents expressed the view that if this project must proceed then the pipeline across the golf course would be preferable. However, they held concerns regarding the prospect of an access road being constructed parallel to the existing entrance to the golf course, for the heavy construction vehicles. They consider that it would result in noise and dust pollution, that could impact the mental health and well-being of residents in that vicinity.

Some consider that a more suitable and obvious entry/ exit point is further along Coleshill Road, away from residents' homes, where there is already an entry/exit gate. That way vehicular traffic will not impinge on those living on Coleshill Road.

The golf-course is an important leisure facility for the town and a business that seems likely to suffer financially, not just during the disruption, but, in an unquantifiable way, as a result of that disruption, if golfers moved their allegiance permanently to other golf courses, rather than temporarily.

The loss of very old trees on the common land would have also been raised as a concern. Whilst some would likely be replaced, it would take many decades to recreate any semblance of the previous scene. In addition, walkers would presumably be prevented from accessing that area for some time and this is a popular route, especially for dog walkers.

### **Alternative Route Options**

There are options that would be much more acceptable for all parties. These include taking the pipeline across farmland, for instance, between Mancetter and Hartshill.

## **BENEFITS TO ATHERSTONE**

Under all options and proposals for this scheme, Atherstone residents are set to bear the brunt of the negative impacts, but do not currently stand to benefit from the project. They expressed that the usual benefits of such a scheme would be the construction of a reservoir in the distribution area which has recreational benefits and a new habitat for plants and animals.

## **CONCLUSION**

Having canvassed a number of residents, it is clear to ATC that the vast majority of the residents of Atherstone, and surrounding areas, are not aware of the proposed GUCT project. This submission represents the views of a small number of residents. Many more will have engaged directly with the consultation process, A more effective communication strategy, to alert those who are likely to be affected by the implementation of this project, needs to be implemented, well in advance of any future public consultation on this matter. It is anticipated a far wider range of a views would be harvested, which would be more representative of the views of residents.

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