

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 18 September 2019

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community & Resources

SUBJECT: Update on Water Supply Issue, Sankey Canal

WARD(S) Halton View, Riverside

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the effect of the closure of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station on the water level in the Sankey Canal.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board notes the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background – Canal Importance

- 3.1 The Sankey Canal was first opened in 1757, and was one of the first wholly artificial canals in England. It starts in St. Helens and extends through Warrington and ends at Spike Island, Widnes, with locks out to the River Mersey.

The canal and boat to rail connection at Spike Island was essentially the first 'intermodal transport system' in the world.

Unusually for a canal, each section of it is owned by the respective Council it passes through. Only a few small sections are owned by the Canal & River Trust.

The canal is an important green corridor with a wide range of habitats and is part of the Trans Pennine Trail.

Canal Hydrology

- 3.2 Originally the canal was largely formed by following Sankey Brook, with later extensions added in Warrington and Halton. The head of water that fed the canal system came from Carr Mill Dam in St. Helens.

The canal became disused in the late 1950's/early 1960's and some upper sections of the canal were removed and infilled; this effectively stopped the natural flow of water to the lower sections in Warrington and Widnes. Without a

continuous water supply these sections of canal were dry during the 1960's and 70's.

In 1978 the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) agreed to pump water for free in to the canal to facilitate recreational activities and an amount of locking in and out to the River.

Halton's section of the canal, which has largely been in open water since this date relies entirely on the input from the power station (see AECOM 2016 Hydrology Report). WBC is in a similar situation. SSE have announced they will cease generating operations at the end of March 2020. The station will then enter a period of decommissioning. From this point on any supplied water to the canal will be extremely unreliable and likely cease altogether.

The Sankey Canal Partnership & Sankey Canal Catchment Basin Group

- 3.3 There are two pre-existing groups that have been working to improve the canal, the canal/brook corridor and surrounding catchment area.
1. The Sankey Canal Partnership is made up of all three authorities, Canal & Rivers Trust and SCARS. This group's main objective is the restoration of the canal and projects that preserve and enhance the heritage and bring the added benefit of leisure and business opportunities.
 2. The Sankey Catchment Basin Group is made up of the three authorities, Environment Agency, United Utilities, Mersey River Trust and Mersey Forest, concentrate on water related issues such as water quality and flood alleviation.
- 3.4 Neither of these groups has any core funding to carry out its business and they rely on successful bids from any appropriate grants that may be available. Resources and staff availability within these organisation to prepare these bids is extremely limited. The situation is further complicated by an Environmental Agency requirement to retain the canal as a water body with good water quality.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None

5.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Funding is required to help plan for possible alternative water supply solutions, as well as implementing the Spike Basin approach ahead of the SSE closure of Fiddlers Ferry power station in 2020. This emergency planning will include means to mitigate known environmental impacts as well as potential damage to canal structures that will occur with this major loss of water from the canal system.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no direct implications associated with this report, although the effect of water loss may make the area less desirable as a leisure and recreation destination.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The potential effect of losing a significant portion of the water supply to the canal, will have a detrimental effect on the environment in this area.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Options being investigated:

Option:	Constraints:
<p>Do nothing/allow canal to dry up Goes against the Partnership ambitions which each authority and CRT have signed up to and would be against EA advice.</p> <p>The option to leave or infill the canal is not a cheap option to pursue.</p>	<p>There are requirements to safeguard habitats/species which each authority will need to meet in order to avoid damage to the environment.</p> <p>The canal walls will become unstable and require 'shoring up' to prevent possible collapse when not in water.</p>
<p>Hydrology study-reconnection of canal upstream As part of the Catchment Basin Group work, the EA are undertaking a study of the catchment basin and canal hydrology. They have been asked to explore the opportunity of utilising the Canal as a 'flood relief' opportunity with any possible funding opportunities this could bring.</p>	<p>Timescale for this study and any resulting outcomes/resulting works are far beyond the date of SSE power station closure.</p> <p>Will require action from St. Helens and other stakeholder to deliver.</p>
<p>Short term pumping Using the power station system left behind after the power station shuts. (SSE have indicated they would consider this option). WBC are considering the offer and looking at ways to fund it.</p>	<p>The existing pumps are old and way beyond the scale required for just lifting water from the river to the canal.</p>
<p>Long term pumping solution This would involve a similar arrangement as the power station currently employs now, but with new, smaller scale / more appropriate pumps to lift water from the river to the canal.</p>	<p>This option may require the current lagoons (currently SSE owned) and an expensive EA extraction licence (Circa £50k). Due to the environmental benefits of the canal it may be possible to negotiate the EA licence fee given the benefits to the wider habitat water extraction will bring.</p>

<p>Spike Island Basin HBC/OSSD with the help of CRT engineers are exploring the possibility of retaining a portion of the Canal in water around Spike Island using the surface water input from the Mersey Gateway bridge deck. This would involve installing stop logs at the 'Iron Swing Bridge' location.</p>	<p>There will be costs associated with carrying out this work and no certainty to how reliable the resulting water level will be carried out.</p>
---	---

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 There are no Equality and Diversity issues in relation to this report.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- Barker Langham-Conservation Statement March 2016
- AECOM Hydrology Study, August 2016
- Place of Inspection - Open Space Services Division, Picow Farm Depot
- Contact Officer – Nick Martin