

## **Briefing Paper re Little Ouse Navigation reopening Brandon to Thetford link**

The Little Ouse has been a major artery into Thetford for centuries and following improvements made in the 1600's became known as the Thetford Navigation. It continued to provide a route for heavy goods into the town until the coming of the railway in 1845 and brought a great deal of materials in for the railway. Trade continued along the river bringing coal and raw material for the Fison's Fertiliser works with Malt and Fertiliser being exported from the town. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the staunches fell into disrepair and have subsequently been replaced by two control weirs and a newly built (smaller than ideal) lock at Brandon. The Navigable Rights for the Thetford Section went across from the Borough of Thetford to the newly formed Breckland District Council in 1974.

The Environment Agency is responsible for the river to Thetford and although management of the Little Ouse for navigation is only maintained at present, to moorings a few hundred metres upstream of Brandon Bridge. The river is navigable for small craft up to Santon Downham bridge where there are some small moorings put in by the Great Ouse Boating Association. Beyond here the river is too shallow and not maintained to allow craft much further.

In 2003 the Environment Agency commissioned a feasibility study which identified the need for four new locks. In 2006 the Waterway Plan for the Great Ouse Catchment identified the restoration of the Little Ouse River as an aspiration with estimated costs of £12m.

Following a meeting of stakeholders in 2014 it was clear that there is a desire to see the navigation restored to Thetford and a Waterspace study was commissioned jointly by Thetford Town Council and Breckland Council. This was launched in February 2018. The full report is available from the Thetford Town Council website.

Whilst the larger scheme would take years to come to fruition, smaller quick wins such as providing facilities for canoes to access the river either side of the control weirs and improving the footpath along the riverside can be achieved quite quickly.

The economic benefits of tourism, improvements in health and well-being from increased use of the waterway and associated paths are well documented. This scheme will offer the opportunity to market Thetford as a riverside town and help maintain footfall in the town centre. It will also offer extra facilities and amenities for the expanded town that will soon have to accommodate 5,000 new homes and also provide a green infrastructure that can link the new development to the town centre and beyond to the forest and national walking trails.

The Wet Brecks HLF scheme has earmarked some projects that will deliver some small scale improvements to the route and funding for fish and canoe passes are also being sought. This coupled with the town expansion, the growth of Thetford Forest as a regional recreational centre and Thetford's growth as a tourist destination makes the time right to push for the long overdue improvements to the Thetford Navigation.

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