

Proposed wording for letter re. Ironbridge Power station development

Outdoor leisure tourism is a major driver of the local economy in both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. Currently there is no east west route along the flat river plain between Ironbridge and Buildwas along the south of the river for local people and tourists to use on foot, on horseback or on a cycle.

Two National Cycleways meet at The Iron Bridge in the Severn Gorge, one follows the disused railway line along the south of the river that stops at the entry to the Ironbridge Power station at its eastern perimeter, this is National Route 45 of the NCN that links Chester with Salisbury via Whitchurch, Ironbridge, Bridgnorth, Droitwich Spa, Worcester, Gloucester, Cirencester and Swindon.

The other is National Route 55 of the National Cycle Network when complete will connect Ironbridge to Preston via Stafford, Macclesfield, Stockport and Wigan or Bolton. Between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent the route follows National Route 5. It follows the Silkin Way into the area of the Gorge and links with Route 44 at The Woodbridge in Coalport and from there one can walk, cycle or ride to Ironbridge along a disused rail line and beyond to the perimeter of the power station site.

Interestingly the old railway line continued on to Shrewsbury, the other side of Buildwas bridge, opposite Buildwas Abbey. Not to continue this route through the Power Station site would be a missed opportunity should funding become available via a charity such as Sustrans or via funding from other sources to continue these long distance routes 'off road' to Shrewsbury.

This line would be marvellous bridleway for local riders and again it connects with the long distance Jack Mytton Way Bridleway in the Gorge.

The long distance walking routes that converge at the Ironbridge or that have direct walking routes to it include The Shropshire Way, Severn Way, The Telford T50 50 Mile Trail, The Silkin Way, South Telford Heritage Trail amongst others.

For all these reasons the logical main access point on foot, by cycle and on horseback is via the line of the disused railway line from the east. To make a non vehicle access and route through the site from where the old railway terminates at the boundary would not only be a wonderful opportunity for outdoor leisure tourism but it would enable the local communities on either side of the Gorge to interact socially and economically. This is especially important for those groups such as the young, poor or old without access to cars.

An additional path along the river and access point across the old 1930s bridge in the north west would create many circular and linked routes north and south and from the west and provide an alternative to using a fast section of road on the north bank of The Severn.

At the stakeholders initial meeting you invited representatives of The Ramblers and organisations representing other outdoor leisure interests. The two above propositions were suggested and seemed to be supported.

Therefore at the public consultation, it was very welcome to see a public right of way being proposed across the 1930s bridge and along the riverside and links to and through open space close to the river. There seemed to be a suggestion that the main non vehicle access point to the site could be this old bridge?

However, on the maps of the site put forward for consultation there was no non vehicle route shown accessing the site from the east and through the middle of the site, following the line of the disused railway towards Buildwas. Feedback from people we talked to who attended the public consultation noted that many of the participant suggested they would very much like a route for walkers, horse riders and cyclists along this line. They argued the main point of access should be from the east though the idea of a second access point from the old bridge was very welcome too, it was clear local people wanted and needed both. A shared bridleway/ cycleway/ footpath trail along the line of the old railway, perhaps alongside a highway through the site would also be an attractive prospect for tourists wanted to walk/ cycle/ ride between two major 'draws' in the Gorge, Buildwas Abbey and the Iron Bridge itself.

It would seem that representatives of walking, cycling and and horse rider groups have not been invited to subsequent stakeholders meetings although The Chair of Telford and East Shropshire Ramblers sent a follow up letter via email as suggested at the consultation, she has not had a response. This may be of course because their focus addressed other priorities and their needs will be looked at later.

We would therefore like to ask what are the current plans for non vehicle through routes through the site?

We would like to ask whether our respective organisations, could meet with the developers to discuss whether we could help plan for this group of users and how this site could maximise the opportunities available for an east/ west and north / south' green corridor' for non vehicle users through the site?

Between us we represent the views of both Local Authorities teams responsible for outdoor leisure and public access for walkers, horse riders and cyclists as well as representatives from a number of groups with a direct interest and a lot of practical experience of multi user shared paths. Our members are drawn not from not just groups representing walkers and riders but those with a much wider view, such as The Open Spaces Society, AONB, and many local Trusts. All of us were very impressed by the knowledge and understanding and practical examples of what you had achieved with developing trails and paths from other projects you have managed.

If we can help in any way we would be delighted to do so.

We look forward to your response.