



PRESS RELEASE

PHOTO CALL Friday February 17, 10am, ON CANAL BOAT, TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL AT END OF NEWPORT LANE, MIDDLEPORT

Embargoed to 6am, February 17, 2006

PARTNERS SUPPORT RESTORATION OF BURSLEM CANAL ARM

Regeneration partners have rallied behind a project to restore an historic canal and provide a marina and moorings for 60 boats in Stoke-on-Trent.

Public sector organisations including RENEW North Staffordshire, the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and British Waterways have agreed to support a proposal to rebuild the 500m long Burslem Arm of the Trent and Mersey Canal.

The decision was taken after a study into the economic and engineering feasibility of rebuilding the canal recommended it should be restored alongside the development of hundreds of new highly-desirable canalside homes in the area.

The canal was built in 1805 but closed in 1962 after a major breach and was filled in. A local community group of residents and waterways enthusiasts, the Burslem Port Project, has been campaigning for nearly 10 years to rebuild it and help regenerate the local neighbourhood.

The total cost of the canal work is estimated at £10.5 million but this is expected to lead directly to £65 million further investment in new housing and facilities.

The study says that building the canal will drive up the value of development land alongside it by 18 per cent. This increase in values would allow the building costs to be met by developers as part of their planning agreements.

The study concludes that building the canal would lead directly to the development of:

- up to 500 new canalside homes, 20 to 25 per cent of which would be affordable
- development of leisure businesses such as restaurants and bars overlooking the canal
- a marina and moorings for 60 boats in total including 15 hire boats, a day trip boat, visitor and private moorings
- facilities for boaters including a shop, diesel sales and pump-out facilities.

The canal arm would be used by boaters, canoists, anglers, walkers and cyclists. It is predicted to attract 144,000 visitors a year, who would contribute over £4 million a year to the local economy, supporting around 25 full-time jobs.

Rebuilding of the canal arm will also add to North Staffordshire's unrivalled network of canals, parks, rivers and green space which is already being renovated with high quality new cycle and walkways, play areas and public art.

The study's findings will now be built into plans for the Middleport and Burslem area. Extensive consultation is already taking place with local people on how to improve housing conditions in the area and a local "masterplan" is expected to be complete later this year.

A steering group will now be set up to drive forward the plan but it is likely to be several years before work can begin.

Hardial Bhogal, director of RENEW North Staffordshire, said: "The Burslem canal arm will play a fundamental role in attracting new housing development and making Middleport and Burslem an attractive and desirable place to live.

"A huge amount has been achieved by the Burslem Port Project in getting the idea this far and we will now work with them and other partners to find the most practical way to make this happen."

Roger Savage, chairman of Burslem Port Project, said: "We are delighted at the outcome of this study. Local people have retained fond memories of the canal and we have campaigned for nearly 10 years to rebuild it and help regenerate the neighbourhood around it.

"We now look forward to making it happen."

Julie Sharman, general manager of British Waterways Wales and Border Counties, said: "We are very excited at the possibility of restoring the Burslem branch to the canal network.

"In many other cities, such as Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham, waterside homes have helped attract new residents to previously run-down areas. The canal also provides a lively, attractive public space for local people and visitors. We are currently delivering a £5.4 million scheme to improve 17km of canal and towpath through North Staffordshire. Canals have played a central role in the area's history and they are now a fundamental part of its future."

Ends

Photo call: You are invited to send a reporter / photographer to the Trent and Mersey Canal at its former junction with the Burslem Canal Arm, off Newport Lane, Middleport, at 10am on Friday, February 17. Representatives of RENEW North Staffordshire, Burslem Port Project and British Waterways will join local MP Joan Walley on a canal boat to celebrate the support for rebuilding the canal arm.

Historic photos: A photo included with this press release shows the Burslem Canal Arm in the 1930s with the skyline of Middleport and Burslem in the background. The Mersey Weaver warehouse in the centre still exists. Photo courtesy of British Waterways Cyril Arapoff Collection.

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Notes to editors

1. RENEW North Staffordshire is the housing market renewal pathfinder for Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Biddulph East. Our aim is to help make North Staffordshire a thriving, diverse conurbation where people want to live, work, invest and study. We do this by working with communities and partners to:
 - balance housing supply and demand
 - retain and attract population
 - provide quality housing that meets the aspirations of existing and new residents
 - transform the environment and make the best of our heritage and green space
 - support economic regeneration.
2. The RENEW North Staffordshire team can be contacted by the public on 01782 232024 or renew@stoke.gov.uk. Further information can be found on the website: www.renewnorthstaffs.gov.uk.
3. The Burslem canal arm was built in 1805, 30 years after the main Trent and Mersey Canal was opened. It was used to bring in china clay, stone and other raw materials for use in the Burslem potbanks. Finished ware was then exported via the River Mersey and Liverpool Docks.

In 1879 the canal is shown on maps as a branch of the Trent and Mersey Canal with wharves and associated buildings at the northern end.

There was a major breach in the canal sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s due to severe underground mining subsidence. This was repaired, but in late 1961 a final breach occurred and the canal was officially closed in 1962.

The canal was filled and has become overgrown.

In 1996 a local group, the Burslem Port Project, was formed and worked with the community to develop plans to restore the canal arm.

In 2003 it published detailed, visionary plans to use the canal arm as a central feature in wider plans to regenerate Middleport and Burslem.

In 2005 an economic and engineering feasibility study into the restoration of the canal arm was commissioned by RENEW North Staffordshire. The Trent and Mersey Canal Society and the Stoke-on-Trent branch of the Inland Waterways Association each donated £1,000 towards the cost of the study.