



The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal as it passes through Aylestone Park following reed removal. Source: Ralph Barber, Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust.

BIG IDEA 10: REESTABLISHING THE HEREFORDSHIRE & GLOUCESTERSHIRE CANAL

Summary

The route of the former Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal provides an important ecological and historical asset for both Hereford and the wider county. Ongoing plans to restore the canal should be brought right into the city centre with the creation of a new Hereford Terminus. Additional water-based recreation and community facilities should be provided within Aylestone Park, providing access to the water and interactions with nature for all.

The historic route of the canal, which is protected under Core Strategy Policy E4 of Hereford's existing Local Plan, should be safeguarded through Hereford and reinstated as a blue-green active travel corridor along its towpath as a priority. Once the route is secured, aspirations for future rewetting, recreation and biodiversity enhancements can be delivered in partnership with the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust.

THEME 1 MOVEMENT

Enhancing active travel links between north Hereford and the city centre by securing a new green corridor along the former towpath.

THEME 2 COMMUNITIES AND CULTURE

Creating safe access to water-based recreation for people of all ages and abilities through the delivery of a new community basin.

THEME 3 THE ECONOMY AND OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting the visitor economy and sustainable day trips into the city.

THEME 4 LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE

Providing a continuous green and blue corridor connecting Hereford's city centre with Herefordshire's wider countryside.

THEME 5 PLACES AND SPACES

Reviving one of Hereford's lost heritage assets and providing a distinctive setting to new development within the Station Quarter.

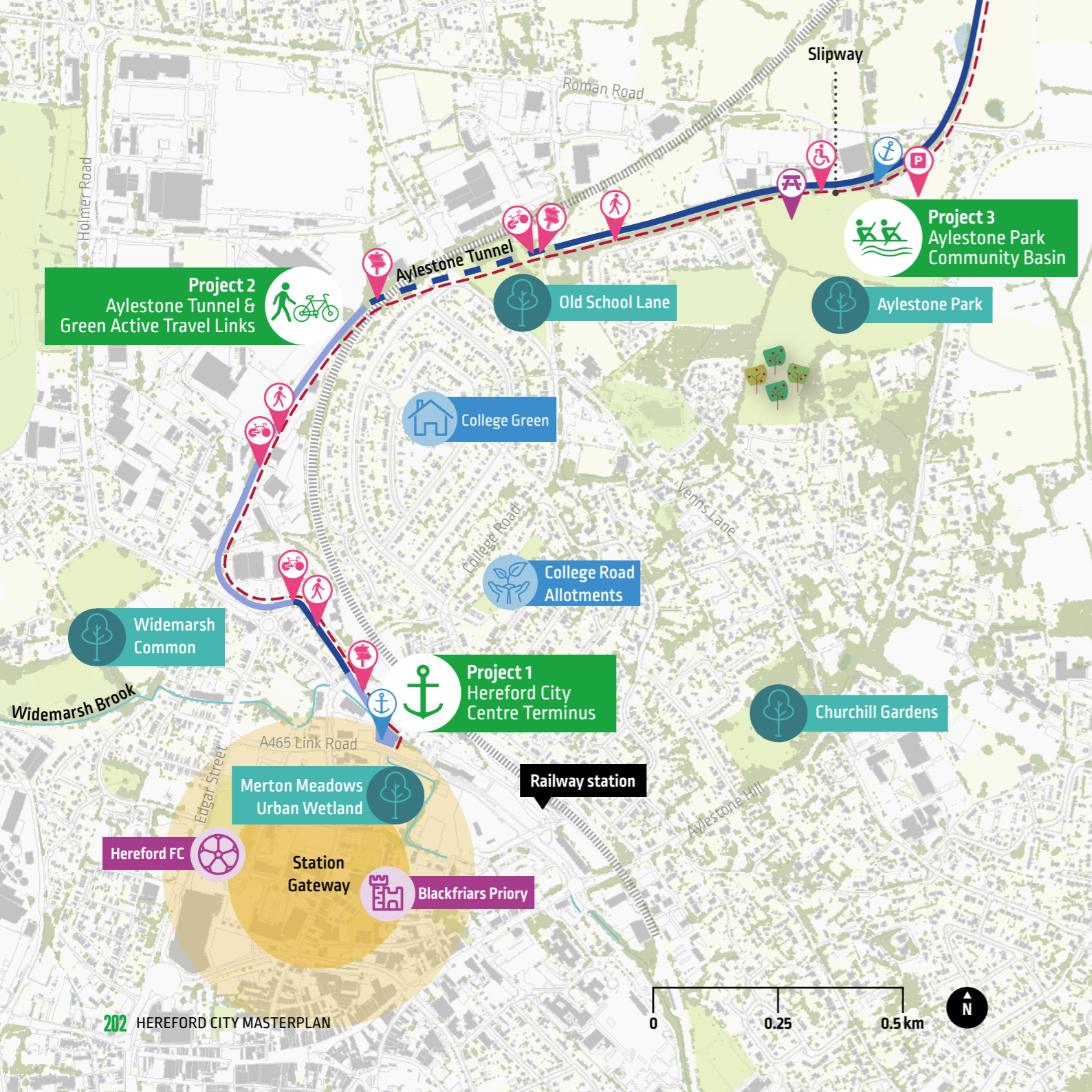


Figure 30

Re-establishing the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal

Themes

- Project
- Movement
- Communities & Culture
- Economy & Opportunities
- Landscape & Wildlife
- Places & Spaces

Existing assets

- Historical canal alignment
- Tunnel
- Railway
- Orchard
- Parking provisions
- Picnic facilities

Proposed interventions

- Proposed canal alignment
- Proposed towpath for walking & cycling
- Enhanced walking provisions
- Enhanced cycling provisions
- Enhanced disabled access
- Enhanced signage & wayfinding
- Watersports
- Moorings

Context

The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal first opened in 1798 and connected Hereford with the city of Gloucester. Following the arrival of the railways, traffic on the canal began to decline, leading to its eventual closure in 1881. Within Hereford, the canal terminated at a basin located adjacent to the current railway station.

Today, remnants of the canal's route are still present within the wider landscape in the shape of wooded corridors and seasonally wet ditches. Since 1992, the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust have been striving for the complete restoration of the canal, with roughly 10% of the 34-mile route currently restored or under restoration, and a further 10% under active negotiation.¹

¹ Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust



▲ The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal within Aylestone Park, including car parking, playground and slipway access. Source: Ralph Barber, Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust.

The restoration of historic waterways provides a significant range of health, economic, wildlife and community benefits to the neighbourhoods they serve. It can also play an integral role in the regeneration of areas, providing distinctive design cues and helping to reestablish a sense of place. It is thought that for every £1 invested in the canal towpath network, £7 is returned in health benefits.²

Project 1: Hereford City Centre Terminus

The masterplan supports plans for the creation of a new canal terminus near to the site of the original basin, just north of the Link Road. Under Policy E4 within the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy, the historic route of the canal must be safeguarded and plans for its restoration incorporated within designs for any adjoining development proposals. Therefore, revival of the canal must be secured prior to permission being granted.

The new terminus will form an important placemaking element within the Station Quarter Urban Framework and will create an attractive setting for future development within the area. Revival of the area's night-time economy should be explored through the creation of moorings, activated waterfronts, student accommodation and attractive public realm.

The location of the terminus adjacent to the Essex Arms Urban Wetland identified within **Big Idea 8: The Station Quarter** on page 174, means a green, blue and active travel link can be made right into the city centre. The canal could also form part of a wider network of nature-based solutions to flooding within the area, subject to further hydrological survey work.

Project 2: Aylestone Tunnel and Green Active Travel Links

To the north-west of the terminus site, a stretch of Canal Trust-owned land and safeguarded land to the south of Currys should also be explored for rewetting, with some bridges and signage already in place to support interpretation of the canal. Efforts to extend the Great Western Way northwards would provide a direct link to this stretch of the reestablished canal and towpaths.

To further expand the active travel connections which the former canal's towpath presents, the opening up of the Aylestone Tunnel could be explored. The tunnel, which connects the canal at Aylestone Park with the industrial estate around Burcott Road, could provide a link between north-east Hereford and the city centre. This would be subject to sediment removal and structural investigations. The tunnel would also require 'brightening' through the use of lighting and painting to enhance perceptions of safety.

Between Currys and the Aylestone Tunnel, landowner engagement and buy-in will be required to create a link between the new terminus and Aylestone Park. Ideally, this safeguarding of the canal's towpath as a green active travel corridor should be carried out as a priority, with the rewetting of the canal as a future aspiration.

Project 3: Aylestone Park Community Basin

Aylestone Park is a strategically significant piece of public green space in the north-east of Hereford. The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust has made significant progress in reviving the stretch of the canal which passes through the park, including undergrowth clearance, silt removal, slipway construction, overflow weir construction, organising boating days and continued

reed removal. This has resulted in a permanently wet stretch of canal that hosts an important mosaic of riparian habitats and supports species such as kingfishers.

At present, this stretch of the canal is little known and underused. The creation of a new Aylestone Park Community Basin could help to reinforce this stretch of the canal as a recreation asset for the whole of Hereford to enjoy. There is a desire for more water-based recreation within Hereford. However, access and safety issues continue to persist along the Wye and the Lugg.

The canal could offer a safe location for children and adults to take part in water-based activities such as kayaking and paddle boarding. The existence of a slipway will allow for disability groups (such as Sailing4Disabled) to gain access to the water. Space for moorings could also be provided, bolstering the basin and Hereford as a tourism destination.

Subject to the delivery of a new active travel link through the Aylestone Tunnel, the community basin could provide an opportunity for sustainable daytime access into the city centre, avoiding the often congested Roman Road and A49. This could be reinforced through the provision of parking and bike hire. The course of the canal restoration could then stretch northward beneath the Roman Road and create active travel links towards Withington Marsh along the canal's towpath.

Key delivery partners

Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust, developers & landowners, Sustrans, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Wilder Hereford, Herefordshire Food Alliance.



▲ The Aylestone Community Basin would present an opportunity for water sports.



▲ Restoration of the Stroudwater Navigation at Ebley Wharf, Stroud.

² Water Adds Value – Highlighting the impact of the restoration of our waterways. Canal & River Trust and The Inland Waterways Association 2015.