

Canal destroyed by developer to be landscaped

By Mike Cotton

A DEVELOPER ordered by the council to reinstate a stretch of canal destroyed without planning permission has submitted new plans to 'landscape' the area instead.

The destruction of the canal has been blasted as 'diabolical' by a member of the Dearne and Dove Canals Trust who says the canal must be reconstructed.

Earlier this year one side of the former Dearne and Dove canal bank was removed at Stairfoot, behind the businesses of Barnsley Trade Park off Wombwell Lane, while two new units were being built.

The unauthorised works prompted outrage from nearby residents — at first they were complaining that an informal footpath had been closed, and that trees and vegetation had been stripped back.

Their fury multiplied when heavy machinery was brought in to start cutting away the remains of the canal, lowering the land on one side to remove the bank completely.

Swift Property Management and Consultancy Limited, which had planning permission for two new retail units in the adjoining trade park, was issued with a temporary stop notice, and then an enforcement notice by the council, which ordered the firm to restore the canal.

The firm submitted an appeal

against the council's enforcement action, but has also now submitted a new planning application for 'engineering operations to re-profile and landscape' the former Barnsley canal. A landscape report submitted as part of the application says it will be possible to restore a large portion of the former condition of the site but without reinstating the exact profile of the former canal.

Under the plans, the area where the bank has been removed would feature a new public footpath linking Caulk Lane to Wombwell Lane, and it would be landscaped with 'native species' and wild flowers. There would be a new 'post and rail fence' at the border with the trading estate behind Jewson's and other businesses.

The report argues that before the recent works, the landscape had not been of 'particularly high value' and while acknowledging the unauthorised works had caused harm, it says the proposed works could result in an improvement compared to how it looked before the work started.

"There is an opportunity to introduce wildflower and grassland species to enhance the quality and biodiversity of the landscape to a status that could be considered as an improvement over the former condition," the report says.

It adds that the proposed public footpath would give 'access

to the landscape and recreational opportunities' that were not available before the unauthorised works.

The report says: "...it is clear that the unauthorised works have caused a major change to the former canal site which can be deemed as significant and adverse. However, the harm is not considered to be permanent and can be repaired with the correct landscape intervention."

Mike Silk, of the Dearne and Dove Canals Trust, said: "I think what they did was diabolical. No civilised person should have just done that, willy-nilly. It's a very unfortunate loss.

"I cannot speculate as to why they wanted to do this. If they wanted to landscape it, they should have landscaped the canal bank the way it was."

Yesterday a council spokesman said: "The owner of the land has submitted a planning application which seeks to avoid fully reinstating the section of former canal to its previous condition, which conflicts with what the council is seeking in the enforcement notice.

"The applicant was advised against submitting such an application but we are nevertheless compelled to determine it. The application is therefore likely to be considered at planning and regulatory board on May 31."

The developer was unavailable for comment.