

# Whaley Bridge Transhipment Warehouse

## Feasibility Study 2008

### *Consultation feedback*

#### **a) Initial consultation**

On 23 April 2008, Heritage Works hosted a consultation open day for those interested in the future of the Transhipment Warehouse. Throughout the afternoon and evening there was a steady stream of visitors to the vacant Market Street shop, ranging from councillors to canal enthusiasts to passers-by. About 50 questionnaires were completed and comments were collated. These responses were then reported back to the project team, made up of architects, surveyors, engineers and Heritage Works officers.

Whaley Bridge Canal Basin is already used by many people on a regular basis - for walking, shopping and leisure activities, from feeding the ducks to events such as Whaley Water Weekend. There is an interest in canal boat heritage and country goods. The Basin is used as a route to other destinations, such as the town car park, or the towpath to Tescos and the Bugsworth Basin. Respondents felt that much more use could be made of the Basin. All events using the canal basin and boats are of general interest, providing an occasion to meet friends, enjoy the fair and browse the food and gifts stalls, generating a sense of inclusion community spirit. It was felt that, to gain local participants' support, events would have to complement Whaley bridge activities, such as a market selling local produce, outdoor pursuits, events for community groups and a meeting point for open public processions.

Respondents placed emphasis on a mixed-use facility but with a focus on community use and heritage information. This could include a community and education facility; a meeting place for young people; a library; museum or heritage centre; a visitor and tourist information centre, promoting the High Peak & Goyt Valley area; a family friendly café with possible outdoor playground; and, farmers and other markets. It would be necessary to provide good access for the less able.

While respondents were conscious of the need for economic viability, they were very keen that any scheme should also be socially beneficial to the area. Existing community space in Whaley Bridge tends to be inadequate or inaccessible and there is a lack of heritage facilities, public entertainment venues and open space. Whaley Bridge has no town square or market place. Participants want to improve the area for residents and visitors. A more joined up approach to leisure and tourism would draw on the strengths of this area, providing a regular programme of events making use of the canal side, with good quality food outlet to attract lunchtime customers. The wharf and basin can be seen as a pivotal space generating a sense of 'pride and belonging'.

## **b) Summary of feedback from Phase 1**

The first section of the questionnaire asked people to consider the issues related with local amenities both within the town and possible inclusion of some services within the basin development.

Approx 60% of respondents were members of the library. When asked if relocation of the library would affect their use, the response was mixed. 50% of respondents claimed the move would be beneficial to their use of the library with 12.5% saying the move might have a negative impact, citing the adverse effect on the Mechanics Institute. There was emphatic support for the incorporation of a community space into the enabling development. Double the numbers of respondents said they would actively support activity classes in such a space compared to those who would not. Again there was overwhelming support for a café and balanced views on who should run it, with community operators just shading the private sector. There was a consensus that the private and voluntary sectors could co-exist; only a small percentage said they thought it was not possible.

The final question in this section dealt with the community, leisure/tourism commercial use split. We asked if they agreed with the first round consultation results, which indicated a near equal division of uses within the 3 categories, was acceptable. 99% responded positively.

The next section dealt with issues of development. We subdivided the 3 categories and asked people to rate their favourite uses with an option to vote for mixed use.

### Community

The most popular suggestion for the section dealing with the inclusion of community facilities was mixed use i.e. inclusion of all of the elements in this section. The relocated library, with arts and study room, came a close second. In third place was community room, followed by events and markets and finally exhibition and performance space.

### Tourism/Leisure

Mixed use of all the suggestions for this category was the most popular, closely followed by a café/restaurant provision. There is a desire for some kind of cinema or film club but comments point to a space which can accommodate occasional screenings, as there exists a popular picture house in Marple. Water sport provision gained little support and the establishing of holiday lets performed badly with very little support. People were worried about clashes with the new boutique hotel and suggested that a bunkhouse provision might be more appropriate, catering for walkers and cyclists.

### Commercial

This section bucked the trend by voting the mixing of the generic elements into third place. An indoor market outstripped all other options, followed by boat repair/chandler with lettable office space attracting only a small percentage of support.

The questionnaire encouraged respondents to consider the effects of development on employment prospects for the town. Most of the people who now commute out of the town would consider appropriate local employment should the chance arise. Most of the respondents were also confident that Whaley could attract new business to the town.

75% of respondents supported the principle of job creation through development at the basin. The confidence of respondents was more tempered when asked if there would be an adverse effect on existing business in the town by development of the basin. The response was 50/50. We asked if the townspeople were aware of large scale development plans earmarked for land around Bingswood industrial estate should the second access bridge be secured by the local authority. 66% were aware of the proposals while 34% were not.

#### Other development issues

We asked if people thought enabling development would have a negative effect on the basin's current uses i.e. pleasure boating, fishing, events, exercising etc. The response was a large 'no'; it would not affect the basin adversely. People expressed a desire to get involved with the project further by inputting on the design and materials selection of any future development, to ensure any enabling development met local design aspirations. A few respondents commented on the need to retain space for craning boats into the canal, and for canalside events.

Many respondents commented on the need for a new bridge into the Bingswood industrial estate to alleviate traffic problems in the basin area. Some considered that re-use of the Warehouse would not be viable without this.

Overall support for the project was consistent, with the message that Whaley Bridge must 'think big'. The town should actively encourage tourism and not allow Whaley Bridge to become simply a jump off point for neighbouring destinations.

#### Management

The requirements and responsibilities which are associated with a development proposal of this nature were set out in the questionnaire. We asked the public for their initial thoughts on how the Warehouse might be developed and managed in the long term. There was considerable support for community involvement during the development process and in the future management (but not necessarily for the community undertaking the development, which was considered to be a job for British Waterways or some other not-for-profit socially-minded enterprise) Respondents thought a small professional management team would be required, with some representation from community groups, perhaps through membership of a project steering group.

### **c) Summary of feedback from Phase 2**

An online voting form was also made available. From 109 votes received, the results were as follows:

Option 1 (latterly option W): The default, 'do nothing' option	1 vote
Option 3 (latterly developed into option Y): a new, separate building to the back of Market Street pavement	26 votes
Option 7(latterly option Z): a side extension, with glazed link	39 votes
Option 7a: a new block joined on to original building, plus an additional third storey at the north end of the old Warehouse	43 votes