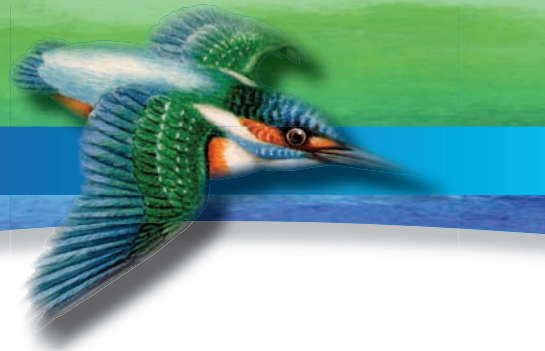


# AVON FROME

## FEASIBILITY STUDY

Summary - June 2006



## Consultation

**Over the next few months we will be contacting local people and organisations to gather views on the proposals outlined in the Avon Frome Feasibility Study.**

We are particularly interested in finding out what you like, what you don't like and what you think might be missing. This information will be used to help develop a 10-year strategy to improve and manage the Avon and Frome Valleys and the Bristol and Bath Railway Path in a way that meets the needs of local people and visitors and helps us to secure the funding we need to do this.

### Background

This document summarises the Avon Frome Feasibility Study. The study took place to look into how to guide the development of these river valleys and the Bristol and Bath Railway Path together as part of a wider strategy. A team from Bath & North East Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Bristol City Council, the Avon Valley Partnership and the Forest of Avon was formed to progress this work.

The River Frome, the River Avon and the Bristol & Bath Railway Path are major green corridors that link communities with important heritage areas such as Bristol, Bath and the Cotswold Hills. They are also key routes for sustainable transport and tourism that provide access from urban Bristol and Bath to the countryside and a regional network of recreational paths. The study highlights the importance of the rivers to our local area and the opportunities they present for learning and helping to build a healthy, sustainable environment for both people and wildlife.

The impetus for the study came from previous consultations with the community that indicated a strong need for a wider reaching project to improve access, interpretation and management within the river valleys and the links between these and other routes and the communities that surround them.

These community responses and recommendations from existing studies were drawn together and used to guide the development of this study. Its proposals will contribute to the aims of the community strategies for the three local authorities and help deliver some of the aims within the following the plans and strategies:

- ▶ *Forest of Avon's Forest Plan and Gateways & Recreational Routes Strategy*
- ▶ *The emerging Parks and Greenspace Strategies for the three local authorities*
- ▶ *The Walking the Way to Health initiative*
- ▶ *The walking, cycling, access and cultural strategies for the three local authorities*
- ▶ *The replacement Joint Local Transport Plan (including the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan)*



### Who's who?

The Avon Valley Partnership co-ordinates strategic projects that enhance the wildlife, landscape, accessibility and heritage of the Avon Valley (including the Bristol & Bath Railway Path). The Partnership has been running since 1993 and employs one officer, based at Bristol City Council.

The Friends of the River Frome is a partnership of individuals, local groups and organisations who are working together to improve the environment and enjoyment of the whole of the Frome Valley.

### Vision

***'To inspire the diverse communities of Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset to access the historic and natural environment through a network of green corridors'.***

The vision will be achieved by:

- ▶ *Improving access to and promoting the heritage of the three green corridors – the River Frome, the River Avon and the Bristol and Bath Railway Path.*



- ▶ *Working with local communities and individuals to maintain and promote the heritage of the wider Avon and Frome corridor through events, innovative site interpretation and other activities.*
- ▶ *Realising the potential of the three corridors for learning, improving the health of local communities, sustainable transport and attracting visitors.*

Project proposals in the feasibility study fall into three categories:



## 1. Events, Education and Interpretation

### Events and activities

The three routes and adjoining open spaces provide many opportunities for developing an events programme that improves the health of communities in areas of deprivation; promotes sustainable transport; increases access to and celebration of heritage and introduces people to their local countryside.

#### Actions:

- ▶ *Develop walks and events linked to existing Health Walks programme*
- ▶ *Develop a programme of cycle rides to encourage exploration of the local area by bike and improve health*
- ▶ *Develop themed guided walks along the three routes and adjacent sites and trails*
- ▶ *Organise community events to promote 'gateway' sites and their links*

### Water Fun

Both rivers could provide high quality waterways activities. However, at present, facilities such as canoe launches and angling platforms are of variable quantity, quality and distribution. Well-placed facilities would encourage people to join in and help alleviate damage to river banks caused by the creation of informal access points. Waterways activities would also provide an ideal opportunity for disadvantaged young people to participate within a supported environment.

#### Actions:

- ▶ *Identify any shortfall in facilities and make improvements*
- ▶ *Work with partners to develop a programme of waterways activities for young people*

### Education

Education projects will focus on the rich heritage of the area, including biodiversity, geology, and local industrial and transport heritage.

Following success at Oldbury Court, schools' projects will be developed – targeting heritage education programmes at children is an effective way of involving the wider community.

#### Actions:

- ▶ *Develop an inspiring education programme that maximises the potential of the rivers as a learning resource*
- ▶ *Work with local geological societies and Avon RIGS Group to develop projects that celebrate the geological heritage of the three routes*
- ▶ *Work with partners to develop schools' projects focusing on the cultural and natural heritage of the three routes*



### Interpretation

All three routes are rich in industrial, cultural and natural heritage. Some interpretation has been installed but there is little interpretation along the Frome Valley Walkway. More needs to be done to develop the links between the local communities and the heritage of the three routes to provide a 'bigger picture' interpretation of the area.

#### Actions:

- ▶ *Audit current level of interpretation provision for each of the three routes*
- ▶ *Implement outstanding projects from existing interpretation plans and strategies*
- ▶ *Develop innovative interpretation for the Frome Valley*
- ▶ *Identify opportunities for new projects and make links to others*

## 2. Regional Trails Network

The regional trails network will be improved by creating new links between the three major routes and improving access to 'gateway' sites. Gateway sites are green spaces that are located close to local communities, providing sustainable links between people and the wider countryside. They may include parks, commons and nature reserves. There are several key gateway sites in or close to the Avon and Frome Valleys.

### Developing an access action plan

A new action plan will focus on identifying and removing barriers to access that are currently preventing the routes being used and enjoyed to their full potential. These barriers may be social, cultural or intellectual as well as physical. The action plan will also consider where links between the three routes and the surrounding communities should be improved or created, and how to promote and signpost them.

### Delivering access improvements

The access action plan will identify the following improvements:

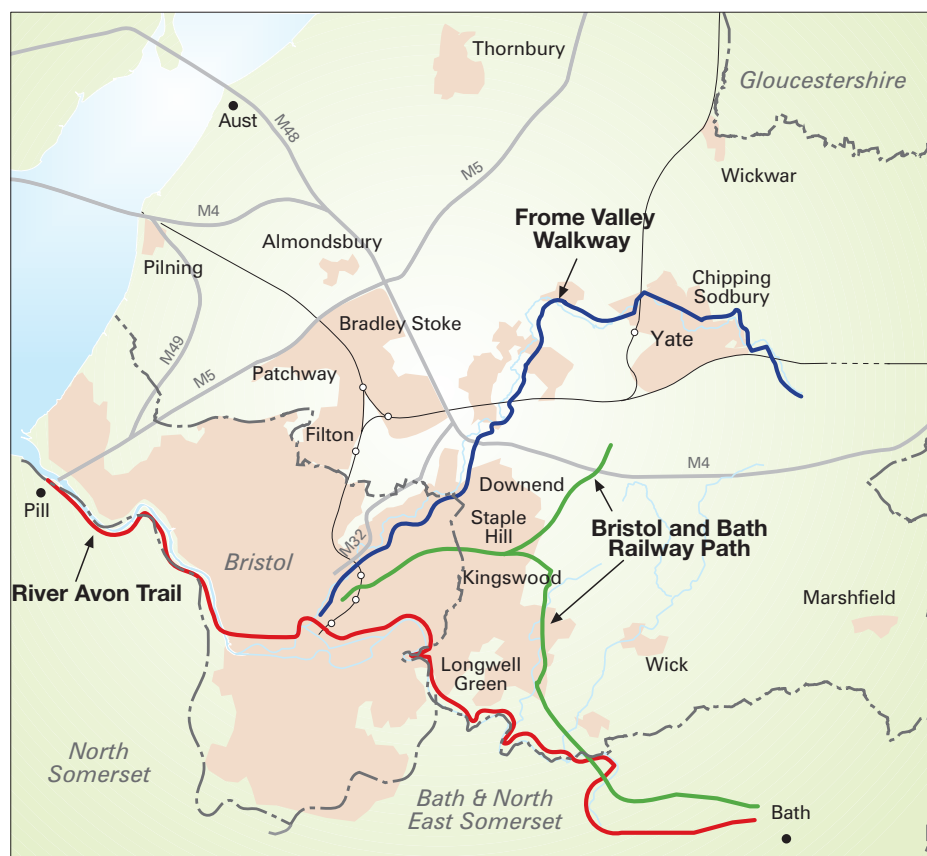
#### Actions:

- ▶ *Make priority gateway improvements through capital investment*
- ▶ *Develop the projects needed to deliver other priority route improvements (to Disability Discrimination Act 1995 standard where appropriate)*
- ▶ *Timetable works to improve the routes through regular, ongoing maintenance*
- ▶ *Improve signage along, on to and between the three routes and other sites*
- ▶ *Promote the green corridors and their links to other routes, communities and places of interest (targeted to achieve a sustainable level of use)*



#### Actions:

- ▶ *Clarify the access responsibilities of land owners and local authorities*
- ▶ *Map areas of existing and potential community involvement*
- ▶ *Locate existing gateway sites and identify gaps in provision*
- ▶ *Assess the quality and accessibility of gateway sites*
- ▶ *Identify the current barriers to access to the three routes including consultation with users/potential users*
- ▶ *Identify priority access improvements*
- ▶ *Identify areas in need of maintenance*
- ▶ *Assess the existing waymarking and signage and make recommendations for improvements*
- ▶ *Consider better site management to improve gateway sites*



## 3. Sustainable Management

All three routes support important habitats and wildlife, including some nationally threatened and scarce species. The aim is to achieve consistent and appropriate levels of management across the area and support and encourage the local community to get more involved.

Some sites and sections of the routes have been designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are also several sites of geological value that have been designated as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) or geological SSSIs. Finally, there are a number of recently designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), in the Frome and Avon Valleys.

SNCIs and other designated sites often need careful management to maintain their value. However, much of the information about the three corridors is incomplete or out of date, so new assessment methods will be used to make recommendations for future management. Designated sites will be surveyed first, followed by the non-designated sites.

The distribution of non-native plant species in the area is increasing so action will be planned to eradicate them. The survey results will then be used to plan the management needed to maintain the value of designated sites and improve the ability of habitats on non-designated sites to support wildlife.

Community involvement is important for sustainable management and so training and support will be provided to help volunteers participate in surveys and management programmes. Much of the land within the study area is within private ownership so working with and supporting land owners to sustainably manage their sites will be essential

To increase the understanding, awareness and importance of biodiversity, an education programme will be developed, linked to the aims and objectives of local and Avon Biodiversity Action Plans.



### Project Delivery

The Avon Valley Partnership and the Friends of the River Frome will work together as a wider Avon Frome Partnership with increased opportunities for attracting funding and additional partners. The Avon Frome Partnership was agreed by each of the local authorities in April 2006. Its work will be guided by the 10-year strategy. Projects identified in the new 10-year Avon Frome Strategy will be co-ordinated by the Avon Frome Development Officer and delivered by a wide range of partners within the new partnership.

### Survey and analysis

#### Actions:

- ▶ Carry out an audit of SNCI and other designated sites using new Avon-wide methodology
- ▶ Survey non-native plant species and develop a plan to reduce their impact
- ▶ Carry out an audit of non-designated sites using the methodology above

### Habitat management

#### Actions:

- ▶ Support and work with landowners and communities to carry out the habitat management works identified by the surveys to improve or maintain the conservation status of sites
- ▶ Carry out the management recommendations from existing management plans and surveys where they are current and up to date
- ▶ Programme works to reduce the impact of non-native plant species along the three routes

### Community Participation

#### Actions:

- ▶ Provide training to enable community groups to take part in ecological surveying, monitoring and reducing non-native plant species
- ▶ Involve community groups with practical habitat management tasks
- ▶ Work with local authority partners to develop and deliver the education strands of the local and Avon Biodiversity Actions Plans



### For More Information

For details of how to obtain a full copy of the Avon Frome Feasibility Study telephone:

**0117 922 4325**

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