

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust Ltd

52 Annual General Meeting

Held at Shalford Village Hall

On Saturday 18th October

The Chairman opened the meeting at 2.30 attended by about 110 members

Apologies for absence: Peter Winter, Steve Bell, Chris Tavener and Sally Schupke

The minutes of the previous AGM held on 19th October 2024 were received and approved.

Chairman's Report:

Margaret Darvill, the Acting Chairman called for a minute's silence to remember those members who had died during the year.

2024 was a year of consolidation as we waited for various permissions to enable us to proceed with work of restorations. The time between application and grant of planning permission has grown enormously in recent years and we have to learn to be very patient, frustrating though the process can be. But nonetheless we were very busy:

- The Rooks Hill / Fanesbridge planning application was progressed and eventually granted earlier this year
- A review and redesign of the Rushetts Common scheme (the next section south from Rooks Hill) was carried out following the refusal of the previous planning application
- Our Rye Farm planning application was approved and a Bridleway Diversion Order pursued
- At Elmbridge Road we continued our dialogue with Surrey County Council in relation to them replacing the current single lane road section with a new wider bridge with navigable clearance, although still without a binding commitment by them to proceed.
- At Fastbridge, Dunsfold an initial design for the scheme to remove the A281 blockage was developed in cooperation with landowners.
- At Tickner's Heath (Stage 1) work was done to identify and re-route the water main (now completed). For Stage 2, Common Land Consent has been granted and the planning application is progressing.
- On the navigable section, work continued on the refurbishment of Drungewick Lock and Long Meadow: and a large number of unsafe ash trees were removed, with associated extensive replanting of trees.
- The opportunity was taken, following the criminal damage to the back-pumping systems on the navigable section, to replace and upgrade the pumps and control systems and their housing to make them more effective and reduce the risk from any future malevolent action.

2025 is proving to be a very different year from 2024:

- Having now received Planning Permission for Rooks Hill, work started on June 16th. Due to good weather, we have made very good headway and further progress will continue over this winter if the weather is not too inclement. Our fundraising appeal for this project has been generously answered and donations received have covered most of the cost of Rooks Hill so far, although the work, and our need for further funds, will continue.
- We have completed the First Phase of the new bridleway at Rye Farm and work has started on the second phase. We are continuing to talk to landowners about acquiring more land for future projects.
- Work has restarted on the temporary road at Tickners
- And discussions continue with several landowners which we hope will result in the Trust acquiring further sections of the canal.

We have also appointed a new Operations Manager, Stuart Dawson. Stuart is our key employee in both restoration and maintenance work and is already a familiar face with all of the working parties.

In 2025, Water levels in the Loxwood section couldn't be maintained over the dry summer with pumping restrictions from the E.A. in place. As a result no boat trips have been possible since July.

Two Directors are stepping down from the Board at this AGM. They are Julian Morgan and Dennis Gillen. Giles Eyre highlighted their many achievements for the Trust and with Margaret presented a gift to each of them.

Margaret announced that she was stepping down as Acting Chairman at the end of this AGM but that she will continue to be a Board Director. No replacement has yet been identified and the burden on the remaining directors is increasing to ensure the oversight of all the Trust activities is maintained. Margaret asked the AGM participants to speak to any of the Directors if they can provide some assistance.

It was also announced that following a review by the Board and professional advice received, W&A Enterprise Ltd (our Trading company through which the boat trip income and merchandise has been managed) will not be used from 2026. Giles Eyre explained that the majority of income is supporting our charitable aims (which include promoting the use of the canal) and the remainder falls well within the charity's exemption from Corporation Tax. So there are no tax advantages in maintaining the trading company and insurance we have for boat operations in practice removes any liability concerns. WAEL will be retained as a dormant company, but we are planning from 2026 to channel all income directly into the Trust and to cease using the trading company. As a member or as a user of our services, you will most probably see no difference, but from the viewpoint of the Boards of the two companies, we will see a reduction in management and administration.

To receive the accounts:

Margaret Darvill presented the finance report. In 2024, the accounts show a surplus of £117,000. While income was down, expenditure was also down a reduction in staffing costs and the absence of any large restoration project. Income included a generous donation from the MJ Camp charitable foundation.

Margaret also shared the 2025 financial summary to the end of September which showed income and expenditure broadly the same. However we expect to finish 2025 with a healthy surplus despite the increase in restoration expenditure as we have recently received another generous donation from the MJ Camp charitable foundation.

To Appoint the Independent Examiner:

The appointment of D Wallis Consulting as Independent Examiner was recommended to the meeting. Proposed by Dave Miller, Seconded by Mark Feeney and Approved by the meeting.

Election of Directors:

Bill Nicholson and Margaret Darville stood for re-election, proposed by Mark Fenny and seconded by Andrew Christmas. Their re-election was approved by the meeting.

To Receive a report from W&A Enterprises Ltd:

Julian Morgan presented a report on the 2024 activities of the trading company. Due to a declining number of volunteers, it had been decided to concentrate on cream tea and charter trips at the expense of public trips. As there had been a steady decline in the use of Zachariah Keppel boat in recent years it has been decided to limit the passenger numbers on this boat to less than 12 to take it out of the requirement for MCA surveys to reduce costs. Low water levels due to the dry summer have meant that no passenger trips have run since 28th June.

It was noted that the board had decided to make W&A Enterprises Ltd a dormant company as we no longer needed a separate trading company.

He expressed thanks to all volunteers in the canal centre, the boat group and the various work parties who maintained the navigable section of the canal.

Awards:

The Jack King Cup was awarded to Keith Lyall for his work with the Tuesday and Thursday groups, the organisation for our Drive a Digger experience at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair and extensive photography for Wey-South and the 2026 Calendar. The John East Trophy was awarded to Lorraine Feeney for her work as Archivist and in assisting with the monitoring and collection of paperwork from volunteers.

Date and Location of next AGM: To be confirmed

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.