

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2023

New Surrey section acquired



One of the original lock sites in Bonfire Hanger

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has acquired a further 800m of canal and towpath at Bonfire Hanger near Alfold, just north of the Surrey/Sussex border. The section includes the sites of four former locks, part of the group of nine locks that raised the canal through Sidney Wood.

The Trust will prioritise restoring the towpath in this section. It is a public bridleway and part of the Wey-South Path – but it's an unpleasant quagmire for some of the year. This will complete a beautiful year-round four-mile path largely provided and maintained by the Trust for walkers, cyclists and riders, from Drungewick via Loxwood in West Sussex to near Alfold's Rosemary Lane in Surrey.

Volunteer teams have already started to improve the appearance of the canal in the area. We will be seeking grant assistance to speed up remedial work. Full restoration of the canal itself at Bonfire Hanger has to be for the longer term.

Our objectives - not just restoring the canal

One day, the Canal Trust will have made boat travel from the River Wey to the River Arun possible once more. In the meantime, our volunteers will have achieved so much more for the public good. The Trust has now restated the wider benefits of 'What We Do'. These are the new aims:

- Restoring the inland waterway from the River Wey at Shalford to the River Arun at Pallingham, following the original route wherever possible and working with landowners and other stakeholders to that end
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment along the route to create a "green corridor" for wildlife and for the peaceful enjoyment of the countryside
- Enhancing public access to this corridor, including restoring the towpath and creating new footpath and bridleway links, and promoting the route for leisure, health and well-being
- Encouraging use of the waterway for recreation and leisure for all (regardless of age or ability), including for canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding
- Working with community groups, educational organisations and individuals to use this corridor as an educational resource and as an opportunity for volunteering activities
- Researching and conserving heritage features along the route and publicising information on the history and ecology of the waterway



Our aims in action - improving public access

Long before extended navigation on the canal is possible, the Canal Trust's work is extending and improving public footpaths and bridleways. The long-distance Wey-South Path between Guildford in Surrey and Amberley in Sussex follows the canal route as closely as possible. The path is marked on Ordnance Survey maps. Sections of the canal towpath have become very well used and the Trust has invested heavily in improving and maintaining these. Recently, restoration of the canal at Birtley in Surrey has given the public access to another 600m of the towpath, plus 100m of new route connecting to the Downs Link path, resulting in a popular circular walk.



Volunteers resurfacing a towpath

The Trust is currently developing projects which, if approved, will further improve countryside access. Immediately south of Birtley, the canalside walk will be extended to connect with the Greensand Way path and add a new circular walk with the parallel Downs Link path (the route of the old railway).

Further south, plans for Elmbridge (near Cranleigh) and the Dunsfold Park/Tickner's Heath area will add new traffic-free paths so that walkers and riders no longer need to use busy roads.

The total length of new paths already created or proposed in the Waverley Borough Council area is 4km (2½ miles).



Birtley lifting bridges on order

The last step in removing blockages on a 900m length of canal and towpath at Birtley, immediately south of Bramley, Surrey, is planned for this autumn.

The Canal Trust has placed a £150,000+ order for fabricating and installing the hydraulically-operated lifting sections of two new bridges across the canal. The substructures were major projects built by our volunteer teams, in concrete with brick facings. The concrete for the just-completed second bridge was pumped directly from the adjoining Singh Concrete plant. The popular Birtley circular walk opened in 2021 will cross both bridges.



The first of two bridges that will soon have lifting decks

Swift response to malicious damage

There was a malicious attack on the canal at Loxwood during the night of 1st-2nd April. Several pumping control cabinets were destroyed or damaged, padlocks on locks were broken and paddles were raised to flush away precious water. The pumps are vital to the canal's operation, conserving water used in a boat's passage through a lock. Naturally, the police were involved. Volunteers and staff put in exceptional efforts to restore water levels and all boat trips over the four-day Easter weekend went ahead as planned.

Facing an estimated repair bill of at least £50,000, the Trust launched an emergency fundraising appeal. The response from Trust members and the public was swift and generous, making a significant contribution to the cost of reinstatement.



A drained section of canal immediately after the incident



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