

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2021

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Future plans for Surrey canal restoration

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has acquired a length of canal at Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge, south of Bramley in Surrey, and has submitted a planning application to Waverley Borough Council to restore the waterway in this area.

Restoration here will extend the 900m section of canal at Birtley which the Trust bought in 2019. On the Birtley section Trust volunteers have constructed the first of two new bridges. South of the Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge section, plans for the Rushett Farm length of canal are currently being considered by Waverley Borough Council.

The Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge restoration will provide sections of new and reinstated canal, restoring an additional 1km length of waterway. This will be a further move towards the Trust's long-term goal of restoring the canal from Shalford to Pallingham as a fully navigable waterway, delivering enhanced sport, leisure and recreation facilities.

Plans for Rooks Hill/Fanesbridge include the construction of a brick-faced canal lock and a traditional brick-arched brideway bridge, plus new and improved footpaths and cycleways/bridleways. Together with the proposals further south at Rushett Farm, the restoration will create more than 2km of quiet and safe rural footpath for public enjoyment and healthy exercise.

The paths will be designed to be accessible to all users and could result in more of the existing long-distance Wey-South Path being able to follow the route of the canal.

The proposals will not only preserve the Downs Link cycleway and footpath for leisure and recreation but also enhance its long-term use.



The new section of canal available for restoration is south of the new bridge at Birtley, where in the next few months volunteers will be adding the deck. Plans include a brick-arched brideway bridge, similar but not identical to Pallingham (below left), and a lock similar to Gennets (below right).



Encouraging wildlife

This spring more than 100 saplings were planted along the canal as part of an initiative with the Woodland Trust. Among them were Hazel, Blackthorn, Crab Apple, Dog Rose and Rowan, chosen to connect woodland and provide beautiful blossom and autumnal displays.

The Trust has also linked up with charity Butterfly Conservation in a project to help increase numbers of the declining Wood White butterfly.

In the south east of England there is just one remaining colony, comprising isolated populations in woodlands, verges and meadow edges around Chiddingfold, Dunsfold and Plaistow. An area around Sidney Wood has been identified as an ideal Wood White habitat and so Trust volunteers will be working with the Chiddingfold Wood White project officer to look at the way the area is managed to work with the life cycle of the butterfly. Seeding and plug planting of wildflowers will also be carried out there.



Wood White photo by Fiona Haynes.

Left: Saplings have been planted in several areas of the canal. Top: The Trust is taking part in a project to increase colonies of the Wood White butterfly. More native species such as Bird's Foot Trefoil which grow along the canal will be planted.

Apprenticeship first

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has become the first independent canal trust in the UK to take on a Water Environment Worker apprentice.

Nineteen year old Adam Rayner has begun work at the Trust on the level 3 apprenticeship, run in tandem with Bridgwater & Taunton College. The course was developed in 2019 by the Environment Agency, in partnership with the National Trust, the Canal and River Trust and Somerset Drainage Board. The Wey & Arun Canal Trust is the first independent canal trust to invest in the apprenticeship scheme.

Adam will work with Trust employees and volunteers to gain on-the-job training while studying remotely and in person at the West Country college.

Wey & Arun Canal Trust Vice-Chairman and training director Margaret Darvill said: "This is a bold move for an independent canal trust and we are really proud to have been able to offer Adam this opportunity to learn about waterway management and show how rewarding canal restoration can be. The Trust already employs two full-time maintenance and restoration staff and so we are well placed to take on an apprentice, offering on-the-job training alongside structured college-based learning."

Adam added: "The apprenticeship scheme means I get some hands-on experience alongside my classroom work, and a professional training qualification at the end of it. The Trust has achieved so much already and I am keen to be a part of their future success."



Adam has joined the Trust as an apprentice.



The new footbridge at Tickner's Heath has just been put into place.

Road crossing progress

The project to build a new road crossing and footbridge to take Dunsfold Road over the canal at Tickner's Heath, near Alfold in Surrey, has moved on apace over the past six months.

Before the last lockdown, volunteers had created a construction compound and readied the site for piling contractors to begin their work, meaning that when they received the green light to return to work the concrete foundations for the footbridge had been completed. The team has also been bolstered by the addition of three young helpers working towards their Gold and Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Awards.

The footbridge will provide a safe route for walkers and horse riders at the new canal crossing on the busy Dunsfold Road. The footbridge will run parallel to the new road bridge and has been constructed by steelwork specialists Four-Tees Engineers from Fareham. The company delivered and installed the footbridge in early June. It is 16m long and 3.5m wide and weighs 6.5 tonnes.

In the meantime volunteers have been constructing the brick facing for the footbridge; once it is in place they will be preparing and fitting handrails and several tonnes of timber decking.

Boat crew gear up for a busy summer season

Boat trips on the Wey & Arun Canal at Loxwood resumed in May, with passenger numbers limited to ensure social distancing.

Trip boats have been given an overhaul ahead of the restart, with the narrowboat *Zachariah Keppel* being repainted and fitted with new flexible seating to allow for different table arrangements and better suit passengers' needs.

Public cruises are now scheduled to run throughout the summer (the latest schedule is on the Trust's website). A programme of special cruises will also run, beginning with a Welcome Back Mid-Summer Celebration Special boat trip, complete with champagne and canapes served on board. The popular cream tea cruises will also be making a return.

On the late May Bank Holiday Monday *Zachariah Keppel* was put into operation, running 35-minute trips for family groups looking for a different experience.

As well as walkers enjoying the towpaths, the weekend saw a high turnout of canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders use the canal. Last year the number of those buying licences to use the canal more than trebled.



Boat trips restarted in May after a period of lockdown.