

Wey & Arun Canal News

December 2020

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Planning applications reveal the next steps

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has submitted several planning applications as it moves nearer to its ambition of relinking the canal with the River Wey Navigation.

Plans for the Bramley Link Phase 1 were first unveiled at a public consultation in June held under Covid-safe conditions and subsequently submitted to Guildford Borough Council. They show how the Trust proposes to create approximately 1km of new canal from the Wey Navigation by the A281 bridge to a point near to Gosden Aqueduct, close to Tannery Lane. The works will include: an extension to Hunt Nature Park; new canal with a lock; two new bridges; a small canal basin for turning boats; and a flood relief channel.

The Downs Link path, which runs along the old railway route that once connected Horsham and Guildford, is a vital element of the plans and will be rerouted across the canal in two places, adding further interest to this valuable amenity so well used by walkers and cyclists.

Separately, a 650-metre length of canal between Run Common and Rushett Common (midway between Bramley and Cranleigh in Surrey) would be created in plans submitted to Waverley Borough Council. Some of the original canal over this section has long since been filled in and is now in private ownership, so the plan is to replace the stretch by taking the canal alongside the Downs Link.

Elsewhere in Surrey, an application for restoration of the canal and road improvements to Elmbridge Road in Cranleigh has also been made to Waverley Borough Council. In conjunction with the County Council, the Trust is proposing widening the difficult single-lane stretch to create a two-way road and footway. The road widening will include a replacement canal bridge, allowing restoration of the Wey & Arun Canal to continue beneath the major obstacle that the current road represents.

The project has involved liaising with the adjacent landowner to release land for the road improvements and allow restoration of some 300m of canal south of the road and alongside Elmbridge Village retirement community. The Trust proposes rejuvenating the existing public footpath and creating a new footpath link to provide the residents of Elmbridge Village with an additional pedestrian route into Cranleigh.



Participants in Guildford Walkfest and Heritage Open Days were taken to Gosden Aqueduct in a guided walk led by Trust volunteers in late summer. The Trust proposes creating some 1km of new canal to a point close to this historic structure.



Plans would see an extension to Hunt Nature Park in Shalford, Surrey, owned and managed by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has added a Wheelyboat to its fleet, specially built to take disabled passengers on canal cruises. The purchase of the secondhand Mk III boat has been made thanks to a donation from supporter Peter Grove in memory of his grandfather Walter Grove, who was master carpenter on the Wey Navigation from 1885-1930. Flexible seating means that up to five wheelchairs can be accommodated in comfort, making the pleasure of cruising the canal accessible to a greater number of adults and children. The boat was supplied and refurbished by The Wheelyboat Trust, a charity set up to make water-based activities accessible to all. An outboard motor will be fitted over the winter months along with seating and canopy (generously provided by the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust) ready for use in 2021.



The Wey & Arun Canal Trust's John Reynolds (left) with Andy Beadsley from The Wheelyboat Trust.

Harsfold Bridge opens on time

It turned into a race against time to finish Harsfold Bridge, near Wisborough Green in West Sussex, on schedule after storms, floods and coronavirus lockdown delayed its construction. The bridge had to be completed by the summer as it provided the landowner access to his fields for harvesting, so the pressure was on.

Storms in November, December and January caused the nearby River Arun to flood, with water flowing close to the site. Just as the team celebrated getting the steel beams in, the country went into lockdown and construction stopped. However work restarted at the end of May, subject to strict Covid precautions, and volunteers worked five days a week to catch up on lost time.

Their efforts meant the bridge was opened to farm traffic and the public in July, and volunteers then concentrated on excavating the canal beneath.

The project cost just under £50,000, with all work completed by volunteers apart from fitting the specially-made metal safety balustrade.



Volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure Harsfold Bridge was completed to a high standard, and to schedule.



Work has begun on a new road crossing at Tickner's Heath in Alfold, Surrey.

Work begins on new road crossing

Work began this summer on construction of a new road bridge at Tickner's Heath in Alfold, Surrey in what will be the first phase of an ambitious restoration project.

The route of the canal here is blocked by the causeway that carries Dunsfold Road and constructing the bridge in its original position is not feasible. Instead, some 200m of new canal will be created to divert around the causeway and a new road bridge built at a point where Dunsfold Road is straight. The project will also include constructing a separate bridge over the canal for use by walkers, cyclists and equestrians.

Volunteers have been working in small socially-distanced teams to set up a car park and a construction compound and erect tree protection ahead of building a temporary road diversion. The majority of the construction will be carried out by volunteers, with contractors brought in for specialist work such as piling.

A second phase of work will see the new canal rejoining the existing canal on the west side of the site.

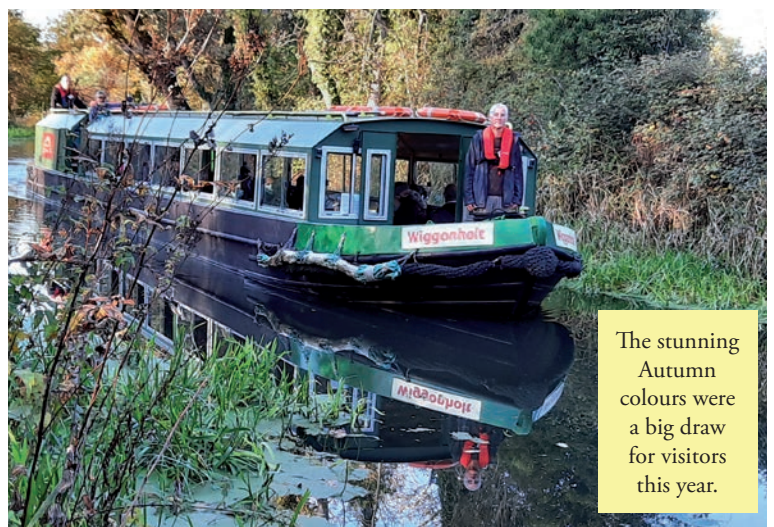
High demand for boat trips and towpath walks

Boat trips along the restored section at Loxwood, West Sussex resumed in August, operating under strict Covid-safe procedures to keep both passengers and volunteer crew safe.

Passenger numbers were limited to 14 instead of the usual 48 on board the large electric boat *Wiggonholt*, to allow for two-metre social distancing, with just a skipper and one crew member on board, and another on shore operating locks. Demand from the public was high, with most trips sold out in advance.

The public has also flocked to the canal for walks, cycling and canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding as the nation turned to green spaces for recreation and exercise.

With revenue hit by cancellation of fundraising events and reduced capacity on boat trips, the Trust was grateful to receive support in the form of grants from Chichester District Council, the National Lottery's Heritage Emergency Fund and the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust. The grants funded canal and boat repairs as well as Covid safety measures.



The stunning Autumn colours were a big draw for visitors this year.