

Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust Ltd

Chairperson's Report for 2017 Accounts

The Trust's achievements during 2017 were enormous, as were its challenges! On achievements: a conservative average of 8 work parties a week throughout the year, an overall increase in the number of volunteers, an increase in corporate and youth group volunteer days, very visible restoration work at a record number of sites, and consistent income generation from the "bread and butter" sources of donations, membership, events and marketing. On challenges: financing the additional volunteer efforts; maintenance and repair costs of ageing plant that are being worked more intensively; the "behind the scenes" and very onerous management work of keeping track of planning, development and regulatory matters.

On achievements:

a) Lichfield Canal

- The increase in average work party days each week variously derived from establishing a separate Summerhill work party twice a week and from increased number of corporate, youth and Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) days.
- The number of companies opting to undertake their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment with us has increased and resulted mainly (but not exclusively) in fantastic extensions to The Heritage Towpath Trail, with its concomitant PR advantages.
- Similarly, the addition of National Citizenship Service youth volunteers to our previously established Queen's Croft High School's, other schools' and Scouting and Guiding Groups' involvement meant more work done, more publicity and greater inculcation of the younger generation of the importance of environmental and heritage issues.
- On record number of sites being actively worked: twice weekly work parties at Summerhill have meant that the sponsored "Willey's Lock 9A" - the replacement NW of A461 for Lock 9 which was SE of A461, and which will result in the canal coming under A461 at a lower level than the original hump back bridge accommodated! - now has its foundations; The Boat Inn itself is shored up (with contrasting brickwork in the gabions to depict "The Boat Inn") and the ancient sand wharf is now restored as a heritage feature. Also, 1km of Heritage Towpath Trail now facilitates wheelchair, pushchair, cycle and easy walking from The Boat Inn to the Aqueduct and back.
- Still on sites being worked: early in July we were awarded £18,500 from Postcode Local Trust to create Fossey Heath Nature Reserve and Wetlands! This needs to be spent by July 2018, so our regular volunteer parties and our corporate and youth groups are concentrated on achieving the creation of wetlands, boardwalks, Heritage Towpath Trail and topographical preparation for the canal to be rerouted to avoid the housing developments that prevent its taking its original line. As a passer-by remarked to me, "you cannot create an omelette without breaking a few eggs" – I am confident that we're not far from creating a great omelette! And all the time we are conscious of our responsibility to protect the environment for wildlife and for community enjoyment.
- Extensive brickwork, concreting and earthmoving at Tamworth Road has resulted in restoring Pounds 25 and 27 and the completion past the Narrows near the A51 such that little more can be done until road crossings of the A51 and Cricket Lane can be made.
- On income generation: David Suchet formally launched the Tunnel Vision Appeal at the London Boat Show on 9 January 2017; by the end of the year just over £400,000 had been raised, so we still have quite a challenge to raise £1,000,000 by early 2019. The success of Events, especially the

biennial Huddlesford Gathering in September which raised very nearly £10,000, and introducing social media based donating schemes are proving important.

b) Hatherton Canal

- The 500m of former Hatherton Branch Canal at Wedges Mills, south of Cannock, transferred to the Trust by Cannock Chase Council last year, has required the Trust to pay regular close attention to negotiating with adjacent major industrial developers the correct legal boundaries and reaching agreement on surface water management into the canal.
- Strong objection was lodged against the proposed massive West Midlands Interchange project near Calf Heath for failing to recognise the potential for including the Hatherton Canal into the scope of works.

On challenges:

- We are victims of our success in that the growth in all types of volunteers on average requires £500 running and material costs each day that a large group works for us. It is also reminding us that our plant and equipment have seen better days, and downtime and repair costs are of concern.
- BCN Canal Cottage 271 at Ogley Junction came on the market during 2017, was sold at a price that was significantly above the offer we had made, but that sale fell through so we returned and matched the offer which the market had demonstrated, bolstered by part of the very substantial legacy from our late Chairman, Brian Kingshott. Our purchase was completed early in 2018 when a revised Charity Bank mortgage loan with the benefit of additional rent income will enable much of the capital value to be redirected to our fund-raising Appeals.
- A further financial challenge came from the request that we move 11 concrete culvert sections, bought as part of an ERDF project 12 years ago, from where they have been stored near Cannock over to Lichfield. They will be used by the Trust and at a current value of around £200,000 we went to great engineering lengths to prepare the new storage location and hire cranes and low loaders with which to move them with great success.
- The “behind the scenes” work is definitely a challenge: keeping informed about and responding to local plans, making our own planning applications and responding to those of others, dealing with other land issues, with the Environment Agency, seeking grants and making funding applications all take huge amounts of time by Directors and Officers. The Trust has an impressive range of skills, experience and commitment from those people, but could do much more if we can attract more “behind the scenes” volunteers.
- It is worth singling out the Inland Waterways Association for its assistance to us in “behind the scenes” activities, particularly for expertise and co-operation regarding local plans and HS2, and also for a very generous donation to Tunnel Vision

I took on the role of Chair in June; I had expected it to take quite a lot of my time, but had not actually predicted just how much! I have learnt a great deal, and I am conscious that I still have plenty more to learn. But my overwhelming impression is of a Restoration Trust which consistently rises to challenges, has enormous credibility nationally amongst restoration and waterways groups and locally with its informal and formal communities, and is immensely successful. Its success comes from an amazing and very mixed group of volunteers undertaking the hands on and the behind the scenes activities. And I am very sincerely grateful to everyone in the Trust for the welcome and support I have had, and I also wish to thank my predecessor, David Dixon, for all his work for the Trust and for his invaluable support and advice to me.