

Report to Council

15th February 2017
By Cllr. John Bailey

INFORMATION REPORT



Not Exempt

UPDATE ON WEY AND ARUN CANAL TRUST (WACT) RESTORATION WORK

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to give an update on the work of the Wey and Arun Canal Trust (WACT).

Wards affected: Rudgwick

Contact: Cllr. John Bailey, Representative on outside bodies for Wey and Arun Canal Trust

Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust (WACT) has worked on more than half of the 23-mile canal that once linked the Thames to the English Channel, via the Wey and Arun rivers. The longest navigable section at Loxwood is now around 3½ miles, from Drungewick Lock north to Southland Lock, which was reopened in the summer of 2014.

The Trust's greatest restoration project to date has been the reinstatement of the navigable channel under Loxwood High Street, including a new road bridge and lock. This was completed in 2009 at a total cost of around £1.9m.

WACT is now giving priority to projects in three areas (from north to south):

1. Re-establishing the link with the national waterways system at Shalford, near Guildford, Surrey. The Trust's Bramley Link team has commissioned engineering and environmental studies in preparation for a Phase 1 planning application, expected to be submitted during 2017. Phase 1 is a rebuilt canal, partly on a new alignment, between the River Wey and Gosden Aqueduct. At the end of 2016, WACT assumed ownership of the Hunt Nature Park from Surrey County Council; this includes land on both sides of the Cranleigh Waters

between Shalford and Bramley. In 2017 the Trust plans to construct a Visitor Centre at the western entrance to the park, next to the A281 Guildford-Horsham road.

2. The summit level (5 miles between Rowley, near Cranleigh, Surrey, and Sidney Wood, near Dunsfold). In the centre of this section is Dunsfold Park, an airfield and business park where a major housing development is likely to go ahead soon. In October 2016, the Trust officially opened the new Compasses Bridge, at the south entrance to Dunsfold Park, replacing a concrete causeway that blocked the canal here. The concrete shell of the bridge was constructed by contractors, then WACT and visiting volunteers added brick facing, constructed training walls and carried out landscaping. The total project cost was £750,000. The official opening formed part of celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the Wey & Arun Junction Canal opening in 1816. The Trust is now developing plans for another new bridge south of Compasses; the Alfold-Dunsfold road currently crosses the canal on a causeway at Tickner's Heath.
3. Gennets Bridge Lock, the next lock north of the current limit of navigation on the canal's Loxwood section. In late 2015, contractors constructed the concrete shell of the lock, allowing volunteers to continue with the construction, including brick facing and a bridge for a farm track across the southern end of the lock. The volunteers hope to complete their work during 2017. Installation of lock gates and other navigation works will follow once the canal section north of Southland Lock has been restored.

The Trust currently has six salaried part-time staff at offices in Loxwood and Shalford and at the Loxwood Canal Centre. They include a fundraising and public relations/press officer, as money raising is stepped up in line with increased restoration activities.

Update

Cllr. John Bailey attended the meeting of the WACT on 8th December 2016 held at the "Bridge End" Somerswey, Shalford, as the Council's representative. The main subject of the meeting, the first for over a year, was item 1 of Introduction and Background above.

The Bramley Link Project Manager, Philip Oliver, explained the logistical and engineering issues encountered in planning the route the restored canal will take, including the construction of two locks. The locks are needed to allow the canal to be lifted over an existing gas main that crosses the canal route.

The meeting adjourned to visit the site, about half a mile away, to look at the proposed route.