



# Volunteers cruise on with Lichfield canal ambition

↑ Narrowboats, like those pictured on the nearby Coventry Canal, will one day be able to travel along 11km of restored canal past Lichfield

**Funding challenges and difficult interfaces with major transport infrastructure are not holding back those set on reinstating a historic stretch of canal near the city of Lichfield. Steve Dale reports.**

Impressive efforts of volunteers battling to restore 11km of lost canal and towpaths in Staffordshire were formally recognised in November as the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust was presented with a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The award will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the dedication of those involved, most of whom are retired and share a vision to see the historic Lichfield Canal – opened in 1797 and abandoned in 1954 – reinstated for the benefit of the local community.

"We are very active and we are doing a huge amount," says the trust's engineering director Peter Buck, who, after moving to the Midlands discovered a passion for narrowboat travel and joined the restoration effort. "Once you become involved it is like being part of a big family," he adds.

The trust was formed over 30 years ago. Its aim is to restore part of the original Wyrley & Essington Canal



*"A modern canal doesn't just take boats on it, it's a community asset."*

Peter Buck

from Huddlesford Junction in the east, through 30 locks and under the same number of bridges to Ogley Junction near Brownhills in the west.

Work has moved forward slowly over many years and is at various stages of completion along the route – which boasts some restored sections of canal – but is still far from finished.

The planned route is mostly along the line of the original canal and is safeguarded in Lichfield District Council's local plan. But rather than receiving local authority support, the trust must pay for work through its own fundraising efforts and by applying for grant funding.

"The challenge of getting funding is massive and endless," says finance director Bob Williams. "It's about finding the opportunities and taking them," he adds, noting that grants usually come with specific criteria restricting how they can be used on the project.

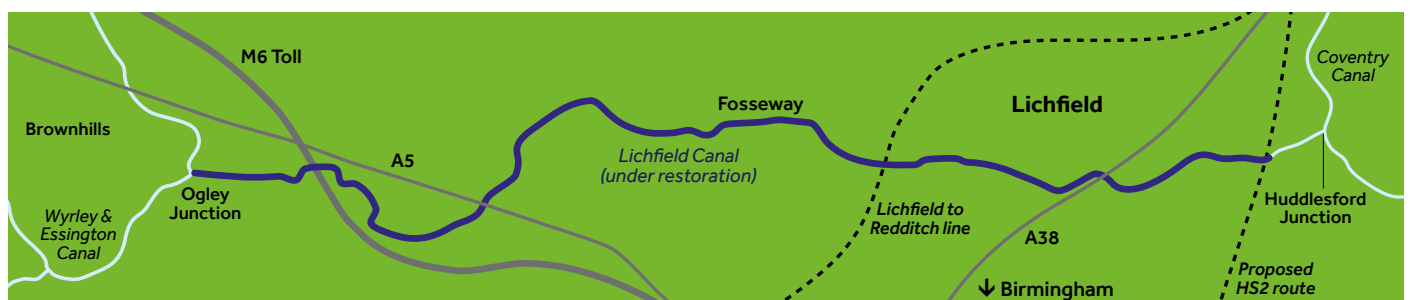


↑ A sign to Ogley Junction stands ready

Peter chips in: "We are accused by some people of working in a disjointed manner, but it is because we have to work where we can apply the money from grants."

However the trust has recently submitted a bid for £9.8M from the National Lottery Heritage Fund – a quarter of the estimated £40M total cost of the scheme – which could take it a long way towards realising its vision.

"So much work has been done





← Volunteers carry out towpath construction LHCRT



← A canal tunnel was buried beneath this roundabout

already, but it is a question of linking it all together," says Bob. "That grant would enable us to connect pretty well everything from the Coventry Canal to Fosseway. The difficult bits are crossing the main roads; that's where the money goes."

Along its route, the restored canal will cross both road and rail corridors including the A38, M6 Toll, the Lichfield to Redditch railway line and High Speed 2, subject to a Government review.

The latter would dive down at Huddlesford and pass beneath the canal, but requires the demolition of a road bridge built previously by the trust. The plan is that High Speed 2 will construct and pay for a diversion of the canal and a new bridge.

"All along the route we are working with agencies, landowners, volunteers, colleges and others," says Peter. "It is really a communication and people business that we are in."

Moving west along the route, the canal will go into a jacked box tunnel beneath Highways England's A38.

"That's a planning application we are about to put in," says Peter, who notes that the job will be let to a specialist contractor.

The canal is also planned to go under the Lichfield to Redditch railway line close to where work is being carried out to deliver the final phase of the Lichfield Southern Bypass. The bypass scheme involves creating a rail bridge for the new road to pass beneath, which will slide into position over Christmas.

On the western side of the railway is a roundabout where the new bypass will join the existing road network near a major planned housing development. The trust has already taken the opportunity to bury a canal tunnel underneath this roundabout when it was built in 2007.



**"We try to build ecology in right from the outset of our planning."**  
Chris Bull

The canal will also pass beneath the A5 and over an aqueduct that crosses the M6 Toll, which has been in place and ready to take boats for over 15 years. Great efforts were made by the trust along with actor David Suchet – television's Poirot – to lead a funding campaign to build the aqueduct before the road opened to preserve the canal crossing.

No specific timescale has been set for completion of the Lichfield Canal restoration. But when it does finish, explains trust chair Chris Bull, benefits will be wide ranging including health and wellbeing improvements as well as attracting tourism to the area, boosting wildlife and biodiversity and even flood attenuation.

"We try to build ecology in right from the outset," she says, noting that the project is creating new areas of heathland environment as well as nature trails.

In terms of wider community benefits, Chris adds: "We have also got at the moment a record number of youngsters volunteering with us for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and we have bricklaying students doing work experience from two local colleges."

Peter concludes: "A modern canal doesn't just take boats on it, it's a community asset."



**"The challenge of getting funding is massive and endless."**  
Bob Williams

## Grantham locks make progress



SEALANE MEDIA

↑ Work under way on Lock 14

Restoration of the Grantham Canal in Lincolnshire passed a key milestone in September when the fourth of the seven lock Woolsthorpe flight opened to boats for the first time in 90 years.

Lock 15 was rebuilt through a partnership between the Canal & River Trust and the Grantham Canal Society, with support from the Waterway Recovery Group. The next in the flight – Lock 14 – is also now nearing completion. The works were supported with a grant of £830,500 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Survey work has also begun on the last two locks in the flight and funding to carry out their restoration is currently being sourced. The fully restored Woolsthorpe flight will give 10km of navigable waterway from Grantham into Leicestershire.

## Shropshire scheme targets turning point



↑ Channel restoration works in progress SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL SOCIETY

Boats will return to a northern section of the Montgomery Canal on the Shropshire / Welsh border in just over a year when works to restore over 2km of channel are due to complete.

The Shropshire Union Canal Society completed a turning point for narrowboats at Crickheath earlier this year which is now in water, marking 60% of the canal's total restoration.

It is now extending the channel 735m from a previously reinstated section at Pryces Bridge to link with the new turning point. A second phase of these works started in the summer following the removal of great crested newts from site. The project is due to complete next December.