

# STAFFORD RIVERWAY LINK

(A Community Interest Company)

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**Patron:- The Lord Stafford, DL, FRAGS**

*Objective: To promote the restoration of the historic river and canal waterway linking the county town of Stafford to the national waterways network for the benefit of the community and all interested groups.*

*Website: [www.stafford-riverway-link.co.uk](http://www.stafford-riverway-link.co.uk)*

**Newsletter No 34**

**June 2021**

Hello Everyone,

Well, we had the coldest April, the wettest May and now we are experiencing a true 'Flaming June', though probably hotter than the Junes of many years back that originally gave rise to that expression. The weather is good for British conversation but has played havoc with work parties! Too cold, too wet, too hot. Ah well! We have had wonderful volunteers turn up for most of them but not in the numbers that we were getting in March, and it's always a guessing game as to who will come along. It's been a pleasure to see some new faces and we have 2 'father and son' teams, though ironically they have yet to attend at the same time, so the younger lads haven't met so far. Their enthusiasm is wonderful and because of this, we can look forward to a continuation of the project once some of us 'originals' are too old to keep digging. I have it on the good authority of an 11 year old, that helping with the Link is better than being on the computer.....Now we just need a few girls, equally keen, to join us and in these current times of equality, I will ask, 'Where are you? I need more female company!' That said, we do have some ladies who join in the work parties on a regular basis.

The last two work parties have seen an impromptu re-establishment of our little bric-a-brac stall which has raised a few pennies for us. I hope this will be ongoing throughout the summer and autumn work parties. It is, of course, weather dependant.

As always, we have input from some of the committee:

## **Notes from the Chairman**

It continues to be a strange time with restrictions still affecting some of the activities of Stafford Riverway Link. Fortunately, the Building Team has been able to carry on working and they have been doing sterling work, as those of you who have visited the basin site or have seen the progress on Facebook will know. The same goes for the volunteers who have helped, weather permitting, with work around the site, particularly with the tree planting. There will be more of that to come in the autumn.

We have had two significant visits to the site. Firstly, in May, Theo Clarke, MP for Stafford came, accompanied by Cllr. Ann Edgeller. They were met and shown round the basin and told about the project and its objectives by John Potter and me. In early June Cllr. Edgeller again visited the site, bringing Cllr. Philip White, Staffordshire County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills and John Henderson, the Chief Executive. They were met by a number of Directors, Committee Members and, importantly, volunteers. Thanks to all who attended on our behalf. Let's hope the visits bear fruit, if not in terms of funding, in supporting what we are trying to achieve.

On the technical/procedural side we have made a Feasibility Submission to Canal and River Trust and will now make progress on a Design and Construction Submission.

The Committee was able to hold its first meeting in person since March 2020, on 2 June. We did, of course, follow all the Covid safeguarding rules and guidance. Hopefully, this can now continue. We discussed a range of current items but we have started to look forward to being able to hold events and visits to the basin site and the return of the Social Evenings in the autumn. Next year it is the 250th anniversary of the opening of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and we are starting to consider what we can do to mark the event and raise both awareness and funds for the Riverway Link.

On the matter of funds, we need to continue to raise money for the project. As you gradually meet more of your friends, please talk to them about SRL, persuade them to join or donate and, of course, take part in the Quiz.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for the support and encouragement they have given in my first few months as Chairman.

I hope you all have a safe and enjoyable summer whatever you are doing. I'm going boating!

## **Mike Price**

### **A reminder from the Membership Secretary, Malcom**

The SRL membership "year" runs from April to March so (unless you are a life member) if you have not yet renewed your subscription for this year then it is overdue. Details about membership are on our website and Facebook pages, or you can contact me by email or letter.

We need your support and your membership fees to keep going so, if you have yet to do so, please renew now, and why not get a friend to join as well?

### **Site Update from John Potter**

We have made really good progress and are well up to date with our targets for this year. Our volunteers have put in over 2,000 hours so far since the new year. If we are able to keep up this momentum then we could actually 'be in water' in 2025. We have installed some mooring bollards at the future lock entrance, I wonder who will be the first to use them!!!

We have planted over 300 trees / hedge plants since the Autumn with more to go in this November, this planting together with the wildflower areas should enhance the area and encourage more wildlife. We have also created a herb garden for canal users to help themselves from.

The builders are now ready to make a start on the South basin wall and they are on target to have all the basin walls completed by the end of this year with work on the bridge, hopefully, starting next year.

### **History and Research Update from David Jones**

As always, research is on-going, and since the first lockdown in March 2020 much has been achieved. 64 pages of articles have been added to the History Pages of the Website. Articles about the Baswich "Lock Keepers" William Sambrook and Harry Holloway were updated and an article about "Lockett & Sons Mineral Water Manufacturers of Cannock & Stafford" completed. In addition, the "Heritage Report (2020)" outlines some of the notable events in the development of the SRL from 1997.

However, the most important achievement over the past 15 months has been to find out why the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal Company's three attempts to link Stafford with the main line of their Canal at Radford Bank between 1797 and 1800 failed. This is a major breakthrough and the result of several years original research looking for primary sources of evidence scattered up and down the country. An interim article, "The Proposed Stafford and Radford Canal: 1797-1800", was uploaded to the website in July 2020. Since then additional material has emerged and a fully revised article has been accepted for publication in the Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society.

Another article is nearing completion. It is about Edwin Wall who was the Lock Keeper at Baswich between about 1875 and 1885. Do you think it will be a happy story, after all this is the nineteenth century? Will the Grim Reaper come early? You are right, best have the handkerchief ready, just in case.

Artifacts from the Baswich Site were to have been displayed at several libraries in the Stafford area from May 2020. However, coronavirus pandemic restrictions and lockdowns meant these displays could not take place. The intention is to reschedule them when circumstances permit.

In May 2020, Phil Carr made a 15½ minute video, Stafford's Lost Riverway Link, as part of his Run the Cut series of videos. He runs the route of the Navigation from the Baswich Site to Green Bridge in the centre of Stafford and back, and actively promotes the SRL. The link to this video is on the SRL website.

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As you will read in Mike's update, he's off boating and he's not the only one. John and I will be off as well so work parties will be on hold for a while, with the next one scheduled, hopefully, for July 24<sup>th</sup>. There is also mention of a fund-raising quiz, which has a closing date of September 30<sup>th</sup>. Should you meet a committee member with copies for sale, please do buy one. Every £1 will help! We should have had a stand have a stand at Gnosall canal festival but the event has now been cancelled. It just remains for me to say, 'enjoy the summer'.

Best wishes, Vee



The entrance to the future lock.



The herb garden.



The site to date



The East boundary hedge and wildflower area.



**Corporate member**

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