

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

Newsletter No 32

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This has been the strangest year and I make few apologies for the lack of newsletters. It seems to have been a recurring theme when making contact with family and friends ‘there’s no news, there’s just nothing of interest to pass on. We’re all stuck in our very restricted environments...’ And for SRL, there was the double-wammy of Covid 19 restrictions **and** waiting for some planning permissions. **However**, all is changing and we do have news so let’s start, as usual, with a few words from our chairman:

‘Hi all,

What a rough year we are having!! We at SRL hope you are keeping safe and will continue to support us in any way you can.

Good news at last due to our fabulous Volunteer Planner, Andy and after months of patient communication with all parties involved in the phase 1 of our plan, we have PERMISSION to proceed, with some conditions to be met. The build team have already started preparing the site for continuing the basin wall build. The site has full fencing around it now for Health & Safety and looks very tidy.

We now need to raise more funds to continue the build. To this end Clive (Funding manager) has started a new Funding site which I am sure Vee will tell you about!

For the best part of this year, whilst we have been waiting for planning permission to continue we have had various forms of lockdown. But there is light on the horizon we believe and are looking forward to a much happier and more productive year in 2021. I would like to finish by wishing all of you a very Merry Christmas & a Happy and Safe New Year. Ivor Hind.’

Backtracking to earlier times, the pandemic came close on the heels of winter, when there is often little activity to report on. Then came the first lockdown. John, as site co-ordinator, and I made occasional trips to the site to check on security etc. John with occasional help from some of our volunteers, kept the lock house garden and towpath cut and I did a small amount of weeding. We considered this to count as ‘exercise’ which was being encouraged. We also kept the leaflets topped up as there was an increase in towpath walkers, some of whom were using ‘exercise’ to explore their local community.

The first major excuse to have an organised work party arrived when The Woodland Trust delivered the trees they had promised us much earlier in the year. The first batch consisted of 100+ saplings. There was ground to prepare but we considered this to be essential work. A handful of volunteers spent a couple of days on this project. We all worked sensibly, keeping our distance, using plenty of sanitiser and having very minimal refreshments as sharing crockery/utensils/nibbles is considered a hazard. No sooner was this planting accomplished than we took delivery of a further 2 lots of saplings! Great for our site and great for the environment and great for ‘having something useful to do’. At about the same time, the planning permission, which had been so long in getting sorted, came through. Delays were not the fault of our amazing ‘Andy’, to whom we owe so much thanks, **but** ‘we got there in the end’.

The building team were able to get their hands dirty again, the first time for so many months! The non-building team had more to do as, before we could plant more trees, we had to move a fence and establish our new boundary. Brian, who leads the builders, organised a digger and a dumper for their work, not to mention a driver for the digger, (thank you Paul!) and we had a few days of the most activity on site that had been seen for a long time. We also welcomed some new volunteers. Suffice to say, the progress has been fantastic and there now follows a report from our site co-ordinator.

Site Update.

Progress, after a lengthy spell of little activity, is now running apace with the building volunteers back on site and making rapid progress. The East side basin wall foundations have been dug and as we go to press concreting has started. We are lucky that our ballast for the concrete is not costing us anything as we are 'digging our own' on site. What we are now going to call, 'The grounds team', have been busy hedge planting and fencing and have just started on levelling the ground to the north of where the lock cut will be. We have a bit to do here as there is the towpath to build. This will need topping up periodically as the newly back-filled ground will continue to settle over the next few years. We intend to 'follow the builders', building up the towpath behind them as they move on. The 300 plants or so for the hedges have been donated by The Woodland Trust and include some trees. This work to benefit the environment will 'tick us a few boxes' for the planners as well as enhancing the biodiversity in the area. We have planted the Eastern boundary hedge as well as part of the Northern boundary along where the connection to the river will be in the future.

We have also built a new stile for the public footpath and now have a large sign for the link on the Staff and Worcs canal towpath fence so that passing boaters can see what we are about.

I would like to take this opportunity to give heartfelt thanks to all our volunteers both on site and in the background.
John

With work parties up and running again, watch out for information regarding dates and what might be happening. We hope to see more of you. Perhaps, I should reassure you that all our work parties are 'covid secure' and we regularly check with Canal and River Trust as to what is allowed – currently groups of up to 6! Our Building Team and our Grounds Team are seldom working anywhere near each other! Very little of the work involves close contact with another volunteer and keeping 2 metres apart is no problem. More importantly, we are always outside which is the safest place to be.

So, we have lots of positives – work parties re-established, some new faces helping us, increased interest from towpath users. The only downside is finance. As happened to so many volunteer groups, fundraising during the pandemic ground to a halt. No meetings meant no raffles which used to bring in small amounts, so useful for buying fuel for the mowers, cement mixer, refreshments etc. No work parties meant we no longer had our bric-a-brac stall which attracted passers-by. Trying to access larger amounts from local communities or more 'National' sources often needed to know that all planning permission was in place and we can only now tick that box on any application form. We do need more funds to keep up the current surge in activity. As such, our financial wizard, Clive, has set up an on-line fundraiser. Should you, your friends, families, colleagues etc wish to donate please access the following using control and click:-

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/stafford-riverway-link-basin-amp-bridge-project>

There is also a link to this on the SRL website and Facebook site.

I should mention, with a very big 'thank you', the table! While the building gang were unable to build, they made a beautiful picnic table which, no doubt, kept them busy for a short period. It seats 8 and, although it is in a traditional round 'pub-garden' style, their use of the decking wood has been imaginative. Do have a look, 'sit and enjoy' next time you're on site.

A further improvement has been the levelling of an area which now provides much better car-parking.

SRL was recently featured in one of the local Stafford newspapers and we understand it will also feature in Towpath Telegraph at some point.

Now that everything is looking so good, we hope many of you will visit the site for yourselves. Prepare to be impressed! Perhaps 'site' should be in the plural and you will feel inclined to visit both the physical place and the computer fundraising site. Visiting both would be a wonderful boost to all concerned in making 'The Link' happen. Those who are working regularly look forward to meeting more of you, our valued members and supporters. See you soon!

On behalf of everyone, best wishes,
Vee



The new footpath stile April



Hedge planting November



Putting the tree guards on



Brian and co soil moving November



More digging November



Preparation for foundations November



Corporate member

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