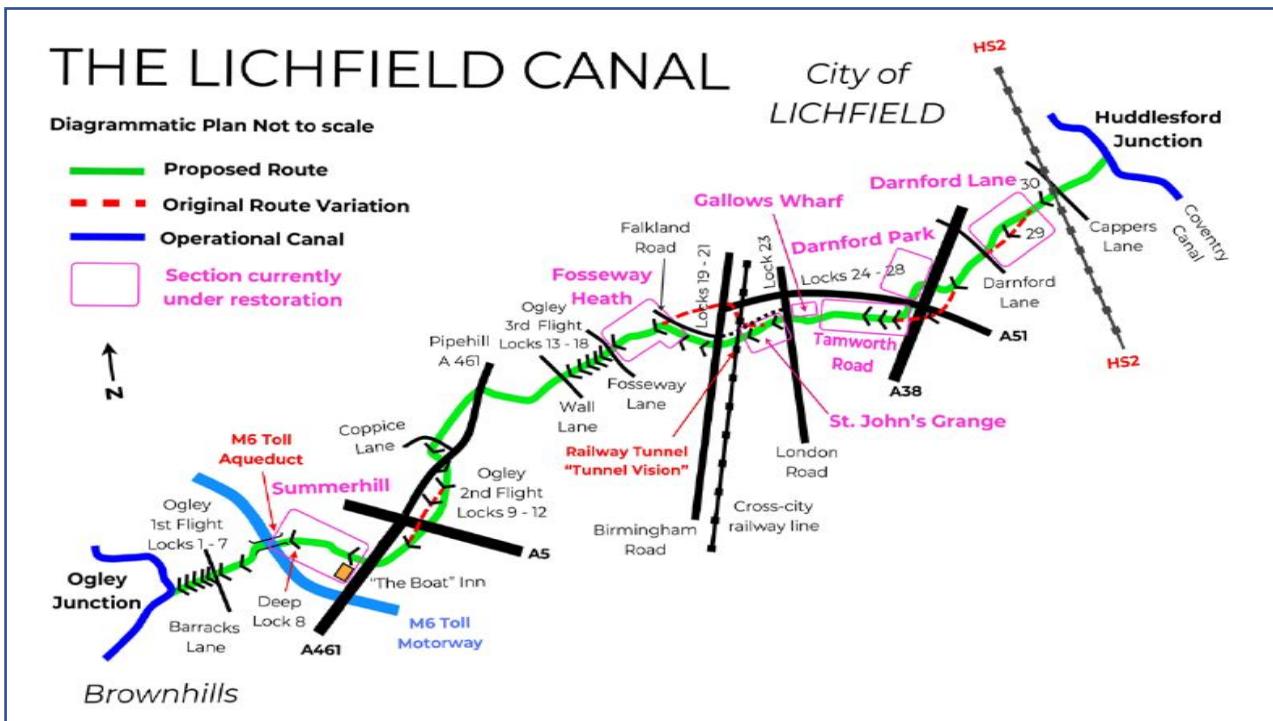


Lichfield Canal Trust - August 2021

Progress update on canal restoration at Fosseway Heath and adjacent to Falkland Road



Fosseway Lane

Extensive restoration has taken place on the Fosseway Heath section of the Lichfield Canal dating back to 1990s when the historic Lock 18 chamber near Fosseway Lane was extensively restored under Lichfield District Council Licence and a lock-side recreation area opened together with a section of the canal towpath. LDC has subsequently transferred legal ownership of this section to the canal Trust.



More recently, an extensive 400m section of the canal channel was cleared out with additional machinery loaned to the Trust by a local construction company and 600m of new Nature Trail has been created along the north side. This now connects Fosseway Lane near the disused railway crossing with a new ramp and entrance off Falkland Road adjacent to the unused new railway bridge. The new footpath constantly attracts many visitors from far and wide and much has been written about the range of plant and animal species present along this length and the environmental benefits and improvements to the biodiversity which have been evident along this Nature Trail.



At about the mid-point on the canal between Fosseway Lane and Falkland Road the adjacent farmer had encroached onto the towpath. The Trust has had to divert the canal channel to the north to make space for both a new towpath and a wetland area incorporating bridge walkways and islands. This section was made possible with support from the Postcode Local Trust grant of £18,500 in 2017. A 300m section of the southern towpath wall was dismantled and rebuilt using recycled heritage materials with Trust volunteers and many visiting volunteer groups, including college bricklaying students. This allows a new Heritage Towpath Trail to be formed above the towpath wall. In addition, a new 300m length of towpath was also formed on the north side of the canal channel.



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Falkland Road

At the Falkland Road end of the canal, the Trust has formed a new canal basin where narrowboats will be able to make the tight turn in and out of the new canal route along the length of Falkland Road. This canal basin which we call "Lichfield Haven" already incorporates visitor moorings with easy access to the Waitrose supermarket, other local facilities and is only a short walk into Lichfield City Centre. This canal section is also within easy walking distance of new housing developments providing wellbeing for residents and visitors with immensely popular walks along the Heritage Towpath Trail and Nature Trail along the Lichfield Canal.



The Trust has worked closely with other local groups and supported the Lichfield City entry into the national Britain in Bloom Competition. The Trust's innovative entry of the "Oss" iron sculpture appearing to pull a $\frac{1}{2}$ scale brick-built narrowboat planted



with flowers helped Lichfield City to be granted a Gold Award in this major competition and is now recognised as an iconic landmark feature on the skyline at Falkland Road proclaiming the canal's relocation.

At Falkland Road, the protected route of the canal identified in the Local Plan has had to be diverted into the reserved environmental corridor alongside the Lichfield Southern Bypass due to the original line past Sandfields Pumping Station to Shortbutts Lane having been covered by new housing developments after the canal was legally closed in 1954.

Zone A



At the north western end of Falkland Road, referred to "Zone A", the canal is on a raised embankment where a new pedestrian and vehicle entrance over former Lock 19 to the Fosseway Heath amenity has been constructed. This was kick-started with the helpful support of an SCC Community Grant of £2,800 in 2019, resulting in the reserved land for the canal being transferred to the Trust and for construction to commence. Private donations from near and far, even from abroad to the Trust's Piling Appeal raised the capital needed to undertake channel work in 2020.

The land alongside the canal has been planted with new mixed hedging and specimen trees with the battered slopes adjacent to Falkland Road sown with wild flowers and meadow grass mix which provides a beautiful floral display in the Spring/Summer, attracting bees and insects to improve biodiversity and the environment.



Zone B



On the next section of the Lichfield Canal alongside Falkland Road up to Claypit Lane, known as "Zone B", the boundary along the back of the highway verge has been secured against intruders by forming a small mound with new mixed hedge planting on the centre line of the mound and specimen trees planted approximately every 10m.

Once the land in Zone B is transferred to the Trust, the excavation for the canal channel and towpath will be

commenced and progressed. The sandy soil from this cutting will be transferred to the adjacent Fosseway Heath low-level area owned by the Trust between the canal and disused railway line to form a new lowland heathland area.

At the point where Claypit Lane passes over the line of the canal a new road bridge will be required. Following an unfavourable planning decision in 2019, it will not be funded from the adjacent housing development so the Trust has been forced into raising substantial funding for this new structure and service diversions that run across the bridge area.

Zone C



The remaining section of the canal between Claypit Lane and Birmingham Road roundabout, referred to as "Zone C", has a gas main within the area designated for the canal. SCC negotiated with the utility company to have this gas main re-located elsewhere and this diversion work which commenced on 25th August 2021 is programmed to be completed in five weeks.

Following completion of this gas main diversion it is envisaged that the Trust will enter into a Licence Agreement with SCC to secure the boundary along the back of the highway verge to Falkland Road with a bund, hedge and selected trees. Then minor excavation and landscaping can be carried out along the southern boundary with the Taylor Wimpey Deanslade development to allow the developer to complete the internal perimeter landscaping to tie in with the proposed canal infrastructure.

On completion of securing Zone C land and landscaping of the development boundary, the Trust anticipates that ownership of the Zone C land can be transferred by SCC to the Trust for excavation and formation of the canal infrastructure with new locks 20 and 21 to connect with the existing canal tunnel which the Trust had installed in advance during new Southern Bypass work for the Birmingham Road roundabout in 2007.



Progress

Covid-19 has had a serious impact not only on the restoration work but some of the Trust funding streams during the pandemic. However, the Trust rises to the challenges we get thrown at us and in spite of the many activities shut down during Covid, a core team of Trust volunteers had continued with essential restoration by keeping apart under Covid restrictions together with the necessary maintenance of the very popular towpaths and nature trails which have had a record number of visitors, especially family groups.

We look forward to the handover and full legal transfer of Zones B and C and the challenging canal restoration which opens up on this key section. When construction work has been completed in the dry channel, water can be pumped up from the existing supply downstream pending a longer-term provision from the summit level. Meanwhile, many more visitors will appreciate what the Lichfield Canal is bringing to the City, District and County in the national inland waterway network.

**P H Buck, Director (Engineering),
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