

Annual Report and Accounts for 2019/20 of the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust Limited

A non-profit distributing company no. 2704407, formed in April 1992, and a registered charity no. 1010721 which replaced the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Society, launched in 1983.

Organisation structure

The charity is run by a team of volunteers who pay an annual membership fee. It is managed by the Trustees who meet each month and are supported by regional based groups and a committee responsible for sales. The board appoint trustees to run The Wharf House Co. Ltd. The Articles of Association allow for up to 10 trustees to be appointed but does allow for the co-option of 2 more to cover special projects. One third of the trustees stand down annually by rotation but can apply for re-election. Potential new trustees are elected at the AGM or are co-opted during the year, but they must stand for formal election at the next AGM. When new Trustees are appointed, they are introduced to the work of the Trust and provided with the information they need to fulfil their roles, which includes information about trustees and charity law.

Risk management

The trustees have a duty to identify and review the risks to which the charity is exposed and to ensure appropriate controls are put in place to reduce risks of fraud error or unsafe acts

The Board of Trustees is aware of the general guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit. The Trustees have regard to this guidance and consider the activities of the charity have been carried out demonstrably for the public benefit and this applies also to their plans for future action. The charitable objects are defined as rebuilding a sustainable canal between Hereford and Gloucester. Several Trustees have undertaken training in Charity law and Governance within the last year.

Board of Trustees of H&G Canal Trust: year to 29 February 2020

Deborah Barber (from March 2019)
Ralph Barber
Roger Holmes (until April 2019)
Ed Helps (from March 2019)
Nigel Jefferies,
John Kilpatrick (until December 2019),
Philip Marshall
Eamonn McGurk
Tony Sellwood (from March 2019),
Keith Vaughan Welch

Chairman's Report:

A challenging year for the Trust with several changes within the board and key volunteers. The board has lost many years of canal trust experience that has had to be picked up by new members of the board. The trustees are continuing to develop the skills for the future, attending workshops and other training that is available from suitable organisations. Our volunteers are also attending training events. My thanks go to all Trustees and Volunteers for their ongoing support and involvement in the Trust.

A strategy review was started and remains ongoing. This has brought together a number of groups looking at sections of the canal. A team in Hereford are looking at the start of the canal and discussion and work is occurring with the local council on a number of sites in Hereford city and further afield in Herefordshire. An engineering team has looked at the crossing of a major road in Newent. After many discussions an inclined plane solution is now under development with the track going through the original station. The railway line was originally built on the old canal – thus we now bring a mixture of different heritage to the restoration. A team at Over are looking at the development of the site working with the local residents and the new lessee of the Wharf House. The site will be more multifunctional for the Canal Trust, the Model Boaters and Sailing for the Disabled who already use the site, and seeing if the site can be developed further for other water users.

The change to the Wharf House Company operation from a directly managed to a leased operation (now The Lock Keepers and The Moorings). This has had some difficulties which have been overcome and we look forward to a profitable relationship for the Trust.

One of the keys to a solid restoration is the involvement of others - councils, locals, all types of groups. A lot of involvement has occurred to continue to ensure the canal route is protected and supported by all. Many positive comments have been received about the change in direction the trust is now taking, after a number of years of some negative comments. The sharing of ideas and use of social media with Facebook and Twitter now being used for interaction is seen as a positive.

Looking further forward, like every other person and organisation Covid 19 coronavirus is having its effect on the Trust. Work has slowed down but volunteers continue to progress matters where they can.

In both Trust and Wharf House Ltd significant efforts have been made to let the portfolio of property assets to secure a longer term income stream, which has involved some spending to bring the property to commercial requirements.

Objectives and activities:

The trust espouses the following core values: -

- Restoring, enhancing, and protecting the canal for all

- Integrating the canal corridor as a sustainable resource into the life of the communities along its route

- Endeavouring to complete the work in partnership with all other interested parties.

Interested Parties

This reporting period we have engaged with the Neighbourhood Plans under development in Dymock and Newent. We have been involved in their open days; and Trustees are part of their steering groups. We are also working with other charity organisations to share the work we are doing and supporting our objectives.

Voluntary help and gifts in kind:

The volunteers form a critical part of the trust, not just in restoring the canal but also maintaining the restored sections and promoting widely through local and national events. All these aspects have continued throughout the year in question and are set to expand.

Risks to the Charity:

The Land & Environment Team continues to negotiate new sites and to rejuvenate former sites with developers and landowners at various places along the line of the canal - including locations in Hereford and Ledbury. These can take years to conclude but we continue with an on-going diverse portfolio of

negotiations so that a flow of announcements can realistically be expected over the coming years. The Trustees expect to provide a level of central support to new sites as and when they arise.

Financial review:

The Trust's financial position again strengthened during the year, showing a useful surplus of £65k, with a further £16k donated for restricted activities. This is on the back of a continued rental stream and donations and legacies. Some £7k of this surplus was spent on works at the Malswick site that will soon enable land for the canal to be transferred to the Trust. It was decided to sell a property in order to fund the losses incurred in the past, but no sale has yet occurred. In the present situation it is uncertain when that sale can be made, and until that sale is made borrowing costs are higher than they should be. The results of The Wharf House Co Ltd showed a loss of £47k for the year. While this is disappointing the whole of this loss occurred in the first quarter as a result of the costs of closing Malswick House and (principally) the run-off of trading at The Wharf House prior to it being leased out. However, the company has traded profitably since the first quarter. Subject to the impact of coronavirus this is expected to continue, and it should produce useful support for the Trust in future.

Reserves policy:

The charity aims to hold projected funds that at least cover the operating costs of the charity for 12 months.

Charitable activities and achievements:

Aylestone Park: Ongoing work to maintain the site for all. Reed clearing done by volunteers as well as the local Aylestone Park Association.

Burcott Road: Ongoing tree pruning and maintenance of the site.

Kymin: Ongoing site maintenance carried out. Several working parties with both volunteers and corporations getting involved in mowing, hedge trimming and removing assorted trees that had fallen in the storms. The site is very popular with local walkers.

Yarkhill: Regular maintenance and vegetation clearance continued on this stretch of canal.

Dymock: The pump that tops up the water levels in the winding pool stopped working and is in the process of being replaced (work currently hampered by Covid 19 situation).

Oxenhall: As well as routine maintenance plans to repair the wing walls below the lock were reinstated and are on course to be completed. Work was done to cut the hedge by the permissive path and during that time a leaning tree that was preventing access to Lock Cottage was removed.

Newent: Longer term investigations have been undertaken to start the process of obtaining planning permission and grants for the Station project. It has been decided that the high embankment under earlier plans was not practicable and instead an inclined plane will be employed to carry the canal over the road from Newent to Dymock.

Malswick: The new 32 tonne bridge and all works associated with it were completed and the team has moved on towards obtaining planning permission to build this section. The work here has allowed the land to be transferred and the legal transfer of the land is with solicitors. An application for planning permission to build this section is being prepared. The team undertook various work in the year to facilitate construction. A swing bridge that was formerly in Somerset was brought to near the site in preparation for its renovation and eventual placement on the site.

Moat: Routine maintenance involving regular mowing of the grassy areas continued to be the focus of work here. The 'wilder' areas occasionally needed some intervention in order to enhance the habitats that have been created.

Over: A meeting was held with Heritage England with a view to resolving the issue of the land slippage at Vineyard Hill. That area has been pegged out to enable monitoring to check whether the bank is stabilised and there is a plan to improve the ability to get boats along the section of canal at the bottom of the hill. Ongoing maintenance occupied the team, including the clearance of weeds.

Heritage Boats: The boats continue to be worked on. Mr Maysey was lifted out of the water. A survey was done and is now undergoing repairs. The super structure will be replaced, and the outboard motor given a full service including cam belt replacement.

Llanthony: Following the departure of a tenant from one property significant repair work has been necessary. This was completed after the year-end and it is expected that the property will be re-let in early Spring.

Membership: 43 new members during the financial year to Feb 2019 and 24 in 2020 year which was lower than in some earlier years. Sadly, we lose a few each year too so the overall figure has decreased slightly to 1239. We thank members for their generosity with all their donations.

The Wharfinger: Its high standard has been maintained thanks to many volunteer hours given by writers, photographers, editors, proof-readers, layout and delivery. The Wharfinger was, for many years, delivered by hand around the two counties but we have now moved to a more efficient way and it comes directly from the printers – thanks to all those who delivered in the past. We have also had items used in national newsprint from the Wharfinger and our published walks have been covered by a leading Waterways magazine this year.

Website: This is constantly running behind the scenes. Queries are passed to the relevant Trust member for a response. The webmaster and web team spent a great deal of time in the planning of the new website which was released in February 2020. Apart from the new layout and look, extra features such as payment of membership and donations can now be done online.

Sales & Promotion: several shows were attended, including Braunston and Droitwich. With more volunteers we would like to attend more local events to promote the H & G. The Winter Bazaar brightened up Ledbury in November.

Socials: we continue to meet at the Royal Oak and between 30-40 usually attend to hear talks on a range of subjects from both paid speakers and our own members. The sale of books and jigsaws at the socials continues to add to the Trust's income.

Grand Holiday Draw raised £1600 – lower than usual as we did not hold any Open Days. Our gratitude goes to those who donate all the prizes

The value of the volunteer work that we have recorded adds up to around £106,551, but we know this does not reflect all the time dedicated to the business of H&GCT by our hardworking volunteers.

R A Barber

Dated