

**Chairman's Report**  
**AGM 2024**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024**

As you already know from the Monthly Updates we have continued to make slow, but steady progress over the past year. Indeed, we now have some massive opportunities that **could** see us raise many millions of pounds towards the project.

But first we have to recognise that the continuing strength of our volunteer base is critical to maintaining that progress. We were all saddened by the loss of Derek, who had spent many hours bricklaying, treasuring and much more. As we've seen we were fortunate that Chris Richardson was available to step into the role when Derek could continue no longer. It is a continual challenge to get competent and committed people to give up their time to further the cause. I'd like to say again that anyone who is interested in helping will be welcomed whatever their history and experience. The project is so complex that every background has something to contribute. And as I can testify we don't know what's around the corner for any of the existing volunteers.

Since the last AGM we have spent a considerable amount of time effecting the repair of the flooded cottages. In the end we decided to take a cash settlement in excess of £60k (not the £100k suggested at the last AGM) and thanks to free advice on flood precautions and with considerable hours put in by Don, Tony and Brian we were able not only to dry the cottages out, but also to create tanked floors that would better protect the cottages from future floods and we made a profit of around £35k. We were able to keep one tenant in situ throughout these works, to let one go immediately (with no regrets) and keep the third, albeit not in situ. After a couple of tenancy changes we now have the cottages full again at a slightly higher total rent than before. We have also undertaken some flood management improvements on the "ditch", which will hopefully avoid future problems.

At Draycott work is progressing behind the scenes, however the focus has now switched completely. Having been pursued by County Flood officers for possibly contributing to the floods in Draycott we have been able to get a group together to address the possibility of comprehensive measures to control flooding in Draycott and Breaston in future. Led by Martin, our new Water industry civil engineer, we have assembled a group led by Network Rail and containing flood experts from the EA, Trent Rivers Trust and Severn Trent, as well as the County Flood officer. Progress is slow, but it seems we have a fair chance of getting the canal funded as a flood capture mechanism in Draycott and Breaston. There's also a back up for water transfer from Spondon to Church Wilne, funded in 2030 by the planned increases in local water rates!

We have settled the claim against Network Rail at much less than we wanted, but we have been promised that NR will fund the removal of the concrete bridge and dredge the ditch this autumn to further improve the flood defences. We are currently awaiting the conclusions from a water vole survey, which looks as though it will show the voles are no longer there. This may have something to do with predators such as mink, but **if** this is the final conclusion it may make matters easier for the engineers. We will no doubt need to repeat the survey next year to be sure.

The year saw dramatic changes to the political scene. We went from three conservative MPs and Margaret Beckett to 4 new Labour MPs and a new East Midlands Mayor, so we've spent a bit of time getting to know the new people. It's been a reasonably positive experience so far, but it has caused delay while changes take place and new people settle into their new roles. As we speak we have the new MP for Erewash, Adam Thompson, who's taken over from Maggie Throup and we'll be entertaining another couple of MPs and key Derby City Councillors on the boat later this week and we may even be in the sights of the new mayor.

As we've heard from Chris we had another good year with the Riverboat in 2023, and this has continued in 2024, although we were blighted by poor weather in April and later. The last trips will be conducted this week before the boat goes into storage again at Darley Abbey. We've made some progress with Derby city, where the cost of licencing of boatmen has been reduced and where we've been given "control" of the pontoon – if we top up the fund and build it to the existing spec. This means we'll be looking for a further £140k to add to the Council grant of £65k, so there's plenty to do and no doubt a few more bureaucratic hoops to jump through. We've also agreed to form a grouping of stakeholders (such as Museum of Making, Down to Earth, DWT, Rolls Royce, etc.) to influence the city centre flood defence plans, so that we'll see more than ugly walls and hopefully a canal basin and lock.

We have only just heard that we have a price quotation for moving the sewer at Sandiacre. Despite the fact that we think we'll need a further £150k to fund it (plus another similar sum to restore the lock chamber it feels like progress after such a long time. We'll need to work with a neighbour, who has offered to have us take down an obstructive garage and with other neighbours who will be inconvenienced, but it will be so good to get back to a substantial restoration project, especially as we expect a lot of volunteer effort to be put into it. It will give our working parties something exciting to get their hands on. They have continued to cut grass, maintain trees and hedges and build walls at least twice a week throughout the last year and it will be a welcome change – if we can organise funding quickly. We are fortunate to be supported by Erewash Borough Council, who have just confirmed an additional amount of £100k of S106 money for the project.

We also had our volunteers – mostly familiar faces – at the events we attended this year. We visited Breaston, Elvaston, Long Eaton and Shardlow. We've enhanced the items for sale and the display boards and we were generally well received and offered encouragement if not physical assistance.

We have also had a busy schedule of members meetings with speakers drawn from a variety of sources including our members themselves. My thanks go to Anne for finding and organising the speakers again this year, although I believe that we may need to consider a new person and/or approach as the ideas for entertaining speakers are proving more difficult for Anne with each additional year.

We also organised a walking visit by the local Rotary in June, which was well received and has resulted in total donations of over £1500. Our thanks go to Paul for organising this and he will say a few words regarding this and the work he and Chris Rees FitzPatrick have made on land acquisition securing two stretches on the line

between Hopwell Road and Risley Lane. We hope to secure the final stretch from Sustrans in the next twelve months, which gives us a near continual stretch from Draycott to the Erewash canal.

So I'd like to conclude with a thank you to all those who have volunteered over the last year and more. Whether the support has been as trustees, directors, working parties, funders or simply members I'm grateful to you all. The strength of the organisation was tested with my enforced absence recently and you all came through with flying colours.

Thank you all and here's to another successful year.