

# Chairman's Update

## March 2026

At last the weather has turned, the sun has put in an appearance and the blossom is everywhere. For me that means that it is time for my bees to get active again. After a winter where a beekeeper wraps them up and leaves them alone it is always a relief to find they have survived the cold and are ready to go again. They don't know it, but the honey they produce is now sold to further the restoration and earned us around £500 last year. The customer base seems to be growing so here's to another productive season.

### Working Parties

March also marks the start of the nesting season, so hedging stops and we await the growth of grass and back to mowing.



The working parties have continued their investigation and plotting of stone work by Ullikers Bridge.

The stone wall has now been completely unearthed between the

bridge and Spondon Bourne. Of course our polite volunteers shook hands when they met in the middle. I think they did that when the railroads met in the USA. It may not be quite so significant, but it's still good to celebrate it. I think that also happened in the pub afterwards.



Work also took place tidying up the cuttings at Sandiacre using our chipper.

We've also redrafted the wording and renewed the information panel at Shelton Lock.

At Spondon the planned marquee was erected and manned from 9am until 2pm. We had a lot of interest from passers by, many of them stopping to discuss what we are doing.



As a result we took 14 names of people with an interest in following our progress and some even happy to volunteer. We undertook this approach as a pilot and so far it seems to suggest that people can get interested in looking after and improving their neighbourhood. We will monitor ongoing involvement when the work takes place in the summer. We have also been joined by new volunteer Paul, who has Royal Engineers experience so we have asked him to look at improving the bridge to provide disabled access at minimum cost.

## Riverboat

Another month and we think we are edging closer to getting the pontoon in place. The HV cable to do list is shrinking. We had good news that the EA don't need a special permit for the works—well done to our MP as the last one took 7 months—and the permissions from the Council and notices of works have just about completed.

We have been told that we need a supervising archaeologist who would cost up to £9k extra, but thanks to National Grid they have decided to undertake works to duct a cable already in the path and therefore share the works cost with us, so we actually achieve a small saving on the original quote. Thank you National Grid! It now looks like we'll soon be able to get the contractor on site.

Two weeks ago we were told the legal and grant funding documents were in draft, but despite the Chief Executive's pushing we still haven't seen them. It's time for another push and perhaps more publicity?



However to finish on a high we were told that the planning permission has been granted a couple of days ago. We have a few conditions (drawings and an ecological plan) to sort before we can start work, but the agreement of planning is a major hurdle passed. We have already been on site to get the details resolved and provide detailed drawings of a gate in the railings. The pontoon manufacturers are on standby for an order as soon as we get the funding document in place and have agreed to reduce the lead time.

As ever our fingers remain crossed. The 4th June looks like a tall order, but we should be there for the school holidays!

We've also spoken to the corporate donor to get some donor recognition on the Riverboat. We've been lucky to also get some good advice on how to promote our organisation generally from marketing expert, Amy, who works for them. Mike and Anne have taken on board how to promote us more actively, especially on social media. I'm just relieved not to be involved in social media, dinosaur that I am.

Plans are also afoot to bring the Riverboat back under Causey Bridge at the end of the month in the belief that the worst of the rain is over. We can then undertake maintenance, give it a good clean and apply some paint. Mike and Simon have been looking at maintenance requirements and drafting alternative commentaries. Our thanks go to all our volunteers, who await the new season and pontoon eagerly.

## Riverside

Plans to develop the riverside for boats continue, albeit slowly. We are well supported by the University and have been pushing it through the Derby Nature Collective. This is a group that Mike and I joined to ensure we can coordinate efforts with the various green charities, such as Natural England and the Wildlife Trust. In furtherance of this networking I attended a day organised by the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England to show off the rewilding of Allestree Park. It was very useful in catching up with influential people, especially the EA.



The works on the flood defences continue and as can be seen the base for the main bund has been dug out and they are getting ready to pile and replace the soil. This means the current mound will be moved back from the riverbank.

The base for the wall around the flats is now also in place awaiting the wall to be constructed on top of it. We are told that the other two buildings will be demolished towards the end of 2026 as the next stage kicks in.



### In other areas

At **Sandiacre** notice has been drafted by STW, which should result in negotiations starting. I was able to attend a meeting of the ECPDA, now renamed as the Erewash Canal Association, to update our sister organisation. Like us they are keen to see progress and offered their support.

The main project plan for **Draycott/Breaston** has been received by the new EMCCA officer and we await a response from the director responsible. We've also had a meeting to update the MP for Mid Derbyshire on the project and therefore expect to get further political support for it, particularly as he sits on parliamentary environmental committees. He is also happy to support the potential for Biodiversity net gain from the A38 road junction improvements.

I'm also pleased to confirm that **the IWA** Trustees have formally voted to devote £100,000 to funding a restoration hub specialist. This has taken three years and a lot of meetings to get off the ground, but all restoration trusts should now be able to benefit from a central expert to guide us and share best practice in the increasingly challenging world of canal construction. The outcome has been the result of substantial consultation and a lot of hours put in by my key members from restorations at Chesterfield, Buckingham and the Montgomery as well as ourselves. I think this will be particularly useful to develop the ideas put forward by Martin Pilbin, our water engineer, at our January meeting as water management schemes are better planned to address national needs and funding pots.

The **Draycott Café** work upstairs is virtually complete and will be done in time for our March meeting. So the good news is that



there will be a coffee machine in place in the reception room and the meeting room has had a new paint finish and has been furnished ready for its use as a café waiting area. This means that the existing whiteboard has been taken down and I have tested out that the repainted wall will provide excellent visibility for presentations. Normally the room will be kitted out with easy chairs and coffee tables, but for meetings nights Garry and Joyce have secured new padded seats. This means we have a number of existing hard chairs for sale.



Any offers? Hopefully the need for cushions will be a thing of the past and the meetings more enjoyable.

On the subject of meetings

### **Members' Meetings**

Our last meeting covered the restoration of Wingfield Station by two of their local volunteers. We were impressed that not only can we see the Victorian building in pristine condition, but volunteers have also arranged a number of family attractions and events throughout the year and provide walking trails in the nearby woods. It almost ranks with our Cottages!

We have postponed the talk on the Chesterfield Canal originally planned for this month.

Instead we will be entertained by Stephen Flinders. Stephen was very well received when he spoke to us before . His topic this time is Stanton at War.

Future meetings will be

24th March                      Stanton at War by Stephen Flinders

28th April                      Erasmus Darwin—inventor of the boat lift by Jenny Abnalls

26th May                      Life as a Mill Worker in the Derwent Valley presented by a Belper Mills guide

Meetings will be held **at the Cottages as usual starting at 7.30pm.**

We are also awaiting confirmation of a walk and talk on June 23rd at Raynesway at the Severn Trent processing site, where we can see what is involved in cleaning our water and also have a presentation from the STW project manager about the water transfer scheme that is being implemented to take water from Minworth to East Anglia via the Grand Union canal.

Thankyou for as always for your continuing support

Chris