

Progress Report (March 2019 – September 2019 inclusive)

1. Horse-drawn barge zone signs

In response to concerns expressed by the Tiverton Canal Co about increasing number of near misses in recent years whereby towpath users have acted dangerously around the horse that pulls the barge, new signs have been developed informing visitors that they are entering the Horse-drawn Barge Operating Zone. These signs use photos and text to demonstrate some of the hazards and the safe behaviour requested of towpath users in this zone.

The signing is in response to reports from people involved in incidents or near misses that they were not aware that they may come across a horse on the towpath. In one case a cyclist with a child strapped in a child seat almost ran into the horse under a bridge and nearly fell in. The new signs should reduce the likelihood of such incidents and ensure that the horse-drawn barge can continue to operate safely on the Canal.

Two smaller A3-sized version of the signs are fixed to the gates near Tidcombe Bridge and Manley Bridge, so that visitors entering at these access points are also made aware.



2. Cyclist signs at bridges

A JAC working group was set up last year to review the existing signage and after taking advice from Devon County Council's Safer Travel Officers (who are involved with multi-use trails around the county) and from the Tiverton Canal Co a new approach was developed and then agreed at the JAC meeting in March 2019.

It was recognised that a large proportion of cyclists do not dismount and walk under the canal's bridges, and that this is unlikely to change significantly whatever signs are put up. As there is no legal or physical restriction that can be called upon to force cyclists to dismount, it was agreed that the best course of action was to focus on explaining to cyclists the dangers they can pose to more vulnerable towpath users in the hope that they will slow down, give way and take more care. DCC Councillors Colin Slade and Ray Radford have funded new signs and posts using their locality budgets.

Instead of being required to dismount, walk and remount at 19 of the canal's bridges, the instruction to dismount is now only being made at five bridges in the horse-drawn barge operating zone and the two bridges on either side of Sampford Peverell, which are generally quite busy and have had several incidents in the past. The signs at these seven bridges have red and orange backgrounds - the other signs have the standard DCC

blue/green shaded background. At these other bridges the messages are to slow down, take care, give way and don't cause an accident.

These A4-sized signs replace the existing A5-sized signs and are mounted on new 4" square posts. The old posts have been removed and where possible the new posts have been located a little further away from the bridges to give cyclists more notice to slow down / dismount, and to make the signs visible from further away.



One of the key design choices was to make the signs photo-based so that even if cyclists and other users don't read the text, a glance at the photos should get across the idea that they can meet someone, or something head on under the bridges.

The horse which pulls the barge was used on most of the signs in which it operates, and several volunteers were found to represent a range of more vulnerable towpath users on all the other signs. These included a mobility buggy user, an older gentleman with a walking stick, a dog walker, and mothers with children in pushchairs. The variety of users that could be impacted by inconsiderate cycling cannot be effectively encompassed in just one sign, but through representation in several consecutive signs, cyclists should realise that they could come across a range of other towpath users that they could scare or hurt if they don't slow down and take extra care.

Another design choice was to take the photo in each sign at the bridge, to be tailor made for where the sign was to be located. Although this made the job of creating the signs more complicated and expensive, it was felt that the message would be more pertinent and meaningful, represented this way than if a generic bridge was used at all the sign locations. The variety of subject matter on the signs was also felt to be beneficial in terms of engaging cyclists and keeping their interest. This variation was continued in terms of the range of different messages used in the text and through the use of different layouts.

All of the signs were installed ahead of the summer holidays and have been well received by the towpath users that have engaged the Canal Manager and Canal Rangers on the subject.

3. Ebear landing stage

The Canal Ranger team and volunteers installed a new landing stage near Ebear Bridge. It is a split-level landing stage with a higher end - level with the towpath and the right height for narrowboats and cruisers, and a lower end - at the right height for canoes and kayaks to be launched and recovered from.



The timber for this landing stage was paid for using funding from Councillor Ray Radford's Locality Budget.

4. Deltalok bank repairs

This year the Canal Ranger Team have been using a new technique for repairing the bank where it has slipped or been eroded. Experience has shown that other techniques for reveting the bank - such as stacking rocks, installing gabion baskets or using geotextile material held in place with posts - don't always work very well. They often end up standing proud of the bank as they get eroded on either side or become undermined and slowly collapse into the canal.

The new approach involves the use of Deltalok bags. These are a bit larger than standard sandbags and are made from a geotextile which supports plant growth through the fibres. The bags are filled with a mix of soil, sand and small pebbles which we mix in a cement mixer. A handful of grass seed (with no rye grass included) is thrown in with each load and incorporated before the bags are filled.



The bags are then used to rebuild the eroded section of bank, with pointed plastic strips placed between each, spanning the joins, so that the bags are all held tightly together. The bags are placed to avoid running joints (like building a brick wall) and are battered to match the angle of the surrounding bank.

The Deltalok wall is then topped off with topsoil and some more grass seed. Within a week or two the grass seed germinates and grow up through the bags, and that over time the seeds of other nearby waterside plants will colonise the bags. This will have the effect of blending the bags into the bank so that they cannot be seen. The root growth will also help to further bind the bags together and into the surrounding bank. Some of the bags that were installed earlier in the year have now blended in completely and look likely to provide a very effective, longstanding solution to these erosion problems. This work will continue through the autumn and winter.

5. Badgers in Wilcombe Embankment

As previously reported to JAC members, Devon County Council aim to reduce the risk of further damage to this embankment by relocating the badgers from the setts in the embankment to an artificial sett built on the land below. After a line of steel rods was inserted along the canal bank in March to provide interim protection for the embankment, agreement was sought and secured from Wilcombe Primary School who kindly agreed to the construction of the artificial sett on their land, subject to certain fencing conditions (to minimise the impact of the badgers on the school grounds). Construction of the artificial sett was completed by an ecologist from Encompass Ecology, with help from an excavator contractor.

During the summer the ecological contractor who built the artificial sett has been monitoring badger activity and has applied to Natural England to exclude the badgers from the embankment. A licence to undertake this work was received in mid-September and so work to clear vegetation from the embankment will now proceed.

Once the vegetation is cleared, one-way doors will be fitted to all the existing sett holes forcing the badgers to use the artificial sett (the most likely outcome) or to disperse elsewhere. After a period of monitoring to ensure the badgers are not getting back into the

embankment sett, the slope will be repaired and netted with mesh to ensure they cannot start tunnelling into the embankment again.



6. Pay and display signs

New signs have been designed to be located beside the Canal Basin pay and display machines. The signs will replace the old ones which are deteriorating and have become out of date but will continue the approach of basing the sign around an attractive photo of the canal and emphasising that all of the car parking income is spent on maintaining the canal. The signs will also highlight the facility for visitors to pay by phone.

Charges

- Payable 7 days a week, sunrise to sunset
- No disabled concessions

Up to 2 hours	£1.50
All day	£3.00
Coaches	£3.00

Pay by Phone option: Tel: 01332 240888

Quoting location: 6607 Coaches, 6607 All other vehicles

Annual parking permit: £24.00 (Purchase online at www.devonpermits.org)

Penalties

The car park is patrolled regularly by Devon County Council's Canal Rangers and Civil Enforcement Officers.

Any vehicle not displaying a valid ticket or overstaying the expiry time may be issued with a Penalty Charge Notice for £50.

Conditions

- No unauthorised overnight camping or parking
- No unauthorised HGVs or trailers
- Coaches to park only in marked bays
- No car parking in coach bays
- Park carefully to keep access routes clear
- Please take your litter home

Income from car parking enables the Canal Ranger Service to look after the Canal's stunning wildlife

Photo credit: Julie Thomas

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All of the income from this car park is used to keep the Country Park a special place to visit

Photo credit: Julie Thomas

7. Proposed dog waste and litter bin collection charges

Mid Devon District Council's senior officer leading on waste management has met twice with DCC's Head of PRow and Country Parks and the Canal Manager to discuss a proposal to charge DCC £12k pa for the emptying of the litter bins and dog waste bins along the Canal. This would take effect in 2020/21 and would take the form of a £12k cut to the existing £40k contribution that MDDC makes to the Canal maintenance budget.

The two DCC officers have argued against the proposal, but it looks likely that this will be one of several options for addressing budget shortfalls to be considered by MDDC's cabinet later in the year.

Such a major cut to the Canal's budget could only be sustained by one, or a combination, of the following responses:

- Reducing the number of bins along the canal
- Reducing the frequency of collections
- Seeking to increase income by raising Canal Basin car parking charges

8. Green Flag and other Awards

The Country Park has been successful in retaining the Green Flag Award for the 11th year running. This year the Canal received a one-hour mystery-shop by a single judge rather than a full day's judging by two judges. The park will be fully judged next year.

On the 17th September, the Canal Manager led a judge from the RHS South West in Bloom, accompanied by Tiverton Town Councillor Wally Burke for a tour of the Canal Basin. Councillor Burke has for the last few years entered the Canal in the Pride in Parks Award. Last year the Country Park achieved the highest grade of 5 stars.

The Canal Manager has also been working with Jeremy Salter of the Tiverton Civic Society on an application to a competition run by Civic Voice to find England's Favourite Conservation Area. This year the Civic Society is entering the Canal Conservation Area in the competition, and if shortlisted, the Canal Conservation Area would be part of a public vote to find the country's favourite.

9. TS Hermes renovation

Renovation of TS Hermes, home of the Tiverton Sea Cadets has been completed inside and out and the Canal Manager has congratulated the Cadet leaders on a great job. Not only do the Sea Cadets now have much better facilities, but canal visitors in the Canal Basin car park are greeted by a far more attractive building.

TS Hermes is built on land owned by Devon County Council and the Sea Cadet lease this land. The lease will soon be due for renewal and Devon County Council have agreed to offer a much longer lease than usual in order to help strengthen the case for the fundraising and investment that has been undertaken by the Sea Cadets.

10. Graffiti incident

Sadly, the Country Park suffered a serious case of graffiti one Saturday night in June. Four youths used spray cans to spray swastikas and other symbols and words on bridges, benches, gates, signs and trees between the Canal Basin and Manley Bridge.

Fortunately, the horse-drawn barge was out on an evening trip and the skipper contacted the canal manager to inform him of the graffiti and the fact it was still fresh. A description of the likely perpetrators, who had just passed the barge, was also provided. The Canal Manager and one of the Canal Rangers

were quickly on site and as well as finding, challenging and photographing the culprits, they also managed to pressure wash off almost all of the graffiti before it set. The photos were passed to the police and the Canal Manager gave a statement, but it is not known if any further action was taken.



11. Visitor Centre touchscreen photo galleries

When the displays were developed for the Visitor Centre, one of the advantages of the touchscreen system was that it provided the opportunity to continue adding and updating content as time and budgets allow.

The last Progress Report discussed the addition of new bat-related games and identification information.

This summer and other new section – a photo gallery – has been added. Photos are organised into four categories:

- Historic Photos
- Landscapes
- Wildlife
- Canal Activities



There are 24 photos in each category, most of which have been taken by local residents and canal visitors. Many came from the Canal photo competition held in 2015.

12. Devon Bat Survey

In the spring, the Canal Manager was approached by the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project to see if the Country Park could host one of 21 automatic bat detectors located at centres around the county, which can be booked out by members of the public. Once collected, the person borrowing the detector puts it out in their garden and leaves it for three nights before returning the detector to the centre and posting an SD card from the detector to the project HQ. A few weeks later they receive a report listing the species detected.

As well as engaging the public and giving them interesting details about the species of bat in their garden, the project is also generating large quantities of reliable and geographically well-spread data which will help conservationists looking to protect bats.

The detector based at the canal has been booked out by members of the public 20 times to date, and on 10 occasions when it was not booked out, the detector was deployed at locations along the Canal, providing a real insight into the species present in the country park.



13. Boehill slipway parking

When the boat-launching slipway was built, agreement was reached with the owners of the nearby Minnows Touring Park for them to provide parking for boater's vehicles and trailers for a small fee, as there is no parking space beside the slipway. The new owners of Minnows say that their insurance does not cover this and that they would not be able to accommodate boaters' vehicles and trailers.

Agreement has been reached with the owner of the allotment field halfway along the slipway track for vehicles and trailers to be parked in the field near the allotments for a small daily fee, payable in advance at Minnows. The gateway to the field has been widened to accommodate the long trailers that boats use to tow their boats.

14. Weed-cutting

As in the last few years, the Canal Rangers have operated the weedboat for four days a week in most weeks between April and October. This has largely prevented blanket weed and Water Soldier from completely choking the Canal along most of its length. However, at the time of writing it is apparent that there is still a lot of Water Soldier on the bed of the canal in some sections and work to clear as much of it as possible will continue into early autumn.

15. Fringed lily control

Yellow fringed lily is an invasive, non-native plant and, if left untreated, can completely cover the canal to the detriment of other plant species. However mechanical control by cutting and collecting is not effective as the plants grow back and any fragments which float away can form new colonies.

Every few years a specialist contractor with a purpose-built boat is engaged to spend one or two days at the canal spraying off the plant with glyphosate herbicide. He also secures the EA licence required for this work. Although most of the fringed lily is killed off, there is always some lurking behind reeds and other plants which survives and re-establishes a colony over a period of years. Therefore, this work must be repeated after three or four years.

16. Mowing and strimming

The Canal Rangers and volunteers have undertaken all the usual mowing and strimming along the towpath, car parks and picnic sites. Thanks to a £4k contribution from Tiverton Town Council, a new mower was purchased in the spring which makes a far neater job of mowing the Canal Basin and Sampford Peverell picnic sites.



17. Bank cutting

Each summer a point is reached when vegetation starts to collapse across the towpath and brambles extend out from hedges across the towpath. In mid-July, the Canal Manger spent eight days in the Kubota tractor siding up both sides of the towpath along all 11 miles in order to maintain clear access for towpath users. In most cases the bankside needs two passes and the hedge side needs three or four. As it is just a light cut, the majority of wildflowers remain, as can be seen in this post-cut photo taken near Ayshford Bridge:



The bank between the Canal Basin and Crownhill Bridge is cut completely in the summer each year by a contractor once the plants begin to impede the horse-drawn barge rope and place extra strain on the horse. This year the dry early summer conditions restricted plant growth, and good water levels meant that agreement was reached with the Tiverton Canal Co to delay this cut until early August – a month later than is often necessary - providing time for wildflowers to finish flowering and set seed.

18. Tree management

In the spring a storm brought down several trees along the canal including two very large poplars and a willow near Bamfylde Close in Tiverton.

Clearing these poplars and resetting the root plates proved to be a difficult and expensive task involving a team of tree surgeons, a JCB contractor and a tractor winch contractor.



The two fallen poplars with the frame of a temporary dam (related to the Wilcombe Embankment works) between. The root plates were set back in their original position once the trunks were detached.

Fortunately, we own an adjacent strip of land which we were able to winch the trunks and branches out to. All of the timber (around 15 tonnes) was sold either for planking or firewood and this helped to offset the cost a little. The Canal Rangers and a fencing contractor have undertaken some repairs and restoration of the adjacent gardens and the Canal land has been levelled, rotovated and seeded with a wildflower meadow seed mix.

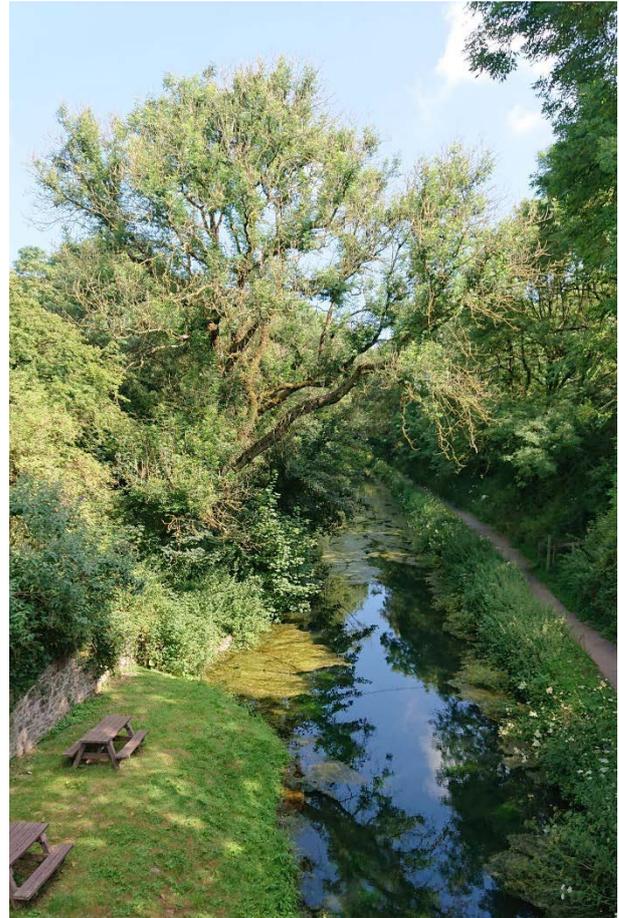
A few other small to medium sized trees have come down at points during the year, and a couple of large branches have snapped off large oak trees, and all have been cleared by the Canal Rangers and/or contractors. The Canal Rangers have also been crown-lifting trees with low branches above the towpath and canal.

19. Ash dieback

It is clear that this fungal disease is spreading rapidly not only along the canal but throughout the county. Roughly 30% of the Canal's trees are Ashes, totalling several hundred along both sides of the 11 ¼ mile long canal. The latest predictions are that around 90% of these trees will succumb to the disease in the next decade and given that most are within falling distance of the canal and/or towpath, a very large number of ash trees are likely to require felling.

In the last two years several large diseased ash trees have been felled and around 20 more will need to be felled this autumn/winter as they have reached the 50% canopy loss threshold which Devon County Council has set as the point at which diseased trees above highways should be felled.

Diseased trees are increasingly difficult to fell safely as the disease progresses within the tree and many of these trees are in inaccessible locations on the offside banks, such as the one pictured right, located near Whipcott Bridge. This means that greater use will need to be made of Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWPs) and excavator-mounted tree shears. This will require more frequent towpath closures when work is undertaken as this machinery completely blocks the towpath.



20. JAC site visit

This year's site visit began in the Canal Basin, where members were shown the new additions to the visitor centre touchscreen system, and some of the new signs in the Canal Basin. The Canal Manager also updated members on the Wilcombe embankment / badger issue, the clearance of the fallen poplars, the new mower and the new bridge signs for cyclists.

The group then moved on to the Aqueduct where plans for relining this leaking structure were outlined. Finally, the group visited the new landing stage near Ebear Bridge.



21. Sign and noticeboard posts

All of the posts supporting signs, panels and noticeboards within the country park have been inspected and many require replacement, having rotted at ground level. The process of replacing them has started this summer and will continue through the coming months.

22. Spirit of the sixties motorcycle rally

Fine weather welcomed the *Spirit of the Sixties* motorcycle rally which visited the canal on May 12th. The Canal Basin hosted this Westland's Classic Bike Club event in which more than 150 classic bikes joined 75 more marshals at the Basin in aid of the Freewheelers EVS ('Blood Bikes'). Those taking part stopped in Tiverton on a round trip from Yeovil where they are based. The event gave motorbike lovers the chance to see motorcycles of the type made between 1954 and 1976.



John Dodge, organiser of the event and secretary of the Westland Classic Bike Club, said: "This is the 29th event of its kind and the second time we have been to the canal after coming here last in 2011. The canal is always a beautiful place to come. They always make us welcome here."

23. 'Dragons teeth' at Tiverton Road car park

The posts located beside the towpath on the northern side of Tiverton Road Bridge, have been replaced as the old ones were rotting at the base. In stead of 3-4" round posts, banged in by hand, 5" round posts have been banged in by tractor, providing a more secure and longer lasting barrier to prevent vehicles from entering the canal at this point, either intentionally or accidentally.

24. Aqueduct repairs

A Devon County Council engineer has been drawing up plans and designs for repairing the aqueduct this autumn. The channel will be dammed off with portadams, drained and then cleaned back to the previous sprayed cement lining. A butyl liner will then be added to make the aqueduct channel watertight again and this will be protected by a concrete canvas (cement-impregnated fabric) lining. New rubber fenders will be added along the sides and some other repairs will be carried out on brickwork forming the walls and arches of the structure.

The work is being funded and supervised by the Devon County Council Bridges and Structures Team and is likely to take around six weeks, starting mid to late October. It is anticipated that the towpath will remain open throughout most of this time, but tendering has not yet been completed and this will need to be agreed with the successful contractor.

25. Canal Basin car park flower bed

This new flower bed was once again sown with a wildflower mix in the spring, once the daffodils had gone over. After the remnants of the daffodils were cut and raked off, the bed was dressed with 1-2 inches of topsoil to provide a good seed bed without disturbing the daffodil bulbs. The bed is still flowering well in late September.



26. Benches

A new oak memorial bench, built and installed by the Canal Ranger Service, has been installed beside the dragonfly panel near Ebear Bridge. It replaced an old softwood bench which was in poor condition.



27. Canal Basin wall

In the summer, vandals removed several concrete blocks forming the top course of the modern blockwork wall supporting the land at the eastern end of the Canal Basin car park and threw them into the garden of the District Council-owned flats below. At first neither Devon County Council or Mid Devon District Council felt they had responsibility for the wall (which dates to the construction of the adjacent flats), but after discussion the district council did accept responsibility and arranged for the top course to be rebuilt with new blocks.

28. Buckland Bridge steps

The rotten wooden handrails beside these steps have been replaced with galvanised metal ones which should last as long as the steps. Although the handrails are quite shiny and currently stand out, they should dull down and blend in more within a year or two.

29. Tiverton Road car park tarmacking

Potholes in the car park and around the entrance have been patched by a tarmac contractor.

30. Volunteers, work experience and apprentice

Volunteers have provided 181 person/days help during this period. These figures include several regular college work experience placements - Joni, Alex, Joseph, Adam and Katie Taylor - from Bicton, Cannington and Petroc colleges each attend one day a week. Joni, Alex and Joseph attended a Brushcutter training course and Adam is due to attend soon, so they are also gaining qualifications as well as work experience.

Two high school pupils each spent a week undertaking their work experience with the Canal Rangers in July.

Throughout the year a Country Park Apprentice Ranger, Rob Daley, has spent four days per week working at Stover Country Park (near where he lives) and one day a week working at the Canal. The placement is funded by a separate Devon County Council budget until next Easter.

31. Schools & Groups

Total = 357 children attended + forthcoming Rainbows group on Sat 21st Sept.

- 19/3/19 **Bickleigh Primary** (Pond dip/Mini-beast Hunt) 17 Reception children
- 1/4/19 **Wilcombe Primary** (Pond dip/Mini-beast Hunt) 33 Reception children
- 8/5/19 - **Stover Country Park** - Jo helped lead Pond dipping sessions
- 17/5/19 - **Heathcoat Primary** (Pond dip/Mini-beast Hunt) 55 Yr 4 children
- 20/5/19 - **Blundell's Primary** (Tree Walk from TRB to Basin & Pond dip) - 25 Yr 3 children
- 22/5/19 - **Kingswood Nursery**, Uffculme - Pond dipping & Mini-beast Hunt - 10 Pre-school children
- 13/6/19 - **Burlescombe Primary** (Pond dipping at their school & Mini-beast Hunt & Tree Walk along towpath) - The whole school - 58 children
- 20/6/19 – **1st Tiverton Cubs** - Pond dipping - 22 children
- 27/6/19 - **Webber's Primary** - Pond dipping (Pond dipping at their school & Mini-beast Hunt & Tree Walk along towpath) - The whole school - 83 children
- 8/7/19 **Kentisbeare Primary** (Pond dip/Mini-beast Hunt) 20 Pre-school children
- 17/7/19 **Castle Primary** (Pond dip/Mini-beast Hunt) 34 Reception/Yr 1 children
- 21/9/19 – **1st Tiverton Rainbows** - Pond dipping - ? children

32. Canal Ranger Service Events

- 20/3/19 - Walk and Talk - Sampford Peverell - 35 people
- 10/5/19 - Bat Walk - 14 people
- 24/7/19 - Walk and Talk - Swans Neck - 33 people
- 14/8/19 - Wild Wednesday - Pond dipping - 23 children
- 21/8/19 - Wild Wednesday - Pirates - 34 children

- 28/8/19 - Wild Wednesday - Butterflies & Fairies - 22 children
- 17/9/19 - Bat Walk - 12 people

33. Other organisations' events hosted at the Canal

- 12/5/19 – Spirit of the Sixties motorcycle rally
- 13/7/19 – Sampford Peverell Society – 1st World War 'Peace day' commemoration sports event.
- 14/7/19 – 26th Clic Sargent Grand Western Canal Walk and Run
- 20/7/19 – Learn to Fish South West – Have a go fishing day

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORKS

Management projects

- Complete update of management plan
- Green Flag Award application
- Aqueduct relining
- Badger relocation and embankment repairs
- Ash dieback felling (felling licences, towpath closures & diversions)
- Visitor Guide update, printing and distribution
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures
- Pond and grassland restoration work at Ebear Pond
- Ongoing Canal Basin signage improvements
- Potential new interpretation panels (subject to funding)
- Potential underwater film for visitor centre touchscreen (subject to funding)
- Exploring potential for Canal Basin public toilet refurbishment (subject to funding)

Practical projects

- All usual tree and hedge management work
- Ongoing sign / panel post replacement work
- Hedge-planting at points along the canal
- Ongoing daltalok bank repairs
- Landing stage extension in Sampford Peverell
- Habitat creation / restoration works at Ebear Pond
- Concreting towpath under bridges with persistent puddle problems
- Annual bank and hedge trimming works
- Resurfacing towpath between the Canal Basin and Tidcombe Bridge (subject to funding)