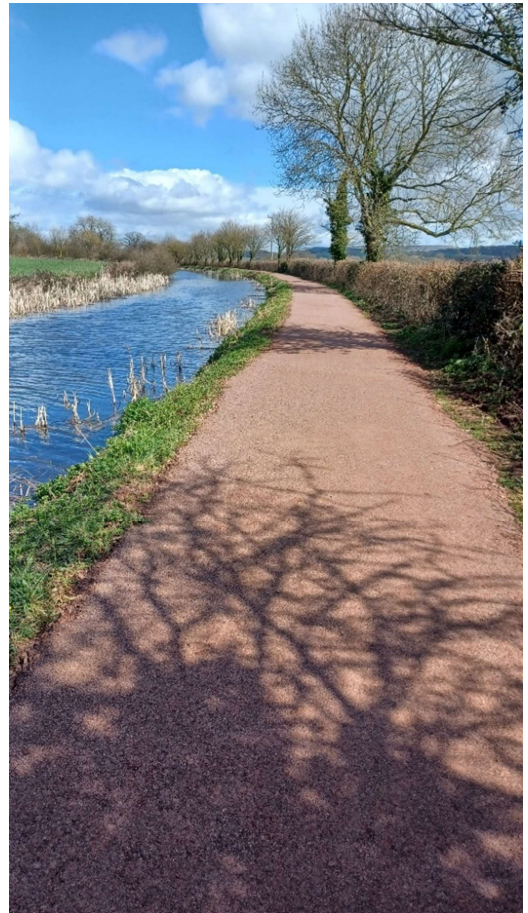


Progress Report (March 2023 to September 2023 inclusive)

1. Towpath Resurfacing

A 900m long stretch of the towpath between Battens Bridge and Chains Road in Sampford Peverell has been resurfaced. In response to a few issues with resurfacing work undertaken last year (when the limestone scalping mix didn't bind very well in places, leaving loose stones on the surface), the contractor mixed in extra stone dust which led to a very smooth and well compacted finish.

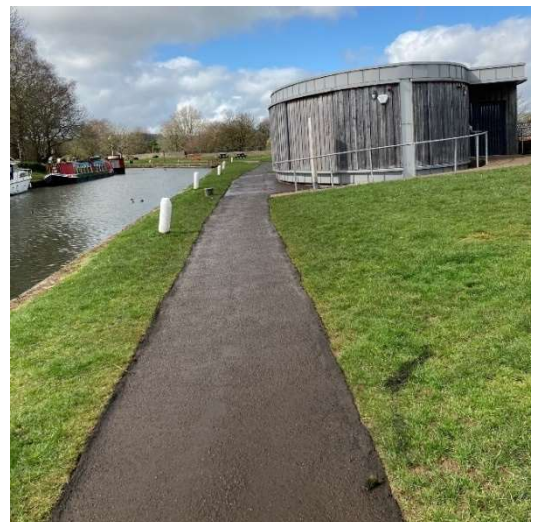
Feedback from towpath users and local residents has generally been very good. Some cyclists have reported that the surface is undulating, but the Canal Manger has cycled the section and found that the slight undulations only seem to become apparent at higher speeds and so are not deemed to be a significant cause for concern.



2. Slurry-sealing of Canal Basin paths

In mid-March the tarmacked paths in the Canal Basin were slurry-sealed by specialist contractors. Slurry-sealing is a relatively low-cost method of maintaining tarmacked paths and is often used on pavements.

The paths here were last slurry sealed in 2010, but that layer was being worn away quite significantly in some areas and so needed to be redone. A liquid coating that includes bitumen and grit is spread on the paths and this dries hard and should preserve the surface for many years to come.



3. Vandalism in Canal Basin toilets

During the spring, there were a series of vandalism attacks in the Canal Basin public toilets. A sink and a hand drier were broken off the walls, and tiles in one of the Ladies cubicles and under the sinks in the Gents were broken off the walls. Doors and doorframes have also been badly damaged.



Repairs were carried out, costing close to £1000. This followed vandalism of toilets, the bin outside the toilets and to the equipment in the nearby Play Park last year.

In order to deter further vandalism in these areas, CCTV cameras have been fitted on the outside of the public toilet block in July and signage has been updated to inform of the presence of CCTV cameras. No vandalism has taken place since then. The purchase and installation of the CCTV equipment was generously funded by the Friends of the Grand Western Canal.

4. New dipping pond

Having completed much of the excavation of a new pond in the garden of the Ranger's Office during a Volunteer Day in March, another Volunteer Day was held at the start of May to finish off profiling the pond, add a marshy overflow area at the back of the pond, and then install the liners.

The bed of the pond has since been lined with some gravel; and it's been filled with water and had some rocks, logs, plants and pond mud added from



another pond in the garden added to kick start its colonisation by wildlife. Damselflies have already been seen ovipositing (laying eggs).

The pond has been left to establish through the year and hopefully next year the Canal Rangers can begin using it for pond-dipping activities during school visits and public events.



5. Flooding at Lowdells

Intense downpours on the 9th May led to flooding at several locations around the county. One such downpour was centred on the Holcombe Rogus area, with roads being submerged throughout the village. Nearby at Lowdells, a stream which runs beside the canal ran at levels not witnessed before and inundated a culvert which carries the flow some 130m to the highway. Properties at either end of the culvert (which is owned by DCC as part of the Canal holding) were flooded and a resident at one of the properties was assisted to leave by the Fire and Rescue Service. The image below shows flooding on the road and water blasting out of the culvert outlet.



There was considerable concern about the condition of the culvert, as a large quantity of debris had been washed out onto the road and some of it was clearly masonry from the culvert structure. After the initial clear up of the road was completed, a remote CCTV survey was undertaken and ascertained the culvert was still safe enough to conduct an in-person inspection. An enclosed access team conducted a visual inspection of the culvert. They reported that whilst there has been some scouring of the floor of the culvert, the walls and roof are still in good condition and have not been undermined.

Following a period of design work, health and safety assessment and contract arrangement, repair work started in August. At the time of writing, repairs to the 8m deep shaft that leads into the culvert have been completed, and work on the culvert itself has commenced. In order to safely access the shaft, a complex scaffolding system has been installed with a winch and tripod fitted to take in and bring out materials.



Investigations have revealed that within the culvert some sections are scoured (with holes washed out in the bed of the culvert floor), whilst in other areas there is an accretion of stones and silt which has built up over decades, possibly centuries.



The annotated photo shows one such section where there has been an accretion of material against the walls. The red line shows the original profile, which will be reinstated. The photo was taken close to the base of the shaft looking towards a 90 degree turn in the culvert. This sharp bend will have slowed down the flow of water and led to the depositing and blocking of material over time. Work is being funded via the highways capital programme and is being supervised by DCC's Engineering Design Group and set to continue for several months.

6. Badger Fencing

In 2022, a badger sett in an embankment near Battens Bridge was demolished under licence from Natural England (as reported in the October Progress Report). In March, the Canal Manager and an ecologist spent a day covering the embankment in that area with badger-proof fencing in order to prevent any potential re-excavation of the sett tunnels by badgers.

7. New Ranger Service vehicle

Two years ago the Canal Ranger Service's Ford Ranger suffered a gearbox problem that meant the vehicle was beyond economic repair and needed to be replaced.

A new Toyota Hilux was ordered, and a temporary replacement Ford Ranger was found in the meantime, but due to backlogs in car deliveries to the UK, the Hilux only arrived in April. The Canal Rangers are pleased with the new vehicle and it should be a real workhorse for them over the next decade.



8. Community Safety Accreditation / Accredited Police Volunteers

The Canal Ranger team and members of the Community Patrol Boat crew are being accredited by Devon and Cornwall Police and have received limited police powers to deal with anti-social behaviour in the Country Park and offences against the Canal Byelaws.

In April they attended two training days. The first was at the Canal during which 'actors' challenged them with a range of difficult scenarios and behaviours to deal with. This was rather daunting but excellent practice as it mirrored the realistic scenario of entering a situation without knowing how people will react to a request for them to cease whatever anti-social behaviour it is they are undertaking. They practiced non-confrontational but assertive approaches, and how to use their police powers as a last resort if the antisocial behaviour persisted.

The second training day was a get together of over 100 Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) accredited employees across Devon and Cornwall, held at Saltash. There are three main types of occupations that have engaged with CSAS – countryside and urban greenspace rangers (there was a large contingent of Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Rangers in attendance); District Council enforcement /community welfare officers; and civil parking and traffic management officers / companies. As well as



updates on CSAS, there were a series of presentations on topics including mental health first aid, cyber-crime, traffic crime reduction, and counter-terrorism initiatives.

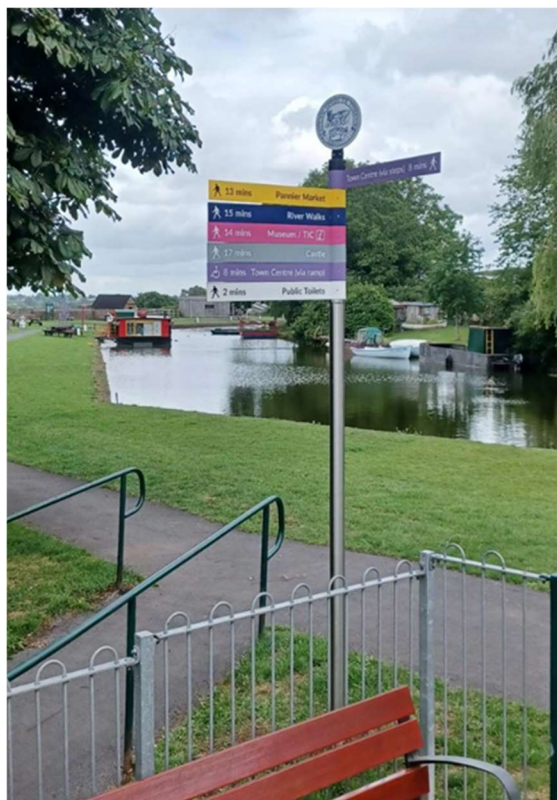
In June there was an official public launch of the two schemes at the Canal, as shown on the photo above. Since then, the Canal Rangers have had no need to use their police powers. The skipper of the Community Patrol Boat will provide an update on their activities with a verbal report at the JAC meeting.

9. Tourism promotion

The Canal Visitor Guide was updated and reprinted ahead of the Easter holidays. During the summer the Canal Manager had meetings with members of the MDDC Economic Development Team to discuss potential tourism promotions involving the Country Park. As a result the Canal Manager has submitted an expression of interest and is intending to submit an application for funding for new displays within the Canal Visitor Centre. Several other potential projects, including refurbishment of the Public Toilets, were determined to be outside the scope of the funding scheme.

The Country Park has been included within the colourful array of new directional fingerposts that MDDC have installed around Tiverton, strengthening the link between the Canal and the town centre.

There are also plans for a walking festival in Autumn 2024 which will incorporate the Canal, and potentially other initiatives to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the horse-drawn barge *Tivertonian* operating on the Canal.



10. Wheeled digger jobs

The Canal Manager spent a day in July and a day in September working with a JCB contractor, undertaking a series of tasks in the along the Canal.

These included:

- Clearing a landslip in the cutting beside Waytown Tunnel



- Rebuilding an eroded section of bank beside Waytown Limekilns



- Sealing a leak beside Westcott Bridge using puddling clay



- Rebuilding an eroded section of bank beside Manley Bridge.



11. Investigating other 'leaks'

The Canal Manager has spent a considerable amount of time this summer investigating two potential leaks from the canal where water is causing concern for adjacent residents.

The first related to water seeping out onto and under the road near Ayshford Bridge. This water was permeating into an adjacent properties drainage system preventing repairs to a water treatment unit. The usual divining survey carried out by the Canal Manager indicated the source was natural spring water flowing under the Canal, rather than a leak from the canal. This was backed up by water sample analysis undertaken by a water testing laboratory.

The second related to water seeping through the wall of a property located below and close to the canal in Sampford Peverell. Once again divining indicated no leakage from the canal and this was backed up by analysis of water samples. Again it is believed that ground water is the source. It is possible that some excavation of the towpath may be required in order to enable the homeowners to seal their property against the penetration of this water, in which case we will arrange for the required towpath closure / temporary diversion.

12. JAC summer site visit

The JAC summer site visit took place on 29th June. Attendees met in the Canal Basin and introductions were made as there were several new JAC members present following the recent district council elections.

After discussing some recent works and issues in the Canal Basin including the slurry sealing of the paths and the vandalism in the public toilets, the group headed out to Lowdells. Here they viewed the culvert inlet shaft in the garden of one of the properties that had been flooded in May, and the outlet at the road beside the other property that had been flooded.

The group then headed to the nearby quarry which houses a police live-firing range and which is subject of a planning application. The group did not enter the quarry but were able to get a sense of the proximity of the Canal. The meeting ended there.

13. Green Flag Award

The Country Park has achieved the Green Flag Award for 2023/24, this being the fifteenth consecutive year it has held the award.

The Green Flag is only presented to parks and greenspaces that meet a high standard of management and maintenance, based on judging and mystery shops undertaken by independent judges who work in the sector and have undergone training by the Award's organisers Keep Britain Tidy.

Because the Country Park has achieved consistently high scores over a number of years, it is only fully judged every other year and is subject to a mystery shop by a judge in alternate years. This year the Country Park was mystery shopped and, in all categories assessed, received a green grading, meaning it met the standards with no concerns raised. JAC members on the summer site visit helped to celebrate the achievement by being photographed with this year's flag:



14. Vegetation maintenance

Canal Rangers and Volunteers have undertaken all of the usual mowing, strimming and weedcutting through the spring and summer. The bankside vegetation from the Canal Basin to East Manley Bridge was flailed by a contractor in mid June to enable the horsedrawn barge to continue operating and the Canal Manager used the Kubota tractor to side up the vegetaion overhanging the towpath over eight days in early July.

Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts has spent the majority of her time working with volunteers strimming picnic sites and bridge abutments and around benches, gates and other structures. She has also mowed the sides of the towpath throughout its length on several occasions, with one more cut planned in late September.

Canal Ranger, Craig Saunderson has been operating the weedboat for 4 days per week for almost all of the period from April to September and will continue with occasional days on the boat until mid-October. He has generally spent his fifth day of the week mowing the Canal Basin and Sampford Peverell picnic sites.



15. Invasive plant species

Following the discovery (and subsequent removal) of the invasive alien species Water Primrose in a couple of small patches near Tidcombe Bridge last summer, the Canal Manager has discovered and removed several more small patches in the same area this summer. In open conditions, the plant forms distinctive trails that drift out across the channel in a few lines (as opposed to the clump forming nature of most other floating plants on the canal).



However, on the other side of Tidcombe Bridge near Milestone 1, the plant was found growing amongst a large patch of the native Bogbean, where it was difficult to spot and extract. These areas will be closely checked each year for any further Water Primrose growth.

Several new patches of Fringed lily have appeared at points between Boehill Bridge and the Canal Basin. A licence application to the EA for ongoing herbicide control of this invasive plant was submitted several months ago, but due to backlogs the EA has in processing applications, the application has still not been determined. The window for effective herbicide control of this plant closes in the autumn as the leaves die back and so the intention will be to resubmit the application early in the new year to enable the treatment to proceed next summer.

16. Wildlife monitoring

The British Trust for Ornithology's Wetland Bird Survey continues to be undertaken along the canal with the Canal Manager and some volunteers undertaking a count of wetland birds on a roughly monthly basis (based on dates set by the BTO). One volunteer has had to step back from being involved and so there is currently a vacancy for a counter in the Burlescombe to Lowdwells section. Given the relatively small range of wetland birds encountered on the canal, counter's ID skills don't have to be extensive and anyone interested can contact the Canal Manager for more information.

During the spring and summer, a volunteer has continued the reptile and amphibian monitoring programme that he started last year. This has been focussed on areas of the Country Park which are not publicly accessible and include offside ponds and the south-facing side of Swing Embankment.

17. Memorial seats

New memorial seats have been installed in the following sections of towpath:

- Greenway Bridge to Sellake Bridge:
The seat is in memory of a couple who used to live at Halberton Court Farm (located in front of the church, behind the bench in the photo). It has been positioned so that as the Cherry tree behind it grows, it will offer shade to those sitting below.
- Buckland Bridge to Boehill Bridge x 2
- Crownhill Bridge to the Aqueduct



18. Garden and Gateway Agreements

Throughout most of the Canal holding, Devon County Council owns several metres of the offside bank and also the land on which the hedge beside the towpath grows. Adjacent residents are able to rent the offside land between their garden and the Canal through Garden Agreements; or enter a Gateway Agreement with DCC to have and use a gateway

through the hedge to access the towpath. The current rental fees at £50 and £25 respectively.

The Canal Manager has spent several days through the summer knocking on doors and liaising with the DCC revenue and legal services teams, to ensure that the agreements and rental payments are up to date. In several cases, elderly residents had died or moved into retirement homes without DCC being informed. As a result several obsolete agreements have been terminated and several agreements with new residents have been commenced.

19. Temporary Ranger

The Canal Ranger Service has benefitted from some extra help this summer, in the form of a temporary member of staff, Will, who has spent three months splitting his time between the Canal Ranger Service and the Public Rights of Way team. For three years Will had previously undertaken one day's work experience per week with the Canal Rangers as part of his courses at Bicton College, and so he knew the work and fitted in seamlessly. The extra help was really welcome as one of the Country Park's long-term volunteers has been unavailable for much of the year due to health issues. Will's contract ends in early October and the team wish him well in his future endeavours.

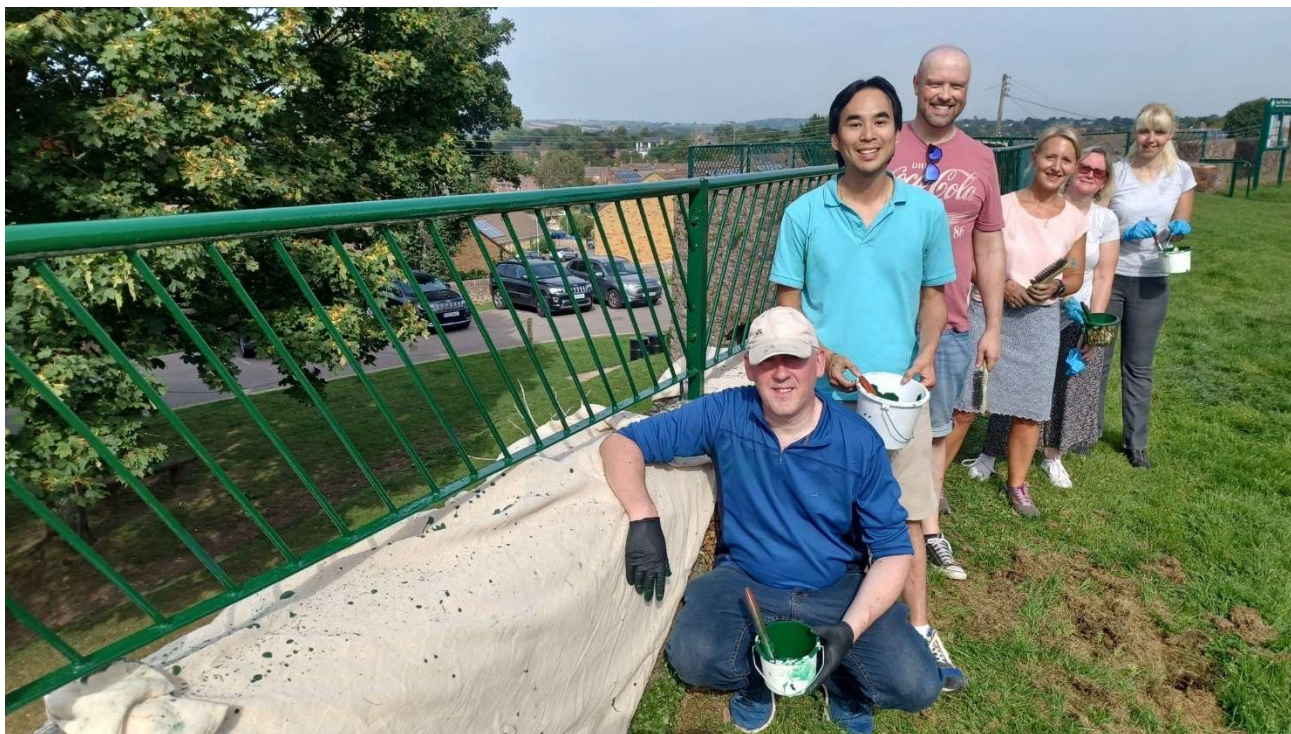
20. Volunteers

Despite the absence of one of our key volunteers due to health issues for much of this year, we have continued to benefit from the contribution provided by various volunteers and work experience students. The totals for March to September inclusive are as follows:

- Weekday volunteering = 39 days
- Work Experience students from colleges and schools = 30 days
- Volunteer Days = 41 days
 - 6 March - Blundells School Community Partnership Field Day, planting a new hedge near Burlescombe and building bird and bat boxes - 21 students



- 12 March - Volunteer Day - Digging new pond in garden - 8 volunteers
- 4 May - Volunteer Day - Finishing pond and thank you BBQ - 6 volunteers
- 11 Sept - Volunteer Day - 6 volunteers from Barratt David Wilson Trading Ltd, Exeter painted railings in the Canal Basin (photo below)



21. Walk and Talks

As part of the Tiverton Walk and Talk programme, Canal Ranger Joanne Roberts has led walks starting at the following locations, incorporating the towpath and local footpaths:

- 22 March - Swans Neck - 35 walkers
- 19 April - Holcombe Rogus – 22 walkers
- 28 June - Canal Basin - 20 walkers
- 13 September – Sampford Peverell - 20 walkers

22. Events

During the Summer holidays Joanne Roberts organised and ran a very successful series of 'Wild Wednesday' events. Each day comprised separate morning and afternoon sessions lasting two hours.

- 9 August - Pond Dipping - 30 children
- 16 August - Tremendous Trees - 9 children
- 23 August - Marvellous Minibeasts - 21 children
- 30 August - Nature Crafts - 15 children

The Canal Manager is due to lead a Bat Walk on the evening of 22 September, with all 35 spaces booked.



23. Ranger-led school and youth / community group visits

- 10 May - Castle Primary - pond dipping - 45 children
- 16 May - St Andrews Primary, Cullompton - pond dipping - 54 children
- 18 May - Home Educators - pond dipping - 12 children
- 22 May - Blundells Prep - pond dipping - 36 children



- 7 June - Castle Primary - pond dipping - 41 children
- 14 June - Tiverton ACE pond dipping - 19 children
- 19 June - Trefoil group - pond dipping - 10 ladies
- 29 June - Beavers - pond dipping - 12 children
- 25 Sept - Brownies - pond dipping - ? children

Future programme of works

Practical works

- All usual trimming back of overhanging branches and crown-lifting of low branches
- Tree safety works as specified following tree safety inspection (being carried out by arboriculture consultant in autumn 2023)
- Various hedge laying / planting, coppicing and tree planting works
- Ongoing small-scale bank erosion repairs

- Annual strimming of bridge abutments and trimming of the banks and hedges which the flailing contractor cannot access
- Mowing Swing and Sellake embankments
- Reed clearance (on towpath side by excavator) between Manley Bridge and East Manley Bridge
- Installing three new noticeboards (recently delivered) and relocating two of the old ones to two new locations (opposite Ebear layby near dragonfly panel and below Beech car park on ramp to towpath)
- Installing new nameplate on Buckland Bridge
- Repairs to Holbrook landing stage
- Repairs to Canal Basin landing stage
- Ongoing painting of Canal Basin railings and handrails
- Cutting and raking of wildflower meadows
- Re-staining benches
- Building and installing new memorial benches as and when ordered
- Severing and removing worst of ivy growth on bridges
- Raising towpath level above large roots near Waytown Tunnel (Lowdwells side) and filling in gullies to remove trip hazards

Management tasks

- Organisation of all works listed above
- Ongoing work with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan (delayed due to lack of capacity amongst DCC engineers)
- Scenario-based test of Emergency Plan
- Fenacre water transfer system
- Apply for Countryside Stewardship capital grants funding
- Apply for MDDC Prosperity Programme funding for new Visitor Centre displays
- Organise an update and reprint of the Canal Visitor Guide
- Finalise production and installation of 11 A2 information panels to go in noticeboards,
- Complete update of boating regulations and procedures and design/printing of new permits book (stocks of old permit books now almost used up)
- Organise update and replacement of the Ebear dragonfly panel
- Organise ongoing Ash Dieback felling works and a range of tree management works
- Organise annual cutting of hedges and banks
- Green Flag award application
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines