

STOKE BRUERNE CANAL PARTNERSHIP: report to Annual Parish Assembly 2025.

Although it had various antecedents, Stoke Bruerne Canal Partnership came into being in its present form in 2007. It is a slightly strange animal, being made up of representatives of a variety of organisations who have the common aim of a desire to enhance the Canal Corridor at Stoke Bruerne. These organisations include:

1. Canal and River Trust
2. Stoke Bruerne residents
3. Stoke Bruerne Parish Council
4. Canal Museum Management
5. West Northants Council
6. Inland Waterways Association
8. Stoke Bruerne business community
9. BCN Wildlife Trust
10. Friends of Canal Museum

The Partnership has for many years met once a month and concerned itself with a variety of matters. However, during the past year meetings have become more infrequent and representation and involvement of some of the member organisations has been missing. Consequently, the Partnership agreed to give itself a sabbatical 6 months until September 2025. During this time the local elections will take place and new members of West Northants Council will have the time to settle in. Also, the Chief Executive of the Canal River Trust, Richard Parry, is retiring after 13 years in the post and the appointment of his successor could have repercussions all down the line as to CRT's policies and priorities. In the autumn, therefore, the Partnership will reconvene and decide if it has a future at all and if so, what that might look like. There may well be fewer meetings on specific topics and less involvement in the every day running of the canal and its businesses in our area.

Having said that, all is not entirely mothballed on my desk! There are ongoing projects which require the Partnership's input. Probably chief amongst these is the Grand Union Canal Water Transfer project which is a joint effort on the part of CRT and Affinity Water, the water company which serves the Luton / Beds / Herts area. Very simply, this area is very short of water and the idea is to move surplus water from further north in the Birmingham area via the Grand Union Canal to a pumping station in the Dunstable area. The project is very much in its exploratory fact-finding stages. Because of its size, the scheme will eventually be determined by the Planning Inspectorate, not the local planning authority. An

Environmental Scoping Report has now been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, detailing the areas to be investigated and the methodology for doing so. There are various updates being issued but so far, no real details have been released. The impact for Stoke Bruerne, if this goes ahead, is likely to be very significant because water levels will rise by several inches and a method of moving the water down the lock flight will have to be introduced. The Partnership has registered itself as a consultee and is keeping abreast of and feeding into discussions whenever possible.

Another project which is likely to commence this summer involves a quantity of iron rails which originate from various mining quarries in the Blisworth area when stone and iron ore were brought down to the canal for transshipment. We would like to display the rails, perhaps with an original waggon, and interpret this part of our area's history properly, using modern techniques as well as traditional displays.

Although the Partnership is somewhat in limbo, its offshoot, the Stoke Bruerne Adoption Group, continues to meet monthly to carry out practical projects to improve the environment in the Canal Corridor, supporting CRT in their work where appropriate and carrying out additional tasks which would not otherwise happen. I hope you will agree that the Woodland Walk has been kept in excellent order, for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. The group has responded a number of times to issues arising as the result of extreme weather conditions. We have a new shed at the back of the museum which helps enormously with storing equipment at the point of need. There is always something to be done and more volunteers would be very warmly welcomed! I should like to make particular mention of one local volunteer, Roger Cooper, who every week empties all the dog bins along the canal side from the tunnel down to the bottom of the lock flight. I hope you will agree that this is volunteering beyond the call of duty and is very much appreciated by the significant number of regular dog walkers in our area, which include many villagers as well as visitors and boaters. Without this, the bins would have been removed by CRT as they have done elsewhere. Finally, in addition to our monthly task days, a few volunteers have been helping CRT staff restore the small allotment site down by Lock 20, where a polytunnel, raising planting beds and a composting loo are all planned. The idea is to create a plant and tree nursery, providing plants with which to backfill towpath hedgerows after hedge laying.