

Briefing note on new Trust Strategy and Vision

In the light of the impact of Covid on the Trust's finances, and to provide a clear basis for attracting new memberships and funding, Trust Council agreed at its meeting in July to set up a strategy review group. This comprised David Line, Chris Sims, David Copley and Chris Bolt. Input to the review was sought from all branches.

The main focus of the Group's discussions were:

- developing a new Vision and Strategy for the Trust, which augments the Trust's stated mission statement ('Protect, Enhance and Promote the Kennet and Avon Canal');
- reviewing the membership structure, and looking at new membership systems to simplify membership management; and
- identifying options for reducing the Trust's administrative costs.

The results of the review were considered at the Trust Council meeting on 7 November.

A new high level vision for the Trust was agreed, which was "To promote the Kennet and Avon Canal to the benefit of all its users, the communities through which it passes, and its heritage".

This vision recognises that, although the Trust was instrumental in securing the restoration of the canal, day to day operation and maintenance is now for the Canal and River Trust. So our distinctive contribution should be in promoting initiatives which benefit users, particularly where these help to link the canal to the community through which it passes, and also in championing schemes which protect the canal heritage. We can do this not only at sites owned by the Trust such as Crofton Beam Engines, but also at other locations where the Trust leases historic buildings now used as cafés, at Bradford on Avon, Devizes, Newbury and Aldermaston.

This vision is therefore supplemented by more specific strategic aims in respect of representation of canal users - whether on the towpath or on the water, preserving the canal's heritage, improving access, and developing new ways of enabling the public to experience the canal and its history.

We will deliver these aims through the current branch structure, but recognise that we need to improve communication between Trust Council and branches, and with volunteers and members, and also encourage more collaboration between branches and sharing of experience. Sharing the lessons learned from the major Lottery-funded project at Crofton is one example of this, for example in the use of interpretation panels and developing a learning programme with schools and colleges.

We recognise that the operation of our boat fleet has a key role to play in enabling members of the public to enjoy the canal, and that there are opportunities to develop our network of café sites to promote the canal and explain its history. We will of course continue to work constructively with the Canal and River Trust and other stakeholders.

Our priorities then flow from the new strategic aims and method of working. This is all set out in the attached statement of Vision and Strategy. This will be launched more formally, including updating the Trust website and explaining the new approach to members, around Easter when the Spring edition of The Butty is published.

At its November meeting, Trust Council also agreed a more detailed set of priorities for 2021, which is also attached. This is an ambitious programme, and can only be delivered with the commitment and support of all our volunteers and Branch Committees.

We welcome feedback.

Chris Sims

Chairman, The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust

Kennet and Avon Canal Trust

Vision and Strategy

What are we here to do?

- To promote the Kennet and Avon Canal to the benefit of all its users, the communities through which it passes, and its heritage
- To be a voice for users of the Kennet and Avon Canal - whether on the water or on the towpath
- To preserve the heritage of the canal, by promoting protection and restoration of historic features and making them accessible to visitors, canal users and local communities
- To provide opportunities for all members of the public, and in particular community groups and those who are disadvantaged or disabled, to access the canal whether on boats or along the towpath
- To develop new ways of enabling the public to experience the canal and its history, and widen the range of people who can engage with it

How will we do it?

- Through our Branch structure, we will ensure that the whole length of the canal has a local champion, working to improve the canal and towpath both directly and through lobbying
- We will develop facilities for learning and community engagement along the canal
- We will identify and promote projects to protect the canal's heritage
- We will encourage our trading subsidiary to continue to provide boat and other recreational facilities, supporting these with grants where they are not commercially viable but bring public benefit
- We will engage constructively with the Canal and River Trust as the canal's owner and operator, and with other heritage and community bodies, and participate in events promoting the canal
- We will report regularly on our activities to members, volunteers, funders and other stakeholders

What does this mean for our priorities?

- We will prepare and publish an annual plan, which will set clear objectives for our work, and in particular identify projects which, with external funding support, we will champion
- We will identify our key stakeholders, including in particular CRT, and engage constructively with them to protect, enhance and promote the canal and towpath
- In collaboration with our partners, including café licensees, we will develop our visitor facilities along the canal
- We will refresh our membership offer, and seek to increase the number of members
- We will maintain and develop links with potential funders
- We will improve our communications with members, with Branches and volunteers, and with the public, using a range of channels

Kennet and Avon Canal Trust: 2021 Priorities

1. Vision and Strategy

- Once agreed, communicate within Trust and to canal and towpath users, our partners and local communities

2. Trust Council and Governance

- Establish structure of 'portfolios' for each member of Trust Council, with each Trustee having a (written) role description
- Refresh membership on the basis of open advertising
- Ensure effective induction for all new Trustees, and provide refresher training for all Trustees
- Agree structure and remit of standing sub-committees
- Formalise procedures for establishing Branch constitutions and committee membership
- Develop Trustee and Director Manual; update Staff Handbook; review all Trust policies, and fill any gaps

3. Branches

- Redefine role of Branches in line with agreed vision and strategy
- Hold meetings of all Branch Chairs at least twice a year
- Obtain regular updates from Branches before each Council meeting, with feedback following meeting

4. Members

- Launch new membership scheme, with a target number of new members
- Agree and implement plan for printed and electronic editions of the Butty

5. Marketing and communications

- Establish a joint Trust/Enterprise marketing sub-committee
- Develop a marketing plan for all Trust and Enterprise activities
- Replace Trust web site
- Following this, renew Branch websites
- Develop coordinated plan for use of social media across the Trust

6. Partners

- Identify list of key stakeholders, and agree a 'relationship owner' for each
- Develop working relationships with key stakeholders

7. Finance

- Update Trust and Enterprise 5 year plans alongside budget approvals
- Require each Branch to develop a 3 year plan (5 years for Crofton), updated annually to support budget bids

8. Key Projects for 2021

- Crofton: implement Learning and Community Engagement plan; progress on accreditation; boiler re-riveting; development of Smithy and Crew Room Extension projects; identify lessons from Learning and Community Engagement programme for roll-out in other Branches
- Bruce Branch: introduction of new Discovery Trips to Crofton
- Newbury: improve the environment of Newbury Wharf in collaboration with West Berkshire Council
- Aldermaston: aim to start work on Wash House restoration in 2021
- Devizes Wharf: develop outline plan for possible future use as a visitor centre (office, café, museum, archive etc)