



# Bradley Canal Restoration Society

## Annual Trustees Report 2024-25

### General Update

We continue to make progress with our plans for restoration, which now includes a regular dialogue with the Leader of Wolverhampton City Council, Cllr. Stephen Simkins and colleagues from the regeneration and transport teams. Prior to the West Midland Combined Authority Mayoral elections, we also benefited from the support of Andy Street. However, since the change of Mayor, it has proved difficult to re-engage with the Combined Authority, but the association will continue to strive to meet with colleagues at the Combined Authority to share our plans. Both organisations are critical to our plans as we move forward and we are committed to pursuing similar relationships with both Sandwell and Walsall, as the scheme is located within area adjacent to both regions.

Commissioning a detailed and fully costed Feasibility Study is a vital next step in the long-term restoration of the Bradley Canal. The study will provide a robust evidence base to assess technical viability, environmental and heritage considerations, delivery options, and realistic costings and timescales. Over the past year, the Society has undertaken fundraising activities, and received donations from members and supporters, to fund this work and is now seeking additional grant funding to enable the Feasibility Study to be commissioned. Securing this investment will allow the Society to progress with confidence, strengthen future funding applications, and move from aspiration towards a deliverable restoration project.

Our relationship with the Canal & River Trust continues to be central to both our current activity and our long-term sustainability. Colleagues from the CRT Bradley Workshop and the West Midlands area office have provided significant support throughout the year, contributing to the planning and delivery of the Bradley Canal Festival, supporting volunteer work parties through training and guidance, and helping to raise community awareness via regular health walks delivered in partnership with Bilston Urban Village Medical Centre.

In last year's report we explained how a relationship has been developed with Kennedys Law to support the update and further development of our policies and procedures, on a pro-bono basis and how they could support our future work through their corporate social responsibility activities. This has resulted in the production of essential statutory policies and guidance, and we look forward to continuing to benefit from Kennedys Law in the future.

During the year we have had the opportunity to present to other local organisations and canal societies. As part of our partnership with the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society, we organised a series of guided walks to complement their Explorer Cruises. These walks provided participants with the opportunity to explore the canal's history, heritage, and

natural environment in greater depth. The walks, alongside guided tours of the Bradley Workshop helped to engage a wider audience, promote local heritage, and foster a deeper appreciation of the canal restoration scheme and its surroundings. Further such walks and presentations are planned for the new year and are an excellent opportunity to share our plans with the wider community and generate interest in the restoration and hopefully add capacity to the Society.

## **Work Parties**

With regular monthly gatherings and a consistent group of attendees, we continue to see considerable advances in clearing and maintaining the stretch of canal from Moorcroft Junction to the bottom lock and the area above, up to Bilston Road bridge.

Significant work has been undertaken to expose the pounds in the vicinity of locks eight and nine, which has allowed for a greater flow of water through the culverted locks. We are now in discussions with CRT regarding the use of machinery to excavate the full extent of the pounds.

Ongoing management of the canal environment, including the regular removal of overhanging branches and the clearing of Himalayan Balsam and other low-level vegetation, has greatly enhanced the appearance and accessibility of the area. These efforts by our dedicated work parties have not gone unnoticed, with frequent positive feedback from local residents and visitors highlighting the tangible benefits of our work.

In addition to general maintenance, the careful placement of logs and natural materials has been used to create microhabitats, supporting insect populations and contributing to local biodiversity.

Litter picking remains an important part of our work, as littering continues to be a challenge. Our consistent efforts have fostered strong community engagement, with local residents and walkers regularly expressing appreciation for the improvements to the canal environment. These activities not only maintain the area's beauty but also encourage community stewardship and a sense of shared ownership of this important local green space.

As always, we take this opportunity to record our thanks to both the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and Canal & River Trust for their support and of course to all the volunteers who, through their efforts, have made such good progress.

## **The Black Country Canals Strategy 2024-2029**

The Society was pleased to attend the launch of the Black Country Canals Strategy 2024-29, on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024, at the Black Country Living Museum. This is an important step in shaping the future direction of the area's waterways. The Strategy includes references to the restoration of the Bradley Canal, recognising its heritage significance, environmental value, potential contribution to regeneration and community wellbeing and a local authority aim and an active project:

*"Restoration of the Bradley Arm Canal in Bilston to reconnect the Birmingham Main Line and Walsall Canal Line, whilst creating the existing active travel route along the corridor and ensuring that restoration does not sever existing connectivity between communities on either side of it. This will create a significant urban ecological corridor restoration project, linking with Moorcroft Wood Local Nature Reserve, which is a geosite in the Black Country Global Geopark"*

This formal recognition within a strategic document strengthens the case for future investment and provides an important framework for partnership working with local authorities, funders, and delivery organisations. Attendance at the launch enabled the Society to raise the profile of the restoration project, engage with key stakeholders, and position the Bradley Canal as a credible and integral element of long-term regional planning. Further details and a copy of the strategy can be found here:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands/black-country-canals-strategy-2024-2029>

## **Bradley Canal Festival**

The Bradley Canal Festival continues to play a vital role in raising the profile of the restoration project and celebrating the canal's heritage within the local community. The event provides an important opportunity to engage residents, visitors, and partner organisations, helping to increase awareness of the Society's work and its long-term ambitions. The festival also generates valuable income through stalls, activities, and donations, while acting as a key route for recruiting new volunteers who often first encounter the Society through the event.

However, the scale and success of the festival also bring significant challenges. Planning, coordinating, and delivering the event requires a substantial commitment of time and effort from a small number of dedicated volunteers. Tasks include securing permissions, managing logistics, coordinating partners and stallholders, marketing the event, and ensuring health and safety compliance. While the Festival remains a highly valued and successful occasion, its organisation places increasing pressure on volunteer capacity. The Society therefore appeals for additional support from members, volunteers, and partners to help share the workload and ensure the festival remains sustainable in the future.

In light of these pressures, the Society is exploring the option of delivering the Bradley Canal Festival on a bi-annual basis. Moving to a two-year cycle would allow sufficient time for planning, fundraising, and volunteer recruitment, while reducing the risk of volunteer fatigue. A bi-annual approach would also create opportunities to develop a larger, higher-quality event, strengthen partnerships, and increase overall impact, while continuing to use smaller activities and engagement events in intervening years to maintain visibility and

community involvement. This approach would help ensure that the festival remains a positive, well-managed, and sustainable celebration of the Bradley Canal for years to come.

If you feel you can help, with the planning or on the actual day, please contact us on [info@bradleycanal.co.uk](mailto:info@bradleycanal.co.uk)

### **Priorities for 2025-26**

- Collaborate with Canal & River Trust engineers to explore clearing infill within the pounds at locks 8 and 9, improving navigation potential and enhancing the canal environment.
- Partner with local businesses to raise the profile of the restoration scheme, attract external support, and develop opportunities through corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- Identify and pursue grant funding opportunities to resource specific restoration and environmental improvement projects.
- Continue to work with City of Wolverhampton Council and other partners to secure grant assistance for the Canal Restoration feasibility study.
- Commission the Feasibility Study to provide a robust evidence base for future planning, informed decision-making, and strengthened funding applications.
- Undertake a LiDAR survey of the canal corridor to support the restoration programme and identify the most viable options for crossing Bradley Lane.
- Engage with the School of Built Environment at the University of Wolverhampton to explore opportunities for research collaboration, technical expertise and student involvement in the restoration project.
- Expand the skills, capacity and expertise of the Executive Committee through the recruitment of additional members, strengthening governance and long-term sustainability.
- Build and maintain strong, collaborative relationships with Sandwell and Walsall Councils to support effective communication and shared strategic objectives.
- Continue to deliver the annual Bradley Canal Festival, increasing attendance and deepening community engagement with the canal and its heritage.

The targets will be the focus for Executive Committee meetings during the year, and progress will be reported back at the Annual General Meeting.



# Bradley Canal Restoration Society

## Financial Report 2024-25

This report reflects the financial position of the association from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

Gift Aid continues to be reflected in the accounts, and we would encourage members, who are UK taxpayers, to indicate as such when they renew.

As explained last year, the change of date for membership renewals resulted in reduced membership income as members who paid during the year would have their date deferred to the new April 1<sup>st</sup> date. Following the new membership period we have seen membership income return to previous levels.

### Statement of Accounts: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

	2024-25	2023-24
<b>Income</b>		
Subscriptions	£ 1,482.00	£ 858.68
Donations	£ 3,860.00	£ 1,607.00
Gift Aid	£ 43.31	£ 33.17
Charitable Giving	£ 229.79	£ 54.69
Bradley Canal Festival	£ 1,212.72	£ 918.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 6,827.82</b>	<b>£ 3,472.04</b>
 <b>Expenditure</b>		
Equipment	£ 82.27	£ 314.82
Insurance	£ 562.24	£ 389.76
Administration	£ 1,352.07	£ 2,077.58
Subscriptions	£ 363.00	£ 285.40
Event Costs	£ 120.44	£ 134.75
Accountancy Fees	N/A	£ 400.00
Printing	£ 1,326.11	£ 427.76
Bradley Canal Festival	£ 678.47	£ 499.28
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 4,484.60</b>	<b>£ 4,529.35</b>
 <b>Balance</b>	<b><u>£ 2,343.22</u></b>	<b><u>£ -1,057.31</u></b>

G Hawkins (Hon. Treasurer) – 5<sup>th</sup> April 2025