



# SEDGWICK PARISH

## CANAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

### 1. Background and Context

Sedgwick is a small rural village just south of Kendal with a population of just under 500. The former Lancaster-Kendal Canal bisects the village and is a significant visual element and widely used amenity, and as such is a key aspect of village life. Since the 1960s, residents have been actively involved in canal matters and since April 1980, the Parish Council have owned the section of the canal located to the east of the Historic Aqueduct in the centre of the village. Their land includes a length of approximately 450m of the canal and comprises an area of 3.2 acres. The canal towpath is a Public Right of Way and is part of the Lancaster to Kendal Canal Footpath.

#### History

The Canal took 33 years to build and was completed in 1819, when it linked Kendal to Tewitfield, on the Lancaster-Preston Canal. It was originally intended for freight and soon became busy with barges taking timber and limestone from Kendal and bringing back cheap coal (which halved in price overnight) from West Houghton. There was a Coal Wharf in Sedgwick and gunpowder from the Basingyill and Sedgwick Gunpowder Mills was dispatched from the village. However, a passenger boat service was soon introduced to compete with the existing road based stage-coach service between Lancaster and Kendal. Journey times fell from 14 to 7 hours (8mph) as the “packet” boats took precedence over freight and changed horses every 4 miles. The Lancaster-Preston Railway opened in 1840 and ran alongside the packet boat service for a while, but by 1864, the Canal Company was dissolved and the canal, unable to compete and under the ownership of the railway fell into slow decline. Commercial traffic ceased in 1944 and following its demise and closure, it was de-watered in 1956. The British Waterways Board took ownership but, neglected, it fell into disrepair becoming a derelict and unsightly eyesore. The construction of the M6 in 1968 (and later the A591 Kendal Bypass in 1970), dissected the path of the former canal isolating stretches of canal bed.

#### Residents’ Involvement

In the 1960’s, an active group of village residents became interested in rescuing the canal for the benefit of the village. In 1968, they fought a council proposal to use the former canal bed as a refuse tip and then in 1974, campaigned to save the aqueduct from demolition by the new owners, South Westmorland RDC. The residents championed “the importance of the section of canal to the quality of the environment in the village” and the Parish Council finally bought the section on behalf of residents, for £120 in April 1980, so that they could safeguard its future as a village amenity. The village developed a clear vision for the area;

“to keep the area as natural as possible whilst protecting flora and wildlife”

“to protect it as a natural conservation area to be used as an amenity for residents and visitors”

“to maintain the area as a haven for wildlife and peaceful safe and quiet place to enjoy”

The village worked hard over the next 10 years to rescue, reclaim and restore the area. With the help of several environmental grants (Countryside Commission, Shell, SLDC) and practical support from local organisations (Schools, Guides, Scouts and Nature Groups) as well as individual donations, the canal bed was cleared of refuse and replanted with primroses, trees and shrubs. The towpath became a well-used and much appreciated village amenity.

## **Parish Council Management**

Since the mid -1990s, the majority of work to maintain the canal area has fallen to the Parish Council with their limited funds derived from the County Precept.

The first “Management Plan for Sedgwick Canal” was devised in 1994 and focussed on the management of the trees on the embankments. Despite an update in 1999 which identified the need to coppice the canal bed in addition to the embankments, from 2003 onwards, with resources scarce, the area became much more overgrown, especially with self-seeded ash and goat willow.

In 2015, the Parish Council embarked on a comprehensive review of their management of the canal in order to devise a new 10-year Canal Management Plan. It began by revisiting the original vision for the canal and evaluating how the canal was used and valued by residents. The original values of protecting the canal as a haven for wildlife and peaceful area for walking were unanimously reinforced by resident feedback;

- During previous consultation on proposals to reopen the canal, many residents expressed concern over possible disruption to the peaceful atmosphere along the canal and within the village. An influx of visitors, threat to wildlife, noise and loss of tranquillity were all cited in opposition.
- The Parish Plan questionnaire revealed strong approval for the canal area and its contribution to the quality of the environment with 72% of residents citing the quality of the environment as the most important factor in choosing to live in Sedgwick. Protection of wildlife habitats, canal maintenance and maintaining footpaths and trees were identified as the most important issues.

And so, with this clear mandate, the following principles were agreed as the basis of the new plan.

- The area contains a range of habitats that provide a significant corridor for nature
- The stretch of the canal is an important visual element in the village
- It is a well-used and popular amenity for walkers who value the tranquillity and peace
- It impacts on many residents living close to the boundary

The Council acknowledged the importance of retaining control over such an important visual, environmental and functional part of the village and renewed their commitment to safeguarding the future of the amenity. After taking initial advice from The Lancaster Canal Trust and SLDC, the council appointed an Arboricultural Consultant and commissioned a comprehensive Woodland Management Survey of the area. The report prioritised both short and long-term work required to restore and maintain the area to original vision. These projects were incorporated in the new Canal Management Plan 2015-2025. (see Part 2).

A successful application for a grant of £2,224 from SLDC’s Environmental Fund covered 50% of the costs of the immediate short-term work, which was completed in May 2017. The council set aside a further £5,000 to cover anticipated ongoing maintenance costs up to 2025, thereby safeguarding the conservation of the canal in the medium term.

See also Canal Management Plan Appendices

1. Record of Action
2. Woodland Management Report

Further information is held by Sedgwick Parish Council

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