

	Document Title	Restoration, Accessibility & Archives Policy		
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	Author	P Romanko	Authorised By	S Davies

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Restoration, Accessibility and Archives Policy

1. Policy Administration

The Society's policy:

- Is valid from the Issue Date until such time as an updated version is published.
- Will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required by changes to the Society's activities, to legislation or to best practice guidance.
- Note that the canal was initially known as the Sankey Brook Navigation and later as the Sankey (St Helens) Canal.

2. Restoration Policy Scope and Purpose

This policy explains Sankey Canal Restoration Society's (SCRS) strategy for the restoration and development of the Sankey Canal as a navigable waterway from Widnes to St Helens and for the respectful use and enjoyment of the canal by all members of the community.

The Sankey Canal is an asset to the community and its restoration is a catalyst for economic regeneration. This will be done in a way that protects the canal's heritage, improves people's health and well-being and enhances the environment along the canal corridor. The Society will celebrate the area's rich history, positively improve the overall environment and create a legacy for future generations. Also see Section 4 – 'Waterways For Today' report by the Inland Waterways Association.

The geographic scope of the restoration is the Sankey Canal from Widnes (Spike Island) to Warrington (Sankey Bridges), Newton Le Willows and St Helens (Church Square and Blackbrook branches) plus any relevant feeder watercourses and structures.

Two short sections of the Sankey Canal are navigable although there is currently a water supply issue:

- Fiddlers Ferry Marina, Penketh, owned by Warrington Borough Council
- Spike Island Marina, Widnes, owned by Halton Borough Council

3. Restoration Definition

'Restoration' is the full extent of works required to achieve the Society's objectives:

- Repairs and improvements to the in-water sections of the canal.
- Excavation and rebuilding of the in-filled sections of the canal.
- Cutting of a new length of canal where an original section is no longer viable.
- Removal of obstructions such as low fixed bridges, embankments and pipelines.
- Renovation, improvements, site clearance and other ancillary works along the canal corridor e.g. to towpaths, access tracks, visitor facilities, water supply sources and flood defences.
- Purchase or lease of the canal, land or ancillary structures.

Restoration will be phased over a number of years. Original structures and features will be retained, restored and displayed where possible but modifications might be required to them, for example due to site constraints, topographical changes or legislative requirements.

A restored section of canal can potentially be narrower and shallower than the original canal, to make efficient use of the available supply of water, to protect and enhance the natural environment or to make it suitable for amenity use, for example angling or canoeing activities.

Restoration includes support for like-minded organisations and complementary projects, for example:

- Bid for UNESCO World Heritage status (Sankey Valley, Earlestown), to include the Sankey Canal and Sankey Valley 'Nine Arches' Railway Viaduct
- Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire & Merseyside application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to restore Broad Oak Canal Basin.
- Potential northern canal extension from St Helens to link up with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.
- 'Unlock Runcorn' project to restore the Bridgewater Canal link to the Manchester Ship Canal.

4. Links To Strategic Policies

Restoring the canal supports the delivery of national, regional and local strategic policies, including:

[Plan for Prosperity | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority](#)

[St Helens - Local Plan - June 2022](#)

[Warrington - Local Plan - Adopted December 2023](#)

[Halton - Delivery and Allocations - Local Plan - March 2022](#)

[Waterways for Today - The Inland Waterways Association](#)

[Keeping our Canals Open & Alive: our ten-year strategy | Canal & River Trust](#)

5. Restoration Leadership and Sankey Canal Partnership

The Society will champion the restoration of the canal and take an active lead where possible. This is in partnership with the canal's owners, landowners and other stakeholders. The Society will consult with interested parties to ensure community involvement in the restoration and operation of the canal.

The Society will seek to re-establish the Sankey Canal Partnership or create a new collaborative organisation to co-ordinate improvements along the canal corridor, to promote the Sankey Valley and Trans Pennine Trails and support a business case for the canal's phased restoration. Current members of the Partnership are SCRS, St Helens Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council, Halton Borough Council and Canal & River Trust.

6. Structure of the Society's Restoration Function

The Society seeks to work positively and effectively with its Volunteers and other Stakeholders. The Society's restoration activities are carried out by its Executive Leadership Committee, consisting of people with different skills and experience. The Society can vary the number Committee Members, or co-opt Members to provide specialist assistance, or establish Sub-Committees in accordance with its Constitution.

The Executive Leadership Committee will normally meet monthly and receive restoration progress reports from its Members or Sub-Committees. Trustees can attend all Committee meetings and Sub-Committee meetings to observe and provide advice. Non-voting attendance at Committee and Sub-Committee meetings is open to all Society Members and Non-Members who have a restoration interest or contribution to make, subject to making a request to the Society's Chair.

7. Project Restoration Manager / Development Officer

Currently there is no-one in post but the Society aims to appoint a role holder, initially on a voluntary basis and later in a paid capacity. The role-holder's indicative responsibilities are:

- 1) Create the restoration scope, produce cost estimates and deliver a project as part of a programme.
- 2) Advise on any risks, opportunities and organisational changes to deliver the project.
- 3) Ensure funding is in place, manage the budget and report actual & forecast costs and risks.
- 4) Establish a sustainable ownership / maintenance model that is acceptable to key stakeholders.
- 5) Engage with key stakeholders, sponsors, delivery organisations and supporting organisations.

8. Canal Ownership

Sections of the canal are each owned by a different organisation, including three local authorities and Canal & River Trust. The Society will consider an opportunity to own or lease a section(s) of the canal or a related asset, subject to assessing the benefit, cost and risks (including short and long term maintenance works, structural integrity, heritage significance, public access, amenity potential, funding / income sources and riparian liabilities including drainage obligations).

9. Navigation Authority

There is no navigation authority. The long-term preferred option is for a single canal navigation authority, such as the Canal & River Trust or a joint board of local authorities and other stakeholders.

10. Water Supply

The canal is part of the Sankey Brook drainage area. Prior to closure the canal's primary water supply was from Carr Mill Dam. Several other watercourses in St Helens (e.g. Windle Brook and Rainford Brook) supplied the upper reaches of the canal. The hydraulic integrity of the canal was broken in the 1970s by the ad-hoc and poorly considered infilling of some sections of canal and the diversion of watercourses.

Downstream of Sankey Bridges the lower reaches until 2020 were supplied by cooling water pumped into the canal by Fiddlers Ferry Power Station on a goodwill basis. Following its closure, a permanent water supply solution has not been identified. Fiddlers Ferry Marina and Spike Island Marina have a limited supply, including brackish River Mersey water (pumped out of the locks), rainfall and surface water run-off.

The restored canal requires a sustainable gravity water supply:

- A hydraulic survey(s) is required to identify the most cost-effective solution(s), which could include Carr Mill Dam, Sankey Brook / tributaries, surface water, highway run-off and the River Mersey.
- Several watercourses cross under the canal (e.g. Newton Brook). If pumping is required, the use of energy efficient equipment and renewable energy sources will be pursued.
- If the water supply cannot maintain levels in the canal, or the hydraulic gradient is insufficient, or a drop lock arrangement is required (to cross underneath an obstruction), the ability to back pump will be included as required.

11. Water Quality

Historically the Sankey Brook drainage area and Sankey Canal were heavily polluted by industrial effluent, domestic sewage and run-off from contaminated land. The highest polluting industries have now closed down

and since the 1980s there has been a sustained investment in drainage infrastructure, sewage treatment and contaminated land remediation. Water quality is better now than at any time since the industrial revolution but further improvements are required. The canal is still vulnerable to pollution, for example:

- Petrol, oil and litter from highway drains.
- Oil and chemicals from being illegally flushed down surface water sewers.
- Untreated sewage from private properties due to them being mis-connected into surface water sewers.

The Society collaborates with stakeholders and supports activities to reduce pollution, improve bio-diversity & natural habitats and promote amenity use of the canal corridor. This includes restoring overflows, keeping channels clear, managing tributaries, cutting back vegetation and removing debris.

12. Flood Risk Management

Prior to its closure in 1963 the canal operated with the Sankey Brook to drain the area. However, all waters now drain into Sankey Brook (an Environment Agency 'Main River'). Sankey Brook is affected by the state of the River Mersey tide and several locations experience severe flooding on a semi-regular basis, including at Blackbrook and Bewsey.

The Society advocates use of the canal as a low cost, low-tech, sustainable way to provide additional stormwater capacity for Sankey Brook and convey stormwater downstream in a controlled manner. The tributaries can be used to 'slow the flow' during periods of heavy rainfall.

- During severe storm conditions, Sankey Brook overflows into the disused canal at Bewsey (opposite Higham Avenue) and water is conveyed through Bewsey Lock. The canal could instead convey some daily flow from Sankey Brook to the lower canal reaches. Flow data (Causey Bridge Gauging Station) shows that it is a reliable supply during all weather conditions (typically 60 million litres per day dry weather flow and 180 million litres per day average wet weather flow).
- Regular use of Bewsey channel as a stormwater overflow would also reduce the downstream volume in Sankey Brook and reduce the flooding risk in Warrington (assuming the canal channel is free flowing and there is no detriment to the canal banks).
- If a minor alteration is made to the height of Sankey Bridges canal overflow, the canal could convey more water to Fiddlers Ferry Marina instead of it going to waste in Sankey Brook.
- If a channel is cut through the reeds downstream of Fiddlers Ferry Marina and the dam modified at Fiddlers Ferry Marina, the canal could convey water downstream to Spike Island Marina to supplement existing sources. During storm conditions the canal would discharge excess water into the River Mersey via the three existing overflows.

All future canal restoration proposals should include a sustainable drainage solution and provide no worse (and preferably better) flood protection compared with the existing situation. Any alterations to watercourses and drainage arrangements will be confirmed with the Environment Agency or Lead Local Flood Authority to ensure the capacity to deal with extreme events.

13. Environmental Benefits of Restoration

The Sankey Canal runs through a diverse and ever changing landscape from urban St Helens to the wide expanse of the Mersey Estuary. The canal's restoration is helping to transform an area that is still recovering from the adverse effects of its traditional former industries (coal, glass, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and heavy engineering).

The canal is a blue-green corridor that connects separate habitats, enables biodiversity net gain and provides wider environmental benefits through habitat creation and enhancement. Canal banks and adjacent woodlands and open spaces provide thriving homes for wildlife to flourish, and they provide opportunities for people to see plants, insects, birds and aquatic life that they would not normally experience in an urban environment. There are several sites of environmental significance along its route including the Mucky Mountains Nature Reserve and Red Brow Wood Ancient Woodland in Newton Le Willows.

The Environment Act 2021 requires most development projects in England to deliver a biodiversity net gain of at least 10% and for it to be maintained for at least 30 years. Local authorities and developers should consider the canal corridor as an off-site location for biodiversity credits where a developer cannot achieve this target on its own site.

Long sections of the canal are a designated Greenway and a linear park. It is easily accessible using the Sankey Valley Trail and Trans Pennine Trail, allowing people to enjoy the great outdoors, experience nature and improve their physical health and mental well-being.

14. Environmental Design & Implementation Principles

- Development of both green and blue corridors to encourage growth in wildlife and aquatic life and improved diversity in flora and fauna.
- Sustainable long-term operation and maintenance of the canal, including energy efficient solutions, re-use of materials and low or zero carbon footprints wherever reasonably practicable.
- Collaboration with stakeholders to restore and enhance the natural environment, including sympathetic hard and soft landscaping.
- Appropriate woodland, vegetation and waterways management to reverse the adverse effects of uncontrolled growth, the spread of invasive species and restricted or polluted water flow.
- Plant and establish areas of native species of trees, hedges, plants, flowers and grasses.

15. Environmental Management During Restoration

Also see P014 Environment & Sustainability. The environmental impact of restoration works will be minimised by complying with legislation and:

- Consulting with landowners, ecologists and wildlife groups as restoration plans are developed.
- Carrying out 'before and after' surveys as sections of the canal are restored.
- Collaborating with stakeholders to implement green and blue improvements along the canal corridor.
- Keeping work timescales to a minimum and taking account of the ecology calendar.
- Protecting special eco-systems and habitats that have reclaimed former industrial locations.
- Ensuring that Volunteers and Contractors use safe and efficient tools and equipment, including battery powered where possible.

16. Canal Heritage

Restoration works will reveal, protect and restore the historic features of the canal and any related structures and features, as far as is reasonably practicable. If a heritage feature cannot be preserved or it constrains restoration progress (for example due to a third party obstruction or due to complying with modern engineering standards), priority shall be given to the Society's primary charitable aim to restore the navigable waterway.

The Society will seek to sympathetically update or repurpose poor condition heritage assets for safe, accessible use by all members of the community. A heritage asset or artefact changed or lost through the restoration process will be considered for relocation or the materials reclaimed and re-used wherever possible. Prior to any changes, the subject will first be surveyed, recorded and interpreted.

Opportunities will be pursued for archaeology surveys to record, identify and conserve artefacts, including with the assistance of local universities.

17. Financial Sustainability Of The Restored Canal

The short and long term financial sustainability of the restored canal will be considered and included in the restoration proposals or business case wherever possible. These will include potential external funding sources and opportunities for merchandise sales, food and drink outlets, water sports, walking, wildlife spotting, boat moorings and boat and cycle hire and servicing.

18. Funding Sources

The Society will pursue income from its Members and supporters, for example membership fees, merchandise sales and donations. Volunteer resources and funding in kind services will be used wherever possible, for example as part of an organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

Grants, awards, donations of materials and equipment and gifts in kind will be sought from relevant organisations. Opportunities may arise that require restoration priorities to be re-evaluated. Funding from local development projects and targeted initiatives will be investigated with local authorities and developers, for example Section 106 Planning Conditions, Community Infrastructure Levy, Active Travel Fund and Path Accessibility Fund.

19. Community Engagement

The Society will engage with local communities and other stakeholders during the concept, design and implementation of canal restoration projects. This includes local authorities, canal owners, canal lease holders, schools, national groups (waterways, heritage and environment) and local groups (residents, community and special interest). It is important to balance the needs of different members of the community and to secure positive and active support for the restoration of the canal.

20. User Groups and Activities

The design and implementation of restoration activities will support the following groups and activities:

- **Private Boats, Hire Boats and Trip Boats** – Maximum size of craft and draught to be determined, subject to canal lock, channel depth and overhead clearance constraints. Low / zero emission methods of propulsion to be encouraged. Provision to be made for the launch and removal of boats.
- **Non-Powered Craft** – Canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and rowing boats to be encouraged. Provision to be made for the launch and removal of non-powered craft.
- **Residential Boats** – Consideration will be given to the provision of residential moorings at suitable locations and where a demand is identified.
- **Camping** – Potentially to be designed into marina sites. Provision of facilities to be encouraged at suitable nearby locations, for example farms and public houses.

- **Walking** – All-weather access throughout, with clear lines of sight and safe crossing points. Trails / routes to be established. Guided walks by community and special interest groups to be encouraged.
- **Jogging, Running, Fitness** – As for walking.
- **Sitting, Resting, Relaxing** – Access throughout. Views of structures and landscapes to be opened up. Benches & picnic areas to be provided.
- **Play Areas** – Quality play areas for children at suitable locations.
- **Wheelchair and Mobility Vehicles** – Access throughout. Speed might need to be restricted in places. Some structures and landowner boundaries might constrain multi-user access.
- **Cycling** – As for walking. Include zero-emission assisted cycling. Maximum speed 15mph.
- **Horse Riding** – Where safe and appropriate.
- **Angling** – Where sufficient width on the towpath exists. Provision of dedicated pegs / platforms to be encouraged including some suitable for disabled use.
- **Local & Industrial Heritage** – Encourage visits / events by special interest groups. Link up with nearby attractions & venues.
- **Other Activities** – For example photography, ornithology, train spotting, motorcycle meetings.

21. Signage and Visitor Information

Trails / routes along the canal corridor to be waymarked or signposted (including directions to bus and railway stations). Local heritage trails to include canal stop-off points. Car parks to be located at the main access points to the trails. The Society will seek to establish a visitor information / heritage centre and install information boards at key locations. Canal historic features will be named / identified and the canal alignment will be revealed where possible. Towpath milestones will be installed along the canal's route.

22. Long-Term Role of the Society

The Society's ambitious aim is to restore the canal, which will take many years. Once it has been achieved the Society will then focus on increasing people's use and enjoyment of the canal by facilitating events and providing volunteering opportunities for the benefit of local people and long term preservation of the canal.

23. Working with Local Authorities

The Society will collaborate with all local authorities through whose area the canal passes, to deliver mutually beneficial projects for the community and to support events and initiatives in accordance with its charitable aims. The Society is politically neutral.

24. Working With Waterways Organisations

The Society will collaborate with waterways organisations and navigation authorities to deliver mutually beneficial projects, to support events and initiatives and to share technical information and advice.

25. Working with Supporters

The Society appreciates the goodwill, encouragement and assistance of its supporters. The Society will collaborate with like-minded organisations (such as heritage groups, sports clubs and environmental charities), to deliver mutually beneficial projects, to support events and initiatives and to share ideas and experiences.

26. Working With Volunteers

The Society appreciates the goodwill, enthusiasm and assistance of its supporters. The Society will maximise the use of Volunteers subject to their availability, skills and competence and it will provide opportunities for personal development, enjoyment and well-being. Some activities will require specialist advice, supervision or training and the need for professionally qualified people and Contractors.

27. Working With Specialist Consultants and Advisors

When directed by the Trustees, Specialists may be consulted on matters that are beyond the Society's experience or capability, or where it is efficient and prudent to do so.

28. Working With Contractors

When directed by the Trustees, Contractors may be consulted and engaged on matters that are beyond the Society's experience or capability, or where it is efficient and prudent to do so.

29. Health and Safety

The design, construction and operation of the restored canal will be undertaken in accordance with relevant legislation and with the Health, Safety and Environmental policies of the Society and other appropriate third party organisations.

30. Archives

The Society's archives are a record of the struggle since its formation in 1985 to halt the destruction of the canal and the gradual success in helping to change official attitudes and raise the profile of the canal amongst residents and visitors.

The archives are in five main sections:

1. Documents relating to projects carried out by the society over its 40 year history, mostly consisting of correspondence, plans, and drawings. Examples include the 'Barmere' barge restoration and the Sankey Valley Gateway projects.
2. Copies of **Canal Cuttings**, the official magazine of the society. The journal ran until 2023 when it was replaced by **Sankey Milestones**.
3. Minutes and related notes of Society meetings and discussions.
4. Photographs of the canal when it was in use in the 1940s, through to its decline and closure in 1963 and its derelict state in the 1960s and 1970s. Also included are photos of the Society's projects, work parties and events. In addition there are many digital images on discs and a computer hard drive plus a considerable number of film slides.
5. Files of the comprehensive 1996 Sankey Canal Feasibility Report, which can be viewed on our website.

Currently our archives are in safe, dry storage. We share the information upon request or whenever we can, for example at events or during presentations. We intend to digitise the collection and make it more accessible.

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