

The Watercress Way Annual Report 2021-22

This report covers the financial year 2021-22, but for completeness, it describes the work of the charity up to the Annual Meeting.

Our Annual meeting was held on June 16th 2022, which was the 6th anniversary of the date the charity was started, in 2016. Minutes available on our website.



Governance:

The Watercress Way is a foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and can have up to twelve trustees with voting rights. A copy of the constitution (our registration number is 1167675) is available on the gov.uk charity website and at <https://www.thewatercressway.org.uk/policies>.

We currently have 9 trustees:

1. Jackie Porter, Chairman
2. Clive Cook, Vice Chairman
3. Mike Collis, Secretary
4. Julie Fullstone, Treasurer
5. Stephen Jeffery, Volunteer organiser
6. Emma Banks, Fundraising, Communications and community
7. Chris Brunskill, Website
8. Tony Langridge
9. Brigid Taylor

I'd like to thank our Trustees who contribute fully to the work of the charity in so many ways. They have a wide range of skills and experience which are really appreciated, and help us to move the charity forward.

Thank you too, to Kim Adams and Jim Thompson (also a founding trustee) who retired from their trusteeships in 2021. Their enthusiasm and skills were valued by us all and we are pleased that they will continue to volunteer from time to time.

Our vision:

The routes of the old railway lines between Sutton Scotney and Kings Worthy and Kings Worthy and Alresford will be available for public use, accessible on foot and bicycle.

As well as providing pathways to connect communities, these routes will be havens for wildlife and celebrate the historical context of their creation.

This circular route, created by connecting these two sections with the old drove system from Sutton Scotney to Alresford will be approximately 27 miles, and will be marked on the OS map as a long distance walk, The Watercress Way.

Our mission:

To work with landowners, and other interested parties including rights of way and planning authorities, to improve and preserve the rights of access to the disused line as marked on the 1953 OS map; meanwhile

- showing the public how to connect the sections already open by map, noticeboards and a series of markers along the Way
- improving access to all users
- improving flora and fauna habitats, and educating the public on the ecology of the route
- investigating and celebrating the history of the route.
- establishing a volunteer team to care for and improve the route
- Identifying projects which will bring us closer to our vision, developing a business plan for funding purposes and stakeholder engagement

How we delivered on our mission in 21-22



Raising public awareness of the route, and its possibilities for non-motorised travel

We hosted a 'trade' stand at The Watercress Festival in May 2022. Trustees spoke to over 300 people and received several offers of practical help, which we are following up.

Sponsorship starting up again. Though Trustees didn't seek commercial sponsors during the pandemic (pubs etc had their own troubles to contend with), sponsorship has been offered by some outlets. We continue to publicise eateries and other facilities along the route, and will develop this further as hopefully, the effects of the pandemic lessen.

We continue to raise our profile on websites, social media and the press. Trustee Chris Brunskill took the lead in designing and producing a new improved website which we can maintain ourselves. Our emails enjoy over 65% open rate. We advertise events in the press, online and on Facebook.

Working with landowners and other stakeholders:

Historical Railways Estate identified a number of bridges across England that they declared unsafe and proposed to demolish them or fill them up with concrete.

We objected to the plans to seal up a bridge in Itchen Stoke with concrete. Although the section is still in private ownership, the bridge is owned by National Highway (Historic Railways estate) and the road above is owned by HCC. Closing the tunnel would mean that all future use as a cycle or footway would be lost. We publicised our concerns and sought support from our Friends of the Way.

Our successful challenge means that this work will not go ahead in the near future, and not without specific planning permission. We maintain regular contact with the national campaigning group on this issue.

We have engaged with landowners and authorities on Southern Water's Candover water augmentation scheme because it is proposed to cross the route, and would affect the setting of the right of way.

Showing the public how to connect the sections

We continued to update the route, and mark sections clearly, repairing/replacing any damaged items. Trustee Chris Brunskill led the development of a new website which we can update more easily, and introduced online booking and payment /donation facilities. We continue to grow interest on Facebook and we keep in touch with over 300 Friends of the Way who have registered on our website.

During the year, a permissive path was granted in Itchen Abbas, allowing walkers to link two bridges at Northington Lane and Rectory Lane with one direct path, without the need to go through a housing estate.

We successfully pressed for a new route through Kings Worthy, and led participants through this new route at our Dawn to Dusk Day.



Improving access to all users

In February 2022, we sought CIL grant funding from South Downs National Park for improved accessibility onto the section in Itchen Abbas. We await the outcome of that application in October 2022.

Improving flora and fauna habitats, and educating the public on the ecology of the route

We held our fifth Dawn to Dusk Day on the last Sunday in April 2022.

Two of the three walks focussed on the general ecology and included the history of the routes, and the Dawn Chorus walk, held in Alresford for the first time this year, recorded forty different species.

A 12-picture calendar was produced showing different habitats and views, which was sold at shops, profitable for both shops and the charity.

Investigating and celebrating the history of the route

We held our Annual General Meeting at the Alresford Railway Station, courtesy of the Mid Hants line. Chris Cornell, former trustee, gave the talk about the station and its link to The Watercress Way. Our thanks go to Chris who continues to support the charity by developing his own knowledge of the route, also joining us on walks to entertain and inform our participants.

Trustee Stephen Jeffery has family connections with the line too: we hope to record some recollections of life on the line in the future.

We are also building a stronger relationship with the Mid Hants line, now called The Watercress Line.

We have applied to crowdfund to complete the Sutton Scotney bridge gates project.

Establishing a volunteer team to care for and improve the route

Up to now, the majority of the work on the route has been led by trustees for minimal cost.

It was agreed that, to develop our mission, we would need to build a much larger volunteer base for future work, and develop the ability to raise greater funding. The 21-22 year enabled the team to 'open up' again after the lockdown restrictions of previous years and set to work!

A grant was successfully obtained from the Watercress and Winterbournes Project to develop a work programme around the eastern section of the route, in the Alresford area. This grant is enabling the charity to develop a volunteer led programme of activity, led by Emma Banks, which is ongoing..

New volunteers recruited and trained:

- A small expert team was trained in brush cutting, adding to the certified skill base.
- Two experienced litter pickers are regularly carrying out litter clearance
- An RSPB trained volunteer helped to identify birds on our Dawn Chorus Walk, adding to the accessibility of the event and confidence of the public.
- Safeguarding training has been undertaken

Identifying projects which will bring us closer to our vision, developing a business plan for funding purposes and stakeholder engagement

We have identified the following projects as strategic for our Business Plan:

- Disabled access onto the old railway line at Martyr Worthy/Itchen Abbas
- Watercress and Winterbournes Project
- Gates for the Wonston Road bridge at Sutton Scotney
- Installation of two seats and mag post
- Bird song on website, relevant to habitats
- Ongoing maintenance
- Completion of Business Plan

Jackie Porter, Chairman

