

The Friends of the Itchen Navigation

The Friends of the Itchen Navigation Facebook Group was created out of a desire by interested people to preserve and develop the work completed in 2012 on The Itchen Navigation Heritage Trail Project. The group has just over 1,400 members.

In order to be in a position to provide more support and practical help an application has been made to create a formal Charity, this is currently underway, and we hope it will be in operation in early 2023.

The objectives of the group and Charity are to preserve the natural and physical environment of the Navigation, to provide information and education about all aspects of this special site and to help provide resilience against any effects of climate or other changes which might affect its future.

There are many other groups who have an interest in the future of the Navigation and our aim is to work closely with them to ensure that progress is efficient and duplication is avoided. Our overall aim is to make this special site as accessible to all as it can be. While much of the work will focus on physical access to the path and surrounding environment we will also be developing online material as well.

We have a group of Volunteer River Wardens who regularly walk along the Navigation and they report any issues that they find. Recent examples have included fly tipping and sewerage contamination alongside completing some litter picking. Reports are made to the relevant authorities if further action is needed.

This group is currently undertaking a survey of the whole site in order to formulate a plan of action for the future. The restoration of the banks in a wildlife friendly manner, the removal of non native species and the clearing and preservation of the locks will feature within the urgent section of our plans.

Every winter the towpath and historic locks are deteriorating and the neglected towpath around Mansbridge is making access for the public more difficult. The Charity will raise the awareness and cultural significance of the Navigation and help coordinate practical work that will include tree and scrub management and the creation of bankside habitat. These improvements will complement the management of the surrounding habitats and help protect and preserve the historic remains of the Navigation.

There is historic evidence for water management and navigation on the River Itchen in Southampton since the 11th century. The Itchen Navigation was one of the earliest, longest running, and most successful of canals and navigations in the country.

The Itchen Navigation officially starts in Northam, but the first Sea Lock was located at Woodmill. The towpath starts at the location of Woodmill sea lock and continues alongside the river through Riverside Park to Mansbridge where it provides a gateway to open countryside above Mansbridge lock with links to the Itchen Valley Country Park. The towpath then follows the Itchen Way footpath along the river through many villages and towns all the way to the rivers source above Winchester.

The towpath is an integral part of the Itchen Navigation, and the towpath cannot be diverted or extinguished except by Act of Parliament.

One of our aims is to tell the story of the Navigation's history around Woodmill, Riverside Park and Mansbridge with carefully located interpretive panels. We have recently contacted the Woodmill Coffee Kitchen and agreed to work together to ensure that visitors have access to relevant information whenever they visit the area.

We look forward to working on the sections of the Navigation in Southampton in the future. We have some very enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers and would be interested to know of any funding that might be available to help them undertake restoration work needed, such as for materials required.