



What your local waterway can do for your community

Planning for waterways in Neighbourhood Plans



Canal &
River Trust



Canals and rivers can define the personality of a village, town or city, helping to explain the history of a location and what makes it special today. Local waterways can help make people's lives better by helping them live healthier and more sustainable lives, as well as improving local connectivity.

They provide open space on people's doorsteps, to use free of charge – somewhere to spend time with family and friends, to see wildlife, a traffic-free accessible route to work, a place to connect with the natural environment. When used to their full potential, waterways can change places for the better.

The Canal & River Trust (the Trust) is the charity that cares for 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England and Wales. We are passionate believers in using the power of local waterways to transform places and enrich lives. We want to support local communities to secure and build on the multiple benefits that waterways bring, now and in the future. We believe that by working together we can deliver living waterways that transform places and enrich the lives of local communities. We want to encourage and support local communities and town and parish councils to champion their waterways in the planning process.

We only own around 4% of the land adjacent to our waterways, therefore influencing developments on this land is essential to develop and protect the places that local communities value and to create the types of places that can allow us to achieve our vision. In speaking up for waterways, local communities can complement our role as a statutory consultee in the planning process.

Neighbourhood Plans

Local communities and town and parish councils in England have the power to prepare Neighbourhood Plans, setting out the policies that they want to apply when a planning application is submitted in their area. This can be a great opportunity to understand how waterways contribute to the character and life of your area and to shape how they'll do so in the future. This document sets out some issues and opportunities to consider when preparing a neighbourhood plan that considers the contribution of your waterway to community life.

Waterway Benefits

Early in the process of preparing a plan, you may want to consider data and information available to help you. You may find our Open Data can assist. To demonstrate the breadth of our impact at both local and national level across a range of cross-cutting themes; how waterways relate to the different local communities we serve, and our contribution to the nation's wellbeing in its widest sense, the Trust is developing an Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF). On the following pages, you will see how we believe that the delivery of thriving waterways through the planning system can drive the six inter-related outcomes shown below. In the future, we hope to be able to share evidence on these outcomes with local communities.



Living Waterways:

We work hard to ensure our waterways are safe to enjoy. We want them to be loved and used and to be the heart of community life, alive with people, boats, wildlife and activity.

Active Waterways

Boats are a key part of the character of our canals and rivers, bringing life, colour and vitality to the waterways. They can provide natural surveillance over the waterside, a market for waterside businesses and sometimes a place where people choose to live, where appropriate. Planning permission may be required for moorings in some circumstances. We encourage you to discuss any proposals that your plan may have to support these essential facilities.

Biodiversity

Canals and rivers provide homes for all kinds of plants and wildlife. New development should help to protect and enhance these habitats, avoiding the spill of artificial light and providing complementary connected habitats.

Structural Integrity

It's vital that the Trust is consulted on new developments that may involve the digging of foundations close to our waterways, imposing loads on waterway walls or risks causing a breach of the waterway. Not doing so risks damage to the waterways, third party property and a risk to life. We should be consulted on neighbourhood plans that allocate sites in the vicinity of our waterways.

Water Quality & Resources

The quality of water in canals and rivers can affect how attractive they are as spaces for people to be on, in or alongside. It can also impact on the plants and wildlife that rely on it. Where a development might affect the amount of water available, for example a new marina, we need to ensure that it won't adversely impact our ability to maintain standards for navigation.

Navigation

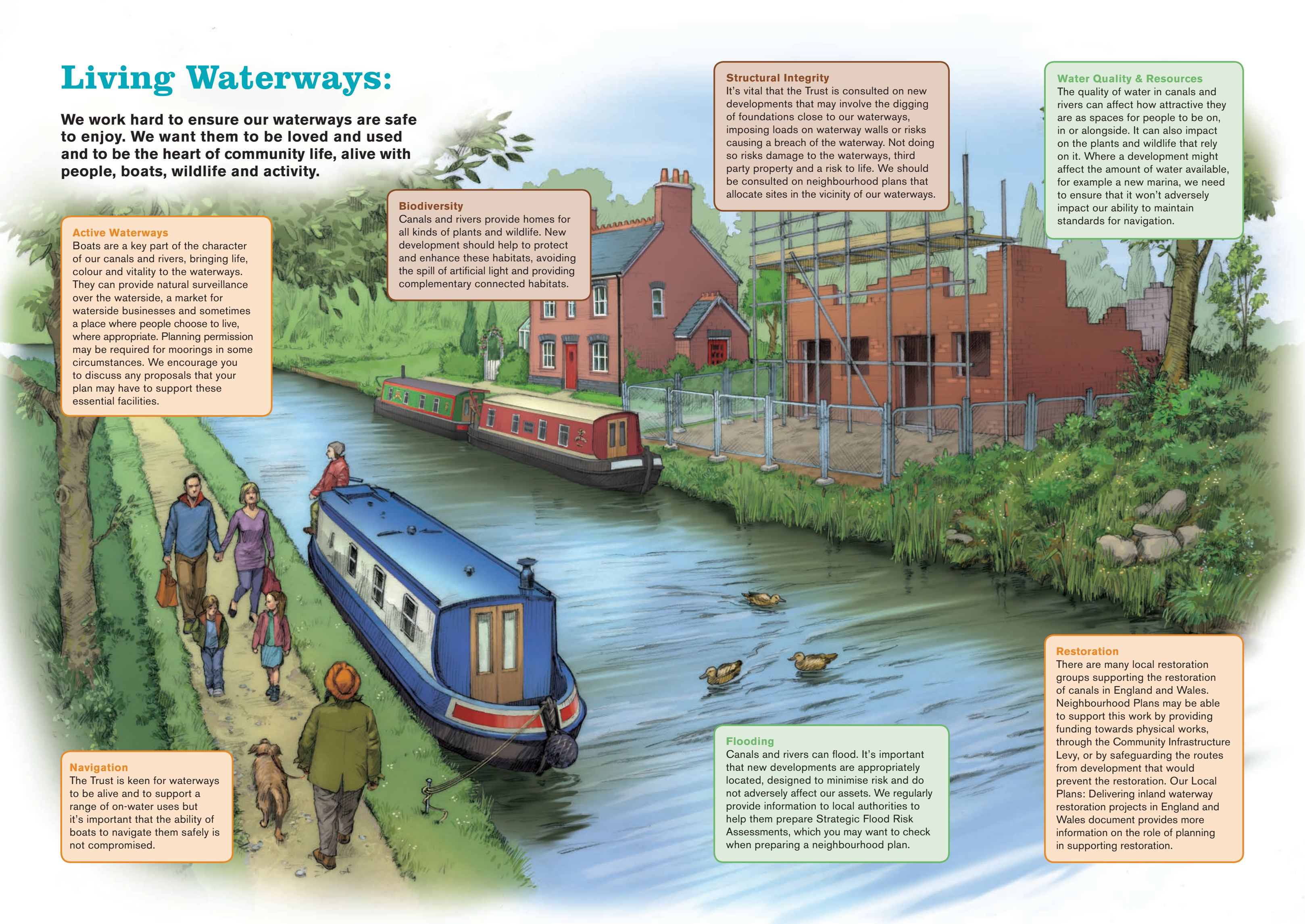
The Trust is keen for waterways to be alive and to support a range of on-water uses but it's important that the ability of boats to navigate them safely is not compromised.

Flooding

Canals and rivers can flood. It's important that new developments are appropriately located, designed to minimise risk and do not adversely affect our assets. We regularly provide information to local authorities to help them prepare Strategic Flood Risk Assessments, which you may want to check when preparing a neighbourhood plan.

Restoration

There are many local restoration groups supporting the restoration of canals in England and Wales. Neighbourhood Plans may be able to support this work by providing funding towards physical works, through the Community Infrastructure Levy, or by safeguarding the routes from development that would prevent the restoration. Our Local Plans: Delivering inland waterway restoration projects in England and Wales document provides more information on the role of planning in supporting restoration.



Transforming Places:

We want our canals and rivers to define the personality of a village or town, helping to explain the history of a location and what makes it special today.

Well-designed places

Waterways are not simply an attractive backdrop for buildings, they're important spaces of public realm and the relationship with them should be the starting point when designing new developments. Developments should engage with waterways and, where appropriate, open up access to, from and along them. Buildings that provide views over the waterway and include active uses (like shops or cafes) provide natural surveillance, helping people to feel safe when using the towpath or moorings.

Heritage

The Trust is the custodian of one of the largest collections of industrial heritage. It's vital that new development protects, respects and enhances these assets so that they can continue to be enjoyed now and in the future.

Sustainable Travel & Air Quality

Towpaths make excellent places for people to walk and cycle considerably. Not only is this great for recreation, it can be an attractive way for people to commute, reducing congestion, carbon emissions and poor air quality in the wider area and supporting people to lead healthier lives. There are also opportunities to use some waterways to transport freight, with some of the same benefits.

Canal & River Trust land

There may be opportunities to develop land owned by the Trust to create better waterside places. Where a development is proposed by a 3rd party on the Trust's land, such as new bridges crossing our waterways or providing new utilities connections under the towpath, a commercial agreement will be required. The Trust's Code of Practice should be followed for works affecting our property.

Heating & Cooling Buildings

Water can be used as a renewable source of energy to heat and cool buildings and then returned to the waterway. This can provide a cost and energy-efficient approach, which can reduce carbon emissions. The Government's Heat Map provides more information.

Tourism & Business

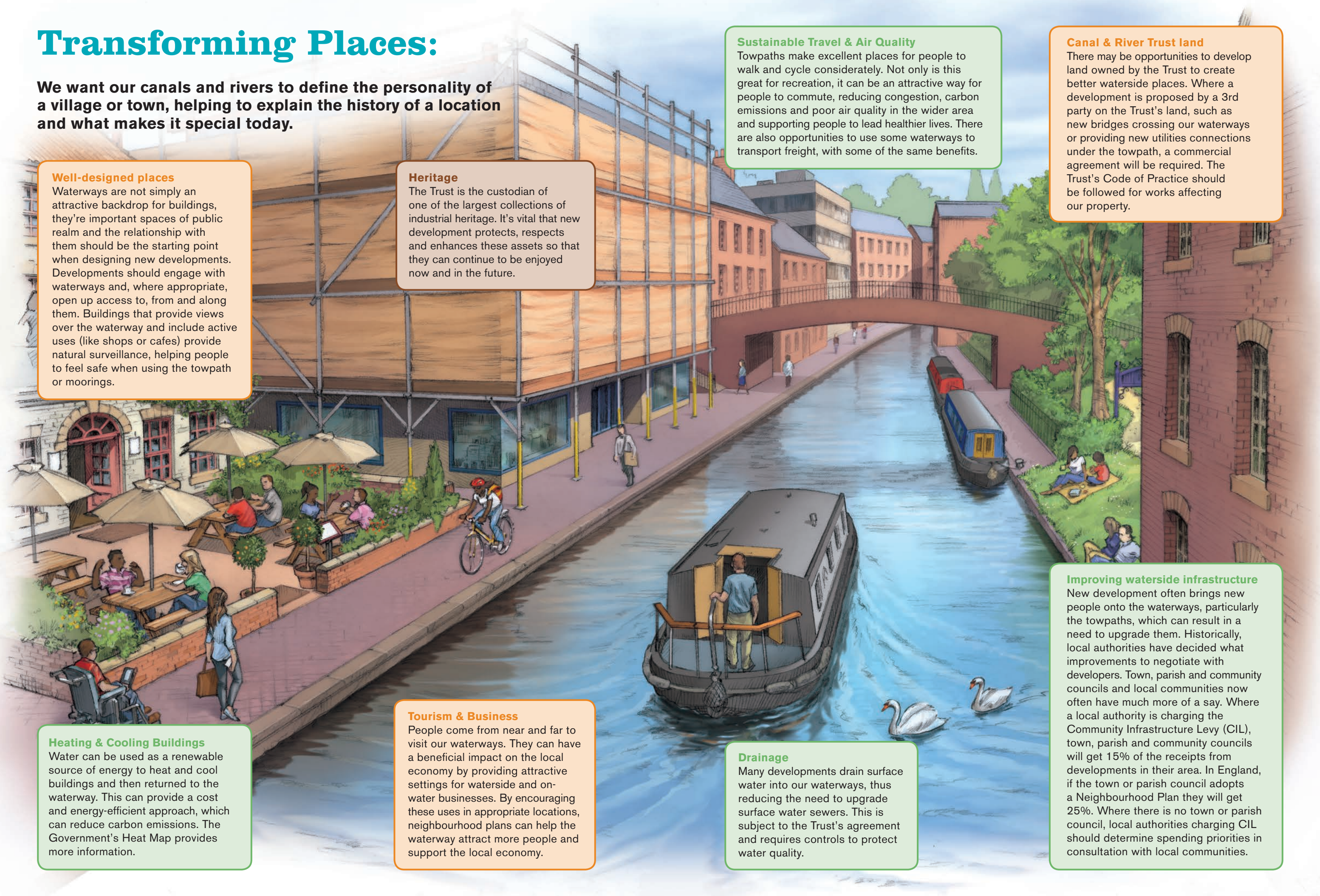
People come from near and far to visit our waterways. They can have a beneficial impact on the local economy by providing attractive settings for waterside and on-water businesses. By encouraging these uses in appropriate locations, neighbourhood plans can help the waterway attract more people and support the local economy.

Drainage

Many developments drain surface water into our waterways, thus reducing the need to upgrade surface water sewers. This is subject to the Trust's agreement and requires controls to protect water quality.

Improving waterside infrastructure

New development often brings new people onto the waterways, particularly the towpaths, which can result in a need to upgrade them. Historically, local authorities have decided what improvements to negotiate with developers. Town, parish and community councils and local communities now often have much more of a say. Where a local authority is charging the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), town, parish and community councils will get 15% of the receipts from developments in their area. In England, if the town or parish council adopts a Neighbourhood Plan they will get 25%. Where there is no town or parish council, local authorities charging CIL should determine spending priorities in consultation with local communities.



Enriching Lives:

Waterways make people's lives better by providing a place for people to visit and escape to – for hobbies, relaxing and spending time with family and friends.

Recreation

In an increasingly fast-paced and crowded world, our canals, rivers, docks and reservoirs provide much-needed spaces where we can slow down, enjoy the environment and relax. On both land and water, waterways support various activities, including walking, cycling, boating, canoeing and fishing. Some of these may require plans for specific facilities, whilst people's enjoyment of others may be enhanced by investment in infrastructure.

Arts & Culture

In many parts of the country, waterways provide great focal points for a wide range of different arts and culture projects, broadening participation and improving wellbeing. New projects may be suitable uses of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

Physical Health

Waterways provide an ideal environment for people to get outside and get active. They support many forms of physical activity, both on the water and alongside it. By improving the quality and safety of towpaths and their environs or by supporting facilities necessary for on-water uses, planning can support the role that waterways play in encouraging people to take up physical activities.

Mental Health

Waterways provide an ideal environment in which people can relax and spend time enjoying nature and tranquillity, hopefully reducing stress in the process. In addition, by volunteering to work with us on the waterways, people have new opportunities for social interaction and to build their self-esteem.

Adoption

Local community groups have the opportunity to work in partnership with us to care for specific sections of their local waterways by adopting them. There are various tasks that you could get involved in, from maintenance to promoting the waterway. Why not think about adopting the stretch of waterway through your neighbourhood area to take the community's care for it a stage further?

Volunteering

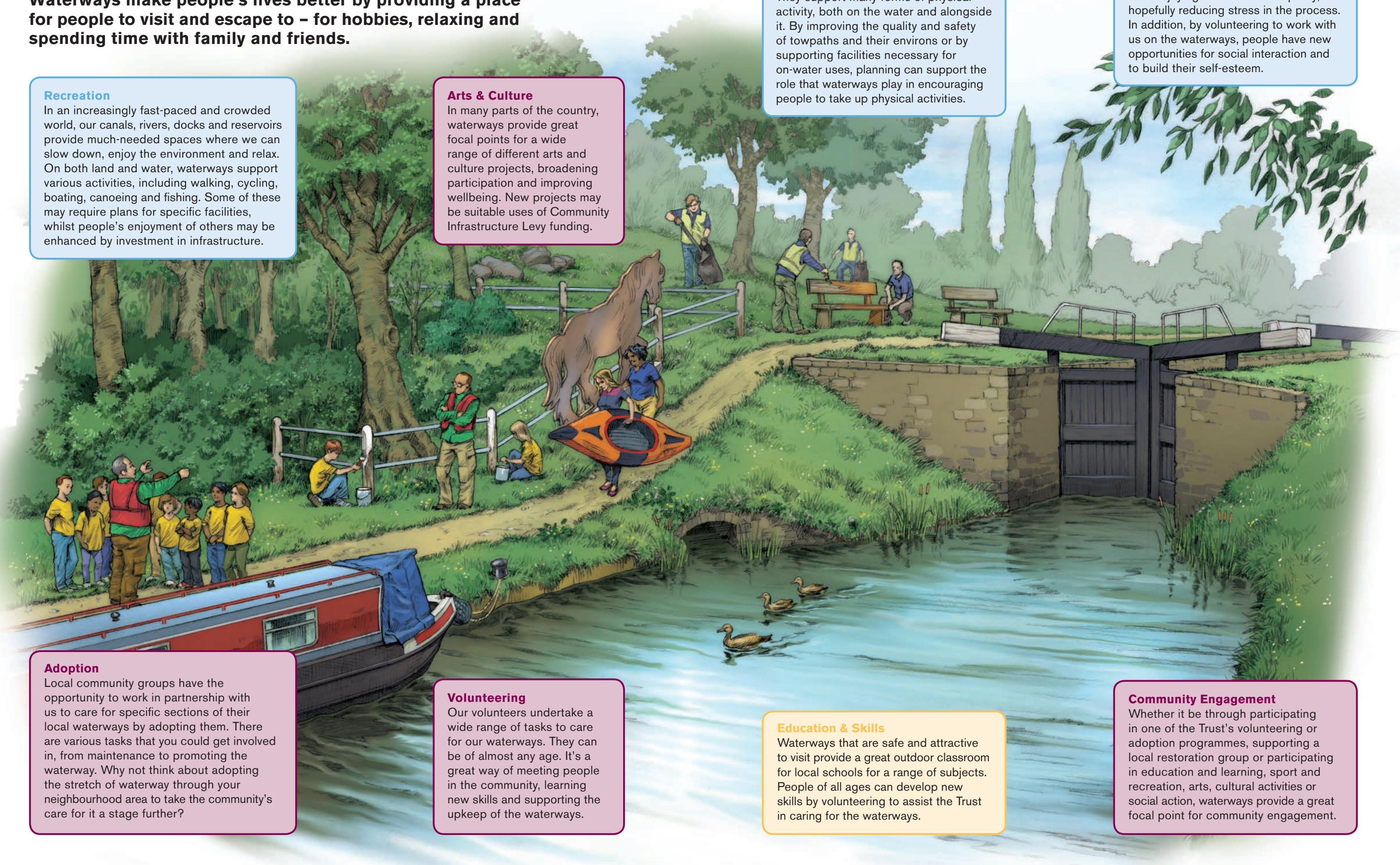
Our volunteers undertake a wide range of tasks to care for our waterways. They can be of almost any age. It's a great way of meeting people in the community, learning new skills and supporting the upkeep of the waterways.

Education & Skills

Waterways that are safe and attractive to visit provide a great outdoor classroom for local schools for a range of subjects. People of all ages can develop new skills by volunteering to assist the Trust in caring for the waterways.

Community Engagement

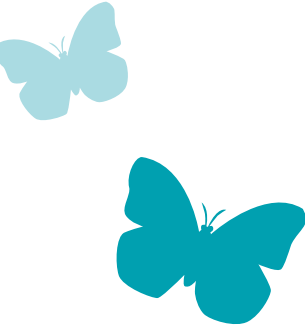
Whether it be through participating in one of the Trust's volunteering or adoption programmes, supporting a local restoration group or participating in education and learning, sport and recreation, arts, cultural activities or social action, waterways provide a great focal point for community engagement.



The Canal & River Trust's Guiding Principles for Planning and Design

- Individual waterways and water spaces need to be viewed as an integral part of a wider network, and not in isolation.
- Water should not be treated as just a setting or backdrop for development but as a space and leisure and commercial resource in its own right. The 'added value' of the water space needs to be fully explored.
- Waterways themselves should be the starting point for consideration of the development and use of the water and waterside land – look from the water outwards, as well as from the land to the water.
- A waterway's towing path and its environs should form an integral part of the public realm in terms of both design and management.
- It is important that the siting, configuration and orientation of buildings optimise views of the water, generate natural surveillance of water space, and encourage and improve access to, along and from the water.
- New waterside development needs to be considered holistically with the opportunities for water-based development, use and enhancement.
- Improve the appearance of the site from the towing path and from the water
- It should be recognised that appropriate boundary treatment and access issues are often different for the towing path side and the offside.

For further information when preparing planning policy documents and responding to planning applications related to waterways please see our website.



Producing a Neighbourhood Plan

Town and parish councils and/or local communities can produce planning documents, which set out policies against which applications are judged. They can also produce Development Orders granting planning permission for certain types of development. National Planning Practice Guidance provides more information on the process of preparing these documents, including basic conditions that need to be met. We're keen for communities and/or town and parish councils to engage with us early in the process and throughout.

The Trust's National Spatial Planning Contacts

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