



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Boater Report 2024



#KeepCanalsAlive

canalrivertrust.org.uk



Introduction

Our Boater Report gives an overview of how we generated income and our expenditure during 2023/24 to maintain navigation on our amazing heritage network of over 10,000 individual structures including locks, bridges, aqueducts and reservoirs, many up to 250 years old. It was a year of near record spend on charitable activity, but one that saw the continued effect of climate change taking its toll on our ageing canal infrastructure.

In 2023/24 we spent close to £49 million on around 80 large maintenance and repair projects, and our skilled teams of carpenters, stone masons and bricklayers completed further construction projects, at a cost of around £20 million.

Dealing with emergencies

From leaks in embankments and waterway walls, storm damage, flooding and blue green algae, to bridge strikes by road vehicles, vandalism, fly tipping and pollution incidents, read how we're dealing with some of the dozens of emergencies across our network every week.

The impact of climate change

Our changing climate continued to have a massive impact on our waterways. The succession of named storms wreaked havoc on our network. Thousands

of trees were blown down, towpaths were washed away, banks and culverts collapsed, and landslides occurred. A breach on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal at Burscough in Lancashire cost over £270,000 to repair. In Leicester, the River Soar breached several times at Blue Bank lock, eroding the towpath and pushing the pilings over. The eastern end of the Kennet & Avon Canal was closed for several months due to extremely high water levels, widespread damage to towpaths, banks and lock walls, and extensive silt deposits. There were two major landslips on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal: on the embankment at the northern portal of Dunhamstead Tunnel; and just south of Shortwood Tunnel. There was also a major slip in the cutting at Easenhall on the Oxford Canal, requiring over 4,000 cubic metres of material to be cleared, and costing over £1 million to resolve.

Income & expenditure

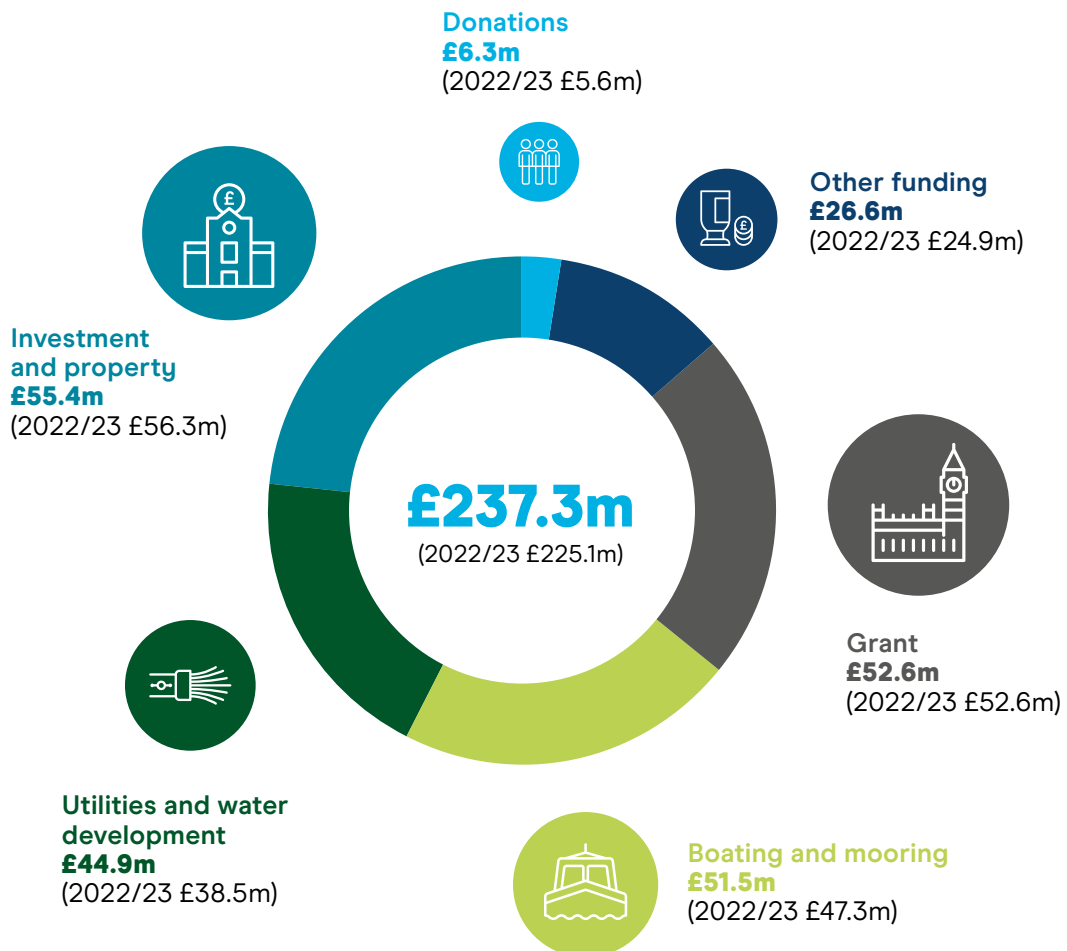
We have continued to diversify our income streams to support the financial resilience of the Trust. Our trading and investment activities continued to make a significant contribution to our work, for waterway maintenance and repairs.

We face the challenge presented by the Government grant settlement, announced in July 2023, with steep funding cuts to be applied from 2027, coming after a six-year period when the grant has been frozen (and hence its value has already fallen by over 30% in real terms).

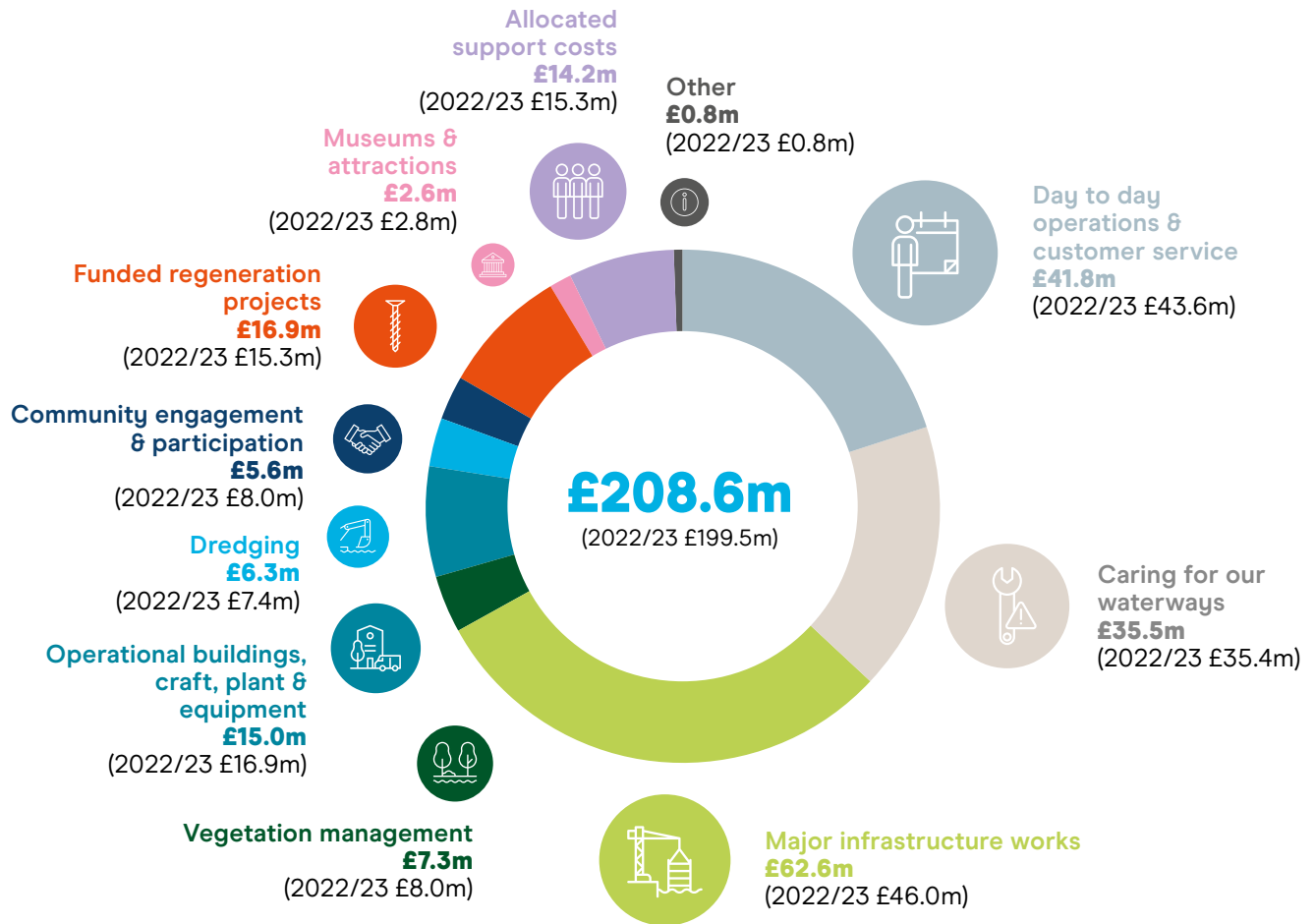
Despite this pressure, in 2023/24 income as a whole grew by £12.2m to £237.3m.

The revenue received from boat licences, part of the boating and mooring figure, continues to be a vital contribution, making up 12.7% of the total annual income.

Income



Expenditure



This chart shows how our expenditure on charitable activities is broken down. On the whole spending grew by £7.1m to £208.6m, with the vast majority funding the work required to look after the waterways. Work to repair and strengthen the resilience of the canal network during the year included almost 450 planned engineering projects, at a cost of around £70 million. Delivering statutory safety measures at the charity's large reservoirs, critical for navigation and in protecting the communities around them, continued to dominate major infrastructure expenditure, with over £27 million spent on resilience works at 19 of our 71 large reservoirs.

Other significant spend included day-to-day operations (incident response, water management and customer service) and the ongoing repairs, maintenance and inspections that are required throughout the year.



More detail on both income and expenditure can be found in our 2023/24 Annual Report, available from our website at: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/annual-report-and-accounts>

Our plan for better boating

Over the summer we ran our annual Boater Survey, asking boaters about their experience of our canals and rivers and their feelings about the Trust.

One of the key questions we ask is how satisfied boaters are with our canals and rivers. Unfortunately just 46% of boaters responding to the survey were very satisfied or satisfied in 2024.

We're committed to increasing boater satisfaction to 75% by 2030. We've listened to feedback from boaters and engaged with our elected boater representatives on the Trust council and boaters on our navigation advisory group to inform our plan for better boating.

This is in addition to our major winter works programme, our annual dredging works, ongoing major reservoir works and other critical assets work programme, which are essential to keeping the canals safe and open.

The Better Boating Plan will prioritise things that will improve navigation and target issues that will make the experience of boaters better. The plan will focus on these key areas:

Keeping canals open for boating



We will demonstrate to boaters that keeping our canals open for navigation is at the heart of what we do. This is our commitment to boaters, from the top of the Trust, that boating will be central to our long-term plan.

Getting the basics right



Boating should feel easier for you, with our locks and swing bridges better maintained and easier to use. You should also see fewer unplanned stoppages that disrupt your cruising.

Boater facilities



We know that boater facilities are important, so when they do break, we'll work quicker to fix them. Combating overflowing bins and fly tipping will improve your experience of using these facilities. And we know many boaters care about recycling: clearer facilities will make it easier for you to do this.

Better communication & customer service



We want to make it easier for boaters to tell us if there is a problem so we can fix it. Being able to find up-to-date information is important, so we'll improve the communication and customer service you receive and provide more opportunities to meet and talk with us.



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Read our plan for better boating at <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/better-boating>

We will be publishing a better boating dashboard with specific measures to monitor the implementation of our plan by 31 March 2025.



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The full results of the 2024 annual boater survey can be found on our website <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-news/annual-boaters-survey-2024>

Making moorings more accessible in Birmingham

In 2023/24 we created three accessible mooring spots in Birmingham city centre to help improve access to the waterways for disabled boaters and anyone who experiences long- or short-term mobility issues, for example older people or pregnant women.

Accessible moorings are open to anyone, but we ask all boaters to be considerate and only moor at them if they, or others on their boat, have access needs. Please remember that not all disabilities are visible, so it may not be obvious why a boat has moored here.

The accessible moorings in Birmingham are signed and have bollards that are painted blue. They are located near Cambrian House, Gas Street, and the Brindleyplace entrance to the International Convention Centre / Symphony Hall.



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We're looking to create more short-stay accessible mooring sites across the network in the coming year. More information can be found here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/boating-accessibility>



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If you need a temporary short-term overstay at any location or if you may require longer-term support due to an equality issue, please get in touch. <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/license-your-boat/boat-licensing-compliance-and-enforcement-team>



Trialling Artificial Intelligence CCTV to protect bridges



The humpback bridges which cross the canals are an instantly recognisable feature of the British landscape. Built centuries ago to allow horses and carts to cross the canal, many are still in use today. Unfortunately, we're seeing more collisions involving vehicles and bridges, but not every motorist will stop and report the damage.

In addition to the inconvenience to boaters through stoppages, and residents through road closures, these repairs cost the Trust up to £1 million in repairs annually. This diverts funds from the vital maintenance needed to protect and keep open the ageing canal network.

In order to try and catch the motorists involved in these hit-and-run incidents, we are trialling the use of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) CCTV system.

Traditional CCTV systems are difficult and costly to install as they require a constant power supply. This new system uses AI to control it and only requires a mobile phone signal to send pictures of the bridge whenever vehicle movement is detected.

These images are then assessed by the AI system and, if damage is identified, we are notified and the pictures, complete with number plate, sent. If no damage is identified, the pictures are deleted. We can then track down the driver and claim the full cost of the repair through their insurance.

If successful, this could be rolled out to keep a close watch on more of our 2,800 historical bridges.

Tackling fly-tipping



Dealing with fly-tipping across our canal network is an enormous challenge that consumes precious resources, both in cash terms and in staff time. This is a national problem, but the London & South East region is particularly hard hit. The money and time spent on dealing with this crime is to the detriment of all the other maintenance activities that need to be carried out on a daily basis – some of our operational colleagues can spend up to 60% of their time responding to issues with waste.

Waste attracts waste, so it is critical that fly-tipping is detected and responded to quickly, before the problem grows. We have started trialling the use of CCTV in some London & South East hotspot areas, which also provides a deterrent to potential perpetrators.

CCTV has a range of benefits, including:

- Remote monitoring of sites, reducing unproductive travel time.
- Enabling emerging problems to be identified and responded to quickly.
- Helping us understand the sources of illegal waste (on or off our network, for example).

- Helping with enforcement by providing valuable evidence to support prosecution.

The first of these sites to go live was Little Venice. Prior to the installation of the CCTV, it was one of the most expensive and problematic sites on our network. Waste (armchairs, electrical appliances, rubble, containers of oil, etc.) would typically be dumped in the bin store, blocking the bins and preventing servicing by our contractor. Within 24 hours tonnes of excess rubbish would build up on site, costing hundreds and sometimes thousands of pounds to remove. This also attracted vermin which posed a health hazard.

Since the CCTV has been installed, our staff are able to monitor conditions on site remotely whilst undertaking other tasks. We now can and do respond to any fly-tipping immediately, preventing small issues from becoming bigger problems. We better understand where the waste is coming from, which led us to restrict access from the adjacent road. We have also been able to detect and take action against a number of perpetrators. Overall, this heavily-used customer waste facility now operates smoothly and much more efficiently.

Caring for our canal network...

Investing in the 200 year old assets so they are resilient and safe to use



...means more people can enjoy more time on and around the water.



Boat licensing and welfare team changes

With over 35,000 licensed boats providing an essential 12.7% of our income, the licensing, compliance and enforcement team is an essential part of managing navigation on our canals and rivers. In September 2024, we moved from six regional teams to one national team structure to help us speed up how we respond to cases. A single point of contact will continue to be provided for all boating customers who need support.

While most boaters follow their licence terms, the licensing, compliance and enforcement team supports those who have difficulties getting a boat licence or meeting the requirements of continuous cruising. In cases where there is a clear need we may be able to approve an extended stay for boaters with short-term illness or other issues. Where boaters are unable or unwilling to meet their licence terms, or where a boat is abandoned, the team will take action to resolve unpaid debt and ensure the canals are fair and safe places for all boaters.

Our boating welfare team can offer more help to the most vulnerable people on the canals and rivers. They support those who are struggling with money, health and other issues which may affect their ability

to pay for their licence or mooring. In recent years, more and more people are making their homes on the water. Our welfare team will help support boaters who are struggling so they are also less likely to fall into our enforcement processes. Amongst other things, our welfare officers can and have supported boaters to apply for housing benefit to help them pay their licence fees, resulting in fewer unlicensed boats and less financial worry for the boaters themselves.

Find out more about the new teams and how to contact them here:



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Licensing, compliance and enforcement team <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/license-your-boat/boat-licensing-compliance-and-enforcement-team>



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Welfare team <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/boating-accessibility/welfare-officers>

Boat licensing enforcement stats (as of October 2024)



1,563

Unlicensed boats with a home mooring under enforcement



1,605

Unlicensed boats who continuously cruise under enforcement



313

Boats with an approved short-term extended stay



450

Boats not displaying the required index number



Boater Census Survey Reports

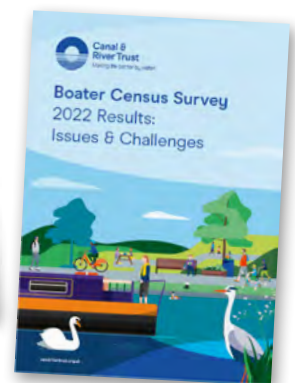
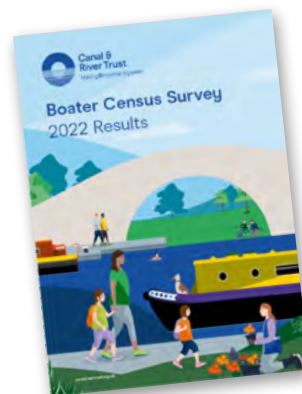
The Boater Census Survey: Issues and Challenges Report, which we published in July 2024, revealed that boaters living on the UK's waterways face significant challenges accessing financial services, medical support, and benefits. Over 9,500 boaters (just under a third of current boat licence holders) responded to the survey, sharing thousands of comments alongside quantitative data that was published in 2023. The most common theme was the difficulty of not having a fixed address, and a postcode in particular.

In the report, we included information about boaters' rights, such as being entitled to register to vote, the help available, and links to support material. However, the results clearly show that more needs to be done to make sure boaters' needs are met. The publication of this report went alongside a call for local and national government and other bodies to include the canal network and liveaboard boaters in their decision-making, policy and services.



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Both census reports can be viewed here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/boating-news-and-views/boating-news/boater-census-survey-2022>



Key facts and figures



£49m

spent on large maintenance and repair projects



111

lock gate leaves replaced



89

locks repaired



90

structures including culverts, bridges, weirs and aqueducts repaired



£9m

spent on emergency works such as storm damage



£27m

spent on upgrading 19 large reservoirs

Our 2,000 miles of canals and rivers play host to over 35,000 boats. We ensure canals provide a home to liveaboard boaters, a sanctuary for holidaymakers, and a workplace for the many boats selling their wares up and down the country, as well as access to nature and the outdoors for millions of visitors every year.

There are lots of opportunities coming up for you to meet the team, find out what's happening nationally and in your area, and raise your questions and concerns.



Read more here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating>



Canal & River Trust

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