



Canal &
River Trust

Our Election Statement



canalrivertrust.org.uk

Our canals matter

They matter not only to the 10 million people who visit them regularly and feel better because of it, but to everyone else as well – because canals enhance the natural environment, they help to mitigate climate change, and they are integral to our future water security and supply.

Canals are part of our national story – in the past, the present and for the future. They are living heritage, unique in the world. They form an integral part of our national infrastructure, generating immense social, environmental and economic value.

We, the Canal & River Trust, are proud to hold these irreplaceable assets in trust for the nation. We have a strong record but know that with the right partnership with government, we can do much more.



The Canal & River Trust is the charity that works to maintain and adapt this iconic 2000-mile network for the future. We work to ensure it continues to thrive, is available for millions to enjoy and, in partnership with Government, plays a significant role in addressing some of the most pressing issues of our time.

The next government will face enormous challenges – from the climate emergency and its impact on nature, water and the environment, to widening inequality and the cost of living and health crises.

Our canal network is itself under threat from the effects of extreme weather, stretching resources to breaking point and potentially risking lives and livelihoods, our precious heritage and our nature habitats.

Yet with the right partnership with government, we know that we can continue to play our role in tackling these challenges together, safeguarding the huge returns that a resilient canal network can deliver for the nation – valued independently at £4.6bn in annual social value and £1.5bn financial economic benefit.

We are calling on all political parties:

To recognise what our inland network of canals, reservoirs and docks contributes for people, communities and businesses around the country; for nature; for water supply; and for our fight against the effects of climate change.

To commit to investing in our inland waterways – ensuring that they play their vital role in a greener and more sustainable future.

How we can make a difference, together

With the right partnerships and support, our canal infrastructure can:

Support health and wellbeing on the doorstep for over nine million people

Our canals offer free access to ‘blue-green’ space and nature for millions – a low-cost public health and wellbeing gift from the past, which passes through many of our most deprived urban communities. For many, it is the only such space within reach. It is imperative that these spaces are well-managed and safe, to encourage people to use them and benefit from them.

Protect lives and livelihoods from the growing impacts of climate change

The existence and the resilience of our network of canals, together with our systems to manage water, form an important component of the flood protection landscape. The network provides defences that equate to billions of pounds worth of flood resilience.

Properly maintained, our network offers an opportunity for water movement, ensuring water security at a time when this is increasingly under threat. Our interconnected canals allow the movement of water from wetter areas to drier areas – they are used already to supply drinking water to London, Bristol and Cheshire, with other projects poised to follow suit.

Conversely, without adequate investment, failure of any one of over 1000 of our assets could pose a material risk to life and property: 70 of the oldest reservoirs in our care are classified as high risk, and over half of our planned asset spend is on reservoir safety.

Support nature recovery and biodiversity along our 2000-mile ‘linear park’

Canals provide much-needed habitat for threatened wildlife at a time when biodiversity in the UK is in crisis. Our network is the UK’s longest linear blue-green space and a vital part of the nation’s nature recovery network – a 2000-mile wildlife corridor that connects urban green spaces for wildlife and is home to many everyday and protected species.

Contribute to economic prosperity

Our network of canals and associated heritage structures generates some £1.5bn of economic benefit per year to England and Wales through hospitality, tourism and marine businesses, supporting over 80,000 jobs.

Furthermore, the economic and social value of urban regeneration with water at its heart has been shown multiple times – transforming places and recreating communities where this is most needed.

Encourage innovative low-carbon energy solutions

Running through the hearts of our towns and cities, our canals and docks contribute to a low-carbon future, offering traffic-free routes along our towpaths for local travel as well as recreational walking, running and cycling, and routes for waterborne freight.

The latent energy in the water itself provides further exciting opportunities – cooling urban areas in warm weather, providing low-carbon heating and cooling for neighbouring buildings, and generating green energy through hydropower schemes.

Help us to ensure the future of our canals

Our canals have become vital to the world today, in ways unimaginable to their original architects 250 years ago. We must not take them for granted. With the right support, our canals can continue to deliver even more environmental, social and economic benefits for all.



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