



Canal &
River Trust

Making life better by water

Boater Report 2023

#KeepCanalsAlive

The Canal & River Trust is the charity responsible for over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers throughout England and Wales, whose network is enjoyed by the millions of people who visit the towpath and by the many thousands of boaters who cruise along the waterways on more than 35,000 registered boats.

We care for our 250-year-old network throughout the year, looking after over 10,000 individual structures. Come rain or shine, our colleagues and volunteers work to keep the waterways open for boaters and record numbers of other visitors. During 2022/23, we once again undertook an extensive programme of planned and emergency works, from replacing lock gates and repairing paddles, re-lining channels and repairing culverts, right through to major works to upgrade our reservoirs to ensure public safety and secure future water supplies.

This report outlines how the Trust's income was generated and examines the expenditure on our charitable activities to maintain the waterways. We've highlighted some of the large-scale resilience and repair works we completed, as well as the many day-to-day challenges over the last year.

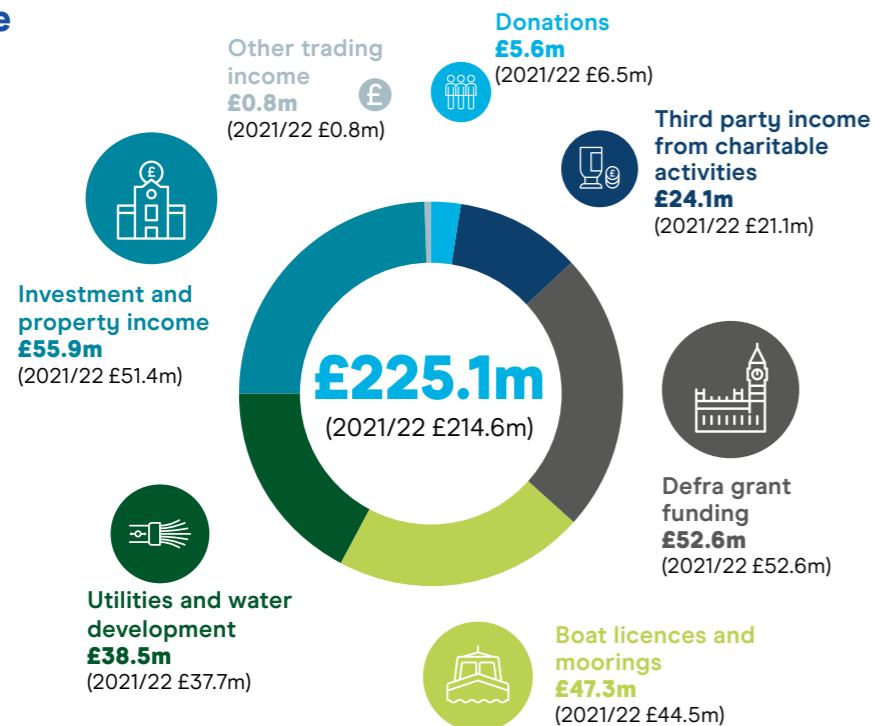
The Trust also benefitted from over **636,000 volunteer hours**. Without this vital contribution from our dedicated team

of volunteers we would not be able to achieve all we currently do to operate and care for our wonderful waterway network.

The record-breaking dry weather of 2022 was an example of the unique challenges we face as we strive to keep the network open and navigable. Not only do extreme climatic events like this bring immediate pressure on water resources, but they also cause longer-term effects on the ageing structures that the canal network depends upon, and we must ensure all emergency repairs are made safely, quickly and effectively.

The costs of maintaining and keeping our waterways open are increasing, but we believe our canals and river navigations make a huge difference to millions of lives, health and wellbeing, the natural environment and to the economy – with the potential to do even more in the future to help combat some of the impacts of climate change.

Income

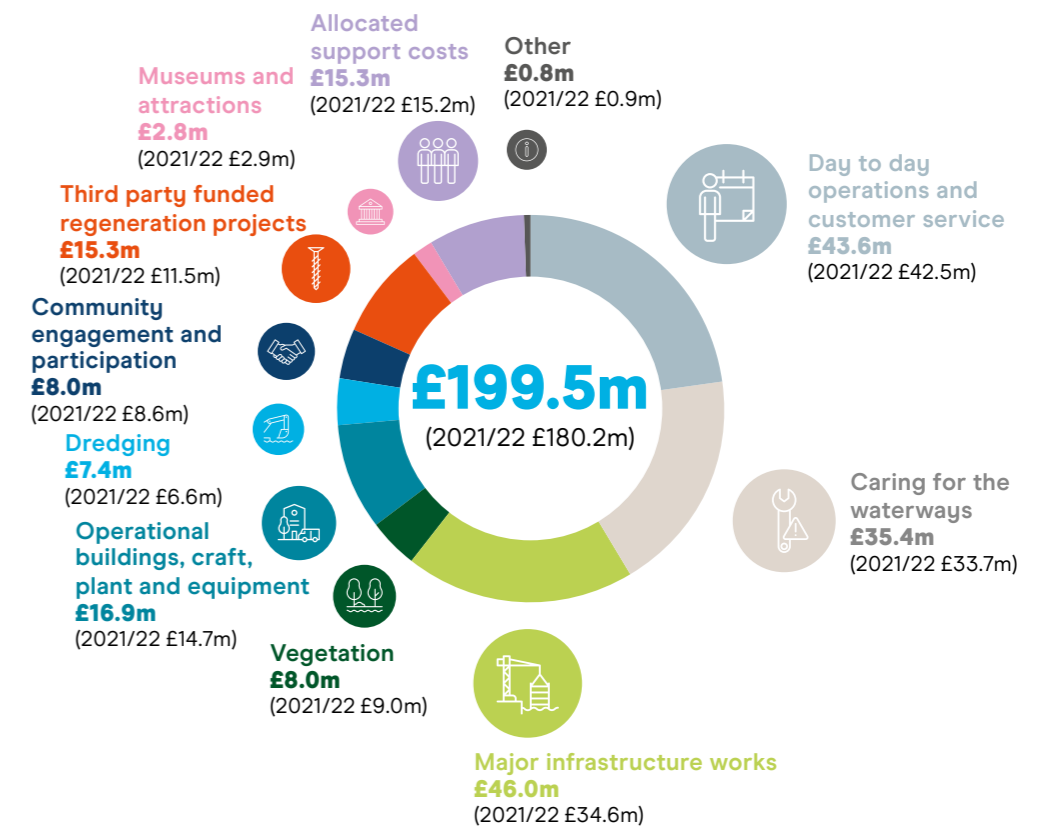


We generate revenue to support our work in a variety of ways. Around a quarter of our total income comes from our annual grant from Government – but the amount has been fixed from 2021 with no allowance for inflation and none planned; it is due to fall steeply from 2027 onwards. We receive around another quarter of our income from careful management of our commercial portfolio of property and non-property investments. We generate another 17% of our income by using the network to support utilities such as water distribution, power cables and digital networks.

We also raise money by shaping projects paid for by third-party funders, councils and companies, alongside donations from supporters.

Boaters, of course, also play a central role in funding our work: the money we receive from boat licences forms a vital 11% of our finances, with another 10% from moorings and fees from boating businesses. These contributions are essential to help us take care of the waterways and fund the projects and other vital interventions that keep our canals alive.

Expenditure on charitable activities



We increased our expenditure on charitable activities in 2022/23 to £199.5 million, representing a 10% uplift in the investment in maintaining our network so that it benefits boaters and a wide array of users.

This chart illustrates how our expenditure is distributed. The bulk of our expenditure is on actively looking after the waterways – everyday maintenance, repairs and inspections – and on major works to infrastructure assets such as reservoirs which are essential for navigation. Another significant proportion is on day-to-day

operations – responding to incidents and managing water supplies – and customer service. Other costs cover vegetation management, plant and equipment, dredging, community projects, regeneration projects and the outgoings for our museums and other visitor attractions.

More detail on both income and expenditure is included in our Annual Report and Accounts, available on our website at canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/annual-report-and-accounts

Working to keep water moving

2022 was the warmest year on record for the UK, and saw several meteorological records broken, including the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK. Summer 2022 was the 10th driest on record. The drought conditions that prevailed across much of the country led to severe shortages for canal water supplies on several of the Trust's canals. Despite this, 85% of the network remained open for navigation. At the peak of these dry conditions, around 15% (by length) of the network was either closed or severely restricted to navigation due to the lack of water for sustaining lock operations and boat movements. Canals affected included much of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, the Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals, the Rochdale Canal, the Caldon Canal and, for the first time in a generation, the Trent & Mersey summit section.

Several of the Trust's reservoirs were subject to major public safety works during

the summer which meant they were drawn down and couldn't provide the full water supply. In total the Trust spent £22.7 million on reservoir works in the year. This put greater pressure on other reservoirs and water abstractions and, as a result, many of these reservoirs were also drawn down to historically low levels as we sought to meet canal demands for water with so little rainfall. A significant effort was required to manage and mitigate possible adverse ecological impacts caused by such low levels, compounded by the high temperatures we experienced. Pumping of water around the network to support canal demands for water was the highest in recent years, at around 35% more than 2021 (with the electricity cost of this pumping 118% greater than 2021). Despite these challenges, the Trust teams worked tirelessly through the year to ensure the majority of the network was open and available for boating.



2022 Drought

Anderton Boat Lift Repairs

The mighty Anderton Boat Lift is one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Waterways' and has earned its nickname of Cathedral of the Canals for a very good reason. Not only does it still do the job it was designed to do of lifting boats and barges the 50 feet from the River Weaver Navigation to the Trent & Mersey Canal, but it does it with the most ingenious and endearing character of any structure on the canal system.

In July 2022, following routine testing, a defect was found which meant it wasn't safe to operate the Lift. Initially it was hoped that a temporary repair could be made, but the conclusion was that the Lift would need to remain shut in order for a more detailed analysis to be undertaken, and significant repairs made to the gate mechanisms that allow the water in and out of the caissons.

The repairs affected all the aqueduct gates and this required the installation of new equipment in the gate lifting mechanism. With the Lift being just a couple of years away from its 150th birthday, any new components had to be designed, approved by English Heritage, manufactured and tested, which couldn't be a quick process. In August the difficult decision was taken to keep the Lift closed for the remainder of the season.

This led to a number of boats needing to find an alternative way into or out of the Weaver Navigation and Ellesmere Port, so our North West colleagues arranged for their passage via the Manchester Ship Canal.

Over the winter the repair work included having to change the seals on both the hydraulic rams. These had to be split from the caissons, polished, seals changed before the other maintenance to extend the life of the rams could be completed. These works were finished by the end of February 2023 which meant that the gate system repairs could commence.

In late March we were able to start the recalibrating phase and to conduct the necessary safety testing for an initial partial opening on Easter weekend, with the full reopening of one of the seven wonders of the waterways coming a little later, on 24 April 2023.

During the repair work we were pleased to secure a £574,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the development of the major repairs and a refurbishment project.

Cost of repair – Circa £450,000



Removing main cylinder from bottom of caisson



Changing the bearings and seals on one of the main cylinders

Everyday Challenges

In addition to our major projects, we also deal with everyday challenges that are reported to us. For example, in a single week in November 2022, we had to remove three cars that had been dumped in our West Midlands waterways – from the New Main Line Canal, from the Grand Union and from the Dudley No.1 Canal. Each takes time and effort to deal with and ensure any locks are safe for use.

The cost of these three removals alone came to around £10,000 as specialist equipment had to be brought in.



Delph Lock Flight, Dudley No. 1 Canal

Valuing Our Waterways

Providing the figures for the annual income and expenditure is a fairly easy process, but how do you put a value on our fantastic waterways as a whole, and how do you measure the benefit they bring to local communities and the wider country?

In November 2022 we published the report 'Waterways & Wellbeing – Valuing our Waterways', which identified that over 80,000 jobs are directly or indirectly dependent on our waterways, with over £1.5 billion being contributed to the UK economy through the tourism, hospitality and marine sectors each year.

The report also identified that the *Annual Social Value* generated by our waterways is a huge £4.6 billion which includes, through the active use of our towpaths, a saving of £1.1 billion to the NHS every year.

All the reservoir dams and canal embankments maintained by the Trust help ensure water stays in our canals, but they also provide protection for many households, properties, businesses, telecommunications and utilities, including other national infrastructure such as electricity sub stations, schools and transport. The approximate *Asset Protection Value* of all these elements including flood protection offered by our embankments and reservoirs, and utilities support from our bridges and towpaths being in good condition, is £42 billion.

Looking at these numbers it is clear to see the enormous value for money provided by our waterways.

The full report can be read on our website canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/valuing-our-waterways

Looking to the future – Keeping Canals Alive

In July 2023 the Government announced a new funding settlement, spanning from 2027 to 2037, to follow on from our current grant agreement. Whilst we welcome this further long-term commitment to the nation's historic waterways, the amount awarded represents a steep reduction in funding of over £300 million in real terms over a ten-year period compared to recent levels. A reduction that could have devastating consequences on our canals and the people and wildlife who rely on them.

Without further support, such a steep reduction risks a decline in the overall condition of our waterway network, and, alarmingly, the possibility of canal closures. It puts at risk invaluable natural habitats, historic infrastructure and cherished public spaces.

What happens next?

We are sure you will share our disappointment at the Government's decision. We are determined to fight to change it, to re-state the case for the funding needed to keep canals alive, and to sustain the wide range of benefits they deliver. With your help, and that of all our other users, partners, boaters, volunteers, Friends and supporters, we will continue our campaign over the months ahead whilst also taking every opportunity to generate funding from other sources, and to deliver our work efficiently. Together we can keep canals alive and thriving for the future.

In the meantime, we'll continue to raise our voice and fight for our network.

What happens next?



We'll raise awareness of the issue with everyone who lives, works and spends time on our waterways network to build support



We'll target the media to raise the profile of canals and their importance to everyone



We'll keep collecting and presenting evidence that shows just how valuable canals are for people, wildlife and the economy



We'll meet with MPs from all political parties to influence policy and shape manifestos



We'll continue to raise vital funds to ensure we can continue to keep canals open for all to enjoy

If you haven't already you can show your support by writing to your MP to demand action for canals, please see our website canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us/our-campaigns/keep-canals-alive

Major works, minor works & everyday repairs



93%

licence compliance



9,530

boater responses received to first ever boating census



£24.1m

major infrastructure third party funding



83

major works completed



325

in-house construction projects



59

unexpected repairs



57km

dredged



112

lock gates replaced



208,090

hours of volunteer lock keeping



£7.4m

spent on dredging



87.17%

of assets graded A-C



120,000

tonnes of material removed

Canal & River Trust

National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port
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CH65 4FW

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Enjoy. Volunteer. Donate
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All information correct at the time of publication.

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Hebden Bridge, Rochdale Canal