

Canal &
River Trust

Impact report

2024/25

A vital connector for people, boats,
nature, places and for a brighter future

We're the
charity
protecting the
canals & rivers
you love.
Support us.



**Canal &
River Trust**

The vital connector

2,000

miles of canals
(3,219 kilometres)

791

million
'unique visits'

10+

million
visitors

Attracting **791 million 'unique visits'** and **10+ million visitors** to our network of **2,000 miles** of canals and towpaths, navigable rivers, docks and reservoirs

Figures cover period April 2024 – March 2025 unless stated otherwise.

Place & Prosperity



Supporting sustainable growth, boating, development and living

13,000+ boat licence holders living aboard across our network and **8.9 million** people living by or near the water (within 1km)

We care for over **2,700** heritage structures



741 miles of Green Flag awarded canals

135 new lock gates installed, keeping network open for navigation for **33,000+** licensed boats

£11.7 billion annual contribution to the economy, supporting **230,000** jobs

Centre for Economics and Business Research (2025) valued the impact of our canal network based upon 2022/2023 figures

Nature & Biodiversity



Vital habitats and corridors for nature to thrive

Canal network at the heart of UK's first official '**Nature City**'

Today, we protect

68 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and **1,500** non-statutory wildlife sites

3,184 kilometres of interconnected watercourse habitats



450 species recorded along the Regent's Canal in London and

900+ species recorded on Manchester's canals

Removal of **1,300** bags of plastic waste and **1,500** tonnes of floating pennywort

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs



PADDLE UK

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Department for Transport



Active Travel England



2025 NGO Impact Award winners in **Unlocking Biodiversity**

Health & Wellbeing



Connecting people with blue spaces, routes and nature

747,518

volunteering hours



78% felt close to nature on their most recent visit

71% of users say their mood was changed positively by being near the water

£1.1 billion

savings to NHS derived from active use of our waterways and towpaths – Valuing Our Waterways Report (2024)

Over **18.6** miles (30 kilometres) of towpath improved, supporting active travel and recreation

ONS wellbeing metrics on 'Life Satisfaction' are significantly higher for canal users than non-users

53.7% of households within 1km are experiencing wellbeing inequalities (up to 63% in some areas)

Resilience & Security



Critical and interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure

80%

of network kept open and the water cooled cities and towns by 1-2°C during summer 2025 droughts

15 emergency repairs

200+ winter works projects

repairs to **22** large reservoirs



Leeds & Liverpool Canal water being used to heat

9,000

homes and **4 million sqft** of commercial space

Supporting hydro schemes generating c.21MWh per year, equivalent to powering **c.6,500** homes

Flood protection – benefitting **13.4 million** people and **370k** businesses



Building and sustaining vital connections

Together, we're creating vital connections to blue and green spaces on the doorstep of millions. These spaces matter to local people, and we believe everyone should have access to nature and the outdoors within 10-15 minutes of home.

Availability

Provision of accessible blue space and nature on doorstep



2,000 miles
of free blue spaces with
8.9 million
people living within 10-15 minute walk of our network

Wellbeing inequalities

53.7% of households within a 10-15 minute walk of our network are experiencing wellbeing inequalities (up to 63% in some areas)

Diverse communities

34.9% from an ethnic minority background (ranging from 5.4% to 85.1%)

Quality

Making blue spaces safe and inviting



Over 4 million people

living within 10-15 minutes of one of our

741 miles of Green Flag

awarded canals

90% towpath user satisfaction

77% of adults who are aware they live within 1km of a Trust waterway and recognise its value to them personally or their local community

Engaging

Creating positive and meaningful experiences of blue spaces



Community Roots programme

in 10 deprived and diverse areas

103,000+ children
attended an outdoor learning session

69,000+ people
attended water safety sessions

19,481 participants
attended our Let's Programme events
and **1,263** events held

Connections

Enabling everyday use and deepening connections with blue spaces



791 million unique visits,
with an average of
10.3 million people
per month in 2024/25

56% of more frequent waterway users have high nature connectedness

77% of users agree that access to waterways encourages them to do more exercise

Sustainability

Empowering pro-environmental actions to transform blue spaces for the benefit of people and nature



747,518 hours
by our
5,473 volunteers

70,000+ hours
of community payback activity delivered by nearly
6,000 people
at 36 sites

An army of Citizen Scientists
participating in species spotting and our Plastics Challenge

Thanks for supporting us

5,473

active volunteers,
delivering 747,518
volunteering hours

100+

funders and partners
supported us this year

32,086

Friends
(regular supporters)



Introducing the report Canals: vital connectors

We believe access to water, nature and outdoor space is not a luxury; it's a lifeline. These blue and green corridors are vital for healthier lives, thriving communities and a greener, fairer future for all.

Our 2,000-mile network of canals and towpaths, navigable rivers, docks and reservoirs is powering recovery, for people, nature, the economy and the planet. Our waterways are transforming lives every day by delivering growth, health and wellbeing, pride, biodiversity and water security to millions.

Yet the UK faces three urgent, interconnected crises: biodiversity loss, disconnection from nature, and deep wellbeing inequalities. With **51% of Britons feeling cut off from society*** — especially in deprived areas — canals stand out as shared community spaces, reconnecting people to each other and to the natural world.

Independent research by More in Common (2025) shows that

access to green space is the single biggest source of community pride, yet it remains unequally shared. Our canals help close that gap, providing blue space within **15 minutes of home for 8.9 million people**. They offer safe, welcoming places to live, walk, meet, enjoy and belong, where community and nature thrive side by side.

They're also vital to the nation's resilience, forming a key part of our national water infrastructure in the UK, supporting renewable energy and sustainable living on and by water, while helping communities and places adapt to a changing climate.

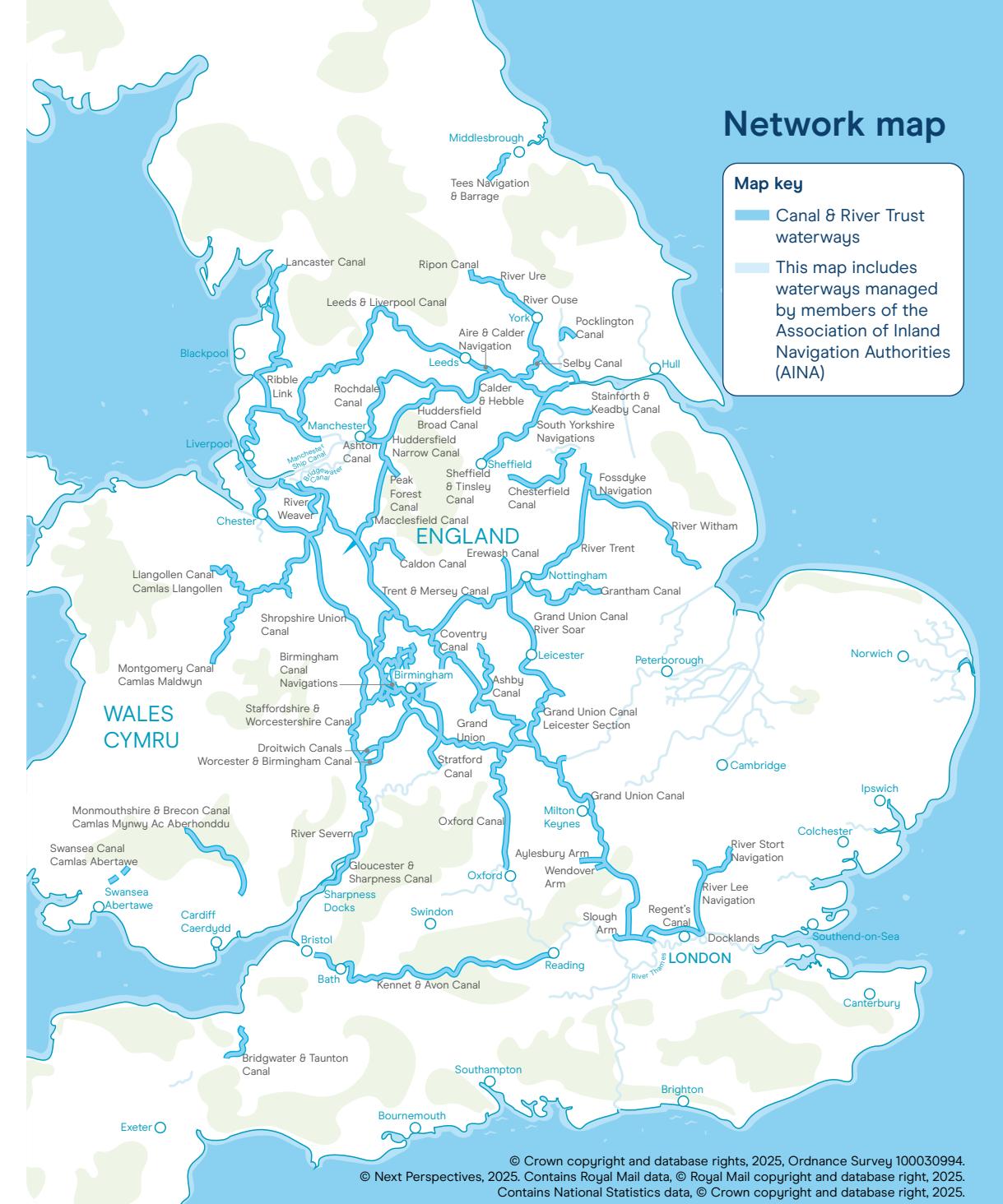
Despite extreme weather this year, from flooding to drought, over **80% of our network remained open for navigation**.

In the face of huge economic, environmental and social challenges, the regeneration of our canals over the past 70 years shows what's possible when people unite behind a shared purpose. Every repair, restoration and towpath improvement strengthens this living heritage network, connecting people, nature and place.

Our canals are not relics; they are living arteries providing vital connections.

This report shines a light on their value, potential and transformative power, and on the partnerships and people helping to protect these vital connectors for generations to come, bringing to life the stories behind our published annual report 2024-25.

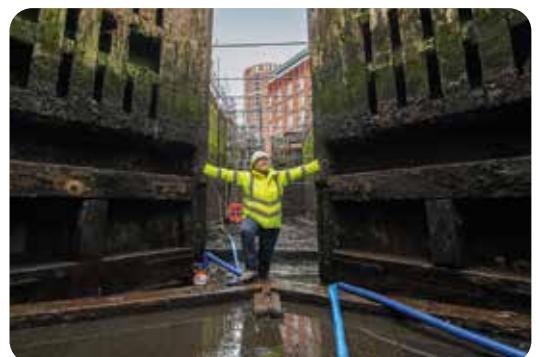
Our cause is both urgent and hopeful, fired by the belief that together we can shape a better, more connected future.



**Together,
we're delivering
the vital
connections
society needs**



The ripple effect of our network, our partnerships and the work we do delivers real lasting change, creating a brighter future for people, boats, nature and places



Introduction





Keeping our canals open and alive

We're the UK's largest canal charity, looking after 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England and Wales.

Our purpose is to achieve a sustainable future for our canal network, keeping it open and alive, making it resilient and safe, and maximising its value for people, nature and the economy.

Our vision – Our canals are living waterways that transform places and enrich lives

Living waterways provide vital habitats for wildlife, much-needed open spaces and routes for people and boats, and help tackle some of the UK's most pressing challenges

Transform places by connecting communities and businesses, physically and digitally, providing a focus for regeneration and giving us new ways to live and work sustainably

Enrich lives by connecting us with nature, with each other and with our past and our future

Fulfilling canals' potential as vital connectors: the difference we can make to society

Our network of canals, navigable rivers, docks and reservoirs plays a vital role in transforming communities and places, enriching lives, and delivering significant societal impact.



Our pathways to societal impact

Our canals can only deliver their full potential if they are safe, well-maintained and welcoming. Extreme weather makes stewardship of infrastructure, water, environment and heritage increasingly challenging.

Assets

200+ years old fragile heritage assets are resilient and safe

Quality

Accessible and inviting blue spaces and infrastructure

Experience

Platforms for uses, activities, utilities and sustainable development

Impact

Societal Outcomes (Public Benefits)



Creating the necessary conditions for delivering societal impact

Key enablers of impact:

- Maintaining and improving waterway resilience in the face of growing impact from the climate emergency
- Removing the barriers to use
- Extending our reach and impact

The following chapters showcase the transformative impact of canals and the partnerships that make it possible.

Flowing solutions for modern challenges

Rethinking canals, reimagining resilient communities

Our canals are part of our past, present and future. Once built for industry, they now connect us to something richer – thriving communities, flexible homes, greener travel and stronger connections with nature. Upgraded moorings, towpaths and green corridors deliver sustainable living, while careful water management protects ecosystems and reduces climate risks.



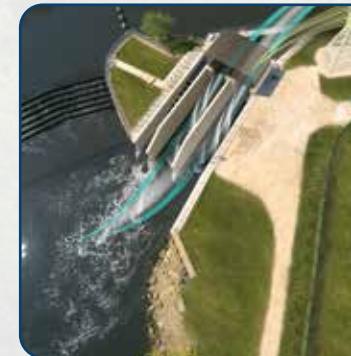
Homes on and by the water



Healthy routes supporting active travel and recreation



Water supply and transfer



Renewable energy generation



Climate mitigation and adaptation

Built for the past, made for the future

A vital connector for nature and people

The UK ranks lowest of the 14 European countries considered in a recent study across three critical indicators, experiencing the greatest biodiversity loss, lowest levels of nature connectedness and highest levels of wellbeing inequalities as shown below.

Thriving nature and biodiversity



Nature-based solutions and learning

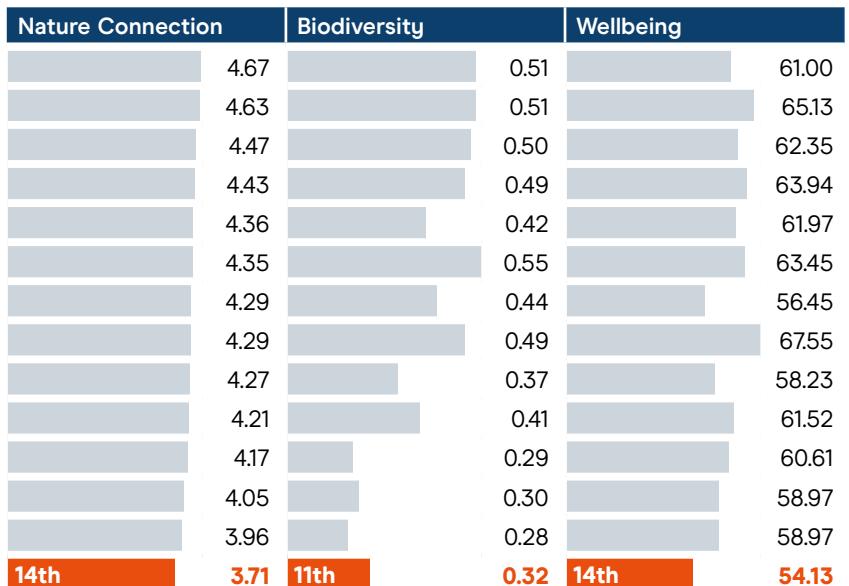


Active and healthy communities



Our canals provide the opportunity to help address these three interconnected challenges.

Numbers are scores given to each country based on the study.



The Guardian. Source: Country-level factors in a failing relationship with nature, Miles Richardson, Iain Hamlin, Lewis R Elliott & Mathew P White, *Ambio* (2022).

Our impact: the difference we can make to society

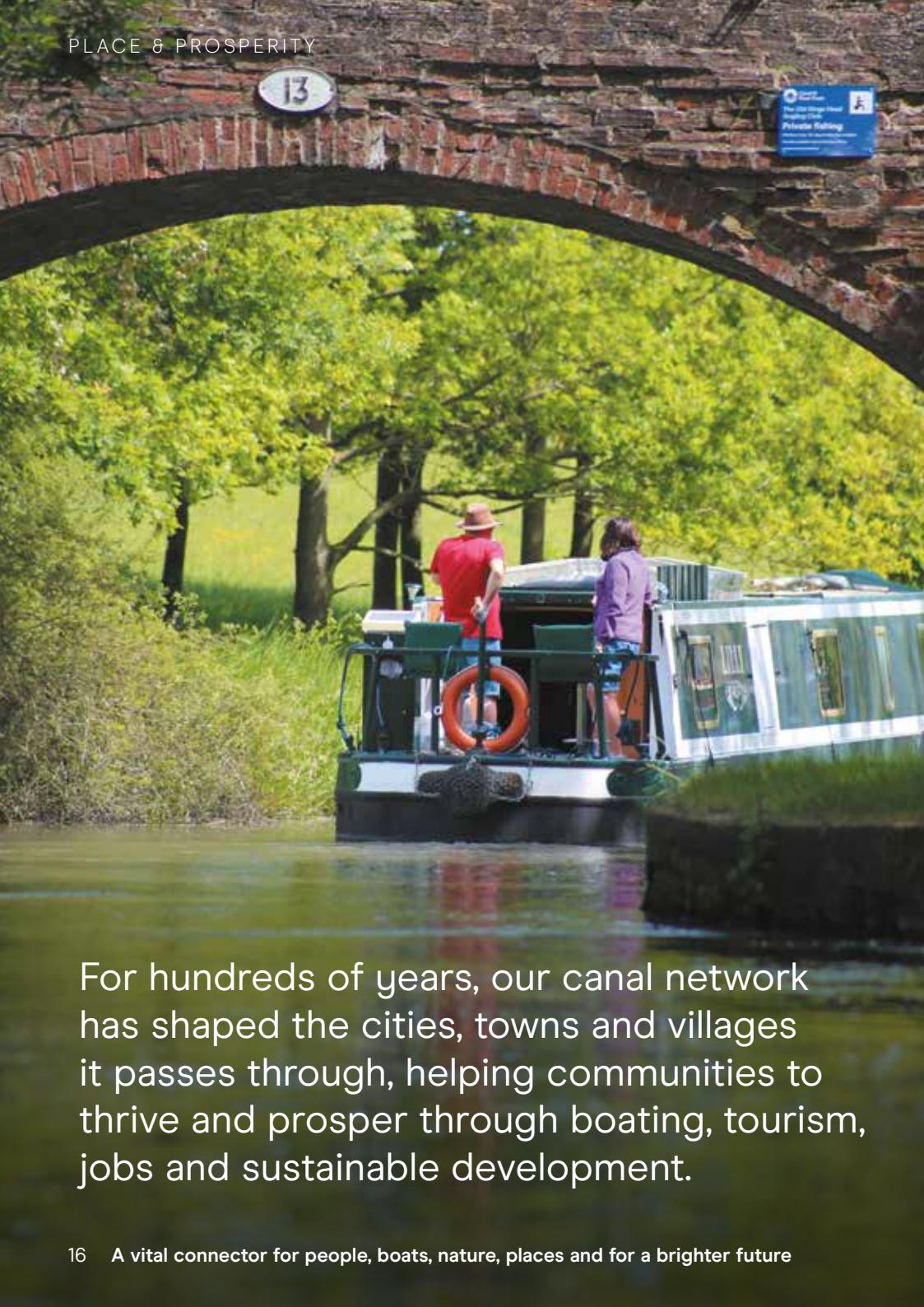




Place & Prosperity



Supporting sustainable growth,
boating, development and living



For hundreds of years, our canal network has shaped the cities, towns and villages it passes through, helping communities to thrive and prosper through boating, tourism, jobs and sustainable development.

UK societal challenge

Too few homes, slow economic growth and insecure water and energy supplies are serious challenges facing our nation. And it's impacting communities, who feel left behind.

However, the Plan for Change (December 2024) is seeking to stimulate economic growth, build new homes, make Britain a clean energy superpower and a high-nature, low-carbon society, as well as break down barriers to opportunities.

And just as our canal network helped to spur innovation and growth over 200 years ago, it can be part of the solution today.

The difference we make

Our canals are living, working heritage like no other, connecting us to our past and inspiring our future.

They drive urban and rural regeneration and enhance the quality of our lives, making our towns and cities better places to live and spend time in. Our network can fuel economic growth by supporting tourism, our utilities and the marine economy, as well as support resilience of water supply, flood mitigation and renewable energy generation.

Working in partnership to build connections and resilience in our local communities

Through our Community Roots programme, players of People's Postcode Lottery have enabled us to bring together different communities to shape and care for their local canal.

The programme is currently delivered in ten urban areas where the need – and potential for impact – is greatest. Through co-creation and inclusive engagement, we help communities rediscover the environmental, cultural and wellbeing value of their local canals, changing perceptions and creating pride in place.

Ten outcome focus areas



Sheffield



Blackburn and Burnley



Black Country



Birmingham



Leicester



Tottenham Hale



Torfaen



Brent



Sefton



Coventry

People taking part in Community Roots programmes and activities



22,930
participants

4,890
aged 25 and under

25
canal adoptions

Together, we're looking after our national treasure and creating connection in every mile

Caring for 2,000 miles of canals and rivers, including 741 miles of award-winning Green Flag routes that link people, boats, nature and place.

From green wildlife corridors to vibrant community spaces, local pride flows through every stretch. By caring for this network, we protect the special places we call home today and create sustainable, thriving places for tomorrow.



With our volunteers, we're creating great places



“
I've been really lucky to find a role which I find interesting, challenging, varied and rewarding. ”

Penny
Water management volunteer



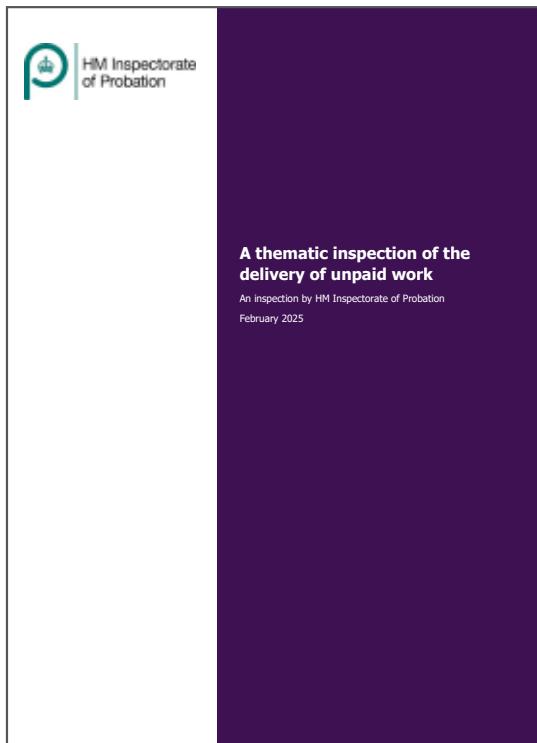
“
I was just stuck inside doing nothing. Volunteering helped me meet great people, learn new skills and feel proud of what I can do. ”

Cameron joined the Beeston Towpath Taskforce as a volunteer in 2023. He was recognised for his energy and dedication and the optimism he brought to every task when he won Young Volunteer of the Year in 2024.

People on probation help transform the nation's canals

Thanks to a partnership between the Canal & River Trust and the Ministry of Justice, people on probation are helping to rejuvenate the nation's canals.

A national report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation (February 2025) into the Probation Service, positively highlighted the partnership with the Trust and its impact.



People on probation are helping to improve our towpaths

70,000+ hours

of Community Payback activity delivered by nearly 6,000 people at 36 sites



“

We established a national partnership with Canal & River Trust in 2022, and it's gone from strength to strength. Together, we deliver thousands of hours of Community Payback each year, helping maintain waterways and benefit local communities and the environment. It also gives people on probation the chance to learn new skills and connect with nature.”



Caroline Morrison, Head of policy for Community Payback, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service



Ministry
of Justice

**Ian Hodgkin's team is
doing brilliant work in the
community.**

“

Probationers are painting locks, cutting back brambles and keeping the canal tidy. It's hard graft, unpaid and they've got to hit our standards. They give up weekends, work long days, but you can see the difference they make – it feels great for them and the local community.”

For probationers, being outdoors by the water is about more than just the physical work – it gives a real sense of purpose. ‘Joe’, a local participant, says: “I come here with my daughter. It's better than prison, we do a good day's work, and I go home knowing I've done something useful.”

Each week, teams across East London to East Lancashire, and the Tees roll up their sleeves to care for our canal network. Their dedication is making a tangible impact, not only on the canals themselves but also on the communities that rely on them. Every cleared path and tidy bank is a small but meaningful step toward stronger, more connected neighbourhoods.

80
London schools within 1km of a canal

56
schools and colleges participated

12,695
pupils participated

Figures cover period 2022 – 2025.

“

The staff who went on the trip came back saying it was wonderful. Nowrujee who ran the sessions was fantastic and the kids really loved it, so I got in touch to see if she could do assembly sessions for the whole school – and she did! ”

Vassa Armitas
Assistant headteacher at Gladesmore Community School



Building brighter futures for young people through our STEM programmes

We're connecting young people with nature and helping to develop in demand skills so they're ready for the future.

Our canals and rivers are ready-made outdoor classrooms. In London, the STEM programme uses nearby water to bring science, geography and careers to life for pupils who are least likely to access nature or employer encounters. Schools choose from free educational visits, assemblies, webinars and careers sessions that connect the curriculum to the real world.

Sessions include ecology, rewilding, low-carbon transport and flood management, with practical tasks and local history. Teachers report strong engagement, especially from pupils who rarely spend time outside. A GIS fieldwork pilot on the River Lea showed pupils from Gladesmore Community School, Tottenham, how mapping, observation and enquiry build confidence and memory.

Kick starting young people's futures

Daniel joined the Trust through the Government's Kickstart scheme, progressed to an apprenticeship, and is now a Team Leader, demonstrating that with the right support, canals can be a launchpad for long-term careers.



“We want to engage young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and raise their aspirations. By providing hands-on learning experiences that link STEM skills to the real world we can start to make them realise what's available to them – that STEM is for them.”

Nowrujee Ali
Skills & learning coordinator

“My mum and I both loved canals and the history behind them, so her passing in 2020 was especially difficult. Shortly afterward, I had the opportunity to become a Kickstart member with Canal & River Trust, which I eagerly accepted. This six-month project focused on improving access around the Perry Barr area.

“After an incredible and successful experience, I progressed to a bricklaying apprenticeship where I excelled, finishing as Bricklayer of the Year and Student of the Year. I was later also recognised

by the Bricklayers and Tilers Guild in London with an award. I moved into a full-time role with the Trust, gaining hands-on experience with the canals and the infrastructure that supports them.

“I am now proud to serve as Team Leader for Birmingham, managing 52 miles of the local canals I grew up around. The Trust has helped me realise my potential and pushed me toward my goals. The support, guidance, and connections I've received along the way have been incredible, and I look forward to building a long and fulfilling career at the Trust.”

Shaping vibrant waterside places together

A vibrant neighbourhood with
500+ homes



“

Hale Wharf is a great example of what can be achieved when organisations work in partnership. By collaborating with Canal & River Trust, we've delivered placemaking that creates vibrant, nature-rich communities and connects people to the blue and green spaces of the Walthamstow wetlands. These canalside developments don't just regenerate areas, they bring life, biodiversity, and wellbeing into the heart of our cities.”



Phil Mayall, Managing director, Muse

Reviving Ellesmere Yard: reimagining heritage



We care for

2,700+

heritage
structures

4

world
heritage
sites

46

scheduled
ancient
monuments



We received funding from Historic England and Shared Prosperity Fund to carry out vital emergency repairs at Ellesmere Yard during 2024 and 2025. Additionally, we secured a grant from National Lottery Heritage Fund to reimagine the future of the historic canal hub on the Llangollen Canal built in 1806.





Where canal-based businesses and communities thrive



Barge East is a 125-year-old Dutch barge turned award-winning restaurant in Hackney Wick. It offers seasonal, locally sourced menus and features a lush riverside garden, promoting sustainability and community engagement in East London.

“

Since receiving the opportunity from Canal & River Trust in 2018, Barge East has grown from a small start-up into an award-winning sustainable bar and restaurant aboard a 125-year-old Dutch barge. We've been recognised nationally and globally, including TripAdvisor's #1 One-of-a-Kind Restaurant in the UK and #8 in the world. We proudly employ 25 permanent staff, increasing to around 50 during summer, and create meaningful training and employment opportunities for people in East London and within the wider canal community. The Trust's support has been fundamental to our growth, impact, and continued commitment to the waterways.”

Tommo Stuart Thomson
Owner, Barge East

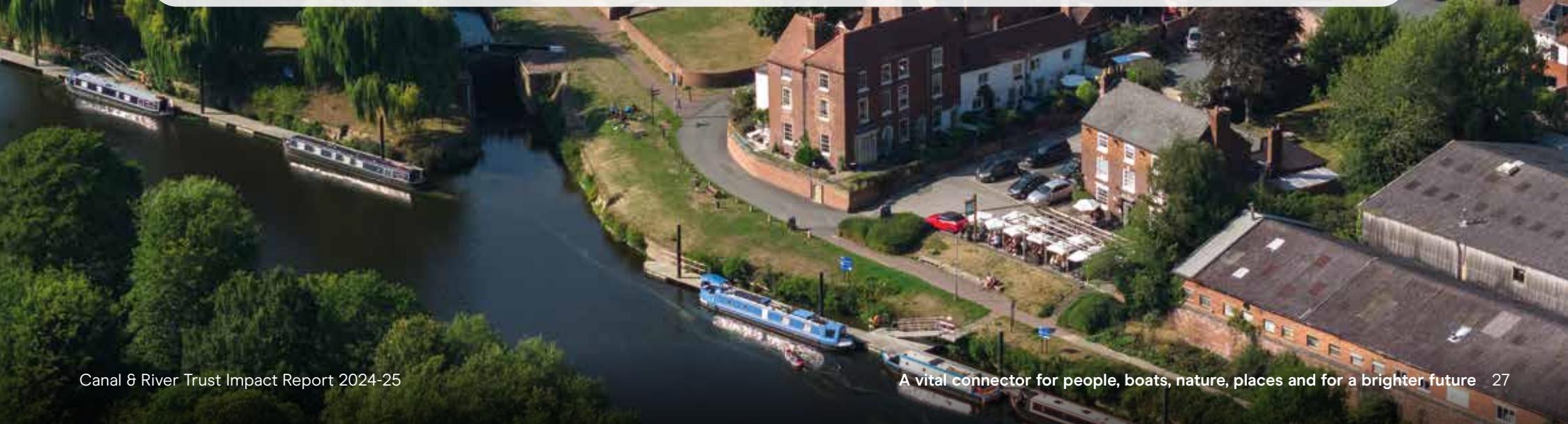
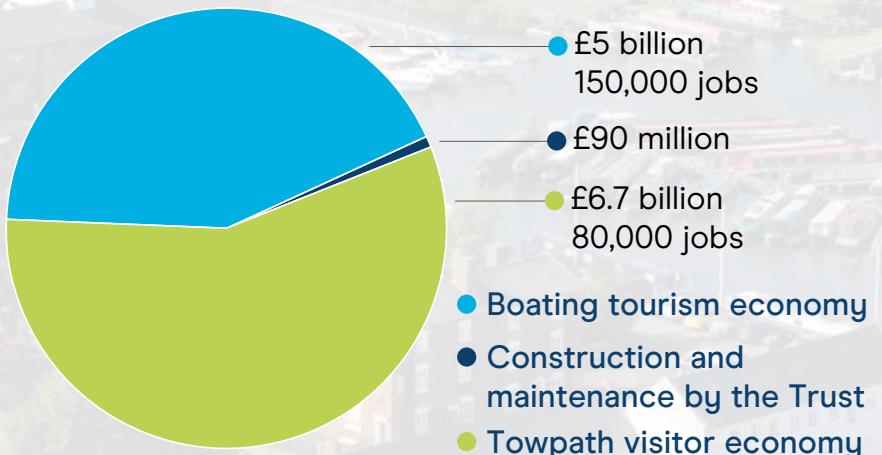


Our canal network delivers vital growth, jobs and thriving local businesses

From towpaths to docks, our canalside spaces sustain livelihoods and strengthen community connections.

From bustling docks to vibrant towpaths, our canals drive tourism, create jobs and support local businesses. A report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (2025) valued the impact of our canal network using 2022/23 figures at **£11.7 billion Gross Value Added** and **230,000 jobs** annually.

Total economic impact



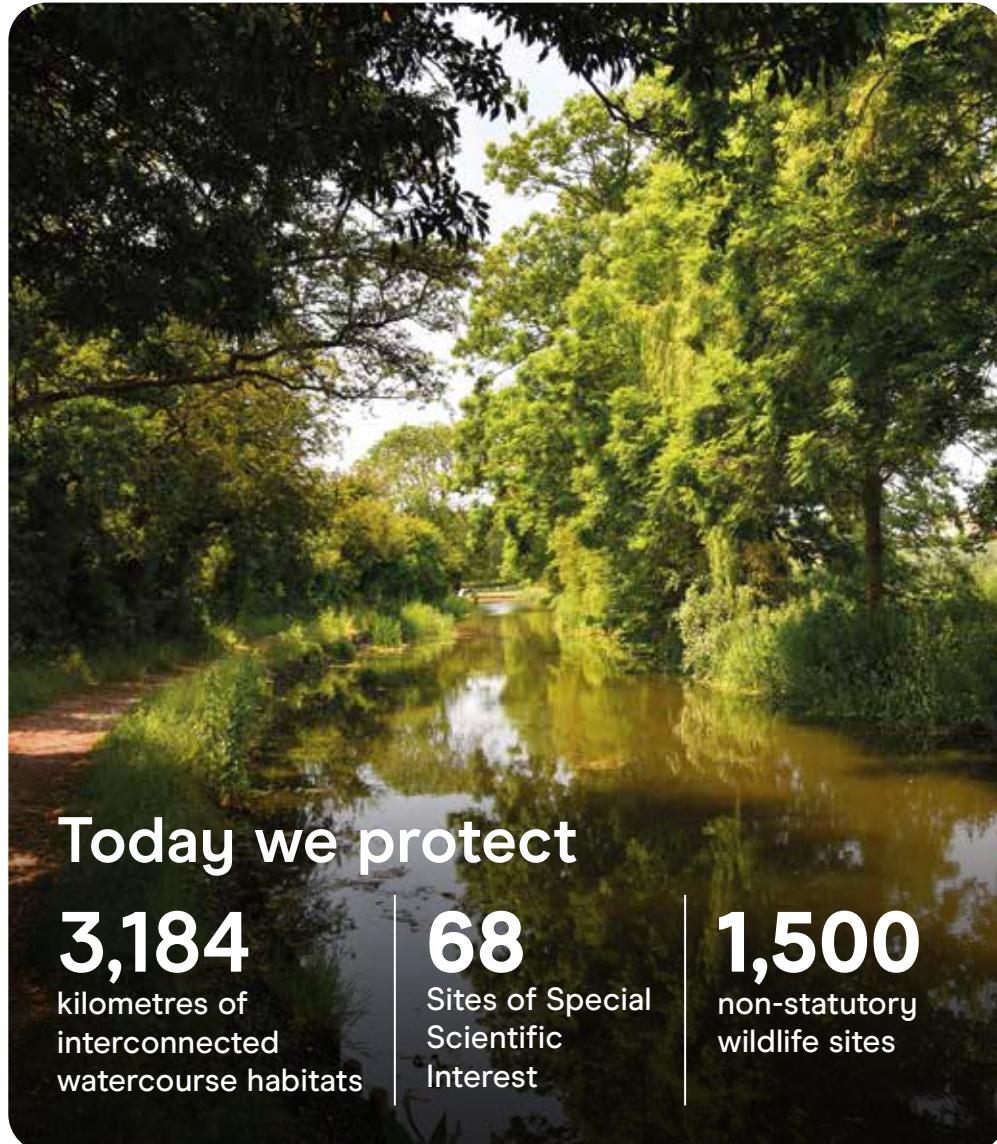


Nature & Biodiversity



Vital habitats and corridors
for nature to thrive

Our network of canals and hedgerows provides vital habitats and corridors for nature to thrive, connecting blue and green spaces, from cities and towns to the open countryside.



UK societal challenge

The UK faces a severe biodiversity crisis, characterised by significant species decline and habitat loss – and is one of the most nature-depleted countries globally.

To secure our future and protect UK wildlife, the country must move to a high-nature, low-carbon society.

The challenge we face

Iconic species along our canals, like kingfishers and water voles, face urgent threats from habitat loss, pollution and climate change.

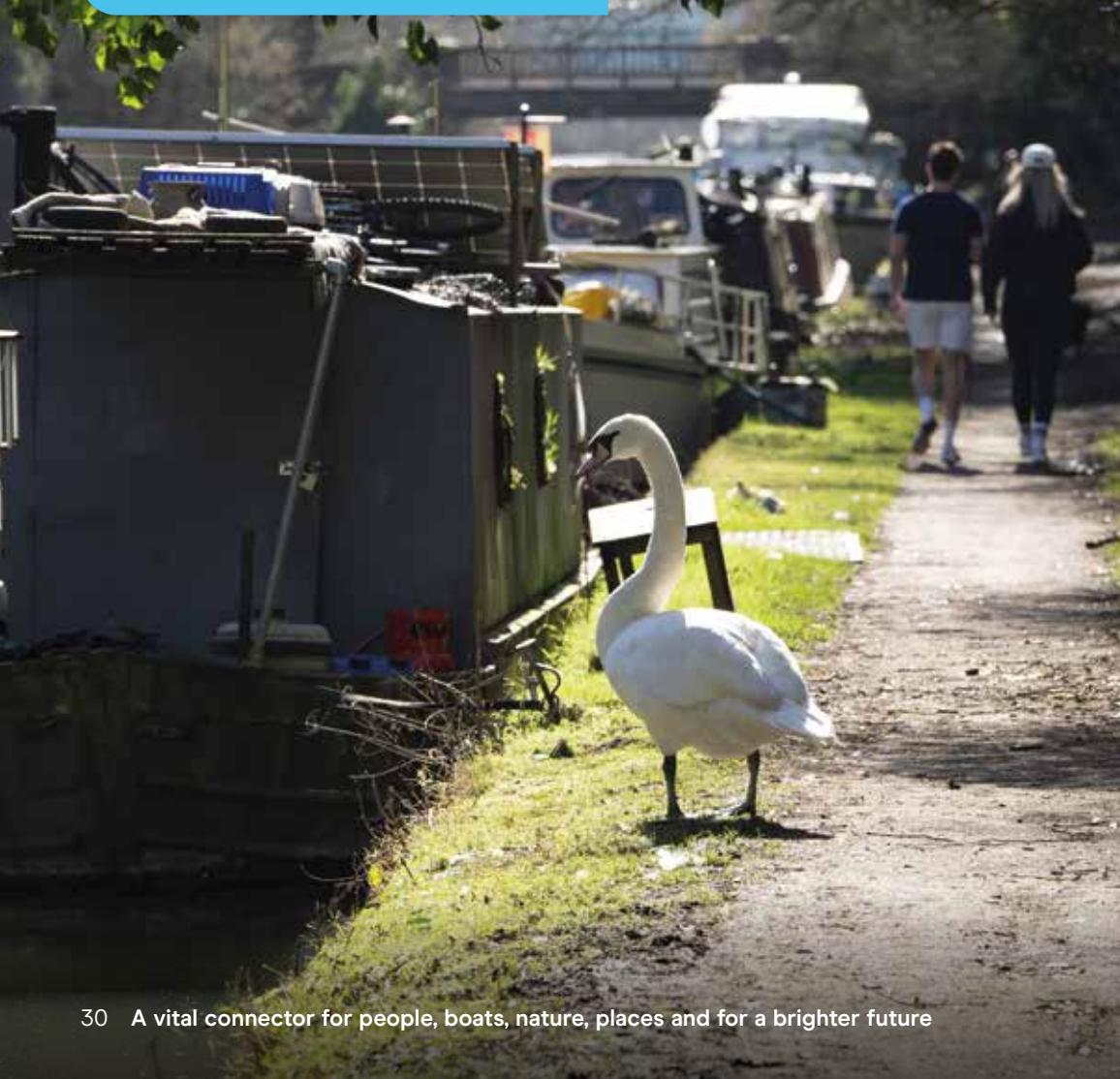
Invasive and non-native species are making it hard for native canal animal and plant life to survive. Pollution, from plastics to sewage, is releasing chemicals and greenhouse gasses, contaminating the water and harming the wildlife that makes its home in, on and along our canals.

We continuously need to clean up, reduce carbon emissions and provide more homes where nature can thrive.

State of UK nature

UK wildlife is in decline: nearly 500 species have been lost from England in the last 200 years.

Canals are part of the solution, providing homes, safe routes and connections for wildlife to thrive.



Our canals' unique habitats at the heart of nature's recovery

Stretching through towns and countryside, our vital living canal heritage sustains thriving ecosystems and wildlife. They provide safe, interconnected spaces where species can move, flourish, and recover, helping to reverse the decline in UK biodiversity.

Today, canals are places where boats, nature and people live side by side — offering havens for wildlife, green spaces for everyone and a resilient, sustainable future for generations to come.

Understanding the ecological value of our network

We completed mapping our ecological footprint in 2024, establishing our ecological baseline. We're working with local authorities to make sure our canal network is an integral part of local nature recovery strategies, contributing to the Government's 30by30 goal.

Restoring connection where it's needed most

Our canal network runs through the very areas where nature is most depleted, making it uniquely placed to drive nature recovery and reconnection.

Our canals offer vital continuous habitats, acting as a living mosaic that bridges ecological gaps and links urban and rural environments. They help mend the fractures between people and wildlife to create a more joined-up resilient landscape.

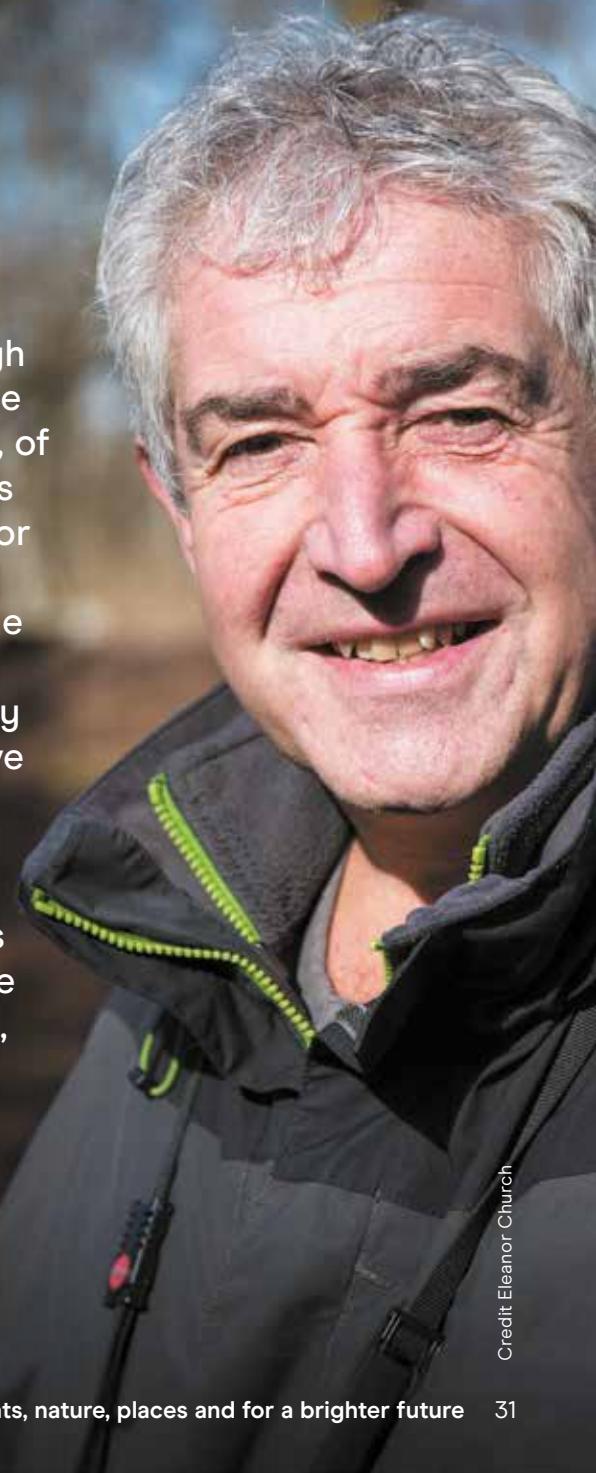
These aerial images show canal corridors in nature-poor urban and rural landscapes.



“

We can connect up the landscape through the use of infrastructure, with wildlife corridors that are attached to what are already linear features running through the landscape: alongside railways, highways, and, of course, by canals. That's why it is so important for the Canal & River Trust to be participating in the national programme to create a nature recovery network. Wildlife can live very close to people, even in the heart of our towns and cities, especially if we harness this green infrastructure to be not only beautiful, but to be connecting up the landscape and thereby contributing to nature's recovery. ”

**Dr Tony Juniper, CBE
Chair of Natural England**



A vital champion for nature

Our network and nature-based recovery programmes are giving wildlife a home in both rural and high-density urban areas. With people, boats and wildlife living and thriving side by side.

Once in decline, otters are recovering, thanks to our canal's freshwater and connected canal habitats.

Otter spotted at dusk in the Nottingham & Beeston Canal at Castle Lock, in the heart of Nottingham city — first ever for this location.



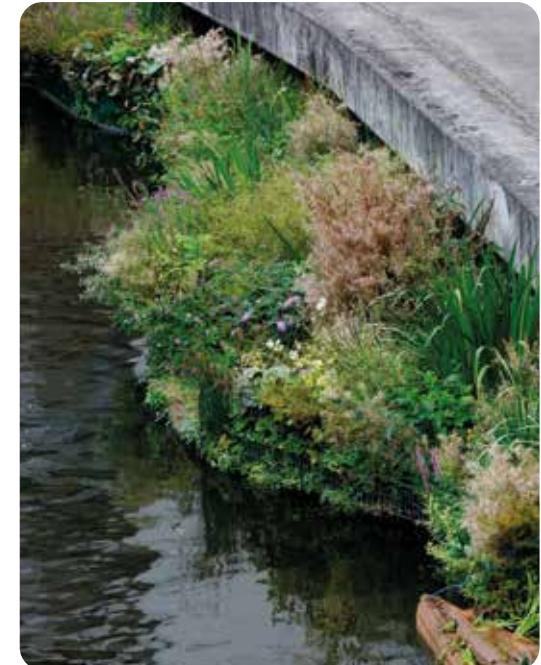
This map includes data from: Landsat / Copernicus Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Airbus, IBCAO.

'CanalSpot', our species recording portal linked to iRecord

Players of People's Postcode Lottery have enabled the development of CanalSpot, our species recording portal.



POSTCODE
EARTH
TRUST



Floating ecosystems installed on Nottingham's canal to attract more wildlife into the city centre.

Collaboration at the heart of delivering a healthier natural world for all

Pennywort be gone

In May 2024, the River Douglas catchment partnership joined forces to tackle floating pennywort and Himalayan balsam on the Rufford branch of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. These invasive plants threaten the health of the canal and the wildlife that depends on it. **Led by the Angling Trust and supported by 50 United Utilities staff**, the teams worked together to clear the canal's heart, creating space for native plants and animals to thrive.

The success of the initial event led to follow-up sessions, with the Environment Agency and other partners. This collaborative effort demonstrates the vital role



of partnerships in protecting our canals, supporting biodiversity, and ensuring waters remain healthy, vibrant habitats for wildlife and people alike.

Working in partnership with



Chris, one of our many volunteers, clearing away invasive species on the Montgomery Canal

Nature's solution

On the Dearne & Dove, Chesterfield and Huddersfield Broad canals we released a natural solution — tiny weevils, to remove out of control water fern, an invasive plant species. Safe, effective and sustainable, they offer an alternative to herbicides or physical removal. We released **5,500 weevils** on the Dearne & Dove and **3,000** on the Huddersfield Broad.



Encouraged by the success, we plan to expand this approach to protect more canals and wildlife.

Helping Birmingham transform into the first ‘Nature City’



In 2025, Birmingham became the UK’s first official ‘Nature City’, recognised for improving community access to nature and green spaces.

Our canals and nature-first programmes restore vital habitats and bring wildlife into the heart of the city. Often the only nearby nature-rich spaces, the canals let people breathe, explore and reconnect with nature.

Through our network and initiatives, we support Birmingham City Council’s vision by transforming canals into vibrant corridors benefiting people, nature and communities. Our programmes and blue and green corridors make the city more climate-resilient, ensuring a sustainable future where people and nature thrive together.



Wild in Birmingham volunteers enriching the city’s nature

Wild in Birmingham is a group of gardening volunteers who meet weekly to maintain the towpath gardens in the city centre.



“

Partnering with the Canal & River Trust through our volunteering programme at Mailbox has been incredibly rewarding. It has strengthened our connection to the local community. These hands-on conservation efforts perfectly align with our commitment to build a better tomorrow.”

Molly Orviss, Mailbox Adoption

Together with local businesses, creating lasting beauty and keeping our canals alive

When companies get involved, their teams bring energy, creativity and community spirit, helping protect and celebrate these special places for everyone to enjoy.

In the West Midlands, Engagement Lead Terry Hodgetts has forged inspiring partnerships with organisations based at the Mailbox, Birmingham, who have adopted stretches of canal to care for. Their teams regularly roll up their sleeves for volunteer days, tackling

litter, hedge planting, vegetation management, and creating spaces where people and nature can flourish.

Local businesses giving back to their communities are shaping a better tomorrow and their support is vital to helping keep canals alive.





Vital funding and support delivers a lifeline for nature

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

In 2021, the Trust secured £1.7 million from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) to deliver ecological and environmental improvements across the West Midlands. Running until 2023/2024 the programme combined community engagement, conservation training, apprenticeships, outdoor learning and employment opportunities, helping Birmingham earn its 'Nature-first' city recognition.

Working together to help nature recover and thrive in the West Midlands



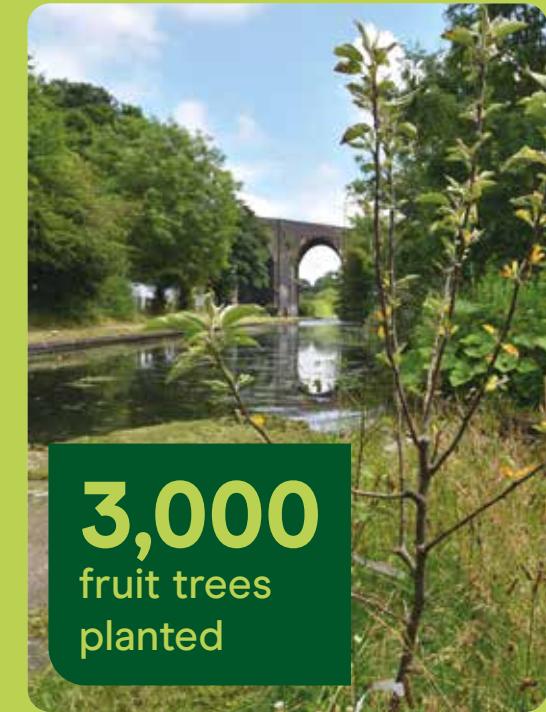
6,700
volunteer hours

1,700m
of coir roll installed
providing over 20km
of connected habitats
for water voles

7
SSSIs were improved

250
volunteers completed
Citizen Science of
8 species groups

 **102 miles of Green Flag in West Midlands**



3,000
fruit trees
planted

The world's longest community orchard, planting a 50-mile orchard from Wolverhampton to Worcester

Unlocking biodiversity in the West Midlands

We delivered a major nature recovery initiative across **335km of canals in the West Midlands**, designed and delivered by us with funding from Severn Trent Water's Great Big Nature Boost campaign.

Guided by scientific data and best practice, it focused on creating and restoring vital habitats to support wildlife. Success was built on collaboration — with volunteers playing a central role, alongside partners including Butterfly Conservation, Wildlife Trusts, Natural England's Purple Horizons project, and local communities.

These efforts strengthened biodiversity and created healthier habitats for nature.



2025 NGO Impact Award winners in Unlocking Biodiversity



Great Big Nature Boost campaign outcomes

33km
of water vole aquatic margin habitat

54km
of hedgerow restoration

134km
of species-rich grassland created

11 locations in the West Midlands benefitted from new or restored reedbeds



100,000

fish successfully
relocated

Approximately

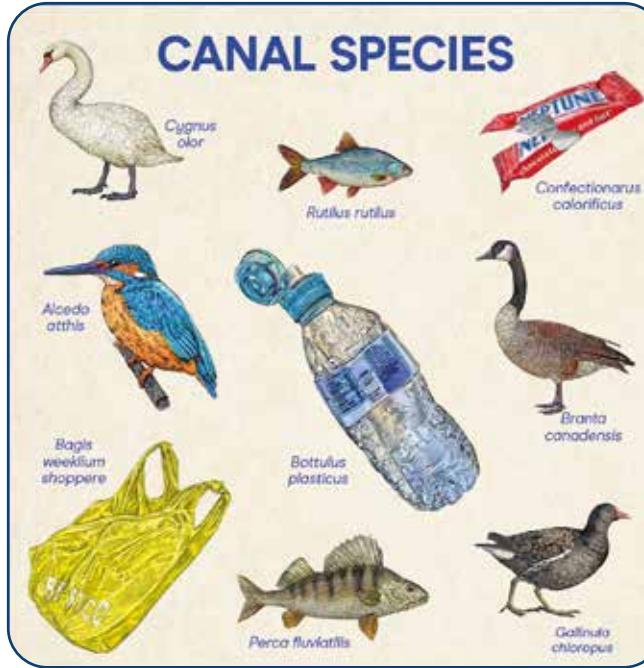
15 tonnes of fish

Our largest fish rescue at Brent Reservoir

At Brent Reservoir, also known as the Welsh Harp, we're proud to showcase how essential maintenance and wildlife conservation go hand in hand.



Standing up together for nature in the fight against plastic pollution



Plastic and litter in our canals threaten swans, otters, other canal animals and their habitats, with 14 million plastic items entering our canals each year.

In 2024, our campaign highlighted plastic 'species' alongside canal wildlife.



“

I took part in Canal & River Trust's Big Plastic Pick-Up. Plastic and litter can be dangerous to both people and wildlife, so we urgently need to keep up the fight against it. Together we can help banish plastic rubbish by canals for good.”

Neil Jones, TV presenter and Strictly Come Dancing performer



In partnership with Leeds Waterfront Group, Canal & River Trust introduced the UK's first WasteShark

WasteShark is an innovative, electric-powered drone that clears up to 500kg of litter from waterways. Guided by GPS and inspired by nature, it helps protect wildlife and collect vital data.

53.7%

of households (up to 63%) living within 10-15 minute walk (1km) of our network have health and wellbeing challenges

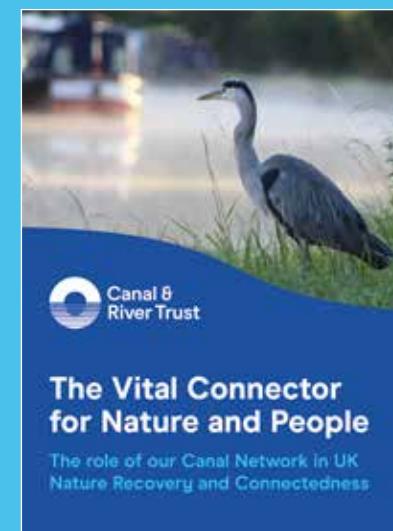


Vital spaces for nature and people, a modern solution to today's pressing issues

Our canal network offers a powerful opportunity to tackle three urgent, interconnected challenges — biodiversity loss, low nature connectedness and high wellbeing inequalities.

As a free, open urban connector, our canals bring wildlife and people together, especially in areas with limited green space.

Our canal network links cities with countryside, allowing wildlife to thrive and nine million people to access restorative spaces. By investing in our canal network, we strengthen nature recovery and foster nature connectedness.



With thanks to our contributors for sharing their expertise.



Dr. William Bird MBE



Professor Ian Rotherham



For more information, please go to canalrivertrust.org.uk/vital-connector-for-nature-and-people



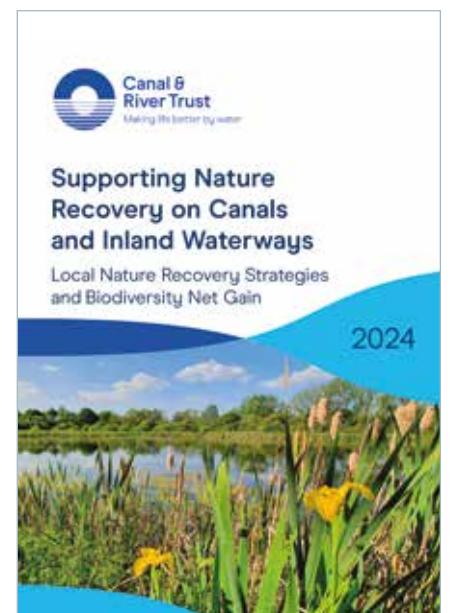
The potential we offer

Interventions in isolated locations won't solve the biodiversity crisis on their own or create the nature recovery network urgently needed. Nature needs our connected waterways habitats and sanctuaries to thrive.

Our canals, flanked by historic hedgerows and verges, offer vital nature corridors, connecting urban habitats with the open countryside — helping our precious wildlife to flourish by providing space for different species to roam and offering an escape route in times of threat.

Now we've mapped our ecological footprint, we're working with local authorities to ensure our network of canals and rivers are an integral part of local nature recovery strategies.

With more support we can do so much more to help nature thrive.





Health & Wellbeing



Connecting people with
blue spaces, routes and nature

Our canals enable people to be happier, and to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing by connecting people with nature and providing accessible blue and green spaces and routes.

UK societal challenge

The UK is facing an unprecedented public health crisis.

Stubborn inequalities persist, impacting on quality of life and life expectancy. The likelihood of poor mental health impact, childhood obesity and long-term health conditions is much higher amongst those experiencing some level of poverty. To turn the tide on this crisis, as a nation, we need to focus on prevention, on active lives, bringing people together and increasing our connection with the natural world.

This is where our charity, working with our partners, can play an important role.

Credit Charlotte Graham



Advocate of canals and the physical health and mental wellbeing benefits they offer, Dr Amir Khan

The state of health in England & Wales



People in the most deprived areas of England experience a healthy life expectancy at birth that is almost 20 years shorter than those in the least deprived areas.
(ONS 2022)



In 2022, nearly 50% of adults in the UK reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often or always.
(Campaign to End Loneliness)



1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem each year.
(MIND 2020)



Obesity is over twice as high for children living in the most deprived areas.
(NCMP, 2021)



Physical inactivity is associated with 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and is estimated to cost the UK £7.4 billion annually.
(Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2022)



41% of adults have at least one longstanding illness or condition.
(Health Survey for England, 2022)



Funded by Sport England
and National Lottery

National partnerships delivering local impact

Canals offer everyday opportunities for exercise and relaxation. Through our partnership with Sport England, we're enhancing wellbeing in communities with the greatest need by helping people get outdoors in the fresh air and active on and around water.

With £1.67 million in funding over three years, we've upgraded facilities, created paddle sport hubs and improved accessibility, giving participants safe, welcoming spaces to try physical activity.

The programme builds confidence, routines and social connections for those who are inactive or nervous about starting, using achievable activities that encourage long-term engagement.

“

Sport England's partnership with Canal & River Trust creates vibrant, active environments by uniting partners to enhance communities. Through inclusive design and community consultation, people can enjoy these spaces to improve their mental and physical wellbeing. The partnership tackles inequalities, strengthens connections between communities and their local environment, and creates lasting opportunities for activity where they are needed most.”



Lisa Dodd-Mayne
Executive director, Place



2,500+
participants

40
leaders trained

250+
sessions provided



Nervous first steps turned into confidence, friendship and a weekly habit

Rach, 53, from Keighley, joined our Sport England-funded canoe and walking programme through an NHS Green Social Prescribing initiative.

“After losing my husband, I was lonely and anxious. My mental health was really bad. All I did was sit at home every day.



“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous about going canoeing, but they tied the boats together at first and I felt safer. When we were out there, it just felt like I could breathe again. I watched the ducks and the lily pads and I forgot about everything else.

“It was amazing. Better than any prescription. Now our Wednesday meetings can’t come fast enough. Next week we’re doing nature crafts, and the week after is a walk together.

“It’s made me feel more confident getting on the bus or talking to people. I feel more me again.”



Working in
partnership with



Department
for Transport



Active
Travel
England



Transforming our towpaths into active travel routes

We're encouraging people to explore new ways of travel and to get active.

We partnered with East Staffordshire Borough Council, completing a £2 million project improving a 5.5 mile stretch of the Trent & Mersey Canal in Burton upon Trent. Funded by the Government's Towns Fund, the project

resurfaced and widened the towpath, creating a puddle-free, accessible route for walkers, cyclists and boaters. Additional support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund enhanced wildlife habitats.

Burton upon Trent



Before



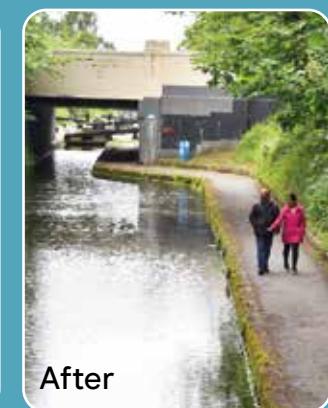
After

77% of users increased
their frequency of use after
the improvements were made

Walsall



Before



After

Walsall towpath
improvement scheme
improved 9 miles of
active travel routes,
including towpaths,
access and solar
lighting.

In total over
18.6 miles
(30 kilometres) of
towpath improved

Step into health along our canals

We support the wider work of our national partners such as Sport England, through local connections and the role our canal network plays in providing tranquil spaces for people taking their first steps in getting active.

We help amplify national campaigns like 'This Girl Can' and 'We Are Undefeatable', both designed to get people moving, tackle health inequalities, help manage long-term conditions, and lead healthier lives.

As part of the 'We Are Undefeatable' campaign, Blackburn & Darwen Borough Council promoted small ways for people to move more, working with local communities and partners to encourage exploration of nearby outdoor spaces. Dilwara shared how walking along the canals transformed her health and wellbeing. Despite a rare endocrine condition and family, work and community commitments, she found time to walk for fitness, fundraising and peace of mind. The canals offered safe, scenic routes, connection to nature and motivation — helping her manage symptoms, improve sleep and find balance.



“

I've discovered so many beautiful places in the borough beyond Darwen Tower, Sunnyhurst Wood, Rivington and Pendle Hill, which I wasn't aware of until I started walking. I feel much healthier and sleep well after a good walk in the fresh air. It's my 'me' time to relax and unwind.

”

Dilwara, an avid walker along Blackburn canals

 **SPORT
ENGLAND**

**WE ARE
UNDEFEATABLE**

A vital connector for people, boats, nature, places and for a brighter future



“

Isla started Let's Fish! at six and she's thrived ever since. She's grown in confidence, learned so much and even inspired her siblings to try fishing.

I've loved watching her excitement and it led me to become a coach. Let's Fish! has given our family unforgettable moments together. And we definitely notice what a positive effect being outdoors doing something we all love has on our wellbeing.”

Chris, Isla's dad and Let's Fish! coach



Let's Fish!

5,314 participants
336 events



Let's gets people active and outdoors

Being out in nature, by or near water, can have a positive effect on people's wellbeing.

Our Let's events get people outdoors to enjoy fresh air, exercise and the wellbeing benefits of being on or near water. They build confidence, foster social connections and encourage pride in local canals, leaving participants happier and healthier.



Getting people moving and out in nature through our Let's events



POSTCODE
EARTH
TRUST

Let's Walk!

8,290 participants
529 events

Let's Paddle!

1,358 participants
115 events

Blue social prescribing transforms people's wellbeing

In Leicester, a two-year programme (2023–2025) allowed people to self-refer or be referred to our Let's Paddle! programme.

“
I found I relaxed and responded to the quietness of the water. I was in a different zone, the distinction between the land and the water was incredible. Being on the water I could switch off – it was like meditation.”

Let's Paddle! participant

25.4%

The average wellbeing score before participation

28.6%

The average wellbeing score after participation



Working in partnership with



Working in the community to connect people with nature

Supporting people's mental wellbeing through our nature connection programme.

Our Community Roots coordinator, Sharron Bright, led a guided walking session along the Bradford Canal as part of the Mind Bradford programme.

In the first week, she met Ruth, who joined after a borderline personality disorder diagnosis. Ruth discovered how much being outdoors lifted her mood. She loved the group, describing it as "warm, supportive, and life-enhancing." After the programme ended, she continued daily walks along the canal and shared nature experiences with her daughter at a bushcraft session.



“

Seeing participants like Ruth discover the calming power of nature inspired me to create the Waterways Nature Connection Programme. With support from players of People's Postcode Lottery, we've connected people with nature via their local canal spaces. It's wonderful to see how small steps outdoors can make a big difference in people's lives and boost their mental wellbeing.”

Sharron Bright
Community Roots coordinator



Safety first

We're committed to helping young people learn to stay safe around water. Partnerships play a big part in the water safety programme.

Over
69,000
water safety sessions
have been delivered

Engaging new audiences through culture and arts

Our partnership with Arts Council England and Arts Council Wales, is using arts and culture to bring canals to life in exciting new ways to reach audiences from all backgrounds.

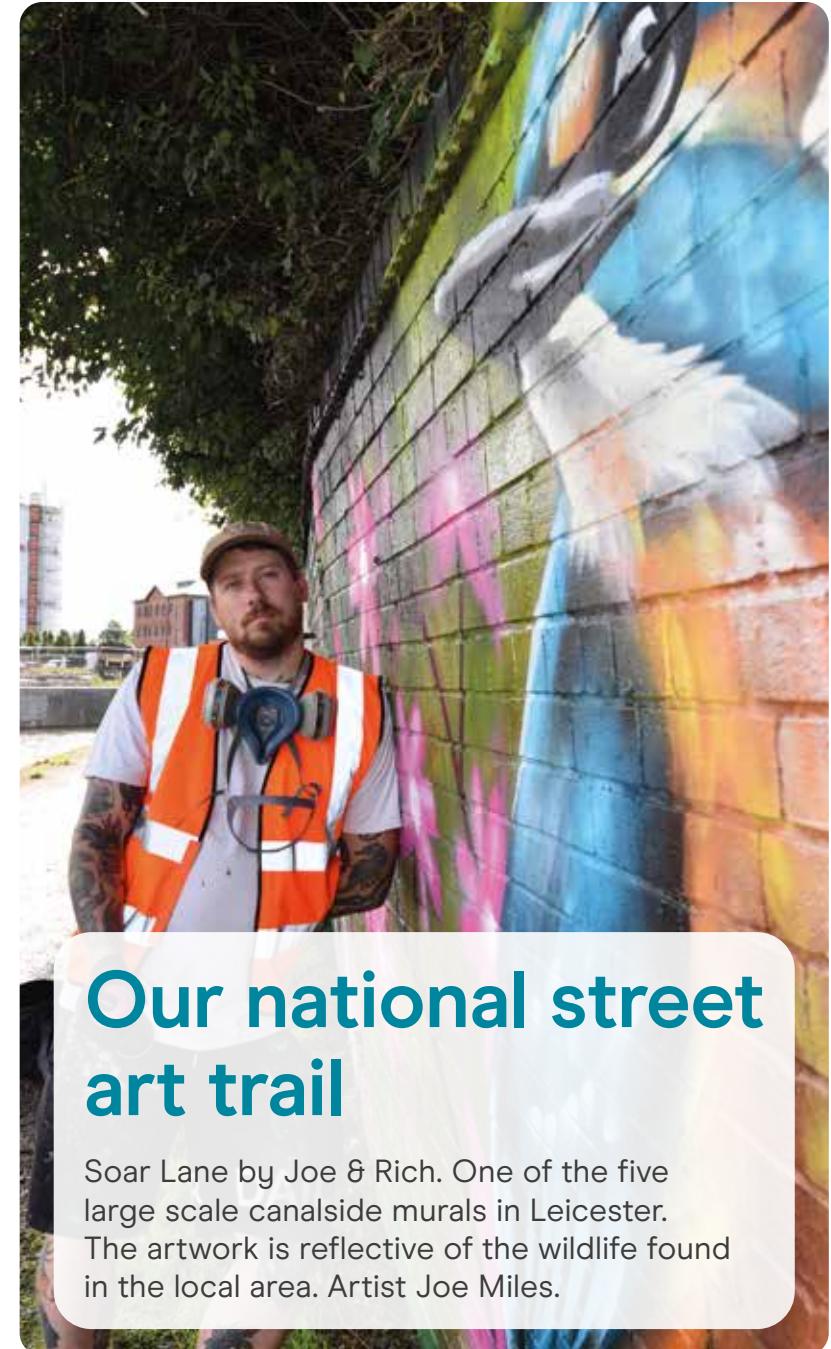


“

Our partnership brings culture to places, such as Hinterlands in Sheffield and Super Slow Way in Lancashire, supporting creative activity that engages with the environments around waterways and the communities who live near them. Our continuing work with the Trust brings the benefits of creativity and culture to even more people across the country.”

Dr Darren Henley, CBE
Chief executive, Arts Council England

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



Our national street art trail

Soar Lane by Joe & Rich. One of the five large scale canalside murals in Leicester. The artwork is reflective of the wildlife found in the local area. Artist Joe Miles.

The potential we offer

Everyone deserves the right to a healthy life and to spend time in nature.

Our extensive network of urban canals and rivers provides vital, free, open access to nature and waterside locations near the homes of millions of people, giving them valuable opportunities to relax, be active, learn and enjoy the scenic and colourful urban and rural landscapes our canals offer. This is central to our six strategic areas of focus, our community programmes and our work with key partners, helping to prevent and address multiple health and wellbeing challenges — preventative health in action!

With funding and support, our charity can realise the full potential of canals for the benefit of everyone.





Resilience & Security



Critical and interconnected part
of the nation's infrastructure

Whether it's ensuring a sustainable supply of drinking water in water-shortage areas or hosting hundreds of miles of cables connecting homes and businesses, our canals and towpaths are a critical and interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure.

UK societal challenge

Our nation is facing a climate crisis, with more intense and extreme weather – floods, droughts and soaring temperatures.

Each year, thousands of people, homes and businesses, as well as wildlife are affected by these weather extremes.

The challenge we face

Our ageing canal network is increasingly under immense strain due to the impact of severe weather events.

Battered by seven named storms during 2024/25 alone, our historic canals, reservoirs and bridges are at risk of breach, subsidence or collapse.

From droughts



to floods





Rising above the storm, our teams showcase resilience in every season

Unpredictable weather, from powerful winds to heavy rain and extreme dry weather, continues to wreak havoc on our network.

Our crews are out in all weathers tackling emergencies, dealing with fallen trees to leaking canal banks, and sunken boats to operating electric sluices during power outages. Their commitment and your support helps us keep our vital working canal heritage and infrastructure resilient now and for the future.

Our dedicated teams responded to
over 220 incidents
across our network during storms
Bert, Conall and Darragh

Keeping our network strong and safe

Vital engineering and heritage works safeguard our canals, reservoirs, docks and bridges for future generations.

Dimmingsdale Bridge

Following vehicle damage, we carried out essential heritage repairs to Dimmingsdale Bridge, rebuilding masonry, clearing debris, and restoring safe access for boaters, towpath users, and the local community.



Before



After

15
emergency
repairs

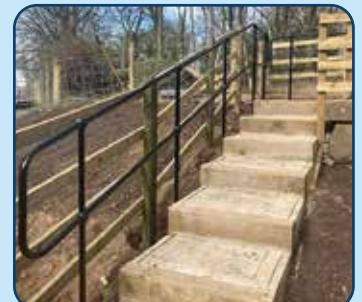
200+
winter works
projects

135
new handcrafted
lock gates installed



Lancashire breach

In July 2024 a breach damaged the Lancaster Canal embankment and the adjacent Grade II-listed Hollowforth Aqueduct. The £1.6 million, nine-month repair reinstated the canal bed and embankment, repaired the aqueduct structures, and reopened navigation before winter.



Our vital work in protecting critical infrastructure and working heritage

Top Lock 58 at Tardebigge remains an enduring part of our working heritage, vital for navigation and a key feature in the local landscape, thanks to our emergency works.

A huge
thank you
to our
400+
public donors



“

Restoring Tardebigge Top Lock 58 was a true privilege. Handbuilt over 200 years ago, the 30-lock flight raises boats 220 feet in just over two miles — a remarkable feat of early canal engineering. Beside the deepest lock on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, the history in every brick is tangible. Working with specialist craftspeople, we preserved much of the original brickwork. ”

Emily Harris
Project manager





Protecting passage over the Pennines

Thanks to gifts in Wills, Grade II-listed Lock 41 at Bank Newton now has a new bottom gate, keeping boats moving for generations to come.

Hand-built from oak as a direct like-for-like replacement, it conserves heritage while keeping traditional craftsmanship and skills alive, ensuring boats continue to pass along this historic Yorkshire – Lancashire flight for generations to come.

A tribute to David's passion for canals and engineering

David's generous gift in his Will enabled the urgent replacement of Banbury Town Lock's ageing top gate on the Oxford Canal. The new gate was floated in by crane, and the lock was drained with a temporary dam. While on site, our team also repaired the cills, coping stones and stop plank grooves to strengthen the lock for years to come.



Repointing the past, building the future. What a legacy



Thanks to Peter's generosity, with a gift left in his Will, and his love for the canal in his home village, Bridge 91a near Braunston Marina has been fully restored. Our volunteers used traditional lime mortar techniques and are now inspired to carry these skills forward, repointing more bridges along the canal — keeping Peter's legacy alive.



Securing water for our future

When hot weather and growing demand strain water supplies, it's easy to forget where it comes from — until it runs low. We use our historic canals to move water where it's needed most, protecting wildlife, cutting carbon and ensuring communities have water today and for the future.



The importance of our water

Our network moves water vital for drinking, farming, energy, industry, wildlife, navigation and recreation. Stretching as a long, continuous network it will play an even more important role in the future, supporting people, nature and sustainable growth across the regions it connects.

1. Drinking water



2. Agriculture



3. Power generation



4. Industry & data centres



5. Nature

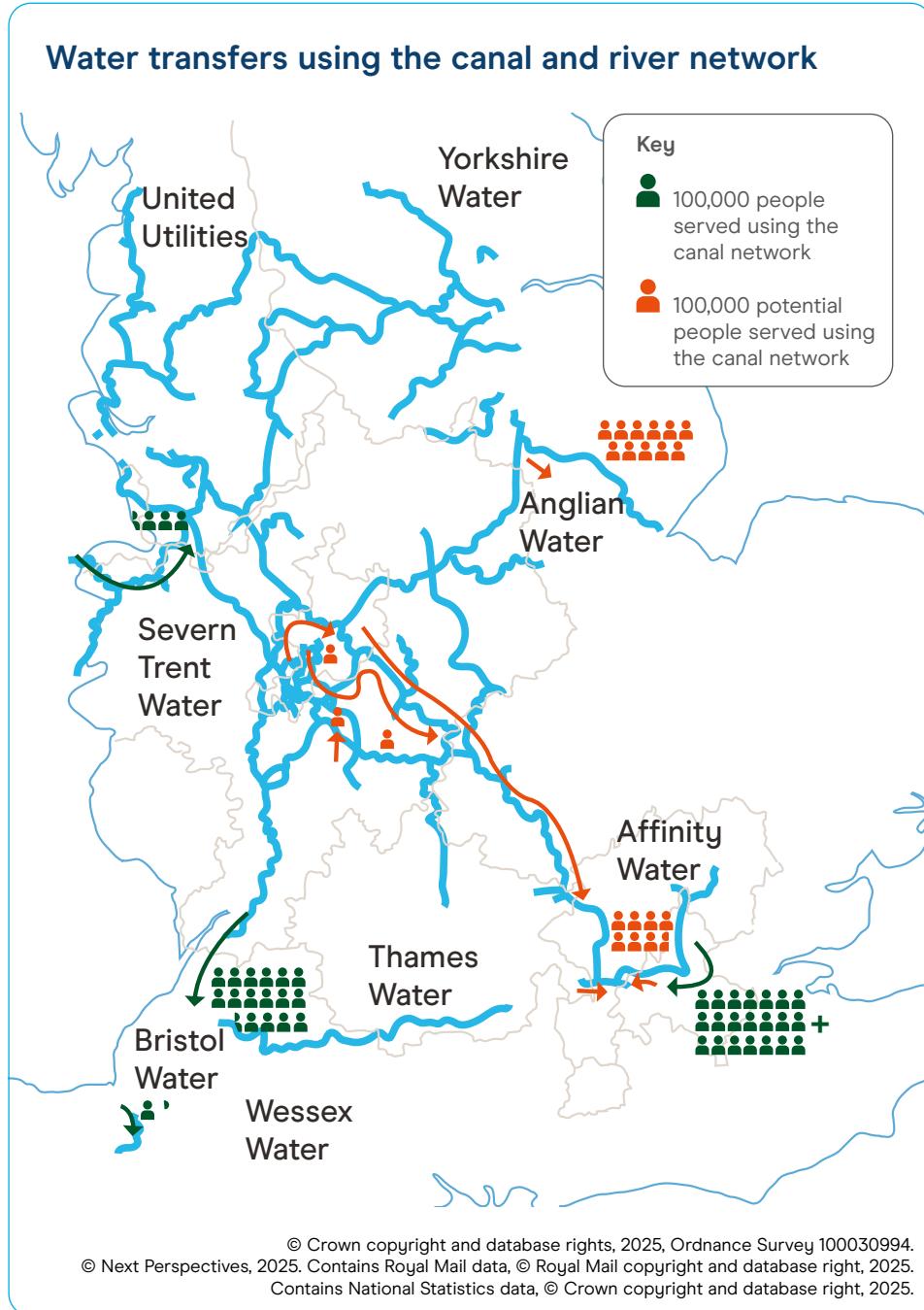


6. Navigation



7. Recreation





Flowing forward: how the Grand Union will keep communities supplied

The Grand Union Canal Transfer is a partnership between Canal & River Trust, Severn Trent and Affinity Water, working to secure clean, reliable water for communities for decades to come. Treated, recycled water will travel 120km along canals to reach homes in the South East. Construction starts in 2030, with water flowing by 2032-33. The project will strengthen canals, support wildlife, and bring lasting benefits to people and local communities.

Working in partnership with



Keeping our reservoirs safe and future-ready

We manage

74 large raised reservoirs

22 reservoirs have been upgraded during 2024-25, including extensive masonry repairs to the draw-off tunnel and 11 metre high vertical drop spillway at Knypersley Reservoir



Our vital network at the heart of a resilient, water-secure future

Looking ahead to 2050, as the UK faces increasing pressures on its water resources, our reservoirs will play a **key role in easing shortages**, providing a buffer against drought, supporting sustainable water management and ensuring our canal network remains navigable and resilient.

Mersey Heat, a new energy centre

Water from Leeds & Liverpool Canal will be a vital component of Peel NRE's Energy Supply Company which will see a district heating network.

Water source heat pumps and thermal stores will provide energy for the new district, heating the new network. The water source heat pumps (6MW in total) will take water from the Leeds & Liverpool Canal before returning it to Peel's dock system.

The energy centre opened in October 2025 and is one of the UK's largest heat pump installations.

9,000

homes supplied with heating

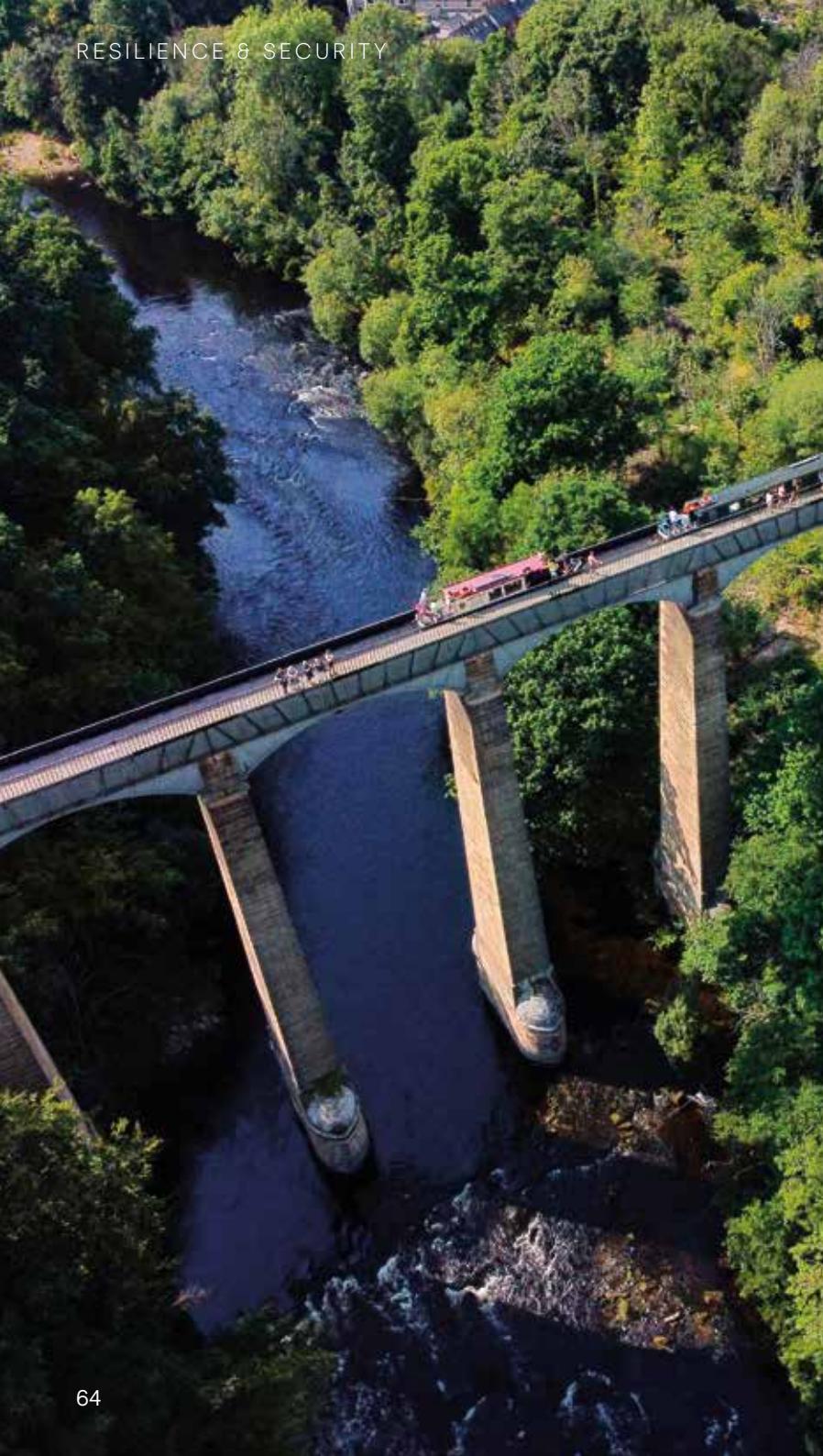
4 million

sqft of commercial space supplied with heating

4,200

tonnes of carbon saved each year





Our canals adapting for climate change

Climate change is reshaping our world and our canals are facing the consequences and offering solutions.

In our **ARP4 report**, we share the **top 12 risks** from eroding banks to stressed habitats, along with the steps we're taking to be climate resilient. We're actively adapting, reinforcing structures, improving ecological corridors, and exploring innovations in water flow management.

Meeting climate challenges requires innovation, funding and strong partnerships.

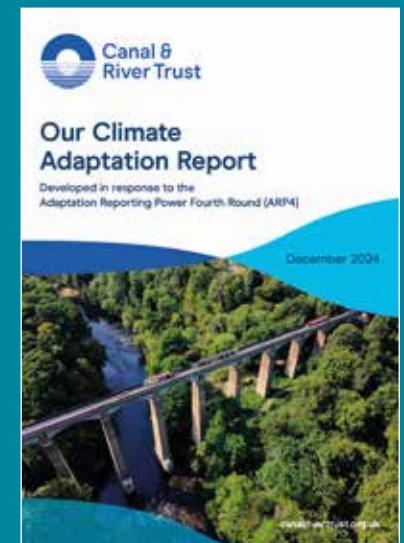
Our canals can be part of the solution.

Together, we can unlock the climate resilience of our canal network.

Our Climate Adaptation Report published in December 2024 highlights how our canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks are vital to the UK's climate resilience and identifies the steps we're taking to protect communities, wildlife, and water for the future.



For more information, please go to canalrivertrust.org.uk/our-response-to-climate-change



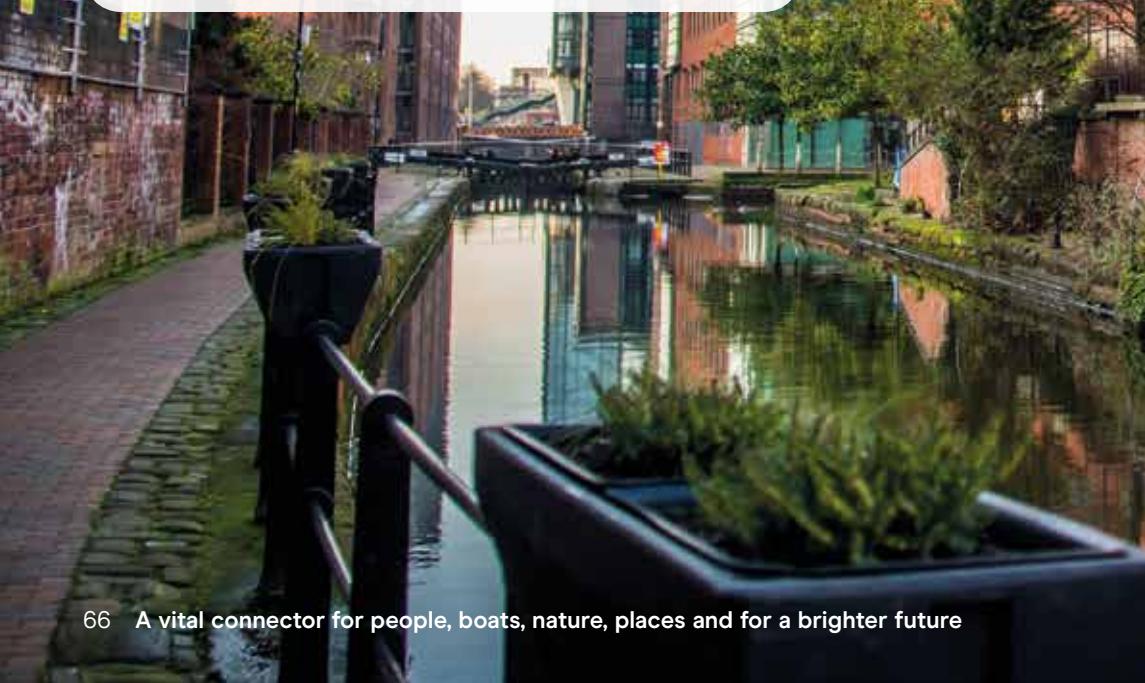


The potential we offer

While our charity is working hard to protect these historic assets and precious wildlife habitats, we're also looking to the future, identifying opportunities where this unique infrastructure can help solve the problems our nation faces.

Flood defence, water security and urban cooling depend on a safe, resilient network.

With more partners and support, our network can play a greater role in climate change adaptation.



Keeping our cities cool

Climate change is threatening to make summers in many urban areas intolerably warm. Our research work with the University of Manchester demonstrates that the urban network of canals and docks can absorb heat and reduce the temperature of the surrounding area by an average of 1°C. During the heatwaves of 2025, this impact was more pronounced, with canals reducing temperatures up to 2°C.

With temperatures predicted to rise by 1.5°C over the next 25 years, our canals are helping to make city living bearable for millions of people.

Looking to the future





Together, we're the vital connectors

It's a privilege to join the Canal & River Trust and to see, even in my first few months, the extraordinary passion, skill and dedication of everyone who helps care for our canal network.

This impact report captures that spirit, the stories, the partnerships and the quiet, dedicated work that makes such a visible difference to people's lives.

Our canals are national treasures, built by hand centuries ago, now repurposed for hope and renewal. They carry with them the potential to connect us in ways our modern world so often forgets: to one another, to nature and to the places we call home.

As I begin my time with the Trust, I am inspired by what's already been achieved and energised by the opportunities ahead. The challenges ahead are real; climate change, funding pressures and growing demands on our blue and green spaces — yet our resolve is stronger than ever. We will continue to stand for connection, resilience and hope to ensure everyone can share in the benefits of our canal network.

Together with our volunteers, partners, funders and supporters, we can ensure these living waterways continue to transform places and enrich lives for generations to come. Thank you for everything you do to keep them flowing — for people, for boats, for nature and for a brighter, more connected future.

Campbell Robb
Chief executive, Canal & River Trust

Supporters of Canal & River Trust

Thank you to everyone who has donated, volunteered, or supported our work. Volunteers, youth and community groups, canal societies and clubs have joined with us to help transform our canals and rivers. These unpaid hours have made our work possible.

We're very grateful to the thousands of individuals who have joined us as Friends of the Trust or who have given personal donations to support our work.

We would also like to thank and acknowledge all those who gave a gift in their Will or in memory of a loved one this past year. These personal gifts are very much appreciated and have a significant impact on the positive work of the charity.

Thank you to the following Charitable Trusts, Grant-making bodies, landfill operators, local authorities, lotteries etc. (£10,000+)

Active Black Country	Greater London Authority & Mayor of London	Monmouthshire County Council, funded by UK Government from the Shared Prosperity Fund	Sandwell MBC
Anochrome Group Ltd	Greater Manchester Environment Fund	Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust	Severn Trent Water Ltd
Arts Council England	Green Pear	National Lottery Community Fund	Sheffield City Council
Association for Industrial Archaeology	Gwynedd County Council funded by UK Government from the Shared Prosperity Fund	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Shropshire County Council
Bath & North East Somerset Council	Harborough District Council	Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	Shropshire Union Canal Society
Blaby District Council	Heart of England Community Foundation, West Midlands Combined Authority and Department of Culture, Media and Sport	Nottingham City Council	Sport England
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	Oadby & Wigston Borough Council	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Bugsworth Basin Heritage Trust	Hyndburn Borough Council	Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation	Stoke on Trent City Council
Burnley Borough Council	Kirklees Council	Oxford City Council	Stratford-upon-Avon District Council
Calderdale Borough Council	Kirklees Borough Council	Pendle Borough Council	T Clarke Contracting Ltd
Candex Solutions Ltd	Lancashire County Council	Players of People's Postcode Lottery	The Earnest Cook Trust
Canoe Foundation	Leicester City Council	Powys County Council	The Syder Foundation
Charnwood Borough Council	Liverpool BID Company	Preston City Council	Walk Wheel Cycle Trust
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	LUF Clwyd South, funded by UK Government from the Levelling Up Fund	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	Walsall Council
City of Wolverhampton Council	Merseytravel	PVH Ltd	West Lancashire Borough Council
Colt Data Centre Services UK Ltd		Rightmove PLC	Westmorland and Furness Council
Drax Foundation		Rushcliffe Borough Council	Wigan Borough Council – The Mayor's Cycling & Walking Challenge Fund
East Staffordshire Borough Council			Xylem
Environment Agency			



Canal &
River Trust



Inspired by the
impact of our work
and the potential of
our canal network?



canalrivertrust.org.uk

supportercare@canalrivertrust.org.uk

0303 040 4040

Registered charity no. 1146792

Get in touch to
discuss opportunities
for support



SUPPORT US

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