



Canal &
River Trust

Impact

report 2023/24

The Charity
Keeping Our
Canal Network
Open & Alive

Living waterways,
transforming places
and enriching lives



Impact highlights 2023/24

Attracting

859 million 'unique visits'
and **10.3 million visitors**
to our network of canals, river
navigations, reservoirs and docks
during 2023/24.



Nature & Biodiversity

Providing vital
habitats & corridors
for nature to thrive

304

Conservation
areas

68

SSSIs

Creating the world's
longest community orchard



Supplying drinking water to
5 million people
per annum



Place & Prosperity

Supporting sustainable growth,
boating, development & living

35,000
boaters



We now have over

3.9 million people

living within 10-15 minutes of one of our

737 miles of Green Flag awarded canals



Health & Wellbeing

Connecting people with blue spaces, routes & nature

50,000 hours delivered through our partnership with the Ministry of Justice

£6.1 billion of social value

4,566 volunteers who gave **739,443** hours



On the doorstep of

over 9 million people, with 61% of households experiencing wellbeing inequalities*

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Supporting over **80,000 jobs**, benefitting **13.4 million people** and **370,000 businesses**



Resilience & Security

Critical & interconnected part of the nation's infrastructure

2,000

miles of free blue-green spaces

Over **2,700** heritage structures

Caring for our canal network

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



This means people can enjoy more time by and on water.



Introduction



Keeping our canals open and alive

We're the 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



Available and open to everyone

No turnstiles or closing times, our canal network is available and open to everyone.

Canals are a lifeline for millions of people, providing much-needed access to nature and blue-green spaces where it's needed most.

Our free-to-access canal network gives everyone the opportunity to be by or on the water – and experience the physical health and wellbeing benefits.

And people can enjoy our network in a number of ways, whether spotting wildlife, walking, running, cycling, paddleboarding, boating or marvelling at some of the world's finest examples of working industrial heritage.



Our canals

Are **vital for nature**, providing havens for some of the UK's most threatened species.

Provide much-needed outdoor spaces for **10 million people** regularly using our canals, rivers, towpaths, reservoirs and docks each year.

Have seen a surge in visits since 2019 – within the last year we had **859 million unique visits**.

Are home to **2,700+ heritage structures** and some of the world's finest examples of living industrial heritage.



Canals are at the heart of the UK's national story

Our canals are helping to tackle some of our nation's greatest challenges by supporting nature recovery, enabling the country to manage its water supplies and protecting our homes from flooding.

They are more than our industrial past – they provide a modern solution to reducing carbon emissions through active travel routes and can help build a healthier society. Our places by water bring communities together to make the world a better place to live, work and do business.

But these special places are under constant threat. Storms and flooding are destroying the towpaths we walk on, the bridges we cross over, the places we fish and the canals we travel along. Droughts are causing brickwork to crumble and canals to run dry. Rising costs and shrinking government support are making it harder than ever to keep this network open. Last year alone, we allocated an extra £9 million just to make our canals safe again after they were hit by multiple storms.

Canals play a critical role in society. With the support of like-minded public and private partners, other charities and community organisations, we can ensure canals continue to help address some of the UK's key societal challenges.

Our teams and volunteers work around the clock every day of the year, using their skills, expertise and passion to look after these amazing waterside locations. We repair and restore pieces of working heritage. We protect ageing historical structures. We create homes for some of the UK's most vulnerable wildlife and look after nature by clearing plastics. And we make canals inviting places to visit, so people can enjoy all the things they love about being by water.

Our canal network is helping to solve some of the UK's most pressing challenges

National public health crisis

Being on or by water improves the physical and mental health of the nation.

Urban green space deficit

9+ million people live within a 10-15 minute walk of their local canal and the access to nature it offers.

Wellbeing and regional inequalities

61%* of households who can access a canal within a 10-15 minute walk experience wellbeing inequalities.

UK biodiversity crisis

Canals are an important part of the UK's nature recovery network and provide access to nature in towns and cities.

Climate emergency

Canals help address the effects of climate change through urban cooling, water security, low-carbon transport options and more.

Housing shortage & economic growth

Our canals create great places for sustainable urban living, by or on the water and act as catalysts for economic growth and regeneration.

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Our impact: the difference we can make to society



Place & Prosperity 9

Connected communities & places
Sustainable development, growth & living



Nature & Biodiversity 19

Biodiversity & nature recovery network
Connecting to nature



Health & Wellbeing 30

Active lives
Improving mental wellbeing



Resilience & Security 38

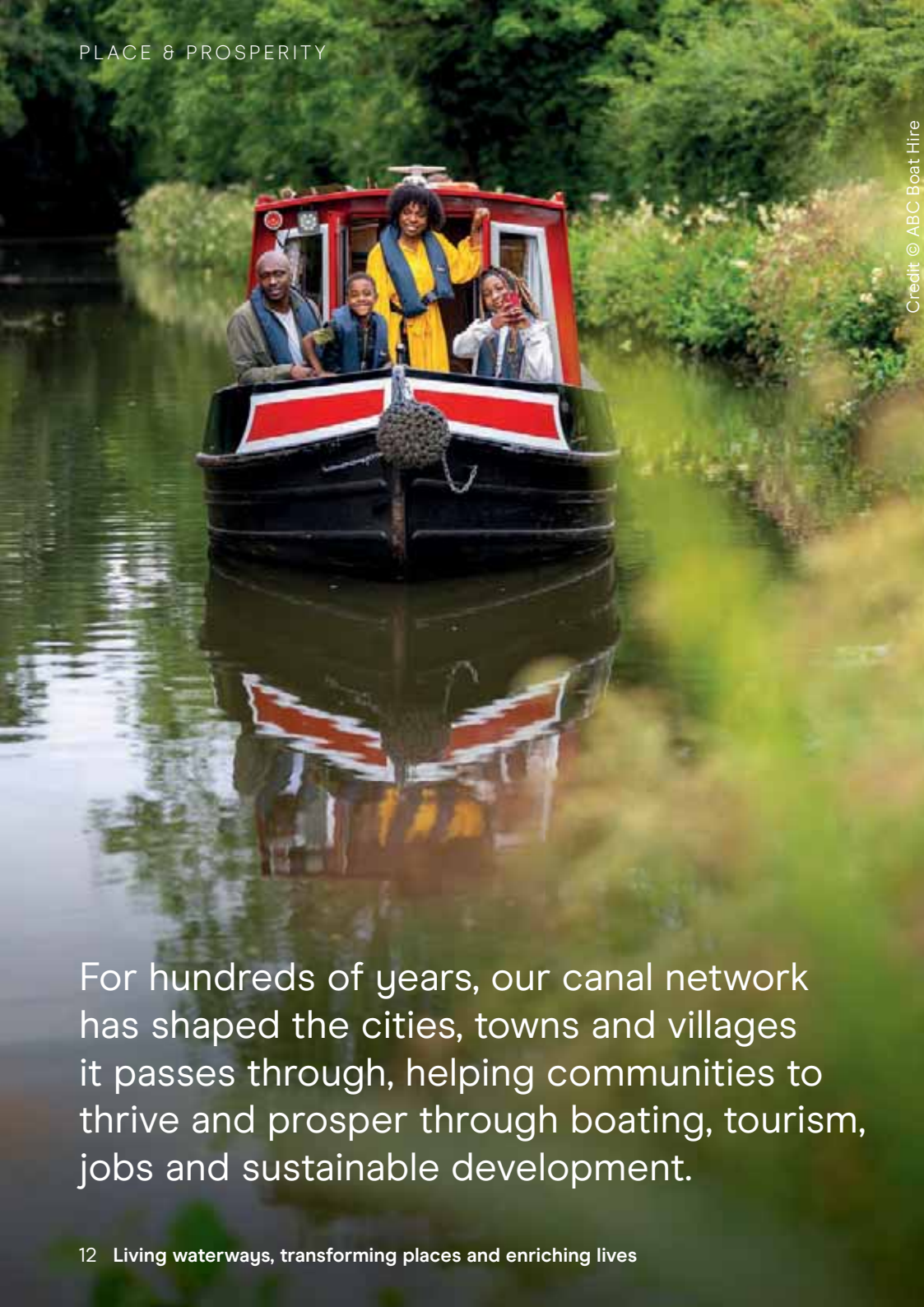
Water resourcing & security
Drainage & flood protection



Place & Prosperity

Supporting sustainable growth, boating, development & 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 cast aside and forgotten.

However, there are ambitious plans to 'Rebuild Britain' by kickstarting economic growth, building new homes, making Britain a clean energy superpower and a high-nature, low-carbon society, as well as breaking 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.

Our canals are flying the flag

The Green Flag Award® scheme is internationally recognised as a standard for managing great outdoor public spaces. With the incredible support of our volunteers, local communities and partners, today, over 737 miles of canals – more than a third of our network – now hold the Green Flag Award.



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

Through our current Community Roots programme, players of People's Postcode Lottery have enabled us to bring together different communities to create a shared vision and action plan for their local waterway. These co-created programmes promote physical and mental wellbeing and environmental improvements while connecting people with water and nature. We've focused on ten areas to drive our impact of connecting communities, making them stronger and more resilient.

People taking part in Community Roots programmes and activities



16,973 adults
5,755 children and young people

18 local communities adopting stretches of canals

Ten outcome focus areas



Sheffield



Blackburn and Burnley



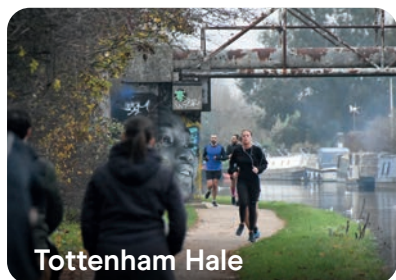
Black Country



Birmingham



Leicester



Tottenham Hale



Torfaen



Brent



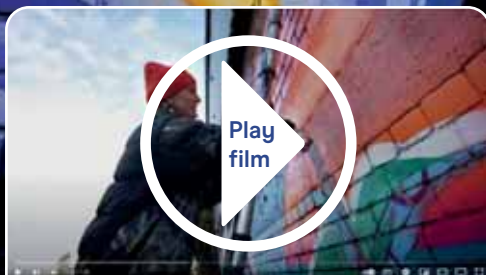
Sefton



Coventry

Engaging communities to re-imagine our canal spaces

Poet laureate Warda Yassin worked with local people to create a crowd-sourced poem representing the connection to and history of the Sheffield & Tinsley Canal. More recently, the poem has stimulated an inspiring installation created by local Sheffield artist, Grace Visions. Displayed along the walls by the Sheffield & Tinsley Canal, the installation reflects local perspective whilst creating a vibrant and inviting space.



You can watch a short film about the project and the creation of the installation here:
<https://youtu.be/hdrFEZQVVQk>

Support for community roots in Burnley

Patricia is a highly-valued volunteer who manages our Community Roots gardens, helps with towpath activities and supports participants in our paddle groups.

“

I like volunteering, it's great for my mental health and it boosts my self-confidence. I've made so many friends and in a way I feel that some have become my family. I get great encouragement and support from my team leaders and could not have done things without them. Volunteering has changed my life, I feel much more confident and now I can't wait for my next challenge.”

Patricia, Community Roots volunteer



Building community connections and resilience



“

When I first moved here, it was difficult because in my accommodation, there's truly little green space. I was introduced to the canalside, it is everybody's local nature reserve.”

Our Community Roots participant



Holidaymakers from around the world

Around 450,000 holidaymakers enjoy the unique experience of cruising along UK canals every year. In doing so, they support local businesses and the UK's visitor economy. Our diligent lock keepers, dedicated volunteers and colleagues make holidaying on our canals possible.



“

It's an empowering feeling to be allowed to drive heavy narrowboats on 200-year-old canals. And just look at the old engineering solutions still working. Examining close hand, the wonders of aqueducts, cuttings, embankments and locks is a real thrill.

”

Johan and his family spent two weeks cruising the Four Counties Ring

Protecting one of the ‘Seven Wonders of the Waterways’

Opened in 1805, the world-famous Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and the 11 miles of the Llangollen Canal is a World Heritage Site, described as ‘a masterpiece of creative genius’ by UNESCO.



The aqueduct is an important part of North Wales’ visitor economy with more than 500,000 people from 52 different countries visiting this breathtaking attraction.

For the first time in 20 years, we carried out a full inspection during February and March 2024. By closing and draining this much-loved 126ft (38m) historic structure, it enabled Mark and his team to really scrutinise ‘the stream in the sky’ and complete the work needed to keep it safe and open for all to enjoy.

“

It was a huge undertaking with lots of different challenges, but at the same time, it was hugely rewarding. It’s not every day you work on a UNESCO World Heritage Site that’s got the same status as the Taj Mahal.”

Mark, construction manager who oversaw the inspection



Step behind the scenes with Dan Snow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rZRsyapFw8>

Building sustainable communities

The UK urgently needs more high-quality sustainable homes. With access to active travel routes and blue-green spaces, canalside developments offer ideal places to live.

Along with over 100 homes, the award-winning Port Loop development boasts a canalside park, leisure centre, art house and the award-winning floating café, as well as good links to the wider towpath network. Further phases of the development include moorings and access to the water for paddle sports.



Academy of Urbanism/Urban Splash/Places for People



Academy of Urbanism/Urban Splash/Places for People

Accessible and inclusive canals

In 2024, we excitedly opened a new footbridge with ramped access as part of a new active travel route connecting Brentford rail station and the local high street with our new canalside development and the towpath at Brentford Lock West.



Marcus and our design team worked in close collaboration with our Disabled Boaters Forum and the Accessible Waterways Association to design a new accessible mooring bollard to support boaters with reduced mobility. We have embarked on the next stage of this innovative project with engineering students from Walsall College to develop a working prototype for real-life testing.



The potential we offer

Our canal network has existed for over two centuries. With greater recognition, imagination and investment, it has the potential to solve challenges today and contribute to the economy of the future.

Being part of the Fibre Optic network

Beneath our towpaths lies a national network of fibre-optic cables carrying vital communications across the country with over 700km of telecommunication routes.

This year, we began the first phase of work for a 9.6km linear telecommunications installation along the Grand Union Canal (Paddington Arm).

Providing renewable energy in Liverpool

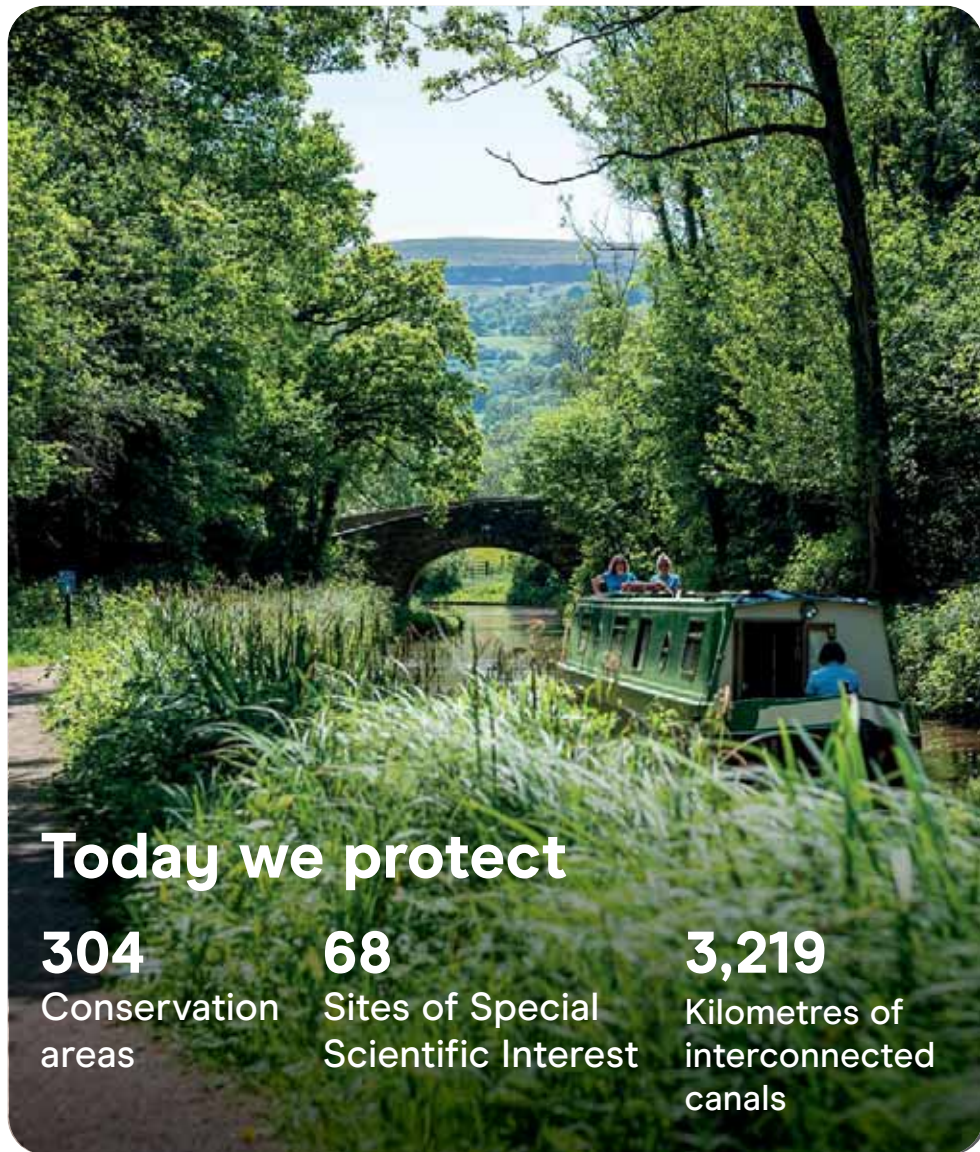
Peel NRE's Energy Supply Company is set to use water from the Leeds & Liverpool Canal for its district heating network. This network will supply heat to more than 9,000 homes and four million sqft of commercial space at Liverpool Waters and other nearby buildings. The water source heat pumps and energy centre goes live in early 2025.

Nature & Biodiversity

Vital habitats
& corridors for
nature to thrive



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



Today we protect

304

Conservation
areas

68

Sites of Special
Scientific Interest

3,219

Kilometres of
interconnected
canals

UK societal challenge

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Since the 1970s, 41% of UK species studied have declined. We're in the midst of a biodiversity crisis.

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.

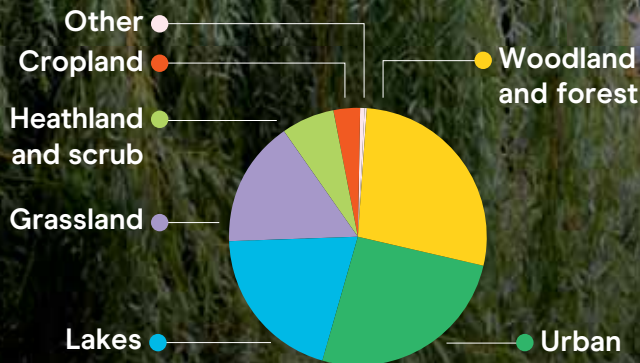
We urgently need to clean up, reduce carbon emissions and provide more homes where nature can thrive.

The difference we make

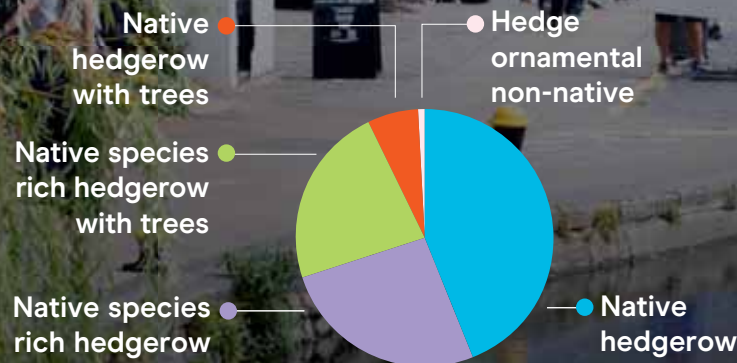
Our unique interconnected network of hedgerows, waterways and canal banks provides nature a home like no other and is critical for the survival and recovery of our nation's threatened wildlife.

As the nation's longest corridor of freshwater habitat, our canals provide essential habitats and ways for wildlife to move around, supporting a resilient ecosystem across England and Wales. To support national and local nature priorities, we have mapped this 2,000-mile network to give a fuller understanding of the diversity of habitats found along our canals – a rich mosaic spanning England and Wales, providing food and water sources and allowing species to move safely through a fragmented and increasingly pressured landscape.

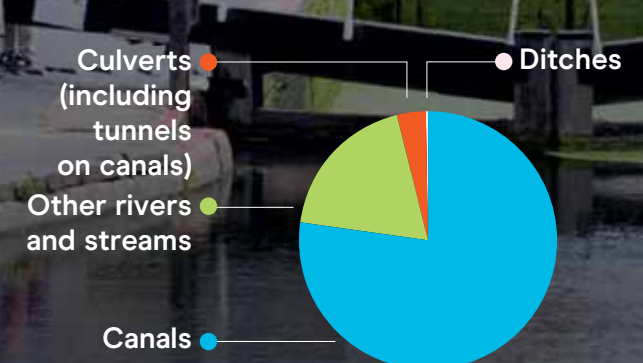
Area habitats – 5,933 hectares



Hedgerow habitats – 1,421 kilometres



Watercourse habitats – 3,184 kilometres



Creating the world's longest community orchard

With the support of our volunteers, we're creating a 50-mile-long community orchard along our canals in the West Midlands.

“

Planting the trees was really nice to see and do because it is good for nature. I like it as it's nice for everybody who lives nearby because they can eat the fruit and enjoy the view.”

Evelyn Crowther, aged 9 – volunteer from Tibberton Orchard planting

Fighting plastic pollution

Plastic and litter in our canals are endangering swans, otters and fish, and destroying habitats. Our research has found that 14 million items of plastic enter our waterways every single year.



In 2023, we launched our Big Plastic Pick Up campaign. Donations from this campaign directly funded interventions, such as bubble barriers, sea bins and equipment for our volunteers.

Breathing life into our canals

2023 was one of the warmest years on record, with a number of severe storms. These conditions drastically reduced the amount of oxygen in the water, causing an unprecedented number of fish deaths across our network. Working with the Environment Agency, we installed emergency aerators and pumps at 25 locations, enabling fish and plant life to flourish once more.



Homes for water voles

Water voles have suffered one of the most serious declines of any animal in Britain in the last century. Our own research revealed a 94% decline in the number of water voles on our waterways since the 1990s.

Our specialist teams and amazing volunteers like Phil have been working hard to reverse this trend, creating 15km of new habitat along the Grand Union, Oxford, Walsall, Worcester and Birmingham canals. Adding coir rolls to canal banks allows water voles to burrow and forage, providing a safe passage along the canal away from predators.



“

We all enjoy working as a team doing a variety of jobs across our patch to help maintain the canal for the benefit of all, whether they be boaters or towpath users. This specific project was the second year we had been involved. We received many encouraging comments from members of the public on the work we did last year as to how the rolls were blending into the environment and the sightings of more wildlife. This encouraged us to work with the ecology team to do more work this year. It was hard work, but we all get great satisfaction from seeing a job completed.”



Phil on behalf of the Grand Union Canal volunteer team

We also stabilised an 800-metre section along the Montgomery Canal using coir rolls and timber stakes, creating a soft bank for wildlife, thanks to funding from the UK Government's levelling up fund, in partnership with Powys County Council and Montgomery Canal Partnership.



Removing tonnes of Floating Pennywort from our canals and rivers

In 2023, we worked with Paddle UK, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and Angling Trust to remove Floating Pennywort from the River Lee and Calder and Don Navigations. This amazing partnership expanded its efforts into the East Midlands in 2024.

This work wouldn't have been possible without the help of dedicated volunteers. Now these waters are flourishing with native species, healthy fish and people are back enjoying time on these stretches of water.

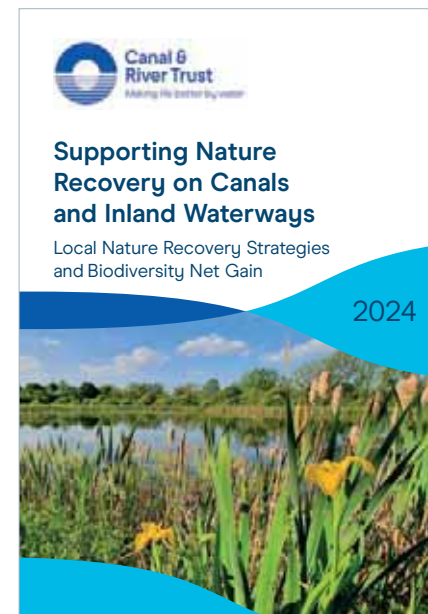
The potential we offer

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 are 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.



The interconnected relationship between biodiversity, access to nature & wellbeing

Often, the UK describes itself as a 'nation of nature lovers', but the reality is that it's in 14th place in the European League table (University of Derby – 2022) across all three metrics of greatest biodiversity loss, lowest nature connectedness and highest wellbeing inequalities.

The UK is experiencing an urban green deficit. Over eight million people have no private garden or no/limited access to public open space and nature within 15 minutes from where they live. Our canals provide the opportunity to address these challenges.

Our network, the vital urban connector

Our collaboration with King's College London led to the publication of an academic study (August 2022) which found that visiting canals and rivers was associated with a 6% improvement in mental wellbeing and this association is statistically stronger when compared to just greenspaces alone.

We believe everyone should have access to waterside spaces within a 10-15 minute walk of their home.

Access

Open, free & accessible spaces

9+ million living within a 10-15 minute walk of our network

Quality

Inviting, welcoming & safe spaces

Removing the barriers to use and achieving Green Flag and Blue Flag Awards

Engaging

Our opportunities to engage & experience activities on & by the water

Connection

Community connections, involvement & 'ownership'

Access

Open, free & accessible spaces

9+ million living within a 10-15 minute walk of our network

10 million regular users

859 million unique visits in 2023/24



Boating

32,600+ licensed boats on our network

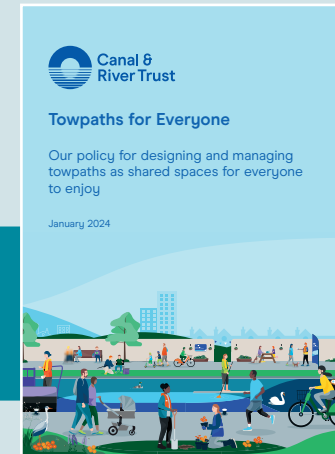


Identified towpath improvements

15,000 surveys completed by 100 dedicated volunteers covering 1,500kms of towpath

Towpaths for everyone

Our policy for designing and managing towpaths as shared spaces for everyone to enjoy



Towpath improvement scheme



32.5 miles of towpath improved

Quality

Inviting, welcoming & safe spaces

Removing the barriers to use and achieving Green Flag and Blue Flag Awards

Floating invasive species



Removed in partnership with Severn Trent in the West and East Midlands and with Paddle UK in Yorkshire and London

2,500+ tonnes

of invasive weed removed

Removing graffiti



Street art

Green Flag

An international benchmark for well-managed parks & blue-green spaces



737 miles

 of our network now holds a Green Flag award

Before



After

Community rehabilitation

People on probation are helping to improve our towpaths

50,000 hours

of community payback activity at 25 sites



Engaging

Our opportunities to engage & experience activities on & by the water

Let's events

19,000+

enjoyed Let's Fish, Let's Walk and other Let's activities



Events

2,220 events held including open days

585,000 attendees



Museums

98,000 visits

Learning

103,537

children took part in our learning activities and programmes

108,303

children used our learning resources



Water safety

Our Explorers team delivered water safety messages to over

77,593

children

and distributed over

61,730

water safety booklets in the last financial year



Connection

Community connection,
involvement & 'ownership'

Let's Fish & Paddle

Let's Fish:

477 events held
8,303 attendees

Let's Paddle:

82 events held
2,654 participants



Enabled by players of
People's Postcode Lottery



Volunteering and social action



11,765
trees and hedge shrubs
planted in 2023/24

11,400
square metres of space
improved

19,000+
volunteer hours spent
caring for adopted canals

3,300
bags of plastic waste
collected

Our volunteers

4,566
dedicated volunteers

739,443
hours given by volunteers

216,679
hours of lock keepers at 130 sites



Health & Wellbeing

Connecting people
with blue spaces,
routes & 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-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.



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

The state of health in England & Wales



Almost two decades less of life in general good health among those living in the most deprived areas of England, compared with the least.

(ONS 2022)



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)



The difference we make

Being more active and connecting with each other and with nature helps people live happier and healthier lives.

Our network provides free access to green and blue spaces on the doorstep of over nine million people across England and Wales. 61%* of households within 1km of a canal have some form of health and wellbeing inequality, often with limited access to a garden or private outdoor space and low car ownership.

“

For anyone wanting to get active, it's a great place to come. You know, when you live in a city, there are not too many green spaces like this about.”

Haroon Mota from Foleshill, a Coventry Canal enthusiast, founder of Active Inclusion Network

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Changing lives through our partnerships

Priory Hospital Kemple View, a mental health recovery organisation, has adopted a stretch of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal as part of its patient recovery programme.

Mathew, a volunteer at Priory Hospital Kemple View, reflects on the recovery programme: "It's good fun, the people are kind and I make new friends. You do many different activities, learn loads of new skills and it helps with my mental health and recovery."

“

I've taken many patients to our adopted stretch of canal, and the impact on the patient's recovery journey has been immeasurable.

”



Adrian,
recovery team,
Priory Hospital
Kemple View

The Beat the Street programme connects people to their local outdoor spaces, making physical activity and active travel an enjoyable part of everyday life.



Our most recent Beat the Street game took place in Edmonton in partnership with Intelligent Health, Enfield Council and Sport England.



People taking part in Beat the Street

Engaging **8,373** players
covering **36,220** miles

Reported use of canal
went up from
33% to **55%**

The five ways to wellbeing: Use your local canal or river to improve how you feel



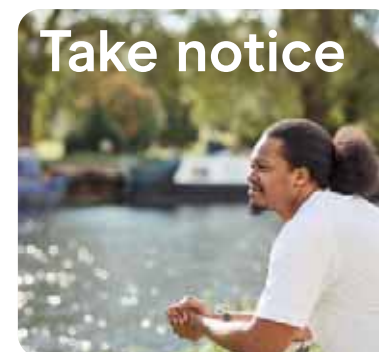
Connect



Be active



Learn



Take notice



Give

Taking steps to a healthier life

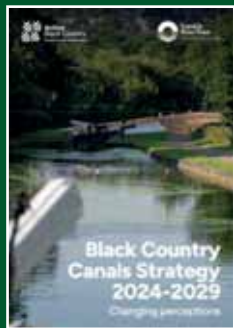
In collaboration with local GPs, Active Black Country and Health & Beyond, we have expanded our Green Social Prescribing programme, 'GP guided walks', to support patients with long-term conditions in Bilston.

Regular walks along the local canal are helping patients increase activity levels whilst connecting with nature and each other, boosting their mental and physical wellbeing.

“ I've made lots of new friends from walking each week. I feel more confident to walk now and go on my own sometimes. I have not really used the canals before, this walk has made me use them more often now and it's a great place for being close to nature.

”
(Female 55-64 participant)

'Canals on prescription' in action



“ It was great to see the joint strategy document on the table between Canal & River Trust and Active Black Country Active Partnership around developing their waterways in place. Another brilliant example of one of our national strategic land-owning partners delivering in place.”

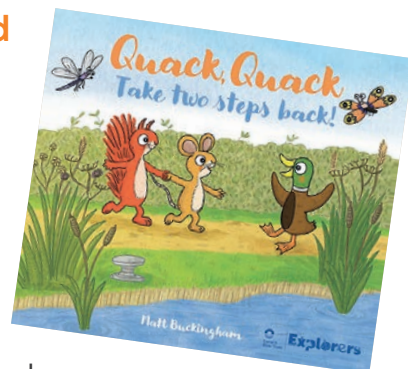


Lisa Dodd-Mayne, Executive Director, Place, Sport England



Keeping our youngest children safe

Our charity is committed to helping everyone be safe around our canals and rivers.



During 2023/24, thanks to funding raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery, we extended our water safety messaging to pre-schoolers through our Water Safety for Little Explorers campaign. We distributed over 5,000 specially written storybooks to libraries, nurseries and schools in England and Wales to help toddlers and pre-schoolers understand how to stay safe by water.

“

The story really held the children's attention, and the song was such a clever way to teach water safety to this age group. Now that we have these resources our staff can use them to make sure children remember the messages. We've shared the video with our parents too.”

Richard Colborne, Nursery Manager,
Rocking Horse Nursery, Newbury

Learning in nature and our community outreach programmes

Taking lessons beyond the classroom is a crucial tool in bringing learning to life and engaging pupils with a subject.



“

The Welsh curriculum is very focused on real life learning so this type of day fits this perfectly.”

Mr Davis, Acting Deputy Head,
Ysgol Min Y Ddol



Building confidence with Swim Sista Swim

Our Swim Sista Swim project was a 12-month pilot designed with women from African and African-Caribbean communities in Nottingham to boost water confidence and swimming skills.

“

Prior to doing the Swim Sista Swim programme I had an immense fear of water which has significantly reduced since taking part in the programme. The canoeing gave me a different view of the outdoors and I now enjoy walks by the canal. My physical and emotional health has improved, and I feel more confident taking the grandchildren by the water.”

Sharon Thomas



This project has received wonderful acclaim, winning the Equity Award at the Health and Care Awards in Nottingham, as well as winning the 'This Girl Can Physical Activity Group Award' by Active Nottinghamshire.

Confidence levels in being on a canal towpath increased by **89%**

(between pre & post survey)



Watch our film 'Swim Sista Swim' here: <https://youtu.be/kizjToran9g>

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.



Tackling physical inactivity



Addressing health inequalities



Promoting an active lifestyle



Making a difference for children and young people



Connecting with nature



Fostering social connections

Resilience & Security

Critical &
interconnected
part of the nation's
infrastructure



Whether it's ensuring a sustainable supply of drinking water in water-shortage areas or housing 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 12 storms during 2023/24 alone, our historic canals, reservoirs and bridges are at risk of subsidence and collapse.



Our teams on the frontline responding to damage from 12 storms



“ Going back over my 30 years, we’ve always had emergencies. But incidents are increasing as canals, long past their life expectancy, are now facing more climate challenges.”
Dean, head of direct services



Lock repairs



Landslips, culverts and breaches

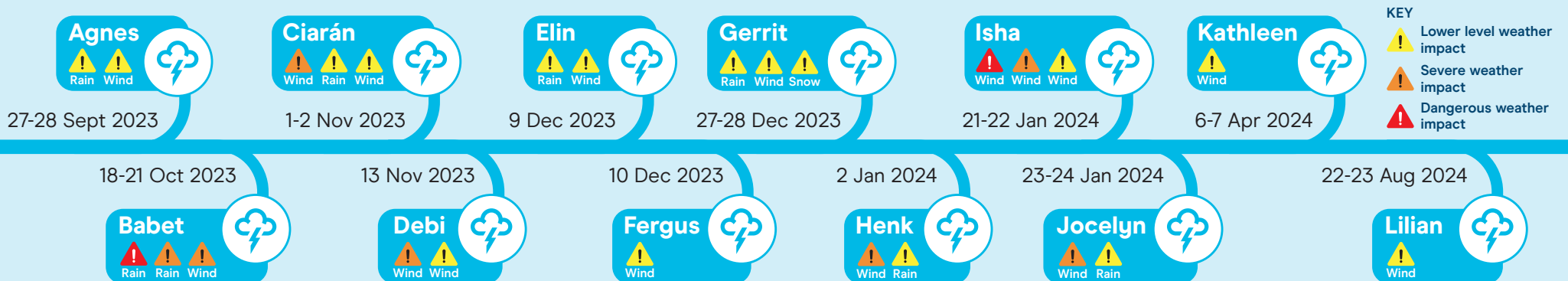
Towpath repairs



Before



After





Keeping our canals and towpaths open

While our canals are protecting lives and communities, this excessive weather is causing millions of pounds worth of damage to the network. In February 2024, weeks of torrential rain led to 4,000 tonnes of mud sliding 18 metres into Easenhall Cutting on the Oxford Canal, one of the busiest stretches in the country.

Protecting the places we love from Storm Babet



“

The role the Trust played within the partnership response to the flooding ensured that the impacts were minimised as much as possible and I would therefore, on behalf of the Council and residents of Bassetlaw, like to thank the whole team for the work you did at this very difficult time.”

David Armiger, the CEO of Bassetlaw District Council

When Storm Babet hit Worksop in October 2023, it wreaked havoc. Flood water was threatening to swamp nearby homes. Fast work by our teams and volunteers operating the feeder sluice allowed thousands of gallons of water to be diverted away from flooded rivers and into the Chesterfield Canal.

Working throughout the night, we carefully managed the water flow, moving excess water along the canal, saving homes and businesses along its route.

The difference we make


Our canals are contributing to climate change adaptation

Flood protection offered by our embankments and reservoirs protects many households, properties, a wide range of businesses, telecommunications and utilities, as well as other national infrastructure, such as electricity sub-stations, transport and schools.

Canals support decarbonisation, which is a critical aspect of global efforts to address climate change and transition towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future.

The water in our canals helps keep cities and urban areas cool as temperatures rise.

And our network offers a ready-made transfer route to deliver a sustainable, plentiful supply of water for people, businesses and nature.

 For more information, our APR4 Climate Change Adaptation Report launched in December 2024

From canal to tap

Without the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, Bristol's water supply would quickly run dry. Nearly half the city's population relies on the canal for drinking water. Every day, we pump some 245 million litres of raw water from the River Severn at Gloucester to Bristol's water treatment works at Purton.

We are working with other water companies on similar projects.

The potential we offer

While our charity is working hard to protect these historic assets and precious wildlife habitats, we are 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 2022, this impact was more pronounced, with canals reducing temperatures by 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.

10 ways our canals can help tackle climate change

1

Active travel and low-carbon transport



Our towpaths support active travel and our commercial waterways support waterborne freight transport.

2

Heating and cooling buildings



In London PlatformDIGITAL is using our dock water from Millwall Docks to cool its data centre.

3

Reducing urban temperatures

4

Supplying drinking water, water for industry and agricultural irrigation

5

Playing a role in mitigating flooding



This 70m-wide barrage controls the flow of the River Tees, maintaining water levels and preventing localised flooding around Stockton-on-Tees. Visitors can experience the sheer scale of the operation at our regular open days.



Grade II listed sluices on the River Weaver at Dutton, Cheshire are producing power for local electricity grid via a low-head hydroelectric plant installed by our partner, Nether Dutton Hydro Limited.

6

Utilising hydropower

8

Helping nature recovery

7

Low-carbon boat energy



© Ortomarine

We offer discounts to electric boats and are partnering in pilot schemes to install electricity charging points at inner-city moorings to encourage the use of electricity for heating as well as propulsion.

9

Providing blue-green spaces on the doorstep

10

Solar battery storage



Solar panels on our network produce electricity to power water pumping stations, keeping our canals full of water.

Looking to the Future



Transformative change in the heart of communities

We've given you a glimpse of the breadth of activities and partnerships over the last 12 months and the positive impact they've had on people's lives.

These success stories would not have been possible without our amazing volunteers, partners, funders and donors, Friends, supporters and ambassadors – a huge thank you to each of you.

And if our network is to help address some of the most significant challenges our nation faces over the next ten years and beyond, we need you by our side.

To keep our iconic and everyday heritage alive, help us win the battle with invasive species, and provide threatened wildlife a home like no other. We need your support so our canals can be part of the climate solution and continue to be at the heart of our local communities, where there is space for people to lead healthy lives and enjoy life by and on the water.

Support our cause by

Volunteering

Becoming a partner

Donating to us

Funding a project like Anderton Boat Lift

With you by our side, we can keep our canals alive delivering transformational impact for the benefit of individuals, communities and wider society.





“

Volunteering gives me a purpose, it has a really positive effect on me mentally and physically. I have gained so much confidence.”

James

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 are very grateful to the thousands of individuals who have joined us as Friends of the Trust or 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 very personal gifts are 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. (£1,000+)

Amazon UK	Generation Foundation	London Borough of Ealing	Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Active Black Country	Gloucester City Council	Marjorie Boddy Charitable Trust	Stephenson Halliday
Active Travel England	Greater London Authority & Mayor of London	National Lottery Community Fund	Sustrans
Arts Council England	Greenham Trust Ltd	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Environment Agency
Bank of America	Groundwork	Nottingham City Council	Ernest Cook Trust
Baron Davenports Charity	Halton Parish Council	Oadby & Wigston Borough Council	Lionel Abel-Smith Trust
Bath & North East Somerset Council	Harborough District Council	Odd Rode Parish Council	North of England Zoological Society
Blaby District Council	Haribo Happiness Fund	Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation	The Philip and Irene Toll Gage Foundation
Black Country Consortium Ltd	Harris Charity	Oxfordshire County Council	The Rachel Kay Shuttleworth textile collections
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	Helen Jean Cope Charitable Trust	Oxford City Council	The Fort Foundation
Buckinghamshire Council	Hemel Garden Communities	Pendle Borough Council	The Island Quarter
Burnley Borough Council	Hertfordshire County Council	Players of People's Postcode Lottery	UK Community Renewal Fund
Campaign to Protect Rural England Northamptonshire	Historic England	Powys County Council	UKH Foundation
Canoe Foundation	Hinckley Borough Council	Rushcliffe Borough Council	University of Oxford
Charnwood Borough Council	Hyndburn Borough Council	Sandwell MBC	Walsall Council
Cherwell District Council	Ingestre with Tixall Parish Council	Severn Trent Water Ltd	West Lancashire Borough Council
Chorley Council	James Beattie Charitable Trust	Shropshire County Council	West Yorks Passenger Transport Executive
Cononley Parish Council	John R Murray Charitable Trust	Solihull Metropolitan Borough	West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner
Department for Communities & Local Government	Kirklees Metropolitan Council	Sport Birmingham	Westminster City Council
Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund	Lancashire County Council	Sport England	Westmorland and Furness Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council	Leicester City Council	Staffordshire County Council	Whitbred PLC Chairmans Fund
Finastra	Loughborough Town Deal	Staffordshire Police & Crime Commissioner	
Gale Family Trust	London Legacy Development Corporation		
	London Borough of Hillingdon		



Canal &
River Trust

canalrivertrust.org.uk

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

Get in touch to
discuss opportunities
for support and help us
to keep our canals open
and alive for tomorrow
and beyond.

SUPPORT US



SCAN ME



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