

PRESS RELEASE

21 April 2020

Data shows people swapping tourist hotspots and city centres for the local towpath on their doorstep

- Canal charity urges people to stay local and limit use -
- Cyclists urged to slow down and respect others -
- All users asked to avoid moored boats -

The Canal & River Trust, the charity which looks after 2,000 miles of the nation's waterways, welcomes the latest Government advice about the importance of accessible green space, as data shows a growth in people staying local to discover the canal on their doorstep in place of the usual tourist hotspots and many city centre towpaths.

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis and social distancing measures, the Trust has seen a shift in usage from busy tourist hotspots like Little Venice in London, central Birmingham, and the World Heritage Site at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct in North Wales, in favour of local less-used canal towpaths in residential areas. This includes a surge in usage amongst less affluent communities where green space is often at a premium.

The Trust has a number of towpath counters around the country and from these sources it has noted the biggest increases in visits in Burnley (+261%), Sandwell (+199%) and Blackburn (+187%), with the biggest decreases recorded in Paddington Basin (-72%) and Camden (-47%) in London, by Brindley Place in Birmingham (-52%), and at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct in North Wales (-38%).

The Trust is sharing these results as the Government highlights the importance of keeping parks and green spaces open, particularly in communities where people don't have access to gardens or the countryside, but with the clear message that all outdoor exercise should be strictly local. The Trust is asking people to limit their towpath use, observe social distancing at all times and to be mindful of other users. In particular, the Trust is urging cyclists to go slowly and take care around other users and asking everyone on the towpath to keep away from moored boats.

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, comments: "I'd like to thank everyone who is using the Trust's towpaths responsibly - observing government guidance to stay local and applying social distancing. We know how invaluable our canals are to local communities and

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the picture across our canal network is that people are switching to spend time on less-used canals in residential areas, and away from tourist hotspots like the World Heritage site at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and the busier city-centre locations.

“The figures bear out that people are heeding the Government advice to restrict their daily exercise to local green space to maintain their health and wellbeing. Our canals provide, for many people, a vital green/blue route on-their-doorstep, but people must limit their use and act considerately at this time – standing aside for others to pass, to respect social distancing, where the towpath narrows.

“I particularly urge cyclists to only use the towpath for relaxed and responsible cycling; anyone wanting to cycle faster than walking pace must give pedestrians priority and is strongly advised to instead use the road network, as it’s much quieter – and safer – during this pandemic. I also ask all towpath users to take particular care around moored boats – please keep clear and respect those living aboard, who may be in self-isolation.

“It’s wonderful to hear that people are discovering their local towpaths for their daily exercise. Our canals can be a lifeline for people but only if we use them responsibly.”

In support of the government advice to stay at home as much as possible, the Canal & River Trust has an [online hub](#) of canal-related films, images, interactive content and stories for everyone to enjoy safely at home to get their enjoyment of the waterways virtually.

Ends

For further media requests please contact:

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Towpath use by area:

Area	Average Daily Count (baseline before lockdown)	Average Daily Count (post lockdown - 21st March)	% Change
Burnley	97	350	261%
Sandwell	52	156	199%
Blackburn	194	555	187%
Milton Keynes	84	229	172%
Torfaen	416	1028	147%
Wolverhampton	125	291	132%
Walsall	89	205	130%
Birmingham (Inner)	463	1024	121%
Tottenham Hale	1051	2248	114%
Ilkeston	314	595	90%
Liverpool	236	440	87%

London (West)	948	1424	50%
Pocklington	126	171	36%
York	1557	2078	33%
Stratford-upon-Avon	361	471	30%
Brecon	495	585	18%
Nottingham	297	342	15%
Manchester	748	830	11%
Brent	1671	1740	4%
Stockton-on-Tees	623	584	-6%
Coventry	208	186	-11%
Devizes	431	373	-13%
Saul Junction	241	185	-23%
Sheffield	602	433	-28%
Leicester	570	409	-28%
Leeds	2438	1561	-36%
Pontcysyllte WHS	610	380	-38%
London (Camden)	5173	2729	-47%
Birmingham (Central)	2567	1241	-52%
London Paddington	11224	3094	-72%

Notes to Editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk