

PRESS RELEASE

10 June 2020

Underwater video, photos, infographics and Plastics Challenge guide available
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4dwhioyoabzvtf4/AABtkihLbfQ8R8ilXUb60PxRa?dl=0>

CANAL CHARITY CALLS ON INDIVIDUALS TO HELP TACKLE THE GLOBAL PLASTICS CRISIS ON THEIR DOORSTEP

Waterways and wellbeing charity Canal & River Trust is calling on people across England & Wales to help stop half a million pieces of plastic reaching the ocean by taking its Plastics Challenge this month.

The charity, which usually relies heavily on its army of volunteers to help clear the waterways of plastic and litter, has had to put volunteering activity on hold since mid-March due to coronavirus. At the same time, the need for people to 'stay local' has in some areas seen an increase in the number of people using their nearby towpath and the litter and plastic they bring with them.

Since the launch of its Plastics Challenge last spring until March this year, volunteers had given more than 10,000 hours a month to tackle the problem, and a survey showed that plastics and litter in and around the Trust's waterways had dropped by 30% since last year. However, with all volunteer activity suspended since March, it is now feared that much of those environmental gains could have been lost during the coronavirus lockdown period.

Peter Birch, national environmental policy advisor at Canal & River Trust, said: "Our canals are great on-the-doorstep places for people to enjoy, however the unintended consequence is that they can be highways to the ocean taking 500,000 pieces of carelessly discarded plastic along our waterways and out to sea each year.

Canal & River Trust, Toll House, Delamere Terrace, London, W2 6ND

T: 0203 3204 4514 **E:** press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk **W:** www.canalrivertrust.org.uk **Twitter:** [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

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“Thanks to the efforts of individual visitors, local communities and volunteers, we had seen great gains prior to lockdown, however this trend could have reversed as our volunteers have been required to stay away and the use of towpaths has increased in many urban residential areas as people have enjoyed using towpaths for their daily exercise.”

Every year 14 million pieces of plastic end up in and around our canals and rivers and these plastic bottles, food wrappers, bags and straws can be harmful for the fish, swans, ducks and birds that make the canals their home. It’s an ongoing issue and one that the charity’s volunteers help to keep on top of.

Peter Birch continues: “Staying close to your home has become more important than ever in recent times and for many people their local canal or river will have brought some vital wellbeing at a time of great anxiety. But sadly, the problem with discarded plastics and litter remains an issue for us and every year enough plastic to fill 20,000 bin bags are washed from our canals and rivers out into the ocean.

“The canals have been there for local people during lockdown and we need people to help us look after them to ensure they remain a place everyone can enjoy. It’s the little things we do on our doorstep that can make a world of difference. If everyone who visits one of our canals or rivers picks up just one piece of plastic, they’d be clear within a year. Get active to fight plastic by joining our Plastics Challenge and help make a global difference in your local community.”

Whilst people still need to carefully follow Government guidelines on social distancing and washing their hands, the Trust is asking visitors to carry out a short litter pick while enjoying some exercise at their local canal or river. To ensure everyone takes part in the challenge safely, it’s created a handy [guide](#) which can be downloaded from the Canal & River Trust website. Please make sure you wear gloves or use a litter picker if you have one, and please take home what you collect and recycle what you can.

The charity would love to hear from people who have taken the challenge and is encouraging people to share their photos on social media with the #PlasticsChallenge

To find out how you can join the Canal & River Trust’s Plastics Challenge, visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/plastic or follow us on social media @CanalRiverTrust #PlasticsChallenge

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For further media requests please contact:

Lucy Scott, Campaigns Manager
m 07920 411077 e lucy.scott@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and river navigations 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 @CanalRiverTrust

Last year, the charity worked with Coventry University to publish a 'state of the nation' analysis of plastics and other litter found in its waterways. The report found that if no action was taken, we estimated that 14 million pieces of plastic would end up in and around our canals and rivers every year. Full report [here](#)

Further information around the Plastics Challenge, why it is important and additional resources can be found at www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/plastic

Volunteering:

In 2019/20 volunteers gave 127,000 hours of their time helping to clean-up the plastics and litter found in and around our canals and rivers which equates to more than 10,000 hours a month. Please note this was prior to lockdown in mid-March.

Towpath usage:

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%). Full details can be found [here](#)