

PRESS RELEASE

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Birmingham Main Line Canal glows green after being awarded prestigious environmental award

Waterways and wellbeing charity, Canal & River Trust, is celebrating after the Main Line Canal from Birmingham to Sandwell has been awarded a Green Flag Award from Keep Britain Tidy. The award is a first for the 250-year old Birmingham Canal Navigations.

The Green Flag status, now into its third decade, is awarded to spaces that boast the highest possible environmental standards, are beautifully maintained and have excellent visitor facilities.

To celebrate this award the Grade I Listed Galton Bridge, which was once the highest single span bridge in the world, and the Smethwick Pumping Station, will be lit up green for one night on 14 October.

Now a museum, the Pumping Station was, for a relatively short time due to reducing traffic on the canals in the early 1900s, an important cog in Birmingham's industrial past, pumping water from the New Main Line to supply the Old Main Line Canal.

The award to a 4½ mile stretch of the Main Line Canal from central Birmingham to Smethwick, which forms part of the recently created UNESCO Geopark in the Black Country, marks a remarkable transformation for the canals in Birmingham and the Black Country which were once at the heart of Industrial Revolution. Now the canal is mainly used by local people for commuting, exercise and as a valuable green and blue space in the heart of the city.

This award follows a long period of work to turn an area once better known for fly-tipping into a place where wildlife can thrive. Working together, partner organisations including Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Birmingham City Council, Eco Sikhs, Nowka Bais, Gurdwara Akaal Bungal, Friends of Galton Valley, Birmingham Canal Navigations Society, and the Community Connect Foundation, as well as Canal & River Trust colleagues and volunteers, have been able to make huge improvements.

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Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: First Floor North, Station House, 500 Elder Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1BB

Changes to the canal include creating community gardens, carrying out towpath repairs, improvements to wildlife habitats and increased volunteer litter picks and management of vegetation. New benches and bins have also been installed along the route.

Adnan Saif, Canal & River Trust regional director, said: “We’re delighted that our Revolution Walk has been recognised with a Green Flag. It’s a testament to the hard work of local volunteers, partner groups and our colleagues to bring about so many improvements. There is still a lot of work to do in the area, but the award reflects the huge progress that has been made over the last few years.

“Our canals provide local people and visitors really important green and blue traffic free routes. They are on the doorstep of so many people in the region and we know that spending time on and by the water is good for health and wellbeing, that’s why it is so important they are looking great and have received this recognition.”

Keep Britain Tidy Chief Executive Allison Ogden-Newton OBE said: “This year, more than ever, our parks and green spaces have been a lifeline and we know that millions of people have used them to relax, meet friends, exercise or simply escape for a short time.

“It is testament to the incredible dedication and hard work of parks staff and volunteers that, despite the challenges that went along with record numbers of visitors, the Canal & River Trust, along its partners and volunteers has achieved the highest international standards along the Revolution Walk demanded by the Green Flag Award.”

Councillor Maria Crompton, Deputy Leader for Sandwell Council, said: “I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has played a part in achieving this prestigious Green Flag Award.

“This is a very welcome addition to Sandwell’s ever-growing number of Green Flag-awarded green spaces – and it’s wonderful to have the canal recognised like this.”

Councillor Jackie Taylor, Sandwell Council’s Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport, said: “Our many miles of canals are such a fantastic resource, with towpaths offering peaceful green corridors where people can experience nature and take their daily exercise, whether that’s walking or cycling.

“We are working closely with the Canal & River Trust and other partner organisations to get more people using and enjoying our canals.”

Birmingham City Council’s Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, Councillor Waseem Zaffar MBE said: “This award is a real milestone for our city, and thoroughly deserved considering the amount of work that has gone into improving this particular area. Birmingham’s canal network is full of history and culture and it’s a real pleasure to see families, cyclists and local communities enjoying and looking after this green space.”

For more information about the Canal & River Trust, including how you can volunteer or support the charity, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk

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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 @crtcomms

The **Green Flag Awards** Scheme (<http://greenflagaward.org/>) is run by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, in partnership in the UK with Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Wales Tidy and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The scheme also operates in an additional 14 countries including Portugal, New Zealand and USA.

Keep Britain Tidy is a leading environmental charity. We set the standard for the management of parks and beaches, inspire people to be litter-free, to waste less and to live more. We run programmes including Eco-Schools, the Green Flag Award for parks and green spaces and the Blue Flag/ Seaside Awards for beaches. To find out more about Keep Britain Tidy, our programmes and campaigns visit www.keepbritaintidy.org.

Any green space that is free to enter and accessible to the public is eligible to enter for a Green Flag Award. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award status. A Green Flag Community Award recognises quality sites managed by voluntary and community groups. Green Heritage Site accreditation is judged on the treatment of the site's historic features and the standard of conservation.