

PRESS RELEASE

22 July 2021

WAVE OF ARTS TO CONNECT COMMUNITIES ALONG NATION'S LONGEST CULTURAL SPACE

New partnership brings outdoor art and culture to England's waterways

The Canal & River Trust is unveiling a summer of arts along its waterways as coronavirus restrictions lift. The programme is made possible by a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Arts Council England, signed today (22 July 2021), which will focus on communities facing socio-economic disadvantage, disconnected from creative hubs and opportunities, with thousands of local people connected to their canal by talented local artists.

Over the past year millions have discovered their local towpaths, and the MoU will help even more people experience the wellbeing benefits of being by water while being entertained and inspired to participate. The Trust's 2,000 miles of urban and rural waterways run through varied landscapes providing communities with free, accessible blue-green corridors wherever they pass. The MoU will enable the Trust to work with professional artists, amateurs and voluntary arts groups to connect with local people, the young in particular, to produce art influenced by the community.

In 2021-22 arts projects will involve many local people engaging with the Trust's waterways and various arts partners, including a cultural programme for the Coventry Canal as part of Coventry UK City of Culture; street art alongside canals in Sefton, Tottenham and Walsall; a floating short story boat project called Small Bells Ring; Hinterlands, a series of participatory arts activities in Sheffield and Enfield; and new audio works by women artists.

Arts and culture bring people to the waterways and encourages them to explore. Measured over the past six years, more than 81% of those surveyed said they were more likely to visit waterways if there were arts events. Once on site three quarters visited other parts of the canal. These statistics highlight the significance of arts and cultural activities for visitors to waterways.

Richard Parry, Chief Executive of the Canal & River Trust, said: "The canals have provided invaluable breathing space for communities during the pandemic. The special partnership we

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have with Arts Council England will build on this recognition that they are unique places, with a new wave of arts projects that will improve wellbeing for local people, support artists, attract new visitors, and make life better by water.

“This partnership recognises the vital role that creative practitioners and cultural organisations, with the canvas of the canals to work on, can play in the nation’s recovery. We are excited by the opportunity this programme offers to create a wide range of creative productions that celebrate the waterways and the communities they run through over the coming years.”

Darren Henley OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Arts Council England said: “Creativity has played an integral role in supporting our nation’s wellbeing through the challenges the last 16 months have presented. Cultural experiences have kept many of us feeling inspired, connected, and hopeful – just as England’s waterways have provided many with an outdoor space to unwind, reflect and stay active. All of which remain so important.

“The continuation of the Arts Council’s long-term relationship with the Canal & River Trust will ensure that more high quality and ambitious cultural offers punctuate our country’s great waterways at a time when they are needed most. Together, we will ensure that people from all backgrounds can experience the sheer joy and benefits of exploring creativity along the rivers and canals that flow through our country’s vibrant communities.”

To date, the Trust’s arts programme has seen installations, concerts, plays, creative workshops, outdoor galleries, indoor exhibitions, floating libraries, street art, and reflections of the Canal Laureate produced with professional and voluntary arts partners.

More information on arts on the waterways can be found on the Trust’s website:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/waterway-arts>

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Notes to Editors:

The Audience Agency and the Trust’s research team conducted and analysed more than 800 face-to-face interviews and e-surveys of participants or visitors to arts on waterways events and projects between 2016 and 2019.

This Memorandum of Understanding will enable many more sustainable connections between the Canal & River Trust and the arts and cultural community in England. It is an active tool to help generate a new wave of high-quality arts engagement programmes led by the Trust’s six regions. Regional teams will work with fundraising managers to seek support through Arts

Council England and other funders and to forge new relationships with Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations.

Key partnership principles will underpin the MoU. These are:

- **Artistic Quality and Ambition:** to work with high quality creative practitioners across art forms and support upcoming practitioners with potential to excel, enabling the development of quality processes, arts and culture
- **Capitalise on being local:** to build closer, more relevant connections with communities, particularly those places that are underserved or overlooked
- **Collaborative and dynamic:** to nurture more co-creation and work with inventive practitioners, collectives and communities
- **Environmental sustainability:** to follow the defined environmental responsibilities of the two parties and to leave as small a carbon footprint as possible whilst highlighting the importance of environmental responsibility to people and communities

The specific aims of the Canal & River Trust's arts and culture programme are to:

- **Open up new opportunities** for artists, freelancers, children, young people and families to co-create new arts on the waterways projects and activities.
- **Attract and connect a more diverse** range of supporters, visitors, audiences, families, volunteers, artists and workers to the Trust's waterways and museums
- **Deliver beauty on the doorstep**, creating spaces and places that communities can be part of, enjoy and be proud of to encourage wider use of the waterway network
- **Create a sense of belonging through participatory arts activities** where communities will be an integral part of the process, increasing collective care of their local canal
- **Enhance five ways to wellbeing** where arts and communities can flourish by water and connect with nature.
- **Create new local, regional and national partnerships** bringing together arts, environmental and wellbeing organisations

These guiding principles, themes and aims will guide the growth of arts programmes in priority areas of the Trust's regions. These will include, though not exclusively, the following: **Burnley, Sefton, Smethwick, Sheffield, Leicester, Tottenham, Brent, Walsall and Coventry**

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.

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in [Let's Create](#) that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million **Emergency Response Package**, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies administering the Government's unprecedented £1.96 billion **Culture Recovery Funds**. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19