

PRESS RELEASE

28 October 2021

Canal & River Trust publishes its 2020/21 Annual Report

Canal & River Trust has today (28 October) published its 2020/21 Annual Report & Accounts which document a year dominated by Covid-19, from the pandemic's operational and financial impact on the Trust, to the lifeline the waterways and towpaths provided throughout for millions of people across England and Wales. The Report also looks ahead to the 2021/22 Government Grant Review, and demonstrating the waterways' benefit to the nation.

The Trust's income was £215.4 million in 2020/21 (2019/20: £216.1m), reflecting the actions taken in recent years to ensure that its income, vital for looking after the ageing waterways infrastructure, is secure. Whilst overall spend on charitable activities decreased year-on-year by £10.8m to £183.3m, partly the result of provisions for Toddbrook Reservoir made a year ago, underlying expenditure on core maintenance, repairs and infrastructure works continued to grow.

There was a small decrease in the contribution from boating, moorings and waterway-related businesses to just under 19% of income in 2020/21. This, in part, reflects the support the Trust gave to boating business and charitable partners during the pandemic and the granting of a one-month licence extension to private boat owners in light of the disruption to navigation in 2020.

Although maintenance works in the early part of the year were halted as the Trust responded to the immediate risks of the new virus by delivering essential emergency works only, the charity adapted its way of working and a full programme of winter repair works was completed.

The challenges in 2020/21 did not stop at the pandemic, with extreme weather and floods continuing to cause emergency works, with a breach on the Aire & Calder Navigation outside Goole in December, followed by Storm Christoph early in the new year causing extensive damage across the North West. This coincided with the year-long re-build of Figure of 3 Bottom Lock, damaged during flooding in early 2020. In total, extreme weather events cost the Trust over £5m in unplanned works. The Trust has taken considerable steps forward in the stewardship of its reservoirs, with a strengthened team and a major review of all high-risk assets

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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

(with a high consequence of failure) that will lead to a significant uplift in planned expenditure to further strengthen their resilience over the next few years.

Allan Leighton, chair of the Canal & River Trust, comments: “Our canals, rivers and towpaths have played a key role for so many people in the face of the national pandemic. During those times when people were restricted to their immediate area, our local waterways – on the doorstep for millions – provided the spaces that people desperately needed, to exercise and connect with nature.

“The role of our network as a cornerstone of a ‘natural health service’ has been fully vindicated by its value to so many people, seeking respite from the mental stress and physical limitations of the lockdowns. They provided vital access to the outdoors, to green and blue spaces, particularly critical for those living in densely populated towns and cities where access to the natural environment was so limited and so many don’t have access to a back garden.

“The estimated total number of visits to our waterways rose to nearly 750 million in the year, demonstrating the significant reach of our natural network, and its impact on the nation’s health and wellbeing.”

Richard Parry, chief executive at the Canal & River Trust, comments: “After coming through all the challenges of 2020/21, this year is critical for the Trust’s long-term future with the vital Grant Review work underway and intensifying in the months ahead as we work towards next summer’s conclusion. This wide-ranging review will provide a clear indication of the Trust’s Government grant funding from March 2027 when the current Grant Agreement comes to an end. It will make the case for this vital funding to continue, to support both the very considerable public benefits of, and the substantial risks associated with, our remarkable historic waterways network, at the heart of so many communities, and to re-affirm its value to the nation.”

To view the Annual Report & Accounts visit: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/annual-report-and-accounts>.

This year the Trust’s Annual Public Meeting will be hosted online on 22 November with people able to view and submit questions to the Trust’s chief executive and chair. Further details will be published on the Trust’s website.

ENDS

For further information contact Jonathan Ludford on 07747 897783 or email jonathan.ludford@canalrivertrust.org.uk

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