



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water

# Boater Report 2021

Caring for our waterways  
– the work that goes into  
keeping the waterways navigable



With around 2,000 miles of canals and rivers throughout England and Wales, with countless locks and bridges as well as banks and culverts, maintenance is a never-ending task. Keeping the waterways open for the more than 35,000 boaters who use the network is a priority. We schedule as much work as we can for the winter months when fewer people are out boating. However, we still need to react to problems that crop up when more people are boating between April to October. In this report we highlight some of the work, both planned and reactive, that our teams have carried out around the network in the past year.

All this work needs funding. Our income is derived from a variety of sources, with around half coming from the grant we receive from the government and from our own investments. We also receive income from lottery funds, corporate and local authority partnerships, and

donations from the public. Volunteers are a life-line – we are grateful for the 236,803 hours they gave for free last year.

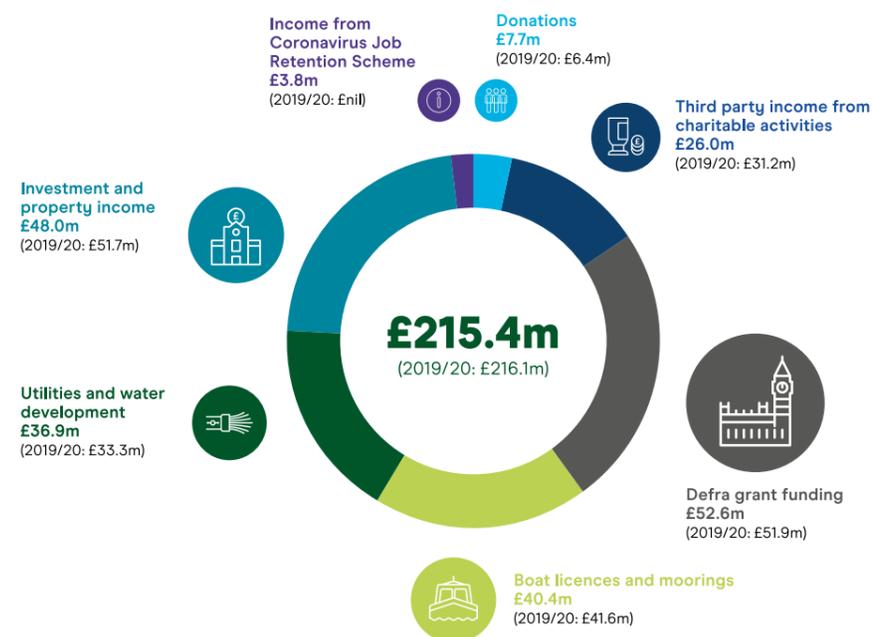
Boating activities contribute substantially to income. Moorings and boating businesses are a key factor, adding £19.1m, whilst leisure boat licences add a further £21.3m. This is vital for the work we undertake on the navigation and contributes about 1/5th of what we need to spend annually on its upkeep. This means we need to work hard to derive and grow the income from elsewhere to benefit our boating customers.



For every £1 we receive from boating, we get approximately £4 from elsewhere

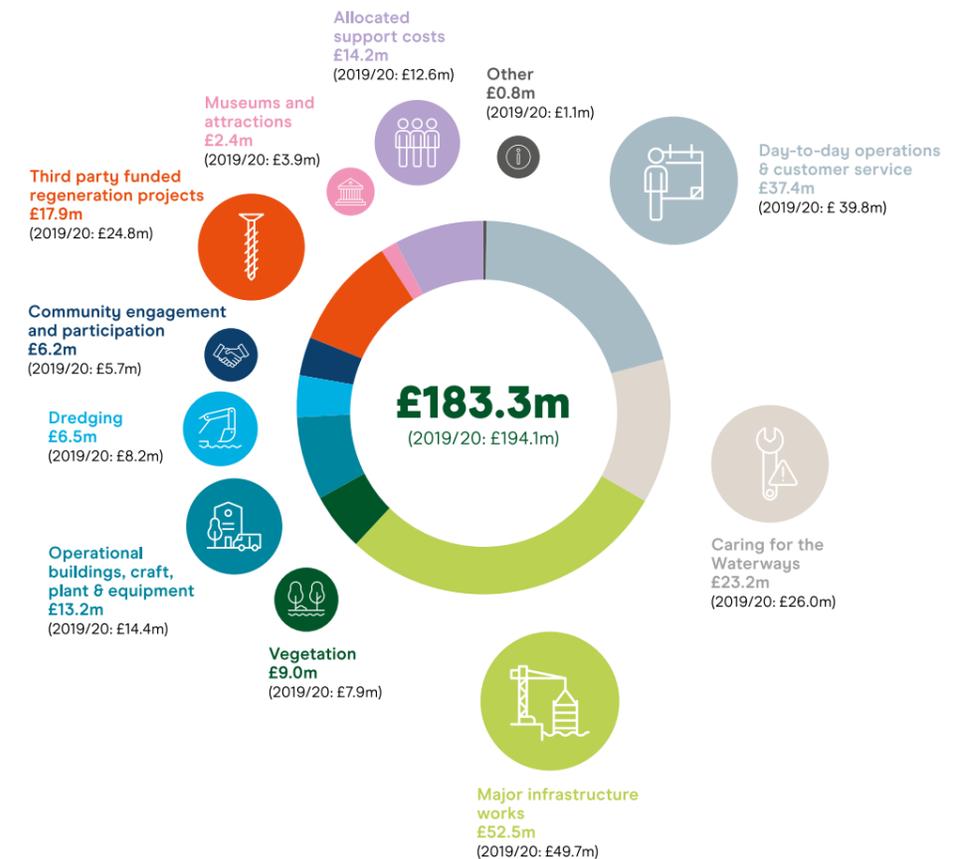
## Income

Income sources can be summarised as follows:



## Expenditure on charitable activities

Our charitable expenditure for 2020/21 was £183.3m. Most of this was spent on maintenance or the day to day running of the Trust. We completed 96 major works projects and undertook 282 planned repairs. We replaced 92 lock gates and spent £6.5m on dredging. Our day-to-day costs include IT, recruitment and training. We also contributed to works which were funded partially by partners outside the Trust, especially towpath resurfacing. The following pages show you just a fraction of the projects, both planned and reactive, that we have undertaken during the past year.



## Maintenance

Maintaining and restoring the waterways for boating is central to our work. Here are some highlights of a few of the 530 works we've carried out in the past year.

### Yorkshire and North East

#### Planned – Vegetation clearance, towpath reinstatement

**Problem:** The section of towpath was overgrown, the retaining wall needed to be shuttered and concreted, and the pathway and access steps needed replacement.

**Challenges:** Access – steps were too worn to take equipment to towpath.

**Solutions:** New access steps were built so work on the retaining wall and towpath could take place.

#### Reactive – Oxclose Lock, Ripon Canal

**Problem:** Oxclose Lock would not fill due to suspected damage to the floor or cill on the bottom gates.

**Challenges:** It was difficult to assess the lock. We couldn't bring workboats in as the water level was too low.

**Solutions:** We brought in a machine on a specialist hopper to carry out the works.

### West Midlands

#### Planned – Caldon Canal Froghall Basin

**Problem:** A 70 metre section of concrete wash wall had failed and was rotating.

**Challenge:** The concrete wash wall had to be broken out and removed.

**Solution:** We installed piling and backfilled with puddled clay before reinstating the area. It took 45 days in total.

#### Reactive – Llangollen Canal temporary culvert repair

**Problem:** A culvert near Nantwich was found to be defective, causing flooding.

**Challenge:** Without immediate intervention, this could have caused further deterioration of the culvert and the embankment. However, a full stoppage would adversely affect boaters at the start of the season.

**Solution:** We put in a temporary repair, which we are monitoring. This has kept the canal open for the summer.



### London & South East

#### Planned – Lock 3 Aylesbury Arm

**Problem:** There is severe rot damage to the collar on the bottom gate on the towpath side.

**Challenge:** To keep the Aylesbury Arm open until November, when there is an annual stoppage on that waterway. We felt it would be best to fit a steel retro collar, but that would need to be made by a fabricator who had supplied similar retro fits in the past.

**Solution:** We removed the balance beam. The gate was lifted from the recess with a crane boat, the rotten timber collar and heel cut away, and replaced with the new steel retro fit. We then replaced the balance beam.

#### Reactive – North Grove Lock

**Problem:** The heel post on the 24 year old lock gates had rotted. We wanted to keep the lock open for narrowboats as much as possible, so a temporary repair was made to the damaged gate whilst new gates were made in our workshops.

**Challenge:** There is no vehicular access to the lock which made bringing the new gates to the site difficult.

**Solution:** All the equipment and gates were floated in by our customer operations team.



### Wales & South West

#### Planned – Piling and soft bank protection on the River Kennet, at Burghfield

**Problem:** A 15 metre erosion pocket had developed near the moorings at Burghfield.

**Challenge:** A few old tree stumps had to be removed, weighing nearly a tonne each. Smaller erosion pockets had also formed downstream due to river flooding.

**Solution:** A crane was hired to carry out the piling works. Six metre long steel piles were driven in and 30 tonnes of loose stone was used to backfill behind the piling. Chestnut stakes, rock rolls and coir rolls were used to reinstate the bank.

#### Reactive – Culvert 2 on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

**Problem:** The culvert developed a leak.

**Challenges:** The hole could quickly have opened up, and caused major problems for the rest of that waterway.

**Solution:** The team worked out of hours, collaborating with the engineer, and machines were brought in to back fill the area with clay.



## East Midlands

### Planned – Northampton Arm of the Grand Union, opposite Gayton Marina

**Problem:** A section of piles and bank had started to collapse, and canal water was beginning to undermine the towpath. This had been caused by some boats repeatedly colliding with the bank as they turn into and out of the marina.

**Challenges:** We needed to reinforce this section to give greater resistance to boat impacts, to prevent it happening again.

**Solution:** We excavated the failed section of bank, installed new piles and tie bars, replaced 25 metres of waling with an oak fender and installed new waling to the rear of the piles. We then reinstated the bank, towpath and verges.

### Reactive – River Soar – work to repair a large section of wash wall

**Problem:** A section of towpath wash wall had failed at the base and was rotating, causing holes in the towpath.

**Challenge:** The holes were repaired but the wall was still unstable.

**Solution:** The masonry wall below the waterline needed to be removed, to allow piles to be installed. The towpath surface was then reinstated.



## North West

### Planned – Combs Reservoir

**Problem:** As part of our reservoir safety programme, we identified a need to improve the control of the incoming flow of water.

**Challenge:** Some low areas along the by-wash needed to be raised in order to contain the maximum flow that might be required.

**Solution:** We installed a concrete weir at the inlet of the reservoir, which meant we could control flow and divert it when necessary into the by-wash channel.

### Reactive – Wall collapse – Rochdale Canal

**Problem:** A section of the wall collapsed onto the towpath, which could have led to a much more serious problem if we had further wet weather. Further sections of the walling needed to be replaced.

**Challenges:** The site had very restricted access and all plant and materials had to be floated in using a combination of our own floating plant and hired equipment.

**Solution:** The wall was excavated and benched, to give more stability to that section.



## Supporting vulnerable boaters through the Covid pandemic

We have been working hard during the pandemic to help boaters, particularly those living aboard who were vulnerable, shielding and who had no fixed postcode who often find it difficult to access any kind of health care. We've advised Cheshire and Oxfordshire Healthwatch who have produced an access card, which helps open up health services to boaters to get, amongst other things, their vaccination.

The increased awareness of supporting those who are isolated or in need during the pandemic has helped open doors with statutory partners and agencies, who have begun to take a wider view of the needs of vulnerable people, wherever they are. We have also worked extensively with the Department of Works and Pensions around making access to universal credit easier for boaters.

We have extended our safeguarding team, by training leads from all areas of the business, which takes safeguarding to a wider audience within the Trust. We have also raised awareness of boater welfare amongst volunteers. Out on the towpath volunteers will come across vulnerable boaters; they have a chance to engage with them and highlight concerns to us.

Waterways Chaplains have continued to work throughout the year, despite the difficulties encountered by the lockdown restrictions. They are now creating regional hubs to ensure their cover is widespread.

An area where we have made the biggest impact over the years is in the adjustment to cruising requirements for those who are disabled or have an equalities issue. We have worked with boaters to make our equalities process less lengthy and cumbersome. The equalities questionnaire is now available online making it more accessible, so it can be filled in digitally, and returned either by post or email. We have also streamlined the equality adjustment review process, making it easier for boaters and the team to continue to offer the support needed with less holdups.

## Mowing Trial

The purpose of the mowing trial carried out in 2021 was to seek to balance the needs of boaters, towpath users, anglers and others accessing the waterways, whilst trying to bring the benefits to wildlife and biodiversity to the whole canal network, especially in urban areas.

Following the trial the Trust will be increasing habitat coverage across our canals by allowing grasses, plants and wildflowers to grow and flourish along the towpath, whilst still ensuring the safety of all our users by maintaining a walking pathway and ensuring key navigational sightlines are managed.

We're always keen to hear feedback from customers, colleagues and volunteers on these changes so do send us positive feedback as well as what can be improved upon, either via our [contact us](#) page, through your local regional customer service team or at a local forum.



## Major works, minor works & everyday repairs



**95%**

licence compliance



**£53.2m**

spent on major infrastructure works



**£17.9m**

third party funding



**96**

major works projects completed



**282**

planned repairs



**68**

unexpected repairs



**49km**

dredged



**92**

lock gates replaced



**89,109**

hours of volunteer lock keeping



**600km**

of towpath in mowing trial



**87.11%**

of assets graded A-C



**83,700**

m<sup>3</sup> volume of dredging removed

## Canal & River Trust

National Waterways Museum  
Ellesmere Port  
South Pier Road  
Ellesmere Port  
Cheshire  
CH65 4FW

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