

PRESS RELEASE

23 May 2022

Leighton Buzzard towpath closures begin 6 June 2022

On 6 June, in partnership with national walking and cycling charity Sustrans, Canal & River Trust, the national waterways and wellbeing charity, is starting a £500,000 towpath improvement project on the Grand Union Canal in Leighton Buzzard.

The works, which will be undertaken by the Canal & River Trust's engineering contractor Kier and are due to be completed by 23 August, will improve, resurface and widen a 780-metre section of towpath running south from the B4032 Leighton Road Bridge 114 to Bridge 115A (Mentmore Gardens). The towpath will be closed, and towpath notices will display a diversion route via Mentmore Gardens, Mentmore Road and Wing Road.

The towpath will temporarily reopen on Saturday 30 July, to allow access to the Linslade Canal Festival at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park.

The project will also improve a 2.1km section running north from Lock 27 (Leighton Lock) to Bridge 110 (Sandhole Bridge) in Old Linslade. Here there will be surfacing improvements, vegetation trimming and biodiversity enhancements. The works in this section do not require the towpath to be closed.

The towpath in Leighton Buzzard forms part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network 'Paths for Everyone', which aims to deliver a traffic-free, more consistent and accessible network for everyone, including walkers, cyclists, families and people with mobility requirements.

The project builds on previous towpath improvements undertaken by the Trust in Leighton Buzzard in 2015, between Leighton Road and Leighton Lock. It will add a further 2.9km of improved towpath, resulting in a 4.1km stretch of continuous high quality towpath through Leighton Buzzard and surrounding areas.

The towpath improvement project planned for Leighton Buzzard is one of a series of Department for Transport (DfT) Active Travel funded towpath improvement projects being delivered by the Canal & River Trust across England and Wales, helping the nation's waterways to provide high quality off-road routes for walking and cycling, and an important 'natural health service' across the country.

Ros Daniels, the Canal & River Trust's director for London & South East, explains:

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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

“Research shows that being next to water improves your mental and physical health. The Canal & River Trust wants to make its canals more welcoming, safe and clean to encourage more people to use them, and enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of walking and cycling, and being by the water.

“Canal & River Trust ecologists and heritage advisers are involved in the design of the works to ensure the works are sensitive to local wildlife and heritage structures, making enhancements where possible, including hedge laying, vegetation and tree management.

“We welcome the support of local people to help deliver some of the wildlife or heritage improvements with other volunteers, or to help look after the new towpath environment once it is complete.”

To find out more about the proposed improvements and volunteering opportunities, go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/leighton-buzzard>, call the Canal & River Trust on 03030 404040 or email enquiries.londonsoutheast@canalrivertrust.org.uk

For more information on Canal & River Trust including how you can donate money or volunteer to support our work visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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For further press information contact:

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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

During the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, towpath use in many urban residential areas increased dramatically, confirming the vital role of canals in providing access to the outdoors, nature and wellbeing. No other UK organisation has 2,000 miles of freely accessible green and blue space, so close to so many people, in areas of most need.

Memorandum of Understanding with Sustrans

Sustrans aims to deliver 5,000 more miles of traffic-free paths by 2040, with 80 network improvement projects underway. With soaring levels of obesity and poor mental health, providing a safe and accessible space that fosters physical activity and wellbeing has never been more important.

Towpaths can form attractive and practical parts of walking and cycling networks and help more people have equal access to the natural environment. There are currently around 500 miles of National Cycle Network routes on towpaths and waterways form an important part of Sustrans work to create traffic-free paths for everyone.

The Canal & River Trust has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sustrans. Canals are special places and the Trust's Memorandum of Understanding with Sustrans recognises the unique historic nature of towpaths and the range of different users who must be respected.

<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/news/2020/january/canal-river-trust-and-sustrans-sign-memorandum-of-understanding/>

The Trust's Towpath Code makes it clear that pedestrians and those accessing the water have priority and cyclists in particular should be considerate of others. Cyclists wanting to travel at speed should use alternative routes away from the canal.

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views/our-campaigns/stay-kind-slow-down/our-towpath-code>