



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Year of Green Action

Impact Report 2019



Welcome to our Year of Green Action

Throughout 2019, the Trust proudly supported Defra's Year of Green Action. Our repositioning to become a waterways and wellbeing charity in 2018 was a perfect fit with this initiative, which aimed to connect people from all walks of life with nature, to show how we can take positive action to improve our environment.

We believe life's better by water. We're passionate about encouraging the millions of people who have canals and rivers on their doorstep to spend more time by them – walking, cycling, canoeing, fishing or just sitting and taking in the sights and sounds. Our canals are at the heart of communities across England and Wales and we want more people to benefit from this free and accessible source of wellbeing.

Year of Green Action was a perfect opportunity for us to promote our existing opportunities to more diverse audiences, create new projects and work with specialist partners to engage communities, who were previously underrepresented amongst our visitors and volunteers.

In May, we launched our Plastics Challenge, encouraging people to do their bit in the fight against plastic pollution. We ran community clean up events and

What's Year of Green Action?
A year-long drive to get more people involved in projects supporting nature and improving the natural world – in our own gardens, schools or workplaces, and as consumers.

waterborne litter picks, recruited Plastics Rangers and launched our Plastics Challenge boards to show people how taking local action can help tackle global issues.

This year also saw us work with the #iwill campaign and partners from across the environmental sector to put young people at the heart of our programme. We co-created projects, developed volunteering roles, expanded our work with schools and recruited our first ever national youth panel (see pages 10-11). We also worked with Sports Leaders to develop a bespoke environmental social action award, which will be available to groups and individuals from 2020.

Year of Green Action may have ended in December but it provided a helpful focus for our existing work as well as being a catalyst for developing new programmes and reaching fresh audiences. Our work with communities and young people continues to go from strength to strength and we're excited to see what 2020 brings.

Lucie Unsworth, National Youth & Civil Society Manager



“ At the Trust we have been proud to support the Year of Green Action throughout 2019. The initiative enabled us to provide ever more opportunities for the millions of people who live alongside our canals and rivers. We have developed new partnerships and projects that continue to open up potential for local people to get out and discover for themselves these amazing green-blue spaces they have on their doorstep. We have welcomed many people who had never set foot on the towpath before and helped them to recognise how they can play their part in improving their own wellbeing, their local area and the environment. Putting young people in the driving seat through the creation of our youth panel really helped us to see things from a fresh perspective and understand how our 200 year old canal network can play an important role in improving the lives of the people who live alongside it today and for the future. ”



Richard Parry, Chief Executive

A few facts and figures...

Volunteering activities



Hours worked No. of volunteers

NB. These figures are accurate as of January 2020. Full figures will be calculated in March 2020. Some activities fall into more than one category so breakdown figures exceed 610,330.

Education



The way we work: our approach to making the most of Year of Green Action

The Year of Green Action was a great opportunity for the Canal & River Trust – but in order to maximise our achievements, we took a three strand approach to our work:

1 Raising awareness & changing behaviours

From delivering sessions through our education programme to running campaigns, creating resources and attending events. We worked hard to get the message out there through a range of initiatives:

- We published our **Plastics Challenge Report** to highlight the issue of plastics in our waterways and encourage people to support us in tackling the problem.
- The **online campaign** performed well, reaching 214,854 through Facebook and 314,632 on Twitter in its first week.
- Our **downloadable resource packs** provided tips on the small changes people can make in their daily lives to make a difference.
- We worked with the Scouts Association to co-create a range of **plastics focused activity packs** for all sections from age 6 to 25.
- Joining forces with **#2MinuteBeachClean** we placed 10 **A-frames** around the country with biodegradable, compostable bags and litter pickers attached, providing a quick, easy and accessible way for people to play their part

We promoted our support of Year of Green Action online; creating a new webpage, sharing short films and case studies, and posting tweets and Instagram stories. This content was further shared by partners which helped us reach new audiences in the youth and environmental sectors.



canalrivertrust



2 Taking practical action

Our fantastic volunteers gave a total of **610,330 hours** in 2019. 45,191 of these hours were given by young people. Whilst not all of this was driven by our involvement in the Year of Green Action, the types of activities our volunteers got stuck in to supported the aims of the initiative and had proven environmental benefits.

2019 also saw growth in other areas of our work with children, young people and communities, enabling more people to get outdoors and reconnect with the natural environment through a wide range of participatory activities.

83,331 children were engaged in our Explorers Education programme, with 13,367 taking part in outdoor education sessions by the canal.

Our People's Postcode Lottery funded Community Roots programmes in the West Midlands and North West went from strength to strength and new projects started in 7 locations across England and Wales. This is an exciting programme for us, aiming to reach non-users of our waterways within metropolitan and urban areas and help make local canals and rivers relevant to them. Taking a needs-led approach, we are working with communities, changing patterns of use and perceptions of the environmental, cultural and wellbeing value of the waterways.

Our established Let's Fish! initiative saw its largest numbers yet, with 147 events delivered from 2018-2019. We are continuing to build on this success with new offers planned for 2020 and beyond, including Let's Canoe and Let's Cycle.

We also diversified our youth social action programme – creating new opportunities, working with new partners and encouraging more young people than ever to get involved through:

- Community clean-ups
- Wildlife walks
- Arts projects
- Young Curators and Junior Lock Keepers schemes
- Let's... activities and events
- and much more!

147
Let's Fish!
events

Approx
610,330
volunteering
hours

83,331
Explorers
children

3

Encouraging youth leadership & community ownership

We always work hard to make sure our projects and activities have real impact on the lives and communities of a wide range of people – and through 2019, we focused on the younger generation.

We asked young people what matters to them...

We wanted to understand what issues concern young people and find out how they'd like to work with us to make things better – so we carried out an online survey of over 2000 16-24 year olds across England and Wales. What did we learn? Global and local environmental concerns came out as two of the top five areas that young people care about. And they told us that 'Finding a solution to environmental issues' was the top wish amongst young people.

We launched a youth panel to hear their voice...

We set up a panel of young people from across England and Wales, who worked with us to develop our programme for the year. They also worked alongside regional and national teams to create a Year of Green Action legacy and make sure the activities delivered are sustainable beyond 2019. You can read more about this on pages 10-11.

We got schools involved in their local areas...

Building on our successful canal adoption scheme – encouraging community groups to take a lead in looking after a stretch of their local canal or river – we launched our new schools pocket adoptions. **Five schools across London signed up** to take part and over the last year **around 200 school children have been involved** – making site visits, understanding the issues they would like to address and working with other local volunteer groups to develop action plans to improve the canal for themselves and the wider community.



“It’s been great to be involved with Year of Green Action. There are lots of opportunities for young people to deliver environmental improvements on our waterways and it’s been brilliant to see more and more of them get involved. It’s also important that we have been opening up to hear their views on issues of importance to them – for instance a group of our Youth Panel members joined with our Environmental Advisory Group recently to participate in our annual horizon-scanning exercise. This generated a lot of discussion between the young leaders and the Group members and led to a different output than we would have got by ourselves – and this is already influencing how our strategies develop for the future.”

Peter Birch, National Policy Advisor



Caring



Open



Local



Involvement



Excellence

Our regional work in action



North West

Yorkshire & North East

London & the South East

Wales & South West

West Midlands

East Midlands

North West College adoption of Leeds Liverpool Canal

The background

In November, after working with Project Leader Vicki Birch for over a year, Hope College adopted a stretch of the Leeds Liverpool Canal. This is part of our Pocket Adoption scheme to get young people involved in social action at the Trust – to improve the site and help them to develop personal and employability skills.

What happened?

Coming to the canal every week, 20 students have been involved in a wide range of projects including vegetation removal, litter-picks, upcycling items reclaimed from the canal, removing invasive plant species from the canal via canoe and a sponsored walk to raise funds for the Trust.



The result

College Tutor, Natalie Hamilton has seen the difference in her students, “One student, who is very lively and doesn’t usually take part in links away from college, has made significant progress. He communicates with sign language and limited speech but his speech has become clearer and he’s using more words. He’s carrying out jobs with support and staying focused on the task for longer periods of time. It’s amazing to see him so happy, having fun in this learning environment.”



“This group has been absolutely fantastic to work with. They are full of enthusiasm and have already made a real difference. It has been great to see them grow in confidence and start to take more of a lead on activities.”

Vicki Birch,
Project Leader





London & South East School pocket adoption of Regents Canal

The background:

Learning & Skills Coordinator, Mike Wakeford, spent time with pupils from five primary schools across London, piloting our Schools Pocket Adoptions – a scheme which aims to empower children to lead positive change in their community.

What happened?

In November, Mike started working with a wellbeing and nurture group at Barrow Hill Junior School, who adopted a stretch of the Regents canal. The pupils have put lots of energy into making the site a more attractive place for people and wildlife, producing a plan of how they'd like to redesign it. They're now working with Trust colleagues, fellow pupils and local volunteer groups to make their ideas a reality.

The result:

This project is still in progress, but it's already helping the children connect to the waterway environment and their local community, and improving confidence and wellbeing. It's also enabling them to develop skills like teamwork, communication and project planning. The children are also appreciating the calming effect of being by water and highlighting things they want to tackle.

"This rubbish is rubbish! We can definitely get rid of that!"

"It's really quiet and safe."

"I can't wait to improve things."



Quotes from Barrow Hill Junior School pupils



West Midlands Explorers scheme in Walsall

The background:

Explorers' is the Trust's education programme, aimed at children aged 5-11, and aims to inspire children's learning by connecting them to our canals and rivers. Millfield Primary School in Walsall trialed the idea of becoming a facility base for nearby schools to participate in the Explorers programme, as they are ideally located just metres from the Wryley & Essington Canal.

What happened?

Pupils took part in a themed Explorers week, where they experienced a taster of our activities, from water safety workshops to our new plastics themed activities. They also were hands-on clearing up litter, weeding and bulb planting.



The result:

The school continued their link with their local stretch of the canal once the week had finished. The children engaged enthusiastically and feedback from their teachers was positive.

"The children from Millfield Primary School have cleared the canal with hand grapples, weeded the towpath and planted bulbs on a regular basis for over 12 months now. The area has really improved. Now that we have 'our own' stretch of the canal we would like to address the problem of dog poo by placing informative signs along the bank and educating the children about its dangers – a message, which will hopefully get passed on at home".



Yorkshire & North East Urban Wilderness Partnership

The background

Our team worked with Urban Wilderness – an arts organisation specialising in connecting disadvantaged young people to nature. We took a place-based approach to engaging young people with their local waterways to make a positive impact and address loneliness in 14 – 25 year olds.

What happened?

In February, we spent a week in Tinsley Marina, Sheffield, working alongside several groups of young people that we met through local youth charity, Endeavour. Urban Wilderness engaged the young people in three activities – a bright mural taking inspiration from boat art and nature, creating a cleared and sign-posted pathway through an area of shrubs, and building greenwood benches to create a meeting point.

The result

Not only did the project make a positive impact to the physical environment, through picking litter and creating wildlife friendly log-piles, it also benefited the young people. The staff noted that a really important element was giving them the opportunity to spend time with others.

For many of the young people it was the first time they had been on a canal. Several were surprised by how friendly people were along the towpath and told us that they felt more relaxed being by water. The colourful meeting point will be visited again by Endeavour, who are planning to adopt a nearby stretch of canal.

One young participant commented, “Once you get into the mindset, you don’t really think about anything, it’s really therapeutic.” Another said, “it’s really nice. It’s calm. It’s quiet.”

“It’s got them out together socialising, just enjoying being together and learning new skills... Otherwise they are just sat at home, and that’s when depression kicks in.”

**Project Worker,
Nicola**





“Through this challenging pond project the students have had to listen and follow instructions to work as a team. It’s evident that they have gained from being involved and have matured considerably. The Canal & River Trust team have been supportive to all our learners enabling them to work at higher levels to achieve more, whilst stretching and challenging them.”

Madeleine Burgess, Employability Development Coordinator

Wales & South West Gloucester Pond Project

The background

Trust colleagues worked with 30 students from the Cheltenham and Forest of Dean campuses of Gloucestershire College on a ‘build a pond’ project funded by People’s Postcode Lottery. This was part of their Princes Trust E3 award, designed to increase their understanding of volunteering within their community and build on employability skills.

What happened?

Working at Saul Junction on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, they helped to create a new habitat for great crested newts, a protected species. The students, who all have additional support needs, were involved in a range of activities including site clearing, fence-building, digging out and preparing the pond for filling. They also planted wildflowers on the surrounding bunds.

The result

Celebrating their achievements was an important part of this project, from passing on the positive comments from the public to hosting a pond filling ceremony for all 30 and their families so they could see the impact of their work. The students will continue to engage as the college has a community adoption from Fretherne Bridge to just north of Junction Bridge.

“I enjoyed the carpentry especially measuring out for the fence and fixing the cross braces. I learnt how to fix hinges on to a gate and how to fix fence panels level using a spirit level.”

Aiden, student



East Midlands Wildflower project along the Nottingham Beeston Canal

The background

The East Midlands Team spotted that though there were a variety of wildflowers on the towpath verge of the Nottingham-Beeston Canal, alongside the busy London Rd in Central Nottingham, none tended to grow tall and diversity was kept down by the grazing of Canada Geese. This wildflower project was developed to improve the verge for pollinators, and to make it more species rich, colourful and attractive.

What happened?

Over several months, Trust colleagues and volunteers worked with Nottingham Trent University students, local businesses and community organisations (including Nature in Mind, who support people with mental health problems through engagement with nature-related activities). They removed wildflowers (to be replanted later!), rotavated the ground, cleared rubble, pruned trees, picked litter and planted up containers and the towpath bank with a range of wildflower bulbs.

The result

The project has made a fantastic difference to the area from both the canal and road-side. It’s set to continue with activities planned around litter-picking, seeding, bulb planting, further improvements to the relaxation quadrant and seating area, and the installation of an all-important goose proof barrier!

“The canal is a real antidote to city life, giving those that work and live in Nottingham a quiet, green place to get some fresh air and enjoy being closer to nature. Local people and businesses have played a key role in helping to create these wildflower meadows which we know will bring more wildlife right into the heart of the city and make the canal side a more welcoming and attractive place to spend time and recharge by the water.”

Richard Bennett, Heritage & Environment Manager



The younger generation

The Year of Green Action provided us with an exciting opportunity to recruit our first ever national youth panel. Representing all six of our regions across England and Wales, the panel was made up of 16-24 year olds from a wide range of backgrounds, all with a shared interest in the environment.

The group helped to shape and lead campaigns, acted as ambassadors for green action at the Trust, and worked closely with teams across the country. They even had the opportunity to meet and lead a session

with our council, trustees, chairs of our regional boards and members of the exec team – highlighting the role young people could and should play in protecting and promoting our canals, now and in the future.

James Long, Urban Engagement Manager at the Trust said:

“Young people from the youth panel have made a fantastic contribution at key events and meetings for the Trust. It has been really exciting to have young people ‘in the room’ when we have been having quite high-level or technical discussions to give their ideas and opinions.

From talking to the young people involved they always felt included and listened to by colleagues and volunteers, and this made a big difference in making them feel comfortable. We were really conscious about getting the mood and environment right for young people to take part in meetings and workshops, and it was great to see how people from across the Trust embraced this.”

To ensure the group was as inclusive and representative as possible we took a flexible approach to engagement with some young people sharing ideas and feedback over the phone and via email, some attending face to face meetings and some leading practical sessions and workshops. Members were provided with a menu of events and opportunities and could choose the ones of most interest to them. We created an online forum so the members could get to know each other and have their voices heard even if they weren't able to make meetings in person.

At the Trust we're excited to involve more people, trial new projects and do things differently. We want our future generations to be able to enjoy our waterways and be proud of where they live. The Year of Green Action panel marks an important first step for us and we are busy co-creating opportunities for young people to get involved and have their say at local, regional and national levels. It's essential that we have their help in shaping the future of our waterways for everyone.



Trust Young Leaders at the launch of the Desmond Family Canoe Trail

shaping a greener future

Reflections from the panel

Why is the youth panel important?

“The Youth Panel is important because it is in a **unique position to inspire** and enthuse a much closer connection of young people with our waterways. This is because it can see the situation from a youth perspective. In these uncertain times, now more than ever, there needs to be a collective effort to preserve this vital part of Britain’s environment and heritage. Young people’s involvement in the canals and rivers is crucial to steering the Trust’s future.”

“Young people’s opinions, although important, are underrepresented. The youth panel **enables our voices to be heard**, and hopefully encourages other young people to speak out as well.”

“The youth panel I see as very important, because it raises awareness of the charity to the younger generation. Plus it **raises awareness for climate change** that is a massive thing for our current generation and other generations to come.”

“The Canal & River Trust Youth Panel is so important, because the more that **young people get involved** with the environmental issues we have today, the better equipped our generation will be to deal with the global concerns of tomorrow. I also believe that young people learn best from their peers, so having the involvement of a Youth Panel will be beneficial in campaigns that target a younger audience.”

What does making life better by water mean to you?

“To me life better by water means is helping the public to gain an understanding and appreciation of the water around them to enable them to help them utilise it in a way to **help benefit their life.**”

“The integration of rivers and canal into daily urban life is vital for the aesthetic improvement of our environment as well as **for our own mental wellbeing.** The opportunity for escape that rivers offer from the hustle and bustle of built-up areas is invaluable for our own enjoyment of the natural world, its biodiversity, and its history.”

“Making life better by water means cleaning up our waterways and making them inviting and accessible for all. People who live near these features deserve **to enjoy them** and as a society we have a responsibility to preserve them for the future.”

“I would like to see people of all ages engaged in enjoying the waterways, whether this is on the water, on the footpaths or by enjoying some of the Trust’s amazing buildings. But I also think people should take an active role in understanding what the preservation of the waterways involves and why it is so important. An on-going programme could be done in schools, at community events and part of a fun series of events for young people. It could **support ecological and global climate change messages** that are becoming increasingly mainstream and urgent.”



With huge thanks to our fantastic panel members; Hazel, Preeti, Stuart, Harrison, Alex, Isabelle, Holly, Marion, Harry, Karim, Allen, Luke, Andy, Renee, Carly & Holly for your input and involvement.



We thoroughly enjoyed our involvement in the Year of Green Action and are excited to build on the projects and partnerships we have developed over the past year. We pride ourselves on our ability to offer wellbeing and participation opportunities on the nation's doorstep and have lots of exciting activities planned for 2020 and beyond.



Whether your interest is in volunteering, keeping fit, making friends, developing skills, trying new things or just enjoying a quiet moment outdoors, we're confident our beautiful waterways and friendly teams will have something to offer you.

To get involved:

visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer • email: volunteer@canalrivertrust.org.uk • call: 0303 040 4040

For more information on our youth & community engagement work please email lucie.unsworth@canalrivertrust.org.uk



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