Waterways Enrich Lives!

Central Shires Waterway Partnership
Our Plan for The Next Ten Years
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canal &amp; River Trust:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Governance</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Strategic Priorities</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Shires Waterway Partnership:</strong></td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique and Diverse</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent Valley</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anker Valley</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soar Valley</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What Our Waterways Can Offer Locally</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Wellbeing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthier Communities</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperous Communities</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Communities</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Plans for the Future</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Living waterways transform places and enrich lives”

Canal & River Trust, 2014
Welcome

“The creation of the Canal & River Trust in summer 2012 has put our canals exactly where they should be - that is into the hands of everyone and in the control of the people who care passionately about their long term survival.”

It now gives me great pleasure to share our current thinking on the Central Shires Waterway Strategic Plan, where we set out a vision, priorities and action plan that will make a real difference to our cherished waterways and the communities that surround them.

Our plan has been designed to help articulate the wide range of issues and priorities that are seen as key in managing the part of the wonderful canal network that comprises the Central Shires waterways, and to construct a solid foundation from which we can meet the challenges that lie ahead. This plan goes beyond the commitment to high quality day to day maintenance of the canals and rivers to protecting and improving the navigation experience of the existing waterways.

It has been a privilege to be chair of the Central Shires Waterway Partnership and work with a dedicated team of volunteers alongside the Trust’s local management team. It has meant I have seen first-hand the splendid work being done each and every day on our historic structures by the skilled workforce. I have also been able to witness how contributions to the Trust’s work from sources unavailable to the waterways in the past are now having an impact on what we are able to achieve. Significant donations from corporate sponsors have helped support canal maintenance, alongside support for specific environmental projects like rescuing the declining water vole population; or supporting the popular open days when local communities have had the chance to see for themselves the impressive ways we care for a 200 year old network.

However, the really impressive part of what we have achieved is the growing numbers of volunteers and Friends of the Trust that are getting involved in supporting our work. Volunteers have generously given their time to help vital work be completed and volunteer days have increased five-fold in the last four years - and we are increasing resources again next year to hit even more ambitious targets, with an increase in education volunteers going into schools on the agenda.

Our Partnership has been unanimous about the need for setting out a shared vision and a strategic way ahead for the waterway. This document sets out the issues we see as critical and how we plan to tackle them. The feedback we have had on our early work has already influenced this version of the plan and I am confident it will serve us well.

Charlotte Atkins
Chair, Central Shires Waterway Partnership
About Canal & River Trust: Our Governance

Why local partnerships?

We need to manage our canals and rivers as one network, with effective policies across England and Wales in order to allocate resources where they are most needed and will be most efficient. However, the opportunities for joint working, as well as appreciating the obstacles to better use and enjoyment of our canals and rivers, lie in understanding individual stretches of waterway and working locally.

That is why new Waterway Partnerships have been established across England and Wales, to bring together representatives of local communities, businesses and organisations to work closely with the Canal & River Trust to influence and add value to what we do in each area.
Almost 50% of the population of England and Wales lives within five miles of our network of canals, rivers and towpaths.

The network is cherished by millions of visitors, neighbours and communities, yet it has been difficult in the past for many people to get involved in shaping its future. We intend to change that.

The true potential of our canals and rivers and their long term survival will only be secured if the new Trust fully engages and works with visitors, users, neighbours, business partners and local authorities, including parish, town and community councils.

Our priority is to widen the enjoyment of our waterways today, whilst protecting them for future generations. The Trustees have set out six strategic goals aimed at unlocking this potential.

**People** To enrich people’s lives.

**Waterways** To protect and improve the accessibility, usability and resilience of our assets and their heritage, for people to use and enjoy, now and in the future.

**Resources** To secure sufficient resources, and manage them efficiently, for the long term sustainability of the waterways within the Trust’s care.

**Influence** To be a widely respected partner and trusted guardian with growing influence and responsibility.

**Places** To provide special places that people value, sustainable environments and routes.

**Prosperity** To yield economic benefits for local communities and the nation.
Canal & River Trust: Resources

Nationally, we have:

• an annual income of approximately £120m
• 1,600 staff. Over half our team are canalside, looking after the fabric of our canals and rivers every day
• 2,727 Listed Buildings and structures – We are the third largest owner of Listed Structures in the UK
• over 2,000 miles of historic canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks
• an additional 200 miles of waterways restored and re-opened in the last decade
• 1,000 wildlife conservation sites and 400 miles of Conservation Areas
• 32,000 licensed boats on the network – 2014 (more than at the height of the Industrial Revolution)
• 15,000 heritage objects, 100,000 archive records and images across museums and attractions sites

Our income is derived from a wide range of sources including:

• individual donors and corporate sponsors
• commercial income, including revenue from the licensing of boats, moorings and angling; and from property and utilities
• grants from other organisations
• our 15 year contract with the UK Government
Canal & River Trust: The Central Shires Waterway Partnership

Who are we?
We are a group of volunteers from public, private and community organisations with a wide range of professional, community and waterway interests and skills. Among these are regeneration, environmental protection, strategic planning, marketing, physical and community development, heritage and sports such as canoeing, cycling and angling, as well as boating and engineering. Find out more about our partnership members at canalrivertrust.org.uk/central-shires/whos-who

What are we for?
• Promoting knowledge and use of the waterways in the region
• Understanding the issues facing communities in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire and assessing how the waterways can play a part
• Shaping future plans of the Canal & River Trust to deliver, either on its own or in partnership with others
• Securing the resources to deliver those plans
• Ensuring that the job gets done

How we will do that job?
• By taking a wide range of evidence and data held by the Trust and others
• By talking to as many people and organisations as possible who might have an interest in working with us (or may need some persuading that they do)
• By analysing the evidence
• By exploring opportunities for making the best return on investment
• By capturing this in a long term plan, the Strategic Waterway Plan
• By channeling the skills, expertise and resources of the Canal & River Trust, its partners, agencies and local communities towards its objectives
• And, by implementing that plan on the basis of common purpose, shared benefit and mutual interest among partners and communities

This Plan
This plan is the result of our consulting and listening to ideas and views of individuals, stakeholders and businesses of the Central Shires.
“A sustainable and evolving canal and river network that is a national treasure – accessible to and cherished by all.”

Canal & River Trust, 2012
Our Waterways

Key
- Trent & Mersey Canal (from south of Harecastle Tunnel to Derwent Mouth Lock no. 1)
- Ashby Canal
- Coventry Canal
- Caldon Canal (and Leek branch)
- River Soar
- Grand Union Canal (downstream of Bridge 87 – Kilby Bridge to Leicester)
- Lichfield & Hatherton Canals restoration
- Derby & Sandiacre Canal restoration
- Ashby Canal extension restoration
- Uttoxeter Canal restoration
- Burslem Port Arm restoration
Central Shires Waterways: Unique and diverse

The Central Shires waterway network is located at the heart of the nation’s historic network of canals and rivers. It straddles the countryside between the urban parts of the West and East Midlands, connecting the Potteries with Leicester and Coventry. The diversity of environments, from city centres to leafy wildlife-rich navigations, enables the waterway to attract visitors and local communities for activities varying from towpath commuting, spending quiet times boating or just relaxing away from it all.

The Central Shires waterways consequently play a vital role in attracting around 15.7 million visits each year and support a wide range of business activities. They also touch on a fantastically wide and ethnically diverse population. The impact the canals have on the local economy, environment and the community they come close to is correspondingly wide and so we have considered the waterway in three distinct areas which we have characterised as the Three Valleys.
These help us to focus on what has evolved over time and give a platform on which to enhance the multiple benefits that the waterways can bring in the future. Each has its own features, challenges and opportunities and these areas provide a simple signpost of what we are seeking to achieve and how the network can make a major contribution to the aims and aspirations of the many other bodies seeking to improve the quality of life in the areas.
1. Trent Valley

A cross country canal with a unique heritage connecting town and country

Context

The Engineer James Brindley designed a ‘Grand Cross’ of canals to join the existing four main river navigations of the Trent, Mersey, Severn and Thames via the Midlands. The first two of these were linked by the Trent & Mersey Canal and the canal today forms a vital part of the nation’s industrial heritage.

The canal has a close affinity to the River Trent and this strategic area reflects the connectivity that the canal has with the communities along its length.

The Potteries (primary urban area a) has a unique sub-regional identity of its own with the Trent & Mersey and Caldon Canals forming a green corridor through Stoke-on-Trent, as well as offering a boating, cycling and walking route through to rural Staffordshire.

As the canal shadows the course of the River Trent, it connects the Potteries with rural southern Staffordshire and drops to Burton on Trent (secondary urban area) to its connection with the Trent. This cross-country canal therefore takes you through scenes from the rich industrial history of Stoke-on-Trent’s Potteries district to the nature reserve at the picturesque Fradley Junction.

Throughout the Trent Valley the canal forms an important wildlife corridor and is used for a wide range of activities including boating, canoeing, angling, walking, cycling and other general amenity purposes.
Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

- Congestion at Fradley Junction is an issue for boaters
- Limited locations to allow boats to stop in Stoke on Trent
- High boat movement across the waterway with around 8,000 boats a year and high number of marinas
- High number of visitor destinations, with Staffordshire tourism promoting places to visit
- Restoration of the Uttoxeter Canal, Burslem Branch Canal and Derby and Sandiacre Canal
- Home to part of the National Forest

Priorities

- Exploiting the canal connections to, and with, existing tourism attractions
- Developing the canals to empower local communities and instil greater community pride
- Working with Local Authorities to encourage greater involvement, commitment and higher prioritisation of their waterways
- Improving the locally poor image and environmental quality of the canals caused by poor waterside boundaries and presence of large tracts of derelict land, especially in the Stoke on Trent area
- Supporting the sustainable growth of waterway dependent businesses, visitors and investors by promoting the opportunities the waterways can offer

2. Anker Valley

Waterways steeped in history, from the Mercian kings to the Battle of Bosworth and the Blitz

Context

For the communities in this area of Warwickshire, Leicestershire and eastern Staffordshire, the influence of the river has continued to have an impact throughout the centuries. Tamworth (secondary urban area) was the seat of the Anglo Saxon kingdom of Mercia; Bosworth, near Hinckley and the Ashby Canal witnessed the fifteenth century battle that heralded the beginning of the Tudor age; and Coventry survived the severe bombing of the city during the blitz.

After the Second World War the canal in Coventry (primary urban area b) was in danger of being built over. It was saved by local volunteers, who led the campaign to put the canal back at the heart of the city, although it later became isolated from the centre by the ring road.
Further north, Hawkesbury Junction is where the Coventry Canal meets the Oxford Canal. Beyond the junction, the canal passes through Bedworth and Nuneaton (secondary urban area) before heading north through a mix of urban and rural landscapes.

At Marston Junction the Ashby Canal begins, which originally ran from Bedworth to Moira, near Ashby de la Zouch. The Ashby Canal suffered from mining subsidence during the first half of the 20th century, and was progressively closed to the current terminus at Snarestone. There is active support for the restoration of the Snarestone to Measham length.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

• The towpath is a popular pedestrian route, yet there is the challenge of connecting the Canal Basin to Coventry City Centre
• Varying awareness in local authorities of the benefits canals bring to local communities and businesses
• Ashby Canal towpath condition is generally poor
• Commuter zone connections at Coventry, Nuneaton and Tamworth
• Restoration of the Lichfield and Ashby Canals

Priorities

• Improve the poor environmental quality of the canals in urban areas
• Create and promote Coventry Basin as a canal destination
• Create greater canal awareness with Local Government partners
3. Soar Valley

A navigation set in locations renowned for their quality of life

Context
Heading north from Foxton along the Grand Union Canal (Leicester Line), on reaching Kings Lock, Aylestone, the canal is joined by the River Soar before passing through Leicester (primary urban area c) which has many attractions with easy access from both the water and towpath. The navigation then proceeds gently northwards for the next 20 miles or so to the junction with the River Trent near Ratcliffe Power Station.

The Watermead Regeneration Corridor north of the city supports the regeneration of Thurcaston village centre and provides a highly accessible site for inward investment. It will create jobs close to a Priority Neighbourhood and will connect the community with the adjacent Watermead Country Park.

Passing villages, including Syston, Mountsorrel, and Barrow on Soar, the land alongside the Soar navigation is predominantly agricultural as the rolling countryside rises away before reaching the town of Loughborough (secondary urban area), renowned university town and a former industrial town with engineering works and railway sidings (Great Central Steam Railway) backing on to the canal section.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas
• Flooding is a major factor for the river navigation
• Invasive plant species exist across much of this strategic character area
• The Local Authorities are proactive and have established a Partnership to develop and deliver a strategy for the River Soar and Grand Union Canal
• Opportunities exist for canal related tourism development, including linking to Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre and the Go Canoeing Guided Tours along the CRT managed waterways
• Create better links with other visitor destinations e.g. Great Central Railway
• Promoting angling and canoeing (within national strategies) with young people could be a major opportunity

Priorities
• Working with local government partners and other local organisations to create a greater sense of ownership of the waterway and its environment
• Help promote and raise awareness of water-based activities (e.g. canoeing) by working with new and existing partners e.g. Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre and Sea Cadets
What Our Waterways Can Offer Locally

Community Wellbeing
Our waterways have a significant and unique role to play in connecting people, places and opportunities by improving the physical environment, prospects for people and the wider economy as well as supporting carbon reduction and environmental sustainability. The canal network is already generating public benefits to local communities and the economy within the Central Shires area but it has the potential to deliver so much more.

Healthier Communities
Our waterways can act as a Natural Health Service, offering a wonderful – and free – way of getting people out more easily into the fresh air and on the move. Many of our towpaths have been improved to provide freely accessible, well surfaced walking and cycling routes which can be used by local people to keep fit and well.

The Midlands is made up of diverse, sometimes isolated communities in terms of social and economic background, age and ethnicity. The waterways of the Central Shires have the potential to reach out to them all and to aid social cohesion by developing a sense of shared identity and encouraging community groups to work together to improve their local environment.

Anti-social behaviour is a very real concern for residents in many parts of the Central Shires. Our waterways can help to encourage a greater sense of community identity and shared ownership, giving people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to help care for their local waterways and to provide access to formal and informal sport and recreation activities.
Prosperous Communities

It’s impossible to talk about our waterways without talking about the economy – the very reason the canals exist was to connect cities, businesses, goods and markets. Today, our waterways continue to be integral to sustainable growth, even though their original role for trade may have changed.

Boaters, cyclists, anglers, other visitors, everyone who comes to our waterways all contribute to the local economy. The Central Shires waterways are unique, rich in character and history, home to a diverse range of marinas, waterside pubs and attractions and they greatly enhance the region’s tourism offer.

We believe the waterways can help to enhance the region’s skills base through training, volunteering and work placement opportunities.

Our waterways can also contribute to sustainable growth of the region through the development of innovative renewable energy schemes. Waterborne freight also has the potential to combat the effects of climate change, whilst connecting the region directly to Europe and further afield.

Sustainable Communities

The Midlands is a special area with a colourful history, bustling towns and cities, and some nationally and internationally significant areas of ecological interest. However it can also be under-appreciated by those living here and overlooked by those in other parts of the country.

Our waterways are an integral part of the Midlands landscape and we believe they can play a stronger part in raising the profile of the area.

Our waterways are fantastic examples of green infrastructure, connecting communities and bringing visitors into the area through linkages with wider walking and cycling networks, plus canoe trails. As such they can act as a gateway to the Midlands.

The Central Shires waterways can act as catalysts for regeneration, transforming previously disused areas of land into vibrant destinations, giving our towns and cities a greater sense of place, improving their intrinsic value and making them more attractive to tourism and investment.
Canal & River Trust: Our Plans For The Future

We are putting together plans to make sure that our waterways are used and developed in a way that has maximum benefit for our local people, places and local economies. The details below show our outline objectives and some of the ways in which these objectives can be achieved.

1. We want to:

   Develop a stronger sense of community ownership and responsibility, and change local perceptions of the waterway network within the Three Valleys.

   This means building and broadening community engagement and ownership, improving awareness of the waterways to attract more people to use and enjoy them and encourage positive, responsible behaviour towards the waterways.

2. We plan to:

   a. Promote and establish Community Adoptions of canals
   b. Work with communities to make the most of their setting alongside our waterways to improve the image of canals
   c. Encourage participation in either Towpath Taskforce events or Volunteer Lock Keeping
   d. Work with other trusts, associations and charities to widen the local and community interest in the waterways
   e. Develop a programme of engagement with schools and academies using Canal & River Explorers
   f. Increase usage of our waterways through key partners, including use for boating, canoeing, angling and cycling
2 Grow community engagement activities to encourage greater use and enjoyment of the waterways by people living within the Three Valleys area

This means encouraging and facilitating greater use of the canals and rivers by people from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, ages and abilities. Encourage participation in recreation, sport and learning activities on and by the water, promoting the use of towpaths as routes to workplaces, homes and schools.

We plan to:

a. Develop our understanding of, and address barriers to potential new audiences
b. Work with the Angling Trust to encourage the take up of angling
c. Work with Canoe England to increase participation in canoeing on our waterways, including creating new and improving existing facilities
d. Create links with outdoor pursuits centres and other organisations to promote active participation
e. Establish the Trust as a delivery partner with Health and Wellbeing Boards

3 Support the sustainable growth of waterway related tourism and leisure to increase visitor numbers, satisfaction and spend

This means maintaining and improving the condition of the waterways, facilities and environs, encouraging greater activity in terms of sustainable transport along the waterways and supporting the growth of waterway tourism to increase visitor numbers and spend.

We plan to:

a. Improve more towpaths and access to them whilst encouraging responsible shared use
b. Work with local Destination Boards to promote waterways for boating and other tourism activities
c. Review provision of visitor moorings on the waterway to ensure they are fit for purpose and in appropriate locations to encourage boaters to use local shops and other amenities
d. Improve the ecology of the canals and rivers as part of the green infrastructure network
4 Attract different forms of investment into the waterways and their corridors

This means encouraging waterside businesses and landowners to benefit from their location and in turn make a positive contribution to the waterway environment and visitor experience, and encouraging investment into waterways through corporate and business engagement and enterprise.

We plan to:

a. Engage and work with existing and potential waterway dependent businesses to support local economies
b. Support appropriate new developments, both urban and rural, which respect and enhance the waterways
c. Improve the environmental quality and image caused by poor waterside boundaries
d. Support the restoration of the Lichfield & Hatherton, Derby & Sandiacre, northern Ashby, Uttoxeter and Burslem Branch canals

5 Exploit the economic benefits that waterways can provide to their wider corridors and communities

This means creating links and forging new relationships with the business communities in the villages and towns through which the waterway, passes encouraging active participation in promoting the canal / river environment and supporting physical improvements to help with local economic activity.

We plan to:

a. Establish links with the Local Enterprise Partnerships in key areas
b. Create additional visitor moorings at key locations
c. Improve facilities for boaters and other visitors
d. Working with partners, promote canal side projects to harness the economic benefits of the waterways to towns, cities and villages e.g. Operation Footfall project in Atherstone, on the Coventry Canal
e. Support the development of sites adjacent to the waterway for amenity use
6 Make the waterway corridors in the Three Valleys welcoming and interesting places to visit, live, work, use and enjoy

This means increasing use and activity on underutilised waterways, developing the potential of key towns and cities as waterside destinations, improving places of interest along the waterways, improving the visibility of the physical presence of the waterways and improving environmental quality and image caused by poor waterside industrial and agricultural boundaries and the presence of derelict land.

We plan to:

a. Create and publish trail information (including canoe trails) with partner organisations
b. Work with Stoke City Council to evaluate the potential added value of the Waterside to the developments in Middleport, Westport and City Canalside Quarter
c. Use the benefits gained from working with Stoke to form the methodology for similar studies in Leicester and Coventry
d. Improve signage and information for visitors and users

7 Make the waterway corridors in the Three Valleys accessible, safe and well-connected places for all visitors, users and local communities

This means connecting communities and places along and across the 3 Valleys, improving access to, from and along the canals and rivers, increasing the use of the waterways and their paths for sustainable transport and recreational routes and connecting the waterways to other routes and other modes of public transport and facilities.

We plan to:

a. Develop walking and cycling opportunities to enhance use and activity, whilst promoting responsible cycling
b. Improve condition of and access to towpaths and reservoirs and links to other rights of way
c. Work with local authorities to improve connectivity of villages, towns and cities through improved signage to and from the waterways
d. Work with projects linked to improving connections to existing bus routes, train stations and car parking provision
e. To identify specific locations to improve access, egress and portages for water users such as canoeists and anglers
Conserve and enhance the key heritage and environmental qualities and landscape character of the waterways that make them locally distinctive

This means conserving, promoting and interpreting the industrial and cultural heritage value of the canals and rivers, and improving the ecological value, landscape and biodiversity of the canal and river corridors. It also entails mitigating the impacts and exploiting opportunities arising from High Speed Rail (HS2) and promoting appropriate and innovative new urban and rural developments which respect and enhance the canal and river corridors.

We plan to:

a. Maintain and enhance the condition of heritage assets to ensure they are used and appreciated by all

b. Work with Wildlife Trusts to encourage environmental improvements in our work and the work of third parties to enhance the ecology of the canals and rivers

d. Work with agencies to develop a long term invasive species management strategy

e. Work with the HS2 team at the Trust to minimise or remove impacts whilst developing opportunities for improvements

f. Work with partner organisations to help improve water quality by the management of pollution hot spots and enforcement against unauthorised discharges
The Central Shires Partnership has developed an action plan for this area in consultation with our interest groups, partners and stakeholders.

We have ambition and enthusiasm to make a positive difference and we are keen to work with you or your organisation to make improvements to our network.
Why not get involved with the Central Shires Waterway Partnership?

We need offers of help with all levels of our work, and we need ideas for the continuing development of our work.

Get in touch with us at: enquiries.centralshires@canalrivertrust.org.uk

- How can we work together on community, economic or environmental projects?
- Would your local school, organisation or community like to get more involved in your local waterway’s future?

Ways to contact the Central Shires Partnership:
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Check our noticeboard for updates:
canalrivertrust.org.uk/centralshiresboard