



Canal &
River Trust
Making life better by water

Ripple Effects Report

Thank you Friends

Together, we've kept canals alive in 2023



Thanks to you, canals are rising to the challenge



Hello there, I'm Malcolm and as chief infrastructure and programmes officer, I head up the team that maintains our canals and keeps them working and flowing. So, I'm delighted to share some ways our Friends have helped us do that in 2023.

In my first year with the Canal & River Trust, we've done a huge amount of work, including maintaining the reservoirs that are so vital to the network. It's great to see how we're renewing some key pumping stations, like at [Crofton](#), to keep water in the Kennett & Avon Canal. I'm also proud that we've improved another 30-40km of towpaths around the country and are investing £89m on works this winter.

Investments like this are vital when waterways are being affected by climate change. As an engineer, I'm struck by how much more fragile our historic canals are compared to more modern infrastructure like railways or motorways, but excited by how we use a unique combination of skilled heritage techniques and cutting-edge technology to protect our waterways.

In the report, you'll see that not a single penny of your generous support goes to waste. Just this year, I've seen how '[super stoppages](#)' can bring teams together to complete works more efficiently, getting more things fixed at the same time. New Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, drones and remote monitoring devices are also helping us protect 250-year-old bridges and embankments more cost-effectively – helping us to watch for any problems and intervene at the optimum time.

Though the support of government and other funding [partners is vital](#), it's the passion of thousands of people, just like you, who love and enjoy canals every day, that make me feel the most positive about the future. We all help to keep canals alive, heritage to survive, let nature thrive, and allow people to live more healthily and happily. So let me say a huge thank you, because we simply couldn't do it without you.

Malcolm Horne,
Chief infrastructure and programmes director
Canal & River Trust.



Your impact on canals in 2023

Your support is actively helping us to look after over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers. And the huge scale of the work we do means your support goes even further than you might think. Every year, you're keeping history alive, helping nature thrive, providing places where people can feel healthier and happier, and protecting our 250-year-old canals from threats like climate change.

Across England and Wales, you help us to care for:

- 1,581 locks
- 2,970 bridges
- 281 aqueducts
- 55 tunnels
- 71 reservoirs

Mile for mile our canals offer our nation amazing value, giving over nine million people access to outdoor space, helping to manage water in areas of drought or flood, and attracting more boaters and visitors than ever before.

But our canals are fragile. As mortar crumbles, metal rusts and oak beams rot away, the very foundations of our canals are threatened by cuts in funding. That's why our charity relies on your support to keep canals alive. And it's why we're so grateful to all our Friends for all you do to protect canals today and for generations to come.

Your impact



£3 million

in donations from our wonderful Friends are helping to keep over 2,000 miles of canals alive for everyone.



3,000

heritage sites protected including 2,700 listed structures, 49 scheduled ancient monuments and five UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



10 million

walkers, runners, boaters, anglers, cyclists and paddlers visited our canals every month to relax, get fit and boost their wellbeing.



700 miles

of canals now have Green Flag Awards, including for the first time, the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal.



123 lock gates

handcrafted from sustainable sources of oak in workshops at Stanley Ferry and Bradley and installed across the network this winter.



46% of our waterways

are protected for wildlife, including over 100 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and around 3,000 County Wildlife Sites.



61,000

cups of tea were bought by 234,000 visitors to our museums and attractions this year. Cheers!



five million

We celebrated our five millionth volunteering hour this year. Over 4,300 volunteers deliver work, equivalent to over 300 full-time staff.

Where your money goes

From protecting precious industrial heritage, to keeping native wildlife thriving and helping people enjoy our towpaths, every penny you give us keeps our canals alive. Below are just some of the projects you helped put into action in 2023.

Thanks to you, Teesiders now enjoy even more wonderful riverside walks beside the impressive barrage, water sports centre and nature reserve, thanks to much-improved towpaths. You also kept Eurovision Song contest visitors in Liverpool safe by supporting work enabling engineers to abseil down to repair the dock walls ahead of the event.

Long before our recent appeal to Keep Anderton Boat Lift Alive, your support covered the £450,000 cost of two key repair projects last winter. Firstly, you helped reseal, repolish and reset two giant hydraulic ram cylinders which move the water tanks up and down the lifts. And you added safety systems to each of the ten lift gates, which act like giant seat belts.

You've been at the forefront of the fight against damaging invasive plants like floating pennywort. In the last year you contributed almost £180,000 to keep the Chesterfield and Bridgwater and Taunton canals clear. And you can take pride in helping fish to thrive in the River Severn, where you helped us repair and restore our fish pass at Bevere in Worcester after it was vandalised.

With your help we also planted 20,000 pollinating plants along the Talybont embankment after delivering repairs to stop leaks last winter. You also contributed to a £1.8 million upgrade to the historic pumping station at Crofton which will help keep the Kennet & Avon Canal in water all the way down to Reading. Finally, tall ships in London's Docklands are enjoying a better welcome, thanks to repairs you've helped make to a bridge over West India Dock.



Super stoppages make for smarter winter works

To make sure we repair, maintain and improve canals as cost-efficiently as we can, we make the most of every penny in our multi-million-pound winter works programme. That's why we're now pooling resources into super-stoppages, where repairs to a series of locks, gates or pounds are all done at once.

The much-loved locks 14-20, just below Stoke Bruerne on the Grand Union Canal, are one place where we're spending £560,000 even more smartly this winter. Julian Rasen, our regional construction manager explains: "This flight of locks is busy all year round, as it leads to the Canal Museum and many pubs and restaurants before the Blisworth Tunnel. We're replacing both sets of gates at lock 14 and the topside set at lock 18 anyway, so it makes sense to repair sills, bump stops, lock ladders, and brickwork on the other locks too."

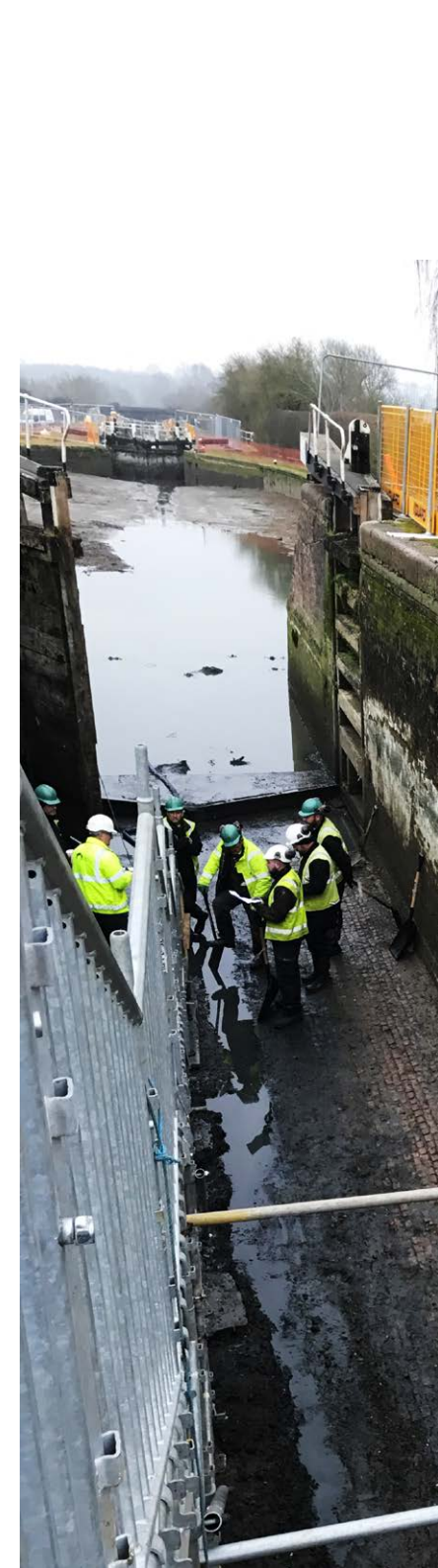
Winter works are always a team effort and our engineers, contractors and heritage advisers on this site are working together to preserve the Grade II Listed lock structures. Our ecologists are involved in supervising a fish rescue before the pounds and chambers are drained of water, and the local volunteer team will also help out by fixing 720 panels of fencing over 1km of canal to keep people safely away from the empty waterway. When we can see under the waterline, everyone will muck in to clear away rubbish, inspect canal walls for damage, and recommend further remedial works, while the canal is drained. But until then, no-one can be certain how complicated further works will be.


In the coming months, we hope to share all our work at Stoke Bruerne with a virtual open day, showing you everything being done in a series of videos, time-lapse films and drone shoots. You can keep track of how you're helping look after canals at Stoke Bruerne and on other waterways nationwide by visiting:

canalrivertrust.org.uk/opendays

£89 million

is being invested in works across our 2,000-mile network



A close-up photograph of a giraffe's head and neck. The giraffe has a white coat with large brown spots. It is looking down and to the right, with its long, dark tongue extended to eat from a green leafy branch. The background is slightly blurred, showing a dark window or door frame.

Feeding time from the canal

Thanks to Friends like you, all sorts of plants, insects, birds and animals are thriving along our canal banks, but did you know that your support reaches even further to feed the camels, giraffes and zebras at London Zoo?

As waterways operative, Anton Haynes explains: “Every year, the maintenance team here on River Stort, in Essex and Hertfordshire, need to cut back fast-growing and overhanging willow, poplar or ash branches from the canal, which can obstruct the towpath or navigation.

“Normally, we would just leave them to rot down to create habitats for invertebrates and other small mammals. But this year, the heavy rain combined with warm weather, means we’ve got even more vegetation to deal with and more than we need to protect biodiversity by the canal.

“My wife used to work as a veterinary nurse at London Zoo, and through her connections we discovered a new way to recycle the excess branches and leaves. What is waste vegetation to us, is actually a tasty treat for all kinds of grazing animals from around the world. It adds variety, enrichment and nutrition to the feeding regime for all kinds of giraffes, okapi, camels, llamas and other hoofed animals. So now our colleagues on the Regent’s Canal are starting to bring in more leaves and branches by boat all year round.

“It’s really helped that our maintenance teams have been given some powered pole saws and been trained to use them safely. That means we can clear vegetation much higher and create food for the zoo even faster. Who knew that we could help protect wildlife at home and abroad, simply thanks to a few extra power tools?”



River Stort Navigation
Sheering Mill Lock 6
Sheering Mill Lane CM21



Anton Haynes (far left) and his team are helping wildlife thrive on the canal bank and at London Zoo

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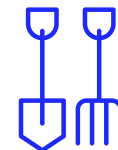
We can do this thanks to powered pole saws that our supporters have funded. Now we can clear vegetation and create food for the zoo.”

Anton Haynes, waterways operative

It costs around

£360

to provide our maintenance teams with a powered pole saw and train them how to use it safely





Thank you for keeping the Kennet & Avon Canal flowing

Thanks in part to gifts from Friends like you, our charity recently completed a multi-million-pound refurbishment of the historic pumping system at Crofton. This critical site at the summit of the Kennet & Avon Canal will now keep the canal in water for decades to come, just as it has for the last 200 years.

It's always been crucial to feed water into the canal at Crofton summit, otherwise locks downhill could run dry, stopping boats heading west to Bath or east to Newbury. As early as 1789, before the canal was built, engineers expressed concern about water supply in summer months, until nearby natural springs were dammed to create a 7-million-gallon reservoir now known as Wilton Water.

Yet even Wilton Water sits some 40 feet below the highest point of the canal, so since 1812, the world's oldest working steam powered beam engines at Crofton pumping station have pumped water uphill. Incredibly they can still be fired up today, when necessary, although from the early 1900s onwards, a separate electric pump system has done the heavy lifting.

Now, you've helped to give the 1900s electric system a 21st century upgrade. These modern, efficient and brand new pipeline, pumps, controls and electrics, will keep the canal topped-up with water for boats, wildlife, anglers and towpath users to enjoy. This complex project, along with assistance from our heritage team, has also restored the Grade II listed Wilton Water sluice gates with exact oak replicas, complete with restored original ironworks.

It's been a huge challenge to complete these major works over two successive winters while keeping the canal in water through the intervening summer. In August of this year, even the old beam engines came back into use to help us keep levels up whilst the new system was being commissioned. Now, however, the new pumps sit side by side with the old, giving the canal a more robust, reliable and efficient water supply for years to come.

“

For the last 200 years, sluice gates have controlled the flow from Wilton Water into the canal. As part of the works we've replaced these listed structures with exact replicas in new oak, using traditional carpentry and joinery techniques.”

Morgan Cowles – regional heritage adviser



Your gifts have directly contributed to a project to keep the Kennet & Avon Canal flowing, costing

£2.4 million

From isolation to inclusion

Your Friendship provides wonderful canal spaces where people can come together, relax and ease the pressures of everyday life. You're also supporting work to share these healing, positive places with more people who are experiencing the effects of loneliness and isolation. Our From Isolation to Inclusion projects are making a difference in Leeds and around the country.

Sharron Bright, our community inclusion coordinator for Yorkshire and the North East explains: "The project began post-lockdown when many people were stuck at home or scared to go out. The pandemic just compounded problems for people already struggling with anxiety, depression or other mental health issues, often linked to a complex range of issues like ill-health, addiction issues, unemployment, financial struggles or family issues like caring for older relatives.

"We worked with the local NHS Care Partnership to encourage GPs to prescribe time together by the water, rather than medication. Few people realise there's kingfishers, herons, plants and trees right by them. And by taking part in nature walks, wild foraging, bushcraft, boat trips, or poetry days, people can make friends, find a place to talk and that helps build confidence and resilience. On the towpath you walk side by side, with no eye-contact, and that can help people open up and tell their story. We've seen so many lives transformed, and as their love for life returns, some go on to volunteer for us, taking part in litter picks, clearing vegetation or repainting canal bollards."

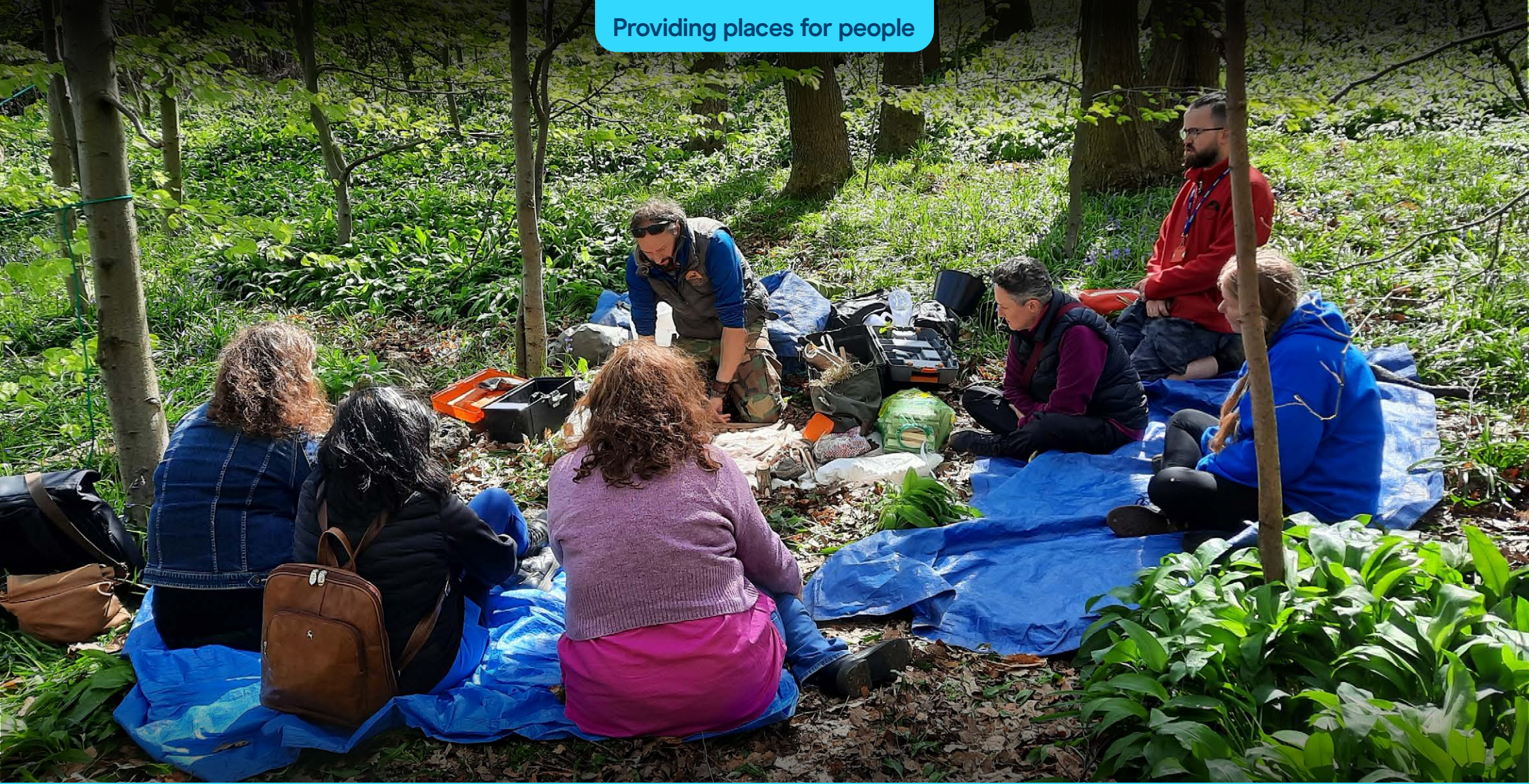
Although European external project funding has now ended, Sharron says many of the groups have become self-sustaining. And she is confident that so long as we keep our canals alive, other community partners will help turn our canals into more pathways to a healthier, happier quality of life.



Actively using our waterways and footpaths contributes to saving the NHS an estimated

£1.1 billion





“

The canals offer people a sense of community, positivity from coming together, and happiness. The foraging shoehorns so beautifully into health and well-being. People can come together as a group; friendships are forming and everyone seems to be buzzing.”

Craig Worrall – Wild Food Forager, tutor and chef

Taking our protest to parliament

Last July, we launched our #KeepCanalsAlive campaign in response to government cuts to the future funding of our charity. We're sure many of you were among almost 12,000 people who emailed over 600 MPs to firmly put future funding for canals onto the political agenda.

The response has been very encouraging, with many political players writing to DEFRA or speaking out in the Houses of Parliament and in the media. In recent months, many MPs have also visited their own local stretch to better understand the work we do and learn how we maintain and protect canals for future generations.

Last November, we helped raise more awareness about the funding cuts for our waterways by joining the Inland Waterways Association's protest cruise. Our colourful and noisy display sounded the alarm for canals right outside parliament, cheered on by supporters on Westminster Bridge.

The Thames cruise built on the success of well-supported campaign cruises earlier in the year in Birmingham and Gloucester. And with a general election on the horizon, we're urging all our supporters to talk to all of their local candidates to demand stronger commitments to the future of canals in party manifestos, recognising the importance of their role in the 21st century.

A huge thank you again to everyone who has taken part in #KeepCanalsAlive so far. You are making our voices heard in the corridors of power, so please continue to raise awareness by sharing this message far and wide. Together, we'll continue to fight for the future of canals.

Join our campaign at:

canalrivertrust.org.uk/keep-canals-alive



Keeping Canals Alive




With annual cuts of 5% year on year from 2027, our charity faces a real term funding cut of over

£300 million

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My boat is my home and I volunteer on canals, but cuts to funding will have a devastating effect on my way of life. Our waterways make this country special and everyone risks losing them.”

Christine Kemp,
waterway volunteer and liveaboard boater



In the last financial year our partnerships with many different funding bodies helped to raise

£46 million

Delivering through partnership

Building an even wider network of Friends

As a Friend, you do so much to help us care for our canals and rivers, but with a 2,000 mile, 250-year-old network to look after and share with everyone, it's vital we partner with other organisations too. By building an even wider network of friendly partners and funding bodies who share our vision to keep canals alive, we can make every pound you give us work as hard as possible.

“Given dwindling government funding, we have to find new ways of caring for our waterways.” explains national partnership manager, Simon Pappriill. “It's not just about money, it's also about having the right partners whose interests align with the Trust and complement our own expertise, insight, and audience. It's also great to have Friends with influence who can help advocate and promote the benefits of the Trust and the importance of our waterways to others.”

As Simon explains, our relationship with British Canoeing is a good case in point: “Participation in paddlesports has boomed in recent years, but we have more experience managing the network for boating so we've built up a really great partnership to benefit from their paddling expertise. We can do so much together, for instance, 100,000 British canoeing members now have a paddling licence included in their membership generating valuable new funding for our charity.”

British Canoeing is also working with the Trust to promote paddle sports on our waterways, creating new paddling hubs around the country. This includes a training programme for staff and volunteers running 'Let's Paddle!' events. We're also working together on water safety, limiting the spread of invasive species, keeping our waters clean, and making them easier to access with pontoons and ramps for paddlers.

This dynamic partnership is just one among many, including a similar relationship with British Rowing. Our work with Sustrans means more towpaths can be improved for cycling to encourage active travel. The Ramblers are helping to train our guided walk leaders. Keep Britain Tidy are helping our canals win more Green Flag awards. Historic England are helping protect our canal heritage. And Natural England are supporting our efforts to improve canal wildlife.

We can achieve so much more by working together, rather than alone. And thanks to Friends like you, we're widening our network of partners all the time.





“

About one quarter of the national cycling network or NCN being built by Sustrans is on our network, and in the last year and a half they've helped deliver over £7 million of towpath improvement projects across 15 waterways.”

Simon Pappill – national partnership manager



Thank you Friends

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Registered with
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Canal & River Trust, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW
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