

Leisure Facilities on the Towpath

by
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INTRODUCTION

1. It is increasingly difficult to keep hold of the fact that when canals were originally built, it was essentially for the single purpose of shifting freight from A to B; a navigable water channel with a rough towing path for the horse and his 'boy'. Only a few waterways in the United Kingdom (albeit not insubstantial ones) are now used for freight, and waterway restoration is almost entirely aimed at leisure and recreational use.
2. It is equally a fact of life that our waterways are no longer restricted to boat traffic. There are substantial pressures - financial, economic, environmental and social - to maximise the use of the inland waterway infrastructure way beyond the aspirations of the burgeoning restoration movement of the late 1940s, let alone the original canal pioneers. More leisure time due to an increasingly mechanised and computerised workplace; traffic-congested cities; increasing public accountability and financial self-sufficiency of local authorities and quasi-nationalised industries such as British Waterways (BW); destruction of wildlife habitats through green belt development; these pressures and others mean that the often rarified atmosphere of the canal corridor can no longer afford the luxury of a narrow, waterborne, user base.
3. It is against this background that those who wish to restore our disused and abandoned waterways to navigation have to operate. Restoration - whoever undertakes it - inevitably needs public sector finance and that means public accountability. Public accountability means not only balancing the books in the medium to long term, but also meeting such non-financial objectives as government at local, national and European level deem appropriate.
4. Bringing boats back to the canal will rarely be enough. The towpath network offers opportunities to increase revenue flows post-restoration (albeit usually only marginally to the canal owner) and meet a number of other social and environmental objectives. Improving the towpath network for varied recreational use is therefore increasingly a prerequisite to securing the funds necessary to complete a restoration.
5. This chapter looks at the three principal users of the towpath network - walkers, anglers and cyclists; why they need to be considered and how their needs can be encompassed in the restoration project. Many such users will be boaters for whom their activities on the towpath will be secondary to their principal reason for using the waterway - no distinction is made between primary and subsidiary activities as improved towpath facilities can be expected to attract more non-boaters and boaters alike. This chapter also considers wheelchair users, and suitable suggestions are made as to how such users can be accommodated.
6. In 1990, the IWA issued a Towpath Policy [1] which covered both the design and maintenance of towpaths. Insofar as this chapter only covers the first of these areas, it is not intended to be a replacement for that Policy, but where alternative design standards are proposed, the author would hope that such proposals would be incorporated in any future revision of the Policy.

7. The use of the words 'canal' and 'waterway' can be regarded as inter-changeable in what follows - other than possible statutory differences between man-made canals and navigable rivers, the basic considerations are the same.

But first ...

THE LEGAL POSITION

8. When canals were originally built, the navigation companies bought sufficient land to allow for the construction of a towpath alongside the water channel to allow for towing by horse, bow-hauling by manpower and for general maintenance purposes. Generally the navigation company would have been under no obligation to maintain the towpath in a serviceable condition other than for those purposes, but will occasionally have issued their own bye-laws covering permitted third party use of the towpath.
9. In isolated cases a right to tow craft from the towpath was created either by statute (e.g. the Thames Conservancy Act 1932) or by custom, use or prescription, but this is distinct and separate from any right to use the towpath for other purposes [2].
10. As horses gave way to motor power, towpaths were eroded by propeller wash. As a continuous path was no longer essential to the operation of the waterway, standards of maintenance declined.
11. When the State took over the principal waterways still operating at the end of the 1940s, the legal position did not substantially change; the 1968 Transport Act which set out the State's commitments to the waterways in its charge, placed on them no obligation to maintain the towpath, for walkers, cyclists, horses or anyone [3]. The 1995 British Waterways Act goes little further, though there is a general requirement to promote recreational access of all kinds to the network and BW do have their own internal standards for towpath specifications. The position on waterways operated by the Environment Agency (EA) and the Broads Authority is similar to BW canals, though those bodies do not have the same degree of 'ownership' of their waterways and are consequently less able to influence the state of the towpath.
12. Waterways still in private ownership are not affected by the 1968 or 1995 Acts and, apart from any subsidiary powers of EA in terms of flood control, the position on their towpaths remains unaltered.

Right of Way or Permissive Path?

13. In consequence, the majority of canal towpaths in the UK are regarded by the relevant canal owner (usually but not always BW) as permissive paths; their use being entirely at the behest of the owner of the land over which they pass. The landowner, who will invariably also own the canal bed itself, has the right to allow or disallow public access for whatever purpose. The landowner may enter into a formal agreement with say, an angling association or a local authority, which may

restrict his powers to withhold access for a particular purpose but this does not generally alter the statutory position.

14. In fact, many lengths of canal towpaths were designated as 'definitive rights of way' under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, much of which is now consolidated in the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (WCA81). On these paths, the public have a statutory right to walk, every day, at any hour of the day. The highway authority (see paragraph 23) is legally obliged to maintain the path for that purpose; they may sub-contract out that task, for example to the landowner or navigation authority, but the statutory responsibility for maintenance remains with the highway authority. It should be pointed out however that the existence of a right of way on the definitive map cannot confer a status that may otherwise be precluded by other legislation that existed at the time the right of way was so 'dedicated'. This caveat applies equally to the '20 year rule' described in paragraph 16 et seq.
15. The path may be closed temporarily on the grounds of safety, while repairs are undertaken; it may also be closed for other purposes such as general maintenance of the waterway, but only if a schedule to the definitive map specifically so allows. In any other circumstances, closure either temporarily or permanently, can only be achieved through a formal closure and/or diversion order, made by the highway authority on application.
16. Importantly, WCA81 sets out criteria for establishing paths as rights of way, principally that after 20 years use without let or hindrance, the path automatically acquires 'right of way' status, subject to the caveat mentioned in paragraph 14. Therefore towpaths which appear to have no legal status may in fact be protected under WCA81, and have the same status as 'definitive' rights of way.
17. This is especially important in urban areas as urban authorities were exempted from the requirement of the 1949 Act to produce a 'definitive map'; this explains why Ordnance Survey maps usually do not show any public rights of way through major towns. In many cases towpaths in urban areas may have acquired right of way status through usage under the '20 year rule'.
18. In practice, legal status under the 20 year rule is invariably only proven on testing it through the courts. If there is any doubt about legal status, it is recommended that advice be sought from the Ramblers Association (RA) [4], the Open Spaces Society (OSS) [5] or the Towpath Action Group [6]. The 'Blue Book' jointly issued by the RA and OSS may also be invaluable [7].
19. There are a number of categories of rights of way, each of which confers different rights. If a towpath is defined as a footpath, then the public have a right of way on foot, or with an invalid carriage.
20. A bridleway is a right of way for the public on foot or with an invalid carriage, and additionally have the right to ride horses and bicycles along. A byway open to all traffic (BOAT) essentially carries vehicular rights as well as all those applicable to a bridleway. The number of towpaths that fall into either of these categories is sufficiently small not to warrant further discussion.

21. The nature or ownership of either the waterway or the land on either side of it does **not** affect the legal status of the towpath.
22. Unless you are trying to persuade a highway authority and the canal owner to upgrade a permissive path to a definitive right of way, it is recommended that no attempt be made to alter the legal status of the towpath. This one exception has the clear spin-off of passing the responsibility for future maintenance onto the highway authority.

Diversion of rights of way

23. If the towpath under consideration is a right of way then an application for temporary closure and a suitable diversion, pending restoration works, needs to be made to the highway authority - either the county council or in the case of major conurbations, the metropolitan borough council or city council. There will be a time limit for completion of the works, and the highway authority may impose specific requirements on the nature of restoration.

WALKING

24. Towpath walkers represent by far the greatest number of users on the canal system, and apart from cyclists, probably represent the biggest growth sector too. Although they do not generally pay directly for their use of the towpath, a number of case studies show conclusively that they spend substantial amounts within the canal corridor at pubs, cafes, restaurants, visitor facilities etc. Indirectly of course, through national taxes and Council Tax, the public **are** contributing to the upkeep of rights of way and BW towpaths via the local authority, and central and local government grants.
25. Therefore, notwithstanding the comments already made in the introduction, there are sound **economic** grounds for ensuring that this substantial potential customer base is attracted to the restored canal by providing a continuous towpath adjacent to the waterway wherever it is physically possible so to do. Promoting public access at an early stage may also help to demonstrate public support for the rest of the project, and attract fresh voluntary labour. A canal towpath may form part of a walking network in conjunction with footways which run alongside carriageways, through residential areas, to schools, shops and other places. If this is the case then the local highway authority should be consulted, and consideration given to maintaining a consistent quality of walking surface and signing throughout the network.

The walking surface

26. Dedicated walkers generally are undemanding in their requirements for the state of paths, but because of the level nature of canal towpaths, they attract walkers who may be less able or keen to cope with rutted surfaces, puddles and minor obstructions. The path will generally need to be of a higher standard than, for example, moorland paths.

27. Wherever possible, the towpath should be at least two metres wide, from the water's edge to the hedgerow or wall. Besides making it safer for towpath users, this will also facilitate hedge and grass cutting by mechanical plant. A strip at least one metre wide needs to be flat, and well drained to provide the principal walking surface. Ideally this should be away from the water's edge, with a grassed strip to the canal bank separating the walker from the water. If anglers are likely to use this length of canal, the grassed strip must be at least one metre wide, to prevent them obstructing the walking surface with their tackle. The walking surface should not be hard up against a hedge - the hedge could encroach onto the walking surface in summer months and nettles and brambles at the base could cause harm to towpath users.
28. The walking surface should be sympathetic to the local environment. Setts and cobbles, particularly near locks and bridge-holes should be retained but damaged sections will need to be repaired for reasons of safety. Brick and tarmac surfaces should be used only in urban areas where there is high usage, and their use is not visually obtrusive; stone paving will usually look more attractive, but only if it can be kept level, particularly at joints. If the towpath is used by wheelchair users or those with walking difficulties, there may be a stronger argument for a consistent level surface
29. Outside of urban areas, there is a strong case for keeping a grass path providing the ground is well-drained. Poor sections could benefit from turf reinforcement, usually at substantially lower cost than any more elaborate construction. The case for retaining grass will be less strong if the path is used by cyclists, parents with prams, and wheelchair users, or if the ground is unstable. In such instances, a more durable walking surface such as a concrete or limestone base, with a gravel, woodchip, hoggin [8], red/black ash or cold planed asphalt [9] dressing may be more effective. Any gravel or stone dressing should be finely graded for better bonding and well-compacted, or even graded to dust (scalpings), particularly if the path is used by the disabled.
30. The walking surface should be free of obstruction, subject to any requirements to erect stiles or gates to deter motorcycles or prevent livestock escaping. Facilities for other users should not be sited such that their use might obstruct the walking surface, for example fishing platforms for disabled anglers or mooring rings.
31. If the ground does not drain well, then suitable drainage should be laid before constructing the path [1]. Failure to do so will render any restitution of the path temporary, so adding to the future maintenance cost.

Access points

32. Existing access points, particularly at bridges and where other paths or tracks join the towpath should be restored if necessary to an appropriate condition, particularly if the adjoining path/track is a right of way. If a bridge is a listed structure then permission from the appropriate authority should be sought. Where access at bridges is by steps, and it is desired to create wheelchair access by means of a ramp, it is preferable to look for alternative new access points in the immediate

- vicinity; concrete ramps from bridges can look unattractive and there may be insufficient space on the towpath to accommodate a long ramp without compromising the safety of those on or joining/leaving the towpath. It is also advisable to site wheelchair access points close to off-road parking facilities wherever possible.
33. Ramps should be no steeper than 7-8%, but ideally nearer 5% [1], [8]. Where there are steps - particularly if narrow or steep - it is generally preferred not to have a moving gate (especially one that swings into the steps) or stile at the top, as these can be difficult to use. If a gate is needed then chicane or kissing gates are most appropriate. Handrails should be provided/reinstated on any steps and exposed edges. As with any new structure, the materials e.g. timber, steel, should not be visually intrusive, but they do need to perform a task and be relatively maintenance-free.
 34. Where there is scope and a desire for a new access point (for wheelchair use or otherwise), there may be new land ownerships to consider, but 'compensation' schemes administered by the Countryside Commission [10] or land assembly by the local authority for example, may make this an avenue worth exploring.
 35. It is worth considering the routes that towpath users are likely to adopt. If a strategic footpath links in with the towpath, or where there are public transport facilities, or a major road crosses, the access point and towpath in the immediate area is likely to be well used, and space for motor-cycle barriers, interpretation boards, litter bins, waymarkers etc. may need to be incorporated into the plan at the initial stages, even if the actual provision of such 'facilities' is left until later on.

Waymarkers, mileposts and interpretation boards

36. Waymarkers - essentially heavy posts between one and two metres high - are important considerations where there is likely to be any substantial pedestrian use beyond the dog-walking, 'trip to the shops' level; they should be clearly visible but discreet and generally only need to be placed at principal access points, e.g. bridges, or where another major footpath links in. Commonly, they only indicate the **direction** of a particular route, maybe a circular walk (and often colour-coded in accordance with Countryside Commission guidelines [9], [10]), but there is no reason why distances cannot also be provided in certain cases.
37. Distances are more commonly shown on finger-posts, but these tend to be more prone to vandalism, especially timber ones, and are usually more expensive to replace than waymarkers. If it is deemed necessary to provide distances to more than a couple of towns/villages, a finger-post may be the only realistic option.
38. Unless the waterway has retained original milestones, or the intention is to faithfully replace them to 'original specifications', it may be worth thinking of adopting a milestone 'design' for waymarkers - stone or iron is far more vandal-proof than timber. This is one area where there is real scope for innovation without harming the integrity of the waterway.

39. Waymarkers, finger-posts and milestones can be useful vehicles for encouraging local involvement in the project. Civic societies may help fund waymarkers on local town trails that incorporate the towpath; milestones could be 'adopted' or sponsored by local people or organisations, with a small plaque showing their name; local rambling groups will often help, and may well be accustomed to erecting waymarkers and benches in memory of members who have passed away. As well as encouraging funding (albeit small-scale) from new and varied sources, these methods may help demonstrate wide public support for the restoration, and give a far less sterile, and more 'community' feel to the restored waterway.
40. Interpretation boards are a development of the last couple of decades and are a useful way of informing the public about the subject of the restoration project. Since waterways appeared in the National Curriculum for schools, they have also been seen as educational tools, which if nothing else, may offer scope for a further source of funding. Their principal drawback is that they are extremely attractive to vandals and can look intrusive in anything other than an urban setting - indeed almost by definition they are **large** and **obtrusive**. Their cost is such that they will generally only warrant consideration where there is relatively high usage, and unless they relate to a specific site of interest, are best placed within fifty metres or so of a major access point. Ideally they should not be sited right by the walking surface, as those reading them may then obstruct other towpath users.
41. If there is a suitable wall on which to place one (**not** the side of a listed building!) then this is likely to be less visually damaging, and damage-prone, than a free-standing one; it may also however be easier for the casual walker to miss, so it may be necessary to make it sufficiently eye-catching to attract attention.
42. Free-standing boards generally come in two forms; vertical, with most of the information broadly at 'eye-level', or sloping back at an angle of between thirty and forty-five degrees to the horizontal at a height of no more than one metre. The latter are usually less prone to vandalism and far better-suited for children and wheelchair users - they may be more restrictive in terms of size but the majority of visitors will have a far shorter attention span than the designers of some of the larger boards seem to think.
43. Interpretation boards will rarely last for more than a few years, and it may be worth thinking of them as a temporary advert for what you are doing, rather than as a testament to our waterway heritage that will outlive the Doomsday Book. By describing the waterway in terms of current activity, restoration or otherwise, the board becomes part of a living museum and not a history book.

Bridge-holes and tunnels

44. Where a bridge or tunnel is being reinstated/lifted/created it is infinitely preferable to have the towpath following the waterway through the bridge-hole. This may well increase the cost of this part of the restoration - by as much as 15% in the case of a new bridge - but by demonstrating the

desire to accommodate a much wider user base, public funding should be that much easier to secure. Clearly where a swing bridge or lift bridge is concerned, this is unlikely to be relevant.

45. In some quarters there is concern surrounding towpaths through ‘tunnels’ on the grounds of perceived possible misuse by the anti-social members of today’s society but this concern is not widespread, and even then, misguided. There is little evidence that such concerns are borne out once the waterway and towpath are restored and well-used, and resistance by local authorities to ‘through’ towpaths on such grounds should be countered. If a boat gets into trouble in a tunnel, a through towpath will of course substantially ease both the boat’s occupants’ escape, and access by the emergency services if necessary.
46. Clearly if an overland route for pedestrians can **also** be provided then this is preferable, particularly if there is no major road to cross. In such cases, ramped access for wheelchairs, prams etc. should be provided if at all possible (see paragraph 32).
47. There will occasionally not be the scope for the ‘ideal’ two metre path through a new or reinstated bridge-hole or tunnel, and where the bridge profile is rectangular rather than arched, one and a half metres may be adequate. Two metres is likely to remain appropriate for an arched profile. Handrails are certainly desirable through tunnels of any great length, but should not be necessary in conventional bridge-holes, though there may be a stronger case where there is no alternative route over the top. Where handrails are provided, they should be designed so as not to impede the ability of a boat’s occupants (some of whom may be disabled) to escape onto the towpath in an emergency.
48. Where possible, ‘vandal-proof’ lighting should be provided in tunnels.

Crossing points

49. Where the towpath changes sides and the bridge or ferry that allowed the user to cross over has disappeared, it is recommended that either a simple footbridge is constructed, or possibly that a walkway is created on the non-towpath side to the next bridge that does provide a crossing point.
50. Walkers should not be expected to cross on lock balance beams, even if there is a handrail, especially if the crossing is a strategic link between two paths or a link between two sections of towpath on opposite banks. Where such a link is necessary, a more formal bridge crossing will be required.

Disabled users

51. Some of the requirements of the wheelchair user have been covered in the previous sections, but it is worth consolidating some of the more crucial points.

52. The towpath surface needs to be flat and level over the whole course under consideration, and a route round retained setts and cobbles is likely to be required. Grassed surfaces are less likely to be suitable unless they are exceedingly well drained and there is a firm underlying base.
53. Stiles or 'wheelchair-unfriendly' barriers/chicanes will need to be removed or replaced, depending on other requirements such as preventing motorcycle access or containing livestock (see paragraphs 80 and 81). Access to the towpath needs to be on the level or by ramped access, and ideally close to parking facilities. Where the towpath runs through a bridge-hole or tunnel, an overland route will probably need to be secured. If this necessitates a road crossing then a controlled pedestrian crossing facility may have to be sought from the highway authority.
54. Of course, wheelchair users are not the only disabled users who may use the towpath. Those who merely have walking difficulties will probably share similar needs with wheelchair users, but those who are blind or partially-sighted, deaf etc., will merit different considerations. This is a more specialized subject, the detail of which goes beyond the scope of this chapter but where it is likely to be an issue, consultation with an appropriate national body or relevant local group should be made. Two such bodies which might offer advice are the Fieldfare Trust [15] and the Community Boats Association [16]

ANGLING

55. Angling is the top participation sport in the country, and while the number of canal anglers is substantially lower than canal walkers, it might provide some income for canal owners through lease of fishing rights, and the almost continuous presence provides a measure of security for canalside properties and moored craft, and deters use by the anti-social elements of society.
56. The sport has developed considerably over the last twenty years or more, and so, noticeably, has the expense and size of the average angler's 'kit', most notably the roach pole in place of the conventional rod and line. The demands of anglers have grown in tandem with this development, and where angling is to be encouraged, special considerations in regard to the towpath need to be applied.
57. This chapter does not consider the questions of water quality, contamination, fish stocks, lease agreements - these areas may need to be looked at before determining whether or not the waterway is suitable for use by anglers.
58. It is also worth making the observation that anglers prefer to fish the quieter waters on the non-towpath bank of the waterway, but **from** the towpath side. Therefore provision of fishing pegs on the opposite side to the towpath away from other towpath users, while attractive to such other users, may not actually be regarded as attractive by anglers - even assuming that there are no difficult land ownership issues to consider. Clearly it is worth consulting with local angling groups [11] and other likely users if such provision is to be proposed.

Space and surfacing

59. Given the space needed for tackle boxes, trolleys, umbrellas and maybe bicycles, the two metre overall width proposed in paragraph 27 is unlikely to be adequate for a stretch where angling is likely to take place. The fringe between the water's edge and the principal walking surface needs to be at the very least, one metre wide (probably nearer one and a half metres, especially if disabled angling is likely [8]), flat, and the bank stable.
60. In addition, a fringe of at least half a metre on the other side of the walking surface needs to be retained and cut back for extraneous items of kit such as a trolley or bicycle. This is likely to lead overall to a minimum width of two and a half to three metres; more if the bank slopes into the water.
61. For obvious reasons, the walking surface should ideally not give rise to undue noise when walked upon; as it was suggested in paragraph 29 that any gravel or stone dressing be well graded and compacted this should not present a problem.

Vegetation, wildlife and habitats

62. The fringe between the walking surface and the water's edge needs to be flat and well-drained, free of any substantial vegetation that may cause bank erosion, and may need stabilising, especially if disabled anglers are likely to be using it.
63. If the waterway is exposed, hedgerows and saplings could be replaced/planted to protect anglers from the elements. This also serves to delineate the canal boundary, and could act as a wildlife refuge. If there is a risk that these might restrict the angler's ability to cast [9], it would be advisable to consult with local angling groups on an appropriate solution.
64. Equally, shrubs and aquatic vegetation by the channel margins (particularly on the non-towpath bank opposite the anglers' pegs) will help provide food and shelter for the fish [8], [9]. Provision of such species is unlikely to be a major aspect of the restoration project, but if such species already exist, they should not be uprooted unless necessary, e.g. for re-lining the canal walls. Trees provide a refuge for fish from direct sunlight but should not overhang the waterway to the extent that they are hazardous to navigation.

Additional facilities

65. Because of the increasing size of kit, more and more anglers are using cars to drive to their chosen spot. Accordingly there needs ideally to be provision for off-road parking within no more than a kilometer of the pitches, and easy and safe access from there to the towpath. Ideally, existing parking facilities should be made to operate more efficiently, since the provision of new facilities will bring additional pressures on the local environment. Either way, the highway and planning authorities should be consulted over the implications of the additional traffic generated.

66. If the waterway is likely to be regularly used for angling at match level, other facilities such as toilets, litter collection sites and refreshment/bait shops may need to be provided at some point in the future. In the event that such a level of use can be reasonably confidently predicted - there may already be extensive fishing anyway - it is worth earmarking 'plots' where such structures could be erected; indeed there may already be suitable buildings available, such as former lengthsmen's huts, which if capable of restoration can at least be made safe in the interim.

Restricted areas

67. It needs to be borne in mind that angling cannot be accommodated near officially designated moorings, close to locks and their landings, swing bridges, water points, sanitary stations etc., or under electricity pylons - if a length of waterway is frequently punctuated by such 'obstacles' then it may not be worth building in comprehensive angling facilities. Suitable signs should be erected where fishing is prohibited and, particularly in the case of pylons, these should be to an agreed standard.

Disabled anglers

68. Disabled anglers need a hard surface from the edge of the walking surface of at least one metre in width, for ease of access and manoeuvrability. There should be a kerb or upstand to prevent the wheelchair rolling over the edge. This kerb can be concrete or wood, running the full width of the hard-standing. It could also be achieved by using piles not driven to their full depth, though these would need to be covered in timber or rubber to avoid injuries caused by falling onto sharp edges.

CYCLING

69. The growth in off-road cycling in the last decade has been phenomenal and canal towpaths have shared in this growth. Albeit from a relatively low base, cycling is almost undoubtedly the fastest growing use on our towpaths; in 1994 the number of waterway visits made by cyclists was close to that of anglers [12] and it is likely that by now (January 1997) cyclists are second only to walkers in terms of user-visits, though their visits will invariably be much shorter than most other users.

Formal cycleways or just provision for informal use?

70. What is equally certain is that the current level of cycling is seen by many other existing canal users as being excessive, and there is great resistance to further increases, especially the trend towards **actively promoting** cycling on towpaths. Against this, central government is actively promoting 'sustainable transport' and though this is a political initiative it would appear to cross all political boundaries and is consequently a pressure that will not go away. Such policies are increasingly being adopted by local government as part of Agenda 21 which came out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit on sustainable development.

71. It is not the place of this handbook to comment on the rights or wrongs of using towpaths as cycleways; there is strong pressure to 'encourage' such use, and public money available for so doing. Waterway design may need to accommodate such use in a great many parts of the country, but it must be incorporated at a level which neither denigrates the integrity of the waterway for what it is, or materially compromises the enjoyment or safety of other users of the waterway network. It is worth bearing in mind that the four m.p.h. 'standard' which has been the norm on the water and the towpath for two centuries may now be coming to an end and new standards of towpath construction and surfacing need to be set.
72. Many sections of towpath will never be suitable for use as a formal cycleway, either because they are too narrow along long sections or because they are geographically remote.
73. There is a difference between a towpath that is used by cyclists and one that is actively promoted for them. A formal and publicly promoted cycleway is only likely to be viable if it is part of a strategic network, and isolated rural stretches are therefore unlikely to attract public support, especially if there are poor road links. It is not envisaged that restoration bodies will be looking at cycle access in terms of a strategic network, and unless a major partner in the project is able to dedicate resources to pursuing this, it is only worth considering the level of demand likely from local people, lock-wheeling boat crews and the like.
74. A formal cycleway will need to allow for higher usage, fewer 'obstacles' and a generally higher design specification. It is also likely to involve an ongoing maintenance liability that the navigation authority is unlikely to want to pick up - unless someone is prepared to underwrite this future maintenance, it is advisable not to pursue a formal cycleway (see paragraph 84).
75. Where a cycleway along the waterway is proposed, it should if at all possible be on a path separate from the towpath, for example, on the opposite bank, or better still on the other side of an existing hedgerow or fence on the towpath side. It is probable that in many cases, land ownership considerations will prevent these from being financially viable, though the local authority may be prepared to consider land assembly as a way forward.

Space and surfacing on combined footpaths/cycleways

76. If there is no option but to incorporate the cycleway into the towpath proper, the minimum width of one metre walking surface prescribed in paragraph 27 needs to be increased to at least two and a half metres. Unless the towpath is particularly wide (say five metres including any fringes), footpaths and cycleways separated by some sort of barrier (even a planted hedgerow) should probably be avoided as this tends to destroy the aesthetic integrity of the waterway.
77. Even moderate cycle use will necessitate a harder towpath surface and generally grass is unlikely to cope without being heavily rutted after a short while. A rutted surface is likely to become dangerous for all towpath users and regular maintenance will become a financial burden. All of the constructions mentioned in paragraph 29 are likely to be adequate for anticipated demand. If the

- existing walking surface is grass and that is deemed appropriate for future **pedestrian** use, there is no reason why a limestone-based surfaced cycleway cannot run alongside a grassed walking surface, and generally this is likely to reduce conflict.
78. Where there is some level of separation of paths, there is no indisputable case either way as to whether cyclists or walkers should be nearer the water - fearing collisions, both camps are likely to argue that they would rather not be at the water's edge. This may have to be decided bearing in mind the likely levels of use by both groups, and the number of points where pedestrians and cyclists are likely to join or leave the canal corridor.
79. However, where angling takes place, or where there are mooring facilities (officially designated or otherwise) there is a strong case for having the cycleway as far away as possible from the water to reduce the likelihood of cyclists running into either anglers (or their kit), or persons disembarking from, or rejoining, moored craft.
80. On any narrow sections, cyclists should obey the BW Waterways Code, and slow down and/or dismount when passing other users. In practice it is often the pedestrian who 'gives way' and the overall width of the towpath should be sufficient for this to take place, particularly if the walking surface is close to the water's edge.

Barriers and other speed prevention measures

81. Where speeding cyclists may make the towpath inherently dangerous, measures to slow down cycles should be incorporated. These would generally take the form of barriers or stiles, though barriers that actually force the cyclist to dismount should only be used where such action is absolutely necessary - if a cycleway is being actively promoted it has to be reasonably attractive to cyclists, and not seen as an obstacle course.
82. Gate design will also have to incorporate the needs of other users, such as those pushing prams and push-chairs, and those in wheelchairs. Few designs are wheelchair-friendly; though lockable gates are an option in this instance, the process of obtaining a key when needed can be difficult, particularly if the waterway is 'unmanned'.
83. Places where speed prevention measures may be necessary include narrow or low-headroom bridge-holes (or where the path under the bridge is out of line with the main towpath), the area around locks, lengths of setts or cobbles, well-used access points, designated moorings, water points and blind corners.

Future maintenance

84. The wear and tear on a cycleway is likely to be heavy if the surface and underlying structure are not suitably designed. It is unlikely in the initial stages of a restoration project that anyone will be prepared to underwrite an expensive future maintenance liability: a poorly-designed cycleway that

quickly degenerates and ceases to be used is a white elephant. It is therefore recommended that advice on appropriate construction is sought from, for example, BW Waterway Environment Services [13] or Sustrans [14].

85. As has already been noted, cycleways, to a much larger extent than pedestrian paths and basic angling facilities, will have an ongoing cost that the navigation authority is unlikely to be prepared to meet unless it can generate sufficient income for that purpose from fees or other sources, such as local authority assistance. Where a formal cycleway is envisaged, an appropriate means of covering this ongoing cost will need to be established,

CONCLUSION

86. There is no doubt that incorporating facilities, however basic, for non-boating users adds to the cost of any restoration project. Ever since the formation of the IWA, the restoration movement has been led by those with an interest primarily in the core navigational aspects of the waterways - the water channel and the towpath only to the extent that it is needed for navigational purposes; the 'whistles and bells' have often been added only after the boats are back on the water. Now, there is far greater availability of external finance for restoration, particularly from local authorities and public grants albeit, as was observed in the Introduction, with strings attached.
87. Relatively cheap enhancements to a restoration project are going to attract far greater public support, and considerably higher levels of financial incentives, simply because the project moves from being narrowly-targeted to one of regional, and maybe national economic and social significance. The restoration movement has the opportunity to shape the country for future generations, and at the same time significantly enhance the prospects of meeting its own objectives. This can only be achieved if projects are seen to encompass the widest range of potential activities.

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