



**INLAND  
WATERWAYS**  
ASSOCIATION

# THE FUTURE OF THE INLAND WATERWAYS

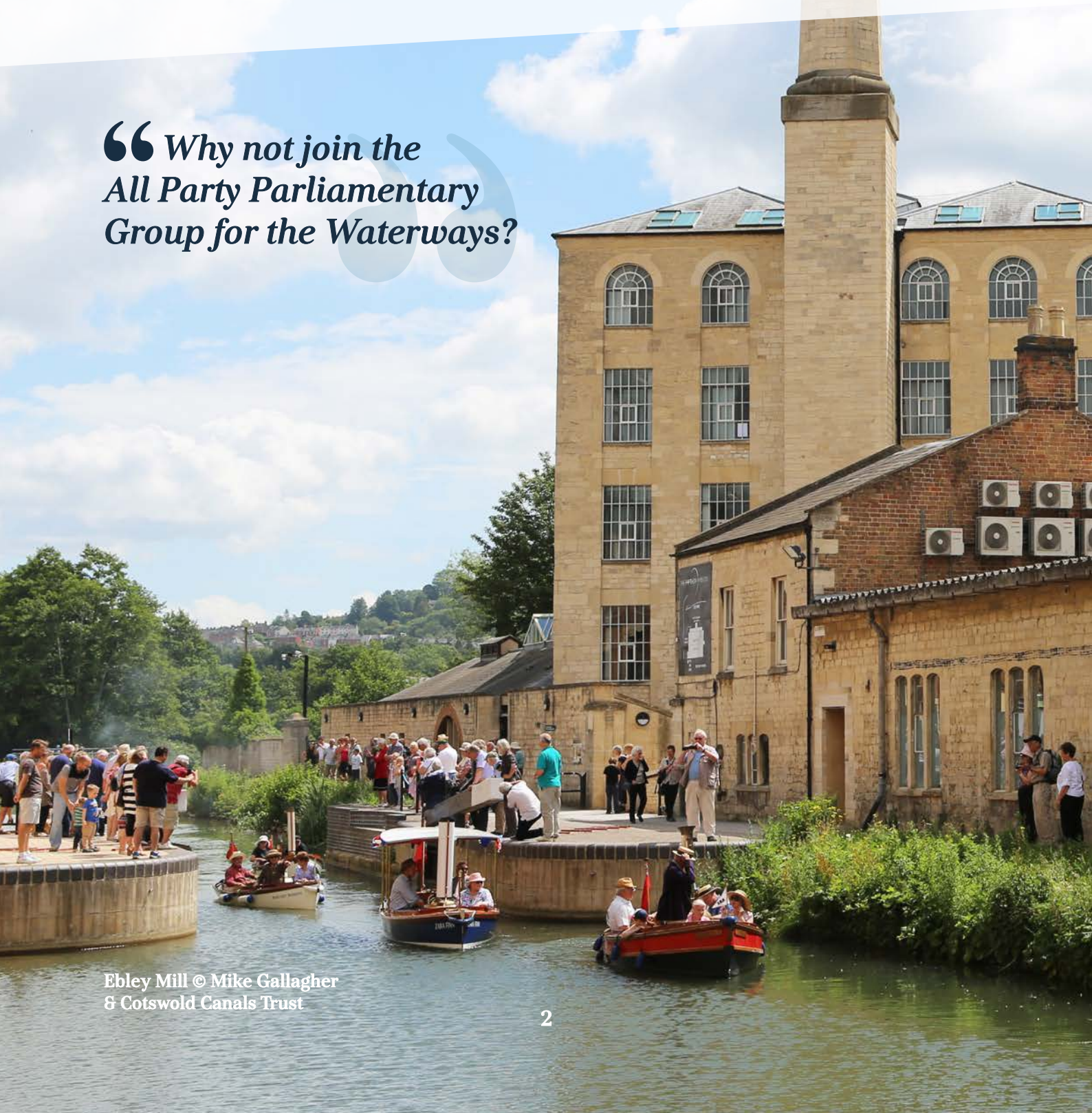
*Parliamentary Briefing*



The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is a membership charity with local branches that champions inland waterway navigation and restoration issues across the country. Our members are passionate about all the ways in which people can enjoy the waterways, such as boating, angling, cycling and volunteering, as well as simply walking along the towpath to enjoy the heritage and wildlife.

IWA has a vision for “A thriving, growing network of sustainable inland waterways for everyone” and asks Members of Parliament to support that vision by acknowledging the issues raised in this briefing document. We also encourage MPs to engage with the local waterways in their constituencies and to join the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

*“Why not join the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways?”*



## OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT ISSUES

There are many concerns faced by the people who enjoy our country's inland waterways today, and IWA asks Members of Parliament to support the work of IWA in protecting those waterways, particularly on the following issues:



### Government Funding



Adequate money for the ongoing maintenance of the publicly owned waterways operated by Canal & River Trust and the Environment Agency.

### The Environment



Research into how the waterways can be more sustainable and could help contribute to the Government's goal of the UK becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

### Affordable Moorings



Working with local authorities to find solutions to address the lack of available moorings and associated facilities.

### Waterways Heritage



Protecting what makes our waterways special through the local planning system.

### Waterways Restoration



Can act as a catalyst for a much wider regeneration of the surrounding area.

**“A thriving, growing network of sustainable inland waterways for everyone.”**

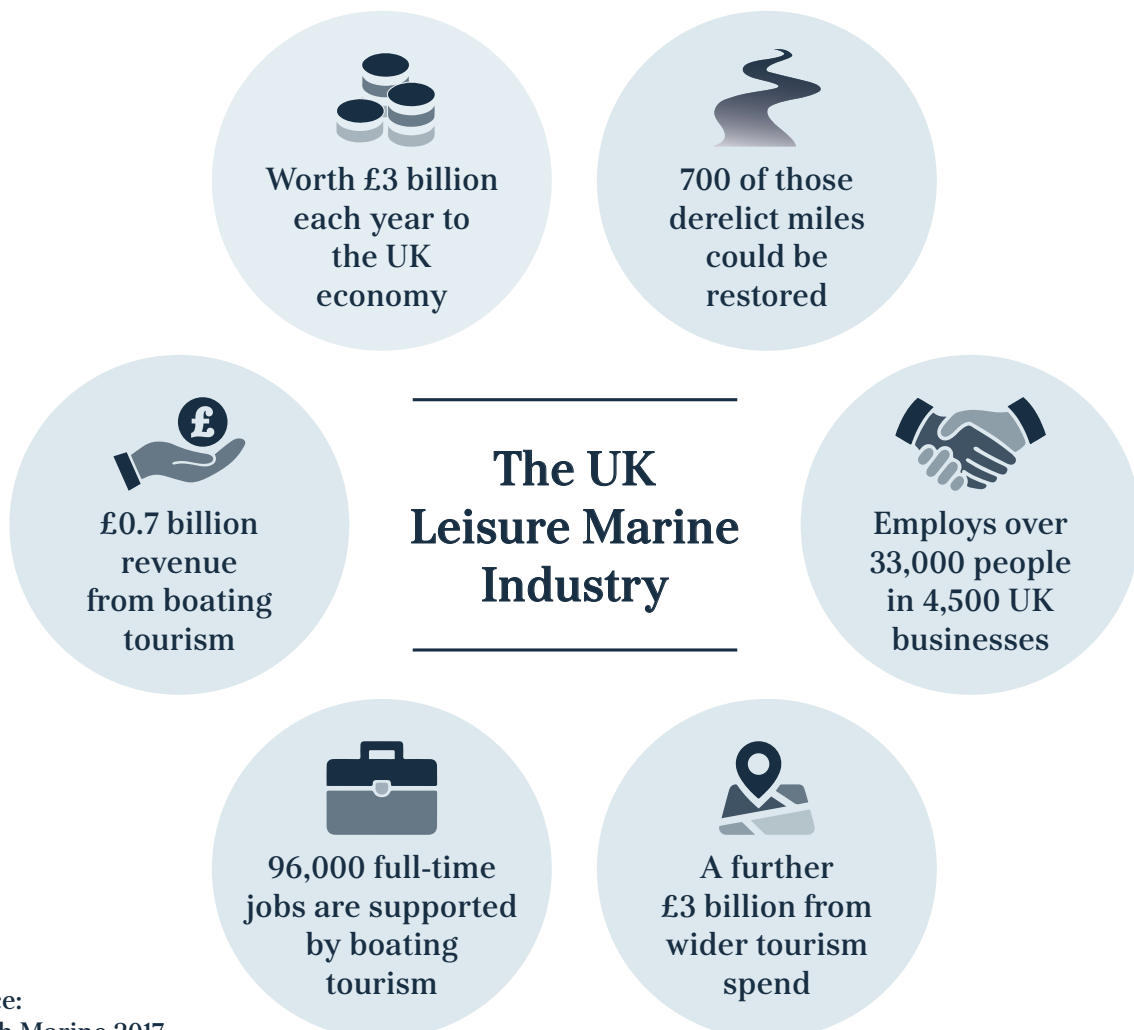
## BACKGROUND

Today waterways are seen as a valuable part of Britain's landscape. The popularity of recent TV programmes has introduced the waterways to a wider audience than ever before. The value that inland waterways bring to our nation includes improved health and well-being for the whole population through opportunities for holidays, exercise and recreation, and financial benefits to local economies through tourism, employment and regeneration.

There are 4700 wonderful miles of navigable canals and rivers in Britain, along with a further 1800 miles which are currently derelict and abandoned. IWA supports the active restoration of 700 of those derelict miles, as well as campaigning for the protection and improvement of all navigable waterways.

The two largest navigation authorities are Canal & River Trust (which was set up as a charity in 2012 to manage the waterways previously run by British Waterways) and the Environment Agency. Other navigation authorities include the Broads Authority, Middle Level Commissioners and Scottish Canals while other waterways are run by a mix of private, public and third sector organisations.

There is a good return for the public funding of canals and navigable rivers. A cautious estimate of the benefit ratio is 1:6 and this can be much higher when waterside property and commercial development is fully restored.



Source:  
British Marine 2017

## ISSUE 1. GOVERNMENT FUNDING

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It is vitally important that the publicly owned waterways (the 2000 miles managed by Canal & River Trust and the 630 miles run by the Environment Agency) continue to receive sufficient funding from Government.

Every year across urban and rural Britain millions of us visit our inland waterways to fish, walk the towpath, observe wildlife or go boating to enjoy the sheer splendour of our canals and navigable rivers. Access to the waterways is free, and with over half the population living within about 10 minutes of a waterway and towpaths are ideal for people to use for walking, jogging, cycling, fishing, using boats and making journeys to work or shops.

### 1.1 CANAL & RIVER TRUST'S CONTRACT

Canal & River Trust looks after 2000 miles of canals and rivers in England and Wales. It has made great progress since it came into being in 2012, to run the waterways previously managed by British Waterways, but it needs to see a continued level of funding so that the many benefits of the waterways can continue to be realised. Canal & River Trust's 15 year contract comes to an end in 2027, with a review starting in 2022. If funding from Government were removed completely it would have a disastrous effect on the role that these waterways play in the economy and health of the country.

A continued level of Government funding in the future for Canal & River Trust is essential, given the significant benefits that the waterways in their care give to the nation in terms of leisure, health and wellbeing for individuals, and to communities through tourism and the local economy. Economic valuation

research carried out for Canal & River Trust estimates that waterways deliver an estimated social wellbeing value to those using just their waterways of £3.8 billion per year [Canal & River Trust 2018]

### 1.2 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY NAVIGATION FUNDING

Along with its many environmental responsibilities, the Environment Agency manages the navigation of 630 miles of waterways such as the River Thames and the River Medway in the south east, and many waterways in the Anglian Region.

Whilst funding for Canal & River Trust was guaranteed for 15 years from 2012, budget for the navigation function of the Environment Agency (which was originally proposed to be part of the new waterway charity when Canal & River Trust was being set up), is still subject to cuts in the grant-in-aid.

Following the announcement by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in June 2019 that it would not be progressing Canal & River Trust's offer to take on the management of EA's navigations, it is now more important than ever to identify additional funds in order to prevent further asset deterioration and waterway closures. Only with increased funding will these navigations realise their potential through leisure, tourism, health and wellbeing, all of which come with associated economic benefits for the local and wider UK economy.

***“We ask MPs to ensure that budgets and legislation take account of the value of our waterways in terms of their contribution to the nation's economy, health, wellbeing and heritage.”***

## ISSUE 2. THE ENVIRONMENT

It is becoming increasingly important that research is carried out into how the waterways can be more sustainable and could help contribute to the Government's goal of the UK becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

There is an expectation that the maritime sector, including inland waterways, will transition away from fossil fuels, as outlined in the Department of Transport's Maritime 2050 Strategy. The Government's Clean Air Strategy also outlines specific measures to tackle air pollutant emissions from the UK's maritime and inland waterways sectors, with a long term transition to low and eventually zero emissions.

Currently the overwhelming proportion of craft navigating the inland waterways of the UK are propelled by fossil fuels (mainly diesel but some petrol). Research into alternative forms of propulsion to these engines is imperative if the inland waterways are going to be able to contribute to these carbon emission reduction goals.

*Inland waterways can in themselves help the rest of the country be more sustainable, such as through more use of water transport for freight traffic to get more lorries off the roads, and more use of weirs for generating hydro-electricity.*

*“We ask MPs to support research into new solutions to reduce the impact of climate change by embracing new developments and technologies.”*

Electric hire narrow boat, Brecon & Abergavenny  
© Alison Smedley

### ISSUE 3. AFFORDABLE RESIDENTIAL MOORINGS

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IWA's aspiration is for a vibrant inland waterways system where every boater who wishes to have a permanent mooring can find and afford one, and where all boaters can find suitable overnight moorings while travelling around the waterways.

In some areas of the country leisure and residential moorings are in short supply and the costs are beyond the reach of many people. IWA wants to see an increase in the number of affordable moorings to meet this need. IWA also wants families and young people to be able to afford to get afloat and enjoy the waterways.

IWA recognises the issues that arise as a result of the increasing number of people choosing to live on boats.

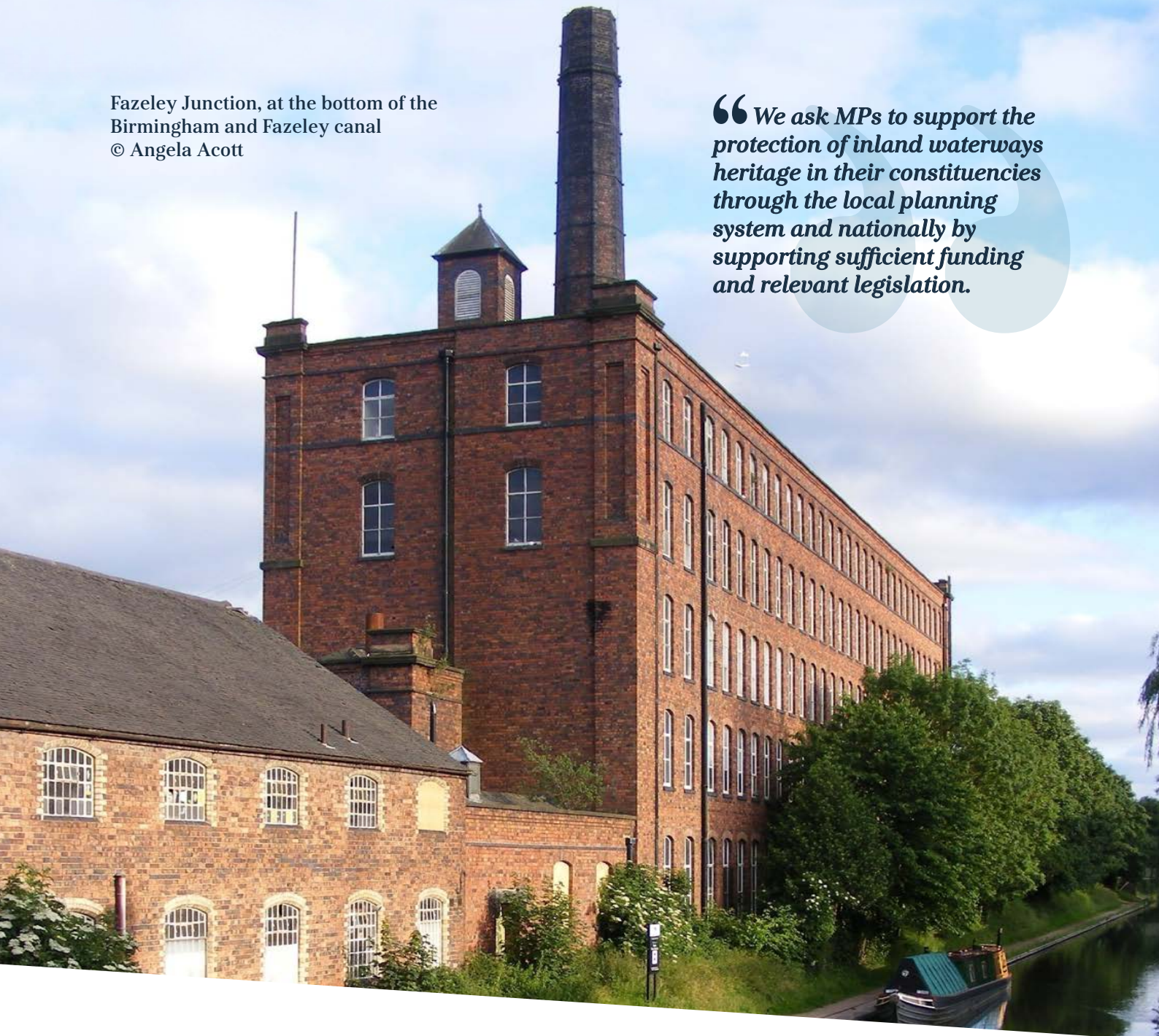
Solutions are needed, working with local authorities and the planning system, to address the lack of available moorings and associated facilities.



*“We ask MPs to support initiatives for affordable moorings in their constituencies, working with local authorities and to encourage Government to look at new ways to promote affordable boating.”*

Fazeley Junction, at the bottom of the  
Birmingham and Fazeley canal  
© Angela Acott

**“We ask MPs to support the protection of inland waterways heritage in their constituencies through the local planning system and nationally by supporting sufficient funding and relevant legislation.**



#### **ISSUE 4. PROTECTING OUR WATERWAYS HERITAGE**

Britain's waterways are home to over 2700 listed structures, 50 scheduled ancient monuments and five UNESCO world heritage sites. The heritage of the inland waterways system encompasses not just the canals and rivers themselves, but also the buildings, engineering structures, working mechanisms, artefacts, boats, people and operations. The history is told through the waterways system in its entirety; a 'museum without walls' with structures and artefacts in their correct location and where possible working as they should.

This heritage is what makes our waterways special and it needs protecting through the local planning system, and through sufficient funding for its maintenance.

Much of the waterways infrastructure is 200 to 250 years old; Government needs to ensure sufficient funding is in place for historic structures such as reservoirs, dams and embankments, and other structures such as locks, bridges, tunnels and aqueducts.



## ISSUE 5. WATERWAYS RESTORATION

More than 500 miles of the UK's canals and river navigations have been restored to navigation since IWA was founded nearly 75 years ago, including the Kennet & Avon Canal, the Rochdale and Huddersfield Narrow canals across the Pennines, and most recently the Droitwich Canal. Another 700 miles is under active restoration thanks to the work of volunteers and hundreds of trusts and societies across the country.

IWA has a long history of leading and supporting waterway restoration; our Restoration Hub champions restoration and provides access for restoration groups to the collective knowledge, skills and expertise of our volunteers and staff while IWA's Waterway Recovery Group helps restore waterways by running working holidays and providing training for volunteers.

There is a strong body of evidence that shows how restored canals can be a catalyst for regeneration in run down urban areas and that they become an essential component of those redeveloped areas. Examples, cited in IWA's recent Waterways in Progress report, include Chesterfield, Cwmbran and Stroud, where restored lengths of waterway have acted as catalysts for wider regeneration including waterside housing, commercial development and leisure activities such as shops, public houses and restaurants.

**“We ask that MPs support the work of volunteers in restoring and regenerating our nation's inland waterways through engaging with local restoration societies and representing their interests in Westminster.”**



Lichfield, Canal Camp 2019

## IWA PARLIAMENTARIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

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Each year IWA presents a trophy to the parliamentarian who has done the most for the waterways. Previous recipients have been nominated for their support of local restoration projects, engagement with the waterways in their constituencies and their support of waterways issues in Westminster.

**“We ask MPs to support local waterways groups in their constituency and to join and get actively involved with the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways at Westminster.**”

## JOIN THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR THE WATERWAYS

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MPs can support the Inland Waterways Association to protect and restore our waterways by joining the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

This Group brings together MPs and Lords to keep waterways matters on the Parliamentary agenda and scrutinise Government, Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency and other bodies.

In local constituencies there are voluntary groups whose members use and promote the waterways for the benefit of the wider community, including restoration groups, boat clubs and IWA branches.



Braunston, Grand Union Canal  
© Nigel Essery

## THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

The Inland Waterways Association is a membership charity that works to protect and restore the country's 6,500 miles of canals and rivers. IWA is a national organisation with a network of volunteers and branches who deploy their expertise and knowledge to work constructively with navigation authorities, government and other organisations.

The Association also provides practical and technical support to restoration projects through its expert Waterway Recovery Group.





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