

Making more use of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors



The Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC)

Report prepared by Entec UK Ltd and Asken Ltd

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What is the Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC)?

IWAC is a statutory public body consisting of fourteen Volunteer Members and a part-time Chair. It provides independent advice to the UK Government, Scottish Government, navigation authorities and other interested parties on matters it considers appropriate and relevant to Britain's inland waterways.

IWAC was established in April 2007 by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Its predecessor organisation was the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council, formed in 1968.

In England and Wales, IWAC's remit covers all of the inland waterways such as:

- canals (including those managed by British Waterways, canal companies, local authorities and smaller independent bodies);
- rivers (including those which are the responsibility of the Environment Agency, British Waterways and port authorities);
- the Norfolk & Suffolk Broads; and
- the navigable drains of the Fens.

In Scotland, IWAC's remit covers inland waterways that are owned or managed by, or which receive technical advice or assistance from, British Waterways.

In July 2010, UK Government and Scottish Government ministers announced that IWAC will be abolished during 2011-12. It has no formal work programme beyond 2010.

What is IWAC's role?

IWAC's role is to ensure that the inland waterways are developed sustainably to meet the needs of all who use and enjoy them. Once used mainly for freight transport, inland waterways now have a strong recreational and amenity use. They are an effective catalyst for the regeneration of local economies, acting as a distinctive focus to bring economic, social and environmental benefits to cities, towns and rural communities.

IWAC has published reports which include: using inland waterways to tackle social exclusion, funding and income sources for a selection of overseas waterways, insights into the funding of inland waterways in Britain, balancing the needs of navigation and aquatic wildlife, awareness and appreciation of the canal network in Scotland, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by moving more freight onto inland waterways.

More about IWAC

Please visit its website at www.iwac.org.uk for further information about IWAC and to see copies of its reports.

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Summary

Principal conclusions

Together with the waterways themselves, waterway paths impact on communities throughout Great Britain and this report identifies over 7,500km of waterway paths, with indications that over **half the nation's population visited a waterway** in 2009, contributing some **£8 billion to the economy**.

Of over 900 million visits to the waterways in 2009, most were dependent on waterway paths, with water-based activities accounting for less than 10% of visits.

Waterway paths provide **social, environmental and economic benefits** through:

- enhancing green infrastructure in urban areas;
- their use as routes for sustainable transport;
- providing a recreational and tourism resource which encourages healthy exercise and contributes to wellbeing; and
- facilitating access by local communities to tranquil greenspace and the historic environment, which can also improve wellbeing.

The existing waterway path network has additional capacity, so **action to increase sustainable use**, and thus **unlock greater benefits, should be taken immediately**. A significant change can be achieved at little cost, simply through increasing awareness of the value of these paths among local communities and ensuring that people know how to, and are able to, access the resource.

Minor physical improvements, for example improving surfaces, addressing users' fears for their personal safety, bridging minor gaps in paths and eliminating smaller obstacles to different users should also be given priority.

Immediate action is also required to ensure that more ambitious actions for development of waterway paths (e.g. new bridges, major waterside development, extension of the network or creation of new destination attractions) are incorporated into the whole range of **local development plan documents**, and that appropriate **developer contribution** models are established to maximise contributions from development projects. Action now will assist greatly as the opportunity arises to implement such waterway path schemes.

Local communities and many **official and voluntary bodies** have an interest in the benefits of increased use of waterway paths. In some cases, there is potential for conflict between different users and consensus will need to be reached on solutions. All the evidence points towards the conclusion that **local partnerships** between community organisations, planning authorities, landowners, user bodies and local businesses provide the best mechanism for delivery of the benefits that waterway paths provide and their widespread establishment is recommended.

Waterway paths have long been seen as a secondary by-product of our country's extensive historic waterway network and their important contribution to everyday life has largely gone unrecognised. This report identifies their enormous potential and sets out ways in which their greater use and development will assist in realising a comprehensive suite of benefits, transforming them into an even more valuable asset for our people and communities.

The UK Government and the Scottish Government both recognise the contribution that Great Britain's inland waterways could make in many areas of life, including the role of waterway paths as a means of increasing activities such as walking and cycling. IWAC recognised that there was a gap in advice on how to make more use of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors in a manner which was sustainable for both the inland waterways and the wider environment. This report was therefore commissioned to provide evidence on the potential for sustainable expansion of the use in Great Britain of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors that could be used as the basis for advice to the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government, navigation authorities, local authorities, transport authorities, health authorities and tourism bodies.

IWAC wants to see waterway paths attract more commuting, tourism and leisure activities whilst at the same time potentially decreasing carbon footprints, reducing road congestion and improving the health of local communities.

The report identifies over 6600km of navigable inland waterway in Great Britain, comprising canals, rivers, drains, the Broads and tidal waterways, with approximately 7500km of associated waterway paths. A further 1600km (approximately) of currently non-navigable waterway also provides further lengths of waterway path. These paths include towpaths originally constructed for waterway operations, as well as paths along river floodbanks and long distance trails developed in more recent years. It is estimated that about 90% of the waterway path resource is rural in nature.

With a few exceptions, waterway paths no longer have a significant role as towpaths for towing boats but now provide important access routes for recreational walking, cycling and, to a lesser extent, horse riding, as well as sustainable personal transport. These new roles place new demands on the waterway path network in terms of accessibility for all, links to residential areas, tourist destinations and workplaces, and associated car parking and public transport links.

The report examines the status of waterway paths in terms of rights of use (many are not public rights of way) and existing levels and types of use. Survey data indicate that over 900 million visits are made to waterways each year, of which the vast majority are to use the waterway paths for walking or cycling. Over half the GB population visited a waterway in 2009. Water based activities account for less than 10% of the total number of visits. Users come from a wide range of age groups and backgrounds but those over 65 years old, those with a long-term health problem or disability, ethnic minorities and working class people are under-represented among waterway and waterway path users.

Existing management of waterway paths is described, including rights of way, maintenance standards, access for disabled people, links to other paths and public transport, staffing, signage and marketing.

Survey data show that users are attracted to waterway paths mainly because they provide an attractive quiet environment, away from road traffic, close to home and are well maintained. Principal deterrents to increased use include lack of time, lack of appeal of waterways, poor path provision and maintenance, access issues (such as lack of parking), rubbish/dog faeces/graffiti, adverse perceptions of visitor safety and antisocial behaviour. Most users regard landscape/townscape and cultural heritage interest and wildlife associated with waterway paths as 'quite important'.

Factors are identified that could increase use, including better maintenance (including vegetation management), ensuring continuity of paths (i.e. no gaps in the traffic-free route), improved marketing and signage, addressing misuse (particularly by dog walkers failing to clear up after their dogs) and antisocial behaviour, assurances about personal safety, resolving inter-user conflicts (particularly between cyclists and walkers), better links and car parking, maintaining waterway character, landscape and wildlife and providing visitor attractions.

The benefits provided by use of waterway paths are then examined. These can be summarised under four main headings as follows:

‘Place making’

Waterway paths:

- form a basis for green and blue infrastructure networks associated with waterside development;
- with appropriate design, can contribute to the premium value attached to waterside property; and
- contribute to ‘sense of place’, especially in urban areas.

Sustainable personal travel

Use of waterway paths as traffic free routes for walking and cycling:

- improves health and wellbeing;
- contributes to climate change mitigation; and
- saves fuel and thus cost.

Recreation, sport and tourism

Waterway paths provide a varied recreational facility for walkers, cyclists and equestrians which:

- provides access to water-based sport and recreation;
- facilitates exercise;
- contributes to healthy lifestyles;
- improves wellbeing;
- provides links to visitor destinations; and
- contributes over £8 billion in income to the GB economy.

Access to greenspace and the historic environment

Waterway paths provide easy access for a high proportion of the population to greener and more tranquil outdoor areas than those experienced in much of their daily life, resulting in:

- improved health and wellbeing, especially mental health;
- greater appreciation of the environment and cultural heritage; and
- the potential contributions to community cohesion and social inclusion.

Delivery

The benefits derived from waterway paths are largely a function of sustainable use – if such use increases, so will the benefits. The vision is therefore to make the maximum sustainable use of waterway paths, thus delivering the greatest benefits to the local community and the economy. The benefits from use of waterway paths accrue mainly to local communities, so the best solutions are likely to be those developed locally. The evidence suggests that significant increases in use can be achieved at little cost and a series of low cost actions has been identified for implementation as a priority (where this is not already happening).

In order of increasing cost and ambition, local delivery bodies should work to achieve the following outcomes:

- increasing use of the existing waterway path resource through marketing and education;
- minor enhancements and improved signage;
- perceived conflicts or threats to users addressed;
- elimination of small gaps in the waterway path network to remove effective obstructions for different types of user;
- bridging of larger gaps in the waterway path network, for example by provision of a new bridge;
- extension of the network, particularly as part of regeneration projects where funding can be obtained through planning agreements, and potentially creation of new public rights of way; and
- development of new waterway related visitor destinations.

Experience from elsewhere shows that benefits will be maximised through formation of local partnerships to promote their local waterway paths. Therefore, we recommend that local waterways partnerships should be created, as an integral part, where possible, of the wider local community partnerships system (e.g. co-operatives, local enterprise partnerships), to promote waterway paths and to develop clear, costed, action plans. More strategic partnerships may be needed to manage specific long distance paths. Local planning authorities are an essential part of most such partnerships.

Potential partners include:

- local communities – who stand to benefit most from development of waterway paths;
- local planning and highway authorities – where waterway paths contribute to policy objectives for tourism, green infrastructure, sport, community health, transport, road safety and regeneration;
- navigation authorities – who may own the waterway path and have duties to have regard to public access and who may receive income where they operate visitor facilities or attractions;
- local businesses – who will benefit through increased visitor-spend;
- Sustrans – since waterway paths contribute to regional and national cycle networks;
- sports bodies – as waterway paths provide running routes and access to water-based activities;
- walking groups – who see waterway paths as an important part of the wider path network;
- waterway societies – who have interests in maintaining the waterway and its heritage;
- landowners – who may own the paths and may benefit by providing facilities for users;
- local transport operators – who may provide access to waterway paths; and
- tourism and destination management bodies – who have an interest in increasing tourism use.

Other bodies may also usefully be involved, depending on circumstances, for example the Local Access Forum, wildlife trusts or the Forestry Commission.

Partnerships or lead organisations must identify and take responsibility for specific tasks to deliver the outcomes listed above and should seek to learn from and build upon experience of successful partnerships elsewhere.

If they are not already being addressed, priority actions in the short-term should include the following.

- Marketing – the local community and users from further afield will only benefit if they know what is on offer in terms of activities, destinations of interest, pre-planned walking routes, access and the special qualities of waterway paths. Information should be disseminated by all 'partners' through websites, signs and posters, publications, radio and events.
- Signage – improved signage inviting people onto waterway paths, providing direction and interpreting the waterway environment will be effective, particularly in urban areas.
- Stakeholder consensus building – stakeholders must be fully engaged in dialogue to build consensus on resolving problems of inter-user conflict on multi-user paths; this will be achieved better by gaining stakeholder co-operation than by attempts at enforcement.
- Minor improvements – for example in path surfaces, vegetation management and provision of seating, or provision of art works may achieve significant increases in user numbers.
- Removal of threats – perceived or actual, to waterway path users, in cases where use of a path is discouraged by fears about personal safety; this may involve physical measures, such as greater permeability, lighting, opening out dark areas and possibly greater human presence, for example through wardens.
- Elimination of small gaps - in the continuity of traffic-free waterway paths and access routes, provision of car parking and links to public transport and addressing pinch-points to make paths suitable for multi-functional use, where practicable, will encourage greater use.

Next, attention should be given to ensuring that longer-term waterway path proposals are embedded into local development plan documents and that developer contribution proposals are worked out in advance of large waterside development projects. Such proposals may include:

- elimination of larger gaps – particularly bridges over waterways;
- maximising developer contributions - to waterway path improvements, e.g. through planning agreements (reflecting the greater profitability of waterside development);
- creating new paths - along waterways where there are none;
- creating new public rights of way - where required to secure long-term availability of a waterway path; and
- new destination sites - development of new waterway attractions accessed via waterway paths.

Finally the report briefly discusses funding sources and provides further guidance on delivery of an action plan. A series of case studies is provided to illustrate relevant issues.

Introduction

Inland waterways can bring benefits to many areas of life. Waterway paths can help to increase activities such as walking and cycling. The UK Government and the Scottish Government both recognise this contribution.

Purpose of this report

The Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC) recognised that there was a gap in evidence-based advice on how to make more use of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors in Great Britain in a manner which was sustainable for both the inland waterways and the wider environment. They recognised that path activities could be for both recreational purposes and for more functional purposes, such as commuting to work or to access services, and considered that these should be carefully considered by policy makers at the national, regional and local level.

Waterway paths have the potential to contribute to many of the policy objectives identified in sustainable development and green infrastructure policies. These include, in particular, contributing to:

- place-making and shaping (including the contribution of green infrastructure to neighbourhood renewal and 'sense of place');
- climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- environmental improvement;
- protection of cultural heritage;
- healthy lifestyles and improved wellbeing;
- sustainable transport;
- tourism and business development; and
- fairer, stronger and more active communities (including community cohesion and social inclusion).

This approach is supported by wider government policies – see **Appendix 1**.

This report was commissioned by IWAC who wished to provide evidence on the potential for sustainable expansion of the use in Great Britain of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors that could be used as the basis for advice to the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government, navigation authorities, local authorities, transport authorities, health authorities and tourism bodies.

IWAC wants to see waterway paths attract more commuting, tourism and leisure activities whilst at the same time potentially decreasing carbon footprints, reducing road congestion and improving the health of local communities.



The green transport alternative

Objectives and scope

The report:

- provides a contextual background for GB waterways and their associated paths;
- describes existing uses of waterway paths;
- identifies potential for sustainable expansion of the use of waterway paths and their surrounding corridors;
- examines ways of developing multi-user paths while avoiding conflict between users; and
- suggests good practice for delivery, including policy issues, funding possibilities and use of partnerships.

Definition of 'waterways'

The study is about paths associated with navigable waterways, particularly those falling within IWAC's remit, which includes:

- all waterways in England and Wales with a navigation authority, even if there is no right of navigation (such as those managed by British Waterways); and
- all waterways with a right of navigation (which may or may not have a navigation authority).

In Scotland, the project covers only waterways:

- owned or managed by British Waterways; or
- where British Waterways is providing technical advice (i.e. canals and the River Leven and River Forth).

Navigable tidal rivers are included in this study's definition of waterways but not areas that are primarily coastal. (A convenient cut-off in England, interpreted flexibly, is to exclude areas that will be served by the 'English Coastal Route' to be established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which is expected to run up the shores of estuaries to the first available crossing point by bridge or ferry).

Derelict waterways as listed in the third (2006) *IWAC Review of Waterway Restoration and Development Projects* and all additional waterways included in the 1904 edition of *Bradshaw's Canals and Navigable Rivers of England and Wales*, plus key derelict waterways in Scotland, are also included in the resource estimates. Waterways that became derelict in the 18th and 19th centuries have often effectively been obliterated and it can be difficult even to trace their course, so they have been omitted.



Some derelict waterways have passable towpaths, although many are privately owned, as here at Monkhide on the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal

Although the above definition does not cover all rivers, it is recognised that paths associated with smaller, non-navigable rivers play an important role and have potential to contribute to greater use of waterway paths, as part of wider path networks, and to help deliver the associated benefits. Similarly, paths connecting with and providing access to canal reservoirs often provide attractive diversions from the towpath.



Paths in river floodplains may deviate from the riverbank without loss of aesthetic quality, as here in the Broads

Scope of the 'waterway corridor'

The study also covers the waterway corridor. In the case of canals, the waterway corridor is essentially the extent of ownership of the navigation authority. For navigable rivers in rural areas, the waterway corridor has generally been defined for the purposes of this study as the extent of the 1% AEP (1 in 100 years Annual Exceedance Probability) floodplain, plus any paths which follow the flood plain margin (e.g. paths on the top of flood embankments). In urban areas, paths that lie behind flood defences but are clearly river corridor paths have still been considered as waterway paths.

Definition of 'paths'

Throughout the report, use is made of the term 'path'. This is used as a generic term (as distinct from, say, 'public footpath', which has a more specific meaning). Path should be interpreted as meaning a linear way that can be used by some or all of the following users: on foot, on cycle, on horseback and when using a mobility vehicle. Paths, in this context, are not intended to be used by the public using motorised mechanically-propelled vehicles (other than those for disabled people).

Approach

The report is essentially in two parts. First we have established the existing baseline in terms of:

- an inventory of waterways and their paths;
- a summary of existing uses; and
- management and funding.

Secondly we have looked at the future potential for waterway paths through consideration of:

- opportunities and challenges;
- potential benefits; and
- proposals and delivery.

Sources of information

The study has drawn upon a range of sources of information including published material, unpublished research reports and responses from consultees.

A comprehensive list of reports referenced is included in the Bibliography chapter. These include a number of reports produced by the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA), who have produced guidance to navigation authorities on waterway paths, and reports published by IWAC on the benefits of inland waterways, as well as unpublished research findings ('grey' literature).

Data have also been obtained from a sample of local highway authorities on existing uses and proposals for development of waterway paths from Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP) (note these do not only consider rights of way), as well as from Green Network Partnerships in Scotland for information from Core Path Plans (note publicly accessible land includes water in Scotland, so core paths on water are also included in the plans).

Information has been obtained from a wide range of stakeholder groups through a standard questionnaire using the web-based *Survey Monkey* system.

In addition, direct approaches have been made to key stakeholders with specific questions, requests for primary survey data, where available, and enquiries about representative examples of waterway path projects for use as case studies.

Consultees approached included mainly national or regional representative bodies, including navigation authorities, local access forums (England & Wales), green networks (Scotland), Sustrans, Inland Waterways Association, Sport England, user groups (e.g. Ramblers, Cyclists Touring Club, British Horse Society, International Mountain Biking Association, the Angling Trust and similar organisations).

Details of consultees approached are given in **Appendix 2**.

Case studies

Based on information collected early in the project, case study examples were selected in conjunction with the IWAC Project Team, to cover both urban and rural areas, long-distance and local paths, with a range of users, environmental qualities and socio-economic conditions, including both successes and outstanding problems.

The case studies also cover a variety of promoters (e.g. navigation authorities, local authorities and partnerships), focussing mainly on a limited number of exemplars but adding brief details of other cases in support. Some were selected to show where future opportunities have been identified but not yet realised. Details of all case studies are tabulated in the final chapter, which includes more detailed summaries of selected projects which illustrate particular points.



The 9km of urban Coventry Canal towpath in the city is promoted as Coventry's longest park, featuring an arts trail, pocket parks, heritage interpretation and an improved towpath surface, funded by European grants, National Lottery, English Partnerships, Coventry City Council, British Waterways and Groundwork

The waterway paths resource

There are over 7000km of publicly available waterway paths in Great Britain.

The waterways of Great Britain

The Great Britain inland waterway resource considered in this report comprises a number of different waterway types:

- urban canals (categorised by size);
- rural canals (categorised by size);
- river navigations with functional floodplains;
- highly modified and regulated rivers in urban areas;
- fenland drains;
- fenland rivers (main high level carriers raised on embankments);
- the Broads waterways; and
- tidal rivers.

There is great variety in size within some types.

For example canals range from the 'narrow' canals of the English Midlands, with a corridor typically less than 20m wide, to large canals designed for ships (such as the Manchester Ship Canal and the Caledonian Canal). River waterways also vary greatly, represented by small rivers, such as the Yorkshire Derwent, through to large waterways, such as the Thames in London. Canoe England also points out that, in addition to formally recognised navigations, there are another 65,000km of canoeable rivers in England with no navigable access rights.

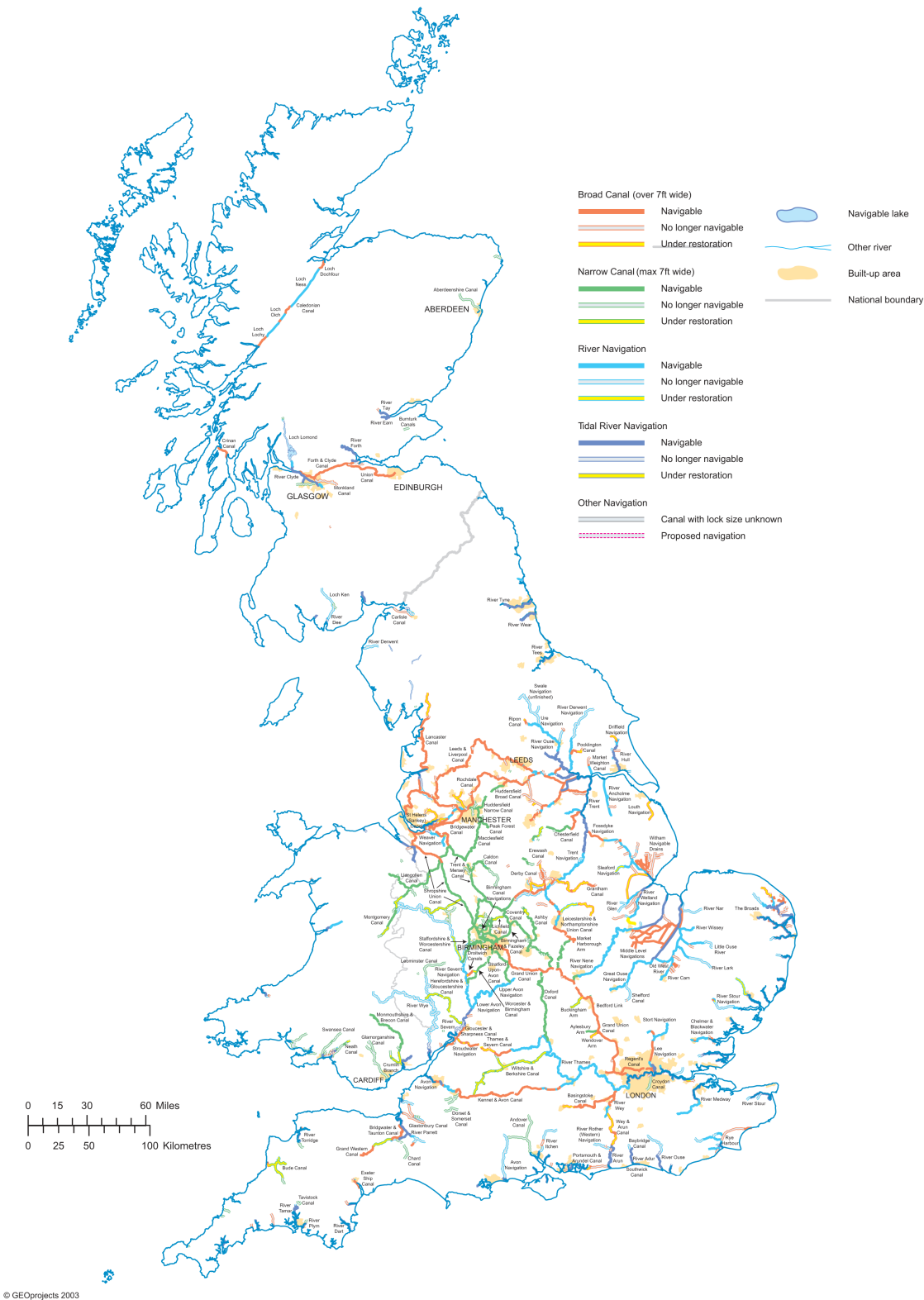
Many waterways have structures of cultural heritage interest, such as buildings and wharves associated with cargo carrying, lock and weir structures, aqueducts, boat lifts, toll collectors' and lock keepers' houses. British Waterways is the third largest owner in the UK of listed buildings, after the National Trust and the Church of England. New structures can also be visitor attractions, for example the Falkirk Wheel in Scotland.

Waterways are also linked to many designated wildlife sites. British Waterways' land alone includes all or part of 73 sites of special scientific interest (SSSI).

The waterway resource is summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1 The waterway resource in Great Britain

Waterway type		Length navigable (km)	Length un-navigable approx (km)	Navigation authorities (navigable lengths only)
Small canals (for boats <4.35m beam)	Rural	1766	636	Mainly operated by British Waterways (BW)
	Urban	572	310	
Large canals (for boats >4.35m beam)	Rural	316	186	Operated by BW, Peel Holdings companies and various others
	Urban	60	70	
River navigations – 'natural'	Rural	588	237	Mainly operated by the Environment Agency (EA) and British Waterways
River navigations – heavily modified	Urban	80	16	
Fenland drains	All	269	58	Mainly operated by internal drainage boards
Fenland rivers – high level carriers, Cut-Off Channel and Relief Channel	All	231	42	Operated by the Environment Agency
The Broads	All	201	36	Operated by the Broads Authority
Tidal rivers	All	1844	N/a	Authorities include BW, EA and ports
TOTAL		6654	1591	



The waterway resource in Great Britain, distinguishing canals, rivers and tidal waterways

Waterway paths

Many waterways have waterside paths that were specifically constructed for towing vessels, using men, horses or latterly, in some cases, tractors.

Canals

Towpaths are almost universal on canals, having been constructed at the same time as the canal, on the canal company's land, usually with a fence or hedge between the path and the adjacent land. Towpaths are usually provided only on one side but some particularly busy canals (e.g. the Birmingham Canal new main line) had towpaths on both sides. For the most part these paths are relatively narrow (allowing for two horses to pass) and useable width has in some rural areas been reduced significantly by erosion of the canal edge and encroachment of vegetation on the hedge side. Most rural canal towpaths are unsurfaced, except where specific waterway path projects have been undertaken and various hard surfaces have been laid.



Well maintained rural canal towpath (Chesterfield Canal)

In urban areas, paths are sometimes surfaced with cobbles, with raised lines of cobbles on slopes to give horses better grip. In the London area towpaths were latterly used for towing barges using small tractors and significant lengths are hard surfaced and wider than in most places. In contrast, on some larger waterways, such as the Aire & Calder Navigation in Yorkshire, where use of steam tugs was introduced early in the 19th century, towpaths largely fell out of use and in some places are no longer continuous, particularly where industry has developed alongside the waterway. In fact larger canals, such as the Manchester Ship Canal, never had a requirement for a towpath and there is no continuous waterside path.

Where canals passed through tunnels, although a few tunnels included one, or even two, towpaths, the more common procedure was to route the towpath over the top of the hill, so preserving the continuity of the path for horses, and to propel boats through the tunnel by various manual means or latterly by use of a tug. Many but not all of these routes are still available to today's towpath users.

As canal towpaths were an essential part of an industrial operation in the early days of canals, and even up to the 1970s in the London and Birmingham areas, public access was not particularly encouraged and in urban areas was often actively discouraged, partly through making access difficult by use of fencing and locked gates. Now British Waterways (which operates 90% of GB canals) encourages use of its towpaths by the public but still generally retains all rights over its private land. Thus, except in some cases where maintenance agreements have been made with third parties, BW towpaths are not public rights of way (PROW), although canal towpaths in Scotland are not excluded from the application of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (see later).

Rivers

Companies establishing navigations along rivers did not usually acquire the riparian land (or indeed the river bed) except in sections comprising an artificial channel, so did not automatically have rights to construct towpaths. On larger, rural rivers, such as the Severn and the Yorkshire Ouse, vessels would be sailed or sometimes poled along if necessary but towing from the bank was also widely used, often by men who were expected to cross or get around obstacles that a horse could not.



Many waterway paths along rivers are not owned by the navigation authority. This is the Thames Path at Kingston

Towpaths were constructed in some cases on river navigations and on some fenland drains, often by obtaining rights across private land, but many fell into disuse when tugs and self-propelled barges were introduced.

On the other hand, some rivers, particularly in urban areas (e.g. the River Lee in London or the River Aire in Leeds) were provided with well-constructed towpaths which were, and still are, well used.

On rivers where floodbanks have been constructed immediately along the riverbank, these have often become paths or even roads.



Urban towpath available to cyclists and walkers (River Lee, London) – this is a public right of way

The floodbanks of artificially constructed rivers in low lying areas provide significant opportunities for waterway paths and roads. Such rivers are often high-level carriers, taking away water that is pumped from surrounding low-lying areas. The great advantage here is that the land occupied by embankments was often owned by the drainage authority that constructed them, as on canals, so such embankments are typically fenced off from adjacent land and provide an unobstructed riverside route. In the Fens, such rivers were constructed from the seventeenth century onwards. Many of the paths along these embankments are PROW, often on both banks. Some embankments along tidal rivers (e.g. the Trent) fall into this same category.

In contrast, gravity drainage systems in low lying fenland areas (e.g. in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire) are often on private land owned by internal drainage board members and navigable drains do not necessarily have publicly accessible paths. In fact there are often few PROW in such areas, reflecting the fact that historically, before the extensive drainage programmes of the 17th century, many of these areas were wetlands and

difficult to traverse without detailed local knowledge.

Another difficulty in fenland areas is that the crests of embankments along the main rivers often carry roads with no associated foot or cycle path, creating breaks in the network of routes free of motorised traffic. These roads have been considered as part of the waterway path network but are not ideal for some users.

River navigations therefore present a very mixed picture. While not all rivers have paths alongside the waterway, many do and a number of these are PROW and have been developed by the local highway authority into promoted routes. The most notable example is probably the Thames Path National Trail, which provides a PROW 243km long from Cricklade in Gloucestershire to the Thames Barrier in east London. In rivers with extensive flood plains, the main riverside paths may be supported by a network of paths within the floodplain.



There are PROW on the flood embankments on both sides of the tidal River Parrett in the Somerset Levels

Taking account of the different types of path associated with different types of waterway, the waterway path resource available to the public in GB along navigable waterways (although not all as PROW) has been estimated as shown in **Table 2**. For un-navigable waterways it is not possible to generalise. Some have accessible paths, while in other cases land has reverted to agriculture or other uses and there are no paths.

Examples of specifically identified walks, for example as long-distance trails, that include waterway paths for a substantial part of their length, are given in **Table 3**.

Table 2 The waterway paths resource in Great Britain (for navigable waterways only)

Waterway type	Length of path (km)	Rationale for estimate
Canal towpaths (rural)	2082	Assume continuous towpath on one side of the canal on average. A small number of canals have gaps in towpath provision or no towpath but a few have towpaths on both sides. A review of mapping and aerial photographs indicates that these approximately balance out. These anomalies are mainly in urban areas, so the urban estimate may be less reliable than that for rural areas.
Canal towpaths (urban)	632	
River related paths (rural)	4700	Allows a factor of 1.5 for additional paths within floodplains and for rivers with paths on both sides, allowing for navigable drains with no paths
River related paths (urban)	96	Allows a factor of 1.2 for additional paths within riverside parks and for rivers with paths on both sides
TOTAL	7510	

Table 3 Some examples of named long-distance paths that include waterway paths

Route	Length of path (km)	Length of waterway path (km)	Waterways
Basingstoke Canal Walk	53	53	Basingstoke Canal (all via canal towpath)
Cheshire Ring Canal Walk	158	158	Bridgewater Canal, Trent & Mersey Canal, Macclesfield Canal, Peak Forest Canal, Ashton Canal, Huddersfield Narrow Canal, Rochdale Canal (all via canal towpaths)
Cuckoo Way	74	74	Chesterfield Canal (whole canal towpath)
Grand Union Canal Walk	234	234	Grand Union Canal (including Warwick & Birmingham, Warwick & Napton and Grand Junction Canal sections) (all via canal towpaths)
Great Glen Way	117	85	Caledonian Canal (follows navigation except for part of Loch Ness)
Itchen Way	50	23	River Itchen Navigation (derelict between Winchester and Swaythling)
Jubilee Walkway	23	5	Thames Estuary (riverside from Lambeth Bridge to Tower Bridge)
Kennet & Avon Canal Walk	122	122	River Kennet, Kennet & Avon Canal (Reading to Bath) (all via waterway towpaths)
Lea Valley Walk	85	82	River Lee, Bow Creek, Thames Estuary (all via towpath upstream of Three Mills)
Medway Valley Walk	45	35	River Medway and Medway estuary (Tonbridge to Rochester) (most via towpath above Maidstone)
Ouse Valley Way	229	145	Great Ouse, Ely Ouse, Old West River, Bedford Ouse
Oxford Canal Walk	133	133	Oxford Canal (all via canal towpath)
River Parrett Trail	80	45	River Parrett
Royal Military Canal Path	43	42	Royal Military Canal, River Rother (Eastern) (canal sections via towpath)
Severn Way	360	183	Montgomery Canal, River Severn, Severn Estuary, River Avon (Bristol) (canal sections via towpath)
Shakespeare's Avon Way	142	24	River Avon (Warwickshire)
Sussex Ouse Valley Way	68	20	River Ouse (Sussex)
Thames Path	243	220	River Thames
Usk Valley Way	77	3	Brecon & Abergavenny and Monmouthshire Canals (all via canal towpath)
Water Rail Way	40	27	River Witham (via old railway)
Weaver Way	65	60	River Weaver, Trent & Mersey Canal, Shropshire Union Canal (canal sections via towpath)

Accessibility

Waterways are accessible to a large proportion of the population. British Waterways estimates that over half of the population lives within 5 miles of one of its waterways.

Waterway paths are available to most of the population, without the need to have access to a boat (or even a bicycle).

However, an appraisal of issues relating to the physical provision of waterway paths based on a review of mapping and aerial photographs suggests that, while waterway paths represent a significant national resource, their value may be compromised by gaps in provision including:

- gaps in paths along certain waterways requiring a diversion away from the waterway with no obvious route free of motor traffic connecting the two sections;
- waterway paths where crossing of busy roads is required *en route*;
- sections of waterway path that include sections on roads with no provision for walking, cycling or horse riding without sharing the carriageway with motor vehicles;
- gaps where paths cross-rivers, due to absence of former ferries and lack of bridge provision;
- inadequate links to other path systems and to public transport; and
- lack of provision of car parks.



The need to cross a busy road on the level where there is no towpath under the bridge has been overcome here on Limehouse Cut in London by use of a floating path

Particular issues arise for disabled users, especially those with a physical disability, in that:

- some paths are available but too difficult to use;
- a single obstacle, possibly something quite small, can render a long section of path useless to someone dependent on a wheelchair or mobility vehicle;
- similarly, there is no point in making a waterway path suitable for disabled users if there are no suitable access routes to it; and
- there is a need for clearly understood standards and guidance, so that prospective users can be confident that a path will be suitable for their use or information provided so that they'll know what they can and cannot use.

These aspects are discussed further in the chapter on *Existing Management and Funding*.



A key factor in making waterway paths accessible for wheelchair users is ensuring that slopes at locks are within acceptable limits (un-navigable Swansea Canal)

Existing uses

Over 900 million visits are made every year to waterways in Great Britain. Over half of the population visit a waterway each year. Most of these visitors make use of waterway paths.

Who has a 'right' to use waterway paths

Before describing the existing use of waterway paths it is worth considering the legal aspects of access to paths in general, especially as inland waterway paths are not afforded any special legal status. The legal situation in England and Wales is essentially the same, whereas the situation in Scotland is quite different. So, they will be described separately.

England and Wales

Public access to land can best be thought of in two ways – linear and area-wide.

Linear Access

The most common form of linear public access is along 'highways'. In popular jargon, this is usually taken to mean surfaced roads but the term, in law, actually covers metalled roads (plus associated footways – usually referred to as 'the pavement') and all public rights of way (PROW). Typically, these came into existence through common law (i.e. customary routes developed and used by the general public over many years) and were then recorded after the introduction of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

The term PROW refers only to the following four categories of highway, each of which has different rights of access:

- **Footpaths:** access is allowed on foot and by mobility vehicle only;
- **Bridleway:** as for footpaths, plus a right to ride or lead a horse; there is also a legal right to ride bicycles but on condition that priority is given to other legitimate users;
- **Restricted byways:** access is allowed on foot, riding/leading a horse, riding a cycle or driving other forms of non-motorised

vehicles (e.g. horse and carriage), as well as by mobility vehicles; and

- **Byways open to all traffic/Byways:** the public has rights similar to a restricted byway except that there is also a right to drive motorised vehicles (although the route is most commonly used as if it was a footpath or bridleway).

This report is concerned principally with the first two categories (footpaths and bridleways).

The network of PROW is recorded on Definitive Maps and Statements maintained and kept under review by surveying authorities (effectively the local highway authorities, which are county and unitary authorities). However, whilst the definitive map is definitive insofar as what is shown on it, it is not definitive with regards to what is *not* shown. So, if the map shows a route as being a public footpath, then it is legally certain that there is a right for public access on foot. However, there may also be a right to ride a horse (i.e. it is a bridleway) but, for whatever reason, the bridleway status has not been recorded on the map. Some routes are not included on the map at all (so-called 'lost ways'). There are legal processes for the correction of omissions from and errors on the map. In addition, new rights of way can come into existence in various ways; these are discussed further in [Appendix 4](#).



At Shrewley a separate tunnel was built for boat horses but BW byelaws currently do not allow horses on canal towpaths in England and Wales except with specific permission or where designated as a bridleway

The public has a right of access on PROW. However, there are many routes which the public can use with permission (or tolerance – i.e. implied permission) of the landowner. Such routes typically mirror PROW in terms of status; a permissive path may be thought of as a permissive footpath or permissive bridleway. Permissive routes may arise as part of a government grant scheme (e.g. such as the High Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme) or for landowner's altruistic reasons. Some landowners, including some public navigation authorities, have duties to promote access. Permission may be granted subject to certain conditions. It is not uncommon for a route to be a public footpath and a permissive bridleway.



The Offa's Dyke and Severn Way long distance trails use parts of the Montgomery Canal and include towpath sections that are permissive paths, not PROW

Canal towpaths were originally constructed to allow vessels to be towed (whether by horse, man or machines), whereas now (along with routes around/adjacent to reservoirs) most are permissive routes. Responsibility for maintenance of these permissive routes rests with the owner (e.g. the navigation authority). In contrast, many riverside paths are PROW and responsibility for the maintenance of the surface of the path rests with the local highway authority.

A peculiarity of PROW law is that the legal line of a route can only be changed through a legal process. So, if a riverbank that carries a PROW is eroded, the legal line of the PROW does not automatically shift to the new alignment of the river but stays on the legally-defined one. This means that it may be lost to public use. The local highway authority may seek to divert the legal line back onto solid ground, but there is no legal obligation on the owner of this land to accept the diversion.

The definition of inland waterways does not include the coastal zone but, given that some estuaries extend a long way inland, it is worth making a special reference to this. The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 placed a duty on Natural England to create an access corridor around the coastline of England.

It is empowered to do this through amendments to the 1949 Act and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The end result is expected to be a linear route of about 4m width, with rights of public access on foot for recreation. It will extend along rivers upstream to the first suitable crossing point (whether by bridge or ferry). Although similar in many respects to a PROW the linear route will not actually be one nor will it be recorded on the definitive map and statement. Most land between this new linear route and the sea will become a form of open access land together with some land on the landward side (depending on circumstances) (referred to as 'spreading room'). Area-wide access is discussed further below.

The 2009 Act gives powers to the Welsh Assembly Government to introduce legislation to improve public access to the Welsh coast but it currently has no plans to do so. Instead, it is using existing PROW legislation to develop a coastal access route (which, in this case, will be a PROW for most of its length, although there may be some sections of permissive path).

Some paths are developed and actively promoted either by the local highway authority and/or others, usually by mentioning them on websites, producing guides and/or leaflets and, in some cases, special waymarking along the route. There are now approaching 1,000 promoted routes around the country (see the Long Distance Walkers Association website www.ldwa.org.uk for further information).

Although some of these are shown on Ordnance Survey maps, it is worth noting that there are no special access rights associated with promoted routes, including national trails. However, the 1949 Act gives local highway authorities powers to develop long-distance trails and for the national conservation agencies to provide financial support from central government funds to support them.

Area-Wide Access

There are many ways in which the public can have a right of access to an area of land (as distinct from a linear route across land).

These are of limited relevance to waterway paths, mainly in terms of connected access areas, rather than the path itself, so we limit the discussion to a short summary of each type – see **Table 4**.

Table 4 Rights of access in England and Wales

Type of Access	Legislation	Public rights provided
Open access land (mountain, moor, heath, down, registered common land)	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act)	On foot for recreation. Rights can be restricted under various circumstances
Dedicated land	S.16 of the CROW Act	As for open access land
Access agreements or orders over	National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, as amended by the Countryside Act 1968.	Area-wide access on foot for recreation but depends on details of each agreement/order
Spreading room	Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, amending the CROW Act	On foot for recreation. Design is intended to ensure that access is available all day every day
Section 15 land (of the CROW Act)	Law of Property Act 1925 (s193) Access agreements and orders made under National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Special Act of Parliament (e.g. Dartmoor Commons Act 1985) Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979	For 'fresh air and exercise'. Taken to mean on foot and on horseback Depends on order/agreement Depends on the Act Depends on access arrangements
Town and village greens	Various Commons Acts (most recently, the Commons Act 2006) and associated case law	To indulge in lawful sports and pastimes but only applies to residents of the locality or a neighbourhood within a locality
Management Agreements	Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Depends on the agreement
De facto/ Permissive	Customary practices/by permission	Whatever the landowner is prepared to tolerate/permit
Country Parks	Countryside Act 1968	No specific set of rights but typically used for recreation
Agri-environment scheme	Contract law, via agreement between landowner and Natural England	Generally as for open access land

Notes: the power to make orders or agreements over open country was introduced by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The 1949 Act included a definition of open country (at s.59(2)), which was extended by the Countryside Act 1968 (at s.16), which adds to the definition of open country: "(a) any river or canal, and (b) any expanse of water through which a river, or some part of the flow of a river, runs, and (c) a strip of the adjacent land on both sides of any river or canal, or of any such expanse of water, of reasonable width...". S.16(2) also clarifies that "The strip of adjacent land comprised in any access order shall be wide enough to allow passage on foot along the water and wide enough to allow the public to picnic at convenient places and, where practicable, to embark or disembark, and shall include – (a) the banks, walls or embankments along the water, and (b) any towpath or other way or track beside the water." The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 (at s.46(2)) repealed the power to make access agreements or orders over open country but only insofar as to the extent that the types of open country are covered by Part I of the Act. Hence, the power to make orders or agreements over waterside land is still extant. However, it is important to note that only two access orders have been made over the sixty years since the 1949 came into force; more access agreements have been made but these cover 'mountain, moor, heath and down' and are being allowed to expire as CROW has effectively made them obsolete.

Scotland

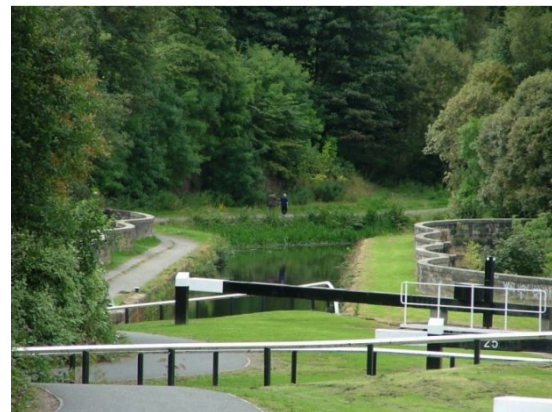
The processes surrounding public access in Scotland vary markedly from those in England and Wales. The status of PROW is similar, although the terms used are perhaps easier to understand (pedestrian, horse, cycle, vehicular or unknown). However, they are also classified according to the strength of their legal status:

- **vindicated:** all routes declared to be rights of way by the courts and which have evidence of continued usage (if necessary); this category also includes routes created by diversion orders and other legal events;
- **asserted:** all routes where either the landowner accepts the route as a right of way, or the local authority has indicated that it would be willing to take court action if required; and
- **claimed:** routes over which claims exist that the route meets the conditions for being a right of way but which have not been vindicated or asserted.

Only a relatively few routes have been fully vindicated (c. 7,000 are recorded in the Scottish Catalogue of Rights of Way). Further information about PROW in Scotland can be found on the website of Scotways¹.

In practice, the significance of PROW in Scotland was much diminished by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, implemented in February 2005. This gives a right of public access to all land in Scotland for non-motorised uses, including land and inland waters. It does not extend to land growing crops or land covered by buildings and their curtilages (such as canal locks and lifts; water treatment and sewage works; and fish farms and hatcheries). There are other exceptions. The right is not restricted to just recreational or educational uses either.

With respect to inland waterways, therefore, the 2003 Act means that walkers, cyclists and horse riders already have a right of access to most inland waterways. In addition, canoeists, rowers, yachtsmen (i.e. users of non-powered water craft), swimmers, divers and so on can also use any water body as of right. The Act confers no right to fish. However, a key feature of all the access rights is that they are subject to the user behaving responsibly. Landowners are also required to act responsibly, too, with respect to public access. This begs the questions “what does ‘responsible’ mean?”; it is defined by the statutory Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).



This towpath by the Forth & Clyde Canal in Glasgow forms part of the National Cycle Network (Route 754) and is accessible to walkers, cyclists and equestrians

The SOAC explains some of the principles of what is responsible. For example, the access right does not extend to activities that are illegal or cause damage (e.g. to pollute water, allowing a dog to enter water intended for use as public water supply). The Code advises users to be aware of and avoid dangers from land (or water) management activities, “routine water discharges from reservoirs and canals, and routine maintenance and repairs on reservoirs, canals or water intakes” and “dredging in rivers, canals and lochs”.

Some user groups, such as the British Horse Society, have produced guidance specific to their type of use – for example in relation to horse riding on canal towpaths.

¹ See:

http://www.scotways.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47:national-catalogue-of-rights-of-way-crow&catid=34:about-rights-of-way&Itemid=66

Other considerations

England and Wales

There are two aspects of the CROW Act that are of possible relevance to inland waterways:

- every local highway authority in England and Wales (except inner London boroughs) was required to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan; and
- every appointing authority (local highway and national park authorities) was required to set up and is required to maintain a Local Access Forum (LAF) for its area. Each forum has certain specific responsibilities and a more general role to advise 'prescribed bodies' on matters relating to public access and recreation in their areas.

A sample of ROWIPs has been reviewed to gain an insight into how waterway paths are considered within such Plans (see [Appendix 3](#)). The response in relation to waterway paths is summarised in the *Opportunities and challenges* chapter.

LAF can have an important part to play in developing access, partly through their involvement in monitoring the implementation by their appointing authority of its ROWIP and partly by advocating proposals for new access developments.

Scotland

The 2003 Act mirrors two provisions in the CROW Act: local authorities are required to produce Core Path Plans (CPP) and to set up Local Access Forums. Further discussion on CPP is included in the *Opportunities and challenges* chapter and in [Appendix 3](#).

Scottish LAF have a remit that is, to all intents and purposes, the same as that of their counterparts in England and Wales.

Existing users and use

Past and current

As with the waterways themselves, the use of waterway paths has shifted over time. No longer are waterways and their paths used predominately for trade and industry (most notably by workers leading the horses that towed barges) but more commonly they are used for recreation.

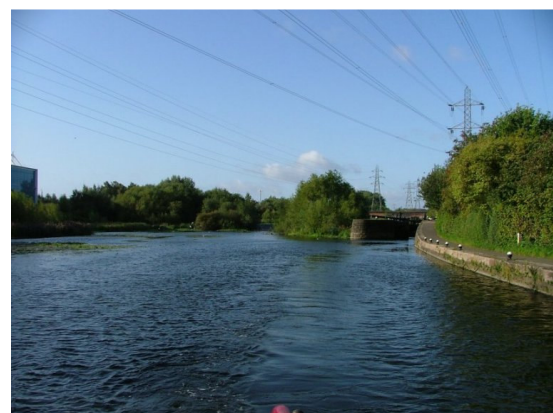
This shift from a functional/utilitarian use to a recreational use is a result of large scale changes in British history and society. The introduction of engine power made horse drawn boats obsolete whilst the population has an increasing amount of leisure time available.



Waterway paths are no longer used by horses towing cargo boats but several trip boats make use of horses, as here on the Godalming Navigation, and the Horseboating Society maintains pressure for towpaths to be available for demonstration of horse towing techniques

At the same time the available waterway path resource has been increasing due to navigation authorities and others making previously unavailable paths accessible and due to waterway restoration increasing the length of path available.

In order to explore the potential of increased use of waterway paths it is important to understand the existing use and users of waterway paths.



Many waterway paths have become essential components of the green infrastructure of urban areas, those along rivers in particular often providing access to a green corridor through towns, as here in Leicester

Although a lot of literature recognises the different types of users and use of waterway paths, specific quantifiable evidence is more limited. There are however two recent key documents that have sought to identify and quantify the current users and use of inland waterways as follows:

- **British Waterways Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report (2010)** - a telephone survey of a national representative sample of adults, amounting to a total of 11522 un-weighted respondents during 2009; and
- **Environment Agency Valuing Waterways Draft Report (2010)** - comprises two distinct surveys: i) a national OMNIBUS telephone survey, achieving a total of 868 adult respondents; and ii) a local community telephone survey of people living within 15km of five Environment Agency river systems (Thames, Medway, Stour and Ancholme, as well as the Nene, Great Ouse and Welland combined), a total of 800 adult responses.

These documents are particularly pertinent as they relate specifically to inland waterways and provide national coverage.

Further data were also obtained from a wide range of stakeholder groups during this study through a questionnaire survey.

Number of visits and visitors

Table 5 shows that the total number of visits to British Waterways (BW) waterways in 2009 was 346.3 million, representing a marked increase from 2008 of 32%. The total number of visits to 'any' inland waterway in 2009 was 914.4 million representing an 8% increase from 2008 (in previous years numbers had been falling year on year).

It should be noted that inland waterways within the BW Inland Waterway Visitor Survey (IWVS) includes canals and navigable rivers (which are part of the scope of this report) but, due to varying levels of familiarity of respondents with waterways, may also include some data on visits to ponds, reservoirs and other inland water bodies.

Table 5 Visits to waterways

Year	Millions of visits	
	BW waterways	All inland waterway visits
2009	346.3	914.4
2008	262.6	844.6
2007	245.3	952.2
2006	268.5	1077.1
2005	297.2	1233.5

Source British Waterways *Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report* (2010)

Uses of waterway paths

The BW IWVS identified the number of visits by activity (see **Table 6**). Although the survey does not distinguish use of the waterways themselves from use of waterway paths, the activity undertaken during the visit is detailed. This demonstrates that the majority of visits are predominately for activities which utilise waterway paths, whilst only a small proportion of visits are for purposes which may not necessarily involve use of waterway paths (for example a visit to a boat).

The figures show:

- the majority of visits (529 million per year - over half) are for walking (including dog walking) alongside a waterway; and
- that water based uses (i.e. fishing, and boating) account for less than 10% of visits.



Walking is the most frequent use of waterway paths

Table 6 Visitor use

Use	Millions of visits p.a.		
	BW waterways	Other waterways	Any inland waterway
Walk/run/ramble	123.1	163.4	286.5
Dog walking	74.9	167.6	242.5
To get somewhere	65.6	80.9	146.5
Running/jogging	27.4	39.2	66.6
Cycling	23.2	30.6	53.8
Fishing	6.6	11.6	18.2
Using path	320.8	493.3	814.1
Attraction	13.8	26.6	40.4
Boat (with engine)	5.5	25.4	30.9
Other	3.4	13.4	16.8
Boating (no engine)	2.8	9.4	12.2
May/may not use path	25.5	74.8	100.3

Source British Waterways *Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report* (2010)

This clearly demonstrates that the majority of people visit waterways do not actively use the waterway but utilise the associated waterway corridor.

The survey did not specifically distinguish between activities that are dependent on the waterway and those that are independent of the water. However visits that were undertaken 'to get somewhere' (approximately 16% of visits) can be interpreted as equating to uses that are independent of the waterway.

Even though some visits may be made by boat on the waterways themselves, these uses are also highly likely to use the associated waterway path to access the water (e.g. to access moorings, to get canoes into the water or for lock operation).

The Environment Agency (EA) *Valuing Waterways* (VW) report concludes, based on the national telephone survey, that:

- 63% of the population surveyed used inland waters and their surrounding area in 2009; using census data, this equates to approximately 27 million visitors per year, an increase of 10% on 2008; and
- 59% of the population used inland waterways for 'recreational purposes' rather than 'active purposes' (see below).

However, it should be noted that inland waterway within the EA VW report is defined as 'any inland water including rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, ponds and canals'.

Similarly to the BW IWVS, the EA VW report does not differentiate between those visits/visitors using waterway paths and those not. However activity/use associated with the visit is identified and categorised as 'active purposes' or 'recreational purposes'.



Some 'active' uses on larger waterways involve little use of waterway paths (River Thames, Oxford) but coaching from the towpath is common on smaller waterways.

'Active purposes' are motor boating, angling and other water sports (including swimming), i.e. activities involving use of the water, where there may or may not be use of a path (although it is likely that a path would be utilised to access the water for these activities).

'Recreational purposes' cover walking/dog walking/rambling, cycling, picnicking, feeding ducks/wildlife, bird/wildlife watching, other, running/jogging, frisbee/playing ball games, kite flying/model boats etc, sunbathing, horse riding, rollerblading/skating and skateboarding.

The proportion of users engaging in each of these 'recreational' activities is shown in **Table 7**. It is likely that all these recreational uses make use of waterway paths. In addition to identifying use by the population as a whole and those that use any inland waterways they also identified use by communities local to named rivers where the EA is the navigation authority.

Table 7 Proportion of visitors by activity

Use	Percentage		
	Proportion of users in national population	National population who are users	Communities local to named EA rivers
Walking/ dog walking	50	84	92
Cycling	6	11	32
Picnicking	6	10	24
Feeding ducks/wildlife	4	7	31
Bird/wildlife watching	3	6	23
Other	3	5	2
Running/jogging	3	4	12
Frisbee/playing ball games	2	3	10
Kite flying/model boats etc	1	1	5
Sunbathing	1	1	7
Horse riding	1	0	1
Rollerblading/ skating	0	-	-
Skateboarding	0	-	-

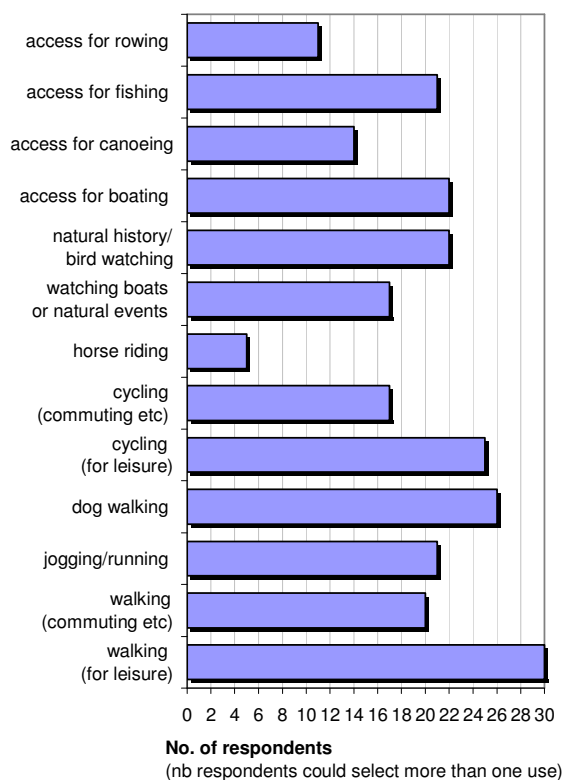
Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)

The findings of this survey indicate the majority of people using waterways (over 80% as a proportion of those recorded as using waterways) are doing so for walking/dog walking and 50% of the national population use waterways for this reason. Cycling and picnicking are also popular activities as are activities associated with natural history.

It is interesting to note that communities local to named EA rivers tend to use the waterway and its corridor more for a diverse range of activities. This possibly indicates waterway corridors are providing the local community with public open space and their use for a variety of activities reflects this.

Based on views of key stakeholders questioned in this study, the main uses of waterways are for walking for leisure, followed by dog walking, cycling for leisure, natural history/bird watching and access for boating associated with the waterways (see **Graph 1**).

Graph 1 Main uses of waterways paths



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

The questionnaire results support the conclusions from the BW and EA surveys that major uses of waterway paths include walking (including dog walking), cycling and access to nature and wildlife. The stakeholder survey also placed access for boating high in the ranking, probably reflecting that this survey covered interested stakeholder bodies rather than the public at large.

In summary:

- the BW and EA surveys indicated that there were 27 million visitors and 914 million visits to inland waterways in 2009;
- the majority would have used/involved paths associated with waterways;
- walking/dog walking is, by a very clear margin, the most popular activity undertaken by visitors to waterways, accounting for 529 million visits;
- over half the national population visited a waterway path for walking in 2009; and
- waterway paths are also used for a wide range of other activities.



Some waterway paths provide convenient cycle commuting routes in urban areas (River Lee, Edmonton)

Although these surveys provide a broad indication of use across a range of waterways, as highlighted through the consultation process, the main users and uses of waterway paths will differ for different waterways paths.

Differences are largely dependent on the characteristics of the paths as well as the path's geography. Waterway paths in lowland areas are flatter and thus more attractive to cyclists and wheelchair/mobility vehicle users. Paths within urban areas will be more heavily used for commuting purposes than, say, a highly rural path, whereas a rural path may have more visitors using the path for bird watching or recreational walking.

Demographics of users

Both the BW IWVS and EA VS sought to determine the demography of inland waterway users see **Table 8**.

Table 8 The demography of visitors to inland waterways

Group	BW waterways	Any inland waterways	Whole population.
Average age (years)	43.7	42.8	
Male	54%	51%	52%
Female	46%	49%	48%
No long term illness, health problem, disability	91%	91%	nk
Long term illness, health problem, disability	9%	9%	nk
White	95%	94%	92%
Non white	5%	6%	8%
Social Grade A	5%	4%	4%
Social Grade B	18%	14%	22%
Social Grade C1	29%	29%	21%
Social Grade C2	22%	23%	29%
Social Grade D	10%	10%	16%
Social Grade E	16%	20%	8%
Social Grade C2DE	48%	53%	53%
Visitors with children aged 0-5	6%	7%	
Visitors with children aged 6-10	4%	5%	
Visitors with children aged 11-15	5%	6%	
Visitor parties with any aged 0-15	13%	15%	

Source British Waterways *Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report* (2010)



Some cultural groups are generally under-represented as users of waterway paths

Conclusions set out in the BW report are:

- compared with the GB adult population as a whole, the age-group under-represented among BW waterway visitors is those aged 65 or over;
- the proportion of visitors to BW waterways with a long illness, health problem or disability has declined in 2009;
- the proportion of visitors from ethnic minorities is lower than in the population overall; and
- the proportion of visitors to BW waterways within social grades C2DE has increased but is still lower than the population overall (social grades are grouped into ABC1 and C2DE to represent upper/middle class and working class respectively).

The EA VW national survey indicates similar conclusions:

- people from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to visit waterways than those from lower socio-economics groups; and
- uses of waterways generally decreases with age with over half (54%) of over 65s being non-users (compared to 39% of those aged 45-64, 27% of those aged 25-44 and 35% of 18-24 year olds).

These findings suggest that users who are currently under-represented or in decline either based on previous studies or the national population are those:

- **over 65;**
- **with a long term illness, health problem or disability;**
- **from ethnic minorities; and**
- **who are working class.**



Visitors to the Severn Estuary watching the Severn Bore from the Gloucestershire Way path near Minsterworth

Categories of users and use

Summary

Waterway paths have various types of users and types of uses. Broad types of users include: pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

However within these broad groupings people 'use' the environments in very different ways. Main uses that have been identified through literature research, the on line questionnaire sent to key stakeholders and the case studies include:

- walking (for leisure);
- walking (commuting to work/schools/shops);
- jogging/running;
- dog walking;
- cycling (for leisure);
- cycling (commuting to work/schools; getting to the shops etc);
- horse riding;
- access to private property;
- going to the pub;
- picnicking;
- playing games;
- sunbathing;
- rollerblading/skating;
- feeding ducks;
- natural history/bird watching associated with the waterway and its corridor;
- watching boats, locks working, natural events (e.g. tidal bore);
- access for boat use (house boats, moorings, commercial boats, private boats etc);
- access for canoeing/canoe portage;
- access for fishing; and
- access for rowing.

Although the majority of these uses can generally be applicable to a range of paths or public open spaces, the last seven uses distinguish waterway paths as being different. These are dependent on the waterways whilst the other uses may be related to the waterway but not necessarily. Water based and waterway related uses are described below.

Water-based uses

Activities such as canoeing, rowing, boating etc are not in themselves utilising waterway paths (they utilise the waterway) but it is important to consider use of paths incidental to:

- boating (including use of the waterway path for mooring and lock operation);
- access to fishing sites (including use of the waterway corridor/path for angling);
- maintenance of the waterway (repairs to canals, collection of monitoring data);
- horse boating;
- canoe portaging; and
- rowing coaches on bicycles etc.

These 'incidental' uses are considered to be within the scope of this study.



Boat crew often make use of towpaths to walk or cycle ahead of the boat to prepare locks

Waterway related uses - dependent

This category includes recreational access and tourism where the waterway environment is an attractor in itself but where water-based activity is not involved. Example of activities associated with this category include

- walking/dog walking/jogging/running (where the waterway is an attractor);
- cycling (where the waterway is an attractor);
- horse riding (where the waterway is an attractor);
- watching boats/viewing locks/watching a tidal bore; and
- natural history/bird watching associated with the waterway.



Waterway paths provide access for wildlife watching

Waterway related uses - independent

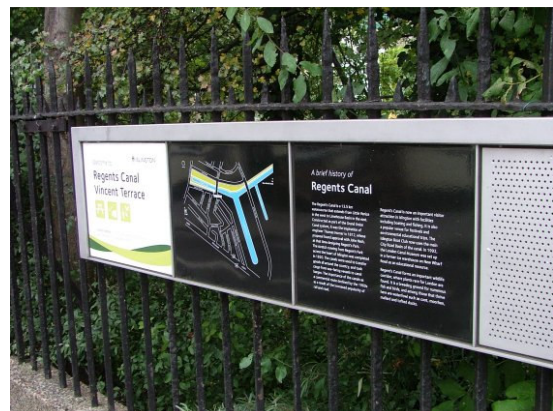
These uses include use of waterway paths for travel (e.g. to work or community facilities), where the demand is for a suitable path, which may or may not be along a waterway.

Example activities associated with this category include:

- walking/dog walking;
- jogging/running;
- cycling; and
- horse riding.

In summary waterway paths are used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders for:

- **recreation (both water related and non related activities);**
- **access (for waterway related uses); and**
- **personal transport (as a movement corridor between places).**



Waterway paths provide valuable green infrastructure in inner cities – this panel welcomes users in Islington with background information on the canal and its history

Issues associated with use of waterway paths

Issues associated with multi-functional use of waterways paths vary between users but can include:

- conflict between different users (between cyclists and pedestrians in particular);
- conflict between land uses/landowners and waterway paths users (e.g. in relation to security, privacy, health and safety);
- different users often disagree over the optimum path surface/maintenance;
- the poor quality of the waterway environment in some areas;
- lack of connectivity with other paths and public transport;
- lack of visitor facilities/information (covering aspects as diverse as car parking, cafes and path access and route information);
- access to the paths may be poorer than the quality of the waterway path itself, deterring access by certain categories of user;
- legal status of paths (what one can and cannot do on paths);
- personal safety, crime, vandalism and antisocial behaviour issues; and
- health and safety issues.

These issues are explored more in the chapters on *Opportunities and challenges* and *Proposals and delivery*.



Waterway paths in urban areas are often hidden from view – inviting users onto the paths and providing information on access points can be important



Some urban towpaths have few access points (low permeability). This can discourage use as people feel trapped and thus more vulnerable to threats by others

Existing management

Effective management is essential to provide good access and gain the maximum benefit to the community from waterway paths. This includes maintenance of the paths and links for different types of user, as well as wardening, signage and marketing. Many different partners are involved in management of waterway paths.

On a permissive path, the landowner is responsible for all aspects of the path's maintenance unless there is an agreement with (say) the local highway authority to share some of the burden.

Introduction

An important factor in the development of access opportunities, and sustaining them in the longer term, is the question of responsibility for maintenance and (by implication) how resources are found for doing this.

Responsibilities and funding

PROW and permissive paths

There are important difference between PROW and permissive routes when it comes to maintenance and liabilities. With respect to PROW, the responsibilities for the route are divided between landowner and local highway authority as set out in **Table 9**.



Waymarks on the River Lee

Table 9 Responsibilities of highway authorities and landowners regarding PROW

Roles and responsibilities of highway authorities with respect to PROW
• Maintain the surface of highways and control vegetation (other than crops) on the surface of field-edge paths and those enclosed by hedges, fences or walls and on set-aside land; • Maintain bridges over natural water courses including farm ditches (if the ditch was there when the path was first recorded); • Provide signposts where public rights of way leave metalled roads (highway authorities may also waymark public rights of way, after consulting the landowner); • Assert and protect the public's right to use public rights of way; • Secure the removal of obstructions; • Respond to notices served by members of the public requiring action to be taken over obstructions, or the maintenance of the surface of a public right of way and any subsequent order from a magistrates' court; • Ensure that there are no false or misleading notices that deter the public from using paths shown on the definitive map; the authority could prosecute anyone who displays such notices; • Take action, in default where necessary, to ensure that the duties of others are carried out; • Take account of the accessibility of the local rights of way network to those with mobility problems or visual impairment when preparing Rights of Way Improvement Plans; • Provide a minimum 25 per cent contribution towards any costs incurred by a landowner in maintaining gates or stiles on public rights of way, when requested to do so by the landowner.

Roles and responsibilities of landowners and occupiers with respect to PROW

- Keep public rights of way clear of any obstructions, such as padlocked gates, rubbish, barbed wire, slurry, manure, electric fences, hedgerows and chained or loose dogs (although the landowner is not responsible for whatever may grow on the surface, not planted by him/her, and which interferes with use of the way);
- Warn users about potential dangers (e.g. slurry lagoons, quarries, deep water) near public rights of way with appropriate notices;
- Fence-off abandoned quarries and plug old mine shafts where failure to do so would constitute a statutory nuisance;
- Cut back vegetation encroaching from the sides, and above, so that it does not inconvenience the public or prevent the line of the public right of way being apparent on the ground. Occupiers do not have responsibility for the surface of a public right of way except such as where crops (or 'volunteers' from previous crops) are growing on the surface or where they have failed to adequately maintain their drainage systems;
- Keep paths clear of crops (other than hay and grass silage) to ensure that they do not inconvenience users;
- Ensure that gates and stiles on public rights of way (where necessary and authorised) are maintained in good order; a minimum contribution of 25 per cent of the cost of works may be claimed by the occupier from the highway authority (some authorities provide materials, for example stile kits, and others may carry out the work themselves);
- Provide adequate bridges where, with the permission of the highway authority, new ditches are made or existing ones widened;
- Ensure that field-edge footpaths, bridleways, any restricted byway, byways open to all traffic or other public roads over which there are public vehicular rights are never cultivated;
- Ensure that paths over cultivated land remain apparent on the ground, to at least the minimum width, at all times and are not obstructed by growing crops;
- Ensure that bulls are not kept in a field crossed by a public right of way unless they do not exceed 10 months old; or are not of a recognised dairy breed and are accompanied by cows or heifers. The keeper of the stock should ensure that any warning notices are displayed only when a bull is present in a field;
- Never keep an animal known to be aggressive (including any bull of whatever breed) where the public has access – animals with young can be a threat in some circumstances;
- Ensure that no misleading signs are placed near public rights of way that might discourage access;
- Take into account the needs of disabled people whenever providing a service to the public.

Certain public bodies have duties towards access to waterways. For example, although British Waterways is not obliged to provide a public right of access, s.22 of the British Waterways Act 1995 requires them, insofar as is consistent with duties to protect the environment and heritage, to have regard to the desirability of preserving for the public any freedom of access to towing paths and open land and especially to places of natural beauty. They must similarly have regard to the desirability of maintaining the availability to the public of any facility for visiting or inspecting any building, site or object of archaeological, architectural, engineering or historic interest. There is a specific requirement to take into account the needs of persons who are chronically sick or disabled. Similar obligations are placed on some other bodies with large land holdings, for example water undertakers (under s.3(3) of the Water Industry Act 1991).

The Environment Agency similarly has duties under s.7 of the Environment Act 1995, in relation to freedom of access to areas of woodland, mountains, moor, heath, down, cliff or foreshore and other places of natural beauty and in relation to buildings, sites or objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest.

They also have a duty under s.6 (1) generally to promote wildlife conservation in relation to water and associated land, as well as to promote the use of such waters and land for recreational purposes. The duties of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency under the Water Resources Act 1991 are similar. Of course, the duties of the environment agencies are not confined to navigable or formerly navigable waterways.

Relevance to waterway paths

In the case of some navigations, the towpath is a PROW; for example, on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation, Essex Waterways Ltd is funded by Essex County Council to keep grass mown and the Council pays for major repairs, such as footbridges.

Where towpaths are not PROW, then the maintenance responsibility (and liabilities associated with that) will rest with the landowner, usually the navigation authority, unless this has been passed on to a third party by agreement.

Many paths alongside rivers are PROW and so maintainable by the local highway authority. However, there are many examples of paths alongside rivers/water bodies which are not PROW but which are in public ownership (e.g. owned by the local authority, the Forestry Commission) and are made available and maintained by the authority for public use.



The mainly rural towpath on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation is a public right of way

The responsibility for maintaining waterway paths which are created by developers will depend on how the development is managed after completion. If the local highway authority is willing to see a route become a PROW (through express dedication of the landowner – i.e. the developer), then it will become maintainable at public expense. However, the local highway authority may ask the developer to contribute a commuted sum for future development, especially if there are structures (e.g. bridges) associated with the PROW.

As noted above, if a route is a PROW, the local highway authority is responsible for the maintenance of the PROW's surface. However, it cannot be guaranteed that sufficient resources are available to maintain the network. A further complication is that there are no fixed standards to which PROW must be maintained. The standard requirement is for it to be, in effect, 'fit for purpose'.

Planning gain

In line with their duties, the Environment Agency, British Waterways and other navigation authorities take opportunities where they can to promote access in their responses to consultation on waterside planning applications and to obtain benefit for waterside paths through the planning process.

Standards, monitoring and maintenance

In relation to public rights of way, maintenance and monitoring are closely linked. Some background is probably of value when considering how the public right of way approach can 'fit' with that which could be used on inland waterway corridors.

As discussed above, local highway authorities have a general duty to secure PROW for public use (e.g. kept clear from obstructions) and have a specific duty to maintain the surface of the way. In order to monitor the extent to which local highway authorities met their general duty, a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) was devised (number BVPI 178²). This was a standard method (agreed amongst rights of way professional bodies) used to assess 'ease of use' of public rights of way within an authority area. The value for the indicator was derived from:

- a 5% sample of the network;
- half surveyed in November and half in May (to reflect different conditions in different seasons);
- scores based on the ease with which a person could navigate the route using a 1:25,000 scale OS map but no compass; and
- 'pass/fail' observations (e.g. whether a sign was in place if the selected route abutted a metalled road – as is required by law).

Most authorities achieved scores of around 70%. The monitoring of ease of use using the BVPI approach is no longer mandatory but many authorities still use it as a useful tool for internal management.

Although the BVPI provides a useful indicator for comparison with other highway authorities, it is a blunt tool when it comes to specific management needs. Therefore, some authorities adopt an approach which requires them to survey all of their network each year and to log work requirements, with different

² For further detail about the monitoring of PROW, see Countryside Agency (2006) *Public Rights of Way, a review of provision by highway authorities*, Research note CRN100, May 2006, available at <http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/CRN100> and the full report: Asken Ltd (2005) *Research on monitoring local authority provision of public rights of way*.

priorities based on the type of problem (for example, a risk to public health and safety would usually receive a high priority, whilst encroachment of vegetation may be a lesser one). By adopting such an approach, authorities are better able to programme work and also have in place a defence should a claim for damages be submitted by someone injured whilst using a PROW.

Another variant is that used by Devon County Council. This has divided the network into three categories – gold, silver and bronze, with gold being the heavily used routes and bronze the least popular. Inspection and maintenance regimes are geared to reflect the different standards.

A further complication is that there is no set standards against which the condition of PROW can be judged. However, in the absence of any legal standard, many authorities now adopt BS 5709:2006 *Gaps, Gates and Stiles*³ as the basis for their work. Special standards are available where routes are intended for use by people with disabilities – see below.

AINA has published standards for towpaths covering surface, drainage, width, barriers, closures and signage for different types of towpath, as well as standards for maintaining the environs, based on the level of use⁴.

Access for disabled people

The Disability Discrimination Acts (of 1995 and 2005) impose a duty on service providers to take reasonable steps, when providing their service, to make them accessible to people with disabilities. It is important to note that there is a test of reasonableness – costs of making the provision should not be disproportionate to the benefits. What this means in practice will depend, to some extent, on case law as it develops; as yet, there has been little case law of direct relevance to making better use of inland waterway corridors. For the moment, guidance can be obtained from the relevant authorities.

There are two main sources of guidance available:

- Fieldfare Trust – *Countryside for All*⁵; and
- Natural England - *By All Reasonable Means*⁶;

The Fieldfare Trust standards are seen as something of a 'gold standard' to aspire to where a high cost solution is justified. However, in practice, many routes will have sections that are popular and others that are more remote and so less likely to be of interest to disabled users. The Natural England guidance recognises this by suggesting that a route is divided into A, B and C zones, with 'A' being designed and constructed to the highest standard and 'C' to a lesser standard.



The towpath at Hatton Locks provides good access for mobility vehicles

Appendix 1 of the publication sets out standards for the 'ideal' and for each of the three zones.

- Zone A – Provides access for **most** people, especially those with mobility impairment.
- Zone B – Provides access for **many** people, especially those with mobility impairment.
- Zone C – Provides access for **some** people, especially those with mobility impairment.

³ BS 5709:2006 Gaps, Gates and Stiles – Specification; see <http://products.ihs.com/cis/Doc.aspx?AuthCode=&DocNum=278277>

⁴ AINA (2003) *Defining waterway standards: Guidance for navigation authorities*.

⁵ Fieldfare Trust (2005) *A Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People*, see http://www.fieldfare.org.uk/?page_id=53

⁶ Countryside Agency (2005) *By all reasonable means: inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people*, Research report CA215, May 2006, available at <http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/CA215>

There is such a wide range of possible disabilities that it is difficult to be prescriptive about standard, however. Consequently, it is vitally important, when providing access for the disabled, that good information is available, as this enables the disabled person him/herself (or his/her carer/assistant) to determine for themselves whether a route is within their capacity to complete.

Zone A should be considered a priority for paths that are most likely to be used by the mobility-impaired, e.g. paths close to towns (where there are larger populations who can benefit from these paths) and at honey-pot sites which attract a relatively high number of visitors.

Links

Waterway paths form part of a wider network of paths and maintenance of links from other forms of transport and from other paths is a critical factor in encouraging use of a waterway path.



Lower Heyford Station, immediately adjacent to the Oxford Canal towpath walk, with signposting from the station and detailed information boards along the walks

Clearly there is a need for these links to be designed and maintained to the same standard as the waterway paths. This can necessitate co-operation between different authorities (e.g. the navigation authority and the local highway authority) and appears to work best where a partnership approach is applied, as is the case for many promoted long distance paths.

In some cases partnerships have involved public transport providers, for example, the North Oxford Canal Partnership includes British Waterways, local businesses and Great Western Trains, who have introduced summer Sunday train services to local stations along the Oxford Canal, accompanied by leaflets promoting the Oxford Canal towpath walk.

Staffing/wardening

Although it is not realistic to provide constant staffing across the whole network of waterway paths, use of wardens and other public-facing staff can provide a useful contribution to reducing antisocial behaviour and inter-user conflict, particularly in urban areas. Examples include patrolling of waterway paths by local authority staff, often linked to park staffing, presence of licence enforcement staff by navigation authorities and volunteer wardens at mooring areas, who may be offered a concession on boat mooring fees in return.



Oxford City Council wardens at work on the towpath

Responsible residential use of boats at mooring sites should be encouraged, to provide a presence which can discourage antisocial behaviour and in some locations such residential boat owners are paid to provide maintenance services as well as acting as a security presence.

Signage and interpretation

Direction signs

It is a legal requirement (on the local highway authority) for PROW to be signposted from where it meets the metalled highway network pointing in the direction of the PROW. However, there is no requirement for routes to be waymarked or for other information (e.g. destination details and distances or interpretation), although this is encouraged as it helps reduce risk of trespass and, by giving users reassurance and useful information, can enhance enjoyment. The local highway authority will normally try to waymark PROW in collaboration with the landowner.

On permissive paths, much will depend on what the landowner finds acceptable.

On open access land, there is no legal requirement to erect signage (other than a requirement NOT to erect misleading signs). However, the access authority can erect signs containing the open access land symbol where users come onto land or the 'end of open access land' symbol where users leave such land.



Open access land symbol

For waterway paths, the route of the path will usually be fairly clear and defined by the presence of the adjacent waterway; this is a key attraction of waterway paths.



Comprehensive direction sign on a waterway path in London, including confirmation of present location

The extent of detailed direction signage and maps typically depends on whether a path is actively promoted and on the level and type of use. In general, there is an expectation that recreational users of paths in rural areas will take steps to obtain maps and guides, whereas in urban areas, where the balance of use is more likely to tend towards commuting and casual use, signage may be more important in achieving the maximum use (and thus benefit) from the path.



Pond dipping platform and interpretative sign on former side pond at Stoke Bruerne Locks (Grand Union Canal)

Other signage

Other signs may cover safety information or interpretation of features of interest and the local cultural or natural heritage.

Provision of safety signage varies greatly between authorities, with bodies such as the Environment Agency providing extensive safety signage at all their navigation structures, while British Waterways tends to restrict signage to a limited range of specific hazards (for example overhead power lines in relation to use of carbon fibre fishing poles).



Environment Agency safety signs at Welches Dam Lock in the Fens

Interpretative signage is, as would be expected, focussed on the busiest paths, particularly at places of particular interest which are significant recreational destinations.

Issues regarding signs

Signage is a controversial issue in some locations, with excessive numbers of signs, as well as the style of some signs, regarded as out of keeping with the (often historic or natural) waterway environment.

Excessive numbers of safety signs may not be the best way of communicating safety messages and their installation may sometimes be driven more by a perceived need to provide a defence in any legal challenge rather than by demonstrated effectiveness in reducing risk to users.

There is also the issue of achieving the right balance between the use of words, which may not be understood by non-English speakers, and use of symbols, which may be equally incomprehensible to some.

Signs are prone to theft and vandalism and designs have been evolved to minimise the chance of the former and to be as resistant as possible to the latter.

Marketing

There is no duty on a local highway or access authority to promote use of PROW/access land in their areas, although all do so in one form or another. However, with budgets under severe pressure, the resources devoted to non-statutory duties may be sacrificed, leading to the promotional material becoming less valuable as it becomes dated.

Research done by local highway authorities while preparing their ROWIPs revealed that, in many cases, the public felt that insufficient information was available to allow them to decide to use a route.

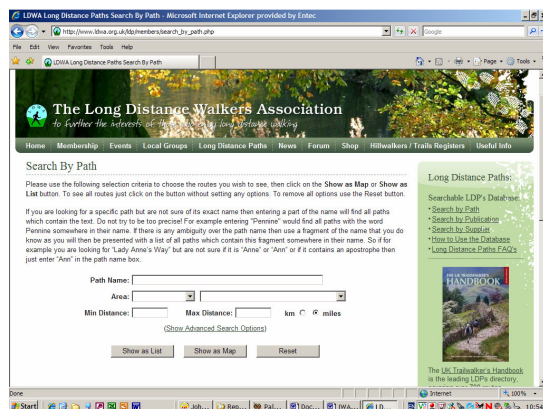
Navigation authorities produce numerous guides to waterway paths, including participating in leaflets describing complete walks including sections away from the waterway. The waterscape website (www.waterscape.com) also provides information on paths, although the quality varies between waterways under different jurisdictions – some navigation authorities have been more pro-active than others.



Public signs, as here at Heyford Station, can perform a marketing function to passing travellers as well as reassuring those already committed to a visit

Published waterway guides aimed mainly at boaters are also including increasing amounts of information on waterway paths, widening their potential value to include other users.

Voluntary groups also produce a wide range of guidance, often aimed at the specific interests of their membership.



The Long Distance Walkers' Association website contains a searchable database of over 1200 named paths and trails, many including waterway paths



Regular information boards along a waterway path can reassure users that they are on the right path and enhance enjoyment by highlighting features of interest

Opportunities and challenges

Understanding why people use or don't use waterway paths is essential if action is to be taken to increase use. The waterway environment is an attraction to most users but must be conserved and protected. Benefits of waterway paths are not always well recognised in public policies and strategies. Landowners must be brought on board, access rights considered, ongoing maintenance assured and funding secured. This chapter discusses these challenges and opportunities.

What attracts people to waterway paths

The main factors influencing people's use of waterway paths identified through the on-line stakeholder questionnaire are shown in **Graph 2**. These are consistent with data from literature research and the case studies.

Based on views of key stakeholders questioned **the main factors influencing people's use of waterways are:**

- **attractive views and scenery;**
- **away from the traffic;**
- **quiet and tranquil;**
- **close to home; and**
- **well maintained.**

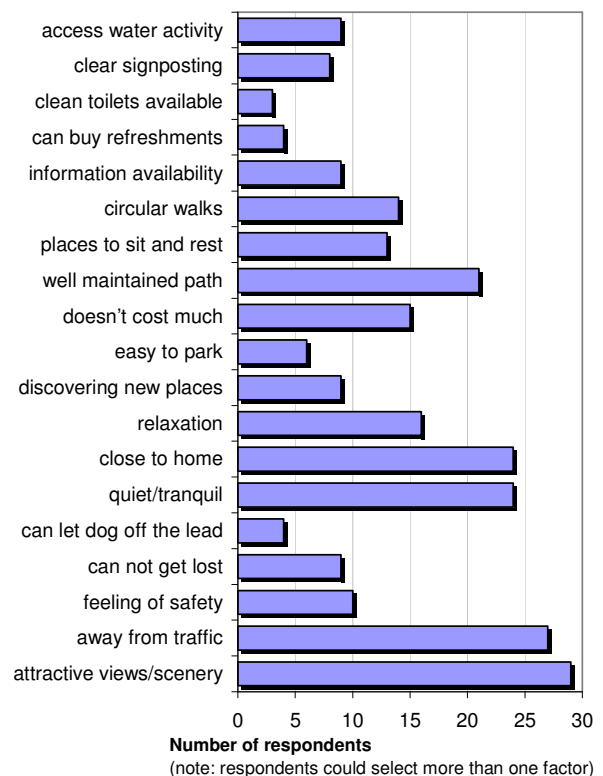
Over 60% of respondents identified these as being main factors in influencing people's views.

In terms of attractive views and scenery the waterway associated with the waterway path is in itself a key draw. Even though some waterway paths and corridors may not immediately be considered 'attractive' their relative attractiveness compared to the surrounding environment may be high and often provides a welcome contrast.

Being away from the traffic will be a key draw for cyclists, in particular those new to cycling and those less confident on the road. Lack of traffic is also important to those with children who may be concerned over safety and for walkers who do not want to share highways with motorised vehicles. As well as providing a

safer environment, the lack of traffic also makes the environment more pleasant. There is a lack of noise, air pollution and visual intrusion associated with motorised vehicles.

Graph 2 Main factors influencing people's choice of waterways paths



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

Relativity is also significant when considering the quietness and tranquillity that attracts people to waterway paths. Waterway paths, particular in urban areas, provide a contrast to the surrounding environment - a place where you can get away from the hustle and bustle of the urban environment. Although the environment may not be as peaceful and tranquil, as say a moor, it is often relatively quiet and tranquil compared to the wider environment in which it is located which is important.

The fact that waterway paths are located close to people's homes is an important factor influencing use. Waterways are located within both rural and urban environments across much of GB and hence are located in close proximity to large proportions of the population.



The Thames Path Trail in London

Having a well maintained path will mean users do not have to use specialised footwear, risk of accidents due to slipping is reduced and the route is likely to be more accessible to a variety of users (for example cyclists and wheelchair users). Well designed paths also 'lay out' the route for the users by good signage, meaning there is less dependency on maps and a lesser risk of users accidentally going 'off route'.

It is important to recognise different factors will attract different users and also different paths will have different attractors dependent on its characteristics/geographic location. For example being away from the traffic will be a key draw for cyclists, whilst those walking for leisure will be attracted by the associated views and scenery.

In addition it is often the combination of a range of different factors that make a given waterway path attractive. For example visitors use the Thames Path National Trail within London due to a combination of the relatively pleasant environment, being traffic-free and ease of passage along a well maintained path. In contrast some paths, for example the towpath over the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, are a draw to people for the attractive views and scenery they offer.

Considering the main factors influencing use it can be seen that they are a result of both:

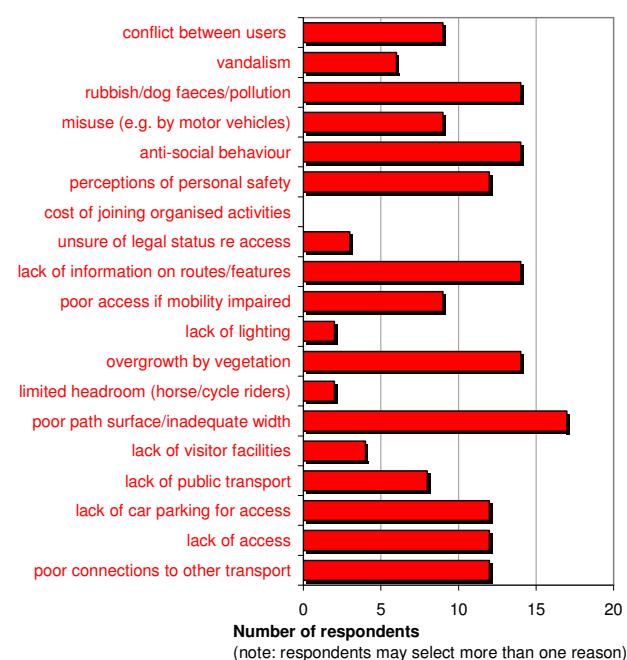
- **inherent characteristics of the waterway and its surrounding environment; and**
- **management of the waterway path and its surrounding environment.**

What discourages use

Factors discouraging people from using waterway paths

Factors relating to path provision that discourage people from using waterway paths identified through literature research and the on-line questionnaire are shown in **Graph 3**.

Graph 3 Main factors that discourage use



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

The EA VW national survey also identified the reasons why people have not used inland waterways within the last 12 months see **Table 10**. It also identified, within communities local to named EA rivers, barriers to initiating usage amongst non-users and increasing it amongst current users - see **Tables 11 and 12**.

Table 10 Reasons for not using waterways

Reason	% of non-users
Health/disability/too old	26
Activities don't appeal/boring	22
Don't live near a waterway	18
Lack of time/too busy	17
Too far away	6
Prefer other activities	4
Family issues/children too young	3
Personal safety concerns/crime	3
Don't like water	3
Weather	2
Poor transport links	2
No/poor disabled access	2
Lack of facilities	1
Too expensive	0
Go abroad	0
Poor surrounding area/poor condition of water	0

Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)

Table 11 Barriers to non-users within communities local to named EA rivers

Barrier	Applies to me (%)	
	Definitely	Somewhat
Busy doing other things	32	25
Live too far away	20	21
Not interested in outdoor activities	8	15
Environment is not clean (litter/dog mess/graffiti)	6	12
Water sports cost too much	5	8
I don't feel safe around the local river	4	6
Not comfortable with people that go there	3	4

Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)

Table 12 Barriers to increased use within communities local to named EA rivers

Barrier	Applies to me (%)	
	Definitely	Somewhat
Too busy doing other things	21	26
Lack of facilities (toilets, parking etc)	19	24
Too expensive (boating etc)	8	12
Not suitable for children	4	8
It's too busy	4	11
I live too far away	4	8
Don't feel safe	4	9

Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)

Based on the EA survey and the views of key stakeholders questioned, the main things that discourage use include:

- **lack of time;**
- **little appeal of waterways;**
- **poor path provision and maintenance;**
- **access (including distance, parking, public transport);**
- **rubbish/dog faeces/graffiti;**
- **adverse perceptions of visitor safety; and**
- **antisocial behaviour.**



Inexpensive improvements, such as provision of benches, as here by the Trent & Mersey Canal near Alrewas, may provide significant benefits in terms of encouraging use of waterway paths by less active users

These deterrents to increased use can be classed as:

- **'personal/lifestyle factors'**, i.e. inland waterways do not appeal/prefer other activities/lack of time; and
- **geographical factors**, i.e. don't live near a waterway/too far away/poor access; and
- **standards of maintenance**.

Importance of the surrounding environment

Landscape, townscape and heritage interest

The landscape and cultural heritage importance of waterway paths is well recognised. Several waterways pass through Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (for example the Kennet & Avon Canal passes through the North Wessex Downs AONB and Cotswolds AONB, the Wye Valley AONB and the Tamar Valley AONB focus upon their respective waterways), while the Broads are in effect a national park. In Scotland, the Crinan Canal passes through the Knapdale National Scenic Area. Many waterways pass through conservation areas and some, for example the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation, are conservation areas along their whole length.

There are also numerous building, bridges, locks, mills and weirs associated with the waterways that are listed buildings or scheduled monuments.



Traffic-free waterside paths give access to historic Albert Dock in the World Heritage city of Liverpool

Some are so important that they are inscribed as World Heritage Sites (e.g. Antonine Wall on the Union Canal, Hadrian's Wall on the River Tyne, Saltaire on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on the Llangollen Canal, Derwent Valley Mills on the Cromford Canal, Maritime Greenwich on the Thames and the cities of Liverpool and Bath).

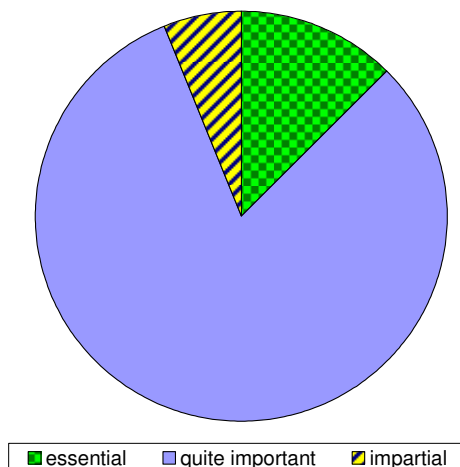


Interest can be added to waterway paths by presentation of personal stories about waterway characters or visitors

As can be seen from **Graph 4**, the majority of consultees surveyed through the on-line questionnaire (79%) felt the landscape/ townscape and cultural heritage interest surrounding waterway paths is 'quite important' to users. The following points were noted by consultees:

- for some users it will be very important (i.e. the main reason for using a path) but for others it will not be as important;
- the waterway landscape is seen as different from other path landscapes;
- opinions will depend upon people's motive for using paths;
- opinions will depend on location;
- people's views depend on awareness;
- people are interested in their past and like to connect with how things used to be; and
- the landscape/ townscape and cultural heritage interest adds to the experience.

Graph 4 Importance of the landscape/ townscape and cultural heritage to users



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

The BW IWVS identifies that the mean score agreeing with the statement that canals are “an important part of the nation’s heritage” is 1.6 (with 2 being agree strongly).

The EA VW survey asked users of EA managed rivers about the importance of rivers to the community. The statement ‘visit places of interest because of heritage’ ranked sixth out of nine statements with 58% of respondents scoring this statement eight or more out of ten in terms of its importance to the local community.



Mown path with woodland and reed fringes to the waterway at Sudbury (River Stour, Suffolk), providing a multi-user permissive path with low visual intrusion

Public art

The attractiveness of waterway paths for recreational use is enhanced in many places by using the waterway as an art trail, particularly for sculpture. Examples of waterways with such trails range from larger waterways such as the tidal River Tyne to the Coventry Canal. In other places more isolated art works form part of a wider visitor attraction, such as at Foxton Locks.



Swan seat on the Trent & Mersey Canal

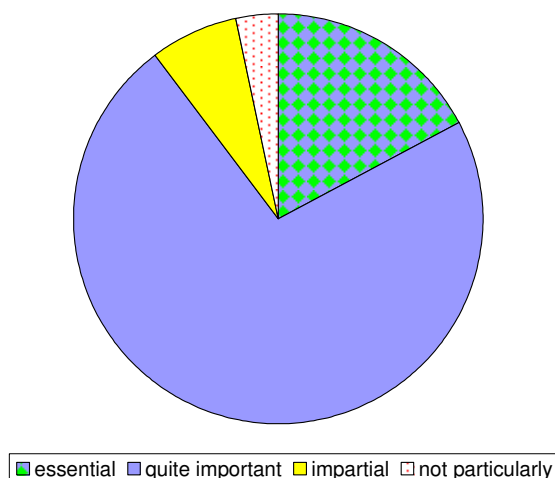
A series of sculptures telling a story can encourage use of waterway paths over longer distances. An example is the Somerset Space Walk on the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal, where sculptures of the sun and planets in our Solar System are presented along six miles of canal towpath in their proportionally correct sizes and distances apart.

Nature conservation

Canals and rivers and their surrounding corridors provide a variety of habitats with associated flora and fauna. A large number of waterways and their surrounding corridors are designated nature conservation sites be it international (e.g. part of the Montgomery Canal is a ‘Special Area of Conservation’) national (e.g. much of the Basingstoke Canal and parts of the Rochdale Canal are Sites of Special Scientific Interest) or local designations. Also waterway structures, for example tunnels, will often accommodate protected species such as bats.

As can be seen from **Graph 5**, the majority of consultees surveyed within our research (70%) felt that nature conservation interest is ‘quite important’ to users.

Graph 5 Importance of nature conservation interest to users



The following points were noted by consultees:

- for some users it will be very important (i.e. the main reason for using a path) but for others it will not be as important;
- this interest sets the waterway path aside from the urban pathway;
- opinions will depend upon people's motive for using paths;
- opinions depends on location;
- waterway paths enable you to see wildlife and plants on and off the water; and
- nature conservation interest is incidental to the walking experience.

(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

The BW IWVS identifies that the mean score agreeing with the statement that canals are "*full of wildlife*" is 1.26 (with 2 being agree strongly).

The EA VW survey asked users of EA managed rivers about the importance of rivers to the community. The statement 'somewhere people can go and enjoy wildlife, natural world and relax' ranked first out of nine statements with 72% of respondents scoring this statement eight plus out of ten in terms of its importance to the local community.

Overall therefore, **landscape, visual, cultural and wildlife quality are important factors in attracting users to waterway paths.**

What can be done to encourage greater use

The EA VW surveys have identified what can be done to improve existing use of local rivers (**Table 13**) and how likely different factors are to encourage greater use by local communities (**Table 14**).

Table 13 Improvements to increase use of local rivers

Improvement	% of local community
More facilities (e.g. cafes/toilets/boat hire)	16
Better paths	14
Cleaner environment/dog bins	13
Better/free parking	10
Improved access	6
Public transport	2
Safer/wardens	2
Don't know	13
Nothing to improve	25



Where practicable, urban paths should be wide enough to allow cycling and walking without conflict, as here in Oxford. Mutual understanding is also required and appears to be high in places such as Oxford, where cycling is well accepted throughout the town.

Table 14 Likelihood of improvement encouraging greater use

Improvement	Very likely to encourage greater use %		
	Active user	Recreational user	Non user
Better/free parking	43	45	31
Cleaner water/less pollution	40	39	20
Activities or events for families	40	32	21
Clearly marked footpath and walks	40	47	25
More information about facilities and activities	40	38	24
More or better cafes, bars etc	37	35	22
Less litter or cleaner environment	28	36	23
Improved paths for bikes, prams and wheelchairs	26	34	22
Better lighting in winter/late evening	20	27	17
More water sports e.g. canoeing	19	15	10
Better public transport	15	19	15

Thus factors that could encourage greater use of waterway paths identified through the BW and EA surveys, literature research and the on line questionnaire sent to key stakeholders include:

- improved path quality and maintenance (including vegetation management);
- improved access for all types of user;
- promotion of shared use;
- better information and promotion, including signage and promotional material (possibly utilising ipod downloads);
- provision of circular routes;
- provision of parking/seating/cafés/toilets; and
- increased capacity at busy points (possibly by use of alternative walking/cycling routes).

Conclusions regarding encouraging greater use

By considering

- what attracts people to waterway paths,
- what discourages use, and
- the importance of the surrounding environment;

certain factors emerge that will encourage greater use of waterway paths. These aspects are discussed in detail below, with the highest priority aspects placed first, and are summarised in **Box 2**.

- **The continued provision of well maintained paths**, with a good path surface and well controlled vegetation, plus widening where possible, will attract a wider variety of users. However care needs to be taken that the surface used is both appropriate for existing and future users and appropriate for the local environment (care should be taken that rural routes are not unduly urbanised). Again this is somewhat easier to control where the path landowners are British Waterways or a local authority but more difficult when the landowner is not a public body. It has been proven that, in most cases, improving path quality has led to increased use (see **Table 15**).



Different path surfaces will be appropriate at different locations – this tarmac-surfaced canal towpath is in the suburbs of Northampton

Table 15 Impact of towpath improvements

Site	Visits per annum		% change
	Before	After	
Stourbridge (West Midlands)	41,500 (1999)	87,500 (2001)	+111%
Walsall (West Midlands)	71,500 (1999)	154,500 (2001)	+110%
Ratho (Scotland)	56,000 (1998)	111,000 (2003)	+100%
Linlithgow (Scotland)	20,000 (1997)	144,000 (2003)	+343%
Craigmarloch (Scotland)	29,000 (1997)	67,000 (2003)	+90%
Cadder (Scotland)	48,000 (1997)	76,000 (2003)	+ 37%
Edinburgh (Scotland)	89,000 (1998)	112,000 (2003)	+ 26%
Maryhill (Scotland)	60,000 (1997)	71,000 (2003)	+ 21%
Bonnybridge (Scotland)	59,000 (1997)	57,000 (2003)	- 3%
Limehouse Cut (London)	41,000 (2002-05 mean)	92,000 (2006-09 mean)	+124%

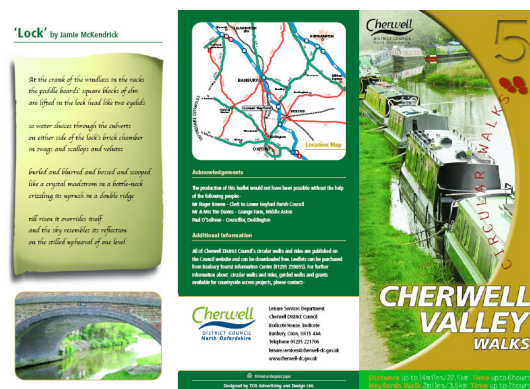
Source: British Waterways pedestrian counter estimates

- **Continuity of paths along the waterway**, without any gaps, is important to users, including provision for crossing tributary streams or rivers and an adequate bridge or a ferry where the path changes sides of the waterway. The need to deviate onto a road carrying motor vehicles may render a path unsuitable for or unattractive to horse riders, inexperienced cyclists or those with small children.



Ferries were once a common component of river paths but this one at Hampton, Thames, is one of the few left

- **Promoting and marketing of waterway paths** is a major factor in securing increased use. Lack of information on routes/features of interest means people do not know where to go and what they may encounter in terms of both the path quality and attractions along the route. Knowing that a path may lead to a specific destination (e.g. a historic feature of interest or particularly good view) may encourage additional people to use the paths. Knowledge about what parts of the route can be used by cyclists or horse riders will both encourage use and help reduce misuse where these activities are not permitted. Effective promotion and marketing of waterway paths by electronic and traditional means will help address these issues; this role can be shared by many partners



Detailed guide to walks using the canal towpath in the Cherwell valley, Oxfordshire, from Lower Heyford station

- **Better signage may help.** Some potential users do not know where waterway paths are, that they can be used or how they can be reached. Improved signage would encourage people to use the paths although care needs to be taken that users don't become bombarded with signs;
- **Misuse of waterway paths** by dog walkers failing to clear up dog faeces, fly tipping and pollution of water by litter can severely degrade their attractiveness. The provision of dog bins and human surveillance, both direct from wardens and indirectly from people overlooking the waterway, can help minimise these problems.
- **Personal safety, crime and antisocial behaviour concerns** are a particular feature of some waterway paths in urban areas, where people are discouraged from using waterway paths because of a

perceived or actual threat of anti-social behaviour, although these concerns do not rate highly overall in survey data. This is particularly prevalent where access points to a canal towpath are widely spaced and the path is hemmed in by walls or industrial buildings.

- **Design improvements** such as lighting, opening out of vegetation, increasing permeability of the path so that people do not feel trapped and human surveillance, either indirect from people overlooking waterway or direct via wardens, will help overcome these issues. Care needs to be taken that the waterway's character is not destroyed, e.g. it may not be appropriate to introduce lighting in a rural area;
- **Perceptions of water safety** vary greatly. Some see activity next to water as dangerous, while others see water as a positive recreational asset. If people have a realistic awareness of water safety and risk, their confidence in using waterway paths will increase and they will be more likely to use them. However, conveying an objective understanding of risk issues to the general public is notoriously difficult and is not helped by poor understanding by some of the news media. AINA has produced advice in their report *Managing inland waterway safety risks: A good practice guide for navigation authorities*.
- **Vegetation control** featured highly in responses. This includes mowing, using an appropriate regime to maintain nature conservation interest where appropriate, and cutting back of overhanging trees which can be a hazard.
- **Conflict between different legitimate users** is a common complaint. Different users of paths have different requirements which are sometimes difficult to reconcile, particularly where space is limited (as on many canal towpaths).

For example, encouragement of use of a path by cycling commuters wishing to travel at relatively high speeds can cause aggravation and danger to users on foot. An example of attempts to resolve conflicts is British Waterways' 'two tings' campaign' (see **Box 1**).

Horses can present a hazard to others if paths are too narrow and obstructions caused by fishing gear can aggravate those wishing to pass.

For anglers, other users may cause disturbance to fish and in some locations anglers pay money to access the waterway banks for fishing, so may feel that their use takes priority over others who pay nothing.

Box 1 – The 'two tings' campaign

The two tings leaflet sets out British Waterways guide to considerate cycling on London's canals. The aim of the 'Two Tings' campaign is to make towpaths safer for everyone.

The campaign promotes a 'code of conduct' for towpath users, encouraging cyclists to use a bell and ring it twice when approaching a pedestrian, to pass people slowly and to ride at a sensible speed, and also encouraging pedestrians to listen for cyclists' bells and to allow cyclists room to pass.

The campaign follows a series of physical works to improve safety on the Regent's Canal. The 'Two Tings' campaign comes after local residents voiced their concerns about inconsiderate behaviour from some towpath users.

Sources: <http://www.lcc.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=864>
http://www.lcc.org.uk/documents/two_tings_leaflet.pdf

- **Car parking provision** is important to many users. Although many people live near enough to waterways for non-motorised access, some sections of the population will require the use of a car to get to waterways. The provision of car parks at access points along the waterway will help encourage greater use.
- **Connectivity with public transport links** is an important factor in allowing some users to gain access to waterway paths. Some will use public transport for part of their journey in both directions (e.g. commuters), while for others use of public transport for their return journey allows a one-way recreational walk. Improved connectivity could also alleviate concerns for those people who feel they live too far away to make use of waterway paths.



Canals and railway routes often follow the same corridors. This Midland Metro tram route (along a former heavy rail line) provides many opportunities for one-way walks along the Birmingham Canal Navigations

- **Better connectivity with other paths and provision of circular links** can improve the attraction of waterway paths. Although waterways by their very nature provide a network of routes, links to the wider PROW network could be improved in many cases, particularly in rural areas. This may simply involve better signage, provided that links are already available to at least the same standard as the waterway path. Priority should be given to ensuring good direct links between residential areas and waterway paths for both existing and new housing areas. In particular there is a need to harness missed opportunities where urban areas turn their back on rivers/canals and almost dismiss their existence or fence them off as a 'hazard'.
- **Maintaining the inherent environmental character of the waterways and surrounding corridors** is important to many users and can be achieved through appropriate management regimes. This is somewhat easier to control where the landowner is BW, for example, and they control the management of the waterway and its surrounding corridor. However it can be more difficult when the landowner is not a publicly sponsored body. Preserving the relative quietness and tranquillity of a waterway path may be difficult on popular routes (e.g. urban commuter routes during peak hours) and at popular locations (e.g. Symonds Yat on the River Wye).
- **Currently under-represented sections of the population** among waterway path users include those over 65; those with a long term illness, health problem or disability; those from ethnic minorities and those who are working class. Success in widening the user base will depend upon active engagement of local communities in waterway partnerships.
- **Making paths accessible to a wider range of types of user** should be considered. A relatively even, well surfaced footpath (including access points) may attract older users who are perhaps more unsteady on their feet, as well as those who are mobility-impaired. Similarly routes that enable use of mobility vehicles and wheelchairs will attract associated users. Improved surfaces are required to support commuter cycling and equestrian uses, particularly in urban areas, to avoid paths becoming so muddy that walkers are deterred.

- **Provision of visitor facilities**, such as cafés, toilets, shelters, benches and shops will generate greater use of waterway paths however the provision of these facilities will not be appropriate in all cases. Careful consideration of viability and demand is required, together with consideration of environmental factors (including impact on local communities).



Visitor facilities such as cafés and trip boats can provide a major attractor to potential waterway path users

- **Overcrowding** can occur at some popular locations on waterway paths, such that users' experience is degraded. At such locations, thought should be given to how users could be dispersed to less busy areas, perhaps by signing alternative walks or improving access points, while taking care to preserve wildlife refuges.
- **Maintaining the landscape/townscape and cultural heritage interest around waterway paths** contributes significantly to the attraction of waterway paths to users. Works such as new surfaces may be regarded by some as necessary to make reasonable provision for disabled access, while others may be concerned about adverse visual and landscape effects or adverse effects on cultural heritage. These factors need careful balancing if this attraction is to be maintained.
- **The wildlife interest** accessed by waterway paths is important to many users but in some cases, increasing use may result in a risk of disturbance of valued wildlife, especially by dogs, and this needs to be managed accordingly. Path design and vegetation maintenance regimes are also important in maintaining the nature conservation interest.

Box 2 Summary of opportunities and challenges regarding increasing use of waterway paths**Aspects to consider for increasing the use of waterway paths (in order of descending priority):****User aspects**

- improving the maintenance of the paths and surrounding environment (including vegetation management);
- continuity of paths along the waterway, avoiding the need for use of roads with motor traffic;
- better promotion, marketing and information provision;
- better signage;
- keeping routes free of motorised vehicles;
- addressing misuse of waterway paths;
- tackling personal safety, crime and antisocial behaviour concerns;
- increasing awareness of water safety;
- resolving conflict between users;
- car parking provision;
- increasing connectivity with public transport;
- better connectivity with other paths and provision of circular links;
- ensuring good direct links between residential/work/services areas and waterway paths;
- maintaining the inherent environmental character of the waterways and surrounding corridors;
- encouraging use by currently under-represented sections of the population;
- making paths accessible to all types of user where appropriate;
- provision of visitor facilities; and
- dispersion of users to avoid overcrowding;

Environmental aspects

- maintaining the landscape/townscape and cultural heritage interest surrounding waterway paths; and
- maintaining the nature conservation interest.

Situations where greater use should be approached cautiously:

- locations where the nature conservation of the site is particularly sensitive;
- where the path is narrow and the multi-use of paths is not practical and could lead to unavoidable conflicts between different uses;
- busy sites or those locations where user capacity has already been reached;
- where there may be health and safety concerns;
- where there are privacy/security issues; and
- where changes/upgrade to paths may be inappropriate to the surrounding rural or historic built environment.

Circumstances where the greater use may not be appropriate

Situations where measures to achieve the greater use of waterway paths will need to be approached with caution and wider consultation include:

- **locations where the nature conservation value of a site is particularly sensitive** (e.g. international and nationally designated wildlife sites where the interest features would be adversely affected by the proposed improvements to public access);
- **where the path is narrow and cannot be widened**, use may need to be restricted to pedestrians only, possibly with alternative routes found for cyclists, to avoid conflicts between different users;
- **where user capacity has already been reached**; it is very difficult to define what is meant by 'capacity'; even so, there may be merit in encouraging use at quieter sites so that the visitor load can be spread, or to encourage use that would arise at a different time to existing uses (for example, commuting traffic tends to arise at mornings and evenings during the week, whereas recreational use tends to be greatest at weekends and during the middle of the day);
- **where there may be health and safety concerns**; this could range from steep slopes/eroding banks to passing through highly active areas (e.g. where there may be waterside machinery, such as wharf cranes, sluices) or concerns relating to bridge maintenance;
- **where there are privacy/security issues**, for example where greater use may cause unreasonable disturbance to residents' use of their private gardens; and
- **where changes/upgrades to paths may be inappropriate to the surrounding environment** (e.g. introducing lighting to a rural area or a hard surface to a rural towpath may not be appropriate).

These aspects are also summarised in **Box 2**.

How waterway paths are considered within policies/strategies

Rights of Way Improvement Plans and Core Path Plans

As part of the research, a sample of local authority plans was reviewed. The sample comprised:

- Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP) selected from local highway authorities in England and Wales); and
- Core Path Plans (CPP) selected from authorities in Scotland.

Plans for the review were selected to provide a spread of authority type (e.g. county/unitary; urban/rural) and a cross-section from across the country. This was achieved by selecting one plan from:

- highland and lowland Scotland;
- Wales; and
- each Government Office region in England.

Further, authorities were selected on the basis that there were significant inland waterways in their areas.

The list of plans reviewed was as follows.

England	Scotland
Birmingham (West Midlands)	Glasgow Core Paths Plan
Cheshire (North West)	Highland Core Paths Plan
Devon (South West)	
Enfield (London)	
Kent (South East)	Wales
Lincolnshire (East Midlands)	Powys
Norfolk (East of England)	
North Yorkshire (Yorkshire & The Humber)	
Tyne and Wear (North East)	

Introduction

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a duty on local highway authorities in England and Wales (apart from Inner London Boroughs) to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Virtually all authorities have now completed their ROWIP. In producing their plans, authorities were required to:

- assess the needs of users, including those who are blind or with visual impairments, and those with limited mobility;
- assess the network (of local rights of way);
- identify shortfalls in provision;
- draw up a statement of actions they intend to carry out; and
- consult widely over the proposals.

In Scotland, a similar duty was placed upon local authorities. In this case, the requirement is to produce a plan for a system of paths “sufficient for the purposes of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area”. Each plan is a document that identifies core paths within each of the authority areas which will form the network. Consequently, they are structured very differently from ROWIP and tend to be more map-based. It should also be noted that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gave a public right of responsible access onto nearly all inland waters for non-motorised craft, so core path plans need to give consideration to giving access for such users, as well as land-based users.

It is important to understand that although the production of a ROWIP or CPP is mandatory, there is no duty on the issuing authority to implement it.



The Caledonian Canal features in the Highland CPP
© Darrin Antrobus 2007 CCBYSA

Conclusions

The review of the above plans should be regarded as indicative only; the sample has been selected with inland waterways in mind (i.e. we targeted those plans which cover areas in which inland waters are likely to be important). Therefore, it may not be representative of all such plans.

With these caveats in mind, the following conclusions are drawn.

- It seems that inland waterways are not given a particularly high prominence in plans, so it can perhaps be inferred that they do not feature in the thinking of local highway authority officers (notable exceptions are Kent and North Yorkshire). This lack of prominence occurs even where promoted routes covered by the plan are along waterways (less true in Highland Region's CPP). The opportunities presented by the coastline are given greater prominence (in English counties with a coastline).
- Where referred to, rivers and canals are seen as providing an attractive setting for rights of way users, especially walkers but also (in some cases) for cyclists and horse riders. The fact that waterway corridors in the lowlands are generally at gentle gradients mean that they may be well-suited to use by mobility-impaired users. However, it is clear that access along the desired routes is often not good.
- Almost equally, though, rivers and canals are seen as potential obstacles to network development, as they need to be bridged and bridges need to be maintained.
- A large majority of the PROW network comprises footpaths (available for use only by walkers and mobility vehicles). Correspondingly, walking (including dog walking) is the most common activity recorded on PROW.
- Most walkers want short (2-5 miles) circular walks close to their homes. Inland waterways are not well-suited to achieving this, tending to be linear in nature.
- Despite their linear nature, inland waterways may have a role in providing valuable links in the network of routes free of motorised traffic. Many plans stress the importance of creating such links, especially if this can be done for cyclists

and horse riders. Any green infrastructure that links town and country is particularly valued, and inland waterways can fit this requirement admirably.

- Statements of Actions tend to be fairly generic in nature and so specific opportunities for improvements stemming from inland waterways are not immediately evident. Exceptions can be found though – in Birmingham and North Yorkshire, for example.
- The environmental value of river corridors is recognised in some plans but this is not seen as being an obstacle. Rather, it serves to highlight the need to plan and implement access improvements with care.
- Climate change is noted in some ROWIP and the implications it may hold for PROW – mainly the likelihood that there will be increases in storms and high intensity rainfall events which will cause flooding and erosion. This needs to be factored into planning for the future, in terms of route development and design of structures.

Local Development Framework

The *Broads Plan 2004* (the existing plan) was reviewed together with the *Draft Broads Plan 2011-16*. It was considered due to the extent of waterways within its remit, that the Broads plan would be an appropriate plan to review. Again, though, it may not be representative of all such plans.

Broads Plan

The Plan poses the question – “What do people value about the Broads?”. Amongst the answers offered is the following: “A place where people come to enjoy quietly the special qualities of this wetland landscape: exploring the waterways by boat; exploring on land the extensive network of footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways; and pursuing a range of recreational activities that are compatible with its special qualities, environmentally sensitive and socially acceptable, such as sailing, canoeing, fishing, bird-watching and visiting historic sites.”

It is also guided by a number of key principles; Guiding Principle 8 deals with land-based recreation as follows: “Land-based access will be protected and enhanced and new rights of way will be established, to maximise the social, environmental education and health benefits of

open space to people, while ensuring that the resource itself is not degraded.” Section 6 of the Plan deals with Tourism and Recreation, and stresses the value of land-based recreation, and highlights the opportunities for improvement to the network of routes through the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (see [Appendix 3](#)) and the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project. This is translated into policy terms with the following relevant policies.

- **TR10** Develop and implement a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the Broads, in accordance with the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act.
- **TR11** Develop a strategy for managing public enjoyment of the fens.
- **TR13** Improve physical access to facilities and services for all, including people with disabilities.



Provision for blind people using Broads paths

The achievement of these policies is to be measured using ‘ease of use’ (formerly BVPI 178) and length of wheelchair accessible routes. However, no targets appear to have been set.

The draft version of the subsequent plan (covering 2011 to 2016) reiterates the value of waterways for the Broads’ visitors. Draft policies show some difference in emphasis.

- **AR1:** Develop a strategic approach to sustainable access in the Broads, incorporating route networks linked to destination points and public transport.
- **AR2:** Improve access links between land and water and associated waterside infrastructure.

- **AR3:** Continue to foster sustainable forms of recreation available to all that promote active enjoyment of the Broads resource and a sense of wellbeing.

There is still a target outcome of increasing the percentage of routes which are easy to use, but with a more specific goal of having 10 more leaflets describing walks. Another relevant outcome is to have an “Increase in recreation sites managed in good condition”.

Conclusion

The review shows that the key policies of significance for waterway paths are those relating to:

- access/transport; and
- recreation.

The Broads plan is a good example of the planning officers and highway officers working closely together (i.e. the Broads Plan supports the development and implementation of the ROWIP). Likewise the Draft Plan also addresses sustainable access and links between different types of infrastructure.

Such coordination between planning authority and highway authority should be encouraged to ensure that increased use of paths (including waterway paths) is appropriately considered within the Local Development Framework. (This is particularly pertinent where the county is the highway authority and the district the local planning authority for development.)

Legal and landowner factors

Introduction

This section considers the challenges to creating waterway paths and what is realistic to propose with a good chance of being delivered. Key factors in creating access routes where no legal right of access currently exist are the attitudes of the landowner and his/her relationship with the local highway authority (operating within the raft of legal powers available to the authority).

Current Access Situation

One of the most critical factors is the current situation with regard to access. As a general assumption, it is likely that the greater the current access, the more likely it is that access could be improved.

It is useful, therefore, to consider a hierarchy of starting points from which accessibility might be improved:

- no public access along the waterway;
- partial public access along the waterway but insufficient to afford a good continuation along the waterway;
- customary access (i.e. use continues but there are no recorded rights of access);
- permissive access;
- statutory right of access (e.g. PROW or open access land) for pedestrian use;
- statutory right of access for ‘higher’ uses (e.g. cycling or horse riding); and
- statutory right of access with ‘access for all’ (i.e. suitable for use by people with a wide range of disabilities).

It will be a challenge to move up this hierarchy and will be harder the more steps are attempted.

Perhaps the most crucial and difficult step is the change from permissive to statutory rights. As implied in the name, use of a permissive route is by permission and this permission could be withdrawn. Even so, this may be a useful first step in securing access where the landowner is reluctant (or, in the case of the National Trust, unable) to grant rights of access in perpetuity (as is the case with dedication of a PROW or land as open access land). Many authorities will accept permissive route status if this provides the only means (at the time) of securing a link in a chain of a long-distance and/or promoted route. For example, the South West Coast Path National Trail (which runs for 630 miles) still contains sections of permissive route (although normally national trail status is not granted unless all access is by right).

Who is the landowner?

Unless access is available as a public right, then granting of permission for access rests with the landowner (taking into account the views of any tenant). Consequently, the owner is a key factor when considering improvements. As a general assumption, it is usually easier to secure improvements in access if the landowner is a public body, of whatever type, as most such bodies will have a presumption in favour of public access wherever possible.

Landowners which fall within the voluntary sector may also have a very positive attitude towards public access. In cases like the National Trust, providing public access wherever feasible is part of their remit. Similarly, county wildlife trusts, who collectively own many areas of attractive countryside as nature reserves, take a positive view towards public access, subject to suitable management being feasible and being able to mitigate any potential adverse effects on wildlife.

Private landowners are the most diverse group and a range of attitudes will be encountered. As a general rule, though, private landowners will be the most resistant to introducing public access. Typical grounds given for this reluctance are (not in any order of priority):

- loss of privacy;
- reduction in security;
- unwillingness to give up property rights;
- interference with farming/land management activities;
- risk of damage to property and livestock;
- liabilities for litter, public safety and maintenance of infrastructure; and
- increased traffic.

Weighed against these perceived disbenefits is the fact that by dedicating a permissive route as a PROW, the liability for maintenance of the path's surface will pass to the local highway authority.

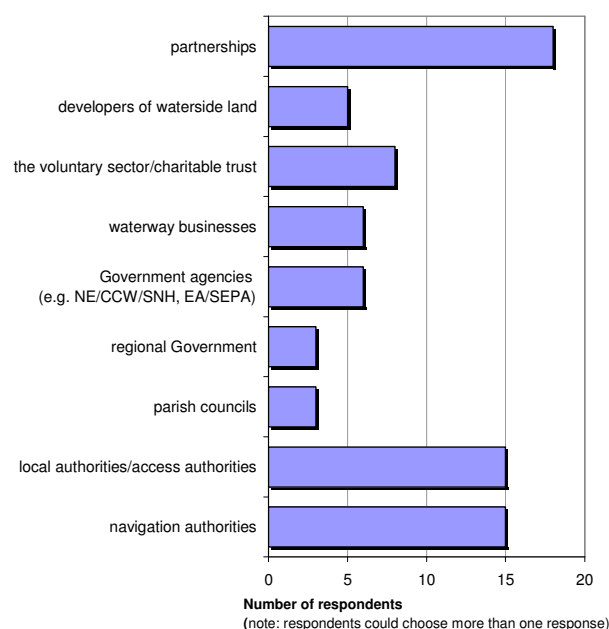
Again, as a general rule, owners of land used for woodland are potentially more amenable to public access than owners of farmland (as impact on their activities, privacy etc. is generally small). Also, arable farmers may feel less of an impact than livestock farmers, especially as headlands currently have to remain uncropped as part of their cross-compliance arrangements, whereas livestock farmers generally have major concerns about dogs worrying sheep or cattle injuring members of the public on their land.

Responsibility

Responsibility for the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and creation of waterway paths, as well as their promotion, varies. **Graph 6** lists types of body that are currently taking responsibility and shows stakeholder responses to the question 'who should take the main responsibility for development and promotion of waterway

paths'. A significant proportion of respondents suggested '**partnerships**' followed by '**local authorities/access authorities**'; and '**navigation authorities**'.

Graph 6 Responsibility for the development/promotion of waterway paths



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

A number of respondents felt that partnerships were essential. This approach has generally worked well on the delivery of waterway path improvements in the recent past (see **Box 3** for an example). An added benefit of using partnerships is that the project is often able to access a range of funds that would not be available to a single organisation.

With regard to the navigation authority it was noted that the benefits provided by waterway paths are wide ranging and there can not be an expectation that the navigation authority will be solely responsible for the towpath.



The Chesterfield Canal Partnership aims to complete the restoration of the Chesterfield Canal and its towpath

Box 3 Chesterfield Canal Partnership

The cross regional multi- agency advisory Partnership, consists of a membership drawn from the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary bodies that have an interest in the Chesterfield Canal. It was formalised in 1995 to co-ordinate restoration efforts and pool expertise for the preservation, restoration and sustainable development of the canal. The ambition is simple: to restore the whole of the waterway to full public use. Members include:

- British Waterways
- Bassetlaw District Council;
- Chesterfield Borough Council;
- Derbyshire County Council;
- North East Derbyshire District Council;
- Nottinghamshire County Council;
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council;
- Inland Waterways Association;
- Environment Agency;
- Natural England;
- Groundwork Creswell;
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust;
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust; and
- Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.

All the partners are very actively developing and improving the foot, cycle and bridleway networks around the canal. All have undertaken works to improve the connectivity of the waterway and in consequence increase the numbers of towpath users – even on those sections not yet in water

In March 2007 the Partnership won the annual Waterways Renaissance Awards Partnership Category. Comments from the award judges were as follows

"This is a very effective partnership...the relationship between the public and the voluntary sector has been crucial and has shown the value and wealth of experience that the voluntary sector can bring to a project such as this. The modern renaissance of our waterways is transforming the environment, creating education and business opportunities, injecting new life into areas and bringing communities together. As a winner of the Partnership category, Chesterfield Canal Partnership is properly recognised as an exemplar and we hope its success will inspire and encourage others to do the same."

Funding

As with responsibility, funding for the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and creation of paths as well as the promotion of waterway paths can come from various sources. **Graph 7** shows the responses to the stakeholder questionnaire on who should fund waterway paths.

Considering users as funding sources there are also a few 'moral' arguments regarding waterway paths which are as follows:

- social justice - we all have a right to enjoy the environment; and
- people should have a 'right' of access (as people pay via taxes for maintenance and monitoring of many waterways).

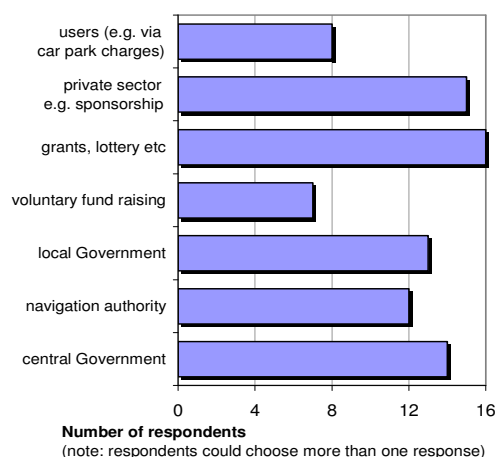
In terms of funding it is important to recognise that it can be difficult for authorities to secure external funding for work which is not deemed to be a statutory duty. So, the costs of footpath repair and erecting signs where a PROW leaves a metalled road have to be funded from core funding. However, promotion of a PROW, development of material to improve public knowledge of PROW usage and development of new routes are all discretionary and so can be funded by external sources.

Within the on line questionnaire when asked where funding should come from for the improvement/development of waterway paths popular responses were **grants and lottery, private sector/local business, central government, local government and navigation authorities**.

It is recognised that:

- funding availability will vary dependent on location of the path and potential users;
- funding for on going maintenance (not just improvements and development) is essential; and
- a mix of funding sources should be utilised as appropriate (especially in view of the wide range of benefits and functions waterway paths provide and policy objectives waterway paths could deliver).

Graph 7 Funding for improvement/development of waterway paths



(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

Benefits of use of waterway paths

Use of waterway paths provides a wide range of benefits to local communities, including access for all to green spaces, the natural environment and cultural heritage features, sustainable transport routes and healthy recreation opportunities, as well as benefits to the local economy. This section of the report identifies these benefits.

Quantifying existing benefits

The key document that has been used to identify and value the benefits of inland waterways paths is IWAC's report *The Benefits of Inland Waterways (2nd Edition)* (2010).

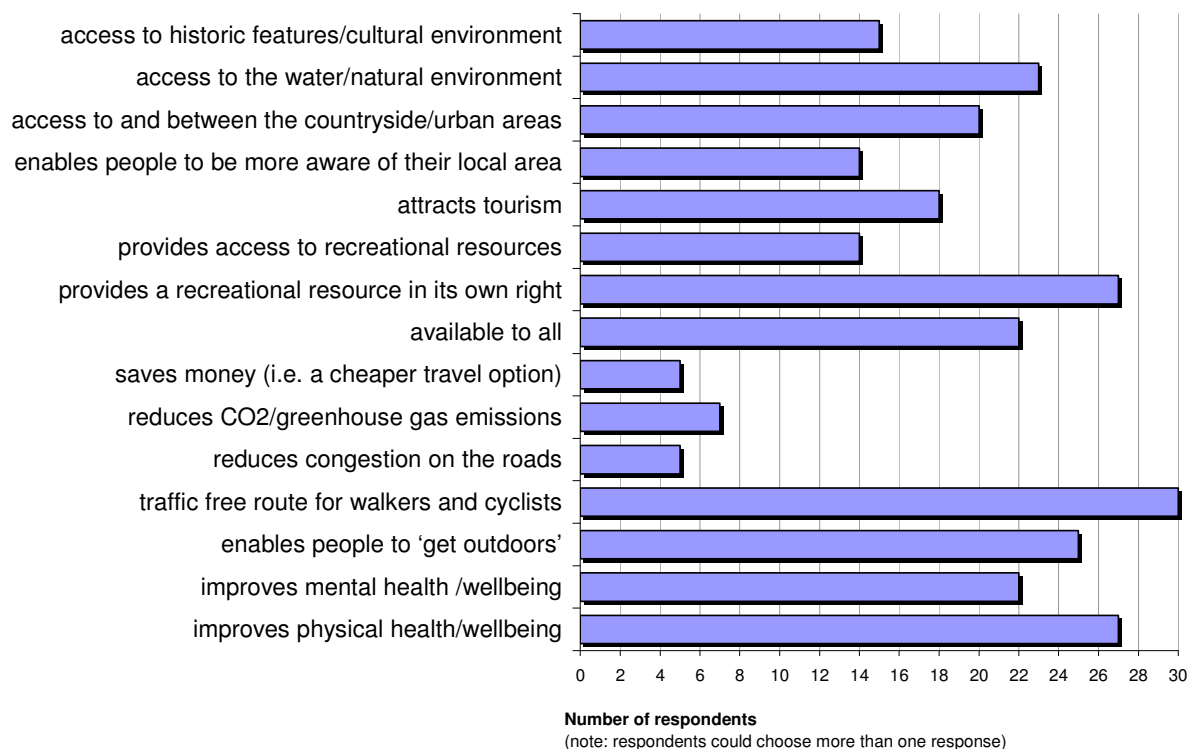
The benefits accrued from waterway paths are far ranging. Existing key benefits identified through literature research and the on line questionnaire (grouped by the themes listed in the introduction to this report) include:



The towpath, waterway, bridges, locks, boats and activity all contribute to the sense of place at Hillmorton, Rugby

- place-making and shaping;
 - enabling people to be more aware of their local area;
 - providing access to and between countryside/urban areas;
 - a focus for redevelopment.
- natural environment;
 - access to water/natural environment;
- climate change;
 - reduce CO₂/greenhouse gas emissions through use of non-motorised transport;
- cultural heritage;
 - providing access to historic features/cultural environment;
- health well being recreation and sport;
 - improving physical health/wellbeing;
 - improving mental health/wellbeing;
 - providing recreational resources in their own right;
 - providing access to recreational resources;
- sustainable transport
 - providing routes free of motor traffic for walkers and cyclists;
 - saving money (cheaper travel option);
 - encouraging people to 'get outdoors';
- tourism and business development
 - generating tourism income;
- fairer, stronger and more active communities:
 - available and accessible to all.

Graph 8 shows the relative importance allocated by stakeholders to each of the above benefits in the questionnaire survey.

Graph 8 Key perceived benefits currently provided by waterway paths and their use.

(It should be noted that these responses are based on a very small sample and should only be used as an indicator.)

It is recognised that the benefits accrued will vary dependent on:

- **the type of user** (e.g. whether the user is a commuter or someone using the path for recreation);
- **the characteristics of the waterway** (e.g. whether the waterway has particularly strong heritage aspects); and
- **the geographical location of the waterway** (e.g. a waterway path in an urban area where public open space/green space is limited is likely to provide different benefits from a waterway path in a rural area).

Also it is recognised that some of the benefits provided by waterway paths can be very hard to distil and quantify and that many of the benefits are interrelated.

It is interesting to note that, although some people did say all the benefits stated in the questionnaire were main benefits, the scoring for some benefits was not high. This could indicate that some of the benefits provided are indirect benefits and the link was not being made by the respondents (e.g. reduces traffic congestion) or the full potential of that benefit is not currently being met (e.g. access to the historical features/the cultural environment).

In the EA national survey, all respondents who used EA rivers were asked about the importance of the waterway and surrounding area to them and to the local community see **Table 16**.

Respondents were also asked whether they disagreed or agreed with statements about the river and what they would miss if they no longer lived close (within 10 miles) to a river, see **Table 17**.

The BW IWVS identifies the mean scores agreeing with statements about canals (see **Table 18**).

Table 16 Benefits of the river to respondents and to the local community

Value	% of respondents scoring 8+ (10 - very important; 1 - not at all)	
	Importance to them	Importance to the local community
Somewhere to enjoy wildlife, natural world and relax	65	72
Somewhere to enjoy time with friends and family	67	71
Somewhere to enjoy leisure activities and interests	56	67
Improves the quality of life	56	64
Somewhere to keep fit and exercise	50	61
Visits places of interest because of heritage	46	58
Corridor for safe cycling, walking	38	56

Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)



The River Thames is the Environment Agency's most visited river navigation, seen here at Oxford

Table 17 Strongly agree with statements about local rivers

Statement	% strongly agree
Local river improves quality of the local environment	64
Local rivers are an attractive place to visit	67
I'm lucky to live close to a river	60
I would miss the countryside and wildlife	50
Travel further for leisure activities	44
Fewer places to spend with family and friends	37
Use the car more	37
Less healthy lifestyle	31
Walk/cycle less	33
More difficult to take exercise	23
None of these	23

Source Environment Agency *Valuing Waterways Draft Report* (2010)

Table 18 Agreement with statement about canals

Statement	* Average mean score
Places that are peaceful and relaxing	1.47
Good places for taking exercise	1.28
Full of wildlife	1.26
Good place to eat and drink	0.95
Somewhere you would consider for a day out	0.89
Imaginative and inspiring	0.89
Places where there is lots going on	0.72
An important part of the nation's heritage	1.60
The canal system in Britain is well managed and operated.	0.79

* - Average of scores from 2 agree strongly to -2 disagree strongly

Source British Waterways *Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report* (2010)

In summary, the data indicate that waterway paths have the potential to provide the following social and environmental functions and benefits:

- **'place making' (regeneration and development)** – the basis for green infrastructure networks associated with waterside development, thus contributing to 'sense of place', particularly in urban areas;
- **sustainable travel** – transport corridors, free of motor traffic for personal transport by walking or cycling, contributing to health and wellbeing and climate change mitigation;
- **tourism, recreation and sport** – a varied recreational facility for walkers, cyclists and equestrians, facilitating exercise, providing access to water-based sport and recreation, contributing to healthy lifestyles and improved wellbeing and linking to visitor destinations; and
- **access to greenspace and the historic environment** – an outdoor escape to relative calm and tranquillity, improving health and wellbeing and with the potential to contribute to community cohesion and social inclusion.



Waterway paths contribute to sustainable transport - the waterfront close to Exeter town centre provides access to traffic free paths along both banks of the Ship Canal, much accessible by bicycle, towards the coast

Monetary value of benefits

In addition to the social and environmental benefits of waterway paths, their use contributes significantly to the national economy. IWAC's report on the *Benefits of Inland Waterways* (Jacobs, 2010) examined the benefits of inland waterways in general. Attempts are made by the authors to attribute monetary values to these benefits. Those for which some values are available are the enhancement of property values and

recreation. It is the latter that are of particular interest; however, caveats should be attached to the values available because:

- they generally cover all forms of recreation (i.e. on, in and along the waterways) not just those associated with paths, although primary studies typically look at specific activities;
- unit values used (i.e. benefit of an individual visit) are now dated; and
- there are difficulties in extrapolating the data to larger scales (e.g. a navigation authority area).

In the benefits transfer model proposed in the report, it seems that the only sources of benefits data of use are from 1990 and 1991 and these produce the unit values in **Table 19**.

Table 19 Unit values of benefits

Benefit	Unit Values	Method
General visitors - Locals (<10 miles)	£0.02 - £0.09	TCM
General visitors - Non - Locals (>10 miles)	£0.22 - £10.94	TCM
Walking	£0.08 - £0.63	TCM
Dog walking	£0.03 - £0.33	TCM
Short cut takers	£0.07 - £0.36	CVM
Cycling	£0.31	CVM
Boating	£0.17 - £0.45	TCM

Source: ranges are sourced from IWAC (2010)⁷ and Willis and Garrod (1990⁸ and 1991⁹)

Notes – TCM=Travel Cost Method;
CVM=Contingent Valuation Method

There is also the potential to factor in 'non-use' and 'option' values, which can be considerable.

⁷ IWAC (2010) *The benefits of inland waterways*. 2nd Edn. Report for IWAC by Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd. See www.iwac.org.uk

⁸ Willis, K.G., and Garrod, G.D. (1990). The individual travel-cost method and the value of recreation: the case of the Montgomery and Lancaster Canals. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 8, 315-326.

⁹ Willis, K.G., and Garrod, G.D. (1991). Valuing Open Access Recreation on Inland Waterways: On-site Recreation Surveys and Selection Effects. *Regional Studies*, 25(6), 511-524

Based on results from communities local to named EA rivers, the EA VW report sets out that the:

- average spend per visit for recreational uses is estimated to be £9.06; and
- annual spend on waterway visits per adult living within 15km of a river is estimated to be £104.38.

The BW IWVS also identifies visitor expenditure (see **Table 20**).

Table 20 **Average spend per head on last visit**

Users	Average spend per head on last visit (£)	
	BW waterways	All inland waterways
Boat with engine	15.6	51.88
Boat no engine	19.1	11..9
Fishing	2.8	6.21
Cycling	7.1	5.44
Walked dog	6.2	4.82
Leisure/heritage/museum	10.3	11.89
Walk/ramble/run	5.3	5.56
Pub	4.7	22.11
Run/jog	4.7	5.27
To get somewhere else	10.7	12.05
Sat or stood	6.3	5.81
Other purpose	6.8	8.24
Average	6.70	9.69

Source British Waterways *Inland Waterways Visitor Survey 2009 Annual Report* (2010)



Pubs attract the greatest expenditure by visitors, although income for rural waterside pubs may be very seasonal and viability is often an issue



Although primarily established to serve the boating trade, marinas can also be a tourist attraction for users of waterway paths and contribute to visitor spend

Money was spent on the following (in declining order of expenditure and excluding money spent on waterborne activity):

- pubs;
- cafes/restaurants;
- food from shops;
- petrol for car/boat;
- boat trips/hire/cycle hire;
- gifts, souvenirs, books;
- public transport;
- car parking; and
- angling tickets/permits.

The estimate of average spend per visitor (excluding waterborne activity) for 2009 for all waterways from the BW IWVS was £9.69, in close agreement with the EA VW survey figure of £9.06 for recreational purposes' (again excluding waterborne activity). The median of all the values quoted by Jacobs for 1990/91 is £5.48, which, corrected from the end of 1990 using the Retail Prices Index, would be equivalent to about £9.00 in mid-2009. Assuming that the mean is somewhere close to the median for these values, this represents fairly good agreement.

Taking the average visitor spend per visit as £9.00 and using the BW IWVS value of 914.4M visits per year gives an estimate for the **contribution to the economy from visitors to the waterways of £8.2 billion**. This is well in excess of the government grant-in-aid to the waterways and represents a substantial contribution to the national economy. Most of this is from visitors who are mainly or exclusively using waterway paths.

Increasing the benefits from waterway paths

It should be noted that increased use can be taken to mean existing users using an access opportunity more often, more people using an access opportunity than before or users having a better experience (i.e. a qualitative increase) in the use.

By considering the benefits **waterway paths currently provide** and responses received from key stakeholders who responded to the online questionnaire question “**what additional benefits could waterway paths provide**” along with information obtained from the previous chapters, the case studies (see **Case Studies chapter**) and a literature review, the following additional benefits have been identified. They have been grouped under the eight themes listed in the introduction to this report. Further brief case studies are described in boxes to illustrate particular points.

A summary of the relevance of each case study to major benefit categories is given in **Table 21**.

Place making and shaping.

Increased use of waterway paths can build local pride and increase interest in waterways which in turn provides local communities with a sense of ownership and belonging. It can also help local communities to become more aware of and better understand their local area. An example is the improved public access to canals in central Birmingham (see **Box 4**).



Brindleyplace on the Birmingham Canal
© Geoff Pick, 2010 CCBYSA

Box 4 Central Birmingham

The restoration and regeneration of the canals in Birmingham has dramatically changed the awareness and understanding local communities have of the canals.

In the late 60s/70s the canals were seen as ‘no go’ areas with dereliction being rife. Now, following extensive regeneration, the canal attracts many visitors to its towpaths, as well as creating an improved quality environmental for retail, business and residential development alike.

As stated on the waterscape website:

The regeneration of the city's canalside quarter began in the late 1980s. It was epitomised by the internationally acclaimed Brindley Place development, which was the first UK winner of the International Excellence on the Waterfront Award (in 1995) and the UK winner of the 1997 UK BA Tourism for Tomorrow Award Winner for sustainable visitor attractions.

The area is now regarded as the entertainment centre of the city with theatres, music and events venues, restaurants, pubs, exhibition venues and an art gallery and was recently voted as one of the top ten places to visit in Britain by The Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

The International Convention Centre and National Indoor Arena are well established landmarks alongside the canal. Newer landmarks include the 1,000,000 sq ft Mailbox development, a visionary example of cutting edge urban design which combines designer shopping outlets with offices, restaurants and bars on the waterfront within a development.

Development of apartments, bespoke office spaces and restaurants with views over the canal continues, with development and conservation working hand in hand.

Central to all of these developments is a link back to the canal's function as a transport network, with the towpath linking all of these developments and a waterbus offering an alternative and sustainable mode of transport to get around the central area

Source: <http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/birmingham-canal-main-line/history>

The potential of waterway paths to provide access to the countryside is also recognised. Many waterways link highly urban and highly rural areas providing urban population with green corridors to the countryside. The contribution waterways make to green corridors and green infrastructure is often significant (e.g. the River Nene Regional Park in Northamptonshire, see **Box 5**).

Box 5 Nene Regional Park

The River Nene Regional Park is identified within 'The Northamptonshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework Plan'. The Plan illustrates *the interconnected network of Sub-Regional and Local GI Corridors. They are not intended to indicate rigid corridors for Green Infrastructure provision but instead identify broad landscape zones within which Green Infrastructure related proposals should be focused. These multi-functional zones will encompass a range of objectives.*

As stated on the River Nene Regional Parks website:

The River Nene Regional Park is an independent Community Interest Company creating a green infrastructure network of environmental projects extending from Daventry to Peterborough linking the towns of Northampton, Towcester, Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby. Since the inception of the River Nene Regional Park in 2004 approximately twelve million pounds has been secured for ongoing investment in this area.

Some of the River Nene Regional Park projects include the award winning Tree Top Way at Salcey Forest, the innovative facilities at Stanwick Lakes and Top Lodge at Fineshade Woods. Funding is also being invested into community projects through the environmental grants scheme focussing on areas identified by the River Nene Regional Park as being key to the environmental network. All of these projects are bringing about change on the ground and enhancing the environmental assets that we already have.

Working with a wide partnership of organisations the River Nene Regional Park is in a strong position to deliver projects around its core themes which include "The champion for Green Infrastructure across the region".

Sources: [http://www.rnrpenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk/data/5.0%20GI PARTS%201-3.pdf](http://www.rnrpenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk/data/5.0%20GI%20PARTS%201-3.pdf)
<http://www.riverneneregionalpark.org/default.asp?PageID=14&n=RNRP+Partnership>



Foot Meadow on the riverside in Northampton has been improved as part of the Nene Regional Park initiative

Waterways and their waterway corridor including waterway paths can also act as a focus for regeneration and renaissance in smaller urban areas (e.g. the regeneration of canals in Twechar in East Dunbartonshire, see **Box 6**).

Box 6 Twechar Regeneration Group

Twechar is a rural, former mining village situated on the banks of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Following the closure of the Firth and Clyde canal in 1963 the mines in the area wound down with the last pit closing in 1968. The canal was reopened by British Waterway in 2001 enabling links to the restored Union Canal.

As stated on the Twechar community website.(hosted by the Twechar Regeneration Group):

"In many ways, the reopening of the canal in May 2001 heralded a new beginning for Twechar and with plans to regenerate the village now gathering pace, the local community can look forward to a bright future."

The role of the Twechar Regeneration Group (TRG) is to help ensure Twechar continues to prosper. As stated on the Twechar community website:

"In November 2004, the TRG commissioned a regeneration masterplan which sets out the strategy for breathing new life into the village."

The regeneration masterplan concluded that increasing the population, providing a greater mix of housing and delivering economic development, training, capacity building, health improvement and community social enterprise projects are all vital to the long-term sustainability of the village.

Over the next three years, up to £7 million will be invested in housing in the area, including demolition and rebuilding work. The partner agencies that comprise the Twechar Regeneration Group are also working to improve the canal-side infrastructure to ensure better road access to the Forth and Clyde Canal, and there are proposals in place for a jetty, slipway and community boat house."

Source: <http://www.thinktwechar.org/index.asp>

Natural Environment

Waterways and their surrounding corridor can provide a wide diversity of semi-natural habitats (particularly important in urban areas) and can contribute significantly to the provision of ecosystem services. By encouraging and providing opportunities to use waterway paths, people can obtain contact with nature as well as gain a better understanding and appreciation of the natural environment (which can be enhanced by effective interpretation).

It should be noted that as people become aware of their environment and see the impacts of, for example water pollution and litter, the more likely they are to become involved in other environmental issues.

Climate change

Indirectly waterway paths can contribute to climate change mitigation by increasing the use of local waterways for recreation (reducing the need to travel long distances to places of interest) and providing an alternative sustainable personal transport route. Both these benefits can help reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Also waterways provide opportunities for people to go to rivers/canals to benefit from the cooling properties of water and the surrounding vegetation. This is particularly significant in urban areas.

Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage importance of Great Britain's waterways is well recognised. In the case of canals for example, people are able physically to access and touch bridges, locks, cobbles and therefore have direct access to the past. The heritage interest of, for example, Foxton Locks, can be a major tourism draw.

By encouraging and providing opportunities to use waterway paths people can gain a better understanding and appreciation of Great Britain's cultural heritage (which, similarly to nature conservation, can be enhanced by effective interpretation).

Health, well being, recreation and sport

Waterway paths can provide opportunities to maintain and enhance peoples physical and mental well being. (It is noted that being close to water and being outdoors can be mentally therapeutic, hence distinguishing waterway paths from other paths). They can also provide "opportunities for reflection tranquil respite from the often hectic environment"¹⁰.

The capacity of waterway paths to provide access for a range of different users is recognised. The inherent flatness of these paths (i.e. gradients tend to be gentle) mean they are particularly accessible to /provide opportunities for those who are less fit, infirm or disabled, although it is noted that appropriate access and surfacing to these paths is required.

Inland waterways offer a linear feature which serves as a 'handrail' for orientation purposes (i.e. individuals would be hard pushed to get lost when following a river/canal). Such a characteristic is particularly useful for the less confident path user.

In addition the recreation, exercise and wellbeing offered by waterways are free/relatively low cost, a particularly pertinent benefit considering the existing financial climate and pressures on the NHS. Natural England's Walking for Health initiative and Let's Walk Cymru (building on the success of the Countryside Council for Wales' Walking the Way to Health) both promote the use of the outdoors for walking – see **Boxes 7 and 8**.

Box 7 Let's Walk Cymru

'Let's Walk Cymru' aims to get more people using natural green space, scenic landscapes and urban parks more often as a way of becoming active. It has been developed by Sport Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and Countryside Council for Wales

"There are over 30 walking projects up and running across Wales. Some projects have been established for a number of years through the 'Walking the Way to Health' programme and have a number of long established led walks which attract participants on a regular basis. The introduction of 'Let's Walk Cymru' has provided an opportunity for established and new projects to grow and develop to meet the needs of the people in their areas."

The initiative recognises that walking is one of the best forms of activity – it's free, accessible and available to all as well as being key to leading a healthy life.

Source: www.lets-walk-cymru.org.uk/home

Box 8 Walking for Health

Walking for Health - a cost-effective healthcare solution

"Walking for Health (WfH) is the largest national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks. It is a Natural England initiative supported by the Department of Health."

The average cost of physical inactivity, per Primary Care Trust, is over £5,000,000 per year. Walking for Health is a tried and tested, cost effective intervention that is proven to get sedentary people active at least three times per week for periods of over a year. It is locally run, flexible and can target hard-to-reach groups, elderly people, those at risk of or suffering serious long-term ill health and young families."

Extracted verbatim from: Natural England (2010) *Walking for Health - a cost-effective healthcare solution*. Natural England, Cheltenham

¹⁰ *Green Infrastructure Strategies - An introduction for local authorities and their partners*. (Forestry Commission and Natural England, 2008)

Sustainable travel

Waterway paths can provide traffic free commuting, particularly in urban areas for both walkers and cyclists. This aligns well with the government's drive on sustainable travel. In today's economic climate with high and rising fuel costs, commuters are more frequently considering alternative transport options and walking/cycling is a free/relatively low cost transport option. It should be noted that at times waterway paths can provide access to areas which may be severed by roads.

To be effective it is important that connections/links to key destinations are available and where necessary promoted, as through Sustrans' 'Connect2' (**Box 9**) and 'Links to Schools' initiatives (**Box 10**).

Box 9 Connect2

"Connect2 is the Big Lottery funded walking and cycling project that is transforming local communities across the UK. People in Connect2 communities will be able to take pride in places that are benefiting from better walking and cycling links as the project rolls out over the next five years.

Behind the scenes at Sustrans, the Connect2 team have been working closely with the Big Lottery Fund and local partners to get the UK-wide project underway. Over the next 5 years (to 2013) £50 million of Big Lottery Funding will be matched with more than £100 million of other funding to create dedicated, high quality local walking and cycling networks benefiting an estimated 6 million people across the UK from Devon to Perthshire.

Sustrans is now working with our many partners to ensure that the 79 schemes are the best they can be, and that the community is being involved as much as possible so Sustrans' Connect2 really creates the right environment to enable people to walk and cycle to school, the shops, to visit friends, for leisure and pleasure."

Extracted verbatim: www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/connect2



Surfaced towpath and new bridge over the canal in Coventry suitable for use by both cyclists and walkers

Box 10 Links to Schools

Funded by the Department for Transport, the Sustrans Links to Schools project is in its fourth year and local authorities across England are working with Sustrans to connect schools and their communities to the National Cycle Network.

These Links come in a variety of forms, from new cycle routes to pedestrian crossings, all providing the safe routes that young people need to cycle and walk to school.

Apart from safety, there are of course other direct benefits to communities.

By reducing the number of cars taking children to and from school, there is less congestion and pollution and less potential for accidents outside school gates. Walking and cycling also provide everyday exercise, encouraging children to be more active and healthy.

The whole community benefits since links also connect people to their work, to their shops, and to green spaces. Traffic-free routes are also great spaces in their own right - a linear playground for children and adults alike.

Source: www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/links-to-schools

Surfacing and perceptions about personal safety need to be considered. There may also be a need to remove or mitigate barriers where necessary (e.g. to reduce steep gradients) and potential conflicts between different users need to be managed.



In rural locations a more natural path may be more appropriate and cyclists need to make allowance for lower speeds, a rougher surface and stopping to allow pedestrians to pass

Strategically, waterway paths are part of a larger path network although this is not always recognized. Similarly, the strategic network on a national basis provided by waterway paths, in particular canal towpaths, is possibly under appreciated. Waterways provide a ready made national network of routes particularly considering they in turn link up to the coastal network currently being developed.

Tourism and business development

Making more use of waterway paths will increase the number of visitors and visits. This in turn will lead to increased visitor spend, hence boosting local economies, and indirectly could provide employment opportunities (**Box 11**). In addition, increasing visits/visitors may provide opportunities for diversification of business, e.g. bed and breakfast on farms with knock-on economic benefits.

Box 11 Thames Path economic benefits

Just under 190,000 user days were undertaken by short distance walkers on London sections of the Thames Path, contributing an estimated £370,000 to the local economy.

An estimated £11,000 was attributed to the 34,000 user days undertaken by short distance cyclists on London sections of the Thames Path.

Source:

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Thamespath/uploads/Appendix%202%20-%20London%20Summary\(1\).pdf](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Thamespath/uploads/Appendix%202%20-%20London%20Summary(1).pdf)

Waterways can provide “an inspiring setting for economics growth and investment and help attract and retain people ensuring stable populations and labour supply”¹¹. The presence of waterways often increases property and land values with commercial and residential property in close proximity to inland waterways commanding a premium.

Fairer, stronger and more active communities and social justice

There is potential for waterway paths to provide an educational resource in particular in regard to water, engineering, nature conservation and cultural heritage. Not only is this resource free it will often be located close to educational establishment minimising travel costs. British Waterways and its partners have harnessed this opportunity through ‘Wild over Waterways’ (WoW) (**Box 12**).

Box 12 Wild over Waterways

British Waterways has developed a initiative called Wild Over Waterways (WOW).

WOW provides resources for “children aged 7-11 years and their teachers, group leaders and families”. The resources are designed to help visitors “safely explore the canals, rivers and waterways of Britain”.

Resources provided include:

- topic packs;
- fact files;
- trail information;
- teaching resources (including curriculum resources); and
- activity ideas.

The Education Report 2009 (dated 19th Jan 2010) demonstrates visits to the WOW website have increased since 2007:

- 2009 - 126,163 visits
- 2008 - 107,967 visits
- 2007 - 81,623 visits

Requests through the website have also increased from 109 in 2007 and 87 in 2008 to 342 in 2009. In addition there were 63 educational visits led by British Waterways Education and Interpretation Manager in 2009.

Derived from www.wow4water.net/ and British Waterways (2010). *Education Report:2009*. Unpublished British Waterways report.

The potential of waterway paths to provide routes that are accessible to all regardless of demographics, and hence encourage community cohesion, was also recognised. Especially as canals link communities including areas of multiple deprivation.



Can you identify all the bugs and minibeasts living in a waterway environment?



www.wow4water.net

¹¹ *Green Infrastructure Strategies - An introduction for local authorities and their partners*. (Forestry Commission and Natural England, 2008)

WoW produce information packs to engage children and encourage waterway visits at a variety of levels

Table 21 Cross-reference matrix of case studies vs benefits demonstrated

Case study	In-depth or summary	Place making	Sustainable personal travel	Recreation /sport /tourism	Access to green space and historic environment
Thames Path	In-depth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weaver Way	In-depth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hatton Locks	In-depth	-	-	✓	✓
Kennet & Avon Canal	In-depth	-	-	✓	✓
Aire Valley Towpath	In-depth	-	✓	-	✓
Montgomery Canal	In-depth	-	-	✓	✓
Falkirk Wheel	In-depth	✓	-	✓	✓
Lincolnshire Waterways	In-depth	-	-	✓	✓
Three Rivers Way	In-depth	-	✓	✓	✓
Leicester Riverside	In-depth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Erewash Canal	In-depth	-	✓	✓	✓
Lee Regional Park	In-depth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chesterfield Canal	Summary	-	✓	✓	✓
Central Birmingham	Summary	✓	✓	-	✓
Nene Regional Park	Summary	-	-	✓	✓
Twechar Regeneration	Summary	✓	-	-	✓
Let's Walk Cymru	Summary	-	✓	✓	-
Walking for Health	Summary	-	✓	✓	-
Connect2	Summary	-	✓	✓	-
Links to Schools	Summary	-	✓	✓	-
Wild over Waterways	Summary	✓	-	-	✓

Summary of benefits

- The 6654km of navigable waterway in Great Britain have associated with them at least 7510km of publicly available waterway paths. In addition, a proportion of the 1591km of disused waterways also supports waterway paths. Over 900 million visits are made each year to the waterways, most for activities that involve solely or mainly waterway paths. Visitor-spend by these waterway path users is estimated at over £8 billion annually.
- The presence of the waterway gives waterway paths considerable added attraction over many other paths.
- In addition to the economic benefits, there are significant social and environmental benefits of use of waterway paths. Benefits are summarised in **Box 14**. Waterway paths contribute to the value of the first category (place making) by their presence or creation, while for the other three categories, benefits increase as use of the path increases.
- The added value of simply increasing use of the existing waterway path resource will thus be significant and this should be a priority. Although this will have its problems in certain areas in terms of path capacity and potential for inter-user competition for space, much of the network has considerable spare capacity which could be realised at minimal cost in terms of capital works on the ground.
- Extension of the waterway path network would increase benefits further but would require more capital outlay. However, extension schemes should be considered, if and when funds become available, as it is likely that many individual projects will show a favourable benefit:cost ratio.

Box 14 Benefits of waterway paths

'Place making'	Waterway paths: • form a basis for green and blue infrastructure networks associated with waterside development; • with appropriate design, can contribute to the premium value attached to waterside property; and • contribute to 'sense of place', especially in urban areas.
Sustainable personal travel	Use of waterway paths as traffic free routes for walking and cycling: • improves health and wellbeing; • contributes to climate change mitigation; and • saves fuel and thus cost.
Recreation, sport and tourism	Waterway paths provide a varied recreational facility for walkers, cyclists and equestrians which: • provides access to water-based sport and recreation; • facilitates exercise; • contributes to healthy lifestyles; • improves wellbeing; • provides links to visitor destinations; and • contributes over £8 billion in income to the GB economy.
Access to greenspace and the historic environment	Waterway paths provide easy access for a high proportion of the population to outdoor greener and tranquil areas than those experienced in much of their daily life, resulting in: • improved health and wellbeing, especially mental health; and • the potential to contribute to community cohesion and social inclusion.

Proposals and delivery

Waterway paths deliver significant social and environmental benefits, as well as contributing some £8 billion to the economy of Great Britain. The benefits are largely a function of sustainable use – if such use increases, so will the benefits.

The vision

On this basis we should:

‘make the maximum sustainable use of waterway paths, thus delivering the greatest benefits to the local community and the economy’.

Priorities for action

The first priority is to increase use of the existing waterway paths network. The evidence suggests that, in many cases, simple, low-cost actions can unlock significant social and economic benefits.

At the same time, all interested parties should maintain pressure for waterway path enhancements to be embedded into local development plan documents and regeneration proposals from the earliest stages.



Actions to promote use of waterway paths range from low-cost marketing of existing infrastructure to major projects, such as the £22M Gateshead Millennium Bridge, which provides a traffic-free link for walkers and cyclists between paths in Newcastle and Gateshead.

In order of increasing cost and ambition, local delivery bodies should work to achieve increased benefits from waterway paths by carrying out the following actions:

- **use marketing and education to increase the use of the existing waterway path resource;**
- **encourage greater use through improved signage and minor enhancements;**
- **address perceived conflicts between or threats to users;**
- **eliminate small gaps in the waterway path network to remove effective obstructions for different types of user;**
- **remove larger gaps in the waterway path network, for example by provision of a new bridge;**
- **extend the network where possible, particularly as part of regeneration projects where funding can be obtained through planning agreements;**
- **create new PROW where appropriate (e.g. to protect against developer antagonism to paths across frontages of new developments); and**
- **develop new waterway-related visitor destinations.**

Delivery partners

Experience from elsewhere shows that benefits will be maximised through partnership working.

Local waterways partnerships should be created, as an integral part, where possible, of the wider local community partnerships system (e.g. co-operatives, local enterprise partnerships), to promote waterway paths and to develop clear, costed, action plans.

More strategic partnerships may be needed to manage specific long distance paths.

As well as bringing together local authorities, navigation authorities, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), partnerships can be valuable as a means of promoting cross-departmental working within larger organisations.

Local planning authorities are an essential part of most such partnerships, usually having the most effective systems in place to engage local communities, as well as exercising planning powers, while NGOs may have more freedom to generate proposals. Navigation authorities can play a valuable role and may be the owner of waterway paths. Other official bodies may also be involved usefully, depending on circumstances, for example the Forestry Commission or public transport operators. Involvement of the Local Access Forum may help to garner support and to advise and facilitate progress.

Experience shows that the success of partnerships is very dependent on choice of a leader with the necessary flair, whose roles and responsibilities are clear and who directs activity effectively. The lead role can successfully rotate between organisations or may be fixed depending on circumstances.

The benefits from waterway paths accrue mainly to local communities so the best solutions are likely to be those developed through locally based partnerships, giving an opportunity for individuals in local communities to take a lead and for groups with different interests in waterway paths to pool their ideas. Although consensus will not always be easy to achieve, effective partnership working will achieve the most community benefits from waterway paths.

Such local initiatives help to build fairer, stronger and more active communities with longer term commitments to the project. They are also consistent with the 2010 Coalition government's 'localism agenda' as part of its 'big society' proposals.

Guidance on waterway partnerships is provided by IWAC in their 2010 report *Working together: effective waterway partnerships*.

Some potential partners for promotion of waterway paths and their interests are listed below. All such bodies with waterways in their area should consider contributing to such partnerships. Examples of successful partnerships are included in the case studies presented in this report.

Local communities	Waterway paths are important to local communities and groups such as community interest companies and social enterprises in many ways, as sustainable transport routes, as a recreational facility, as a contributor to wellbeing, as part of the character of the area, as locations for art works and many other uses.
Local authorities	Waterway paths contribute to policy objectives for tourism, green infrastructure, sport, community health, transport, road safety and regeneration. Various departments should be involved (e.g. planning, highways, tourism, leisure, environment and health).
Navigation authorities	Many own waterway paths. Contribution of paths to meeting duties to have regard to maintaining public access and to providing income where they operate visitor facilities or attractions;
Local businesses	Waterway paths contribute to increasing visitor-spend
Sustrans	Waterway paths contribute to regional and national cycle networks
Sports bodies	Waterway paths provide routes for running and access to water-based activities
Walking groups	Waterway paths contribute to development of walking routes for all abilities
Waterway societies	Waterway paths are an important part of the waterway heritage
Landowners	Many own the paths and may also have an interest in providing facilities for users
Local transport operators	May be important in providing access links to waterway paths and in marketing these, including commercial services and those supported by local authorities.
Tourism and destination management bodies	Tourism bodies have an important role in marketing waterway paths, which may contribute to meeting visitor targets for the area and for specific destinations.

Delivery of the action plan

Partnerships or lead organisations should identify and take responsibility for specific tasks to deliver the outcomes listed earlier. Many of these are being achieved successfully in some areas and delivery organisations should seek to learn from and build upon experience of successful partnerships elsewhere – solutions are available.

The maximum benefits will be achieved by multi-functional paths, subject to practicalities.

Key actions should include the following, if these issues are not already being addressed. Lead bodies are indicated for situations where no formal delivery partnership is in place.



Multi-use of the canal towpath in Berkhamsted with fishing and a beer festival in progress, as well as use as a busy thoroughfare for walkers and cyclists

Marketing	Inform the local community about what is on offer in terms of activities, destinations of interest, pre-planned walking routes, access and the special qualities of waterway paths. All 'partners' can contribute to dissemination of information through websites, signs and posters, publications, radio and events.	Lead – usually local authority or navigation authority Support – all interested bodies (official and voluntary) should be engaged to contribute
Signage	Signage should invite people onto waterway paths, particularly in urban areas, provide direction and reassurance and interpret the waterway environment.	Lead – usually local authority or navigation authority, or voluntary bodies Support – highway authorities, public transport undertakers, voluntary bodies and owners of paths
Stakeholder consensus building	Stakeholders must be fully engaged in dialogue to build consensus on resolving problems of inter-user conflict on multi-user paths; this will be achieved better by gaining stakeholder co-operation than by attempts at enforcement	Lead – partnership leader or local authority or navigation authority as an impartial broker Support – all partners
Minor physical improvements	Improvements in path surfaces, vegetation management and provision of seating, may achieve significant increases in user numbers. Interest can be added by siting of art works along paths (examples include a sculpture trail in Peterborough and the Space Walk on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal).	Lead – the path owner or highway authority Support – funding bodies, voluntary organisations (including those giving practical support through work parties)
Removal of threats	Physical measures, such as increasing permeability, lighting, opening out dark areas and greater human presence, for example wardens, should be employed to increase use of waterway paths, where use is discouraged by fears about personal safety.	Lead – usually local authority or navigation authority Support – police, volunteers
Elimination of small gaps and constraints	Provision of car parking and links to public transport and addressing pinch-points or gaps to make paths suitable for multi-functional use should be undertaken to provide continuity of traffic-free waterway paths.	Lead – the path owner or highway authority Support – funding bodies, voluntary organisations (including those giving practical support through work parties)

While delivery of the types of development below may require longer timescales to secure funding, partners should start work immediately towards future improvement and expansion of the waterway paths network by:

- ensuring that waterway path proposals are incorporated into local development plans, including area action plans and sustainable community strategies; and
- preparing generic proposals for incorporating waterway paths into new developments and models for developer contributions through planning agreements or other arrangements, which can be put forward rapidly when opportunities arise.



Modern development on the non-towpath side of the Grand Junction Canal incorporates a waterway path accessible to all, although this is not a PROW

The following types of development should be included in plans and implemented as funds become available.

Elimination of larger gaps	Examples might include reinstatement of bridges over waterways.	Lead – highway authority or navigation authority Support – voluntary bodies
Maximising developer contributions	For waterside development sites, contributions to waterway path improvements should be sought through planning conditions or planning agreements which reflect the greater profitability of waterside development.	Lead – local planning authority Support – developers
New paths	Where opportunity arises, new paths should be created along waterways where there are none.	Lead – highway authority or navigation authority Support – landowners, voluntary bodies
New PROW	PROW should be created where this is needed to help to secure long term availability of waterway paths.	Lead – highway authority or navigation authority Support – landowners, voluntary bodies
New destination sites	Development of new waterway attractions accessed via waterway paths will increase use of and benefits derived from waterway paths.	Lead – often the navigation authority Support – all partners

Funding

Sources

Although income can be generated directly from users of waterway paths (e.g. through car parking), the maintenance of recreational waterways (including towpaths owned by the waterway authority) generally involves input of public money.

A report by IWAC in 2009 on *Funding and income sources for a selection of overseas inland waterways* showed that this situation applies for amenity waterways across Europe and north America.

Survey respondents saw local authorities and navigation authorities as the key funding agencies for waterway paths but there is a widening consensus that partnerships, often with multiple funding sources, are the most effective delivery vehicle for directing funding of and managing waterway path projects. Examples are seen in the case studies described in the next chapter.

A common problem is that it is usually easier to obtain funding for one-off capital expenditure projects, such as creating or improving paths, than it is to secure ongoing funding for maintenance, which is essential to secure the future availability of waterway paths. This is recognised by Sustrans, who look for maintenance and management funding for 40 years before they will pay grants under their Connect2 programme.

Sources of funding for waterway paths include the following.

Public grant-in-aid	Local authorities and navigation authorities receive funding from central government. However, funding for navigation authorities, enhancement of waterway towpaths beyond the normal towpath standard and creation of paths where there is no towpath must generally come at least partly from sources additional to the navigation authority's maintenance budget, as expenditure on paths is often outside the authority's core remit.
Navigation authority earnings	Income from visitor attractions and property may contribute to the revenue from which towpaths are maintained.
Local authority budgets	Most local authorities have pressure on their budgets for funding access work and so need to prioritise. Clearly there are specific responsibilities falling on particular bodies or individuals, for example the local highway authority in the case of PROW. However, the wide range of benefits identified as arising from use of waterway paths potentially justifies expenditure from a wide range of public sector budgets covering matters as diverse as health, transport, heritage, regeneration, tourism, art and sport. Other projects, such as flood risk management works, may be able to deliver waterway path benefits incidental to their main purpose.
Developer contributions	Funding can be secured through various types of planning agreements or developer contribution models associated with development of particular waterside sites. These mechanisms should be embodied as early as possible into development plans and sustainable community strategies.
Sponsorship	To date it has been unusual for private sector companies to sponsor paths, possibly because of the long-term commitment that may be associated with this. Even so, there are examples of private sector sponsorship of access routes. Examples include: • The North Face Trail – a mountain bike route built in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, and part-funded by The North Face. (See: www.forestry.gov.uk/thenorthfacetrail); • Altura Trail – a mountain bike trail in Whinlatter Forest in the Lake District, which is supported by Zyro, makers of Altura clothing and mountain bike products. Perhaps more common is for private companies to contribute towards the production of a leaflet, or sponsorship of an event, for example First Great Western Trains and a local boatyard sponsored leaflets about Oxford Canal walks based around access using local trains. This tendency extends to public sector bodies, too. Recent examples are Knowsley NHS Trust, which funded the production of a walks leaflet and Islington & Camden NHS Trust, which developed four routes, each linked to a GP surgery, with 'tear-off' maps which could be given to patients in the same way as a prescription.
Charities	Additional funds are available from the voluntary sector, charitable sources and the lottery but partnerships need to make the effort to apply for such funds.
Volunteers	Current Government ideas about transfer of some waterways to the 'civil society' sector include an assumption that greater use will be made of volunteers. This can provide funding 'in kind' both for capital and maintenance projects in appropriate circumstances.

Application of funds

The first priority identified above, better marketing leading to greater use of existing waterway paths, can be achieved with relatively little public funding as part of existing promotional initiatives and by obtaining one-off sponsorship from local businesses.

Nevertheless, for web-based promotion in particular, updating is essential to maintain public confidence in the website and there is an, albeit relatively small, ongoing funding commitment involved.

Other prioritised projects, such as improved signage and interpretation boards, can also be delivered relatively cheaply, as can changing hearts and minds to resolve conflicts, if stakeholder groups are fully engaged.

Art projects can make waterway paths a more interesting place to visit and enhance the waterway path experience and are likely to attract different funding streams from those directed towards access.

Further information on aspects of delivery

Engagement of key stakeholders

Early communication between different user representatives and landowners is important, before decisions are made, to agree shared objectives and solutions, so that potential problems are understood by all users and they are encouraged to work together to avoid them. Consensus building is discussed in detail in IWAC's report *Britain's inland waterways: balancing the needs of navigation and aquatic wildlife*.

Policy support

Efforts to improve public access along or within inland waterway corridors may require resources – staff effort or funding – for delivery. As such, much will depend on the 'political will' that exists within the agency best placed to deliver the improvement (typically a local highway authority but could be the navigation authority on a man-made waterway).

The political will is likely to be greater where policy support is available at local or national level. Thus it is important to establish protection of the existing network and, even where there is no prospect of immediate funding, longer-term aspirations for new paths

in formal policy documents, such as local spatial plans, local transport plans, countryside and/or walking strategies and associated documents including ROWIP/CPP, green infrastructure strategies, AONB and national park management plans. This is most likely to be achieved if the contribution of waterway paths to multiple local authority targets is well articulated.

Where the proposed improvement is specifically mentioned in the ROWIP/CPP, then there is already strong political support for the improvement. However, it should be remembered that there is no duty on local highway authorities to implement ROWIP or CPP, so there is no guarantee that funding is in place to bring about the improvement.

Marketing and information

There is undoubtedly unused capacity in the existing system of waterway paths, so increasing use of the existing system is the most cost-effective way to increase the benefits that accrue from use of waterway paths. This requires marketing (in its widest sense) of the network through a wide range of outlets, not only those with a waterway focus but also others, including tourist information centres and public transport operators. This need not be costly, particularly with the availability of the internet as a vehicle for such information.

Web sites such as the www.ldwa.org.uk, www.ramblers.org.uk and www.waterscape.com already pull together information on paths from across GB into single, convenient websites and provide a good basis on which to build. Local authorities can, and already do in some cases, contribute significantly to dissemination of such information through their own websites.

Some existing publicity for waterway paths focuses largely on recreational use and could be extended at relatively little cost to promote green travel to work, shops and other day to day destinations – provided that the necessary links between residential areas and destinations are in place.

While there appears to be little research that specifically demonstrates that promotion of a route will lead to increased usage, inferences that can be drawn to support the assertion that this will occur can be obtained from:

- many visitor surveys show that people use information from various sources to decide where they want to go when visiting the countryside, including promotional material;
- research undertaken for ROWIP/CPP, and by BW and EA regarding waterway paths, often identifies lack of information as a barrier to increased use of countryside access opportunities; and
- some people are willing to pay for guidebooks and maps, and this is likely to be a good indicator of an intention to use the contents.

By way of example, a survey by TNS for Natural England, asked a sample of people what would induce them to make a lot more use of strategic recreational routes. Their answers are summarised in **Table 21**.

Table 22 Natural England survey data

Statement	% of users giving this answer (38% of total)	% of non-users giving this answer (62% of total)
More printed information about routes/tracks	12	9
Better signposting	11	8
More on-line information about routes/tracks	8	6

References: TNS (2008). *The Market for Strategic Recreational Routes. Final report for Natural England*. See: www.naturalengland.org.uk/

Path design features

Different design features (e.g. path surface, path width) may be preferred by particular users but seen as inappropriate by others, while user behaviour is also an important factor. Thus establishment of multi-user paths requires consideration of both physical design and promoting appropriate user behaviour and expectations (it's better if users know with whom they are sharing the route).

Key physical design issues include width, path surface, barriers and sight lines.

Where towpaths are unsuitable for enlargement it may be appropriate to consider a separate cycle path behind the towpath hedge, particularly in urban areas.

Continuity

For some users, a continuous path free of motor traffic is important. For example a short stretch of busy road may be enough to sever the path as a through route for equestrians or inexperienced or young cyclists. On the other hand, a ford that is passable on horseback may act as a barrier for many walkers.



This refuse wharf in the City of London loads barges with containers across the Thames Path. However, the path is maintained with a protected passage (just visible) and traffic lights/barriers for occasional brief closures

Severance often occurs in urban areas where industrial premises reach down to a waterway, perhaps with a disused or currently active wharf in the way. While the need to maintain towpaths on canals across the front of industrial premises is generally recognised on canals, riverside paths are often simply diverted onto the nearest roads, although at some sites the riverside path is maintained within a protected shield. This is the preferred option.

The path environment

This problem of potential users being deterred because urban waterway paths may be seen as threatening can be reduced to some extent by ensuring that paths are 'permeable', i.e. provided with frequent access (and escape) points, but may require other education or enforcement measures to allow the benefits of the path to be realised. Lighting may be another way of improving a way's appeal but then creates other concerns – such as costs and light pollution.

In rural areas, particularly in the fens, where path routes occasionally include sections along vehicular roads on the tops of flood embankments, it is worth considering whether an alternative route can be created between the top of the bank and the waterway, possibly along a berm, accepting that it may need to be designed to withstand regular flooding.

Many of the design issues presented here also apply to links to the waterway path, which should be to an equivalent (or better) standard.

Safety

Risk minimisation regarding water hazards can be achieved either by trying to prevent access to the water using fencing or by education of users to recognise and avoid hazards. Different authorities adopt widely varying approaches. One problem with fencing is that it can hinder rescue if someone does get past it and gets into difficulties and it is preferable to rely where practicable on education and provision of facilities (ladders, ramps) to allow people who fall in to get out of the water or to be rescued.

Safety signage in general should be designed with a view to communicating unexpected risks in the most effective way, so as to achieve a real reduction in risk. The provision of large numbers of safety symbols in an attempt to cover every eventuality may be less effective. Case law on liabilities is discussed briefly in [Appendices 4 and 5](#).

Other Interests

It is highly unlikely that any new public access, or even a higher level of access, can be created without having implications for some other interests. Every situation is likely to be different but other interests that will probably need to be considered are (again, in no particular order of priority):

- boating activity (e.g. mooring, operation of locks);
- angling, especially where organised events are staged;
- nature conservation (e.g. risk of disturbance of wildlife or trampling of plants), especially at statutorily designated sites;
- flood defence (health and safety at structures such as sluices, impact on integrity of defences);
- local community impacts (e.g. need for car parking, traffic impacts, risk of noise); and
- other users (inter user conflict is often mentioned as a concern when cyclists, horse riders and walkers are channelled along the same route).

Health and safety concerns may surface in relation to each of the above other interests. However, much of the concern over conflicts between interests can be overcome through early stakeholder engagement, careful design and subsequent management (see below).

Legal

Inland waterway corridors offer potential as routes for public access. They can be a route of interest in their own right (e.g. the Thames Path is a national trail) or can serve to link other sections of path to provide more continuous routes free of motor traffic than would otherwise be possible. However, there is no guarantee that the bank of a river or canal will carry a right of public access or the right may be limited in some way. So, it is appropriate to consider whether any rights need to be sought and whether the benefits from acquiring rights would justify the cost and effort involved.

The mechanisms available for creation of public access have been discussed in [Appendix 4](#). However, it is important to recognise that there could be seen to be something of a hierarchy of preference for acquiring rights:

- permissive agreement with no formal agreement/term;
- contractual agreement (i.e. an agreement under contract law but without a PROW being created);
- PROW created through Highways Act 1980 s.25 agreement;
- PROW created through Highways Act 1980 s.26 order unopposed; and
- PROW created through Highways Act 1980 s.26 order opposed/ compulsory purchase orders (CPO).

In practice, opposed s.26 orders and CPO are seldom used to create PROW because of the attendant 'bad feeling' it often generates.

Management

At the outset, it is important to consider which body is responsible for management of the new facility. As noted earlier, responsibilities for managing PROW are divided between the Local Highway Authority and the landowner. On open access land, the management largely lies with the landowner but the access authority (the local highway authority or national park authority) has powers to help landowners with management of access, where it considers it necessary. On permissive routes, most of the management burden falls on the landowner.

A major drain on management resources can arise if illegal activities take place and have to be controlled. The sorts of illegal activities that commonly arise are:

- illegal driving of motor vehicles (usually motorcycles);
- littering, especially dog fouling;
- vandalism; and
- under-age drinking and taking of drugs.

Techniques are available to seek to discourage these activities becoming established.

Successful introduction of new public access will often require careful design and continuing management. With careful design, management can be made a lot easier. For example, the way users behave when given access has been studied and shows a good degree of conformity.

For example, people will tend to:

- enter an area at certain points (e.g. car parks) so the location of these entry points will dictate, to some extent, where people go;
- follow a clear route, so they can be influenced to walk along a particular line (without actually stopping them from following another line) by:
 - laying a surface along the preferred line, or cutting a swathe through vegetation;
 - putting bridges or boardwalks on the preferred line and not elsewhere;
 - waymarking/signing the preferred line;
 - placing access furniture (stiles, gates, seats) along the preferred line; and
- find certain features attractive whilst other features deter them and so 'desire lines' will tend to form between entry points and attractive features. Linear features like rivers and canals, as well as walls, ridges and escarpments, tend to be attractive to users.

Armed with an understanding of user behaviour, it is possible to create an access plan, although subsequent refinements may be needed once the patterns of access have developed after introduction.