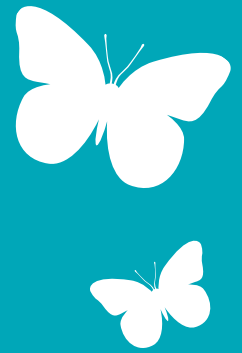


Sharing Towpaths

A consultation on towpath use for the Canal & River Trust



The Canal & River Trust is consulting with stakeholders, local authorities, communities and partners in order to put together a National Towpath Use policy. The aim of the policy is to improve the experience for those who use towpaths in England and Wales. We aim to attract more visitors to regularly use and enjoy the waterways and to encourage shared, safe use of towpaths.

In an age where life is increasingly fast-paced, and every day stresses can wear us down, it's important to find the time to slow down.

Whether it's a short lunchtime stroll, jogging, a cycle ride or angling, the towpaths have a wide range of users and with 50% of the population of England and Wales living within 5 miles of a Trust waterway, so many more people could benefit from the calm the water brings.

This paper sets out the Trust's proposed approach to towpath management to ensure they are shared spaces where a range of uses can be enjoyed, with all parties respecting each other's use.



Canal &
River Trust

Purpose



The production of a national towpath use policy which will:

- be clear on the Trust's approach to managing safer sharing of towpaths
- set out what the Trust will do
- set out what visitors can do

The Policy will also help guide partners and funders on some of the challenges faced by the Trust and the expectations of our visitors.

Above all, the Policy is a form of social contract or memorandum between the Trust as guardian of a historic network on the one hand, and everyone who uses and enjoys it on the other; a shared commitment to conserve and improve all it offers now and for the future.

Towpath Funding Trends

Over the last 10 years there has been significant funding available for improvements of towpaths. Local Authorities, Local Sustainable Transport Fund, Sustrans, Wales and other Government funding has recognised the value and accessibility that improved towpaths offer. More recently the Cycle Ambition Fund and, in London, the Mayor of London's Cycling Vision have offered additional investment for towpaths.



All of this means that whilst there is a significant funding opportunity for towpaths, funded programmes present challenges to ensure investment continues to deliver benefits for everyone, particularly the majority of visitors who are pedestrians.

In simple terms, any funding should deliver better towpaths for everyone and improvements to increase towpath use should not be at the expense of the quality of the towpath experience but with a clear aim of increasing betterment over time.



The Trust's Approach

The Trust is in a position to provide leadership on policies and practice related to 'shared use' paths. Some of our work is of continuing interest to many other organisations, including local authorities and parks that experience similar challenges in managing safe sharing of paths.

The policy will underpin our management measures, reflecting experiences around the country.

Principles

1. Towpaths have established uses in supporting boating, angling, walking and other water-based activities, to be balanced with their role in connecting places.
2. The Trust and its stakeholders will ensure canal and river environments are safeguarded as havens for people and wildlife.
3. Towpaths should be free to access for all users who wish to walk, run, fish, cycle etc. and who are committed to behave considerately to other users of the towpaths who are slower or more vulnerable than themselves.
4. Towpaths should be improved where needed, to accommodate increased visits safely and to improve disabled access. Improvements should benefit a wide range of users and enhance the waterway setting.
5. Towpaths should be a distinct category in cycle or other route design standards, recognising their shared use and historic waterside character.
6. Visitors will continue to recognise they are entering a slower space shared by pedestrians, cyclists, boaters, joggers and anglers.
7. Routes along canals and rivers will be branded in the names of these historic waterways.
8. The tradition of horse boating is part of the heritage of our waterways and improvements made should follow the guidance for horse boating. Towpaths although built for horses are now predominantly used by people and (except where designated as bridleways) use for horse riding requires specific permission or alternative routes may be developed.
9. Where there are concerns over capacity or underlying condition, towpaths will not be promoted as part of a wider route network, but alternative routes along roads will be sought.

What the Trust will do

The Trust will work in partnership with local authorities and local communities to improve and promote the use of its towpaths for a wide range of users.

- Deliver surface improvements in line with our Towpath Guidance Document including the design of towpaths to encourage safe shared use.
- Consider the effects of such improvements (risk reviews)
- Provide information for visitors on the condition of our towpaths, including identifying those which are surfaced and are therefore more suitable for mobility vehicles, pushchairs and cycling.
- Encourage local communities to work with us to maintain towpaths and through that local ownership encourage others to respect them and treat them with care.
- Reclaim towpath width for safer shared use where practical and appropriate.
- Manage vegetation and improve verges where appropriate, recognising also the environmental and wildlife benefits that this provides.
- Review and research the best practice for towpath design and shared use.

- Review towpath use where there is evidence of conflict and if required:
 - ⇒ act to protect the slowest moving users first
 - ⇒ make use of our campaigns (e.g. Share the Space, Drop your Pace)
 - ⇒ introduce additional signage
 - ⇒ aim to provide a visible presence through volunteering to encourage improved behaviours
 - ⇒ introduce physical measures with the aim as not to inconvenience
- Conduct surveys, and /or focus groups relevant to sharing of towpaths.
- Share findings with others.



We will be clear on behaviours expected of those using towpaths

- Publish and promote a Towpath Code intended to encourage responsible behaviour and reduce negative behaviour.
- Develop shared use signage – ‘pedestrian priority’, ‘thanks for slowing down’.
- Encourage events led by rangers and or volunteers to help reinforce considerate behaviour.
- Encourage adoption of our towpaths by local communities or businesses.

Work with partners to enhance the towpath environment for visitors

- Liaise with key interest groups.
- Work with local authorities and the Police.
- Promote alternative routes around the busiest towpaths.
- Consider joint enforcement of anti-social behaviour.

What visitors can do

- Be aware of the shared nature of towpaths
- Be considerate of others and acknowledge other users courteously
- Keep towpaths clear for other users

A proposed Towpath Code:

Share the space - consider other people and the local environment whenever you're on a towpath. Remember some people may move less predictably, for example young children or those with visual or mobility impairments.

Drop your pace - considerate sharing of the limited towpath space is the key. Jogging and cycling are welcome, but drop your pace in good time and let people know you are approaching by ringing a bell or politely calling out before waiting to pass slowly.

Pedestrians have priority - towpaths are shared spaces where pedestrians have priority and vehicles, except bicycles and mobility aids, are generally excluded.

Be courteous to others – a smile can go a long way. Abusive or threatening behaviour is not acceptable and should be reported to the Police.

Follow signs and obey local bye-laws - they are there for the safety of everyone. Cyclists should dismount where required and use common sense in busy or restricted areas, recognising that pedestrians have priority.

Give way to oncoming people beneath bridges whether they are on foot or bike and be extra careful at bends and entrances where visibility is limited.

Give way and use common sense when travelling in large groups, especially if you are running or cycling.

Avoid wearing headphones as this makes you less aware of your surroundings, possible hazards and others sharing the same space.

Keep dogs under control ideally using a short lead on busy towpaths and clean-up after them. Dog fouling is unpleasant for other towpath users and is a health hazard.

At all times, keep children close to you and encourage them to learn and follow the Towpath Code



We would like to hear your feedback on our proposals

Tell Us
What You
Think

- Do you experience problems on your local towpath?
- What additional priorities should we address in our code of conduct?
- What behaviours should we seek to encourage?
- How should we encourage better sharing of towpaths?
- Should we adopt the same approach in all areas, urban and rural?
- How should we balance the needs of busy communities with capacity of the towpaths in those areas?

Please send us your feedback:

Participate in our website survey and let us have your views by Friday 9th May 2014

(Link to be added)



Get involved

Become a friend of the Canal & River Trust

There are many ways you can make a difference to your local canal or river.

You could join our Friendship scheme by giving a monthly donation. Or you could simply make a one-off donation and help ensure that our inland waterways remain a valued part of our local landscapes now and forever.

Visit • Donate • Volunteer

canalrivertrust.org.uk