

**Tell Us
What You
Think**

Strategic Waterway Plan

The Next Ten Years first draft

West Midlands Waterway Partnership



**Canal &
River Trust**

Contents

Tell Us What You Think

Please read this document through the lens of your community, organisation or user interests.

*Come back to us with comments by **6 December 2013** (contact details on the back cover) with how its objectives, priorities and actions fit with your aspirations - or how they could fit better!*

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Welcome

The creation of the Canal & River Trust in summer 2012 has put our canals exactly where they should be. That is into the hands of everyone and in the control of the people who care passionately about their long term survival.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the West Midlands Waterway strategic plan where we set out a vision, priorities and action plan to make a real difference to our cherished waterways and the communities they touch.

Our strategic plan will be designed to articulate the wide range of issues and priorities that are seen as key in managing the wonderful canal network of the West Midlands and place us on a firm foundation to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

As chair of the West Midlands Waterway Partnership I have been greatly encouraged by the contributions to the Trust's work from sources unavailable to us in the past. This has included significant donations from corporate sponsors to support canal maintenance, but also specific environmental projects like rescuing the declining vole population, or to support the popular open days when the public have had an opportunity to see the marvellous work done on historic structures by our skilled workforce. Something close to my heart as an advocate of the splendid heritage of the canal network in the West Midlands.

The West Midlands waterways have also seen growing number of Friends of the Trust and volunteers. People who have so generously given their time to enable vital work to be completed. In fact, volunteer days have increased five fold in the last four years and we are increasing resources again next year to hit even more ambitious targets – with a big increase in education volunteers going into schools on the agenda.

Our Partnership has nevertheless been unanimous about the need for a shared vision for a strategic and planned way ahead for the waterway. We have already embarked on a journey that is making a real difference to what the Canal & River Trust can achieve through a partnership approach and the feedback we have already had on our early work demonstrates our belief in a truly collaborative process. It has given us an excellent foundation to work together in ensuring the survival of the West Midlands' canal network for future generations and this document sets out the issues we see as critical and how we plan to tackle them. I am confident it will serve us well. However, we would be very keen to hear what you think and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Peter Mathews CMG

Chair, West Midlands Waterway Partnership

Canal & River Trust:

Our Role and Objectives

The Canal & River Trust was established by Parliament in July 2012. It has responsibility for canals, rivers, docks and reservoirs, along with historic buildings, archives and three waterway museums, including the National Waterways Museum.

These assets are recognised as a national treasure and a local haven for people and wildlife. They are held and managed by the new Trust on behalf of the nation. The principal role of the Trust is to care for this unique legacy, holding it in trust for the nation in perpetuity.

The new Trust will act as guardian for the canals and rivers of England and Wales - ensuring that history, nature and communities are central to everything it does.



“A sustainable and evolving canal and river network that is a national treasure - accessible to and cherished by all”

Canal & River Trust, 2012



Canal & River Trust:

Our Strategic Priorities

Almost 50% of the population of England and Wales live within five miles of our network of canals, rivers and towpaths. The network is cherished by millions of visitors, neighbours and communities, yet it has been difficult in the past for many people to get involved in shaping its future. We intend to change that.

The true potential of our canals and rivers and their long term survival will only be secured if the new Trust fully engages and works with visitors, users, neighbours, business partners and local authorities, including parish, town and community councils.

Our priority is to widen the enjoyment of our waterways today, whilst protecting them for future generations.

The Trustees have set out in a document entitled ‘Shaping our Future - Strategic Priorities - Keeping People, History and Nature Connected’ (July 2012) six strategic priorities aimed at unlocking this potential:



Ensuring our canals and rivers are open, accessible and safe



Inspiring more people to enjoy the canals and rivers and support our work



Earning financial security for our canals and rivers



Doing everything we can to deliver on our charitable objectives



Minimising the impact we make on scarce resources



Establishing the Trust as a respected and trusted guardian of our canals and rivers

Canal & River Trust:

Our Resources

Nationally, we have;

- an annual income of £120m
- 800 operational staff whose role it is to ensure that the physical infrastructure is maintained and developed
- 2,727 Listed Buildings, we are the third largest owner of Listed Structures in the UK
- 2,000 miles of historic urban and rural canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks
- 200 miles of waterways re-opened in the last decade
- 1,000 wildlife conservation sites and 400 miles of conservation area
- There are 35,200 licensed boats on the network - 2010/11 (more than at the height of the Industrial Revolution)

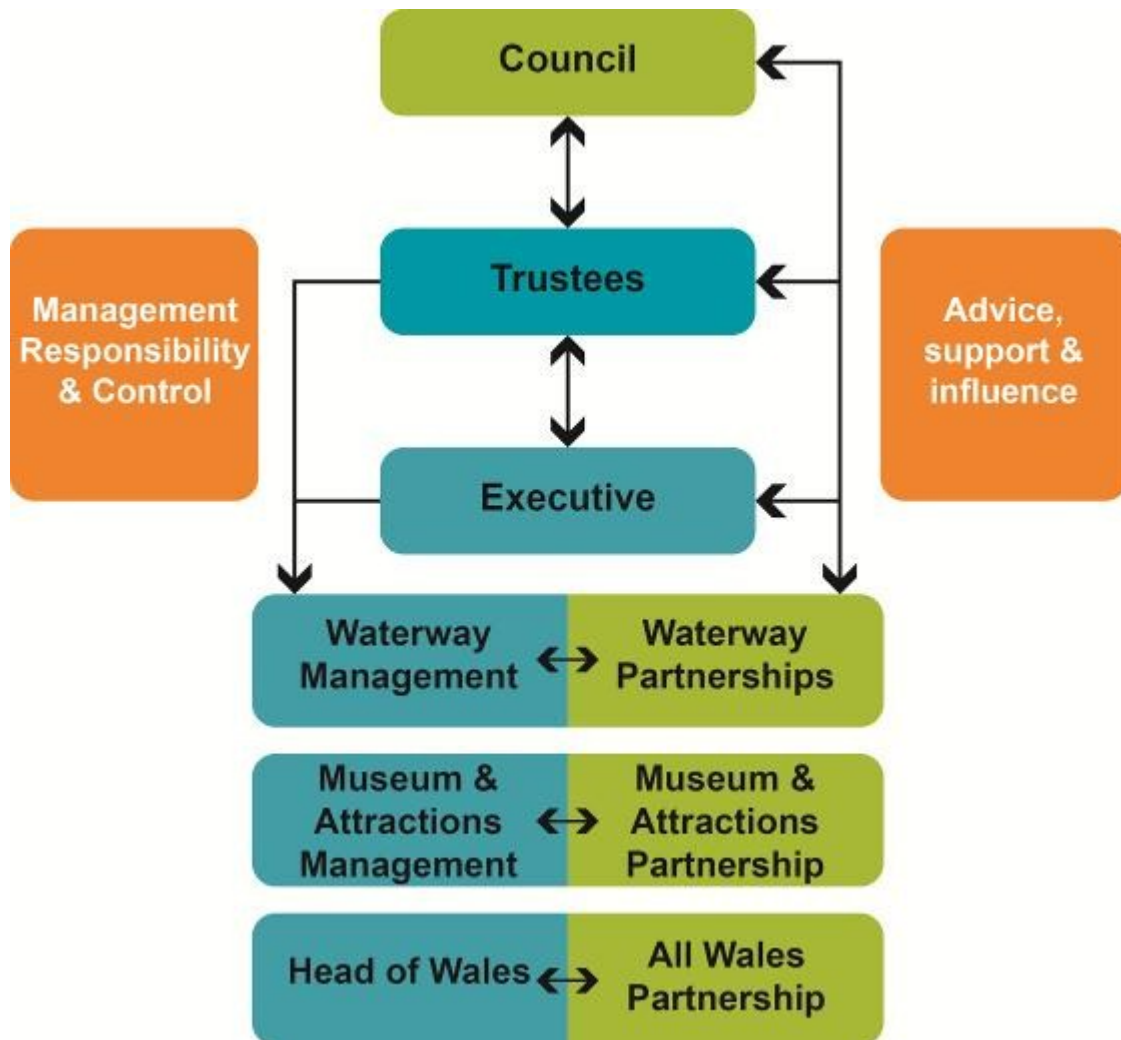
Our income is derived from a wide range of sources:

- individual donors and corporate sponsors;
- commercial income including revenue from the licensing of boats, moorings and angling; and revenue from property and utilities;
- grants from the other organisations; and
- our 15 year contract with the UK Government.



Canal & River Trust:

Our Governance



We need to manage our canals and rivers as one network, with common policies across England and Wales in order to allocate resources where they are most needed and to be most efficient and effective. However, the opportunities for joint working, as well as the obstacles to better use and enjoyment of our canals and rivers, lie in understanding individual stretches of waterway, and working with localities and local partners, agencies and companies.

That is why new Waterway Partnerships have been established, across England and Wales, to bring together representatives of local communities, businesses and organisations to work closely with the Canal & River Trust to influence and add value to what we do in each local waterway.

Canal & River Trust:

The West Midlands

Waterway Partnership

Who are we?

We are a group of volunteers from public, private and community organisations with a wide range of professional, community, waterway interests and skills. Among these are regeneration, environmental protection, strategic planning, marketing, physical and community development, heritage and sports such as cycling and angling, as well as boating and engineering. Find out more about our partnership members at [**canalrivertrust.org.uk/west-midlands/whos-who**](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/west-midlands/whos-who)

What are we for?

- Promoting knowledge and use of the waterways in the region.
- Understanding the issues facing communities in Birmingham, the Black Country and contiguous locations touched by our waterways.
- Shaping future plans of the Canal & River Trust to deliver either on its own or in partnership with others.
- Securing the resources to deliver those plans.
- Ensuring that the job gets done.

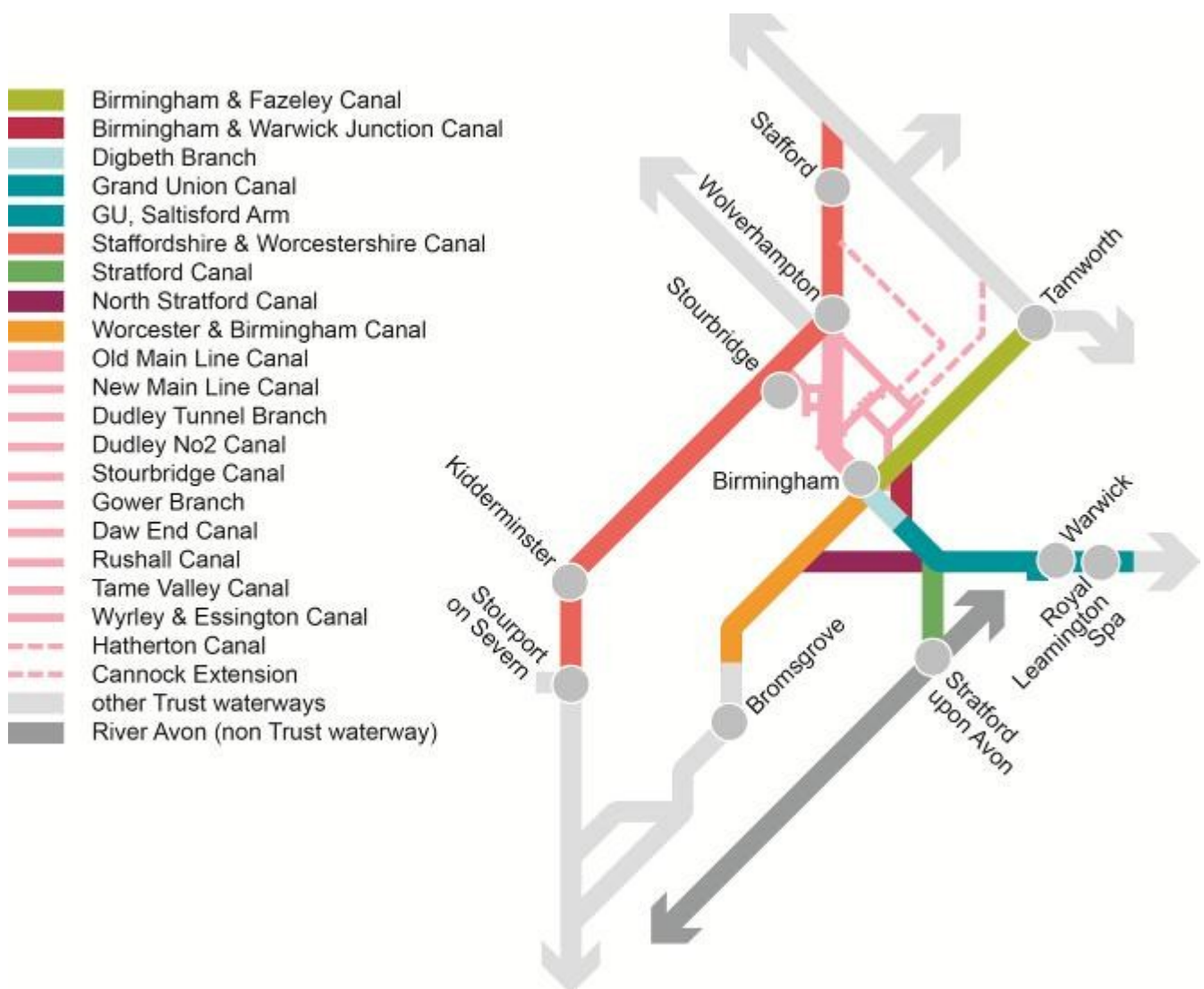
How will we do that job?

- By taking a rich picture view of evidence and data held by the Trust and others.
- By talking to as many people and organisations as possible who might have an interest in working with us (or may need some persuading that they do).
- By analysing the evidence.
- By exploring opportunities for making the best return on investment.
- By capturing this in a long term plan, the Strategic Waterway Plan.
- By channelling the skills, expertise and resources of the Canal & River Trust, its partners, agencies and local communities towards its objectives.
- And, by implementing that plan on the basis of common purpose, shared benefit and mutual interest among partners and communities.

Strategic Waterway Plan:

The plan is currently in draft form as set out in the following pages. It is the starting point for a structured conversation with you. It is a genuine conversation.

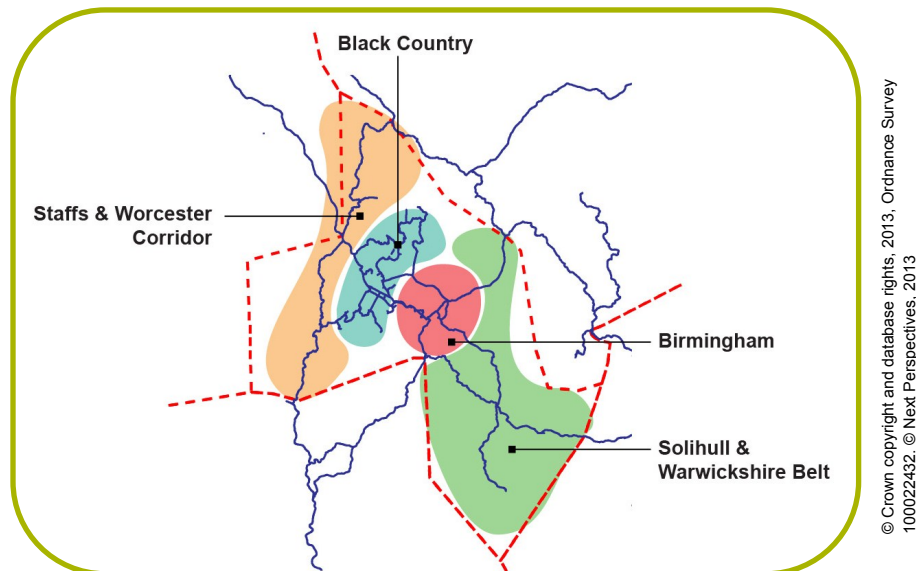
We are looking both to involve you and to take on board your views about how best we can work together for the benefit of the waterways, their many users and supporters, and the communities they enrich and to whom they belong.



West Midlands Waterways: Unique and Diverse

The West Midlands waterway network is located at the very heart of the nation's historic network of canals and is home to the cross roads of the national inland navigation system.

It is a landlocked waterway that includes one of the most heavily urbanised areas in the country. Birmingham, Wolverhampton, the Black Country and Solihull together form the most densely populated conurbation in the United Kingdom outside London, with a combined population of around 2.27 million. However, the West Midlands waterways are not entirely urban. Many stretches of canal traverse localities and communities which retains a strongly rural character and there is a designated green belt between Birmingham, Walsall, West Bromwich and the Sandwell Valley

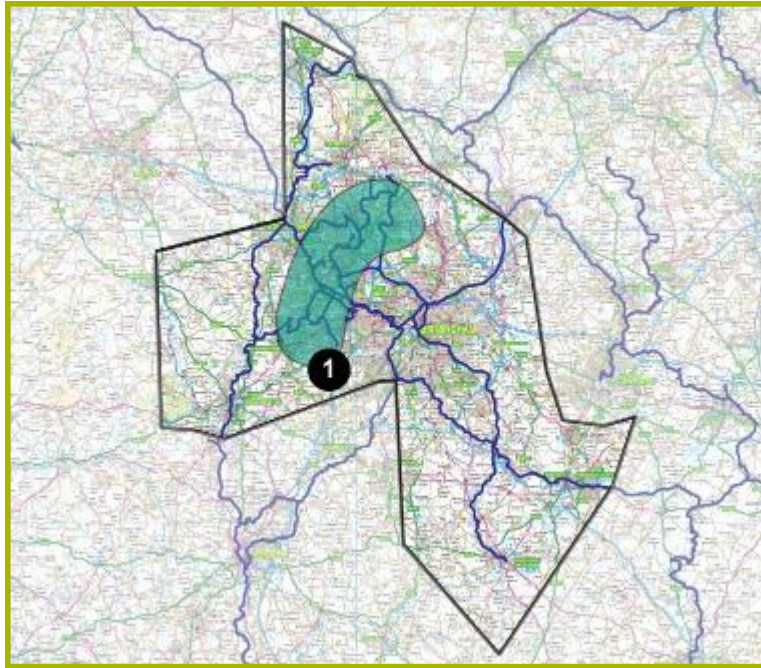


The canal network that comprises the West Midlands waterways is therefore located at the core of the country's historic waterway system with unique heritage relating to the blooming of the Industrial Revolution. A legacy that means we have the pedigree and assets that can deliver a truly special waterway environment that benefits both local communities and visitors alike.

The impact the canals of the West Midlands have on the local economy, environment and the communities they come close to is correspondingly wide and so we have considered the waterway in four distinct areas. These strategic character areas help us to focus on what has evolved over time and give a platform on which to enhance the multiple benefits that the waterways can bring in the future. Each has its own features, challenges and opportunities and they provide a simple signpost of what we are seeking to achieve and how the network can make a major contribution to the aims and aspirations of the many other bodies seeking to improve the quality of life in the areas.

1. The Black Country

Heart and spine of the Urban Park



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Context

This area broadly encompasses canals located in the area by tradition called *the Black Country* – a name internationally recognised – and is defined by the local government boundaries of Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley. This area does include the northern end of the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN).

The canals were the Victorian Black Country's life-blood and at their height, they were so busy that gas lighting was installed beside the locks to permit round-the-clock operation. Boats were built without cabins for maximum carrying capacity, and a near-tidal effect was produced as swarms of narrowboats converged on the Black Country collieries at the same time every day.

Today, these former industrial canals remain rich in character and have become well used routes for commuters, walkers and cyclists alike whilst at the same time the Dudley Tunnel is a major tourism attraction with the Black Country Living Museum adjacent to the canal too.

Wolverhampton city offers a major opportunity for the canal to play a part in the regeneration of the area around the railway station and public transport interchange.

We believe the Black Country waterway has the potential to play a catalytic role in regeneration plans by providing a multi-purpose green corridor that can also deliver social, economic and environmental goals that connects communities.

The Black Country cont.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

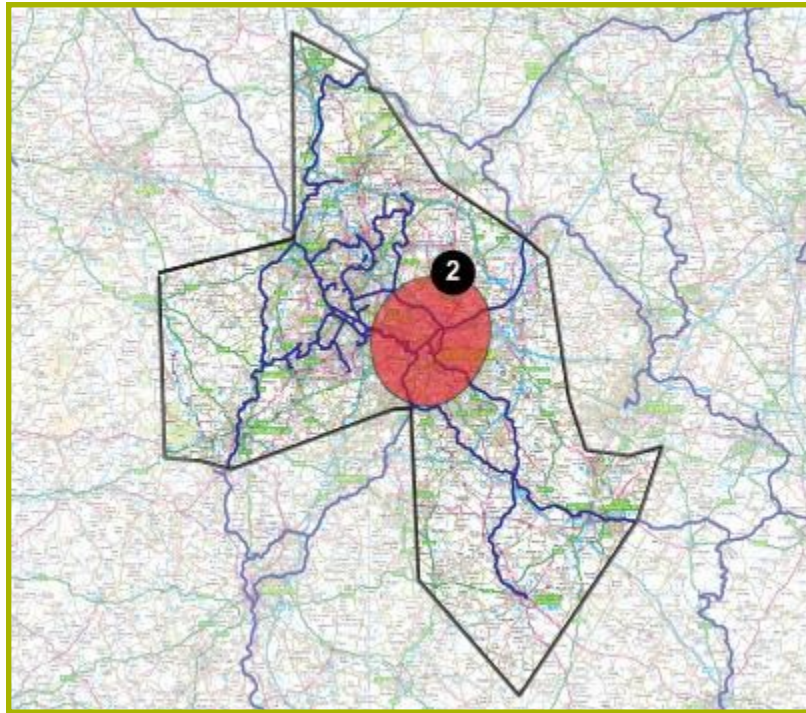
- Changing perceptions of people living and working in the Black Country.
- Strengthening partnerships and community linkages.
- Supporting waterway dependent businesses.
- Changing how the Black Country is perceived by potential visitors and investors outside sub-region.
- Increasing and improving existing facilities, services and attractions. Lack of safe stop-over moorings.
- Improving environmental quality and appearance of waterside boundaries, particularly industrial & large tracts of derelict land.
- Improving biodiversity as part of the Black Country's green infrastructure.

Priorities

- Supporting the sustainable growth of waterway dependent businesses, visitors and investors by making the canals the 'heart' and 'spine' of the new Black Country Urban Park.
- Exploiting the canals connections to, and with, existing tourism attractions.
- Developing the canals to empower local communities and instil community pride.
- Improving the image and environmental quality of the canals caused by poor waterside boundaries and presence of large tracts of derelict land.
- Tackling the anti-social behaviour within the canal corridors in the Black Country area.
- Walsall Waterfront and Dudley become established regional and sub-regional tourism hubs by land and water.

2. Birmingham

Britain's Canal Capital - a rich diversity of networks



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Context

Birmingham has one of the most intricate canal networks in the world. Its hub is the bustling city centre junction at Gas Street Basin where colourful boats and historic canal artefacts sit side-by-side with the vibrant architecture of modern restaurants, cafes and bars. Broad Street and the canal it traverses is in the heart of Birmingham's nightlife and shopping districts. The mainline and city centre canals are consequently busy with boaters, floating businesses such as trip and restaurant boats whilst the towpaths attract commuters, walkers and cyclists.

However, elsewhere on the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN), you can really get away from it all on winding suburban canals and some surprisingly quiet branches.

The city's waterways have seen major investments over the last twenty years or so and now form an integral part of the Birmingham 'brand'. They provide a convenient link between major employment locations and the urban transport network and the canal towpaths form an important part of the sustainable transport plans for the future. The challenge lies in how we can address increasing or new levels of use sustainably and capitalise on the opportunities the canals offer for continued regeneration and development of the city's attractions.

Birmingham cont.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

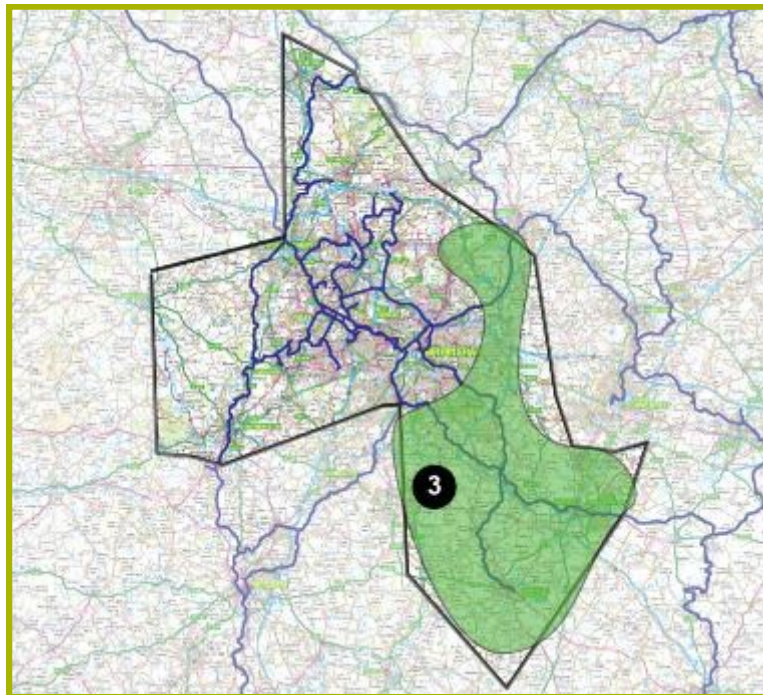
- You do not go to Venice and not go on water—why not Birmingham? Access to /from canal is not always clear to visitors.
- Why won't holiday boat hire businesses locate in the urban areas and could the Partnership help create right conditions for such business start-ups?
- Getting existing businesses to diversify could help them expand and thrive.
- Centre of the city is of high quality but the approaches to this area show all the signs of deprivation resulting in low boat movement - boaters by pass the city.
- Weak cultural connections with the canals for certain economic– social, age and ethnic groups. Cultural diversity needs to make everyone feel the canals are for them.
- Incidences of anti-social behaviour and crime: perceived to be unsafe places after dark.
- Destinations and local distinctiveness is important and this can be promoted by effective signposting to /from canal to /from places.
- Large companies and big industry are still present alongside the canals and could provide adoption and sponsorship opportunities.

Priorities

- Optimising the role and value of the canals and the Edgbaston Reservoir as city assets locally, nationally and internationally.
- Making the waterways accessible and relevant to all the different communities within the city and making it easier to navigate around on foot, bike and by boat.
- Extending the success of the regeneration, use and vibrancy of the canals in central Birmingham to the wider conurbation.
- Using canals to promote regeneration and growth.
- Using the canals to tackle inequality by opening up accessibility across the city.
- Mitigating the impacts of High Speed 2 on the canal corridor and exploiting the opportunities to integrate canals with the new station approach to create a 'world class' place.
- Contributing to Birmingham's aspirations of a '*City of Sport*', a '*world class visitor experience*' and '*a city where tourism contributes to economic success*'.
- Building upon Birmingham's diversity within the canal corridors (including strengthening cultural connections, creating new opportunities to live afloat and opening up accessibility).

3. Solihull and Warwickshire Belt

Connecting People & Places



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Context

Warwickshire, Stratford, Solihull and semi-rural locations north of Birmingham form this strategic area. These locations actually have stronger connections in terms of commuting flows, housing markets, retail and leisure activities with the wider Birmingham sub-region.

However, given the strong economic similarities between these areas and the core sub-region, along with a history of joint working, means that the canal network performs an important function on a number of levels. From a backdrop formed by the Stratford Canal Basin adjacent to the world famous theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon to the popular walker and visitor attraction formed by the Hatton Lock Flight on the Grand Union Canal.

Solihull and Warwickshire Belt cont.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

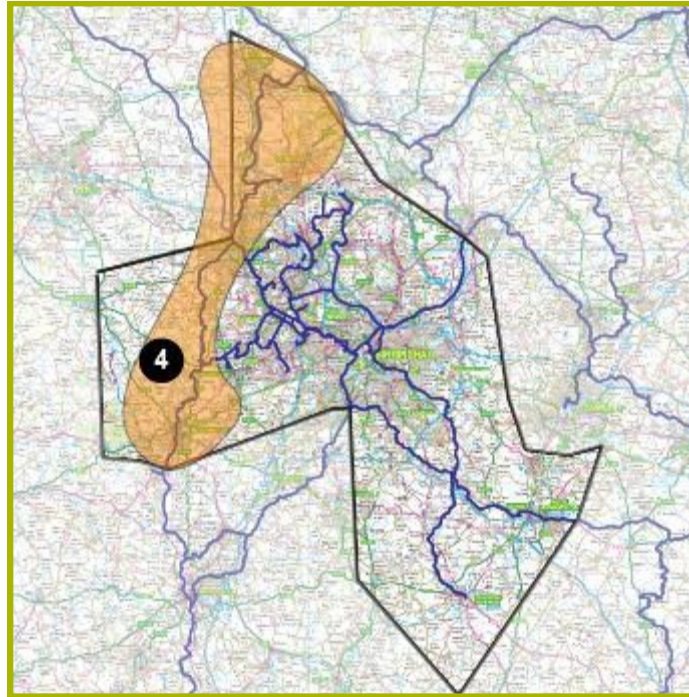
- Changing perceptions: issue around resistance to marinas; canal in urban area is perceived as scruffy and unsafe place & industrial environment; people use the canal as a tip; cuttings are perceived as no-go areas.
- Greater use of towpath by affluent A /B socio economic households. People / communities with different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds do not view the canal as their local asset. e.g. Leamington.
- More licence /enforcement action and /or provision of mooring sites for residential use.
- Route of canal goes through certain industrial areas with poor environmental quality and appearance which discourages people from visiting.
- Lack of interpretation & welcoming information, for example at Leamington and at Lapworth, there is a lack of signage and smartphone application information.

Priorities

- Making the canals accessible and relevant to all the communities within Solihull and Warwickshire.
- Fully integrating and exploiting the canal to enhance the visitor experience of Warwick and Stratford as international tourist destinations.
- Transforming the canals from being viewed as a hidden backwaters to safe, attractive and accessible public places to use and enjoy.
- Improving the appearance, environmental quality and accessibility of the canals to make them more appealing to use by local people living within Solihull, Leamington, Stratford and Warwick.

4. Staffordshire and Worcester Corridor

Brindley's Grand Cross



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The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal runs through gently undulating West Midlands countryside as it skirts around the edges of the urban conurbation of Birmingham and the Black Country without ever becoming truly urban. This canal was one of the major routes of the canal age, and would have been constantly busy with coal boats. It now forms part of two cruising rings, and is one of the prettiest ways to explore the waterway network in the Midlands.

At the southern end of this area, the canal connects to the River Sever at the historic Stourport Basins in the Georgian town that owes its birth to the construction of the waterway by James Brindley in the late eighteenth century. Kidderminster lies north of Stourport and is town founded on the carpet industry but is now addressing the economic challenges faced by many larger market towns.

The southern reaches of the canal run close to the River Stour, which is an important wetland habitat. The canal near Kidderminster and Kinver has unusual sandstone cliffs which provide a tourism attraction in their own rights.

At the northern end of this area, the city of Wolverhampton provides a cultural anchor for the industrial heritage of the canal.

Staffordshire and Worcester Corridor cont.

Issues, Opportunities and Big Ideas

- Changing perceptions is a key issue: Kidderminster is a challenging area – anti-social behaviour by Tesco's car park /Piano Warehouse; Sainsbury's trolleys in the canal; the canal is concealed by walls near to Tesco; Stourport – attractive but suffers anti-social behaviour and could be more of a destination for visitors .
- Gap in facilities for boaters (Kinver – Gailey) needs to be addressed.
- Cycling pressure at Kinver/ Wolverley/ Stewponey.
- Canal skirts around Stafford - need to create better connections, marketing and promotion.
- Towpath condition is poor in parts e.g. Great Haywood .
- I54 Enterprise Zone in Wolverhampton could provide new investment opportunities .

Priorities

- Strengthening Wolverhampton as the regional canal interchange and gateway between urban and rural waterways.
- Widening the use of the canals by local communities.
- Improving the boating experience by improving facilities and services etc on this popular cruising canal (particularly the section between Kinver and Gailey).
- Making Kidderminster a canal 'embracing town', where local people positively use and enjoy the canal and where boaters want to visit.
- Tackling the anti-social behaviour within the canal corridors in the Kidderminster area.



West Midlands Waterways: **What Our Canals can** **Offer Locally?**

Community Well-being

Our waterways have a significant and unique role to play in connecting people, places and opportunities by improving the physical environment, prospects for people and the wider economy as well as supporting carbon reduction and environmental sustainability. The canal network is already generating public benefits to local communities and the economy within the West Midlands area but they have the potential to deliver so much more.

Healthier Communities

Waterways can act as a Natural Health Service offering a wonderful – and free – way of getting more people, more easily out in the fresh air and on the move. Many of our towpaths have been improved to provide freely accessible, well surfaced walking and cycling routes which can be used by local people to keep fit and well.

The West Midlands has an incredibly diverse community, in terms of social and economic background, age and ethnicity. Our waterways have the potential to reach out to them all and to aid social cohesion by developing a sense of shared identity and encouraging community groups to work together to improve their local environment.

Anti-social behaviour is a very real concern for residents in many parts of the West Midlands. The waterways can help to encourage a greater sense of community identity and shared ownership, giving people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to help care for their local waterways and to provide access to formal and informal sport and recreation activities.



Prosperous Communities

It's impossible to talk about our waterways without talking about the economy - the very reason the canals exist was to connect cities, business, goods and markets. Today, our waterways continue to be integral to sustainable growth, even though their original role for trade may have changed.

Boaters, cyclists, visitors...everyone who visits our waterways contributes to the local economy. The West Midlands waterways are unique, rich in character and history, home to a diverse range of water-related businesses, waterside pubs and attractions and they greatly enhance the region's tourism offer.

We believe the waterways can help to enhance the region's skills base through training, volunteering and work placement opportunities.

Our waterways can also contribute to sustainable growth of the region through the development of innovative renewable energy schemes.

Sustainable Communities

Waterways are an integral part of the nation's landscape and we believe they can play a stronger part in raising the profile of the area.

The West Midlands is a special area with a rich and colourful history, bustling urban areas and some significant areas of ecological interest. However it can also be under-appreciated by those living here and overlooked by those in other parts of the country.

Our waterways are fantastic examples of green infrastructure set in an urban landscape, connecting communities and bringing visitors into the area through linkages with wider walking and cycling networks. As such they can act as a gateway to the wider Midlands.

The West Midlands waterways can also act as catalysts for regeneration, transforming previously rundown areas of land into vibrant destinations, giving our towns and cities a greater sense of place, improving their intrinsic value and making them more attractive to tourism and investment.





Objectives

Our plans For the future

- 1 We are putting together plans to make sure that our waterways are used and developed in a way that has maximum benefit for our local people, places and local economies. The details below show our outline objectives and some of the ways in which these objectives can be achieved.**

We want to:

Develop a stronger sense of community ownership and responsibility, and change local perceptions of the waterway network within the West Midlands

We plan to:

- a. Promote and establish Community Adoptions of canal lengths**
- b. Work with communities to make the most of their setting alongside our waterways**
- c. Roll out parish council road shows**
- d. Develop a programme of engagement with schools and academies using Canal & River Explorers**

Our Objectives

2 Grow community engagement activities to encourage greater use and enjoyment of the waterways by people living within the West Midlands

We plan to:

- a. Develop our understanding of, and address, barriers to new audiences
- b. Develop a local angling strategy to engage new anglers including young people
- c. Promote canals as part of the 'natural health service'
- d. Develop and promote circular walking and cycling routes

3 Support the sustainable growth of waterway related tourism and leisure to increase visitor numbers, satisfaction and spend

This means maintaining and improving the condition of the waterways, facilities and environs, encouraging greater activity in terms of sustainable transport along the waterways and supporting the growth of waterway tourism to increase visitor numbers and spend.

We plan to:

- a. Deliver Birmingham's canal based Cycle Ambition project
- b. Continue to develop and deliver towpath improvements
- c. Encourage responsible shared use of towpaths
- d. Review the provision of moorings for both visitors and residents
- e. Promote the heritage and natural environment as part of our green infrastructure network



4 Attract different forms of investment into the waterways and their corridors

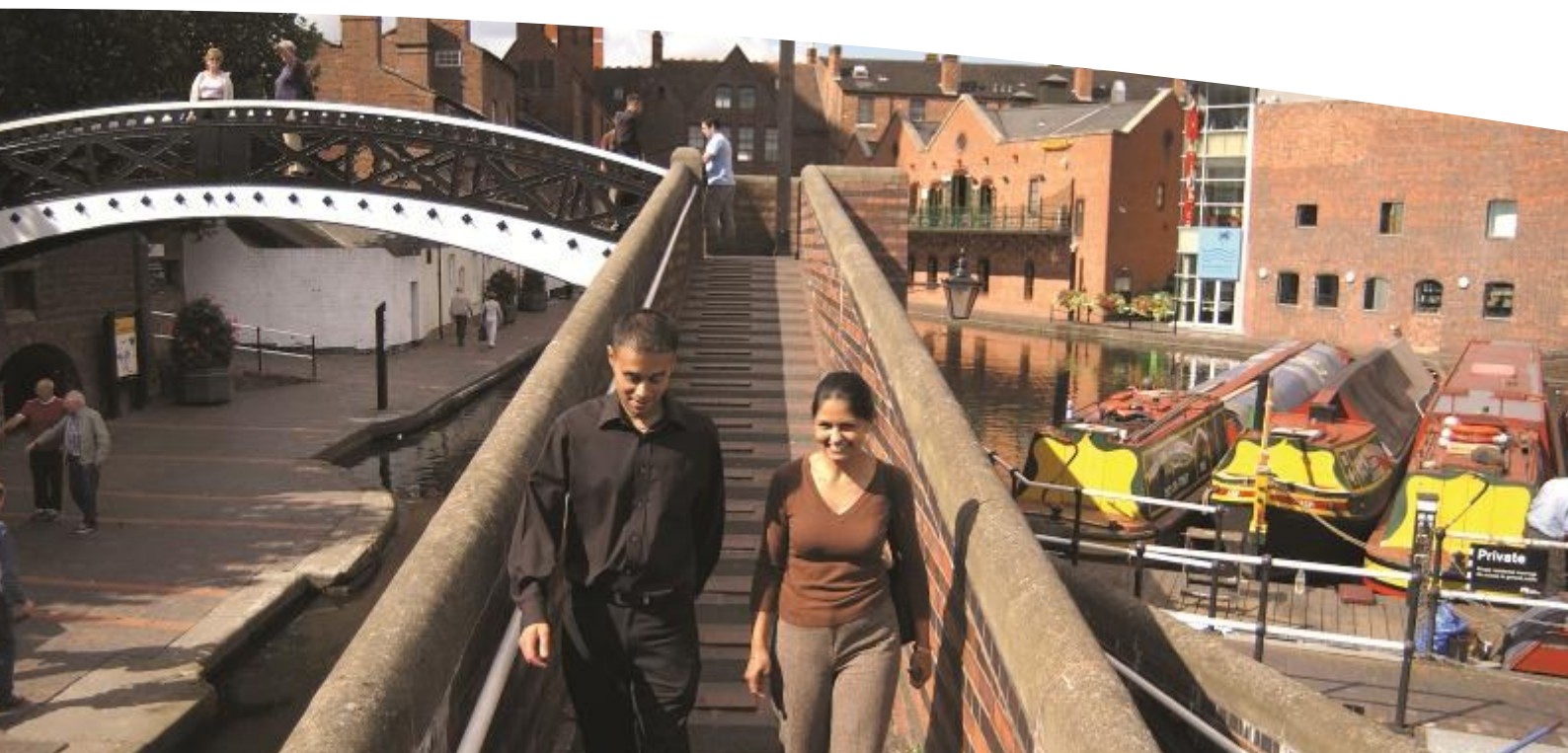
We plan to:

- a. Engage and work with waterway dependent businesses to maximise tourism potential to support local businesses
- b. Improve the environmental quality and image caused by poor waterside boundaries
- c. Support appropriate new developments, both urban and rural, which respect and enhance the waterways
- d. Encourage waterside businesses and landowners to benefit from their waterside location and contribute to the canal environment positively

5 Exploit the economic benefits that waterways can provide to their wider corridors and communities

We plan to:

- a. Establish links with the Local Enterprise Partnerships in key areas
- b. Create additional visitor moorings around the network
- c. Improve facilities for boaters and visitors
- d. Support new strategic links to expand the network to spread the economic benefit of canals



Our Objectives

- 6 Make the waterway corridors in the West Midlands welcoming and interesting places to visit, live, work, use and enjoy**

We plan to:

- a. Create and publish trail information with partner organisations
- b. Connect visitor attractions, hubs, nodes and places of interest to create strong days out
- c. Exploit the unique features of the West Midlands being the largest concentration of canals in the country
- d. Improve signage and information for visitors and users

- 7 Make the waterway corridors in the West Midlands accessible, safe and well-connected places for all visitors, users and local communities**

We plan to:

- a. Develop a responsible use of the canals campaign to aid antisocial behaviour reduction
- b. Continue to improve canal infrastructure and towpath condition
- c. Work with local authorities to improve connectivity of cities, towns and villages through improved signage to and from the waterways
- d. Work with projects linked to improving connections to existing bus routes, train stations and car parking provision



8 Conserve and enhance the key heritage and environmental qualities and landscape character of the waterway network and their corridors make them locally distinctive

We plan to:

- a. Create and develop apprenticeships within our operational teams**
- b. Maintain and enhance the condition of heritage assets to ensure they are used and appreciated**
- c. Encourage environmental enhancements in our work and the work of third parties**
- d. Work with agencies to develop a long term invasive species management strategy**
- e. Work with the HS2 team at the Trust to minimise or remove impacts whilst developing opportunities for improvements**
- f. Work with partner organisations to help improve water quality by the management of pollution hot spots and enforcement against unauthorised discharges**



Next steps

Now we want to find out if we've got it right in our first run at our plans for the future.

And, as we do so, we want to develop a platform of common purpose, based on shared benefit and mutual interest, with local communities, local authorities and agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations and local societies and user groups. We will do these things by:

- Disseminating this consultation draft to all interested parties and agencies from October to Friday 6 December.
- Meeting with strategic partners through October and November.
- Inviting interested parties and agencies to a workshop
- Further developing our objectives and actions to reflect the consultation and engagement contributions received by the end of November.
- Finalising the ten year Strategic Waterway Plan by December 2013.



How to get involved

- What do you think about the broad strategy?
- What would you like to see prioritised in the strategy?
- What do you think about the proposed objectives and actions. Are there others we should be including?
- What plans or policies do you have that we could complement or enhance?
- How can we work together on community, economic or environmental projects?
- Would your local school, organisation or community like to get more involved in your local waterway's future?

Write to us, by 6 December 2013, at:

Email: enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Address:

Strategic Waterway Plan Feedback
West Midlands Waterway Partnership,
Canal & River Trust, Peel's Wharf,
Lichfield Street, Fazeley
Tamworth B78 3QZ

Check our noticeboard for updates
canalrivertrust.org.uk/westmidlandsboard



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Get involved