

# Water Adds Value

Highlighting the impact of the restoration of our waterways



Canal &  
River Trust



The Inland  
Waterways  
Association



**“The waterway network is part of the fabric of our nation but it’s easy to forget that not so very long ago some of our most popular canals were almost lost forever.**

**The fact that we can still enjoy them today is thanks largely to the vision, dedication and sheer hard work of volunteers in the 60s and 70s. These inspiring men and women just wouldn’t take no for an answer and worked on the basis that nothing was impossible. We need to recapture that same spirit today to ensure we bring more of these once proud waterways back to life.”**

Sir Tony Robinson



# Foreword

**As the MD of a local authority that was instrumental in driving the final stages of the Droitwich Canal restoration I am delighted to support and contribute to this report to provide further stimulus to Britain's economy.**



It's hard to overestimate just how important our canals and rivers were in shaping the Britain we live in today. They contributed to the phenomenal growth of trade during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and brought prosperity to villages, towns and cities.

It's funny how things go full circle; here we are in the 21st century and canals still have the ability to attract investment, stimulate growth and create jobs. Of course today this growth is fuelled by people rather than freight – we want to live by waterways, work alongside them and spend more of our free time by the water. We saw this in Droitwich and wanted to bring these benefits to people living in the town.

In today's Britain it's clear that waterways have the potential to touch all aspects of our daily lives as well as providing valuable habitats for a wide variety of species, but of course they haven't always been cherished in this way.

It is easy to forget that many of the waterways we know and love today were once almost lost forever, Droitwich included. It was only through the passion, commitment and vision of a significant number of dedicated volunteers some 40 years ago that it was possible to arrest the decline of our once proud waterways and gradually bring them back to life. These people flew in the face of fashion and popular opinion and to them nothing was impossible.

As a local authority we were delighted to be part of the Droitwich Restoration Partnership and we found that working with a committed range of partners was certainly the main key to success. It's been incredibly heart-warming to see the canal begin to fulfil its potential, since opening we've seen more people visiting the towpaths and around 2000 boats using the canal each year which, in turn, has supported the development of a new marina.

Local passion combined with clear evidence that canals can bring jobs, growth and a wealth of social outcomes can combine to support the progress of other restorations. To help this we need more people to recognise the ways in which healthy, vibrant waterways can improve all of our lives. I hope this report goes some way to help make that happen.

**Jack Hegarty**

**Managing Director of Wychavon District Council**

# Introduction

In 2013 the Canal & River Trust commissioned the University of Northampton to carry out a research project that would explore the economic, social and environmental impacts of restoration projects carried out over the previous two decades.

The Trust recognised the importance of these projects and was keen to demonstrate to a broad range of partners that restoration delivers real and measurable economic, health and social impacts. The research uncovered a wide range of benefits that recent restoration projects had brought to communities, local economies and to the wider waterway network as a whole. This summary aims to bring to life the main report, explore these benefits and provide compelling evidence of the importance of waterway restoration.

**Specifically, the research project aimed to:**

1. Highlight the **economic impacts** delivered by waterway restorations
2. Understand the **social impact** delivered by waterway restorations
3. Assess the **environmental impacts** delivered by waterway restorations
4. Develop a **holistic matrix** for capturing the future social impact of restorations that can be used to support the evaluation of future restoration.



# Methodology

The full details of the research can be found on the associated main document  
A review of the impact of waterway restoration is located here:

<http://www.canalrivertrust/restoration>

The research included:

- A review of previous restoration evaluations highlighting the main benefits
- Interviews with key restoration stakeholders
- A simplified methodology for evaluation of restoration benefits

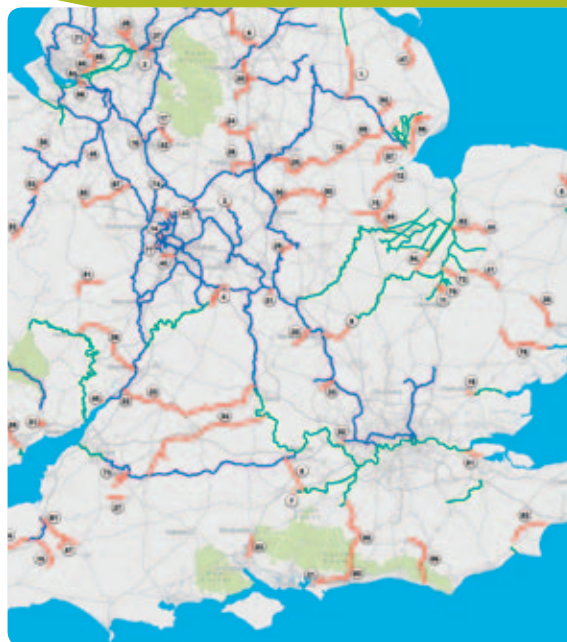
The main report outlines the findings of this research in relation to these aims, and also introduces the concept of a newly developed matrix that can be used to assess the impact of future waterway restoration schemes.

This is an illustrative summary, a digest of key information taken from the main report. The purpose of this document is to enable the Canal & River Trust, The Inland Waterways Association, volunteer restoration groups, local authorities and other restoration stakeholders to raise the profile of the benefits of restoration and to underline why waterway restoration is important to the economy.

Each section looks at evidence taken from previous research followed by recent interviews with key stakeholders.

## Context

We looked at 7 case studies of restoration in the UK including the Rochdale, Huddersfield Narrow, Kennet & Avon and Droitwich Canals (unpublished data), that have been completed in recent history (relative to when they were built). To put this into context nationally there are over 80 restoration projects across England and Wales. These are at various stages of development ranging from well-established groups seeking full restoration to isolated pieces of lost canal being interpreted by a small group of people. This represents a huge unrealised potential to support local and national economies through boosting tourism, regeneration and community action.



Snapshot to show interactive map.  
For the full map and details go to:  
**[canalrivertrust/restoration](http://www.canalrivertrust/restoration)**

# Chapter 1

## Economic Benefits

Significant economic benefits were identified in all of the restoration evaluation reports especially in the areas of visitor numbers, visitor spend and regeneration. This was confirmed by every interviewee as being a significant output from canal restoration and development work.

### 2. Liverpool Canal Link

Contributed to the delivery of an estimated 280,000 extra visitors annually to the Liverpool waterfront which in turn contributed to and £4.3 million additional gross visitor spend. 10 out of 16 leisure related businesses in the Pier Head / South Docks area reported an improved economic performance following the completion of the Canal Link project.

### 3. Kennet & Avon

Delivered 23 property related schemes, including marinas, retail, offices, residential – resulting in over £35 million of investment & 328 net Full Time Equivalent jobs. The restoration contributed to the success of the £250 million Oracle Centre, constructed on a which attracted over 20 million visitors in first year of opening and employs more than 4000 people.

### 4. Bridgwater & Taunton

Created 51 jobs within recreation & leisure and tourism with an estimated property value enhancement of £54 million. Over 600,000 visits were made to the canal in 2010 and these visits generated approximately £1.7 million of direct expenditure. Restoration positively supported business start-ups and business development and canal related investments often acted as a catalyst for investment and regeneration.

### 1. Forth & Clyde

12,800 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs with 3500 FTE in construction. Encouraging business start-ups. Property developments, mainly residential. Attractions such as Falkirk Wheel attracting spend of over £3 million into the local economy (2013).



**“Restoration is the catalyst for redevelopment and regeneration in the canal corridor, we’ve seen an investment of over £85 million across two Local Authorities, creating over 300 jobs and the restored canal has been the catalyst for two major district centre developments.”**

Graham Birch, Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society



### **5. Rochdale & Huddersfield Narrow Canals**

Created 150–160 Full Time Equivalent jobs in leisure and tourism. Delivered significant canal related development, including residential, business and offices on the Rochdale Canal. Visitor numbers for the Rochdale Canal are estimated at 3.8 million visitors with a net impact of £2.5–4.1 million pa, for the Huddersfield Narrow estimates are 2.3 million visitors, with a net impact £2.5–2.8 million pa.

### **6. Chesterfield Canal**

(Tapton Lock in Chesterfield to Staveley)  
To date 12 miles of the canal have been restored along with 36 locks and 11 bridges. This has increased developer and local authority confidence and was the catalyst for significant economic investment including a major urban regeneration programme in Chesterfield and a new marina at Staveley. The towpath is part of Sustrans Route 73 and National Cycle Route 6. In Retford, the towpath upgrade provides an all-weather traffic free route through the town.

### **7. Droitwich Barge Canal** (unpublished)

Has delivered an approximate 20% uplift in towpath visitors, a positive impact on businesses close to the canal, £1.1 million visitor spend from boating supporting currently 11 full time jobs. With approximately £2 million private investment in the new marina, creating 2 jobs with plans to expand and supporting significant waterside development.



## Economic Benefits

On top of the headline data collated the interviewees felt that house prices were boosted by canal restoration and that the restored canal encouraged the reuse of land and buildings around canal corridors to be regenerated. Anecdotally it was suggested that property values were boosted by 15-25% by restorations. Many residential developments were delivered, both new builds and re-developments of former historic buildings (e.g. mill buildings), were situated alongside restored canal corridors.

**“I think it’s fair to say that if it had continued to have been a derelict canal or just a filled in strip of green, it wouldn’t have been such an attractive proposition to re-develop and re-use (the mill building).”**

Alan Stopher, Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society

**Commercial developments** went hand-in-hand with residential developments and again provided a boost to jobs. As well as the impact on the local economy, restorations were seen as bringing increased vitality to town centres with the boost in the numbers of visitors and the attractiveness of areas.

**“...having life on the water has been beneficial, it adds life and vibrancy to the town centre.”**

Ian Clarke, Landscape Lead Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council





**“The restoration of Chesterfield Canal is fundamentally important to the regeneration of Chesterfield Waterside.”**

Robin Stonebridge, Chair of the Chesterfield Canal Trust

Some interviewees felt that the restoration had boosted the economy of the town during the recent recession, by stimulating regeneration and protecting and creating jobs through increases in leisure and tourism.

**“The Stanley Dock complex – one of the buildings there is being converted into a hotel which will be opening this year, and part of that development is because of the activity on the dock, there’s something to look at.”**

Rob Burns, Urban Design Manager, Liverpool City Council

In Scotland the restoration of the Forth & Clyde and Union Canals and their joining through the creation of the Falkirk Wheel, as well as the newly developed Helix project (a £43 million development of urban green space) has had a major economic impact on the local areas.

Indeed, restorations have created direct and indirect jobs in marinas, boatyards, restaurants/cafes, tourist attractions, retail outlets, pubs and community spaces/hubs. The economic impact of the canal restorations, whether in urban or rural areas, was undoubtedly one of the most significant impacts. As Graham Birch, (Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society) succinctly stated...

**“economy, economy, economy.”**





It's clear that canal restorations deliver on strengthening the economy through;

- Increased visitors
- Increased visitor spend
- Increased leisure activity
- Stimulating regeneration and development activity



If you have a local restoration scheme take a look at the potential for your city, town or village. Restored canals have the potential to transform places and enrich lives.



# Chapter 2

## Social Benefits



As well as the economic benefits, which clearly have social outcomes stemming from increased jobs, economic activity and regeneration impacts there are other less tangible social benefits that have been identified through the case studies. These can also be referred to as the health and community benefits brought about by the canal restorations. Restorations open up walking and cycling routes through improvements in towpaths and the canal itself, and many towpaths are now accessible for wheelchair users. The fact that many canals are level means that they can be especially beneficial to those getting back into exercise.

The latest report on Scottish canal regeneration sets out how the network of canal towpaths, which is extensively used for different forms of active travel e.g. walking, jogging and cycling contributes almost £7 million of additional public health benefits per annum through:

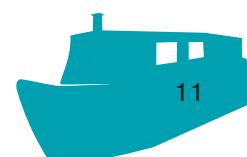
- £219,000 as the value of casualties saved from road traffic accidents
- Reduction in absenteeism
- Reduction in exposure to poor air quality
- People visit outdoors more and take more exercise

The report suggests that for every £1 invested in the canal towpath network there is a return of £7 of health benefits.

Evidence from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) proposes:

**“That investment in canal-side communities, such as in North Glasgow, has led to a relative improvement in their SIMD\* ranking. The evidence does suggest that the activities of Scottish Canals are helping to reduce deprivation in some of Scotland’s most disadvantaged communities. Making communities more attractive & engaging them & fostering civic pride. Positive impact on communities. Engagement with 3rd sector organisations and more than 40,000 people actively engaged in Lowland canals.”**

\*Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation





## Social Benefits

Interviewees commented on how restored canals provide a beautiful environment for people to escape the bustle of busy towns and cities. Indeed, lots of areas run organised walks and provided maps to encourage and support visitors, whether they are cyclists, walkers or joggers.

**“It’s a...spectacular facility for local people.”**

Cllr Fleur de Rhé-Philippe, Cabinet Member for the Economy,  
Wiltshire County Council

Additionally, improvements in well-being, in terms of physical and mental health should not be underestimated as a benefit of restorations, albeit one that can be difficult to quantify.

**“Everyone has a really strong empathy with water and the canal and its history and its current environment.”**

Alan Stopher, Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society

This empathy, along with the green spaces created by canal restorations was identified by the participants as a clear and tangible benefit of such schemes.

Canals were also seen as a way of improving areas of deprivation.

**“If you look at Liverpool it has 3 out of the top 5 deprivation wards, the canal runs through these wards, it’s not all doom and gloom, if we start to look at developments in housing and education, if you start to look at big area improvements, then you look at where the quality is and what you have to work with and the canal is there. It’s in the top 2 or 3, part and parcel of a whole regeneration package.”**

Rob Burns, Urban Design Manager, Liverpool City Council



# Volunteers & the Community

One of the other benefits referred to by all of those interviewed and in some of the evaluation reports was the way in which local volunteers became engaged with bringing their local canal back to life and working together to care for it into the future. Canals can be an excellent focus for community activity and help develop civic pride. Many local people were involved in volunteering work to help restore canals and many were involved after the restoration in a variety of projects. The data shows that local people were seen as the 'engine' behind regeneration and played a fundamental role in maintaining the heritage of the canal.

Local community involvement in canal restoration was seen as key to a successful sustainable restoration project, and some interviewees commented on how important it was to have community buy-in to a project for it to be successful.

There was a feeling that canal restorations also led to longer-term volunteering groups that remained in the community after the restoration project was finished. This cohesion can greatly benefit local communities, bringing them closer together and giving a greater affinity with their local environment.

**“...the restoration (of the Droitwich Canals) has spawned an active volunteer community, which is a very positive side-effect.”**

Jack Hegarty, MD Wychavon District Council

Finally, the involvement of volunteers and the community as a whole was also seen as crucial to the engagement of younger people with the canals.



**“It’s about evolving and engagement and seeing new opportunities around canal restoration for younger people.”**

Robin Stonebridge, Chair of Chesterfield Canal Trust

This makes canal restorations about so much more than just an engine for economic change; they also deliver significant social benefits.



# Chapter 3

## Environmental & Heritage Benefits



**We can see from the research that waterway restoration can greatly benefit the local environment. Restored waterways have been found to improve bio-diversity of whole areas, bringing wildlife into the heart of our communities and acting as green lungs within towns and cities.**

**There are also wider environmental impacts such as:**

**Transport:** The use of towpaths by commuters have been shown in evaluations to have led to decreases in traffic fumes, pollution and congestion. Evaluations show that the canals are providing green corridors and vital green space, particularly in the ever overcrowded urban areas.

**Air Quality:** Additionally, they are also leading to a reduction in exposure to poor air quality. In Chesterfield, there have been significant environmental improvements, for example a former gasworks, which has now been transformed into a shallow water wetland habitat. These types of environmental changes have profound benefits for wildlife and the surrounding communities.

**Flooding:** Canal restorations can also positively impact the environment in relation to flooding, land drainage and water quality. Indeed canal restorations can provide improved flood defences; increase the drainage of the surrounding area. For example drainage valued at just under half a £million was completed on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal and in recent flooding this was a main drainage channel.

**Heritage:** Restoration frequently secures the conservation and new uses of important heritage buildings and structures, including industrial buildings and other structures. These developments offer economic benefits but also engender a sense of local pride and a connection with local history. Examples include the Apple Cross Street Workshop on the Forth & Clyde Canal, Union Inn on the Union Canal and over 40 listed buildings along Scottish canals. The restoration of the Droitwich Barge Canal brought back to sustainable use 5 miles of very early James Brindley Canal, a significant piece of our industrial heritage.



# Environmental & Heritage Benefits

Another example of this would be old mining towns which have lost local jobs, but which can be regenerated by canal restorations and have aspects of their heritage restored.

**“...there is a high degree of connection between the canal and the local community, because of its former history as a mining town, the association is very strong.”**

Mike Hayden, Head of Regeneration, Chesterfield Borough Council

Biodiversity: Much of the data and comments from interviewees referred to increased biodiversity and improved wildlife habitats. Examples included specially planted reed-beds and a rise in the number of some of the nation's important and much-loved species such as water voles, kingfishers and native crayfish.

**“The impact on wildlife is good, there are water voles, kingfishers, it's a protected environment and it brings wildlife into the heart of Taunton.”**

Ian Clarke, Landscape Lead Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

**“The canal is a water and wildlife corridor virtually from one side of England to the other.”**

Cllr Fleur de Rhé-Philippe, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Wiltshire County Council

Alongside the recreational users some restored canals also provide great commuter routes, helping to improve the environment health and benefit local communities.

**“...the canal is a fantastic commuter route into Taunton itself, from the surrounding villages, it is surprising how many walkers and cyclists use it.”**

Ian Clarke, Landscape Lead Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Photo: Daniel Prim



# Key Impacts for Funders

One of the biggest challenges for canal restoration projects is securing funding and providing compelling, sustainable business plans for funding bodies.

Of course, funders have different considerations and look for different outcomes from restoration schemes. The research showed that many felt that in addition to heritage and biodiversity benefits, the economic argument was the key one for funders (for instance how many jobs will be created). However, land development values, waterside businesses and bringing vacant land and buildings back into use were also seen as very important.

**“For the funders we had to provide credible statistics in terms of economic benefits that was the output that they needed...the others like, community enhancement, are nice but it’s the economics that matters.”**

Graham Birch, Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society

Others felt that funders were looking for more than just economic gains and that the healthy living agenda and environmental and heritage benefits were equally important. Volunteering, training and community engagement all contribute to the funding package.



## Social Impact Matrix

Using evidence from previous restorations is a key component for justifying future projects. This research has restated the value of waterway restorations and brought it to life through contemporary interviews with key restoration stakeholders.

It is clear however that the more data that is collected in advance the better and more robust future evaluation will be. Our full impact matrix can be found in the main report but to simplify this to a more practical perspective the key and most beneficial areas to evaluate are;

- Visitor numbers including breakdowns of boaters, towpath visitors, etc
- Visitor spend, how much do these new visitors spend?
- How many temporary and permanent jobs are created?
- Hectares of brownfield sites developed
- Numbers of new houses built
- Volunteer and community involvement
- The improvements to environmental habitats

This criteria will help shape developing restoration projects, helping to solidify and articulate economic, social and environmental impact.



# Conclusion



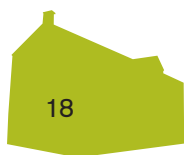
**It is evident from the data in the original papers, supported by comments from those interviewed that the impact of waterway restorations is very far-reaching and almost always in excess of that which was anticipated and planned for.**

At the heart of every restoration are the economic benefits associated with restoration. These include short-term impacts such as construction jobs, to the more long-term impacts such as increased leisure and tourism and the re-development of disused land and buildings. The positive impact that waterway restorations can have on job creation is supported by the data, but not always easy to quantify. Interviewees and case-study evaluations also referred to the impact on housing in the area, from uplift in values to new housing projects. As well as new residential and commercial developments, waterway restorations have also secured the future of many historic buildings, as the data shows that many of those in the canal corridor have been redeveloped following on from, or alongside, canal restoration projects.

Restoration can benefit the local community, whether through involving people as volunteers restoring or maintaining the waterway, or as a recreational resource. The data shows that local people were seen as the 'engine' behind regeneration and played a fundamental role in maintaining the heritage of the waterway.

There are significant positive impacts of waterway restorations on many aspects of the environment. There are benefits to wildlife from the restored waterways and improved and increased green space with improved biodiversity in the flora, fauna and habitat but also other environmental benefits such as reductions in traffic (as more people use the improved towpaths for commuting), improved drainage and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Whilst some of the social impacts can be difficult to translate into monetary terms, their value is significant in many non-monetary ways. Whilst economic benefits appear to be the key arbiter of success amongst funders, the impact on local communities in terms of walking/cycling routes, green space and increased community engagement through volunteering are equally important and significant. Restoration can be a catalyst for regeneration along the whole of the waterway corridor. These regenerative impacts include benefits to health and well-being, the built and natural environment, flood alleviation, traffic, heritage, community cohesion and civic pride.



Parting remarks:

**“Local people love it; they feel as if their town now has an active and functioning canal bringing visitors in.”**

Jack Hegarty, MD Wychavon District Council

**“The impact on wildlife is good, there are water voles, kingfishers, it’s a protected environment and it brings wildlife into the heart of Taunton.”**

Ian Clarke, Landscape Lead Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

**“Everyone has a really strong empathy with water and the canal and its history and its current environment.”**

Alan Stopher, Chair of the Huddersfield Canal Society



Photo: Alan Stopher, Chair, Huddersfield Canal Society



# Living waterways transform places and enrich lives



For the main report and the original reports please go to our website [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/restoration](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/restoration)

The IWA and Canal & River Trust would like to thank University of Northampton and all interviewees who made this work possible.



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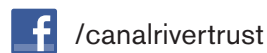
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[canalrivertrust.org.uk/restoration](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/restoration)



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