



Better Towpaths for Everyone

A national policy for
sharing towpaths



Canal &
River Trust

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Foreword

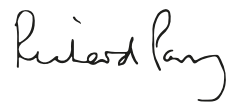
The Canal & River Trust wants people to enjoy the waterways within its care. We want to encourage a diverse range of people to use, enjoy and cherish our canals and river navigations.

Towpaths were built originally to support the use of boats on the water, and they remain essential for boating and other water-based activities such as angling, canoeing and rowing. They all need to use the towpaths for access to the water, including for mooring up, or the operation of structures like locks and moveable bridges. Others enjoy the towpaths themselves – for walking, running and cycling, or simply to experience the calm, tranquil environment away from the bustle of everyday life.

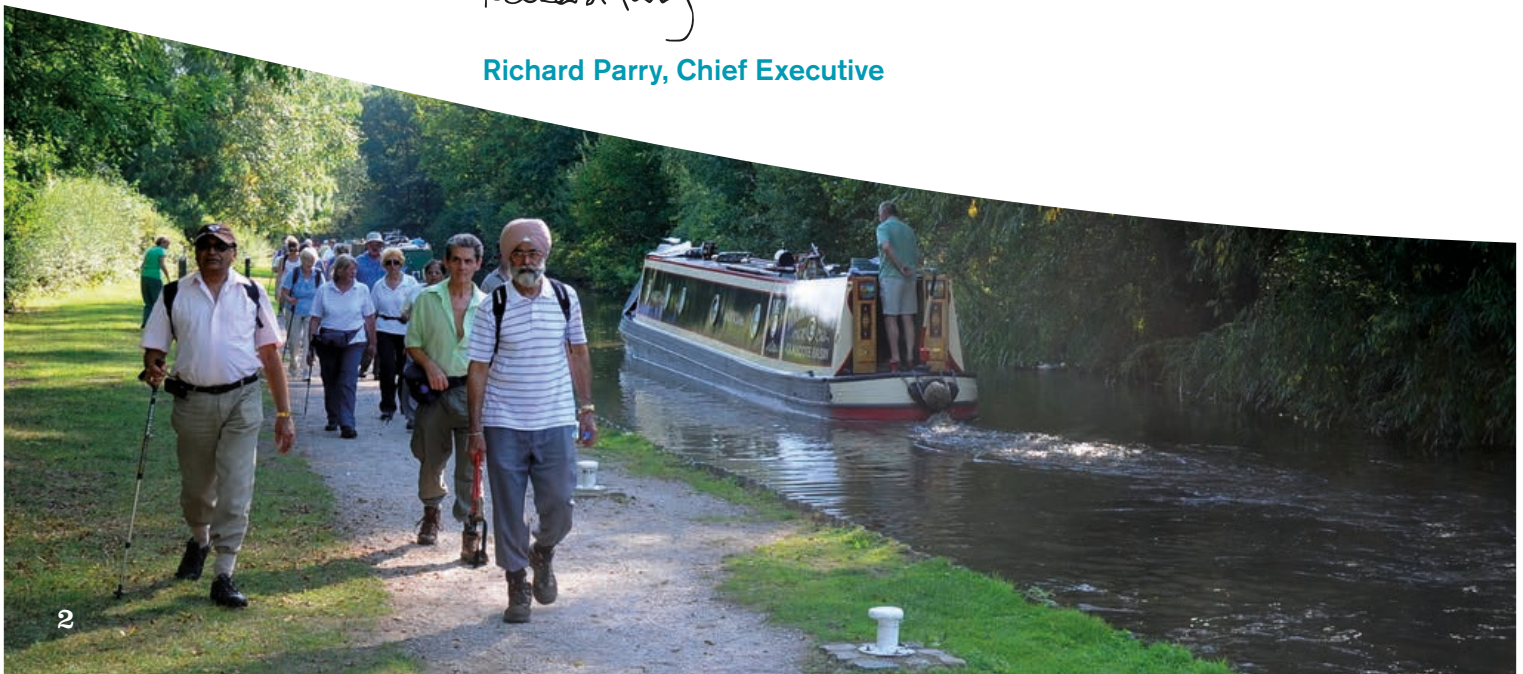
Given the wide range of uses, and the millions of people who visit, we ask that people are considerate to others and in particular the slower, static or more vulnerable users when they are on our towpaths. We do of course recognise that some of our towpaths are busier than others; in some locations we know that conflict can occur, sometimes because an individual has wrongly assumed that they have priority over another, or because they don't appreciate or respect other users. Sadly this detracts from people's enjoyment, and we are committed to encouraging better behaviour by everyone on our towpaths, so that people can feel safe and secure when they use them.

We are also committed to improving the physical condition of our towpaths so more people are able to access and enjoy them safely, and over the past two years over £15m has been spent on re-surfacing and general improvements.

We recently sought your views on our proposed towpath use policy. This generated a large and enthusiastic response and we are grateful for all the input that we received. Having listened to and tried to take on board many of your comments, we have now produced this national towpath policy for the Trust. I hope that you will see that, in setting out this policy, we have addressed the needs of the broad range of towpath users and sought to achieve the right balance between them. Ultimately, with such an extensive network, the success of the policy will depend in part upon how you, as one of our users, engage with it, take responsibility for its application, and hence ensure that our waterways and towpaths remain a treasured national resource for all.



Richard Parry, Chief Executive



“We have focussed on the needs of a broad range of towpath users and sought to achieve a balance which concentrates on how you, as one of our users, choose to engage with it.”

Richard Parry, Chief Executive



Introduction

The Trust is responsible for over 2,000 miles of towpath in England & Wales. Our towpaths are urban, rural and everything in between. In addition to giving access for traditional activities like boating or angling, they offer sustainable journey choices, responding to the boom in walking, jogging & cycling. The Trust also upholds the tradition of horse boating on the network where there is an opportunity and demand for it. Towpaths support diverse patterns of use at varying times of the day, weekdays and weekends.

As well as connecting people and places, towpaths are important places in their own right. Their underlying condition is often very variable as they pass from one area to another. To support their continued popularity, they need to be fit for purpose, through care and investment, and free for people to use safely for a wide range of activities.

We will do this by adopting clear principles of towpath use and by delivering **better infrastructure, better signs and better behaviour.**

Consultation

In spring 2014, we published ‘**Sharing Towpaths**’ – our thoughts on how towpaths in our care can continue to be enjoyed by everyone. We consulted widely on guiding *principles*, a draft *towpath code* and extending our pilot *behavioural campaign* to benefit the waterways in England & Wales.

The consultation output reports are available on our website, we would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to our consultation and shape this document.

The outcome is this Better Towpaths for Everyone, which promotes wider awareness of, and access to, 2,000 miles of historic waterways and sets out the Trust’s approach to the safe sharing of our towpaths.



Principles of towpath use

Our *principles* reflect the values of the Trust and set out clearly what we intend and expect for our towpaths.

1. The Trust's towpaths are places for people to spend time safely for a variety of activities.
2. Everyday access to the towpaths will be free to everyone, although we reserve the right to charge for specific access such as special events.
3. Towpaths will be available to support both use of the water-space, and the towpaths themselves.
4. The Trust aims to improve towpaths to achieve a good towpath condition throughout its network, consistent with the character of the area in which the towpath is located.
5. The Trust wants to offer all users an enjoyable towpath experience and recognises that this is dependent on people being considerate, particularly to those who are not moving, are slower, or more vulnerable; in general priority should be given to the slowest and those using the waterway.
6. The Trust recognises the incorporation of towpaths as part of walking and cycling routes and, where designated as a bridleway, or as a permissive route, towpaths are also available for horse riding.
7. The Trust's Towpath Design Guidance specifies physical characteristics of towpaths and also includes requirements for signage, recognising shared use and the historic waterside character.
8. Where there are concerns over towpath capacity or condition, we will seek opportunities to secure further external investment.
9. Where towpaths are unsuitable for some uses – too narrow or too heavily-used – we will seek to work with others to provide alternative routes.



Better infrastructure

Towpath Design Guide

The Trust published a **towpath design guidance** document in 2011 to help guide the choices and decisions made when improving parts of the towpath network. The guidance has been essential and well used and as part of this work additional sections will be drafted to cover;

Lighting

- The Trust will properly assess with partners the requirements for lighting and will develop guidance on type, level and maintenance of lighting as an additional section to the existing Towpath Design Guidance.

Access and barriers

- The Trust will review the appropriate use and application of measures to support safe sharing as an additional section to the existing Towpath Design Guidance. Work proposed by Sustrans relating to effectiveness of barriers and the Trust's contribution to the review of the London Cycle Design Standards (LCDS) in off road environments will inform this guidance.



Better signs

Signage Design Guide

The Trust's new *signage design guide* will include clear and prominent shared-use signs, based on widely supported pilot versions.

- At locations where there are concerns raised by local stakeholders and customers the Trust will use clear simple signage to encourage safer sharing such as at blind spots, pinch points and on busier towpath stretches, where there may also be moored boats.
- Below are 2 examples of proposed towpath signs.



The Trust is updating its towpath design guidance to include an appendix of these shared-use signs, to be considered in appropriate locations



**share the space
drop your pace**



Better behaviour

Towpath Code

Our *towpath code* is a common sense guide to sharing the towpath and what to expect of others. At its heart is the Trust's **Share the Space, Drop your Pace** slogan, a registered trademark.

Share the space – towpaths are popular places to be enjoyed by everyone. Please be mindful of others, keep dogs under control, and clean up after them.

Drop your pace – pedestrians have priority on our towpaths so be ready to slow down; if you're in a hurry, consider using an alternative route for your journey.

It's a special place – our waterways are a living heritage with boats, working locks and low bridges so please give way to waterway users and be extra careful where visibility is limited.

Activities

Our *activities* will promote considerate behaviour through engaging media and events.

- The '*Share the Space, Drop your Pace*' campaign will be extended to all the Trust's Waterways.
- We will create engaging communications including downloadable and print versions of the Towpath Policy, Towpath Code and local waterway maps.
- Where required, local events will be delivered, planned jointly with stakeholders and targeting locations of concern.
- At locations where there are concerns raised by local stakeholders and customers the Trust will aim to recruit volunteer towpath rangers locally to promote safe and considerate behaviour.
- We will make it easier for visitors to report towpath issues and make suggestions to the Trust.





We would like to thank those organisations who supported our sharing towpaths consultation:

Angling Trust

Association of Inland Navigation Authorities

Association of Pleasure Craft Operators

Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs

British Canoeing

British Cycling

British Horse Society

British Marine Federation

CTC the national cycling charity

The Inland Waterways Association

Living Streets

National Association of Boat Owners

The Ramblers

Residential Boat Owners' Association

Sustrans



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