

PRESS RELEASE

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OPPORTUNITY FOR MILLIONS TO GAIN HAPPINESS RIGHT ON THEIR DOORSTEP

The charity that cares for the nation's 2,000 miles of canals and rivers is today setting out how former industrial waterways can improve the wellbeing of millions of people. The Trust's waterways run through some of the most heavily populated communities in England and Wales providing accessible green and blue space on their doorstep.

With ever increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, and other debilitating conditions – and rising levels of stress, anxiety and other mental health conditions in the UK, the Canal & River Trust believes waterways are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of the nation, with millions of people living within easy reach of one of the free-to-use towpaths running alongside its canals and rivers. New independent research published today shows that simply spending time by the waterways can make you happier and improve your life satisfaction, with an equivalent estimated social wellbeing value of £3.8bn per year (1/2).

Many of the waterways cared for by the charity run through some of our country's most deprived and multi-cultural urban communities, where their potential impact is greatest, with people living in the least prosperous areas twice as likely to be physically inactive than those living in more prosperous areas (3).

A report commissioned by the charity – *Assessing the wellbeing impacts of waterways usage in England and Wales* – written by social impact consultancy group Simetrica, reveals:

- The associated benefits of visiting a canal or river increase with the length of visit, with research showing higher levels of happiness and lower levels of anxiety for longer trips
- Any visit to a waterway is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and visiting regularly is associated with even higher levels of life satisfaction.

The Trust's research also reveals that three quarters of towpath users say they visit to 'get away from it all and clear my head', and because they are 'great places to relax and de-stress' (4).

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However, of the eight million people living within a kilometre of a waterway, currently just three in ten ever visit (5/6); with vast potential to make a meaningful impact on millions of lives.

The charity is today (Wednesday, May 23rd) setting out this enhanced new role for the waterways, to improve the health, happiness and wellbeing for those living in waterside communities. It describes the impact that England & Wales' 200-year-old waterways can have on a society that's ranked just 19th in the World Happiness Report and is home to 20 million people who are physically inactive, with some of the worst rates of mental health in the world (7).

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, comments: "Our waterways are an amazing historic legacy for us all, and it is exhilarating to find that they can play such an important new role in our lives. This research presents clear evidence for what we might all experience – that we can make life better by water. And for the millions of people living alongside them, especially in our towns and cities where green space is at a premium, canals and rivers can provide a boost to health, happiness and wellbeing. They are free to use and on people's doorstep.

"Working with partners and local communities, we believe that waterways have the power to make a real difference to people's lives, and we're on a mission to make the most of the benefits they can provide."

Daniel Fujiwara, founding director at Simetrica which offers social impact analysis and policy evaluation of the highest scientific rigour to governments, international organisations, and the private and not-for-profit sectors, comments: "Evidence shows that spending time by water is associated with higher levels of happiness and there are a number of studies underway by the Trust to precisely measure and demonstrate the value of these waterways – in improving people's wellbeing and the significant benefits this could offer to the NHS and the nation at large."

In the last year the charity has needed to spend more than £100 million on maintaining and caring for the waterways, making them available for people to escape to, for exercise, or simply to spend time away from the daily routine, with nearly 400 million visits each year (8).

'Water' ambition:

- We want over 7 million people (90%) who live close to the waterway to appreciate the benefits they can provide
- Waterways can be the catalyst for more cohesive communities. We want one million volunteering hours every year, and for a quarter of the network – 500 miles - to be adopted and cared for by local communities
- We want one million children and young people to be engaged in our waterways and actively benefit from them
- We want the wellbeing benefits of our beautiful waterside spaces to be celebrated with a quarter of the network awarded a prestigious Green Flag award.

The charity is calling on communities to provide their time as volunteers or to make a regular donation, so the waterways can continue to be cared and enjoyed by everyone. To find out how to feel better by water and to get involved visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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For a full copy of the Simetrica report please visit our website www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a real difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to transform their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

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Research

Research was carried out by consultancy group Simetrica which provides social impact analysis and policy evaluation. Simetrica was commissioned by the Trust to look at existing survey results (Community Survey, Towpath Survey and WEM) and produce a report which shows the impact our canals and waterways have on a person's wellbeing, providing us with a 'Wellbeing Valuation'.

References:

1. Simetrica's report found all levels of waterway usage are associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and the more people use them the more satisfied they are with their lives. It also concluded that the association between happiness, spending over an hour at a waterway for example, is around two times larger than spending between 15-30 minutes there.
2. By multiplying the per trip value (£6.63) by the estimated number of trips to our waterways in 2016/17, we estimate an indicative social value of £3.8bn per year in England & Wales. This means by visiting a waterway people receive an uplift of life satisfaction equivalent to an additional £3.8bn of income.
3. Figures from the Health Survey for England 2012 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/health-survey-for-england-2012>
4. Towpath Survey (September 2017) is administered face-to-face on towpaths themselves, gathering detailed insight on the profile of towpath users. The survey also measures trends by gathering evidence on demographic characteristics, journey purpose &

frequency, as well as motivations and behaviours and perceptions of personal wellbeing and safety. A total of 2,717 towpath users participated in the 'full survey' (including online completes) while an additional 64 people participated in a further qualitative survey online.

5. 61% of households within 1km of our waterways are deprived in at least one dimension (per the 2011 Census definition). Nationally, 58% of households are deprived in at least one dimension. This is higher still in urban areas at 62% and in certain local authorities higher still e.g. 76% of households in the Sheffield waterway corridor or 70% in Manchester.
6. The Trust's Waterway Engagement Monitor (WEM) (April 17 to March 18) shows 29% of adults living within ½ mile of a Trust waterway have visited within the past two weeks so approximately three in ten, approximately 2.3 million people.
7. World Happiness Report 2018 <http://worldhappiness.report/>; British Heart Foundation's Physical Inactivity Report 2017: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/statistics/physical-inactivity-report-2017>; Varkey Foundation's Generation Z Citizenship Survey 2017: www.varkeyfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Young%20People%20Report%20%28digital%29%20NEW%20%281%29.pdf; Cancer Research UK February 2018: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-us/cancer-news/press-release/2018-02-26-millennials-top-obesity-chart-before-reaching-middle-age>
8. Canal & River Trust annual report 2016/17