

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 6 October 2025 at 7.00 pm

Next ordinary meeting
Monday 2 March 2026 at 7.00pm

Please Note: This meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the public and press are able to attend via Teams. If you are intending to attend in person please contact the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 328 104 710 191 5

Passcode: pH6V2dV9

A G E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

- 1 **Election of Chair for 2025/2026**
To elect a Chair for 2025/2026 (the Terms of Reference state that the appointment should be made from the Mid Devon District Council representation for 2025/2026).
- 2 **Election of Vice-Chair for 2025/2026**
To elect a Vice Chair for 2025/2026 (the Terms of reference state that this appointment should come from the Devon County Council representation for 2025/2026).
- 3 **Apologies**
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 4 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions from the public and replies thereto.
- 5 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting** (*Pages 5 - 16*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 March 2025 as a correct record.

- 6 **Matters Arising**
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting
- 7 **Local Government Re-organisation**
To receive a verbal update regarding Local Government Reorganisation.
- 8 **Fenacre Water Transfer System Update**
To receive an update from Mr J Penny, Regional Estates Manager – South West, HOLCIM UK Limited.
- 9 **Terms of Reference and Membership Review** (*Pages 17 - 24*)
To consider and approve the Terms of Reference and membership of the Committee for 2025/2026 (attached).
- 10 **Sale of the Horse-Drawn Barge**
To receive a verbal update with regard to the sale of the Horse-Drawn Barge.
- 11 **Draft Grand Western Canal Management Plan** (*Pages 25 - 202*)
To consider the draft Grand Western Canal Management Plan presented by the Country Park Manager, Devon County Council.
- 12 **Grand Western Canal Progress Report** (*Pages 203 - 218*)
To receive a report from the Country Park Manager, Devon County Council summarising the work that has taken place with regard to the canal since the last meeting.
- 13 **Any Other Business**
To consider any other relevant business.
- 14 **Identification of any issues for discussion at the next meeting**
To identify any issues for discussion at the next meeting.
- 15 **Date of the Next Meeting**
To agree the date of the next meeting as Monday 2nd March at 7pm.

Guidance notes for meetings of Mid Devon District Council

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Teams.

If the Council experience technology difficulties at a committee meeting the Chairman may make the decision to continue the meeting 'in-person' only to conclude the business on the agenda.

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at Committee@middevon.gov.uk

They can also be accessed via the council's website [Click Here](#)

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP.

2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership.

The Code of Conduct can be [viewed here](#):

3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. Minutes of meetings are not verbatim.

4. Public Question Time

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District wishing to raise a question and/or statement under public question time are asked to provide their written questions to the Democratic Services team by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting to ensure that a response can be provided at the meeting. You will be invited to ask your question and or statement at the meeting and will receive the answer prior to, or as part of, the debate on that item. Alternatively, if you are content to receive an answer after the item has been debated, you can register to speak by emailing your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. You will be invited to speak at the meeting and will receive a written response within 10 clear working days following the meeting.

Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible

5. Meeting Etiquette for participants

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

For those joining the meeting virtually:

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off your camera if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using camera then please state your name)
- Switch off your camera and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called "turn on live captions" which provides subtitles on the screen.

6. Exclusion of Press & Public

When considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act. If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed. They will be invited to return as soon as the meeting returns to open session.

7. Recording of meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and Committee meetings (apart from items Media and Social Media Policy - 2023 page 22 where the public is excluded) you can view our Media and Social Media Policy [here](#). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance.

8. Fire Drill Procedure

If you hear the fire alarm you should leave the building by the marked fire exits, follow the direction signs and assemble at the master point outside the entrance. Do not use the lifts or the main staircase. You must wait there until directed otherwise by a senior officer. If anybody present is likely to need assistance in exiting the building in the event of an emergency, please ensure you have let a member of Democratic Services know before the meeting begins and arrangements will be made should an emergency occur.

9. WIFI

An open, publicly available Wi-Fi network is normally available for meetings held in the Phoenix Chambers at Phoenix House.



MINUTES of a MEETING of the GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE held on 3 March 2025 at 7.00 pm

JAC Members Present:

Cllr C R Slade, Devon County Council (Chair)
Cllr L Cruwys, Mid Devon District Council (Vice-Chair)
Cllr F Box, Burlescombe Parish Council
Mrs P Brind, Mid Devon Moorings
Cllr K Browse, Halberton Parish Council
Peter Burgess, Devon Wildlife Trust (on-line)
Cllr S Bush, Tiverton Town Council
Cllr G DuChesne, Mid Devon District Council
Cllr B Fish, Mid Devon District Council (on-line)
Mr J Hampshire, Cycling UK
Mr R Hodgson, Friends of the Grand Western Canal
Mr R Jones, Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society
Cllr J Lock, Mid Devon District Council
Mr S Pidgeon, Canal Business Group
Cllr A Pilgrim, Holcombe Rogus Parish Council
Mrs J Pilgrim, Inland Waterways Association
Mr P Saupe, Tiverton Sea Cadets
Mr M Trump, Tiverton and District Angling Club
Cllr J Wright, Mid Devon District Council
Cllr G Westcott, Mid Devon District Council

Also Present:

Mrs J Brind, Tiverton Canal Company
Cllr E Buczkowski, Mid Devon District Council
Cllr C Harrower, Mid Devon District Council

Officers:-

Mr R Walton, Public Rights of Way & Country Parks Manager, Devon County Council
Mr M Baker, Country Park Manager, Devon County Council
Mr S Densham, Housing Development Service Manager, Mid Devon District Council
Mr J Hammond, Development Management Manager, Mid Devon District Council
Mrs A Howell, Democratic Services Officer, Mid Devon District Council

48 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr L Kennedy, Cllr R Radford, Cllr S Taylor and Mr T White.

49 **Public Question Time**

Vicky Pugh – with regard to Item 7 on the agenda

I'd like to start by thanking the Committee for its support since 2020 regarding the planning application at Tidcombe Hall.

My question relates to the Public Inquiry in May instigated by the applicant's appeal. Committee Members will be aware that public opposition to the development remains strong.

The fundamentals of why this should not proceed are unchanged; they are the reasons planning permission was refused. Firstly, that the proposal is outside the settlement limits that are core to the Mid Devon Local Plan and that it fails to adhere to a number of planning policies.

Secondly, that Mid Devon aims to show that they can deliver evidence to support a 5 year housing supply.

And thirdly, and most relevant to GWC JAC, how the development would bring harm to the environment of the Grand Western Canal and change for worse the experience of canal users. This includes the impact on Mid Devon's iconic heritage asset and major tourist attraction, the horse-drawn canal barge and the consequences for the area if it were to close.

Given that these are the 3 criteria that will be central to the Public Inquiry, can I please ask this Committee to respond to the following question:

Q:- Will the Committee agree at this meeting that the best way that the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee (GWC JAC) can oppose this appeal is by making a representation at the Inquiry that focuses strongly on the specific areas that the Planning Inspector will be considering in deciding whether 100 houses are to be built at Tidcombe?

With this in mind, will the Committee make a commitment today to ensure that, at the Inquiry, the GWC JAC representation gives weight to and stresses the serious potential impact on the following:

- 1) "the character,
- 2) the appearance,
- 3) the setting
- 4) and the significance of the Grand Western Canal".

A:- The Chair explained that Cllr A Pilgrim had made a submission to the Inquiry with objections that followed along the lines outlined in the issues above and that she had the Committee's commitment.

Cllr A Pilgrim confirmed a submission had been made which had been noted by the Inquiry with an invitation to speak to it. He explained he was unable to attend the Inquiry on the first day and hoped that another Committee Member would be able to attend instead to ensure that the points raised above would be emphasised.

Vicky Pugh

Those of us that have put in written submissions have done so as an initial document. At the Inquiry further detailed presentations would be made with targeted details given on the day. There was not a need to stick to what has been drafted and submitted as there was an opportunity to bring up additional points, to do more and to go further.

The Chair also confirmed that he had submitted his objection as a County Councillor.

Goff Welchman- with regard to Item 7 on the agenda

Q:- I no longer need to ask my first question as that is now answered on the Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) website, where we can all see your initial excellent objection. I do however need to ask, if your objection and request to speak at the enquiry were submitted by the 20 February deadline, as the website shows 27 February.

A:- The Chair confirmed that the submission was given on time and had been acknowledged.

Q:- Will any Member be speaking at the Public Inquiry as an interested party? If so, may we know the detail of what will be said, in order to avoid duplication with other speakers? My intention in asking this question is to ensure we all present a coherent front at the enquiry, with minimum duplication, and no contradictions. May I suggest that on this point you answer me either privately, off the record, after this meeting is closed, or in a confidential email before the enquiry takes place?

A:- The Chair confirmed that the Committee would provide a written answer to Goff Welchman nearer the time.

Cllr Sophia Beard- with regard to Item 7 on the agenda which the Chair read out on her behalf

Q:- I would like to raise an observation regarding the absence of any mention of plans to strengthen the relationship between the canal and the town centre.

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - As managers of Grand Western Canal Country Park, we (the Canal Ranger Service) believe the canal and the businesses and facilities offered within the Country Park have a very positive role in generating footfall and business for Tiverton, including for the town centre and we believe this view is shared by stakeholders on the Joint Advisory Committee. The Canal, and associated facilities offer a unique selling point for Tiverton and Mid Devon, attracting many overnight tourists and day trippers to the town. This has multiplier effects throughout the local economy.

We also recognise that more can be done to acknowledge and improve on this important relationship. As an example, we recently liaised with Mid Devon District Council to install new finger posts in the Canal Basin and the Canal Hill car park which direct visitors towards the town centre and its facilities and businesses. We have also engaged with the model Tivvy Bumper and Swan Trails that have taken place within the town in recent years, encouraging greater links between the canal and the town centre; and we also developed an excellent working relationship with the Town Centre Manager whilst planning the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the horse-drawn barge last year – which in itself drew visitors down to the town.

Q:- Could you kindly outline what plans you have in place to foster this relationship moving forward?

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - We are open to suggestions and initiatives that support and encourage flow between the canal and town centre. The importance of this relationship is currently being reviewed as part of updating the Country Park Management Plan. A possible new / additional initiative could be to work jointly with the Tiverton Town Council or Mid Devon District Council to secure additional, alternative funding to develop new media such as a short film or a text and photo summary showcasing the town centre, which could then be accommodated on the touchscreen system within the Canal Visitor Centre. At a simpler level, there is also the potential for a permanent A4 poster about the town centre in the Canal Basin noticeboard.

Q:- Additionally, could you provide a detailed breakdown of how the Town Council's grant funding will be allocated in the forthcoming financial year to achieve this aim?

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - Our understanding is that the additional Tiverton Town Council funding is being provided to "enhance the running and safety matters on and around the canal". The funding will therefore be prioritised towards maintenance activities and safety improvements in the section of the Country Park within Tiverton Town parish (i.e. from the Canal Basin to Manley Bridge). This is important in helping to retain Green Flag Award status (the quality standard for parks and green spaces), and optimising the value of the canal to local residents and visitors alike as a recreational green space (which is also of high importance for wildlife, heritage and landscape). Works and projects we currently have in mind which this funding could contribute towards include:

- Resurfacing the towpath between Tidcombe Bridge and Snakes Wood
- Replacing the two circular picnic benches beside the Visitor Centre (both date from 2012 and are at the end of their serviceable life)
- Repairs to the public landing stage in the Canal Basin
- Repairs to the limekiln walls

- Repairs to the play park in the Canal Basin, include replacement of a damaged panel within the play boat
- General maintenance of the Canal Basin as a high-use 'honeypot' site

Q:- In light of these efforts, I would also appreciate clarification on whether there are plans to engage with local traders, either through the Town Council or the Town Centre Partnership, to ensure that their input and support are taken into account.

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - We have well-established connections with MDDC Economic Development Team and representatives from Tiverton Town Councillors. The Canal's Joint Advisory Committee provides strategic guidance on the management of the canal and there are opportunities to engage either through attending meetings or through Town Councillors raising agenda items. Representation from traders close to the canal are included as part of the Committee and we would be happy to support opportunities to build on this relationship e.g., providing information to enable improved communications between interested businesses.

Q:- Furthermore, could you provide details on how the impact of the plans funded by this grant will be measured? It is essential to understand the criteria and mechanisms in place to evaluate success.

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - The practical works outlined above are relatively straightforward to assess (e.g. as direct outputs). Overall success (outputs and outcomes) is monitored and reported through the Joint Advisory Committee (which includes Tiverton Town Council), and Tiverton Town Council are provided with a summary report as /when funding contributions are drawn down. External assessment is important, with the Green Flag Award process providing a useful measure.

Q:- Finally, will there be a guarantee that the funds are ring-fenced for the specific purpose outlined by Councillor Kennedy, namely, the additional funding was specifically requested for this particular initiative? This is a crucial point to ensure that the funds are used in accordance with their intended objectives.

A:- Mark Baker, Country Park Manager - The additional funding will be spent to "enhance the running and safety matters on and around the canal". Furthermore, we undertake to target this funding on the section of the canal within the Tiverton Town parish boundary.

The Chair explained to the Committee that Tiverton Town Council had increased the budget of the existing annual grant of £4,000 by an additional £6,000 and expressed his thanks to the Town Council.

Paul Elstone – with regard to item 11 on the agenda

I wish to bring to the attention of this Committee that the owner and operator of the Red Linhay Anaerobic Digester located at Crownhill, Halberton has submitted a planning application that if approved by Mid Devon District Council would allow the operation of the anaerobic digester without limitations.

An application that would allow the applicant to more than double the power generation output over what the current consent permits.

Also wanting to operate with no constraints on feedstock tonnages or locations also digestate spreading locations. Resulting in no limitations on tractor movements or the routes that tractors could take.

In making the application, the Red Linhay operator has effectively declared that he has been doing exactly as he is now requesting. That since 2019 that he has been in breach of all related planning conditions.

Red Linhay is an industrial sized facility it is clearly not just a farm. It most certainly is not anything like as green as the applicant attempts to project.

Traffic movements with tens of thousands of miles being travelled and with tractors burning around 1 litre of diesel for every mile. Time prevents me from providing the full justification to this statement.

In blatantly and seriously breaching the planning conditions the operator continues to create excess noise, vibration, odour and traffic movements, including increasing road safety risk. This impacting on the local and not so local community

It is causing harm to the Grand Western Canal amenity, something which this committee understands much better than me with regards to its impacts.

Using the applicant's own data it shows on one day 163 weighbridge tickets were issued. This equating to one tractor either arriving or leaving Red Linhay every 2 minutes 20 seconds over a 12-hour working day. This involving 13 different tractors which could have been on the road at the same time.

It is known that the tractor movements, up to 200 per day, impact on Blundells School with its over 3000 pupil road crossings a day, something the current planning conditions should prevent.

Also Braid Park, Manley Lane, Warnicombe, Canal Hill, Halberton, Sampford Peverell, Willand, Cullompton, Bickleigh, Thorverton, Crediton, Copplestone, Holcombe Rogus and as far away as Bow, Wimple and Wellington all being impacted.

Q:- Will this Committee debate this application and then hopefully agree to prepare a very robust and detailed objection?

This will be the final opportunity it seems to stop this longstanding abuse. Enough is enough.

A:- Cllr A Pilgrim - This was a tricky application as the history of the Red Linhay site was one of non-compliance with conditions. I am aware of the problems it causes with noise, smell and pollution as well as the huge amount of traffic. A more drastic response was required and I have a few ideas in my mind.

The Chair explained that a written response would be given within 10 working days.

Paul Elstone confirmed that a written response was not required as he had confidence that this was being considered by this Committee.

50 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on 1 October 2024 having been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record with the exception of one amendment:-

Minute Number 43- Fenacre Water Transfer System.

Rather than “Cllr J Lock informed the Committee that she had requested a seat on the Quarry Liaison Group” it should instead read as “Jane Pilgrim” rather than “Cllr J Lock”.

51 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

52 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Cllr Frances Box to the Committee – she had recently joined as a representative from Burlescombe Parish Council.

53 Aggregate Industries UK Limited Update

Mr John Penny, Regional Estates Manager for Aggregate Industries – owner and operators of Westleigh Quarry, Burlescombe gave a verbal update to the Committee regarding the water transfer scheme and highlighted the following:-

- Since the last update given in September 2024, the company had now appointed new consultants – SLR Consulting.
- They were a national firm of consultants with technical expertise in water, hydrogeology etc.
- A meeting took place at the beginning of January 2025 with the consultants, officers from Devon County Council (DCC) and the DCC’s consultant to discuss the revised scheme.
- Subject to technical details it was understood that DCC were still okay with the principles of the scheme.
- The Consultants had now provided a technical briefing note which had been approved and would be submitting this to the Environment Agency by way of a pre-application by close of play on Tuesday 4 March 2025.
- The Consultants would also be liaising with DCC Local Lead Flood Authority with regard to the land drainage consent.
- It was anticipated that the Environment Agency would take approximately 3-6 weeks to respond to the pre-application and in the meantime the Consultants would progress with the detailed design of the scheme and undertake ecology surveys required.
- The application would be accompanied by an Environmental Statement and a Method Statement.

- It was understood that this piece of work would take around 6-8 weeks to complete and then the formal application would be submitted to the Environment Agency towards the end of May or early June 2025.
- It was understood that it would take approximately 16 weeks for the Environment Agency to determine the application. However that time scale may be quickened by the fact that they had received a previous application and should be familiar with the components of the scheme.
- It was hoped this would allow the scheme to be implemented in quarter 4 of this year and anticipated the scheme to be fully live by 2026.

Mark Baker, Country Park Manager explained that he had not seen the technical briefing note and was therefore unsure what was being proposed to the Environment Agency.

Mr Penny agreed to send the technical briefing note tomorrow and to give DCC time to share the details with their Hydrological Consultant before submitting the application.

The Chair thanked Mr Penny for the update.

54 **Tidcombe Hall, Tiverton Planning Inquiry**

John Hammond, Development Management Manager, MDDC gave a verbal update to the Committee and highlighted the following:-

- There would be a Public Inquiry starting on 20 May 2025 which would run for a period of 5 days and then would reconvene on the 3 June 2025 for 3 days.
- There was a timetable provided for public commentary to be submitted.
- A Case Management Conference would take place shortly where the Inspector holds a meeting with the two parties and sets out their provisional thoughts about a timetable for the Inquiry.
- It was suspected that the Inspector would want public representations to be made quite early on in the Inquiry.
- With regard to comments made in public questions that people would be expanding on submissions made in writing, it would be worth noting that the inspector would be running a quasi-judicial process as the Inspector would want to ensure that any new evidence raised in discussion that all parties would have an opportunity to comment on anything brought forward that was not in previous written submissions that might have been reviewed.
- The Inspector would be concerned that all parties to the appeal had a chance to comment. This could be during the second week that had been set aside. It could lead to requests for a deferral or adjournment for evidence to be presented. The Inspector would not be happy if they felt they had been blindsided by information and putting themselves or the decision at risk without giving all parties the chance to provide a counter position.
- There were 4 reasons given by MDDC for refusal:
 - (i) There was not a requirement for additional housing due to the 5 year housing supply.
 - (ii) Heritage assets.
 - (iii) Landscape character.
 - (iv) The lack of a legal agreement regarding public community infrastructure.

- The key issue that needed to be addressed would be the first reason for refusal in light of the Government's announcements at short notice of a new housing supply requirement for Mid Devon. The Council's Local Plan would change from delivering 393 houses a year to now deliver a national requirement of 572 houses per year. That date would become effective in July 2025 when the Council's current Local Plan would be out of date.
- MDDC would be presenting three witnesses, a Planning witness, a Heritage witness and a Landscape witness. Those points remained fully valid.
- There would now be a requirement for the Council to deliver an Action Plan to demonstrate how the additional housing would be delivered.
- The next steps were for Cabinet to look at the Local Development Scheme and the options to deliver a new Local Plan and the work to progress it. In April 2025, Cabinet would then look at those steps to deliver housing supply in the short term. This could then be used as proof of evidence to demonstrate measures which could be taken and to be put in place to deliver additional housing.
- A page would be created on the MDDC website so that all documentation would be in one location.

Mr Malcolm Trump commented that this development was to the south of the canal rather than in the north where the services were. From a practical point of view it could not be serviced and it would be more expensive with water, drainage and sewage requirements. This should not really be considered in that area without practical knowledge of service requirements.

John Hammond explained that it would be considered as the next site in line. It was a site that had previously been considered. There had been two applications on the site – this application did not include the totality of the contingency site, which meant it then concentrated the impact on probably the heritage assets to a greater extent.

Mr Philip Brind, Tiverton Canal Company expressed his disappointment with this application as the Horse Drawn Barge would be greatly affected. If the development were to proceed an application would have to be submitted to DCC to relocate the Horse Drawn Barge as it would be a trip through housing estates rather than fields.

55 Canal Progress Report

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a Progress Report from the Country Park Manager summarising the work that had taken place on the canal since the last meeting. A brief discussion took place regarding the following issues:

- **Proposed Sale of the Moorings**

Mr P Brind, Tiverton Canal Company wished to thank the Chair for his services in saving the Moorings from being sold and how impressed he was by his services. He was however extremely disappointed with the way DCC handled the situation especially as Mark Baker, Country Park Manager was required not to tell anyone about it.

Mr M Trump was also disappointed with the lack of consultation with the GWC JAC.

- **Towpath Resurfacing Planning**

It was explained that this work would begin tomorrow – Tuesday 4th March 2025.

The Chair thanked the Country Park Manager for the comprehensive report and the work that the Rangers and Volunteers did throughout the year, regardless of the weather, keeping the canal looking good and keeping it safe for all users.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

56 **Canal House (aka The Moorings)**

The Chair gave a verbal update and highlighted the following:-

- Devon County Council (DCC) Land and Property Committee was only just established.
- The officers were charged with the duty of disposing of surplus assets owned by DCC.
- The officers were aware that the property was owned by DCC.
- After intervention by himself, officers then realised they should have consulted with a much wider audience. Officers were not being devious or trying to hide anything they simply thought they had an asset to be disposed of.
- The Country Park Manager had made a very compelling case as to why it should be kept and maintained.
- After receiving some very strong emails from Members of GWC JAC which were used as ammunition when it came to the meeting, it was agreed by the Committee to withdraw the property from the list.
- It was agreed at the Land and Property Committee that any future properties which had public interest then all stake-holders would be consulted.

The Country Park Manager explained that at the last inspection of the property approximately 5 years ago found lots of potential works but a lot of it was decorative and low priority. Therefore the future maintenance costs were a lower financial burden than was originally anticipated.

The Committee discussed the reasons why the Country Park Manager was not able to inform the Committee regarding this. It was explained by the Chair that DCC officers perhaps did not understand the situation and any reason behind that would have been due to commercial sensitivity.

57 **Devolution White Paper**

The Chair explained that Mrs Jane Pilgrim had asked for this item to be added to the agenda and read out the following email she had asked to come before the Committee:-

'In the light of the proposed, but as yet unspecified, changes to local government in Devon, I am concerned for the future of the Grand Western Canal. I am also aware that this committee may be a casualty of these changes.

The Grand Western Canal is currently owned by Devon County Council who supply the majority of the funding to maintain it. In the event of a change of 'ownership' it is important that adequate, secure, funding, present and future, is built into any transfer agreement. I would be interested to hear the thoughts of our Chairman, MDDC, and our vice Chairman, DCC.'

The Chair explained that it was still very early days in terms of local government reorganisation. Various District Councils were holding meetings and the County Council had a special meeting on 20 March 2025. The deadline for submissions was the 21 March 2025.

Various options included the possibility of one Unitary Authority for the whole of Devon or there could be three Unitary Authorities. No decision had yet been made on the proposals to be put forward. It would be much later in the year when Government would decide. New Unitary Authorities would go live in 2028 so it was a long process. As time went by more details would emerge and that would be closely monitored. He did not believe the Grand Western Canal would be closed and it would simply be inherited by the succeeding Unitary Authority.

The Country Park Manager hoped the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee would continue in some form.

58 Any Other Business

The following was raised:-

- The lack of consultation with the GWC JAC with regard to the caravan park at Tiverton Road Bridge. Halberton Parish Council were informed. The GWC JAC should have been consulted with regard to potential problems. The owners should be informed that they will not be permitted to fish from that side of the canal and that any access through the land would be regarded as trespassing.

It was **AGREED** that Angie Howell, Democratic Services Officer would speak to the relevant officers to pass on the above request and report back to the Committee.

The Country Park Manager was not aware either. He confirmed there was a fence in place and he intended to let the owners know that access beyond it would not be permitted.

Councillor G DuChesne explained that this was general permitted development – the owners only had to advise MDDC of their intentions so nothing could be done.

It was **AGREED** that Cllr G DuChesne would speak with MDDC officers regarding consultation with the GWC JAC in future with regard to any other such applications that affected the canal.

Cllr Adam Pilgrim – there was a facility for MDDC to call for conditions. If the GWC JAC had known it would have been emphasised regarding access and protecting the habitat. However it would be too late to submit those conditions now.

- The Country Park Manager informed the Committee that he had meetings last week with officers of MDDC looking at whether there were any potential further protections of the canal and its wildlife. Possibilities included the inclusion within the emerging Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy or another option was for the canal being designated as a Local Green Space which would be of greater benefit. This would be discussed as the Local Plan develops over the coming months and discussions with the GWC JAC would take place at an appropriate time.
- Mr K Browse asked if there was an update on the Conservation Area.

It was **AGREED** that Angie Howell, Democratic Services Officer would ask the relevant officer to write to Mr K Browse with information

59 Identification of Items for the Next Meeting

It was requested the following items be brought to the next meeting:-

- Update on the Fenacre Water Transfer System.
- Update on the potential Local Green Space designation within the Local Plan.

60 Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 6 October 2025 at 7pm.

(The meeting ended at 8.24pm)

CHAIR

GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Group Represented	Representative(s)
Devon County Council	Cllr Jacqui Hodgson Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity jacqi.hodgson@devon.gov.uk
Burlescombe Parish Council	Cllr Frances Box Burlescombe Parish Council Email: cllr.frances.box@burlescombeparishcouncil.gov.uk
Halberton Parish Council	Cllr Ken Browse
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council	Cllr Adam Pilgrim,
Sampford Peverell Parish Council	Stephen Taylor
Tiverton Town Council	Cllr Steve Bush
The Tiverton Canal Company	Mr Philip Brind, Tiverton Canal Company Limited, The Wharf, Canal Hill, Tiverton EX16 4HX Deputy Mr David Poxon (c/o Tiverton Canal Co, as above)
Devon Wildlife Trust	Simon Stennett Director of Nature Recovery sstennett@devonwildlifetrust.org Deputy – none appointed
Wildlife Advisory Group	Ray Jones, Malcolm Trump
Inland Waterways Association	Mrs Jane Pilgrim
Tiverton and District Angling Club	Mr Malcolm Trump Deputy Mr Eric Priest,
Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society	Mr Ray Jones

Mid Devon District Council	Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change Cllr Natash Bradshaw nbradshaw@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Les Cruwys lcruwys@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Gwen DuChesne gduchesne@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Beckett Fish, bfish@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Lance Kennedy, lkennedy@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Jane Lock jlock@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Gill Westcott gwestcott@middevon.gov.uk
Devon County Council	Cllr Simon Clist sclist@middevon.gov.uk Cllr Neale Raleigh c/o County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QD Neale.Raleigh@devon.gov.uk
Friends of the Grand Western Canal	Mr Trevor White Deputy: Mr Robert Hodgson, info@friendsgrandwesterncanal.org.uk
Mid Devon Moorings	Mrs Pat Brindn EX16 4NJ Deputy – Jacquie Brind
Mid Devon District Council	Mr Steve Densham, Land Management Officer C/O; Property Services sdensham@middevon.gov.uk Angie Howell ahowell@middevon.gov.uk
Devon County Council, PRoW and Country Parks Manager	Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, Lucombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QW richard.walton@devon.gov.uk
DCC, Country Park Manager	Mr Mark Baker, The Moorings, Canal Hill, Tiverton EX16 4HX mark.baker@devon.gov.uk
Canal Businesses Group	Steve Pidgeon Canal Tea Rooms and Gardens

Tiverton Unit Sea Cadets	Mr Peter Saupe
Community Patrol Boat	Awaiting info
Cycling UK	Mr John Hampshire

This page is intentionally left blank

Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee (GWCJAC) supports and encourages an active partnership between all the bodies involved in and co-ordinating management across all activities of the Grand Western Canal (GWC). The management of the GWC is co-ordinated by the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager on behalf of Devon County Council.

The Joint Advisory Committee represents the main mechanism for the co-ordination of advice and the collation of local views relating to the management and maintenance of the canal.

The aim of the County Council is “to conserve for the future the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource”.

The principle functions of the GWCJAC are to:

- Promote and act as champion for the canal;
- Support the aims of the County Council for the GWC which are to:
 - Preserve and maintain the canal as a civil engineering asset;
 - Develop, conserve and interpret the biodiversity in the surrounding area;
 - Promote the canal for amongst other things – tourism purposes.
- Provide a forum for discussion and information exchange between the different interested parties;
- Provide advice for the County Council on issues of management of the GWC

This will be achieved through providing advice:

- To assist the implementation of the Management that supports the County Council's aims for the GWC;
- To inform a review of the Management Plan at appropriate intervals;
- To permit the monitoring of the success and achievement of the GWC Team and the use of the Canal;
- To inform the County Council on the impacts of existing or proposed uses of the Canal;
- To inform the commissioning of special studies of issues if necessary, utilising appropriate forums;
- To inform the local planning authorities about developments which are likely to affect significantly the GWC, its environs and landscape character;
- On the likely resources necessary for effective management;
- On the dissemination of information and by undertaking this through appropriate organisations;
- On the accommodation of new requirements due to changes in legislation affecting the GWC.

It should be noted that the GWCJAC does not have executive powers over the funding partners, but acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to the funding partners and others as required.

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

- The GWCJAC will meet twice a year;
- The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be elected annually;
- The position of Chairman and Vice Chairman will rotate between the main funding partners of Mid Devon District Council and Devon County Council;
- The secretariat for the GWCJAC will be Mid Devon District Council and the Committee will be run under MDDC standing orders;
- The GWCJAC will be considered quorate when eight representatives are present of whom 3 should be County or District Councillors with 1 being a County Councillor;
- Representatives will be expected to attend all meetings or to send a suitable replacement with prior notice;
- If a representative fails to attend two GWCJAC meetings within the year, without reasonable cause, then their eligibility to attend any future meetings will be terminated with immediate effect;
- Meetings will be open to the press and public with opportunities for the items to be brought in by the public for part of the meeting with prior notice;
- Suggested agenda items and questions should be presented 3 weeks before any meeting;
- Press and publicity must be channelled through Devon Media Services having initially been authorised by the Chairman or Vice Chairman or the Public Rights of Way & Country Parks Manager;
- The membership of the GWCJAC will be reviewed once during each financial year to ensure there is a wide and balanced representation of canal interests;
- New members may be co-opted onto the GWCJAC with the agreement of the GWCJAC following a presentation to the Committee outlining the reasons why they should have representation;
- These Terms of Understanding will be reviewed by the GWCJAC following the agreement of the Chairman with recommendations for change being made to the funding partners;
- All organisations will have equal voting rights should the occasion dictate, with the Chairman having the casting vote;
- The GWCJAC will report to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport who will be the County Council's representative on the advisory committee.

GRAND WESTERN CANAL JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP

Group Represented	Votes
Members	
Devon County Council - Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport	1
Devon County Council – Member for Tiverton East	1
Devon County Council – Member for Willand and Uffculme	1
Mid Devon District Council – Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Cranmore (3 councillors)	3
Mid Devon District Council – Member for Halberton	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Canonsleigh (2 councillors)	2
Tiverton Town Council	1
Halberton Parish Council	1
Sampford Peverell Parish Council	1
Burlescombe Parish Council	1
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council	1
Friends of the Grand Western Canal	1
Devon Wildlife Trust	1
Wildlife Advisory Group	1
Inland Waterways Association	1
Tiverton and District Angling Club	1
Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society	1
Tiverton Sea Cadets	1
Cycling UK	1
The Tiverton Canal Company	1
Mid Devon Moorings	1
Canal Businesses Group	1
Community Patrol Boat	1
Officers	
Devon County Council – Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager	0
Devon County Council – Country Park Manager	0
Mid Devon District Council – Land Management Officer	0
Mid Devon District Council – Member Services Officer	0
Total	27

Each organisation may register a deputy to be their representative, which must be approved by the GWJAC in advance.

The GWCJAC will be advised by the Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager and Country Park Manager and other officers as required.

We endorse the above Terms of Understanding for the GWCJAC and hereby agree to represent, to the best of our ability, the interests of the GWC. We understand our role is to act as an ambassador for the GWCJAC and further its aim to conserve, for the future, the integrity of the Grand Western Canal in its setting as a wildlife, historic, recreation and education resource and to be supportive of sustainable economic activity and tourism in the area.

Organisation.....

Named representative.....

Position.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Contact Details

Address.....
.....

Tel.....Fax.....
.....

Email.....

Named Deputy.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Contact
Details.....

Address.....

Tel.....

Fax.....

Email.....

Grand Western Canal



Management Plan 2026-2030



Acknowledgements

This plan has been drafted by Devon County Council's Grand Western Country Park Manager (also commonly referred to as the 'Canal Manager'), Mark Baker, with assistance from colleagues and Canal stakeholders. It supersedes all previous Grand Western Canal Management Plans. Further information about the plan can be obtained by email: gwcanal@devon.gov.uk. All plans are reproduced under Crown Copyright, Licence No 100019783. All rights reserved. Front page photo credit: Wayne Ashton

Document History

Date	Description	Author
2025	Document drafted, based on review of 2020-25 Management Plan	Mark Baker

Terminology within the plan

This plan relates to the Grand Western Canal Country Park, the boundaries of which are defined by Devon County Council's Grand Western Canal holding. The word 'Canal' (with a capital C) and the term 'the Country Park' are interchangeable and are both used to mean 'the Grand Western Canal Country Park'. It should also be noted that 'GWC' is a common abbreviation for 'Grand Western Canal' and likewise 'GWCCP' can be an abbreviation for 'Grand Western Canal Country Park'. The Grand Western Canal is also sometimes known locally as the Tiverton Canal (although this is not used for official correspondence and documents). The word 'canal' with a small c is used in the general sense of a waterway as opposed to a specific one. The term 'canal channel' is used when specifically referring to the water channel and not the Canal holding. The term 'offside' relates to the side of the canal channel opposite the towpath. Common names of species are used where available and scientific names are not given unless necessary to avoid any confusion.

Contents **[to be updated once final version is agreed]**

Section	Heading	Page
	Acknowledgements, Document history, and Terminology	
	Contents	
	Foreword	
	Chapter One: Introduction, background and context	
1	Introduction and background	
2	Vision and Aims	
3	Location and map	
4	Site description	
5	Land tenure	
6	Legal factors	
7	History	
8	Access, recreation and tourism	
9	Map and photo coverage	
10	Current management and funding arrangements	
11	National context	
12	Local strategic context	
	Chapter Two: Where are we now?	
13	Introduction	
14	The Green Flag Award	
15	A welcoming place	
16	Healthy, safe and secure	
17	Well-maintained and clean	
18	Sustainability	
19	Conservation and heritage	
20	Community involvement	
21	Marketing and communication	
22	Management	
	Chapter Three: Where do we want to get to?	
23	Introduction	
24	Evaluation	
25	Aims and Objectives	
	Chapter Four: How will we get there?	
26	Action Plan	
	Chapter Five: How will we know when we've got there?	
27	Monitoring and performance	
	Appendices	
1	Geology map	
2	Historic structures	
3	Country Park Byelaws	
4	Country Park Codes of Conduct	
5	Inspection regime	
6	Tree Management Policy	
7	Joint Advisory Committee membership	

Foreword

To be added once final version is agreed

Chapter One: Introduction, background and context

Chapter 1 of this management plan aims to set the scene and provide the introduction and background to the site's management. Information is given about the location and a description of the site is provided. The context of the site within the County of Devon and the District of Mid Devon is discussed and relevant wider policy issues are described.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Purpose of this management plan

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for the current and future management and maintenance of the Grand Western Canal Country Park. This version covers from 2026 to 2030. The plan is a statement of Devon County Council's commitment to ensuring that the Country Park continues to provide high quality services to the citizens of and visitors to Devon. The aims of the Plan are:

- To set out the vision for the development and principles for the management of the Country Park;
- To ensure that the needs of conservation and recreation are balanced and that the management methods and development proposals identified are appropriate and represent both best practice and best value in country park management;
- To be a document that reflects the ideas and aspirations of local communities and stakeholders regarding the future of their Country Park;
- To act as a master reference document and to signpost staff and site managers to key information;
- To demonstrate quality management to award bodies, grant agencies, funding bodies and potential sponsors.

This management plan builds upon previous management plans. It is not a stand-alone document and should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and documentation including Mid Devon District Council's [Grand Western Canal Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan](#). An Asset Management Plan for the Country Park is currently in preparation at the time of writing and will focus on the management, inspection and maintenance of the Canal's built infrastructure (embankments, bridges, tunnel, aqueduct, limekilns, sluices etc.) with a focus on managing the safety and integrity of these structures. Therefore, these issues are not discussed in extensive detail within this plan, other than to recognise the importance of public safety and to reflect upon heritage/conservation/landscape value and relationship to recreational use of the Country Park.

1.2 Format

The format of the management plan is in five sections, which provide the following:

- A background and context to the park including the site history and a policy review;
- A current position statement and assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats based around the Green Flag Award judging criteria;
- An assessment of long-term objectives and future management needs for the park;
- A five-year action plan for continuous improvement
- A monitoring/evaluation programme.

The format, style and narrative of the plan are deliberately focused and sequential to facilitate supporting documentation for Green Flag Award submissions and as a management tool for Council Officers.

1.3 Target audience and usage

This plan is a working document that is provided principally for officers and members of Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council, members of the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee, and Green Flag Award judges. The plan can be shared with any member of the public that requests a digital copy and will be published on the Country Park website.

The plan will act as a definitive reference to key information regarding the park. The Grand Western Canal Manager will have lead responsibility for the delivery of this plan. The plan will be reviewed annually by the Canal Manager and fundamentally reviewed in the fifth year. This will include regular reporting and consultation through the Joint Advisory Committee. Updates to the plan may be made at any time following decisions made by Devon County Council – usually informed by advice from the Joint Advisory Committee (see sections 10 and 20 for more information about this stakeholder committee).

2. Vision and Aims

2.1 Vision

The vision for the Country Park is as follows:

To maintain and conserve for the future, the Grand Western Canal Country Park & Local Nature Reserve as a peaceful, attractive and wildlife-rich corridor within which a range of suitable recreation activities may be enjoyed.

Devon County Council also seeks to promote and demonstrate good practice on this multi-interest site, providing opportunities for enjoyable visits by a variety of users in a way that also benefits local communities, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing and the Country Park's role in the local economy.

In addition to guiding the management of the Country Park itself, the Plan also seeks to influence the wider setting of the Canal, recognising its importance in the landscape, its function as a linear corridor connecting other sites and features of conservation significance and the inextricable links between it and land-use in its catchment.

2.2 Aims

The aims for the Country Park are as follows:

- To provide a pleasant, accessible and informative welcome to the Country Park for all visitors and members of the local community
- To provide a healthy, safe and secure park for all users
- To provide an attractive Country Park, which achieves a consistently high standard of maintenance and cleanliness
- To advocate and demonstrate sustainable environmental management
- To protect, enhance and promote enjoyment and understanding of the special biodiversity, landscape and heritage value of the Country Park;
- To engage local communities in the management of the Country Park and to ensure it provides a high standard of facilities and services, enabling a range of recreational activities to be enjoyed
- To use appropriate marketing and communication techniques to encourage use of the Country Park, and to develop understanding and enhance the visitor experience
- To ensure a high standard of service through effective resource management and delivery of the management plan

3 Location and map

3.1 Location

The Country Park is based around the remaining 'in-water' section of the Grand Western Canal and is located in the north-eastern quarter of Devon, entirely in the district of Mid Devon. It extends for eleven and a quarter miles (18km) from the Canal Basin in Tiverton through the villages of Halberton, Sampford Peverell, and Burlescombe to its present-day terminus at the hamlet of Lowdells, close to the Somerset border.

Grid references and what3word address:

South-western end: Tiverton Canal Basin SS 963, 124 [///glaze.estate.full](#)

North-eastern end: Lowdells ST 073, 196 [///udder.slyly.oaks](#)

The Canal Basin is located on the south-eastern side of Tiverton and is well sign-posted by brown tourist attraction signs from all major roads into Tiverton. The surrounding road network makes it possible to access the canal at regular intervals along its length.

The canal was once connected to the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal at Taunton, but since the Somerset section of the Grand Western Canal was closed in the mid nineteenth century it has been isolated from the rest of the UK waterways network.

3.2 Map



3.3 Zoning and identifying locations

For the purposes of ecological monitoring, the Canal has been divided into 16 sections:

Section No.	Section description	Section No.	Section description
1	Canal Basin to Tidcombe Bridge	9	Sampford Peverell Bridge to Boehill Bridge
2	Tidcombe Bridge to Manley Bridge	10	Boehill Bridge to Ayshford Bridge
3	Manley Bridge to Crownhill Bridge	11	Ayshford Bridge to Westcott Bridge
4	Crownhill Bridge to 'Holly Dam'	12	Westcott Bridge to Ebear Bridge
5	'Holly Dam' to Greenway Bridge	13	Ebear Bridge to Fossend Bridge
6	Greenway Bridge to Swing Bridge	14	Fossend Bridge to Fenacre Bridge
7	Swing Bridge to Battens Bridge	15	Fenacre Bridge to Waytown Tunnel
8	Battens Bridge to Sampford Peverell Bridge	16	Waytown Tunnel to Lowdwells

The sections are based principally on identifying sections with distinct habitat types or geomorphological features (egg. in cuttings or on embankments) but also seeks to divide the canal into series of regular sections.

For most other purposes the Canal tends to be divided into the sections between bridges, as these are easily identifiable and fairly regularly spaced along the length of the Canal. Specific points along the canal are generally described in relation to the nearest bridge, although most of the original milestones are still in place (all except milestones 10 and 11) and can also be referred to.

Where very detailed location data is required, a chainage measurement can be used – this being a linear distance along the canal/towpath from the start of the Canal in the Canal Basin, Tiverton. The original engineering plans for the canal contain chainage measurements from the Canal Basin (in imperial measurements) and in recent years metric chainage measurements have been used by geotechnical consultants in relation to the location of canal embankments and by arboricultural consultants in relation to the position of trees.

There are currently no zoning policies (regarding recreational use) in effect, and none are proposed within this plan.

4 Site description

4.1 Overview

The Grand Western Canal Country Park is one of two Country Parks owned and managed by Devon County Council, the other being Stover Country Park near Newton Abbot. Each of the Country Parks has its own Ranger Service team, which also looks after other nearby countryside sites.

The Grand Western Canal Country Park is eleven and a quarter miles (18km) long forming a linear park based around the Canal. On the towpath side the boundary is usually defined by a hedgerow and/or fence. On the offside the boundary is usually defined by a fence several metres in from the water's edge. Generally, the Canal holding extends to the top of cuttings and to the bottom of embankments. At a few points along the Canal, the ownership extends out from the canal to take in some small fields and small blocks of woodland. Devon County Council's land ownership within the canal holding is registered with the Land Registry and is delineated on a series of detailed maps held at the Canal Offices. The total area of the Country Park is approximately 48 hectares.

4.2 Brief description of the route of the canal

The first mile of the Canal from the Canal Basin is located within the residential fringe of the town of Tiverton, with housing on both sides of the Country Park. The Canal then passes through open farmed countryside and patches of woodland passing above the village of Halberton before it enters Sampford Peverell. Here it runs through the middle of the village before passing under the A361 (North Devon Link Road) close to M5 Junction 27, and then on through several more miles of farmland before it passes through the village of Burlescombe. After Burlescombe the canal enters a deep wooded cutting for a mile before it terminates at Lowdwells Lock. Lowdwells is a small hamlet close to the Somerset border (the River Tone some 200m to the north) and is quite remote and can be difficult for visitors to find by road.

4.3 Geology and soils

Soils making up the canal banks are likely to be contemporary with the surrounding soils although clay may have been imported in some areas to ensure a watertight seal. Please refer to Geology Map and Soils map in Appendix 1.

4.4 Hydrology

There are several different types of water input into the canal, including:

- **Rain** that falls directly into the canal.
- **Temporary overland flows** during times of rain, including ditches that empty to the canal and road drainage channels, which occur frequently throughout the canal's length. These flows can be particularly large at Atherton Way, Tiverton and along the parallel length of road to the north of Whipcott Bridge, near Burlescombe.

- **Land drains** in adjacent farmland above the canal frequently drain into the canal along offside banks. Whilst the volume of water they deliver is not significant, the quality of the water may be a concern, depending on the farming practices being undertaken.
- **Permanent watercourses** which discharge into the canal. The only significant watercourse of this type flows into the canal on the northern/towpath side of Fenacre Bridge, although some small farm ditches do also appear to flow into the canal throughout the year.
- **Spring water feeds** from the bed of the canal within the cutting between Fenacre Bridge and Lowdwells. These are of considerable importance to the Canal's water budget during the summer months. They are affected by patterns and volumes of winter and spring rainfall and have been declining in recent decades due to the deepening of the nearby limestone quarries. Work is ongoing to compensate for this effect by redirecting water from quarry de-watering operations to the canal via Fenacre Water.
- **Floodwater** from overtopping watercourses. The only significant watercourse which is perched above the canal is Fenacre Water, and there is a history of water flooding across from this stream and into the canal during periods of heavy rain, often leading to rapid and significant canal level rises. Interference by adjacent landowners in the topography of the land between the canal and the stream has increased the frequency and volume of these flooding events.

Canal levels are maintained within an acceptable range through the operation of fixed weirs (where water overtops into adjacent watercourses in a controlled manner, once a certain level is reached) and various sluices. With regard to sluices, the canal has:

- One 3m² tilting weir (remotely-controllable) and one 1m² guillotine sluice 400m south of Fossend Bridge near Burlescombe.
- One 600mm diameter penstock sluice beside Fossend Bridge, Burlescombe.
- Two 600mm and one 250mm diameter penstock sluices in Snakes Wood, near Tiverton.



- One 300mm penstock sluice near Follett Road, Tiverton (no longer used due to potential exacerbation of erosion issues beside properties downstream on Westcott Road).

In addition to these controlled methods of releasing water from the canal, the canal inevitably experiences some leakage, although the extent of this is not possible to accurately gauge. In 2013, some very significant leaks were discovered near Rock Bridge, when a section of the canal was drained for repairs to a wharf wall. There had been no evidence to suggest leakage was taking place, and clearly the water had been draining down to the water table. In most years some small-scale leakage is discovered somewhere along the canal, often indicated by damp patches or

puddles at the base of embankments. Wherever possible, action is taken to seal leaks, and if attempts to seal leaks are unsuccessful or unaffordable, monitoring of the leaks is undertaken to check that they do not become worse.

Other processes that lead to water loss from the canal include evaporation, and transpiration from trees. Most of the canal is lined with trees, a large proportion of which will be obtaining water from the canal. The volume of water that can be drawn up by a large tree is considerable although the impact is offset to some degree by the reduction in evaporation due to the shading effect of its branches and leaves.

In addition to the canal channel, the Country Park also contains some small ponds located near Boehill Bridge, Ebear Bridge and the Canal offices in Tiverton. The former two are not publicly accessible and are managed for wildlife with occasional dredging and shade-reduction works being carried out. The ponds in the garden of the Canal offices are built and managed for pond-dipping with school groups.



Water quality was previously monitored on a monthly basis by the Environment Agency at Tiverton Road car park and Fenacre Bridge, but was ceased in 2014 due to cuts in government funding to the EA. There have been occasional volunteer-based efforts to resume water quality monitoring since that time, but this has not been consistent and addressing this will be a focus for this management plan period. Within the Water Framework Directive, the Canal has been assessed as being an ‘artificial waterbody’ having ‘good ecological potential’.

4.5 Climate

The climate of the Country Park is typical of that experienced in the South West of England. As a result of climate change, Devon’s weather is changing. According to [Climate resilient Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly](#), we will see:

- Drier summers and an increased likelihood of droughts
- Hotter summers and an increased likelihood of heatwaves and extreme heat
- Milder, wetter winters with an increase in rainfall intensity and frequency
- Less snowfall, frost and ice
- Increase in the risk of wildfires
- Rising sea levels
- Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms
- Shift in the growing seasons
- Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures

South West England is experiencing almost 10% more rainfall over the year now than it did in 1961. Seasonal rainfall is highly variable, but since 1961 it has **decreased** by 9% in summer and **increased** in autumn by 28% and in winter by 16%. Winters are also milder – on average per year, South West England has almost 21 fewer days of air frost than it did in 1961.

Wetter winters and drier summers (combined with greater rates of evapo-transpiration) will undoubtedly put greater strain on our capacity to maintain water levels within the ideal range. Increases in winter rain are also likely to lead to greater silt inputs as soil is washed off farmland and roads, particularly when combined with the current trend towards autumn-harvested crops such as maize. These issues are considered in greater detail in the Canal's Asset Management Plan.

There will also be implications for canal wildlife and whilst it will be difficult to mitigate the effects of climate change on specific species, it will be important to build resilience in the Canal's natural systems through appropriate management. The selection and management of the canal's tree stock is one key area which needs to be considered in relation to projected climate change. The Canal is likely to have an increasingly important role as a linkage within the landscape which will facilitate the gradual migration of species in response to climate change.

The potential lack of water to supply the canal in summer months may also have impacts on wildlife along the margins of the canal and may also impact on recreational activities such as boating and fishing.

4.6 Landscape character

With reference to relevant [landscape character assessments](#), the majority of the Country Park beyond Tiverton lies within the rural setting of the 'Culm Valley Lowlands' (Devon Character Area). The area is characterised by a colourful patchwork of fields, thick hedgerows and distinctive red soils that combine to form a quintessential 'Devon' scene. The area is the 'gateway' into Devon when viewed from the major transport corridors (road and rail) which pass through it. Its sense of history as a transport corridor is apparent in the Grand Western Canal, which flows serenely through the area, crossed by distinctive bridges. Despite the presence of busy transport routes and several large settlements, the valley of the River Culm retains a peaceful atmosphere, with the tree-lined river meandering through a wide floodplain.

The Canal is noted as a distinctive and special feature of the Culm Valley Lowlands. Also valued are the "Unexpected long views e.g. to the Sidmouth Gap from the Swan's Neck on the Grand Western Canal near Halberton". The landscape strategy for this area is: "To protect the area's characteristic Devon agricultural landscape, and enhance its role as a gateway into Devon. Agricultural land use is encouraged, and associated features such as hedgerows are well-maintained. The biodiversity of agricultural land is increased. Development in the form of settlements and transport corridors is sensitively accommodated. Links between settlements and the countryside are encouraged, and the recreational, historic and wildlife values of the river valleys are enhanced."

The Culm Valley Lowlands landscape is made up of different 'Landscape Character Types' (LCTs)- areas that share common key characteristics. Between Tiverton and Sampford Peverell, the Canal passes through 'Lowland Plains' (LCT3E) described as "an open, low lying flat landscape and a prosperous agricultural area with a rolling landform and great soil fertility. There are some early but isolated settlements that harmonise with the landscape. Notable estates and manor houses within the area have important visual relationships to the broader landscape and designed vistas". Further

east, beyond Sampford Peverell and the A361, the Country Park edges a ‘Sparsely settled farmed valley floor’ (LCT3C). Typically, this comprises low-lying river valley flood plains characterised by a pastoral landscape of gently sloping or level land with a smooth surface topography. Trees and woodlands trace the sinuous patterns of watercourse’s, creating a sense of enclosure.

There are specific guidelines aimed at protecting and managing valued landscape attributes and planning for positive change. Care has been taken to ensure that this plan accords with this wider strategy as well as specific guidelines associated with this strategy. At a local level, the landscape of the Country Park can be further subdivided into ‘Local Landscape Zones’ discussed in Section 4.7.

The Country Park is an important component in the attractiveness of the local landscape, as signified through the Country Park’s Conservation Area status. The Country Park’s own visual amenity and its impact on the wider landscape is influenced by several components, including:

- Historic canal structures (such as bridges, embankments and limekilns);
- Country Park infrastructure (such as the towpath, signage, car parks, moorings, benches, gates and fences);
- Naturally vegetated soft earth banks (only wharves and bridges have hard edges and the only section that is piled is a short section of plastic piling at Lowdwells)
- Trees and hedgerows;
- The canal and its banks (in particular, the amount of open water and the quantity and type of vegetation both in the water and on the banks);
- Adjacent land use (agricultural, residential and commercial land use, and adjacent infrastructure such as roads, power lines and modern bridges).

4.7 Local Landscape Zones

4.7.1 Canal Basin, Tiverton

The Canal Basin in Tiverton represents the south-western terminus of the Canal and extends between Canal Hill and the first winding hole (beside the privately owned Canal Tea Rooms and Garden). It is the main gateway and ‘honeypot’ site for the Country Park containing the largest car park, visitor centre, play area, cafes, and public toilets and is home to the Tiverton Canal Co which offers horse-drawn barge trips, boat hire, a gift shop and a floating café-bar. The Canal Ranger Service is also based here.

The picnic site area on the grass beside the canal is located on the former site of several limekilns, all but one of which are now filled



in, although the archways are still intact at the lower car park level. The limekiln complex is Grade II-listed, and the long stretch of original stone wall which retains the limekilns is a key feature of the Canal Basin landscape zone. Consistency in paint colours, signage and the use of traditional 'roses and castles' canal design by the Tiverton Canal Co and by Devon County Council in the play area help to reinforce a sense of place within the Canal Basin. Excellent views across eastern Tiverton toward NT Knightshayes are afforded from the Canal Basin.

4.7.2 Eastern Tiverton suburbs

The next mile of the canal is bounded by suburban residential areas, mostly built during the middle part of the 20th century. The towpath side is bounded by hedges which restrict views of adjacent properties, whereas offside properties generally have open views to the canal. The canal generally provides a key selling point for residents of these bungalows and the adjacent gardens are mostly tidy and well kept.

As with almost all of the rest of the canal, DCC owns a portion of the offside bank (historically for dredging silt and weed onto) and adjacent residents can rent this land – typical 3-4m deep and the width of their property in most areas for a modest annual rent, subject to certain conditions. These conditions and the ability to terminate agreements provide DCC with the power to prevent and control inappropriate or unsightly land use on the offside banks.



4.7.3 Edge of Tiverton to Tiverton Road car park

Planning permission has been granted for residential development of Tidcombe Hall and some surrounding fields. Devon County Council and the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee have engaged with the planning process and will need to continue these efforts to minimise any negative impacts on the Country Park. The Canal Ranger Service will need to monitor the integrity of the boundary fencing, ensure good screening vegetation is maintained and work with DCC engineers to monitor silt deposition in the two siphon culverts under the canal that serve watercourses from the site.

Particular features in this section are the mature oak trees between Follett Road and Snakes Wood, and the short, wooded section (on both sides) of Snakes Wood itself. Most of this wood lies to the south of the canal, is privately owned and is a County Wildlife Site. It has a secretive and enclosed feel which contrasts with the more open landscape at either end which is highlighted on the horse-

drawn barge trips where passengers are asked to soak up the atmosphere in silence as they pass through.

Present and future potential threats to the landscape quality in this section include the major development entailed in the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension (Tiverton EUE) and the construction of a large Anaerobic Digester beside the canal near Crownhill Bridge. The Canal's Joint Advisory

Committee has successfully lobbied for the fields adjacent to the Canal from Follett Road to Manley Lane to be protected from development in order to minimise impacts on the amenity value of the Canal. Mid Devon District Council has recognised the importance of this and have designated these fields as green infrastructure within the Allocations and Infrastructure Development Plan as part of the Mid Devon Local Plan and this policy has also been adopted by developers with the Tiverton EUE masterplan. The present intention is for some of these fields to be used to create a countryside park, fulfilling Biodiversity Net Gain requirements for the developer and providing greenspace for residents of the new development. Devon County Council is involved in engagement with the developers, their ecological consultants and Mid Devon District Council planners about the specifics of the countryside park. It is possible that the Canal Ranger Service could play a role in managing and maintaining this land to compliment the Country Park.



The anaerobic digester at Crownhill Bridge has had a considerable detrimental impact on the local landscape between East Manley Bridge and Tiverton Road Bridge, with the ancillary clamps and structures in particular providing a sprawling industrial aspect at odds with the surrounding rural views. Dust, smells, noise and increased traffic are also an intrusion on the setting. The main aim of this plan regarding this issue is to screen the views of the AD plant as fully as possible with thick hedges and standard trees.

4.7.4 Tiverton Road Bridge to Greenway Bridge (The Swans Neck)

The Country Park's second busiest car park is located beside Tiverton Road Bridge and gives access to a mile and a half long bend in the canal known as the Swan's Neck. A circular route incorporating this section of towpath and some recently-created paths provide a very pleasant and largely off-road circular route, promoted as the Swans Neck Circular Route. This section bounded by farmland and for a few hundred metres on the offside, the Tiverton Golf Club, offers



wonderful views across to the Blackdown Hills (a National Landscape) and the long ridges which characterise the East Devon landscape. There are also good views across the village of Halberton, featuring St Andrews Church and Halberton Court Farm.

4.7.5 Greenway Bridge to Sampford Peverell Bridge

After passing through a short, wooded cutting between Greenway Bridge and Swing Bridge, the canal crosses the highest embankment along its length, where views of the Blackdown Hills are afforded. A major breach of this embankment took place in 2012, but following extensive repairs there is now virtually no evidence of the huge scar on the landscape which was created. The Canal continues to pass through mixed farmland with outstanding views to the east until it reaches the village of Sampford Peverell.

4.7.6 Sampford Peverell

The canal passes through the centre of Sampford Peverell. The western end of the village is characterised by attractive older buildings and St John the Baptist church, whereas the canal at the eastern end is bounded by more modern council housing on the offside. As in Tiverton, adjacent residents can rent DCC-owned offside land (subject to conditions). The offside land contains a large number of help to screen some of the more modern housing.



4.7.7 Buckland Bridge to Fenacre Bridge

Beyond Buckland Bridge, the Canal once again enters a more rural, farmed environment, punctuated briefly by the A361 North Devon Link Road which crosses the canal via the modern concrete Boehill Bridge and then to a lesser extent by the presence of Minnows Touring Park located behind a hedge on the towpath side.

From Holbrook Bridge, the quiet rural feel is restored, with views across to the Blackdown Hills. A highlight within this section is the 15th century Ayshford Chapel and 10th century (or earlier) Ayshford Court which are located beside the Canal on the offside. Ayshford Chapel is a former private chapel and is recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a



designated Grade I listed building. It is under the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches.

Between Ayshford Bridge and Westcott Bridge a solar farm has been built in the field beside the towpath. It is fairly well screened along much of its length by a hedgerow, but opportunities to add further screening as the canal enters an embankment near Westcott Bridge could be considered.

When it reaches Burlescombe, the canal passes between a handful of properties dotting the canal banks, but there is no major change in landscape character until the canal enters a cutting just before Fenacre Bridge.

4.7.8 Fenacre Bridge to Lowdwells

The canal extends through a deep wooded cutting until its present-day terminus at Lowdwells. The cutting has distinctly different atmosphere from the rest of the canal, characterised by mature trees and crystal-clear water (the springs which feed the canal are in this section). Away from centres of population and visitor services, this section of the canal receives considerably less numbers of visitors despite its special qualities.



5. Land Tenure

Please note: This is not a legal document – please refer to the original legal documents before taking any decisions or actions that may have legal implications.

Devon County Council holds the freehold of the Grand Western Canal Country Park following its transfer as a remainder waterway from the British Waterway Board in 1971. The land was previously covered by a Caution Notice, but ownership was registered with the Land Registry in 2005. In very general terms, with regard to the width of the Canal holding, it extends from the boundary beside the towpath (hedge or fence) to the boundary (usually a fence) on the offside bank, which is usually several metres back from the water's edge. Ownership generally extends to the top of cuttings and the bottom of embankments and includes a few small fields, areas of woodland, depots and car parks beside the canal. One exception to the normal pattern of ownership is found to the north of Waytown Tunnel, where the land on either side of the canal for approximately 250m from the tunnel is owned by the adjacent Wharf House.

Plans showing the ownership boundary are held at the Canal offices, but due to the scale of the plans (1:2500), it is often difficult to precisely define the exact boundary on the ground. At a few locations along the canal original Great Western Railway boundary markers are still in place, but in general topographical features (tops of cuttings, toes of embankments) structures (walls and fences) and hedges have become the de facto boundaries over the years with regard to management and maintenance. The area of the Country Park is approximately 48 ha.

There are several leases, wayleaves and other agreements relating to the Country Park, the details of which are filed at The Moorings and the offices of Devon County Council Legal Services (at County Hall, Exeter). The most notable leases are those relating to the Tiverton Canal Company (for premises and operation on the Canal of the Horse-drawn barge, Old Stable gift shop and boat hire), the Duck's Ditty floating cafe-bar, Tiverton and District Angling Club (for angling rights), Mid Devon Moorings (for structures and operation on the Canal) and Tiverton Sea Cadets (for premises in the Canal Basin car park).

A large number of adjacent homeowners have garden or gateway agreements with Devon County Council, whereby an agreement is made (including an annual fee) for the homeowner to use Devon County Council owned land as part of their garden or to use a gateway from their property onto the Canal towpath.

6. Legal Factors

6.1 Public Rights of Way

The entire length of the towpath from the Canal Basin in Tiverton to Lowdwells is a Public Footpath with the following footpath numbers:

- Tiverton FP22
- Halberton FP34
- Sampford Peverell FP12
- Burlescombe FP33
- Holcombe Rogus FP25

As landowner Devon County Council also permits cycle use along the towpath. Accordingly, the towpath is important for sustainable / active travel as well as for recreation and leisure.

6.2 Designations

Devon County Council's Grand Western Canal holding is:

- All contained within the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area (which also takes in some adjacent land and properties not owned by DCC)
- A Country Park declared in 1971 under the 1968 Countryside Act.
- A Local Nature Reserve declared in 2005 (ref. Section 21, National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949)
- A County Wildlife Site

The Country Park contains many Grade II listed structures including bridges, milestones, limekilns and a tunnel. These are listed in Appendix 2.

6.3 Easements and wayleaves

Devon County Council is party to several legal agreements with adjacent owners and service providers. Copies are kept at the Canal offices and by Devon Legal Services.

6.4 Byelaws

The Country Park has a series of byelaws established in 1976 under Section 41 of the Countryside Act 1968, which were revised in 1999. Copies of these are listed in Appendix 3. The length and legalistic language of the byelaws do not lend themselves to easy public understanding and so they are not displayed in full within the noticeboards along the canal. However, they are published on the Canal webpages and some of the key points are incorporated into the Towpath Code of Conduct and 'permit required' posters which are contained in the noticeboards; and the Waterway Code of Conduct and the boating and angling terms and conditions, copies of which are given to boaters and anglers when they buy their permits.

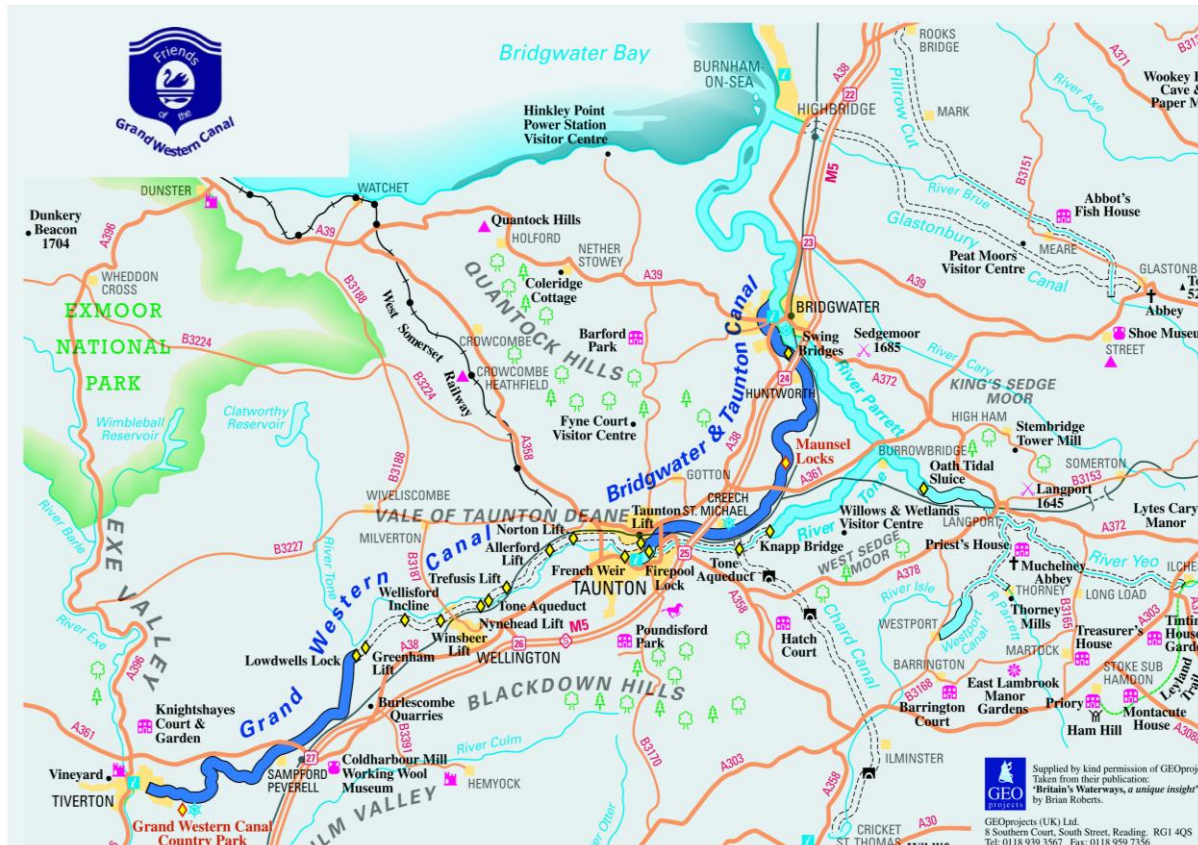
6.5 Health and safety legislation

There are a number of acts and regulations that Devon County Council and its staff must adhere to in managing the Country Park, as summarised below:

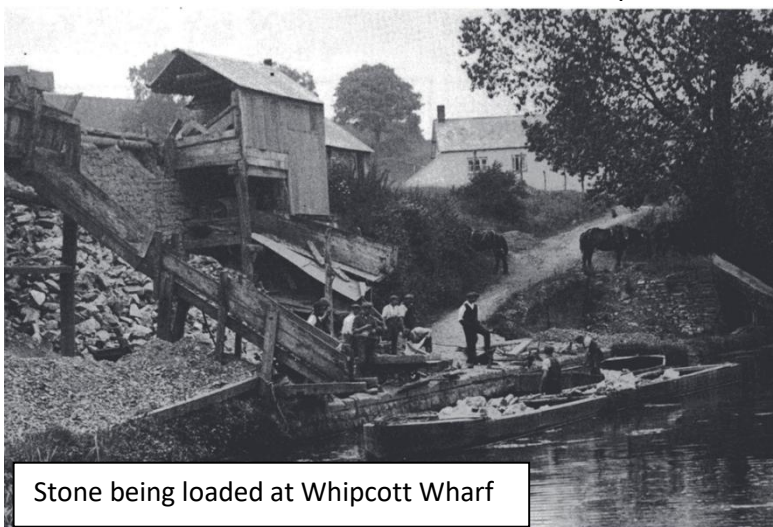
- **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA)**
 - The primary legislation covering occupational health and safety.
 - Requires employers (including local authorities managing parks) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare of employees and the public.
 - Applies to staff, volunteers, contractors, and visitors.
- **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**
 - Requires risk assessments, health and safety arrangements, and competent persons to manage safety.
 - Particularly relevant for managing hazards like water bodies, uneven terrain, wildlife, and public events.
- **Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 & 1984**
 - Places a duty of care on those who control land (e.g. park owners / managers) to ensure visitors are reasonably safe.
 - The 1984 Act extends some duties to trespassers, especially children.
- **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002**
 - Applies to use of chemicals like pesticides or cleaning agents in park maintenance.
- **Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)**
 - Ensures safe use of tools and machinery by park staff.
- **Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992**
 - Relevant for tasks like lifting logs, moving equipment, or handling animals.
- **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)**
 - Requires reporting of serious incidents involving staff or visitors.

7 History

Originally part of an ambitious scheme to link the Bristol Channel with the English Channel, the Grand Western Canal was proposed as a way for goods being transported to and from Devon and Somerset to avoid the long and perilous journey around the Cornish peninsular.



The section from Tiverton to the limestone quarries near Westleigh (also known locally as the Tiverton Canal) was completed in 1814. The next section through to Taunton was eventually completed in 1838. By then any plans to link the canal with the English Channel had been abandoned, but for a short time the Canal was profitable, mostly carrying culm and limestone,



Stone being loaded at Whipcott Wharf

much of which was burnt in limekilns and used for improving agricultural land.

The advent of the Bristol & Exeter Railway took much of the trade from the canal, and in 1865 the section from Lowdells to Taunton was abandoned. However, the limestone trade continued on the 'Devon section' until 1925 when a major leak led to the damming off of a section near Halberton.

Proposals in the 1960s to fill in part of the canal and develop the land galvanised local support for preserving the canal.

SAVE THE CANAL TOW PATH WALK

Saturday, 18th October, 1969

The Lock Cottage, Greenham	-	-	10.30 a.m.
Burlescombe (Fossend) Canal Bridge	-	-	11 a.m.
Sampford Peverell Bridge	-	-	12.45 p.m.
Halberton Road Bridge	-	-	2 p.m.
West Manley Bridge	-	-	2.30 p.m.
Tidcombe Bridge	-	-	3 p.m.
Tiverton Basin	-	-	3.30 p.m.

3.30 p.m.

CIVIC WELCOME by the MAYOR OF TIVERTON

TIVERTON TOWN BAND SEA CADET DEMONSTRATION

Issued by the Grand Western Canal Preservation Committee

Halsbury, Filton, 15a Farn Street, Tiverton, Tel. 2813



'The march to save the canal': poster (left) and participants at Lowdwells Lock (above)

The campaign to save the Canal proved to be successful as in 1971 Devon County Council took on ownership of the canal from the British Waterways Board and declared it a Country Park. Since then a substantial investment in relining and dredging the canal has been made and the Country Park is now a popular visitor attraction and thriving local amenity.

Many original structures dating back to the Canal's heyday are still to be found in the Country Park, including limekilns, bridges, milestones, a tunnel, aqueduct and lock (See Appendix 2).

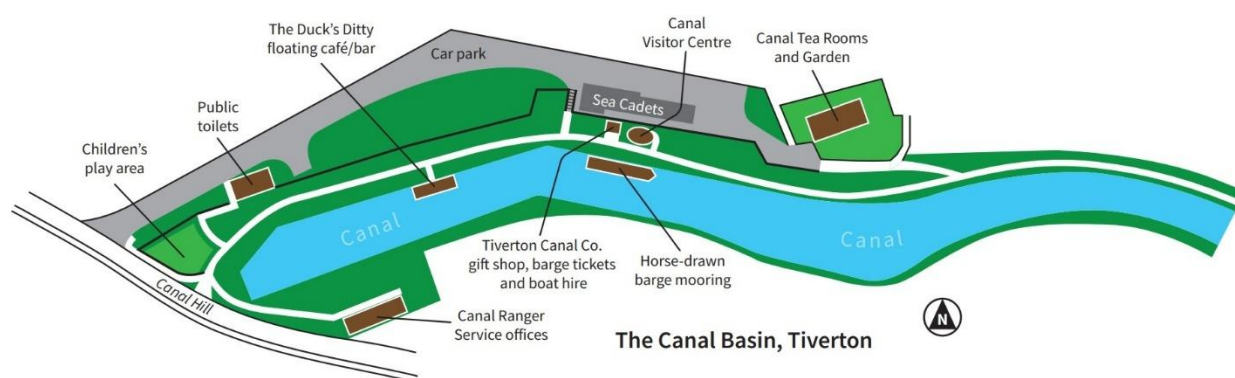
In November 2012, the Canal suffered a major breach of its largest embankment, near Swing Bridge, Halberton. Devon County Council quickly committed the funding not only to repair the embankment but also to upgrade the Canal's infrastructure to reduce the risk of future breaches. The rebuilt embankment was reopened in March 2014 in time for the Canal's Bicentenary celebrations and in the subsequent years major improvements have been made to the Canal's water management systems.



8. Access, Recreation and tourism

8.1 Access

Access to the Country Park is possible at dozens of points along the Canal. The main gateway / 'honey pot' site is the Canal Basin in Tiverton. Brown tourist signs with a barge logo lead from the surrounding road network to the Canal Basin car park on Canal Hill. As well as the Country Park's largest car park, the Canal Visitor Centre, the Canal Ranger Service offices and workshops, and public toilets are located here. It is also home to the Tiverton Canal Co - which runs the horse drawn barge, canoe and rowing boat hire and a gift shop - the floating Ducks Ditty Café-Bar and the privately owned Canal Tea Rooms and Garden which is located at the end of the car park.



Several other car parks are located along the canal (as shown on the map in section 3.2), the largest of which is Tiverton Road car park beside Tiverton Road Bridge. Access is also possible from the road at most of the bridges which cross the canal, and from several pedestrian access points within Tiverton, Sampford Peverell and Burlescombe. Where possible and appropriate, entrance points have been improved in recent years to make it easier for wheelchairs, mobility buggies and pushchairs to access the towpath at these locations.

The Canal towpath has been upgraded throughout its length since 2002, so that nowadays it is surfaced throughout and is largely devoid of muddy areas (although large shallow puddles can arise in many areas after rain, despite efforts to create drainage channels). The towpath is unique in the area in that it provides flat, easy, year-round access for many miles into the countryside from Tiverton and the villages along the canal and is particularly valued by less physically-able members of the public who visit regularly because of these attributes.

8.2 Recreation

The Country Park provides the opportunity for a range of recreational activities. These include walking, dog-walking, jogging, mobility buggy use, cycling, fishing, unpowered boating (canoeing, kayaking, rowing and stand-up, paddle boarding), motorised boating, model boating, wildlife-watching, and picnicking. Of these, powered and unpowered boating, and fishing require permits.

Considerate participation in all these activities is encouraged and promoted by the Canal Ranger Service. Horse-riding and motorcycle use are not permitted.



All of these different user groups have the potential to upset and annoy other users if acting thoughtlessly, and so codes of conduct (as shown in Appendix 4) have been developed and are promoted to encourage considerate behaviour towards other users and to the Country Park's natural and built heritage.

8.3 Tourism

The Country Park has become a major tourist attraction in Mid Devon, largely due to the popularity of the horse-drawn barge, which is a unique selling point for the region. A large proportion of the passengers on the barge arrive as part of coach tours. The tour will often visit other attractions in the area on the same day, but the principle reason for visiting Mid Devon will be the horse-drawn barge trip.



The number of visitors to the Country Park (currently estimated at around 320,000 p.a.) has been shown to be increasing steadily since automatic vehicle counting began at the two main car parks in 2009 (and is generally agreed to have been increasing steadily in the decade before then, according to Canal Rangers and key stakeholders) and as well as greater year-round use by local residents due to improvements in the

towpath surface, a significant proportion of this increase is likely to be of a touristic nature. The reasons for this are likely to be as follows:

- Standards of management and maintenance have improved and enhanced facilities (such as surfaced car parks, new interpretation panels, a new visitor centre) will have combined to improve the visitor experience which is then shared by word of mouth and through digital media outlets such as Facebook and TripAdvisor
- The profile of the Canal has been raised through publicity and promotional efforts by the Canal Ranger Service and the Tiverton Canal Co, attracting day trips from around the region as well as further afield.
- Information about the canal (in the form of leaflets and websites) has improved making it easier for visitors to plan their trips.
- Cycling has grown as a recreational activity and is strongly promoted by Devon County Council. This has been reflected in the numbers of cyclists enjoying an easy, scenic, off-road cycle ride along the towpath.

Not only are the economic benefits of tourism generated by the Country Park important to the main canal-related businesses, but are also significant in the wider local economy. This economic benefit is key to ongoing funding for the canal provided by Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council, alongside health and well-being, community engagement, biodiversity, landscape etc.. In times of austerity, the role of the Country Park in supporting the local economy is such that these other benefits may not be significant enough in isolation to avoid major cuts to funding. The Country Park is promoted through the Visit Mid Devon initiative, with paid for entries on the website and printed leaflets. More detail on national and local tourism strategy is included in sections 11.9 and 12.4.

9. Map and photographic coverage

The Country Park extends across two maps in the OS Explorer Series. The section from the Canal Basin to the Swans Neck is shown on map *114 – Exeter and the Exe Valley* and the section from the Swan's Neck to Lowdwells is shown on map *128 – Taunton and the Blackdown Hills*

All or part of the Country Park is covered by the following historic maps that are held at the Westcountry Studies Library in Exeter:

- Dawson's map of Tiverton, 1837, shows the beginning of the Canal, marked 'Wellington Canal'.
- John Wood's map of Tiverton, 1840 shows the beginning of the Canal on the extreme edge.
- The Ordnance Survey County Series, 1st edition 6" (1890) shows the Canal's route over sheets 45NE, 46NW, 35SE, 35SW and 35NW
- The County Series 1st and 2nd editions 25" (1889 and 1905) show the Canal's route over sheets 45/7, 46/5, 46/1, 46/2, 35/14, 35/15, 35/11, 35/12, 35/8 and 35/4.

Photographic coverage

The photographic records contain thousands of slides and photographs of the Canal, its wildlife and management, including some historic images.

Since the early 2000s all photographs taken by the Canal Ranger Service have been digital, with photos up to 2004/5 being saved on CD stored at the Country Park offices and photos taken since then being saved in the Country Park's folders on servers based at County Hall, Exeter.

Fixed-point photography commenced in 2004, with digital photos being taken in each direction from every bridge and other fixed points along the Canal, in January and July each year.

10. Current management and funding arrangements

The Country Park is managed by the Canal Ranger Service. Employed by Devon County Council, they comprise of a Country Park Manager and two Canal Rangers and are assisted by volunteers and work experience students. The Service sits within Devon County Council's Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Team, which in turn is part of the Climate Change, Environment and Transport Directorate.

Devon County Council's management of the Country Park is advised by the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). This committee is made up of members of Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council who have divisions or wards along the Canal; by members of town and parish councils along the Canal, and by representatives of various user groups, interest groups and businesses which have a clear interest in the Canal (see Appendix 7). It is chaired alternately by Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council members, meeting three times a year including an annual site visit to points along the canal in the summer. The committee acts as an excellent forum for discussing issues and agreeing recommendations, and forms the main channel for agreeing and submitting responses to planning applications and consultations that may affect the canal.

The Country Park's revenue budget for 2025/26 is £215k. Funding of £76k is provided by Devon County Council and £37k is provided by Mid Devon District Council. The remaining £102k is raised through income generated by the Country Park through car parking, leases, rents, grants, boat permits sales and log sales. Most of the revenue budget is spent on overheads relating to the operation of the Canal Ranger Service (which undertakes the majority of management and maintenance work as well as delivering community engagement work such as events and school visits) and essential annual maintenance works that need to be undertaken by specialist contractors. Very little is usually available for improvements such as new noticeboards or interpretation panels and so external funding are usually sought for such projects.

Applications for capital funding are made to Devon County Council as the need arises. In the last decade, significant capital funding has been provided for the response to the 2012 breach, upgrading the Canal's water management systems, relining the Aqueduct and resurfacing the towpath.

Under current government plans for local government reorganisation, the current County and District councils in Devon will no longer exist by the end of this management plan period, being replaced by one or more unitary authorities. Clearly this could have a significant impact on the management and funding arrangements for the Country Park and efforts will be made by the relevant officers to ensure the best outcome for the Country Park. As always, strong support from local councillors and stakeholders will be essential to ensure the Country Park is adequately appreciated and resourced. Local Government Review and the proposed change to unitary authority potentially offers opportunities to further optimise the important role that the Country Park has as strategic green infrastructure (reference section 11 below).

11. National strategic context

11.1 Green Flag Award and Country Parks Accreditation Scheme

There are two main sources of guidance and standards for the management of Country Parks in England, these being the Green Flag Award and the Country Park Accreditation Scheme.

This management plan is largely based around the **Green Flag Award** criteria and the scheme is summarised in more detail in section 14.



Country Parks Accreditation Scheme

Natural England provide guidelines for essential and desirable criteria for a Country Park to be accredited through their Country Parks Accreditation Scheme. To qualify, sites must have all of the essential criteria and at least 10 of the desirable criteria to receive accreditation.

Essential criteria

The Country Park must be:

- at least 10 hectares in size
- defined by a clear boundary – marked on a map, whether it's open or fenced in
- accessible – less than 10 miles from a residential area
- free to enter
- inclusive and accessible – show how you've met equality and disability needs and provided for varied groups
- predominantly natural or semi-natural landscape, for example woodland, grassland, wetland, heathland or parkland, with no more than 5% of the area built upon (excluding car parks)
- signposted and easy to navigate – you should show visitors where they can go, what they can do and direct them along footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes
- visibly staffed, for example litter collection and maintenance
- available for public or educational events
- near public toilets – either on-site or a 2 minute walk away
- informed by the local community – the public should have some influence over the management and development of your site

Desirable criteria

The Country Park should ideally have:

- a visitor centre
- play facilities
- catering

- bike and horse trails
- art and sculpture
- permanent staff presence during the day
- detailed information available to visitors, such as leaflets
- brown and white tourist directional signs and shown on an OS map
- activities outside, such as water sports and adventure sports
- achieved, or is working towards, Green Flag Award status
- a green transport policy, such as buses and cycle routes to your site
- facilities for less able visitors, such as easy trails, seats and information available in accessible formats
- planned for the management of biodiversity, geodiversity and preservation of historical environment
- opportunities for practical community involvement, such as volunteering
- promoted the health benefits of walking
- an outreach programme promoting your site to less represented sectors of the community
- a programme of events and guided walks, promoting healthy living and environmental awareness

The Grand Western Canal Country Park currently meets all of the essential criteria and almost all of the desirable criteria and has been accredited through the scheme since 2009. Accreditations last for a period of 3 years and the Country Park has recently applied for its latest renewal of the accreditation.



11.2 *Sustaining success in parks*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustaining-success-in-parks>:

Published by the UK government in 2025, this is a rapid evidence review of successful methods of working for local authority parks teams.

Key findings

- Parks and green spaces support a diverse range of local authority agendas.
- A collaborative partnership with the community multiplies the benefits that parks and green spaces deliver.
- A forward-looking, supportive and innovative organisational culture fosters good practice.
- Prioritising quality improves the varied benefits of parks and green spaces.

Key recommendations

The report identified three principal recommendations that can be applied across both local and central government's strategy and approach. These are:

To establish a strategic approach to parks and green space delivery and management. Integrating parks and green spaces into a council's core strategies enhances delivery of a wide range of council services, including health and wellbeing, adult and child social care, climate, and housing. Doing so also engages council teams beyond the parks team, and signals that these spaces are vital infrastructure benefitting the community and the environment. Embedding parks across council agendas requires organisational change supported by leadership committed to long-term improvements. This includes prioritising funding for capacity-building and innovation. Transformational change also needs support from central government, which has traditionally been limited to capital funding rather than resources that support organisational change, collaboration and long-term sustainability.

To deliver parks and green spaces through collaborative and coordinated ways of working. With increasing demands on, yet dwindling resources for, parks and green spaces, council parks services cannot deliver high-quality, multifunctional spaces on their own. A collaborative way of working is, thus, fundamental. Working with a diverse range of internal and external partners, council parks teams should approach their role as enabling the delivery of council strategies and priorities, but not needing to lead on every initiative. Fundamental to this is protecting council community-engagement staff and resources, whose support facilitates community partners' ability to multiply the benefits of parks and green spaces. Such a collaborative approach also should be reflected at the national level, where coordinated support across central government organisations can better leverage capacities and resources than siloed, often duplicative funding schemes.

To cultivate a focus on quality and innovation. Improving and sustaining the quality of existing parks and green spaces should be prioritised to ensure these spaces deliver multifunctional benefits that support a range of council services. Quality should be guided by existing standards (e.g. Green Flag) tailored to, or new standards established for, local context and in collaboration with the community.

11.3 Provision and management of greenspaces (NEER027)

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5105047550296064>

This Rapid Evidence Review published by Natural England in 2024 explores the utilization and enjoyment derived from green spaces and routes in urban and adjacent areas, it aims to identify design features that encourage their use. The report provided extensive lists of findings based on a review of existing research, but those relevant to urban / urban fringe parks are also conveniently summarised in the diagram below:

Green space – key interventions graphical summary

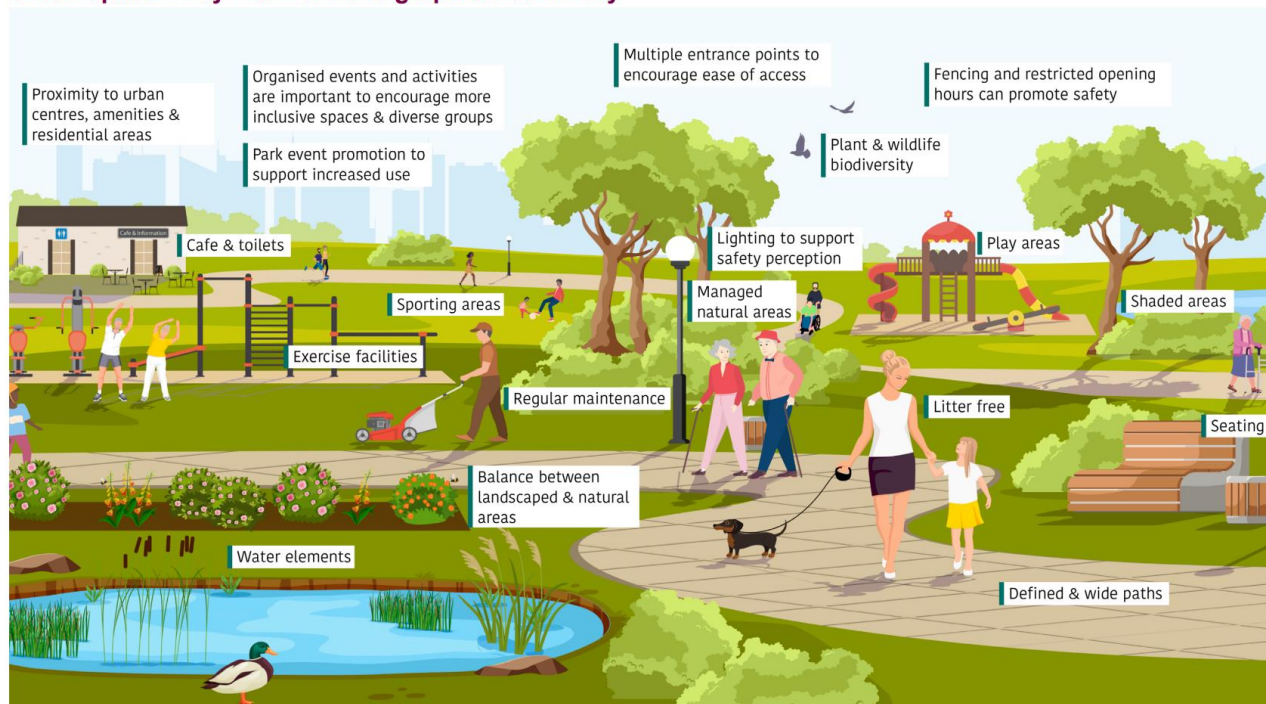


Figure 1. Illustration of key findings for promoting enjoyment and use in urban green spaces.
Diagram by Emma White & Grant Waters using vectors from Adobe Stock.

11.4 Outdoor Accessibility Guidance

<https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/outdoor-accessibility-guidance>

Published by the Sensory Trust and Paths for All in 2023, this guide updates and expands 'Countryside for All', which has been widely respected as a benchmark reference for improving access to the countryside across the UK since it was published in 1997.

Outdoor Accessibility Guidance is designed to help make our outdoor places and spaces, routes and facilities more accessible, and outdoor experiences more inclusive, so they can be enjoyed by everyone. Outdoor Accessibility Guidance provides practical information and examples on the following:

- adopting an inclusive approach as an organisation
- undertaking an access review of a site or route
- planning and prioritising access improvements
- working with communities
- creating inclusive activities and events
- designing for comfort and flexibility
- maintenance
- access standards and recommendations

A copy is held by the Canal Ranger Service and should be referred to with regard to any new access features and be used to identify potential improvements in the infrastructure and services offered within the Country Park.

11.5 *Creating More Accessible Green & Blue Spaces: Understanding the experiences of people with visual impairments that visit green and blue spaces*

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6281542247383040>

This research report published by Natural England in 2023, based on findings from focus groups and a large scale survey, examines the barriers that people with visual impairments face when attempting to access and enjoy green and blue space (GBS). Despite the numerous benefits that GBS can offer, including improvements to mental health, physical wellbeing, and social relations, many individuals with visual impairments feel uncertain about visiting such spaces.

Five key headlines emerge from the research:

1. The lack of accessible information about GBS and the difficulty of anticipating weather and crowds can make planning a visit challenging. Where individuals with visual impairments depend on others to accompany them, this raises additional barriers such as cost or finding someone to accompany them on a walk.
2. The absence of accessible public transportation as well as convenient parking or drop-off facilities and the availability of step-free or wheelchair-accessible routes were identified as significant barriers.
3. Respondents reported struggling with locating entrances and exits, using gates and turnstiles, and understanding signage, while uneven terrain, potholes, overhanging trees, bushes, and other obstacles were also challenging. Bench seating, cafes or pubs, toilets, picnic areas, and bins were identified as important facilities, but often difficult to access.
4. Accessing maps was frequently mentioned as a challenge, with many respondents noting that they rely on Google Maps or similar apps but issues arise due to poor signal/internet connections.
5. Fear of getting lost or becoming a victim of crime, falling, or encountering negative attitudes from others were important concerns for those visiting GBS.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations would enhance the accessibility of GBS for visitors with visual impairments but also for visitors with disabilities more generally:

- Provide accessible information in various formats, such as audio, large print, and/or braille, tactile mapping and colour schemes.
- Improve transportation options, such as providing accessible public transport and parking or drop-off points.

- Enhance physical access by ensuring uneven terrain, potholes, overhanging trees, bushes and other barriers are addressed.
- Increase availability of facilities, such as benches, toilets, cafes or pubs, picnic areas, and bins including dog bins.
- Address safety concerns, such as getting lost, falling or becoming a victim of crime or negative attitudes from others by improving signage, lighting and staff presence.
- Offer organised activities, such as walks or tours, and walking groups to provide social interaction and help overcome challenges of visiting GBS alone.

The report concludes that equitably improving accessibility to GBS for individuals with visual impairments requires a multifaceted approach that includes better information, transport options, facilities, and physical access. Organised activities, such as walks and tours, and walking groups were identified as important ways to facilitate access.

11.6 *Making the Most of Green Space for People's Health: Summary of Evidence*

<https://beyondgreenspace.net/making-the-most/>

Based on research by the University of Exeter Making the Most of Green Space for People's Health is new guidance for Local Authorities and other stakeholders on the ways in which green space benefits health, and can be improved, expanded and promoted to maximise benefits for people and place.

Health benefit of green space

There is a relatively robust and extensive body of evidence regarding the relationships between exposure to, use of, and perceptions of green space and a number of mental and physical health outcomes. These include reductions in psychological stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression, and promotion of better subjective wellbeing, as well as a variety of improved physical health factors.

Mental health benefits of greenspace

- The evidence suggests that greater exposure to greenspace enhances quality of life for children and adults
- Children and young people living in greener environments tend to be found to have better mental wellbeing outcomes.
- Studies have found links between experiencing nature in urban environments and positive emotions
- Greener living environments are linked to reduced levels of depression, anxiety and fatigue

Physical health benefits of greenspace

- Studies have found that a greater percentage of green space around a residence is associated with reduced mortality.
- Several studies have found self-related health tends to be higher in those with greater exposure to natural environments, especially if the environment is of good quality.
- Greener living environments are linked to less physiological stress symptoms, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol and lower incidence of type 2 diabetes.
- Higher levels of green space around the home are associated with more favourable birth weight, as well as positive association with cognitive development indicators in childhood.

How does green space promote health?

There are a variety of ways that greenspace can promote positive health and wellbeing outcomes, including:

- Physical activity – visits to green space are often associated with higher levels of physical activity, often through walking. Physical activity is one of the cheapest and most effective forms of health improvement and preventing disease.
- Community and social cohesion – green spaces, especially in urban settings, can help people feel connected to their communities, and help minority groups become better integrated and identify with their communities. Green spaces can reduce isolation and loneliness by providing the opportunity to participate in shared social activities.
- Rest and relaxation – spending time in or near green spaces can help reduce stress and anxiety.
- Reduced environmental hazards – Green spaces can help to reduce levels of air pollution, and can also help to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

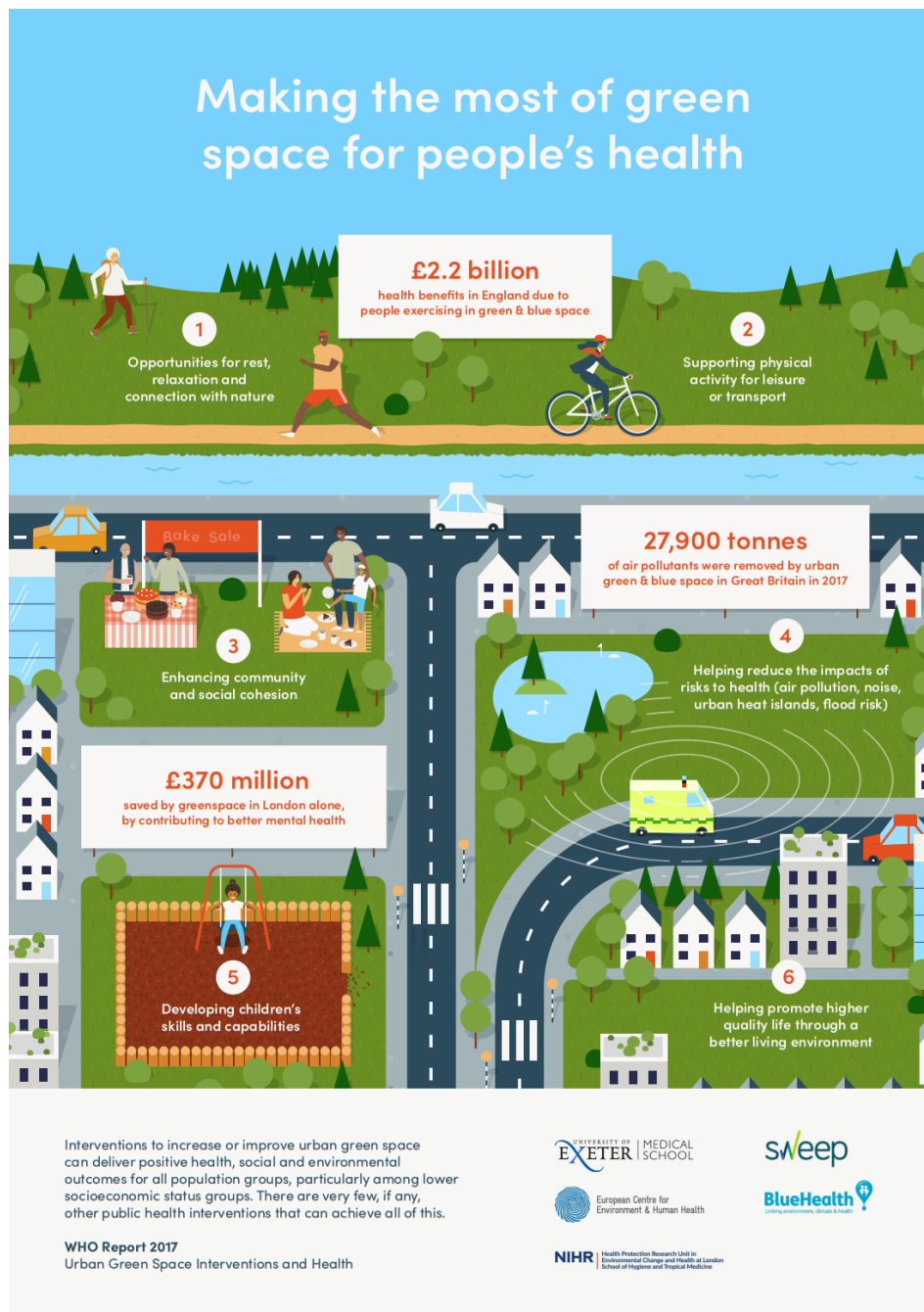
Other factors that can influence the health impact of a green space

There are a wide range of factors that influence how green space might impact health and wellbeing for a community. As mentioned above, we still do not thoroughly understand this complex set of relationships, but things to consider could include:

- Different types of environment might be important for different people.
- Environmental 'quality' is important, but multidimensional. The natural qualities of places might influence how they are used and valued for health and wellbeing, including factors such as vegetation, wildlife, topography, water.
- Facilities and amenities that make places attractive to people are also important, for example presence of benches or other places to sit, signs and interpretation materials, access to refreshments, toilets, parking, paths and other facilities.

- Perceptions matter – how safe does the place feel? Is it a place that people perceive as somewhere they belong? Are there other people there that they do or don't want to encounter?

These factors may all be differently important for different people – for example what is restorative for a parent with young children may be different for a group of teenagers or an older couple. There may also be differences between people who have different experiences, such as those that have grown up in nature versus those more used to built environments?



Green spaces have the potential to help local authorities address other key delivery issues. They can help:



What can local authorities do to enhance health benefits of green space:

Improve	Engage	Expand
Improve, maintain and protect existing green space to ensure they are being used for maximum effect. Improve transport links, pathways and other means of access to green space. Provide imaginative routes linking areas of green space for active travel.	Establish interventions, such as community or green social prescribing initiatives. Introduce natural capital accounting to demonstrate value of green spaces. Act as a green space ambassador and work with colleagues in other departments to make the links. Incorporate health into Local Plan and develop supplementary planning documents that cover green space.	Provide new, good quality green space that is inclusive and equitable (especially in new developments). Increase green infrastructure within and between public spaces and promote healthy streets.

Principles of successful interventions:

A dual approach of physical changes to green space and well-targeted social promotion activities has been shown to be most effective in encouraging use and benefit.	Accessibility of green space needs to be considered, for all communities. This includes the distance from home to green space, the ease and safety of the route and the familiarity of different groups with visiting green spaces. Also consider how the capabilities of individuals in the local community and the local context may affect accessibility.	Quality of green space has an impact on benefits – both the ecological quality (biodiversity and planting) and the condition of the space (amenities, how well they are maintained, aesthetics, perceived safety). Essential to incorporate inclusive design.	Community engagement is key – at all stages, from designing and maintaining to supporting people to use green space – this is especially important to reach more disadvantaged/excluded groups. To do this it is vital to understand the barriers to using green space for different communities.
--	---	--	--

Further information, evidence and resources, including case studies are available at <http://beyondgreenspace.net/making-the-most/>

11.7 Blue Space Forum – Health and Inequalities Report

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-wellbeing-benefits-of-blue-space-lived-experience>

There is a growing body of evidence pointing to the positive health and wellbeing benefits of being in, on or around blue space. In 2022 and 2023 the Environment Agency, together with project partners from British Canoeing, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Groundwork Trust, Natural England, the University of Brighton and the Wave Project, led the Blue Space Forum project.

The report, published by the Environment agency in 2023, gathered the lived experiences of people who use blue space to improve their health and wellbeing as well as those living with barriers to accessing blue space and its benefits. By understanding the challenges and opportunities for improved access, experience and engagement with the water environment, the aim is to help more people gain from its benefits. The paper sets out the findings from eight themed workshops that captured the lived experiences and perspectives of frequent and infrequent blue space users as well as experts in the areas of blue space, health and inequalities.

Health benefits of blue space:

- Blue spaces are beneficial for health and wellbeing.
- Physical, embodied effects associated with blue spaces are calming, restorative and relaxing.
- Social and psychological benefits can promote personal growth.
- There are multiple uses of blue spaces for wellbeing and health benefits. Most visits to blue spaces are active, commonly involving walking, not all immersive or involving swimming.
- Environmental issues can be framed as wellbeing issues: if being around water makes people feel well, they are more likely to look after it.

Recommendations:

- Blue spaces support physical, psychological, and social health of people who access and use them. People place a high value on the intangible benefits – the memories, paddling in the river, getting interested in the wildlife, connecting with family and friends. We should recognise these benefits to people and enable and account for them in our work in the environment.
- To make blue spaces truly accessible, supportive infrastructure is needed alongside physical infrastructure. Supportive infrastructure may include, for example, blue badge parking spaces in close proximity of the blue space and accessible toilets.
- Infrastructure development should integrate access for all at every stage, working with community groups to provide opportunities to input in a sensitive way. Co-creation results in a better and more inclusive user experience.
- Communication and engagement should be considered from the outset of any project. There is no one-size fits all channel of communications – they need to be diverse to reach different people. It is not all about social media, more traditional methods are important.
- Talking to local people in the community is key to understanding barriers to access. The barriers may be different from what we assume they are.
- Try to understand the views of the people and communities which are not the most vocal.
- Communication and engagement rest on passion, enthusiasm, specialist knowledge and professional experience. They are necessary in identifying need, rallying support, and making projects happen. A motivated and proactive community drives interest and inspires support.

- There is a lack of understanding of basic water safety in the general public. We are sometimes taught that water is dangerous and not to go near it, instead of giving people the education they need to make informed decisions and the skills to manage themselves. There is a feeling that we need to reset our national attitude to risk and provide relevant information. We should work with local and national stakeholders on raising awareness of water safety and environmental education to support use and access to blue spaces.
- Codified access should be opted for in lieu of blanket restrictions where appropriate. There are some places that are genuinely dangerous to enter, however no access policies applied more broadly than necessary devalue this message. Codified access is about education and culture. People who are informed understand how to safely access spaces and will self-regulate.
- Regarding popular or “honeypot” sites, public education helps people understand what kinds of behaviour constitute disturbance to wildlife or damage to habitat. The benefits of an informed population who value the environment should be balanced against the risk of accessing it. We should aim to dilute the negative impacts by avoiding overloading particular sites.
- Education and information are key. Users understanding of good quality water is also important to driving environmental improvement. Consider what information different users might need to know to make informed decisions and how best to make the information freely accessible with a trusted voice.
- Urban waterways may present the easiest places to engage diverse communities in blue spaces. With appropriate education about access rights and safety factors, people living in urban areas can take up opportunities to engage with blue space. These opportunities may already exist although they may not be well recognised and are often unequally accessed.

11.8 Summary of current UK Biodiversity policy

11.8.1 [National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan \(NBSAP\)](#)

The UK’s NBSAP (2025–2030) is the central document guiding biodiversity efforts across England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the UK Overseas Territories. It aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), committing the UK to all 23 global targets, including:

- Protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030
- Reducing pollution to levels not harmful to biodiversity
- Promoting sustainable agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry
- Ensuring legal and sustainable use of wild species

The strategy is coordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and emphasizes cross-border collaboration and monitoring progress through national reports in 2026 and 2029.

11.8.2 [Legally Binding Biodiversity Targets \(Environment Act 2021\)](#)

Under the Environment Act, the UK has set statutory targets to be achieved by 2030 and 2042, including:

- Halt species decline by 2030, and increase abundance by 10% by 2042
- Restore or create 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042
- Reduce species extinction risk below 2022 levels by 2042
- Increase woodland cover to 16.5% of England's land area by 2050
- Improve marine protected areas, aiming for 70% in favourable condition by 2042

These targets are supported by the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), which outlines delivery mechanisms including funding, planning reforms, and habitat restoration.

11.8.3 [UK Biodiversity Framework \(UKBF\)](#)

Published in 2024, the UKBF provides a governance structure for biodiversity policy across the four nations. It:

- Facilitates joint action on shared biodiversity goals
- Supports international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity
- Promotes whole-environment management, integrating biodiversity into broader decision-making

11.8.4 [Nature Recovery Network \(NRN\)](#)

The NRN is a national initiative to create a connected network of wildlife-rich places. It aims to:

- Restore habitats and ecological corridors
- Improve climate resilience and ecosystem services
- Ensure everyone lives within 15 minutes of a green or blue space
- Mobilize £1 billion/year in private finance for nature recovery by 2030

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) are central to this effort, mapping actions and aligning funding streams like Biodiversity Net Gain and Sustainable Farming Incentives.

11.8.5 Common Themes

- Devolved delivery: Each UK nation tailors implementation to local contexts.
- Integration with climate policy: Biodiversity is linked to net zero and resilience.
- Public-private partnerships: Funding and delivery involve government, NGOs, and landowners.
- Monitoring and accountability: Progress tracked via indicators and statutory reports.

11.9 UK waterway tourism

The UK Government's broader tourism strategy includes a goal to reach 50 million international visitors annually by 2030, with a focus on regional growth beyond London. Canals are increasingly recognized as key assets in this effort, contributing to:

- Sustainable tourism
- Heritage and cultural preservation
- Active travel and wellbeing
- Economic regeneration in rural and urban areas

Economic & Social Impact of Canal Tourism

According to the Canal & River Trust:

- £1.5 billion annual economic value from water-based tourism
- £4.6 billion annual social value, including:
 - £1.1 billion NHS savings from active use of towpaths
 - Mental health benefits from canal visits
 - Urban cooling and flood protection
 -

Strategic Opportunities for Canal Tourism

Canals are being positioned as:

- Nature highways supporting biodiversity
- Accessible leisure spaces for underserved communities
- Cultural and heritage tourism hubs
- Low-carbon transport routes (walking, cycling)
- Event and business venues in rural and urban settings

12. Local strategic context

12.1 Devon County Council Strategic Plan 2025-29

In September 2025, Devon County Councillors approved a new Strategic Plan setting out a vision to build “a positive future for Devon where everyone thrives”.

The Strategic Plan for 2025-2029 has been developed with input from County Councillors, the Devon Youth Council and interim findings from the New Devon survey which has been running since July to ask people for their views on local authority services.

The plan has a clear focus on children and young people across all of its priorities and we will seek regular feedback from the Devon Youth Council. A separate Strategic Plan is also being developed for Devon Children, Young People and Family Wellbeing.

Six priorities and a series of commitments will ensure delivery of the plan. These are:

- **Positive Futures for every child and young person:** delivering inclusive and compassionate services that meet the needs of children and young people, ensuring they are safe from harm, reducing inequality and improving life outcomes;
- **Supporting independence and dignity:** promoting personalised care to enable people to live independently as long as possible and strengthen access to preventative support. It includes a commitment to support young people with a disability or complex need to be supported to lead independent and fulfilling lives into adulthood;
- **Continuous service improvement:** focusing on continuous improvement of services to deliver high standard, value for money services that people can rely on;
- **A green Devon for future generations:** empowering communities to lead environmental action, promoting green jobs and skills, reducing carbon emissions and protecting the natural environment;
- **Economic inclusion and local prosperity:** improving access to housing, transport and digital connectivity, especially in rural areas. It also includes improving skills, training and employment, and support for small businesses. There is a strong emphasis on opportunities for young people and retaining investment within the local economy;
- **Stronger communities and safer places:** includes supporting the voluntary and community sector, enhancing community safety, and improving access to health and wellbeing services. It places an emphasis on supporting young people to feel safe in their communities to access local services and activities.

At the time of writing, the key measures to gauge performance and progress of the plan are yet to be agreed by Cabinet. However it is clear that the Country Park delivers against all of the six

priorities listed and in fact they correlate closely with the eight Green Flag Award criteria headings, which are discussed in the next chapter this management plan.

12.2 Mid Devon District Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28

<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/356361/corporate-plan-2024-2028.pdf>

The plan features a photo of the Canal on its front cover, but there is no reference to the Canal within the document. It talks in very general terms about the council's desire to support a range of broad objectives, or focusses specifically on a relatively narrow series of priorities and actions within the council's control. There are general references to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, and to promoting tourism, which are relevant,



but given the understandable focus on actions within the council's control, there are very few opportunities for the Country Park to contribute to most of the stated priorities.

12.3 Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/wildlife/devons-local-nature-recovery-strategy>

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a new approach to setting priorities for nature at a local level in England. They are a statutory requirement, defined in Sections 104 to 106 of the Environment Act 2021. The statutory requirements are a 'statement of biodiversity priorities' and a 'local habitat map'. The Strategy must include:

- A description of the area and its wildlife
- Opportunities
- Priorities for restoring wildlife
- Actions need to achieve the wildlife priorities and also achieve other socio/economic priorities such as food control, clean water, improved health and wellbeing and carbon sequestration (through nature based solutions).
- A map – showing areas of existing importance for wildlife and areas where we want to focus action.

The Devon LNRS is currently being developed by Devon County Council, supporting authorities and other stakeholders under the umbrella of the Devon Local Nature Partnership to ensure a

collaborative approach. The current aim is to have the strategy agreed by the end of 2025 and published in early 2026.

The Canal Ranger Service will engage with colleagues working on the strategy with regard to opportunities and threats for wildlife within the Country Park. It is clear from the draft strategy at the time of writing that the Country Park and the work of the Canal Ranger Service will help to deliver a range of targets within the strategy.

- Canals are recognised within the Watercourse Corridors section as a valuable habitat and link in the landscape.
- The Canal Ranger Service play an important role in minimising the spread of invasive species
- The Country Park provides excellent opportunities for communities to engage with nature
- The Country Park is home to many of Devon's 'Special Species' including Otter, Dormouse, Harvest Mouse, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Serotine Bat, Spotted Flycatcher and Common Toad.

12.4 Tourism strategies in Devon

Within the Devon County Council Strategic Plan (2025–2029), Devon County Council's strategic priorities include:

- Economic inclusion and local prosperity
- Sustainable tourism development
- Green recovery and climate resilience
- Support for rural communities and small businesses

Tourism is recognized as a key sector in Devon, contributing to:

- £2.3 billion in annual visitor spend
- Over 50,000 jobs
- Nearly 5,000 tourism-related businesses

In Mid Devon, tourism accounts for £101 million in annual spend and 5% of employment. The Mid Devon Destination Management Plan focusses on:

- Building a competitive and sustainable tourism sector
- Coordinated stakeholder engagement
- Economic impact tracking

Key targets within the Mid Devon Destination Management Plan at present are:

Target segmentation – day and staying visitors

- Expanding over 55's no children (typical Countryside-lover) ABC's
- Attract more Families – ABC's
- Visiting Friends and Relatives - day visitors

Audience location

- Staying visitors from - Midlands, Hampshire, Bristol, South West, South Wales, London, South East and M4 Corridor.
- Day visitors – radius of 1hr 30mins travel.

Key product development to meet the target segmentation needs

- Improve green infrastructure (footpaths & cycling) and the promotion of them. Walks linked to local food and drink establishments, best scenic routes, short and long routes etc.
- Developing the night time / evening entertainment. Better coordination to promote what's on offer e.g. most unique pub, best spots for live music and star gazing, evening activities such as skittle hire. Develop new offers such as music in the park events, food and drink campaigns.
- Enhance the local food and drink offer – campaigns / dog friendly establishments, award winning, local offer, best cream tea, best fireplace to sit and eat beside

The Canal is referenced frequently in the plan and is well-placed to help deliver the targets relating to target segmentation. The Country Park has liaised with the District Council's economic development team on previous tourism promotions (such as the walking festival and model swan trail in 2024) and the funding schemes that they administer, and will continue to do so going forward.

Chapter Two: Where are we now?

13. Introduction

The Green Flag Award and the accompanying guide, *Raising the Standard*, provides a useful tool for assessing the quality and performance of open spaces. In addition, Cabi Space's *A guide to producing parks and green space management plans*, suggest using the Green Flag Award framework as tool for self-assessment.

14. The Green Flag Award

The Green Flag Award scheme is overseen and delivered by Keep Britain Tidy and is the recognised national standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces. The scheme recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

The Canal first applied for and secured a Green Flag Award in 2009 and has retained it every year since, achieving its highest ever score in 2018. The Canal is at a sufficiently high standard whereby it is only fully judged every other year, but is mystery-shopped by a judge in intervening years so ensure no significant drop in standards has occurred.

The purpose and aims of the scheme are:

- To ensure that everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.
- To ensure that these spaces are appropriately managed and meet the needs of the communities that they serve.
- To establish standards of good management.
- To promote and share good practice amongst the green space sector.
- To recognise and reward the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers.

To this end, sites are assessed against several criteria which are assembled under 8 headings, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections:

Section 1: A welcoming Place

This section recognises the culmination of everything done well. A welcoming place is one that invites and draws people into it. This means creating a space which, through its visual appearance, range of facilities, standards of maintenance and ease of access, makes people feel that they are in a cared-for place.

1. Welcome
2. Good and Safe Access
3. Signage
4. Equal Access for All

Section 2: Healthy, Safe and Secure

This section looks at how well managers understand their users' needs, encouraging them to enjoy healthy activities using appropriate, safe-to-use facilities and activities, and to feel personally safe and secure.

5. Appropriate Provision of Quality Facilities and Activities
6. Safe Equipment and Facilities
7. Personal Security
8. Control of Dogs/Dog Fouling

Section 3: Well Maintained and Clean

For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons, issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be addressed, in particular:

- + litter and other waste management issues must be adequately dealt with;
- + grounds, buildings, equipment and other features must be well maintained;
- + policies on litter, vandalism and maintenance should be in place, in practice, and regularly reviewed.

9. Litter and Waste Management
10. Horticultural Maintenance
11. Arboricultural Maintenance
12. Building and Infrastructure Maintenance
13. Equipment Maintenance

Section 4: Environmental Management

This section seeks to ensure that the way the site is managed has a positive impact on the environment, locally and globally, both now and for the future. Where choices can be made for future procurement, landscaping or buildings, they should aim to minimise energy and resource consumption and waste, and design in benefits to the local and global environment. Policies should seek to eliminate the use of peat and chemicals to control pests and as fertilisers. Horticultural and arboricultural decisions should reflect an understanding of the impacts of climate change.

- 14. Managing Environmental Impact
- 15. Waste Minimisation
- 16. Chemical Use
- 17. Peat Use
- 18. Climate Change Adaption Strategies

Section 5: Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage

Attention should be paid to the appropriate management and conservation of natural features, wildlife and flora; landscape features; and buildings and structures. Their particular character and requirements should be identified and appropriate management strategies put in place to conserve and enhance them.

- 19. Management of Natural Features, Wild Fauna and Flora
- 20. Conservation of Landscape Features
- 21. Conservation of Buildings and Structures

Section 6: Community Involvement

This section examines the extent to which the managing organisation:

- + understands the community it seeks to serve;
- + actively and appropriately involves members of the community in making decisions about the site's development;
- + provides opportunities for active participation in site projects; and
- + ensures that there is appropriate provision of recreational facilities and activities for all sectors of the community.

- 22. Community Involvement in Management and Development
- 23. Appropriate Provision for Community

Section 7: Marketing and Communication

This section seeks to examine the ways that managers understand the key benefits of the site and how they use this information to promote it appropriately. They should understand who the main user groups are, could be or should be, and use a fitting range of interpretation and engagement techniques to communicate with them. This basis ensures that appropriate facilities, events and activities can be offered and most effectively promoted, and forms a solid foundation for development now and in the future.

24. Marketing and Promotion

25. Appropriate Information Channels

26. Appropriate Educational and Interpretational Information

Section 8: Management

This section evaluates how well the management plan is implemented on site.

27. Implementation of Management Plan

In the sections below (15-22) the current management practice will be discussed with reference to Green Flag Award headings and guidance, a SWOT analysis will then be presented, leading to the identification of a series of projects / approaches / changes that could be undertaken to improve the park / current management practices.

15. A welcoming place

15.1 Evaluation for 'A welcoming Place'

15.1.1 Welcome

Over its 11 ¼ mile length, the Country Park has multiple access points which need to be considered in terms of the welcome that is provided for visitors. However, the majority of these are used by local residents who know the canal well and don't require the same level of information provision and facilities as day trippers and tourists who tend to begin their visits primarily at the Canal Basin, and to a lesser extent at the smaller outlying car parks along the canal.

Good standards of maintenance are expected at the main access points, with noticeboards providing useful information, maps and guidance at the outlying car parks. Greater provision of facilities and neater management of amenity areas is expected at the Canal Basin.

15.1.2 Good and safe access

Works in 2017 to move back a wall (improving sight lines) and to create a new pedestrian crossing point have markedly improved access to and from the Canal Basin for drivers and pedestrians. Once in the park, the only vehicles occasionally encountered are carefully driven Ranger Service or contractor's vehicles, with banksmen present for any reversing. At two locations the towpath changes side and crosses a road and at these locations towpath users are forewarned and advised to take care. However, this is not currently the case at Chains Road, Sampford Peverell, where the towpath joins the road for a short distance.

Ample car parking is provided at points along the canal, although the Canal Basin can occasionally become full on bank holidays and summer holiday weekends, despite overflow parking on the grassed areas being made available. This is the only car park for which charges are made, via pay and display, with phone / online payment options available.

Cyclists can present a safety hazard to other users and codes of conduct, signage and intervention by Canal Ranger Service staff are all used to encourage safe and considerate cycle use. The towpath is maintained to provide the maximum appropriate width available to make it easier for cyclists and walkers to pass each other and to pass anglers.

15.1.3 Signage

The Country Park benefits from brown sign coverage along the major access roads into Tiverton, leading to the Canal Basin car park, although some of the signs are faded, obscured by trees or missing, making it difficult for visitors approaching from some directions. Some of the outlying car

parks close to main roads are also signed with brown signs. Devon County Council highways staff have previously confirmed that it is not possible to place brown signs to the Canal along the M5. All the Canal car parks have had welcome signs installed, stating the name of the car park and informing visitors that littering and overnight stays are prohibited.

Along the towpath the provision of signs is limited to minimise the impact on the landscape, with noticeboards being provided at key access points, where posters can be neatly displayed.

15.1.4 Equal access for all

The Country Park provides a rare opportunity for visitors to follow a flat path in the countryside beside water for many miles. To realise the potential benefits of this opportunity for all members of society, the towpath has been surfaced throughout, making it suitable for wheelchairs, mobility buggies and pushchairs all year round. Gateways at access points onto the towpath are equipped with two-way, self-closing gates and several fishing platforms for disabled anglers are provided at points along the canal.

Facilities for disabled visitors in the Canal Basin were significantly improved in 2004/5 to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. Ramps, an accessible public toilet, and dedicated parking bays being provided. New developments since then have all taken account of the 2010 Equalities Act.

The Canal Visitor Guide and website feature a section summarising the provision of facilities for disabled and less physically-able visitors. Further improvements for equality of access are no doubt possible and audits should be undertaken during the period of this plan, making reference to the accessibility guidance summarised in section 11 and with assistance from local expertise / lived experience, to identify what more can be done to welcome all sections of society.

15.1.5 SWOT evaluation for 'A welcoming Place' category

The SWOT evaluation below provides a useful tool for identifying where improvements can be made, and these are then listed as targets to be taken forward by this management plan.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
• Good provision of pre-visit information through website and visitor guide • Prominent entrance panel to Canal Basin car park. Good orientation panels • Well surfaced and lined car park • Attractive and interesting historic structures • Well maintained amenity area and paths • Excellent new visitor centre and play area • Consistent styles (paint, bench designs etc.) • Good range of facilities and recreational opportunities	• Car park on different level from canal • Slightly lack of consistency in information signage design • Limited parking space – insufficient at busiest times. • Tarmac in Canal Basin car park beginning to break up at eastern end. Lining beginning to wear away. • Poor public transport links • Difficult connectivity between the Canal Basin and the town (in terms of gradient) • Visitor Centre unmanned.

• Friendly and helpful Ranger Service and canal business staff • Good access and disabled facilities • Cycle racks for cyclists • Good provision of noticeboards • Sea Cadet building TS Hermes recently benefitted from external redecoration. • Good brown sign coverage leading to Canal Basin from the principal route for tourists • Outlying car parks have a good array of signs and noticeboards and are generally well maintained	• Some sections of towpath prone to large puddles • No warning signs about towpath joining Chains Road • Maintenance of walls in Canal Basin • Wildflower growth in eastern half of bed at the car park entrance in the Canal Basin is poor • Limited features (outside of the Canal Basin) to excite and engage children. • Brown signing is absent or inadequate on some routes through Tiverton
<u>Opportunities</u> • Creation of extra lined parking spaces at eastern end of the Canal Basin car park • Update / add new display material in Visitor Centre • Improve awareness of Canal with new signage at the bottom of Canal Hill • Warning signs at Chains Road • Reduce the numbers and size of puddles • Equal access audit • Improvement of brown signs to the Canal around Tiverton • Provision of more features within the Country Park to engage children	<u>Threats</u> • Funding / staffing cuts lead to deterioration in maintenance standards • Vandalism / graffiti / antisocial behaviour • Non-compliance with parking regulations (overnight use) • Inappropriate development on adjacent land

15.2 Improvement options for 'A Welcoming Place'

- a) Continue to raise standards of maintenance throughout the Canal Basin
- b) Improve maintenance of the Canal Basin walls (vegetation removal and repointing)
- c) Review parking space provision / lining. Create new spaces if possible
- d) Review displays in Visitor Centre and consider opportunities for new displays
- e) Review planting in wildflower bed beside entrance to Canal Basin car park
- f) Resurfacing eastern end of Canal Basin car park and reline throughout, if funding can be secured
- g) Audit and improve brown sign coverage to the Canal in Tiverton
- h) Install signs at Chains Road warning towpath users that the path joins the road for a short distance.
- i) Undertake resurfacing / annual drainage clearing works to reduce puddles, including puddles under bridges
- j) Commission / undertake, and where possible enact the recommendations of, an equality of access audit.
- k) Consider opportunities to excite and engage children.

16. Healthy, safe and secure

16.1 Evaluation for 'Healthy, safe and secure' category

16.1.1 Appropriate Provision of Quality Facilities and Activities

The Country Park provides a range of opportunities for activities which benefit health and well-being. As well as the physical activity benefits associated with recreational pursuits such as walking, jogging and canoeing, the Canal also offers the benefits for mental well-being associated with spending time in quiet, relaxing natural surrounding by water. The play area and forthcoming rubbing trail extends this provision to cater better for young children.

Excellent café facilities are provided in the Canal Basin by the floating Duck's Ditty café-bar and by the Canal Tea Rooms and Garden. Elsewhere along the Canal there are several cafes and pubs within easy reach of the Canal offering food and drink. These businesses are all highlighted on the maps within the Canal Visitor Guide, and along with many other local businesses such as shops, campsites and B&Bs, get a free listing on the Country Park website.



Public toilet facilities are provided in the Canal Basin by Devon County Council and close to the Canal beside the picnic site in Sampford Peverell by the parish council. Whilst it would be beneficial to have more toilet facilities at other points along the canal, there is very little scope to provide these in a safe, compliant and affordable manner. There is an excellent provision of benches throughout the length of the Canal.

The Canal Ranger Service staff are qualified first aiders and carry first aid kits in work bags, vehicles and work boats. In addition, there are larger first aid kits in the offices and workshops and a defibrillator located in the offices. Signage at the Canal Basin Play Park informs visitors that the Canal Ranger Service staff are first aid qualified and are happy to assist if they are in the area. It provides details of the Tiverton Minor Injury Unit if they are not around.

There is a public Automatic External Defibrillator located on the side of the public toilet block in the Canal Basin car park. The AED is also registered with the national defibrillator network 'The Circuit', meaning that 999 operators can direct any nearby members of public making a 999 call to come to the Canal office for assistance if our AED can be used before an ambulance arrives. To prevent misuse and vandalism, the AED is within a locked cabinet which a 999 operator can provide the code to open.

Water Safety is clearly a key concern along the canal and is risk assessed annually or after incidents. Generally, the canal has battered edges and reasonably shallow banks, such that adults and children can stand within their depth along the edges of the canal, and can climb out if they fall in. The exception is where the edges are walled, such as wharves and under bridges. Given the increased likelihood of visitors falling in the Canal Basin (due to greater numbers of visitors and the provision of boat hire facilities), a grab cable and two sets of steps have been installed along the wharf wall. At present, a life ring or throwline has not been deemed necessary as anyone falling in would be beside the wharf wall and the grab cable, but this is under annual review.

Another key safety concern relates to cyclists riding underneath bridges. On the approach to most of the Canal's bridges it is impossible to see what is coming from the other direction. A number of accidents and near misses caused by cyclists riding under bridges have been reported at several of the Canal's bridges and it is likely that a far greater number of incidents have occurred but not been reported. Signs instructing cyclists to dismount and walk under bridges have been in place along the canal since around 2000, and although the design and wording of these has changed three times between 2000 and 2019, the experience of the Canal Ranger Service and many canal stakeholders was that the majority of cyclists do not dismount and walk.

In response to ongoing incidents and increased concern from the Tiverton Canal Co regarding near misses involving cyclists and the horse that pulls the barge, the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee formed a working group to look at the issue. This group agreed that a more effective approach to signing the dangers and changing behaviour would be to provide photo-based signs which highlight the vulnerable towpath users that cyclists could crash into if they didn't slow down /dismount. It was also agreed that it was unlikely that many cyclists would be willing to get on and off at every bridge along the canal and so a more successful strategy would be to encourage cyclists to slow down / take extra care / give way etc. at most of the bridges, but to only insist on dismounting and walking at five bridges where the horse-drawn barge operates and the two bridges either side of Sampford Peverell, where a large number of incidents had been reported in the past.



In order to keep gaining the attention of cyclists as they approach the bridges, the messages vary from bridge to bridge and the photo of a vulnerable user is taken at that specific bridge, to make it more immediately relevant and not just a generic image/message that seen once can be disregarded. The size of the sign was also increased from A5 to A4.

The signs were installed on new posts in early summer 2019 and received positive feedback from towpath users. The Tiverton Canal Co reported a marked decrease in the number of incidents involving cyclists under bridges within the section in which they operate, following installation of the signs. The specific safety guidance for visitors in relation to the horse-drawn barge is communicated through signs prominently positioned at the access points to the section within which the barge operates.

16.1.2 Safe equipment and facilities

Devon County Council's procurement protocols and approved contractor panels significantly help in ensuring that new equipment and facilities are safe and legally compliant. The Canal Manager has passed the IOSH Managing Safely Course and a recent refresher and the Canal Rangers have also completed a large number of health and safety courses and refreshers. The awareness and understanding provided by this training further reduces the risk of equipment and facilities being unsafe.



The Canal Ranger Service undertakes a range of risk assessments and safety inspections to ensure the safety of visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors. Risk assessments are agreed and written by the Canal Ranger Service in response to new equipment, processes or situations, and are reviewed annually. Devon County Council's Health and Safety Team undertakes an audit every three years of the Country Park's health and safety systems and documentation to ensure legal compliance (next due in January 2026).

Devon County Council also organises a number of legally required inspections in the Country Park premises through corporate contracts overseen by its property partner South West Norse. The Canal Ranger Service is also responsible for undertaking various periodic checks and inspections. These are outlined in the Inspection Regime in Appendix 5.

16.1.3 Personal security

The Canal Ranger Service comprises three uniformed staff who work normal office hours on weekdays and who also work during summer holiday weekends. All have mobile phones and are provided with *Spot Gen 3* GPS tracking/alarm devices for use when lone-working. At least one staff member is present in the offices at the Canal Basin for roughly 80% of the time (on average) during working hours. Contact details for the Canal Ranger Service are provided on signs beside bridges and on noticeboards throughout the length of the Canal. Emergency procedures and location details are provided on all of the noticeboards.

All three members of the Canal Ranger Service are accredited by Devon and Cornwall Police under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme. This provides them with limited police powers to deal with anti-social behaviour and relevant offences (against the Country Park Byelaws or the Mid Devon Dog Control Public Space Protection Order). Specifically they have the power to require name and address of individuals suspected of committing such offences within the country park. Failure to provide these details to a CSAS accredited staff member is in itself an offence. The staff have undergone police vetting and induction training and are at the time of writing due refresher training to maintain their accreditation. They are issued with a powers card and a CSAS ID badge and attend annual CSAS conferences featuring presentations on a range of policing matters. As part of the wider police 'family', they have access to more direct lines of communication with police via report forms and expedited 999 processing.



Due to its linear nature, the Country Park offers excellent sightlines throughout its length. Much of it is close to settlements and given its popularity with dog walkers, the towpath is usually quite busy throughout the hours of daylight. With the exception of boating and fishing, nighttime use is not prohibited, but is generally not encouraged (except on Ranger-led bat walks) and lighting is only provided in the Canal Basin car park, which is used in hours of darkness by the Sea Cadets and the owners of the Canal Tea Rooms and Garden.

Any hazards reported or identified are swiftly investigated and resolved / cordoned off and an incident log is maintained by the Canal Ranger Service.

16.1.4 Control of dogs / dog fouling

Dog walkers make up the largest single user group in the Country Park. Dog walking is of tremendous value to owners' own health, wellbeing and social engagement, and many regular dog walkers are well-known to the Canal Ranger Service and act as their eyes and ears, reporting issues and making suggestions for improvements. For these reasons, dog walking is supported as a positive and welcome recreational use of the Country Park.

However, as is the case with virtually all well used dog walking venues, the Country Park does suffer from problems related to dogs – mainly dog fouling but also problems with dogs attacking other dogs, people, wildlife and livestock in adjacent farmland. The erosion of canal banks by dogs entering and leaving the canal also pose safety problems to towpath users and a difficult maintenance issue for the Canal Ranger Service.

Dog fouling (failure by the dog owner to remove their dog's faeces) is a criminal offence under the Dogs (Fouling of land) Act 1996. To assist dog owners in complying with the law, dog mess bins have been installed at all the major access points along the canal. These were paid for by Devon County Council and/or the local parish council and are emptied by Mid Devon District Council.

Despite this provision, dog fouling continues to be a problem, most likely caused by just a small number of irresponsible dog owners / walkers.

The Canal Ranger Service has engaged with various initiatives to highlight the problem and encourage responsible behaviour. However, limited and/or lack of intervention by the police or Mid Devon District Council to help address the issue proactively means that perpetrators are rarely caught and fined.

Incidents involving dog attacks are rare, although may be unreported. Those incidents that are reported are passed on to the Mid Devon District Council enforcement officers and/or the Police to investigate. The Country Park's byelaws (Appendix 3) state that dogs must be kept under control at all times. It does not require them to be kept on leads and any move to introduce this would be very unpopular and largely unenforceable within present resourcing levels, and the public footpath status. However, in 2018 a new rule was brought in, using the powers set out in the Canal Byelaws, which requires dogs to be kept on leads at all times in the Canal Basin Picnic Site.



Good boundary management reduces the risk of attacks on adjacent livestock and posters in noticeboards and sections in the Canal Visitor Guide all promote the need for dogs to be kept under control.

In October 2024, Mid Devon District Council extended a [Dog Control Public Space Protection Order](#) covering the district including the whole of the Country Park. The Canal Basin play park is also included in Schedule D, prohibiting dogs from entering this area.

16.1.5 SWOT evaluation for 'Healthy, safe and secure' category

<u>Strengths</u> • Canal-themed play area, overlooked by Ranger Services offices, local housing and CCTV • Various volunteering opportunities • Well-attended, ranger-led healthy walks • Lots of benches along the towpath / picnic areas • Grab cable and steps in Canal Basin for anyone who falls in. Ice safety posters put out when canal is frozen • Slopes in Canal Basin gritted when paths are icy • Emergency procedures in every noticeboard along towpath • Adequate and DDA compliant toilet facilities in Canal Basin. Nearby public toilets in Sampford Peverell • Comprehensive inspection regime in place • Comprehensive array of risk assessments in place and internal DCC H&S audit every 3 years • Good staff presence (and by proxy through Canal business's staff). Staff uniformed, DRB checked, CSAS accredited, equipped with mobile phones and trained to deal with conflict • Clear sightlines throughout Country Park. • Vandalism and hazards always promptly attended to by staff. • Good links with Police • Good provision of dog mess bins along towpath • Well-publicised codes of conduct	<u>Weaknesses</u> • Lack of time / human resources to promote / supervise volunteering means full potential of volunteers / volunteering not being realised • Public toilets are old and tired and prone to vandalism and graffiti. • Lack of toilet facilities along much of the Canal • No constant staff presence • Ongoing problems with dog fouling despite provision of bins • Lack of enforcement / political will by dog wardens / Mid Devon District Council to catch offenders • Codes of conduct often ignored • Community Patrol boat scheme (previously run in spare time by ex-PCSO + volunteers) has been paused due to standing down of skipper and unsuitability of the boat.
<u>Opportunities</u> • Provide more opportunities for volunteering • Promote first aid procedures	<u>Threats</u> • Vandalism and graffiti • Lack of resources to manage and maintain facilities

• Seek funding for refurbishing public toilets • Ongoing improvement of inspection programming /adherence • Joined up programme to promote responsible dog walking • Potential to relaunch Community Patrol Boat scheme if suitable new skipper can be found and new boat funded	• Failure to share / adhere to risk assessments • Dog fouling spoils / deters visits
---	---

16.2 Improvement options for Healthy, safe and secure

- a) Identify opportunities to make volunteering more useful / meaningful for volunteers (e.g. offer training?)
- b) Identify and promote voluntary opportunities other than supervised practical work
- c) Promote first aid procedures
- d) Liaise with partners regarding responsible dog walking initiative and develop if possible
- e) Investigate options and potential funding for refurbishing Canal Basin public toilets
- f) Relaunch Community Patrol Boat scheme if suitable new skipper can be found and new boat funded

17. Well-maintained and clean

17.1 Evaluation for Well-maintained and clean

17.1.1 Litter and waste management

Devon County Council has a responsibility to keep the Country Park clear of litter and refuse under s.89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (UK). Littering within the Country Park is also prohibited under the byelaws.

A number of simple policies are followed regarding the management of litter and waste within the Country Park:

- Litter bins are generally only provided where there are catering or retail outlets enabling waste to be generated on site. This is currently just the Canal Basin, but the mobile catering outlet located at Tiverton Road car park, also provides a bin for their customers to use. The exception to this policy is in Sampford Peverell where the Parish Council has provided litter bins at Chains Road and Boehill Slipway. With the exception of the play area litter bin (emptied by the Canal Ranger Service), all of these bins are currently emptied by Mid Devon District Council (MDDC).
- Dog waste bins are provided at all major access points used by dog walkers and are emptied by MDDC. A charge of c.£8k p.a. is made by MDDC for emptying the litter and dog waste bins, with the collections set at appropriate frequencies depending on the levels of use of each bin.
- Visitors are encouraged to take their rubbish home with them.
- The Canal Ranger Service inspects the Canal Basin for litter daily and outlying car parks are checked at least once per week.

Fortunately, the County Park does not suffer from a great deal of littering with most of it being focussed in the car parks, where it is relatively quick and easy for the Canal Ranger Service to spot and clear it. The Canal Ranger Service is frequently assisted by Duke of Edinburgh award participants who undertake litter picking along the towpath. There are occasional problems with fly-tipping in car parks.

Much more of a problem is dog waste. Although the Canal Ranger Service believes it to be a very small proportion of dog walkers that do not pick up after their dogs, the daily accumulation of waste from these few does build up along the edges of the towpath. As discussed in Section 16, various initiatives have been tried, and the potential for a joined-up approach working with other landowners could be explored.

17.1.2 Horticultural maintenance

The Country Park contains very few flower beds or amenity planting areas, with these being limited to the Canal Basin. The two small beds around the Canal Visitor Centre are maintained by the Canal Ranger Service. A wildflower bed near the entrance of the Canal Basin car park has been created in

2018 and has provided an attractive and pollinator-friendly alternative to the rather plain and uninspiring bushes that were there before. A dense mix of daffodils provide colour in the spring, prior to annual re-seeding with a wildflower mix in late spring to provide colour and nectar in the summer and autumn. The eastern half of this bed has poor wildflower growth due to the silver birch tree within the bed taking up all of the available moisture. Consideration will be given to alternative planting options within the bed to address this.

The main form of horticultural maintenance undertaken within the Country Park is the mowing of grassed amenity areas and picnic sites. This is undertaken by the Canal Ranger Service using the Park's two ride-on mowers. The Etesia ride-on brushcutter is used for mowing the edges of the towpath and some other rough areas and the Husqvarna ride on mower is used to provide a neater finish in the Canal Basin and Sampford Peverell picnic sites.

The timing of grass cutting in the Canal Basin is dictated by growing conditions, but usually commences in March at fortnightly intervals, increasing to weekly intervals during the summer, before tailing off and ceasing in the late autumn. Grass cutting regimes in picnic sites along the canal are slightly less intensive, rarely exceeding a frequency of fortnightly cuts, whilst ensuring the grass is presentable and not exceeding 10cm in height.

17.1.3 Arboricultural and woodland maintenance

The Country Park has a large stock of trees lining the towpath and offside banks. Trees are not permitted to grow between the towpath and the canal. Most of these trees are native or naturalised species which are self-sown. None of the Country Park's trees are likely to predate the construction of the Canal (1810-1814), but whilst this means that none are 'ancient', there are several very large oak trees which may well have been planted along the towpath soon after the canal's construction.

No trees along the Canal are currently covered by Tree Protection Orders, but all the trees within the Country Park are protected by the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area. This means that any neighbour wishing to undertake works on a tree whose branches, roots or trunk fall within the Conservation Area boundary needs to apply for and secure planning permission beforehand. However, Devon County Council is exempt from this requirement as the Town and Country Planning (Trees) regulations 1999 enables Local Planning Authorities to undertake works under its own delegated powers. However, it is understood that the Mid Devon District Council Tree Officer will be consulted on any plans for major works or felling involving landmark trees.

17.1.3.1 Tree safety

The Country Park follows Devon County Council's Tree Safety Management Policy. This specifies tree safety inspection requirements and refers to the County Council's Tree Framework Contract which lists approved arboricultural contractors and consultants that can undertake work on behalf of Devon County Council.

The Canal Manager, using his experience of patterns of use within the Country Park, has identified High, Medium and Low Use zones and this dictates the frequency of inspection and level of expertise required for each zone. All tree safety works prescribed by inspection consultants are completed within the timescales given. Any potentially hazardous defects identified by the Canal Ranger Service which they are not trained or equipped to deal with immediately are referred to tree surgeons to resolve or are referred to consultants for advice if the correct course of action is not self-evident.

Areas are cordoned off as necessary to protect public safety. Benches are not to be located underneath large mature trees where the increased dwell time would increase the risk of the tree to public safety and may bring forward the need for tree surgery work.

17.1.3.2 Tree management

The Country Park's trees provide a very important wildlife habitat, play an important role in the local landscape and have an important effect on plant growth below (due to shading). The presence and management of trees along the canal also has an impact on some of the canal's recreational uses, and on the maintenance of canal infrastructure.

As part of Devon County Council, management of tree safety in the Country Park is dictated by the County Council's Tree Safety Management Policy. The Country Park has its own Tree Management Policy (see Appendix 6). This policy assists the Canal Ranger Service in making and justifying tree management decisions which do not relate to immediate tree safety issues. However, the policy cannot dictate management decisions in every circumstance and so the Canal Ranger Service must use its experience and its awareness of the factors at play (recreation / infrastructure / landscape / wildlife / political) in each situation to determine the best course of action and balance the various demands and preferences along the Canal.

The Canal Ranger Service is supported in this decision-making role with advice from arboricultural consultants. A database and CAD-based mapping system including records for all significant trees has been built up through regular inspections, providing tree details, recommended works and works undertaken. This long-term view provides continuity and helps to identify works (such as thinning, formative pruning and removal at an early stage of poorly formed trees) which are not an immediate safety concern, but which contribute to sound and cost-effective management of the Country Park's tree stock over many decades.

With regard to impacts on recreational activities, the main issue is overhanging branches reducing the navigable width of the canal and reducing the width of the waterway which can be fished. Therefore, an annual winter programme of cutting back overhanging branches, crown-lifting (cutting off the lower branches) and coppicing (particularly willows and hazels) is undertaken by the Canal Ranger Service working from their maintenance barge, working along the offside banks.



On the towpath side low and overhanging branches can be a hazard to walkers and cyclists and so hedgerows are trimmed each winter and low branches growing from hedgerow trees are pruned. Tree reduction or removal works can also be detrimental to recreational activities. Trees provide shelter from the wind and shade from the sun and low overhanging branches and branches in the water can provide a valuable habitat for spawning fish and fry, so it is important to consider all of these issues in each case.

With regard to wildlife, trees are generally very beneficial, supporting a wide variety of other species, acting as corridors for travel and dispersal, as well as being important in their own right. However, there is a balance to achieve in limiting the natural progression towards complete high canopy tree cover along the whole canal. The shading created by trees significantly limits the variety of wildflowers and water plants which can flourish within the Country Park and many bird and invertebrate species prefer the dense scrubby growth maintained in some sections of the canal (notably Greenway cutting) through frequent coppicing. Therefore, the extent and growth of trees needs to be managed in some locations along the canal to preserve unshaded areas and to provide areas of thick coppice regrowth.

To some extent these locations are dictated by infrastructure management considerations. There is a general preference to keep large embankments clear of trees to enable inspection and deter badgers from taking up residence. There is also a preference to manage trees in steep cuttings by coppicing on rotation, as the poor rooting conditions combined with the tendency of trees to lean over the canal to maximise light absorption makes failure of trees more likely in cuttings (with higher safety risks and clear up costs as a result). Due to a historic lack of tree management over many decades (prior to the Country Park being established), many cuttings and embankments are dominated by mature oak and ash trees. The cost and environmental impact of removing these now would be too great to consider, but over time it would be desirable to move towards a situation where more of the Canal's cuttings are managed by coppicing on rotation.

With regard to other impacts on infrastructure, the main issues relate to tree roots penetrating and weakening structures such as walls, culverts and limekilns. In such circumstances the removal of trees is usually the best course of action. Trees growing from the water's edge have the potential to create leaks if they are blown over during storms. This could be particularly serious on embankments where such a leak could rapidly lead to a breach. Since the 2012 breach, a programme of felling trees growing along the water's edge on embankments has been pursued, under advice from geotechnical and arboricultural consultants. Trees also have an impact on the build-up of silt within the canal channel. The annual input of fallen leaves and acorns is considerable and so controlling overhanging tree coverage is one way of reducing siltation of the canal and the frequency of expensive dredging operations.

Rotting wood and standing dead wood are very valuable habitats for a range of species, and there is a preference to retain standing deadwood wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. To this end, several dead and dying trees beside the towpath have had their crowns removed leaving a 'monolith' or 'ecostump', wherein the safety hazard has been removed, but much of the valuable standing deadwood is retained. Tree surgeons can saw the branches in such a way that the tree looks storm damaged rather than heavily pruned, enabling it to blend into the landscape. Whilst fallen branches under the water are always removed if they encroach on the Canal channel, some are retained if they are limited to the offside edge of the canal and clear for anglers to see (and avoid), as they provide a safe location for fish to spawn and for fry to escape from predators.

Most of the logs arising from tree works are extracted and sold as cordwood to local residents. This generates several thousand pounds per annum which helps to offset the cost of the works and also strengthens ties between the Country Park and the local community. However, most of the Willow and Poplar logs are left on the bank in habitat piles, as are any logs which are difficult to extract (generally on offside banks), so there is still a good amount of deadwood habitat left on the ground.

One of the most significant threats to the Canal's tree stock is Ash Dieback. Ashes are one of the commonest large tree species along the canal, with several hundred mature ash trees located beside the towpath or on the offside banks. The disease has affected large number of tree within the Country Park and around 100 have been felled for safety reasons since the UK outbreak began in the early 2010s.

The response to Ash Dieback within the Country Park will continue to be guided by Devon County Council's tree safety policies, but care will need to be taken that the importance of Ash trees to the Canal landscape and to associated wildlife are taken account of and not lost within the County Council's mostly highways and premises-focussed policies. Consideration will need to be given to where it is safe to retain dead or dying ash trees as standing dead wood, and whether pollarding



rather than felling badly affected trees would address the safety concerns whilst retaining the ecologically valuable trunk of the tree to provide future dead wood habitat. In some cases – mainly along the towpath-side hedgerows – it may be necessary/appropriate to replant following felling with alternative tree species (or resistant Ash if they become available).

Fortunately for the Country Park, Devon County Council has taken its response to the disease seriously and has provided the necessary funding for felling and pollarding work that has been required along highways. As the towpath is a public right of way and therefore a highway, the Country Park has been able to access this funding to assist with all the extra tree work which has and will continue to be required for public safety.

With regard to the proportion of the Country Park which has tree cover, the consensus of the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee in the late 2010s was that it should not be allowed to increase and that more active management and control of young trees (in particular, willows) is desirable, in order to enable recreational use, preserve views along the canal and protect shade-intolerant plant species. Works to reduce the quantities of trees growing on the crests of embankment (in response to geotechnical consultant's concerns following the 2012 breach) have reduced the tree cover somewhat and Ash Dieback is also having a significant effect. It is possible therefore that an acceptable balance between tree cover and more open habitats can be achieved without the need for much extra felling (other than any required in response to Ash Dieback) or a need for widespread planting following such felling. However, it is envisaged that the replanting of standard trees will continue to take place at points along hedgerows where ash trees are lost, due to the significance of these trees in the landscape.

17.1.4 Building and infrastructure maintenance

As outlined at the start of this document, a separate Asset Management Plan for the Country Park is currently in preparation and so this plan does not set out full details for the management of 'engineering' structures such as bridges, limekilns, culverts, embankments, weirs and suchlike. However, inspection by appropriately qualified engineers is considered important and carried out according to Devon County Council policies and procedures, with routine and reactive inspections arranged via support from a central bridges and structures team. Related data is held within a

central software system. This section of the plan more directly addresses the management and maintenance of timber structures and visitor-related infrastructure such as public toilets, benches, gates, fences and noticeboards as well as the Rangers Offices and the Canal Visitor Centre.

Devon County Council's property management system lists the following structures and 'premises':

- The Ranger Service offices and workshops at The Moorings
- The Canal Basin public toilets
- The Canal Basin Visitor Centre
- Some of the Tiverton Canal Co workshops (DCC retains some responsibilities for these as landlord)
- The 'Halberton Depot' near Tiverton Road car park

Devon County Council's property partner, South West Norse, oversees the maintenance and H&S compliance (e.g. electrical testing, annual legionella and asbestos checks, fire extinguisher checks etc..) relevant to these buildings. Corporate budgets cover certain elements of the maintenance work required for 'premises'.

The Canal Ranger Service is responsible for the day-to-day management and maintenance of these premises, for various non-expert inspections (e.g. monthly legionella temperature checks) and for arranging larger scale maintenance works which are considered a local rather than corporate responsibility. It is also responsible for the management and maintenance of all of the visitor-related infrastructure throughout the country park. Regular inspections are outlined in the Inspection Regime in Appendix 5.

Given that the Canal Ranger Service is a long-serving team that knows the Country Park very well and is ably supported by a community of regular users who are quick to report issues, the general approach to maintaining these structures is reactive rather than programmed. Work is done as and when it needs to be done rather than on a (potentially arbitrary) periodic basis. This provides the most cost-effective approach ensuring the maximum 'lifetime' of structures and finishes is achieved. Given the relatively low cost of much of the maintenance / replacement of visitor-related infrastructure, there is not any great imperative to programme work years in advance in order to structure medium term budgets. However, within such an approach it is imperative that any issues which are identified or reported are addressed quickly. Any changes (such as major funding cuts or increases in workload) that impact on the ability of the Canal Ranger Service to react to issues may require a reassessment of this approach.

Maintenance of the 'visitor infrastructure' is underpinned by regular and ad hoc inspections with a two-monthly cycle survey of the entire canal by the Canal Manager forming the most important of these. Within this survey, the Canal Manager inspects all timber structures as well as the condition of the towpath and adjacent vegetation. The job lists that results from these inspections feed into the Canal Ranger's work programme for the following weeks, with tasks prioritised by the Canal Manager.

17.1.5 Equipment maintenance

17.1.5.1 Equipment used by staff

The Canal Ranger Service is well-equipped and uses a variety of tools and machinery, including boats, vehicles, a tractor, mowers, petrol and electric power tools, and hand tools. All tasks using equipment are risk assessed and all powered machinery is serviced at appropriate intervals according to manufacturer recommendations and levels of use. All equipment is visually inspected prior to use and all staff and volunteers are adequately trained prior to using any equipment. Maintenance records and schedules are kept in a dedicated folder at the Canal Ranger Service offices.

DCC fleet items including vehicles, trailers and the Kubota tractor are serviced annually as part of a corporate contract. The air compressor is inspected annually as part of a DCC corporate insurance contract. All other machinery is serviced upon request by local specialist contractors (mainly ABA Groundcare in Tiverton, Radmore and Tucker near Exeter, and Masons Marine in Exeter).

17.1.5.2 Equipment used by the public

A new play area was opened in March 2018 in the Canal Basin. Prior to opening a post installation inspection was completed. One of the Canal Ranger Service team completed a training course for undertaking the regular inspections and a qualified inspector undertakes the more detailed annual inspections. As of 2025, this annual inspection will be included in the inspections organised by Mid Devon District Council each autumn. If play equipment is damaged or vandalised, then it will be isolated to prevent use until a repair is undertaken.

The Canal Visitor Centre and the public toilets in the Canal Basin are inspected daily and any damage is repaired swiftly. The pay and display machines in the Canal Basin car park automatically alert the DCC off-street parking team if they go out of order or if they are approaching this state due to lack of tickets or lack of space in the cash box, providing an opportunity to avert this.

Benches and noticeboards along the canal are inspected periodically and any reports of damage or safety concerns provided by members of the public are responded to promptly.

The Dudley Weatherley Jubilee lift bridge is regularly inspected by the Canal Ranger Service. Operation of the bridge is limited to boat users (through the use of a combination padlock) and instructions for safe use are provided by a sign on the bridge.



17.1.6 SWOT evaluation for 'Well-maintained and clean' category

<u>Strengths</u> • Only a low-level littering problem – better than most urban fringe public greenspaces. • Mid Devon District Council undertake dog and litter bin collections. • Dog mess bins at all main access points to the towpath. Litter bins provided where litter can be generated on site. • Attractive, pollinator-friendly, low-maintenance flower beds in Canal Basin. • Well-managed amenity grassland. • Excellent Devon County Council policies and procedures - relating to premises maintenance and tree safety – in place and followed by Country Park. • Excellent stock of trees with fantastic landscape and wildlife value • Funding available for dealing with Ash Dieback.	<u>Weaknesses</u> • Dog fouling a real problem in the most heavily used areas of the Country Park (close to residential areas and car parks). • Canal Basin flower beds are empty or not particularly attractive at certain times in the year. • Some user groups feel there are too many trees. • Trees are constantly growing over the canal to seek the light and are time-consuming and expensive to manage. Shading can lead to problems of bank erosion and accumulation of leaf and seed debris in the canal increases the need for expensive dredging work. • Some bridge nameplates are corroded and becoming illegible
<u>Opportunities</u> • Joined up programme to promote responsible dog walking. • Install secondary glazing at The Moorings to improve sustainability and conditions for staff	<u>Threats</u> • Dog fouling spoils / deters visits. • Canal car parks are targeted more by fly-tippers. • Accidents/ damage as a result of tree failure. • Access to funding for tree work could be reduced due to cuts or eligibility criteria. • Detrimental impact on wildlife and landscape through felling of diseased ash trees. • Vandalism of public equipment. • Theft of Canal Ranger Service equipment.

17.2 Improvement options for 'Well-maintained and clean'

- Contact partners regarding responsible dog walking initiative and develop if possible.
- Seek to increase litter-picking in high use areas.
- Monitor and manage impacts of Ash dieback, identifying needs for replanting where appropriate.
- Repaint / replace bridge nameplates as necessary
- Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings
- Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.

- g) Aim to seal all leaks as soon as possible
- h) Continue to pursue improved water transfer system at Fenacre Bridge, and other potential water inputs that may be used to supply the canal with water if levels are low
- i) Complete the bespoke Asset Management Plan

18. Environmental management

18.1 Evaluation for Environmental management

18.1.1 Managing environmental impact

The Country Park draws on Devon County Council's [Environmental Policy](#) for guidance on how to minimise its environmental impact, and also plays a role in helping the County Council to achieve its environmental targets. Whenever machinery or equipment is being replaced or whenever premises are being refurbished or improved in some way, consideration will be given to taking the opportunity to minimise environmental impact if possible.

In addition to the three specific headings of waste minimisation, chemical use and peat use discussed in subsequent sections, some other key potential environmental considerations are assessed in this section:

- **Water efficiency**

Although the Canal does not currently abstract water in any significant way and relies on 'natural' longstanding supply sources (groundwater springs, rainfall and one small stream input), the owners of Westleigh Quarry have applied to the Environment Agency for permission to improve the system to transfer water from Fenacre Water to compensate for declining spring inputs due to the activities at Westleigh Quarry. It is imperative that the Canal is kept as water tight as possible and that any leakage is minimised.

The other key area of the Country Park's activities that have a bearing on water use is the public toilets in the Canal Basin. At present a water management system is installed to minimise the amount of water used for flushing. A rainwater harvesting system has been considered but was felt to be prohibitively expensive. In the event of a major refurbishment of the public toilets, this should be reconsidered.

Several water butts are located in the Ranger Office gardens, and are mainly used to provide water for topping up pond dipping ponds during the summer months.

- **Energy / fuel efficiency**

Energy efficient light bulbs are used throughout Country Park buildings and lights are switched off when not in use, either manually when staff leave or by timer. The Canal Visitor Centre is very well insulated and does not have or require any heating or air conditioning. The Canal Ranger Service offices require no air conditioning, and the energy required for heating is minimised through careful use of thermostats, good loft insulation and the recent installation of a new combi boiler. However, there is still an ongoing problem with draughts through windows and secondary glazing should be considered.

Much of the Canal Ranger Service's equipment is powered by petrol or diesel. In recent years battery technology has improved to the point that battery-powered garden machinery has become more feasible for commercial use. As well as the potential reduction in fossil fuels, electric tools create less vibration and no fumes. Over the last 5 years much of the grounds maintenance machinery has been switched to battery powered equivalents, and this will continue for appropriate machinery as and when the petrol powered version becomes uneconomic to repair. Fuel use is minimised through careful planning of journeys and by regular servicing of vehicles and machinery.

Since 2021, the Country Park's weed clearing boat and tractor have been run on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), which is a waste product from the food industry and produces 90% less CO₂ than regular diesel.

Following discussion with the DCC Fleet manager, the intention will be to replace the Ranger Service's small transit van with an electric van in 2026/27. This will require the installation of a charging point on the Ranger Service workshops.

- **Renewable energy production on site or procurement from off-site sources**

The characteristics of the Country Park and its buildings do not currently lend themselves to significant levels of renewable energy generation, but the Canal Manager has registered an interest with the DCC premises department in installing solar panels on the roof of the Country Park offices and awaits their response. With regard to energy procurement, this is undertaken by Devon County Council's procurement team, with no scope for input from the Country Park, but will be done with regard for the Council's Environmental Policy, which states an aim to "Reduce its demand for energy, improve its energy efficiency and source 30% of its energy needs from renewable technologies by 2030 whilst enhancing air quality."

- **Measures taken to improve air quality**

The Country Park's main impact on air quality is to improve it through the action of the thousands of trees which line the canal. Careful management of this tree stock and the prevention of any avoidable large-scale felling, will help to sustain these benefits.

- **Measures taken to reduce pollution of water**

The quality of the water in the canal is of great importance to the Country Park and various measures are taken to reduce the likelihood of pollution.

To prevent pollution through the Canal Ranger Service's own activities, biodegradable hydraulic oil is used on the weed boats and biodegradable bar oil is used on the chainsaws at all times. Outboard engines are serviced regularly to help guard against fuel or oil leaks and refuelling is never undertaken over water. Containers of oils and fuels are stored in a secure, bunded, purpose-built steel unit, and the fuel oil tank complies with the latest

standards to reduce spillages and is housed within a locked steel shed. Only herbicides approved for aquatic use are ever used on or beside the canal channel and Environment Agency consents are obtained as required.

To prevent / reduce pollution of the canal through third party activities several approaches are taken:

- Where relevant, all leases and licences held between Devon County Council and other individuals, businesses or organisations which use the Canal or adjacent land, will include clauses prohibiting the pollution of the canal.
- The Country Park byelaws and codes of conduct prohibit pollution of the Canal.
- Emergency contact numbers are provided at all Canal Bridges and noticeboards.
- The Canal Ranger Service holds a supply of pollution response equipment including oil absorbent pads and booms.
- The canal operates the [Boat Safety Scheme](#), and through the expert inspection regime which underpins the scheme, the likelihood of oil or fuel leaks and spills will be reduced.
- The Country Park promotes [The Green Blue](#) initiative to boaters by putting up posters in noticeboards and giving leaflets to boaters when they buy their permits.
- Country Park land ownership along offside banks has been registered and, in most cases, fenced. This prevents encroachment and poaching by cattle, reducing silt pollution, and reduces the risk of spray drift by keeping sprayers further back from the water.
- Where land ownership allows, silt traps have been created to reduce silt inputs where streams constantly or frequently flow into the canal. A longstanding ambition to further reduce silt and nutrient inputs near

Fenacre Bridge is to create a new reed bed and silt trap system. This project was delayed following the 2012 breach and subsequent water management infrastructure improvements, and has also diminished in urgency following infrastructure improvements at the nearby farm, but could again be looked at during the period of this plan. In 2019 a new silt trap was installed on the line of a small stream that flows into the canal beside Manley Bridge and more silt traps could be considered to protect the canal and its siphon culverts from silt deposition.



- **Measures taken to reduce noise pollution**

Most noise pollution created in the Country Park is as result of machinery being operated by staff or contractors. In most cases this is just a passing low-level disturbance for visitors or neighbours and is unavoidable if the necessary task is to be completed. The Canal Ranger Service only undertake work during normal daytime working hours (9am-5pm). The ongoing switch to battery-powered machinery will continue to diminish noise from maintenance work. Mowing and strimming in the Canal Basin is organised to avoid the operation of the horse-drawn barge.

On the infrequent occasions when water needs to be pumped 24 hours a day, only super-silent pumps are used and are located where they will have least impact. The Country Park Ranger Service has an 8' by 4' noise suppression panel which can be placed between a noise source (such as a generator) and members of the public/neighbours if necessary. As with air pollution, the Country Park's trees and hedges can have a positive impact on noise pollution from road traffic.

- **Responsible procurement**

Devon County Council has an Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy which guides corporate procurement decisions, many of which affect the Country Park. One example that is relevant at the Country Park is the policy to only purchase unbleached, recycled plain paper. Another is the requirement to include environmental performance as a scoring category in all tenders.

18.1.2 Waste minimisation

The Country Park is entirely located within the district of Mid Devon and so it is Mid Devon District Council's waste and recycling collection policies and procedures which dictate much of the Country Park's approach to waste management.

In the first instance, the Country Park seeks to minimise its use of materials. Most materials are purchased as needed from local suppliers. Wherever possible materials or equipment are reused. The Country Park has ample storage space at its depots which allows for surplus materials, equipment and offcuts to be stored for potential future use rather than disposed of immediately.

Tree management includes the conversion of logs and branches into other products – mainly cord wood logs which are sold as firewood to local residents, and woodchips which are sold for mulching garden beds to local residents or used to mulch around newly planted trees and hedges. Most other woody material produced as a result of woodland and forestry management remains on site as stacked rows or habitat piles, piles of chips or in some cases where this is not possible, it is carefully burned.

Plant material generated by weed clearing operations is left to rot down in piles on offside banks. Silt generated through dredging operations is spread in adjacent farmland, under agreement with

local landowners and subject to Environment Agency consent (which requires proof that the silt will improve the land for farming).

Any waste materials generated by the Canal Ranger Service are recycled where possible including paper, cardboard, glass, plastic bottles and aluminium cans. Bulky steel and aluminium items are taken to the local scrap merchant for recycling.

The Mid Devon District Council litter bin collections do not allow for separation of recyclable material and so the Country Park are unable to currently offer recycling at the litter bins located in the Canal Basin car park or in Sampford Peverell.

18.1.3 Chemical use

Pesticide use is kept to a minimum and comprise two elements. One is the use of herbicides, and the other is the use of wasp nest destroyer powder / foam.

Herbicides are used in the following limited number of situations:

- To control the spread of invasive alien plant species. To date this has involved the occasional use of glyphosate by a specialist contractor operating under Environment Agency consent to control fringed lily. If other invasive alien species were to be introduced to the canal, herbicide use may be an appropriate response.
- To prevent the coppice regrowth of tree stumps (typically unwanted willows) along the water's edge. This is done with *Ecoplugs* which provide an environmentally safe method of treating the stump and root system with no chance of the glyphosate product reaching the wider environment.
- To control the growth of plants such as ivy and buddleia growing on Grade II listed structures such as limekilns and bridges. The roots of these plants can do significant damage to masonry walls. Killing the plants in situ is less damaging to the pointing than pulling the plants out whilst alive and also prevents regrowth from remaining roots and stumps.
- To prevent the spread of notifiable weeds from canal embankments onto adjacent farmland, spot spraying of weeds at the rosette stage is occasionally undertaken in late spring. In practice in recent years this has only been undertaken on the offside slope of Swing embankment to manage creeping thistle. Weeds on flatter, more accessible land are hand-pulled as necessary.

Wasp and hornet nests are only destroyed if the danger of inadvertent interference by people or pets is considered to be high. This depends on the location of the nest and is down to the judgement of the Canal Ranger Service. Hornet nests beside the towpath (in banks or tree cavities) are occasionally fenced off with chestnut palings to prevent inadvertent disturbance. Wasp nests in similar locations are more likely to be destroyed as wasps are inclined to sting with less provocation required. Care is taken to prevent any wasp nest powder or foam from entering the water.

A variety of other chemicals are used including fuels, oils, paints and wood stains. These are stored in specified storage units at the Canal Rangers Service workshops. Safety data sheets and COSHH risk assessments are kept for all chemicals.

18.1.4 Peat use

Peat is not used in the Country Park. Compost is rarely used, but when it is purchased, peat-free compost is chosen.

18.1.5 Climate change adaption strategies

The Canal provides a well-shaded recreational route and an excellent corridor of high-quality habitat for species to spread through and migrate along.

All new landscape management, arboricultural and horticultural decisions should consider the future likely impacts of climate change. The management of trees and selection of species to retain / plant should take into consideration their capacity to deal with drier summers, wetter winters and higher temperatures.

Changing rainfall patterns have the potential to affect canal water levels, particularly in years of low winter rainfall when the aquifer that provides the spring feed to the canal is not recharged. A lack of summer rain years such as these can lead to very low canal water levels. Ongoing action is required to secure the Canal's water supplies and to minimise leakage.

18.1.6 SWOT evaluation for 'Environmental management' category

<u>Strengths</u> • Devon County Council has strong environmental policies and objectives which the Country Park adheres and contributes to. • The Country Park has a good range of policies and approaches to minimise water pollution by staff and canal users. • The Country Park is well placed to play an important role in connecting habitats and providing a corridor for migration of species in response to climate change. • Bulk waste generated from management activities is reused where possible and disposed of on-site if not, with none going to landfill.	<u>Weaknesses</u> • Energy efficiency of the Canal Ranger Service offices is compromised by the draughty windows. • There is little control of water inputs to the canal. • The capacity to offer visitors the ability to recycle waste at Country Park litter bins is limited.
<u>Opportunities</u> • Install secondary glazing at The Moorings. • Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.	<u>Threats</u> • Water pollution by third parties. This includes point source pollution in the form of spills or ongoing runoff into a feeder

• Install silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert. • Consider water harvesting system for public toilets if they are refurbished.	stream; or diffuse pollution such as mud and silt washing off fields and roads into the canal. • Low water levels in summer months due to low aquifer levels following dry winters, or due to continued quarry deepening reducing spring water inputs to the canal.
---	--

18.2 Improvement options for Environmental management

- a) Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings
- b) Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.
- c) Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert.
- d) Only use pesticides where essential, exploring other options for weed / pest control where viable.
- e) Aim to seal all leaks as soon as possible
- f) Continue to pursue improved water transfer system at Fenacre Bridge, and other potential water inputs that may be used to supply the canal with water if levels are low

19 Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

19.1 Evaluation for Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

19.1.1 Management of natural features, wild fauna and flora

Although the Canal is an entirely manmade feature, it has become colonised and naturalised during two centuries of existence, such that it is now an important wildlife habitat in its own right, as evidenced by its County Wildlife Site designation. The Canal is also a great place for people to view, connect with and learn about nature, and this led to the Country Park's declaration as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 2005.

The Country Park is home to or is used by several European Protected Species (as listed in Schedules 2 and 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994. These are Hazel Dormice, European Otters and all UK bat species. It is an offence to deliberately kill, capture, or disturb these species, or to damage or destroy the breeding site or resting place of such an animal.

The Country Park is home to a wider range of notable and iconic species and although there are no management plans developed for specific species, it is felt that the general approaches to managing the Canal's habitats (discussed below) are beneficial to the European protected species present within the Country Park as well as a wide range of other wildlife, including species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) such as Grass Snake, Slow worm, Palmate Newt, Common Frog, Cetti's Warbler and Kingfisher.

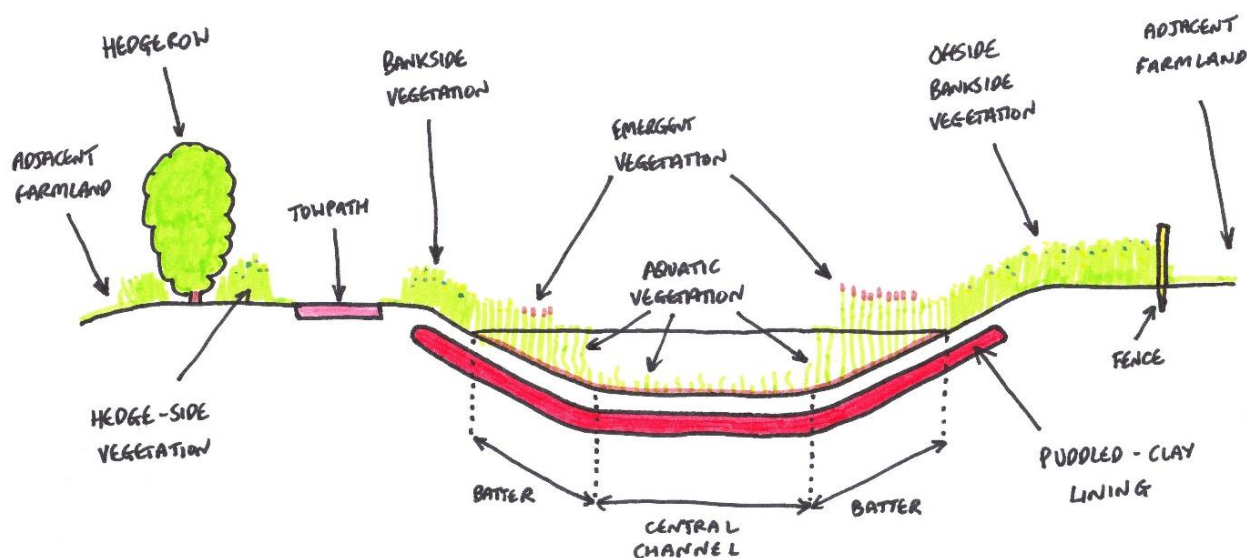
The general approach to habitat management within the Country Park seeks to manage vegetation sensitively for the benefit of wildlife, whilst balancing this with the other functions of the Country Park (recreation, landscape, heritage etc.). This balance has been agreed through discussions with stakeholders and interest groups – most notably the Canal Joint Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from the Devon Wildlife Trust and the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society – resulting in a consistent approach to managing the Country Park's habitats over the last 20 -30 years.

In addition to the management of vegetation, wildlife is further supported by the installation of nest boxes, creation of log piles and through the limitation of public access to some areas (for example, offside ponds and woodland, embankments and cuttings).

Over the decades, the species which are suited to this management have thrived and those which are not suited will not have persisted. However, with natural systems in a state of flux, brought on by climate change, widespread habitat degradation and fragmentation, the arrival of alien invasive species, and the reintroduction / recovery of some native species, the role the Country Park plays and the species it can support is also changing. In particular, the Canal's function as a natural corridor connecting habitats and spanning catchments may be increasingly important for the northerly migration of some species in response to climate change.

In the following sections each of the main habitat types found within the Country Park will be described and its management discussed, followed by a section relating to specific groups and species.

The diagram below provides a cross section of a typical section of canal and summarises the main components.



With reference to the diagram above, it should be noted that along much of the Canal, the offside banks are tree lined and that there are large numbers of standard trees dotted along the hedgerow beside the towpath. The shading created by these trees significantly reduces the quantities of bankside, emergent and aquatic vegetation. The surrounding land use also changes significantly with some sections surrounded by residential gardens, and the geomorphology is also variable with some sections in deep cuttings or on top of high embankments. The presence of a discernible clay lining is also not always as distinct as the diagram suggests.

19.1.1.1 Canal channel and ponds

This habitat type is characterised by aquatic and emergent vegetation, open water and a layer of silt at the bed of the canal or pond. The silt layer does not always extend to the edges of the canal channel and the batters are often covered with a rocky / gravelly substrate.

Running throughout the length of the Country Park, the width of open water varies according to the original profile, the length of time since the section was last dredged and the intensity of boating and weed-cutting activity. However, there is generally at least 6-8m of open water between emergent vegetation on either side of the canal, with a depth of 100 – 170cm (dependent on the same factors as above).

In addition to some very small ponds in the Canal Ranger Service office gardens, which are used for pond-dipping with schools, the Country Park also contains two large, well-established ponds

located beside the offside banks (Ebear pond, beside Ebear Bridge, and Long Pond, near Boehill Bridge). These ponds are in good condition and are managed for wildlife, through the periodic trimming back of overhanging branches and dredging of reeds. Another recently restored pond lies in a small triangle of woodland to the north east of Boehill Bridge. Here shading has been reduced by selective felling and the pond was re-excavated in 2025, having largely silted up.

The aquatic vegetation typical of the Canal channel and open water areas of ponds includes submersed species such as Nuttall's Waterweed, Hornwort, Greater Water Moss, Water Starwort and Ivy-leaved Duckweed; and floating species such as Amphibious Bistort, White Water-lily, Broad-leaved Pondweed and Common Duckweed.

Aquatic habitats are of particular importance to fish, water plants (macrophytes), waterfowl, amphibians and invertebrates. Mammals such as otters and Daubenton's Bats also use the canal for feeding and travel. Important factors in the condition of this habitat are **dredging activity, boat movements, water quality, weed-cutting, shading** and the presence of **invasive, and non-native species**. These will be considered below:

Dredging

The Canal was most recently dredged between 2002 and 2007. Over time the canal will slowly fill up with silt comprising of sediments washed from farmland into the canal (which mostly arrive through point sources but then disperse along the canal) and decomposing plant material which grows and dies in, or falls into, the canal. Rates of accumulation vary between sections, but it is anticipated that large scale dredging works are unlikely to be required within the period of this plan.

Spot dredging (where the mud is spread onto adjacent banks) was undertaken along some short sections along the Swan's Neck in 2021 and around Manley Bridge in 2025. It is possible that further spot-dredging may be required in certain areas. If this is the case, it should be undertaken between October and February (inclusive) during which time the impact on wildlife will be minimised.



Boating

The main impact boating activity has on the canal ecosystem is to increase turbidity and consequently suppress the growth of submerged plants. Levels of boat use are very low along most of the canal and so this effect is negligible except for the section between the Canal Basin and East Manley Bridge where the horse-drawn barge operates. The regular operation of the barge in this

section throughout the growing season suppresses the growth of submerged plants such that virtually no weed cutting activity is required. This has been the case for over 40 years and during that time the assemblage of macrophytes in this section has altered to favour those which can survive more turbid conditions, particularly those with floating leaves.

Water quality

The canal is relatively eutrophic and suffers from large inputs of nutrients during heavy rainfall when water and silt are washed in from surrounding farmland and roads. The creation of fenced buffer strips along much of the Canal's offside land holding (between 2003 and 2008) will have reduced the diffuse pollution of the canal with nutrient-rich run-off.

However, point sources where mud on roads is washed into the canal through road drains or drainage ditches are still very much a problem and are very difficult to address. One stream flows directly into the canal under the towpath beside Fenacre Bridge. It currently passes through a rudimentary silt trap, but as mentioned above in section 18.1.1, there are ambitions to create a much-improved silt trap and reed bed system here.

In the winters of 23/24 and 24/25, the canal in Sampford Peverell suffered extensive silt pollution resulting from a nearby building site some distance from the canal, where the site drainage entered a pre-existing drain that eventually discharged into the canal. The Environment Agency investigated but the pollution was not deemed to have reached the levels required to take legal action.

Two other ephemeral drainage ditches (which flow into the canal only after rainfall) pass through silt traps. The silt trap located along the ditch at Manley Bridge was rebuilt in 2019 to increase its capacity and to make it possible to clean out using a small excavator or wheeled digger. The silt trap on the ditch that flows into the canal to the south of the Waytown Limekilns has not been emptied for many years and should be cleaned out during the first half of this plan period.



Being a largely rural watercourse, the Canal does not suffer from the legacy of heavy metal pollution relating to adjacent heavy industry that many other canals around the UK experience.

The canal does sometimes suffer from low dissolved oxygen levels, and this is discussed further below in relation to weed cutting and fish.

The Environment Agency ceased their monthly water quality testing at two points along the canal in 2014 and at present no formal water quality monitoring is undertaken due to the associated cost of laboratory analysis. Attempts have been made to facilitate volunteer monitoring of water quality using some basic colour indicator tests as part of the Westcountry Rivers Trust, CSI citizen science initiative but this was beset by issues relating to staffing and equipment availability within the Westcountry Rivers Trust and by turnover of potential volunteers. Attempts should be made to revisit this initiative as a method for monitoring water quality in the canal.

Weed-clearing

As a result of the high nutrient levels discussed above, the Canal is prone to excessive weed growth with the whole channel and surface along much of the canal becoming choked with weed if left uncleared. Particular problems are filamentous algae (blanket weed) and Water-soldier. Both can increase rapidly, supressing other less vigorous water plants and pose major problems for recreational uses – in particular, boating and angling.

To keep the canal acceptably clear for these recreational uses and for other less vigorous species, the Canal Ranger Service operates a weed clearing boat between April and September each year. The frequency of use is largely dictated by growth patterns but in recent years the boat has been operated around four days per week on average in order to keep on top of the invasive Water-soldier. The prevalence and extent of this weed has increased enormously



since its discovery near Ayshford Bridge in 2005 and at present has colonised a 7 ½ mile section of Canal between Snakes Wood and the Burlescombe tilting weir. The only feasible control method is mechanical removal and the majority of the weed clearing workload relates to clearing Water-soldier.

Most of the weed clearing work is undertaken using the large rake on the front of the boat. This is effective in clearing both floating and submerged weed, although is much less effective at collecting small floating weeds such as Duckweed and Water Fern as they tend to flow between the tines. Also, many plants which are rooted in the canal bed will not be removed by the rakes.

The boat has a pair of V-shaped trailing blades which skim above the bed of the canal behind the boat on a chain and sever any plants that are rooted to the bed. The blades are particularly

effective at freeing up Water Soldier when it is naturally buoyant in the summer months and floats to the surface once the loose roots that connect it to the bed are severed. Once on the surface it is then easy to spot and collect with the rake. The trail blade system is designed so that at the appropriate speed, the blades are pulled along just above the bed rather than dragging along it. This means that the impact on canal bed wildlife (freshwater molluscs, invertebrate larvae etc) is minimised. The photos below show a section of canal after blading, with large amounts of water



soldier floating on the surface, and then after it has all been raked up and removed. Without the constant work of the weedboat from spring to autumn each year, much of the canal would look like the photo on the left during the summer months.

Weed clearance is also important for the health of fish in the summer, when excessive weed blooms during sustained sunny periods followed by change to cloudy weather can lead to very low oxygen levels at night time and result in fish deaths. Environment Agency advice is that weed clearance is the best approach to minimise the likelihood of such occurrences.

Once collected by the boat's rake, the weed is tipped into piles on the offside bank where it rots down. Whilst this practice will undoubtedly enrich the soil at points long the offside bank leading to a more rank assemblage of plant species, there is no feasible alternative. This method does also have the advantage that any animals such as newts, larvae or fish caught up in the weed that is removed, have a chance of survival, given that it is tipped beside the canal. Efforts are made to use the same tips sites each year in order to minimise any impacts on nesting birds (which won't be able to nest on previous year's tips sites).

Whilst undertaking weed-cutting and any future dredging work, it is crucial that any White Water-lilies are left uncut and in situ, as they have suffered a tremendous decline on the Canal in the last 50 years, most probably due to dredging works removing them from the canal along with the silt.

Shading

Throughout the length of the canal and around the Country Park's ponds, trees tend to grow out across the water in search of light. Not only is this a problem for recreational use of the canal but can also have a detrimental impact on canal wildlife. Heavy shading by trees can suppress the

growth of other plants, and the nutrient inputs through falling leaves and seeds are not beneficial to water quality.

Without management, the canal would become tree-lined and shaded throughout its length. In order to maintain a balance between trees and ground flora, provide a varied plant structure and to enable recreational use to continue, tree management work is undertaken during the autumn and winter months each year by the Canal Ranger Service and by tree surgery contractors. The work entails the trimming back of overhanging branches, the cyclical coppicing of some bankside trees, the selection and formative pruning of self-seeded trees and the removal of trees due to disease, safety issues and shade reduction considerations. Management of trees will be discussed further in sections 19.1.1.5 and 19.1.1.6.

Invasive and non-native species

The Canal is prone to colonisation by a range of invasive and non-native species. Some of these have already become established in the canal, including Water-soldier discussed above, which although considered native to Eastern England is a highly invasive and unwelcome addition to the Canal's flora. Also present is Water Fern (Azolla) Least Duckweed, Nuttall's Waterweed, Canadian Waterweed and Water Primrose.

Whilst often found in the margins, neither Water Fern nor Least Duckweed have bloomed to completely cover the water's surface over significant sections in recent years. In 2017 a 200m long section of canal in Snakes Wood was completely covered by a layer of Water Fern, which had not been dispersed by the wind due to the protection offered by the surrounding trees. On close inspection the plants were found to be host to Water Fern weevils (*Stenopelmus rufinasus*) which only feed on Water Fern and are now established in the wild. Within a fortnight the plants had disappeared.



Least Duckweed also has the potential to coat the surface of the water, cutting out light below at the expense of other plants and animals. It also can cause problems for narrowboats by blocking up their cooling water intake pipes. Both of these floating plant species tend to get blown in to the margins along most of the canal and it is only on bends and in wooded sections that they tend to coat the canal.

Fringed Lily is well established at many points along the canal although its core area is between Greenway Bridge and the end of the lined section near the golf course. Since 2004, contractors Complete Weed Control have been engaged to treat infestations of fringed lily with Glyphosate herbicide (under licence from the Environment Agency). The focus has varied between knocking

back the main area of infestation near Greenway and Sellake Bridges some years, and then treating outlying pockets of the plant towards Sampford Peverell of Tiverton in other years. Given the effort that has gone in and the results that have been witnessed, it seems unlikely that the plant can be eradicated (as it often persists out of sight or reach in the marginal vegetation), but that it can be controlled with periodic herbicide applications.

Whilst Nuttall's and Canadian Waterweeds are present in many sections along the canal, they have not yet reached problematic proportions and are relatively easy to remove using the weedboat in the course of its work to remove blanket weed and Water-soldier.

A few small patches of Water Primrose (photo right) were identified during the 2022 Macrophyte Survey undertaken by the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre. These have been carefully removed by hand, but one larger patch near the bend in the canal at Tidcombe Bridge has been treated by glyphosate. Efforts will be made to eradicate this plant before it becomes more widely established.



The Canal is fortunate that it has not become invaded by any other non-native plants found in the UK, some of which are highly invasive and difficult to remove. These include:

- Parrots feather (found at the Canal near Ayshford Bridge and swiftly eradicated in 2006)
- New Zealand Pigmyweed
- Floating Pennywort
- Japanese Knotweed
- Himalayan Balsam
- Giant Hogweed

There are also invasive, non-native animal species which are present or which could colonise the canal and cause major problems:

- Terrapins are already present in the canal and there have been several sightings over recent decades. Numbers are thought to be low, with minimal impacts. Eradication of existing populations is unlikely to be feasible (although successful breeding in the wild is unlikely).
- American Mink have certainly been present on the Canal in the past, but a seven-year (2009 -2016) monitoring project using nine mink rafts along the canal failed to find any clear evidence of their continued presence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the resurgence of Otters has pushed Mink off the main watercourses and diminished their populations in many regions.

- Grey Squirrels are prevalent throughout the Mid Devon countryside, including the canal and any joined up attempts to eradicate them during the period of this plan seem highly unlikely at the time of writing.
- Sunbleak (known to anglers as ‘Motherless Minnows’) are present in the canal and as well as competing with native fish, are a great cause of irritation to anglers. Eradication is unlikely to be feasible.
- ‘Killer shrimps’ (*Dikerogammarus villosus*), Quagga Mussel, Zebra Mussel, Signal Crayfish and Topmouth Gudgeon are all invasive non-native species which could colonise the canal.

Continued vigilance and ongoing promotion of the need to avoid spreading these plants and animals is essential to reduce the risk of them becoming established within the Country Park.

19.1.1.2 Emergent vegetation

This type of vegetation generally grows on the batters of the canal and around the margins of ponds, although if left unmanaged, some species can grow from a depth that would enable them to cover the whole canal or pond. The majority of this vegetation is what is often loosely referred to as ‘reed growth’ although it should be noted that it does not contain Common Reed - which would be an unwelcome addition to the canal flora as it would be difficult to prevent from growing across the canal channel. The most prevalent constituents of this ‘reed growth’ are Great Reedmace, Yellow Iris, Branched Bur-reed, Unbranched Bur-reed and Water Horsetail.

There are many other emergent species dotted in amongst these more common plants. An interesting and unusual-looking one is Greater Tussock-sedge which forms 1.5m tall pillars growing in shallow water at the edge of the canal. These plants provide a home for other plants, such as Skullcap, which live in the crown of the tussock.



Emergent vegetation is important for a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates, fish (particularly fry and smaller fish species, which can hide amongst the stems), and birds including Reed and Sedge Warblers, Moorhen, Mallard, and Water Rail.

In order to balance the needs of recreation and the desire to maintain the majority of the canal channel as open water, reed growth does need periodic removal and/or regular cutting to prevent it from extending too far out into the canal. This work was done fairly comprehensively during the most recent period of dredging works (2002 -2007), but in some areas of the canal the reed growth is reaching the point where it needs to be managed once again. In recent years, the removal of reed growth has been undertaken on both sides of the canal between the Burlescombe tilting weir and Ebear Bridge; between Ebear Bridge and the dragonfly information panel along the towpath

side; to the west of Ayshford Bridge along the towpath side and beside the towpath between Manley Bridge and East Manley Bridge.

Reed growth was cleared from Long Pond (located on the offside bank between Boehill Bridge and Buckland Bridge) c.2005, but is now approaching the point where some more clearance may be required. Reed growth was significantly reduced when the southern side of Ebear pond was dredged in 2019.

The general principles which guide this work are as follows:

- Work is undertaken in autumn / winter months when the impact on wildlife is minimised
- Work is limited to around 200m per year in any given section of the canal. This may be reduced in known wildlife hotspots. For example, the section between Ebear Bridge and Westcott Bridge is a particularly good section for dragonflies and damselflies and so the reed clearance here will be broken into two or three sections undertaken several years apart.
- Where possible work will jump around between different sections, such that work does not take place beside a section that was cleared the year before. This will increase the chances of animal species being able to recolonise areas recovering from previous clearance work, before the adjacent section is also cleared.
- The choice of sections will be decided by the Canal Manager in consultation with angling, boating and wildlife interests. At present the main focus is on towpath side works as excessive reed growth on this side has the greatest impact on recreational uses.
- Reed clearance / dredging in ponds should not exceed 1/3 of the total area in any given year and should be phased over at least a nine-year period.

19.1.1.3 Bankside vegetation

This section considers the non-woody terrestrial vegetation growing on the canal banks between the water's edge and the towpath on one side of the canal, and between the water's edge and the fence / hedge / woodland / far edge of embankment crest on the offside bank (generally 2-5m from the water).

The Canal's bankside vegetation is characterised by common, damp-loving terrestrial species such as Meadowsweet, Hemlock Water Dropwort, Yellow Loosestrife, Hemp Agrimony, Great Willowherb, Reed Canary Grass and Stinging Nettle. Living amongst these are a wide range of other flowering plants.

Bankside vegetation is particularly important for pollinating insects and their invertebrate and avian predators. The colourful flowers also form a key part of the attractive canal landscape in spring and summer. The dense base of this vegetation also provides valuable habitat for rodents, grass snakes and amphibians.

Bankside vegetation on the towpath side is managed by an annual cut at ground level by a contractor with a large tractor mounted flail. In the 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ mile section between the Canal Basin and Crownhill Bridge this is undertaken in mid-June – mid July (depending on growing conditions and water levels) to enable the horse-drawn barge to continue operating. The work is left as late as possible and is triggered by the Tiverton Canal Co. indicating the point at which their horses start to struggle to pull the rope through the plant growth.

The rest of the towpath-side banks are cut at ground level in the winter months – usually January or February – which leaves the seeds and stems of the plants as food and habitat for wildlife for as long as possible.

In addition to these complete cuts, the bankside vegetation is 'sided-up' with a tractor mounted flail when it starts to fall across the towpath, usually in early to mid-July. This work is undertaken by the Canal Ranger Service using their small Kubota tractor and has the aim of keeping the towpath clear for users for the rest of the year whilst retaining most of the bankside vegetation (as shown in the photo, right)



A further cutting regime undertaken using strimmers and the ride on mower is the provision of fishing swims, boat mooring areas and sightlines on bends. The total length of these cut areas is relatively small and as well as being useful for Country Park users, they provide a slightly more diverse vegetation structure which is likely to be of benefit to some species.

If resources allowed, plant diversity would benefit from all cuttings being collected and removed, rather than being left to decompose on the banks, but current resources do not allow for this to be considered, and the benefits would only be evident over a period of decades.

The bankside vegetation on the offside is largely unmanaged. Once again in an ideal world the offside banks would be cut annually in the winter with arisings being removed to reduce fertility, but limited resources mean that at present only small sections of offside bank are cut each year. The main benefit of increasing cutting of the offside banks is that it would help to limit the gradual colonisation by woody species such as brambles and willows.

19.1.1.4 Dry grassland vegetation

This section looks principally at the vegetation found between the towpath and the boundary hedge or fence, and the vegetation which grows on the sides of embankments and cuttings. It also considers briefly the management of the amenity grassland found in picnic sites.

The soil beside hedges and on cutting and embankment slopes is generally much drier than along the banksides, and shading is often much greater and so the plant species represented are often different and the size of the vegetation is generally smaller than is found on the waterside banks. The grassland species of the more open areas merge with hedgerow and woodland plants where there is more shading.

As with bankside vegetation, hedge-side vegetation and vegetation beside the towpath on embankments and cuttings is cut annually by a contractor using a large tractor mounted flail. The approach is to cut two flail lengths up cuttings and down embankments (where tree growth allows). The main advantage is that this prevents the scrubbing up of these areas adjacent to the towpath.

On the Canal's largest embankments - Sellake Embankment and Swing Embankment - grazing is undertaken by adjacent landowners, under agreement with the Canal Ranger Service, in order to prevent scrub encroachment. The exception is the towpath side to Sellake embankment, where grazing is not feasible. This embankment is covered with bracken and brambles. From an asset management perspective, the aim is to keep these embankments largely clear of trees and scrub to enable monitoring of their condition and to deter badger occupancy. Control of scrub is also beneficial from a biodiversity perspective and the south-facing, towpath side of Swing embankment in particular provides a great habitat for plants, invertebrates and reptiles. To achieve this in a safe manner, a contractor is engaged every other year to cut these embankments with a remote-controlled roboflail. Cutting annually would be preferable but is currently unaffordable.



Creeping Thistle control is required on the offside slope of Swing Embankment as the seeds easily spread across the pasture land below. This is done by spot-spraying herbicide on plants at the rosette stage and occasionally by burning the seeds of any thistles which reach maturity with a gas burner.

Amenity grassland is important for landscape and recreation but is of less value from a wildlife perspective. Whilst the aim is to keep the grass short and tidy in most of the picnic sites and car parks, some areas are cut less frequently and some edges are left to grow in order to provide more structure. Fertilizers and herbicides are not used on the amenity grass areas.

19.1.1.5 Hedgerows

A hedgerow extends for approximately nine miles beside the towpath from the Tiverton Basin to Fossend Bridge in Burlescombe with only a few short interruptions. It is likely that much of hedgerow was first planted at the time the Canal was built and today is dominated by Hawthorn, Hazel, Blackthorn, Elm and Holly, interspersed with a varied range of other tree species.

In the first mile and a quarter out from Tiverton, the hedge between the towpath and the adjacent houses is often more domestic in nature with non-native species or ornamental varieties being used and being regularly trimmed by the adjacent homeowners. Although mostly planted on Canal land, this management is generally long-accepted in this suburban section of the Country Park.

The towpath side of the hedge is cut annually by tractor-mounted flail and the hedge is topped in most years. Exceptions to this are in residential areas (where in some cases homeowners own the hedge and maintain it themselves), and in sections where the hedge is being allowed to grow up following, or prior to, laying. The established norm is that land/homeowners take responsibility for cutting their side of the hedge.

As part of a Countryside Stewardship agreement between 2003 and 2012, three and a half miles of hedgerow was restored, mostly by laying with some replanting. Since the end of the agreement, the periodic laying of sections of hedge has continued, albeit at a reduced rate, often supported by Capital Grants payments from the Rural Payments Agency.



The hedgerow is important for a range of wildlife, particularly birds, mammals, invertebrates and plants. Factors affecting the condition of the hedgerow include the cutting regime, unapproved cutting by adjacent landowners, tree surgery work on standard trees, frequency and quality of hedgelaying, cutting of the vegetation at the base of the hedge, root compaction (by machinery or towpath resurfacing works) and shading (particularly by standard trees).

A very notable component of the Canal hedgerow is the wealth of standard trees that are found throughout its length. Most of these are mature Pedunculate Oaks or Ash, with considerable wildlife and landscape value. As the hedges are laid, opportunities to promote the growth of new standard trees in appropriate locations are being taken.

Most standard Elm trees along the canal have been killed by Dutch Elm Disease but the species is still prominent within the hedgerows, sprouting from the roots as suckers.

In most sections the aim is to maintain a thick hedge between five and eight feet high. To increase the quantity of flowers and berries available as food for wildlife, some sections of hedge are to be topped every second or third year. The Canal Manager surveys the hedge and provides a cutting plan for the contractor to follow, indicating which sections should not be topped that year. The hedgerow needs to be sided up every year in most sections in order to prevent encroachment across the towpath. In some cases, it is possible to allow the hedge to become taller and wider for a period of years (prior to laying) but in most cases there isn't the space to allow the width of the hedge to increase without encroaching on the towpath or neighbours land.

Prior to laying a section of hedge, it is allowed to grow up to ten feet high in order to allow effective laying. Once laid, it is envisaged each section will be maintained by trimming with a tractor-mounted flail as described in the paragraph above. After about 20 years it is likely to benefit from being laid once again. Hazel-dominated sections of hedge may be laid more frequently to keep them stock/dog proof. Any gaps in the hedge are filled with a standard wildlife hedge mix of whips, planted at five per metre.

The need for hedgerow restoration management will be kept under review, and the extent of any restoration work will be related to the availability of necessary resources.

In view of their importance for the landscape and wildlife, existing standard hedgerow trees are left standing and new standard trees are identified during laying (usually Oak, Holly or Hawthorn with good form and in a suitable location) and are also left to grow on. Within a 100m section one would usually expect to find 2-4 standard trees. As Ash Dieback leads to the felling of many standard Ash trees along the canal's hedges, these should be replaced either through planting or promotion of existing hedge trees during laying.

19.1.1.6 Woodland

The only significant area of woodland found within the canal corridor is Snakes Wood, near Manley Bridge. This damp, ancient and largely unmanaged woodland is a County Wildlife Site and, apart from a narrow strip beside the canal, is owned by two adjacent landowners. Other areas of woodland along the Canal are mostly found in cuttings, particularly around the Swan's Neck, in Greenway cutting, and in the cutting from Fenacre Bridge to Lowdwells. There is also a small area of woodland at Lowdwells. It should be noted that the 250m section of canal-side land north of Waytown Tunnel is owned by Wharf House and the Canal Ranger Service is only responsible for the towpath and canal channel and not for the woodland growing on the sides of the cutting.

Most of the wooded cuttings are dominated by standard Pedunculate Oak and Ash. The relatively sparse understorey is dominated by Hazel, Holly, Ash and Sycamore, with the field layer dominated by Brambles, Nettles and Dog's Mercury. Invasive alien species such as Laurel or Rhododendron are not present in the wooded sections of the Country Park. The herb layer is of interest, particularly in the cutting between Fenacre Bridge and Lowdwells, for the numbers of ferns (especially Hart's-tongue Fern). The cuttings are generally damp and support a range of mosses, lichens and liverworts.

A programme of tree management work is undertaken annually by the Canal Ranger Service, focussing mainly on trimming back overhanging offside branches, coppicing waterside trees and minor thinning / formative pruning works.

Devon County Council has a duty of care under the Occupiers Liability Act 1957, as amended, and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to maintain its tree resource in the Country Park in a safe state. Compliance with these acts require an appropriate and demonstrable tree inspection survey and recording system, undertaken by suitably trained personnel, with any prescribed tree safety works identified as a result of the inspections being undertaken in a timely manner.

The Canal's tree stock is surveyed, and risk assessed (using the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment method) annually by an arboricultural consultant, in line with DCC policy. In addition to any safety-related works required, the consultant also identifies (with a priority rating) tree management works which will help promote tree health and reduce future management costs. These works often require climbing or involve trees greater than 38mm diameter and so are usually undertaken by DCC-approved tree surgeons.

To increase safety and efficiency, contractors working at height are increasingly using Mobile Elevated work Platforms to provide safe aerial access to undertake tree surgery work, rather than climbing using ropes. Large, off-road versions of these platforms are available and are often used on the towpath if undertaking work on a number of trees within a given section of the canal.



Two significant woodland management projects (each costing c. £20k) have been undertaken in recent decades. Between 2004 and 2007, a major programme to thin the mature trees growing on the towpath side cutting between Waytown Tunnel and Fenacre Bridge took place. The aim here was to take out poorly formed specimens let in more light and create a more diverse structure. In recent years, similar work has been undertaken in the cutting to the south of Fenacre Bridge and on the offside cutting near Lowdwells.

The other major project took place on the embankment between the Canal depot near Tiverton Road Bridge and the golf course. The same aim of thinning to reduce shading and diversify structure was also present, but the main driver was the removal of large numbers of trees growing on the waters sedge which had the potential to damage the integrity of the embankment crest if windthrown.

All of the trees within the Country Park are protected under the Canal's Conservation Area status. Mid Devon District Council has delegated power to Devon County Council to undertake necessary management of the trees within the Country Park, without seeking prior permission from the local planning authority (MDDC). However, in the case of any particularly extensive or potentially controversial works, MDDC's Tree Officer will usually be consulted for their opinion. Any works resulting in more than 5 cubic metres of timber being felled in one calendar quarter will require an application to the Forestry Commission for a felling licence (prior to the works taking place). A number of exemptions apply and these may be viewed at www.forestry.gov.uk/felling.

The Country Park has a Tree Conservation and Maintenance Policy (see Appendix 6) which sets out the vision, aims and objectives for tree management within the Country Park. This defines the Country Park's approach to tree management, which is to:

1. *Seek to perpetuate the tree stock for as long as practicable with the minimum of intervention consistent with the duties to:*
 - i) *ensure public safety and meet legal obligations; which shall be as far as possible without prejudice to the duties to*
 - ii) *conserve wildlife and public amenity; which shall take precedence over the desire to*
 - iii) *ameliorate nuisance to neighbours and users of the Country Park.*
2. *Seek to create a diverse uneven-aged and healthy tree population and increase the number and variety of native trees appropriate to the South West region.*

The woodland habitats along the Canal are most important for birds, mammals and invertebrates. The factors affecting their condition include the felling or tree surgery works, climate and weather, recruitment of saplings and root compaction.

Tree management must take account of a range of often competing pressures such as nature conservation, safety requirements, landscape values, effects on adjacent landowners and resource limitations.

The Tree Conservation and Maintenance Policy (provided in Appendix 6) aims to provide a clear system to help determine what management is required for any given tree. It also provides basic standards and guidelines for a range of common tree maintenance activities.

Within the period of this plan, large numbers of Ash trees will continue to succumb to Ash Dieback Disease. Wherever dying trees can be retained without any risk to canal or towpath users, they will be retained for deadwood habitat and to reduce risks to tree surgeons. However, the majority of diseased Ashes will need to be felled or heavily pruned for safety reasons.

It is likely that most of the trees within Country Park are self-seeded and that as space in the canopy is created through the felling of diseased Ashes, seedlings of other trees will grow to fill these spaces. The benefit of gaining a few years by planting a replacement tree in these circumstances is likely to be outweighed by the benefits of allowing a locally-native species that wins out through competition and is suited to the conditions to fill the space.

Also, it is acknowledged that prior to Ash dieback, there was an underlying desire expressed by canal stakeholders on the Joint Advisory Committee to reduce shading of the canal. Therefore, widespread planting of replacement trees is not envisaged, with the exception of standard trees in the hedgerow (where they need to stand proud of the surrounding hedge immediately in order to avoid being flailed).

19.1.1.7 Species-specific management / considerations

This section summarises some of the considerations relating to specific species and groups.

Invertebrates

Dragonflies and damselflies

The Country Park is an important site for dragonflies and damselflies, listed on the British Dragonfly Society website as one of the top 40 sites to see dragonflies in England. The Canal boasts a growing assemblage of species that includes the relatively recent additions of the Hairy, Scarce Chaser and Lesser Emperor dragonflies and the Red-eyed and Small red-eyed damselflies. Casual monitoring of dragonflies and damselflies has been undertaken for many years by a keen volunteer, with annual reports and notable sightings being reported to the Canal Ranger Service, and new volunteers need to be found to ensure this continues in the future.



Factors affecting their survival include water quality, plant growth, disturbance and shelter. Some key management considerations relating to dragonflies and damselflies are as follows:

- Efforts to maintain water quality by reducing pollution, siltation and eutrophication are vital.
- The maintenance of a fringe of emergent reeds and tall bankside vegetation is crucial for adults to shelter and hunt amongst. The larvae of many species prefer waters with an abundant growth of water plants in which the larvae can hide from predators and ambush their prey.
- Adult dragonflies need feeding and roosting areas near their breeding places. They and their prey require warmth and, therefore, sunny, sheltered places provided by trees and bushes. The trees and bushes should not be at the water's edge but a few metres away. Excessive shading by waterside trees will lead to a deterioration in dragonfly habitat.
- Disturbance can be detrimental and can be caused by various recreational activities and maintenance activities such as dredging, weed-cutting and reed clearance. Wherever possible, maintenance activities should be organised and phased to minimise the impact disturbance and where possible to limit the impact to smaller sections over a period of time, rather than larger sections all at once.

Butterflies

The Country Park provides suitable habitat for a variety of common species with the bankside vegetation and the hedgerows providing nectar and shelter. Casual monitoring of butterflies has been undertaken for many years by a keen volunteer, with annual reports and notable sightings being reported to the Canal Ranger Service, and new volunteers need to be found to ensure this continues in the future.

The key management considerations are to minimise the early cutting of bankside vegetation and hedges, and to maintain ivy growth on trees until such point as the sail effect it creates when spreading through the crown may begin to endanger the tree. In addition, new hedge planting should usually include a good proportion of blackthorn in order to provide opportunities for Brown Hairstreak butterflies whose caterpillars feed on blackthorn.

Other invertebrates

Whilst the Country Park undoubtedly provides a valuable habitat for a wide range of other aquatic and terrestrial invertebrate species, very little survey or monitoring work has been undertaken in recent decades to inform management. This gap in knowledge should be addressed and efforts should be made to find volunteers to build up a better understanding of the species present along the canal.

Birds

Wetland birds on the Canal have been monitored for nearly 30 years as part of the British Trust for Ornithology's Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Two very competent birders undertook this survey for over twenty years and as well as providing accurate and consistent counts over this period, also provided valuable insights and advice relating to other bird species present within the Country Park.

In 2017, both of these surveyors stood down from this role. Since then, a new cohort of volunteer WeBS counters have been recruited and are carrying on the survey.

Mute Swans

Mute Swans are a much-loved and iconic species for the Canal, featuring on the Country Park logo. Most years, three or four pairs set up territories spaced along the canal and typically 4-9 cygnets per pair are raised to the point at which they are shoed away by their parents at the start of the winter.

Confrontations between resident pairs, between parents and their offspring or between resident birds and newcomers are common and can be distressing for visitors. The Canal Ranger Service often has to remind visitors that they are wild birds doing what comes naturally and so generally do not get involved in trying to stop confrontations.

The Canal Ranger Service does intervene in the event of Swans swallowing or getting entangled in lost fishing tackle, or in shepherding swans back to the canal that have landed on neighbouring land /roads. In such cases if the bird is a juvenile that is being driven away by its parents, rather than placing it back on the canal to be persecuted again, it may be taken to Exeter Quay where large numbers of juvenile birds are able to congregate in relative safety, whilst they grow mature enough to find their own territory somewhere. Injured birds are reported to / taken to the Vale Vets in Tiverton for initial examination and treatment, with birds needing longer term care being passed on to the RSPCA or local wildlife care centres.

In terms of management considerations, the main aims are to prevent disturbance of their nests (or regular nesting locations), and to encourage responsible and competent angling practices which reduce the likelihood of tackle being lost. Swans sometimes nest beside the picnic site and towpath at Lowdwells Lock and to prevent them being attacked by dogs, the Canal Rangers erect a temporary fence to protect them.



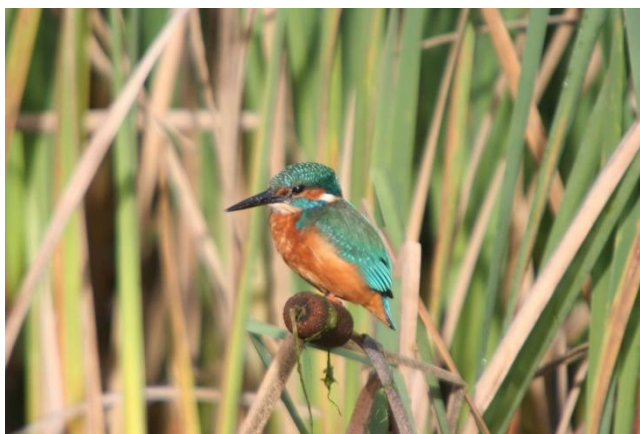
The feeding of swans and ducks has become a somewhat controversial issue in recent years, with some bird charities encouraging the public not to feed bread whereas others say bread is fine, leaving some members of the public confused. The Canal Ranger Service takes the view that although these are wild birds and do not usually need to be fed, it recognises the value of these interactions between people and wildlife, which can be formative for children in gaining a love of nature. It therefore supports the feeding of birds in moderation but feels that a varied diet of plant-based food including peas, lettuce, grains and packaged duck/swan food is likely to be better for the bird's health than bread.

Mallard

According to the Devon Bird Atlas 2007-13 (Beavan & Lock), the Canal supports one of the biggest populations of Mallard in the county, particularly in the winter when number swell as the birds congregate in large groups near car parks and settlements where they are regularly fed. The Country Park's position on feeding ducks is as given in the previous section on Mute Swans.

Kingfishers

Another iconic bird species for the Canal is the Kingfisher. The Devon Bird Atlas 2007-13 (Beavan & Lock) stated that the canal was the most densely occupied area by Kingfishers in the county and between late summer and early spring they are a common sight and sound along the canal. They are less likely to be seen in the spring and summer as they leave the canal to breed on local streams and rivers as the Country Park does not have the vertical sandy soil faces undercut by a watercourse into which they burrow their nest cavities.



With regard to management considerations, ensuring that a good number of overhanging branches for birds to fish from are retained at intervals (although these can be close enough to the bank or high enough so as not to cause an issue for passing boats) is important as is the general management of good clean water conditions required for fish to thrive.

Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers

These migratory birds nest in emergent and bankside vegetation along the offside banks – particularly in the sections between Watton Bridge and Battens Bridge, and Westcott Bridge to Ebear Bridge. It is therefore important that any maintenance works affecting this vegetation is undertaken outside of the breeding season and in small blocks phased over a number of years, so that not all of the habitat is affected at once. Cetti's Warblers have only been present along the canal since the early 2020s and it is unclear whether they are successfully breeding yet.

It is possible that some recreational uses of the canal, in particular angling and boating, could impact on the adult birds ability to feed young (for instance if a boat is moored beside a nest or an angler is fishing opposite a nest, the adult birds may be deterred from returning to the nest to feed chicks for as long as the disturbance exists). Given the low level of likelihood of these events occurring, given present levels of boating and angling use, there are currently no restrictions in place to manage this potential problem, but if circumstances change, this may need to be reviewed by the Canal Joint Advisory Committee's Wildlife Advisory Group.

Spotted Flycatchers

This species has been known to nest in well-screened, wooded areas along the offside bank near Tiverton golf course. Concern was raised about ten years ago by a WeBS surveyor at the extent of bankside tree coppicing taking place in the area and so since then the Canal Ranger Service have sought to adopt a lighter touch to the management of understorey bankside trees which provide screening in wooded areas, and have also put up dozens of open fronted nest boxes on the back side of mature trees in such areas to increase nesting options for this species.

Coot

The decline of Coot numbers on the Canal during the period between 2000 and 2010 (dropping from 60 or 70 per year to one or two) remains a mystery. Various factors such as predation, disease, dredging and other maintenance works have been considered but there is no clear reason why the recruitment of young birds repeatedly failed until the all the resident adult birds eventually died (presumably through natural causes), when this pattern was not reflected in the wider countryside. The last decade has seen the occasional pair of coots attempting to breed on the canal, but none seem to have been successful in raising a chick to adulthood.

Mammals

Bats

The Country Park provides excellent habitat for a number of bat species with large sections of the canal sheltered by trees or cuttings and rich in insects rising from and flying above the water. During 2019 an automatic bat detector / logger has been deployed at locations along the canal to record the bat species calling within 10m during the three nights the detector spent at each location. The results have provided the best insight yet into which species are using the canal. The species most frequently detected were Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Noctules, Myotis species (probably mostly Daubenton's) and Serotines. There were also a couple of Lesser Horseshoe records.

In terms of habitat management within the Country Park for bats, the key targets are to ensure good water quality which provides an abundance of aquatic flies, plenty of sheltered areas where the canal is lined with trees and insects can congregate even on windy nights, and continuous linear features such as lines of bankside trees/bushes and/or hedgerows. Gaps between these linear features should be reduced / kept to a minimum, and wherever possible hedges should be allowed to reach a significant size (albeit a size which can be maintained with a tractor-mounted flail unless it is being left to grow on prior to laying). Standing dead trees should be retained where safe to do so.

With regard to maintenance works within the Country Park, given the high level of protection afforded to bats it is essential that any works to potential roosting sites are carefully considered and that a bat survey is undertaken by a suitably trained contractor before works take place. Examples include tree felling/ surgery works on mature trees which may have cracks, splits or cavities that bats may roost in, or repair / repointing works on brick or masonry walls.

Otter

A water mammal monitoring project which ran for seven years from 2009 – 2016 used mink rafts with clay pads in the base of a tunnel to capture footprints of any animals passing through the tunnel. Although no American Mink footprints were identified, several of the 10 rafts spread along the canal regularly returned Otter footprints, confirming that the species is regularly using the canal

– particularly in the northern half of the waterway. This evidence compliments the regular sightings of spraint under bridges and occasional half eaten fish.

Otters range widely and the canal is likely to form just part of the home range of the otters which spend time in the Country Park. They are no doubt attracted by the healthy fish population, the presence of other prey items such as eels, amphibians and small mammals; by the cover afforded along the offside banks; and by the relative lack of disturbance.

Otters are a European Protected Species and so they and their holts are protected from injury and disturbance. Whilst the Canal is unlikely to provide the conditions required for a natal holt, the canal will provide good opportunities for otters to safely lay-up safely during the daytime, particularly under log piles, brash piles and fallen trees along quiet sections of offside bank which have become overgrown with brambles. A careful inspection should be made prior to any maintenance work around such areas to look for a worn otter pathway in and out of the water, and if found, works should be stopped and reconsidered.

Harvest Mice

Harvest Mice are listed as ‘Near Threatened’ in England and the Devon Mammal Group has been running the Devon Harvest Mouse Project for a number of years with the aim of raising awareness and increasing survey efforts to build a better picture of their populations in the county.



In 2020, the Country Park hosted a training session lead by the Devon Harvest Mouse Project Officer, and during surveys held in the afternoon, Harvest Mouse nests were discovered in rough grassland at Ebear Pond and in the field beside Beech car park. A follow up survey in the Beech car park field in 2024 also found Harvest Mouse nests. In terms of management implications, large grass tussocks should not be cut during the summer months. These are mostly found on offside banks and small plots of adjacent land that are not publicly accessible and so are not cut as part of the normal vegetation management programme.

Water Vole

Water Vole have not been present on the Canal since the 1990s. At that time the Canal was one of the last strongholds in Devon, prior to their extinction in the South West, hastened by predation by American Mink.

Given that the Canal is now thought to be free of American Mink and at its northern end is only a few hundred metres from the River Tone, on which water Voles are still present (albeit some distance away) the Canal offers a potential opportunity for Water Vole to recolonise Devon along the canal and then perhaps out into the wider Culm and Exe catchments.

The Canal still provides excellent habitat for Water Voles, although some of the offside banks could be improved by removal of brambles. Water Voles are fully protected under UK law and so if they did recolonise the canal, they would be protected and could complicate periodic maintenance such as reed clearance and dredging. However, given the perilous state of this iconic species in the UK, any recolonisation should be welcomed and may have positive effect on visitor experience and wildlife-based tourism.

The long-term outlook for water vole populations on linear waterways is usually not good as a ranging mink can very quickly cause a local extinction by working its way along a river or canal over a period of weeks. Therefore, any long-term recovery of the species in the Country Park would probably require ongoing mink control / eradication and the provision of suitable habitat in along the ditches, streams and ponds within the wider catchments through which the canal extends.

Beavers

Since the government decision in 2020 to allow beavers to remain on the River Otter in East Devon and spread naturally, the beaver population within that catchment has grown and some beavers have moved to surrounding catchments including the River Exe, where they have now spread north of Tiverton. Whilst beavers have the potential to provide significant benefits in terms of water quality, flood alleviation and nature recovery, they can cause problems at specific locations.

Embanked structures such as canals and reservoirs are examples of such locations where beavers will need to be managed (and possibly removed) due to their habit of digging into banks. Typically, they will dig an underwater hole in a bank and then burrow upwards to create a chamber. These chambers are often extended over time and if they reach the surface, branches, mud and vegetation are piled on top.

Given that much of the canal is embanked on one side or both, beavers would clearly pose a threat to the integrity of the canal in terms of causing leaks or breaches. Devon Wildlife Trust, who took a leading role in the partnership that oversaw the River Otter Beaver Trial, understand the danger that beavers pose to the canal and have previously offered their support in helping to trap and relocate any which do arrive at the canal.

In 2022, they provided a training session with one of their beaver officers to look at the field signs so that the Canal Ranger Service know what to look out for and can provide an initial assessment of any signs reported by members of the public. The Canal Ranger Team spent a morning at Otterhead Lakes in the Blackdown Hills, where they were shown feeding signs, a burrow and a dam. Feeding signs are typically small branches cut at an angle, and floating, bark-stripped sticks.

Reptiles and amphibians

The Country Park provides excellent habitat for amphibians containing both the aquatic and terrestrial components they require and is known to provide a home for Common Frog, Common

Toad, Smooth Newt and Palmate Newt. The ponds in particular provide a safe haven for tadpoles to grow, due to the lack of fish.

The reptile species found in the Country Park are Grass Snake, Slowworm and Adder. The first two listed are common and widespread along the canal, whereas Adders have only previously been seen on Swing Embankment. In 2018, the Country Park was used as a receptor site for 168 Slowworms that were captured from two DCC-owned development sites in Tiverton. Most were released on either side of Swing embankment and some were released on Sellake embankment. Periodic scrub control is required on these embankments both from an asset management perspective and in the interests of flora and reptiles.

A small number of Terrapin have been released in the Canal in the past and are seen occasionally in sections of canal near Tiverton and Halberton. Whilst their presence is unwelcome as they may impact to some degree on native species, their removal from the canal would be so difficult as to be unfeasible.

Surveys of reptile and amphibian species at Ebear Pond, Long Pond and Swing embankment took place in 2022 and 2023, with a knowledgeable volunteer undertaking a variety of survey techniques to gain a better understanding of the populations present at these locations. The volunteer has since moved on and recruitment of new volunteers to continue the surveys would be beneficial.



Fish

The Canal provides a home for a healthy, self-sustaining fishery made up of a number of native coarse species including Bream, Tench, Rudd, Roach, Eel, Carp, Perch and Pike.

Fishing rights are leased to the Tiverton and District Angling Club which has a strong interest in the health of the fish and will report any issues relating to fish health or species composition they become aware of. A number of stocking operations undertaken by the Environment Agency (and the National Rivers Authority before them) took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, with the main aim of introducing new bloodlines to boost the genetic diversity and vigour of species present. Following the breach of Swing Embankment in 2012 and the subsequent loss of large numbers of smaller fish, the Environment Agency undertook some restocking with fry, introducing 2000 Tench, 5000 Roach and 2000 Crucian Carp the following year.

The local Environment Agency Fisheries officer is of the view that provided there are no catastrophic losses of fish from a section or of a particular species, then there is generally no need to stock the canal with fish in order to boost numbers. However, he agrees that occasional small-scale stocking – maybe once every five years – would be beneficial to replenish the genetic diversity of the species present. The Environment Agency no longer undertake routine periodic testing of fish health due to the high costs involved, but if a specific issue arises, such as concern that a disease is killing fish, then live and/or dead samples will be sent off for analysis.

Dead fish floating in the canal should always be a cause for concern, especially if there are more than one or two in the same area. The potential for a pollution incident should always be the first cause to check, but it is common for some fish to die in the spring due to the stress of spawning. Another situation in which large numbers of fish can die is due to a lack of dissolved oxygen in the water brought about by excessive water weed / algal growth in the canal, usually following a long spell of hot sunny weather.

When this takes place, in addition to the presence of some dead fish, shoals of fish can often be seen gulping at the surface. In such situations, an assessment of the extent of the problem should be established by walking / cycling the towpath and the Environment Agency Fisheries Officer and Angling Club should be notified. Efforts should be made to clear as much weed from the affected area(s) as possible. In serious cases, the Environment Agency Fisheries Officer may recommend the use of oxygenation fountains or other equipment to oxygenate the water, as shown in the photo above.



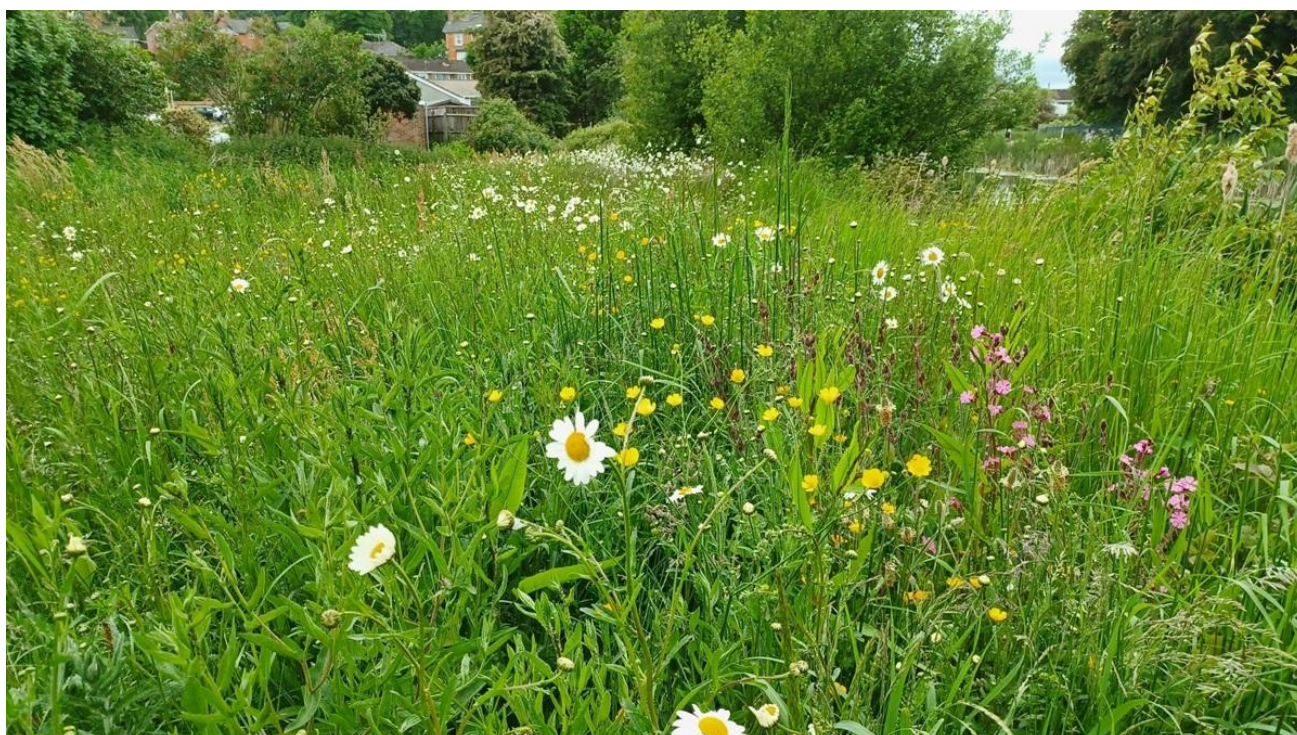
A small invasive, non-native species called Sunbleak (also known as ‘motherless minnows’) has at some point in the past found its way into the canal and can form large shoals, which can outcompete native species and cause great irritation to anglers. At present there are no management or eradication options available which would not impact unacceptably on other fish species, but care should be taken not to export this species to other fisheries.

Flora

The flora of the Country Park has developed alongside long-standing management regimes and recreational activities and given the lack of any rarities no specific management is specified for particular plant species. The broad principles of managing / preventing scrub growth in open areas to reduce shading, removing arisings where possible to reduce nutrient enrichment, combatting the introduction of invasive species and continuing the long-established vegetation management

regimes is believed to be suitable to ensure the continued abundance and diversity of plant life within the Country Park.

In the late 2010s and early 2020s, the Canal Ranger Service created three small wildflower meadows at Bamfylde Close, Tiverton, Sampford Peverell Community Orchard and beside Ebear Bridge. In all cases the previous vegetation was rank, nettle and dock-dominated and nutrient-rich. The approach taken was to scrape off the top 10-20cm of topsoil to remove the nutrient rich soil and the seed bank, and to then sow the areas with a wildflower meadow seed mix. The meadows have established well providing excellent habitat for a range of invertebrates and small mammals, and are managed by an annual cutting and raking regime in the early autumn.



19.1.2 Conservation of landscape features

Landscape character and landscape zones of the Canal have already been described and discussed earlier in this plan in sections 4.6 and 4.7.

The main methods for conserving the landscape of and around the Canal are as follows:

- Retention / replenishment of hedgerows and standard trees dotted along their length
- Pruning / crown-lifting trees to give clear views towards bridges
- Removal of ivy from historic structures such as bridges and limekilns
- Swift response to any eyesores that may come about within the Country Park (e.g. vandalism, graffiti, fly-tipping)
- Screening of residential and industrial developments by planting / thickening hedges and planting trees

- Opposing inappropriate developments which would impact on the Canal corridor either through consultation responses from appropriate DCC officers and/or through the Canal Joint Advisory Committee.
- Maintenance of good relationships wherever possible with adjacent landowners and residents to build influence and deter / respond effectively to visually intrusive activities or developments within the Canal corridor.
- Ensuring that the design and location of Country Park infrastructure, such as signs, benches, noticeboards etc. minimises their visual intrusion on the landscape. One way of achieving this is to use consistent design throughout the canal, so that they become less noticeable. A good example is the benches found along the towpath. There are over 160 benches located beside the towpath, but as they are almost all of just two simple designs (one with a backrest and one without) they blend in well.

19.1.3 Conservation of buildings and structures

The Country Park contains many Grade II listed structures including bridges, milestones, limekilns and a tunnel. These are listed in Appendix 2. There are a number of other historic structures which are not currently listed but which merit conservation, including milestones, culverts, accommodation bridges, wharves and the aqueduct.

These structures remain as evidence of the Canal's industrial heritage and provide visitors with a link to the past, helping to reveal the Canal's history. In their own right they are fascinating structures, playing an important role in the Canal landscape and with many exemplifying the high standard of masonry typical of the late Georgian period.

The conservation of the Country Park's built heritage will be addressed in the Grand Western Canal Country Park Asset Management Plan.

As outlined above, arrangements are managed in accordance with Devon County Council policy and procedures, utilising support from engineers within the bridges and structures team who manage related data systems. Core principles are to routinely inspect; maintain structures safely; and to safeguard heritage value.

19.1.4 SWOT evaluation for 'Biodiversity, landscape and heritage' category

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<u>Biodiversity</u> • Excellent wildlife corridor • Visitors / local residents value the wildlife • Good habitat available for a wide range of species • Good monitoring records for some species / groups	<u>Biodiversity</u> • Little or no survey or monitoring for many species / groups • Insufficient in-house capacity / expertise to undertake or resources to commission more surveys / monitoring

• Presence of some characteristic ‘flagship species’ (e.g. kingfishers) • No legacy of industrial pollution (unlike many canals in the UK) <u>Landscape</u> • Attractive rural landscape beside most of the length of the canal • All of the Country Park and some adjacent land is designated as a Conservation Area • Pleasant, far-reaching views from several points along the towpath • A sense of peacefulness and tranquillity where it survives away from Tiverton and major road corridors. • Lots of attractive, mature standard trees lining the canal • Continuous hedgerow beside the towpath for most of the canal’s length • A number of attractive structures forming focal points along the canal including bridges, limekilns and a tunnel • Well-organised and recognised Joint Advisory Committee able to comment on / object to adjacent planning applications and planning policies. • Consistent long-term management <u>Heritage</u> • The Country Park has a large number of historic structures, many of which are Grade II-listed. Most are in good condition • Routine inspections and repairs of Canal bridges undertaken by DCC Bridges and Structures Team • This team also provide support and advice for maintenance of other historic canal structures • Support also provided by DCC Estates team • DCC capital funding made available for major repairs as and when required (e.g. culverts project in 2000s and aqueduct relining in 2019/20)	• Insufficient resources to provide more focussed habitat / species management • Presence of several invasive species • Eutrophic water conditions • Significant recreational, heritage and asset management pressures which can limit beneficial management for wildlife <u>Landscape</u> • Little control / limited influence on adjacent land use • High proportion of Ash (30-40% of total mature tree stock) = significant visual impact as ash dieback progresses. • Much of the adjacent land is desirable for development • Limited space to allow hedgerows to grow large and bushy • Past loss of orchards which were a key feature of the area <u>Heritage</u> • Limited resources for the regular inspection / repair of some of the historic structures. • Limited revenue funding or human resources for repair works to structures other than road bridges • Access to many historic structures for inspection or repair is often difficult (e.g. enclosed access in culverts or reaching offside banks with machinery) • Use of inherently poor materials in construction of some structures (e.g. use of crumbly breccia stone in walls – prone to erosion) • The known working heritage of the canal is somewhat mundane – mostly just hauling stone from A to B, without the live-aboard canal culture of the waterway networks found elsewhere the UK. • Apart from legal and transactional details, the known history of the canal is relatively
---	---

• A key element of the Canal's history – the transport of limestone by horse-drawn tub barges - is preserved and brought to life for modern day visitors by the horse-drawn barge trips.	sparse with few highlights to capture the imagination of visitors.
<u>Opportunities</u> <u>Biodiversity</u> • Engage more volunteers / wildlife organisations in surveying / monitoring canal wildlife • Run more wildlife-themed events • Achieve both of the above with a bioblitz? • Restoration of ponds beside the canal / creation of new ponds? • Restoration of hedges by gapping up / laying • Provision of nest boxes and bat boxes • Tree planting to replace ash trees that have or will succumb to ash dieback • Possible opportunities to manage / positively influence management of adjacent GI-designated land? <u>Landscape</u> • Restoration of hedges by gapping up / laying • Tree planting to replace ash trees that have or will succumb to ash dieback • Protect / restore surviving/ former orchards and/or plant new orchards • Possible opportunities to manage / positively influence management of adjacent GI-designated land? <u>Heritage</u> • New or improved interpretation of historic structures • Tighter control of ivy and scrubby growth on historic structures • Improved monitoring of historic structures	<u>Threats</u> <u>Biodiversity</u> • Potential colonisation by invasive species • Increasing water nutrient levels due to agricultural run-off • Increasing terrestrial nutrient levels due to dog fouling and tipping of aquatic weed • Potential pollution incidents • Low water levels in drought periods • Increasing recreational pressure • Habitat loss / fragmentation within the wider canal corridor due to development / agricultural intensification • Badly planned / timed maintenance work <u>Landscape</u> • Existing and potential future development within the setting of the Canal could harm its attractive rural setting, sense of tranquillity, and quality of long views • Detrimental impact of artificial lighting from adjacent development on rural tranquillity and nature conservation • Unattractive adjacent land use (e.g. extensive use of agricultural fleece/polythene, proliferation of modern agricultural barns and anaerobic digesters) • Lack of funding to undertake maintenance and repairs of canal structures • Inappropriate design / style / location selection for country Park structures such as signs, benches, information panels, fences etc. <u>Heritage</u> • Slow deterioration of historic structures due to lack of inspection / maintenance

	• Sudden collapse / failure of historic structures due to lack of inspection / maintenance or extreme weather • Unintentional damage by staff or contractors (e.g. flailing milestones) • Vandalism / graffiti
--	--

19.2 Improvement options for Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

Biodiversity

- Identify groups / species that it would be useful to monitor/survey
- Seek to recruit volunteers / organisations to undertake monitoring / survey work
- Explore options / availability of experts for a bioblitz at the Country Park. Organise if feasible
- Make plans / funding bids for use of land beside Fenacre Bridge as new silt trap / reed bed / pond system.
- Ongoing hedge restoration including gapping up and periodic laying
- Planting of new hedges where appropriate
- Promotion of new standard trees in hedgerows to either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying
- Provision of bird boxes and bat boxes as appropriate
- Ongoing awareness raising amongst canal users / local residents regarding invasive species
- Ongoing efforts to reduce dog fouling
- Secure funding, commission and install replacement dragonfly panel at Ebear straight.
- Seek to influence plans for the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension Green Infrastructure land beside the canal, to realise opportunities to enhance wildlife within the canal corridor

Landscape

- Ongoing hedge restoration including gapping up and periodic laying
- Planting of new hedges where appropriate
- Promotion of new standard trees in hedgerows to either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying
- Plant new orchards / encourage adjacent landowners to restore neglected / former orchards
- Maintenance of trees to keep open views along the towpath towards bridges
- Maintenance of bankside vegetation on bends to keep open views along the canal
- Seek to influence plans for the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension Green Infrastructure land beside the canal, to minimise any negative impacts on the local landscape
- Seek to maintain good relationships with adjacent landowners and residents, to be in a better position to protect the canal corridor landscape from inappropriate adjacent land use.

Heritage

- a) Secure funding, commission and install replacement interpretation panels at Waytown Tunnel and the Aqueduct.
- b) Consider other possible locations for interpretation panels
- c) Undertake an annual survey of ivy/scrubby growth on historic structures to inform annual removal works
- d) Monitoring and maintenance of historic structures to be covered in forthcoming Asset Management Plan

20. Community involvement

20.1 Evaluation for Community Involvement

20.1.1 Community involvement in management and development

One of the great strengths of the Country Park has been long-standing community involvement. Local residents are proud of their Canal and successfully campaigned to save it in the 1960s. A Grand Western Canal Management Board was formed in 1970 with input from Devon County, Tiverton Rural District and Tiverton Borough Councils, which has continued in various guises until the present day – nowadays called the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee.

Over the years the membership of the committee has expanded to incorporate as many organisations representing people (and wildlife) with an interest in the Country Park as possible. At present it has 26 members representing 18 different organisations including local councils, interest groups, user groups and canal-related businesses (see Appendix 7)



The JAC meets twice annually, in March and October, with a third summer site visit to look at recent works and current issues. The wide representation present within the JAC provides an excellent forum for discussing the strategic development of the canal and for agreeing the best way to handle issues as they arise. Although the JAC has no separate budget or powers, it is very rare that Devon County Council will act against the JAC's recommendations, provided the necessary human and/or financial resources are available.

The JAC provides local residents with several opportunities to have their say on the management of the canal. Membership includes the Parish, Town, District and County Councils along the canal, and so all local residents will have three levels of local government member to represent them. Also, there is up to half an hour of public question time at the start of each of these (public) meetings.

In addition to the formal opportunities for community involvement in the strategic management of the canal provided by the JAC, the Canal Ranger Service frequently meet local residents and canal users whilst undertaking their work, and the good relationships formed this way provide an easy way for people to share their views and report issues. The Canal Ranger Service's contact details are given at all noticeboards and on all publications making it easy for people to get in touch by phone, email or social media. Visitor input is also sought through the provision of a suggestion box at the Canal Visitor Centre and through visitor surveys which are undertaken every five years (the most recent in 2024/25).

Local communities can also get involved in the practical management of the Country Park. There are two main volunteering opportunities available to anyone who wants to help look after the Canal:

- Most weekdays the Canal Rangers are assisted by one or two volunteers or college work experience placements. Given the linear nature of the site and the machinery-based nature of most of the work, two volunteers is the ideal number for most of the tasks the Canal Rangers undertake.
- During the autumn and winter, Volunteer Days are held on the second Sunday each month with around 6 – 12 volunteers helping a ranger to complete a task (usually hedge laying or hedge-planting). In the spring and summer, there are fewer tasks that would benefit from a large group, which is why these Volunteer Days don't take place at that time of the year.



A common form of unsupervised volunteering that takes place along the towpath is litter picking undertaken by Duke of Edinburgh Award participants. The Canal Ranger Service lends them litter picking equipment and provides a health and safety briefing, and they then typically spend two hours per week litter-picking for three months.

From time to time the Country Park accepts requests from businesses or individuals that wish to spend a day volunteering at the Canal as part of a corporate volunteering scheme. Common tasks for such groups include painting railings in the Canal Basin or building nest boxes indoors if raining.

One other way in which the Canal Ranger Service engages with local communities is through the provision of talks about the Canal delivered by the Canal Manager to community groups such as local history, Rotary, Probus, U3A and Women's Institute groups.

All of these methods of engagement should provide participants with a sense of pride, purpose and achievement; increased physical activity and social engagement; as well as a greater awareness of and appreciation for the Country Park

20.1.2 Appropriate provision for the community

Patterns of use and the types of activities undertaken at the Canal have evolved over time and will continue to do so. The two most basic elements for Country Park to be usable by a wide range of local communities and visitors are an accessible towpath and an open, navigable waterway and the majority of the Canal Ranger Service's time is spent ensuring that these are always available. Other key facilities are also discussed below:

Towpath

The majority of the use of the canal takes place on or from the towpath and feedback from visitors that have travelled around the UK waterway network is that the Grand Western Canal has one of the best maintained towpaths in the UK.

Between 2002 and 2009 all of the towpath was surfaced with compacted stone, providing a wide, flat and dry path for visitors of all abilities to use throughout the year. In the years since this surfacing work was undertaken, grass has grown in at the edges narrowing the width of the stone surface; and the verges have 'risen' as dead plant material has mulched down, leaving many sections slightly sunken and prone to puddles. In recent years an excavator contractor has been engaged to scrape back the edges of the towpath in the worst affected areas and some sections such as between the Canal Basin and Manley Bridge have been resurfaced again. Maintenance work and resurfacing should continue as necessary/affordable to ensure that the full width of the surfaced path is available, providing the best access for towpath users and maintenance vehicles.



Canal channel

The maintenance of an open, navigable channel is particularly important for anglers and boaters – both of which are obliged to pay for licences for the privilege of enjoying their respective leisure pursuits and so have a reasonable expectation that the canal channel will be kept clear enough for their activities. Ensuring that the canal does not become overly shaded or choked with algae or invasive plants is also important from wildlife and landscape perspectives. The main interventions for maintaining an open and navigable waterway are as follows:

- Cutting back of overhanging branches: This is mainly undertaken in the winter by the Canal Rangers working on the maintenance barge from one end of the canal to the other, but ad hoc cutting back is undertaken at other times whenever necessary.
- Periodic dredging: The Canal was extensively dredged in the period 2002-2007. Over time the canal will slowly fill up with silt again and will once again need to be dredged, but that is not anticipated to be necessary during the period of this plan (although some spot dredging may be required in specific locations).
- Clearance of weed in the channel: The Canal Ranger service spends on average four days per week between April and September clearing weed from the canal using their Conver weed boat. The workload has increased significantly with the spread of the invasive Water-soldier over the last decade, and the Canal Ranger Service has for several years been dedicating the maximum amount of resources it has available (without neglecting the other core aspects of their work). Most of the time this keeps the canal sufficiently clear of weed for boating and

angling to take place although both groups do continue to complain from time to time about the weed hampering their activities. The only apparent options for further reducing the impact of weed would be to focus more on key areas or for more resources to be made available by Devon County Council or external funders to increase staffing.

- Periodic clearance of marginal reed growth if it begins to extend into the main channel: Since the last phase of dredging, reed growth has slowly recovered and expanded along the edges of the canal. Whilst providing an excellent habitat for wildlife and safe environment for young fish to escape predators, the reed growth does hamper angling and will also eventually hamper boating if allowed to spread as far as the main channel. In recent years, an excavator contractor has been engaged to clear back sections of reed growth at a number of locations, and this regular, small-scale work should continue, focussing on sections where the reed growth is becoming excessive. In order to minimise the impact on wildlife, the sections cleared should not exceed 200m and should not be consecutive (i.e. should not be next to a section cleared the previous year) so that no one area is impacted too greatly in the course of a few years. Disposal of arisings is a significant consideration with this work and has to be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the availability of nearby disposal areas and vehicle access.

Car parks

A large proportion of the Country Park's visitors arrive by car and so the provision of car parking opportunities close to the canal is important in making a visit to the canal attractive. Fortunately, the Country Park has several car parks and laybys dotted along its length, helping visitors to park near the area they wish to explore and spreading visitor numbers along the canal.

The Canal Basin car park is the only one with pay and display charges and is mainly used by day visitors, whereas the smaller outlying car parks are free and tend to be used by more local visitors. Pay and display is not currently deemed to be viable at any of the outlying car parks as the machines would be prone to theft / vandalism and a large proportion of current users would probably just use other car parks instead.

At the busiest times during the summer months the Canal Basin car park can be full to capacity, and this seems to happen increasingly frequently, despite the opening up of the grassed area beside the limekilns as overflow parking. Given the narrow nature of the car park, it can be difficult for drivers to negotiate their way around looking for a space when the car park is full. The tarmac at the far end of the car park is becoming worn and would benefit from resurfacing during the period of this plan (subject to funding availability) if this takes place it may be prudent to see if any extra parking spaces can be created in this area.

Five parking spaces are provided for disabled drivers. These are located near the ramps to the towpath near the public toilets and near the Canal Tea Rooms and Garden. If possible, one or two extra disabled spaces would be a welcome addition.

Car parking charges provide a very significant proportion of the Country Park's income and given that most drivers using the car park are tourists or very occasional visitors, there is less price sensitivity than if were being used more regularly by more local visitors. With 2025 prices being set at £2 for two hours, £4 for all day and £24 for a season ticket, prices are relatively modest compared with many countryside visitor attractions. There is scope for a small increase in the charges during the period of the plan, without any significant impact on numbers using the car park. However, in order to keep the car park affordable for any regular local users, it would be preferable not to increase the season ticket cost by much, if at all.

In addition to the ongoing maintenance of the other outlying car parks, welcome signs which state the name of the car park and prohibit overnight use and littering have been installed.

Public toilets

Although they could be seen as an expensive drain on resources, the ongoing provision of public toilet facilities in the Canal Basin is essential for the site to continue to attract visitors and support the businesses located in the Canal Basin.

The public toilets are often the first Country Park facility experienced by visitors when they arrive and in order to make a good first impression, it is important that they toilets are clean and well maintained. However, a balance must be struck between the frequency of cleaning and the resources available. At present a cleaning company cleans the toilets three times per week in the autumn and winter and four times per week in the spring and summer. The toilet block includes an accessible toilet and baby changing facilities in the ladies and accessible toilet rooms.

Over the years, all of the interior aspects of the toilets (doors, sinks, wall tiling etc..) have been damaged and repaired, creating a run-down and patched-up look. If funding can be secured, the Canal Basin visitor experience could be markedly improved by refurbishing the public toilets.

The only other public toilets close to the canal are located in the play park in Sampford Peverell and are waymarked from the towpath. They are managed by Sampford Peverell Parish Council and include a disabled toilet accessible with a RADAR key. Whilst it would be beneficial for other public toilet facilities to be provided at other points along the canal, the likelihood of the resources being made available to install and maintain them is low. .

Visitor Centre

A new visitor centre was opened in the Canal Basin in 2012. The centre is unmanned, and features floor-to-ceiling wall displays, various hands-on activities, a touchscreen system and a tourist information / canal leaflet area.

The photo-based wall displays are designed to be visually appealing, to provide small bite-size pieces of information and to let photos and images tell much of the story. The intention is that the information on the wall-based panels will not date and so will not need to be replaced for many years, and certainly not within the period of this plan. The touchscreen system provides the opportunity to make more detailed information available, which can easily be updated or added to. Since the centre was opened, several new features have been added to the touchscreen system, including bat information and games and a photo gallery. In 2024, new video screens were installed to replace the original 'retroscope' units which were often out of order. Further new features should be added as opportunities arise, and the system's content should be fully reviewed annually to ensure nothing has become out of date.

Although all still relatively new and functioning well, some thought should be given during the period of this plan to potential improvements/replacements that could be made to the hands-on equipment at some point in order to refresh the centre. The central horse and cart display/game could also potentially be replaced with new displays at some point if funding was available. If and when any of these upgrades take place care should be taken to ensure that more of the display material and hands-on equipment is provided at a lower level as much of the existing provision is above the reach of someone in a wheelchair.



Noticeboards and interpretation / information panels

The provision of factual information (maps, codes of conduct, permit requirements, safety information, events details etc..) is important for visitors to plan and enjoy their visits and the Country Park is currently well-served by a series of welcome panels and noticeboards at the main access points along the canal. 12 new noticeboards have been installed along the towpath since 2022, providing a smart and consistent welcome at the main access points along the canal. These all house new A3 information panels that include a map of the canal (with a 'you are here' arrow) and some details about the history, wildlife or management



work in that area. A series of interpretation panels are located along the towpath. These are considered in more detail under the Interpretation heading in Section 21.1.3

Play Park, trim trail and nature trail

A new canal-themed play park was installed in the Canal Basin in 2018, and this combined with the hands-on activities and touchscreen games in the visitor centre, means that a visit to the Canal Basin is much more attractive and enjoyable for children and families. Given its location, it is easy for the Canal Rangers to inspect frequently and to spot and repair any defects or damage promptly.

A children's play area was also installed near the canal in Sampford Peverell, and although not on DCC land, its presence is outlined in the Canal Visitor Guide as it may be of interest to canal users or form a destination point for a walk or cycle ride along the towpath.

Given the existence of these two new play areas and a lack of appropriate land owned by the Country Park, there is unlikely to be any further formal play equipment provision within the Country Park. Opportunities for informal play (e.g. tree-climbing, shelter-building etc) are severely limited by the narrow linear nature of the site and the lack of woodland on the towpath side.

A new trim trail - organised and funded by the Sampford Peverell 200 Club – was installed during Easter 2020 within the picnic site area of the Country Park in the village. The trim trail consists of simple timber exercise stations with no moving parts and little maintenance requirement, although it will require regular safety inspections.

At the time of writing, external funding has just been secured for the purchase of 20 nature-themed rubbing posts which will be installed along the length of the canal to form a nature trail that families can undertake, with the desire to collect all of the rubbings acting as an incentive for children to want to explore the canal. These will be installed beside existing country park furniture in order to minimise their visual impact on the canal landscape and to protect them from accidental damage by the tractor that cuts the banks and hedges.

Picnic benches and seats

The Country Park is very well provided for with over 160 seats and benches along the 11 ¼ mile length. Many of these are simple memorial benches (with two oak legs and an oak bench top) built by the Canal Ranger Service and paid for by donors, who also supply a plaque. In recent years, in response to demand from towpath users for seats with back



rests, a simple but sturdy seat design (provided by Streetmaster Ltd.) has been chosen to offer memorial seat donors. As with virtually all towpath furniture installed in the last 20 years, the aim has been to use a single consistent design throughout, to minimise visual intrusion, so only two designs of memorial bench are offered – the backless ones built by the Canal Rangers and the Streetmaster seats with back rests.

A number of factors have to be taken into account when considering potential locations for new benches – sensible spacing and avoiding an oversupply in a given section; not locating under mature trees (which would increase the risk rating of the tree and may hasten the need for tree surgery work); ensuring maintenance vehicles can still pass safely. At the time of writing there are very few remaining opportunities for new benches between Tiverton and Sampford Peverell but given the distribution of the local population, this is often where donors wish to see their memorial bench placed. A memorial bench policy has been developed and approved by the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee explaining the considerations that have to be made when selecting a location, and restricting the placement of flowers and other items, which had become an issue with some benches that were constantly adorned and created the atmosphere of a memorial ground.

In the Canal Basin, seven picnic benches are installed permanently, five of which provide opportunities for wheelchair users to sit at the either end, and two of which have a tarmac base to enable easy access around the bench. The Tiverton Canal Co also provide picnic benches for their customers at the Ducks Ditty during the operating season.

A baseline survey of seats and benches was undertaken in 2019, and they are regularly inspected to inform the organisation of repairs and replacements.

Slipway and landing stages

The Boehill Slipway and the various landing stages located along the canal are key facilities for boaters. The slipway was built in 2003 and benefits from being close to M5 Junction 27 and close to Minnows Touring Park (which provides boat permits and other services). The track to the slipway was tarmacked in 2018 providing easier and safer access for towing vehicles. The main disadvantage with the location is the lack of parking for vehicles or trailers and the problem that any that are parked there may block the way for other slipway users. This has been a particular problem in recent years since Minnows Touring Park ceased providing parking space for boaters' vehicles.

At the time of writing an arrangement has been made with an adjacent landowner to provide parking space in his field halfway along the slipway access track. The gateway has been widened, but no hard standing can be provided for cars and trailers to park on. In the event of any major developments beside the canal taking place, any opportunities to provide a new slipway with nearby car parking and trailer parking should be discussed with developers.

A number of timber landing stages were installed at points along the canal in the mid-2000s. Some have since been rebuilt or re-decked. All were originally built at towpath height (with the exception of the East Manley landing stage which was built predominantly for the horse-drawn barge to use and has a small step down from the towpath), which is an ideal height for most narrowboats, and cruisers, but is too high for canoes, kayaks and rowing boats to use easily. In response to this issue new split-level landing stages have been built near Ebear Bridge in 2019 and Holbrook Bridge in 2025, with one level at towpath height and the other half 20-25cm lower.



The landing stage at East Manley Bridge is approaching the end of its serviceable life and will need to be refurbished or replaced during the period of this plan.

Events

A series of events and activities are provided for local communities by the Canal Ranger Service each year. In the past, these have included some major events, such as the IWA National Trailboat Festival (which was hosted by the Country Park in 2008 and 2014), a Queen's Diamond Jubilee event in 2012 and a 50th anniversary of the horse-drawn barge in 2024 all of which took many months of planning by organising committees and attracted thousands of attendees.

More typically, a series of much smaller scale events for local families such as bat walks, nest box building activities, family fun days, healthy walks, and wreath making, make up the usual programme and can be organised and delivered by the Canal Ranger Service and its volunteers without impacting on their ability to keep up with the practical maintenance of the Country Park.

These events are seen as an opportunity to engage with local communities, raise awareness of the canal's natural and cultural heritage and encourage local people to visit their canal. They are generally not seen as an opportunity to generate income and the Canal Ranger Service does not have the time or resources, to organise events of a scale /standard that would justify a level of charge that would make any significant income. This high quality/high-cost type event is often provided locally by the National Trust at Knightshayes and other visitor attractions. Attendees of events organised by the Canal Ranger Service are attracted partly by the low cost (charges are usually set to cover costs, although some events with large numbers of attendees such as Wild Wednesdays family activity events during the summer holidays and Christmas wreath workshops generate several hundred pounds profit), and if prices were substantially increased, attendance would probably fall significantly. The ongoing annual programme of fairly small-scale events is envisioned for the period of this plan.

Since 2020, the Country Park has hosted a number of running events organised by Winding Paths. These operate under a licence and generate reasonably significant income for the Country Park, whilst being scheduled and managed in such a way as to minimise impact on other users and businesses. These events are promoted on social media to forewarn other visitors that the section hosting the event will be busier than usual.

The Tiverton and District Angling Club organise a programme of official club matches and more informal mid-week get togethers. Since early in 2025, these events are being more proactively promoted by the club through social media, mainly to forewarn other visitors that a given section will be busy with anglers, should they wish to avoid it.

School and youth group visits

The Canal Ranger Service leads a number of school visits to the Canal each year. These are discussed under the Educational Provision heading in Section 21.1.3.

20.1.3 SWOT evaluation for ‘Community involvement’ category

<u>Strengths</u> • Strong public support for the Country Park • The JAC – providing a long-established and representative forum for community engagement in the Canal’s management • Good relationships between the Canal Ranger Service and almost all adjacent residents / landowners and also many regular towpath users. • An active Friends Group with charity status • Strong volunteer support, significantly increasing the volume of work achieved and providing good links with community • Excellent range of good quality, well-maintained facilities • Good links with local schools and community groups • Canal Ranger offices are located in the busiest part of the canal, and within the most heavily populated section, assisting contact with the greatest number of users / local residents	<u>Weaknesses</u> • Limited engagement with non-users • Limited opportunities to involve large groups of volunteers • Repetitive, mechanised and physically-demanding nature of much of the work deters some potential volunteers • Location of Rangers offices at one end of a linear site can make it harder to make links with communities at the other end. • Some local schools do not engage with the Canal Ranger Service, and some have engaged less as a result of developing their own pond dipping / wildlife areas
<u>Opportunities</u> • Seek opportunities to engage with non-users of the Country Park • Refurbish public toilets if funding can be secured	<u>Threats</u> • Funding cuts • Vandalism of facilities

• Install car park signs at the outlying car parks • Consider opportunities to create extra parking spaces in Canal Basin car park • Seek opportunities to help grow the membership and capacity of the Friends group • Engage with new communities that will form near the canal as a result of forthcoming housing development	• Decline of Friends group due to lack of management committee members or lack of focus on Devon section • Decline in school visits as they develop their own facilities or if curriculum pressures / funding for transport preclude outside visits. • The canal becoming a ‘political football’ within the JAC with appointments / discussions / recommendations becoming more politically motivated rather than purely what may be best for the Country Park. • Proposed local government reorganisation impacting on the effectiveness or existence of the Joint Advisory Committee • Sale of Ranger Service Offices (proposed by DCC Estates officers in 2024, but overturned by councillors on the Land and Property Committee)
---	--

20.2 Improvement options for Community Involvement

- a) Seek opportunities to engage with non-users of the Country Park
- b) Develop ideas for potential refurbishment of the public toilets and seek funding
- c) Produce and install car park signs at the outlying car parks
- d) Provide events at other points along the Canal – not just the Tiverton end
- e) Develop ideas for potential future improvements to the Visitor Centre displays
- f) Explore opportunities to provide a welcome pack for new residents of the TEUE and any other nearby housing developments
- g) Engage with local government reorganisation consultations / discussions to ensure that the forum provide by the Joint Advisory Committee continues under the new unitary authority that will own the canal
- h) Engage with councillors to emphasise the importance of the ranger offices for their effective management of the canal and engagement with local communities

21. Marketing and communication

21.1 Evaluation for Marketing and communication

21.1.1 Marketing and promotion

What are we trying to achieve?

The most relevant part of the Vision, described in Section 2, with regard to marketing and communication is as follows: “... *providing opportunities for enjoyable visits by a variety of users in a way that also benefits local communities, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing and the Country Park’s role in the local economy.*”

The Country Park should appeal to a wide range of potential visitors offering something for everyone. The facilities and services must always benefit local people through enhancing their opportunities for leisure and recreation, or by benefitting the local economy. The canal is one of the key visitor attractions in Mid Devon and management and promotion should be geared to developing tourist visits in a sustainable and appropriate manner, whilst continuing to provide accessible greenspace and activities for local communities.

Visitor numbers have steadily increased over the last fifteen years as evidenced by vehicle counters at the two main car parks and through the personal experience of the Canal Ranger Service and the stakeholders they speak to. The aim should be to steadily and sustainably increase visitor numbers without compromising visitor experience or the natural environment. To some extent the fact that the Country Park’s car parks are being filled to capacity means that further increases at the busiest times will be limited, although the growing local population may lead to increases in visitors walking or cycling to the Canal.

Determining at what point the visitor experience is degraded by the presence of too many people is a subjective and highly personal opinion, but feedback from visitors and stakeholders directly to the Canal Ranger Service and through representatives on the JAC can serve as an indication of general opinion.

How is the park currently used?

The park is used in a wide variety of ways by a range of different users. The simplest breakdown is to look at activity types: dog walking, walking, cycling, angling, horse-drawn barge trips, kayaking, boating, photography etc., but underlying these broad activity types are more fundamental motivations for visiting such as improving health and fitness, unwinding and de-stressing, meeting people and being sociable, spotting wildlife, or just getting from A to B.

The 2024/25 visitor survey collected 134 responses. Whilst the results need to be interpreted carefully (due to the small sample size and self-selecting nature of the online survey) some consistent patterns and themes have emerged. Here are a few:

- The most important reasons for visiting are the peaceful and relaxing atmosphere and the beautiful landscape.
- In terms of improvements that can be made, the commonest responses related to dogs, with respondents citing dog fouling and dogs off leads in particular.
- Interpretation and information provision is generally seen to be very good.
- Canal infrastructure (benches, noticeboards gates etc.) was generally seen to be in good condition.
- All respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their most recent visit.
- 95% of respondents felt the overall management and maintenance of the Country Park is either satisfactory or very satisfactory.

Zoning

This plan does not seek to impose any formal zoning of the Country Park for particular activities or for development/protection. The patterns of use have developed naturally over a long period of time based on the proximity of population centres, access points and car parks, and other facilities. Opportunities to change these patterns of use are limited and at present there is no great imperative to try and manage usage patterns along the canal. However, if and when usage patterns change, new tourism developments are proposed or visitor number growth is felt to be too great, then more consideration may need to be given to how usage patterns can be managed.

How would we like it to be used?

Whilst some user groups may occasionally resent the presence of certain other users / user groups, Devon County Council is generally happy with the range of activities currently enjoyed at the canal. Activities which are not deemed to be acceptable, and which are prohibited include horse-riding, motor cycling, the use of boats above the 4mph speed limit, the use of drones and the release of lanterns or balloons.

The main area of concern is inconsiderate behaviour by visitors of any user group. All user types have the capacity to upset or irritate other users with inconsiderate behaviour, and this is exacerbated by the very constrained nature of the site where everyone needs to share the same narrow space. The behaviour of some users, particularly some cyclists, also carries the risk of physically injuring other users.

Codes of conduct have been developed and refined over the last decade and are widely publicised in Country Park publications, noticeboards and signs. Efforts to encourage considerate use should continue to be reviewed/refined through the period of this plan in conjunction with the Joint Advisory Committee.

Devon County Council is keen that all members of the public can enjoy the Country Park undertaking the permitted recreational activities. The Country Park has been made more accessible over the last two decades through the surfacing of the towpath, improvements to gates and better information for disabled visitors. Further improvements can be made to assist a wider range of

people with disabilities to get the most from a visit to the Country Park and it is recommended that an accessibility audit is undertaken during the period of this plan to identify and prioritise any such improvements.

The last decade has seen an increase in families visiting the Canal, in line with a wider societal increase in families spending days out cycling on cycle paths and encouraged by a greater general awareness of the Canal, the installation of the Play Park and the provision of fun, hands-on activities and displays in the Visitor Centre. This is a trend that should be encouraged.

The Country Park provides an excellent opportunity for members of local communities to improve their health and wellbeing, and so Devon County Council is keen for local residents to be encouraged to take up the opportunity – especially those who are not currently active or confident in visiting countryside sites.

Who do we need to work with?

The Canal Ranger Service needs to work with a wide range of organisations and individuals in order to effectively manage and promote the Country Park, including:

- The Joint Advisory Committee (as a group and also member organisations individually)
- Country Park visitors – through informal conversations, visitor feedback channels and visitor surveys
- Country Park ‘friends’ – including volunteers, members of the Friends of the Grand Western Canal, members of the Grand Western Canal Friends Facebook group and followers of the Canal Ranger Service social media platforms
- Tiverton TIC and Visit Mid Devon
- Adjacent homeowners and landowners
- DCC and MDDC departments
- Accessibility auditors (Living Options Devon?)
- Local community groups and schools

Who are our main target audience(s) and which communication channels should we use?

The Country Park has not had the resources available to develop a marketing plan (or undertake the detailed market research this would require) or to identify any particular target audiences /market segments it wishes to appeal to, beyond the broad ambitions to make the site more appealing for families, to continue to attract tourists and day trippers and to continue raising standards that will benefit all users.

Visitor surveys were undertaken in 2010, 2015 and 2024/25, but the relatively low numbers of returns (357, 143 and 134 respectively) and self-selecting and self-completing nature of the surveys means that although they provided some useful comments and insights, they cannot be expected to reliably represent the usage patterns and views of the many tens of thousands of visitors that come to the canal each year.

In the absence of a detailed marketing plan that looks at target audiences in terms of market segmentation or socio-economic groups, three useful ways of looking at visitors and target audiences is to break them down based on the activity they are undertaking, their proximity to the Country Park and their age.

Each of these categories is considered below along with suggestions as to the best communications channels to use:

Activities

- Dog walkers: One of the largest single user groups within the Country Park, but fairly disparate (i.e. all individuals with no form of organisation or representation, although loose groups of regular dog walkers in an area will know each other and share thoughts / information about the canal). Likely to be mostly local residents. The best channels for disseminating information will be posters and notices at access points along the towpath, Facebook, local press, and posters at shops and vets and face to face contact with Rangers or Volunteer Wardens. The best ways for getting information back will be Facebook, email, face to face contact, and phone calls (if reporting issues).
- Walkers: Another large user group, but could be locals out for a stroll, locals getting from A to B along the towpath, or visitors from further afield. Once again, a very disparate group and so a range of different communication channels would need to be used including posters and notices at access points along the towpath, Facebook, local press, and posters at shops, information in the Canal Visitor Guide and website and face to face contact with Rangers or volunteers. The best ways for getting information back will be Facebook, email, face to face contact, and phone calls (if reporting issues).
- Cyclists: The most commonly seen types of cyclist tend to be either young families or older couples on day trips to the Canal; or locals getting from A to B (although there are a few regular local cyclists that cycle the canal for pleasure). Cyclists are represented on the Joint Advisory Committee by Cycling UK, although there is unlikely to be any link between the average canal cyclist and this organisation. Therefore, the best communications channels will be the same as for walkers, listed above.
- Anglers: Angling rights are leased to the Tiverton and District Angling Club and all anglers should therefore have purchased a day permit or annual membership from the Club. The Club potentially therefore provides a very good link to and from anglers fishing at the Canal. However, this is dependent on the extent to which the Club and its members, and the Club and the Canal Ranger Service all communicate effectively with each other. Most anglers tend to be local, although a significant number are tourists staying at Minnows Touring Park. Other communications channels include posters and notices at access points, face to face

contact with Rangers and volunteers, contact through tackle shops / permit sales outlets and Facebook.

- Canoeists / kayakers / paddle boarders / rowers: This user group is made up of a mixture of fairly local (i.e. Mid Devon and South Somerset) residents, for whom the canal is the closest places to paddle; local schools (Tiverton High, Blundell's and Wellington Schools, in particular); and visitors staying in the area - all of whom will be bringing their own craft. Permits are required for this activity, so the sales outlets provide an opportunity to pass on information and receive feedback. Other communications channels include the same as those listed above for walkers, the schools listed above, and British Canoeing (the national governing body for canoeing in the UK which supports canoeing and kayaking both as a leisure activity and a sport). The Tiverton Canal Co hires out Canadian canoes and rowing boats from the gift shop in the Canal Basin and so provides the main communication channel to / from their customers.
- Boaters: There are two main categories of boaters – those with a mooring whose boat is kept on the Canal (mostly at Mid Devon Moorings), and those bringing a boat to the canal for a short visit (usually trailed and launched at Boehill slipway and usually on the canal for a day or a weekend). Communication with boaters with moorings is usually straightforward with Mid Devon Moorings able to pass on messages in either direction and to put up posters in their noticeboard. Communication with short-term visiting boaters is less reliable, but the noticeboard beside the slipway, Minnows touring park (which provides facilities for boaters and sells permits), the Canal Visitor Guide and Country Park website provide opportunities for information to be passed on. Email, telephone and Minnows Touring Park provide the main channels for boaters to communicate with the Canal Ranger Service.
- Other activities: There are a number of other activities undertaken in the Country Park such as picnicking, wildlife-watching, jogging, painting, but the communication channels for these users are generally likely to be the same as for walkers, as above. One significant user group not listed above are visitors enjoying horse-drawn barge trips. The Tiverton Canal Co who operate the barge trips provide the main communication channel for these visitors, although they may also see posters, leaflets and displays in the Canal Basin and Visitor Centre before or after their trip.

Proximity

- Local residents - people who live near the Country Park, i.e. in Tiverton and the villages along the Canal. This group will include current users but will also include people with a sense of affinity/ownership/pride in the Canal even though they may not or may no longer visit the Country Park. In terms of increasing the Country Park's positive impact on people's health and wellbeing, the greatest gains are likely to be made by encouraging a larger proportion of local residents to engage in some form of recreation at the Country Park.

The best communication channels for local communities include posters and notices at access points along the towpath, Facebook, local press, and posters at shops, information in the Canal Visitor Guide and website and face to face contact with Rangers or Volunteer Wardens. The best ways for getting information back will be Facebook, email, face to face contact, and phone calls (if reporting issues).

- Day-trippers from the region – mostly residents in Devon or South Somerset. Previous visitor surveys and the experience of the Canal Ranger Service suggests that this group has increased significantly over the last 15 years in line with a growing awareness of the Country Park probably generated by increased media coverage and by word of mouth and underpinned by improving facilities and standards.

The best communication channels for this group will be local, regional and national media / magazines (e.g. Devon Life, One magazine), Facebook, website, posters/notices at access points, and face to face contact with Rangers or Volunteer Wardens. The best ways for getting information back will be email, face to face contact, and phone calls (if reporting issues) and Facebook.

- Overnight tourists – People staying in the area on holiday or visiting friends/family. If staying with friends or family they are most likely to visit the canal with or on the recommendation of their hosts and so the communication channels given for local residents and day trippers will apply, perhaps with more emphasis on the Country Park / Tiverton Canal Co websites which they may check for more information once the canal is suggested.

Tourists staying with accommodation providers in the region will either need to find out about the canal through their own research or by word of mouth. The key channels here are tourist information services / leaflets, publicity in national media/magazines and recommendations from accommodation providers. Whilst the Canal Visitor Guide is distributed and available at Tourist Information Centres in the region and at local shops, pubs, cafes, hotels and B&Bs in the local area, the resources are not available to attempt a wider reach. However, this gap is filled by the Tiverton Canal Co which invests in a wide-reaching marketing strategy designed to encourage visits from outside the region.

The Country Park and the Tiverton Canal Co maintain close links with the Tiverton Tourist Information Centre and are both engaged with Visit Mid Devon and the Mid Devon Attractions Group, and through these partnerships aim to encourage more visits to the district and to raise awareness of the Canal as a visitor attraction.

Age

A few key age-related brackets are selected/considered based on likely differences in the best communication channels:

- Children: Children will find out about the Canal through word of mouth, visits with their family and friends, and school visits. The best channels for passing on information will be displays, word of mouth from parents/rangers/teachers and the website. The best channel for receiving information is likely to be word of mouth from parents/rangers/teachers
- Older teenagers / young adults: Typically, a difficult age group to engage with countryside recreation, unless they have a particular interest or recreation activity they can pursue at the site. The most likely activities may be dog walking, kayaking /paddle-boarding or cycling/walking from A to B. The communication channels they will use most will be the various social media platforms, but any attempts to engage this group through these channels must be carefully thought out, provide information that is likely to be of interest and undertaken by someone who understands the language and protocols/norms of the platform.
- Parents of children living at home: In terms of communication channels, the main difference between this group and the recreation-based ones above is that children provide an excellent link for engaging their parents. Parents will attend Country Park events that include children's activities, and parents are likely to hear all about a school visit to the Canal. School newsletters and Primary Times also provide potential channels to parents through their children.
- Empty nesters / retired: This group generally has the time and income to engage frequently in day trips and short holidays and may prefer to visit outside of school holidays. They also have much to gain from keeping active and so should continue to be a focus for the marketing of the Country Park. A large proportion of this age group are active on social media – especially Facebook and Tripadvisor and so these are key channels along with the more traditional media such as the local press and local radio stations.

21.1.2 Appropriate information

The communications channels currently used by the Country Park are as follows:

- Canal webpages on DCC website: devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal -These follow the DCC corporate style and are kept up to date by the Canal Ranger Service and provide factual information about the Country Park and its history, wildlife, management and visitor information, along with some attractive images. Whilst the webpages are a good source for factual information about the Country Park, they are not particularly inspiring in terms of encouraging viewers to visit. A modern, visitor-focussed, standalone website would be a great improvement but may be unaffordable / prohibited by DCC policy.
- Canal Ranger Service Facebook page: facebook.com/grandwesterncanaldevon (2.1k followers in Sept 2025)- This is updated by the Canal Ranger Service and all posts are also

shared with the independent Grand Western Canal Friends Facebook group: facebook.com/groups/262602619339 - This group page has a large membership (6.5k in Sept 2025) promoted strongly by the Tiverton Canal Co and consisting largely of local residents and current/previous Tiverton Canal Co customers. The bulk of its posts are photo sharing (frequently including some excellent quality shots by a few very talented local amateur photographers) but it is also used for announcements/event promotion and by members for reporting / complaining about various issues.

The Canal Rangers also have a Facebook profile facebook.com/GWCanalRangers with 1.4k friends, through which they post news and events. Most posts are also then shared to the canal Facebook page and the Canal Facebook group.

Whilst the Canal Ranger Service would prefer (and promotes) telephone or email as a more direct form of reporting issues which is likely to be seen more promptly, it accepts that Facebook is the preferred platform for communication for many people and so checks the Facebook pages at least daily.

- X (formerly Twitter): Although the Canal Ranger Service once had a Twitter account, there were few followers and little interaction through this platform and so it was closed on the advice of the DCC communications team in 2022.
- Instagram: instagram.com/grandwesterncanalcountrypark - The Canal Ranger Service launched an Instagram page in 2019 in recognition of the growing popularity of this platform and uses it mostly to post the same content as is posted Facebook. As of September 2025, it has 676 followers.
- Other social media such as YouTube and TikTok: Whilst recognising the tremendous popularity of these video sharing sites, the Canal Ranger Service rarely has the capacity to generate good quality video content on a regular enough basis to generate a sizeable body of followers. Given increased support or resources this could be considered, but it is understood that considerable time investment is required to utilize these platforms effectively.
- Telephone and email: 01884 254072 / gwcanal@devon.gov.uk - These contact details are widely published along the canal and in Country Park publications and are the preferred methods for people to report issues. The office telephone has an answerphone message which provides an out of hours number in the event of very serious and urgent issues such as leaks or pollution incidents.
- Noticeboards along the towpath: There are twelve new noticeboards located at key access points along the towpath and one inside the Visitor Centre. All include a map of the

Country Park with some interesting information about that local section of the Canal, information about permit requirements, codes of conduct, posters about up-coming events, and safety information. There is seldom room for other organisation's events or activities posters (with the exception of the Friends of the Grand Western Canal) and so requests are usually declined.

- The Canal Visitor Guide: Given the large amount of visitor information that needs to be shared (largely due to the range of recreational interests) the Guide has evolved from a DL (A4 folded in thirds) leaflet crammed with information at a small font size, to an A5 24-page booklet which provides the space to give more extensive and engaging information and photos using a more accessible font size. In 2016, the guide was redesigned by the DCC communications team, and the text was rewritten by the professional copywriter who researched and wrote the text for the Visitor Centre displays (ensuring greater consistency).

The 24-page format also provided enough space for a series of adverts, the income from which covers the cost of printing the guide. The current advert policy is to only include adverts that are likely to be of interest to Canal visitors during their visit (i.e. canal activities and service providers; nearby cafes, pubs, farm shops and convenience stores and accommodation providers; and heritage-themed attractions in the district. The Guide is updated and reprinted bi-annually with the aim of distributing it ahead of the Easter holidays.

- Media coverage: As opportunities arise, the Canal Ranger Service drafts press releases relating to projects, initiatives and events to pass on to the DCC Media Team who will refine and then publish the release on the DCC news webpages and forward to appropriate members of the media. Typically, releases are picked up and published online by DevonLive or are printed by the Tiverton Gazette and sometimes the Western Morning News. Depending on the significance of the story and the availability of other news articles, BBC Radio Devon may also wish to interview someone with regard to a story. DCC's Media Team must coordinate any such media contact to ensure that policies are followed, and stories are presented appropriately. Very occasionally news stories are also picked up by national press.
- Word of mouth through Canal Ranger Service staff and volunteers: Staff and volunteers spend a lot of their time working along the towpath and frequently have conversations with visitors and neighbours. Such conversations provide opportunities for more useful and meaningful communication than one-way channels such as posters or websites, with a greater opportunity of increased understanding of why work is being undertaken or why an issue may be important to a visitor/neighbour. The flip side is that poorly-briefed staff or volunteers can inadvertently give inaccurate information or wander 'off-message' whilst

giving the impression they are passing on the 'official' position on a given issue. Staff are easily identifiable as they wear a standard uniform.

- Word of mouth / output from third parties: There are a number of organisations and individuals who are in a position to pass on information about the Country Park to visitors and local communities. In particular, these include canal-related businesses, permit sales outlets, accommodation providers and TICs. They provide a valuable service in passing on information about the Country Park to visitors and local communities and the Canal Manager believes that in general they do a very good job in this. However, there remains the potential for misinformation and so the regular contact between the Canal Ranger Service and these third parties is important to ensure they are kept up to date on Canal matters.
- Periodic visitor surveys: Generally conducted every five years, these have previously been quite small scale and have been organised and undertaken in-house by the Canal Ranger Service, as limited resources have not permitted the task to be undertaken by a professional consultancy. As a result of the limited time and financial resources, the 2010 and 2015 visitor surveys took the form of self-completing forms left in the Canal Visitor centre and the Ducks Ditty café/bar for visitors to fill in if they wish. In 2024/25 a Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award student undertook 56 in-person surveys at points along the canal and then adapted the survey to enable it to be shared and completed online via relevant social media groups, with a further 76 responses being made online. These relatively small and self-selecting samples mean that the responses, whilst often interesting and relevant, cannot necessarily be taken as a true reflection of overall visitor patterns/attitudes.

To be more meaningful any future surveys should ideally include a greater proportion of interview-based completion, with respondents selected at random at points spread along the canal (in rough proportion to the relative busyness of that section of canal) and spread over time of year, times of week and times of day, with care taken to ensure that a range of different types of user are included.

- Tripadvisor – Although Tripadvisor appears to be waning in its level of use, the Country Park holds a high rating: 4.6 out of 5, with the vast majority of respondents giving it 5 stars and just a few giving it one star due to a bad experience with inconsiderate cyclists or dog owners.
- Suggestions Box: The Visitor Centre does feature a suggestions box in the lobby, and whilst it is subject to a degree of misuse, there are useful suggestions left from time to time.
- Joint Advisory Committee Progress Reports: The Canal Manager drafts a six-monthly Progress Report for members of the JAC which summarises and explains all the main areas

of work undertaken by staff, volunteers and contractors in the previous six month and discusses any significant issues that may have arisen. It also lists some of the key projects and pieces of work anticipated during the next six months. The report is written specifically for JAC members with the presumption of a reasonable degree of understanding of the canal and the history of various issues but is available to the public and media if they want to find it as it is published on the MDDC website as part of the JAC agenda pack.

- Friends group newsletter: The Canal Manager writes a column for the monthly E-newsletter produced by the Friends of the Grand Western Canal for its members. This provides an opportunity to highlight or explain current works or projects, promote events or to talk about aspects of the Canal's natural or cultural heritage.

21.1.3 Appropriate educational and interpretational information

The Country Park is able to provide local communities with opportunities for learning about, and experiencing ways of enjoying and understanding, its built heritage and nature. There is also a strong interest from many visitors to find out more about the history and wildlife of the canal.

Although there is a large degree of overlap, for the purposes of this plan educational provision will relate specifically to Canal Ranger-led work with schools, pre-schools, home educator groups and youth groups such as brownies and cubs; whilst interpretation provision will relate to panels, displays, and any other media placed along the canal or available to take away (e.g. leaflets) or view online, and events which have an awareness-raising or inspirational aspect to them.

Educational provision

In 2003 the Canal Ranger Service began an increased effort to engage with local schools and community groups. Two downstairs rooms at The Moorings (the Canal Ranger Service offices) were equipped to become classrooms, a new dipping pond was constructed and one of the Canal Rangers' job descriptions was changed to specifically include developing and leading school visits as part of the role.

Since then, the Country Park has welcomed school classes on Ranger-led visits from most of the local primary schools each year, mostly during the summer term. The Canal Ranger Service has developed several lesson plans based on national curriculum topics and is also able to tailor visits to any preferences expressed by the teacher.

Although Canal Rangers have led visits by primary schools from outside the district, the main focus has been on developing close links with local primary schools and seeking to engender awareness and respect for the Canal's natural and cultural heritage within children from local communities. To this end, charges have always been kept low in order to cover costs rather than generate income. A significant increase in charges would lead to fewer schools visiting. Current rates for 2025/26 are for Devon County Council funded schools - £1 per pupil for a half day / £2 per pupil for a full day, and £1.50 / £2.50 respectively for non DCC schools.

The national curriculum themes most frequently chosen by teachers to cover during their class's visits are *Plants and animals in the local environment* for younger groups, and *Habitats, Lifecycles, Photosynthesis* (as part of Science) and *Transport* (as part of Geography) for older groups. Given that pond-dipping can cover all of the first three themes, this is by far the most popular activity for school groups on ranger-led visits. To date there has been little interest from high schools wishing to arrange ranger led visits.

Ranger-led visits are also frequently requested and delivered to other groups, including cubs, brownies, rainbows, home-educators, pre-schools, special needs groups and nurseries. In addition to Ranger-led visits, self-led school groups are often seen visiting the Canal, taking advantage of the information and interpretation panels provided along the towpath and in the Visitor Centre, and the teachers' local knowledge.

At present, there is a good balance between the demand for Ranger-led visits and the resources available within the Canal Ranger service to organise and lead them. Any significant increase in the number of visits would either impact on the Canal Ranger Service's capacity to undertake site maintenance or would require more human resources.

Interpretation

Interpretation provision enriches visits to the Country Park through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of places, people, events and objects from the past and present and of the natural world.

A series of interpretation panels have been installed close to points of interest since the mid-2000s, including the Canberra bomber crash site near Manley Bridge, the Aqueduct, Swing Bridge stop gate, a dragonfly panel near Ebear Bridge, the Waytown Limekilns and Lowdwells Lock. All are built in the same style (provided by Shelley Signs Ltd) although the Swing Bridge stop gate one is a lectern style to fit the location. Some of the older panels will need to be replaced due to wear and tear during the period of this plan, and consideration should be given to whether the information needs updating/rewriting and whether a completely fresh design is required.



Writing and designing for interpretation provision is far more than just presenting factual information and input from a skilled copy writer and a professional designer can make a huge difference in how effective the panel is in engaging the audience, and so should always be considered if resources allow.

One consideration that should be borne in mind is the impact that new signs, panels and noticeboards can have on the Canal landscape. The 'cluttering up' of the Country Park with new

signs is always a danger if they are unnecessary, poorly designed or insensitively located. Another consideration is to ensure that the design of any new signs or panels follows good practice with regard to accessibility.

The Visitor Centre provides a wealth of interpretational displays and activities as discussed in depth in Section 20.1.2. These displays are still in good condition and so most should not require replacing or refreshing during the period of this plan, although this should be kept under review and any opportunities for improvements considered, particularly those that can be added to the touchscreen system.

Events organised by (or in partnership with) the Canal Ranger Service provide opportunities to engage with local communities at a deeper level, and the knowledge and enthusiasm of the leader can inspire or raise awareness to a greater degree than panels or displays. The aims and objectives of the event should be carefully identified and should then lead the development of that event.

21.1.4 SWOT evaluation for 'Marketing and communication' category

<u>Strengths</u> • Long service of existing staff underpins good understanding of visitor types, requirements and visitor patterns • Good use of main communication channels • Excellent links with users and local communities through JAC • Good quality information provision • Range of opportunities for visitors to provide feedback or report issues • Promotion of the Country Park by Canal businesses as part of their marketing work • Good links with information 'gatekeepers' such as canal-related businesses, permit outlets, Tiverton TIC and councillors	<u>Weaknesses</u> • No independent research into visitor patterns • No in-depth marketing plan • Country Park website uninspiring • Insufficient resources to afford specialist consultants to undertake these pieces of work • Limited human resources for fulfilling potential communications opportunities • Some visitor types are hard to reach
<u>Opportunities</u> • To find time to generate more media coverage • To find time to post more frequently / thoughtfully on social media • Design / commission / undertake a more useful / representative visitor survey • Develop / commission an in-depth marketing plan for the Country Park • New standalone, visitor-focussed website	<u>Threats</u> • Funding cuts • Failure to update information / interpretation provision due to lack of funds or attentiveness • Opportunities to engage local communities missed if interpretation and events not carefully considered and planned • Declining engagement with schools if ranger-led visits not kept fresh and relevant or if they develop their own resources (e.g. dipping ponds at school)

	• Inaccurate information being passed on by those perceived to be a reliable source of information, but who are not fully informed
--	--

21.2 Improvement options for 'Marketing and communication' category

- a) Explore options for commissioning independent market research / marketing plan development
- b) Explore options for developing a new website for the Country Park
- c) Seek to increase the number of press releases produced by the Canal Ranger Service
- d) Seek to increase the quantity and quality of social media posts
- e) Replace / refresh existing interpretation panels as they become worn / out of date
- f) Develop and use a proforma to be completed at the planning stage of events outlining what the targets for the event are and how they will be achieved.

22 Management

22.1 Evaluation for Marketing and communication

22.1.1 Staffing and budgets

An introduction to the Country Park's current staffing and budget arrangements has been provided in Section 10.

Staff

With regard to staffing over the next five years, it is anticipated that the number, grade and responsibilities of roles will not change significantly. However, this could be affected by funding cuts or local government reorganisation. An increase in staffing would be very welcome and would enable a higher standard of maintenance and more improvements to be made, but given the present financial climate is unlikely to occur.

Whilst the existing Canal Ranger Service team is very experienced, an issue starting to emerge is their physical ability to undertake the physically-demanding work on a daily basis as they grow older. Careful organisation of tasks and selection of techniques/machinery; management of personal fitness; and sharing workloads among staff and volunteers will become increasingly important.

Training

Despite the extensive experience of current staff, ongoing training, refreshers and requalification's remain essential for achieving current best practice and for continuing personal development. In addition to formal training, study days held in the region by the Countryside Management Association (CMA – the professional body for Rangers and other countryside / urban greenspace professionals in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) offer an enjoyable and affordable way to share ideas and learn from what has (and hasn't) worked at other countryside sites in the South West, and the quarterly Ranger magazine extends that sharing of best practice to a national and international level. The CMA also provide an [accreditation system](#) which members can choose to follow at a level appropriate to where they are in their career. In 2021 the Canal Manager achieved accredited membership at 'Principal' level. Staff, volunteers and work experience students should be encouraged to pursue accreditation if they wish.

Budgets

Looking ahead to the next five years, the greatest challenge is likely to be the ongoing budgetary pressures faced by local authorities and the threat of further revenue funding cuts being made by Devon County Council and/or Mid Devon District Council or the unitary authority which succeeds them.

The Country Park has managed to significantly increase income in the last decade, and this has largely offset the reductions in revenue funding already experienced, but options to continue increasing income are limited.

Capital funding has generally been made available by DCC for major works as required, but one limiting factor that seems to be a shrinking capacity within the DCC Bridges and Structures team to assess / design / tender / supervise works to the same extent as they were able to previously. Greater use is being made of framework partners to fulfil these roles which seems to result in over-engineered and significantly more expensive projects.

22.1.2 Implementation of this management plan

The management plan is an agreed action plan for change and continuous improvement within the Grand Western Canal Country Park. It is intended, following consultation, that this document is adopted by Devon County Council as a Management Plan for the Grand Western Canal Country Park. This will provide a clear statement for its management of the site, within agreed parameters, both shared and supported by partner organisations.

It will then be the responsibility of the Canal Manager, to manage an annual work programme based on the principles and aims within the plan. Due to limited resources, not all actions may be possible each year, and the Canal Manager will need to make day to day choices bearing in mind the priorities listed within the action plan, the need to plan and group work tasks efficiently, and prevailing circumstances (e.g. weather, funding levels, unforeseen reactive maintenance works etc).

The Canal Manager will report every six months to the JAC outlining the work which has been achieved in the previous six months and seek views on priorities and progress. The Progress Report provided for the March meeting each year will include an updated version of the action plan, showing which actions have been completed, part completed or not completed. This will also be made available to Green Flag Award judges.

22.1.3 SWOT evaluation for Management

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
• Experienced Ranger Service team supported by volunteers • Good corporate support from numerous DCC teams • Sufficient funding (at present levels) to maintain the Country Park in acceptable condition • Availability of training and personal development opportunities for staff and volunteers	• Declining physical ability of Ranger Team and some volunteers • Reduced capacity for some DCC teams to assist • As not a statutory service, Country Park is at risk of DCC funding cuts • Lack of binding funding agreement with MDDC, means their contribution is always at risk of being cut

• JAC provides excellent forum for discussing progress with management plan	
<u>Opportunities</u> • Increase and expand voluntary support • Seek to strengthen funding partnership with MDDC • Seek to improve funding arrangements within new unitary authority • Demonstrate the wide range of important benefits Country Park brings (to justify continued funding levels) • Seek to increase income	<u>Threats</u> • Funding cuts • Reductions in staffing due to funding cuts • Political decisions/manoeuvring affecting Country Park • Unrealistic targets / expectations

22.2 Improvement options for Management

- Raise awareness among staff and key stakeholders of management plan aims, objectives and action plan prescriptions and priorities
- Continue training / personal development of staff and volunteers
- Recruit and train up more volunteers and work experience students capable of easing the physical burden on staff
- Seek opportunities for volunteers to help with non-practical tasks / projects
- Seek opportunities to convince councillors and relevant officers from DCC and MDDC of the very favourable cost/benefit balance achieved by the Country Park
- Seek to increase income by generating revenue or securing external funding

Chapter Three: Where do we want to get to and how will we get there?

23. Introduction

Chapter 3 of the management plan brings together the information from Chapter 1 and the analysis in Chapter 2 to evaluate and formulate a series of aims, objectives and prescriptions to guide management during the period of the plan.

24. Evaluation

24.1 The vision

In response to the narrative outlined in the previous chapters, the original vision and aims remain unchanged. However, what is clear is that these could change as a result of new opportunities and as a consequence of future funding levels.

24.2 Evaluation

The Country Park is without question an excellent resource catering for a wide range of sometimes conflicting demands. During the course of the next five years, the Canal Ranger Service will need to build on the key assets and address a series of key challenges.

24.2.1 Assets

From the background information and initial assessment undertaken in chapters one and two, it is evident that the Country Park is a well-established venue with a history of providing a good quality visitor experience and reliable and consistent management.

The key assets for the Country Park are:

- The Canal and towpath: The maintenance of these two core features are central to the effective management of the Country Park.
- The horse-drawn barge trips: A real unique selling point for the Canal and for the regional tourist economy. The motivation for a large proportion of visits made to the Canal by day trippers and tourists and the focus of endless photos taken as a memento of an enjoyable visit.
- The Visitor Centre: A great facility providing an engaging and immersive introduction to the Canal and an excellent starting point for visits.
- Staff & volunteers: Staff and volunteers of the Canal Ranger Service and of canal businesses bring to life the Country Park and the impact of people caring, being enthusiastic and sharing their knowledge of the natural and cultural heritage is infectious. Managers, staff and volunteers have an influence on visitor safety and enjoyment of the area and ensure that the site is managed correctly.
- Landscape: The park offers an opportunity for people to experience and explore the natural environment and presents excellent views of, and access to, the wider countryside. Much of the recreational activity is based upon the attractiveness of the landscape.

- Closeness to nature: The combination of habitats that have evolved since the Canal was built and the narrow shape of the site means that the Country Park is a great place for people to get close to nature. This led to the site being declared a Local Nature Reserve – not because it holds particularly rare wildlife in need of special protection, but because people can easily engage with the natural world and see beautiful wildflowers, herons, kingfishers, swans, dragonflies and magnificent oak trees just a few metres away.
- Accessibility: Most of the Country Park is easy to access both in the sense that the towpath is flat and well surfaced, and in the sense that it is easy to get to. The surrounding pavement, road, bus and train networks and the large number of access points and car parks dotted along its length mean that it is relatively easy and convenient to get to whatever section of the canal one wishes to visit.

24.2.2 Challenges

What is also clear from the assessment is that the Country Park is not static; the park is dynamic and can respond to changing needs and pressures. However, a number of challenges face the Country Park over the forthcoming years, and these include:

- Funding: As with all local authorities at present, Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council are under huge pressure to achieve savings and this provides a constant threat to the standards of management and maintenance of the Country Park. Opportunities to increase income have been sought and realised over the last decade and have significantly offset the funding cuts which have been made by both councils during this period. Endeavours to further increase income should be made but opportunities are limited, and efforts should focus on reminding current funders of the huge benefits the Country Park brings with its relatively small revenue budget, so as to avert further cuts.
- Local government reorganisation: There is currently great uncertainty as to the make-up of the unitary authority/ authorities that will succeed Devon County Council and where the Country Park will fit within that organisation. The change will bring with it potential benefits or challenges relating to funding, staffing and departmental support.
- Development: The Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension and other proposed housing developments close to the Canal which may take place are likely to significantly increase pressure on the Country Park and could also have a detrimental effect of the Canal's setting. Careful consideration needs to be given to how the potential benefits of these schemes can be harnessed and how the negative aspects can be minimised.
- Management issues: The Canal Ranger service recognise that there are number of ongoing management issues which will continue to need to be addressed over the forthcoming years. These include:
 - Promoting safe and considerate use of the Country Park (especially cycling under bridges, dog fouling and littering)
 - Managing conflicts of interest between different user groups

- Considering the impact of increased recreational activity upon visitor experience and wildlife
- Promoting the health and well-being benefits of visiting the Country Park
- Making better strategic links with Mid Devon District Council / within the new unitary authority
- Maintaining buildings and infrastructure

25. Aims and objectives

25.1 Aim 1: To provide a pleasant, accessible and informative welcome to the Country Park for all visitors and members of the local community.

Objectives

- 1a. Provide easily accessible and accurate pre-visit information.
- 1b. Ensure the Country Park and its car parks are well signposted
- 1c. Ensure Country Park entrances, car parks and picnic sites are clean and well-maintained
- 1d. Improve the accessibility and visitor experience for visitors with disabilities
- 1e. Orientate visitors through good design / waymarking / signage.
- 1f. Rejuvenate / update on-site interpretation panels and noticeboards as required.
- 1g. Seek to support a gradual increase in visitor numbers.
- 1h. Seek opportunities to encourage more visits at quieter times of the year
- 1i. Seek opportunities to encourage visitors to travel to the Country Park by foot, cycle or public transport

25.2 Aim 2: To provide a healthy, safe and secure park for all users.

Objectives

- 2a. Ensure that all relevant health and safety regulations and policies are adhered to
- 2b. Ensure site and premises are kept in a safe condition
- 2c. Ensure staff and volunteers are adequately trained to safely undertake their work
- 2d. Enforce byelaws and promote codes of conduct.
- 2e. Provide visitor safety information as appropriate
- 2f. Promote health and well-being benefits of recreation and volunteering within the Country Park

25.3 Aim 3: To provide an attractive country park, which achieves a consistently high standard of maintenance and cleanliness.

Objectives

- 3a. Strive to keep the Country Park litter free
- 3b. Deter dog fouling
- 3c. Ensure picnic sites, towpath edges and any other amenity areas are kept tidy

- 3d. Ensure towpath is easily accessible
- 3e. Promote tree safety
- 3f. Replace felled trees where appropriate (especially in hedgerows)
- 3g. Manage vegetation to enable established recreational activities to take place
- 3h. Undertake small scale dredging work if and when required
- 3i. Maintain premises
- 3j. Maintain equipment and replace / add to as necessary / affordable
- 3k. Undertake works to reduce future maintenance burden
- 3L. Manage water levels to support recreational use

25.4 Aim 4: To advocate and demonstrate sustainable environmental management.

Objectives

- 4a. Minimise use of pesticides and store chemicals safely
- 4b. Explain / demonstrate environmentally sustainable management to visitors and local communities where opportunities arise
- 4c. Purchase environmentally friendly consumables.
- 4e. Undertake measures to reduce likelihood / impacts of low water levels
- 4f. Prepare for and respond to any pollution incidents
- 4g. Seek to minimise carbon footprint of the Country Park

24.5 Aim 5: To protect, enhance and promote enjoyment and understanding of the special biodiversity, landscape and heritage value of the Country Park.

Objectives

Biodiversity

- 5a. Undertake wildlife monitoring and surveys to inform management
- 5b. Undertake measures to maintain / improve / monitor water quality
- 5c. Control spread of alien invasive species
- 5d. Act to reduce domination by rank / invasive species
- 5e. Manage hedgerows for wildlife, within constraints of space, public access and land ownership

- 5f. Manage trees for wildlife, within the constraints of public safety, established recreational use and land ownership
- 5g. Manage banks and grassland areas for wildlife and manage natural succession in these areas
- 5h. Manage ponds for wildlife
- 5i. Undertake habitat improvement and habitat creation works as appropriate
- 5j. Raise awareness of the Country Park's biodiversity and provide interpretation
- 5k. Seek to positively influence land management in the wider canal corridor to the benefit of wildlife

Landscape

- 5l. Retain and restore hedgerows and standard trees
- 5m. Keep listed structures clear of scrubby vegetation (e.g. Ivy and Buddleia)
- 5n. Preserve / open up views along the canal (especially towards bridges) and viewpoints from the canal (especially towards attractive landscape features such as hills, church spires etc)
- 5o. Seek to minimise visual intrusions

Heritage

- 5p. Undertake / commission inspections of historic structures as specified in Asset Management Plan
- 5q. Commission maintenance and repairs as necessary
- 5r. Manage vegetation on and around historic structures
- 5s. Interpret the history and historic structures of the Country Park

25.6 Aim 6: To engage local communities in the management of the Country Park and to ensure it provides a high standard of facilities and services enabling a range of recreational activities to be enjoyed

Objectives

- 6a. Support the continued function of the JAC as a forum for local community and stakeholder representatives to discuss the management of the Country Park and provide advice to DCC
- 6b. Provide opportunities for people to engage through volunteering
- 6c. Support the Friends of the Grand Western Canal
- 6d. Provide a programme of events for local communities

6e. Maintain and improve the key facilities provided within the Country Park

25.7 Aim 7: To use appropriate marketing and communication techniques to encourage use of the Country Park, and to develop understanding and enhance the visitor experience

Objectives

7a. Undertake market research to guide future management

7b. Use appropriate communication techniques to connect to current visitors, potential visitors and local communities

7c. Promote the canal as a tourism attraction as well as a facility for local communities

7d. Provide educational opportunities for schools and youth groups

7e. Use a range of interpretation techniques to enrich visitors' understanding of the Canal's heritage and wildlife

25.8 Aim 8: To ensure a high standard of service through effective resource management and delivery of the management plan

Objectives

8a. Manage work programme efficiently and flexibly to achieve aims whilst adapting to changing circumstances

8b. Recruit and manage staff and volunteers and develop their competence and capacity

8c. Secure and manage financial resources to optimum benefit of the Country Park

8d. Engage with stakeholders to adapt / refine / add new management actions, as required

Chapter Four: How will we get there?

26. Action Plan

Notes:

Target years: 1 = 2026, 5=2030,

All = all years

Any = whenever relevant

£ = Subject to additional funding being available to make identified improvements / repairs

Priority: 1 = highest, 5 = lowest

Highlighting: None = not yet undertaken, green = completed, yellow = partially completed

Aim 1: To provide a pleasant, accessible and informative welcome to the Country Park for all visitors and members of the local community.			
Objective	Prescription	Target year(s)	Priority (1-5)
1a. Provide easily accessible and accurate pre-visit information.	1. Keep website up to date	All	1
	2. Update and reprint Canal Visitor Guide bi-annually and distribute	2,4	1
	3. Keep 'information gatekeepers' up to date on current management	All	2
1b. Ensure the Country Park and its car parks are well signposted	1. Inspect and maintain car parking signage in the Canal Basin car park	All	2
	2. Inspect and maintain signage at outlying car parks	All	3
	3. Audit and improve brown signs provision to Canal Basin	Any £	2
1c. Ensure Country Park entrances, car parks, public toilets and picnic sites are clean and well-maintained	1. Undertake inspections as per Inspection Regime (Appendix 5)	All	1
	2. Promptly resolve any issues (litter, graffiti, vandalism, breakages etc)	All	1
	3. Remove any damaging vegetation growing on the Canal Basin walls	All	2
	4. Maintain wildflower bed beside entrance to Canal Basin car park	All	2
1d. Improve the accessibility and visitor experience for visitors with disabilities	1. Commission / undertake an Equality of access audit and respond to recommendations	1 / 2 £	2
	2. Annually inspect towpath condition and organise resurfacing / edge scraping as necessary	All £	2
	3. Ensure all new panels and publications follow good practice for visual accessibility	All	1

	4. Consider resurfacing eastern end of Canal Basin car park and creating an extra disabled parking space, if funding can be secured	Any £	2
1e. Orientate visitors through good design / waymarking / signage.	1. Inspect and maintain orientation signage within the Country Park	All	2
1f. Rejuvenate / update on-site interpretation panels and noticeboards as required.	1. Review displays in Visitor Centre and consider opportunities for new displays	All £	3
	2. Update and replace Waytown Limekilns panel	1 £	3
	3. Update and replace Ebear Dragonfly and Aqueduct panels	1 / 2 £	3
1g. Seek to support a steady increase in visitor numbers.	1. Promote greater recreational use of the canal between Halberton and Burlescombe	All	3
	2. Review parking space provision / lining in Canal Basin. Create new spaces if possible	Any £	2
1h. Seek opportunities to encourage more visits at quieter times of the year	1. Use social media to encourage visits in autumn, winter and spring	All	4
	2. Engage with external media to encourage visits in autumn, winter and spring	All	4
1i. Seek opportunities to encourage visitors to travel to site by foot, cycle or public transport	1. Promote sustainable transport options in all appropriate Canal publications	All	3
Aim 2: To continue to provide a healthy, safe and secure park for all users.			
2a. Ensure that all relevant health and safety regulations and policies are adhered to	1. Annually review risk assessments and safe working procedures	All	1
	2. Ensure all contractors are suitably qualified, briefed and insured and undertake risk assessments for their work	All	1
	3. Pass 3-yearly DCC H&S audit	1 / 4	1
2b. Ensure site and premises are kept in a safe condition	1. Undertake / commission all requisite inspections of site and premises as per Inspection Regime (Appendix 5)	All	1
	2. Respond rapidly to any damage / vandalism or other safety issues	All	1
2c. Ensure staff and volunteers are adequately trained to safely undertake their work	1. Ensure all legally-required training and requalification is undertaken by staff	All	1
	2. Identify opportunities for non-legally required training and refreshers as appropriate	Any	2
	3. Identify training opportunities for volunteers as appropriate	Any	3
2d. Enforce byelaws	1. Ensure Canal Rangers wear uniform to establish authority	All	2

and promote codes of conduct.	2. Canal Rangers to challenge inappropriate, inconsiderate or non-permitted behaviour and activities whenever they see it.	All	2
	3. Promote codes of conduct in noticeboards, Visitor Guide and website	All	2
	4. Run periodic campaigns promoting considerate dog ownership	2 / 4	3
	5. Canal Ranger Team to maintain CSAS accreditation and to use powers and training as appropriate	All	2
2e. Provide visitor safety information as appropriate	1. Provide on-site health and safety information including emergency procedures, first aid availability and emergency contact details.	All	2
	2. Maintain and promote Horse-drawn barge zone safety signage	All	2
2f. Promote health and well-being benefits of recreation and volunteering within the Country Park	1. Continue to support Tiverton Walk and Talk programme	All	3
	2. Promote all of the main recreational opportunities in Country Park publications	All	2
	3. Identify opportunities to make volunteering more useful / meaningful for volunteers (e.g. offer training?)	All	3
	4. Identify and promote voluntary opportunities other than supervised practical work	Any	3
Aim 3: To provide an attractive country park, which achieves a consistently high standard of maintenance and cleanliness.			
3a. Strive to keep the Country Park clean and litter free	1. Undertake litter-picking as per the Inspection Regime	All	1
	2. Encourage visitors to take their rubbish home	All	2
	3. Provide litter bins wherever litter is generated on site (i.e. shops/cafes) and at the play park	All	2
	4. Facilitate litter-picking by volunteers by providing litter pickers, bags and bag holders	All	3
	5. Respond promptly to any vandalism or damage	Any	1
3b. Deter dog fouling	1. Provide bins for dog waste at all main access points	All	2
	2. Run periodic campaigns promoting considerate dog ownership	2 / 4	3
	3. Promote enforcement action against anyone caught dog fouling	All	2
3c. Ensure picnic sites, towpath edges and any other amenity areas are kept tidy	1. Undertake established grass cutting regimes	All	1
	2. Undertake maintenance and repairs of walls, benches, fences, gates, signs etc as required	Any	2

3d. Ensure towpath is easily accessible	1. Undertake annual inspection of towpath condition to inform any significant resurfacing or edge scraping required.	All	2
	2. Undertake resurfacing / edge scraping as required/ affordable	Any £	2
	3. Undertake established annual bank and hedge cutting regimes	All	1
	4. Undertake works to remove puddles under bridges	1	3
	5. Repair bankside erosion gullies (dog holes) that encroach on the edge of the towpath	Any	2
	6. Seek to minimise towpath obstructions / closures due to maintenance works and schedule works to minimise impacts	Any	2
3e. Promote tree safety	1. Undertake tree safety inspection regime as per DCC policy	All	1
	2. Organise / undertake tree safety works recommended by tree consultants or that clearly need to be undertaken	All	1
	3. Avoid placing benches under mature trees	Any	2
	4. Undertake minor tree works to reduce future safety issues (e.g. formative pruning, thinning, crown-lifting)	Any	2
3f. Replace felled trees where appropriate (especially in hedgerows)	1. If no obvious successor tree is present, then plant a replacement of an appropriate species	Any	3
	2. Whenever hedgelaying, seek to leave suitable new standard trees at an appropriate spacing	Any	2
3g. Manage vegetation to enable established recreational activities to take place	1. Undertake weed-cutting during spring, summer and early autumn	All	1
	2. Trim back overhanging offside branches and crownlift towpath side trees, as necessary	All	2
	3. Liaise with angling club on the cutting of fishing swims	All	3
	4. Undertake removal of small sections of encroaching reeds each winter	All	2
	5. Undertake established annual bank and hedge cutting regimes	All	1
3h. Undertake small scale dredging work if and when required	1. Collate feedback from boaters / anglers and consider any spot dredging that may be required taking into account urgency and cost.	Any £	2
3i. Maintain premises	1. Undertake Inspection Regime and all premises compliance checks	All	1
	2. Report any significant premises issues to the DCC estates team	Any	1
	3. Undertake / commission small scale maintenance and repairs to premises	Any £	2

	4. Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings	1	3
	5. Repaint / replace bridge nameplates as necessary	Any	3
3j. Maintain equipment and replace / add to as necessary / affordable	1. Undertake annual servicing of machinery	All	1
	2. Consider purchase of battery powered rather than petrol machinery where feasible	Any £	2
3k. Undertake works to reduce future maintenance burden	1. Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.	Any £	4
	2. Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations	Any £	4
3L. Manage water levels to support recreational use	1. Check water levels and weather forecast daily and seek keep levels within the target range without rapid increases / decreases	All	1
	2. Continue to pursue improved water transfer system at Fenacre Bridge, and other potential water inputs that may be used to supply the canal with water if levels are low	1	1
	3. Seek to seal any leaks that are identified and monitor any unsealed leaks regularly	Any	1
Aim 4: To advocate and demonstrate sustainable environmental management.			
4a. Minimise use of pesticides and use / store chemicals safely	1. Seek alternative methods of managing weeds (e.g. mulching, pulling, burning)	All	3
	2. Use ecoplugs for stump treatment rather than painting herbicide on stump	All	2
	3. Store fuels, oils and pesticides in secure, bunded container. Store paints in dedicated container.	All	1
4b. Explain / demonstrate environmentally sustainable management to visitors and local communities where opportunities arise	1. Use social media, press releases, JAC progress reports and newsletters to highlight such work	Any	3
	2. Organise events that focus on environmentally sustainable management / practices within the Country Park (e.g. bird/bat box workshops, hedge planting volunteer days)	Any	3
4c. Purchase environmentally friendly consumables.	1. Use biodegradable hydraulic oil and chainsaw bar oil and use HVO instead of diesel	All	1
	2. Purchase environmentally-friendly products	All	3
4e. Undertake measures to reduce likelihood / impacts of low water levels	1. Continue to pursue improved water transfer system at Fenacre Bridge, and other potential water inputs that may be used to supply the canal with water if levels are low	1	1

	2. Seek to seal any leaks that are identified and monitor any unsealed leaks regularly	Any	1
4f. Prepare for and respond to any pollution incidents	1. Maintain a spill kit for use on small scale pollution incidents	All	1
	2. Canal Ranger Service to attend spill response training	Any £	2
	3. EA and Angling Club to be informed immediately of any potentially serious pollution incidents	Any	1
4g. Seek to minimise carbon footprint of the Country Park	1. Encourage sustainable travel options for visitors	All	2
	2. Minimise vehicle use by Canal Ranger Service through efficient planning of tasks and through use of electronic communication	All	2
	3. Reduce use of petrol / diesel powered equipment through switching to battery powered or manual equipment, as appropriate	Any £	3
	4. Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings	1	3
	5. Ensure all equipment and machinery is well-maintained / regularly serviced	All	2
Aim 5: To protect, enhance and promote enjoyment and understanding of the special biodiversity, landscape and heritage value of the Country Park.			
Biodiversity			
5a. Undertake wildlife monitoring and surveys to inform management	1. Identify groups / species that it would be useful to monitor/survey	1	2
	2. Seek to recruit volunteers / organisations to undertake monitoring / survey work	1	3
	3. Continue existing monitoring (WeBS)	All	2
	4. Commission macrophyte survey	3 / 4	3
5b. Undertake measures to maintain / improve water quality	1. Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.	Any £	4
	2. Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations	Any £	4
	3. Clean out silt traps once full (including Waytown silt trap in year 1)	Any	2
	4. Undertake weed-cutting during spring, summer and early autumn	All	1
	5. Retain and extend where possible the fenced offside buffer strips	Any	2
	6. Identify and pursue affordable water quality monitoring opportunities	All £	1

5c. Control spread of alien invasive species	1. Maintain vigilance for newly arrived invasive alien species and react quickly to eradicate any potentially damaging new arrivals	All	1
	2. Raise awareness of alien invasive species amongst visitors and neighbours and encourage them to take measures to prevent their spread	All	2
	3. Commission contractor to undertake periodic chemical control of Fringed Lily, under EA licence	1 / 3 / 5	2
5d. Act to reduce domination by rank / invasive species	1. Undertake weed-cutting during spring, summer and early autumn	All	1
	2. Undertake annual bank cutting regime	All	1
	3. Cut and rake off grassland wildlife areas	All	3
	4. Reduce nutrient enrichment of banks by discouraging dog fouling	All	2
5e. Manage hedgerows for wildlife, within constraints of space, public access and land ownership	1. Undertake annual winter hedge trimming regime: tractor-mounted flail siding and topping hedge, but leaving some sections (c.100-200m) un-topped each year to grow on, ready to be laid in subsequent years	All	1
	2. Lay sections of hedge each year, as appropriate	All	3
	3. Plant hedging whips to fill gaps	Any	3
	4. Plant new sections of hedgerow, as appropriate	Any	4
5f. Manage trees for wildlife, within the constraints of public safety, established recreational use and land ownership	1. Promote new standard trees in hedgerows either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying	All	3
	2. Seek advice from tree consultant on any significant proposed work on mature trees, to ensure it is necessary and appropriate	Any	2
	3. Wherever possible retain dead standing wood and manage senescence of trees by gradual reduction rather than immediate felling, when safe and affordable to do so.	Any	2
	4. When felling, consider retention of the trunk as a monolith (or 'ecostump') where safe to do so	Any	3
	5. Plant replacement trees where appropriate and select a range of native species typical of the region.	Any	3
	6. Continue coppice regimes or begin where appropriate (such as in cuttings or along willow-dominated offside banks)	All	3
5g. Manage banks and grassland areas for	1. Undertake annual towpath-side bank cutting regime	All	1

wildlife and manage natural succession in these areas	2. Undertake annual cutting of offside banks and embankments not currently dominated by brambles or heavily shaded by tree growth	All	3
	3. Annually cut and rake recently created wildflower meadow areas beside Bamfylde Close, Ebear Pond and Sampford Peverell Community Orchard in late summer/ early autumn.	All	2
5h. Manage ponds for wildlife	1. Re-coppice trees around Boehill Pond to reduce shading	4	3
	2. Trim back overhanging trees at Long Pond by c.10% each year	All	3
5i. Undertake habitat improvement and habitat creation works as appropriate	1. Build and install 10 bird boxes / bat boxes each year (replacing existing ones as they become rotten)	All	4
	2. Seek opportunities to create new ponds	Any	4
	3. Make plans / funding bids for use of land beside Fenacre Bridge as new silt trap / reed bed / pond system	Any £	4
	4. Create log piles, grass snake nest piles, reptile hibernacula, wildflower meadow areas etc, as opportunities arise	Any	3
5j. Raise awareness of the Country Park's biodiversity and provide interpretation	1. Refresh / update Ebear dragonfly panel	1 / 2	3
	2. Include wildlife elements in new interpretation / information panels in noticeboards	1 / 2 / 3	2
	3. Seek opportunities to improve / expand wildlife elements of Visitor Centre touchscreen system	Any	3
	4. Seek to engage in appropriate nature-focussed projects run by DCC or external organisations	Any	3
	5. Include nature-themed activities in annual events programme (e.g. bat walks)	All	2
	6. Provide nature-themed activities/learning in Ranger-led school visits	All	2
5k. Seek to positively influence land management in the wider canal corridor to the benefit of wildlife	1. Engage with MDDC, DCC colleagues and developers regarding use, development and management of Tiverton Eastern Urban extension green infrastructure land beside the Country Park	All	2
	2. Take opportunities to promote beneficial management when talking to adjacent land and homeowners	Any	2
	3. Engage with JAC and relevant DCC teams to respond to adjacent planning applications that may impact Canal wildlife.	Any	2

Landscape			
5l. Retain and restore hedgerows and standard trees	1. Undertake annual winter hedge trimming regime: tractor-mounted flail siding and topping hedge, but leaving some sections (c.100-200m) un-topped each year to grow on, ready to be laid in subsequent years	All	1
	2. Lay sections of hedge each year, as appropriate	All	3
	3. Plant hedging whips to fill gaps	Any	3
	4. Plant new sections of hedgerow, as appropriate	Any	4
	5. Promote new standard trees in hedgerows to either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying	All	3
5m. Keep listed structures clear of scrubby vegetation	1. Undertake an annual survey of ivy/scrubby growth on historic structures to inform annual removal works. Undertake this removal work	All	2
5n. Preserve / open up views along the canal and viewpoints from the canal	1. Undertake annual survey of views on the approach to bridges from the towpath and views from the towpath towards attractive landscapes. Use to inform vegetation management works.	All	3
	2. Cut periodic gaps in the bankside vegetation to achieve the multiple uses of providing fishing swims, providing views of the canal (once bankside vegetation has grown up) and providing points where boats can pull up to the bank.	All	2
5o. Seek to minimise visual intrusions	1. Use consistent and appropriate design themes for Country Park infrastructure	All	2
	2. Screen unattractive visual intrusions through planting trees / allowing hedges to grow taller	Any	3
	3. Ensure visual results of management works (e.g. brash, woodchip, weed, ruts in verges) are left as tidy and inobtrusive as possible	All	2
	4. Minimise the use of signs along the towpath focussing on placing them at access points and in noticeboards wherever possible	Any	2
	5. Respond swiftly to rectify vandalism, graffiti or damage	Any	1
	6. Maintain good relationships wherever possible with adjacent landowners and residents to build influence and deter / respond effectively to visually intrusive activities or developments within the Canal corridor	Any	2

	7. Oppose inappropriate developments which would impact on the Canal corridor through consultation responses from appropriate DCC officers and through the JAC	Any	1
Heritage			
5p. Undertake / commission inspections of historic structures as specified in Asset Management Plan	1. Liaise with the DCC Bridges and Structures Team to organise / undertake inspections	Any	1
	2. Undertake casual assessments of historic structures whenever passing to identify and report any obvious faults	All	2
5q. Commission maintenance and repairs as necessary	1. Liaise with the DCC Bridges and Structures Team to organise / undertake maintenance or repairs, as required	Any	1
5r. Manage vegetation on and around historic structures	1. Remove scrubby vegetation growing on historic structures	All	2
	2. Manage vegetation around structures to reduce potential for damage and to keep structures visible / accessible	All	3
5s. Interpret the history and historic structures of the Country Park	1. Refresh the Aqueduct interpretation panel	1 / 2	3
	2. Refresh Waytown Limekiln panel (rewrite text)	1	3
	3. Consider other possible locations for heritage interpretation panels (Ayshford Chapel? Whipcott Wharf?)	Any £	4
	4. Seek opportunities to improve/expand heritage elements of Visitor Centre touchscreen system	Any	3
	5. Provide heritage-themed activities/learning in Ranger-led school visits	All	2
	7. Seek to engage in appropriate heritage - focussed projects run by DCC or external organisations (e.g. Heritage Open Days)	Any	3
Aim 6: To engage local communities in the management of the Country Park and to ensure it provides a high standard of facilities and services enabling a range of recreational activities to be enjoyed			
6a. Support the continued function of the Joint Advisory Committee as a forum for local community and stakeholder	1. Canal Manager to attend all JAC meetings, to draft Progress Reports and to organise annual site visits	All	1
	2. DCC to provide JAC members with updates on significant projects / issues and to respond to queries from JAC members, as required	Any	1

representatives to discuss the management of the Country Park and provide advice to DCC	3. Canal Manager to assist in finding representatives for stakeholders if and when required	Any	2
	4. Work to ensure the continuation of the JAC in a similar advisory role under the forthcoming unitary authority that will own and manage the Canal	Any	1
6b. Provide opportunities for people to engage through volunteering	1. Provide a range of opportunities for practical volunteering	All	1
	2. Explore opportunities for other forms of volunteering (e.g. leading walks / events; archiving, managing photo library)	Any	3
6c. Support the Friends of the Grand Western Canal	1. Continue to provide a monthly column for the friends group newsletter	All	2
	2. Explore opportunities to help the friends group relaunch a Volunteer Warden Scheme	Any	3
	3. Discuss other ways the Canal Ranger Service can help to support the friends group	1	2
6d. Provide a programme of events for local communities	1. Organise and deliver an annual events programme themed around the Canal's wildlife, heritage and recreational opportunities	All	2
	2. Seek opportunities to provide new events	All	3
	3. Schedule events to maximise participation and to fit with target audience's likely availability	All	3
	4. Set charges for events at a level that will cover costs or (with high demand events) make a small profit.	All	2
6e. Maintain and improve the key facilities provided within the Country Park	1. Towpath: Annually inspect towpath condition and organise resurfacing / edge scraping as necessary	All £	2
	2. Towpath: Undertake annual bank and hedge cutting regime and crownlift trees above the towpath as necessary	All	1
	3. Canal channel: Undertake trimming back of overhanging branches as required	All	2
	4. Canal channel: Organise spot dredging as required	Any £	2
	5. Canal channel: Undertake weed-cutting during spring, summer and autumn	All	1
	6. Canal channel: Clear sections of marginal reed as they begin to encroach on the central channel	All	2
	7. Car parks: Review parking space provision / lining in Canal Basin. Create new spaces if possible, including a disabled parking space	Any £	3

	8. Car parks: Monitor condition of car park surfaces and lining and maintain as necessary	All £	2
	9. Public toilets: Organise cleaning and maintenance to ensure toilets are functional and presentable	All	2
	10. Public toilets: Investigate options and seek funding for refurbishing the public toilets	Any £	3
	11. Visitor Centre: Ensure the centre is well maintained and that information is kept up to date	All	1
	12. Visitor Centre: Consider options for improvements / additional features / pages to the touchscreen system	Any	3
	13. Visitor Centre: Consider replacements to existing hands-on activities	Any £	3
	14. Noticeboards and panels: Ensure information provided is up to date and factually correct and that posts / structures are sound	All	1
	15. Noticeboards and panels: Refresh the Aqueduct and Dragonfly interpretation panels	1 / 2	3
	16. Noticeboards and panels: Refresh Waytown Limekiln panel (rewrite text)	1	2
	17. Noticeboards and panels: Consider other possible locations for heritage interpretation panels	Any £	4
	18. Play Park / trim trail: Undertake Inspection Regime and organise annual safety inspection by qualified inspector	All	1
	19. Play Park / trim trail: Organise prompt repairs as required	Any	1
	20. Benches and seats: Monitor condition of benches and seats and repair / replace as necessary	All	2
	21. Benches and seats: Stain all Streetmaster seats and benches annually	All	3
	22. Slipway: Repair or replace slipway gate	1	2
Aim 7: To use appropriate marketing and communication techniques to encourage use of the Country Park, and to develop understanding and enhance the visitor experience			
7a. Undertake market research to guide future management	1. Undertake a visitor survey before the end of year 5 to inform the review of this plan	4 / 5	2
	2. Monitor and respond to other forms of visitor and stakeholder feedback	All	1
7b. Use appropriate communication techniques to connect	1. Continue to use a wide range of print, web and social media platforms to provide information and engage with visitors and local communities	All	1

to current visitors, potential visitors and local communities	2. Seek to increase positive media coverage by identifying stories which will capture attention and by generating more press releases	All	2
	3. Raise the Canal Ranger Service's profile on social media by posting more frequently and looking for engaging photos of our work	All	2
7c. Promote the canal as a tourism attraction as well as a facility for local communities	1. Engage with Visit Mid Devon and Mid Devon Attractions Group to raise profile of the canal and encourage visits	All	2
	2. Deliver batches of Canal Visitor Guides to local TICs, accommodation providers and pubs and shops to ensure it is available locally	All	2
	3. Explore options for developing a more engaging and modern stand-alone, website for promoting the Canal as a visitor attraction.	Any £	3
7d. Provide educational opportunities for schools and youth groups	1. Provide affordable and flexible opportunities for schools and youth groups to enjoy ranger-led visits learning about their environment and heritage	All	2
	2. Promote these opportunities to ensure teachers and leaders are aware	All	2
7e. Use a range of interpretation techniques to enrich visitors' understanding of the Canal's heritage and wildlife	1. Replace / refresh existing interpretation panels as they become worn / out of date	All	2
	2. Organise and deliver an annual programme of events	All	2
	3. Develop and use a proforma for identifying aims of events and how they will be achieved	1	3
Aim 8: To ensure a high standard of service through effective resource management and delivery of the management plan			
8a. Manage work programme efficiently and flexibly to achieve aims whilst adapting to changing circumstances	1. Check this Action Plan section regularly (at least quarterly) to inform forthcoming works programme	All	1
	2. Drive efficiency through careful organisation and grouping of tasks to fit human resources and circumstances	All	1
8b. Recruit and manage staff and volunteers and develop their competence and capacity	1. Ensure staff/volunteers hold the necessary competency tickets for equipment / activities they use/undertake	All	1
	2. Identify opportunities for personal development through appropriate learning methods	All	2
	3. Encourage staff and volunteers to join the Countryside Management Association and take advantage of membership benefits	All	3

8c. Secure and manage financial resources to optimum benefit of the Country Park	1. Manage available budgets responsibly, seeking to derive the maximum benefit for the Country Park	All	1
	2. Promote the benefits of the Country Park and respond to funding reviews effectively to protect / increase funding	Any	1
	3. Discuss funding arrangements with MDDC	1	1
	4. Prepare and apply for Countryside Stewardship Capital Grants when the scheme reopens	Any	2
	5. Seek external funding for all new facilities	Any	2
	6. Seek opportunities to increase income	Any	2
8d. Engage with stakeholders to adapt / refine / add new management actions and to update the plan as required	1. Report on progress at JAC meetings, including annual review at March meetings	All	1
	2. Gather and share feedback from other stakeholders and visitors	All	2
	3. Consult with the JAC on any significant proposed changes in Country Park management approaches	Any	2
	4. Fundamentally review the whole plan during year 5	5	1

Chapter Five: How will we know when we've got there?

27. Monitoring and performance

27.1 Monitoring

The management plan will be continually reviewed using the process outlined below.

Annual review

Progress with the action plan will be reviewed by the Canal Manager. The action plan will also be reviewed by the JAC at its March meeting each year and updated or revised if necessary. Actions not completed in each year will be moved to subsequent years or deleted, as appropriate.

Revisions

Where new strategies, opportunities or policies are introduced, or where circumstances (e.g. funding levels) change significantly during the lifetime of the plan, these will be noted and incorporated into the plan as necessary.

Fundamental Review

A fundamental review will be undertaken in year five of the management plan. All partners and stakeholders will be consulted, and a full evaluation of the plan will be undertaken outlining achievements and whether objectives have been met. At this stage another five-year action plan will be developed.

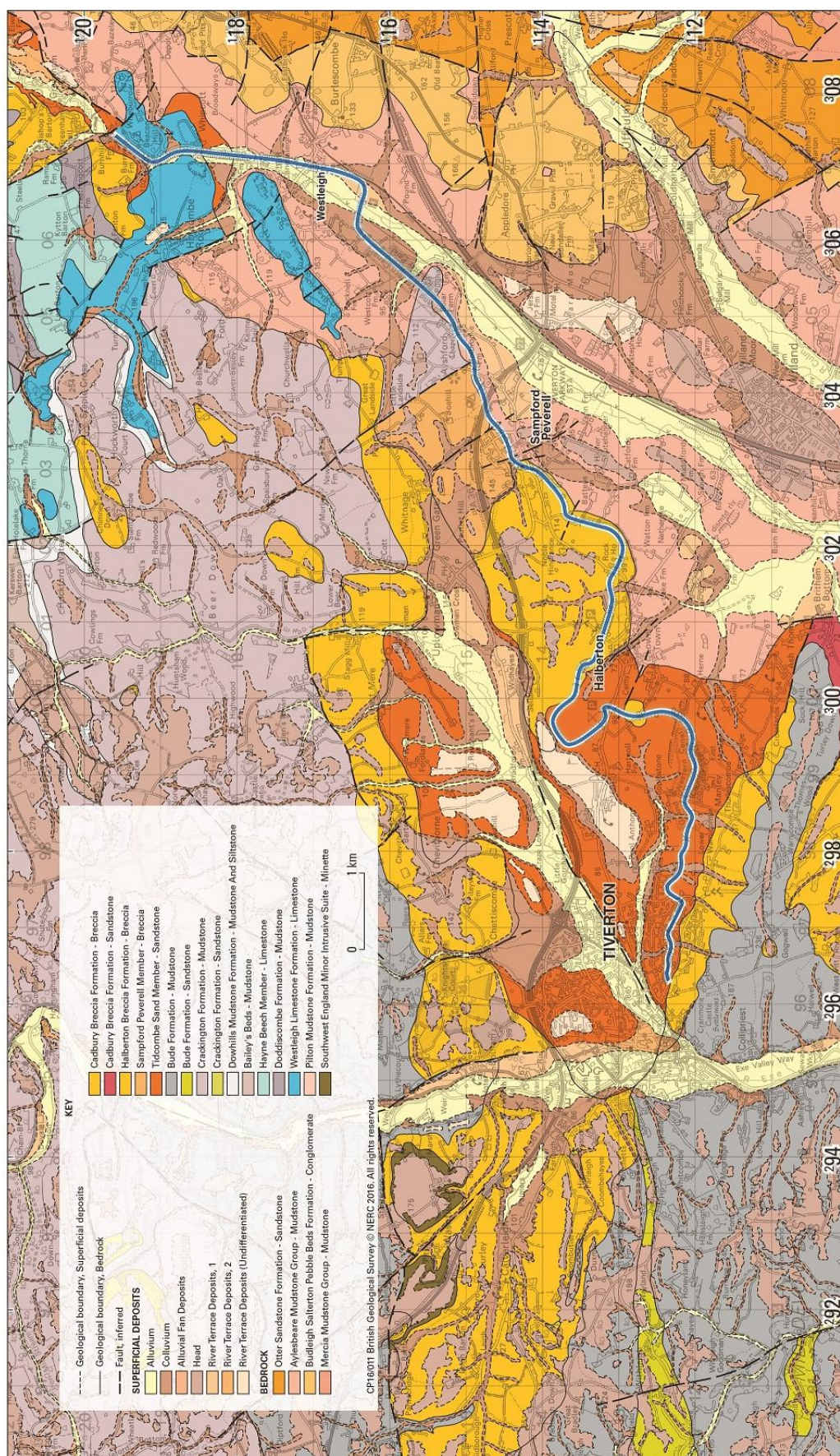
27.2 Performance monitoring

Performance will be measured using the following indicators:

- Green Flag Award scores and judge's feedback
- Other independently judged assessments (e.g. South West in Bloom *Pride in Parks* award score)
- Satisfaction levels in visitor surveys
- Feedback from Joint Advisory Committee (collectively and from individual members)
- Feedback from visitors
- MDDC's funding performance indicators for the Country Park (visitor numbers, number of canal-related businesses, number of school children on Ranger-led visits, and number of volunteer hours)

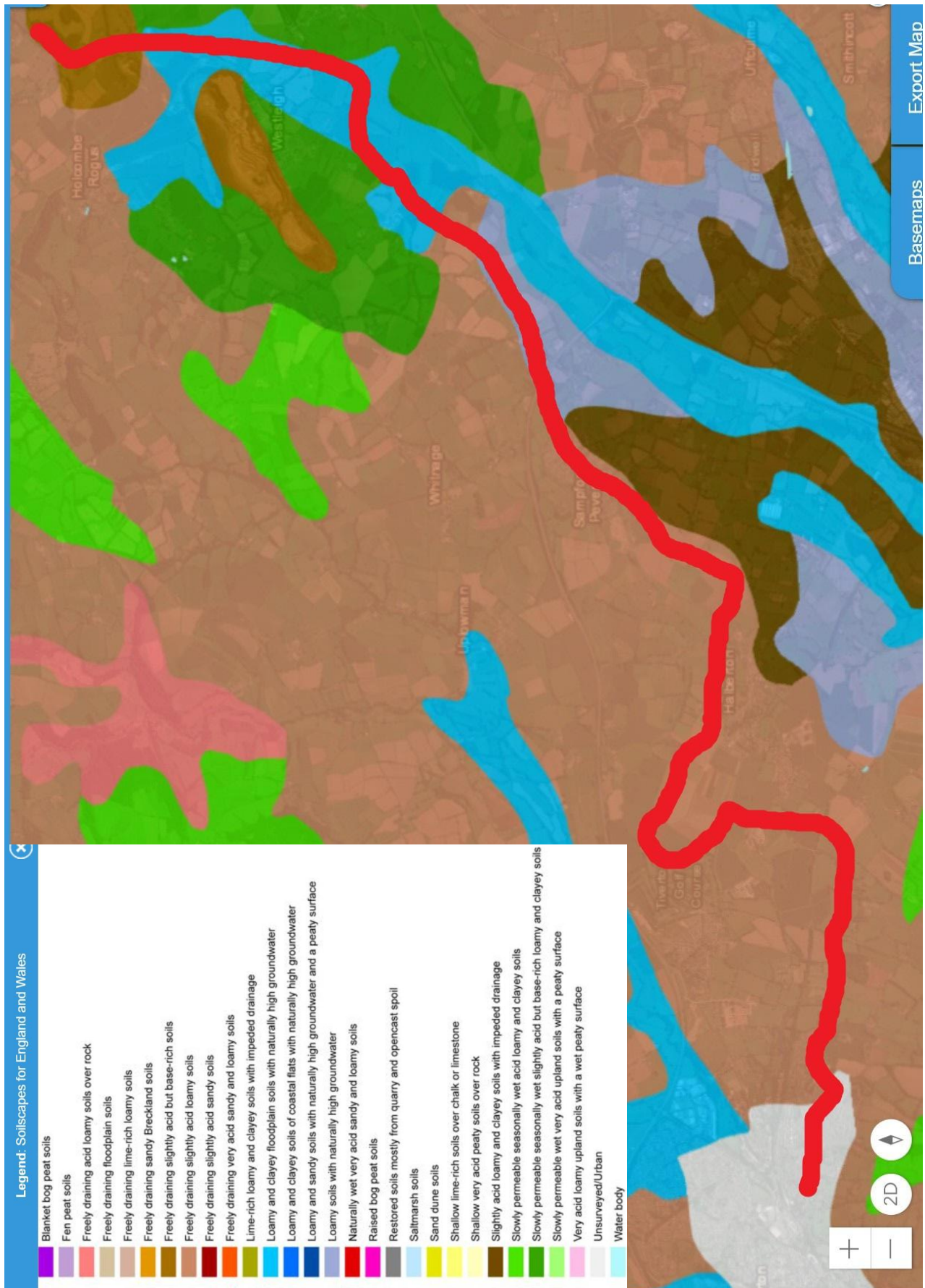
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Geology map



Permit Number CP16011 British Geological Survey © NERC 2016. All rights reserved.
 © Crown copyright and database rights 2016 OS 100019783

Soilscapes map – Courtesy of UK Soil Observatory. Line of Canal indicated in red



Appendix 2 – Historic structures

Structure	Reference number	Grade	UID No.	Comments	Grid reference
Tiverton Parish					
The Moorings				Built 1820	SS 9631, 1234
Canal Basin lime kilns		II	485238	Listed 1/3/93	SS 9632, 1240
Tidcombe Bridge	MD2/8/171	II	485428	1810-14	SS 9735, 1222
Milestone 1					SS 9765, 1227
Warnicombe Bridge					SS 9813, 1212
Manley Bridge	MD2/8/118	II	485315	1810-14	SS 9866, 1215
Halberton Parish					
Milestone 2					SS 9914, 1202
East Manley Bridge	MD8/1/143	II	95332	1810-14	
Aqueduct	MD8/1/140			Not listed, but on draft list	SS 9971, 1221
Crownhill Bridge	MD8/1/153	II	95340	1796-1814	SS 9974, 1274
Tiverton Road Bridge	MD8/1/146	II	95334	1796-1814	SS 9984, 1310
Milestone 3					SS 9983, 1296
Tiverton Road Bridge wharf					SS 9981, 1314
Milestone 4	MD8/1/164	II	95351	c. 1814	ST 0005, 1360
Sellake Bridge	MD8/2/175	II	95362	1796-1814	ST 0022, 1357
Greenway Bridge	MD8/2/194	II	95380	1796-1814	ST 0079, 1323
Swing Bridge					ST 0115, 1312
Milestone 5					ST 0149, 1314
Rock Bridge	MD8/2/203	II	95389	1796-1814	ST 0165, 1308
Rock Bridge wharves					ST 0165, 1308
Battens Bridge	MD8/2/141	II	95330	1796-1814	ST 0229, 1355

Sampford Peverell Parish					
Milestone 6					ST 0259, 1376
Sampford Peverell wharf					ST 0292, 1409
Sampford Peverell Bridge	MD13/8/156	II	96005	c.1814	ST 0298, 1418
Buckland Bridge	MD13/8/157	II	96006	c.1814	ST 0342, 1454
Milestone 7					ST 0379, 1475
Holbrook Bridge	MD13/8/136	II	95861	c.1814	ST 0423, 1489
Burlescombe Parish					
Ayshford Bridge					ST 0476, 1514
Milestone 8					ST 0522, 1540
Westcott Bridge					ST 0559, 1584
Ebear Bridge	MD13/5/6	II	95857	c.1814	ST 0605, 1635
Milestone 9		II	352086	Listed 1/3/93	ST 0638, 1638
Twin culverts		II	352087	Listed 1/3/93	ST 0643, 1636
Fossend Bridge	MD13/5/32	II	95882	c.1814	ST 0696, 1707
Canonsleigh inlet & wharf					ST 0702, 1748
Fenacre Bridge		II	352008	Listed 1/3/93	ST 0708, 1774
Holcombe Rogus Parish					
Whipcott Bridge					ST 0715, 1850
Whipcott Bridge wharves					ST 0714, 1851
Waytown limekilns		II	352085	Listed 1/3/93	ST 0703, 1896
Waytown Tunnel		II	95949	c.1814	ST 0703, 1911
Lowdwells lock					ST 0734, 1958

Please note: This register does not include culverts (except for the twin culverts). A separate register of culverts is held by the Canal Ranger Service.

All comments have been taken from Appendix 2 of the 1992 Grand Western Canal Country Park management plan.

Appendix 3 – Byelaws

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

REVISED BYELAWS FOR THE GRAND WESTERN CANAL COUNTRY PARK COUNTY OF DEVON – BYELAWS

Coming into force on 1 September 1999

made by Devon County Council under section 41 of the Countryside Act, 1968 with respect to
THE GRAND WESTERN CANAL COUNTRY PARK

WHEREAS

Byelaws were made by the Council following a meeting held on 1st of April 1976 and were confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Home Office and took effect on 1st January 1977

Following a meeting of the Grand Western Canal Advisory Committee held on 31st March 1998 it was decided that existing byelaws 4, 22 and 26 should be amended and that additional byelaws which now appear as byelaws 22,23,24,25 and 26 should be incorporated in the manner hereinafter appearing

DEFINITION

1. In these Byelaws, unless the context otherwise requires:-

"The Canal" means the Grand Western Canal owned by the Devon County Council;

"Canal property" means the Canal and any adjacent or contiguous land held by the County Council in conjunction with the Canal for the purposes of a country park;

"The Council" means the Devon County Council;

"Vessel" means any craft or other object capable of floating and transporting a person or persons.

INTERFERENCE WITH WATER

2. No person shall without the consent of the Council put any water into or take any water from the Canal for any purpose.

FOULING THE CANAL

3. No person shall wilfully, carelessly or negligently foul or pollute the Canal.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

4. No person shall without the consent of the Council plant any tree, shrub or other plant in Canal property or release any animal into or onto that land.

GRAZING

5. No person shall use or cause or permit to be used any bank of the Canal for the purpose of grazing or keeping any animal thereon unless he takes such steps as are necessary and reasonably practicable to prevent the bank from being damaged by such use provided that nothing in this Byelaw shall be deemed to affect or prevent the use of any place made or to be made with the consent of the Council for the purpose of enabling stock to drink.

DRIVING, PARKING AND MOORING OF CONVEYANCES, TRAILERS AND VESSELS

6. (a) No person shall without the consent of the Council –

(i) moor, park or leave on Canal property any conveyance, trailer or vessel except in parking places or mooring sites provided by the Council;

(ii) leave any conveyance or trailer in any parking place on Canal property for a period in excess of twelve hours;

(iii) ride or drive any conveyance on any part of Canal property except where there is a right of way for any conveyance or upon parking places provided by the Council.

(b) No person shall ride or drive any conveyance to the danger or annoyance of or without due consideration for other persons resorting to Canal property.

In this Byelaw "conveyance" includes any vehicle or machine other than wheelchairs and perambulators propelled by hand and used solely for the carriage of a child or children or an invalid and "trailer" includes caravans and horseboxes.

ERECTIIONS ON CANAL PROPERTY

7. No person shall without the consent of the Council erect or construct or cause or permit to be erected or constructed any fence, post, pylon, wall, wharf, jetty, pier, quay, piling, groyne, revetment or any building or structure whatsoever on Canal property.

INTERFERENCE WITH THE LAND AND CANAL BED

8. No person shall without the consent of the Council make or cut or cause or permit to be made or cut any excavation or any tunnel or any drain, culvert or other passage for water in, into or out of the Canal or in or through any bank of the Canal.

9. No person shall without the consent of the Council dredge or raise or take or cause or permit to be dredged or raised or taken any gravel, sand, ballast, clay or other material from the bed or bank of the Canal.

10. No person shall without the consent of the Council use or cause or permit to be used any Canal property for the purpose of depositing or stacking or storing or keeping any goods or any material or things thereon.

11. No person shall without the consent of the Council make or cause or permit to be made any excavation or do or cause or permit to be done anything in or upon the bank of the Canal or any land forming part of Canal property adjoining the bank of such a nature as to cause damage to or endanger the stability of the bank of the Canal.

INTERFERENCE WITH STRUCTURES AND EQUIPMENT

12. No person shall without the consent of the Council interfere with any valve, sluice, floodgate, weir, dam or any other structure or appliance for controlling or regulating the flow or level of water in or directly into or out of the Canal or for drawing water from or delivering water into the Canal, nor shall any person without the consent of the Council divert or alter the level of, or the direction of flow of, water in, into or out of the Canal.

PROHIBITED ENTRY

13. No person shall without the consent of the Council enter upon any part of the Canal property if such entry is likely to endanger any person or property or if there is displayed on or near that part of the Canal property a notice prohibiting entry to that part.

OBSTRUCTION

14. No person shall obstruct or interfere with any officer or agent or servant of the Council exercising any of his duties on the Canal property.

VESSELS

15. No person shall navigate any vessel in such a manner or at such a speed as to injure the bank of the Canal.

16. No person shall leave any vessel unattended in the Canal without taking due care to prevent such a vessel from obstructing, or impeding, the free flow of water in or directly into or out of the Canal or the free passage of vessels on or along the Canal.

17. (a) No person shall operate or sail on the Canal any boat which is not for the time being registered with the Council; such registration shall be effected by the Council, upon written application by the owner of a boat,

- (i) entering in a register kept by a duly authorised officer of the Council the name and address of the said owner, a general description of the boat and the serial number of the registration and,
 - (ii) issuing to the said owner a certificate of such registration incorporating such particulars as aforesaid.
- (b) No person shall without the consent of the Council use a vessel of any kind on the Canal except a boat registered under the foregoing byelaw being a vessel propelled by paddles or oars or sails.

FISHING

18. No person shall without the consent of the Council fish in the Canal.

FIRE

19. No person shall on Canal property light any fire, provided that this Byelaw shall not apply to a properly constructed camping cooker or stove used in such a manner so as not to cause damage by fire to anything on the Canal.

HAWKING

20. No person shall without the consent of the Council on Canal property sell or advertise for sale any article or, for the purpose of selling or advertising any article or obtaining custom, tout or importune.

CAMPING

21. No person shall without the consent of the Council camp in any caravan, tent or vehicle equipped for camping on Canal property.

DOGS

22. Dogs must be kept under proper control on canal property at all times.

DOGS ON LEAD BY DIRECTION

23. (a) Every person in charge of a dog shall, as far as reasonably practicable comply with a direction given by any officer of the Council or constable to keep the dog on a lead and restrained from behaviour likely to cause annoyance or disturbance on Canal property.

(b) A direction under paragraph (a) above may only be given if such restraint is reasonably necessary to prevent a nuisance or behaviour by the dog likely to cause annoyance or disturbance to any person on the Canal property or the worrying or disturbance of any animal or bird.

REMOVAL OF OFFENDERS

24. Any person offending against Byelaw 23 may be removed from the Canal property by an officer of the Council or any constable.

OBSTRUCTION

25. No person shall on Canal property:

- (a) intentionally obstruct any officer of the Council in the proper execution of his duties;
- (b) intentionally obstruct any person carrying out an act which is necessary to the proper execution of any contract with the Council; or
- (c) intentionally obstruct any other person in the proper use of the Canal property, or behave so as to give reasonable grounds for annoyance to other persons on the land.

BATHING

26. No person shall, without reasonable excuse, bathe or swim in the Canal, except in any area where a notice exhibited by the Council permits bathing and swimming.

CONSENT OF THE COUNCIL

27. For the purposes of these Byelaws the consent of the Council means:-

- (a) Its consent in writing signed or purporting to be signed by the Council's Chief Executive or Environment Director or other person authorised by the Council.
- (b) Its consent given generally in relation to the acts specified therein by a notice signed or purporting to be signed by the Council's Chief Executive of the Council and affixed to a notice board or notice placard lawfully erected by the Council on Canal property.

SAVINGS

28. (a) An act necessary for the proper execution of his duty by an officer of the Council or by any person or servant of any person employed by the Council shall not be deemed an offence against these Byelaws.

- (b) Nothing in or done under any of the provisions of these Byelaws shall in any respect prejudice or injuriously affect any public right of way through Canal property or the rights of any person acting legally by virtue of some estate, right or interest in, over or affecting Canal property or any part thereof.

NOISE

28. No person shall by operating or causing or suffering to be operated any wireless set, gramophone, amplifier or similar instrument on Canal property, make or cause or suffer to be made any noise which is so loud and so continuous or repeated as to give reasonable cause for annoyance to other persons on Canal property.

HORSE RIDING

29. No person shall ride or lead a horse, pony, donkey or similar animal on Canal property except in connection with the operation of a horse-drawn barge.

PENALTY FOR INFRINGEMENT OF BYELAWS

30. Every person who shall offend against any of the foregoing Byelaws shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding Level 2 on the standard scale.

THE COMMON SEAL of)
THE DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL) L.S.
was hereunto affixed in the presence of:-)

(Signed) S K Clarey
A Duly Authorised Solicitor
Document No: 28785

THESE BYELAWS are hereby confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and Regions on 8 July 1999 and shall come into force on 1 September 1999.

(Signed) Susan Carter
A Grade 5
on behalf of the Secretary of State
Department of the Environment,
Transport and Regions



Towpath Code of Conduct

Making the towpath safer for everyone

All towpath users

- The horse pulling the passenger barge has priority over all other users. Please stop and make way well before it passes.
- If you wish to overtake the horse, please wait for the horseman to beckon you past. Never step over the rope and keep to the hedge side of the towpath.
- Pedestrians have priority over cyclists on the towpath.
- Considerate cycling is permitted provided this code of conduct is followed.
- Horse riding and drone use is not permitted.
- Give way to oncoming users under bridges.
- All users are obliged to keep the towpath free from obstructions to other users.
- Consider other users and the environment. Please take your litter home with you.

Pedestrians

- Please look and listen out for cyclists and allow them to pass.
- The use of headphones is discouraged as you cannot hear cyclists approaching.

Cyclists

- Please slow down and use your bell or politely call ahead when approaching pedestrians. Bear in mind they may be hard of hearing.
- Pass people slowly only once they are aware of your approach and have made way.
- Ride at a sensible speed.
- Slow down and take extra care at bridges – you can't see what's coming the other way! Always dismount and walk when signs indicate to do this.
- Watch out for anglers and their equipment and pass slowly.

Anglers

- Please keep the towpath free from obstructions to other users.
- Anglers must move rods, umbrellas and themselves completely out of the way to the far side of the towpath if the passenger barge horse is approaching, so that the rope does not become snagged.
- Take care not to lose tackle. Almost every year swans and ducks on the canal are killed or injured by lost tackle.
- Please take particular care of towpath users, boaters and offside landowners when casting.

Dog Walkers

- Dogs must be kept under control at all times and on leads in the Canal Basin Picnic Area.
- Always clear up after your dog. Dog mess on or beside the towpath can spoil a visit for everyone and poses a serious health risk – particularly to children. Dog mess disposal bins are located at all major towpath access points. It is an offence to leave dog mess behind, with fines of up to £1000.
- Do not allow your dog to chase or worry wildlife, other dogs or people. Dogs must be kept out of adjacent farmland at all times.

Motorised vehicles

- The use of motorised vehicles is prohibited, with the exception of mobility buggies and electric bicycles.

Other activities

- For policies on other activities please visit devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal/byelaws-codes-of-conduct-policies-faqs



Share this space

Devon
County Council

Appendix 4b – Waterway code of conduct



WATERWAY

CODE OF CONDUCT

Making the canal safer for everyone



About the waterway

The Grand Western Canal was opened in 1814, with its main business being the transport of limestone from quarries near Westleigh. This trade continued on the Devon section of the canal until 1925.

In the late 1980s a campaign to save the canal from proposed development led to its acquisition by Devon County Council in 1971. The Canal was declared a Country Park and work commenced on repairing and dredging the canal so that it could be enjoyed by local people and visitors.

Nowadays the remaining eleven miles of canal is managed in partnership with Mid Devon District Council and in 2005 was declared a Local Nature Reserve. Boating and angling are permitted, but a permit must be bought beforehand (see website for more details).

Most of the canal was dredged between 2002 and 2007 with of current depth of between 1m and 1.5m in the central channel. The Canal Ranger Service is keen to hear if waterway users experience significantly shallower depths than this at any point so that future spot-dredging works can be arranged.

The Canal's water supply comes from springs in the bed of the canal between Whippott Bridge and Lowdells. There is a very slight flow of water from the northern end towards the Tiverton end because of this.

The springs may sometimes be seen as milky patches amongst the reed on the bed of the canal. The Canal's water quality is monitored by the Environment Agency on a monthly basis at two points along the canal.

Code of conduct for all waterway users

- **Please be considerate and polite** to all canal and towpath users.
- **Please act safely.** Do not enter the canal or walk on ice and keep children and pets under supervision. In the event of an emergency ring 999. The noticeboards along the towpath give location details.
- **Please protect the waterway environment** and take care not to harm or disturb wildlife.
- Please report birds or wildlife in distress to the RSPCA on 0300 1234 999. They will need a description of the situation and location details. Please note that wildfowl that eat weed often appear to have fishing line hanging from their beaks. Please ensure this is not just filamentous weed before contacting the RSPCA. Also note that swans frequently hook their legs up onto their backs at a rather bizarre-looking angle at times and this is not usually a matter for concern.
- Please report any pollution, fly-tipping or fish in distress to the Canal Ranger Service (01884 254072) or the Environment Agency (0800 807060).

Code of conduct for all boats and canoes

- **Permits:** All boats using the canal must have an appropriate and valid permit (based on the type and size of boat - see www.devon.gov.uk/gwc/boating for current prices and sales outlets).
- **Rules and regulations:** All boaters must comply with the boating rules and regulations listed on the reverse side of the boat permit.
- **The horsedrawn barge** has priority over all other boats and must be passed on the opposite side from the towpath. Never come between the horsedrawn barge and the towpath!
- **Mooring** is prohibited on the towpath side bank between the Canal Basin and East Manley Bridge during the horsedrawn barge operating season (usually between the start of April and the end of October - please contact the Tiverton Canal Company on 01884 253345 if you wish to check).
- Mooring is always prohibited in winding holes (turning points) and within 10m of bridges (with the exception of the horsedrawn barge). Please do not moor at the end of gardens on the offside and do not trespass into adjacent farmland.
- When mooring on the towpath side, do not tie lines across the towpath and ensure mooring pins are protected or easily visible.
- **The speed limit** on the Canal for all boats is 4mph (briak walking pace) or lower if necessary to avoid creating a breaking wash.
- **Protecting wildlife:** Please minimise disturbance to wildlife by keeping to the central canal channel and slowing down when passing wildfowl - especially when they have young with them. Many birds nest in the reeds along the edge of the canal so please take particular care during the nesting season (spring and early summer). Please observe 'No Mooring' restrictions as and when indicated by signage.
- Please ensure your boat is free of weed when bringing it onto the canal (invasive plant species can be transferred from one watercourse to another on the hulls of boats).
- **Passing Anglers:** Most anglers prefer boaters to proceed past (in single file, if more than one boat) in the centre of the canal channel at a steady speed, unless they request otherwise. Please look out for anglers as they may sometimes be obscured by bankside vegetation. If you approach an angler who is playing a fish, please be considerate and wait until the fish is landed before passing.
- If a fishing match is underway and you wish to pass through, please proceed at a steady pace along the centre of the canal channel. If you were planning to turn around and return shortly after passing the match, please consider not

Code of conduct for rowing boats and sculls

- Due to the narrow, winding nature of the canal, these boats are generally not permitted to use the canal. However the Sea Cadets and the Tiverton Rowing Club have permission to use the canal for the training of beginners, subject to various conditions.
- The speed limit for these boats is 4mph and rowers must be accompanied from the towpath by a coach who will look ahead for other waterway users.

Code of conduct for anglers

- **Permits and licences:** Angling rights on the Canal are leased to the Tiverton and District Angling Club. In addition to an EA rod licence, anglers must purchase a permit from the fishing club (see www.devon.gov.uk/gwc/angling for details). Club rules (printed on the permit) must be observed and the permit must be available for inspection by Club bailiffs or Canal Rangers.
- **Boats:** Please look out for approaching boats and withdraw angling poles to allow boats to pass. Be aware that approaching boats may not see you if you are hidden by bankside vegetation.
- Please move back from the waters edge to allow the horsedrawn barge to pass. Do not allow yourself to come between the horse and the barge and remove any equipment which the rope towing the barge may snag on.
- Boaters are instructed to proceed along the centre of the canal past anglers, unless requested otherwise. Please politely request them to pass on the near or far side if that is what you would prefer. Please note that larger boats have to remain in the centre of the channel.
- Whilst anglers are welcome to fish off the boat landing stages at East Manley Bridge, Minnows Touring Park and the Globe Inn, they are primarily for the use of boats and anglers are obliged to make way should a boat arrive.
- **Prohibitions:** Fishing is not permitted from the offside bank; from boats (unless moored on the towpath side) or during the hours of darkness.
- **Care for the environment:** Please take care not to snag tackle on overhanging trees and avoid casting when other waterway and towpath users are passing.
- Please do not dig the banks and ensure you take your litter home with you.
- **Safety:** Please watch out for overhead power lines - there are many that cross the canal. Do not fish within 30m of these as electricity can arc a considerable distance.

Code of conduct for model boaters

- Model boating is permitted on the canal, but must not interfere with wildlife or other users (particularly anglers). The speed limit for model boats is 4mph, so high powered and noisy model boats are not permitted.
- Please choose areas where interference with other users and emergent vegetation.
- Model boats must not allow oil or fuel to leak into the water.
- Steam powered model boats must have a valid test or exemption certificate available for inspection by the Canal Rangers.

Please Note: Swimming is not allowed in the canal. Bathing and swimming are prohibited within the Country Park byelaws.

Canal Ranger Service contact details:

The Moorings, Canal Hill, Tiverton, Devon,
EX16 4HX

Tel: 01884 254072
Email: gwc@devon.gov.uk
Web: www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal






Appendix 5 – Inspection regime

Inspection / activity	Notes	
Daily		
Public toilets	• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti. • Check toilet rolls, and sanitary bags present. • Check toilet flush, taps and hand-dryers work.	
Canal basin & car park	• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti. • Check pay and display machines working.	
Visitor centre	• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti. • Ensure leaflets displays are tidy and complete.	
Play area	• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.	
Emergency routes	• Check fire emergency exit routes are clear of obstructions.	
Weekly		
Outlying car parks	Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.	
Vehicle checks	Conduct weekly vehicle checks – • mirrors in tack • no other defects • wear on tyres • tyre pressure • oil level • power steering fluid • clutch fluid • brake fluid	• coolant • screen wash • litter picker, bago & bin bags • toolbox • leaflets • first aid kit • fire extinguisher • breakdown leaflet • hand wipes & paper towel
Tap flush	Flush taps in premises to comply with Legionella policy / risk assessment.	
Fire alarm in Rangers Office & Visitor Centre	Check fire alarm is working using control panel, key and fire key. Indicator lamp test, alarm sounds, silence alarm and reset.	
Monthly		
Tap water temperature	Temperature readings of tap water in premises are taken to ensure it complies with Legionella risk assessment.	
Smoke detectors	Check to ensure working	
Emergency lighting	Check all are working	
Fire safety signs	Check all are in place	
Fire extinguisher	Check to ensure haven't been tampered with or discharged	

Play area	Check for all equipment for wear and tear, cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti. Record and report any faults.
Quarterly	
Shower rose and pipe disinfection	Shower rose and pipe at The Moorings disinfected to comply with Legionella risk assessment.
Towpath cycle survey	Canal Ranger Service staff (usually Canal Manager) to cycle the entire towpath, checking the site for cleanliness, infrastructure defects, leaks, vandalism and graffiti and obvious tree defects
6-monthly	
Fixed-point photography	Undertaken by Canal Rangers in January and July.
Legionella check	6-monthly check of compliance undertaken by external contractor under DCC corporate contract, organised by South West Norse
Pay and display machines	6-monthly service undertaken by external contractor as part of annual contract.
Intruder alarm	6-monthly service undertaken by external contractor as part of annual contract.
First aid kits	Checked for completeness and use-by dates.
Fire drill	Carried out at The Moorings & Visitor Centre
Annual	
Machinery service	Annual service of machinery (chainsaws, strimmers, hedge cutters, mower, weed boat etc.) by external contractors.
Lifejackets	Annual inspection of lifejackets by external contractors.
Risk assessments	Reviewed annually by Canal Ranger Service.
COSHH	Reviewed annually by Canal Ranger Service.
Ladders	Inspected annually by Canal Ranger Service.
Defibrillators	Annual inspection of defibrillators by external contractors.
Vehicles, tractor and trailers	Annual Service and MOT of Canal Ranger Service vehicles undertaken by external contractors under DCC corporate contract.
Inspection regime	Reviewed annually by Canal Ranger Service and Senior Manager.
Play area	Annual inspection by suitably qualified external contractor

Trees	Scheduled safety checks by Ranger Service of trees in high use areas
Asbestos, emergency lighting, boilers, fire extinguishers and compressor	Annual checks undertaken by external contractors under DCC corporate contracts, organised by South West Norse.
Trees	Expert scheduled safety inspection of Ash trees within high / medium use areas
2-yearly	
PAT-testing	Undertaken by suitably qualified contractor or staff member
3-yearly	
Trees	Expert scheduled safety inspection of non-Ash trees within high /medium use areas
	Scheduled safety checks by Canal Ranger Service of trees in low use areas
Road bridges	Undertaken by DCC Bridge Maintenance Team.
5-yearly	
Culverts, aqueduct, retaining walls and accomm. bridges	Inspections to be undertaken by DCC Bridge and Structures Team.

NB. All inspections / activities undertaken by Canal Ranger Service unless stated otherwise.

Inspection protocols

- Any defects found are to be reported to the Canal Manager immediately.
- Any defects with health and safety implications for staff or visitors are to be dealt with immediately.
- All other defects are to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but should be corrected as soon as possible, bearing in mind the severity of the defect and the current work priorities of the Canal Ranger Service.
- The Canal Ranger Service must ensure continuity of inspections during periods of staff absence and annual leave.
- The Canal Manager must liaise with external contractors to ensure that inspection and servicing is undertaken by suitably trained staff and that inspection/service periods continue to be appropriate and are observed.
- The inspection regime should be reviewed annually by the Canal Ranger Service to ensure that it remains appropriate, proportional and effective, and is being adhered to.

Appendix 6 – Tree Management Policy

TREE CONSERVATION AND MAINTENANCE POLICY (noted by GWCJAC on 16/10/07)

*For trees owned or managed by the Grand Western Canal Country Park
(Herein stated as the Country Park)*

Vision

A healthy, safe and diverse population of trees that enhances the environment of the area.

Aims

The aims of the Policy are to:

- Establish objectives and policy for the Country Park to achieve the stated vision..
- Conserve (protect, maintain and enhance) the tree resource within the Country Parks ownership.
- Manage the tree resource within the limited human and financial resources available.

Introduction

1. The Country Park owns or controls a large and varied population of trees on along both sides of the Grand Western Canal as well as several wooded areas adjoining the canal. The woodland and trees form a vital conservation, educational and amenity resource.
2. This policy will guide the Country Park in conserving and managing that resource and will help fulfil its aims and objectives as stated in the management plan.
3. The Grand Western Canal Country Park has duty of care under the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 as amended and the Health & Safety At Work Etc. Act 1974 to maintain its tree resource in a safe state. This policy aims to enable the Country Park to discharge its duty responsibly.
4. This Tree Policy adds to those policies already adopted by the Country Park and is in harmony with them.
5. All of the trees owned by the Country Park are protected by a Conservation Area. The policy will strengthen the Country Parks position in regard to the long term management of the tree resource and meeting its delegated powers. The local planning authority should be approached to endorse the policy.
6. Where the Country Park sells or otherwise disposes of land it should ensure the trees contained therein are adequately protected against removal or poor management so that the trees may provide visual amenity now and/or in the future (see FC5). This may be achieved through imposing covenants on any sale agreements.
7. The aims are given effect by the following objectives. Each objective has a number of attendant policies.

First Conservation Objective

8. *To perpetuate the tree stock for as long as practicable with the minimum of intervention consistent with the duties to:*
 - (i) *ensure public safety and meet legal obligations¹; which shall be as far as possible without prejudice to the duties to*
 - (ii) *conserve wildlife and public amenity²; which take precedence over the desire to*
 - (iii) *ameliorate nuisance³ to neighbours and users of Country Park sites.*

¹ Statutory, eg Tree Preservation Order under T & CP Act 1990 or at common law, eg actionable nuisance or trespass.

² May include positive action to enhance conservation value or health of a tree (thereby prolonging value as a public amenity).

Policy (of first conservation objective: FC1 - 13 below)

- FC1 No tree, of whatever age or size (except as provided in Policies FC2 [safety and legal reasons] and FC3 [minor pruning works]) shall be cut down, pruned or damaged without the consent of the Country Park. By agreement this responsibility may be delegated to the Canal Manager in full or restricted to specific areas. The root zone² is similarly protected.
- FC2 Work that is authorised shall be the minimum needed to satisfy the First Conservation Objective, and shall be to the most recent arboricultural standards. In particular:
- Trees shall be retained as long as practicable. Felling shall be a last resort except when it is necessary to meet the duties in 8(i) above or it is for the benefit of the growth and health of other trees of greater value for amenity or conservation.
 - Pollarding shall only be carried out when it is to resume or continue previous practice to establish a new pollard at an appropriate age, or it is for conservation reasons.
- FC3 Minor pruning works not requiring a detailed arboricultural report to achieve objective FC1 and alleviate nuisance caused to adjoining landowners or statutory obligations:
- Branches 5cm diameter or less may be pruned in order to (a) allow clearance, (b) let through more light or (c) to encourage development of the appropriate natural shape for the species (formative pruning).
 - In cases (a) and (b), only lower branches or parts of side branches may be pruned; no more than 15% of the crown may be removed and the tree may not be reduced in height unless the top is damaged.
 - All cuts shall be clean, without tearing and made to the closest available growing point in accordance with natural target pruning methods.
 - Self-set trees of less than 75mm diameter measured at 1.5m from the ground may be cut down or uprooted to allow clearance from the base of structures, fences, sight-lines, French drains and the like.
- FC4 Before undertaking tree work the status of the tree(s) shall be considered to ensure the requirements of the various Planning, Forestry and Wildlife and Countryside Acts and Regulations are met. Mid Devon District Council shall be provided with the required notice of works to trees within a Conservation Area³.
- FC5 Before negotiations are started for the disposal of Country Park land, the Canal Manager should be consulted to see if a full tree survey is needed so that appropriate measures to protect adjoining trees can be considered.

¹ In its ordinary sense as opposed to Footnote 1 and including technical nuisance at common law where any overhang may be cut to the boundary but there can be no action for damages.

² Root zone = radius measured along the ground from the centre of the trunk to a distance in accord with Table 2 of BS5837:2005 or as indicated by a qualified arboriculturalist..

³ Close liaison with the local planning authorities Tree Section will be required with timely submission of notifications or applications as applicable.

- FC6 A full tree survey in accord with BS5837 shall be undertaken on Country Park land that is to be developed (including consideration of neighbouring trees) to ensure sympathetic development and so that the amenity provided by the trees is preserved.
- FC7 In order that trees may be successfully retained to their safe limits they shall be inspected by a qualified¹ person at intervals dependent on the risk posed to people and property as detailed in section 10 below. Subject to resource limitations the inspection standard and interval will be described in the survey data and may be varied. Records of inspection shall be kept in a form specified by the Country Park and a database developed of the extent and condition of the tree stock.
- FC8 Where possible, conflict between 8(i), 8(ii) and 8(iii) of the First Conservation Objective shall be resolved by employing an alternative approach².
- FC9 Where the best technical solution for a tree incurs significant additional expenditure, the cost of the work shall be balanced against the tree's value assessed using the procedure in "Amenity Valuation of Trees and Woodlands" (Arboricultural Association 2000). If the best solution is beyond available resources the Country Park's Joint Advisory Committee shall be consulted.
- FC10 As far as is practicable, *and consistent with preserving wildlife and public amenity*, the Country Park shall ameliorate nuisance to neighbouring property.
- FC11 Cases of significant damage or nuisance occurring within Country Park property shall be treated similarly³ to Policy FC10. If the value of a tree (as assessed as per FC9) outweighs the damage or nuisance being caused to Country Park property, then Policy FC2 shall apply.
- FC12 Work may be carried out in excess of that laid down in the Policy if that is the only way to ensure the long term interests of the tree or to safeguard the public's safety.
- FC13 The Country Park shall, wherever practicable, vigorously pursue any perpetrators of serious acts of wilful damage or destruction to its trees.

Second Conservation Objective

9. (a) *Create a diverse, uneven-aged and healthy tree population.*
- (b) *Increase the number and variety of trees⁴.*

¹ *As approved by Devon County Council and holding a nationally recognized arboricultural or forestry qualification commensurate with the level of survey or inspection being made. See the Third Conservation Objective below (12).*

² *For example it may be possible to fence off a dangerous tree of conservation importance rather than felling it.*

³ *In this situation there is greater flexibility of action as the Country Park cannot cause a legal nuisance to itself.*

⁴ *It will not be possible to measure the success of this objective without baseline data on numbers, ages and condition of trees. The principles are, however, still relevant, but the policies less prescriptive than those of the first objective.*

Policy (of second conservation objective: SC1 - 8 below)

- SC1 Replacement planting for felled trees shall be where practicable at a minimum of one for one¹. If it is not possible or desirable to replant near the felled tree then another suitable site may be found.
- SC2 Planting shall only be carried out if adequate resources for maintenance beyond satisfactory establishment can be guaranteed, notwithstanding Policy SC1. This includes replacing and maintaining any plants that fail.
- SC3 Species appropriate for the location shall be chosen, taking as a guide those trees growing successfully in the neighbourhood. Native species (preferably of local provenance) should be used as a general principle, but varieties and exotics may, depending on the situation, also be suitable.
- SC4 In areas of nature conservation importance, natural regeneration of appropriate species should be encouraged wherever possible.
- SC5 The size of planting stock shall be as small as practicable. In certain vulnerable locations or areas of poor visual amenity advanced nursery stock may be appropriate.
- SC6 Replacement planting shall where practicable be in advance of the remaining life of the tree(s) present to perpetuate features, either individual or grouped.
- SC7 As resources permit management plans in a form specified by the Country Park will be drawn up for groups of trees and woodland compartments detailing numbers, species and condition, objectives of management, and a work programme, including new planting, to create a diverse, uneven-aged tree population.
- SC8 The location and choice of species for replacement planting shall minimise any potential nuisance in terms of encroachment, shade, leaf or fruit deposition, site lines, security, direct or indirect root damage to adjoining property notwithstanding Policy SC1 and objective 8 (iii).

¹ Felling of any trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order is likely to require replacement as a condition of their removal, by the local planning authority.

Survey and Inspection Objective

10. (a) *Ensure that the Country Park meets with its legal obligations to maintain and monitor the safety of its tree resource.*

(b) *To make best use of the Country Park's limited resources in managing the safety of its tree resource.*

Policy (of survey and inspection: SI1 - 5 below)

- SI1 The Canal Manager shall produce a Tree Survey Plan¹ which will inform the survey interval and level.
- SI2 The target appraisal will be undertaken by the Canal Manager and reviewed annually and will inform the Tree Survey Plan accordingly.
- SI3 The Country Park considers that a 1/10,000 limit is an acceptable level of risk (objective 9) below which it will not commit further resources unless the tree in question is causing a nuisance (objective 8 iii) or the Country Park feel so disposed to reduce the risk still further.
- SI4 All routine tree surveys and individual tree surveys will be undertaken by a person qualified in arboricultural surveying² with a moderate level of competence.
- SI5 Detailed tree inspection identified by the tree survey in SI3 will be undertaken by a person with a higher level of competence³.
- SI5 Survey and inspection methodology⁴ will meet with current best practice. All results will be tabulated and held securely by the Canal Manager in hard or electronic format.

11. Supplementary Policy (SP1 – 6 below)

- SP1 The Country Park will only use contractors for its tree work who can demonstrate compliance with all the necessary health and safety regulations, can provide a very good standard of work operationally and meet the appropriate arboricultural standards. Preference, where appropriate or available, may be given to those contractors approved by the Arboricultural Association.
- SP2 An external body shall carry a periodic audit of policy compliance and systems developed to meet them. The audit findings shall be presented to the Devon County Council with recommendations made where appropriate.
- SP3 The Country Park shall review this Policy on a regular basis and recommend necessary changes. This may include data on infringements, referrals, problems of interpretation or operation and gaps in coverage.
- SP4 The Country Park may issue from time to time an annex giving details of to whom they have delegated powers under this Policy.
- SP5 Policy on the management of woodland will follow that laid down in national guidelines issued by the Forestry Commission. The Country Park should consult externally to ensure that all available grants are claimed and statutory licences under the Forestry Acts are obtained.
- SP6 The Country Park will review the policy document every 5 years except where events or changes in current best practice require an earlier review.

¹ The Tree Survey Plan will have marked on it areas of trees and individual trees, a Target Appraisal will identify and categorise areas within and adjacent to trust land according to use and other potential targets. Each target area will be assigned a value which will inform the inspection interval and type.

² The surveyor should hold a minimum national qualification framework level 2 qualification and can recognise tree species, characteristics, diseases, defects and signs of debility but not necessarily their significance.

³ The inspector should hold a minimum national qualification framework level 3 qualification and be able to undertake more detailed inspection of identified defects to determine their significance.

⁴ Survey and inspection methodology should follow the Visual Tree Assessment system expounded by Mattheck & Breloer (1995) & D Lonsdale (1999) Principles of Tree Hazard Assessment & Management, DETR, to aid the diagnosis of potential defects through visual signs and the application of mechanical criteria.

Appendix 7 – Joint Advisory Committee membership

Groups represented	Votes
Devon County Council – Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport	1
Devon County Council – Member for Tiverton East	1
Devon County Council – Member for Willand and Uffculme	1
Mid Devon District Council – Portfolio holder for Environment	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Cranmore (3 councillors)	3
Mid Devon District Council – Member for Halberton	1
Mid Devon District Council – Members for Canonsleigh (2 councillors)	2
Tiverton Town Council	1
Halberton Parish Council	1
Sampford Peverell Parish Council	1
Burlescombe Parish Council	1
Holcombe Rogus Parish Council	1
Friends of the Grand Western Canal	1
Devon Wildlife Trust	1
Wildlife Advisory Group	1
Inland Waterways Association	1
Tiverton and District Angling Club	1
Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society – NE Devon Branch	1
Tiverton Sea Cadets	1
Cycle England	1
Community Patrol Boat (*currently not operating / attending JAC)	1*
The Tiverton Canal Co.	1
Mid Devon Moorings	1
Canal Businesses Group	1
Officers	
Devon County Council – Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager	0
Devon County Council – Grand Western Canal Country Park Manager	0
Mid Devon District Council – Land Management Officer	0
Mid Devon District Council – Member Services Officer	0

Progress Report (March 2025 to September 2025 inclusive, items listed chronologically)

1. Towpath resurfacing

In March, 1300m of towpath between Tidcombe Bridge and Snakes Wood was resurfaced by contractors JB Radford. Over 400 tonnes of crushed limestone from the quarry at Westleigh was spread and rolled and has resulted in a firm flat surface. The total cost of the project was £22.5k and was funded by Devon County Council's Public Rights of Way capital budget.

Experience from past resurfacing works showed that over the first summer a certain amount of loose stone chippings usually develop on the surface and sometimes need to be swept off. However, the surface binding in this section has been excellent with only small amounts of loose stone. These will work their way out to the verges over the next year. The grass has begun to grow back in along the edges, and the path is blending in well with its surroundings.

Feedback from visitors has been very positive and this busy section of towpath is now much safer and more pleasant to use without the puddles and protruding rocks that blighted it before the resurfacing work was done.



2. Spot Dredging at Manley Bridge

During heavy rain, silty water runs off the fields at the top of Manley Lane and flows down the road and into the canal beside Manley Bridge. Although a silt trap was constructed a decade ago to intercept some of this, the majority of the silt is carried straight through and then settles in the canal. As a result, the canal became very shallow around the bridge, with some boats struggling to get through.



A long reach excavator contractor was engaged to spot dredge this area prior to the first horse-drawn barge trips of the year. He spent a couple of days preparing the site, removing several tonnes of silt from under the bridge and from the eastern approach, and then tidying up and cleaning out the silt trap.

The silt trap is regularly monitored to ensure it is emptied before it fills up and as of mid-September is roughly 2/3 full and so will need emptying (by a wheeled digger contractor) before the end of the year.

3. Canal business lease changes

This year has seen a succession of actual and proposed changes in ownership of businesses which operate under lease from Devon County Council. The first was the sale of the Duck's Ditty floating café from the Tiverton Canal Co to the owners of the Canal Tea Rooms and Gardens. This required a variation of lease for the Tiverton Canal Co to remove the Ducks Ditty, and a new lease to be drafted and agreed for the new owners.

The second has been the transfer of ownership of Mid Devon Moorings from Pat Brind to her son Ricky and his wife Honor.

Finally, Philip and Jacquie Brind have announced that the Tiverton Canal Co is up for sale as they plan to retire. The Canal Manager is very grateful to Philip for keeping him briefed on their plans and for his determination to find the right person to take on this iconic business, which plays such a key role in the popularity of the canal and for tourism in Mid Devon.

4. Visitor Centre flower bed

Since the Visitor Centre's construction in 2012, the flower bed beside it has been planted with lavender to provide an attractive combination with the silver oak panels behind as well as provide food for pollinators. There was always a problem with lavender plants dying over the winter and most in most years around 20 new lavender plants were planted to fill the gaps left by those that had died. In recent years, very few of these thrived despite a replacement of the soil in the bed with a sandy lime rich mix.

Following discussion with a local nursery owner, the lavenders have been replaced with a mixture of catmint and ornamental grasses, which have provided a similar colour mix and pollinator food source, but should be more successful in surviving the wetter winters we now experience. The plants have established well and are still flowering nicely in mid-September.



5. Pay and display machine upgrades

The existing pay and display machines in the Canal Basin car park were quite old and were experiencing faults and so Devon County Council's parking team arranged for two much newer models which were being removed from another location to be installed in late March. At the same time, they were upgraded to enable card payments. As well as making it easier for visitors to pay, it has been appreciated by businesses based in the Canal Basin who are no longer be pestered for change.

6. Clearing fallen trees

A storm in April led to a large offside Oak tree near the golf course falling into the canal. After initially clearing the branches that were blocking the towpath, the Canal Rangers worked with tree surgeons and a wheeled digger operator to clear the fallen tree from the canal, with logs being stacked in the Canal's tub barges.



The wheeled digger operator returned a week later to unload several tonnes of wood from the barges into the Canal Ranger's tipper van, which delivered it to local firewood customers.



7. Pride in Parks Award

Following judging in 2024, the Country Park's success in achieving five stars in the RHS South West in Bloom's Pride in Parks awards was announced in late March 2025, with the award being delivered in April.

This top-scoring award recognises excellent community involvement as well as praising the standard of the park itself and the team of rangers and dedicated volunteers that maintain it.



Following a morning visit to the Canal Basin in July as part of the South West in Bloom town tour of Tiverton, the same judge returned to the canal in the afternoon to spend two hours judging the 2025 Pride in Parks Award for the Canal. He and the Canal Manager visited a number of points along the canal, discussing management, maintenance and community engagement, and his judging results will be announced in March 2026.

8. Bank erosion repairs

During the summer, the Canal Rangers have repaired the canal bank in several locations where it had been eroded by dogs entering and leaving the canal. In some cases, this has been achieved with sandbags filled with soil, but with the larger gullies a product called nicospan has been used to revet the bank, held in place by posts driven deep into the bed of the canal. The gaps behind have been backfilled with rocks, soil and crushed stone. This usually settles over a number of months and the filling will be topped up during the autumn.



9. CSAS development day

The Canal Ranger team are all accredited by Devon and Cornwall Police under their Community Safety Accreditation Scheme providing them with limited police powers for addressing antisocial behaviour and relevant offences (against Canal Byelaws and Mid Devon Dog Control Public Space Protection Order). The CSAS support team also provide access to training and expedited channels for contacting the police.

Following the three yearly renewal of their police vetting, the Canal Ranger Team attended a development day in Saltash, where around 100 CSAS accredited staff from a range of businesses and local authorities in Devon and Cornwall, received briefings and presentations on a variety of crime-related topics.



10. Weed clearing

Heavy rainfall during the winter months led to large amounts of silt (and associated nutrients) being washed into the Canal – particularly from the Edendale development in Sampford Peverell, from farmland opposite Minnows Touring Park and from farmland at the top of Manley Lane. High nutrient levels in the water coupled with the exceptionally warm and sunny weather this spring and summer provided ideal growth conditions for many water plants and in particular two which tend to dominate– Water Soldier and Filamentous Algae (blanket weed) – certainly benefitted.

Despite the weedboat operating four days a week from April to September, the weed grew back faster than we could clear it in some areas

The photo taken from Fenacre Bridge shows blanket weed covering a section of Canal that had been cleared just a few weeks before.

Efforts to keep on top of the weed were hampered by hydraulic problems on the weedboat, with the boat out of action for a couple of weeks in August awaiting parts. However, close liaison with the angling club secretary ensured that they were aware of the situation and that the sections on which they had angling matches scheduled were cleared in good time.



11. New Landing stage

In June, the Canal Ranger team constructed a new landing stage near Holbrook Bridge, Sampford Peverell. The previous landing stage had been built in the mid-2000s to compliment the nearby boat-launching slipway, with the adjacent caravan park providing facilities such as water supply and portable loo emptying for boaters.

The landing stage was refurbished in 2017 with a new deck and some structural repairs, but by 2025, the structure of the landing stage was coming to the end of its serviceable life and so a complete replacement was required. By this time, the new owners of Minnow Touring Park had indicated that the main users of the landing stage were anglers and paddlers, but that the existing landing stage was too high for paddlers to launch and recover.

In 2019, the Canal Ranger Service designed and built a new, split-level landing stage providing a deck at towpath height for powered boats to use, and a lower deck at a convenient height for canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. That landing stage has worked well and so that design was repeated, with Minnows Touring Park generously contributing over £500 towards the cost of the timber.

After removing the old landing stage it was discovered that instead of the usual sloping bank, there was instead a vertical bank, and nothing to stop it slowly eroding away into the towpath. Before starting on the new landing stage, the Canal Ranger team therefore had to revet the bank using a geotextile product called *Nicospan* and long posts that also support some safety rails.

Construction of the new structure went well, and it has been well used by kayakers and anglers through the summer.



Another nice aspect to this project is that there are plans to re-use the decking boards from the old landing stage. These were still in reasonable condition and the Canal Rangers intend to use them to make bird boxes during some sessions with students from local schools. The planks are over an inch thick and so should make some sturdy and long-lasting bird boxes which will be put up along the canal.

12. Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension – Countryside Park

During the year the PRow and Country Parks Manager and the Canal Manager have had a series of meetings with a Mid Devon District Council planning officer, Devon County Council Ecologists and the developer undertaking Phase 2 of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension (Westcountry Land). The subject of these meetings has been on the proposed countryside park that is earmarked for land between the development and the canal, with a focus on what the countryside park will contain and how it relates to the Canal; and whether the Canal Ranger Service could play a role in managing this land.

Although all of the land between the old railway line and the canal is designated as Green Infrastructure within the masterplan, Westcountry Land are currently only focussing on the land they now own (outlined in red below) with regard to the countryside park.



The land needs to fulfil two main functions for the development:

- To achieve Biodiversity Net Gain requirements for the developer (improving habitats on this land to offset impacts on habitats where development is taking place, plus a minimum of 10% overall improvement)
- To provide accessible greenspace for the residents of the new development

The Canal Manager also sees a role for this land in soaking up some of the increased dog walking / exercising pressure created by the new development, rather than all of it being focussed on the Canal, where there are already significant issues relating to dog fouling and bank erosion.

Discussions are ongoing and clearly any involvement of the Canal Ranger Service in managing the land will be dependant on adequate resources being provided to achieve this without any negative impact on the management of the canal.

13. Bankside vegetation cutting

In addition to the regular strimming around benches, bridge abutments and fishing swims, bankside vegetation has also been trimmed by tractors in two stages. Firstly in mid-June a contractor cut the bankside vegetation between the Canal Basin and East Manley Bridge to enable the horse-drawn barge to continue operating safely during the summer months.

Secondly, the Canal Manager spent seven days in July siding up the towpath using the Canal Ranger Service's small Kubota tractor and flail, trimming back overhanging vegetation to keep the towpath clear.

14. Fundraising 'Canal Canter'

A special fundraising edition of the regular 'Canal Canter' took place on the morning of Saturday 2nd August. Almost 200 runners, young and old and from all around the south west, completed distances that included a half marathon, 10k, 5k and 1 mile.

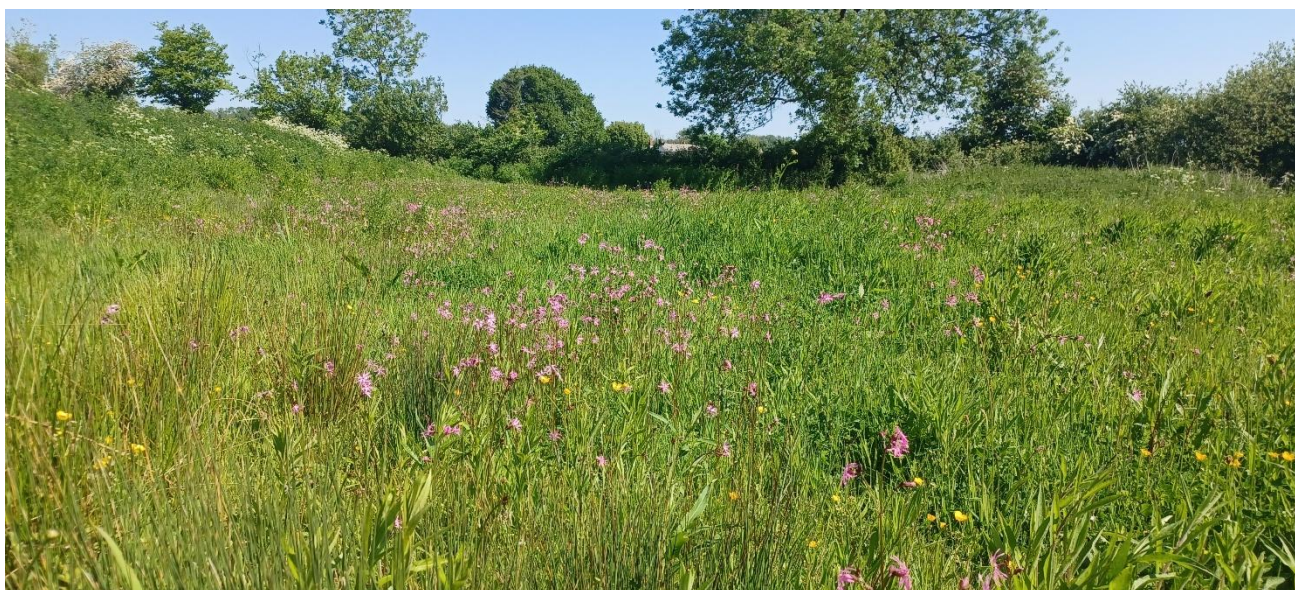
The organisers - Winding Paths - generously donated £1500 of the profits from the event to the Friends of the Grand Western Canal, who will in turn fund projects within the Country Park.



The Friends Group Chairman and the Canal Manager attended to welcome, thank and support the runners and organisers and to promote the Canal and the Friends Group.

15. Big Devon Meadows Count

This year the Country Park has taken part in the Big Devon Meadows Count – a new initiative organised by Moor Meadows and Devon Wildlife Trust. The aim was to survey as many of Devon's wildflower meadows as possible using a specified survey technique. After attending a morning training session familiarising the Canal Manager with the survey technique, he then surveyed the 'pocket meadow' near Ebear Bridge, Westleigh.



This meadow was created in 2019 by scraping off the highly nutrient rich topsoil which was full of nettle, thistle and dock seeds, and then sowing a wildflower meadow seed mix. The meadow is cut and raked off each September to reduce fertility and spread seeds.

Ten one metre square quadrats were surveyed within the meadow, identifying the plant species present in each. It's clear that although several of the species in the original seed mix haven't survived, there are several, such as ragged robin and knapweed which have done really well and provide great habitat for a range of invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles.

The results of the survey have been submitted as one of 323 participants in this year's count, providing a rich source of data for the Devon Biodiversity Record Centre to analyse.

16. Nature trail funding

Feedback from visitors has highlighted a lack of interest for younger children within the Country Park once away from the Canal Basin attractions. The personal experience of the Canal Ranger team with their children when visiting other sites, has shown that rubbing trails are a great way to enthuse children and motivate them to take part in and enjoy a longer walk or cycle ride.

The Country Park aims to appeal to all ages and to engage children and their parents with the Canal's wildlife and a nature trail with rubbing posts will help to achieve this in a way that has minimal impact on the canal landscape (the rubbing posts would be located beside existing furniture such as noticeboards, signs and benches).

Promotion of the trail is likely to encourage more visits, with subsequent benefits for local businesses and increased car parking income for the Country Park.



After researching suppliers and prices, a supplier was identified which has a wide range of wildlife icons to choose from, ensuring that the ones selected will match the key species found along the canal. They are mounted on sturdy oak posts which are fixed in the ground.

The Canal Manager made a funding application to the IWA South West Inland Waterways Regeneration Fund (which has recently funded new noticeboards along the canal and new video screens in the visitor centre). In August, he was notified that the application had been successful and that just over £2000 was going to be awarded for the purchase and installation of 20 rubbing posts along the canal. These will be purchased and installed during the winter, ready for a launch in the spring of 2026. The Canal Manager will liaise with canalside businesses to ensure that notebooks and crayons are available for families to purchase for a small fee if they don't bring their own.

17. Extra staffing

Thanks to long term vacancies within the wider Public Rights of Way and Country Parks team, the salary savings have allowed a temporary ranger at Stover Country Park to be kept on for an extra year, on the proviso that the Public Rights of Way Wardens and the Grand Western Canal Country Park also benefit from some of this extra resource. The Ranger will be spending one day per week working at the Canal.

18. Embankment roboflailing

In order to prevent the two highest embankments along the canal (near Swing Bridge and Sellake Bridge) from scrubbing up and becoming attractive to badgers, and to allow periodic inspections, the embankments are cut at least every other year. Due to the steep slope the safest way to achieve this is using a remotely controlled flail (or 'roboflail'). The best time of year to undertake this work is late summer / early autumn, once bird nesting season is over and whilst the ground is still fairly dry. The brambles are still growing at this time of year and so cutting them now rather than in their dormant winter state will have more effect in knocking them back and reducing their vigour. A contractor has completed this work in late September.



19. Remote operation of tilting weir

The tilting weir near Burlescombe can be opened and closed manually on site, or remotely by sending it text messages. At present problems are being experienced in the remote operation of the weir. The Dutch supplier and UK installer are working with the Canal

Manager to identify the cause, which has involved the checking / replacement of various components, but to date without success. Given the forthcoming need to use the weir more frequently and reactively during autumn storms, more radical and expensive solutions are now being considered which may involve engineers travelling over from the Netherlands, or a completely new control box being shipped over and installed.

20. Re-excavation of Boehill Pond

The Country Park holding includes a small triangle of land on the offside bank between Boehill Bridge and Holbrook Bridge. This land contains a pond which over many decades became overgrown with willows and filled up with mud, leaving very little standing water and then, only in the winter months. In recent years, the Canal Rangers have cleared back some of the trees to let more light in and this summer, adjacent landowner (and JAC member) Ken Browse used his excavator to dredge the pond. Ken did an excellent job and we expect the pond to quickly become populated with a range of plants, invertebrates and amphibians.



21. Visitor Survey

A target within the Canal Management Plan is to undertake a visitor survey in the last year of the five-year plan, in order to help assess visitor satisfaction, identify areas for improvement and inform the review of the management plan. The latest visitor survey - using almost all of the same questions of the previous 2015 survey to enable comparison - has been undertaken by a student from Wellington School as his Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award project.

Initially, he undertook 58 in-person interviews with canal visitors at various locations along the canal. He then adapted the survey using Microsoft forms to make it available online. The Canal Ranger Service have promoted the online survey through their social media, sharing it with relevant Facebook groups. The online survey runs until the end of September and at the time of writing has seen a further 76 responses.

Whilst the results need to be interpreted carefully (due to the small sample size and self-selecting nature of the online survey) some consistent patterns and themes have emerged. Here are a few:

- The most important reasons for visiting are the peaceful and relaxing atmosphere and the beautiful landscape.
- In terms of improvements that can be made, the commonest responses related to dogs, with respondents citing dog fouling and dogs off leads in particular.
- Interpretation and information provision is generally seen to be very good.
- Canal infrastructure (benches, noticeboards gates etc.) was generally seen to be in good condition.
- All respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their most recent visit.
- 95% of respondents felt the overall management and maintenance of the Country Park is either satisfactory or very satisfactory.

A visitor survey report will be shared with JAC members once completed.

22. Canal Management Plan

The current Canal Management Plan runs until the end of 2025 and the Canal Manager has been undertaking a thorough review, resulting in the draft plan for 2026-2030 which has been shared with members ahead of the October 2025 Joint Advisory Committee meeting. Members are encouraged to read the plan and provide any feedback during the meeting.

Devon County Council is keen that the adopted plan is endorsed by the Joint Advisory Committee and so it is hoped that the committee can endorse the plan at the meeting, subject to any amendments that are agreed.

23. Events

- Wed 7th May - Walk & Talk - Swans Neck - 8 people
- Fri 16th May - Bat Walk – Tidcombe to Snakes Wood - 32 people



- Fri 30th May - Pond dipping Event - 28 children

- Wed 30th July - Wild Wednesday - Love Parks Week - 40 children



- Wed 13th Aug - Wild Wednesday - Pond dipping - 31 children
- Wed 20th Aug - Wild Wednesday - Bug Boxes - 29 children
- Wed 27th Aug - Wild Wednesday - Arts & Crafts - 13 children



24. Ranger-led school and youth group visits

- Thurs 22 May - St Andrews Primary School, Cullompton - 53 children
- Tues 10th , Wed 11th & Fri 13th June - Wilcombe Primary School (the whole school) - 170 children
- Wed 18th June - Castle Primary School - 43 children
- Thurs 19th June - 2nd Tiverton Beavers - 20 children
- Wed 25th June - 3rd Tiverton Rainbows - 15 children
- Wed 25th June - 1st Tiverton Girl guides - 12 children
- Tues 15th July - Tiverton High School (part of Activities Week) - 21 children
- Mon 15th Sept - 1st Willand Beavers - 20 children

25. Talks

- Thurs 4th Sept – Canal Manager gave evening talk to Uplowman WI

26. Volunteers

Weekday Volunteering:

- 6 regular volunteers / 137 days
- Fri 19th Sept - DCC Engineering Design Group Special Projects Team - 11 staff painted public toilet walls and stained benches as part of a corporate volunteer day



Weekend Volunteer Days:

- Sun 9th March - 12 volunteers hedgelaying at Swing Embankment

Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteering:

- Two students from Tiverton High School – 2 hours per week for 12 weeks litter-picking
- One student from Uffculme School – 2 hours per week for 12 weeks litter-picking
- One student from Wellington School – Several weekend days and weekday evenings spent undertaking Canal Visitor Survey

Work Experience:

- One student from Petroc completed 10 days volunteering on midweek days
- 7th - 11th July – One student from St Wilfred's School, Exeter
- 14th - 18th July – One student from Uffculme School and one student from Tiverton High School

Future programme of works

Practical works

- Annual trimming of hedges, banks, embankments, abutments and wildflower areas
- Annual barge-based tree works
- Completion of tree safety works as specified by tree safety inspection
- Hedgelaying near Tiverton Road Bridge
- Ongoing small-scale bank erosion repairs
- Reed clearance (on towpath side by excavator) – after full canal survey in autumn
- Building and installing new memorial benches as and when ordered
- Severing and removing worst of ivy growth on bridges
- Install rubbing posts for new nature trail

Management tasks (* = ongoing / already in progress)

- Organisation of all works listed above*
- Reviewing Garden and Gateway access agreements and responding to non-payments*
- Liaising with DCC staff / partner organisations and contractors in relation to premises repairs and upgrades (including repair of damaged wall beside bowls club)*
- Ongoing work with DCC engineers on Asset Management Plan (delayed due to lack of capacity amongst DCC engineers)*
- Fenacre water transfer system*
- Organise filling of potholes at Tiverton Road car park
- Organise update and replacement of the Waytown Limekilns panel
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all relevant H&S policies / guidelines and passing of H&S 3-yearly audit in January 2026*
- External funding applications and budget management*
- Commission Disability Access Audit
- Green Flag award application by end of January 2026
- Completion of review of Canal Management Plan

This page is intentionally left blank