

Grand Western Canal



LOCAL NATURE RESERVE



**DRAFT**

# Management Plan 2020-2025



## Acknowledgements

This plan has been drafted by Devon County Council’s Grand Western 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](mailto:gwcanal@devon.gov.uk)

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## Document History

Date	Description	Author
Jan 2020	Document drafted	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 all official/Devon County Council output avoids using this name. 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.

DCC is an abbreviation for Devon County Council and MDDC is an abbreviation for Mid Devon District Council.

## Accessible format

This plan can be supplied in an accessible format on request – please contact [gwcanal@devon.gov.uk](mailto:gwcanal@devon.gov.uk) or telephone 01884 254072

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## Executive Summary

### **To be written by the JAC Chair, suggested themes to cover:**

- *V. fortunate to have this precious resource – could so easily have been lost. Decades of investment & good mgmt. has delivered a high-quality park which locals are proud of, which supports the health and wellbeing of local communities and which attracts tourism and support the local economy.*
- *A balancing act – different users and interests, narrow corridor, potential conflict.*
- *Ranger Service, JAC & mgmt. plan serve to find and develop the best balance*
- *Green Flag Award provides excellent structure on which to base new mgmt. plan*

## 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 future management and maintenance of the Grand Western Canal Country Park from 2020 to 2025. The plan is a statement of Devon County Council's commitment to ensuring that the Country Park continues to provide the highest quality services possible to the citizens of Devon and its aims 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. In particular it should be read in conjunction with its sister document – the **Grand Western Canal Country Park Asset Management Plan 2020-2030**. This asset management plan 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 will not be discussed in detail within this plan, other than to reflect upon their heritage/conservation/landscape value or relationship to recreational use of the Country Park.

The Country Park is a designated conservation area, and this plan aims to be consistent with policies adopted in the Mid Devon Local Plan that seek to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of this designated heritage asset, including its setting. Mid Devon District Council does not have a conservation area appraisal/management plan for the Grand Western Canal

Conservation Area - as they do for many other conservation areas in their area - and so this plan offers opportunity to fill this gap and manage change for the benefit of the conservation area.

## **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 concise 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. However, it will be published on the Country Park website and so will be available for any member of the public to view. The plan will act as a definitive reference to key information regarding the park.

The Grand Western Canal Manager will be directly responsible for the delivery of this plan. The plan will be reviewed annually by the Canal Manager and fundamentally reviewed in the fifth year. Updates to the plan may be made at any time following decisions made by Devon County Council – usually informed by advice from the Canal’s Joint Advisory Committee (see sections 10 and 20 for more information about this stakeholder committee). An up to date version will always be publicly accessible on the Canal’s webpages at [www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal](http://www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal)

## **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 safe and 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 Lowdwells, close to the Somerset border.

Grid References:

Tiverton Canal Basin – SS 963, 124

Lowdwells – ST 073, 196

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.



### 3.3 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 Abbott. Each of the Country Parks has its own Ranger Service team.

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 is somewhat complicated 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 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 heavy 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 3m<sup>2</sup> tilting weir (remotely-controllable) and one 1m<sup>2</sup> guillotine sluice 40m 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 erosion issues downstream)

In addition to these controlled methods of releasing water from the canal, the canal is undoubtedly prone to leakage, although the extent of this is impossible to 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 is monitored on a monthly basis by the Environment Agency at Tiverton Road car park and Fenacre Bridge. Records extend back to 1993 and analysis undertaken in 2007 by a consultant from the University of Liverpool indicated much higher nitrate and phosphate levels at Fenacre Bridge than at Tiverton Road Bridge, with the suggestion that the adjacent stream that flows into the canal year-round may be the source of the high nutrient levels.

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. However, more pertinent to this plan are the predictions for climate change over the next 50 years. The following headline projections based on the 'medium emissions scenario' are provided for the South West region in the 2009 UK Climate Projections Science Report by Murphy et al:

- Increase in winter mean temperature of 2.1°C
- Increase in summer mean temperature of 2.7°C
- Increase in summer mean daily temperature of 3.8°C
- Change in annual mean precipitation of 0%
- Change in winter mean precipitation of +17%
- Change in summer mean temperature of -20%

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 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 and a few garden frontages have hard edges and the only section that is piled are short section of plastic piling by Sampford Peverell Bridge and 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 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. It 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 the National Trust property 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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**

From Tidcombe Bridge on the offside and beyond Follett Road on the towpath side, the canal enters mixed farmland and takes on a distinctly rural and more natural landscape, with pleasant views to surrounding hills. At the time of writing, there are proposals for housing development in the fields to the east of Tidcombe Hall, and although the fields beside the Canal are earmarked as parkland, some of the development is likely to be visible from the towpath.

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 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 precise nature of the green infrastructure will of course have a bearing on its impact within the local landscape and so this will require ongoing engagement with developers and Mid Devon District Council planners. It is possible that the Canal Ranger Service could play a role in managing and maintaining this green infrastructure land to compliment the Country Park.

The anaerobic digester has arguably 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. The intention 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 (an AONB) 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. At the time of writing, proposed residential development of Halberton Court Farm and the potential construction of new farm sheds to provide storage displaced by the proposed development may impact negatively on the local landscape here.

#### **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 housing and low-rise flats on the offside. As in Tiverton, adjacent residents can rent DCC-owned offside land to use as part of their garden. The offside land contains a large number of trees, which help to screen some of the more modern housing and flats.

#### **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 passes 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 15<sup>th</sup> century Ayshford Chapel and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 (previous owners of the Canal) 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.

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 Legal Services. The most notable leases are those relating to the Tiverton Canal Company (for premises and operation on the Canal of the Horse-drawn barge, Duck's Ditty floating cage-bar, Old Stable gift shop and boat hire), the 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. Those with a Garden Agreement have the opportunity to request a boat mooring agreement which is considered on a case by case basis, in consultation with the Tiverton Canal Co and the Tiverton and District Angling Club. Requests to build a landing stage are also considered on a case by case basis by the Canal Manager.

## **6. Legal Factors**

### **6.1 Public Rights of Way**

The entire length of the towpath from the Canal Basin in Tiverton to Lowdells is a Public Footpath. As landowner Devon County Council also permits cycle use along the towpath.

### **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 Devon County Council)
- A Country Park declared in 1971 under the 1968 Countryside Act.
- A Local Nature Reserve declared in 2005
- 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.

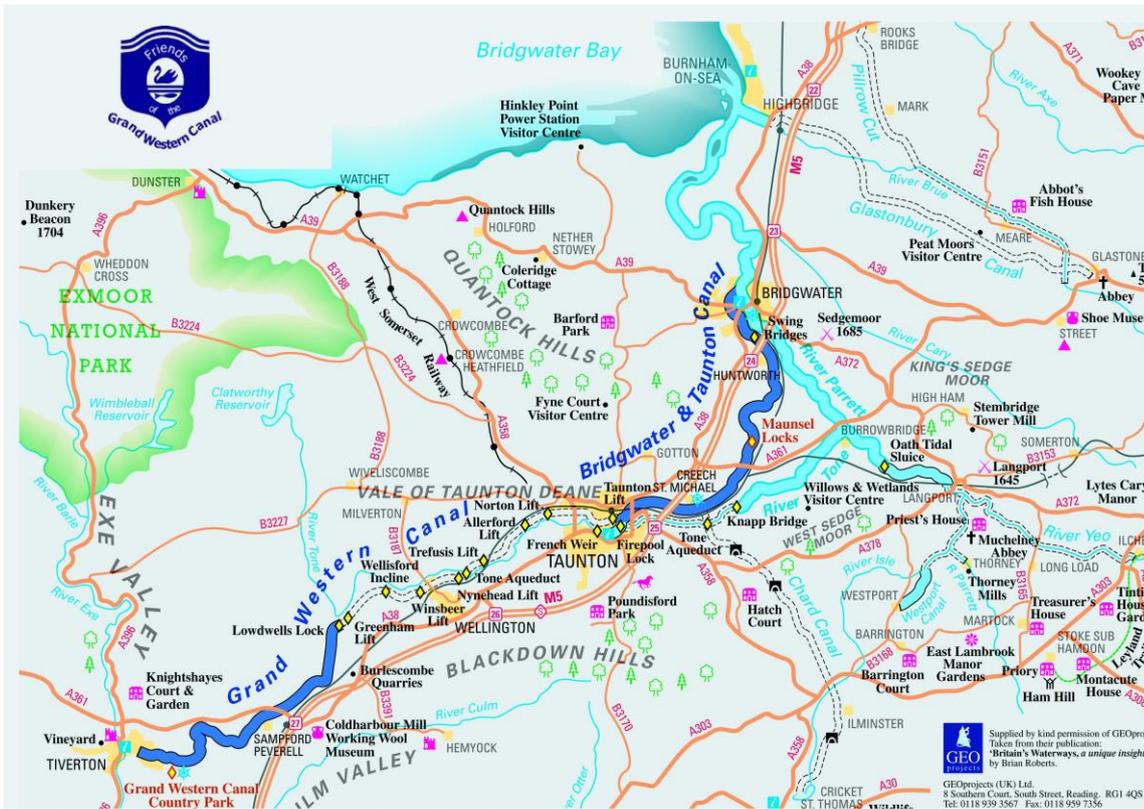
### **6.4 Byelaws**

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 held in the Canal Offices and are listed in Appendix 3.

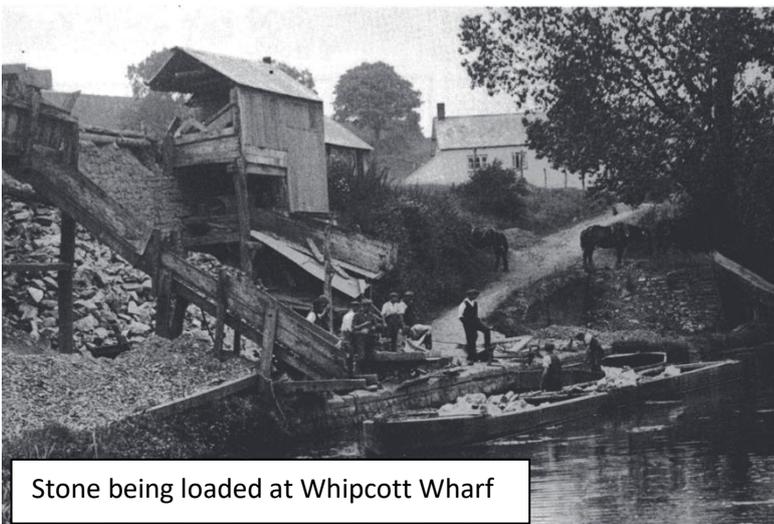
The length and legalistic language of the byelaws do not lend themselves to easy public understanding and so they are not displayed in the noticeboards along the canal. However, some of the key points are incorporated into the Towpath Code of Conduct and 'permit required' posters which are contained 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.

## 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.



*'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.

*Left: Swing embankment after the 2012 breach.*

## **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, a gift shop and the floating *Ducks Ditty Café-Bar*. The Canal Tea Rooms and Garden is also 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 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 remain a problem 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. It 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, quad bike and drone 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 310,000 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. 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, which is identified as part of the National Cycle Network (NCN 3)

The economic benefits of tourism generated by the Country Park important to the main canal-related businesses and are also significant in the wider local area. This economic benefit is key to the ongoing funding for the canal provided by Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council, as in times of austerity, the other benefits provided by the Country Park (health and well-being, community engagement, biodiversity, landscape etc.) may not be considered significant enough to avoid major cuts to funding.

Devon County Council's Grand Western Canal Manager and the Managing Director of the Tiverton Canal Co are both members of the Mid Devon Attractions Association, which seeks to co-ordinate efforts to increase visitor numbers, raise standards and play a role in the strategic development of tourism in Mid Devon.



The Country Park is also promoted through a new Visit Mid Devon initiative, with paid for entries on the website and printed leaflets. The Country Park also maintains a listing on [touristnetuk.com](http://touristnetuk.com).

## 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, held at The Moorings, contain over 2000 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, usually 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 Canal Manager and two Canal Rangers, who 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 Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste department.

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 2020/21 is £196k. Funding of £76k is provided by Devon County Council and £45k is provided by Mid Devon District Council. The remaining £75k is raised through income generated by the Country Park through car parking, leases, rents, 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 towpath re-surfacing or interpretation panels and so external funding sources 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 major dredging works, culvert cleaning and repairs, the response to the 2012 breach, and relining the Aqueduct.

## **11. National context**

There is little recent national policy guidance relating to the management of country parks, but at the time of writing there are several ongoing changes, government consultations, and imminent plans and strategies being discussed or recently released including the 25-year Environment Plan, the Glover Review, the Parks Action Group, the Environment and Agriculture Acts and Brexit. It is proposed that this section of the plan be fundamentally reviewed at the end of Year 1 when the outcomes from all of these national level activities should be much clearer.

## 12. Local strategic context

This section should be fundamentally reviewed at the end of year one once DCC and MDDC have published their next strategic / corporate plans for the period after 2020.

### 12.1 Devon County Council's Strategic Plan 2014 -2020

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/bettertogether>

This plan sets out five key attributes that the Council aims to support and strengthen through its work with communities in Devon. These are listed below along with comments on how these may relate to the Country Park:

- **Resilient** – *“Resilient people and communities are more likely to enjoy health, happiness and prosperity.”*

Devon County Council is very keen to encourage and enable communities to play a greater role in determining and delivering the services they need themselves. The Country Park provides opportunities for people to volunteer and work alongside the Canal Rangers in maintaining and improving their local environment.

The Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee enables stakeholders and local residents (either by attending these public meetings or through their elected representatives) to have an input into the management of the Country Park (which in many cases is the defining feature of their local environment).

- **Healthy** – *“We will enable people to lead healthy lives in Devon’s outstanding environment, support people to live in their own home as part of a supportive community, and focus on reducing inequalities in health.”*

The Country Park provides a range of opportunities for Devon residents to support and improve their health and well-being through the various recreational activities that can be enjoyed. In providing such accessible green and blue space on the doorsteps of residents of Tiverton and the villages along the canal, the Country Park already plays a key role in the health and wellbeing of many and has the potential to accommodate many more users and have an even greater effect. At the time of writing, some ‘trim trail’ equipment is about to be installed at the Canal picnic site in Sampford Peverell.

- **Prosperous** – *“Resourceful small enterprises, innovative high value businesses, agriculture and tourism form Devon’s diverse and dynamic economy.”*

As discussed under 8.3 above, the canal plays a significant role in the local tourism economy supporting jobs and providing income for canal businesses, local pubs, accommodation

providers and shops. The Canal Ranger Service works closely with many of these businesses and several of them demonstrate the value of their links with the Canal by advertising in the Canal Visitor Guide each year. Devon County Council has been and will continue to be open to business proposals which improve the range of facilities and services available to canal visitors.

- **Connected** – *“People need to be able to connect to one another in order to form supportive and inclusive communities.”*

The Country Park forms a valuable opportunity for people to meet and connect either by prior arrangement (to go for a walk or meet up for a coffee) or by chance whilst walking the towpath. Through conversations with regular visitors the Canal Ranger Service know that the daily dog walk along the towpath provides the main opportunity for socialising for many of the retired residents that live near the Canal in Tiverton and Sampford Peverell.

Connection to Devon’s environment and heritage is also highlighted in this section of the Strategic Plan with a pledge to “work together to develop and maintain cycle paths and public rights of way”.

- **Safe** – *“The overwhelming majority of Devon’s families and communities are places in which people can flourish, whatever their circumstances.”*

The Canal Ranger Service plays a key role in ensuring that the Country Park is kept a safe and welcoming place, by ensuring high standards of maintenance, by undertaking regular inspections and risk assessments, and by acting swiftly to react to incidents and breakages (e.g. storm damaged trees, vandalism, etc..).

## 12.2 Mid Devon District Council’s Corporate Plan 2016 to 2020

<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/348008/corporate-plan-2016-2020.pdf>

This corporate plan focusses specifically on the priorities and actions within the council’s control and there are few opportunities for the Country Park to contribute directly to the stated ‘priority activities’. However, the park does clearly contribute towards the more general ‘Community’ priorities of ‘Working with local communities to encourage them to support themselves’ and ‘Promoting physical activity, health and wellbeing’; and the ‘Environment’ priority of ‘Protecting the natural environment’.

## 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, Cobe 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 to ensure that 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:

## Green Flag Award Assessment criteria:

### Section 1: A welcoming Place

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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

**27. Implementation of Management Plan**

*In the forthcoming sections (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 dozens of 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 these 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 at the roadside entrance to the Canal Basin car park to improve sight lines and to create a new pedestrian crossing point have markedly improved the safety of 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 told to take care. However, this is currently not 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. The Canal Basin car park is the only one for which charges are made, via pay and display.

Cyclists can present a safety hazard to other users by riding too quickly, particularly under bridges, and by attempting to pass pedestrians without warning, 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 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 tourism sign coverage along the major access roads into Tiverton, leading to the Canal Basin car park. Some of the outlying car parks close to main roads are also signed with these brown signs. Devon County Council highways staff have previously confirmed that adherence to national road signage policies means it is not possible to place brown signs to the Canal along the M5. All the Canal car parks have had welcome signs installed, although at the time of writing some of these signs have been stolen and are awaiting replacement.

A recent audit of the signage within the Canal Basin confirmed that many signs and posts were in poor condition and that their design was inconsistent. 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 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 audit should be undertaken during the period of this plan to identify what more can be done to welcome all sections of society. This will include application of Devon County Council's new Accessibility Standards to the Canal webpages and other forms of information provision.

### 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.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New entrance panel</li><li>• Well surfaced and lined car park</li><li>• Attractive and interesting historic structures</li><li>• Well maintained amenity area and paths</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Car park on different level from canal</li><li>• Canal Basin car park signage not as good as it could be</li><li>• Lack of consistency in information signage design</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Popular new visitor centre and play area</li> <li>• Fairly consistent styles (paint, bench designs etc.)</li> <li>• Good range of facilities and recreational opportunities</li> <li>• Friendly and helpful Ranger Service and canal business staff</li> <li>• Good access and disabled facilities</li> <li>• Cycle rack for cyclists in Canal Basin</li> <li>• Good provision of noticeboards</li> <li>• Sea Cadet building TS Hermes recently benefitted from external redecoration.</li> <li>• Good brown tourism sign coverage leading to Canal Basin</li> <li>• Outlying car parks have a good array of signs and noticeboards and are generally well maintained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited parking space in Canal Basin car park – insufficient at busiest times</li> <li>• Tarmac in Canal Basin car park beginning to break up at eastern end.</li> <li>• Poor public transport links</li> <li>• Poor connectivity between the Canal Basin and the town (in terms of signs and cycle paths)</li> <li>• Visitor Centre unmanned.</li> <li>• Inconsistency of signage at outlying car parks (some don't have both of the signs required)</li> <li>• Some sections of towpath prone to large puddles</li> <li>• No warning signs about towpath joining Chains Road</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved welcome panels and signage</li> <li>• Creation of extra lined parking spaces at eastern end of the Canal Basin car park</li> <li>• Liaison with Mid Devon District Council and Tiverton Town Council to improve signage between the Canal and the town centre.</li> <li>• Update / add new display material in Visitor Centre</li> <li>• Ensure all outlying car parks have correct signage</li> <li>• Improve awareness of Canal with new signage at the bottom of Canal Hill</li> <li>• Warning signs at Chains Road</li> <li>• Reduce the numbers and size of puddles</li> <li>• Equal access audit</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding / staffing cuts lead to deterioration in maintenance standards</li> <li>• Vandalism / graffiti / antisocial behaviour</li> <li>• Non-compliance with parking regulations (overnight use)</li> <li>• Inappropriate development on adjacent land</li> </ul>

## 15.2 Improvement options for 'A Welcoming Place'

- Continue to raise standards of maintenance throughout the Canal Basin
- Improve maintenance of the Canal Basin walls (vegetation removal and repointing)
- Renew car parking signage in the Canal Basin car park
- Review parking space provision / white lining. Create new spaces if possible
- Work with councils to improve links with the town centre
- Review displays in Visitor Centre and consider opportunities for new displays
- Maintain new wildflower bed beside entrance to Canal Basin car park

- h) Consider re- slurry-sealing the tarmacked paths in the Canal Basin at some point during the period of this plan
- i) Consider resurfacing eastern end of Canal Basin car park if funding can be secured
- j) Install signs at Chains Road warning towpath users that the path joins the road for a short distance.
- k) Consider installation of new noticeboard at Beech car park?
- l) Undertake resurfacing / annual drainage clearing works to reduce puddles, including puddles under bridges
- m) Review provision of signage at outlying car parks and ensure all have the requisite signs
- n) Commission, and where possible enact the recommendations of, an equality of access audit (including access to information).

## **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 will 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 new play area extends this provision to cater better for young children.

Excellent café facilities are provided in the Canal Basin by the Tiverton Canal Co through their 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 (including accessible toilets) are provided in the Canal Basin by Devon County Council and close to the Canal beside the picnic site in Sampford Peverell by Mid Devon District 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 a good provision of benches throughout the length of the Canal.

Regarding first aid provision, all the Canal Ranger Service staff are First Aid at Work qualified 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. 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 an Automatic External Defibrillator located in the Ranger's offices and a poster in the Visitor Centre stating this is the case. The AED is also registered with South West Ambulance Service's Defibrillator Accreditation Scheme, meaning the Service 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.

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 to change behaviour would be to provide photo-based signs which highlight the vulnerable towpath users that cyclists could meet 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 have been reported in the past.



In order to keep 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 although they received positive feedback from towpath users, it is probably too soon (at the time of writing) to gauge how successful the new signs are compared with the old text-based signs. Consultation with visitors and stakeholders on the effectiveness of the new signs will continue during 2020.

### **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 (most recently passed in Dec 2019).

Devon County Council also organises a number of legally required inspections through corporate contracts overseen by its property partner NPS (SW) Ltd. 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. The office answerphone provides a number for the Devon County Council Customer Services Centre and an out of hours number which is monitored by Devon County Council's Highway Operations Control Centre (HOCC) and is manned 24 hours per day and can co-ordinate the response to Canal emergencies such as leaks or pollution incidents.

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, night time 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.

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 significant 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, dog fouling continues to be a serious problem.

Fortunately, incidents involving dog attacks are rare, although many may go unreported. Those incidents that are reported are passed on to the Mid Devon District Council enforcement officers and/or the local PCSO 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. 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 recent years the Canal Ranger Service and some key stakeholders have been discussing the possibility of a combined campaign with the owners of other popular dog walking venues in and around Tiverton (including Mid Devon District Council parks and National Trust Knightshayes). This project seems to have stalled but could be renewed if partners are willing.

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

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New EN1176 compliant, canal-themed play area, overlooked by Ranger Services offices and local housing</li> <li>• Three different volunteer programmes (midweek, winter volunteer days and Friends Group Volunteer Wardens)</li> <li>• Well-attended, ranger-led healthy walks</li> <li>• Lots of benches along the towpath / picnic areas</li> <li>• Grab cable and steps in Canal Basin for anyone who falls in. Ice safety posters put out when canal is frozen</li> <li>• Slopes in Canal Basin gritted when paths are icy</li> <li>• Emergency procedures in every noticeboard along towpath</li> <li>• Adequate and DDA compliant toilet facilities in Canal Basin. Nearby MDDC public toilets in Sampford Peverell</li> <li>• Comprehensive inspection regime in place</li> <li>• Comprehensive array of risk assessments in place and internal DCC H&amp;S audit every 3 years</li> <li>• Good staff presence (and by proxy through Canal business's staff). Staff uniformed, DRB checked, equipped with mobile phones and trained to deal with conflict</li> <li>• Clear sightlines throughout Country Park.</li> <li>• Vandalism and hazards always promptly attended to by staff.</li> <li>• Good links with PCSO</li> <li>• Community Patrol boat (run in spare time by PCSO + volunteers)</li> <li>• Friends Group Volunteer Wardens and local resident act as 'eyes and ears' for Ranger Service</li> <li>• Good provision of dog mess bins along towpath</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of time / human resources to promote / supervise volunteering means full potential of volunteers / volunteering not being realised</li> <li>• Public toilets are old and tired and prone to vandalism and graffiti.</li> <li>• Lack of toilet facilities along much of the Canal</li> <li>• No constant staff presence</li> <li>• Ongoing problems with dog fouling despite provision of bins</li> <li>• Lack of enforcement / political will by dog wardens / Mid Devon District Council to catch offenders</li> <li>• Codes of conduct often ignored</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-publicised codes of conduct</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more opportunities for volunteering</li> <li>• Promote first aid procedures</li> <li>• Seek funding for refurbishing public toilets</li> <li>• Ongoing improvement of inspection programming /adherence</li> <li>• Joined up programme to promote responsible dog walking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vandalism and graffiti</li> <li>• Lack of resources to manage and maintain facilities</li> <li>• Failure to share / adhere to risk assessments</li> <li>• Community patrol boat funding / staffing could end</li> <li>• Potential introduction of unaffordable charges for MDDC dog/litter bin emptying</li> <li>• Dog fouling spoils / deters visits</li> </ul>

**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) Contact partners regarding responsible dog walking initiative and develop if possible
- e) Investigate options and potential funding for refurbishing Canal Basin public toilets

## **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 County 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 at times in the past when a mobile catering outlet has been located at Tiverton Road car park, a bin has also been provided there. The exception to this policy is in Sampford Peverell where the Parish Council has provided litter bins at Chains Road, the picnic site and Boehill Slipway. With the exception of the Canal Basin play park litter bin (emptied by the Canal Ranger Service), all of these bins are emptied by Mid Devon District Council.
- Dog waste bins are provided at all major access points used by dog walkers and are emptied by Mid Devon District Council. However, a recent Mid Devon District Council policy change has been that they will not install or empty any dog mess or litter bins at new locations on land not owned by the district council. The policy is also now to install litter bins rather than dog mess bins.
- Visitors are encouraged to take rubbish home with them.
- The Canal Ranger Service inspects that Canal Basin for litter daily and outlying car parks are checked at least once per week.

Fortunately, the Country 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 assisted by the Friends of the Grand Western Canal's Volunteer Wardens 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 new wildflower bed near the entrance of the Canal Basin car park was 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 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 usually not located underneath large mature trees as the increased dwell time would increase the risk of the tree being a hazard 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. To complement this 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 an arboricultural consultant who has over 25 years' experience as a tree surgeon and consultant working at the Country Park. 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 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, 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 should be possible 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. The earliest recorded outbreak of the disease in Devon was at Bickleigh - just 10 miles away - and during 2018 and 2019 some 20 mature ash trees with the disease were felled for safety reasons. The Forestry Commission website shows that all the 10km squares including and surrounding the Canal have the disease present. Current estimates are that over 90% of Ash trees will succumb to the disease and given that Ashes make up approximately one third of the standard / canopy trees within the Country Park and around half of the small to medium sized trees, there is clearly the potential for a very large impact.

The response to Ash Dieback within the Country Park will be led by Devon County Council's evolving policy, 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 where it will 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 is taking the potential impacts of Ash Dieback very seriously and is setting aside considerable medium-term funding for dealing for the felling work that will be required along highways, and as the towpath is a public right of way and therefore a highway, the Country Park will be able to access this funding to assist with all the extra tree work which will inevitably be required.

With regard to the proportion of the Country Park which has tree cover, the consensus of the Canal's Joint Advisory Committee in recent years is 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 likely to have 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 take place at points along hedgerows where ash trees are lost, due to the significance of these tree in the landscape.

#### **17.1.4 Building and infrastructure maintenance**

As explained at the start of this document, a separate Asset Management Plan for the Country Park is currently in preparation and so this plan will not focus on the management of ‘engineering’ structures such as bridges, limekilns, culverts, embankments, weirs and suchlike. However, this section will address 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, NPS SW, 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 biennially as part of a DCC corporate insurance contract. All other machinery is serviced upon request by local specialist contractors (mainly MST in Tiverton, Radmore and Tucker near Exeter, and Bridger 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. 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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only a low-level littering problem – better than most urban fringe public greenspaces.</li> <li>• Mid Devon District Council undertake dog and litter bin collections.</li> <li>• Dog mess bins at all main access points to the towpath. Litter bins provided where litter can be generated on site.</li> <li>• Attractive, pollinator-friendly, low-maintenance flower beds in Canal Basin.</li> <li>• Well-managed amenity grassland.</li> <li>• Excellent Devon County Council policies and procedures - relating to premises maintenance and tree safety – in place and followed by Country Park.</li> <li>• Excellent stock of trees with fantastic landscape and wildlife value</li> <li>• Funding available for dealing with Ash Dieback.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog fouling a real problem in the most heavily used areas of the Country Park (close to residential areas and car parks).</li> <li>• Mid Devon District Council policy on no new bins.</li> <li>• Canal Basin flower beds are empty or not particularly attractive at times in the year.</li> <li>• Some user groups feel there are too many trees.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Some bridge nameplates are corroded and becoming illegible</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joined up programme to promote responsible dog walking.</li> <li>• Ash dieback offers opportunity to increase income through log sales.</li> <li>• Explore possibility of purchasing ride-on gang / cylinder mower to provide neater finish to amenity grassland areas (avoiding lines of cut grass).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog fouling spoils / deters visits.</li> <li>• Canal car parks are targeted more by fly-tippers.</li> <li>• Accidents/ damage as a result of tree failure.</li> <li>• Access to funding for tree work is reduced due to cuts or eligibility criteria.</li> <li>• Detrimental impact on wildlife and landscape through widespread felling of diseased ash trees.</li> <li>• Potential loss of income due to new restrictions on sale of unseasoned wood</li> <li>• Vandalism of public equipment.</li> <li>• Theft of Canal Ranger Service equipment.</li> </ul>

### 17.2 Improvement options for 'Well-maintained and clean'

- a) Contact partners regarding responsible dog walking initiative and develop if possible.
- b) Seek to increase litter-picking in high use areas.

- c) Monitor and manage impacts of Ash dieback, identifying needs for replanting where appropriate.
- d) Repaint / replace bridge nameplates as necessary
- e) Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings
- f) Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.
- g) Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert.
- h) Aim to seal all leaks as soon as possible
- i) 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

## **18. Environmental management**

### **18.1 Evaluation for Environmental management**

#### **18.1.1 Managing environmental impact**

The Country Park looks to 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. As a general principle, 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), there is a possibility of a new system to transfer water from Fenacre Water to compensate for declining spring inputs, believed to be due to the activities at Westleigh Quarry. It is imperative that the Canal is kept as watertight 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.

- **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.

A large proportion of the Canal Ranger Service 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. As well as the potential reduction in fossil fuels,

electric tools create less vibration and no fumes and should be considered where practical. Fuel use is minimised through careful planning of journeys and by regular servicing of vehicles and machinery. Electric vehicles may also become a feasible option the next time any need replacing.

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

The characteristics of the Country Park and its buildings do not lend themselves to the efficient / meaningful generation of renewable energy. 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 Energy Policy, which states as its first objective the need to "Purchase the most cost-effective and sustainable energy and fuels."

- **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 and the Devon County Council 24-hour Highway Operations Control Centre phone number is provided on the Canal Ranger office answerphone for reporting emergencies including pollution incidents.

- 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 inputs near Fenacre Bridge is to create a new reed bed and silt trap system. This project has delayed following the 2012 breach and subsequent high priority infrastructure improvements 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 – such as at Holbrook Bridge siphon culvert.

- **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 purchase of battery-powered machinery (where feasible) in future would reduce this noise.

Mowing and strimming in the Canal Basin is organised to avoid the times that the horse-drawn barge is in operation, as far as practicable. 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 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 is 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 a very 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 could play an increasingly important role as climate changes in that it 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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devon County Council has strong environmental policies and objectives which the Country Park adheres and contributes to.</li> <li>• The Country Park has a good range of policies and approaches to minimise water pollution by staff and canal users.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Bulk waste generated from management activities is reused where possible and disposed of on-site if not, with none going to landfill.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy efficiency of the Canal Ranger Service offices is compromised by the draughty windows.</li> <li>• There is little control of water inputs to the canal.</li> <li>• The capacity to offer visitors the ability to recycle waste at Country Park litter bins is limited.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install secondary glazing at The Moorings.</li> <li>• Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.</li> <li>• Install silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert.</li> <li>• Consider water harvesting system for public toilets if they are refurbished.</li> <li>• Consider purchasing electric tools / vehicles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water pollution by third parties. This includes point source pollution in the form of spills or ongoing runoff into a feeder stream; or diffuse pollution such as mud and silt washing off fields and roads into the canal.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

### 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.
- j) Only use pesticides where essential, exploring other options for weed / pest control where viable.
- k) Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.
- l) Aim to seal all leaks as soon as possible

- m) 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
- n) Over time, replace petrol / diesel tools, machinery and vehicles with electric versions as appropriate

## **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 to 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 not home to any outstandingly rare or endangered species and as such there are currently 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 species.

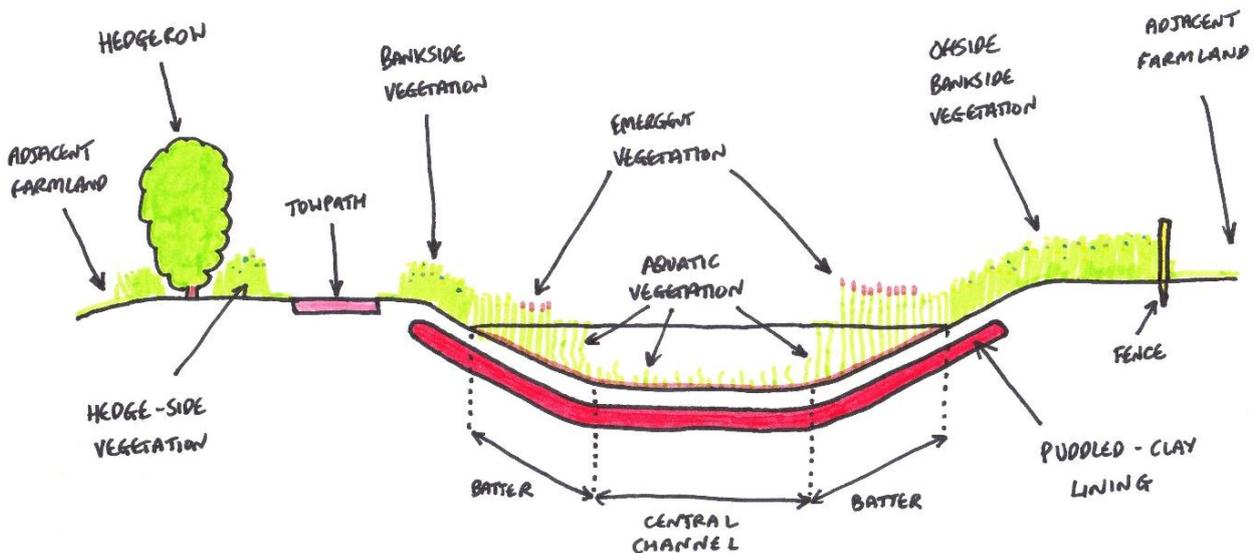
The general approach to habitat management within the Country Park seeks to manage vegetation sensitively for the benefit of wildlife, whilst balancing this with the other functions of the Country Park (recreation, landscape, heritage etc.). This balance has been agreed through discussions with stakeholders 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 75cm – 150cm (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 larger 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 remnant pond lies in a small triangle of woodland to the north east of Boehill Bridge, but until recently this has been heavily shaded and

has apparently suffered from the tipping of waste potatoes by an adjacent farmer in the past and so is currently of much less value for wildlife, but improvements could be made if resources and access for machinery allows.

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**

Most of the Canal was dredged between 2002 and 2007. Over time the canal will slowly fill up again 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 will not be required for many years and certainly not within the period of this plan. It is possible that some 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 which consequently suppresses 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.

### **Water quality**

Water sampling is undertaken on a monthly basis by the Environment Agency at two locations (Tiverton Road Bridge and Fenacre Bridge). Their officers assess the test results and contact the Canal Ranger Service if they have any concerns. Raw data has been shared in batches every few years. At the time of writing there is uncertainty about the Environment Agency's ability to continue undertaking this work given its reducing resources. If they are unable to continue with

the current sampling and testing regime, consideration should be given to continuing this work through other means - most likely through a commercial provider, or through payment to the Environment Agency for continuing the service.

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.

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.

### **Weed-cutting**

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 March 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 currently well over half the weed cutting 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.

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 along 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.

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, to 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, Least Duckweed, Nuttall's Waterweed and Canadian Waterweed.

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 thin layer of Water Fern, but this only occurred here due to the protection from the wind 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. Removal by the old conveyor weedboat is possible once a certain thickness of leaves on the surface is reached, but it is very slow work (as much of the weed falls back into the water) and has rarely proved necessary.

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 or 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.

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
- Water Primrose
- 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 or (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, Coot 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; and to the west of Aysford Bridge along the towpath side.

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 in to 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 ¾ mile section between the Canal Basin and Crownhill Bridge this is undertaken in late June – mid July to enable the horse-drawn barge to operate. 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. Another short section between Sampford Peverell Bridge and Buckland Bridge is flailed at ground level in July at the request of the parish council.

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. There is no early cut of this vegetation for the benefit of the horse-drawn barge, but the siding up in July is undertaken on both sides of 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 which appears to be suppressing bramble growth and so cutting is only undertaken occasionally. 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.

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.

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 sparse field layer dominated by Brambles and Nettles. 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) every two years 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.

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 Lowdells.

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](http://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 number of Ash trees will undoubtedly 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 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 Dragonfly, the Scarce Chaser dragonfly and the Red-eyed Damselfly. 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 Hairstreaks butterflies whose caterpillars feed exclusively 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, and although new surveyors have been found to continue the monthly WeBS counts, the level of expertise is not as great. Encouraging keen local birdwatchers to submit records / provide informed guidance relating to birds at the canal would be valuable going forward.

### 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 shooed 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 Cullompton Wildlife Care Centre which will care for them until they can be released.

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.

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 birds 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 Warblers and Sedge 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.

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 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 Daubentons) 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 grown 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 lay-up safely during the daytime, particularly under log piles, brush 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.

### 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 American 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.

### **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.

Monitoring of reptile species (particularly Adder) would be welcome and so efforts should be made to find volunteers willing to undertake this.

### **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.

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 arising 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.

### **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 land owners 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 2020-2030.

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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p><b>Biodiversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent wildlife corridor</li> <li>• Visitors / local residents value the wildlife</li> <li>• Good habitat available for a wide range of species</li> <li>• Good monitoring records for some species / groups</li> <li>• Presence of some characteristic 'flagship species' (e.g. kingfishers)</li> <li>• No legacy of industrial pollution (unlike many canals in the UK)</li> </ul> <p><b>Landscape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive rural landscape beside most of the length of the canal</li> <li>• All of the Country Park and some adjacent land is designated as a Conservation Area</li> <li>• Great far-reaching views out at several points</li> <li>• A sense of peacefulness and tranquillity where it survives away from Tiverton and major road corridors.</li> <li>• Many attractive, mature standard trees lining the canal</li> <li>• Continuous hedgerow beside the towpath for most of the canal's length</li> <li>• A number of attractive structures forming focal points along the canal including bridges, limekilns and a tunnel</li> <li>• Well-organised and recognised Joint Advisory Committee able to comment on / object to adjacent planning applications and planning policies.</li> <li>• Consistent long-term management</li> </ul> <p><b>Heritage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Country Park has a large number of historic structures, many of which are Grade II-listed. Most are in good condition</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p><b>Biodiversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no survey or monitoring for many species / groups</li> <li>• Insufficient in-house capacity / expertise to undertake or resources to commission more surveys / monitoring</li> <li>• Insufficient resources to provide more focussed habitat / species management</li> <li>• Presence of several invasive species</li> <li>• Eutrophic water conditions</li> <li>• Significant recreational, heritage and asset management pressures which can limit beneficial management for wildlife</li> </ul> <p><b>Landscape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little control / limited influence on adjacent land use</li> <li>• High proportion of Ash (30-40% of total mature tree stock) = significant visual impact as ash dieback progresses.</li> <li>• Much of the adjacent land is desirable for development</li> <li>• Limited space to allow hedgerows to grow large and bushy</li> <li>• Past loss of orchards which were a key feature of the area</li> </ul> <p><b>Heritage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited resources for the regular inspection / repair of some of the historic structures.</li> <li>• Limited revenue funding or human resources for repair works to structures other than road bridges</li> <li>• Access to many historic structures for inspection or repair is often difficult (e.g. enclosed access in culverts or reaching offside banks with machinery)</li> <li>• Use of inherently poor materials in the original construction of some structures</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine inspections and repairs of Canal bridges undertaken by DCC Bridges and Structures Team</li> <li>• This team also provide support and advice for maintenance of other historic canal structures</li> <li>• Support also provided by DCC Estates team</li> <li>• DCC capital funding made available for major repairs as and when required (e.g. culvert cleaning and repairs in 2000s and aqueduct relining in 2019/20)</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<p>(e.g. use of crumbly breccia stone in walls – prone to erosion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Apart from legal and transactional details, the known history of the canal is relatively sparse with few highlights to capture the imagination of visitors.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p><b>Biodiversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage more volunteers / wildlife organisations in surveying / monitoring canal wildlife</li> <li>• Run more wildlife-themed events</li> <li>• Achieve both of the above with a bioblitz?</li> <li>• Restoration of ponds beside the canal / creation of new ponds?</li> <li>• Restoration of hedges by gapping up / laying</li> <li>• Provision of nest boxes and bat boxes</li> <li>• Tree planting to replace ash trees that have or will succumb to ash dieback</li> <li>• Possible opportunities to manage / positively influence management of adjacent GI-designated land?</li> </ul> <p><b>Landscape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoration of hedges by gapping up / laying</li> <li>• Tree planting to replace ash trees that have or will succumb to ash dieback</li> <li>• Protect / restore surviving/ former orchards and/or plant new orchards</li> <li>• Possible opportunities to manage / positively influence management of adjacent GI-designated land?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p><b>Biodiversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential colonisation by other invasive species</li> <li>• Increasing water nutrient levels due to agricultural run-off</li> <li>• Increasing terrestrial nutrient levels due to dog fouling and tipping of aquatic weed</li> <li>• Potential pollution incidents</li> <li>• Increasing recreational pressure</li> <li>• Habitat loss / fragmentation within the wider canal corridor due to development / agricultural intensification</li> <li>• Badly planned / timed maintenance work</li> </ul> <p><b>Landscape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Detrimental impact of artificial lighting from adjacent development on rural tranquillity and nature conservation</li> <li>• Unattractive adjacent land use (e.g. extensive use of agricultural fleece, proliferation of modern agricultural barns)</li> <li>• Lack of funding to undertake maintenance and repairs of canal structures</li> </ul>

<p><b>Heritage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New or improved interpretation of historic structures (e.g. Brindley stop gate at Swing Bridge)</li> <li>• Tighter control of ivy and scrubby growth on historic structures</li> <li>• Improved monitoring of historic structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate design / style / location selection for modern structures such as signs, benches, information panels, fences etc..</li> </ul> <p><b>Heritage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow deterioration of historic structures due to lack of inspection / maintenance</li> <li>• Sudden collapse / failure of historic structures due to lack of inspection / maintenance</li> <li>• Unintentional damage by staff or contractors (e.g. flailing milestones)</li> <li>• Vandalism / graffiti</li> </ul>
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## 19.2 Improvement options for Biodiversity, landscape and heritage

### Biodiversity

- a) Identify groups / species that it would be useful to monitor/survey
- b) Seek to recruit volunteers / organisations to undertake monitoring / survey work
- c) Explore options / availability of experts for a bioblitz at the Country Park. Organise if feasible
- d) Make plans / funding bids for use of land beside Fenacre Bridge as new silt trap / reed bed / pond system with orchard picnic area.
- e) Ongoing pond restoration works at Boehill Pond
- f) Ongoing hedge restoration including gapping up and periodic laying
- g) Planting of new hedges where appropriate (e.g. beside track to tilting weir)
- h) Promotion of new standard trees in hedgerows to either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying
- i) Provision of bird boxes and bat boxes as appropriate
- j) Ongoing awareness raising amongst canal users / local residents regarding invasive species
- k) Ongoing efforts to reduce dog fouling
- l) 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

- a) Ongoing hedge restoration including gapping up and periodic laying
- b) Planting of new hedges where appropriate (e.g. beside track to tilting weir)
- c) Promotion of new standard trees in hedgerows to either through planting or selection of existing trees when hedge-laying
- d) Plant new orchards / encourage adjacent landowners to restore neglected / former orchards
- e) Maintenance of trees to keep open views along the towpath towards bridges

- f) Maintenance of bankside vegetation on bends to keep open views along the canal
- g) 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
- h) 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) Develop and install a new interpretation panel about the Brindley stop gate at Swing Bridge
- b) Update the aqueduct interpretation panel once repair works are completed, and install.
- c) Consider other possible locations for interpretation panels (Ayshford Chapel? Whipcott Wharf?)
- d) Undertake an annual survey of ivy/scrubby growth on historic structures to inform annual removal works
- e) 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 as possible, representing people (and wildlife) with an interest in the Country Park. 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 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 budget or power as such, it is very rare that Devon County Council will act against the JAC's recommendations, provided the necessary staffing 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 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.



Local communities can also get involved in the practical management of the Country Park. There are three different 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 the majority 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.
- The Friends of the Grand Western Canal has a Volunteer Warden team made up of dozens of local residents spread along the canal most of whom tend to adopt and look after a stretch of Canal that they regularly walk. Their duties can include acting as eyes and ears for the Ranger Service – reporting issues so that they can be promptly resolved by the Rangers; litter-picking (all Volunteer Wardens are equipped with litter-pickers and bag holder), trimming back brambles, and encouraging considerate use of the Country Park by others.

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 Women's Institutes, Rotary, Probus, U3A and local history groups.

### **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 the 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**

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 Crownhill Bridge to the Aqueduct) have been resurfaced and consideration is being given to resurfacing the busy length of towpath from the Canal Basin to Tidcombe Bridge where extensive puddles are being created by the growth of the verges. 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 from April to October clearing weed from the canal using the 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 make known their concerns about the weed hampering their activities. The only apparent options for further reducing the impact of weed on anglers and boaters would be to spend a greater proportion of time on certain sections, or for more resources to be found to enable an increase in the total amount of weed clearing undertaken.
- 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 a 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 between Holbrook Bridge and Fossend Bridge, 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, and the Country Park is also missing out on income if the car park is full and there is nowhere for extra cars to park. The tarmac at the far end of the car park is becoming worn and may need 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. However, there is presently no signage indicating the presence of the three disabled spaces at the end of the car park and a sign to this effect should be located beside the first two spaces, near to the public toilets. If possible, an extra disabled space would be a welcome addition.

Car parking charges provide a very significant proportion of the Country Park's income and given that the most drivers using the car park are tourists or very occasional visitors, there is less price sensitivity than if it were being used more regularly by more local visitors. With 2020/21 prices being set at £2 for two hours, £3.50 for all day and £24 for a season ticket, prices are relatively modest compared with many countryside visitor attractions. There is probably 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 should be installed. Such signs were installed in the past but were removed by persons unknown from all but Lowdwells car park. Attention must be paid to ensuring any replacement signs are very securely fixed.

## **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 for the Tiverton Canal Co to continue operating the Duck's Ditty floating café/bar.

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 the 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 subsequently 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 owned by Mid Devon District 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 are very slim.

## **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 of the design 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. 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 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. One significant access point currently without a welcome panel is the ramp beside the public toilets in the Canal Basin. A new welcome panel was installed by the steps in the Canal Basin car park in 2019, and a very similar version of that one could also be located beside the public toilets for visitors joining the towpath at that point.

Some of the noticeboards along the towpath (installed around 2005) have become quite worn and during the period of this plan consideration should be given to potential replacement designs (as the current design is no longer available). Ideally the style of noticeboard should be consistent along the towpath and so a balance will need to be made between maintaining the existing ones/tolerating wear and tear and replacing all of them with a new style, preferably all at once. It is crucial that the information in the noticeboards is kept up to date and that the content is refreshed regularly (this is currently achieved through the provision of events posters and the quarterly *Rangers Rag* newsletters).

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 and trim 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 new children's play area has also been 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.

At the time of writing a new trim trail - organised and funded by the Sampford Peverell 200 Club – should be installed during Easter 2020 within the picnic site area of the Country Park in the village. The trim trail will consist of simple timber exercise stations with no moving parts and little

maintenance requirement, although it will require regular safety inspections. Once installed the equipment will become the property and responsibility of the Country Park.

### **Picnic benches and seats**

The Country Park is very well provided for with over 160 seats and benches along the 11 ¼ mile length. Most 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 to memorial seat donors. As with virtually all towpath furniture installed in the last 15 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 Halberton, but given the distribution of the local population, this is often where donors wish to see their memorial bench placed.

In the Canal Basin, seven picnic benches are installed permanently, five of which provide opportunities for wheelchair users to sit at 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 an annual condition survey should be undertaken 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 provided 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

new housing or other building 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 and although all have since been re-decked, they should remain serviceable for the period of this plan. All are 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 and a request from a boater for more landing stages, a new split-level landing stage was built near Ebear Bridge in 2019, with one level at towpath height and the other half 200mm lower. Low level extensions are planned for the landing stages at The Globe Inn and at Minnows Touring Park in Sampford Peverell in 2020.

## **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, all of which took many months of planning with 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, have a go on the water events, 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. 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, but with one important exception. 2021 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Country Park and so it will be fitting to mark this milestone with a significant event. Planning for this celebratory event should begin during 2020.

## 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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong public support for the Country Park</li> <li>• The JAC – providing a long-established and representative forum for community engagement in the Canal's management</li> <li>• Good relationships between the Canal Ranger Service and almost all adjacent residents / landowners and also many regular towpath users.</li> <li>• An active Friends Group with charity status</li> <li>• Strong volunteer support, significantly increasing the volume of work achieved and providing good links with community</li> <li>• Excellent range of good quality, well-maintained facilities</li> <li>• Good links with local schools and community groups</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited engagement with non-users</li> <li>• Limited opportunities to involve large groups of volunteers</li> <li>• Repetitive and physically-demanding nature of much of the work deters some potential volunteers</li> <li>• Location of Rangers offices at one end of a linear site can make it harder to make links with communities at the other end.</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek opportunities to engage with non-users of the Country Park</li> <li>• Refurbish public toilets if funding can be secured</li> <li>• Install car park signs at the outlying car parks</li> <li>• Consider opportunities to create extra parking spaces in Canal Basin car park</li> <li>• Assist Friends group with relaunch of the Volunteer Warden scheme?</li> <li>• Seek opportunities to help grow the membership and capacity of the Friends group</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding cuts</li> <li>• Vandalism of facilities</li> <li>• Decline of friends group due to lack of management committee members or disproportionate focus on the disused Somerset section of the Canal (at the expense of opportunities to recruit members that love the Devon section)</li> <li>• Decline in school visits as they develop their own facilities or if curriculum pressures preclude outside visits.</li> <li>• The canal becoming vulnerable to local political priorities, policies and targets rather than objective decisions based on</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of new interpretation panels at Swing Bridge and Swing Embankment</li> <li>• Engage with new communities that will form near the canal as a result of forthcoming housing development</li> </ul>	<p>what is best for the country park in the long term.</p>
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## 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) Develop and install new interpretation panels at Swing Bridge and Swing Embankment
- e) Meet with Friends Group to discuss if the Canal Ranger Service can help the organisation
- f) Provide events at other points along the Canal – not just the Tiverton end
- g) Develop ideas for potential future improvements to the Visitor Centre displays
- h) Explore opportunities to provide a welcome pack for new residents of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension and any other nearby housing developments

## **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 safe and 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.

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. 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 will 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 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.

Previous visitor surveys undertaken in 2010 and 2015 have looked at activity types and in the 2015 survey the top three answers given for the respondent’s main motivation for visiting the canal and undertaking whatever activity they had come to enjoy were as follows:

- Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere (30% of respondents)
- Beautiful landscape (18% of respondents)
- Being near water (13%)

Patterns of use vary along the canal. The Tiverton end is much busier, both with canal visitors and the large local population using the towpath as a route to get from A to B. At the northern end there are generally very few visitors, and for many that do go there, this is part of its appeal.

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 the 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 JAC.

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 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 JAC (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 Mid Devon Attractions Group
- 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.

Two visitor surveys were undertaken in 2010 and 2015, but the low numbers of returns (357 and 143 respectively) and self-selecting and self-completing nature of the survey means that although they provided some interesting 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: Probably the largest single user groups within the country park, but completely 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, which can 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 Volunteer Wardens. 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 (as well as regular local cyclists that cycle the canal for pleasure). Cyclists are represented on the JAC 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, and contact through tackle shops / permit sales outlets.
- 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 obvious 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 on 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 own and 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 be check for more information once the canal has been suggested to them.

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, Sea Cadet / Scout activities or cycling/walking from A to B. The communication channels they will use most will be the various social media platforms, (with Instagram and Snapchat being the current favourites at the time of writing) 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](https://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. The Canal is featured in DCC's Explore Devon website, but a modern, visitor-focussed, standalone website for the Country Park would be a great improvement. However, it may be unaffordable / prohibited by DCC policy.
- Canal Ranger Service Facebook page: [facebook.com/grandwesterncanaldevon](https://facebook.com/grandwesterncanaldevon) - 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](https://facebook.com/groups/262602619339) - This group page has a large membership (1700 in Jan 2020) 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. 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.
- Twitter: [twitter.com/GWCanalRangers](https://twitter.com/GWCanalRangers) - All posts on the Country Park Facebook page are also tweeted, but the platform is little-used for communications to/from visitors or local communities apart from that.

- Instagram: [instagram.com/grandwesterncanalcountrypark](https://www.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
- Telephone and email: 01884 254072 / [gwcanal@devon.gov.uk](mailto:gwcanal@devon.gov.uk) - These contact details are widely publicised along the canal and in Country Park publications and are the preferred methods for people to report issues. The Canal Ranger Service 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 nine noticeboards located at key access points along the towpath and one inside the Visitor Centre. Most 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, the latest Rangers Rag newsletter, 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 these are usually declined. Some of the noticeboards are becoming quite worn and consideration may need to be given to their replacement during the period of the plan.
- 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 6000 copies of 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 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 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. It is important that staff and volunteers are fully briefed to avoid misleading information being shared. 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 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 last two visitor surveys in 2010 and 2015 have generally taken the form of self-completing forms left in the Canal Visitor centre or the Ducks Ditty café/bar for visitors to fill in if they wish. This has meant 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: [tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g551696-d3384310](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g551696-d3384310) - The Country Park holds a 'Five consecutive years Certificate of Excellence award' from Tripadvisor in recognition of its consistently high scores in visitor reviews. The fact that the Canal is on Tripadvisor and holds the Certificate of Excellence is promoted in the Canal Visitor Centre. It should be noted that a significant proportion of the reviewers posting on the Canal page appear to have visited solely to go on the horse-drawn barge or visit the Ducks Ditty and whilst the current high level of scores reflects well on the Tiverton Canal Co, it does mean that that the Canal's standing on Tripadvisor is not solely within the control of the Canal Ranger Service.
- 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 suggestion left from time to time.

- JAC 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 months 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 as it is published on the MDDC website as part of the JAC agenda pack.
- Rangers Rag newsletter: A seasonal newsletter is produced by the Canal Ranger Service and is published in the towpath and Visitor Centre noticeboards and on the Country Park website. It usually summarises two or three current, recent or forthcoming projects together with photos or diagrams, helping visitors and local communities to understand how the Canal is managed and why projects are taking place.
- 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.
- The Management Plan: This Management Plan is published on the Management section of the Country Park website.

### **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 (currently 50p per pupil for half a day) in order to cover costs rather than generate income. A significant increase in charges would lead to fewer schools visiting. To date no interest in Ranger-led visits has been shown by local high 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.

Ranger-led visits are also frequently requested and delivered to other groups, including cubs, brownies, rainbows, home-educators, 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 staff 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, a dragonfly panel near Ebear Bridge, the Waytown Limekilns and Lowdwells Lock. All are built in the same style (provided by Shelley Signs Ltd). Some of the older panels may 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.

As identified in Section 19, there is the opportunity to provide a new interpretation panel at Swing Bridge focussing on the 'Brindley stop gate' hidden in the mud below, as this is something most visitors would be completely unaware of, and we have the photos and archaeological research

available to make an engaging panel. Another possible topic for a new panel is the breach that took place at Swing embankment in 2012.

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 fairly new 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**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long service of existing staff underpins good understanding of visitor types, requirements and visitor patterns</li> <li>• Good use of main communication channels</li> <li>• Excellent links with users and local communities through JAC</li> <li>• Good quality information provision</li> <li>• Range of opportunities for visitors to provide feedback or report issues</li> <li>• Promotion of the Country Park by Canal businesses as part of their marketing work</li> <li>• Good links with information ‘gatekeepers’ such as canal-related businesses, permit outlets, Tiverton TIC and councillors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No independent research into visitor patterns</li> <li>• No in-depth marketing plan</li> <li>• Country Park website uninspiring</li> <li>• Insufficient resources to afford specialist consultants to undertake these pieces of work</li> <li>• Limited staff resources for fulfilling potential communications opportunities</li> <li>• Some visitor types are hard to reach</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To find time to generate more media coverage</li> <li>• To find time to post more frequently / thoughtfully on social media</li> <li>• Design / commission / undertake a more useful / representative visitor survey</li> <li>• Develop / commission an in-depth marketing plan for the Country Park</li> <li>• Refresh the rather dated map-based interpretation / information panels in the towpath noticeboards</li> <li>• New standalone, visitor-focussed website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding cuts</li> <li>• Failure to update information / interpretation provision due to lack of funds or attentiveness</li> <li>• Opportunities to engage local communities missed if interpretation and events not carefully considered and planned</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Inaccurate information being passed on by those perceived to be a reliable source of information, but who are not fully informed</li> </ul>

#### 21.1.5 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) Commission new information / interpretation panels to go in noticeboards
- f) Develop and install new interpretation panels at Swing Bridge and Swing Embankment
- g) Replace / refresh existing interpretation panels as they become worn / out of date (one panel per year from targets e or f should be achievable / affordable)
- h) 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 by structural reorganisations within Devon County Council. 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 with 23, 17 and 16 years service by the three current staff members working at the canal, 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.

Despite the extensive experience of 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 worked and what hasn't 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. 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.

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

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced Ranger Service team supported by volunteers</li> <li>• Good corporate support from numerous DCC teams</li> <li>• Sufficient funding (at present levels) to manage the Country Park effectively</li> <li>• Availability of training and personal development opportunities for staff and volunteers</li> <li>• JAC provides excellent forum for discussing progress with management plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declining physical ability of Ranger Team and some volunteers</li> <li>• Reduced capacity for some DCC teams to assist</li> <li>• As not a statutory service, the Country Park is at risk of DCC funding cuts</li> <li>• Lack of binding funding agreement with MDDC, means their contribution is always at risk of being cut</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase and expand voluntary support</li> <li>• Seek to strengthen funding partnership with MDDC</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding cuts</li> <li>• Reductions in staffing due to funding cuts</li> <li>• Political decisions affecting Country Park</li> <li>• Unrealistic targets / expectations</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the wide range of important benefits the Country Park brings (to justify continued funding levels)</li> <li>• Seek to increase income</li> </ul>	
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#### **22.1.4 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.

- **Close 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 and the corporate targets it can deliver with its relatively small revenue budget, so as to avert further cuts.
- **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, including funding opportunities, 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 visitors and wildlife
  - Promoting the health and well-being benefits of visiting the Country Park
  - Making better strategic links with Mid Devon District Council
  - Maintaining buildings and infrastructure
  - Climate change impacts

## **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 steady 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 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 = 2020/21, 5=2024/25, Any £ = whenever funding available, Any = whenever relevant
- Priority: 1 = highest, 5 = lowest
- Highlighting: None = not yet undertaken, green = completed, yellow = partially completed

<b>Aim 1: To provide a pleasant, accessible and informative welcome to the Country Park for all visitors and members of the local community.</b>			
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Prescription</b>	<b>Target year(s)</b>	<b>Priority (1-5)</b>
1a. Provide easily accessible and accurate pre-visit information.	1. Keep website up-to-date	All	1
	2. Update and reprint Canal Visitor Guide annually and distribute	All	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. Renew car parking signage in the Canal Basin car park	1	2
	2. Review provision of signage at outlying car parks and ensure all have the requisite signs	1	3
	3. Annually check brown signs to Canal	All	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 the Canal Basin walls	All	2
	4. Maintain wildflower bed beside entrance to Canal Basin car park	All	2
	5. Consider re- slurry-sealing the tarmacked paths in the Canal Basin	2 / 3	3
1d. Improve the accessibility and visitor experience for visitors with disabilities	1. Commission an Equality of access audit and respond to recommendations	1 / 2	3
	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: £	3
1e. Orientate visitors through good design / waymarking / signage.	1. Consider new orientation panel in Canal Basin car park beside public toilets	1 / 2	3
	2. Re-set leaning cast iron fingerposts in Canal Basin car park	1	1

	3. Improve signage to public toilets from Canal Basin picnic site	1 / 2	3
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. Consider installation of new noticeboard at Beech car park	2 / 3 / 4	4
	3. Commission new interpretation / information panels for noticeboards	1 / 2 / 3	2
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: £	3
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
	2. Work with councils / developers to provide safe and easy access links with the town centre and new developments	Any	3
<b>Aim 2: To continue to provide a healthy, safe and secure park for all users.</b>			
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	3	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 and promote codes of conduct.	1. Ensure Canal Rangers wear uniform to establish authority	All	2
	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. Monitor effectiveness of the new cycling under bridges signage and refine if necessary	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
<b>Aim 3: To provide an attractive country park, which achieves a consistently high standard of maintenance and cleanliness.</b>			
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 DCC estates team	Any	1
	3. Investigate potential / funding for secondary glazing at The Moorings	1	3
	4. Repaint / replace bridge nameplates as necessary	1 / 2	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 (e.g. chainsaws)	Any	2

3k. Undertake works to reduce future maintenance burden	1. Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.	Any: £	3
	2. Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert.	Any: £	3
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
<b>Aim 4: To advocate and demonstrate sustainable environmental management.</b>			
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	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
<b>Aim 5: To protect, enhance and promote enjoyment and understanding of the special biodiversity, landscape and heritage value of the Country Park.</b>			
<b>Biodiversity</b>			
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	1	3
5b. Undertake measures to maintain / improve water quality	1. Develop and deliver the Fenacre reed bed and silt trap project.	Any: £	3
	2. Investigate potential / funding for silt traps at other locations, including Holbrook siphon culvert.	Any: £	3
	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. Report any serious point source silt pollution to the EA	Any	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 to 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')	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 wildlife and manage natural succession in these areas	1. Undertake annual towpath-side bank cutting regime	All	1
	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 and Ebear Pond in late summer.	All	2
5h. Manage ponds for wildlife	1. Seek to dredge Boehill Pond (if machinery access possible)	1	3

	2. Re-coppice trees around Boehill Pond to reduce shading	4	3
	3. Trim back overhanging willows at Ebear Pond by 50%	2	3
	4. 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 three bird boxes and three bat boxes each year	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 with orchard picnic area.	Any: £	3
	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	3	3
	2. Consider new wildfowl panel near the William Authers footbridge?	1 / 2 / 3	4
	3. Include wildlife elements in new interpretation / information panels in noticeboards	1 / 2 / 3	2
	4. Seek opportunities to improve / expand wildlife elements of Visitor Centre touchscreen system	Any	3
	5. Seek to engage in appropriate nature-focussed projects run by DCC or external organisations (e.g. Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project)	Any	3
	6. Include nature-themed activities in annual events programme (e.g. bat walks)	All	2
	7. 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 and developers regarding use, development and management of Tiverton Eastern Urban extension green infrastructure land beside the Country Park	Any	2
	2. Take opportunities to promote beneficial management when talking to adjacent land and home owners	Any	2
	3. Engage with JAC and relevant DCC teams to respond to adjacent planning applications that may impact Canal wildlife.	Any	2
<b>Landscape</b>			
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	All	1

	(c.100-200m) un-topped each year to grow on, ready to be laid in subsequent years		
	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 land owners 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
<b>Heritage</b>			

5p. Undertake / commission inspections of historic structures as specified in Asset Management Plan	1. Liaise with the DCC Buildings 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 Buildings 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. Develop and install a new interpretation panel about the Brindley stop gate at Swing Bridge	1 / 2	3
	2. Refresh the Aqueduct interpretation panel once repair works are completed, and install.	1	3
	3. Refresh Waytown Limekiln panel (rewrite text)	3	4
	4. Consider other possible locations for heritage interpretation panels (Ayshford Chapel? Whipcott Wharf?)	Any: £	4
	5. Seek opportunities to improve/expand heritage elements of Visitor Centre touchscreen system	Any	3
	6. Provide heritage-themed activities/learning in Ranger-led school visits	All	2
	7. Include heritage elements in new interpretation / information panels in noticeboards	1 / 2 / 3	2
	8. Seek to engage in appropriate heritage - focussed projects run by DCC or external organisations (e.g. Heritage Open Days)	Any	3
	9. Organise events and publicity to celebrate the 50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Country Park in 2021	1 / 2	1
	10. Join in celebrations of 50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the horse-drawn barge operating on the Canal in 2024	4 / 5	2
<b>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</b>			
6a. Support the continued function of the JAC as a forum for	1. Canal Manager to attend all JAC meetings, to draft Progress Reports and to organise annual site visits	All	1

local community and stakeholder representatives to discuss the management of the Country Park and provide advice to DCC	2. DCC to provide JAC members with updates on significant projects / issues and to respond to queries from JAC members, as required	Any	1
	3. Canal Manager to assist in finding representatives for stakeholders if and when required	Any	2
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 monthly column for newsletter	All	2
	2. Help to relaunch Volunteer Warden Scheme	1	2
	3. Meet to 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: Renew car parking signage in the Canal Basin car park	1	2

8. Car parks: Review provision of signage at outlying car parks and ensure all have the requisite signs	1	3
9. Car parks: Review parking space provision / lining in Canal Basin. Create new spaces if possible, including a disabled parking space	Any: £	3
10. Car parks: Monitor condition of car park surfaces and lining and maintain as necessary	All	2
11. Public toilets: Undertake cleaning and maintenance to ensure toilets are functional and presentable	All	2
12. Public toilets: Investigate options and seek funding for refurbishing the public toilets	Any: £	3
13. Visitor Centre: Ensure the centre is well maintained and that information is kept up to date	All	1
14. Visitor Centre: Consider options for improvements / additional features / pages to the touchscreen system	Any	3
15. Visitor Centre: Consider replacements to existing hands-on activities	3 / 4 / 5	3
16. Noticeboards and panels: Ensure information provided is up to date and factually correct and that posts / structures are sound	All	1
17. Noticeboards and panels: Commission new interpretation / information panels to go in noticeboards replacing existing A3 ones	1 / 2 / 3	2
18. Noticeboards and panels: Develop and install a new interpretation panel about the Brindley stop gate at Swing Bridge	1 / 2	3
19. Noticeboards and panels: Refresh the Aqueduct interpretation panel once repair works are completed, and install.	1	3
20. Noticeboards and panels: Refresh Waytown Limekiln panel (rewrite text)	3	4
21. Noticeboards and panels: Consider other possible locations for heritage interpretation panels (Ayshford Chapel? Whipcott Wharf?)	Any: £	4
22. Play Park / trim trail: Undertake Inspection Regime and organise annual safety inspection by qualified inspector	All	1
23. Play Park / trim trail: Organise prompt repairs as required	Any	1
24. Benches and seats: Monitor condition of benches and seats and repair / replace as necessary	All	2

	25. Benches and seats: Stain all new Streetmaster seats and benches annually	All	2
	26. Benches and seats: Write and adhere to a memorial bench policy, explaining processes, siting considerations and responsibilities	1	2
	27. Slipway and landing stages: Complete and promote parking provision near Boehill Slipway	1	2
	28. Slipway and landing stages: Complete low-level extensions to two existing landing stages	1	2
<b>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</b>			
7a. Undertake market research to guide future management	1. Investigate options / funding for engaging consultants or a university student to carry out market research / develop marketing plan	Any	3
	2. If this is not possible then seek to undertake an in-house visitor survey before the end of year 3	1 / 2 / 3	2
	3. Monitor and respond to other forms of visitor and stakeholder feedback	All	1
7b. Use appropriate communication techniques to connect to current visitors, potential visitors and local communities	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
	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. Use 'BrochureLink' distribution network to make Canal Visitor Guide available to TICs around the UK.	All	3
	3. Deliver batches of Canal Visitor Guides to local TICs, accommodation providers and pubs and shops to ensure it is available locally	All	2
	4. 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. Develop and install new interpretation panels at Swing Bridge and Swing Embankment	1 / 2	3
	2. Replace / refresh existing interpretation panels as they become worn / out of date	All	3
	3. Commission new information / interpretation panels to go in noticeboards	1 / 2	3
	4. Organise and deliver an annual programme of events	All	2
	5. Develop and use a proforma for identifying aims of events and how they will be achieved	1	2
<b>Aim 8: To ensure a high standard of service through effective resource management and delivery of the management plan</b>			
8a. Manage work programme efficiently and flexibly to achieve aims whilst adapting to changing circumstances	1. Check 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 staff 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 with an aim of averting / minimising funding cuts	Any	1
	3. Discuss funding arrangements with MDDC	1 / 2	1
	4. 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 on any proposed changes in management approaches	All	2
	4. Fundamentally review sections 11 and 12 at the end of year 1	1	2
	5. 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. Section 11 of the plan (National context) should be fundamentally reviewed at the end of year one.

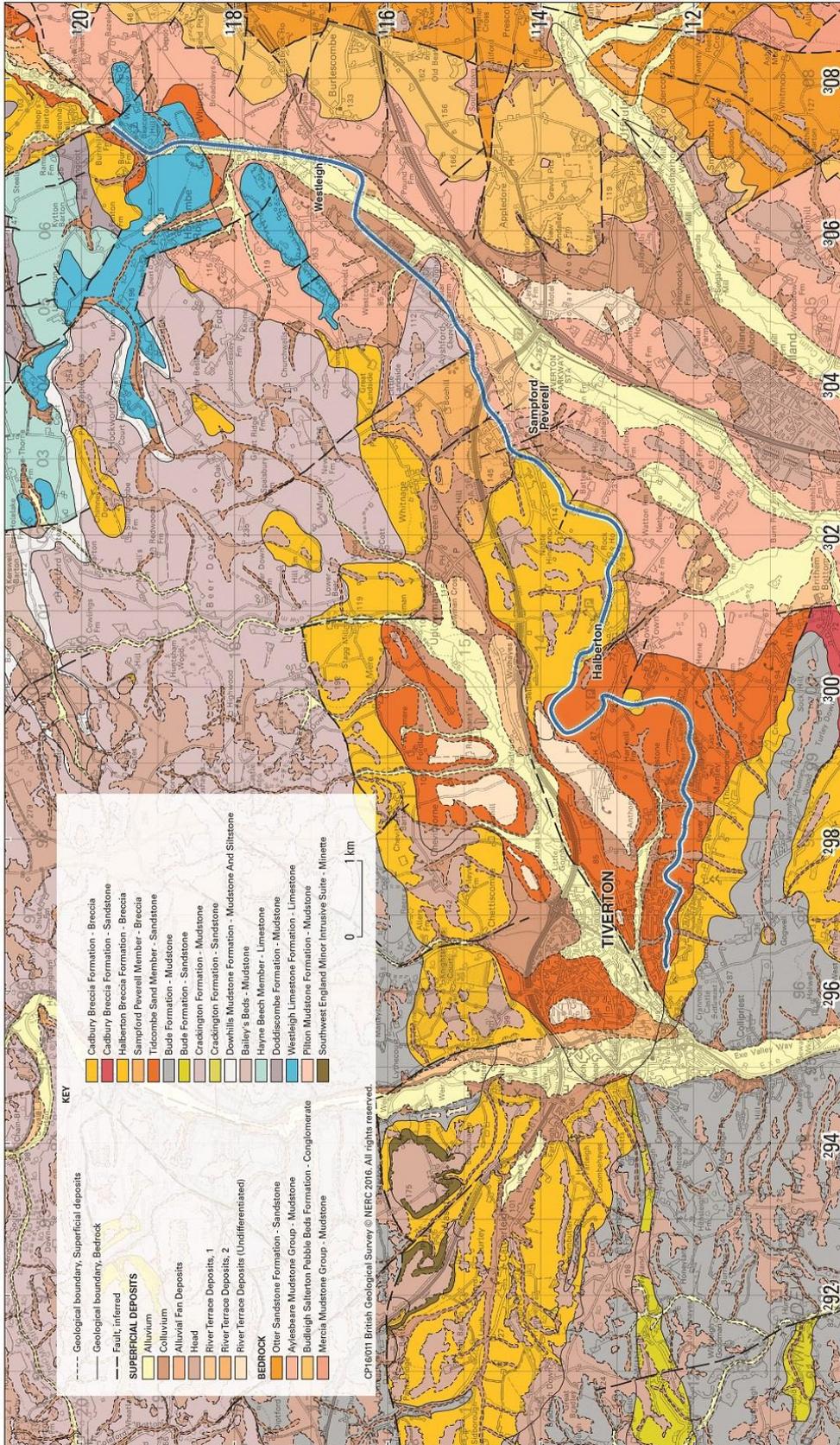
## **27.2 Performance monitoring**

Performance will be measured using the following indicators:

- Green Flag Award scores
- Other independently judges assessments (e.g. South West in Bloom *Its your Neighbourhood* award score)
- Satisfaction levels in visitor surveys
- Feedback from JAC
- 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**



Appendix 2 – Historic structures

Structure	Reference number	Grade	UID No.	Comments	Grid reference
<b>Tiverton Parish</b>					
The Moorings					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
<b>Halberton Parish</b>					
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
<b>Sampford Peverell Parish</b>					

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
<b>Burlescombe Parish</b>					
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
<b>Holcombe Rogus Parish</b>					
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 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1976 and were confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Home Office and took effect on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1977

Following a meeting of the Grand Western Canal Advisory Committee held on 31<sup>st</sup> 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.

**ERECTIONS 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.
- Pedestrians have priority over cyclists on the towpath.
- Considerate cycling is permitted provided this code of conduct is followed.
- Horse riding 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.
- Dismount and walk under bridges – you can't see what's coming the other way!
- 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.
- 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.



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# 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 wildlife that eat wood often appear to have fishing line hanging from their beaks. Please ensure this is not just flammeous weed before contacting the RSPCA. Also note that swans frequently hook their legs up onto their beaks 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/gw-boating](http://www.devon.gov.uk/gw-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 barges). 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 (brisk 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 sculls and 'Ox-bridge-style' 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](http://www.devon.gov.uk) for the terms and conditions). 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 boaters 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 boats with engines

(in addition to the points above)

- Insurance:** All motorised boats must have 3rd party insurance to a value of £1m.
- Boat Safety Scheme:** Boats must have a valid Boat Safety Certificate if they have an internal fuel, gas or electricity system. See [www.boat-safety-scheme.com](http://www.boat-safety-scheme.com) for more information). Insurance details and Boat Safety Scheme details must be provided when purchasing a boat permit.
- Steam powered boats** must have a valid test or exemption certificate available for inspection by the Canal Rangers.
- Speed, wash and noise:** Please slow down whilst passing moored boats. Please avoid creating a breaking wash and don't run your propeller while moored. Please refrain from running your engine or generators when moored, between the hours of 8pm and 8am.
- Overtaking:** Do not attempt to overtake the horsedrawn barge unless invited to do so by the helmsman. Do not overtake other boats near bridges, bends in the canal or moored boats.
- Avoid causing pollution** by ensuring that your engine is running efficiently and does not cause fuel or oil to leak into the canal. Any oil, fuel or chemical spillages into the canal must be reported to the Canal Ranger Service immediately. Please use biodegradable detergents.

### 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 wildlife is minimal and the boats cannot be snagged in 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.

### 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/gw-boating](http://www.devon.gov.uk/gw-boating) for current prices and sales outlets).
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- 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

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- 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.
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- 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 boaters 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.

### Canal Ranger Service contact details:

The Moorings, Canal Hill, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 4HX

Tel: 01884 254072

Email: [gwcanal@devon.gov.uk](mailto:gwcanal@devon.gov.uk)

Web: [www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal](http://www.devon.gov.uk/grandwesterncanal)






**Please Note:** Swimming is not allowed in the canal. Bathing and swimming are prohibited within the Country Park Byelaws.

## Appendix 5 – Inspection regime



### GRAND WESTERN CANAL COUNTRY PARK & LNR INSPECTION REGIME

Inspection / activity	Notes
<b>Daily</b>	
Public toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.</li> <li>• Check toilet rolls, and sanitary bags present.</li> <li>• Check toilet flush, taps and hand-dryers work.</li> </ul>
Canal basin & car park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.</li> <li>• Check pay and display machines working.</li> </ul>
Visitor centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.</li> <li>• Ensure leaflets displays are tidy and complete.</li> </ul>
Play area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.</li> </ul>
Emergency routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check fire emergency exit routes are clear of obstructions.</li> </ul>
<b>Weekly</b>	
Outlying car parks	Check for cleanliness, defects, vandalism and graffiti.
Vehicle checks	Conduct weekly vehicle checks – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mirrors in tack</li> <li>• no other defects</li> <li>• wear on tyres</li> <li>• tyre pressure</li> <li>• oil level</li> <li>• power steering fluid</li> <li>• clutch fluid</li> <li>• brake fluid</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coolant</li> <li>• screen wash</li> <li>• litter picker, bago &amp; bin bags</li> <li>• toolbox</li> <li>• leaflets</li> <li>• first aid kit</li> <li>• fire extinguisher</li> <li>• breakdown leaflet</li> <li>• hand wipes &amp; paper towel</li> </ul>
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.
<b>Monthly</b>	
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.
<b>Quarterly</b>	
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, defects, leaks, vandalism and graffiti.
<b>6-monthly</b>	
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 NPS
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
<b>Annual</b>	
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 contractor under DCC corporate contracts, organised by NPS.
<b>2-yearly</b>	
Bridges and aqueduct	Undertaken by DCC Bridge Maintenance Team.
PAT-testing	Undertaken by suitably qualified contractor or staff member
Trees	Scheduled safety checks by Canal Ranger Service of trees in medium use areas
<b>3-yearly</b>	
Trees	Expert scheduled safety inspection of trees within high and medium use areas
	Scheduled safety checks by Canal Ranger Service of trees in low use areas
<b>5-yearly</b>	
Culverts, aqueduct, retaining walls and accommodation bridges	Inspections to be undertaken by DCC Bridge Maintenance 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 and the Canal Manager's line manager, 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 obligations<sup>1</sup>; which shall be as far as possible without prejudice to the duties to*
  - (ii) *conserve wildlife and public amenity<sup>2</sup>; which take precedence over the desire to*
  - (iii) *ameliorate nuisance<sup>3</sup> to neighbours and users of Country Park sites.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Statutory, eg Tree Preservation Order under T & CP Act 1990 or at common law, eg actionable nuisance or trespass.*

<sup>2</sup> *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 zone<sup>2</sup> 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 Area<sup>3</sup>.
- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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..

<sup>3</sup> 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 qualified<sup>1</sup> 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 approach<sup>2</sup>.
- 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 similarly<sup>3</sup> 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 trees<sup>4</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> *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).*

<sup>2</sup> *For example it may be possible to fence off a dangerous tree of conservation importance rather than felling it.*

<sup>3</sup> *In this situation there is greater flexibility of action as the Country Park cannot cause a legal nuisance to itself.*

<sup>4</sup> *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 one<sup>1</sup>. 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Plan<sup>1</sup> 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 surveying<sup>2</sup> 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 competence<sup>3</sup>.
- SI5 Survey and inspection methodology<sup>4</sup> 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 the 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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

<b>Groups represented</b>	<b>Votes</b>
Devon County Council – Cabinet Member for Environmental and Community Services	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 Street Scene	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
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 – Canal Manager	0
Mid Devon District Council – Director of Community Services	0
Mid Devon District Council – Member Services Officer	0