



All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

Restoration

Tuesday 13th May 2025

1pm Portcullis House Room Q

Officers Present: Bill Esterson MP, Lord Michael German,

Members Present:, Baroness Llin Golding, Ruth Jones MP, Catherine Atkinson MP

Other Parliamentarians Present: Callum Anderson MP, Helen Morgan MP, Peter Prinsely MP, Baggy Shanker MP, Simon Opher MP

In Attendance: Charlie Norman (IWA), Amy Tillson (IWA), Paul Rodgers (Buckingham Canal Society), Edward Tranter (assistant to Kirith Entwistle MP), ?, (assistant to Joy Morrissey MP), ? (assistant to Gagan Mohindra MP),

Speakers: Martin Hollis (Chair of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust) & Terry Cavender (Executive Officer Buckingham Canal Society)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Uma Kumaran MP, Gavin Williamson MP, Ellie Chowns MP, John Slinger MP and Danny Kruger MP. Bill Esterson MP chaired the meeting.

2. Welcome and Introductions

Bill Esterson MP welcomed those present to the meeting, and introductions were made.

3. Benefits of Canal Restoration (presentation by Martin Hollis, Chair of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust)

Martin Hollis introduced himself and gave an introduction to the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust. He also suggested that IWA's Waterways For Today report would be good background reading for all present (copies were shared). He explained that there are 50 canal restoration projects around the country.



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

He said that typically, they are met with opposition until the many benefits of restoration are explained. He then went on to outline those benefits:

Economic

Figures from research carried out on the effect of the restoration of the Kennet and Avon Canal by British Waterways Economic Development Unit in 2010:

- £92m p.a GVA increased economic activity
- 11.2 million visits p.a (up from 7.7million in 1995)
- 2700 FTE jobs along canal corridor
- 1230 FTA jobs form increased canalside activity e.g hospitality
- Doubled canalside development

Indicative benefits of restoring the Wilts and Berks Canal extrapolated from research by Canal and River Trust, IWA and Kennet and Avon canal Trust

- £54m p.a. GVA increased economic activity
- £45.5m remuneration for the restoration's local temporary workforce (est. 360 FTE construction job)
- 2000+ FTE jobs along canal corridor
- 1000+ FTE jobs from increased canal-related activity e.g hospitality.

He also explained that housing beside waterways attracts a 10-20% premium.

Health and Wellbeing

Research carried out by Canal and River Trust (Waterways and Wellbeing Report 2017) indicates that:

- Waterways users have higher life satisfaction
- Waterways users are more active

Indicative benefits extrapolated from CRT, IWA and KACT research indicates that restoring the Wilts and Berks Canal would deliver a £38.5million p.a saving to the NHS.

HM Treasury's Green Book Supplementary Guidance on Wellbeing (Annex Tables) indicates that frequent access to green space has wellbeing value of £4,130 per person per year (All £ values rebased to 2022 prices)

Nature and Biodiversity

He explained that restoring canals

- Reconnects fragmented habitats
- Supports diverse ecosystems
- Benefits a wide range of species

People are (enthusiastically!) behind canal restoration. Active habitat (re)creation and restoration in the form of Local Nature Recovery strategies leads to substantial Biodiversity



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

Net Gain, all driven by lots of enthusiastic volunteers taking part in an “outdoor gym”, leading to a nature-centric virtuous cycle.

He gave the example of the Fromebridge wetlands, next to the canal and part of the restoration strategy.

Flood alleviation

He explained that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) are easily overwhelmed and canals have much higher capacity and dissipate over a much wider area.

He gave the example of an attenuating pond taking runoff from a development in Wichelstowe.

He summarised by saying:

Canal restorations

- deliver significant Economic, Health/Wellbeing and Nature/Biodiversity benefit,
- have been shown to stimulate doubling of Development and Housebuilding
- alleviate Flooding and (as a side benefit) increase Agricultural Productivity & Yield

Independently-proven economic benefits (e.g. £54m + £38m + £100m etc p.a. for the Wilts & Berks) demonstrate that restoration has high payback and is a “no brainer” decision. These benefits and payback ratios apply to all restoration projects.

Canal restoration projects deliver huge benefit and deserve active support from local populations/voters, Councils and Parliament

4. Post restoration: What now? Terry Cavender (Executive Officer Buckingham Canal Society)

Terry Cavender introduced himself and gave some background on the Buckingham Canal Society. He explained that they have Legal, operational and reputational obligations to

- Legislative bodies
- CRT as landlord
- Other partners
- Members and wider public
- Neighbours
- Wildlife
- Boaters and mooring clients
- The Restoration Sector

He explained how important it is to monitor progress and track metrics. Some of the ways they are doing this are through collecting evidence of:



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

- Footfall numbers
- Social prescribing (GPs prescribing volunteering as wellbeing benefit)
- Numbers of users – canoeists, paddleboarders, cyclists.
- Wildlife counts (to compare to baseline evidence)
- Water levels

These can help prove that outcomes can be extrapolated to further restoration sections.

In terms of operational reality they have to consider:

- Reactive and proactive approaches
- Cyclic inspections
- Materials labour and equipment for maintenance
- Dredging plans and consent
- Trees and bank management
- Access rights for land and water for maintenance
- Ongoing business management: employment, premises, Tax and VAT etc

In terms of financial reality:

- Very few grants cover core maintenance costs
- Need to meet previous grant conditions
- VAT considerations need to be taken into account – these can be good and bad opportunities.

Although they are a charity, they need to think and act commercially to take advantage of opportunities, and ensure paperwork including insurance and Health and Safety is covered.

His advice to other restorations is

- Capture everything
- Manage the now
- Consider all of the restoration phases including the before / meanwhile uses, during and after
- Have a vision that can evolve

Finally he set out ways that MPs can help support waterways restorations:

- Recognise canals as national infrastructure
- Support the funding of our waterways by encouraging DEFRA to review ALL of the waterways grants – they need to be index linked
- National Planning Policy Framework should protect restoration routes and include restoration groups as statutory consultees
- All unitary (and county) councils to have a policy on “water spaces” including canals
- Formalise 100% business rate relief on operating canals and water space where they are a charity
- NPPF guidance to standardise and simplify planning process for all heritage groups including canals



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.

- National policy to use canals for flood betterment and water transfer/supply
- Get to know your local canal groups including restoration
- Advocate Social Prescribing including green/blue canal corridors

5. Questions and Comments

Bill Esterson MP thanked the speakers and mentioned how he has been pleased to see developers investing in waterways sites in his constituency.

Simon Opher MP said that there is money in using canals for water transfer, however, he felt that the most important benefit of the waterways was in health and wellbeing, mentioning the benefits of social prescribing by GPs. Terry Cavender confirmed that this has been very successful on the Buckingham Canal.

Simon Opher MP also mentioned how the Cotswold Canals Trust (CCT) are working to restore canals in his constituency and mentioned the “missing mile” : a section of the Stroudwater Navigation canal that was filled in to make way for the M5 motorway and the A38 roundabout. CCT is working to restore this "missing mile" as part of its broader restoration efforts.

Helen Morgan MP mentioned that there is also a “missing two miles” on the Montgomery Canal which would link the canal to the Llangollen and bring huge tourism opportunities.

Terry Cavender said not to underestimate the capacity of volunteer to overcome these engineering challenges.

Bill Esterson MP mentioned how Anglian Water are having conversations about moving water by canal.

Martin Hollis said it is important to link up all these development initiatives to work together to manage water both for flood and transfer.

Helen Morgan MP said that there is a concern that Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) aren't being maintained or adopted by local authorities – if there is a possibility to use canals instead that would be hugely beneficial.

Lord German raised the issue of leveraging these issues to get funding – need to incentivise private development – and provide evidence that there's a 10-20% uplift in property value thanks to the proximity of a waterway.

Martin Hollis said that the Lambeth Smith Hampton paper does provide evidence for this but is somewhat out of date and could be usefully refreshed.

Terry Cavender mentioned the possibility of funding from Highways as there is legislation that infrastructure severed by highways must be remediated. He also mentioned the possibility of selling Biodiversity Net Gain to developers not near the canal – they have raised £600k this way.

The meeting closed at 2pm



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.



The Inland Waterways Association provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways.