

Autumn Waterways Conference 2026

Places with Purpose

Saturday 14th November, Dudley Canal and Caverns, Dudley, DY1 4SB

Welcome

On behalf of Canal & River Trust and the Inland Waterways Association, we would like to welcome you to the 2026 Autumn Waterways Conference.

This year's conference will explore how waterway regeneration can drive placemaking, strengthen communities and support economic growth.

Our keynote sessions will explore how placemaking can support sustainable waterways and create thriving neighbourhoods, with practical examples and insights into developing a placemaking strategy. They will also examine how waterway restoration benefits communities, and how measuring social impact can demonstrate this value, strengthen partnerships and support future projects.

We will also be running a choice of breakout sessions including:

A. Turning Promotion into Funding, Helen Watson Moriarty, Consultant, LCRP CIC

B. A Week in the Life of Maintaining and Operating a Canal, Aaron Atwal, Regional Operations Manager, Canal & River Trust

C. Restoration Delivery Plan: Six Months In, Sean McGinley, Interim Head of Asset Management, Canal & River Trust and Andrew Dobson, Senior Restoration Engineer, Canal & River Trust

In the afternoon, join our **Collective Conversation** to share ideas and help shape the future of the waterways sector.

To round off the day, those who have booked in advance can enjoy a boat trip through Dudley's underground canal and limestone mine network.

Photography & Filming

Photographs may be taken during the event and used to promote this and future events, including on our website and in newsletters. Please let us know if you would prefer not to be photographed. We have yellow lanyards available at the sign in desk so we can ensure those who prefer not to be photographed are not included in images taken on the day.

We are pleased to announce that Paul Rodgers from the Inland Waterways Association will be returning as our compère for the day.

We hope you enjoy the day!

Jodie and Verena

Schedule of the day

09:30	**Coffee and Registration**
10:00	**Welcome** Compère Paul Rodgers
10:05	**Introduction To the Venue** CEO, Dudley Canal & Caverns
10:10	**Opening Message** Henriette Breukelaar, Director for the Midlands, Canal & River Trust
10:20	**Session 1:** Placemaking and Canals Marcus Chaloner, Head of Placemaking & Design, Canal & River Trust
11:00	**Session 2:** The Social Impact of Regeneration Michael Maher, Researcher at the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact, University of Northampton
11:40	**Coffee break**
12:00	**Breakout Workshop Options** **A:** Turning Promotion into Funding - Helen Watson Moriarty, Consultant, Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership (LCRP CIC) **B:** A Week in the Life of Maintaining and Operating a Canal - Aaron Atwal, Regional Operations Manager, Canal & River Trust **C:** Restoration Delivery Plan: Six Months In – Sean McGinley, Interim Head of Asset Management, Canal & River Trust and Andrew Dobson, Senior Restoration Engineer, Canal & River Trust
12:40	**Lunch**
13:40	**Collective Conversation**
14:40	**Short Coffee Break**
14:50	**Breakout Feedback and Panel Discussion**
15:10	**Closing Remarks** Delivered by Mike Wills, National Chair, The Inland Waterways Association
15:20	**Final Thoughts** Paul Rodgers, Compère
15:25	**Group Photo**
15:30	**Boat Trip** For those who purchased a ticket in advance

Meet Our Speakers



Henriette Breukelaar
Director for the Midlands at Canal & River Trust

Henriette works with communities, government, funders and regional partners to ensure canals remain valued, resilient and relevant, while unlocking their potential to support regeneration, nature, heritage and inclusive growth. Her role brings together placemaking, investment, community participation and asset stewardship to develop deliverable programmes with long-term public value. Before joining the Trust, Henriette was Chief Executive of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. Her wider leadership experience spans economic regeneration, innovation, advanced engineering and housing with care, and she began her career in the Netherlands in equalities and community regeneration.

Marcus Chaloner
Head of Placemaking & Design, Canal & River Trust

Marcus has over thirty years' experience of canal restoration, regeneration, and development, and leads the Canal & River Trust's team of Architects and Landscape Architects on significant projects across England and Wales. A Chartered Landscape Architect, his work extends across canal restoration, water and waterspace strategies, area-based regeneration, masterplanning, design guidance, property development, nationally significant infrastructure projects and detailed waterside design. Marcus's work has included the Manchester Commonwealth Games, East Manchester Canal Regeneration, Leeds Clarence Dock, Liverpool Canal Link, Leeds Canal Basin, Olympic Waterway Strategy, Port Loop, HS2 Design Principles for Canal Crossings, Liverpool Waterfront Strategy, Wakefield Waterfront, Grand Union Canal Transfer: Canalside Design Principles, and the Trust's Towpaths for Everyone Design Principles.



He values the character, functional elegance, and authenticity of waterways in the ongoing evolution of the canal network and developments to enable more people to enjoy canals. Through his work he promotes the concept of waterway neighbourhoods, using design and placemaking to connect waterway and waterside communities, placing canals at the heart of neighbourhoods, and extending the joy and benefits of living, working and being close to canals, and making them part of daily people's lives.



Dr Michael Maher
Researcher at the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact, University of Northampton

Dr Michael Maher is a Researcher at the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact at the University of Northampton. His work focuses on social impact measurement across the arts, heritage, education, and community sectors. Michael leads research projects and has supported organisations to measure, understand, and communicate their social impact through practical frameworks, effective data management, and theory of change development.



Helen Watson Moriarty
Consultant, Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership (LCRP CIC)

Helen Watson-Moriarty brings partners, councils and communities together to support sustainable travel, local tourism and heritage conservation through effective funding, collaboration and engagement.
Helen has worked with the Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership for nearly a decade, helping to secure £2.4 million towards the Towpath Trail initiative, a major stepping stone toward restoring the Northern Reaches of the Lancaster Canal. Her engagement style is inclusive, positive, fun and creative, building momentum and confidence around ambitious place-based change.
With a BA (Hons) in Adventure Recreation Management and an MSc in Responsible Tourism Management, Helen blends academic insight with extensive practical experience across multiple community, environmental and cultural projects.
Helen is recognised for her ability to energise communities, strengthen partnerships and deliver projects that celebrate local identity whilst shaping a more sustainable future.



Aaron Atwal
Regional Operations Manager at Canal & River Trust

Aaron Atwal leads large-scale operational teams driving transformational change across complex environments. Passionate about leadership, people development and high-performing teams, Aaron brings energy, authenticity, and real-world experience to every conversation. Away from work, he is a football fan, keen traveller and proud advocate of culture, community, values, and traditions, believing that our differences are what make great teams stronger. Expect practical insights, honest stories and a session packed with enthusiasm and inspiration.



Sean McGinley
Interim Head of Asset Management, Canal & River Trust

After several years working with engineering consultants and contractors in the UK, Sean volunteered for four years in Kenya and then Lesotho, where he developed his passion for volunteering, seeing first-hand the benefits for society and the individual. On return to the UK, Sean joined British Waterways and has worked for our Charity and British Waterways before it since 2002. A Chartered Civil Engineer, he started work with British Waterways as a project engineer in the then North East Region based in Leeds, taking some of our major construction projects from concept through to site delivery. His first projects were the reconstruction of Manor Farm Bridge (No. 78) on the Chesterfield Canal and the extension of the lock approach moorings on the upstream side of Beal Lock on the River Aire. He then relocated to the East Midlands and joined the East Midlands Business Unit and after several years working on a range of engineering projects he entered general management in 2009 as the Waterway Manager for the East Midlands Waterway. He played an active part in growing volunteering within British Waterways, launching Volunteer Lock Keeping on the River Trent in 2010 and more recently at the Trust helping to expand volunteering further with the creation of Volunteer Reservoir Inspectors. In 2018, he was appointed Regional Director for Yorkshire & North East, and in 2026, he took on the role of Interim Head of Asset Management. He is married with two grown-up children and enjoys cycling, gardening, playing poker and drinking beer.



Andrew Dobson
Senior Restoration Engineer, Canal & River Trust

Andrew has worked in the Civil Engineering sector for nearly 30 years. He started with a specialist structural steel fabricator before moving into local highway authorities, designing major highway schemes, before progressing into scheme design and asset management of highway structures. He joined the Trust in 2022, originally as an Asset Engineer, managing the asset management of the Lancaster Canal and associated infrastructure. Since June 2026, he has been seconded into the role of Senior Restoration Engineer, initially on a 12-month secondment, with the aim of supporting volunteer restoration teams nationwide in the delivery of civil engineering projects across the Trust's canal network.



Mike Wills

Mike Wills became National Chair of IWA in February 2024 but has been fascinated by the inland waterways since his teens. Early experiences included digging out a disused lock and helping to raise a sunken wooden narrowboat which was subsequently converted into a houseboat. He has had dozens of narrowboat holidays, is a regular towpath walker and in 2019 purchased part of a worsted mill and wharf on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal which he has restored to create a four-storey house. He is a Chartered Accountant with a wide range of experience including the senior civil service, private practice and non-executive directorship and consultancy. His commercial experience and passion for the waterways has encouraged him to try to raise their public profile, encourage restoration, and seek to influence those who can support the wonderful national asset which is our inland waterways.

Venue

Address: Dudley Canal and Caverns, 501 Birmingham New Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 4SB

Website: Dudley Canal and Caverns | Canal Boat Trips

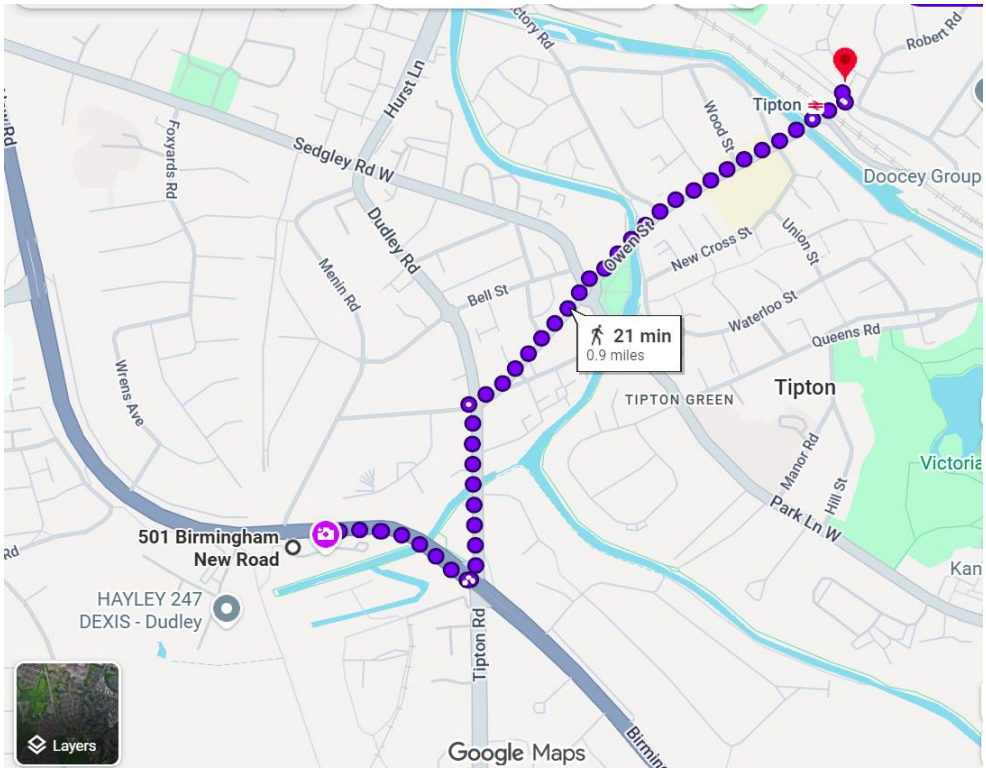
What3Words Address: ///valve.trendy.agents

By car: The venue is located on the A4123 Birmingham New Road, between Dudley and Tipton, approximately 10 minutes from Junction 2 of the M5.

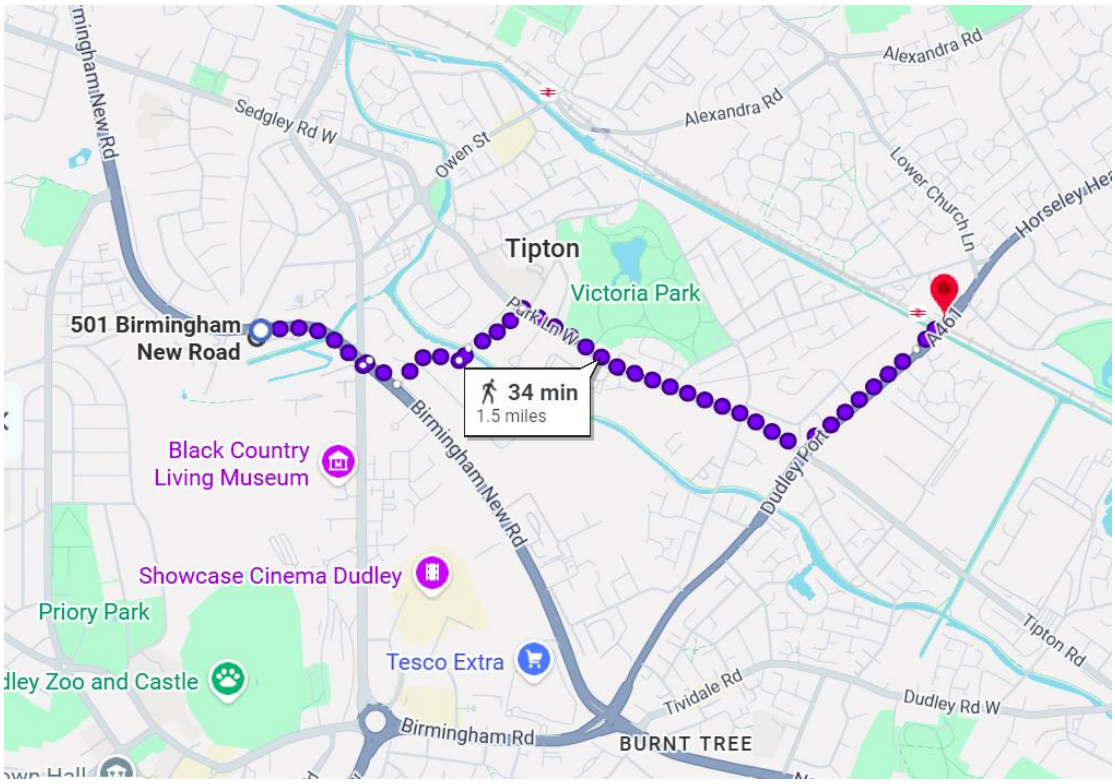
Parking: Free on-site parking is available including accessible spaces. The venue also welcomes voluntary donations towards parking costs and there is a red box in the car park to drop donations into. There are 2 charging devices with 4 connectors for electric vehicles.

By public transport: The nearest railway stations are Tipton, approximately a 20-minute walk from the venue, and Dudley Port, approximately a 35-minute walk. Both are served by trains from Birmingham. Walking routes from both stations are provided below.

Walking Map from Tipton Train Station



Walking Map from Dudley Port Train Station



By boat: The venue is located on the Birmingham Canal Navigations. If you plan to arrive by boat, please contact Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust before your journey to check where you can moor. Visitor moorings are available, but spaces cannot be reserved in advance.

Tel: 0121 557 6265
Email: info@dctt.org.uk
Website: https://dudleycanaltrust.org.uk/plan-your-visit/moorings/

Accessibility

Dudley Canal & Caverns offers a range of accessibility facilities, but some arrangements need to be made in advance.

- Getting around: Accessible parking close to the entrance, lift access to the towpath and accessible toilets are available.
- Boat trip: An accessible boat with a platform lift is available for one electric wheelchair or up to two manual wheelchairs (maximum combined weight 230 kg). Please let us know in advance if you will be using a wheelchair so we can plan accordingly. Wheelchair users must be accompanied by a carer who can assist them on board. The other boats have three steps with handrails.

- Underground environment: Expect darkness, low ceilings, uneven surfaces, cooler temperatures and damp conditions. The trip includes some flashing lights and loud audio. Helmets must be worn.
- Additional support: Ear defenders are available to borrow. Please note that assistance dogs will be present during the conference. Written tour information, additional narration and a visual guide are available.
- Free on-site parking is available, with designated Blue Badge spaces close to the main entrance. The car park has level access to the Portal Building.

If you have any specific access requirements, please ensure you have let us know in advance. We will be happy to discuss your needs and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for your visit.

The venues accessibility guide can be found here: Dudley Canal & Caverns Accessibility Guide.

Optional Afternoon Boat Trip: The Underground Experience

Rain or shine, the afternoon boat trip will take us beneath Dudley and into a remarkable underground world created by the town's industrial past.

The 45-minute, skipper-led journey begins in Dudley Tunnel, the second-longest navigable tunnel in the UK, built around 250 years ago. From there, the boat heads into the Limestone Mine Network, where the caverns were excavated by hand in the 1970s and 1980s by the Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust.

Along the way, you'll travel through historic tunnels, vast underground caverns and former mine workings, accompanied by light and sound displays that reveal the extraordinary scale of the spaces around you.

Please bring appropriate footwear and warm clothing. The underground environment can be dark, cool and damp, with low ceilings and uneven surfaces. Some audio and lighting effects are included in the tour.

Nearby Facilities

Hotels

Premier Inn Dudley Town Centre

Castlegate Business Park, Castlegate Way, Dudley, DY1 4RJ

Phone: 0333 321 9306

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Free on-site parking

Dudley Hotels | Book Cheap Hotels In Dudley | Premier Inn

Travelodge Dudley Town Centre

Discovery Way, Dudley, DY1 4AL

Phone: 08719 846517

Approx. 0.5 miles from the venue. Free parking, subject to availability

Travelodge | Dudley Town Centre hotel - Dudley Town Centre hotels

Village Hotel Birmingham Dudley

Castlegate Park, Birmingham Road, Dudley, DY1 4TB

Phone: 03330 065 222

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Full-service hotel. Parking charges apply after the initial free period.

Village Hotels | The Hotel With Everything Under One Roof

Restaurants and Pubs

Mad O'Rourke's Pie Factory

Hurst Lane, Tipton, DY4 9AB

Approx. 0.7 mile from the venue. A characterful pub serving traditional pies, hearty pub meals and Sunday carvery.

Phone: 0121 557 1402

Mad O'Rourkes | World Famous Pie Factory, Rooms and Bar

The Fellows Pub & Victoria's Restaurant

1 The Broadway, Dudley, DY1 4QD

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Traditional pub atmosphere, British food, a beer garden and occasional live music.

Phone: 01384 243600

The Fellows Pub & Victoria's Restaurant in Dudley

Castle View

Castlegate Business Park, Castlegate Way, Dudley, DY1 4RJ

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Casual pub restaurant serving familiar British pub dishes, with a car park and disabled facilities.

Phone: 01384 245 910

The Castle View Pub Restaurant in Dudley,

Bella Italia

Castlegate Park, Birmingham Road, Dudley, DY1 4TB

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Italian restaurant serving pasta, pizza and other Italian favourites. Wheelchair access and an accessible toilet are listed.

Phone: 01384 958310

Italian Restaurant in Dudley Castlegate Park | Bella Italia

Chiquito

Castlegate Way, Dudley, DY1 4TA

Approx. 1 mile from the venue. Mexican-inspired restaurant serving fajitas, tacos and other casual dishes.

Phone: 01384 215130

Chiquito Dudley | Chiquito

Taxis

Delegates wishing to travel by taxi are advised to book in advance, particularly for journeys to and from railway stations.

Triple Twenty Taxis: 01384 202020
triple20taxis.co.uk

Castle Cars: 01384 666666
Taxi Service, Taxi Company | Tonbridge, Kent - Castle Cars

Waterfront Cars: 01384 78781
waterfrontcars.net

Dudley Taxis: Online booking and fare enquiries at:
taxidudley.co.uk

Beacon Taxis: 01902 666666

Uber: Book through the app online

Things to See and Do Nearby

Dudley and the surrounding Black Country have a rich industrial, geological and cultural heritage. Delegates staying in the area may wish to explore some of the following attractions.

Black Country Living Museum
Discovery Way, Dudley, DY1 4AL

An open-air museum recreating life in the historic Black Country, with reconstructed streets, historic buildings, working trams and demonstrations of traditional crafts. Located next to Dudley Canal & Caverns.

bclm.com

Dudley Zoo and Castle
Castle Hill, Dudley, DY1 4QF

A 40-acre zoo set around the ruins of an 11th-century Norman castle, with hundreds of animal species and a distinctive collection of listed modernist Tecton buildings.

dudleyzoo.org.uk

Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve
Wren's Hill Road, Dudley, DY1 3SB

An important geological site known for its Silurian fossils, including the famous trilobite nicknamed the "Dudley Bug". Self-guided walking trails explore the area's geology and natural history.

Dudley Council: Wren's Nest

Dudley Museum at the Archives
Tipton Road, Dudley, DY1 4SQ

A free museum exploring the history and heritage of Dudley and the surrounding area, located beside the Black Country Living Museum. It is generally open Thursday to Saturday, 10am–4pm.

Dudley Council: Museum at the Archives

Local canal walks

The Dudley canal network offers opportunities to explore the area's industrial heritage, wildlife and waterside scenery on foot. Towpath conditions and accessibility vary along different sections.

Canal & River Trust: Walking routes

Canals & Rivers Near Me | Canal & River Trust

Pharmacies

Boots Pharmacy
25–26 Market Place, Dudley, DY1 1PJ
Tel: 01384 252300
Opening hours: Monday–Saturday, 9am–5.30pm. Closed Sunday.

Tesco Pharmacy
Tesco Extra, Birmingham Road, Dudley, DY1 4RP
Opening hours: Monday–Saturday, 8am–8pm; Sunday, 10am–4pm.

Useful Resources

- **Waterways for Today Report**
  Waterways-for-Today-REVISED-November-2022-FOR-WEB.pdf

- **Restoration Delivery Plan – Canal & River Trust**
  Restoration Delivery Plan - v11

- **IWA Restoration Panel:**
  IWA's Restoration Panel - The Inland Waterways Association

- **IWA New Restoration Delivery Group:**
  IWA's New Restoration Delivery Group - The Inland Waterways Association

- **IWA Restoration Hub**, a free to access area of IWA's website where you will find: Guidance and toolkits relating to canal restoration; How to apply for Training Grants; Latest news about training & events; Access to 'Restoration Hub TV; Information on WRG's Driver Authorisation Scheme & relating forms.
  Overview - Restoration Hub - The Inland Waterways Association
  Sign up to the Restoration Hub Newsletter to receive guidance, training, resources and updates by providing full name, email address and restoration group (if any) to: restoration@waterways.org.uk

- **IWA Toolbox talks** on 70 different subjects.
  https://waterways.org.uk/restoration_hub/advice-support/practical-toolkit-introduction/toolbox-talks

- **Future Events:**
  https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/restoration/restoration-training-and-workshops

- **IWA Practical Restoration Handbook**
  Practical Restoration Handbook - Restoration Hub - The Inland Waterways Association

- **Canal & River Trust Restoration Facebook Group**:
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/184725589073388

- **Waterway Recovery Group Facebook Group:**
  https://www.facebook.com/waterwayrecoverygroup/

- **Inland Waterways Association Facebook Group:**
  https://www.facebook.com/inlandwaterwaysassociation/

- **Restoration Resources – Canal & River Trust**
  Restoring Waterways Group Resources | Canal & River Trust