



INLAND WATERWAYS
AMENITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Inland Waterways: towards greater social inclusion

Final report of the working group on
social inclusion

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1 Executive summary

This report explores ways in which our inland waterways (mainly canals and navigable rivers) can foster social inclusion by enhancing the quality of life of those who live near them who do not currently use and enjoy them.

Research suggests that excluded groups are those on low incomes, people with disabilities, older people, minority ethnic (especially Asian) communities, and women. Smaller groups such as those with learning difficulties and mental health problems need also to be included. For these people, greater use of the waterways offers an extensive range of benefits to themselves and to the wider community. We wish to see work done to value these benefits.

We commissioned surveys of communities in inner city areas of Leicester, London and Manchester and made use of a parallel survey in inner Birmingham to identify the barriers to greater use. We found no barriers specific to those living in areas of acute social and economic deprivation and none specific to the ethnic composition of the local population in such areas.

The barriers - an unpleasant and neglected environment, too few activities to provide positive experiences, the absence of a proactive personal approach to promote sustained use, fears for personal security and safety (especially for children), and physical access difficulties - are barriers to everyone in these areas. Dealing with these will benefit not only the 'excluded' but also the wider community.

In this report we explore a variety of approaches, from Government, local authorities, waterway authorities, organised waterway groups and the voluntary sector, to promote wider use of the waterways. We have found a great deal to commend, particularly in the partnership approach between waterway authorities and local authorities, and the commitment being shown by the latter and the voluntary sector.

We have also found weaknesses. Government needs to give a stronger lead and appropriate funding to the two largest public waterway authorities; waterway use needs to be better integrated into the community strategies of local authorities, and there are too many one-off initiatives instead of strategies for sustained use. Also, more needs to be done in terms of outreach to those potential users still under-represented and the endemic under-funding problem requires more mobilisation of multi-agency partnerships to maximise potential funding sources, skills and support activities.

We also identified a lack of evaluation of the effectiveness, benefits and value-for-money of initiatives that have been undertaken and believe that for the voluntary sector in particular this is a significant constraint on securing continuing or additional funding.

We conclude that the key role for the inland waterways in promoting social inclusion is essentially no different from their role in society as a whole. This is to provide attractive and well-maintained environments, opportunities to relax and enjoy activities appropriate to their special character, and an assurance that users will feel safe and secure.

This will be achieved by partnership and by leadership: partnership between the waterway authorities and the local authorities who have prime responsibility for community development, and leadership principally by waterway authorities which reach out to inform, encourage, build confidence and promote activities that will generate sustained use.

Our recommendations are addressed to Government, waterway authorities, local authorities and the voluntary sector and are designed to make all waterways the community resource they can and should be.

2 Introduction

Context

The term social exclusion describes the disadvantage suffered by individuals, groups of people or communities whose scope to play a full and active part in society is severely restricted by a combination of problems such as low incomes, poor housing, bad health, physical disablement, and high crime environments.

Tackling social exclusion is one of the priorities of national policy. Government is looking for 'joined up solutions to joined up problems', working across departments and across programmes. The aim is to enhance the quality of people's lives and promote social inclusion through improved access to the services and facilities that they need and want.

Among such needs and wishes is improved access to attractive and safe environments for leisure, sport and recreation activities.

In 1999 Alan Meale, then DETR Minister for Waterways, asked IWAAC, as the Government's statutory advisory body on inland waterways, to look at ways in which waterways could contribute more to the goals of tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.

Waterways are defined in the Government's policy report *Waterways for Tomorrow* (June 2000) as canals, navigable rivers and navigable lakes. Further opportunities for social inclusion may well arise by accessing waters not covered by this definition. Many are local to major areas of population.

In September 1999, IWAAC set up a Working Group to address issues specific to the waterways and the disadvantaged. This report presents the work, findings and recommendations of the Group.

The Working Group

The Group included representatives from IWAAC, British Waterways, agencies and voluntary groups currently working with disadvantaged or excluded groups, and other user groups for the inland waterways. Members of the Group were:

Audrey Smith	Chairman, Council Member, former National Chairman of the Inland Waterways Association
Ken Ball	President, National Federation of Anglers
Phil Chambers	Council Member, Director, Fieldfare Trust
Miranda Jaggars	Project Manager, River Thames Boat Project
Councillor M Kamal	Member, Leicester City Council
Carel Quaife	Access and Development Manager, British Canoe Union
Jim Quinn	Projects Co-ordinator, Birmingham City, Planning & Architecture Dept
Linford Tatham	Council Member, former Chief Executive, Sport Council for Wales
Ben Williams	Magistrate and former youth worker
Michael Youé	Regional Environment & Heritage Manager, British Waterways, Midlands & S West Region (replacing Liz Kelly, Recreation Manager, British Waterways Grand Union South)
Derek Gowling	Policy Manager, IWAAC

With consultancy support from Geraldine Petterson.

Terms of reference

Our terms of reference were to:

- appraise the efficacy and adequacy of existing practice in making waterways and their corridors more accessible to the disadvantaged;
- identify best practice in respect of increasing the social value of waterways and removing barriers to increased use by those who are economically, socially, physically, sensorily and in any other way disadvantaged;
- assess opportunities for, and constraints on, improving current practice;
- identify priority matters for further action, their broad resource implications and the responsibility for implementing them; and
- make recommendations to IWAAC and others as appropriate within twelve months.

Our approach

We gathered information through:

- inputs on current practice from British Waterways and the Environment Agency;
- contact with the membership of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities to seek information from other navigation authorities on examples of targeted initiatives to promote access to and use of the waterways;
- the experience and expertise of Group Members;
- selected visits by the Group and individual Members to projects delivering activities to excluded groups; and
- studies commissioned by the Group viz
 - *a literature audit of the impact of social, cultural, economic and physical barriers to use of the waterways, recreation facilities and the countryside generally;*
 - *surveys and focus discussion groups conducted with residents in three inner city areas - in London and Leicester (with substantive black and Asian populations) and in Manchester (an area of multiple deprivation) - all in areas close to canals or rivers. A complementary study, separately funded by the Birmingham Canals Partnership, was carried out in inner city Birmingham (an area of social housing and economic and social deprivation); and*
 - *consultations with regional offices of British Waterways and local groups and agencies to explore further current practices and identify appropriate initiatives.*

The Group met eight times. Different venues were chosen to give us the opportunity to meet with local groups and agencies and learn first hand of their experiences in developing initiatives to meet the needs of excluded groups. Those venues included Leicester, Runcorn (Cheshire), Goole (Humberside), Birmingham and London.

3 Waterways and the excluded

Disadvantage and social exclusion

Our remit referred specially to the disadvantaged but our work and discussions led us to the view that this term is inappropriate for two reasons:

- (a) it is too prescriptive and fails to include all the groups or communities who could be excluded from the waterways. For example, those from the Asian communities in particular may feel their local waterways are not welcoming or accommodating for their needs, though many within those communities would not describe themselves as socially or economically 'disadvantaged';
- (b) it can imply that these communities or groups are in some way part of the problem and this can divert the focus away from the barriers which are responsible for exclusion. For example, a disabled person may be excluded or deterred from using the waterways not because they are 'disadvantaged', but because of barriers to physical access and lack of appropriate information and facilities.

The majority of our inland waterways are publicly owned and/or managed, and maintained with the help of the taxpayer. We believe therefore that the work of the Group should encompass all those who are excluded and do not access them at present, whatever the reason and that 'The Inland Waterways: towards greater social inclusion' is a more appropriate and inclusive title for our report.

Social exclusion and the waterways

Some may question whether there is a problem to be addressed. The leisure and recreational opportunities of river navigations have been enjoyed for well over a century. Those on the main canal system have been nationally recognised since the 1968 Transport Act gave a new remit to British Waterways (BW) and established IWAAC. Canal towpaths are not usually statutory public rights of way but access is open to all. The River Thames and other river navigations have public rights of navigation. The three largest navigation authorities, BW, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Broads Authority all have statutory duties to promote recreation and leisure use of their canals, rivers and water areas. Active recreation users - boaters, anglers, and canoeists - number hundreds of thousands; informal recreation users - walkers, cyclists, and wildlife enthusiasts - number millions.

By a steady process of restoration and transformation, the run-down waterway freight transport system of thirty years ago is now a recognised heritage,

environmental, educational and recreational resource and a catalyst for urban and rural regeneration. Restoration of derelict waterways is running at record levels and investment is due to rise further. Partnerships between navigation and local authorities are ensuring that benefits for local communities continue to be secured for the future.

All this is true but those who know the inland waterways will also know of stretches, mostly, but by no means exclusively, in inner urban areas, where there is little positive inter-relationship between the waterway and local communities.

These are areas where the physical and environmental state of the waterway reflects the social and economic deprivation of those who live around it. Sometimes the main visible activity appears to be anti-social behaviour (imposing additional costs for the waterway authority). Residents rarely experience the waterway as an attractive place to visit for recreation or relaxation, and there are multiple barriers both to access and use locally and to alternative facilities elsewhere. Such stretches of waterway contribute little or nothing to reducing the local experience of deprivation and exclusion. Rather, they reinforce it.

Who is excluded?

One of our first tasks was to decide which were the key groups or communities whose exclusion should be addressed through our work. It was not an easy decision because so little factual information was available to define who was excluded, to what extent and why.

We built up a profile of the key groups using BW survey material on canal user profiles, the literature review (see Appendix A) including work on access to the countryside, and the Birmingham and Black Country Survey (BW 1995). These suggested that the key excluded groups are:

- **Families and others excluded by low incomes** - those not in paid employment or on low incomes are significantly under-represented as visitors to water areas and the countryside.
- **Disabled people** (including those with restricted mobility and sensory disabilities) In a report (1999) to the Environment Agency, the Fieldfare Trust commented that the resources committed to encourage participation by disabled people presupposed that they take part in water recreation less often than the general population.

- **Older people** - only 16% of visitors to towpaths are 65 years and older, although 20% of the population falls within this age range.
- **Black and other minority ethnic (especially Asian) communities** - The survey evidence reveals that those from the Asian communities are less likely than other ethnic groups to visit waterways. In Blackburn, for example, a 1999 study by Groundwork found members of the Asian Muslim community 'adamant in their dislike of the canal' and not surprisingly few made visits. The BW Birmingham survey also provided evidence that Asians are both less likely to visit waterways and have a more negative perception than those from the white or black communities.
- **Women** - The UK Day Visits Survey (1998) indicates a 54:46 ratio of visits between men and women with regard to all visits to inland waterways. Other surveys of informal visitors show that, because of fear of crime, women are less likely than men to visit parks and other open spaces.

We found the statistical basis for the definitions of exclusion far from satisfactory as a basis for our work. The BW surveys were not specifically geared to collecting information about use of waterways by under-represented groups. Other figures quoted above do not relate directly to inland waterways. We also believe that those with learning difficulties and people experiencing mental health problems may have been omitted altogether.

What can waterways offer?

Attractive, well managed and used sections of waterways show quite clearly the benefits on offer and indicate how all waterways have the potential to enhance the quality of life of currently excluded groups. The key point is that realising these benefits will advantage excluded groups and the wider community.

We define the benefits as follows:

Benefits to the excluded

- 1 Better health through
 - opportunities, through walking and active recreation, to develop a healthy lifestyle,
 - scope for quiet relaxation to reduce stress and mental health problems.
- 2 Enhanced community development through
 - providing activities to bring residents together, develop contacts with other members of their community, including those from minority ethnic groups and different age groups, providing opportunities to meet and share enjoyable experiences and so make the local waterway a focus of community pride.
- 3 Increased confidence and understanding through
 - enabling disabled people to take part in mainstream activities with the confidence that facilities will meet their needs,
 - encouraging those from black and other minority ethnic communities to use facilities in the wider community with the confidence that their needs will be respected,
 - tackling fear of crime and encouraging more people, especially women, to feel more confident in using public spaces,
 - enabling those with learning difficulties to enjoy and develop through access to new experiences.
- 4 Reduced 'at risk' behaviour through
 - providing young people with positive alternatives to offending or antisocial behaviour,
 - encouraging local schools to take a pride in, and ownership of, their local waterway,
 - providing a positive focus which brings parents and children together, thus enhancing parenting skills.
- 5 Wider opportunities for education and economic development through
 - use of waterway themes within schools and the national curriculum to illustrate subjects such as geography, history, citizenship and environmental sciences and to learn new skills linked to training and personal development,
 - developing new opportunities for training and employment through waterway-based regeneration and development.
- 6 Greater appreciation of the local environment through
 - regular contact with the history, built heritage, environment and the management of the waterway habitat.

Benefits to the wider community or society from

- encouraging healthy living;
- increasing community contact within neighbourhoods;
- creating a waterway environment which is safer for everyone because more people are using it;
- helping young people to be more responsive in their use of the waterways with the consequence of less crime and antisocial behaviour;
- developing a sense of community ownership which can discourage the dumping of rubbish, help keep the waterways attractive and reduce on-going maintenance costs;
- creating greater awareness of the environment and the need to manage it to promote bio-diversity;
- ensuring the historical legacy of the waterways and the skills associated with it are carried forward;
- regenerating poor areas and making better use of currently under-used assets.

Valuing the benefits

We were concerned to discover how little information is available to put figures on, or even make a qualitative assessment of, the value of these benefits. They have to be asserted but cannot readily be measured. Further research in this area would clearly be of benefit to all authorities, agencies and voluntary sector organisations seeking partnership support and when making applications to grant-making bodies. We wish to see urgent efforts made to fill this key information gap.

4 Understanding the barriers

Researching the barriers

The findings drawn from the literature review we commissioned [Appendix A], supplemented by the experience of our members, suggested the following may potentially be barriers to greater use of the inland waterways:

- a lack of information or appropriate information;
- little publicity or promotional material that is welcoming and targeted at under-represented or excluded groups;
- the image and perspective of waterway authorities, local groups and regular waterway users may be exclusive and unwelcoming;
- concerns for personal security and perceptions that the environment is unsafe;
- a neglected or poorly maintained environment;
- restricted physical access;
- too few facilities to meet the needs of all potential users, including families;
- few opportunities to have positive experiences of a new environment;
- a lack of confidence in accessing an unfamiliar environment and new activities.

Most of the evidence identifying these as potential barriers came from surveys of users/non-users of countryside and leisure activities. We recognised that the absence of evidence specific to the waterways was a serious shortfall in our understanding of the barriers to greater use.

In response, we commissioned research in three inner city areas to explore community perceptions of their local waterways, identify the barriers and assess their relative strengths. This research was complemented by an additional study in a fourth inner city area, financed by the Birmingham Canals Partnership. All were carried out in the second half of 2000. Members of the focus groups have not been identified here to ensure confidentiality, but their words provide an interesting snapshot of public opinion in their areas.

These particular inner city areas were chosen because they were generally understood to be either socially or economically disadvantaged and/or had a significant black or other minority ethnic population. The areas were:

- **Birmingham, Ladywood**

Two residential areas adjacent to the Birmingham Main Line and Soho Loop Canals. The tenure of the two areas is predominantly social housing and the areas exhibit long-term social and economic disadvantage. The areas are predominantly white in ethnic origin with a minority of African Caribbean and Asian residents. Birmingham City Council and British Waterways are undertaking a programme of environmental improvements to these canals.

- **Leicester, Belgrave**

An area with a majority of Asian residents close to the River Soar and Grand Union Canal. Most of the housing is in owner occupation and the area is not generally disadvantaged, although there are significant pockets of economic deprivation. Leicester City Council with the Environment Agency and British Waterways has been actively engaged in improving the waterway environment. The City Council is proactive in encouraging use of the waterways by Asian residents.

- **London, North Kensington**

An area close to the Grand Union Canal with a high African Caribbean and minority ethnic resident population. Social housing accounts for the majority with some privately rented and owner occupation. Social and economic deprivation and fear of crime are known to be high. Improvements have involved London's Waterway Partnership. A new bridge crossing and improvements to the Canal environment have recently been completed.

- **Manchester, Ancoats and Miles Platting**

Areas of social housing between the Ashton and Rochdale Canals with significant economic and social deprivation and where fear of crime is high. The majority population is white UK with a minority group of Asian residents. This part of the Rochdale Canal has been un-navigable for nearly 50 years and much of the current environment is poor. The new owner, The Waterways Trust, in partnership with the local authorities and working through British Waterways, is currently engaged in a major restoration and improvement programme which will result in the reopening to navigation of the whole of this waterway.

In each area, a self-completion questionnaire was mailed to 400 households living close to the waterway. Small group discussions were also held in each locality and overall about 180 people attended, including about 70 from black and other minority ethnic communities. Among those attending the discussion groups were: members of an Asian 'Let's Go Walking' group established by the local Health Authority, pupils from a

primary school, young anglers, black African families and Bangladeshi women and children. The research findings are summarised below and set out in more detail in Appendix B. A report providing the full research findings for each area is available from the Council.

General perceptions of the waterways

The majority of survey respondents had visited their local canal or river occasionally during the previous twelve months. Providing more activities, including boat trips, and maintaining a clean, pleasant and safe environment were identified as key ways of increasing and sustaining the frequency of visits:

"In the past, they did an absolutely wonderful job in looking after the canal. It was a pleasure to walk along the towpath, so many people did then because it was clean and pleasant. There was a pub with seating outside, people were so happy to sit there in the evenings. Then, everything changed and the people stopped using it."

Rivers were often described as more attractive than canals and more likely to provide a pleasant environment:

"Rivers are a lot more exciting than canals. Canals tend to be more of a danger because they are close to where people live. Rivers tend to be cleaner. I always think of nature when I think of rivers, but the canal is what's down the bottom of the road. It's here, in the city."

In all four areas, the most common activity was a walk along the towpath, either alone or with someone else. The wildlife was a significant attraction and often greatly valued:

"We are very fond of the wildlife...feeding bread to the ducks, it looks so nice when the swans come to feed, the children love just being there for the birds."

For some residents, their local waterway was a source of peace and tranquillity, contributing to their well-being:

"It makes me feel better just seeing the canal. When I wake up in the morning, see the canal and the wildlife, it makes me feel calmer, happier."

Percentage of survey respondents who feel waterways are usually -

Survey Areas	Healthy places to walk	Pleasant places to visit
Birmingham	37%	32%
Leicester	47%	54%
London	38%	42%
Manchester	28%	16%

Residents' experiences of their local canal or river strongly influence how they feel about waterways in general. In Birmingham, Leicester and London at least a third of respondents identified the waterways generally as healthy and pleasant places. It is significant that higher percentages of respondents in Leicester identified their waterways as such since this was the area with the most extensive improvements. The exception was Manchester where many expressed negative views of the local Rochdale Canal that has been neglected for many years but is now the focus of a substantive restoration and improvement programme.

Experience of what the waterways can offer through boat trips and visits to a festival or regenerated canal-based development can positively influence perceptions of their potential:

"I've been to Castlefields. We all really enjoyed that, we took pictures going over the little bridge, the kids loved it. It makes you realise how a canal can be, what it's got to offer, even in an area like this."

"With the school, we've been on a barge and learnt all about going through the locks, how the boats work. It was great and we learnt so much about the canals and why we must take care of them."

At the heart of the community

"The canal is a place of importance for our community, it's part of us. We haven't got a local park, but the canal is like our park, our bit of peace."

Despite the very different social and demographic characteristics of the study areas and their contrasting waterway environments, the research findings reveal that, for many residents, their local canal or river was a source of affection and often closely associated with the identity of their local community. In Birmingham, Leicester and London, half of all survey respondents identified their local canal or river as one of the features they most liked about their area.

Significantly fewer residents liked living by the

Rochdale Canal in Manchester, largely because of the poor environment where rubbish dumping is commonplace. However, this still did not prevent many from identifying the potential of the canal and its value to the community:

"The canal's been here for years, it's part of our area, our history and with the right care and attention, it could be really good for the area again."

Barriers common to all

Our research did not uncover any significant barriers to greater use of the waterways that are specific to those living in areas of acute social or economic deprivation. Nor did it reveal any barriers specific to the ethnic composition of the local population in these inner city areas.

The findings reveal that most people are not deterred by a lack of awareness or information or an inability to appreciate the worth or potential of their local waterway. The major deterrents are the poor quality and maintenance of the waterway environment and the lack of activities to attract and sustain the residents' interest. In addition, there are specific concerns which need to be addressed either through design or management of the waterway environment, especially those for personal security, the safety of children and physical access.

If not addressed, any or all of these concerns would impact negatively on the use of the local waterway by any population group and in any area. Such barriers impact disproportionately on those living in areas of acute social and economic deprivation because they lack the financial and other resources to access alternative leisure opportunities further afield.

The picture presented by our research is very different therefore from the findings of surveys into use of the countryside. For the latter, considerable emphasis is placed on the influence of attitudinal barriers, lack of familiarity and the restrictions imposed by distance and cost. Such barriers could well apply as deterrents to accessing waterways at some distance from the home, but appear not to be significant for the local canal and river irrespective of economic status or ethnic group. These findings are much more consistent with the limited survey material on the users and non-users of urban parks.

Looking at the barriers in more detail

An unpleasant and neglected environment

In all four areas, significant numbers of residents said inland waterways generally were not usually clean and free of litter. Too much litter in and alongside the local canal was the reason why a quarter of respondents in Manchester did not visit the Rochdale Canal. In all the discussion groups, the dumping and lack of regular clearance of rubbish and other waste angered many and was seen as the major factor contributing to an unattractive and unwelcoming environment:

"The most important thing for people around here is to keep it clean, people dump everything in it - trolleys, bikes, dead animals, mattresses. They just stay and more gets dumped. How can you expect anyone to enjoy walking by all that!"

"The canal isn't clean. When we're fishing, often you get all caught up on something - trolleys, parts of bikes, rubbish. It ruins it for us."

"It's not always clean and that puts people off. Sometimes, it's very slippery on the towpath with the oil and sometimes the water is black with oil...we want it to be clean and then we'll use it."

Poor maintenance within the waterway corridor was another factor contributing to the perceptions of neglect:

"The towpaths are blocked by encroaching weeds and overhanging branches, it makes it difficult to walk along. You wonder is anyone looking after this?"

"The bushes are left to grow everywhere and people throw all their rubbish on top, bottles, cans - what a sight! They should trim back the bushes and look after it. They are never going to get people to use it, if they don't do these things."

The regular dumping of litter also contributes significantly to these perceptions of neglect:

"People throw rubbish down the stairs on to the towpath and over into the canal. They are very quick. People just walk over and bags are thrown in. Some people arrive in cars and throw stuff over the bridges - paper, junk, beds, mattresses."

Where regular efforts were made to improve the waterway environment and keep the area clear of litter

this was welcomed and identified as a positive means of encouraging regular use of these resources:

"It is a lovely natural resource, the potential is all there and when it is clean and well looked after, it makes us want to use it. Then, it is a pleasure to visit."

Some people compared the environment of inner city waterways with their more favourable experiences of canals or rivers in the countryside:

"It's a very pleasant way to spend a day, on the canal in the country. There it's a nice environment and everything is clean... in the country, it really does you good, the canal's a different world in the country."

Too few activities

Percentage of survey respondents for whom -

Survey Areas	Waterways are not usually places with lots of things to do
Birmingham	59%
Leicester	50%
London	55%
Manchester	78%

The majority of survey respondents did not perceive waterways generally to be places where there was lots to do. Although many welcomed and valued the peace and 'unspoilt' character of the waterway environment, there was still an expressed demand for more activities which could attract people in greater numbers and develop their interest in canals and rivers.

In particular, canal-based festivals and increased opportunities for boat trips in areas where people lived were seen as practical ways of raising local awareness and community involvement in their local waterway:

"In the summer holidays, there should be events and boat trips to involve the children. This would not only stop the vandalism, but could also be a start in making the young people care about their canal."

"There should be a canal bus service and tours along the canal. More boat trips for shoppers and pleasure boats calling at places along the canal which take disabled people like myself."

"A good way to encourage people to use the river and canal is through boat trips, this would encourage families and attract a lot more people."

The literature review suggested targeted action might be required to encourage minority ethnic families to

take up fully the offer of boat trips. However, the qualitative research in London, Leicester and Birmingham suggested many already had positive perceptions of short boat trips. There was evidence from Leicester that more Asian families were interested in hiring boats for longer journeys:

"It takes time and effort, but gradually Asian families are coming to ask about hiring boats and taking trips. The interest and the confidence is growing."

Festivals or events were seen as a means of attracting people to the waterways, but too often were not based in the areas where people live:

"There should be festivals in areas where people live and more going on in those areas. Too often these festivals are only in the posh areas with the expensive boats and houses. They should be for us too. We don't go there because of the distance: the walk is too long, especially with the children. They could have a boat to pick us up, then we'd feel it was for us too."

Activities or facilities which were not 'financially accessible' to local people would not achieve the desired effect of making the waterways more attractive:

"There's no point in having an activity centre, boat trips or the like, if the costs are beyond the reach of ordinary people. The cost will deter the very people who should be coming from the local estates...activities must be financially accessible."

"More cafés linked to the canal would be good, but not too expensive and they should serve food for us as well."

Fears for personal security

Percentage of survey respondents for whom -

Survey Areas	Fear of crime is a reason for not visiting their local canal or river	Would not feel safe when walking alone by any canal or river
Birmingham	6%	46%
Leicester	15%	44%
London	14%	48%
Manchester	33%	62%

The waterways are often seen as isolated and confined places with little natural surveillance and many people would not feel safe walking alone for fear of crime. The seemingly threatening activities of young people and the misuse of towpaths by drug users and others were the main sources of concern for both residents and

boat users:

"Teenagers throw stones at the boats, they burn the benches, it makes it unsafe for everyone... boats wouldn't want to stay up here, not with the idiots throwing bricks."

"I've seen kids of 9 or 10 drinking by the canal...then, they start to fool about - it's not safe for them and not safe for us."

"There's people dealing and smoking dope, it isn't safe... they take advantage because they know there's no police but I wouldn't walk along there knowing I'd have to pass them."

The presence of graffiti and vandalism could contribute to perceptions of an unsafe environment:

"Just looking at the graffiti, the broken walls, where fires have been lit... you know that it's where people run riot, I know I wouldn't be safe."

The media was identified in the group discussions as portraying canals, in particular, as unsafe places:

"I know there have been some high profile incidents along the canal, but it's only 10% bad but the media means you only hear about the bad side and that must put a lot of people off visiting it."

Keeping the bushes trimmed back and having the area around the waterway open and visible can make people feel safer:

"I feel quite safe walking along on my own, but then it's not as though it's all closed in with trees and bushes, it's all quite open and I know I can be seen."

Activities to attract more people to the waterways would contribute to greater feelings of safety:

"What it needs here is, more activities, you need to attract more people to make it safer, people in boats and people walking."

The safety of children

Percentage of survey respondents for whom -

Survey Areas	Waterways are not usually safe places for children to be
Birmingham	36%
Leicester	28%
London	37%
Manchester	56%

Concerns for the safety of children so close to water can be an important deterrent to those who would use

the waterways as a family or may otherwise encourage their children to use it as a recreational resource:

"It's not really safe for children, we need more fencing and railings...when I take the children out for a walk, they run and up down and I worry all the time, what if they were to slip. All the rubbish in the bottom of the canal means they'd get dragged down."

"Canals that go through where people live can be dangerous for children. Those that go through where there's industry, there's not such easy access for kids. But, where people live you have got to keep the kids safe."

There was recognition of the conflict that could arise from installing railings that restrict the activities of anglers and boat users. Giving children the knowledge and skills to use waterways safely was felt by some to be a more viable and practical option.

Awareness and information

As these were local waterways and an integral part of the area where people lived, an absence of signage was not perceived to be a barrier to use. However, where physical access to the river or canal was restricted, a lack of information on the distance to the next exit from the towpath could be a deterrent:

"I like to know how far I've got to go before I can get off the canal, it's a safety thing really but I expect for people who are old or disabled, that's important as well. Living round here I know where the next exit is, but someone who hasn't been to the canal before wouldn't know and might not risk it."

Although in our research, many minority ethnic residents were regular users of their local waterway, they were also more likely than other residents not to visit it because 'they had no reason to go there'. It was suggested that a lack of awareness of its potential could be a significant factor:

"I don't go there because why should I? It's just water and what would I do? I've heard people say it's lovely walking by the river, but I can't believe it myself. I think there's lots of people like me. Maybe if somebody took us there, on a nice day, we'd get to know it."

The literature review suggested that the lack of information translated into community languages could be a deterrent to use of the waterways by minority ethnic residents. This was not substantiated in our research. More importantly, minority ethnic

communities wanted personal contact to introduce them to the potential of their local waterway:

"You could send a leaflet or a form but we wouldn't read it or fill it in. Most of us do not read or write in our own language. A lot of money is wasted on translations, when what people really want are meetings like this and information by word of mouth. Going out to the communities, where they are, that's what counts."

"We walk along the river because someone took us there and introduced us to it. On another occasion, someone from the Council took the group along and described all the plants there were. We really enjoyed it and understood so much more."

For disabled people to feel confident using the waterway, and especially independently, they require information regarding facilities available and practical guidance on the accessibility of the towpath throughout its length:

"Finding out what's available for me, what I can use, would go a long way to helping me feel comfortable and confident in going there."

Our research did reveal that there was a role for more local information in encouraging more people to visit and use the waterways:

"Have people telling young people and others about the canals and their history, what the canal meant to people round here."

"Bring the rivers and canals to life for people. Maybe have a theatre on a boat, which tells people what life was like. Have a horse drawing a barge so people can see for themselves. Tell them why the canal was built, who uses it and its history. Most people don't read leaflets wherever you put them. They want things you can feel and touch, that they can understand."

Physical restrictions to access

Most of the waterways in our survey areas were accessed from paths across level land and consequently difficulties of access to the canal or river were not identified by local users as a significant barrier to use. Where access required negotiating a steep gradient, the lack of a ramp or a poorly designed ramp could be a barrier to use:

"The canal is not accessible for disabled people or for people with difficulty in walking or climbing up or down steps. If there was better access, a ramp

maybe, then it would be better used. But ramps must be well designed for safe use."

The failure to provide dropped curbs and ramps, and to maintain adequately towpaths, steps and ramps can make the towpath inaccessible and even make towpaths, steps and ramps dangerous to use:

"For all of us, those paths down to the canal need to be kept in better repair. You can't just make it better and then leave it. It's dangerous for everyone if they're not maintained properly."

Narrow, uneven and cambered surfaces, especially on the towpath, can make their use difficult or impossible for not only for wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility or impaired vision, but also for those with young children and buggies:

"I am disabled and have to walk with two sticks, it would be good if the towpaths could be made more comfortable for disabled people - an even surface and the bushes trimmed back would help and encourage more to use it."

"It's very difficult to get along there with a buggy, it can be impossible in places. If the path was made a bit more even and trim back the bushes, then I could get through and use it."

"The towpath surface is not user friendly for bikers. It also means that the surface is poor for wheelchairs. I wouldn't like to push a wheelchair along some parts of the towpath."

Permanent barriers are often installed to prevent the towpaths or waterway entrances from being used as cycle or motor cycle tracks, but these barriers can also make the routes difficult or impossible to use by disabled people and those with children and buggies:

"I agree with stopping people riding motor bikes along the towpath, it's very dangerous and can give you a real fright. But, then how do you get through with the buggy, sometimes I can't be bothered... there's lots of things that are good in one way but difficult for others."

"Making the towpath really accessible for a wheelchair also means accessibility for motor bikes, that may be an insoluble accessibility dilemma, but it still needs attention, if you are really going to include everyone."

Conclusions

This chapter opened with a list of potential barriers drawn primarily from the literature review. Our research suggests that, at least in the four areas surveyed, some of these potential barriers are not particularly significant factors in deterring residents from using their local waterway, whilst others are of paramount importance.

Our research was conducted in four inner city areas and sought the views of local residents on their urban waterways. With the proviso that our findings would not necessarily be applicable to all waterway environments, especially those in a rural setting, we found little evidence that the following are significant in deterring residents, irrespective of their ethnic group or degree of deprivation, from using their local waterway:

- a lack of information or promotional material
- a lack of confidence in accessing an unfamiliar environment
- an image or perspective of agencies or activity providers as unwelcoming

Such features may deter use of the waterways in other localities including those in the countryside, but not significantly within inner city areas.

The principal barriers that deter residents from using their local urban waterways are:

- **a neglected and poorly maintained environment, especially with regard to the dumping and irregular clearance of rubbish.**
- **too few activities, including boat trips and festivals, to provide positive experiences of the waterways and their potential**
- **the lack of a proactive and personal approach to promote the sustained use of the waterways through reaching out into the communities**
- **fears for personal security from crime**
- **concerns for the safety of children close to water**
- **difficulties of physical access, including uneven and restricted towpaths, and poor maintenance**

It is these issues on which resources need to be focused.

5 Breaking down the barriers

The target barriers

Our research has identified in four specific locations the principal barriers that deter urban residents from using their local waterways. Tackling these barriers requires more progress to be made in:

- Providing attractive, accessible and well-maintained waterway environments;
- Developing a pro-active approach to reach out into local communities to provide information on the waterways and encourage regular use;
- Offering activities to provide positive experiences of the waterways and their potential;
- Targeting initiatives to tackle fears for personal security and concerns for the safety of children;

We believe, however, that more than this will be needed. Tackling social exclusion requires changes in attitudes and policies at a wider level than the individual waterway and before we turn to the mechanisms to tackle the specific barriers we look first at this wider context in terms of four key players:

- Government;
- Local government;
- Navigation authorities;
- Organised waterway user groups.

Mechanisms for inclusion: the wider context

Government

Integral to Government's Waterways for Tomorrow [June 2000] is a commitment to encourage more people to use the inland waterways for leisure and recreation, tourism and sport, to promote them as a catalyst for regeneration, and to increase access to the waterways for the young, the disabled and the disadvantaged.

This last is an important and welcome commitment but the public navigation authorities have been given no additional funding, other than for safety-related maintenance, to make this non-statutory commitment effective and no national guidance on how it should be best pursued. The Government sees it being achieved through partnerships with others (see below) but it is by no means certain that these partnerships will generate the resources for the crucial on-going maintenance of the waterway environment, even if they can be successfully deployed to finance its upgrading and improvement.

More recently, the Urban White Paper 'Our Towns and Cities: the future. Delivering an urban renaissance', has highlighted how most deprivation and exclusion occurs in urban areas. Its proposals include a wide variety of initiatives to tackle this problem. It places great importance on the new Community Strategies which are to be prepared by local authorities, on the quality, design and value of open spaces (although it does not mention urban waterways), and on the need for community involvement. Although it appeared late in our work, there are many connections between our findings and the issues it raises.

Local authorities

The White Paper gives a central role to local authorities in urban areas. Local authorities are key players as service providers, planning authorities and funding partners. The growth of their active involvement in waterway regeneration has been one of the most positive factors on the waterway scene in recent years; they are clearly the leading player on all issues relating to community development and therefore on the particular issue of social exclusion.

The new Community Strategies which they are being asked to prepare will be essential tools in taking these issues forward. Waterways are part of the social as well as the physical fabric of local communities and therefore effective partnerships between the waterway authority and local authorities are crucial for achieving greater community use of the waterway. We say more about this below.

Local authority support is also vital to navigation authorities, commercial operators and voluntary groups in developing and maintaining the infrastructure which makes possible greater use of waterways. Boats require boatyards and wharves which on the Thames in particular, but also on waterways in other urban locations, are under pressure either from new neighbours or from the threat of redevelopment from more lucrative uses. If these are lost, passenger and community boats cannot be maintained to the required standards and will be forced to cease operating.

Navigation authorities

The smaller authorities

Of the 30 or so navigation bodies which are members of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) only a handful of the smaller authorities responded to our request for information on initiatives they were undertaking. Of those who did so, for example the Basingstoke Canal Authority, the major

activity appears to be modest but useful measures to improve access for physically disabled users and visitors. We suspect that the picture elsewhere among the smaller authorities is very fragmentary. Most are indeed very small with severe resource constraints on their activities but we believe that there may well be potential there for them to do more through partnerships with their local authorities and the voluntary sector.

The situation for the three largest public navigation authorities - British Waterways (BW), the Environment Agency (EA) and the Broads Authority (BA) is, not surprisingly, very different.

British Waterways

BW, whose waterways serve almost all the largest industrial cities in Britain, already operates by far the most varied package of community-oriented initiatives of the three. 'Our Plan for the Future 2000-04', published in July 1999, detailed progress on a variety of measures pledged in the previous (and first) plan. They included the progressive regeneration of the canal corridor in major cities such as Birmingham, London, Leicester, Leeds and Sheffield through partnerships with city authorities; the partnership with the Fieldfare Trust in the Waterway Access for All project to improve access for those with disabilities, and a number of community-based education initiatives. The new pledges made in that plan included developing waterside events and festivals to enhance community interest in the waterways and new training and certification procedures to improve the contribution which volunteers make to them.

We strongly support the BW focus on the improvement to the waterway itself and its adjacent environment because this creates the basic resource for the local community and we applaud the commitment in the Waterway Access for All partnership because this is not only valuable in itself but offers benefits to other users. We believe that BW now needs to fashion, area by area, initiatives for particular groups (the disabled, children and so on) into strategies for sustained use by the wider community.

The Environment Agency and the Broads Authority

We would expect the picture for the EA and the BA navigations to be unlike that for BW because neither operates in the BW environment and the balance of issues they face is different. Both are nonetheless active on a number of fronts.

The Agency, at its September 2000 AGM, adopted six action points to promote 'environmental equality'. They include:

- mapping out and identifying where there are social and environmental inequalities and sharing this information;
- providing better information and consultation techniques to contribute to community plans;
- working with key national and regional initiatives which are tackling social exclusion;
- further developing the skills and capacity of staff to work with stakeholders.

We understand that these commitments are now being taken forward through the Agency's developing social policy framework into specific areas including navigation and recreation work.

The Agency is actively promoting angling in inner cities as an activity which meets many of the objectives to overcome social exclusion and is turning the findings of the 1999 Fieldfare Trust report on recreation sites into practical guidance for disabled users. There are also a variety of noteworthy initiatives in the various Agency regions which combine outreach activities to excluded communities (e.g. the Midlands Diversity Action Plan); promotion of river festivals for the community; research on engagement/participation/consultation techniques; research on the environmental concerns of the socially disadvantaged, and developing partnerships with organisations such as the Black Environment Network.

The Broads Authority does not appear to have a comprehensive statement of policy towards social inclusion issues but has devoted resources to help with disabled access to its water areas, pioneered community festivals and is currently engaged in its first outreach activity to target disadvantaged children in nearby urban areas.

There is clearly scope, through AINA, for more interchange of ideas and experience at the practical level in this field whereby the three larger navigation authorities share their knowledge with the smaller. We believe that Government, which is pledged to assist AINA financially for specific areas of work, should ask the Association to make social inclusion a higher priority for its future work.

Organised national waterway user groups

As far as we are aware, the Community Boats Association (CBA) is the only national organisation which exists exclusively to give to its members, those wishing to set up a community boat service, and local and waterway authorities, information and training in running such a boat and in ways to make the waterways

more accessible and socially inclusive. We accept that other organised waterway user groups - boaters, anglers, waterway supporters and others - have a primary responsibility to their own members but we would like to see them develop new/improved initiatives in two areas:

- supporting the prime movers - local authorities and the navigation authorities - in specific problem areas, offering them their expertise, advice and co-operation;
- increasing their efforts to attract new members from within excluded groups, including minority communities, who do not yet readily participate.

CBA members have for very many years been delivering with limited resources a wide range of activities and education programmes for socially excluded groups on the waterways. They positively seek out children and young people, the physically disabled, people with learning difficulties, those with mental health problems, people disadvantaged by unemployment and poverty and those with a history of offending. The Inland Waterways Association, too, has long experience in outreach through its 'Waterways for Youth' programme. We also welcome the steps that others have already taken. The British Canoe Union has pioneered its own Social Inclusion Action Plan and we would like to see this monitored by the Union in order to test whether it is a model for other groups. The National Federation of Anglers has promoted the development of opportunities for disabled anglers. Even where not comprehensive of all excluded groups, these examples show what can be done to make active use of the waterways more 'open to all' and seemingly less the playground of a minority.

Mechanisms for inclusion: tackling specific barriers

During our work, we have looked at a selection of the programmes and projects (see Appendix C) already underway to widen the relevance and attraction of the waterways to excluded and disadvantaged groups. We have drawn on these to illustrate some of the ways in which the barriers we have identified can be tackled more effectively.

Securing and sustaining attractive, accessible and well-maintained waterway environments

As we pointed out in relation to BW's programme above, we are in no doubt that this is a fundamental requirement for promoting social inclusion.

The waterway itself may be the responsibility of the navigation authority (and we have commented above on their funding needs) but the key relationship is with the local authorities concerned with the waterway in its physical and social context. Sustained improvements, as is now widely acknowledged, will only be achieved by effective partnerships between those responsible for the waterway and the local authorities, together with the private and voluntary sectors. These partnerships must also have the active involvement of local communities if they are to achieve longer-term success.

They require both joined-up planning across local authority boundaries and multi-agency partnerships. The value of these approaches is that they provide a mechanism on which to build strong functional links between national policies and the delivery of local area initiatives (including those set out below). They also appear to be good value for money since they are aimed at benefiting the substantial numbers in deprived urban areas. In addition to the regeneration funding already being deployed by the Regional Development Agencies and others, the Urban White Paper sets out a plethora of new funding initiatives to tackle the causes of social exclusion. Almost all are relevant to the needs of urban waterways and every advantage should be taken of them by waterway/local authority partnerships.

We have looked at a variety of waterway partnership approaches, in particular those with BW in Birmingham, London (the canals and the Thames) and the latest BW initiative in Manchester. All are focused, with varying degrees of emphasis, on economic, social and environmental regeneration.

The most comprehensive is that led by Birmingham City Council, the Birmingham Canals Partnership (core members the City Council, BW and Groundwork Birmingham) which, after years of jointly producing physical and other improvements, is now preparing a strategic Canals Action Plan (SCAP). This will address, amongst other issues, that of social inclusion. A Collaboration Agreement between the City Council and BW is being entered into as a way of producing additional resources for investment in canals in deprived areas. This includes the intention to recycle some of the proceeds from local canal-based regeneration schemes. The improvements to the Birmingham Canals in recent years have been dramatic and there is clearly much to commend in their approach.

Apart from stressing the importance of a cross-boundary and multi-agency approach we would hesitate to prescribe a single approach for all

waterways. A pro-active local authority such as Leicester City Council has been the driving force in improvements to its waterways. In other areas, for example the BW London Canals Partnership and the EA's Thames Ahead initiative (both embracing a number of local authorities), the navigation authority has been the initiator. In all cases, nevertheless, they are in partnership with other agencies and groups.

An issue for many partnerships is the short-term nature of funding packages. Investment in an improved environment, as navigation and local authorities are well aware, must be secured through longer-term revenue finance in order to maintain a quality environment and a safe and secure waterway. It is pointless and ultimately counter-productive to invest heavily in the waterway surroundings only to see the track itself gradually deteriorate due to lack of adequate maintenance funding for what is, after all, an expanding operational system.

Developing a pro-active approach to reaching out into local communities

Although creating a quality and safe waterway environment will attract many residents to their waterway, there will still be those unfamiliar with its potential as a community resource. Developing a proactive outreach into the community is essential to attract those who are unaware or apprehensive of the benefits offered by even a quality waterway environment.

Our surveys have found that personal contact with local groups and escorted visits, rather than the more usual emphasis on improved signing and the distribution of literature, are the key to overcoming negative perceptions although appropriate information is needed to support and sustain these outreach activities.

Social inclusion, as we have said, is outside the statutory remit of all waterway authorities. Those working for them, volunteers and organised waterway user groups may often lack the confidence to reach out to communities and require training and resources to work within communities, especially where staff or volunteers may not share the same culture or language. There are often resources in the voluntary sector and local authorities that could be helpful in meeting these needs. The CBA, for example, offers a Certificate in Community Boat management, which provides training in running a community boat to its members and those wishing to work with socially excluded groups on day or residential voyages.

We are aware of many examples of such outreach activities. Just a few which we have noted in our work include: the Foleshill Canals Alive project; the Groundwork Trusts in East Manchester and Blackburn working with schools and ethnic communities and Leicester City Council involving Asian communities in planning and implementing waterway improvements.

Also there is the project for disadvantaged children which the Broads Authority is organising with the Countryside Agency, and the efforts of the Bridgewater YMCA, which seeks out disaffected young people on the towpath and encourages them onto their community boat and centre, and from there into activities and paths to education and employment.

We in no way underestimate the resource implications of a more intensive outreach effort to build up community use of, and support for, local waterways. Increasingly voluntary organisations are required to be more professional. People are needed to train, manage and direct the voluntary effort involved. Once again, this is an activity facing a seemingly perennial funding problem. People-funding is much more difficult to obtain than capital funding. We return to this point in our final section.

Offering activities to provide positive experiences of the waterways and their potential

We have found that a barrier to use is the perception of the urban waterways as an environment where there is little to attract and sustain the interest of users, especially families with young children. Providing people with positive experiences of the waterways will therefore both attract new users and encourage existing users to visit more regularly. It will also help to sustain an improved environment and reduce security fears (see below). Waterways may not be for everyone but they are as much a part of the social as they are of the physical fabric of their areas.

We consider the way forward is on three fronts:

- More activities on the water e.g. boat trips, canoeing and fishing;
- Making the waterway the focus of local events e.g. festivals and other 'fun' activities as the three public navigation bodies are already doing;
- Siting community (including religious) buildings, appropriate catering outlets and other attractions on the waterway.

Careful management will be needed to avoid conflict amongst users and with the strong attachment by local

communities to the ambience and environment of 'their' waterway that our surveys have revealed. Even where the environment is still poor, many people value the quiet, the wildlife and the character of their local waterway. For them it is a special kind of local park.

Subject to this caveat, we believe that much can be done to promote activities on and around urban waterways to aid inclusion. Again the navigation authorities will need to establish partnerships - with the local authority for funding assistance and help with protecting and developing appropriately the waterway corridor; with the private sector for commercial development, and with the voluntary sector for providing activities for particular excluded groups.

The range of possibilities is huge. Of those we have seen, grouped as above, we would draw attention to:

- the Sobriety Project in Goole, offering learning holidays afloat for adults and children, day and residential boat trips and courses specifically designed to enable women to build confidence and learn new skills around the waterways; the River Thames Boat Project providing education, training and leisure activities at subsidised rates for young, disabled and elderly people on a fully accessible barge; the Digbeth Canal Regeneration Project which includes an explicit inner city schools element and the Islington Narrow Boat Club in London;
- the Broads Authority's 'Fun in the Broads' initiative; the Day-Star Theatre and the Angel Festival in London;
- The Canalside Activity Centre, a voluntary sector education and recreation centre on the Grand Union Canal in North Kensington; the Hindu Temple in Sandwell built by the canal and involving volunteers in environmental projects and improvements; the new Museum of Space Exploration in Leicester which will be especially attractive to Asian families and visitors and is accessed by walkways making good use of its waterside location.

The importance of the voluntary sector in these initiatives needs hardly be emphasised. It is a key partner in tackling social exclusion. Local and community-based initiatives often have the knowledge and neighbourhood contacts to reach out effectively to excluded and disadvantaged groups and communities. Despite this valuable work, many receive limited financial support and consistently face uncertainties as to whether future activities can be sustained.

When funding is provided to the voluntary sector, it is often targeted specifically at capital works and rarely

meets the running or maintenance costs of projects. Charitable sources are often reluctant to fund ongoing costs, preferring one-off developments through capital grants. When revenue funding is made available, it is often on a short-term or yearly basis with voluntary groups unable to plan effectively or develop sustainable longer-term plans. A commitment to tackling social exclusion and encouraging more activities and positive opportunities to raise awareness of the benefits of the waterways requires a commitment to longer term funding and a willingness to help meet revenue as well as capital costs.

Targeting initiatives to tackle fears for personal security and concerns for the safety of children

Fears for personal security remain a critical issue for our urban waterways. Our research bore this out. Many users and potential users are concerned for their personal security when using the waterways. In part, such concerns will mirror their perceptions of the wider environment where they live. There are features, however, specific to the waterways that can enhance fear of crime. They can be lonely places. A narrow towpath can contribute to feelings of entrapment. Users may enter the towpath but be unsure where they can exit. Opportunities for surveillance may be reduced by unchecked vegetation. To encourage everyone to use the waterways, people need to feel secure.

There is now a statutory duty on local authorities and the police to work together with other agencies in tackling local problems of crime and disorder. These Crime and Disorder (or Community Safety) Partnerships are required to conduct crime audits and to develop and implement local strategies to tackle crime and disorder. As far as we have ascertained, only rarely have the waterways received a mention in these audits and strategies or have initiatives been identified specifically to tackle problems in these localities. If our understanding is accurate, this should be remedied.

Ending the decay and dereliction will help. Greater and more regular use and more activities will certainly change perceptions but targeted initiatives will still be needed. We have noted a number; the work of British Waterways with the Metropolitan Police on the London Canals (see for example their joint report *Under Lock and Quay: Reducing Criminal Opportunity by Design* April 2000); the recently established Boat Watch scheme in the West Midlands; the Groundwork project with local schools in Manchester to tackle graffiti and vandalism; a similar initiative in Glasgow with local agencies and the Nolly Barge, and the Eldonian Village

work in Liverpool to establish a safe haven for boats and towpath users. Once again, the way forward for waterway authorities must be through partnership working with the police, local community, schools and the voluntary sector.

Awareness of the waterways and the security of their users need to be raised with Crime and Disorder Partnerships and specific community-based initiatives developed to tackle crime and fear of crime. Such initiatives could include, for example, the use of neighbourhood wardens to patrol the towpaths as part of their remit.

Voluntary groups and communities, as in the Manchester and Glasgow initiatives cited above, also have a role to play in making waterways safer and more secure for children and adults. In our research, many people identified the development of 'ownership' of local stretches of the waterway by local schools or members of the wider community as an effective means of helping to maintain a quality environment and enhance perceptions of safety and security. This is an approach well worth developing further.

Conclusions

It was beyond our remit to assess in detail needs and provisions for the socially excluded in relation to the inland waterways. We have only been able to illustrate a few of the many initiatives which are already underway to widen the use and appeal of the system. That there is scope for much more to be done is self-evident. There are, however, two general (and in our view related) issues we would wish to highlight from what we have seen:

- **The endemic under-funding problem that constrains what can be done now and what might be done in the future.** Our work suggests that the best way to deal with this problem is to develop partnership relationships that mobilise the maximum spread of opportunities for funding, skills and support activities.
- **The absence of any systematic evaluation of the effectiveness, benefits and value for money of the initiatives which have been undertaken.** Outputs may be measured but rarely more than this. We have found little or no evidence of independent and thorough evaluations of individual projects that we see as essential in order to identify their benefits and weaknesses, and the scope for replication. Most important of all, such evaluations are needed to assist in securing continued or additional resources for projects to promote social inclusion. We believe that this is a significant weakness in the current funding scene, particularly affecting the voluntary sector.

We have found much good practice to commend and a great deal of sustained commitment by individuals and organisations, often struggling with minimal resources, to target the excluded but we have not found it possible to fulfil our remit to identify 'best practice' because of the absence of proper evaluations of what is already going on. The CBA has identified examples of good practice among its own members. The Countryside Recreation Network is currently assembling good practice examples of social inclusion projects in a countryside recreation context. We would like to see a mechanism found to parallel this for urban waterways and to include some selected initiatives properly evaluated for dissemination as 'best practice'.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Waterways can and should contribute more to promoting social inclusion. This need not mean providing a whole raft of new special initiatives for the socially excluded. Waterways that offer an attractive and well-maintained environment, opportunities to relax and enjoy activities appropriate to their special character, and an assurance that users will feel safe and secure, benefit all citizens.

The current practice of developing one-off initiatives targeted at specific groups should be subsumed within **strategies for sustained use** to get best value out of the improved waterway and its environment. To achieve both elements of this approach, the crucial relationship for navigation authorities is with the responsible local authorities seeking better use of the waterway assets in their area. It is their Community Strategies which will shape the future, and every waterway should be part of these new initiatives.

Implementing the strategies will require special efforts by the waterway authorities in three areas. Firstly, they need to build on the pilot schemes already underway to improve, wherever appropriate, access for the physically disabled. Secondly, within multi-agency partnerships with the local authorities and the voluntary sector, they need to be more pro-active in reaching out to local communities to inform and encourage, to build confidence, and to promote activities which will generate more and repeated use of the local waterway.

The resource implications of more out-reach activity need to be faced and innovative ways of carrying it out explored. We would like to see a pilot project which focuses these activities on a single individual - a waterway facilitator for community use - supplemented more generally by in-house training for waterway staff.

Thirdly there is the very difficult challenge of tackling perceptions of personal security. There is no ready solution to this other than to ensure that problem waterways are integrated, wherever practical, into Crime and Disorder Partnerships in order to tackle the situation at source and to reclaim the waterway for the local population. In this way, they will increasingly be able to see it and use it as their own community resource.

Recommendations: for actions which benefit everyone

- To enable the waterways to contribute more to social inclusion, the DETR should require the incorporation into the plans, policies and programmes of the three largest public navigation authorities - BW, EA and BA - of a specific commitment to this work, advise them on how best to pursue it, and review their funding needs accordingly.
- The DETR to fund two research projects by AINA (a) to advise navigation authorities on 'good practice' and, if possible, 'best practice' for projects/initiatives to promote social inclusion, and (b) to measure the value of personal and community benefits created by waterways and their use.
- BW and EA to pursue with local authorities, where appropriate, multi-agency and multi-year partnerships in order to progress waterway regeneration, reclaim waterways for local communities and within them to devise strategies for sustained use, deploying the full range of funding packages available through regeneration agencies, lottery bodies and the recent Urban White Paper, and with the direct involvement of the local community.
- DETR to consider a policy whereby local authorities are encouraged/directed to raise a precept to create a ring-fenced 'Environmental Care and Maintenance Fund' to be jointly administered by a partnership body including representatives of the local authority, the navigation authority and the local community.
- DETR to ensure the inclusion of all waterways in the new Community Strategies to be prepared by local authorities, giving particular emphasis to measures to promote a sense of 'community ownership' of individual waterways.
- British Waterways to pilot for, say, three years a community use facilitator on one urban waterway, with costs to be shared with the local authority and funding bodies (e.g. lottery and others) concerned with promoting social inclusion.
- Training relevant staff to work within disadvantaged communities should be an integral part of the in-house training schemes run by all public navigation authorities.

- The DETR to provide guidance via the Home Office to Crime and Disorder Partnerships to raise awareness of the impacts of concerns for personal security on use of local waterways and how this can best be tackled, including bringing them into the remit of neighbourhood wardens.
- Navigation and local authorities to give particular attention to the provision of practical and financial support for community based initiatives delivered by the voluntary waterway organisations and to supporting their bids to funding bodies for longer-term revenue funding.
- Navigation authorities to share resources with and give, wherever possible, practical support (e.g. for training needs and sponsorship) to those voluntary waterway organisations that are targeting particularly vulnerable groups in the community.

A. Introduction

The Working Group commissioned a review of existing literature and other material specific or relevant to their consideration of social exclusion and the waterways.

The review began by analysing the research material that is specific to waterways and the barriers which have been identified in respect of disadvantaged groups or communities. The review then drew on wider research, including the countryside, urban parks, sport and leisure activities and the barriers to greater inclusion. A brief summary of the findings is presented here.

B. The findings specific to the waterways

British Waterways: Annual Surveys

British Waterways [BW] supplied a summary of information from its annual surveys of boat owners and informal visitors to the waterways. The most recent survey of boat owners [1998] revealed:

- nearly two thirds of boat owners are aged between 35 and 64 years. This is more than twice the proportion of those aged 15 years or older in the national population;
- nearly three quarters of boat owners are from professional, managerial and non-manual occupations [ABC1] This compares with about half of the population as a whole; and
- most boats [87%] are licensed to male owners.

Surveys of informal visits to the waterways revealed:

- nearly 60% of adults making informal leisure visits to the waterways are aged between 35 and 64 years;
- more than three-quarters of adults making informal leisure visits are from professional, managerial and non-manual occupations [ABC1] and the skilled manual [C2], this is slightly higher than the proportion in the population as a whole; and
- male visitors account for only a slightly higher percentage [54%] than female.

From the 1998 survey, nearly a fifth of boat owners reported that at least one person with a disability had used their boat at least once during the year.

Again from the 1998 survey, only 16% of visitors using waterway towpaths were adults aged 65 years or older, compared with a fifth of the total adult population being in this age range.

Countryside Recreation Network: Day Visits Surveys

The Day Visits Survey conducted in England and Wales [CRN, 1996] revealed one in ten of all respondents had visited a canal or river during the two weeks prior to the interview. Over the previous year, three in ten people had made at least one visit to a canal or river.

This survey also revealed that the main reasons that respondents had not made leisure day trips [of any kind] during the previous two weeks were: too busy working or studying [27%]; poor health or unable to get out [26%]; the weather [8%]; could not afford too [7%]; too old [7%]; just happy at home [6%]; and disabled or poor sight [6%].

FieldFare Trust: the Recreational Needs of Disabled People

In 1999, the Fieldfare Trust prepared a report for the Environment Agency on the water-based recreational needs of disabled people. Their literature search identified the paucity of sources which provide information specific to the participation of disabled people in water sports and water-related informal recreation.

The interviews conducted by the Fieldfare Trust included those working with water recreation user groups as well as water recreation management agencies and disability organisations. Respondents knew of very little information about the level of participation of disabled people in water-related activities.

The barriers which disabled people face when wanting to participate in water-based recreation were identified as:

- poor access to facilities and services;
- the attitudes and lack of awareness of service providers and of disabled people; and
- lack of information and effective promotion.

With regard to the latter, several respondents felt that many disabled people did not perceive water-based recreation as an activity for them. Disabled people were rarely given sufficient information to enable them to make informed choices about participating in water-based activities.

The Fieldfare Trust's study concluded:

- water-based recreation providers need to be more aware of, and responsive to, the needs of disabled people;

- disabled people must be given sufficient information to enable them to make their own choices;
- disabled people need to be confident that they can, independently, use services and facilities; and
- they should be involved in the design and development of solutions to facilitate and encourage their participation.

British Waterways: Birmingham and Black Country Canals Perception Survey [BW 1995]

An interview survey conducted with 504 residents living in proximity to the Birmingham and Black Country Canals, showed that nearly 60% had made no visit to the canals in the last six months. Women, especially those with children in the household, retired people, young people and Asian respondents were the least likely to have visited their canal. The most common reasons for not visiting a canal recently were 'not interested' or 'too busy'.

As one of the few surveys specifically exploring use and views of the waterways, the findings help us to draw a number of general conclusions that are relevant to the issue of social inclusion.

- most respondents felt positively about canals for their scenery and wildlife, but the majority still expressed negative perceptions about the safety and ambience of the waterways. Most felt canals experienced a lot of vandalism and expressed concerns about personal security and safety close to water. There were also negative perceptions about litter.
- concerns about personal security were reinforced by the number of chosen improvements which would contribute [directly or indirectly] to greater feelings of safety.
- Asian respondents were more cautious about the merits of the canals and stronger in their agreement with the negative statements. They were less likely than other ethnic groups to visit and less likely to know where to obtain information about the canals.
- those with children were more likely to want organised events and boat trips and more activities to encourage greater use.

Groundwork Blackburn and Manchester Metropolitan University: Involving Black and Minority Ethnic Communities [1999]

This study by Groundwork Blackburn and Manchester Metropolitan University [1999] involved focus group discussions with members of the Asian Muslim community in Blackburn.

The study and focus groups with Asian Muslims identified a number of barriers to their participation:

- limitations of time - often the men work very long hours and they prefer to use their free time relaxing at home;
- a lack of appropriate information regarding what the environment has to offer and the opportunities for participation;
- for Asian women, active participation in environmental projects can result in negative comments from the family or their community; and
- there can be a reluctance to participate because of a lack of confidence.

Most of the Asian Muslims in the four focus groups felt that the barriers facing the Asian communities were similar to those facing white communities, but there was a need for more single sex activities in order to meet the cultural differences.

With regard to the local canal, the findings from these discussions revealed many participants were 'adamant in their dislike of the canal. It was perceived to be a dirty, smelly and unsafe place, and no participants ever walked along there'. In contrast, a group of Asian Muslim women had occasionally liked to walk along the canal towpath and their participation in several barge trips organised by Groundwork Blackburn had been a popular activity which had increased their awareness of the canal and its benefits.

The Black Environment Network [BEN] identify that many disadvantaged groups, including minority ethnic communities, have little or no access to information, resources or opportunities for participation. Within many agencies, the commitment at senior level to ethnic community involvement still needs to be strengthened. BEN stresses the need for the commitment to ethnic community involvement to be integral to the core policies and work of the agencies. As their report 'All Colours Green' states, this work must include: outreach to ethnic communities; the training of staff and volunteers; a multi-cultural interpretation of the environment; and facilitating the access of ethnic communities to information, resources and opportunities for environmental participation.

C. Evidence and research findings from the wider environmental arena

When considering the findings from other studies, there is one important difference between the waterways and many other open-air environments used for recreation and leisure. Many canals and other waterways are located within urban environments, often passing through densely populated inner city areas where disadvantaged communities live and are excluded from other mainstream activities and services. The nearness of these waterways can provide a unique opportunity to meet the recreation and leisure needs of many who are disadvantaged. In contrast, locally other forms of outdoor recreation and leisure activities can often be more costly, involve more time and effort, and rely on the availability of private or public transport.

Use and Perception of Urban Parks

The household surveys conducted for a study of urban parks by Comedia and Demos identified the importance of a well-managed and well-maintained environment. In this study, vandalism was clearly of great concern for many park users and reflected a wider distrust and discomfort with the behaviour of 'other' people generally. The park keeper or ranger was seen as 'a symbol of order, care and control'. In common with the research on the countryside, many respondents remarked on the need for more facilities for seating, refreshment and activity.

Respondents identified the proximity of their park to their home as not only a matter of convenience, but also a source of attachment and affection as a distinctive feature of their neighbourhood. Many people liked their park because it was a part of their locality and of the area's identity.

A number of studies have explored perceptions of personal security in open spaces, including urban parks. Although the incidence of crime in parks and commons is far less than in other public spaces, the fear of being the victim of crime and the feeling of vulnerability is high [Burgess, 1994]. Other local and national studies in the UK have identified the links between people's experience of an uncared for environment and their perception that this is an unsafe and unmanaged place [Crime Concern, 1999].

Barriers to Enjoying the Countryside

A major study entitled 'Barriers to Enjoying the Countryside' for the then Countryside Commission was completed in 1997 by Millward and Mostyn. It identified nine common barriers that deter people from visiting the countryside. These include: lack of information, publicity and facilities; the impact of earlier negative experiences; poor maintenance and upkeep; concerns for personal security; and a negative perception of the 'countryside enthusiast'.

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A. Inner-city Birmingham's Main Line and Soho Loop canals

Research methodology

Two residential areas adjacent to the Birmingham Main Line and Soho Loop Canals in Ladywood were chosen. The tenure of the two areas is predominantly social housing and the areas exhibit long-term social and economic disadvantage. The areas are predominantly white in ethnic origin with a minority of African Caribbean and Asian residents. Birmingham City Council and British Waterways are undertaking a programme of environmental improvements to these canals.

A self-completion questionnaire was posted to 580 households living close to these canals. There was an overall response rate of 33%. In addition, fifteen residents gave more detailed views and comments through group discussions and personal interviews.

Summary of main findings

Residents' views and use of their local canals

- Half of all residents responding to the survey said the canals were a feature that they most liked about living in this locality. Only 10% of residents said the canals were a feature which they disliked.
- Over 70% of residents said they liked having a canal close to where they lived.
- Nearly 80% of residents said they had visited either the Soho Loop or Main Line Canal or both in the last year. Most said they visited the canals only occasionally, but a quarter visited them two or three times a week.
- The most popular activities were walking along the towpaths. Feeding the ducks or looking at the wildlife was another popular attraction. Having children in the family and/or a dog encouraged people to use the canals for recreation. Many valued the peace and tranquillity of the canals, especially as this resource is in the busy inner city.
- Only 12% of residents responding to the survey had not chosen to visit their local canals. The main reasons were because they had no reason to go there or it was perceived to be an unsafe environment.
- In the previous year, more than two-thirds of residents had visited the city centre canals off Broad Street. The most popular activities were walking by

the towpath, and having a drink or eating a meal by the canal.

Residents' suggested improvements

- The most popular improvements referred to measures to clean up the canals and deter the dumping of rubbish and litter.
- Improving personal security for those using the towpaths and safety from accidents were frequently mentioned. Suggestions included: trimming back of the bushes; more lighting; regular patrols either by a canal warden or some form of security agency; and more life belts in case of accidents.
- Derelict buildings and wasteland bordering on the canals needed to be substantially improved. Removing graffiti from walls and under bridges was also recommended.
- There was strong support for the wildlife to be safeguarded and sustained.
- There was a desire for sensitive improvements to the canal bridges with the original coping stones being retained as part of the canal's history.
- Signage should be used to provide more information on the history of the canal and the canal network.
- To encourage more people to use the canals regularly, there was strong support for the introduction of boat trips serving these local areas. The sight of boats and barges using the canals was a popular attraction for many.
- An increase in the number of canal-based activities was seen as advantageous [for example, cafe and small picnic areas] but these must not be at the expense of the wildlife or damage the natural environment.
- It was important to involve local people and encourage a sense of local ownership and to prevent vandalism and misuse. Local schools should be encouraged to adopt or take responsibility for parts of the canal.

General perceptions of waterways

- Comparable surveys in different areas [Birmingham, Leicester, London and Manchester] have revealed that people's experience of their local canal or river strongly influences their more general perceptions of inland waterways.
- Nearly half of all residents felt towpaths were sometimes or usually safe places to walk alone.

Women were much less likely to see towpaths as safe places to walk alone.

- Half of all residents felt waterways were sometimes or usually clean and free of litter, but over 40% felt this was not usually the case.
- Most residents thought waterways were places where it was easy to get on and off the towpath. Those who did not think this was so, tended to be older people or those with young children.
- More than a third of residents [many with children] did not think waterways were usually safe places to take children.
- Nearly 60% of residents said waterways were not usually places where there were lots of things to do. However, there were comments on the need to strike a balance between providing facilities to make waterways more attractive and ensuring their natural state is not jeopardised.
- Nearly three quarters of all residents felt waterways were usually or sometimes healthy places for a walk. Nearly 80% thought waterways were a pleasant place to visit.

B. Belgrave area of inner-city Leicester, residents living close to the River Soar and Grand Union Canal

Research methodology

An area with majority Asian residents close to the River Soar and Grand Union Canal was chosen. Most of the housing is in owner occupation and the area is not generally disadvantaged, although there are significant pockets of economic deprivation. Leicester City Council with the Environment Agency and British Waterways has been actively engaged in improving the waterway environment. The City Council is proactive in encouraging use of the waterways by Asian residents.

A self-completion questionnaire was posted to 410 households in Belgrave. There was an overall response rate of 28%. In addition, about 45 residents gave more detailed views and comments through group discussions held at the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre. More than 80% of the participants were from the Asian communities. These participants included Asian men and women from the 'Lets Go Walking' initiative set up by the Health Authority and are using the riverside as a resource for healthy walking and recreation.

Summary of main findings

Residents' views and use of their local river and canal

- Half of all residents responding to the survey said the river and canal were features that they most liked about living in this locality. Only 5% of residents said the waterways were a feature that they disliked.
- Nearly two thirds of residents said they liked having a river or canal close to where they lived.
- Over 70% of residents said they had visited either the River Soar, the Grand Union Canal or both waterways in the last year. Most said they visited the waterways only occasionally, but a fifth said they visited them daily.
- Looking at the wildlife and walking along the towpaths were the most popular attractions. Over a third of residents said they took the children for a walk. Nearly 30% of residents said they went cycling by the side of the river or canal. 15% of residents said they scattered offerings in the river.
- 28% of residents responding to the survey had not chosen to visit their local river or canal in the last year. The main reasons were because they had no reason to go there or it was perceived to be an unsafe environment.
- Those not visiting the waterways had no particular characteristics in terms of ethnicity, gender or family circumstances compared to the total sample.
- A fifth of residents said they had attended a waterway festival or event and more than one in ten said they had been on a boat trip.

Residents' suggested improvements

- The most frequently suggested improvements referred to measures to maintain a clean environment for the river and canal and have measures in place to deter the dumping of litter. Litter bins would be welcomed.
- Another common suggestion was for the towpaths to be kept clear of encroaching weeds and overhanging branches.
- Planting more flowers was another popular suggestion, especially native wild flowers and those which would add colour through the seasons. Sustaining the wildlife found favour with many residents.
- More seating, especially to help the elderly use the towpath and for families with young children, and appropriate venues for refreshment.

- There were concerns that the factories backing on to the canal were responsible for some of the rubbish and should be encouraged to take a more responsible attitude to their river or canal-side location.
- Wardens patrolling the towpath, not just to enhance personal security but also deter misuse and provide information and proactively encourage users.
- More events and increased access to boat trips would be very popular and encourage more regular use of the waterways. Larger Asian families said the cost of such activities could be prohibitive.
- Better lighting near the parks and the towpaths to enhance personal security.
- More outreach into the Asian communities to encourage greater use of the waterways and awareness of its potential. Build on the good practice of 'Lets Go Walking'.
- It was suggested that more information and signage on the river and canal should be provided in the city centre to raise awareness of its existence and benefits.
- The identification of a part of the river for the scattering of offerings would be advantageous with appropriate information and facilities provided.

General perceptions of waterways

- Comparable surveys in different areas [Birmingham, London and Manchester] have revealed that people's experience of their local canal or river strongly influences their more general perceptions of inland waterways.
- More than half of all residents felt the waterways were sometimes or usually safe places to walk along alone. Women were much less likely to see waterways as safe places to walk alone.
- Almost half of all residents felt waterways were sometimes or usually clean and free of litter.
- Three-quarters of residents thought waterways were places where it was easy to get on and off the towpath. Those who did not think this was so, tended to be older people or those with young children.
- Nearly 60% of residents thought the waterways were usually or sometimes safe places for children to be. Less than a third of residents [many with children] felt they were unsafe.

- Half of the residents said the waterways were not usually places where there were lots of things to do. However, as in other areas, there were comments on the need to strike a balance between providing facilities to make canals more attractive and ensuring their natural state is not jeopardised.
- Nearly 90% of residents felt the waterways were healthy places for a walk and a similar percentage described the waterways as a pleasant place to visit.

C. North Kensington and Queens's Park in inner-city London, residents living close to the Grand Union Canal

Research methodology

An area was chosen close to the Grand Union Canal having a high African Caribbean and minority ethnic resident population. Social housing accounts for the majority with some privately rented and owner occupation. Social and economic deprivation and fear of crime is known to be high. Improvements have involved London's Waterway Partnership. A new bridge crossing and improvements to the canal environment have recently been completed.

A self-completion questionnaire was posted out to 400 households in North Kensington and Queen's Park. There was an overall response rate of 25%. In addition, about 40 residents gave more detailed views and comments through group discussions and interviews. These included interviews with users at the Canalside Activity Centre and group discussions with young anglers, Bangladeshi women and children and Somali families.

Summary of main findings

Residents' views and use of their local canal

- Half of all residents responding to the survey said the Grand Union Canal was a feature that they most liked about living in this locality. Only 5% of residents said the canal was a feature that they disliked.
- Over three-quarters of residents said they liked having a canal close to where they lived.
- Over 80% of residents said they had visited their local canal in the last year. Most said they visited the waterways only occasionally, but a third said they visited it two or three times a week or daily. Many people in the discussion groups said they walked along the towpath to reach the nearby retail superstore.

- Looking at the wildlife and walking along the towpath were the most popular attractions. Nearly a third of residents said they took their children for a walk. Less than 10% said they went fishing.
- About a fifth of residents responding to the survey had not chosen to visit their local canal in the last year. The main reason was because of fear of crime.
- Those not visiting the canal had no particular characteristics in terms of ethnicity, gender or family circumstances compared to the total sample. However, women were more likely than men to identify fear of crime as a reason for not visiting the canal.
- A quarter of residents said they had attended a canal festival or event and 15% had been on a boat trip. The distance to walk to a canal festival had deterred some residents, especially those with young children.

Residents' suggested improvements

- The most popular improvements referred to measures to maintain a clean and tidy environment and deter the dumping of rubbish.
- There were also frequent suggestions for the surface of the towpath to be improved and for bushes to be trimmed back. Another common suggestion was for the towpaths to be kept clear of encroaching weeds and overhanging branches.
- Measures to improve personal security were among the many suggestions including: wardens to patrol; the sensitive use of lighting; possible CCTV at entrance and exit points; and encouraging greater use through activities.
- Planting of more flowers was another popular suggestion, along with protection of the wildlife.
- Making the canal safer for children to use with life belts and sensitive use of fencing.
- More events and access to boat trips would be very popular and encourage more regular use of the canal. A canal bus linking the area with Paddington Basin was suggested and it was felt that boat trips and festivals should reach out to communities.
- It was suggested that more information about the history of the canal be provided and that this could be used to raise awareness and interest among children and young people, involving local schools and encouraging responsibility for and safe use of the canal.

General perceptions of waterways

- Comparable surveys in different areas [Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester] have revealed that people's experience of their local canal or river strongly influences their more general perceptions of inland waterways.
- Less than half of all residents felt the waterways were sometimes or usually safe places to walk along alone. Women were much less likely to see waterways as safe places to walk alone.
- Less than half of all residents felt waterways were sometimes or usually clean and free of litter.
- Over 80% of residents thought waterways were places where it was easy to get on and off the towpath.
- Less than half of residents thought the waterways were usually or sometimes safe places for children to be. Nearly 40% of residents [many with children] felt they were unsafe.
- More than half of residents said the waterways were not usually places where there were lots of things to do. Only 6% perceived waterways as places with lots of things to do.
- Nearly 70% of residents felt the waterways were healthy places for a walk and a higher percentage [80%] described the waterways as a pleasant place to visit.

D. Ancoats and Miles Platting areas of East Manchester, residents living close to the Rochdale and Ashton Canals

Research methodology

An area of mainly social housing was chosen, located near the Rochdale Canal and close to the Ashton Canal. The area has significant economic and social deprivation and fear of crime is high. The majority population is white UK with a minority group of Asian residents. Much of the current environment of the Rochdale Canal is poor. However the new owner, [the Waterways Trust] in partnership with the local authorities and working through British Waterways, is currently engaged in a major restoration and improvement programme that will result in the reopening to navigation of the whole of this waterway.

A self-completion questionnaire was posted out to 385 households in Ancoats and Miles Platting in inner city Manchester. There was an overall response rate of just over 20%. In addition, over 30 adults and young people

gave more detailed views through the group discussions. These included a discussion with pupils at the Ancoats Primary School and with parents at the local Family Service Unit.

Summary of main findings

Residents' views and use of their local Rochdale Canal

- Only a fifth of residents said the canal was a feature that they liked most about the area where they lived. More than 10% of residents said the canal was a feature that they disliked.
- Only 38% of residents said they liked having a canal close to where they lived and nearly half said they had no feelings about it.
- Two-thirds of residents said they had visited the Rochdale Canal in the last year. More than a third said they had visited it daily. This may be because it is frequently used as a walk-through to other areas rather than because of its waterway features.
- Walking along the towpath was by far the most common reason for visiting. A third of residents said they took the dog for a walk and a third also said they liked looking at the wildlife.
- About a third of residents responding to the survey had not chosen to visit their local canal in the last year. For all of these residents, the reason for not visiting was the fear of crime; a quarter also referred to the litter and unpleasant environment.
- In response to a specific question, nearly half of all residents accurately gave the name of their local canal as the Rochdale.
- Only 10% of residents had attended a canal festival or event during the last year. Nevertheless, the discussion groups identified the favourable impression created by such visits and boat trips.

Residents' suggested improvements

- The most popular improvements referred to measures to clean up the canal and have measures in place to deter the dumping of litter and bulky rubbish.
- Many suggestions were targeted at crime and reducing fear of crime through police or warden patrols; lighting; secure gates and fencing; and specific action to prevent drug dealing and using on the towpath.
- There were also frequent suggestions for the bushes to be trimmed back to make it easier to access and to increase visibility.

- Many people were concerned about the safety of children, especially as the Rochdale Canal is now being excavated to make it navigable. Although the use of fencing was suggested, in the discussion groups people referred also to the need for children to be educated to use the waterways safely. Children should be made aware of the dangers, but also encouraged to use the canal in a way that is safe and responsible.
- More events and access to boat trips would be very popular and would encourage more regular use of the canal. There was concern that activities tended to happen in city centre locations and did not reach out to more disadvantaged areas.
- It was suggested that more information about the history of the canal and how it could be used to raise awareness and interest among children and young people was needed. There was a popular suggestion that local schools should be encouraged to have 'ownership' of their local canal.

General perceptions of waterways

- Comparable surveys in different areas [Birmingham, Leicester and London] have revealed that people's experience of their local canal or river strongly influences their more general perceptions of inland waterways.
- Only just over a third of residents felt the waterways were sometimes or usually safe places to walk along alone. Nearly two-thirds thought they were not safe.
- Only just over a quarter of residents felt the waterways were sometimes or usually clean and free of litter. 74% felt this is not usually the case.
- Over 70% of residents thought waterways were places where it was easy to get on and off the towpath.
- Less than 40% of residents thought the waterways were usually or sometimes safe places for children to be. Nearly 60% of residents felt they were unsafe places for children.
- More than three quarters of residents said the waterways were not usually places where there were lots of things to do.
- Only half of residents felt the waterways were healthy places for a walk and an even lower percentage [40%] described the waterways as a pleasant place to visit.

Appendix C **Summaries of selected initiatives explored and identified by the Group**

1 Strategies and guidance for greater social inclusion

- The **Birmingham Canals Partnership**, involving the City Council, British Waterways and Groundwork Birmingham, has for some years promoted physical and other improvements, and is now preparing a *Strategic Canals Action Plan (SCAP)* addressing, among other issues, social inclusion. Birmingham shows by far the most comprehensive and strategic approach to canal development and use in the country.
- The **London Waterway Partnership** with British Waterways as the lead agency and the involvement of the Groundwork Trust has Single Regeneration Budget funding to work with local communities to extend access to and use of the waterways. The seven-year programme includes £80,000 a year for community development. Among the individual initiatives the partnership has promoted outreach activities to reach specific groups such as the Chinese community and made a special effort to involve local schools.
- The **Basingstoke Canal Authority** has produced a five-year development plan which includes ways of increasing community involvement and making the canal corridor more accessible for all groups.
- The **British Canoe Union** has developed a Social Inclusion Action Plan designed to increase the involvement in canoeing and paddle-sport activities of those at risk of social exclusion. It has produced a series of leaflets as guidance for member groups on how to make their facilities welcoming and accessible to disabled people. These leaflets set out practical advice, including checklists to ensure facilities are accessible and safe.
- The **National Federation of Anglers** has produced national guidance to promote the development of opportunities for disabled anglers. National and regional competitions are held with facilities to encourage the participation of disabled anglers.
- The **Community Boats Association** supports a network of member organisations using about 125 boats and waterside facilities to deliver educational, training and social welfare programmes. The Association creates opportunities for excluded and disadvantaged people to access the waterways.
- The **Inland Waterways Association's** Waterways for Youth Campaign encourages young people to get involved in a wide range of activities - both

educational and recreational - relevant to the heritage, environment and recreational use of the inland waterways.

- The **Fieldfare Trust** has developed and piloted advisory and training services to help staff understand how the principles of Access for All can be incorporated into the working practices and standards of those responsible for the design, maintenance and management of inland waterways.

2 Publicity and information to promote greater social inclusion

- The **Basingstoke Canal Authority** has produced 'Wheels along the Towpath', a detailed and illustrated guide focusing on accessibility for those using pushchairs or wheelchairs.
- **British Waterways**, on the Union Canal in Scotland, provide interpretation panels to inform visitors what they can expect to experience on the canal. The panels allow those with visual impairment to feel features of interest at that location.
- The **Environment Agency**, in co-operation with the National Federation of Anglers, publicises opportunities they have developed for angling by the physically disabled.

3 Local projects and initiatives for greater social inclusion

- The **Laburnum Boat Club and Islington Narrow Boat Association** in London provide boat trips combined with resources for education and training. Holiday Play Schemes and Family Learning Days are available and minority ethnic and refugee families regularly take part.
- The **Canal Boat Adventure Project** at Runcorn provides trips on the waterways for lone parent families who experience poverty and stress and for young people at risk.
- The **Sobriety Project** in West Yorkshire provides day and residential trips for young people to encourage them to develop an interest in the local waterways.
- The **Foleshill Canals Alive Project** covers 5 miles of the Coventry Canal and includes deprived parts of inner Coventry, with high unemployment and substantial minority ethnic populations (predominantly Asian). It is a community led project set up by the City Council with the support of Groundwork

Coventry and British Waterways to tackle lack of awareness, vandalism and crime, motorcycle intrusion on the towpath and the general image of the canal corridor. It employs two rangers and four 'New Dealers' to engage the local community. The local Hindu population use the canal for religious purposes. Project activities include an events programme, working with local health partnerships to promote walking (particularly targeted at Asian women at home) and a canal watch scheme with the local police. Although casual use of the canal has increased, the potential value is constrained by limited-life funding.

- The **Sagitta Project** in Staffordshire has two boats refurbished to meet the needs of people with sight and hearing disabilities as well as those with restricted mobility. Its Environmental Education Project provides a practical teaching facility including raising awareness of water safety and gives children from disadvantaged areas the opportunity to experience canals and life on boats for the first time.
- A partnership involving **British Waterways, the Nolly Barge, Maryhill Canal Project, Possil Environment Volunteers, Glasgow City Council and Keep Scotland Beautiful** in Glasgow, organises children from local groups and schools in collecting rubbish from the Forth and Clyde Canal. Via British Waterways, two primary schools are being encouraged to adopt stretches of the canal.
- The **Broads Authority** in Norfolk/Suffolk has promoted new access arrangements for the physically disabled, organised annual Fun in the Broads days for local communities, and begun its first outreach initiative to give disadvantaged young people access to the activities and environment of the Broads.
- The **Day-Star Theatre Company** offers a range of five plays to primary schools. Their play, *Water Under the Bridge*, aimed specifically at Key Stage 2 pupils can be linked to one of two pupil workshops. An annual tour of the waterways allows the company to perform in canalside venues.
- The **River Thames Boat Project** provides education, training and recreational activities on the Thames for young, disabled or elderly people from Greater London, who would otherwise not have such an opportunity. The project has forged strong links with the Environment Agency, local authorities, Port of London Authority and local communities.
- The **Canalside Activity Centre** in London is a voluntary sector education and recreation centre on the Grand Union Canal. It aims to raise awareness and give access to canal-based activities to young people from the many disadvantaged housing estates close to the canal.
- The **DART Project** has installed a mini-tiller system on its Gloucestershire riverboat to facilitate navigation by disabled users.
- The **Riverwood Project** in London involves participants at local day centres for people with learning difficulties in regularly cleaning up the Thames foreshore in Greenwich and Bexley and in the recycling of drift wood into furniture and art pieces.
- **Breakthrough**, a youth outreach project in Glasgow, provides young people from disadvantaged areas with access to canoeing and trips on the Nolly Barge.
- The **Waterways Museum** in Goole is a community museum providing a source of information on the Aire and Calder Navigation and the development of the Port of Goole. Many courses and initiatives are in place to include people who would not otherwise use the waterways and the Museum's resources.
- The **Lapworth Unit, British Waterways**, has developed an outreach project for the South Birmingham Canals. The aim is to promote and encourage links with all sections of the community, particularly those that currently under-use the canals, and extend awareness and use of the waterways and their heritage.

4 Attracting minority ethnic communities

- **Dudley Council** has involved local minority ethnic communities in decorating the canal banks in a way that is appropriate and welcoming to their culture.
- The new **Museum of Space Exploration** in Leicester is located on the canalside with pedestrian routes to and from the museum designed to attract visitors, including many Asian families, to walk along the paths by the river and canal.
- The **Balaji Temple** in Sandwell is located on a site adjoining the Gower Branch Canal. The Temple Trust, working with local residents and British Waterways, intend to extend use of the canal for educational and recreational purposes within the wider project aim of increasing understanding of Hinduism and environmental issues. The provision of moorings will encourage use of the facilities by boaters.

- **Lets Go Walking** in Leicester has been developed by the local Health Authority to encourage groups of Asian women and men to take regular walks along their local river and canal. These escorted walks have involved talks about the wildlife and the environment.

5 Enhancing security and tackling at-risk behaviour

- A **Boatwatch** scheme operates between Cowley and Weedon in Hertfordshire, to prevent incidents involving theft and damage to canal boats. Similar schemes operate throughout the country.
- The **Safe Anchor Trust** on the Calder and Hebble Canal works with at-risk young people to prepare them for work and develop a respect for the waterway environment.
- The **Bridgwater YMCA Canal Youth Project** in Somerset was established following misuse of the local canal. It uses a restored boat for canal clearance by young people. A second boat serves as a mobile youth unit offering day and residential trips, including those with at-risk behaviour. BW and the local police have sponsored the initiative with the specific aim of encouraging safe use of the canal by young people.
- **Thames 21** is a partnership initiative with the involvement of the Environment Agency, Tidy Britain Group, the Port of London Authority, Thames Water and the Corporation of London. Among its many projects, it has involved those on community service orders in clearing litter and graffiti and encouraging respect for the waterways.

