

# The Case for Re-surfacing the Canal Tow Path

## Proposal

The CRT is proposing to undertake towpath improvements along the Bath Lock Flight between Bathwick Hill and Widcombe. *“The works will include construction of a high-quality surface with suitable crossfalls and a spray chip finish, hedgerow enhancement and the creation of a wildflower meadow to the north of the site”*. The finish of the surface will be determined by agreement with the conservation officer

## Background

In recent years, work was carried out on a stretch of the Canal path from Bathwick Hill to Bathampton. This has considerably enhanced the experience of the many people who enjoy that stretch of the canal.

## Condition of the Canal Path [Tesco to Co-op]

By comparison this part of the path has suffered from neglect.

During periods of rain, the path gets so flooded that it becomes difficult for walkers to pick their way along the route. It is often a mud-track, full of large puddles. It is especially bad in the winter but can still be impassable to any walker without boots after a summer storm. In fact, this creates a hazard whereby avoiding puddles, people are forced on to the slippery grass verge of the Canal bank. Thus, there is a safety issue in which there could be a fall anywhere along the path or into the Canal itself.

The poor condition of the path has been acknowledged by the Canal & River Trust and the local councillors for Bathwick. In the case of the CRT, volunteers have attempted to improve the path on a temporary basis by laying down grit in the worst areas. This has not proved to be satisfactory.

In short, at times the path becomes scarcely usable. At all times, the path looks bad in comparison with the rest of the Canal path and is potentially dangerous.

## The Users of the Canal Path

This path is in constant use by:

1. Walkers using it as a route:
  - a. people on their way to the city centre;
  - b. to local shops eg. Bathwick Hill & Widcombe
  - c. to the river;
  - d. to the further stretch of the towpath;
  - e. to Bathwick Fields & the Skyline
  - f. to Bath Spa train Station
2. Pupils & parents walking to and from local schools
3. Students going to and from the university;
4. Recreational walkers, anglers, rambblers, bird-watchers
5. Canal boat people
6. Runners
7. Cyclists.

It is likely that there would be still greater use of this section of the towpath and, by extension, the hill-path, if the surface of the towpath was improved.

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## **The Importance of the Canal Tow Path**

In recent years several organizations and groups have stated the importance of outdoor recreation, enjoyment of the local environment, walking, running and cycling as good alternatives to the use of the car and for personal health and well-being.

### **Canal & RiverTrust**

The CRT has installed excellent signage and informational display boards featuring the route of the Canal and what to enjoy along the way. Volunteers are often around to improve the Canal area. They recognize that cyclists as well as walkers will wish to use the path. Hence, they advise: "*share the space, cut your pace*". They encourage people to observe the tow path code. They aim to improve the paths for everyone:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views/our-campaigns/stay-kind-slow-down/better-towpaths-for-everyone>

### **National Trust**

The Guide to the Bath Skyline highlights this section of the canal tow path as providing access to Bathwick Fields and the rest of the walk [p.17]. The fields are the "*Countryside in the City*".

### **Ramblers Association**

In their Walking Works report, the Association includes the quote: "*Walking is the nearest activity to the perfect exercise*". Many ramblers use the tow path when it is accessible.

### **B&NES**

The local authority has a policy of Active Travel.

"This means making it safer and more convenient for you to take short journeys by walking, wheeling, or cycling. This strategy aims to help residents, businesses, and visitors to our area to live healthier lives, reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality".

The scheme will be paid for from the government's [Active Travel Fund](#), which offers time-limited grants for specific projects promoting active ways of travelling." *If we don't use our share of the money by March 2022, we will lose it*".

## **The Consequence of the poor state of the Canal Path**

Residents in Sydney Buildings, an elderly couple, sold their car because they wanted to walk or use public transport in future. Both said that they refuse to walk into town by the most direct route because they fear slipping on the short section of towpath between the footbridge and steps. Due to the poor state of the path, many adult and child cyclists feel the need to use Sydney Buildings, Horseshoe Walk and Pulteney Road to and from Widcombe or Sydney Gardens.

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A mother of two children recently said that she no longer used the towpath to get them to and from school but instead walks along the busy Pulteney Road, which she hates doing on account of the pollution from cars. Another woman wrote: *"I frequently run and walk on that stretch of canal and it is in very poor shape given what an asset it is. I'm surprised that it hasn't been resurfaced like the stretch under the tunnels"*.

It seems a great pity that the poor and neglected towpath surface is a deterrent to people using it and the hill-path a lot more. It had been hoped that the proposed Riverline project would diverge from the river and come along the whole section of canal to Widcombe. This does not seem to be happening.

### **Conclusion**

For all the reasons stated there is a compelling case for funds to be allocated to ensure the safety and enjoyment of the many users of an important stretch of the Kennet & Avon Canal towpath.

**The Committee of the Sydney Buildings Householders' Association, [SBHA], on behalf of its members, fully supports the CRT's proposal. The much needed improvement to the surface of the Canal Path has been a high priority for several years.**

SBHA Committee  
January 2022