

LOWLAND CANALS USER GROUP MEETING

30 October 2004

Zetland Suite

**Scribe – Fiona Willis
Leader – Gary Clarkson**

Discussion Group Feedback

Topic – Habitat

The discussion group was asked to consider the flora & fauna in & around the lowland canals and how the increase in use had impacted on the environmental habitat.

While the group struggled at times to stick to the topics in hand, a number of issues were highlighted for consideration. These being:

The increase in volume of users

There was a general view that the increased traffic on the towpath & the waterway would need to be carefully monitored and potentially controlled to minimize any impact on the surrounding habitat. Concern was expressed that the canal be turned into “wet road” and that traffic levels cannot be allowed to rise too high. A balance must be made between income & environmental impact.

The speed of users on the canal – both the waterway & the towpath.

Of particular concern in this area, was the potential risk of accidents caused by excessive speed of cyclists (and in some cases motorized transport). This leads in many instances to conflict between users. The group felt that speed-reducing measures would be useful to minimize the potential for injury and unnecessary dispute. Education of cycling groups and individuals is required.

Of similar concern was the damage to bank-side vegetation caused by excessive speed of boaters. This is especially important thru' newly planted areas of the waterway. It was felt that education & enforcement were necessary to combat this problem. (Westerhailes is particularly sensitive to the problem, but other areas could be at danger).

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Weed growth & bank-side vegetation

Weed growth can be a particular issue for boats and needs to be combated, however a balance must be struck to minimize impact on invertebrates & fish breeding areas. It is fundamental that proper scientific advice is sought & contractors managed to ensure compliance with instructions thus preventing further damage to the flora & fauna.

Overhanging trees on the offside of the waterway can cause navigation issues; however the management of this woodland to improve the navigable length must also consider as equally important, the impact on the surrounding wildlife. Improving the habitat must be seen as being as important as making boating easier.

Summary

In summary, the main issue for British Waterways Scotland to manage is to strike a balance between the use of the canal as a resource and the potential impact on the surrounding habitat. Care must be taken and expertise sought in the relevant area to ensure a sustainable facility is maintained.

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