



Grand Union
Canal Transfer
Moving water together

Our social value approach

February 2026



Introduction

The Grand Union Canal Transfer is a vital new scheme to bring water from the Midlands to the Southeast.

It's a joint water transfer project between two water companies, Severn Trent and Affinity Water, and the Canal & River Trust (the Trust) charity, who are the owner and navigation authority of the canals in England and Wales.

This partnership is crucial to securing a sustainable and reliable water supply for the future, which is currently under increasing pressure from population growth, climate change and the need to protect our environment.

Beyond this, the scheme has an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy by enhancing the environment, ensuring future water availability for canal navigation, and unlocking positive socio-economic, health and wellbeing impacts for local communities, now and in the future.

The scheme will:



Strengthen the UK's water infrastructure and create a legacy of resilient water resources



Promote healthy communities through a sustainable supply of public drinking water



Create opportunities for strategic partnerships within the water sector/industry



Invest in the resilience of the canal network for the benefit of communities, today and for future generations



Sustain and protect existing historic features and settings along the canal



Incorporate sections of the historic Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union Canals as part of the transfer route



Protect, care for and enhance the environment



Enable economic growth through the creation of local jobs and new skills



Help secure the future of the historic Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union Canals

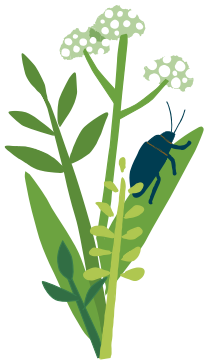


What are we proposing?

The scheme will transfer highly treated recycled water from the Midlands to the Southeast to ensure future drinking water supplies for the region, and to strengthen the UK's water infrastructure.

We'll need a combination of new pipelines, water treatment plants and other infrastructure for the scheme, as well as improvements we'll need to make to existing infrastructure along the canal to enable water to be transferred along it.

We're proposing to start our scheme at the existing Minworth Wastewater Recycling Centre (WwRC) near Birmingham, where water is planned to be transferred via a new underground pipeline to Atherstone in Warwickshire.

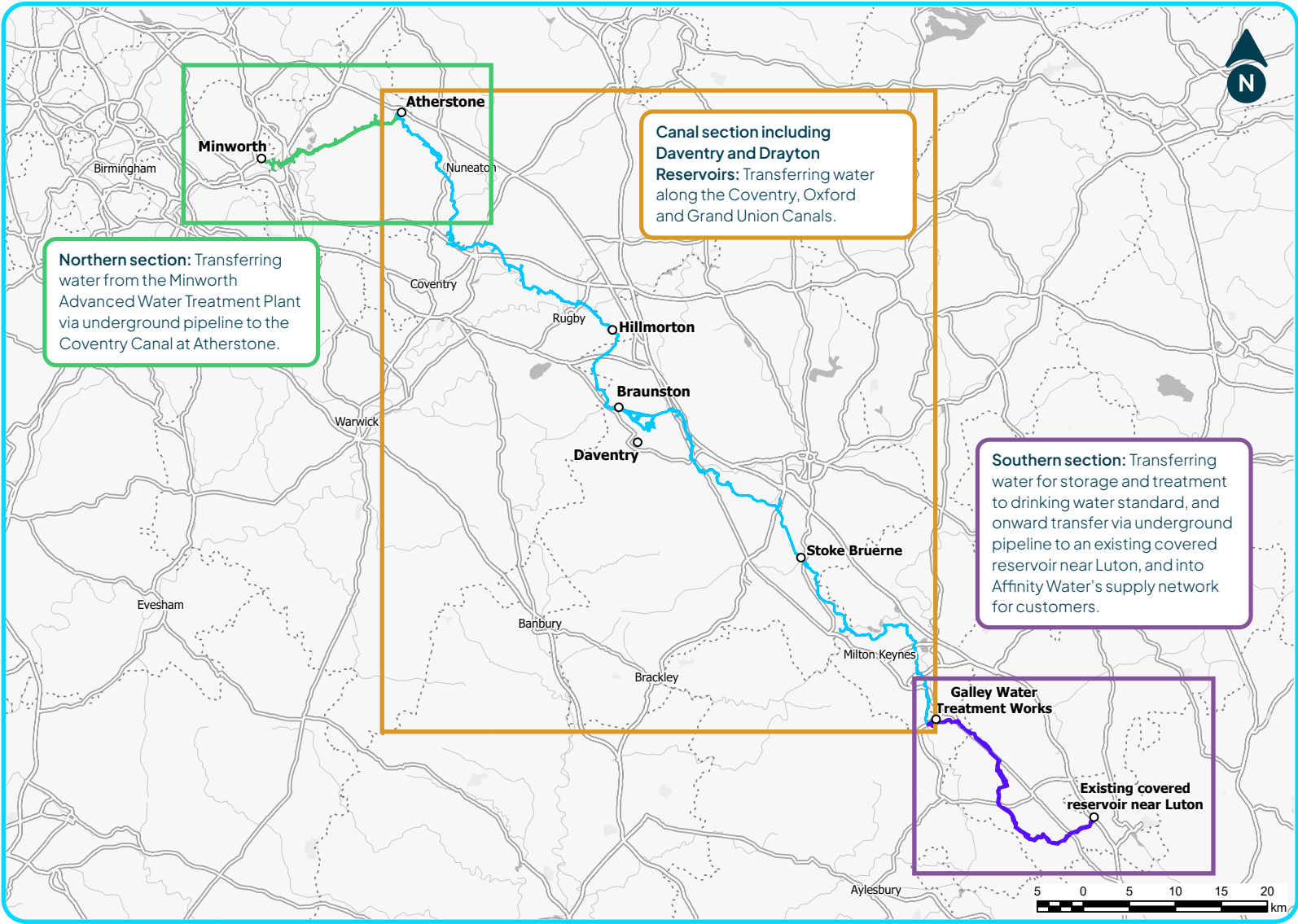


It will then begin its journey along the Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union Canals, where we'll need to build some additional infrastructure. The water from Minworth's WwRC is treated recycled water, which would usually be discharged into the River Tame. Under the scheme, some of this recycled water will be diverted to a new Advanced Water Treatment Plant (AWTP) to bring it to the required quality for transfer through the canal and to ensure the safeguarding of fish and wildlife is maintained.

Once it's been transferred through the canal network, the water will be piped from the canal, stored and treated again at a proposed new water treatment works near Great Brickhill, southeast of Milton Keynes. It will then be transferred via a new underground pipeline as clean drinking water into Affinity Water's supply network for customers, from an existing covered reservoir near Luton.



Grand Union Canal Transfer scheme route overview



To view this map in more detail, please visit our interactive map on our website: www.guctransfer.co.uk

Where are we in the scheme's development?

Due to the scheme's size and importance, we must apply to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate, for a special type of consent known as a development consent, for the scheme to be constructed, operated and maintained.

This is granted in the form of a Development Consent Order or DCO. You can find out more about this process on the National Infrastructure Planning website at: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/decision-making-process-guide>.

The DCO process puts an emphasis on early engagement with communities and stakeholders, to allow for the opportunity to influence a scheme before a DCO application is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

We completed our first public consultation in 2024 and presented the early proposals for the scheme and gathered views and feedback to inform our proposals.

Since then, we've continued our engineering and design work and environmental assessments and had ongoing discussions with landowners and other stakeholders, all of which has helped to shape the next stage of development for the scheme. We've also continued to engage with those who live and work on and along the canal and canal users, to inform the development of our proposals, to ensure we're sensitive to the canal environment and community.

We've now reached the next important milestone where we can share our updated proposals and more details about the scheme. Our Phase Two Public Consultation will take place for seven weeks from Wednesday 11 February to Thursday 2 April 2026.



Example of pipeline construction compound

Our approach to social value

At the heart of our approach to social value is a commitment to delivering long-term benefits for people, places and communities, along the scheme's route.

While securing a resilient water supply remains the primary objective, we're equally focused on creating a lasting legacy by developing initiatives that deliver positive outcomes for local communities and canal users, well beyond the construction phase.

This approach builds on the framework set out in the National Policy Statement for Water Resources Infrastructure, which promotes benefits for mental and physical health, social wellbeing, employment, education and environment.

We also recognise our duties under the Water Industry Act 1991. These include considering conservation, access and recreation, and having regard to maintaining public access to places of natural beauty, as well as making water and land available for recreation, in line with operational requirements and where reasonably practicable.

During our Phase One Public Consultation in 2024, stakeholders highlighted potential impacts on local communities, particularly during construction.

Our Social Value Approach, so far, has been shaped through a combination of data-led research and proactive stakeholder engagement.

We're working closely with local authorities and community groups, to identify opportunities where our support can have the greatest impact, particularly in the most deprived areas along the scheme's route.

At the same time, we want to make the most of the canal towpath's unique potential as a space for everyone to enjoy, turning it into an even more vibrant and welcoming community asset.



If places could be made more accessible, safer and more inviting, it would help lift the area and address the “poverty of aspiration in some of our most challenging areas”.



Any interventions or improvements in physical space and green space peripheral areas would be huge because so many people can access that.

Summarised from an interview with a representative of **Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council**

What is social value?

Social value represents a broader understanding of value on the scheme. It moves beyond using money as the sole indicator, emphasising instead the importance of engaging people to understand how decisions about how the scheme is delivered can positively impact their lives.

This encompasses the positive social, environmental, and economic benefits which include factors such as health and wellbeing, community cohesion, inclusive design, and environmental sustainability.

While organisations inevitably create both positive and negative experiences, the goal should be to achieve a net positive impact, both now and for a sustainable future. Measuring these impacts and using the insights to inform better decisions for people is an essential outcome.

As we developed our approach to social value, we looked at each of the scheme's partner's policies and strategies to explore where there were overarching thematic areas and how these intersect with the social value opportunities along the route.

We've refined these into five key themes that we believe reflect the ambitions of the partners and the scheme, while showcasing positive outcomes which can be made possible through good decision-making. To achieve this, we'll seek to partner with local organisations that are deeply embedded in and actively serving communities facing increasing levels of deprivation.

Together, we'll collaboratively aim to deliver vital support in a way that enables long-term resilience and ensures the social value created is both meaningful and enduring for communities and canal users.



Social value themes:



What is the purpose of this document?

This Phase Two Public Consultation has provided an opportunity for us to share our early thinking on social value and gather feedback on what matters most to you.

As part of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) which will be included in our DCO submission, we'll include a socio-economic statement assessing the likely positive and negative impacts of the scheme. Our Social Value Approach, however, goes beyond impact assessment. It's policy-driven rather than statutory and focuses on identifying the wider socio-economic barriers faced by disadvantaged communities, while setting out how we'll deliver tangible benefits through procurement and other operational measures.

Our approach is designed to evolve over time, allowing us to adapt to changing circumstances in local communities, after our DCO submission.

Our Social Value Approach encompasses some elements which will be delivered outside of the DCO process. We want to hear your views on how our proposals for our approach to social value match with your expectations and which areas we can develop further.

Your feedback will directly shape how we design and deliver our social value outcomes across the lifecycle of the scheme, to create lasting social, economic and environmental value for communities and canal users along the scheme's route.

It's important that the scheme makes a positive contribution by leaving the natural environment in a better overall state than before it's implemented. This is called providing Environmental Net Gain (ENG). ENG goes beyond the net gain approaches that concentrate on biodiversity, and includes providing benefits like recreation and improved water quality.

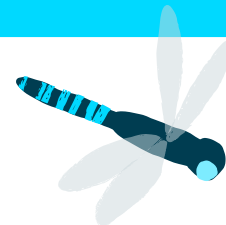
You can view the PEIR and PEIR NTS on our website at www.guctransfer.co.uk/consultation.



Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a process whereby we seek to and achieve measurable improvements in biodiversity. As part of building the scheme, we're looking at opportunities to improve biodiversity, including:

- Creating areas for wildflowers
- Planting new trees and hedgerows
- Creating new habitats for locally important wildlife



Environmental Net Gain

In addition, during construction we would put in place measures to protect the environment. We explain more on managing environmental effects in Chapter 24 of our PEIR, which explains how we've assessed our environmental impact and the steps we'll take to reduce it as much as possible.

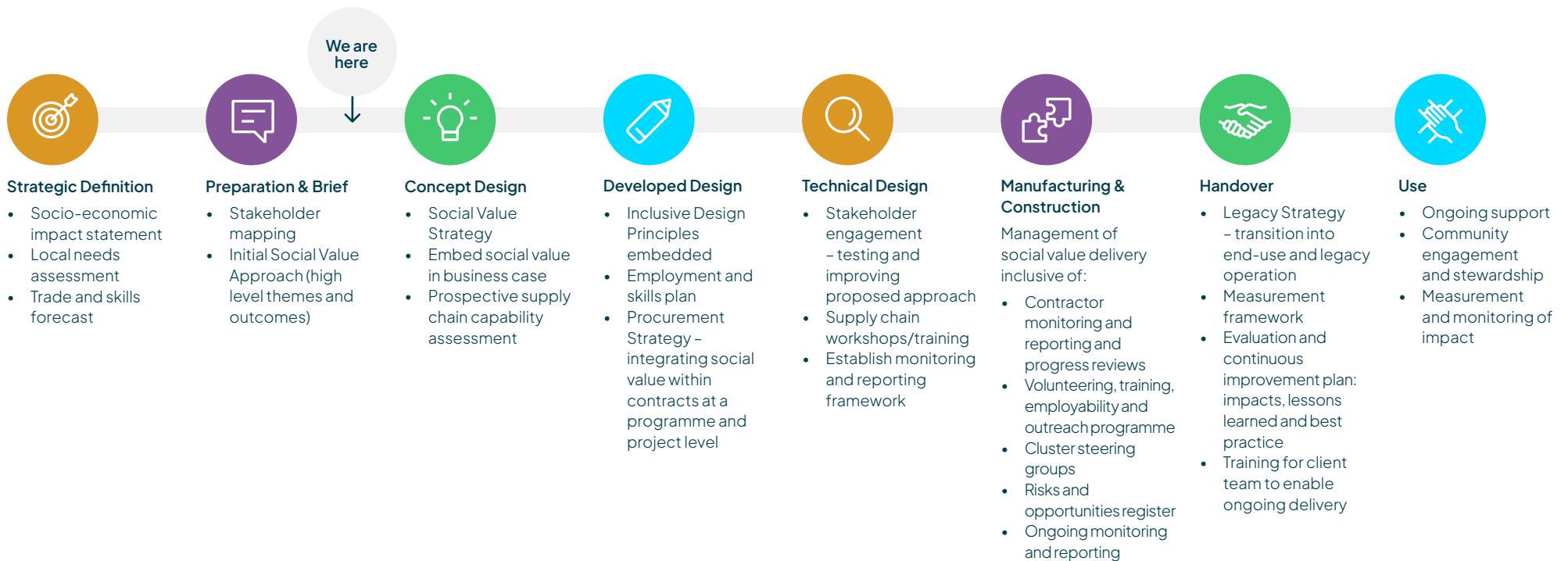
We're currently developing our plans for delivering ENG and BNG, and these will form part of our DCO application. Draft versions of these policies are also available.



Embedding social value

The scale of the scheme is significant, covering around 163kms and passing through ten local authority areas. To make a meaningful and lasting difference to the communities, place and environment across the scheme we need to build our social value themes into every delivery stage, from early design through to construction and long-term 'in use' operation. The diagram below illustrates how we aim to do this.

Maximising social, environmental and economic impact at all project stages



Delivering social value through design

During design and construction, social value delivery will be prioritised in communities that are most impacted by the works and where there's identified need and opportunity to deliver meaningful outcomes. We've developed five principles, through engagement with our partners, to set in place a structure for our social value approach, to ensure we maximise the positive outcomes for local communities, businesses and the environment.

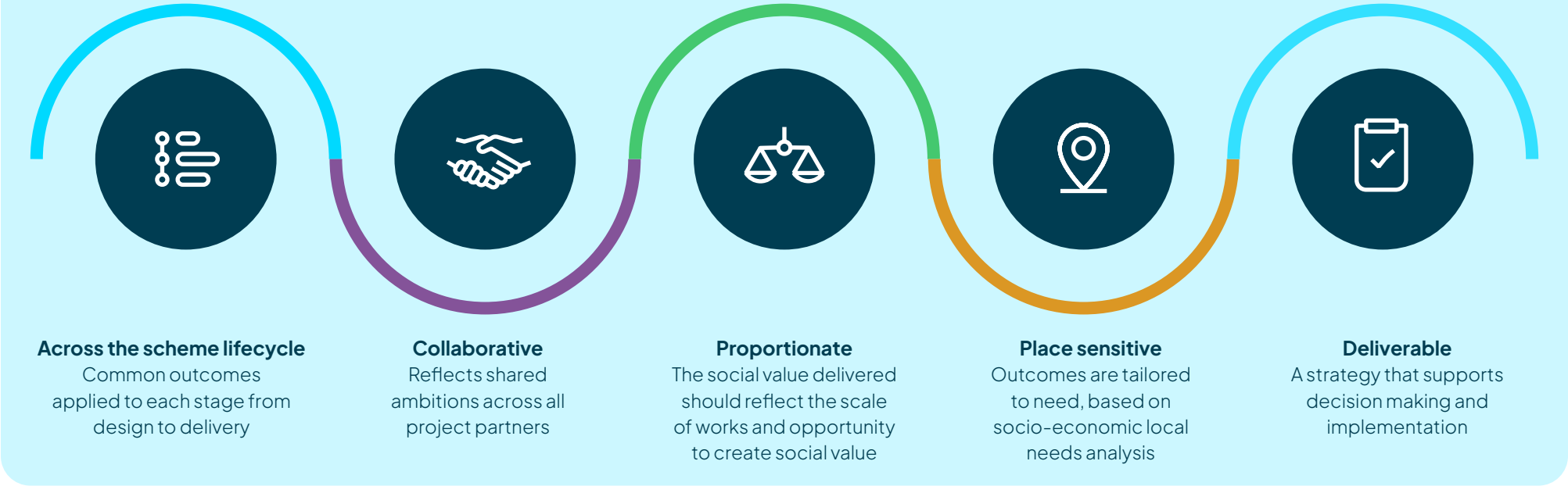
Right now, we're primarily focused on embedding our themes within the proposed design. As part of this Phase Two Public Consultation, we've published our draft overarching design principles which set out further detail on what those principles represent, the key considerations for each one, and how they should be factored into the scheme's design.

The draft design principles for the scheme, and particularly for the canal corridor, consider and respond to the local context, such as the canal's industrial heritage, the surrounding natural landscape, and the cultural stories of the communities along its route.

These principles serve as a checklist to guide the design of canalside buildings and structures, to ensure that new interventions are locally appropriate and connected to their setting.

You can read our Draft Design Principles Document on our website at: <http://www.guctransfer.co.uk/consultation>

The five principles of our social value approach



Proposed social value opportunities identified to date

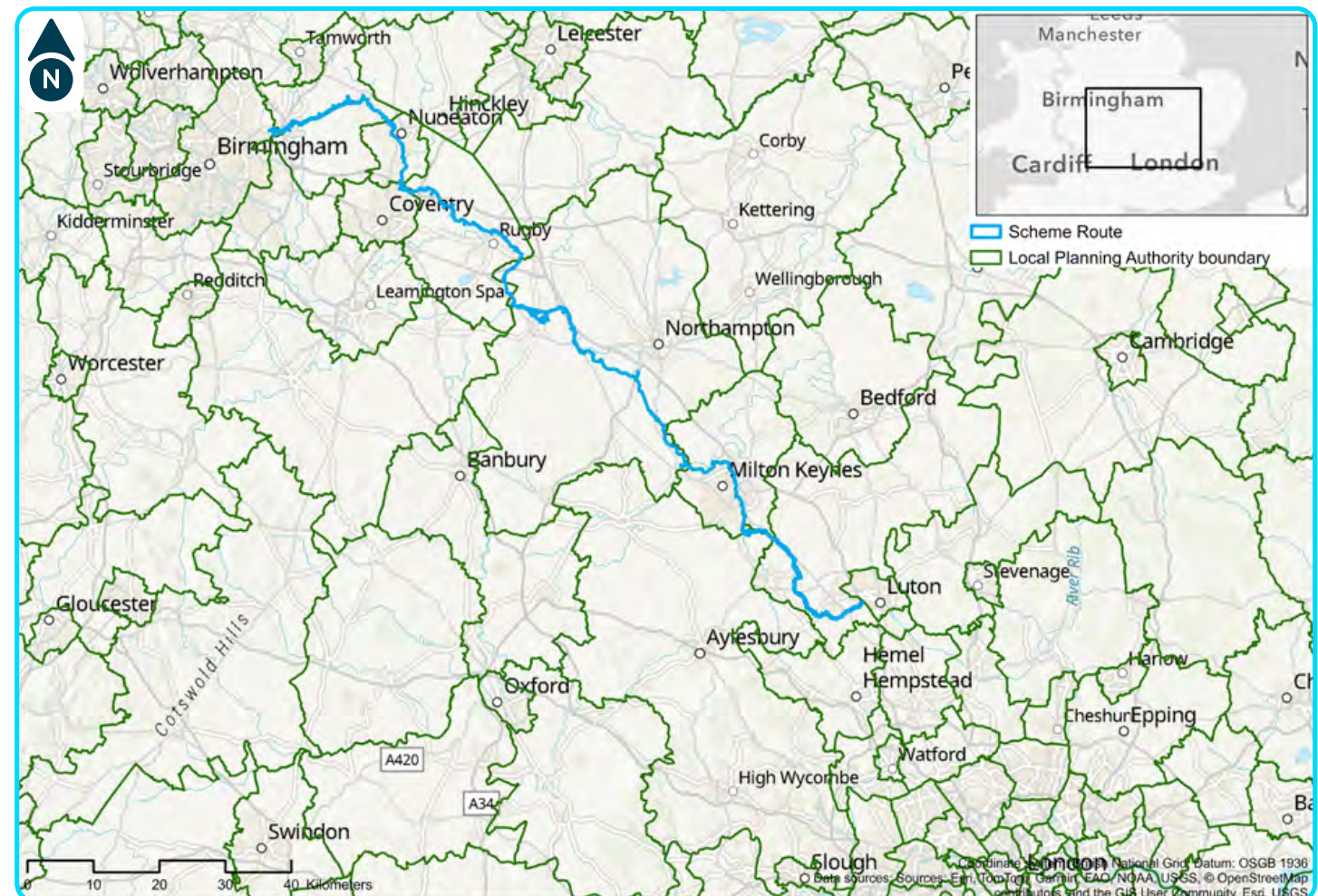
We're developing a scheme-wide and place-based social value programme shaped by local research and engagement with communities and stakeholders.

This approach helps us understand shared priorities and unique local challenges, so we can design interventions that are proportionate and tailored to each region.

We'll establish regional legacy working groups which will include local authorities, training bodies, community groups, supply chain partners etc., to refine initiatives and targets post DCO.

By working together with supply chain partners and key stakeholders, we can pool resources, maximise impact, and deliver meaningful benefits for people and places along the route.

Grand Union Canal Transfer scheme route showing local authority boundaries



We've set out our **initial ideas** for social value opportunities aligned with the priority needs identified, and grouped them under each theme. These opportunities represent our early thinking, and we'd value your input to help shape the final plan and determine which proposals are more important to you and should be taken forward into a formal set of commitments. Your feedback will ensure our approach reflects your own experiences and delivers what will be most beneficial.

Theme	Priority Need(s)	Inherent Social Value
Resilience 	The southeast of England is predicted to have a shortfall of 449 million litres a day by 2050. A new water resource is needed to prevent water restrictions in the future.	The scheme aims to significantly improve water infrastructure and resilience. Key objectives include increasing drinking water capacity. The scheme at maximum, will provide 115 million litres per day, ensuring no deterioration of Water Framework Directive-associated waterbodies, and meeting all drinking water quality standards. It will also enhance the navigational resilience of approximately 120km of canals linked to the Grand Union Canal Transfer and reduce the risk of unplanned outages in drinking water supply.
Partnerships 	Maximising benefits of opportunities.	The scheme aims to work with charities and community groups who are already embedded in the communities. They have local knowledge, trusted relationships, and are a strategic way to maximise social value outcomes and demonstrate social return on investment, with tangible impacts where it matters most.
Growth: Housing 	Lack of housing and employment space in the Greater Cambridge area is constraining growth. Plans cannot proceed without sufficient long-term water supplies.	As part of the solutions being overseen by the Water Scarcity Group, the scheme will support Anglian Water's plans for the Grafham Transfer by reducing the volume of water Affinity Water takes from Grafham Reservoir.
Environment: Chalk streams 	Water companies' responsibility extends to protecting ecosystems by reducing abstraction from vulnerable catchments such as chalk streams.	This scheme is key in enabling Affinity Water to meet its commitments in its Water Resources Management Plan 2024 to reduce abstractions from chalk aquifers.

Theme	Priority Needs	Possible Social Value Opportunities Identified
Communities 	Limited transport links in rural areas contribute to social isolation and restrict mobility. Health inequalities are exacerbated by barriers to accessing essential services in rural communities. Transport and connectivity issues affect lower-density areas, creating barriers to accessing jobs, education, and healthcare. Need to support healthier lifestyles for children and encourage more active living amongst adults. Growing concerns around mental health, particularly among young people. Lower-than-average life expectancy across affected communities.	Community co-design: hosting engagement workshops to ensure local voices shape the development and delivery of recreational spaces along the route. These spaces will serve as community hubs aimed at reducing social isolation. Improved canal infrastructure used at a travel route: upgrading towpaths, signage, and accessibility features to ensure safe, inclusive use for everyone. Wellbeing workshops: partnering with local grassroots organisations to deliver physical activity sessions and promote healthy living in scenic spaces along the route.
Growth: Jobs & Skills 	Low educational attainment and readiness.	STEM education: we hope to inspire the next generation through hands-on science, technology, engineering, and maths activities, with tailored support for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). We've recently begun engaging with the Careers Hub, which connects with 95% of schools across the scheme's route, and we plan to begin engaging with schools in early Spring 2026. Our focus will be on secondary schools (Year 7 through Sixth Form), gradually building and expanding the programme as the scheme progresses. Boosting literacy and numeracy: Volunteers from the scheme will be able to help primary school children thrive through targeted reading and numeracy programmes aimed at improving attainment.

Theme	Priority Needs	Possible Social Value Opportunities Identified
Growth: Jobs & Skills 	Communities face high unemployment, significant skills gaps due to low qualification levels, and an urgent need for reskilling, digital upskilling, and green skills development to improve access to jobs, services, social inclusion, and future-proofed employment opportunities.	Future skills and inclusive employment: our approach will aim to prepare communities for the jobs of today and tomorrow by investing in skills. This will include: • A trade and skills forecast: identifying future needs to shape green skills pathways, construction careers, and digital upskilling programmes. • Accessible training and reskilling opportunities. • Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) will be embedded throughout to promote inclusive recruitment practices, workplace policies, and programmes such as reverse mentoring to ensure everyone can thrive. • Supported internships: opening doors for underrepresented groups through structured pathways into employment.
Growth: Local Business 	Noticeable slowdown in business growth and enterprise.	• Spending targets for micro, small & medium enterprises and voluntary, community & social enterprise. • Capacity-building workshops: helping organisations develop skills and resilience to grow and thrive. • Social entrepreneurship: supporting innovative ideas and start-ups that drive social impact and create opportunities within the community.
Environment 	Increase awareness and understanding of sustainable water management.	Environmental engagement and nature access We'll engage with local communities to protect and celebrate the natural environment along the scheme. This initiative includes: • Community partnerships: collaborating with local organisations to deliver environmental outreach and nature-based activities. • Educational signage: installing co-designed interpretation features along towpaths to share information and inspire learning. • Improved wayfinding: enhancing signage to help people easily access nearby parks and green spaces.

Theme	Priority Needs	Possible Social Value Opportunities Identified
Environment 	Improved connections to water, nature and the environment.	Nature and biodiversity engagement We'll help communities connect with and protect local wildlife along the scheme. This initiative includes: • Green corridors and nature trails: creating vibrant canalside spaces that support biodiversity and offer enjoyable routes for walking and cycling through opportunities such as creating areas for wildflowers, planting new trees and hedgerows and creating new habitats that will benefit locally important wildlife. • Community stewardship schemes: empowering local residents to take an active role in caring for and enhancing their natural surroundings.

We explain more on managing environmental effects in Chapter 24 of our Preliminary Environmental Impact Information Report (PEIR) which explains how we've assessed our potential environmental impact and the steps we'll take to reduce it as much as possible.

Our ENG and BNG work is ongoing and the outcomes will be reported with our Development Consent Order (DCO) application.



You can view the PEIR and PEIR NTS on our website at www.guctransfer.co.uk/consultation.



Next steps

The purpose of asking for your feedback on our Social Value Approach in this Phase Two Public Consultation, is to help us shape and finalise our Social Value Strategy.

This final strategy will help inform and guide the contractors who will deliver the scheme and empower our future regional legacy working groups once they're formed, to turn these opportunities into meaningful, long-lasting solutions for communities along the scheme's route.

By sharing your views, you'll help us to:

- prioritise what matters most to you and your community
- refine our proposals to reflect local needs
- identify opportunities for partnerships and initiatives that leave a lasting legacy

Have your say

As part of our Phase Two Public Consultation, we want to hear your views on our Social Value Approach. We'll use your feedback to shape our final Social Value Strategy.

Questions 13 and 14 in our consultation feedback form refer to our social value approach. You can provide your feedback to these questions and any other questions in the form if you wish, in the following ways:



Visit our website: Complete and submit a feedback form at www.guctransfer.co.uk/consultation



Email us at: contact@guctransfer.co.uk



Write to us at: Freepost GRAND UNION CANAL TRANSFER (no stamp needed)

Any questions?

If you have any questions before submitting your response to the consultation you can contact the team by emailing us at contact@guctransfer.co.uk or by calling us on 0121 270 5920, Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5:00pm.

All responses must be received in writing by 11:59pm on Thursday 2 April 2026. Responses received after that date may not be considered. We can't guarantee acceptance of consultation responses submitted via other channels.



Example of shared use towpath



Grand Union
Canal Transfer

Moving water together

Speak to the team

If you would like to ask any questions about the scheme, please feel free to get in touch with our engagement team:

 contact@guctransfer.co.uk
 0121 270 5920