



PRESS RELEASE

Video and images available – links below

INJURED VETERANS RESTORE HISTORIC CANAL LOCK DAMAGED IN MILITARY DEMOLITION PRACTICE

- Canal & River Trust and Help for Heroes team-up to deliver ambitious £1/2 million canal restoration and career recovery programme
- Injured servicemen rebuild historic Pewsham lock with canal charity's volunteers
- “Since being part of Heritage Heroes I’ve been 100% better in my own wellbeing. I’m meeting so many likeminded people” said Help for Heroes veteran

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Injured servicemen and women are being given the opportunity to re-build their lives, gain qualifications and learn new skills by transforming and restoring historic canals.

The [Canal & River Trust](#) and [Help for Heroes](#) have come together to deliver an ambitious canal restoration and career recovery programme for wounded, injured or sick servicemen, women and veterans.

Veterans from across the country have joined the Heritage Heroes project and are working alongside the [Wilts & Berks Canal Trust](#) to restore Pewsham lock in Chippenham. Veterans and volunteers from the canal charity are rebuilding an abandoned stretch of canal and lock. Ironically the lock was used for military demolition practice in the lead up to the Second World War. As well as the restoration work the team are creating a nature play area on site for local children to play and learn outdoors.

The project, made possible by £500,000 funding from players of [People's Postcode Lottery](#), aims to bring pride and purpose back to our heroic veterans while restoring canals, some of which have been left neglected for decades.

Veterans returning from service are highly-skilled and capable individuals, with a great deal to contribute to society. Too often however, they are ill-prepared for the transition back into the civilian world. The Heritage Heroes project will equip the wounded, injured or sick heroes with City & Guilds qualifications in construction,

health and safety, horticulture and land-based management which can be used to help them identify a new, purposeful career.

Phil Wearing joined the Army in 1993 when he was 23 years old and went into the Green Howards – an infantry regiment. While on a 6 month tour to Northern Ireland he damaged his spine. A year after the injury he was diagnosed with cracked vertebrae. Following rehabilitation, he was medically discharged from the military. Phil said: “I went through a tough time a few years back – I couldn’t work because of the pain I was in, which left me with money troubles and I ended up feeling very suicidal. I was put in touch with Help for Heroes – and the first time I spoke to Help for Heroes I saw light at the end of the tunnel. Although I’m still in pain, Help for Heroes have also helped me with pain management, I was so determined to do this course. I’ve been 100% better in my own wellbeing. I’m meeting so many likeminded people, speaking to similar people is the best therapy I’ve found.”

Jason Leach, Enterprise and Restoration Team Manager for the Canal & River Trust, said: “Heritage Heroes is such an exciting project for us. It gives the Canal & River Trust the opportunity to work with Help for Heroes to transform waterways as well as helping to rebuild our wounded heroes’ lives.”

Roderick Bluh, Chairman, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust said: “It is a great privilege to welcome the Heritage Heroes to our project. Our Trust team has worked hard over the last year in preparation for this day, and we are delighted to be working with the veterans who have joined us from Help for Heroes. I hope that they will gain the experience and skills that they are seeking from our project, but more than that, I hope that both groups of volunteers will learn from each other and in the process be able to continue the friendships that have been forged during this shared time together.”

Mike Lee, Project Manager at Help for Heroes, said: “Leaving the military or realising that your career choice may no longer be possible can be daunting, especially for those who are living with life-changing injuries and illnesses. Working towards a new goal in life through career recovery can be extremely beneficial to an individual’s overall wellbeing, often accelerating their personal recovery journey. This project will resonate with many of our military men and women who will already have some of the necessary skills and enjoy working outdoors, as part of a team.”

Clara Govier, Head of Charities at People’s Postcode Lottery said: “We are delighted that the ‘Dream Fund’ has enabled this partnership between the Canal & River Trust and Help for Heroes. Heritage Heroes will make such a difference to the lives of our injured servicemen and women and I’m looking forward to seeing the results of their hard work on our historic canals.”

More information about the project and how to get involved can be found here: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer/heritage-heroes

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Notes to Editors:

For more information, interviews, video footage, or images contact Lucy Scott, Campaigns Manager, on 07789 178506 or lucy.scott@canalrivertrust.org.uk

For interviews with Help for Heroes beneficiaries contact Kirsty Williams, on 01980 844389 or kirsty.williams@helpforheroes.org.uk

Images available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/home/Heritage%20Heroes/Heritage%20Heroes%20%20-%20Pewsham>

Video content of Help for Heroes veterans available at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/home/Heritage%20Heroes/Heritage%20Heroes%20video>

Heritage Heroes restoration locations:

Stroud (Cotswold Canals)
Pocklington (Melborne, Yorkshire, YO42 4RX)
Pewsham Nr Chippenham (Wilts & Berks)
Kennet & Avon Canal (Bridge 99 near Crofton, Wiltshire and Devizes Jubilee Woodland)

Further information about the project's 'Dream Fund' award win available at:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views/news/canals-and-veterans-come-together>

https://youtu.be/_oo-xf7zfbw

About Help for Heroes

Help for Heroes offers comprehensive support to those who have suffered life-changing injuries and illnesses while serving our country. This support is provided through grants direct to our Heroes and their families, grants to other charities and through four Help for Heroes Recovery Centres across the UK. A recent study launched in January 2016 by Help for Heroes and King's College London found of the 750,000 men and women who served as Regulars between 1991 and 2014, at least 66,000 need long term support.

www.helpforheroes.org.uk

@HelpforHeroes

About Canal & River Trust

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

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About Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is a charitable organisation working to preserve, conserve and improve the route of the Wilts & Berks canal.

WBCT is committed to restoring the full length of this historic canal; from Wiltshire through Swindon and into Oxfordshire. The aim is to create a sustainable and bio-diverse blue and green corridor that, as it winds through our region, provides a host of attractive lifestyle and economic benefits to our communities and to visitors, as well as providing a safe and welcoming habitat for wildlife.

The canal is part of our heritage, but our waterway can also, today, add so much to our busy and crowded 21st century lives. Join us in our journey to create and cherish this regional treasure.

It's time to create an environment both we and our children can be proud of...

It's time to inspire and excite...

It's time to put our canals at the heart of everyday life ...

www.wbct.org.uk