



# Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

## News release

Monday 23 November 2020  
For immediate release

### **Exeter becomes UK's Heritage Harbour No 4 as a new vision for the historic Ship Canal is published**

A new vision for Exeter Ship Canal sees the waterway coming back to life with more boats, the restoration of historic vessels and the return of commercial usage.

The radical revival programme, titled *Making The Canal Matter Again to Exeter*, is published today by the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal to coincide with the designation of the canal and city basin as a Heritage Harbour, only the fourth historic harbour in the UK to achieve this recognition.

John Monks, chair of the Friends, said: "The canal is back on Exeter's agenda. Its nomination as a Heritage Harbour by the Maritime Heritage Trust is an incentive for revitalising Exeter's centuries old maritime traditions.

"We want to see more boats on the canal and more businesses connected with the waterway, as well as a welcome for the restoration of historic vessels. There is also an opportunity for the return of commercial usage on a small scale to begin with."

The canal, Britain's oldest ship canal, and basin were built for the port of Exeter so vessels can navigate from the coast to the heart of the city for the benefit of the city's economy and culture. The Heritage Harbour scheme is a joint initiative by the Maritime Heritage Trust (MHT) and National Historic Ships UK to recognise the long-term benefits that maritime heritage can have for an area. It is linked to similar groups across Europe.

Cllr. David Harvey, Lead Councillor for City Management, said: "This is fabulous news for the city. Heritage Harbour status carried the potential to unlock all sorts of exciting opportunities for the waterway and the port. I am very grateful to the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal for the work they have done in gaining this recognition."

Brian Corbett, MHT representative on European Maritime Heritage, said: "The real nomination of a Heritage Harbour arises from the enthusiasm of its waterways community to form a group that aspires to maintain a working maritime heritage in their area for the benefit of everyone. The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal already constitutes that group."

John Monks added: "We plan an inaugural meeting of the Heritage Harbour community with representatives from quays, boatyards and waterway organisations across the Port of Exeter, as well as the various local bodies involved, joining those from the canal and basin. Their heritage is interlinked and the Heritage Harbour project will extend across the whole port."

The Heritage Harbours vision includes:

- ) the protection of waterfront and maritime heritage assets

More follows

- ) support for local business growth
- ) increased tourism
- ) community involvement
- ) attraction of investment and heritage funding
- ) a welcome for local and visiting historic vessels to find moorings, facilities and support.

Exeter must not miss out on the growing scope and popularity today of waterway uses of all types, the Friends believe. “If today's opportunities are taken the waterway can attract new business and visitors and its heritage will be preserved for everyone’s enjoyment. We would also like to see the wider community working with Exeter City Council, the canal’s owners, on plans that will be game-changers for the canal,” John said.

The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal vision, *Making The Canal Matter Again to Exeter*, was put together with support from the Inland Waterways Association West Country Branch and its chairman, Ray Alexander. It incorporates:

**Easier and cheaper navigation** which will be available when the headroom beneath the bridges across the canal in Bridge Road, Exeter, is raised by Devon County Council.

**Historic vessels**, such as wooden sailing craft, being restored at the basin, creating opportunities for skilled jobs and training.

**Commercial use** with fresh fish and shellfish landed at the basin and produce transported by water.

**Holiday attractions** such as boat lets and picnic boats; combined bus and ferry tickets from the city centre to Double Locks and Turf; and a horse-drawn canal barge.

**A boost to community life** with an annual canal carnival and cavalcade and the purchase of the old gas works social club adjacent to the basin for conversion to a new canal office and community activities focusing on the waterway and its heritage.

John Monks added: “These ideas point the way forward but are only a start. The canal and basin need much better marketing and facilities than they have at present. But there is enormous willingness and commitment among canal users, stakeholders and volunteers to see the waterway thrive. Exeter City Council, Exeter Canal and Quay Trust and the Port of Exeter Authority should respond with common objectives.”

The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal are a voluntary group dedicated to preserving and bringing new life to the heritage of the canal as an integral part of the city's life and economy and for the enjoyment of everyone today and in the future. They are corporate members of the Inland Waterways Association.

Ends

**Note to newsdesk:** This release coincides with the joint announcement today (Monday, 23 November) by the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal and Exeter City Council of the Heritage Harbour status.

The full text of *Making The Canal Matter Again to Exeter* is available on the Friends’ website, [www.friendsofexetershipcanal.co.uk](http://www.friendsofexetershipcanal.co.uk)

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