

MEDIA RELEASE



For immediate release

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Fund Britain's Waterways Takes Warning across the Wash

Whilst this month's Spending Review makes way for significant long-term capital spending (£113bn), when it comes to day-to-day spending the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) faces one of the steepest departmental real-terms reductions: an average cut of 2.7% per year for salaries, staff and services over the next three years. This is concerning, not least because Defra funds navigation on many canals and rivers through the Environment Agency and through grant funding to the Canal & River Trust, as well as supporting the National Park responsibilities of the Broads Authority.

How Defra will manage its resources and what impact its budget cuts may have on navigation authorities is not yet known. What is clear is that public support for the Fund Britain's Waterways coalition continues to grow – as witnessed by the support for the different phases of this year's Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign cruise.

The journey began with an initial group of boats setting off from Doncaster on 29th March which grew to a 26-strong flotilla in London delivering a clear message to Government from the Thames on 7th May. Since then the boats have taken different routes to spread awareness across the country of the value of our waterways and the challenges they face, racking up over 600 miles and 365 locks on their way. Now they are converging on Boston in preparation for the next leg of their journey, a crossing of the Wash on 23rd June leading to the Fenland and Middle Level waterways. The Wash is not natural territory for narrowboats and to see a group of 13 boats making the crossing is highly unusual, demonstrating the determination of the campaigners to draw attention to the importance of their cause.

People still flock to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of Britain's waterways, from holidaying on hire boats to simply strolling along their towpaths. Behind every visitor is an array of local businesses, from pubs and hotels to specialist marine companies, the success of which is heavily dependent on having in place well-managed, clean and navigable waterways.

This is why every effort must now be made to retain, if not boost, the stretched resources our navigation authorities have to maintain the waterways and all the associated economic, environmental and social benefits they provide. After years of insufficient funding and poor management, particularly in regard to the maintenance of locks and enforcement of licence fee regulations, the inland waterway network faces jeopardy and many commercial opportunities are left untapped.

It is time for a fresh approach. This is why Fund Britain's Waterways will ask the Defra Minister to bring navigation authorities together to consider how we can better meet the growing challenges and fully exploit all the benefits that this evidently popular national asset - Britain's waterway network - has to offer.

Hazel Owen, leader of the flotilla and Chair of the AWCC (Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs) and a member of the FBW steering group, said:

"The journey of these boats and their crews has not been straightforward but has required dedication and tireless efforts, surmounting obstacles presented by failing infrastructure and other challenging events along the way. The perseverance and shared mission of the boaters speak for all who care about the preservation and future of Britain's beautiful and historically significant waterways, not only boaters but millions of other people too. They are united in seeking awareness, action, and change."

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About [Fund Britain's Waterways](#) (FBW):

FBW brings together a wide range of organisations with the sole purpose of campaigning collectively for an increase in government funding of Britain's inland waterways to avert their decline, and to promote awareness of the huge economic, environmental, and social well-being value they provide. Established in June 2023, it already has more than 160 members representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways.

Photographs accompanying this release:

1. The advance guard of the FBW flotilla heads for London (credit: Brian Sharples)



2. FBW flag at Foxton Locks (credit: Brian Sharples)



3. FBW campaigners in West India Docks after the Westminster campaign cruise on 7th May (credit: Allyson Marr)



4. Welcome to FBW campaigners at Tooley's Boatyard, Banbury on 24th May (credit: Tooley's Boatyard)



5. FBW flag at the Boat Shop at Braunston (credit: Claire Clarke)



6. FBW flag on High Bridge in Lincoln (credit: Shirley Sefton)



7. FBW campaigner at a bridge over the Grand Union Canal (credit: Allyson Marr)



Contact:

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