

MAYOR BACKS THE FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS BIRMINGHAM CAMPAIGN CRUISE ON 13TH AUGUST

West Midlands Mayor Andy Street is backing canal and river campaigners who will descend upon 'Britain's Venice' on Sunday 13th August.

Boaters, walkers and other canal enthusiasts will converge in Birmingham to urge the government to adequately fund Britain's waterways – and they want the public to get on board.

The flotilla, which will assemble for 12 noon on the canal frontage next to the Mailbox (B1 1RS), has been organised by a new campaign group called Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW). The coalition comprises more than 50 organisations including those representing boaters, anglers and other waterways users.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said: "It's often said that Birmingham has more canals than Venice but their importance goes far beyond this famed statistic.

"Our vast and diverse canal network is a remarkable historical inheritance – cherished by the wildlife and local communities that exist around them and enjoy them today.

"I feel strongly that this very special legacy should be maintained, nurtured and celebrated for generations to come and I'm sure many fellow residents right across our region feel the same. That's why I stand ready to work constructively with both local and national stakeholders to help ensure these unique waterways are preserved in the months and years ahead."

Birmingham alone has 35 miles of canals, many dating back to the 1700s. But many fell into decline when railways and roads took over the long-distance transportation of goods.

Thanks to the determination of passionate campaigners and thousands of volunteer hours, many have since been restored, boosting jobs and the economy with new residential developments alongside restaurants, bars and other businesses.

All this is under threat, say FBW's campaigners. The government has announced it will cut £300m over the next decade from its grant to Canal & River Trust, which manages Birmingham's waterways.

FBW's Chair, Les Etheridge, said: "We want the prime minister to acknowledge the many social, economic and environmental benefits that Britain's inland waterways provide and give his assurance that the government will intervene, where necessary, to ensure our rivers and canals remain fully open, navigable, safe and accessible for all."

He added: "More than 8.5 million people (nearly 15 percent of the population) live on or within 1km of the waterways, and half of us live within 5km. In urban areas, the percentage is often much higher. Add to those figures the additional 10 million people who access the

waterways for business, leisure, wellness or commuting, and it is clear that open, accessible and well-maintained waterways are vital for us all, and for Britain's economy, ecology and wellbeing."

Ivor Caplan, one of the event organisers said: "I have lived on a narrowboat close to Birmingham and really appreciated the local heritage and contribution that these waterways made to the prosperity of the city.

"Along with many other residents on land and water, I enjoyed the green fingers that these canals provide between Birmingham and other West Midlands conurbations together with the varied environment that they support."

Visitors to the event will enjoy the great variety of boats including some original working boats as well as adding their voice to this vital campaign to ensure that these waterways are there to be enjoyed by future generations.

Inland Waterways Association Chief Executive, Professor Sarah Niblock, said: "The Fund Britain's Waterways campaign is not just about boating. The risk to our canals and rivers is equally important for all towpath users. Do show your support for this campaign by coming along to the towpaths at the Birmingham Mailbox from 11.00 am to 1.00 pm on Sunday 13th August.

"As well as enjoying the varied boats attending, there will be an online presentation explaining the importance of the campaign. A link will be added to [this website](#) nearer the date to access it, or via a QR code displayed at the event."

ENDS

For more information, please contact:

IWA CEO Sarah Niblock - sarah.niblock@waterways.org.uk (until 7th August)

Campaign Cruise Co-ordinator (volunteer) Ivor Caplan – mobile: 07778 685764. Email: ivor.caplan@waterways.org.uk (available now and on the day)

The benefits of Britain's inland waterways are documented in:

- 'Waterways for Today' report published by the Inland Waterways Association (November 2022) <https://waterways.org.uk/campaigns/waterways-for-today>
- 'Valuing Our Waterways' report published by the Canal & River Trust with social-value experts Simetrica-Jacobs, with all methodology aligning with 2022 HM Treasury Green Book valuation techniques (November 2022) <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/valuing-our-waterways>

To join the group, please email membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk. For more information, please visit fundbritainswaterways.org.uk or email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk.