

Press Release

The *Fund Gloucester's Waterways* Action Group was formally launched on 19th August 2023 with the following press release:

FUND GLOUCESTER'S WATERWAYS - CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO STOP BRITAIN'S INLAND WATERWAYS FALLING INTO DISREPAIR

Britain's unique and well-loved network of canals and navigable rivers is deteriorating because of inadequate funding. At a time of unprecedented challenges caused by the climate emergency and high inflation, government is failing to respond. '**Fund Gloucester's Waterways**' (FGW) has been formed to provide support from the Gloucestershire area to the national '**Fund Britain's Waterways**', a coalition of now over 70 Trade Associations and Organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways, and is campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and environmental benefit of our waterways.

Management of Britain's 5,000 miles of navigable inland waterways is fragmented. The Canal & River Trust (CRT) has the greatest responsibility covering 2,000 miles. It is already in a difficult financial situation with a fixed government grant of £52.6m per year until 2027. DEFRA whilst agreeing to further support with a further grant, but has recently announced a reduction in funding from 2027, reducing this, in a 10 year reduction package of £400m down to £30m/annum in 2037, with total disregard for inflation over that period.. Other national waterways face similar problems: the Environment Agency is operating with £22m per year, one third of its identified requirement, and Scottish Canals has over £70m of maintenance work outstanding.

The consequences of failing to maintain waterway infrastructure were clearly shown by the evacuation of 1,500 local residents in case the dam at Toddbrook Reservoir collapsed in 2019. This event has shown the need for increased spend on CRT reservoirs of up to £25m per year, but it is as if the lessons have not yet been learnt.

There are thousands of circa 200 year old structures that are placed at a greater risk through reduced funding. These locks, bridges, reservoirs, aqueducts do not generate any income, but are a significant maintenance liability.

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of Britain's inland waterways as people sought blue and green spaces to help recover. This was acknowledged in DEFRA's own Environmental Improvement Plan providing levelling up, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing benefits for us all.

The combined annual economic and social value of CRT waterways alone has been quantified as £6.1bn, including cost savings of £1.1bn for the NHS from active use of the waterways and towpaths.

Despite this greater understanding of their value, and the deteriorating state of the infrastructure today, the Government has now shown its intent to significantly reduce its funding for the waterways, says the FGW group spokesperson who echoed concerns raised by the FBW.

He said:

*As part of the national campaign to focus attention on the proposed severe reduction in Government funding for the waterways, then a second national campaign rally will be held in support of 'Fund Britain's Waterways' with a **cruise and rally in Gloucester Docks on Saturday 30th September**, and Fund Gloucester's Waterways invite boaters, residents, anglers, businesses and everyone who recognises the importance of our waterways to join us.*

Government needs to recognise that saying they value the inland waterways is not enough to prevent their decline. Whilst we in Fund Gloucester's Waterways understand the financial pressures that everyone faces, the financial cuts are too deep, and adequate public funding needs to be allocated to maintain these national assets.

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Further information

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