

# FBW Event Organiser Guide

## *Organising a small event in support of the Fund Britain's Waterways Campaign*

### **INTRODUCTION**

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It has been brought to the attention of the Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign committee that some member organisations would like to hold an event in support of this campaign but are concerned that they do not have the necessary experience. These notes have been produced as basic advice for small event organisers. There is obviously a wide range of waterways events up to large National Festivals which will be considerably more complex and require far more pre-planning.

### **THE BASIC DECISIONS - WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHO, HOW?**

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**What.** This decision tends to be around some form of boat gathering but remember that this need not always be the case. To involve and get our message across to the general public other ideas may be relevant, for instance:

- a towpath walk ending at a suitable location where a FBW display can be arranged
- a FBW display in a shopping centre with a hands-on attraction for younger visitors
- an evening talk well publicised for anyone to attend, about a local waterway with refreshments and FBW display featuring local interest
- an event at a local canal base held jointly with commercial operators who could promote their hire fleet.

**Where.** Location of the event is important taking into account the above decision. If a waterways-based event, consider access for the general public who may be less familiar with the geography. Good parking, public transport and clear directions are important.

If your plan is for a good boating attendance, a waterways venue reasonably close to marinas or other permanent moorings is advisable as boaters are unlikely to cruise long distances to an event. Sufficient depth is required to facilitate good mooring in close proximity and a good width of towpath or adjacent available space is best for safe public access and any stalls or other activities.

**When.** Events are generally held over a weekend (or part of) when visitors are more likely to attend. Check for any other local events which might compete for attendance. It may not be a disadvantage to have it at the same time as other FBW events in the region, greater publicity and attendance may be possible by linking with these.

**Who.** It is generally assumed that your event is aimed at getting the FBW message across to everyone within a particular area, by people attending or learning about it in local press and media. However, in certain case you may decide that the priority is getting the FBW message across to specific organisations or VIPs.

Linked to 'WHO' it is worth considering working in **PARTNERSHIP** to organise the event. Your partner could be a waterways organisation, but others for example focused on Environment or Heritage can widen the scope of our campaigning and facilitate greater publicity, attendance or even funding.

**How.** This is about how you are going to make the event appealing to visitors, to get them to spend time there and take away the right message about FBW. Some events tend to be just a boat rally, boats arrive on the evening, boaters gather and generally enjoy themselves but do not engage with the public. Of course, a boat gathering is fine and photographs can achieve media interest, but do think about widening the general public appeal.

Activity is important to interest visitors and particularly younger ones. Some form of boat-handling, demonstrations, opportunities to go onboard or other activities, will make it a meaningful and memorable experience and give the opportunity to explain what FBW is all about. If your 'WHO' priority above is VIPs, this may be best achieved in a different way, for instance a reception or trip boat may provide opportunities to explain the campaign.

## **APPROVALS**

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Approval for the event from the Local Authority, Navigation Authority and any owner of the land you are using is probably essential and worth checking on at an early stage to avoid last minute panics. These authorities tend to be under-resourced and may not deal with your request immediately so make contact as early as possible, even if your plans are not finalised.

This can also be beneficial as these organisations may circulate community newsletters and will be happy to publicise your event. It is sometimes good to have a site visit with the relevant officers from these organisations to ensure that everything is covered. They may also advise on the right VIPs to invite to your event to assist getting the political message across.

## **EVENT INSURANCE**

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This will be required for the event and lead-in period but your organisation's pre-existing insurance may already cover this. IWA can advise on the requirements and how to obtain insurance.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

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This can seem daunting for those who have not organised an event before, but it is just a commonsense approach to identifying the various activities, their level of risk and the mitigating action required. We can advise and assist with a blank pro-forma but it must be written for your specific event.

## **PUBLICITY**

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May be an obvious point but many good events have not been successful because the organisers forgot to tell anyone about them. In some ways publicity is easy these days with so much social media, but that contains a lot of competing messages, so try to give yours a title or theme that makes it stand out. Some suggestions:

- Make sure you mention the event on your organisation's website.

- Make sure all the FBW member organisations have been informed and asked to promote your event.
- You may want to add the event on your organisation's newsletter.
- Social media. This may include Twitter and Facebook, which events and posts offer the opportunity to spread the word on local waterways FB groups including canal trust FB groups.
- You may produce event flyers to distribute and bring to local businesses especially if waterways related (boat clubs/boat hires/paddling clubs/angling groups/hiking groups/local libraries).
- Local newspapers – if you are looking for some media coverage, you will need a press release with a summary of the event (what, when, where, who, why) to be sent in good time.
- Local radio stations are still a valuable source of information worth contacting to promote your event.

Have a mailing list ready to promote the event. It is usually good to have a first announcement/save the date as early as possible and then at least a reminder closer to the time (2 weeks before).

If you wish to promote the event through social media, identify which Facebook groups may be interested in sharing the news and post on their page/ask the admins to share the event if possible. Please remember to use the #FundBritainsWaterways hashtag as widely as possible, so that other FBW member organisations can like and share your posts to promote them more widely.

If you wish to approach your local newspapers or local radio stations, have a press release ready with a mailing list. Ask them when the deadline is for sending the press release and if any specific material is needed (pictures, videos, past articles on FBW events etc). Many newspapers are happy for you to send in a report and photos after the event, but make sure that someone is designated to do this.

You will need to contact IWA to receive any FBW promotional literature, banners and hi-vis tabards. Make sure you have enough printed material according to the number of attendees you expect. Ask for support from IWA in good time so any material can be printed/posted when needed.

Plan the display of literature so that it is always available to passers-by (through leaflet stands, tables/shelves etc). Be aware of the different weather conditions and how they may affect your stand, e.g. pop-up banners need to be tightly secured to poles/marquees as they are mainly for indoor use. Boat banners can be different lengths (6 or 10ft) and need to be secured with cable ties or sturdy strings. Make sure you always have with you an event kit comprising scissors, string, cable ties, pens and paper, and tape.

**Get IWA to help you.** IWA Head Office will support you in promoting your event. Make sure you notify the contact below as soon as the event is confirmed, so IWA can include the event in their marketing channels, and your event will be mentioned on IWA's website. There are obviously various deadlines for the different publications, and we will advise. IWA branches, WRG and other linked organisations will be informed and asked to support the event.

Contact Verena Leonardini – IWA Events and Restoration hub co-ordinator  
[verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk](mailto:verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk)

## **PRIOR TO THE EVENT**

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**Bookings.** Depending on the type and scale of the event you are organising, you may want to set up a booking system, either through your own platform or an external one such as Eventbrite. Alternatively, you may prefer sending out booking forms to be filled in, rather than relying on online contact. Once people have booked in, make sure you keep contact with them by providing updates, answering questions etc.

**Partners.** Have a list ready with organisations that may have interest in participating and supporting the event (see above). Make sure you have contact details and make contact both in order to get them on board if they wish to, or to help promote the event. Sometimes it is just best practice to inform them (e.g. paddling clubs for a boating events). Some local businesses may benefit from your event and be more prone to contribute to its success practically or even financially.

**Stalls/marquees.** Covered space is desirable to meet our uncertain weather, depending on available area at the location. Hiring is expensive so try your local partners, or IWA may be able to help with sufficient notice.

**Site visits.** Make sure you imagine the whole event, what can potentially happen on site (where to moor if it is a boat gathering, where a stall can be located, where facilities are for attendees, where nearest toilets are, as well as pharmacies and hospitals), what can go wrong etc.

**Fundraising.** Do you intend to make the most of the fundraising opportunity? Be prepared with the FBW donate option: [Fund Britain's Waterways - JustGiving](#)

If possible, have FBW donations buckets. Possibly print and laminate a QR code for FBW donations (ask IWA if you would like a printed QR code to be posted together with the FBW material).

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**Hopefully these notes cover the main considerations prior to your event. Of course, unplanned issues may occur whilst the event is running but our general experience is that with good pre-planning these can be minimised and easily resolved.**

**Some useful contacts are provided below for other advice or assistance.**

***HAVE A GREAT EVENT AND THANKS FOR HELPING TO SPREAD THE FUND BRITAINS WATERWAYS CAMPAIGN MESSAGE.***

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### **USEFUL CONTACTS**

IWA Events and Restoration hub co-ordinator – Verena Leonardini  
[verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk](mailto:verena.leonardini@waterways.org.uk)

FBW Events Co-ordinator - Hazel Owen  
[hazelowen.awcc@outlook.com](mailto:hazelowen.awcc@outlook.com)

Insurance – Neil Edwards  
[insurance@waterways.org.uk](mailto:insurance@waterways.org.uk)

Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) is a coalition of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. We are campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

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