

# Fund Britain's Waterways Update, March 2024

Dear FBW member/supporter,

## **Petition**

The FBW petition has reached the milestone of 50,000 signatures.

Thank you so much to everyone who has signed and helped us achieve this milestone. It isn't enough though. There are far more people who love and value our canals and rivers, and we need your help to get our message to them. Please do encourage all your contacts to sign and share the petition. It is linked to from the [FBW homepage](#) or the direct link is [here](#).

## **Membership**

Membership of FBW has now reached 123 organisations. Again, although this is very good progress, it is not enough and we need more members, especially non-boating organisations. Please do let us have suggested contacts at [membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk](mailto:membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk) – or simply ask your contacts to email that address and we will take them through the process of joining. It only takes a few minutes to join and support the campaign and it costs nothing.

## **Impacts of Inadequate Funding**

We are seeing the impact of inadequate funding on waterways across the country now.

The mainstream media have started to pick up on issues, and in particular two recent episodes of BBC Countryfile have highlighted problems. On [3 March](#) there was a detailed look at what's involved in maintaining and restoring historic waterways and the impact of funding cuts for the Canal & River Trust. On [10 March](#) the importance of the flood protection provided by internal drainage boards like the Middle Level Commissioners in East Anglia was explained – but rising energy bills are causing difficulties.

Again in East Anglia, the lack of dredging by the Environment Agency means that Salter's Lode Lock [cannot be opened](#). Since this is the link between the Middle Level Navigations and the Great Ouse, 130 miles of waterway are cut off from the rest of the network with no opening date in sight. Boaters are stranded and businesses are suffering. Lack of maintenance in adjacent areas is also calling into question the effectiveness of flood defence and alleviation plans for local communities.

Meanwhile on the Broads boat tolls have had to be raised so much to cover rising costs and lack of government funding that [a formal challenge](#) has been made.

Elsewhere, waterways maintained by local authorities are starting to face cuts, notably the [Neath Canal](#) and the Basingstoke Canal (see BBC report of [10 March](#), subsequently corrected on [13 March](#)).

This is only the start and if the funding situation is not properly addressed the situation will get worse and we will lose parts of our waterway system.

## **Plans for 2024**

In view of the developments highlighted above, it is increasingly urgent for FBW to raise awareness of both the benefits of our waterways and the threat to them. As members will be aware, we will be holding a national weekend of action over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend (4-6 May 2024). This will coincide with the Inland

Waterways Association (IWA) annual Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice in London, and will culminate in a Campaign Cruise past the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday 8 May. Parliamentarians will be encouraged to view the event and express their support for the continued maintenance of the waterways to enable them to keep on delivering economic, health, environmental and well-being benefits.

In addition to our own events, FBW will be promoted at [many other events](#) throughout the year. We would appreciate as many supporters as possible helping to publicise these events and attending them.

Please do consider whether you could organise an event for the weekend of action or have an FBW presence at an event. [Hazel Owen](#) of AWCC is co-ordinating the events and says “FBW has had many requests for literature and banners to promote the cause. We are endeavouring to fulfil all the requests for leaflets, but banners are a little more difficult due to the cost of each banner plus we need to be careful with our funds, unfortunately we don’t have thousands to play with. It would be a great help if clubs or individuals could consider purchasing a banner. FBW would organise printing and despatch, the cost for a 6’ banner is £39+VAT and for 10’ £64+VAT.”

In parallel with these awareness-raising events, FBW will be holding sessions with major navigation authorities to explain how they are making the best possible use of funds for the waterways, starting with the Canal & River Trust on 10 April. The sessions will be chaired by FBW and live streamed to FBW members, with a recording and written notes of the meeting to be made publicly available at a later date.

### **Steering Group Activities**

The members of the FBW steering group are busy preparing for an intensive few months.

- As well as co-ordinating events, Hazel Owen of AWCC is to promote FBW at the 250 years celebration of Bingley 5 Rise on 23 March. Then due to the unforeseen delay of 9 weeks on her access to the River Trent through Vazons Bridge – not the fault of CRT – she will be setting sail 15 days earlier than anticipated, to take the long route across the Rochdale Canal to Manchester before starting to head south with the goals of joining Cavalcade and the Palace of Westminster Campaign Cruise.
- Anne Husar of NABO is actively promoting FBW on social media and was responsible for the Facebook blitz which resulted in the petition reaching 50,000 signatures.
- Andrew Phasey of RYA is in charge of the complex logistics involved in the Westminster campaign cruise.
- Joanna Richardson of British Marine is working on FBW materials and liaising with BM members.
- Sue O’Hare is working with a small team of IWA staff and volunteers who design, source and distribute the FBW materials, post on social media and keep the FBW website updated, manage the FBW petition and updates, manage the donations page, manage FBW member communications, and who are running a [survey of boaters](#) to gather input on cruising experiences in 2023.
- I am working on presentation material, political liaison and the navigation authority sessions.

As you will realise there is a lot to do, and we are looking for volunteers to help the campaign move forward more quickly. You can find details of volunteer roles [here](#).

### **FBW ask to members**

To summarise, we would really appreciate all our members doing as many as possible of the following:

1. Like and share our social media posts and create your own using the hashtag #FundBritainsWaterways
2. Encourage all your contacts to sign and share the petition at the [FBW homepage](#) or the direct link [here](#)
3. Send suggestions for members to [membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk](mailto:membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk)
4. Organise an event for the weekend of action or have an FBW presence at an event (via [Hazel Owen](#))
5. Help to publicise events listed [here](#) and attend in support

6. Send questions for the navigation authority sessions as publicised and watch the live streams
7. Volunteer [here](#) for a role to support the campaign.

Please do support us!

Les Etheridge - **Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways**  
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