

Fund Britain's Waterways Update, April 2024

Dear FBW member/supporter,

We are fast approaching a very important week for FBW, with the weekend of action over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend 4-6 May and the Westminster campaign cruise on Wednesday 8 May. We are making more impact in local and national media – you may have seen FBW mentioned in a letter to the Guardian on 26 April – and more is on the way. Please read on and **support us in as many ways as you can, particularly at Westminster** – and please pass on the message to your colleagues, members, customers and other contacts.

May Day Bank Holiday Weekend of Action, 4-6 May 2024

Events will be taking place across the country over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend, from Lancashire and Yorkshire to London via the West and East Midlands and Norfolk. The programme ranges from stalls and campaign cruises to large events including IWA's annual Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice in London, which this year will be themed on Fund Britain's Waterways, as well as the Norbury Canal Festival and the new Electrika electric boat show.

As IWA Lichfield Branch Vice Chair Neil Barnett says, "It's astonishing how many members of the public are unaware of the funding issues and the significant threat to the future of our wonderful and precious waterways. It's important that we spread the word in order to increase the awareness, and garner as much support as possible."

We are very grateful to all the event organisers for their hard work and to those FBW members who have paid for banners and helped to make our funds go further, as well as to the IWA staff team who have managed the logistics of distributing materials far and wide. Please do help to spread the word and support the events, which are listed at <https://waterways.org.uk/waterways/sites/fund-britains-waterways-overview/fund-britains-waterways-future-activities>.

Westminster Campaign Cruise, Wednesday 8 May 2024

The weekend of action will culminate in a second Campaign Cruise past the Palace of Westminster on the tidal Thames during the lunchtime period on Wednesday 8 May 2024. A flotilla of around 30 boats, including commercial freight vessels and over 20 privately owned narrowboats from across the country will journey up the Thames, holding station off the Palace of Westminster before continuing upriver.

We need as many people as possible to show their support on the day. There are still some places left on the vessel chartered by AWCC to host FBW dignitaries, MPs and other VIPs, and these are available to FBW members and supporters for £15 each. Alternatively there will be a group of supporters cheering the flotilla on and engaging with passers-by on Westminster Bridge. For details of how to get involved please see <https://waterways.org.uk/support/ways-to-get-involved/events/fund-britains-waterways-westminster-campaign-cruise>.

Rum'a'Gin Flying the Flag for Fund Britain's Waterways

Hazel Owen, Chair of the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, will be participating in IWA Canalway Cavalcade and the FBW Westminster cruise in London. In order to do this she set off on her boat Rum'a'Gin from Doncaster on 17 March, proudly displaying FBW banners and flags. The need to divert around unscheduled stoppages has meant that her journey will be more than 353 miles and 250 locks. This is giving Hazel plenty of opportunity to spread the word: she is appearing in local media as she goes and she has also set up a Facebook

group for people to track her progress. Please do join the group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/946415890265050> (search for Rum'a'Gin).

Waterway Closures

FBW members are no doubt aware of widespread waterway closures in the wake of the winter storms and for a variety of other reasons. Many people's plans have been affected and ours are no different. The landslip at Easenhall Cutting on the North Oxford Canal has closed the route from the north to the Electrika show at Brinklow Marina, the first event of the weekend of action, while Swarkestone Boat Club's planned campaign cruise to Shobnall Fields is in question because the Trent & Mersey Canal is closed after a major vehicle strike on a bridge. We know of at least one boater who is unable to reach London in time for the Westminster Campaign Cruise because of flooded and silted rivers and closed canals.

This catalogue of incidents is making very clear the increasing challenges faced by navigation authorities and the need for FBW's campaign.

CRT Session, 10 April 2024

The first of FBW's sessions with navigation authorities, with the Canal & River Trust on 10 April, proved open and frank. Questions were posed by FBW members about CRT's current strategy, future plans and the value for money it provides in managing its waterway network. The session was livestreamed to FBW members, and the recording will shortly be made available on [YouTube](#) and the notes on the FBW website.

It was reassuring to hear the Chief Executive Richard Parry say that despite the growing funding gap created by diminishing government grant, high inflation and the need to mitigate the impacts of climate change, CRT had no current plans to close any of its waterways to navigation. However, he warned that the government funding announced for the period 2027 – 2037 will be insufficient to safeguard the future of the waterways. This is why CRT is calling for that planned grant to be reviewed. In the meantime, he said CRT was making every effort to reduce the increasing funding gap by maximising its income from fundraising and other sources, including its property endowment.

FBW welcomed the fact that CRT saw canal closures as a last resort. As the government discovered in the 1960s, closing waterways does not save money as ongoing maintenance is required for safety purposes yet most of the economic, environmental and wellbeing benefits are lost. We need the next government to understand this fact and recognise the substantial value our canals and rivers currently provide.

FBW Volunteer Roles

The existing group of volunteers running the FBW campaign is very stretched and we need more resources to keep pushing forward. I'm pleased to say that several people have already expressed interest, but do please have a look at the areas where we particularly need more support and get in touch if you can help.

<https://waterways.org.uk/waterways/sites/fund-britains-waterways-overview/fund-britains-waterways-volunteer-vacancies>

And of course please do keep encouraging signatures on the petition, looking out for possible new members, supporting FBW on social media and raising awareness as widely as possible. Please send photos of all your FBW activities to info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk.

Les Etheridge, Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways
info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk