

Fund Britain's Waterways Update, May 2024

Dear FBW member/supporter,

A lot has happened since the last update, with our weekend of action around the country culminating in the campaign cruise to the Palace of Westminster on 8 May.

This weekend is the Crick Boat Show, which is supporting FBW by providing a stand and helping to promote the campaign. Please do come and visit the stand (WW8 in the Boating Marquee) and if you would like to spend some time there and talk to visitors so much the better. Please do also help to spread the word about the stand and about the Special Talk on FBW at 14:00 on Saturday 25 May in the Seminar Theatre.

Please read on and **support us in as many ways as you can, particularly at Crick**

– 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

A big thank you to the organisers and supporters of all the events which took place across the country, and resulted in plenty of good conversations with the public about why the campaign is important. Details and photographs can be found [here](#) with the page being regularly updated. Please do send any further photos or reports to info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk.

Several events were impacted by unscheduled stoppages, with the event at Shobnall Fields in Burton upon Trent run by the Swarkestone Boat Club only being confirmed at the last minute when Canal & River Trust managed to reopen a damaged bridge. The cruise of Rum'a'Gin to IWA Canalway Cavalcade was successfully completed but only after the need to change route several times to avoid further unplanned stoppages. [Good publicity](#) for the campaign was achieved by Rum'a'Gin's cruise, and the Telegraph picked up the [story](#) with the link being available to those who subscribe.

Westminster Campaign Cruise, Wednesday 8 May 2024

The weekend of action culminated in a second Campaign Cruise past the Palace of Westminster on the tidal Thames during the lunchtime period on Wednesday 8 May 2024, when the Government received a wake-up call from inland waterways campaigners.

It was a spectacle for both the eyes and ears as the call to safeguard Britain's inland waterways reached the Palace of Westminster. A 20-strong flotilla delivered an unmistakable message to Government for funding to protect the future of our inland waterways. The boats came out of Limehouse at different times with a number setting off very early and passing through the Thames Barrier to mark the 40th anniversary of its opening by Queen Elizabeth II in 1984. After passing back through the barrier once it reopened after a scheduled test closure they met up with the other participating boats departing Limehouse.

The flotilla included a mix of commercial freight vessels, several sea kayaks and 17 privately owned narrowboats, some of which had travelled over 350 miles battling against the severe weather and failing canal infrastructure, determined to reach Westminster. United together, they sounded their horns to cheers from supporters on Westminster Bridge, capturing the attention of many MPs who had just attended Prime Minister's questions (see [here](#) for Wendy Morton MP's report and photo of the flotilla from the terrace). The boats made a very impressive sight and were given permission to hold station on the Thames within the exclusion zone outside the Palace of Westminster.

Welcoming the flotilla were crowds of inland waterway supporters and representatives from the campaign's alliance of organisations, including Dame Sheila Hancock DBE and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways Sir Michael Fabricant MP, together with other dignitaries and FBW supporters onboard the MV Valulla. Speeches were made by Dame Sheila, Sir Michael, Chair of the Twentieth Century Society Hugh Pearman MBE and CEO of GPS Marine Holdings John Spencer.

Special thanks to Andrew and Frances Phasey for their detailed planning and organisation that ensured both the success of the cruise and the safety of all those involved. I must also thank London VTS, the Metropolitan Police, Canal & River Trust, the boaters, the VIPs, supporters on the bridge, supporters on social media and all who helped make it a successful event.

A report including press coverage of the event and photographs will be available shortly on the website.

FBW Plans going forward

With a general election due by January 2025, FBW whilst continuing to promote our message at waterways events will be changing focus in the second half of the year. We will be looking to get our message about the importance of the inland waterways and the benefits they provide to local and national politicians including both current and aspiring members of Parliament. More details will follow in due course, when our plans are fully formed, but if you have expertise in this area please do let us know as we would be delighted to have your input.

Navigation Authority Sessions

Notes of the session held with CRT on 10 April 2024 will shortly be available on the FBW website, together with the recording of the session on YouTube. We are about to invite other navigation authorities to participate in similar sessions. Please let me have suggestions for any navigation authority you think should be invited.

FBW Volunteer Roles

Thank you to all those who have volunteered to help the campaign. Further volunteers would be of great assistance to the group who have run the campaign for the last 12 months, as we still need more resources to keep pushing forward. 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>

FBW Membership

FBW now has over 130 member organisations, which is excellent but we need even more, particularly those who have non boating interests in the waterways. Please do encourage any organisation with an interest in the inland waterways to join FBW and let us have suggestions for those we should invite by emailing membership@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk

And of course, please do keep encouraging signatures on the petition, attending events, supporting FBW on social media and raising awareness as widely as possible. Please send photos of all your FBW activities to info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk.

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