



All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

Working Meeting

Tuesday 21st January 2025

1pm Portcullis House Room U

Officers Present: Lord Michael German, Uma Kumaran MP, Wendy Morton MP,

Members Present: Sir Gavin Williamson MP, Abtisam Mohamed MP, Baroness Llin Golding

In Attendance: Mike Wills (IWA), Charlie Norman (IWA), Amy Tillson (IWA), Susie Mather (CRT), John Lewis (assistant to Baroness Golding)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Bill Esterson, Lee Dillon, Callum Anderson, Julia Buckley, Dave Robertson & Steve Race. In Bill Esterson's absence, co-chair Lord German chaired the meeting.

The APPG for the Waterways notes with deep sadness the recent passing of Baroness Jenny Randerson, a valued member of the group. Baroness Randerson had been due to attend this meeting, and her longstanding support for, and love of, the waterways has been appreciated. Our condolences are especially offered to her APPG colleagues.

2. Welcome and Introductions

Lord German welcomed those present to the meeting, and introductions were made.

3. Introduction from Mike Wills, Chair of IWA.

Mr Mike Wills, Chair of the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), welcomed attendees and highlighted several key concerns regarding the inland waterways network:



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He drew attention to the current crisis facing the network, specifically referencing breaches on the Bridgewater and Huddersfield Canals.

Despite significant volunteer contributions and the documented economic, social and environmental benefits, the British inland waterways system is experiencing decline.

He emphasized that chronic underfunding has led to an increased risk of structural failures, which pose both safety risks and financial implications.

He thanked all attendees.

4. Focus of the APPG for the coming year

Lord German suggested that the meeting focus on the first section of the Themes and Priorities Briefing circulated: Climate: Environmental Management, Flood Defence and Sustainable Freight Solutions

Uma Kumaran suggested adding the issue of the maintenance of canals, in terms of environmental health, and asked for guidance and advice to address the issue in her constituency.

Mike Wills explained that IWA are actively involved in ways to reduce the impact of pollution from boats and explore sustainable propulsion methods. He said that IWA is not just a boaters' organisation, it represents all interests, and environmental concerns are a key area to develop.

Action: IWA to send information on pollution issue to Uma Kumaran

5. Impact of the Bridgewater Breach

There was a discussion around the recent breach of the Bridgewater Canal and its impact on the connected system. The incident has raised awareness of the funding implications of ageing infrastructure, and the links between the waterways network and flooding.

Susie Mather was invited to comment and noted that the network can only be used for flood mitigation if it is well maintained. Major capital expenditure on reservoirs owned by the Canal and River Trust has diverted funds from the rest of the waterways system. Canals can also provide solutions in times of drought by enable water to be moved around the country to where it is needed. However, this is also only effective if the system is maintained.

Mike Wills noted that the whole network is owned and managed by a number of different authorities, resulting in a lack of connectivity. The Bridgewater Canal is owned by the Bridgewater Canal Company Ltd, part of the Peel Group.



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Lord German asked what the responsibilities are of a navigation authority to repair a breach such as this, when privately owned?

Gavin Williamson suggested that whilst recipients of public funding will have statutory obligations, this is not the case for privately owned waterways.

Action: IWA to share a map of the waterways and an overview of the ownership of the different parts of the system

The social and economic impact of incidents like the Bridgewater Canal breach were discussed. Many businesses are affected. Embankments like the one affected are at significant risk in the face of climate change.

Lord German suggested that the focus of the next APPG meeting should be on climate change and the waterways, bringing in experts to speak.

Action: IWA to progress

Wendy Morton noted that while the issue of waterway funding hasn't gone away, the issue of climate impact has come to the fore. She suggested bringing waterways issues to a Westminster Hall debate to raise awareness.

Action: IWA to follow up with Wendy Morton and suggest question/topic

6. Next meeting date: to be decided



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