



# FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

## Fund Britain's Waterways Update, March 2025

We have a window of opportunity to get our message across as the Government is finalising its Spending Review, and we need help from you and your members to make one more push. Please read on to see how you can support the campaign.

The images of the New Year's Day embankment collapses on the Bridgewater and Huddersfield Narrow Canals are stark reminders of the threats to our inland waterways.



Bridgewater Canal breach (credit: @TaylorsAboardaNarrowboat)



Embankment collapse at Lock 11 West, Huddersfield Narrow Canal (credit: Duncan Roberts)

## **FBW Spending Review submission**

FBW made a [submission to the Autumn Budget 2024](#), arguing that cutting waterways funding is a false economy and more investment is needed in order to protect the many benefits as well as safeguard communities. The events of New Year's Day demonstrate the vulnerability of our canals to the increasingly frequent severe weather events resulting from climate change. Increased investment will be needed in order to future-proof the network.

Since there was no mention of waterways in the Autumn Budget, FBW responded to the Treasury's invitation to make a submission to the Government's Spending Review 2025. [Our submission](#) presented a strengthened argument citing the embankment collapses as a demonstration of the need for additional funding to prepare the waterways for more frequent severe weather events, and repeated our request to Government that:

1. the importance of Britain's inland waterways as a unique national asset and part of the national infrastructure is recognised
2. the deterioration in condition that is already happening is acknowledged
3. a review of government funding for all Britain's inland waterways be carried out as a matter of urgency, with the aim of defining a sustainable funding solution which will enable the current benefits of our canals and rivers to be maintained and enhanced for future generations.

We are already seeing the waterways deteriorating and businesses suffering, and the rate of deterioration is increasing because of the effects of climate change. If underinvestment continues this will become worse until a tipping point is reached and waterways have to be closed, wasting the benefits as well as the millions of hours of volunteer time and millions of pounds of public money that have gone into the current network.

Yet to fund our inland waterways properly would cost a small (in government terms) investment measured in millions not billions of pounds. In return the country will continue to obtain billions of pounds of health, economic and environmental benefits, much of the benefit in less well-off areas.

### **One More Push**

The outcome of the Spending Review is expected to be announced in June, well after the FBW flotilla is scheduled to arrive at the Palace of Westminster on 7 May. This gives us a good opportunity to step up our efforts in one more push to get the message across, both to the public and to local, regional and national politicians. Regional mayors and MPs are particularly important to target.

As reported in the last update, the FBW campaign cruise for 2025 will be starting in late March and progressing on Canal & River Trust and Environment Agency waterways before concluding in July on the Middle Level Navigations and Anglian waterways, covering as many navigation authorities as possible. It promises to be spectacular in its own right and will also trigger local events to raise awareness along the route. The first of these will be a [welcome gathering at Gainsborough](#) on 1 April and we would like to see as many supporters as possible on the banks of the Trent.

More details of the cruise to and beyond Westminster can be found at <https://waterways.org.uk/fbw-campaign-cruise>. You can follow progress by joining the Facebook group [Fund Britain's Waterways – Cruises for 2025](#).

As well as detailed plans for the cruise, the FBW steering group is developing a communications plan setting out a schedule for press releases, letters to politicians and social media coverage. Initial press releases, letters and social media posts are planned to go out shortly and will be followed by an ongoing series as the cruise progresses. We also plan to have a stand at the Crick Boat Show over the Bank Holiday weekend 23-26 May.

### **FBW Ask to Members**

To support FBW's "one more push" we ask all our members to do the following:

1. Take action in three ways over the next few months:
  - a. Write to local and regional politicians, mayors and MPs, highlighting the benefits of waterways, the threat to them, the FBW campaign and the opportunity to watch the campaign cruise (a template letter for MPs is attached)
  - b. Support FBW posts on social media by liking and sharing posts with the hashtag #FundBritainsWaterways, and post on social media yourself (we will provide a schedule and suggested content)
  - c. Support events along the route, particularly the Gainsborough event on 1 April and the Westminster campaign cruise on 7 May where we need supporters on Westminster Bridge as well as boats in the flotilla
2. Ask your own members to do the three things above
3. Nominate volunteers for the FBW stand at the Crick Boat Show on 23-26 May (email [info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk](mailto:info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk)).

### **Other FBW News**

FBW's membership now stands at 154 organisations. A particular welcome to the most recent recruits, and many thanks to all for your support.

Thank you too to everyone who completed the recent Member Survey. We are digesting the results and will report in a future edition.

I will leave you with photos from previous Westminster campaign cruises as a taster of the forthcoming spectacle.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Mike Wills, Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways and National Chair, Inland Waterways Association  
[info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk](mailto:info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk)





FBW participants at IWA Canalway Cavalcade 2024 in Little Venice (credit: Hazel Owen)



The FBW flotilla approaching the Palace of Westminster, 8 May 2024 (credit: Liz Rayner)





FBW campaigners on the VIP boat off the Palace of Westminster, 8 May 2024 (credit: Bernard Snell)



Dame Sheila Hancock DBE speaking on the VIP boat off the Palace of Westminster, 8 May 2024 (credit: Bob Fox)



nb *Euclid* passing Big Ben on the 14 November 2023 campaign cruise (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)