

# MEDIA RELEASE



*For immediate release*

**Date: 28 November 2025**

## **Fund Britain's Waterways responds to the Autumn Budget 2025**

Once again the Budget has failed to mention public investment to safeguard Britain's inland waterways. Once again the Government appears to be turning a blind eye to both the peril of the waterway network and its significance to the economic and social fabric of local communities. Well-maintained waterways enable hard-pressed families to enjoy time on or by the water, while vital jobs are provided by inland waterway businesses and the wider tourism and hospitality trade.

The coalition group Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) has made repeated representations to the Treasury, setting out the widely acknowledged benefits that Britain's canals and rivers provide. FBW has stressed – and continues to stress – the threat to our waterways from underfunding at a time when the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather arising from climate change is combining with the ageing infrastructure to create a perfect storm.

More than any other year, 2025 has demonstrated exactly why there is such an urgent need to review and improve funding for the waterways. The year began with winter storms and heavy rainfall which caused a major breach of the Bridgewater Canal and damage to an embankment supporting a lock on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. The dry spring then developed into England's hottest summer on record, with very little rainfall. The resulting low water levels caused the closure of 400 miles of the canal network, an unprecedented proportion. Yet no sooner had water levels begun to recover than sudden heavy rainfall caused river levels to rise rapidly and go into flood, causing yet more waterway closures.

This year is not likely to be a one-off. The Inland Waterways Association has developed a Risk Index Map which uses Met Office projections to show how waterways could be affected both by lack of water and by increased winter precipitation in future. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that this year's events could soon be more widespread and increasingly problematic. Both low and high water levels can not only prevent the use of waterways for navigation, but also damage infrastructure and increase environmental risks. In turn this has severe implications for the businesses that rely on waterway users and visitors, as we have unfortunately seen this year.

The one possible ray of hope for waterways in the Budget is the devolution of £13bn in flexible funding to seven mayors across England and the promise of more of these integrated settlements in future. This year the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Combined Authority has demonstrated what is possible, by providing £500,000 towards the repair of a lock on the River Cam.

But while regional investment is a hugely valuable start, it is not enough. In the context of a budget that will see the tax take rise to over £26bn per annum by the end of this Parliament, and with a fiscal headroom of nearly £22bn, FBW does not think it unreasonable to ask for investment of a tiny fraction of these sums into the inland waterways – which themselves deliver benefits worth billions of pounds.

For these reasons FBW repeats its call for Government to commit to a comprehensive national review of future funding plans for Britain's inland waterways.

Hazel Owen, Chair of FBW said

"The Chancellor spoke of strong foundations for a secure future. FBW campaigners have this year seen at first hand the effects on the waterways of failing infrastructure and more extreme weather. Strong foundations for a secure future are exactly what our canals and rivers need, now more than ever. Without adequate funding their foundations are compromised and their future is far from secure."

ENDS

## **Notes to the Editor**

### **About Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW)**

FBW brings together a wide range of organisations with the sole purpose of campaigning collectively for an increase in government funding of Britain's inland waterways to avert their decline, and to promote awareness of the huge economic, environmental and social well-being value they provide. Established in June 2023, it already has more than 160 member organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways.

For further information about Fund Britain's Waterways, see [www.fundbritainwaterways.org.uk](http://www.fundbritainwaterways.org.uk) or contact Sue O'Hare, Navigation Committee Chair at the Inland Waterways Association [sue.ohare@waterways.org.uk](mailto:sue.ohare@waterways.org.uk)

### **About the Inland Waterways Association's Risk Index Map**

Following the Climate Change Committee's warning to government to prepare for 2°C warming by 2050, the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) has published a first-of-its-kind map revealing the likely impact of this warming on Britain's 5,000-mile network of canals and navigable rivers.

Facing a dual crisis of funding and climate resilience, the new map reveals 99% of Britain's navigable inland waterways are at risk. The research finds that 75% of canals are financially insecure, while 99%

are expected to experience increased winter rainfall, threatening infrastructure already struggling with years of underinvestment.

The map is available at <https://waterways.org.uk/campaign-map>

## References

The benefits of Britain's inland waterways are documented in:

1. The latest [British Marine Economic Benefits report \(April 2024\)](#) which includes:

The combined economic contribution of the inland boating sector and its wider associated tourism generated the UK was £7.6bn in total for the year 2022/23 (the figure includes £1.6bn from the inland marine industry plus £6bn from wider tourism generated by expenditure of those participating in inland boating and other inland watersports on non-boating goods and services such as food and hospitality)

Employment - the inland marine industry provides 41,166 total jobs. In addition, wider tourism associated with inland boating provides 295,886 jobs, so not only does inland boating directly employ over 41,000 people but it also supports almost a further 300,000 jobs through its associated wider tourism.

2. [‘Waterways for Today’ report](#) published by the Inland Waterways Association (November 2022)
3. [‘Valuing Our Waterways’ report](#) published by the Canal & River Trust with social value experts Simetrica-Jacobs, with all methodology aligning with 2022 HM Treasury Green Book valuation techniques (November 2022)



**Photographs accompanying this release:**



1. Aerial view of the breach in the Bridgewater Canal in Dunham, Cheshire, January 2025  
(credit: Taylors Aboard)



2. Storm damage to Lock 11 West on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, January 2025  
(credit: Duncan Roberts)





3. Closure notice and FBW banner and event notice at Baits Bite Lock, River Cam, August 2025  
(credit: Sue O'Hare)



4. FBW supporters on Westminster Bridge, May 2025 (credit: Liz Rayner)





5. FBW supporters at Gloucester Docks, September 2023 (credit: Fund Gloucester's Waterways)

For higher resolution images please contact [info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk](mailto:info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk)