

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release

Date: 26 March 2026

Birmingham Canal Navigations Society / Fund Britain's Waterways Icicle campaign cruise on the Walsall Canal

On Saturday 21 March a flotilla of 25 narrowboats, including two historic working pairs, travelled along the Walsall Canal and assembled in Walsall Town Basin to be welcomed by the Mayor of Walsall. The flotilla had gathered at Moorcroft Junction on the Friday evening, with most of the boats descending Ryders Green Locks and the rest coming along the Tame Valley Canal. Together they made up the biggest group of boats in the basin for some time and attracted television and press coverage.

This colourful spectacle was the annual Icicle Cruise organised by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) to mark the return of spring. This year the cruise was carried out as part of the Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign, drawing attention to the value of Britain's canals and navigable rivers and the threats they face as a result of inadequate funding.

The cruise also celebrated the reopening of the Walsall Canal after an industrial cyanide spill in August 2024 resulted in its closure for 10 months. The canal itself is a case study of the revival of urban waterways, regenerated after near-abandonment and now providing a focus in the town centre overlooked by the New Art Gallery, as well as a valued connection with surrounding countryside. Since it is one of the less well-known parts of the Birmingham Canal Navigations it was particularly good for the basin to be full of boats again, and the sight proved quite a talking point for local people.

The cyanide spill is just one specific example of the vulnerability of the entire inland waterway network. Communities and businesses across the country are at risk as navigation authorities face mounting financial pressures and increasing impacts of all types, from climate change to pollution incidents and other damage.

This is the reason that the Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign was set up and is calling for a comprehensive national review of waterways infrastructure. Our rivers and canals are not just for boaters, or even for the millions of other people who use them to walk, cycle, jog, commute, canoe, paddle, fish or just relax. They are vital for local economies and the environment and an irreplaceable part of our national heritage. We owe it to future generations to look after our waterways and keep them safe and well maintained.

Councillor Louise Harrison, Mayor of Walsall, said: "It was wonderful to see Walsall Canal Basin brought to life this Saturday by a gathering of narrowboats, celebrating our proud waterways heritage.

This informal event also sent an important message, our canals matter, and they need sustained investment to thrive. I do support the call for better funding to protect these vital assets for our communities and future generations."

Mike Anson, Chair of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society, said: "It was fantastic to see so many boats at Walsall. The Icicle Cruise is intended to promote use of some of the less-frequented areas of the BCN. This weekend was no exception, with a record number of boats! Our thanks to our friends at FBW for collaborating with the BCNS to organise this event."

Hazel Owen, Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways, said: "The Icicle Cruise marked a wonderful start to the FBW cruises for 2026. We are grateful to the BCNS for their support, and encouraged by the strong turnout in the Walsall basin highlighting both the appeal and importance of our waterways."

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About the [Birmingham Canal Navigations Society \(BCNS\)](#):

The Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) was formed in 1967 with the goals of conserving the 250 year old Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN) canal system, improving its status and encouraging its use, and providing education about the historic and ecological importance of our canals. It has a headquarters with a meeting room and library in Titford Pumpouse in Oldbury, it organises work parties to carry out ‘clean ups’ around the BCN system, and it holds social events and boating events. The BCNS welcomes this important FBW initiative and is pleased to be working together with FBW in highlighting the value of our local waterways and the threat they face from inadequate funding.

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 members representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. The Icicle Cruise was the first of the 2026 FBW campaign cruises, which will be focusing on the central to northern part of the country.

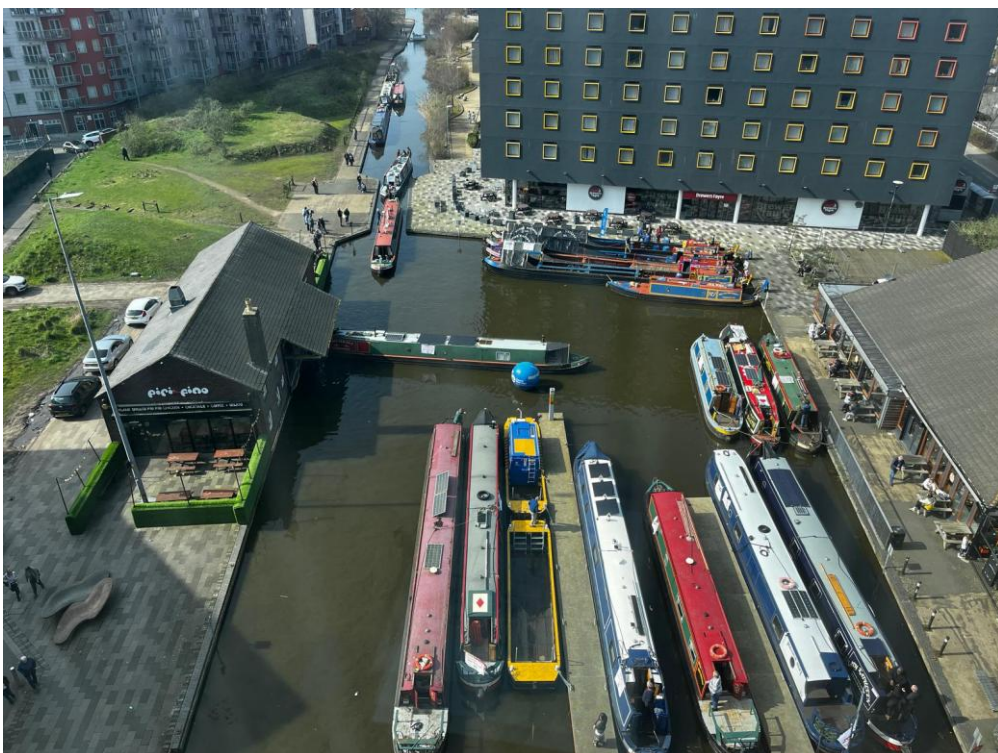
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Photographs accompanying this release:



1. Flotilla gathered at Moorcroft Junction, Walsall Canal on the morning of Saturday 21 March, with BCNS and FBW banners (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)



2. Flotilla assembling in Walsall Town Basin, seen from the New Art Gallery (credit: Mike Anson)



3. BCNS Chair Mike Anson and FBW Chair Hazel Owen at Walsall Town Basin with the Mayor of Walsall, Councillor Louise Harrison (credit: Kev Maslin, Chasing the Boats)

For higher resolution images please contact info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk