

Navigation update: What's the latest?

October 2024



Creating a better place for people and wildlife

Dear Stakeholder

Welcome to this shortened version of the Environment Agency Navigation Newsletter. As we end the 2024 boating season we wanted to reflect on the season and update you on some of the work that has been completed over the year, and our plans for 2025.

We know that the Navigation Service is not where it needs to be, we have assets that are struggling with age and use, our service is not meeting your expectations, and the climate crisis and the financial context is adding to the challenge.

We are planning for a better service in 2025 focussing on what will make the biggest improvements to the Navigation and Waterways communities, which is why this is a more compact update. Over the last six months we have been working to improve ways of working and find efficiencies where we can, to deliver more with the resource available. We have also been focusing on securing income to maximise that resource.

We hope you find this update interesting.

Please feel free to share this with those you represent.

Kind regards

Rachael McFarlane (National Navigation Strategy Manager)

National Navigation Team and improvement strategy

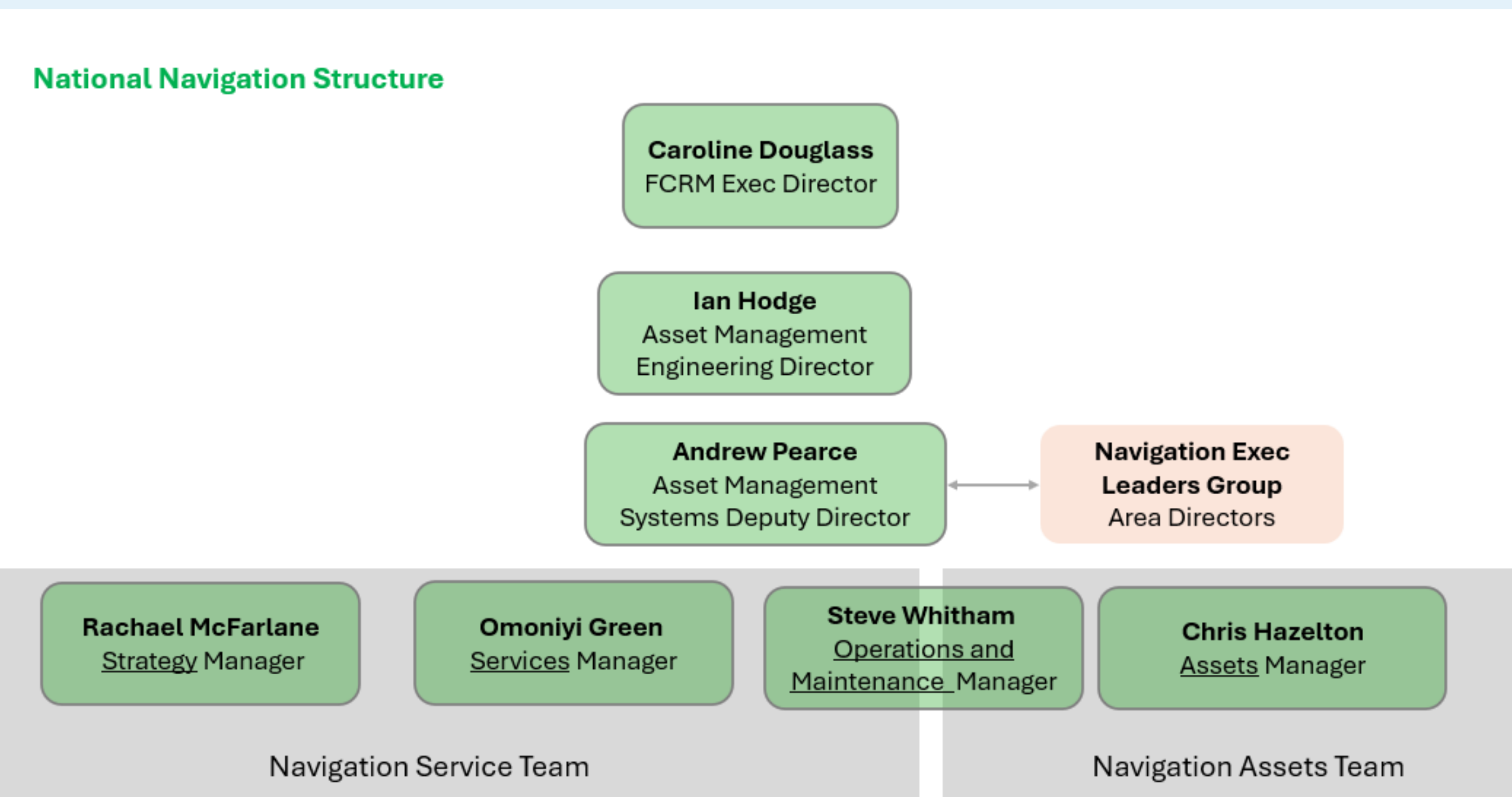


There has been some changes in the National Team. We are now focused on four themes (Strategy, Services, Operations & Maintenance, and Assets), and have been integrated into Asset Management to improve ways of working. Please see the organogram below for more detail.

To link our ambitions and our funding we are proposing to focus on two things in 24/25, 25/26.

- To make improvements to the customer experience
- Stabilise the decline in assets

In 2025 we will understand our longer-term financial outlook and will develop a realistic and deliverable strategy going forwards. As we develop that plan, we will consult with the National Waterways Forum (NWF) and the National Waterways Advisory Group (NWAG).



National Navigation interim engagement strategy proposal

The feedback, advice and expertise of our stakeholders is really important to us, but in order to deliver our two key priorities we are proposing we do this in a focused way for the rest of 2024 and 2025, and temporarily pause the full agreed engagement strategy.

We are proposing to produce a newsletter at the beginning and end of the boating season. We will continue to hold the annual NWF meeting, but will pause the regular NWAG meetings. We will however call short topic specific extraordinary meetings if there are issues to discuss that are important to you that are time sensitive.

We will not be activating the National Waterways Technical Groups (NWTGs) but when there are developments which would benefit from members expertise and engagement we will contact relevant members for topic specific workshop meetings.

At the end of 2025 we will review progress and our full engagement strategy more comprehensively.

If you have any initial feedback on either of these proposals, please contact Navigation@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Creating a better place for people and wildlife

Boat registration charges consultation update

Our consultation on Boat Registration charges from 2025 closed on 16 August 2024. Thank you for your valuable responses to the consultation and for helping us promote it. We had over 1700 responses which is an excellent response. We really appreciate you taking the time to provide your views.

We are now working hard to get the approvals we need before we announce the outcome. You will hopefully be aware that we have had to postpone the announcement due to a delay with the approval from HM Treasury. This is unfortunately outside of our control. We do thank you for your patience.

NWF and NWAG members should have already received an invitation to an extraordinary NWF and NWAG meeting to be held on 27 November 2024 at 3-4pm, where we will announce the outcomes of the consultation and you can ask any questions you may have.

Please do book to attend if you haven't done so already using the link or QR code below.

If you are unable to attend, please feel free to send a deputy if possible, or alternatively don't worry, we will email all stakeholder representatives on the same day with the outcome of the consultation. The minutes from the meeting will also be circulated to all group members



<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/EASU>

Please note this meeting is for NWF and NWAG members only. Area stakeholder groups will be represented by their nominated NWF representative.

Government Spending Review

We have now submitted our bid to Defra as part of the spending review for the funding we need to manage our Navigations. This is for a one-year settlement for 2025 to 2026.

We have made a strong case for the benefits of Navigation, this has received positive feedback on its quality.

We are waiting for the outcome within the Autumn budget on the 30 October.

The next spending review cycle for future years will start soon.

Boat registration digital project

We told you in our last edition that we were developing a new platform for managing our Boat Registration data and were hoping to migrate to the new platform in 2024.

Unfortunately, development of this new platform has been paused. This is outside of our control, and we are still focused on moving boat registration towards a digital solution in the future and will continue to explore all options to make this happen.

Although this work has been delayed, we are working on developing a new platform for managing 'Thames accommodation licensing' data. The current system is outdated and is becoming more difficult to support as we move to new modern operating systems. This work is due to be delivered in January and will give more resilience to future changes in technology and improve how we manage this data.

This is important to ensure we can protect the approximately £600,000 income from these licences which supports delivery of our service on the River Thames.

Asset Management

We are halfway through the capital spend year and we are now preparing to enter our peak construction phase across the waterways. We will report on programme delivery in the next newsletter.

We are currently developing a plan to make sure we, and our assets, are ready for the new boating season.



Compliance and Enforcement

Between now and the new boating season, we are focussing our efforts on progress to develop some key areas that we know from our customers and staff will make a real positive difference on our waterways in 2025 and beyond:

- Work with Defra Group Commercial to develop new national contract specifications and invite tenders from contractors to support our work to remove and dispose of / sell unregistered and sunken boats from our waterways
- Complete priority work to revise and implement proposed processes for removing unregistered boats under Art 16 Inland Waterways Order, having fully considered responses to the 2023 consultation
- Develop a new process under Art 17 Inland Waterways Order enabling lock staff to require and record information from boaters with no registration
- Revise the Non-Financial Scheme of Delegation for Navigation, to allow a wider range of operational staff to issue enforcement Notices

Area highlights



Thames

A joint operation between the Environment Agency, Elmbridge Borough Council, Surrey Police and Surrey County Council was carried out on Tuesday 24 September in the Molesey area of the River Thames. It is the start of a process to see around 70 vessels, currently moored without the Environment Agency's or Elmbridge Council's consent being made compliant with the Environment Agency's boat registration requirements. This will open up mooring space for others. The removal of unsightly and/or abandoned boats and associated detritus will enable the space to be enjoyed by the wider local community once more.

Results: On the day 3 vessels were removed, 154 different enforcement notices were served and 70 advice and guidance packs were issued. Fly tipped items were removed from the riverbank by the councils. The activity generated positive media coverage.

Next steps: All parties involved will monitor the response to the enforcement notices served and take escalating follow-up action if needed. It is hoped that this action will have a considerable deterrent effect. We are already looking at ways to work with the local community to find preventative solutions.



Vessel removal

West Midlands

Earlier this year we saw the culmination of restoration work at Lydney Harbour with refurbished sea gates being re-installed. In a major operation, the gates were removed and transported under police escort for refurbishment before being re-installed.

Dredging was also completed. Operational sea gates allow the harbour to operate as designed, we can manage silt, enable boats to use the outer basin, and make safe passage to the inner harbour.

Our Navigation Team have also delivered significant inner harbour works with new mooring points installed and vegetation management. All works were completed in our role as landowner and Statutory Harbour Authority for Lydney.



Sea gate being craned off the transporter

Area highlights

Kent and South London

Upstream of Oak Weir Lock, East Peckham, erosion had caused a breach. Over the summer, the team monitored the site and observed a drop of approximately 5 inches in the river level as a result.

It was essential works were undertaken before the winter high flows caused further erosion. The repair work was completed in early October. Due to the very remote location, all work and materials had to be delivered and carried out on the river.

The repair involved the use of locally sourced chestnut stakes to stabilise the bank at the breach site. Local willow rods were planted to further bind and stabilise the bank.



Bank stabilisation work from the river

Innovative technology was used to install a new 16-metre long bridge over the entrance to Twyford Marina at Yalding, Kent.

The bridge body and deck are made from fibre-reinforced polymer (FRP). Ramps on either side of the bridge were in block form and could be laid by hand, mostly without the use of mortar, similar to Lego bricks, and removed the need for reinforced concrete walls. The bridge deck was built in the Netherlands. It was shipped to Nottinghamshire where handrails were added, hauled by road to Yalding, and then by barge along the river Medway where it was lifted into position by crane.

The new footbridge forms part of the Medway Valley Walk and provides passage over the river entrance of Twyford Marina and significantly improves boat access to the marina.



New bridge being lifted into position

Anglian

In August 2024 members of the Accessible Waterways Association (AWA) joined members of the Anglian Waterways team for a meeting at the Denver Complex. The AWA has been established to support boaters with additional accessibility needs; including visible and non-visible needs.

The AWA offers a 'blue badge' for boaters requiring extra accessibility, which can be applied for on their website (www.awa-uk.org.uk).

Following our meeting we took a tour of the moorings and the site, as well as discussing areas that could benefit from improvements to enhance accessibility. We would like to thank AWA for their time. If anyone would like to arrange a meeting with us, please contact us on waterwaysanglian@environment-agency.gov.uk



AWA 'blue badge'

We are pleased to have completed refurbishment of 100m of mooring frontage at Irthlingborough on the river Nene, enhancing the experience for all users'.

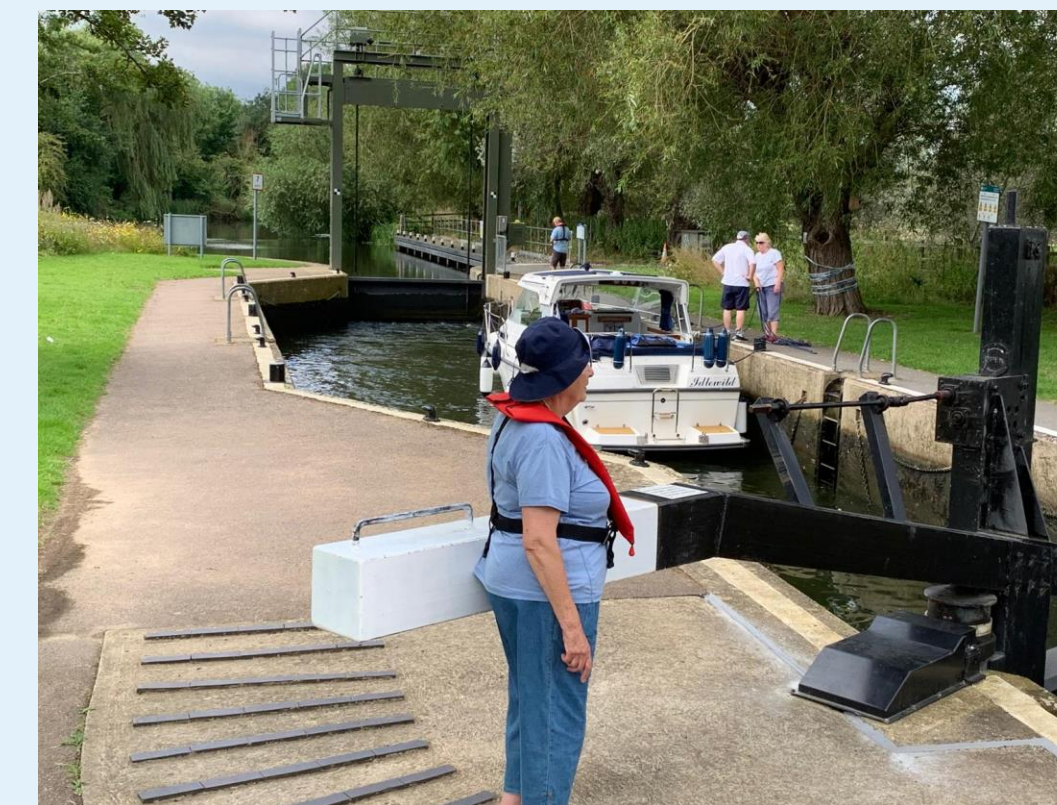


Mooring frontage at Irthlingborough

It is always so rewarding to get out and meet our fabulous volunteers who help our boaters at lock sites across our waterways. The feedback they provide about how much they enjoy getting out into the countryside, meeting people and feeling part of a team, as well as contributing to their local communities, is brilliant to hear.

They have been volunteering every weekend (weather permitting) throughout the summer at lock sites such as Godmanchester, Houghton, St Neots and St Ives (Cambs) on the River Great Ouse, as well as providing support to our staff at Northampton Marina on the River Nene.

We already have new people wanting to join our volunteering scheme in 2025! If you get a chance to say hello to them then please do.
www.cambsacre.org.uk/anglian-waterways-volunteers/



Volunteer at lock

Contact us

If you have any questions or feedback about this update please email us:

navigation@environment-agency.gov.uk

Area teams contact details are included below for you to be able to get in touch with them regards to any area specific issues:

Thames - WaterwaysThames@environment-agency.gov.uk

Anglian - Enquiries_EastAnglia@environment-agency.gov.uk (East Anglia area)

LNenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk (Lincolnshire & Northamptonshire area)

Kent and South London (Medway / Rye Harbour) - enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

West Midlands (Wye / Lydney Harbour) - wye-navigation@environment-agency.gov.uk

For any national issues, please continue to contact us at navigation@environment-agency.gov.uk

