



NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 5 September 2022

Canal & River Trust

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**Record
number of
stoppages
Licence
fee
increase
CRT
funding**



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NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

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Articles, letters, cartoons and photos are most welcome. Images in JPEG format please. Please email your contributions to nabonews@nabo.org.uk or post to the Editor by 19th November.

Cover photo

This photo was taken on the Worcester & Birmingham canal, but could have been anywhere on the network.



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The summer has seen an unprecedented number of stoppages—some caused by lack of water in the reservoirs after four months' drought, but many others caused by infrastructure failures.

In this issue, there are details of stoppages and closures on the Aire & Calder, Ashton, Calder, Chesterfield, Coventry, Erewash, Grand Union, GU Leicester Line and Aylesbury Arm, Huddersfield Narrow, Kennet & Avon, Lancaster, Leeds & Liverpool, Llangollen, Macclesfield, North Oxford, North Stratford, Peak Forest, Pocklington, Rochdale, Sheffield & South Yorkshire, South Oxford, Stourbridge and Trent & Mersey canals (not to mention problems on the Rivers Severn, Thames, Trent and Witham).

The whole thing grinds to a halt

Peter Fellows looks at a picture of a network in rapid decline and what we might do about it.



The wording on the sign near Shirley drawbridge is meaningless as it is a lift bridge

Photo: Sharon Wells

In August alone, there were 31 stoppages—one for every day of the month. CRT says it is pumping millions into repair and maintenance work and has released details of the winter works programme to address some of the problems. But clearly, it is not on top of dealing with its infrastructure maintenance and a great deal more—millions more—is required to have a waterway network that is reliably open to cruise year-round. This boils down to policy decisions by CRT on how

it spends its funds.

Boaters, who?

Most boaters understand that, along with anglers and canoeists, they represent a very small proportion of the population that actually pay to use the waterways.

Equally, they recognise that their requirements are not top of CRT's list of priorities. Many would also acknowledge that it is justifiable for CRT to present to the Defra review a wider 'wellbeing by the water' picture, which includes millions more people having access to canals and rivers, to demonstrate how the waterways deserve funding by the Government.

But without boats, the canals are just ditches that have no greater attraction to the public than local parks or walks in the countryside. CRT would do well to recognise that boaters are an essential part of attracting people to its waterways and, without them, the numbers of visitors will decline.

Eagerly awaiting the Defra report

We should find out soon what the Defra review of CRT recommends for future funding, but indications at present are not good.

If funding is reduced and CRT is unable to maintain navigation on ALL of its waterways, heads will have to roll—and not just CRT's senior management, but also the Trustees who have allowed the current situation to develop. I would call on members who have not yet contacted their MPs to write to them and make sure that they are aware of the impending crisis facing the waterways. Ask them to actively support CRT to get a renewed grant that allows the canals to not only survive, but to flourish.



This is THE most critical time—not only for the future of the present canal operators, the Canal and River Trust—but indeed for the whole future of our amazing waterways. I was shaken to the core by a message sent by CRT's CEO, Richard Parry, in reply to our concerns about the unexpected (and, we believe, unfair) increases in the cost of private boater licences. He said: "I can only offer the general view that we are doing what we can to deliver the best stewardship of the waterways that we can, whilst also growing engagement with and support for, our cause in order to safeguard the waterways future—which is by no means assured, given the financial position we will face for years to come."

This must, of course, be read in the context of the present situation, in which our canals are patently in the worst state that many of us have ever seen—with virtually zero vegetation management for several years, many failing locks and bridges and even simple repairs not being done. (See for example my Regional Report about the situations on the K&A and Mon & Brec.; on the former, our volunteers are actually having to cut down trees to enable the 'Rose of Hungerford' to continue to raise funds to support much of the K&A's precious associated infrastructure, including the world-leading Crofton Pumping Station.)

So, are we being softened up for a situation in which CRT will no longer be able to "safeguard the waterways"? Given current government priorities, can we expect the waterways to be given any additional funding, or is it more than likely that our best hope is for the present level of under-funding to continue? May we, in fact, have to face serious reductions? In which case, could all the work so many people have put

into rescuing and cherishing the waterways become a pointless exercise, especially as far as boating is concerned?

More CRT managers—just what we need

What might be the consequence of any reduced funding? Well, in a perfect world, it might just get CRT to start addressing its own top-heavy staffing situation; I was horrified to see that—almost in parallel with the unfortunate decision to increase our licence fees (without any consultation, of course!)—came the announcement of the recruitment of over 50 additional management positions in CRT—few of which seem to have much to do with actually getting the canals fixed—despite the present mess they are in! How absolutely naive to make these two announcements almost simultaneously!

A critical time for the canals

Chairman, **Mike Rodd**, is concerned about the very existence of some of our waterways.

Surely, when CRT was established to take over from British Waterways, its core function was to maintain the waterways, not merely to act as a PR organisation to attract more people to visit them without any real stake in their future? I have always found that one of the joys of boating was to meet so many folk who were already enjoying the canals—and poor management and maintenance will be a major deterrent to that.

Sadly, one logical consequence could be for them to look after fewer waterways

Sadly, one logical consequence of any reduction in funding of CRT could be for them to look after fewer waterways! So, perhaps we face a situation where some of the more expensive or less popular canals will just simply not be maintained—at least, not to a level on which boats can use them? So, in the south keep the K&A going, but let the short and less-used Bridgewater & Taunton Canal simply silt up and become un-boatable? I can envisage far too many similar situations. Even my own much-loved Mon & Brec canal is only 34 miles long and, despite being the most popular visitor attraction in South Wales, is probably the most expensive canal in the UK to maintain, given its toe-hold along the steep slopes of the Brecon Beacons. A senior CRT manager remarked recently at a meeting that we, the boaters, are very privileged to be able to boat on this canal. Indeed we are, but it would be tragic for everyone—not just the boaters—if it were lost! However, I do worry that this is the sub-text of what Mr Parry was saying in his message to me.

Time to get the NABO act together

So, this is the time for NABO to get its act together and—hopefully together with the other boating organisations (especially the IWA!)—to go public on its concerns and get as much public support as possible, for retaining the canals as worthy of government support.

We need to make it clear that (in this instance at least) Mr Cameron's 'let's get rid of the quangos' policy has failed miserably! I am not suggesting that CRT reverts to becoming part of government, but the authorities have at least to acknowledge that a national, unique

and precious infrastructure like the canals simply cannot be run on the same basis as the National Trust. The fundamental difference is that the latter can charge anyone who uses its facilities, whereas in the case of the canals, few users (besides the easily identifiable boaters!) can be expected to pay.

And now it's your turn

We are coming up for our Annual General Meeting and—being quite frank—your Council is worried about the future of NABO.

As I hope I have explained above, the prospects for our wonderful waterways are in a precarious state, given their present condition and the problems with long-term funding, which may lead to further deterioration or even closures. The need for NABO, both as a critical friend, but also as a mouthpiece of CRT's key users, is more important than ever. However, we are seeing a decrease in members coming forward to help the Council. We are fortunate in that we currently have a very active council but, in truth, none of us is getting any younger and many of us have simply done it for too long! We need an input of fresh ideas and energy. The load is not excessive: about six formal meetings a year, half of which are now held via teleconference and each member is asked to take on the responsibility for specific tasks that particularly interest them. Please do give some thought to coming on board and helping. I'd be very happy to discuss all this with anyone, so please feel free to contact me—see the inside cover for contact details. And do try to attend the AGM—either in person or virtually!

Despite this ongoing tale of woe—for those who can get out onto a working canal, enjoy the last of the good weather!

Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the Council meeting in September

A full meeting with all Council members attending by teleconference. The first and main topic was CRT's increase in licence fees for the second time this year.

This was done without consultation and coincided with its advertisement of a raft of management posts, most of which had little to do with waterway maintenance or management. Councillors accepted that CRT did not have a magic money tree, but were unanimous in their belief that CRT should be more accountable for what it spends where and who takes spending decisions. This is ultimately the responsibility of CRT's Board of Trustees and NABO will contact them to find which trustees are representing boaters' interests and which ones have the expertise and experience to question CRT's management of infrastructure maintenance.

Is there a future?

The statement by CRT's Chief Executive that the Trust could not guarantee the future of the waterways was particularly worrying, especially in light of the record number of unplanned stoppages in recent months, which were not related to the current drought.

NABO is seen by many boaters as the only organisation that is actively campaigning for CRT to ensure that all waterways remain navigable. Councillors will seek to be actively involved in discussions on maintenance spending once the

outcome of Defra's review of CRT is published in the autumn. It remains to be seen whether CRT's 'wellbeing' agenda has been accepted by the review team as a means of broadening the appeal and involvement of the public in the waterways and if, as feared, there is a recommendation for a government grant reduction to the Trust.

Any Other Business

Other topics included the recent CRT boater census, with its focus on liveboards and no option to record shared ownership and the rationale and procedures used to draw up the winter works programme, which Councillors considered to be working well.

Finally, potential problems with lithium ion batteries catching fire were discussed, which is reported to have caused a Norwegian passenger ferry to sink and will be looked at in detail by the BSS.

Byeee.....



NABO Calendar 2022

The remaining Council meetings in 2022 will be on 8th October (by teleconference) and 12th November (after the AGM).

Members are welcome; please just let the General Secretary or Chair know in advance, their contact details are on the inside front cover.

Southern and Welsh Waterways

Mike Rodd



On both the K&A and the Mon & Brec, the main problem continues to be the lack of vegetation management.

Things are so bad on the K&A that the trip-boat, the Rose of Hungerford, (operated by volunteers and generating a significant amount of the K&A Canal Trust income, used for example to maintain the Crofton Pumping Station), is having to spend almost a day a week with its crew cutting back offside trees. These are so bad that boats are unable to pass each other without getting seriously stuck and Rose passengers having to close windows to keep the branches out! The winter work on the K&A does not include sorting out a top paddle which has now been broken for about three years, forcing each of the Rose of Hungerford's 20+ weekly trips to be delayed by up to an hour!

On the Mon & Brec, most bridge holes are impossible to navigate without hitting the bridge as helms are unable to see the bridge edge due to offside vegetation. Indeed, trees are even growing out between some boat moorings! In nearly 20 years cruising on both canals I have never seen such a poorly managed situation. Users of the Mon & Brec were relieved to see some changes to the winter works programme, especially one which proposed to drain a long section of the

Around the regions with NABO's regional reps

canal, resulting in one of the largest marinas being effectively drained for many months—all to allow minor work to be undertaken many miles down the canal!

Anglian Waters

Mark Tizard



As a recent convert from the canals to the Broads, we are still at the discovery stage and are based on the Southern Broads. So far impressions are good with well-maintained visitor moorings with repairs carried out and grass cut. In recent visits, we have seen mooring posts checked for condition, weed-cutters in operation and the rangers' boat out and about. The Broads Authority website seems easy to navigate and everything seems less managed with hardly any signage. Yarmouth yacht station, where there are busy moorings and services, has been closed on the odd day due to lack of staffing, which is a worry. Finding Calor gas continues to be an issue, with most cruisers using the 4.5kg bottle.

Help with energy costs

With the increasing cost of domestic fuel bills, the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) will pay £400 to all households with electricity meters.

Waterway groups have raised concerns that the EBSS wouldn't help those living on boats without electricity meters. In response, the Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change, Greg Hands MP, has confirmed that further

funding will be available to provide equivalent support for energy bills for households that will not be reached through the EBSS.

This includes those who do not have a domestic electricity meter or a direct relationship with an electricity supplier. Details on how and when households can access the support are expected in the autumn.

Drought update—from CRT

In August, CRT reported that 85% of the network was open and fully navigable, 3% was open with restricted operating times and 12% was closed. The following canals are currently closed to navigation or have restricted operating times until water levels recover:

Closed

- Ashton—Locks 1 to 18
- Calder—Lock 1 to Hazelhurst Locks and Froghall Basin Lock
- Chesterfield—Lock 41A, Boundary Lock to Norwood tunnel east portal
- Huddersfield Narrow—Lock 1 West to Lock 1 East
- Leeds & Liverpool—Lock 86 to Lock 1, River Lock
- Peak Forest & Macclesfield—Lock 1, Marple flight to Lock 12, Bosley flight.
- Pocklington—from East Cottingwith Lock to Thornton Lock
- Rochdale—Locks 45 to 81.
- Trent & Mersey Canal—Locks 71 to 29.

Restricted opening:

- Coventry—Locks 1 to 5 Atherstone, opening 8am to 5pm, last entry on flight at 3.30pm
- Grand Union—Braunston Locks 1 to 6 opening 8am—5pm with last entry on flight at

4pm.

- Grand Union—Lock 39, Marsworth to Lock 46 Cowroast, opening Locks 39-40 from 8am—4pm with last entry at 2pm, Lock 46 Cowroast from 8.30—4pm.
- Grand Union, Leicester Line—Watford Lock 1 to Lock 7 and Foxton Lock 8 to Lock 17, opening 10am—4pm with last entry on flights at 3.15pm.
- Grand Union, Aylesbury Arm —Lock 15, Osier Bed Lock, opening 1.30pm and 4pm.
- Leeds & Liverpool—restricted passage through Bingley Five-rise and Three-rise flights
- Leeds & Liverpool, Leigh Branch—pre-arranged passage two days a week on Mondays 10am—2pm and Thursdays 10am-2pm.
- North Oxford—Hillmorton Locks 2 to 7, opening 8am to 5pm with last entry on flight at 4pm
- South Oxford—Marston Doles Locks 15 and 16, opening 9am to 2pm with last entry on flight at 1.15pm.
- South Oxford—Claydon Locks 17 to 21, opening 9.30am to 4pm with last entry on flight at 3pm to clear flight by 4pm.

An update can be found at canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/managing-our-water/drought/water-savings-restrictions.

... and the EA

Also in August, the EA introduced Thames lock restrictions due to the drought, from St Johns Lock to Teddington Lock. Locks are now operated at 15 minute intervals on the hour or 15, 30 or 45 minutes past each hour, completing one full cycle (allowing both upstream and downstream passage), before starting another on the next quarter hour.



A stoppage a day keeps boaters away

CRT reported 31 stoppages in August.

- 1 **Aire & Calder**—problem with Whitley Lock.
- 2 **Anderton Boat Lift**—closed for rest of year.
- 3 **Ashton**—lack of water closes navigation.
- 4 **Aylesbury Arm**—leakage closes arm for a week.
- 5 **Chesterfield**—Lock 41A drained, vandals blamed.
- 6 **Chesterfield**—flash flooding damaged retaining wall between Locks 50 and 51.
- 7 **Erewash**—Gate left open closing canal from Pastures Lock 64 to Potters Lock 69.
- 8 **Grand Union**—Berkhamsted lock gates will not close.
- 9 **Grand Union**—Berkhamsted lack of water.
- 10 **Grand Union**—Three Locks flight closed.
- 11 **Harecastle Tunnel**—one day closure, lack of water.
- 12 **Huddersfield Narrow**—another pump turned off, closing navigation
- 13 **Kenet & Avon**—Crofton pump problem, locks 51 to 60 closed.
- 14 **Kenet & Avon**—Crofton pump fails again, closing navigation.
- 15 **Kenet & Avon**—yet again with Wooton Rivers problem, closing navigation.
- 16 **Lancaster**—Glasson Branch closed as 'dry'.
- 17 **Lee Navigation**—closed at Lock 14 to rescue dying fish.

- 18 **Leeds & Liverpool**—closed from Bingley Five Rise to Dobson's Lock.
- 19 **Leeds & Liverpool**—Newlay Top Lock, lack of water.
- 20 **Llangollen**—Wrenbury Lift Bridge fails.
- 21 **North Stratford**—Lock 17 gate out of cup.
- 22 **Ouse**—Boothferry swing bridge failure.
- 23 **Rochdale**—bad leak at Lock 88.
- 24 **Rochdale**—pump turned off, it is said by vandals, so no water.
- 25 **Severn**—Bever Lock gates worn out, closed for a month.
- 26 **Sheffield & South Yorkshire**—sluice requires divers.
- 27 **Sheffield & South Yorkshire**—Waddington Lock hydraulic failure.
- 28 **Stourbridge**—lock failed with Locks 1 to 16 closed.
- 29 **Stourbridge**—top gate heel post snapped.
- 30 **Trent**—Hazleford Lock electrical fault.
- 31 **Witham**—Serious electrical failure, closes Boston Lock for a week.

On the last closure of the month on the Erewash, CRT commented: 'This is due to the very dry summer we have had, plus we have experienced more incidents of lock gates being left open.' But as Keith Gudgin remarked when reporting the stoppage: "Even if the gates are left open at one end of the lock, the canal shouldn't just drain itself. Who are they trying to kid?"

For sale

Historic unconverted middle Northwich butty

Built by Yarwoods of Northwich in 1936 for the GUCCo, extensively restored by Brinklow Boats in 1990 with a back cabin by Simon and Rex Wain. It still has all running gear, top planks, mast and stands. There's an undercloth conversion that, frankly, needs replacing or rebuilding. One of only three unconverted and the only one in private hands.

For sale for £30,000 as is, unconverted, or £40,000 with a full length steel cabin, fully spray foamed. Other options available. A beautiful boat and a rare opportunity to own a much admired piece of history. And the licence is only 45% of the full price. For more information, ring 07770 271404 or email mail@tigerboats.co.uk. Available for viewing in Bradford-on-Avon



Winter stoppages

CRT has published its winter works programme: 74 stoppages are due to take place before Christmas and 94 scheduled for the New Year. Two stoppages will take place over the Christmas break: on the Regent's Canal at Bridge 17 and on

the Grand Union Canal at Bridge 71a. Details are available at canalrivertrust.org.uk/refresh/media/original/46584-winter-stoppages-2022-23.pdf.

Winter stoppages review meetings

Phil Goulding, NABO's Continuous Cruising Rep, Winter Stoppages and Moorings Rep, explains how stoppages are decided.

The winter stoppages review meetings are part of CRT's consultation process to decide which winter (and occasionally summer) stoppages will take place. They are held regularly, with four to six meetings throughout the year. Representatives from a wide range of interests and organisations attend, including hire-boat companies, coal-boat traders, a representative of historic narrowboat owners, the IWA, a representative from CRT Council and NABO, along with a number of CRT staff who are responsible for repairs and maintenance across the waterway network. The meetings are facilitated and chaired by Sophie Green, CRT's Stoppage Coordinator, following Julia Moore's retirement in April 2021.

The meetings consider the many proposals for repairs and maintenance over the winter period that have been put together by CRT staff, using information gathered from across the network. Further information is gathered at the meetings and additional works can be added or adjust-

ments recommended. One of the main tasks of this group is to try to make sure that the planned closures/interruptions to navigation can be done effectively, by reducing, where possible, disruption to the movement of boats throughout the system.

A 'winter stoppages planning rationale' was developed in March 2016 and a 'stoppages protocol' was introduced in 2019-20 to 'provide a framework for the Trust's planners and project managers in programming planned canal closures'. The aim of these is to help keep at least one major north/south navigation route available both before and after Christmas, along with any links needed between these routes. A Christmas break between closures is created to enable an additional opportunity for boats to move.

All of this is often a difficult task, considering the complexities of the inland waterways network and, in some regions, the limited options available.

Thames lock closures—beginning 31st October

- To 23rd December: Rushey Lock for installation of lock access steps.
 - To 27th January 2023: Romney Lock for lock side resurfacing, wall work and additional safety fencing.
 - To 17th March 2023: Culham Lock for replacement of hydraulic hoses, installation of fenders on lock cut bridge.
 - Goring Lock for lock chamber walkway resurfacing and installation of safety fencing on the lock island.
 - Caversham Lock for replacement of timbers on head landings in the lock cut.
 - Hambleton Lock for repair of lock gate sluices
 - Marlow Lock for replacement of lock chamber timbers.
- See www.gov.uk/guidance/river-thames-restrictions-and-closures for more information.

Dear Richard...

Following an announcement by CRT that private licence fees will increase by 4% in October, following a similar increase in April this year, NABO's **Anne Husar** wrote to CRT's Chief Executive, Richard Parry

Dear Richard,

As you can imagine, we have received much comment from members about this unexpected mid-year increase. What follows is our response.

NABO Statement following the increase to boat licences

Targeting boaters is CRT's easy option but it should not be just boat owners who are expected to make up any shortfall in CRT's finances, whether this is due to the current economic situation or poor management.

The current problems facing boaters include infrastructure failures and low reservoir levels leading to widespread canal closures; closures and failures of facilities; unprecedented incompetence of vegetation management leading to a lack of towpath and offside cutting, which increases the dangers and inconvenience to boaters; increased fuel prices and maintenance costs. It is unacceptable to expect boaters to pay out more money for less; fewer waters to cruise, less services, fewer available moorings as boaters attempt to cram onto official visitors' moorings unless they have a strimmer on board. All this at a time when boaters' disposable incomes are falling like everyone else's. CRT no doubt will blame each of these problems on individual causes, weather and climate change, switching to

new veg contractors, international increases in cost of fuels etc., but some of these could have been predicted and acted on in a preventative way, if CRT managers, directors and trustees were not asleep at the wheel.

Depending on whose figures you believe, boat licences make up between 10% and 12% of CRT's income. The amount they will raise in this financial year would be around £0.5m, hardly a sum to balance the books and trivial in the wider scheme of annual expense. Likewise, fishing licences and permits make up only a small percentage, so neither is a worthwhile target to increase. Apart from hire companies and other waterway businesses, no other group pays to access or use the waterways and it is very unlikely that CRT would be able to introduce charges for cyclists and walkers. Surely instead, CRT should be looking elsewhere to increase the funds available to keep its waterways functioning, such as its investment portfolio for example, which it says makes up around 40% of its income. A close look needs to be taken at the performance and management decisions of CRT's investment division over the last 12-18 months; are the directors and trustees satisfied that CRT are getting the most out of this sizeable income stream?

CRT also needs to take a hard

look at its expenditure, not on waterway maintenance but on all the other so-called jobs that its x-thousand employees have. Are all these jobs essential to the functioning of the charity? A look at CRT's recently published 'organisational structure' document reveals an eye-watering amount of high salaried positions, often with obscure titles and this list is growing. It would be heartening to see these directors offer a temporary reduction in their take-home pay and donate the rest to a waterways fighting fund. Leading from the top is always a good way to garner support.

Then there is the issue of consultation before the licence fee increase was decided and what constraints exist on CRT to prevent it doing the same again whenever it feels like it. To put up the licence fee twice in a year is unprecedented. Boat owners, particularly those in hardship, must have confidence in these costs and be able to manage their income/expenditures. NABO has always pressed both BW and CRT to plan

Dear Anne,

Thank you for sharing some of your members' concerns about our announcement of an additional increase in boat licence fees from 1 October 2022.

We value the broader contribution that boaters make to our waterways, beyond the licence fees that help fund our work. Although each year we spend about five times that total licence fee contribution on managing and maintaining our navigations to keep them open and available for boaters to use, we have managed since 2012 to keep licence fee increases broadly in line with inflation, even when it was close to zero.

ahead on increases and give notice of what the increase will be. If CRT continues with surprise cost rises, it will undermine boat ownership confidence, driving more people to motorhomes and caravans. Not what anyone wants, but boaters can make choices. Should there be a change in CRT's T&Cs to say that the Trust will consult all waterway organisations in future before any additional increases above the planned/published ones are decided? And listen properly to the responses—after all, we are all in this together aren't we?

CRT needs to better manage the funds it already has. A critical look at the performance of senior managers and directors and at the robustness and competence in oversight by the trustees must be performed and published. We need an assurance that this is a one-off increase and that the licence is not going to increase three times next year, hitting the low hanging fruit, we boaters, again and again.

I look forward to your reply,

Anne

When we announced our annual price increase (from 1 April 2022) in late 2021, we carefully considered CPI inflation at that time (3%) along with the predictions for inflation growth; at that time the general economists' consensus was that there would be a brief increase in inflation before it returned to around 4% for summer 2022; hence that was the level of fee increase we decided upon.

Of course, we now all know that we have experienced a much more significant and long-lasting rise in inflation, with CPI now at over 10%. The Trust's cost position is far worse than this headline, notably the rise



in prices of energy, fuel, materials and other construction costs reaches well above the headline consumer inflation rates. The energy costs we face in particular are eye-watering, with no cap on our increase (unlike domestic users); our costs have risen four or five-fold on the 2020 price, adding £millions to our costs (and please note that our single largest electricity use is for pumping to keep water levels up on busy lock flights so they can remain available for boats).

This considerable cost pressure is leading to a projected shortfall in the Trust's finances; some works have been deferred but, with the risks we are managing, we don't believe we can responsibly reduce that further. Other costs are being carefully managed; the range of duties and obligations we bear means that it's not practical to reduce much of this, with most of our wider 'community and wellbeing' spend and spend on towpath improvements, coming from bespoke third-party funders rather than our core funds.

Additionally, the Government grant payment—all of which goes towards the cost of managing and maintaining the waterways—is frozen for the second year (and hence declining significantly in real terms) and will remain frozen until 2027.

This means that costs are forecast to exceed the Trust's income by quite a wide margin this year; we can run with a small deficit in one year but don't have the cash available to withstand something larger. Unless

measures are taken urgently by the Trust to address its budget gap this year (and beyond), we would have to take more drastic action to reduce services.

As the lack of accurate inflation forecasts in 2021 meant that we set our April price increase some way below the actual inflation—CPI was 9% in April, not the 4% we'd been led to expect—it does not seem unreasonable to correct that shortfall, so that licence fees keep pace with the general CPI increase. We can't go back to April, but we can introduce the supplementary increase from October to catch up with the prevailing inflation and giving boaters some notice. We've seen inflation keep rising of course so a combined 8% (4+4) for those renewing after 1 October is still going to be some way below actual CPI in October.

We are of course looking at opportunities to raise income from other sources; some automatically rise with inflation, others (like the grant) are fixed and so this adds to overall financial shortfall. Our investments have performed above the market consistently over recent years—no mean feat—and with so much volatility in the markets currently, it is difficult to see how we can achieve greater returns, though our expert team and advisors manage our investments actively and continue to take every opportunity that we identify.

In noting your other comments about aspects of the Trust's work that you believe are not satisfactory, I can only offer the general view that we are doing what we can to deliver the best stewardship of the waterways that we can, whilst also growing engagement with and support for, our cause in order to safeguard the waterways' future—which is by no means assured given the financial position we will face for

years to come.

I hope my response helps explain why we believe this additional licence fee is essential. We recognise that our boating customers will be feeling the effect of inflation across their personal finances and a mid-year price increase will not be welcomed. But with the highest levels of inflation in 40 years we have to respond if we are to sustain our financial position and continue to care for our waterways. Licence

fees will be lower in real terms, taking CPI into account, than they were two years ago despite the increase.

Whilst we certainly don't intend to have more mid-year fee increases, it does rather depend on how inflation changes in future and how accurate CPI forecasts are; so I can give you some assurance, albeit not a guarantee.

Regards
Richard

Dear Richard—Mike Rodd's reply

Thank you for your detailed response. I am sure you will appreciate the concern of our members, especially given the dreadful state of the canals at this time, with many failures and closures and a wide lack of vegetation management.

Of course, we understand the financial situation CRT is facing—but in many ways this applies to us all. Imposing a significant increase in the licence fee, without any consultation with the boating community, just adds to the issues facing boat owners and is already driving some

of them off the water completely.

I have to say that I am deeply concerned by your comments regarding the potential for a situation in which you are unable to safeguard the canals for the future, etc. I wondered if you could expand on that and explain what you and the trustees are doing to prevent that happening?

As you will know we are in touch with all our relevant MPs to support your bid for future funding, so do let us know if there is anything else we can do to help.

Mike

Dudley tunnel; largely ignored and unused due to restrictive height gauges and rules governing its use (see page 21)
Photo: Captain Peg at www.canalworld.net



Now it's your turn...

The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Boat Owners

Nominations must reach us by 1st October 2022

Please send the General Secretary any **Resolutions** you wish put before the AGM meeting with the names of proposer and seconder by October 3rd 2020.

Please send to:
gensec@nabo.org.uk

or by post to;
Peter Fellows
20 Oak Grove, Hertford,
SG13 8AT

The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Boat Owners.

Now is the time for you to join the dedicated souls that make up NABO Council and stand for election for 2022–2023, so you can have even more say in what we do.

The Council meets around seven times per year and the work is rewarding and interesting... and occasionally frustrating. You'll learn what goes on behind the scenes and make new friends into the bargain. If you feel you might be out of your depth, worry not; one of us will act as your mentor to help you with the few formalities. Don't be shy!

Nominations

Please complete the nomination form, photocopy it if you would rather keep your NABO News intact, and then return it to the General Secretary, by 1st October 2022.

Resolutions

Please send the General Secretary any resolutions you wish put before the AGM meeting with the names of proposer and seconder by 1st October, 2022.

The AGM will be held at Tamworth Cruising Club (Kettlebrook Road, B77 1BS).

Please email gensec@nabo.org.uk for further information

In relation to nominations, the NABO Constitution states:-

Only full members are eligible to be nominated for election to, or to be members of, the Council.

Any member seeking election or re-election to the Council who is, or has at any time in the previous 12 months, held any position of influence or authority in any organization which is involved with the inland waterways, or has any personal interest which is likely to affect their dealings with outside bodies on behalf of the Association, shall declare their interest at the time of being nominated for the Council.

Any member seeking election or re-election to the Council shall declare the full circumstances and current status at the time of being nominated for the Council if he or she is, or has been at any time in the previous six years:

- convicted of any criminal offence,
- involved in or threatened with litigation,
- involved in or threatened with formal insolvency proceedings,
- or the subject of a formal inquiry.

Nomination form for the NABO Council

Nominee

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Boat name:

Signature and Date:

Proposer*

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Secunder

Name:

Address:

Tel:

In 80 words or less, please tell members why they should elect you to NABO Council and any declarations required by the Constitution:

Send to: PETER FELLOWS, gensec@nabo.org.uk or 20 Oak Grove, Hertford, SG13 8AT to arrive by **1st October 2022**

*If you don't have anyone to propose and second you, don't worry, just phone one of the Council members and we can sort that out for you.

Please use the space on the nomination form for necessary declarations, or include an attached sheet.

Meeting with CRT

In August, **Mike Rodd** and **Anne Husar** had another of their regular meetings with Matthew Symonds and the new National Boating Officer, Eleanor Bridgwood-Hill, and raised issues of concern to NABO Members.

Boat licence increase

CRT is predicting a £7m shortfall but assured us that the published winter works programme would go ahead in its entirety. When pushed about the 'non-essential' cost saving measures planned, only some community projects would be affected. Richard Parry has now admitted that the canal system cannot be safeguarded in the future.

Facilities study

Initial findings are to be published in September. CRT will trial contactless payments for pumpouts on two canals.

Leicester Line problems

Three lock repairs in the winter works programme will definitely go ahead, but there is no money to do more. CRT is trying to recruit staff to the regional team but finding it difficult. When they do, they would like boaters to offer to take them on the canal to show them the problems faced.

NAG

NABO remains unrepresented. CRT is still looking at Phil Goulding's application, along with others.

Unpowered craft in tunnels

Mike related a scary incident that happened when he was boating recently, where he narrowly missed two unlit canoes, only because his wife heard them talking from her position in the bow and alerted him. There have been several unpowered

craft going through Islington Tunnel this summer. Matthew categorically stated that unpowered craft would continue to be allowed through these structures and that this would not be stopped. He is asking for boaters to report inaccurate signage (as are the Historic Narrowboat Club). CRT is to introduce a 'Paddler Portal' for use by rangers to report if they come across unlicensed unpowered craft. Matthew was of the opinion that any responsibility in the event of an accident would lie with the unpowered craft if they were not complying with the rules.

HS2

CRT is actively liaising on the next phase.

Birmingham visitor moorings

Matthew hadn't heard of a proposed consultation on reducing the 14-day moorings in the city to 2-days. He agreed that boaters needed to be encouraged to moor in the city as it is underused at the moment.

Vandalism on the system

Apparently there is an unspecified amount, even though Anne's FOI request did not provide any evidence. Matthew will ask the six regions to have another look at their crime report numbers. NABO suggested that CRT should be more careful with its wording when reporting apparent vandalism.

Defra news

Not a lot. CRT is waiting for the new

prime minister to be announced (!). The little that CRT is hearing is not good; probably a smaller grant that will be open to further reduction over the grant period.

Merging with the EA in the future

NO.

Vegetation management

Lots of current problems with the contractors will be sorted over the autumn and winter. Vegetation control will stop again in the spring for nesting birds. Matthew would not be drawn as to whether CRT has actually saved the predicted £2.2m or not.

Reaction to the boater census

Matthew explained how this would be anonymous to CRT because the survey organiser, 'Snap', will be given our emails and will deal with reminders etc. CRT has sent the census to an initial 10% of boaters to iron out any problems before rolling it out to all. So far, there has been a 20% response¹. CRT believes that this will give them useful information on the needs of boaters.

Next CRT chair

If approved in September, David Orr will replace Allan Leighton, who steps down having completed three terms on the CRT Board, including Chair since 2015. David will have an initial term of three years, unpaid, to lead decisions on policy, strategy, legal oversight of the wide range of statutory duties and provide direction to the Chief Executive and his team.

David has had a 30-year career working in the housing association sector where he lobbied for good quality homes for people on low in-

Facebook

CRT's page includes all users of the waterways apart from boaters. The person who runs the social media is over-stretched and CRT is looking to recruit.

Scoters etc. on towpaths

CRT can't do anything about this, although there is an app to report them which will show hotspots that can then be targeted by rangers. Apparently there have not been many reports.

Movement of boats during the drought

Matthew reported that CRT is being more lenient if boaters are finding it difficult to travel the required distances.

Waiting until both paddles break

Mike reminded Matthew that there is still a problem on the K&A which is affecting the trip-boat. Apparently more hirers than usual are giving up on their holidays half way because of all the problems. Matthew will get in touch with hire-boat businesses to assess the situation.

¹From the initial responses, some boaters are questioning whether CRT will say that there's a majority of boaters who are on benefits, because the 'in receipt of state pension' tick-box is under 'benefits'. Others noted that, even if you tick the box to show that you are not a liveaboard, the subsequent questions are all for liveaboards! Additionally, there is no option at all to take shared ownership boaters into account.

David Orr
Photo: CRT



comes. He is an enthusiast for the canal network, taking canal boat holidays and daily walks along the towpaths. Dame Jenny Abramsky, chair of CRT's Joint Council & Trustees Appointments Committee, said: "David's understanding of the Trust's purpose and value to society, together with his passion for campaigning and experience of engagement in political circles, will be vitally important as we work alongside government to secure the support and funding needed to preserve the canal network and the range of benefits it provides."

Report, Report, Report

Anne Husar says let CRT know if you come across a problem.

So, who to report to?

CRT's central phone number, 0303040404, is a useful first step, but then please, please follow it up with an email to the regional team involved, copying in the director or manager of that team and also the CEO, Richard Parry.

It's useful to know that all CRT email addresses consist of the name separated by a '.' then @canalrivertrust.org.uk. For example: richard.parry@canalrivertrust.org.uk.

And here's a link to the current list of CRT directors and managers, so that you can direct your email to the right person: canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/original/46464-organisational-structure-2022.pdf. And just for completeness, this is the link to the incident form if that's appropriate too: canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/reporting-an-incident-accident-or-near-miss/incident-form

There's so much to be dependent about at the moment, from rising everyday costs to the state of the canals, but what can we do? Apart from more careful budgeting, maybe not so much on the first, but on the second there is something all boaters can do: report, report, report to CRT.

Because, if you don't, CRT will say and is saying, that there have been no reports, a sound reason for it to do nothing.

If you encounter a near miss or worse, either on the waterway or

towpath, report it. If on your cruise you find a problem with a waterway structure or the canal that you are on, report it. Don't only have a moan to other boaters or on Facebook or Twitter, report it to CRT because if nothing is reported, nothing is amiss and we all know that that isn't the case.

Now, as boaters, you can sit back, knowing that taking those few minutes out to let CRT know what you are finding on its canals, will be getting to those who need to know. After all, if boaters don't show they care, who will?

Vandalism?

Following an increase in the number of incidents of vandalism reported by CRT, Anne Husar submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Trust.

In the light of so many incidents of vandalism reported as the cause of many stoppages on the canal system, please could you let me know how many of these incidents were reported to the police, generating a crime number and how many led to prosecutions in the last two years?

CRT's J. Fellows (no relation!), Information Governance Administrator, Legal & Governance replied: 'The Canal & River Trust has conducted searches to locate any information held that is relevant to your request. Your request has now been fully considered and the response is as follows: 'The Trust does not hold records on the number of vandalism incidents that have been reported to the police by the Trust. The Trust does not hold any infor-

mation on how many incidents of vandalism have resulted in prosecutions in the last two years. I would recommend that you request the prosecution information from local police forces. In most cases there is no way of identifying who caused the damage unfortunately.'

There remains a suspicion by some that CRT is sometimes using vandalism as an excuse to cover failures caused by inadequate maintenance.

Perceived threats to canal heritage in the BCN area

- The Birmingham Canal water level, which extends over 40 miles, has been maintained consistently at 4" below its correct level and sometimes reducing to 6" below. Only for short periods

during the winter does it ever revert to its proper level.

- At Blowers Green Lock, a bypass weir with a sluice is constantly maintained open, allowing water to pass down the Dudley No 1 and Stourbridge Canals, to compensate for loss of water through leaks that have remained unattended to for years.
- Lock flights have had the gate paddles removed, thus destroying their efficiency and historical authenticity (e.g. Farmers Bridge Locks). Long paddle racks on some lock flights have been changed to shorter racks, so that paddle sluices no longer open fully, lock operation efficiency is compromised. Efficient historically correct paddle pawls have been replaced with incorrect and inefficient ones (e.g. Perry Barr Locks, Rushall Locks). Again all destructive of historical authenticity.
- Many original canal buildings have been demolished. Some of the few that remain are under threat (e.g. the stable block at Holliday Street close to Gas Street Basin, stable block at Perry Barr Top Lock, gauging pumphouse at Perry Barr Top Lock, gauging station at Tipton, Factory Top Lock, Park Head Bottom Lock cottage, lock cottage alongside Perry Barr Lock 12).
- Some sections of canal have been deliberately filled in or allowed to become unnavigable in recent years (e.g. Wednesbury Old Canal from Ryders Green Junction to the Black Country Route and beyond, Houghton Branch, Fens Branch).
- Artefacts of previous, usually industrial, use of canals have been largely destroyed, with the few remaining examples being progressively removed (e.g. on the

Birmingham—Wolverhampton Main Line alongside the Icknield Port Loop a section of tramway used for discharge to and from boats to the adjoining factory has been dug up and removed).

- The route of the Dudley No2 canal from Coombewood to the junction with the Worcester and Birmingham and Dudley Tunnel, which in the 1990s had considerable sums expended to return it to navigability, remains largely ignored and unused due to restrictive height gauges and rules governing its use.
- Hardly any substantial dredging has taken place since nationalisation in 1948 with the result that many sections of canal are little more than muddy ditches close to being unnavigable to deep-draught boats. The exceptions are the central Birmingham canals, which were thoroughly dredged some 30 years ago, but even these are showing signs of needing attention.
- Weeds, saplings and even trees are growing out of the masonry of many bridges, retaining walls and structures, posing an increasingly serious risk to their stability. Similarly, towpath and offside copings and the wash walls beneath are suffering from the growth of saplings, destroying their integrity, with many in imminent risk of collapse (e.g. long lengths of the west towpath of the Birmingham—Wolverhampton Main Line).
- Instead of undertaking repairs to collapsed canal edge walls, bags of aggregate have been lowered into the canal as temporary shoring, which remain in apparent perpetuity—Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak winding hole, Birmingham & Fazeley Canal at Summer Row Bridge for example.

Other buildings and structures at risk

Tipton gauging station, Langley maltings, Chillington wharf
The old BW workshop and boatyard beside the Edgbaston Reservoir following the Icknield Port Loop development
Smethwick pumphouse
Galton and Engine Arm bridges
Groveland (Tividale) aqueduct site
all toll island sites, Horseley bridges and other assets that have graffiti all over them
Remains of the Wednesbury Old Canal from Ryders Green to Ridgacre
Gosty Hill tug building
Feeder channel from Rotton Park reservoir to Engine Arm
Delph stables
Loading rail lines and turntable on the towpath near Rotton Park junction on the Main Line.

Compiled from BCN members by Michael Smith-Keary, Secretary, BCN Society

Restoring the Rochdale

...and its continuing woes

In July, CRT celebrated the 20th anniversary of the full restoration of the Rochdale canal, the first trans-Pennine canal connecting Manchester to Sowerby Bridge in West Yorkshire.

Photos: CRT



The 218-year-old, 32-mile, so-called 'Everest of Canals' has 91 locks rising 600 feet. It was built to carry coal, wool, cotton, grain, cement, salt and timber between Lancashire and Yorkshire, to feed the demands of the Industrial Revolution. By the beginning of the 20th century, the development of rail and road transport led to a dramatic reduction in cargoes and the canal was officially abandoned in 1952. Sections then became derelict, filled-in, with bridges lowered and the M62 motorway built across its line. Restoration began in the mid-1970s when enthusiasts formed the Rochdale Canal Society, which sparked a multi-million pound partnership project, involving BW,

the local councils and the IWA. It used public funding around the Millennium to create a new channel under the M62, a new canal tunnel under the A627(M) roundabout, 12 new road bridges and refurbishment of 24 locks. It was officially reopened at a ceremony in July 2002.

Earlier this year, 'Green Recovery' and various arts projects resulted in rainbow planters being installed in Manchester's Gay Village, new floating reed beds and art installations along the canal. The 'Incredible Edible' garden scheme in Todmorden has promoted canalside growing of free fruit and vegetables for people to pick. To celebrate the anniversary of the full restoration, CRT is promoting its campaign #ActNowforCanals to help look after the canal in future.

Despite these efforts, 2022 has seen the canal closed or restricted for much of the summer: Lock 5 was closed in June due to an offside paddle failure; in July, Locks 1 to 48 were closed and then the summit flight, was closed due to inadequate water supplies, which CRT blamed on repeated vandalism that resulted in low water levels along the flight. This was exacerbated by low rainfall and declining third-party water supplies and surface water that feed the canal. It was open only at 9am on Tuesdays and Saturdays for essential passage, booked 48 hours in advance—CRT teams 'may ask your reason for essential travel'. Later it was open from 8–10am, daily, with CRT implementing a system of operation to ensure that the limited water supply was effectively managed.

Despite these efforts, 2022 has seen the canal closed or restricted for much of the summer: Lock 5 was closed in June due to an offside paddle failure; in July, Locks 1 to 48 were closed and then the summit flight, was closed due to inadequate water supplies, which CRT blamed on repeated vandalism that resulted in low water levels along the flight. This was exacerbated by low rainfall and declining third-party water supplies and surface water that feed the canal. It was open only at 9am on Tuesdays and Saturdays for essential passage, booked 48 hours in advance—CRT teams 'may ask your reason for essential travel'. Later it was open from 8–10am, daily, with CRT implementing a system of operation to ensure that the limited water supply was effectively managed.

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Public Authorities and the Public

Paul Monahan tries to analyse what's wrong with CRT

I have frequent contact with several public bodies, notably the local council, the EA (flood relief, not navigation) and of course CRT.

A believer in reincarnation would think that I must have done something dreadful in a past life! These three organisations may be compared to mythical character of old; in the case of CRT, that of Narcissus—obsessed with its own image. However, they are alike in one important aspect; their arrogance.

This shows in the way in which they treat the public. All have endless public consultations, but to what end? Anything that may be said at these is routinely ignored, because they believe the opinions of the public to be worthless. All share the belief that only highly-paid consultants can produce any worthwhile information. The notion that any member of the public may have useful knowledge, freely given, is a concept which they cannot understand or accept. Public consultation is considered essential these days, but why? Clearly, to tick the box labelled "Have you engaged with the public?" The results of any such consultation can be gauged by this statement, taken from a recent document, "We carefully considered all responses, although we have not made any changes to our proposals before making our recommendations." I will not identify which organisation said this, as it would stand for any of them.

Before we can begin to understand CRT, we must first explore

what it is for. When BW was responsible for the waterways, prior to 2012, the reason for its existence was clear; to maintain, as best it could, the waterway system for navigation. BW existed to support the canals. Now, the canals are there as a means to support CRT. It matters not to CRT senior management whether their 'product' is postage stamps, groceries, railway tickets or canals, provided that the entity 'CRT' continues to exist.

That view is evident from their obsession with 'brand image' and the proliferation of intrusive signs. If they believed in the quality of their product—the canal system—then the product might be allowed to speak for itself by generating increased customer satisfaction.

It is very regrettable that CRT has done so much to alienate those who should be its most committed and valued supporters—boaters. The list of their failings is well known to most of us; maintenance failures, arbitrary restrictions and closures, waste of scarce resources on fanciful, never-completed projects, systematic purging of knowledgeable staff and their replacement with office-based non-jobs; the list goes on.

In this context, should CRT continue to exist as it is or, as our editor has proposed, should it become two separate organisations? One devoted to maintenance of the waterways and their allied structures and provided with proper long-term national funding as befits a national (and world-class) heritage asset, the other concerned only with peripheral interests such as 'wellbeing'?

"It is very regrettable that CRT has done so much to alienate those who should be its most committed and valued supporters—boaters."

Waterways Ombudsman report

The complaints are detailed at www.waterways-ombudsman.org/media/1202/woc-annual-report-2021-22.pdf

The Waterways Ombudsman and the Waterways Ombudsman Committee have issued their Annual Reports for 2021/22. This is the third annual report of Sarah Daniel, the current Ombudsman.

During the year, she received 63 enquiries, 51 of which were directly about CRT, and one concerned the Avon Navigation Trust. The others were about bodies not in her jurisdiction. Twelve new investigations about CRT were opened, of which 11 were closed within the year. Of the 11 resolved complaints, seven were upheld in part and four were not upheld. The partially upheld complaints resulted in recommendations to the Trust, predominately about improving communications. t

A resident living alongside the Grand Union canal complained about overstaying boats causing a nuisance, particularly regarding smoke.

Mr D wanted the Trust to change its mooring policy on this stretch of canal from 14 days to 48 hours to alleviate the situation by obliging continuous cruisers to move on.

He also complained that wide-beam boats are mooring adjacent to his boat, causing a restriction in width, whereby his boat is being hit. I was satisfied that the Trust was taking action to remedy the situation, with signage and recruitment of a Boat Support Licence Officer. It is also working with Mr D and the local council enforcement officer to monitor the smoke pollution and take action as required. I concluded that the Trust had followed its procedure for considering the change of

mooring, but had declined to make the change. The Trust was satisfied that there is sufficient width at this point in the canal to allow the safe passage of boats. I made no recommendations.

Mr T was aggrieved at receiving a letter advising that, because of concerns about his cruising pattern, he would only be offered a six-month licence on renewal.

He argued that he had acted in line with the Trust's guidelines and had completed many miles of navigation in the year. The Trust accepted he had completed an initial long journey but its recorded sightings indicated that, after that, he had predominately stayed in the same locality.

Mr T said he had moved between neighbourhoods, not stayed longer than 14 nights in a single spot and that some trips made were missing from the Trust's sightings. The Trust maintained that, even with the additional trips included, the cruising pattern did not demonstrate that he was engaged in genuine navigation and was not making a progressive journey throughout the network. There were delays in the Trust's complaints responses, which I recommended it should apologise for, and some initial information provided by the Trust may have misled Mr T about the requirements. I concluded that the Trust had acted in line with its policies and procedures and with the guidance it provides. The Trust has now removed some of the wording on its website FAQs referring to 20 miles or more of cruising being expected.

A complaint about the Trust's Equality Policy and the means of assessing a reasonable adjustment.

In 2017, Mr Q developed health problems which left him registered disabled and using crutches. He has a continuous cruising licence and complains that the Trust, although aware of his disability, insisted that he move his boat. He thinks this is not fair and reasonable and goes against the Trust's Equality Policy and possibly the Equality Act.

He complained about the Trust's use of an Equality Questionnaire to gather information on medical conditions and disabilities. He says the Trust does not understand it has a responsibility to provide proper disabled facilities, including disabled ramps and pontoons. It became increasingly difficult for Mr Q to adhere to the continuous cruising policy and he applied for a reasonable adjustment. This complaint arose due to his belief that the Trust had not accurately assessed his needs when deciding on a level of reasonable adjustment. As he is on crutches, he cannot move the boat during the winter months. Having reviewed the evidence, I was satisfied that it was reasonable for the Trust to believe Mr Q had accepted the reasonable adjustments. Mr Q did not feel able to comply with these requirements and he moved once in the two-year period, after making specific arrangements with the Trust to reserve a mooring for his return. Mr Q's argument is that, by not providing the facilities he needs at other locations he has effectively been trapped and unable to move. The Trust advised it cannot agree to a reasonable adjustment which allows for no movement, since that would contravene the British Waterways Act 1995 section 17. The Trust has provided evidence

that demonstrates it has tried to accommodate his needs, taking account of his disabilities. Overall, I did not uphold Mr Q's complaint. There was no evidence of bullying or harassment as Mr Q alleged. I was satisfied that the Equality Questionnaire is a useful starting point and, when combined with a discussion with the boater if appropriate, should be sufficient to decide if a reasonable adjustment can be made. The fact that the Trust has not taken any enforcement action and has allowed Mr Q to remain in his desired location demonstrated it does work with boaters to help them remain on the water. I have found no evidence that the Trust discriminates against disabled boaters by not providing sufficient facilities to allow Mr Q to continuously cruise the waterways. There is no evidence from Mr Q's case that the Trust has shown a lack of understanding of disability issues.



NABO's Welfare Officer, Ken Hylins, comments on the ruling on disability:

"This kind of case will become more common; as we are all getting older our health changes, as does our ability to do things. This case revolves around what is reasonable to expect CRT to do to adapt its facilities. What are the financial costs of such adaptations? The case was presented to the ombudsman, who agreed that CRT had done what was reasonable to accommodate the boater by not taking any enforcement actions on overstaying and also allowing him to stay in the area he needed to. The CRT reasonable adjustment questionnaire has had its criticism in the past for being inadequate and invasive, but at present this is the only document used and it is needed to assess the situation of a boater- it has to start somewhere. In this case the ombudsman ruled in favour of CRT. It may or may not have had the same outcome in a court specialising in these matters and I suspect there will be cases brought in this manner in the future."



Visit the Great Ouse? All those locks!

Peter Earley has news from cruising in the east.

You've got 17 locks from the Grand Union down to the Nene, not really noticeable on the section from Holywell to St Ives Lock where canoeists and paddle boarders mean this is not a time to relax.

Following low water levels last year, some of the EA moorings below Ely have suffered subsidence and are closed temporarily for safety reasons. One of these, Littleport Station, has been completely rebuilt and will soon reopen. The Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) continues to be good value for access to its 26 moorings. These include Cawdle Fen, just upstream from Ely and within easy walking distance of the city and a very long stretch on the Old West River just down from the Lazy Otter. Very few of the GOBA moorings are piled, so ensure your mooring pins are well away from the edge and do not use your bow thruster against the earth bank, unless it's one of the old-fashioned wooden poles! The Old West River continues to be shallow so heed the advice to keep your speed down to 4mph or less. Unfortunately, not all do and we had our pins pulled out twice.

The other good news is that, if you are new to the Anglian Waterways, you may register your boat part-way through the year and only pay pro-rata. And, if you leave its waterways you can now get a refund on the unused part of the licence. All we want now is for the EA to accept electronic payments.

The Great Ouse, like the canals, had its fair share of fallen trees last winter, most of which have been removed, but there are many parts where vegetation reduces the width of the channel and obscures your sightlines at bends. This is most

A Wild Success

Ian Hutson takes a close look at towpath vegetation

The canal hereabouts hasn't been dredged since Thomas Telford coughed his last, so Messrs Boat and I could only get within two long feet of the towpath. I know from visits past that there's Armco lurking at the edge—and that these are the very last civilised moorings before the Draconian year-round restrictions of town

It is impossible not to be in awe of the exotic and endangered flora and fauna that the Canal Company Ltd. has so bravely taken steps to attract and encourage. The bee that I landed on—as he gasped his last—told me that only this morning he'd seen two cabbage-whites and a small horsefly. He urged me with his dying breath to soak in the riches restored unto us. Releasing the flesh of my sliced ankles from the unexpectedly exposed Armco (the towpath having subsided some hidden inches), I cancelled my OAP Fallen Over Ltd. pendant alarm and slipped into The Lotus Position. 'Wow!' I said. 'Wow!' I repeated.

Just look at all of those ultra-rare *Urtica dioica*, *Onopordum acanthium*, *Poaceae* or *Gramineae*, the *Ranunculous repens*, the *Bellis*

perennis, the *Jacobaea vulgaris*, the *Colocasia esculenta* and the steaming fresh *Ogday itshay!* Yes—stinging nettles, thistles, over-grown grasses, buttercups, daisies, ragwort, elephant ears and dog-eggs fresh from the domesticated canine posterior. Those are only the wonders that I can name. Doubtless once the towpath edges are classified as Areas of Special Scientific Interest, others will come to light, possibly snails, slugs, hedgehogs contemplating watery suicide and perhaps even, if we're really lucky on damp days, *Ixodes ricinus* & *hexagonus* (ticks).

Those of you among us who had been hoping for a resurgence of English meadow-baboons, dwarf dodos and sabre-toothed Venus fly-traps will obviously never be satisfied. Weeds and ticks! Those are the things!

Nothing to do with chiselling a penny here and there at all! How could one describe the mowing policy as anything other than a Wild Success? Now, will someone please pass me two elastic bandages, a thumb-splint and a small but perfectly-formed subpoena in re medical costs and punitive compensation.



High Lode moorings
Photo: Middle Level Commissioners

Before you visit please read these notes written by Simon Judge, particularly the bit about licencing, at goba.org.uk/a-guide-for-visitors-to-the-east.

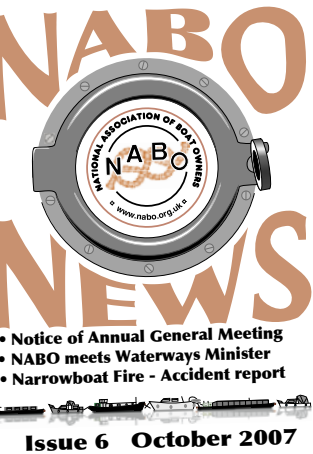


Rewind

Issue No 5 2007

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

LAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS



"NABO aims to ensure that navigation remains possible, pleasurable and affordable."

Wise words from the Chairman and just as valid in 2022 as in 2007. Following heartfelt pleas from the Chair in previous editions, Council Member, Simon Robbins, added his personal thoughts to the theme, spelling out what duties can be expected of Council members. He was aware that in his words *"Maybe being a Council member or Regional Rep looks like too substantial a commitment with meetings, meetings and more meetings?"* And suggests: *"Should we encourage the creation of other roles or 'posts' for members to offer their time in more modest ways?"* It is not

too surprising to say that this situation doesn't appear to have changed substantially in the intervening years and, as we approach the 2022 AGM, it may be a suitable time to ask members to give some thought to ways in which they can help, even though they may not wish to become a Council member. He makes the very valid point that: "NABO isn't just 'us', it's you as well."

"Many members are also members of other national and local organisations and follow matters of personal interests through those affiliations. Should we be sharing reports on local meetings and other common interests with other representative organisations? We tend to do this informally through what I call the 'usual suspects network'—we meet many colleagues from other representative organisa-

tions at meetings—but should we have more formal arrangements in place to take greater advantage of shared knowledge and experience?"

This suggestion was deemed to have some merit and I was invited to join the IWA Navigation Committee as an observer, representing NABO—something I did for a few years. I found it very worthwhile and I think both NABO and IWA benefitted from the exchange of news and suggestions. It did help that I was also an IWA member and indeed a local branch committee member and at times it was difficult to remember which organisation I was representing!

Good Ol' Eugene

Those of you who have long memories will remember the name Eugene Baston, whose departure from his role as BW External Relations Manager was reported in 2007, with the comment that: *"Now three people are needed to do his job."* I wonder if this was an early manifestation that BW (and its successor, CRT) had embarked on the empire building that is still showing no signs of abating.

Wishful thinking? A notice was reported which said: "No fishing beyond the arrows" and below it there are two arrows pointing outwards with only two inches in between. It was suggested that this would need a slim angler to take advantage of the facility!

Letters to the Editor

Opinions expressed here are independent of NABO policy and statements made have not been verified as true.

Boat electrical standards

Let me offer the following comments regarding the Chair's comments on 'Electrical standards for Boats' (NABO News 4, 2022). As I am sure you are aware, there is an ISO standard that covers electrical installations on recreational craft. This is ISO 13297 'Small craft—electrical systems alternating current and direct current installations'. The piece in NABO News referred to the IET Wiring Regulations (published as BS7671) and suggests that the new guidelines for boats will be an 'adjunct to the internationally recognised IEE Wiring Regulation....'. There is a problem here in that BS7671 specifically excludes 'equipment on board ships...' (Section 110.2 iv.). It is not therefore possible for a standard on electrical systems on boats to be connected to BS7671. Presumably, the wording in NABO News was taken from a press release of some sort. Worrying that the 'curtain raiser' contains a fundamental error!

I recall that, when I fitted out my own boat 20 years ago, the British Marine Industry Federation (BMIF) published a 'hands-on' guide to electrical installations on boats which followed the two technical standards in force at the time (ISO 13297 and ISO 10133). I don't know if the BMIF guide is still available. However, I suggest you need to be clear on what space the new guidelines will occupy, bearing in mind the existing technical standard and existing industry guidance. The risk here and it is a real risk I suggest, is that any new guidelines end up not consistent with ISO 13297 (and ISO 10133, covered DC systems—now withdrawn). The erroneous reference to BS7671 doesn't bode well!

John Hancox

What a state!

Currently spending some time pottering around on the northern end of the Staffs & Worcester, I can confirm the canal is in a state: overgrown

towing paths; dragging the bottom with around 2' 2"—2' 5" draft depending on fuel load etc. (some inches deeper underway); difficulty in getting alongside on visitor mornings; getting washed up onto the silt in stretches so narrowed by vegetation it was just possible to get past another boat, then the problem of getting off the silt back into the channel; even bottoming out on the aqueduct over the old mill stream just before Great Haywood; leaking lock gates—Boggs Lock bottom gates leaking so badly a hire boat coming up late left the top gate open (we didn't notice until later) and within about an hour or so the pound had dropped by 4", so having stepped up to the boat when mooring I had to step up to get off with dog. Vegetation blocking the view of where the masonry of bridges is and any guard irons/timbers there may be lurking at water level. I could go on but I know I am preaching to the converted.

On a positive note, last year I wrote to CRT regarding the poor so-called visitor moorings north side of the bridge at Rugeley and was surprised to find they had been dredged and CRT was actually at work extending the pilings northwards. Of course I am not claiming my letter set them into action!

Peter Caswell

CRT needs boaters

Our summer cruise this year covered the Rivers Avon and Severn, parts of the BCN, the Caldon, Stratford and Stourbridge canals. The good weather made it enjoyable, especially not having to worry about rivers in flood; but the lack of rain caused problems for navigation, with some canals having restricted opening or complete closure, which in part decided our route. The waterways were fairly quiet with the exception of the Shroppie, which did not share the drought problems.

Our overall impression was of a system in decline.



The beams of two lock gates on the Stourbridge Sixteen were an extreme example of disrepair, although that flight was better than many other locks in not leaking badly. It was common to pass a boat that had just exited a lock, to find a difference of several inches in water level by the time we got there. Wasteful in normal times, but crucial in a time of drought. Many lock mechanisms are broken or require greasing.

Lack of funding will be blamed for much of the deterioration in condition. Could that be helped by better targeting of available resources and by making use of boaters' experience? Rebranding signs is not useful if the new blue signs are illegible from a boat, or still carry irrelevant information. The contractors that maintain verges and vegetation seem not to have been given guidance. There are expanses of towpath with overgrown canalside verges, making it difficult and potentially unsafe to moor. In the same areas the towpath has been scalped short around bridges, where mooring would be impossible. Damaged brickwork around bridges is often a result of lack of visibility, as bridge holes are frequently obscured by overhanging vegetation on

I name this boat ...

If you have spotted a boat name that made you smile while cruising, please let me have a photo to use in future issues. Here's one from Here's one from Simon Angel



the non-towpath side. A lot of effort seems to have gone into improvement of the actual towpaths, and more walkers are taking advantage of being 'by the water'. That enjoyment should include passing boats.

Using boaters' knowledge could play a part in other

ways. Some tasks could be completed by those best placed to see where attention is needed, such as applying CRT-supplied grease to dry lock mechanisms. There must be a pool of canal users willing to help, relieving CRT of some of the basic tasks so that resources could be directed to more skilled work.

CRT must make use of the experience and observations of boaters if the network is to stay navigable.

Sharon Wells, NB Thomazina

That sinking feeling

As our boat passed The Old Broken Cross heading south on the Trent and Mersey canal towards Middlewich, A small aging steel-hulled boat moored next to the pub set off behind us with a group of four young lads on board. A couple of miles further on, we decided to moor up for the day at Whatcroft Flash. It was then that I heard the cry: "We're sinking!" I looked out of the side-hatch to see the other boat with its bow up and stern down, about twenty metres off my starboard side. The four lads were frantically gathering what kit they could and jumping overboard, as the boat settled at the stern. They managed to get a bow line to the shore and three or four of us attempted to pull the boat to the bank. But it was impossible. The boat had already settled on the silt and all we managed to achieve was to turn the boat side-on to the navigation channel.

At that point I suggested we shouldn't try to move the boat any closer as potentially it could block the narrow channel between the moored boats and the shallow flash. The Middlewich Boat Festival was taking place that weekend and there were a lot of boats passing in both direc-

One of our group called CRT to report the sinking, as it was felt that the boat's position made it a serious navigation hazard for passing boats. CRT did not want to know: "Call River Canal Rescue" we were told. "But", we said, "the sunken boat is a danger to passing craft where it is. Can you at least send someone over to assess the danger, because potentially it could close the navigation?" "It's not our responsibility. Call RCR" came the response.

So, RCR were called. "The earliest we can get there is next week". This was Friday, so there would be a whole weekend before anything could be done. We explained that there was a serious risk of a further incident unless something was done more quickly. RCR said they would see if they could get someone to assess the situation the following day. So that's where it was left.

Everyone was concerned about the danger of a collision, or stranding of other boats that might have ventured onto the flash to avoid the hazard. The sunken boat had moved further into the navigation channel and was more submerged. Some skippers of passing boats were confused about what to do and attempted to go into the flash. The skipper of another boat and I spent the whole day warning boats not to go the wrong side of the sinking. The skipper of the sunken boat returned and further calls were made to CRT, to inform them that the boat was being dragged deeper into the channel by the wash. CRT's response: "Call RCR".

Again RCR were called and the state of affairs explained. This time they felt that the matter was serious enough for them to send someone over to access the risk. Around midday, the RCR guys arrived and decided that action did need to be taken urgently, so they agreed to return with their salvage kit. At 20.00 that evening, the team of three arrived with inflatable rafts and pumps. By 20.18 they were at the boat and started pumping it out. Twenty minutes later they were dragging the boat to the bank. They then proceeded to stabilise the boat, seal up the source of the leak and complete the pumping out. By 22.00 the boat was fully afloat and the salvage operation was over. A very impressive operation, with full marks to RCR for their excellent work at such short notice. As for CRT? No comment!

We were informed by the RCR leader that the reason for the sinking was that the metal cover



on the boat's weed-hatch was missing. In addition, the clamp which should have held the cover down was broken. All the new skipper was aware of was that there was a wooden cover over the weed-hatch—presumably to stop anyone actually falling into the weed-hatch.

Okay, so the skipper was a novice and didn't really know what should have been there. But, he purchased the boat from a broker and was assured that the boat had a safety certificate and had been checked and serviced before he took ownership. This was his first time out on the boat and it sank within 30 minutes. Clearly, the broker was seriously negligent. Fortunately, on this occasion, nobody was injured, or drowned and no other boat came to any harm.

Dean Hawkey, NB Polveithan

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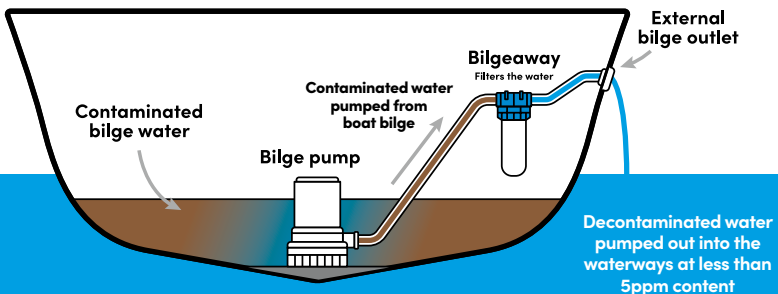
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