



FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

Fund Britain's Waterways Update, May 2026

Welcome to the May 2026 update from the Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) campaign.

In this edition you can find FBW's plans for the main campaign cruise of 2026 to Liverpool and the campaign cruise on the River Great Ouse to Bedford, together with a round-up of this year's events so far and ways in which you can get involved.

MAIN FBW CAMPAIGN CRUISE TO LIVERPOOL, MAY – JULY 2026

After protracted planning caused by various stoppages around the country, the route of the main campaign cruise for this year is decided. The first group left Strawberry Island Boat Club in Doncaster on 12th May and will meet up along the route to Ellesmere Port with other groups from Ashby and Birmingham and other starting points. Here the flotilla will gather in late June at the National Waterways Museum, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, before crossing the tidal Mersey to Liverpool Docks.



Setting off from Strawberry Island Boat Club, 12 May 2026 (credit: Hazel Owen)



Campaigners on the River Nene (credit: Kat On Board)

As the boats progress across the country they will be visiting boat clubs and events along the way to help spread the word. The schedule is set out below. Please do go along and meet the campaigners if you can – they will be delighted to see you.

MAY

12th First group left Strawberry Island Boat Club

13th River Trent (Keadby – West Stockwith)

14th River Trent (West Stockwith – Torksey)

15th River Trent (Torksey to Cromwell Lock)

16th – 22nd Cruising the Trent onto from Cromwell Lock to Stafford Boat Club on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal

24th – 29th From Stafford Boat Club towards Stoke and Etruria on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal and the Trent & Mersey Canal

24th – 29th Boats from Birmingham area cruising to Etruria

24th – 29th Boats from Ashby area cruising to Etruria

30th – 31st Etruria Canals Festival where the groups will be meeting up

JUNE

1st – 6th Strawberry Island group heading up the Caldon Canal to Stoke Boat Club

1st – 6th Ashby and Birmingham groups cruise to Froghall on the Caldon Canal stopping off at Stoke Boat Club

7th – 24th Ashby and Birmingham groups cruise on the Macclesfield, Peak Forest and Huddersfield Narrow Canals via Whaley Bridge to Stalybridge to attend the Russell Newbery Register Rally

7th – 12th Strawberry Island group heads back down the Caldon Canal and up the Trent & Mersey Canal onto the Bridgewater Canal to Runcorn

15th – 19th Strawberry Island group cruises on the Bridgewater Canal from Runcorn to Lymm

21st – 30th Strawberry Island group cruises from Lymm on the Bridgewater Canal to the Trent & Mersey Canal and onto the Middlewich Branch and then the Shropshire Union Canal to Ellesmere Port

24th – 1st July Ashby and Birmingham groups cruise from Stalybridge to Ellesmere Port, where boats will congregate for the safety briefings before crossing the Mersey

JULY

7th Manchester Ship Canal / Mersey crossing from Ellesmere Port to Liverpool (dependent on weather)

13th – 1st August Some boats plan to take the Ribble Link to the Lancaster Canal

GREAT OUSE CAMPAIGN CRUISE TO BEDFORD, 13-19 JULY 2026

The Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) is organising an FBW campaign cruise from St Ives to Bedford, to arrive at Bedford to take part in the River Festival weekend of 17-19 July. The objectives are to draw attention to the lack of central government/Defra funding to maintain all waterways in a safe and navigable condition, to highlight specific navigation and flood risk issues on the River Great Ouse due to failing infrastructure, and to highlight water quality issues relating to sewage discharge and farm run-off. Briefings have been arranged with all the local MPs, and mayors and councillors will next be targeted. The outline plan (subject to change) is as below and more information is available at <https://goba.org.uk/navigating-for-change-2026-great-ouse-campaign-cruise/> or by emailing campaigns@goba.org.uk.

JULY

13th St Ives Waites & Town Quays, Nobles Field

14th Huntingdon, Huntingdon Marina

15th St Neots

16th Willington Grange Estate, an assembly point prior to arriving in Bedford

Arrive Bedford Friday 17th July pm

Participants make their own way back in own time.

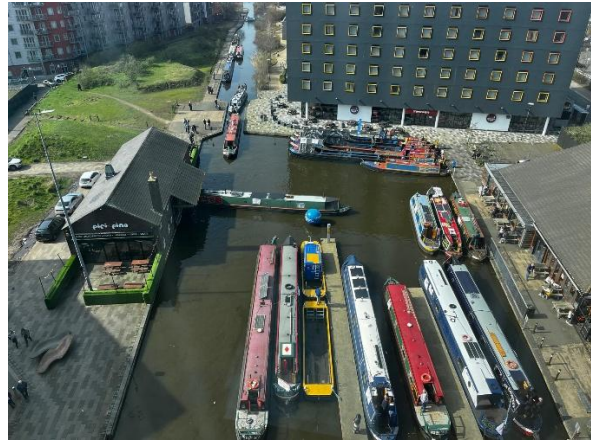
FBW / BCNS ICICLE CRUISE TO WALSALL, 20/21 MARCH 2026

On Saturday 21st March a flotilla of 25 narrowboats, including two historic working pairs, travelled along the Walsall Canal and assembled in Walsall Town Basin to be welcomed by the Mayor of Walsall. Together they made up the biggest group of boats in the basin for some time and attracted television and press coverage.

This was the annual Icicle Cruise organised by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) to mark the return of spring, this year held as part of the FBW campaign. The cruise also celebrated the reopening of the Walsall Canal after an industrial cyanide spill in August 2024 resulted in its closure for 10 months. The canal itself is a case study of the revival of urban waterways, regenerated after near-abandonment and now providing both a valued connection with surrounding countryside and a focus in the town centre overlooked by the New Art Gallery, where IWA Navigation Committee held its annual in-person meeting in support of the cruise.



Flotilla at Moorcroft Junction (credit: Kev Maslin)



Boats in Walsall Town Basin from New Art Gallery (credit: Mike Anson)



BCNS and FBW Chairs with the Mayor of Walsall (credit: Kev Maslin)

FBW / HNBC THAMES TIDEWAY CRUISE, 6/7 MAY 2026

On Wednesday 6th May a fleet of historic working canal boats travelled along the tidal Thames to King George V Dock in North Woolwich where they had been built. Their journey commemorated the 90th birthday of the narrowboats' construction by the Harland & Wolff shipyard in 1936. On the cruise, they were joined by leisure boats dispersing from IWA Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice. All were flying the banners and flags of the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign.

The flotilla locked out onto the river from Limehouse Basin on the morning of 6th May. The boats grouped for photos off Margaretness, some of them stemming the tide for three hours, and then travelled upstream to enter the King George V lock. On 7th May the flotilla locked out and travelled in convoy upstream, displaying FBW banners as they passed the Thames Barrier and the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. A few boats returned to Limehouse, the rest passing Tower Bridge and the Palace of Westminster before leaving the Tideway at Brentford or Teddington.

Cathy Haysom of the Historic Narrow Boat Club, planner and organiser of the visit, said "Many of these boats still work full time, delivering cargo on the inland waterways of the UK. The Fund Britain's Waterways campaign is vitally important to the owners, whose livelihood depends on the continued maintenance and upkeep of the waterways infrastructure."

An excellent video of the cruise can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhpekukS6yk>.



Waiting for the Tide (credit: Kev Maslin)



Boats turning into King George V Lock (credit: Andrew Christy)



Boats with FBW banners (credit: Kev Maslin)

WATERWAY EVENTS

Members of the FBW team participated in the Stafford Riverway Link Open Weekend on 16/17 May and the Crick Boat Show 22-25 May. Future events will include the Etruria Canals Festival on 30/31 May, the Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally on 27/28 June and the Russell Newbery Register Rally in Stalybridge on 24-28 June.

FBW was also delighted to take part in World Boating Day 2026 on 23 May representing UK inland waterways. We flew the flag both through our attendance at Crick and social media coverage.



EXTERNAL EVENTS

On 4th February Defra announced an additional £6.5 million of investment in the Canal & River Trust (CRT) to support repair, maintenance and long-term projects. While obviously welcome, this one-off sum is nowhere near enough to make a significant dent in the figure needed to reverse the decline of CRT's waterways. It also does nothing for waterways managed by other navigation authorities. FBW issued a press release setting out our repeated call for Government to commit to a comprehensive national review of future funding plans for Britain's inland waterways.

FBW also issued a pre-election statement for the local and devolved elections on 7th May, highlighting the fact that 80% of local authorities benefit from a navigable or restorable waterway in their area as well as the threat to these waterways from underinvestment.

FBW ONLINE

Fund Britain's Waterways has a new website: <https://fundbritainswaterways.org.uk/>

Please do visit the website and share it with your colleagues and friends. Please do also follow FBW on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Bluesky](#) and [X](#).

OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT FBW

Lobby your MP about the fragmented waterway network:

If you haven't already, please do write to your MP as well as local and regional politicians and mayors, highlighting the benefits of waterways, the threat to them and the FBW campaign. Guidance and template letters are available [here](#).

Encourage as many people as possible to sign the petition:

<https://www.change.org/p/fundbritainswaterways>

Fly an FBW banner or flag on your boat or elsewhere:

You can [download FBW graphics](#) and use one of the internet suppliers. Or [email](#) us for more help.

Support or organise an event:

Please email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk either for further information about planned events, or if you have ideas for additional events.

Internal and external event kits are now available. Please email info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk if you are interested in borrowing one. The photo (credit: George Seward) shows the external kit in action at the Stafford Riverway Link Open Weekend.



As always, our grateful thanks to everyone who supports the campaign in any way.

Hazel Owen, Chair of Fund Britain's Waterways
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