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**National policy being ignored**

# Confusion as C&RT policy is ignored

There is confusion at the heart of the Canal & River Trust's winter moorings this year – combined with some greed, as prices rise by more than a third in some places.

Back in March this year a policy document, signed off by Richard Parry, looked at short-term moorings and declared: "In order to ensure short term moorings provide a service that is proportionate for the demand and time of year, we advise that visitor short term moorings during the winter period will revert to 14 day maximum stay unless there is a clear safety or customer need to provide otherwise, with exceptions clearly signed on site."

Yet when dozens of notices about winter mooring sites started arriving they stated: "If there is available space at a winter mooring site, visitors may use the mooring for the relevant stay time." A query to Central Shires provided reinforcement that local enforcement teams think summer time limits will still apply. They insisted the length of stay at visitor mooring sites varies.

"This does not mean that all visitor moorings will be 14 days, if that is what you are suggesting, local restrictions will apply." It would seem that a national policy document is being ignored by regional waterways. Immediate reactions from



**Birmingham's Cambrian Wharf where winter moorings will cost the equivalent of £3,000+ a year this winter**

boaters out on the system is to say they are abiding by the March policy document and will be treating all 48 hr, 5-day and 7-day moorings as 14 days between November and the start of March. It would be cynical to note that this year there are far more winter mooring sites than ever before and they cost more than ever before with a top rate of £13.50 per metre per month or more than £1,000 for four months for a 60ft boat. Naturally C&RT are keen to earn as much as possible from this scheme and may hope that not implementing the promise that all moorings will revert to 14 days will assist them. In fact the hike in charges means that already

boaters are turning their backs on even the most popular winter mooring sites with former regulars in prime spots such as Llangollen saying they are not willing to pay a third more than last year and will be continuously cruising instead. Many commercial marinas are now cheaper and offer more facilities than the C&RT winter sites, with one marina on the Trent and Mersey offering three months, with electricity and water beside the boat for less than £600. Whatever the motive there is little doubt that most winter moorings will not have paying customers but there will be many more continuously cruising through the winter months.

In central London there is little choice in the matter as C&RT has unilaterally decided not to provide any winter moorings in the area. They argue that it will make it easier for London CCers to find moorings every 14 days as there won't be any no-go sites occupied by paying winter moorers. Mike Grimes, the new head of boating at the Trust, said: "Not every boater wants to stop moving so we've made sure that where we offer winter moorings on visitor mooring sites, at least half the space will be left free for cruising boats." He hasn't explained the massive price hikes.

## Why are there so many breaches?

This year has seen two very expensive breaches on the canals of the North West and leads to questions about the effectiveness of the Canal & River Trust's monitoring of the system.

The first came when a 730-metre section of the Lancaster Canal, had to be closed for emergency repairs at the end of June. It was the Lune embankment just north of Lancaster which developed a leak. The month-long closure trapped boats on the remote canal as 480 tonnes of clay were required to fill in the three holes along a 20-metre section of the canal. Within a short time the Rufford Branch of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal was shut by another closure, trapping some of the boats that had earlier been stranded on the Lancaster canal as they attempted to get onto the main system.

It didn't reopen until the end of September following the completion of more than £500,000 of repairs to a 200-year old culvert that collapsed in July.

Why these two disastrous collapses were not spotted and dealt with before they became major problems. One answer may be that many of the regional staff are now divorced from the maintenance and repair side of the job which has been centralised and largely farmed out to private contractors.

British Waterways abandoned the traditional method of keeping a check on canals when they got rid of the lengthsmen and the lock keepers would spot problems early because they had an intimate knowledge of their stretch of water and the skills to fix a minor problem before it became a major breach.

Today they are replaced by Asset Inspectors, armed with a tablet computer who check on structures and report back problems to a central engineering office. It then takes weeks to decide whether C&RT is willing and able to do anything about it.

Is that a system that means we will be seeing more and more large scale disruption to our canal system over the coming years?



**The collapsed culvert on the Rufford Arm had to be replaced with plastic pipes**

## Another re-jig at board level of the Trust

The Canal & River Trust has made a series of changes to its senior executive team which it claims will attract new visitors and supporters, while strengthening the charity's focus on customer service, waterway maintenance and repair. Dr Sophie Castell has been appointed as the Trust's new director of marketing, communications & fundraising. Sophie has worked with Coca Cola, RNIB and Save the

Children. Ian Rogers, the Trust's head of customer services, will become director of customer service & operations, taking over Vince Moran's role and will directly manage the Trust's eleven waterway managers, alongside its boating, museums, engagement and education teams. Head of asset management & performance Julie Sharman and head of asset delivery

Simon Bamford will develop and deliver the Trust's maintenance, repair and asset improvement programme, including the prioritisation of major canal repairs and infrastructure projects, and will step up to the executive team, reporting directly to chief executive Richard Parry. Richard Parry said: "Our senior team combines a strong mix of experience and expertise of the waterways, with the knowl-

edge of customer service and branding that we need to take the Trust forward. Frequent C&RT critic Allan Richards said: "What it means is that C&RT no longer believe that a director should have responsibility for discharging its statutory duty of maintaining its waterways. "In other words they will not be replacing Vince Moran."

# The Inland Waterways Association?

**There is no doubt that the Inland Waterways Association has a glorious history, nor that the volunteers of its Waterways Recovery Group continue to do sterling work restoring canals – but has it been overtaken by time and events?**

It is not just me asking the question. At a recent IWA meeting in Milton Keynes one IWA member asked Trustee John Dodwell: "Rather than remaining separate, should we be aiming for an eventual merger, with the IWA machinery serving as the membership arm of CRT?" For his part, John Dodwell was not against the idea. He said: "As to any possible merger, time will tell but I can't see any pressure from CRT on this."

#### No conflict

It is hardly surprising as the creation of the Canal & River Trust means that the IWA has achieved what it set out to do in 1955 when it advocated a National Waterway Conservancy to look after all the waterways. There maybe a little further to go – if and when C&RT takes over the Environment Agency waterways – but it the IWA has got almost all it set out to achieve. The IWA leadership rarely comes into conflict with C&RT, despite regarding itself as a 'critical friend' and even the redoubtable WRG is increasingly working alongside CRT staff and volunteers on major



**WRG-ies at work - there's little doubt that they still have much to contribute to our canals.**

projects – for the first time it is actively encouraged by the ruling waterways body. John Dodwell also said that it would be useful to have the IWA as another external lobbyist when the question of C&RT's government funding came up again, and the same is probably true in any decision to hand over Environment Agency waters, but it is difficult to put a cigarette paper between the two bodies these days.

#### Massive

So I asked the IWA's national chairman, Les Etheridge, whether the organisation had worked itself out of a role and whether the time would soon come to merge with the Trust? Les said: "It seems strange we should be hearing claims that somehow IWA's job is done, as though a successful transfer of EA navigations to CRT (which would then still only account for 60-

65% of navigable inland waterways) is the total measure of IWA's work to promote the waterways for present and future generations.

"The creation of CRT was certainly a massive step forward in extricating the waterways from direct government control, but as its 10-year plan demonstrates, the transition from British Waterways is still only just beginning, and along the way the Trust will need to be kept on its toes.

"This is one of the areas in which IWA continues to play a vital role. As distinct from CRT, which is not a membership organisation, IWA represents about 16,000 members, all of them waterways enthusiasts and many of them boaters. "We work hard

at branch, regional and national levels with CRT's managers and staff to articulate the view from 'the centre of the track'. "Of course we have our disagreements with CRT, but try to resolve them in a constructive rather than confrontational way that could harm the waterways cause.

"At the same time, IWA's size, reach and expertise enable it to campaign suc-



**IWA Chair Les Etheridge doesn't think it's time to call a halt.**

cessfully and lobby national or local government in ways that the navigation authorities cannot, or marshal disparate groups to come together on projects that protect and advance the interests of all waterways users.

"Across the national network there is still huge demand for restoration and here again IWA leads the way. The skills and experience of IWA and Waterway Recovery Group are the catalyst for many practical restoration projects, providing thousands of volunteer hours and helping volunteers learn traditional skills.

#### Festivals

"And not only does IWA fund WRG's activities through its membership fees, donations and

bequests, it also supports many of the independent trusts, associations and other restoration groups who work so hard to reclaim our abandoned and derelict canals. "Finally, many of the vibrant events and festivals that attract so many visitors to the waterways each year are either directly organised or supported by IWA volunteers, providing enjoyment and engagement with local communities and instilling a love of the waterways in a new generation. "Had its day? I don't think so!"

In a way I agree with Les, the IWA hasn't had its day – yet. It has yet to fulfil its full purpose. But in another decade or two ...?

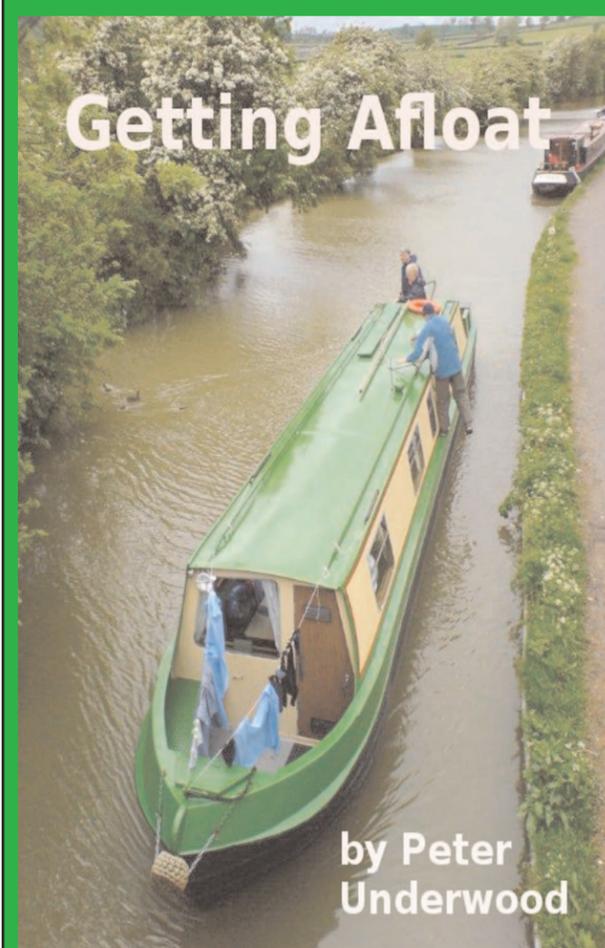
## Scouts to work with C&RT

**The Scouts are to work with the Canal & River Trust as part of a 'Million Hands' project to take social action to improve the lives of people affected by dementia, the lives of the and improving the mental well-being of families.**

*By partnering with the Canal & River Trust, Scouts can choose to adopt a stretch of canal as their form of social action and carry out a range of practical improvements and enhancements all focused around health and wellbeing.*

*Richard Parry, chief executive of C&RT said: "Through A Million Hands, the Scouts will undertake social action to improve the lives of people in the local community by adopting a stretch of canal. This partnership opens up a direct communication link to 500,000 young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and age groups."*

*Bear Grylls, Chief Scout, said: "Water has an amazing effect on people – it connects us to nature and speaks to something deeply elemental inside us. Canals and rivers are great places for us to recharge our natural energies and see the world from a different perspective."*



## Getting Afloat

# Starting a boating life?

Getting Afloat is written by author and journalist Peter Underwood who has owned boats for 20 years and lived on board his 58ft narrowboat for the past dozen years. He takes you through all the basics you need to know when buying your first vessel to cruise the magical inland waterways of Britain. From affordable GRP boats to expensive wide beams the choice is bewildering, but this simple e-book makes sure you think about all the basics. "It is really more about you than the boat," says the author.

**Getting Afloat** is only available in e-format and you can buy it here:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00IWVDN80>

## The Floater

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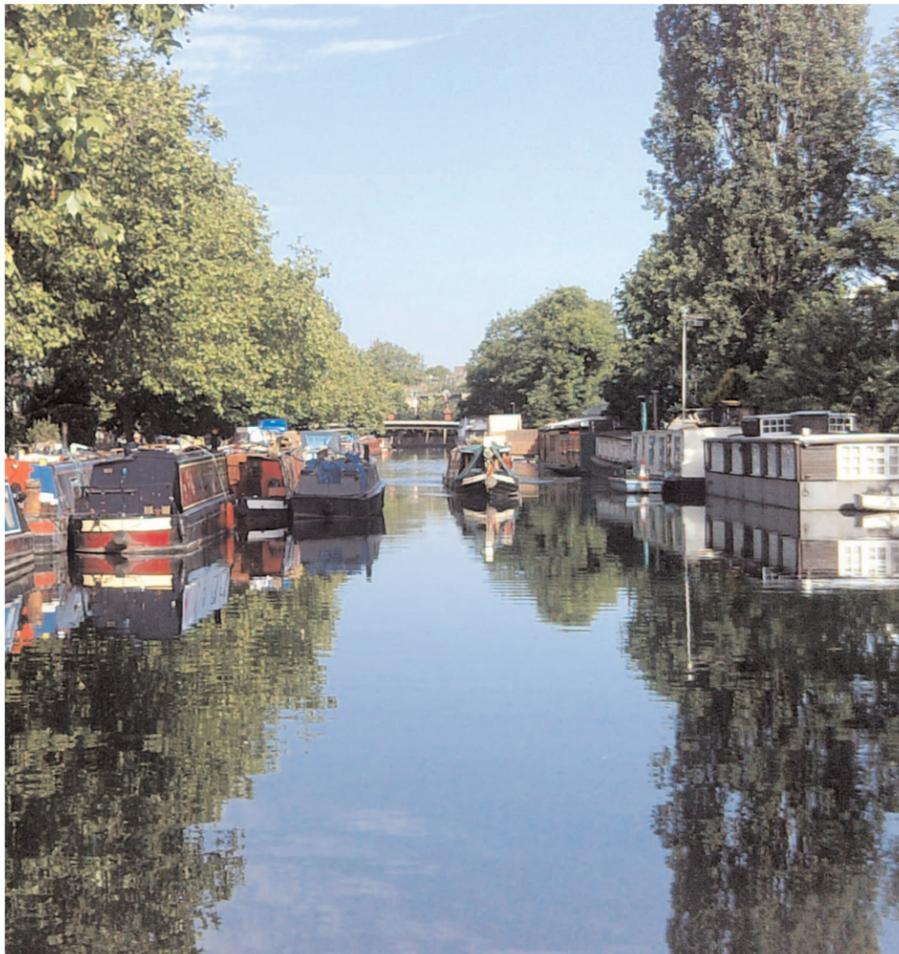
# Boaters on short licences get back right to vote

**Boaters with 'restricted licences' can vote, sponsor candidates and stand for election to the Canal & River Trust (CRT) Council following the intervention of the National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA).**

The rules of the election state that "to be eligible to stand for election, sponsor an election candidate and vote in the election in [the private boating] constituency, you must hold a 12-month canal or river boat licence on 30 September 2015". Chief Executive Richard Parry told the NBTA that CRT had no idea that preventing boaters without home moorings from renewing their licences for 12 months would disenfranchise them from the forthcoming CRT Council election, and that this was not an intended consequence of the new enforcement policy.

#### Invitation

The NBTA raised the issue at the CRT User Forum in September 2015. Mr Parry confirmed to the NBTA later last month that the standard invitation to take part in the election had been sent to those boaters who have been stopped from renewing their licences for 12 months. The deadline to nominate candidates was 14th October 2015. The NBTA claims that CRT's new policy, effective from 1st May 2015, unlawfully imposes a minimum range of movement contrary to Section 17 (3) (c) (ii) of the British Waterways Act 1995. It says the Act does not



**Many of those on 'restricted licences are in busy areas like London - These are boats breasted up in Little Venice**

specify a minimum distance or range that is required for compliance, beyond the limit of 14 continuous days in any one place. Despite that, CRT has stated that unless boaters without home moorings travel in a range of at least 15 to 20 miles, and CRT would expect the range to be greater than this, their licences will not be renewed for the full 12 months unless they take a home mooring. When CRT's predecessor

British Waterways (BW) tried to impose a similar regime (the 'Lock Miles Rules' in 2003), the threat of legal action forced BW to drop the proposal, says the NBTA. It points out that in December 2012 CRT's own Towpath Mooring Q and A conceded that the Trust would be acting beyond its powers if it set a minimum distance. An estimated 350 to 400 boaters without home moorings have had their licence renewal refused for

the full 12 months due to CRT's new policy. Extrapolated over a full year, this figure shows that around 25% of boaters without home moorings are at risk of being evicted from CRT waterways and having their homes seized and destroyed. The NBTA promises it will take whatever steps are necessary to defend barge travellers against this attack on the right to use and live on a boat without a home mooring.

## Secret Garden

The Birmingham Main Line Canal isn't reknown as a place of beauty but volunteers are turning part of it into a secret community garden, planting 500 bluebell and snowdrop bulbs along Smethwick's Galton Valley Nature Trail.

They also planted wild strawberries, mint, and wild garlic as well as a range of native trees. Once established the bee and butterfly friendly plants will create a colourful, fragrant corridor along the Birmingham Main Line Canal, which aims to attract more wildlife to the waterways. Steve Lambert, from the Canal & River Trust, said: "The Galton Valley Nature Trail is a really beautiful part of the waterways and thanks to our group of volunteers the towpath is slowly being transformed into a beautiful secret garden.

"In the spring the canal will be a riot of colourful plants and wonderful smells, it will be a really welcoming place for everyone that visits this part of the waterways."



## Tory Waterways Minister to Chair Parliamentary Group

Richard Benyon MP has been appointed as Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Waterways.

Mr Benyon was elected by MPs and Lords at the inaugural meeting of the Group for the new Parliament on 8th September.

The Newbury MP, was the Waterways Minister at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs between 2010 and 2013, during the period that saw the creation of Canal & River Trust.

Welcoming Mr Benyon's election, IWA National Chairman Les Etheridge, said: "The APPG for the Waterways has benefited from having previous Waterways Ministers as Chairman and I am delighted that once again the APPG will have such a knowledgeable and highly regarded Chairman in Richard Benyon MP; we look forward to contributing to the work of the Group."

The group will be important in influencing Government when the Canal & River Trust's grant comes up for reconsideration during this parliament.

# Living Afloat

## Want to be a full time boater?

**Living Afloat is another guide by author and journalist Peter Underwood that draws upon his experience of living on his narrowboat for the past 12 years.**

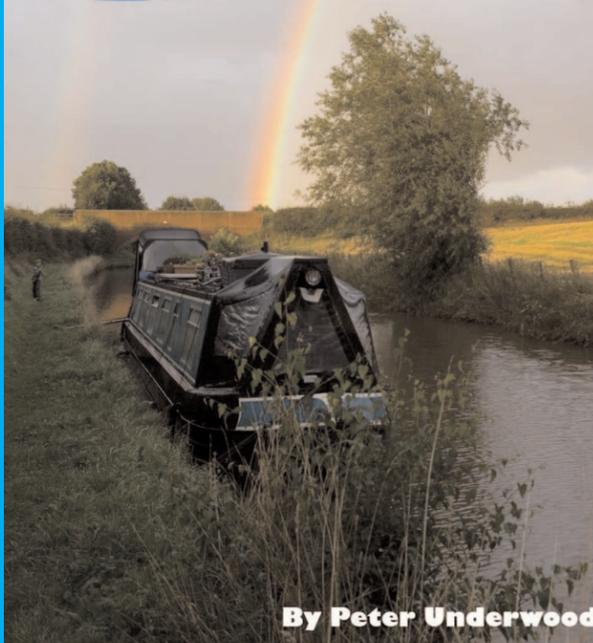
Whether you plan a liveaboard life in a marina or constantly travelling the 2,000 miles of canals and waterways that criss-cross Britain, this book will help you become an old hand very quickly.

An unromantic look at the realities of living in a steel box just 60 feet long and seven across should help the novice discover whether they are yet ready for a 1950s lifestyle.

"It is not the life for everyone," says the author, but it is immensely varied and satisfying if you get it right." With five new liveaboard boaters entering London every weekday this book could help a lot of people come to terms with a life afloat,

**Living Afloat** is only available in e-format and you can buy it here:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B006Z57LUQ>



By Peter Underwood

# More softly-softly attempts to calm down towpaths



**The latest attempt by the Canal & River Trust to calm down the increasingly inflamed relationship between cyclists and other towpath users has been taking place across the country.**

Staff and volunteers from the Trust held events to meet visitors on towpaths across during a week of activity at the start of October to talk about the Share the Space, Drop your Pace campaign. For the first time Sustrans, the cycling charity through which many of the towpath improvement grants are channelled, took a role in some locations. Other groups supporting the campaign at locations

across the country include local bike services, Police and even a group of Beavers and Cubs who will be encouraging visitors to be considerate while enjoying their journey on the towpath.

**360 million visits**  
Built at the time of the Industrial Revolution for horses to tow boats laden with goods, towpaths are now busier than ever, with walkers, cyclists, boaters, anglers and runners – not to mention the ducks and other creatures – all sharing the often narrow waterside paths. There have been many incidents of clashes between speeding cyclists and boaters with animals

killed and elderly people knocked down and injured.

The response from the Trust has been to focus on persuasion despite many calls for national and local speed limits and enforcement.

The Trusts claims that last year more than 360 million visits were made to towpaths prompting the charity to call on visitors to help protect the special atmosphere which has made these spaces so popular. Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, explains: "For many people our towpaths are among their most precious green spaces, antidotes to the pace and stress of the

modern world and places to relax and unwind. They are 'super slow ways', providing a slice of peace and calm through the centres of our busiest cities. "Today they are more popular than ever, with more investment in improvements and better signage, but with that success there can also be problems.

#### Funding

"We are calling on visitors to be considerate of one another, share the space on the towpath and help make our waterways available for everyone to enjoy."

The towpath code 'Better Towpaths for Everyone' was produced after con-

sultation with more than 2,000 towpath visitors and interest groups.

According to the Trust, the top three issues raised were the need for improvements to the towpaths, better signage and better behaviour between visitors.

Last year the Trust secured more than £8m of funding to improve its towpaths, and it is planning a further £10m investment in the next 12 months. Much of it comes through Sustrans who often make it a condition of the grant that speed limits cannot be imposed.

## Red Wheel award for longest flight

**Tardebigge Lock Flight in Worcestershire has been awarded one of the Transport Trust's Red Wheel plaques, marking significant heritage sites in Britain.**

**Tardebigge is the longest flight in the UK, made up of 30 narrow locks on a two-and-a-quarter-mile stretch of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. In addition to the locks, Tardebigge boasts a listed warehouse as well as large limekilns built to supply lime mortar for the brickwork in Tardebigge tunnel.**

**Tardebigge is where that waterway restoration champions LTC Rolt and Robert Aickman decided to form the Inland Waterways**

**Association in 1946, a move which helped transform public attitudes to the nation's historic canals and paved the way for their revival.**

**Important history David Viner, heritage advisor at the Canal & River Trust, said: "Tardebigge was where it all turned around for the canals, so it's fantastic to see its important history marked with a Red Wheel.**

# 15 Open Days this winter

**The national series of free, public open days, arranged to give the public a look at restoration and maintenance work carried out by the Canal & River Trust have proven to be popular and a good recruiting ground for supporters.**

This year 15 are planned, as part of the Trust's five-month, £45 million restoration and repair programme to canals and rivers across England and Wales. The open days will give the public the rare chance to see some of the finest examples of working industrial heritage in the world. Visitors could find themselves climbing down into famous locks in Camden or walking through an aqueduct on Wales' picturesque Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. As part of the programme, the the Trust

is running a three-month survey to record the volume and variety of rubbish discarded in Britain's waterways. From the ubiquitous shopping trolleys, traffic cones, tyres, bikes, bottles and plastic bags to the more unusual safes, unexploded bombs, cars and war medals, it claims to spend nearly £1 million hauling lost and discarded items from the waterways each year. The Trust wants to raise public awareness of the impact of rubbish on Britain's canals and rivers and will be publishing the results of the survey in the spring. Richard Parry, chief executive of C&RT, says: "The Canal & River Trust cares for a remarkable network of historic waterways, which are still working just as they were designed to 200 years ago.

"Keeping them open

and safe requires a huge amount of planning, investment and craftsmanship and involves a wide range of experts, from civil engineers and hydrologists to heritage experts and ecologists.

"As part of this maintenance we will be recording everything we find when the water is drained.

"Sadly a small number of people think it's acceptable to dump things like shopping trolleys and other rubbish in our canals and rivers.

"Our staff and volunteers work tirelessly throughout the year to clear this up to maintain them for the benefit of millions of people who visit each year. We need to highlight the issue to make people realise the damage that rubbish can cause to our visitors, boaters, wildlife and the appearance of our waterways."

