



Newsletter

March 1999

Issue 329

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL A NEW FUTURE FOR BRITISH WATERWAYS

The following document was published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 18th February as part of the long awaited announcement from the Government on the future of British Waterways. As one of the most important announcements affecting the canals for some 30 years, most of the text is reproduced here:

Introduction

British Waterways is the custodian of 2,000 miles of the nation's historic network of canals and inland waterways, much of which is over 200 years old. ...

These canals are an important part of our nation's past and future. The Government is committed to ensuring that they are recognised as a valuable public asset, that their full potential is secured and that as many people as possible, from all walks of life, can enjoy and benefit from what they have to offer.

For too long British Waterways has been starved of the resources needed to care for this national asset. The Government is determined to provide a new framework for British Waterways that will unlock the potential and provide a network worthy of the new millennium.

Partnership

The inland waterways affect the lives and work of many millions of people. Much of British Waterways' progress to date has been based on partnership. The Government's new initiative to unlock British Waterways' potential uses partnership as the key to a modern solution which will realise a new sustainable future for British Waterways.

The initiative builds on progress made to date by expanding partnership opportunities in the public and private sectors, together with an entirely new suggested partnership with the people to engage their enthusiasm and support in caring for a unique piece of the nation's heritage.

Under the provisions of the Scotland Act 1998, responsibility for British Waterways' activities in Scotland will in due course transfer to the Scottish Executive. This paper does not cover any changes that the Scottish Executive may separately decide to introduce. As British Waterways' activities are limited in Wales, there are no plans to transfer them to the National Assembly for Wales.

Public Sector Status

British Waterways will remain in the public sector as a public corporation. The Government considers this to be the right place for an organisation charged with the care of a valuable part of the national heritage and dependent on public funds for a substantial proportion of its income. By retaining British Waterways in the public sector, the Government can ensure proper accountability and control over the public funds provided for British Waterways' and the assets in its care.

British Waterways' status as a nationalised industry, however, is no longer appropriate. For many years British

Waterways' trading activities have been a small and declining part of its operations. Over the last ten years in particular its leisure, amenity and property activities have expanded rapidly. It has little in common with the trading organisations associated with nationalised industry status. Abandoning that status (from 1st April 1998) allows British Waterways to emphasise its role as the custodian of a valuable national asset with activities which are focused on leisure, tourism, heritage and regeneration.

(continued on page 5)

Bugsworth Booklets

IWPS - the people working to restore Bugsworth Basin on the Peak Forest Canal - have just published an excellent set of seven booklets called '**The Bugsworth Heritage Trail**' describing the basin complex and its history from construction to restoration, available at the following prices:

No 1 Bugsworth New Road Bridge to Bingswood Stop Place	£1.00
No 2 Bingswood Stop Place to Bugsworth	£1.50
No 3 The Wharfinger's House, canal office and gauging stop place	£1.00
No 4 The Limekilns	£1.50
No 5 Benjamin Outram - consulting engineer to the canal company	£1.00
No 6 The mobile wagon tippers	£1.00
No 7 The Limestone crusher house	£1.50

... and the following three booklets are also available ...

Limestone - the Bugsworth Legacy	£2.50
A report on the industrial archaeology of the Peak Forest Tramway	£1.50
Nature around Bugsworth Basin	£2.00

... or you can buy all 10 for only £10, saving yourself £4.50 ...

... or for only £15 you can buy all 10 plus '**Bugsworth Basin: a chronological perspective 1795-1927**', '**The memoirs of Martha Barnes**' and '**John Cotton - the Bugsworth wife murderer**', a saving of £7.

Available from IWPS Sales, 41 Tatton St, Knutsford, WA16 6AE.

SOUTHAMPTON CANAL SOCIETY

Established 1967

The objectives of the Society are to foster interest in canals and inland waterways, to assist in their preservation, restoration and development, and to give practical help on waterway projects.

Chairman:

Brian Evans, 19 Lansdowne Gardens, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 8FN. Tel: 01794 517115

Secretary:

Eric Lewis, 51 Friars Croft, Calmore, Hampshire, SO40 2SS. Tel: 01703 860384

Treasurer & Membership:

Laura Sturrock, 27 Northlands Road, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 5RU. Tel 01794 517614

Committee:

Martin Cripps
Paul Herbert
Peter Oates
David Townley-Jones

Newsletter Editor:

Peter Oates, 27 Northlands Road, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 5RU. Tel: 01794 517614

February Meeting

Ron and Myra Glover's slide show - 'The Ups and Downs of Belgian Waterways' was one of the most international that we have so far seen. Beginning on the River Meuse in France, it progressed to Belgium, into Holland, then back to Belgium on a long anti-clockwise tour of waterways both large and not so large. Soon after the start of the holiday, on the Meuse, the Glovers were joined by Eric, Sue and Peter Lewis, who became crew for the following two weeks.

The variety on this trip was quite amazing with most forms of bridges, locks, lifts, freight and pleasure boats. To add to the interest there were the difficulties of three languages, varying rules, vastly differing tolls and by all accounts deciding which of the many brews on offer should be sampled first.

Tidal water was cruised near Antwerp, then back to the south for the "real ups and downs", the four vertical lifts at la Louvière. To finish off, they got as near as possible, on water, to the new, unfinished, gigantic lock at Strépy-Thieu, then had a ride down the Ronquières Inclined Plane one day, and back up the next.

We had all of this in one evening and apart from an interesting commentary and excellent slide show, it was also a jolly good geography lesson.

Their experiences at the four lifts at la Louvière were featured in an article, with pictures, by Eric Lewis in 'Canal & Riverboat' of May 1998.

MEETINGS

1st Thursday each month at 7.45pm
St John's Ambulance Hall,
King's Park Road, Southampton

FORTHCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS

- 4th March** Members' Slide Evening
- 1st April** "Wilts & Berks Canal Restoration" with Clem Barnett
- 6th May** Day Star Theatre
- 3rd June** AGM followed by Waterway Videos
- 1st July** Talk by Neil Kearns of the Eastleigh Railway Preservation Society
- 5th August** Ray Brooks will be Demonstrating Canal Crafts
- 7th Oct** A visit by Trevor Thornton of Commercial Narrow Boat Operators Association

QUIZ NIGHT

A report by Robert Kelley about our December meeting has appeared in Sou'wester (the IWA's South West Region magazine). The IWA Avon and Wilts team enjoyed our American supper "which gave an opportunity for socialising. It was pleasing to have the chance to chat with waterway enthusiasts from other groups. Thanks to Southampton Canal Society for their hospitality and a most enjoyable evening."

A ferry up the Mersey?

This summer, you won't have to simply make do with shuttling across between Liverpool and the Wirral.

On seven Saturdays from May Day onwards, you can sail east from Liverpool along the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal aboard a Mersey ferry (0151-330 1444). The vessel goes as far as Salford Quays, where it moors for the night. Return transport by road to Liverpool is provided if required.

The vessel returns the following day with a fresh set of passengers. The price is £22.

The Independent - 20/02/99

Chichester Canal

Major improvements to the towpath between Chichester and Hunston will commence shortly. These will be funded by monies from the Landfill Tax Rebate Scheme and the Cyclepath Initiative and be carried out by commercial contractors. Whilst there will inevitably be some inconvenience to towpath users until the work is completed, the resultant 3 metre-wide rolled stone path with extensive bank protection will facilitate multi-purpose use and help to reduce the conflicts that arise between anglers, walkers, cyclists and others. Completion is scheduled for mid-June.

CS Newsletter Spring 1999

Distributed by: Hunt & Co, Chartered Accountants, 123/124 High Street, Southampton, SO14 2AA. Tel: 01703 225255

Rochdale: Work under way at last!

It is now over 3 years since the Rochdale Canal became the first successful applicant for major funding for waterway restoration from the National Lottery, but until recently there was little if any physical progress to report.

This was because the actual handover of the promised £12M funding had to await the successful conclusion of a large amount of behind-the-scenes wrangling about matching funding, purchase of the canal from its owners (the property company TCS) and involvement of the local authorities in the Trust established to oversee the restoration.

Although there has been no official announcement that the problems have been sorted, enough money has been released to allow work to start. British Waterways - who its is foreseen will eventually become the navigation authority - have been brought in to prepare designs for removal of blockages. Meanwhile in Manchester, some physical restoration work has begun including the re-excavation of part of the

Easter Bunny Boat Trips 1999

Children may bring their parents and grandparents down the Canal to look for the Easter Bunny and find his Easter Eggs!

Saturday 27 March
to
Sunday 11 April

Boat leaves Chichester Canal Basin at
9.20, 10.40, 12.00, 13.20, 14.40 &
16.00

Fare: Adult or Child £5.00
An Easter Present for every child!

Please note that whilst children of all ages are welcome to participate, the Easter Bunny Trips are aimed principally at the under 10's.

Egremont is completely accessible to all wheelchair-bound persons and those with restricted mobility.

ADVANCE BOOKING ESSENTIAL

Telephone Jenny Pine on
01243 670786

'shallowed section' - filled in in the 1970's to leave a depth of a few inches.

Boats in Bugsworth Basin at last!

Work on reconstruction of the entrance canal and dredging and weed clearance in the basins has been completed to a stage that meant boats could be allowed into the basin complex over Christmas and the New Year. Unfortunately, a slight leak has been identified and the basins are temporarily closed while this is dealt with.

Those with long memories will point out that this is exactly what happened when boats were allowed in in 1975

and 1982, but this time it really is a minor problem and should be quickly cured.

Contrary to rumours that have been circulating suggesting that visiting boats will not be welcome, IWPS have made it clear that once the canal is open they want as many boats as possible to navigate into the basins, as a well used canal is less likely to suffer from re-growth of weed.

A purpose-built facilities block for boaters has just been completed and incorporates an office selling guides and information booklets (see page 1 for a list of recently published Bugsworth Booklets)

Navvies No 173 Feb-March 1999

CANAL SOCIETY SALES STAND

GEOProjects Maps

Inland Waterways of Britain	£4.75
Basingstoke Canal	£3.00
Birmingham Canal Navigations	£3.75
The Broads	£3.75
Caledonian Canal & the Great Glen	£3.75
Coventry & Ashby Canals NEW!	£3.75
Grand Union Canal (each).....	£3.75
Map 1 Birmingham - Fenny Stratford	
Map 2 Braunston - Kings Langley	
Map 3 Fenny Stratford - Thames	
Map 4 Leicester Line - Soar - Erewash	
Kennet & Avon Canal	£3.75
Llangollen and Montgomery Canals	£3.75
London - City and Docklands Atlas	£3.75
Oxford Canal	£3.75
Shropshire Union Canal	£3.75
The Thames Map	£3.75
Trent & Mersey Canal COMING SOMETIME!	£3.75

Ball Point Pens – Embossed 50p

Burgees – Navy Blue - screen printed Society logo on each side £8.00

Decorated Mugs £2.25

Notelets – with drawings of canal and Romsey scenes £1.00
(by Brian Evans)

Shopper Bags – Cotton with screen-printed Society logo each side . £2.25

Society Members Badges – Enamel 75p

Sweat Shirts – 30th Anniversary in Light Grey £16.00
with multi-coloured embroidered Society logo on breast

Sweat Shirts – Standard in Navy or Royal Blue £15.00
with Society logo embroidered on breast

Tea Towels – Various colourful designs £2.50 & £3.25

Tee Shirts – Screen printed with Society logo across chest £6.50
in Navy Blue - medium, large & extra large
in Red - medium

Visit the Sales Stand at Society meetings and place your orders with Paul Herbert or Ray Brooks.

WATERWAYS DIARY 1999

The following is a list of waterway events taking place within approximately 50 miles of Southampton during the first half of this year. Hopefully you can find something to interest you. If YOU know of an event taking place that should be in this list then contact the editor.

Tue 09/03/99 8:00pm. *Surrey & Hants Canal Society* - Roosting Bats & Waterways by Frank Greenway. Westgate Centre, Woking. Contact Arthur Dungeate on 0181 737 4896

Thu 18/03/99 7.30pm. *IWA Salisbury Group* - Meeting cancelled as Branch AGM now to be held on Saturday 20th. Contact Tony Fry on 01722 710192.

Sat 20/03/99 2.00pm - 7.00pm. *IWA Avon & Wilts Branch* - Branch AGM at Swan Inn, Stoford (on A36 Warminster road NW of Salisbury). To be followed by buffet then skittles. Buffet (£6.00) to be booked by 6th March. Contact Tony Fry on 01722 710192.

Sun 21/03/99 2.00pm. *IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - Branch AGM on board SS Shieldhall, Ocean Village Southampton. To be followed by guided tour of the ship. Tea and cake available. All welcome.

Mon 22/03/99 8:00pm. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - Branch AGM followed by Canal Artefacts by Norman Woolley. Meet at Byfleet Boat Club. Contact Paul Fisher on 01372 843569

Sat 27/03/99 to Sun 11/04/99 *Chichester Canal Society* - Easter Bunny Boat Trips from Chichester Canal Basin at 9.20am, 10.40am, 12.00, 1.20pm, 2.40pm & 4.00pm. See advert on page 3. Contact Jenny Pine on 01243 670786.

Thu 01/04/99 7:45pm. *Southampton Canal Society* - Wilts & Berks Canal Restoration by Clem Barnett. Contact Eric Lewis on 01703 860384

Mon 19/04/99 8:00pm. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - Supporting rights of inland navigation by Chris Coburn. Meet at Byfleet Boat Club. Contact Paul Fisher on 01372 843569

Sat 01/05/99. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - Backwater Cruise on Old Woking Stream of the River Wey. Boats up to 50ft long. Visit site of Tudor palace. Non-boat owners may be able to hitch a lift. Contact Andy Simmonds on 01483 576176.

Sun 02/05/99. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - St Patrick's Stream Cruise on River Thames. Contact Andy Simmonds on 01483 576176.

Sun 02/05/99. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - "Beyond the Tunnel" walk on Basingstoke Canal. Contact Andy Simmonds on 01483 576176.

Sun 02/05/99. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch / Wey & Arun Canal Trust* - Canoe and Dinghy Paddle at Loxwood, Wey and Arun Canal. Contact Andy Simmonds on 01483 576176.

Mon 03/05/99. *IWA Guildford & Reading Branch* - Towpath Walk from Newbury to Kintbury on Kennet & Avon Canal. Contact Andy Simmonds on 01483 576176.

Thu 06/05/99 7:45pm. *Southampton Canal Society* - Day Star Theatre. Contact Eric Lewis on 01703 860384

Sun 16/05/99. *IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - Arun Navigation Campaign Cruise between Pulborough and Pallingham. (The 17th running of the popular annual cruise to the head of navigation, campaigning for channel maintenance.) Last year there were 20 boats and 38 people. Why not join them? Contact Alan White on 01243 573765.

Thu 20/05/99 7.30pm. *IWA Salisbury Group* - To be announced. Contact Tony Fry on 01722 710192.

Thu 03/06/99 7:45pm. *Southampton Canal Society* - AGM followed by Waterway Videos. Contact Eric Lewis on 01703 860384

Sun 13/06/99. *IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - Adur Adventure Cruise between Shoreham and Henfield: a 20 mile return 'marathon' flotilla cruise beating the tide into the Sussex downland. Contact Alan White on 01243 573765.

Fri 16/07/99. *IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - Chichester Channel Cruise: Itchenor - Fishbourne. An easy paced flotilla cruise in search of a pub lunch and a lost quay in Chichester Harbour's most attractive arm. Contact Alan White on 01243 573765.

Sun 22/08/99 *Chichester Canal Society / IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - Chichester Canal Water Fair. Fun event in support of restoration of the Ship Canal and exploration of restored section. Contact Alan White on 01243 573765.

Sun 12/09/99. *IWA Solent & Arun Branch* - River Hamble Cruise from Swanwick to Curbridge and Botley. Autumn cruise to a double destination using Hampshire's unique double tides. Contact Alan White on 01243 573765.

First Wednesday in most months - IWA Dorchester Group meets. Contact Graham Pugh on 01305 262305.

Throughout the year - Wey & Arun Canal Trust run cruises on n/b *Zachariah Keppel* on the restored canal. Information from John Lisk on 01493 752403.

Throughout the year - Chichester Canal Society run cruises on n/b *Egremont* on the canal from Chichester. Information from John Cooper on 01243 671051.

Cash for Droitwich

Over £100,000 of funding has been secured from the district and county councils to pay for detailed engineering drawings for dealing with all the remaining blockages on the Droitwich Barge and Junction Canals, and also to establish an option to purchase all the remaining land needed to complete restoration. All

that's needed now is money to pay for the actual restoration work!

New Project on the BCN

Three routes from the Walsall Canal to the Wolverhampton Level of the main line have all been abandoned since 1960 - the Bentley Canal, the Tipton Green and Toll End Communication and the Bradley

Locks Branch. Restoration of any one of these would improve access to the underused northern parts of the BCN. BW have recently proposed restoration of the Bradley Locks Branch with its 9 locks, linking from near the current terminus of the Wednesbury Oak Loop to the Walsall Canal near the Tame Valley Junction.

Navvies No 173 Feb-March 1999

THE FUTURE OF BRITISH WATERWAYS

(Continued from page 1)

Funding

British Waterways is required, under the Transport Act of 1968, to maintain its canals and rivers in a safe and satisfactory condition in accordance with standards defined in the Act. To help it achieve this, British Waterways receives grant from the Government. This is in addition to its income from boaters, property etc., which is not sufficient on its own to cover the costs of maintaining the waterways. British Waterways' success in expanding its external income has been offset by reductions in real terms in the annual grant it receives from Government. Total income has been insufficient to meet the needs of the canal network and a backlog of maintenance, currently estimated at £260 million has built up. Of this, some £90 million is for work that poses a serious public safety risk. The Government considers that this backlog of safety-related maintenance is unacceptable.

British Waterways had already started a programme of work to eliminate the backlog. But with the funds it had available, it would have taken 15 years to eliminate. Following the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government has decided to allocate an additional £8 million per annum in grant to British Waterways. This is the full amount of additional grant that the British Waterways Board sought to enable it to eliminate the safety maintenance backlog over a more acceptable timescale of seven years. This additional grant demonstrates the Government's determination to reverse the years of inadequate funding, and its full support for the Board's aim of eliminating the backlog over seven years. It will enable British Waterways to halve the backlog by the end of the Comprehensive Spending Review period in 2002.

British Waterways has in the past taken out loans from the National Loans Fund to fund investment in its operational activities. Most of these debts date back to the 1970s and early 1980s and relate to uneconomic activities that British Waterways is no longer engaged in, such as freight carrying. The Government has decided to relieve British Waterways from the burden of refinancing this debt by undertaking to phase out most of British Waterways' outstanding loans as they mature. This will save British Waterways the on-going cost of servicing the debt. The Government will, in addition, be providing greater flexibility for British Waterways in its cash flow management at the end of each financial year.

New Objectives for British Waterways

There has been no fundamental review of British Waterways' objectives since 1968. Since then the world in which the organisation operates has changed beyond recognition. We believe that it is vital to modernise the way in which British Waterways works. As part of this, the Government is publishing a Framework Document containing aims and objectives for British Waterways. It is the first time that British Waterways' objectives have been published in this way.

The Document also sets out British Waterways' relationship with Government and responsibilities of the Board and Chief Executive, as well as setting a framework for British Waterways' relations with users, the Waterways Ombudsman and the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.

A new set of standards for maintaining the waterways will be drawn up in conjunction with British Waterways and in consultation with users. The Government will develop challenging targets for British Waterways to ensure that the investment of public funds is used to best effect to modernise its infrastructure and maintain services to users.

Public/Private Partnerships

The Government's new objectives for British Waterways encourage it to take full advantage of the skills, expertise, innovation and funding opportunities that the private sector can bring. British Waterways will, therefore, pursue public/private partnerships (PPPs) wherever possible. It is already exploring PPPs in three important areas, in co-operation with the Treasury Taskforce on Private Finance.

Property

British Waterways has a widespread property estate, estimated to have a total market value of around £250 million. The property falls into two categories:

Operational: valued at £45 million, and made up of property needed to operate the system efficiently and safely. This category includes workshops, land required for access to operational sites etc.

Non-operational: valued at over £200 million, and made up of former warehouses, stores etc. Much of this property has been redeveloped and provides long term rental income to help meet British Waterways' maintenance obligations. Property income (currently £25 million per annum) has more than doubled in the last ten years.

Since 1989, the Government has allowed British Waterways to use income from sales of surplus property to reinvest in development and regeneration. The schemes have frequently been carried out in partnership with the private sector, in developments which are capable of generating further income. A number of joint ventures with public and private sector partners has successfully and strikingly regenerated formerly run-down locations in urban areas. Examples include the waterfronts in Birmingham, Gloucester docks, Victoria Quays in Sheffield, and canal side areas in the centre of Leeds.

Whilst this flexibility has enabled British Waterways to enter into successful partnerships with the private sector, it has frequently been unable to take advantage of opportunities to enhance its estate. For example, lack of investment funds may delay preparation of sites for marketing or acquisition of land to complete an attractive site for partnership development. This prevents British Waterways from maximising the development potential and prospective public sector returns from canal side opportunities, and reduces the Government's investment in the financial and social capital of the waterways, adversely impacting on the return for public funds invested.

The proposed property PPP seeks to overcome this handicap by setting up a long-term partnership with a private sector institution such as a bank or insurance company. The private sector partner would be able to bring additional funds and expertise to take forward selected development opportunities. In turn, British Waterways would identify suitable land holdings and contribute their skills in the field of water-related development and regeneration.

Water Transfer

British Waterways already uses its network to move supplies of untreated water to serve individual water companies (e.g. Bristol Water via the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal). It has also successfully carried out water transfer for its own operational needs (e.g. extracting rising groundwater from disused mines under Birmingham to maintain water levels for navigation on the Oxford Canal which has historically suffered from poor water supply).

Studies by British Waterways and implementation of pilot

(Continued on page 6)

THE FUTURE OF BRITISH WATERWAYS

(Continued from page 5)

schemes have shown that national transfer on a wider scale is technically and environmentally feasible in many parts of the network.

British Waterways' network offers a ready made infrastructure with real potential to transfer water from places of surplus to places of shortage at a competitive cost compared to other solutions. Substantial investment would be required and the environmental impact of such schemes would need careful evaluation. Schemes may involve reversing the flow of water in parts of the canal network, the installation of backpumps at locks, the lowering of canal beds and the raising of canal banks to cope with an increase in the volume and flow of the water, and the installation of short lengths of pipeline to avoid excessive flows of water around and through restricted-width bridges etc. There would be indirect benefits to British Waterways and to canal users, in that improvements to the infrastructure would mean improved navigation depths and greater security of water flow, and a possible reduction in the backlog of safety maintenance. The PPP would entail a partnership with a private sector organisation to implement further development of the network for this purpose.

Maintenance

The waterway network includes 3,200 km of canals, 4,763 bridges, 397 aqueducts, 60 tunnels, 1,549 locks, 89 reservoirs, nearly 3,000 listed structures and ancient monuments and 66 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Much of the network is over 200 years old. British Waterways has worked hard to ensure best value for money in maintaining these special assets. Most work is already put out to competitive tender and is often undertaken in partnering arrangements with contractors to improve value for money.

The Government continues to develop new, innovative forms of long term public/private partnership for the development and maintenance of engineering structures in the public sector. Such partnerships, modelled for example on those currently being explored by the Environment Agency for the Broadlands flood defence scheme in East Anglia, could also be suitable for improvement and maintenance of British Waterways' canals. British Waterways will be evaluating this approach.

Partnerships with the Public Sector

British Waterways has been progressively making agreements with local authorities and other public sector organisations under which funding for improvements to canal towpaths and other infrastructure has been secured for the benefit of the local area.

The Government welcomes this approach and is encouraging British Waterways to broaden it into long term partnerships, which will provide agreed environmental, economic and social benefits in each local area. Broader and more permanent partnerships with local authorities and other public bodies, including the National assembly for Wales and the new Regional Development Agencies, would enable the local and regional benefits of the waterway network to be tailored to local needs and maximised.

Partnership with the People

British Waterways' network is visited each year by 10 million people, of whom only a small proportion own boats or take holidays on the canals. The waterways are used extensively for walking, angling, cycling, wildlife pursuits and visiting heritage buildings and structures.

Many of these visitors have only limited contact with British Waterways, but they represent a potential pool of enthusiasm,

support and even expertise which, if properly engaged in partnership, would bring major benefit to British Waterways themselves and the public at large.

The Government is keen to see British Waterways develop a closer relationship with the millions of people who use and value its facilities. The Government is therefore asking British Waterways to consult on a membership scheme under which members would be offered a range of benefits in return for an annual subscription. Such a scheme would enable British Waterways to develop its relations with the widest section of the public who use, care for, or live near the waterways. Members' benefits might include opportunities to take part in events organised by British Waterways as well as financial benefits.

A membership scheme also offers an opportunity for identifying a candidate, from those who actually use its waterways, for the Board of British Waterways. The Government therefore proposes that, once the membership scheme had exceeded 100,000 members, it would invite members to elect one of their number to be nominated to the Government for a seat on the Board of British Waterways.

The membership scheme might be allied to a charitable trust which would be parallel to, but independent from, British Waterways. The trust's purpose might be related to the preservation and restoration of the canal heritage and environment and to the care of historical artefacts and archives. The Government has asked British Waterways to include this possibility in its consultation.

Improved Openness and Accountability

As a public corporation, British Waterways is required to present its annual accounts and report to Parliament. It is also required to submit a corporate plan to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions each year. British Waterways has for many years, however, gone much further than this, holding regular meetings with user groups at national and regional level and publishing a range of documents about its activities and policies.

In 1998, for the first time, British Waterways published a document ("Our Plan for the Future 1999-2003") containing proposals for its future activities. It held a public meeting to launch the document and to publish the annual accounts and report for 1997/98. British Waterways intends to develop this approach and the new Framework Document formally sets out the requirement for British Waterways to publish a summary of its annual corporate plan and hold an annual public meeting. In line with open Government policies, British Waterways will be developing the range of information that it publishes about its activities, plans and finances.

Conclusion

... This Government is determined to start a new future for British Waterways which will see public and private skills and enthusiasm harnessed to unlock the full potential of British Waterways. This document sets out a way forward which:

- * provides public funding to modernise the network;
- * maximises the input that the private sector can make; and
- * draws in and engages the millions who love our special national heritage.

Further information can be found on the Internet at <http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/bw/index.htm>.

An extensive web site related to the proposals for a membership scheme and trust to run in parallel with British Waterways - includes an on-line survey and mailing list can be found at <http://www.waterwaypartners.co.uk/>