IWA Annual General Meeting 2026

THE IWA's 67th Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday, September 19 at the University of Worcester, St John's Campus, Worcester WR2 6AJ.

Alongside the formal AGM, attendees will hear the latest on the IWA's campaigning work, together with updates on the new IWA Restoration Development Group and the IWA Restoration Panel, and how these are helping to shape IWA's approach to the restoration sector.

The afternoon offers a chance to catch up with other members over lunch, celebrate our achievements in our 80th year, before enjoying an optional guided walk. Members can book at www.waterways.org.uk/agm

Work parties

September 6 and 15: Volunteer on the Northampton Arm. Our work parties are usually held one weekday and one Sunday a month along the arm. The usual start time is 9.30am. Some of the most common tasks undertaken include vegetation clearance, weeding, litter-picking and lock painting. Contact Paul Lynam at paul.lynam@waterways.org.uk

September 17: Monthly work party on the Cheshire Lock flight of the Trent & Mersey Canal, between Kidsgrove and Wheelock, from 10am. Contact Tony Walker on 07708 320470 or walker.tony31@gmail.com

September 19 and 20: The IWA Manchester Branch will be working with Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society at Prestolee at their regular work site, Nob End Locks, near Prestolee Road, Little Lever, Bolton BL3 1AD. The group works from a base in the blue cabins near the top of the locks, adjacent to the summit pound from 10am. Contact Barry McGuinness on 07875 999825.

'Council has a lack of vision' for Exeter's new A379 canal bridges

Responding to the A379 Bridges Replacement Scheme consultation, the IWA and the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal & Heritage Harbour also believe that the consultation is unrepresentative.

DESPITE Devon County Council proposing five options for the new bridges at stakeholders' meetings in October last year, the now-closed consultation presented only one to the public: replacing bridges at a similarly restrictive height as the current structures.

The Exeter Ship Canal provides a five-mile navigable route between Exeter Canal Basin, in the heart of the city, and the English Channel via Turf Lock and the Exe Estuary. The two adjacent bridges carry the A379, a busy dual carriageway, across the canal at its mid-point. Currently, they have exceptionally low air drafts (the clearance between water level and underside of a bridge), which present a barrier to boaters, paddleboarders, cyclists and pedestrians.

IWA representative Ray Alexander said: "Devon County Council appears to be back-tracking on its own Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for the scheme, which has previously been approved by the Department for Transport. For example, the SOBC identified the potential for cyclists and pedestrians to pass underneath the new bridges if they were built higher, but this significant safety benefit would be lost if they now press ahead without doing so."

The IWA and FESCHH point to numerous opportunities and benefits that raising the height of the bridges could bring to the area's community, economy and environment. These include increasing active travel opportunities and safety, enabling sustainable freight use of the canal, reducing pollution and improving the environment.

A paddleboarder demonstrates the height of the A379 bridges. SUPPLIED

Mr Alexander added: "When towns and cities are introducing congestion management and seeking low-carbon transport alternatives, it would be short-sighted to rebuild the A379 bridges at a height that discourages environmentally-friendly freight opportunities."

Ellen Stuart, of FESCHH, said: "Increased use of the canal would encourage more visitors to the basin, quay and city, boosting existing businesses and creating the potential for new ones.

"The scheme proposes spending up to £50m of public money on replacing bridges and associated works. If this investment is to serve Exeter and Devon for the next 60-plus years, it should future-proof Exeter Ship Canal for leisure, freight and passenger use, rather than merely reproducing the existing constraints."

IWA secures improvements to trust's Restoration Delivery Plan

THE IWA has worked with Canal & River Trust to help improve its revised Restoration Delivery Plan (RDP), which will provide the framework for future restoration of canals not currently open to boats and managed by the trust. Through reinforcing the importance of a friendly approach to waterway restoration and encouraging CRT to consider restoration as a core charitable objective rather than a secondary priority, the IWA is pleased that the trust has listened and that the result is an improved plan.

The Restoration Delivery Plan is intended to set out how the trust will work with restoration promoters and other partners to deliver the restoration of waterways in England and Wales. As a critical friend to CRT, the IWA has engaged constructively with the Trust's senior management to ensure that restoration receives the support and strategic priority it deserves.

Through detailed engagement with the plan, the IWA has helped move the document towards a more positive, practical and delivery-focused one that better reflects the ambitions expected of a major national charity.

The discussions have also led to improvements in CRT's internal restoration processes and a better mutual understanding of how restoration activity should be managed across the trust's network. This, however, must be matched by restoration groups becoming increasingly professional when undertaking construction work, both onsite and with design and health and safety paperwork. The IWA believes this revised approach should act as a catalyst for raising standards across the restoration movement. Through its technical expertise, the IWA is well placed to provide the guidance and practical assistance that restoration organisations need to deliver successful projects.

Waterway restoration is one of the IWA's strategic priorities for 2026, and the association will continue working with CRT, restoration promoters and other parties to help build a stronger, more professional and more successful restoration sector.

George Rogers, chair of the IWA's Restoration Delivery Group, said: "The publication of the revised Restoration Delivery Plan is a significant step in the right direction. The IWA has worked constructively with the CRT to strengthen both the plan itself and the processes that support it, and we are pleased that this engagement has resulted in meaningful improvements. We will continue to engage positively to support the successful delivery of these shared objectives."

Historic river's secret war role is revealed

AN exhibition at Buckler's Hard Shipyard is shedding light on the hidden wartime history of the Beaulieu River, revealing how a tranquil Hampshire waterway was transformed into a vital military asset during the Second World War.

Beaulieu River At War opened at the Shipyard Gallery following a launch by historian Dan Snow. Running daily until late October, it draws on shipyard records, estate archives and first-hand accounts to chart the area's dramatic wartime shift.

Organisers say the river became a covert frontline after being requisitioned by the Royal Navy. Training activity intensified, while secrecy was tightened and the surrounding shoreline filled with concealed installations supporting coastal defence and preparations for the D-Day landings.

Artefacts on show in the exhibition. BUCKLER'S HARD/FACEBOOK

The display also highlights the shipyard's rapid move to wartime production, including its contribution to the construction of components for the Mulberry Harbours, which were essential to the Allied invasion of Normandy.

Curated by Marc Heighway and Mary MontaguScott, it offers visitors a vivid insight into how the landscape of Buckler's Hard was reshaped by conflict, turning a peaceful riverside community into a key site of wartime innovation and secrecy. The exhibition is free to enter.

Historian Dan Snow officially opened the exhibition.