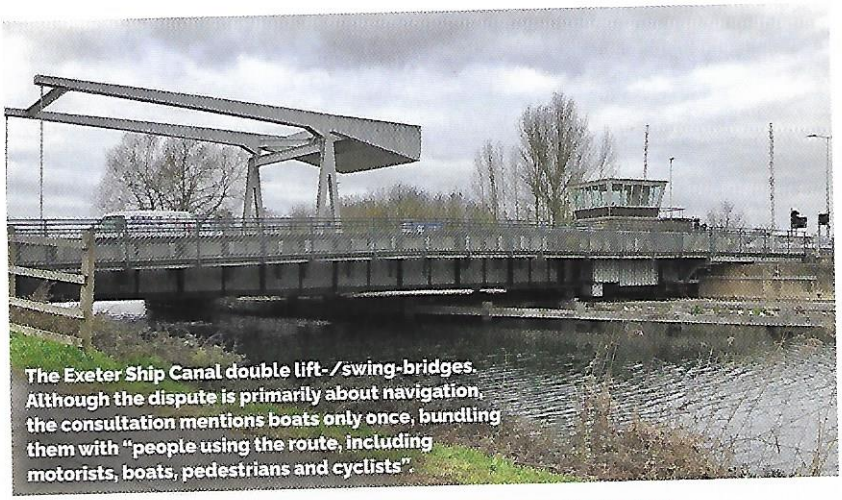


The Exeter Ship Canal double lift-/swing-bridges. Although the dispute is primarily about navigation, the consultation mentions boats only once, bundling them with "people using the route, including motorists, boats, pedestrians and cyclists".

CALL FOR A RETHINK ON EXETER SHIP CANAL BRIDGES

Supporters of the Exeter Ship Canal have criticised a proposal by Devon County Council to replace the familiar swing-/lift-bridge pair on the canal, without taking the opportunity to raise the crossings to create more headroom for boats.

The current pair – the century-old Countess of Wear swing-bridge and a lift-bridge installed as a stopgap measure in the 1970s – are now notoriously troublesome. Between them they have broken down almost monthly since 2020, causing frequent rush-hour traffic jams.

But the bridges have also long been a barrier to boats, with little headroom, so requiring even small motor boats to make an appointment for a combined swing/lift.

Now a new consultation from the council, while mentioning four options, promotes only one – to replace both crossings with a pair of lift-bridges at the current low headroom.

The consultation dismisses the alternative, of raising the headroom by 3m to allow most boats to pass underneath without interrupting the flow of traffic. This would have "significant land take and substantial environmental and landscape impacts", the council argues.

The canal's supporters, led by Steve Race, the new Exeter MP, say this is a missed opportunity. At meetings with the Inland Waterways Association and the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal & Heritage Harbour, Mr Race said that DCC is not taking advantage of the chance to improve both freight transport options and active travel connectivity.

"We have been in discussion with them for many years now and would encourage the public to object to the lack of improvement [their proposal] makes."

GATE DETERIORATION CLOSES LOCK FLIGHTS

Two key Canal & River Trust lock flights closed indefinitely in June after gate deteriorations caused concern.

On the BCN's Walsall Town lock flight, a top gate snapped, after what engineeers suspected was either vandalism or misuse. Whatever the cause, the trust said a complete replacement was required, manufactured out of schedule. Before this can be done, CRT said it would require 'secure funding', something that would take time to plan and deliver.

Meanwhile at the end of June the Kennet & Avon's Caen Hill flight was also summarily closed until further notice, following the failure of a mitre beam on Lock 28, midway down the flight. The mitre beam is the vertical beam in the gate that meets its partner when they close.

Failure at these locks is a serious issue, especially since the flight is one of the key attractions for the many hire-boat bases on the western Kennet & Avon Canal, with no alternative routes available.

The mitre beam on the K&A flight. Failure of this component can be disastrous.

BOATERS LESS HAPPY LAST YEAR – CRT SURVEY

Boaters' overall opinion of the Canal & River Trust fell slightly in 2025, according to the results of the latest Annual Boaters Survey, released in early July.

The survey is carried out by email on a random one-third of CRT's 34,000 boat licence holders from November to March, inviting them to complete a questionnaire on their level of satisfaction with the trust over the previous year. This year they had a record 2,042 responses.

Overall satisfaction fell to 50% from 2024's 55%, although this was still an improvement on 2023's 46%.

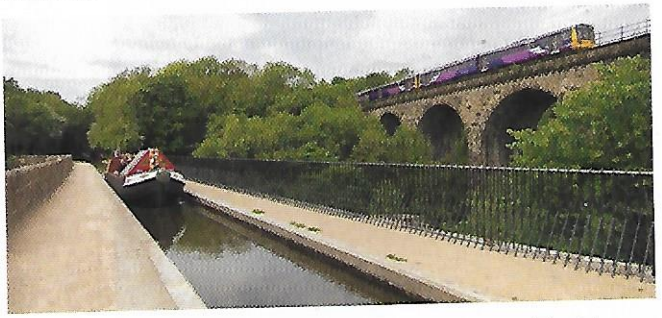
CRT blames the lowered score on the 2025 drought, which was one of the most severe on record. It led to widespread navigation restrictions and, at its peak, the closure of around 20% of the canal network.

A more serious dissatisfaction was that while 70% of boaters said they were unable to navigate as much as hoped, 58% felt drought restrictions could have been better handled. In the previous year only 15% blamed CRT in this way.

Dredging remains the largest negative factor overall, though largely consistent with sentiment in previous years.

On the plus side, 58% of boaters now believe CRT has made a better effort in keeping them informed about important issues.

The results can be seen at *canalrivertrust.org.uk*.



Green flag for Rochdale

The Canal & River Trust has gained Green Flag status for more than half of the Rochdale Canal's 32 miles, including the entire length through Manchester. The award means 758 miles of the trust's waterways now hold Green Flag status – nearly half of its canal network.

In addition, CRT has been given Green Heritage Site Accreditation – a rarer historic award on top of the Green Flag – for the Peak Forest Canal's Marple Aqueduct and Locks.

Separately, the Chesterfield Canal Trust is also celebrating getting a tenth successive Green Flag for its isolated navigable section in Derbyshire.

Keep Britain Tidy, which runs the scheme, judges a site by eight categories. These run from cleanliness, safety and freedom from vandalism to maintenance and biodiversity. Other key factors include community involvement and volunteering, along with visitor information.