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BOATERS' UPDATE MAY 2008

This month we provide details of BW chief executive's plans to tour the network meeting customers, look at the current mooring tenders trial, and preview workboats about to go under the hammer.

Waterways boss goes on tour to meet customers

BW's chief executive, Robin Evans, is starting a nationwide tour to give customers a dedicated forum to discuss their interests and concerns on the management of the waterways.

The twenty customer meetings, throughout the summer, in addition to BW's regular programme of meetings between local management and waterway users, will see Robin give a quick update on BW activities before opening up to questions from attendees. BW is particularly interested to hear customers' views on the mooring tenders trial, which began in October 2007.

Robin says: "Part of the appeal of canals is the diverse groups of users who sometimes have different priorities and different perspectives. I want to manage the waterways for the greatest public benefit and hearing and exchanging views at first hand will help develop the right policies for the future."

Anyone with an interest in the nation's waterways is free to attend, details can be found at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/askbw

Mooring tenders trial

At roughly the half way point in the mooring tenders trial, formal consultation on the allocation and pricing of BW's long term, directly managed moorings is about to begin. BW's head of boating development, Sally Ash comments: "This consultation is not about how high or low mooring prices should be, but about how the prices for all long term BW moorings customers should be set and the best way for vacancies to be allocated.

"The consultation document goes into quite a bit of detail, setting out the background to the trial as well as the feedback and results from the first six months. It assesses several options for moving forward. Now it's time for you to have your say – we'd really like you to consider the pros and cons of each option and pinpoint where your assessment differs from ours, and why."

The consultation paper along with several associated documents will be downloadable online from late May, and responses, ideally using the special questionnaire, need to be submitted during the following twelve weeks.

Mooring Vacancies continue to be listed at www.bwmooringvacancies.co.uk

Waterway Standards Advisory Panel

The theme of dialogue and accountability continues as BW draws up proposals for a panel of representatives to help monitor and develop its new customer service and safety standards which were reported in April's Boaters' Update.

Simon Salem, BW's marketing and customer service director, who will chair the panel, comments: "Our standards clearly define what boaters and other waterway visitors can expect from BW. They will bring many benefits to customers and help increase efficiency."

BW is currently in talks with waterway interest groups and at this stage it looks like it will comprise an equal mix of trade representatives, people from consumer groups and BW staff members such as bank staff or lock keepers.

View the new customer service standards online at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/css

Workboats go under the hammer

Following the introduction of BW's new 'modular' style of workboats, over 100 'redundant' ex-BW workboats will be auctioned as part of the organisation's phased fleet replacement programme.

The next batch will go under the virtual hammer on Thursday 12 June, raising much needed income for reinvestment in the upkeep of the network. Details of the online auction together with the lots available, their locations and viewing dates will be available online on the Go Industry website

In addition, ex-BW workboats which have been identified as having heritage value are being offered to waterway-related organisations who share BW's aim of using them for the future promotion of the waterways. Likely organisations include canal trusts and waterway related charities but not private individuals or commercial organisations. Organisations wishing to express an interest in the heritage craft or who want further details of the heritage boats available should contact Veronica Belfitt in Leeds on 0113 2005799, or email veronica.belfitt@britishwaterways.co.uk

Mon & Brec update

Repairs are progressing well on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal and it's 'business as usual' on much of the waterway.

Just seven months after the catastrophic breach on 16 October 2007, the waterway is on target for a full re-opening in March 2009. In the meantime, two large sections remain open for visitors to enjoy as the new tourism season swings into action.

BW's Wales & Border Counties general manager, Julie Sharman, has said that £7.5 million has been pledged this year towards essential repairs to the waterway, and she's urged local businesses and communities to continue to use and enjoy the large section of the canal that remains open.

Julie comments: "It's vitally important to the economy in South Wales that the message is loud and clear – eighteen miles of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal are still open for business as usual"

A 'wheelie' good attraction

The Falkirk Wheel attracted over half a million visitors in 2007, a 17.5% increase on 2006, according to Visit Scotland's Scottish Visitor Attraction Monitor.

Ranking in the top ten free admission attractions, the unique Scottish landmark had one of the biggest increases in this year's results, welcoming 513,907 visitors.

The Falkirk Wheel, destinations manager, Carole Keltie said: "We are delighted with the results in this report. The Wheel itself is a feat of engineering connecting the Forth & Clyde Canal with the Union Canal and a stunning monument for the future. Visiting The Falkirk Wheel is an enjoyable day out and we hope more and more people will come and pay us a visit."

Historic canal restoration

Two hundred years after it was built, a major milestone in the restoration of the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal has been reached as BW's contractor, Volker Stevin, broke through the end of a new 70-metre long canal tunnel at Salford.

"This is a tremendously exciting step towards the final restoration of the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal," says Robin Evans.

"The canal once played a major role in the life and economy of the north west. It is a tribute to the efforts of the canal society and to our funding partners that it will soon be able to do so again."

Foxton Waterways Festival 2008

With Crick Boat Show bringing the entertainment in May to Crick Marina on 24-26 May, June looks to be just as fun with Foxton Waterways Festival taking place 14-15 June at Foxton Locks. The event organised by Foxton Locks Partnership is to celebrate the completion of the three year project backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project included the restoration of the canal arm, installation of viewing platform over the inclined plane, refurbished footpaths and new interpretation which brings one of Leicestershire's busiest visitor attractions to life for boating and towpath visitors alike.

Spread the word

Britain's canals and rivers are being rediscovered as places to visit and 'get away from it all' as part of everyday life. To encourage wider usage, British Waterways launches a promotional campaign this May urging more people to 'find your local canal & river' as 'it's yours to enjoy anytime'. Colourful guides, including maps, are available covering major conurbations and look out for promotional posters in major cities. Download your free guide from www.waterscape.com/yourstoenjoy or call BW's customer service centre on 01923 201120 for a copy.

Register now for the Boaters' Update

To sign up for your free monthly e-newsletter, simply email your title, first name, surname and postcode to boatersupdate@britishwaterways.co.uk.