

PRESS RELEASE

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FUTURE OF THE UK'S WATERWAYS DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT

Today, Tuesday 22 November, the future of the UK's canals and waterways, with a particular focus on the 2,000 miles cared for and looked after by the Canal & River Trust charity, was debated in the House of Commons.

Michael Fabricant, MP for Lichfield and chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Waterways, initiated the debate, before many other MPs, including Rebecca Pow, the Minister for Waterways, responded.

The debate opened with Michael Fabricant MP setting out the unique contribution to the nation of the Trust and its waterways, from the economic impact through to the huge social and environmental benefits to society.

The debate heard how the Canal & River Trust, formed in 2012 to protect and preserve its waterways across England and Wales, is awaiting the outcome of the UK Government's review of its funding contract beyond 2027. The current grant is fixed until 2027 and is declining both in real terms and as a proportion of the Trust's total income. MPs spoke about how, with the increased threat from climate change events not envisaged in 2012, the Trust is increasing its expenditure on the core national infrastructure in its care. Hence, continued funding from Government beyond 2027 is essential to protect the many benefits from waterways, minimise risk to its numerous neighbouring communities and avert the network's long-term demise.

Michael Fabricant MP explained how the delays to the Government's review was causing great concern for waterway users and will soon start to hinder the Trust's ability to plan for the future, with so many important long-term projects to deliver.

Rebecca Pow, Minister for Waterways, responded to the debate by commending the array of colleagues present at the debate and acknowledging the role of volunteers and the huge range of public benefits delivered by the inland waterways, from leisure and recreation through to industrial heritage, mental wellbeing and as the green corridors that canals forge through both the countryside and urban areas.

E: press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk **W:** www.canalrivertrust.org.uk **Twitter:** [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

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The Minister also spoke about ensuring the critical infrastructure of the canal network is resilient to climate change and how it can help meet net zero targets, not least through active travel and the transfer of water to support the security of public water supply.

On funding, she acknowledged the Trust has very effectively worked on generating other income streams to reduce its dependency on government funding and that Government was 'looking with a laser focus' at all the issues that have been raised and the continued funding case for the grant into the future. She said Government has to get the decision right, which is why time is being taken, but an announcement on the Trust's funding beyond 2027 would be made 'forthwith'.

Richard Parry, chief executive at the Canal & River Trust, commented: "The Trust's work to protect and preserve our historic canal network delivers wide ranging benefits to society and it was good to see this unique value, that only comes from a resilient and adequately funded canal system, acknowledged on all sides of the House.

"The nation's 250-year-old canal network is old and fragile. In partnership with Government, we bear a huge financial responsibility for its day-to-day care to keep it safe and available for millions of people to enjoy. As we continue our discussions with Defra around our ongoing grant, we welcome the cross-party recognition of the importance of the canal network and remain focussed on achieving an outcome that will enable us to meet the rising cost of sustaining the nation's historic waterways, managing the potential risk to all the places they run through and delivering our statutory responsibilities for the long-term.

"We welcome today's debate and look forward to working with Defra to ensure that the case for the waterways' future funding is evaluated thoroughly and, together, securing the future of this critical national network that is both a treasured part of our history and plays such a vital role in our society today."

Ends

For further media requests please contact:

Jonathan Ludford, Canal & River Trust

m 07747 897783 e jonathan.ludford@canalrivertrust.org.uk