



The WABC newsletter

www.wabc.org.uk

Wheelyboat Success: Wallingford's Accessible River Voyages Break new Records!

Wow! What a fantastic season we have had – despite the worst the weather could do to curtail our operations: rain, wind and thunderstorms were thrown at us. Last season, 2023, was a record at the time but this year we have smashed it with 405 passengers carried and 89 river trips undertaken. That's 61% and 37% growth respectively! With passenger ages ranging from 1 to 100 years old, including 55 wheelchair and 11 powerchair users, with people with one of at least 24 different disabilities ranging from MND, Learning Difficulties, Epilepsy, Dementia, Diabetes, ADHD, and Autism to Polio, Cerebral Palsy, Rhett's Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, MS, and Rheumatoid Arthritis. Incredible – and clearly a service for all!

And it's all down to our amazing volunteers who have come up trumps to service our new 5-day a week operation running typically 9 trips, week in, week out. We can't thank them enough – what a fantastic team!

Our passengers seem to have had happy times too. We encourage feedback after every trip and measure their thoughts on crew engagement, safety & security, comfort and their voyage enjoyment, each criterion offering a star rating, 1-5, and without exception, every single one received (around 40% of voyages) gave us 5 stars! Here's what some added which makes very happy reading:



I don't think there is anything to improve we had a lovely afternoon. The volunteer crew were very friendly, attentive and professional and would definitely like to repeat the experience.



"You are the best already!"

"Lovely friendly staff, a really good experience, our service users really enjoyed themselves."

"A lovely trip down the river with Alan the skipper. He made us feel at home."



We had a lovely time with the crew and we will be coming again, it's a fantastic idea as my husband is in a wheelchair and very difficult to get him on a boat.



"Cannot believe that there is this for people who would not otherwise get the chance to enjoy time on the river.."

"We had a lovely trip. Mum really enjoyed it. Without boats and people like yourselves, it would not be possible for mum to go back on the river."



This is a yearly trip I organise and our people we support and staff members can't speak highly enough of the experience.



Ready, Steady....? and then GO!

Well, we nearly got there! The work on our site was due to start on 27th September – we were all ready to see Greenford, the contractors, move on to the site; our roving reporter Chris was hovering with his trusty camera to capture the “cutting of the first sod”, and then, right on cue, the ‘gods of the river’ intervened - up came the river and put a stop to, what would have been, our joyous moment! A sizeable flood in September – what on earth’s going on?!



Great disappointment, of course, and much frustration for the delay, but thankfully it was indeed only a short one, just over 1 week. And on Monday 7th October up rolled Greenford and work started! Yippee!

All things being equal, it is good to know we are nearly there. After 4 years of trekking down the SODC trail, we will have something to show for it – an operational site in central Wallingford which I am sure will open up new opportunities for us. As well as the couple of miles upstream to Benson to play with, we’ll have close on 5 and a half miles downstream to Cleeve Lock of lovely open water offering a wider variety of scenery and flora, fauna and bird life for us all. There’s a pub or two down there too!

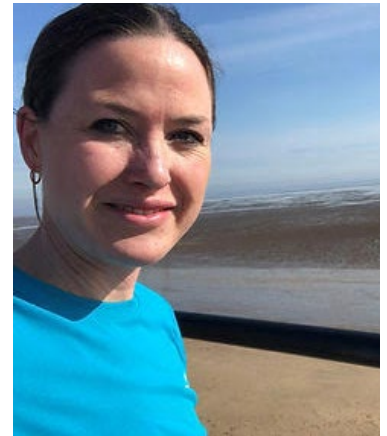
We can all look forward to moving into our new home and welcoming our guests from there!

And thanks again to our trusted roving reporter, Chris, who was able to capture the historic moment in WABC’s journey.

All Hail our Community Champions!

Our Community Champions Award scheme introduced earlier this year has been a great success and a source of much fun and merriment for many. Four very different individuals embraced the scheme and significant funds were raised for our Club as a result.

Firstly, a member of Benson Striders, Abi, a long-standing supporter of WABC, conquered the London Marathon, followed by Louise from Crowmarsh (pictured right) who undertook the Wallingford Thames Run.



Then Becky, who runs Chi-Chi dance classes in Cholsey & Benson (pictured above), organised a sponsored dance session, and finally Benson House Care home, under the auspices of its Customer Care Manager, Jim MacLeod (pictured below with Abi), organised a fundraising tea-party which was a great success!



Sincere thanks to one and all for their wonderful efforts on behalf of WABC - we were delighted to present a Community Champions Award to each of them. We look forward to 2025 for more Community Champions!

Dramatic scenes at Benson Weir



Photo by Roddy Maddocks



Photos by Chris Haigh



Benson Weir is a major feature of the lovely stretch of the River Thames that we have the good fortune to access and so the major works on the weir's repair work is an area of extreme interest to many. The plan is for the Environment Agency to spend £11m, effectively replacing much of the weir and the walkway across it, and interestingly, including a fish pass for migratory fish and eels. Work is well underway for what is a significant feat of engineering, as can be seen by the photos our 'roving reporters' have captured for us. Enjoy!

Our youngest skippers?



3-year-old Florence O'Donnell at the helm!

We are so very fortunate to have so many brilliant volunteers – lovers of the river and boating who are keen to share their love of the river to others, perhaps less fortunate than themselves. Amongst them, in increasing numbers, are our Skippers, highly trained guys



And a little bit older, a 10-year-old. Eyes glued to the bow!

and gals, all keen to help and please. But we had a couple of notable additions recently – perhaps our youngest skippers to date, proudly helming our wheelyboat, WOW-one, during their river trip! Recruitment opportunities for the future!!

Fundraising Round-Up

We've had a good fundraising campaign this year – so far so good, but still a bit to go. Our annual Waitrose collection in May proved again to be a great success and we are looking forward to our Lidl collection in early October. We are indebted to Waitrose and Lidl and their customers for their support as well as all our volunteer collectors – what a great job they do! Our Grand Summer Draw – a star prize raffle – proved to be a great success, breaking last year's record, again thanks particularly to our volunteer members whose sales skills were unsurpassed!

Stop Press. As we go to print – a very successful Dinner Dance at The George Hotel, Wallingford. We were suitably entertained by the magical voice and music of the renowned Sarah Eastwood, who kindly provided her services pro-bono. Lots of fun, lots of song & dance and a wonderful £5k raised for WABC! Thank you everyone!



Photos by Chris Haigh

On a final note, I do want to acknowledge and thank Oxford Community Foundation, South Oxfordshire District Council and the Wallingford Bridge Estate charity for their grant funding. We are very grateful and couldn't manage without their help.

Thanks to all our sponsors!

We are very grateful for the support of our Sponsors whose financial help adds great stability to our operation. Life would be much harder without them – so a very big Thank You from all of us.



Driving Miss Daisy®
We're There For You

CHAMPION & CO.
ESTABLISHED 1969

INSTAVOLT



Pettits
of Wallingford



np design & print ltd
www.npdesignprint.co.uk



**“If you go down to the woods today,
you are sure of a big surprise!”**

**But, have you ever thought, what if you
cannot find an appropriate wood??!!**

Well, here's a thought – try WABC and WOW-one. Our happy trippers certainly did and had a whale of a time!!

Make a picnic on WOW-one a promise to yourself and friends in 2025! Great fun - nothing better.

Welcome to our new Team members!

We are very fortunate to have successfully recruited several new members over the summer months, some of whom have progressed through their training to become fully fledged Skippers. Congratulations to them all! It's thanks to our enlarged team we have been able to adopt our new 5-day per week operational schedule which has been so successful.

We will be undertaking a further recruitment campaign over the winter period so, if anyone is interested in becoming a WABC volunteer, keep a look-out for that!