

Navigation Committee

06 November 2025

Agenda item number 7

Proposed navigation charges for 2026/27 in the navigation area and adjacent waters

Report by Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Head of IT and Collector of Tolls

Purpose

This report is the formal consultation with the Committee on the level of charges for 2026/27 as required by S13 (3) of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988. The views of the Committee are requested. The Broads Authority will make the decision on the navigation charges for 2026/27 at its meeting on 28 November 2025.

Broads Plan context

All strategic actions under Theme C: Maintaining and enhancing the navigation.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Last year there was a range of factors for members to consider, including the impact of inflation, the increase in the Employer's National Insurance Contribution, the annual pay increase and a reduction in the number of smaller boats. After much deliberation, the Navigation Committee recommended a 5.9% increase in charges along with a reduction in navigation expenditure through a cutback on patrolling and practical work. This was accepted by the Broads Authority. This year the main issue is the on-going reduction in the number boats, both private and commercial, even though less than last year it is still significant.

2. Boat numbers

2.1. Table 1 shows the registered boat numbers for 30 September for 2023 to 2025.

Table 1

Private craft numbers 2023–25 as at 30 September 2025

Private craft	Sep 2023	Sep 2024	Sep 2025	Change 23-24	Change 24-25
Motor cruisers	4,993	4,893	4,819	-100	-74
Aux. yachts	960	892	883	-68	-9
Day launches	582	533	539	-49	+6
O/B dinghies	1014	919	894	-95	-25
Workboats	155	162	139	+7	-23
Sailing	809	740	721	-69	-19
Rowing / Paddling	1,870	1,613	1,484	-257	-129
Houseboats	71	71	65	0	-6
Passenger – SPB	22	21	21	-1	0
TOTAL	10,476	9,844	9,565	-632	-279

2.2. In 2024 the total number of private boats using the Broads fell by 632 (-6.0%) as of the end of September. The largest reductions last year were in small boats e.g. rowing 257 (-13.7%), with smaller percentage falls in all the other categories apart from workboats and houseboats. This year the fall has been less than last year, at 279 (-2.8%). The fall in rowing craft is still the largest but half that in the previous year. Private motor cruisers fell by 100 (-2%) last year and by 74 (-1.5%) this year.

2.3. Appendix 1 gives a longer term context showing the number of boats since 2014. This shows a reduction in private craft over the ten years of -853 (-7.9%). The number of private motor cruisers grew in 2021 and 2022 and the overall reduction is -107 (-2.1%). There is a long term trend in the decline in the number of sailing boats, both sailing craft and auxiliary yachts.

- 2.4. Table 2 shows the number of commercial craft across the three years. Last year the number of commercial craft using the Broads fell by 46, (–2.9%), the major change being in rowing craft (a decrease of 29). This year the loss of commercial craft has increased to 85 (–5.4%), with the biggest reduction in day launches and rowing craft.
- 2.5. Appendix 1 shows the long term predicted decline in the number of hired motor cruisers. Research more than ten years ago suggested that the number would fall to around 500. The number of day launches has increased, over the ten years.

Table 2

Commercial craft numbers 2023–25 as at 30 September 2025

Hire craft	Sep 2023	Sep 2024	Sep 2025	Change 23-24	Change 24-25
Motor cruisers	647	641	630	–6	–11
Aux. yachts	45	43	43	–2	0
Day launches	358	344	310	–14	–34
O/B dinghies	4	1	1	–3	0
Sailing	71	71	71	0	0
Rowing / Paddling	442	413	377	–29	–36
Houseboats	26	32	29	+6	–3
Passenger – MCA	6	6	6	0	0
Passenger – SPB	7	9	8	+2	–1
TOTAL	1,606	1,560	1475	–46	–85

3. Lapsed Boat Ownership Research

- 3.1. The decline in the number of private boats appears to be part of wider changes in society with similar falls in boat numbers on other inland waterways and a decline in boat building. We have speculated with members on the causes: the state of the economy, the costs of owning and maintaining a boat and the demography of boat ownership.
- 3.2. It would be helpful for the Authority if we had some better knowledge of the reasons behind the fall in boat ownership. We had hoped that the Tolls Team would have time during the summer months to telephone former Broads boat owners to try and understand the reasons for not renewing their boat toll. But, because of the large backlog in late payers, see below for more information, this has not proved to be possible and there would be advantages in using an independent contractor for such work. The costs would be in the order of £4,000 to £8,000 depending on the sample size. The views of the committee on whether we should commission this work are sought.

4. Navigation Income

- 4.1. On 1 October 2024, the impact of the large reduction in boat numbers was a predicted deficit of -£130,591. At the end of the year the gap between the budgeted income and actual income was -£128,298.
- 4.2. This year the current deficit is -£74,204. This is an improvement, but still a deficit we need to consider and respond to. Table 3 below shows the toll income against the budgeted figures.

Table 3

Toll income as at 1 October 2025

	Private Boats	Hire Boats
Budgeted Income 2025/26	£3,057,000	£1,489,000
Income received 1 April to 30 September 2025	£2,904,280	£1,442,560
Predicted income 2025/26	£3,024,236	£1,447,560
Predicted deficit	- £32,764	- £41,440

5. Late Payment

- 5.1. One of the issues the Authority has addressed this year is late payment of tolls and the additional administrative costs involved. All toll payers are sent notification of their charge for the new year in February/March. The majority pay before 1 April or soon after. The Rangers check if boats have been tolled and if required, issue a Notice of Contravention which is affixed to the vessel, with a duplicate sent to the Tolls Team. The Tolls Team write to the owner reminding them that payment is overdue, and that a £25 administrative charge will be added if they fail to pay by a certain date.
- 5.2. To date we have received over £3,000 in £25 late payment charges which makes a small contribution to our administrative costs. Importantly the prospect of an additional charge encourages prompt payment.
- 5.3. As previously discussed with, and supported by, the Navigation Committee we intend to make a further change to this process next year. The notification of charges, our website and other information will include a warning that if Rangers issue a Notice of Contravention for late payment, tolls payable after that date are subject to a £25 administrative charge. This has the potential to save the Tolls Team a lot of work.

6. Navigation Expenditure

- 6.1. During the year, the Authority has made savings in expenditure on navigation to align it closer with navigation income. For example, we reduced patrolling and practical work and cut our overheads and management costs. The net impact of these changes has been a reduction in expenditure of £65,000. In addition, the pay increase for staff was less than the Authority had budgeted for. The table below provides details of the forecast adjustments since the report to the committee in September.

Table 4

Forecast adjustments

Item	Amount £
Forecast outturn deficit as per LAB	67,606
Adjustments reported 04/09/2025	(3,324)
Decrease to Hire Craft income	6,998
Increase to Private Craft income	(35,278)
Increase to investment income	(16,500)
Increase to staff costs for redundancy	7,558
Forecast outturn deficit as at 30 September 2025	27,060

6.2. The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Navigation forecast compared to the latest available budget for 2025/26.

Navigation outturn 2025/26 vs budget	Budget £	Outturn £	Difference £
Income	(4,726,300)	(4,668,596)	- 57,704
Expenditure	4,793,906	4,695,656	+ 98,250
(Surplus) / Deficit	67,606	27,060	+ 40,546
Transfer of interest to earmarked reserves	50,100	60,000	+ 10,100
Opening reserve	(627,403)	(627,403)	0
Repayment of National Park loan	50,000	50,000	0
Closing reserve	(459,697)	(490,343)	+ 30,646
Reserves as a % of expenditure	9.6%	10.4%	+ 0.8%

7. Capital funding

7.1. It is important to state the additional National Park capital funding is welcomed but it does not relieve the pressures caused by the decline of National Park revenue funding. However, Defra has recently given the Authority more flexibility in the use of National Park capital funding. The department has accepted the argument that improving access to and from the water is one of the main ways the public enjoy the special qualities of the Broads. This means that navigation will benefit from National Park Capital funding.

7.2. Defra's Change Control Notice for this year states:

The capital grant and any income derived from the expenditure is to be treated as National Park income and must be used in furtherance of section 2(1)(a) and (b) of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988.

Any such income may be applied to an expenditure that incidentally supports Section 2(1)(c) provided the primary aim of the expenditure remains the pursuit of Section 2(1)(a) and (b).

Section 2(1) (b) of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act states:

It shall be the general duty of the Authority to manage the Broads for the purposes of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Broads by the public;

- 7.3. Appendix 2 is a copy of the current version of the capital programme. This includes new pontoons and enhanced moorings which have long been on the Navigation Committee's wish list. Upgrading the charging pillars, and more NATO pontoons for floating our excavators are all helpful investments.

8. Factors to consider when setting the tolls for 2026/27

8.1. Level of inflation

The current levels of inflation in September 2025 (announced 22 October) are:

CPI	=	3.8%
CPI H	=	4.1%
RPI	=	4.5%

The costs of owning and maintaining a boat, including mooring fees, repairs, fuel, insurance, and tolls, are continuing to rise and there is little doubt that this is contributing to the decline of private boats and placing strain on the hire boat industry.

8.2. Estimate of boat numbers

It is impossible to give an accurate estimate of boat numbers for next year, but the following assumptions can be made.

1. Given the difficult outlook for the economy and personal finances, it is probable that we will see a further reduction in the number of private craft. It is likely to be similar to this year's – a loss of a further 300 boats, including a fall in the number of motor cruisers of about 95.
2. Based on our information from the industry we are predicting a further loss of 30 motor cruisers in 2026 as companies continue to take older vessels out of their fleets. We can also anticipate a further reduction in day launches and rowing craft. We are using the following numbers in our calculations:

Hired motor cruisers	600	–30
Day launches	300	–17

8.3. Salary increase

Based on current information we are applying a 3% increase in our 2026/27 budget for a salary increase. The Authority is obliged to apply nationally agreed increases by the National Joint Council.

9. Options for 2026/27

- 9.1. Based on the above, a 2.5% increase would be required to maintain the current level of maintenance. A figure lower than 2.5% would require further cuts in services and is not recommended. At the Tolls Briefing on 7 October some members asked officers to explore the option of increasing practical work by raising tolls by 3.5%. This has been done.
- 9.2. The number of Senior Operations Technicians and Operations Technicians has been reduced from 22 to 20 and the proportion of their time given to navigation reduced from 70% to 60% in 2025/26. A 3.5% increase in tolls would produce an estimated additional income of £44,000. With this it would be possible to employ one new Operations Technician and increase the overall proportion of time given to navigation to 62% in 2026/27. These two changes would increase the number of days given to the practical maintenance of the navigation by the Operation Technicians from 2,190 to 2,399. This could expand the programmed work which is allocated to the following tasks: dredging (44%), maintenance of moorings (33%), water plant cutting (11%), riverside trees (2%) (Note: excludes work by Rangers) and other (channel markers, gauge boards, raising wrecks and obstructions etc.) (9%).

Table 6

Cost per m² by category of vessel for the two options

No.	Category – cost per m ² except rowing, canoes etc	Current	+2.5%	+3.5%
1.	Weekly hired motor craft	£44.05	£45.15	£45.59
2.	Weekly hired motor craft – electric and hybrid	£30.32	£31.08	£31.38
3.	Day hired – petrol/diesel	£70.00	£71.75	£72.45
4.	Day hired electric	£43.58	£44.67	£45.11
5.	MCA passenger boats and small passenger boats	£57.97	£59.42	£60.00
6.	Hired motorised sailing craft – diesel	£33.77	£34.61	£34.95
7.	Hired sailing boats & hired motorised sailing - electric	£24.69	£25.31	£25.55
8.	Hired houseboats	£22.33	£22.89	£23.11
9.	Hired rowing – fixed amount	£98.12	£100.57	£101.55

No.	Category – cost per m ² except rowing, canoes etc	Current	+2.5%	+3.5%
	Hired paddle craft – fixed amount	£49.05	£50.28	£50.77
10.	Private motorboats - petrol & diesel	£19.56	£20.05	£20.24
11.	Private motorboats electric	£14.95	£15.32	£15.47
12.	Private motorised sailing craft - petrol & diesel	£14.47	£14.83	£14.98
13.	Private sailing boats & private motorised sailing craft - electric	£11.95	£12.25	£12.37
14.	Private houseboats	£7.70	£7.89	£7.97
15.	Private rowing, canoes etc. – fixed amount	£49.05	£50.28	£50.77

9.3. The implications of a 2.5% and 3.5% increase on the charges for some of the most common types of vessels are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Proposed increase in navigation charges by common types & sizes of vessel

Type of Vessel	Sep No.	Current	+2.5%	+3.5%
5 m ² Private sailing craft	301	£59.75	£61.25	£61,85
11 m ² Private sailing craft	123	£131.45	£134.75	£136.07
5 m ² Private motorboats	524	£97.80	£100.25	101.20
15 m ² Private motorboats	231	£293.40	£300.75	£303.60
22 m ² Private motorboats	305	£430.32	£441.10	£445.28
38 m ² Private motorboats	106	£743.28	£761.90	£769.12
11 m ² Day hired boats – petrol/ diesel	43	£770.00	£789.25	£796.95
11 m ² Day hired boats - electric	18	£479.38	£491.37	£496.21
38 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	50	£1,673.90	£1,715.70	£1,732.42
48 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	53	£2,114.40	£2,167.20	£2,188.32

10. Financial implications

10.1. The steps made to reduce costs during 2025/26 means a 2.5% or 3.5% increase will provide a reserve balance of 11.5%, above the recommended minimum of 10%. This will help provide a cushion if boat numbers reduce further than expected. The medium-term financial plan currently indicates similar increases over the two following years to keep pace with forecast salary inflation and potential further losses of boats in 2027/28 and 2028/29.

11. Social, economic, and environmental implications

11.1. Toll payer surveys have shown that the Authority's tolls account for less than 10% of the typical costs of owning a boat. While boat ownership may be seen by some as a luxury, we know that this is not always the case. The cost-of-living crisis is having an

impact on society and its impact on the boating community using the Broads and those visiting on holiday is difficult to predict. Our community of private boat owners is diverse, and some may face difficult decisions regarding their continuing boat ownership.

- 11.2. The Broads Society and Inland Waterways Association conducted research into the level of navigation charges across different waterways. The research concluded that: 'Looking beyond the headline percentage increases of the past two years, however, the cash cost to most private boat owners today remains modest, giving good value when compared with other navigations.' (Broads Society 2024).

12. Risk implications

- 12.1. As with last year the main area of uncertainty involved in determining charges for next year is the number of boats using the Broads. Estimates have been made using information from the hire boat companies and for the private boats it has been assumed that

13. Conclusion

- 13.1. Last year's switch in the apportionment of operational costs from Navigation to National Park and the lower-than-expected pay rise has more than offset the reduced income from the reduction in the number of boats.
- 13.2. This has put the navigation budget in a healthier position, and an increase in tolls of 2.5% or 3.5%, below the current level of inflation (3.8% to 4.5%), would leave the Authority in a stronger position for this year and the following two, even with our anticipated reduction in boat numbers. The use of National Park capital funding is providing for investment in a range of improvements this year, which our toll payers will notice, and I am sure appreciate. The higher rate of increase would allow for the replacement of an Operations Technician and a nearly 10% increase in the time of the Technicians spent on maintenance of the navigation.

Author: John Packman, Emma Krelle, Bill Housden

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Background papers: Navigation charges 2026/27 – Briefing Note.

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: C1, C2, C3, C4.

Appendix 1 – Annual Boat Numbers as at 1 November from 2014-2024

Appendix 2 – National Park Capital Programme 2025/26

Appendix 1 - Annual Boat Numbers as at 1 November 2014-2024

Annual Boat Numbers as at 1st November													
PRIVATE BOATS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change	% Change
Motor Cruisers	5059	5091	5086	5110	5079	5083	5004	5237	5142	5049	4952	-107	-2.12%
Auxiliary Yachts	1168	1152	1127	1132	1093	1107	965	1048	1024	966	904	-264	-22.60%
Day Launches	514	504	495	556	574	558	562	582	600	592	546	32	6.23%
Outboard Dinghies	1062	1016	962	1064	1060	1058	1051	1140	1185	1039	940	-122	-11.49%
Workboats	180	172	156	158	156	153	144	142	166	159	164	-16	-8.89%
Passenger Vessels SPB				22	21	23	13	19	20	22	21	21	
TOTAL MOTORBOATS:	7983	7935	7826	8042	7983	7982	7739	8168	8137	7827	7527	-456	-5.71%
Sailing Craft	1230	1191	1107	1076	1081	1023	844	920	861	820	747	-483	-39.27%
Rowing Craft	1578	1532	1513	1483	1513	1545	1800	2039	2054	1874	1618	40	2.53%
Houseboats	27	33	45	45	49	52	49	52	67	77	73	46	170.37%
Total	10818	10691	10491	10646	10626	10602	10432	11179	11119	10598	9965	-853	-7.89%
HIRE BOATS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024		
Motor Cruisers	842	821	789	802	806	801	734	729	673	647	641	-201	-23.87%
Auxiliary Yachts	47	43	44	45	46	44	39	45	45	45	43	-4	-8.51%
ALL CABIN HIRE BOATS:	889	864	833	847	852	845	773	774	718	692	684	-205	-23.06%
Day Launches	299	290	295	290	301	297	261	326	363	359	344	45	15.05%
Outboard Dinghies	8	10	11	9	9	8	4	4	4	4	1	-7	-87.50%

Annual Boat Numbers as at 1st November													
Passenger Vessels MCA	10	10	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	-4	-40.00%
Passenger Vessels SPB				6	7	7	4	8	8	7	9	9	
TOTAL MOTORBOATS:	1206	1174	1145	1158	1175	1163	1047	1118	1099	1068	1044	-162	-13.43%
Sailing Craft	110	108	102	101	95	87	74	88	73	71	71	-39	-35.45%
Rowing Craft	175	184	192	191	194	193	182	227	230	442	413	238	136.00%
Houseboats	16	16	16	28	26	26	27	27	28	27	32	16	100.00%
Total	1507	1482	1455	1478	1490	1469	1330	1460	1430	1608	1560	53	3.52%
Grand Total	12325	12173	11946	12124	12116	12071	11762	12639	12549	12206	11525	-800	-6.49%

Appendix 2 – National Park Capital Programme 2025/26

Defra has awarded the Authority £1,385,058 for capital spend. The Authority has adopted a longer list to ensure it can deliver the whole spend by 31 March 2026.

Project	Priority	Indicative cost £	Progress
Purchase of land at Barton Fen	1	472,250	Sale completed September 2025.
Acle Bridge enhancement	2	95,000	
Improvements to Great Yarmouth Yacht Station - showers etc.	2	50,000	Waiting for a new lease to be signed. Investigating options for improvements. These are likely to require over £50k.
Pontoons to improve access to the water	2	175,000	Continuing to consult with local stakeholders before submitting the planning applications for the Upper Thurne and Worlingham mooring sites by the end of September. Tender required for pontoon procurement.
Upgrade 40 electric charging pillars	2	60,000	Options appraisal for meter and pillar systems completed. Demonstrations from the top two suppliers by mid-September. Costs likely to be greater than £30,000 (TBC)
Dockyard solar	2	80,000	Tenders for scheme received and evaluated. Works to start soon.
Truxor attachments	3	12,620	On order.
Fen Harvester with double chop head	3	205,030	On order.
Nato floats (x4)	4	40,000	
Mowing equipment to manage conservation and visitor sites	4	95,000	Remote-controlled mower prioritised instead of electric telehandler.
Ride on Mower	4	14,100	On order.

Project	Priority	Indicative cost £	Progress
RESERVE LIST			
Water quality monitoring equipment	4	30,000	Outside current budget. Quotes received as a guide.
Dockyard enhancement	5	200,000	Outside current budget.
Review and upgrade EV chargers	5	25,000	Outside current budget. Quotes for these works have already been received.
New electric pool vehicles x 2	5	60,000	Outside current budget.