

Navigation Charges 2026/27 – Briefing Note for All Members & Stakeholders

1. Timetable

Last September I provided a background note for members and stakeholders in advance of the tolls briefing for members in October. Feedback indicated that this additional step was helpful and therefore I am repeating the exercise. The timetable for the setting of navigation budget and charges for 2026/27 is as follows:

September – seek views from members and stakeholders based on finances up to the end of August 2025

7 October – tolls briefing for all Broads Authority members using updated finances to the end of September 2025

6 November – formal consultation with the Navigation Committee

28 November – Broads Authority decision

(Note: The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves delivers the Budget on 26 November. This may have implications for the Authority's costs and the level of charges).

Last year there was a range of factors 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 members took the difficult decision to reduce navigation expenditure through a cutback on patrolling and practical work, whilst raising charges by 5.9%.

The Authority's income at visitor centres and yacht stations has increased this year. This is thought to be because of better weather throughout the season, in particular during the Spring. However, the number of boats, both private and commercial, using the Broads has continued to decline and that has been the main consideration.

2. Income

Table 1 shows the registered boat numbers for 31 August for 2023 to 2025. In 2024 the total number of private boats using the Broads fell by 576 (–5.6%) as of the end of August. The largest reductions last year were in small boats e.g. rowing 248 (–13.5%), 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 300 (–3.1%). The fall in rowing craft is still the largest but half that in the previous year. Private motor cruisers have fallen by a similar number in both years.

Table 1. Private craft numbers 2023–25 as at 31 August 2025

Private craft	Aug 2023	Aug 2024	Aug 2025	Change 23-24	Change 24-25
Motor cruisers	4,926	4,834	4,739	-92	-95
Aux. yachts	944	879	873	-65	-6
Day launches	560	526	527	-34	+1
O/B dinghies	970	898	858	-72	-40
Workboats	148	148	138	0	-10
Sailing	803	735	712	-68	-23
Rowing	1,843	1,595	1,475	-248	-120
Houseboats	67	71	64	+4	-7
Passenger – SPB	22	21	21	-1	0
TOTAL	10,283	9,707	9,407	-576	-300

Table 2 shows the number of commercial craft across the three years. Last year the number of commercial craft using the Broads fell by 32, (-2.0%), the major change being in rowing craft (a decrease of 30). This year the loss of commercial craft has increased to 66 (-4.2%), with the biggest reduction in day launches and rowing craft.

Table 2. Commercial craft numbers 2023–25 as at 31 August 2025

Hire craft	Aug 2023	Aug 2024	Aug 2025	Change 23-24	Change 24-25
Motor cruisers	644	641	630	-3	-11
Aux. yachts	44	43	43	-1	0
Day launches	352	349	317	-3	-32
O/B dinghies	4	1	1	-3	0
Sailing	71	71	71	0	0
Rowing	441	411	386	-30	-25
Houseboats	25	31	34	+6	+3
Passenger – MCA	6	6	6	0	0
Passenger – SPB	7	9	8	+2	-1
TOTAL	1,594	1,562	1496	-32	-66

This has resulted in a reduction in income as of 1 September 2025.

Table 3. Toll income as at 1 September 2025

	Private Boats	Hire Boats
Budgeted Income 2025/26	£3,057,000	£1,489,000
Income received 1 April to 31 August 2025	£2,855,431	£1,456,526
Predicted income 2025/26	£3,011,740	£1,456,526
Predicted deficit	-£45,260	-£32,474

On 1 September 2024, the predicted deficit for 2024/25 was -£118,477. This year it is -£77,734. This is an improvement, but still a deficit we need to take into account.

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.

To date we have received over £3,500 in £25 late payment charges which makes a small contribution to our administrative costs. Importantly the prospect of an additional charge encourages prompt payment.

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, a £25 administrative charge will be applied. This has the potential to save the Tolls Team a lot of work.

3. Expenditure

During the course of 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, giving a net reduction in navigation expenditure of £24,000.

4. Capital funding

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.

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;

Appendix 1 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. A new tug, upgrading the charging pillars, and more NATO pontoons for floating our excavators are all helpful investments.

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

5.1 Level of inflation

The current levels of inflation in August 2025 (announced 17 September) are:

CPI	=	3.8%
CPI H	=	4.1%
RPI	=	4.6%

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.

5.2 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
Rowing	360	-26

5.3 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.

6. Proposed increase in charges

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. The implications of the proposed increase on the charges for some of the most common types of vessels are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Proposed increase in navigation charges by common types & sizes of vessel

Type of Vessel	AUG No.	Current	Proposed	Difference
5 m ² Private sailing craft	349	£59.75	£61.24	+£1.49
11 m ² Private sailing craft	124	£131.45	£134.74	+£3.29
5 m ² Private motorboats	624	£97.80	£100.25	+£2.44
15 m ² Private motorboats	237	£293.40	£300.74	+£7.33
22 m ² Private motorboats	307	£430.32	£441.08	+£10.76
38 m ² Private motorboats	112	£743.28	£761.86	+£18.58
11 m ² Day hired boats – petrol/ diesel	47	£770.00	£789.25	+£19.25
11 m ² Day hired boats - electric	23	£479.38	£491.36	+£11.98
38 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	52	£1,673.90	£1,715.75	+£41.85
48 m ² Weekly hired motor craft	57	£2,114.40	£2,167.26	+£52.86

7. Conclusion

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.

This has put the navigation budget in a healthier position, and an increase in tolls of 2.5%, below the current level of inflation (3.8% to 4.6%), 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.

Please come back to me if you have any questions or comments.

With regards

John

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17 September 2025

Appendix 1 – National Park Capital Programme 2025/26

Defra has awarded the Authority £1,385,058 for capital spend. The programme also includes a reserve list (see below) to ensure it can deliver the whole spend by 31 March 2026.

Project	Priority	Indicative cost	Progress
Purchase of land	1		Nearing completion
Acle Bridge enhancement	2	£95,000	Topographic and ecological surveys underway. Structural engineer designs for piling due by mid-September. Tender for piling installation to be opened by the end of September.
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 the £50k allocated.
Pontoons to improve access to the water	2	£175,000	Ongoing consultations 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	£30,000	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 allocated.
Dockyard solar	2	£50,000	Structural engineer report completed. Tender for solar scheme installation to be opened mid-September.
Truxor attachments	3	£10,000	On order.
Fen harvester with double chop head	3	£205,000	On order.
Electric telehandler	3	£90,000	Trial of the highest specification model on the market didn't meet operational requirements. Item withdrawn from priority list. £90,000 to be used to purchase remote controlled mower from the reserve list.
NATO pontoons (x4)	4	£40,000	Open tender for procurement by end September.

22t Long reach excavator and mats REPLACED with new tug to support operational activities	4	£180,000 £160,000 - £190,000	Review of operational priorities shows that that the purchase of a new tug providing increased flexibility and operational capabilities is a greater priority than a long reach excavator.
Mowing equipment to manage conservation and visitor sites	4	£120,000 £90,000	£90,000 for a remote-controlled mower prioritised instead of electric telehandler.
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. Anglia Car Charging have quoted for these works already.
New electric pool vehicles x 2	5	£60,000	Outside current budget.