Navigation Committee

05 November 2026
Agenda item number 9

Proposed navigation charges for 2027/28 in the navigation area and adjacent waters

Report by Director of Resources, Collector of Tolls and Head of Operations

Purpose

This report is the formal consultation with the Committee on the level of charges for 2027/28 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 2027/28 at its meeting on 27 November 2026.

Broads Plan context

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

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1. Introduction

1.1. Each year the Broads Authority is required to determine the level of charges for the forthcoming financial year. Annually all members are invited to a workshop to consider

the latest data available and the priorities for the next financial year. The workshop was held on 6 October 2026 and members views from the workshop have been considered and influenced the content of this report. Whilst there were varying views from the workshop the majority supported a 3.5% increase in line with inflation if the Authority could demonstrate value for money. A summary from the meeting can be found in appendix 1.

1.2. Over the last five years there have been several factors which have led to a range of increases as follows:

- 2022/23 3.6%
- 2023/24 13%
- 2024/25 8.5%
- 2025/26 5.9%
- 2026/27 3.5%

1.3. These factors ranged from covid-19 recovery, the repayment of the £250,000 loan from National Park in five yearly instalments, increased and retained staffing including the summer seasonal rangers and operation technicians, proposed health and social care levy (later abandoned by Government), high inflation in material costs, specifically aggregate, fuel, timber and steel. Increased costs of removing sunken vessels. We have also had to pay for nationally agreed pay increases for our staff as well as changes in employers National Insurance contribution rates, an increase in audit costs and the cost of prosecution for those who have not paid their tolls.

1.4. These increased costs were partially offset by changes in other charges (mooring fees), a switch in operational costs in 2025/26 from Navigation to National Park and a significant organisation restructure to reduce overall staff costs.

2. Boat numbers

2.1. The slow but steady decline in both hire and private boat numbers seen over many years is continuing. Tables 1 and 2 set these out for the last three years as at the end of September 2026.

Table 1
Hire Boats

Class	30/09/2024	30/09/2025	30/09/2026	Change 24-25	Change 25-26
Motor Cruisers	641	630	613	-11	-17
Auxiliary Yachts	43	43	44	0	1
Day Launches	344	310	308	-34	-2

Class	30/09/2024	30/09/2025	30/09/2026	Change 24-25	Change 25-26
Outboard Dinghies	1	1	1	0	0
Sailing	71	71	71	0	0
Rowing/Paddling	413	377	369	-36	-8
Houseboats	32	29	27	-3	-2
Passenger – MCA	6	6	6	0	0
Passenger - SPB	9	8	8	-1	0
Total	**1,560**	**1,475**	**1,447**	**-85**	**-28**

2.2. The fall in hired motor cruisers was not unexpected but is less than predicted by hire boat operators. A similar fall is expected in the coming year and has been accounted for.

Table 2
Private Boats

Class	30/09/2024	30/09/2025	30/09/2026	Change 24-25	Change 25-26
Motor Cruisers	4,893	4,819	4,791	-74	-28
Auxiliary Yachts	892	883	849	-9	-34
Day Launches	533	539	522	6	-17
Outboard Dinghies	919	894	870	-25	-24
Workboats	162	139	163	-23	24
Sailing	740	721	696	-19	-25
Rowing/Paddling	1,613	1,484	1,337	-129	-147
Houseboats	71	65	66	-6	1
Passenger - SPB	21	21	21	0	0
Total	**9,844**	**9,565**	**9,315**	**-279**	**-250**

2.3. Rowing and paddle craft numbers continue to fall, at the same time membership of Paddle UK, with whom we have a block licence agreement, has risen. Both sailing and motor categories reduced again this season but not as much as in the previous year. Overall private boat numbers are currently down 2.6%.

2.4. Canal & River Trust's annual National Boat Count, carried out during March 2026 across England and Wales, recorded a 2.1 per cent decrease in boat numbers across the charity's waterways.

2.5. The annual boat numbers as at 1 November for the last 10 years is set out in appendix 2.

3. Navigation Income and Expenditure

3.1. In October 2025 we were predicting income of £1,442,560 for Hire and £ 3,024,236 for Private boats. We ended the 2025/26 year ahead of those predictions for both Hire at £1,452,300 and Private at £3,046,134. Forecasts are always based on the previous year's pattern of receipt. The tolls team continue to successfully collect overdue tolls including the submission of prosecution cases.

3.2. When the level of tolls was considered for 2026/27 an allowance for a further reduction in boat numbers equating to £75,000, assumed £42,750 less for hire and £32,250 less for private income. However, income in this financial year has remained ahead of budget as set out in table 3.

Table 3
2026/27 Income

Income type	Budget	Forecast	Variance
Hire	(1,438,000)	(1,462,259)	+ 24,259
Private	(3,108,000)	(3,154,623)	+ 46,623
Short Visit and other toll income	(99,354)	(99,354)	0
Investment	(105,000)	(120,000)	+ 15,000
Total Core Income	**(4,750,354)**	**(4,836,236)**	**+ 85,882**

3.3. Expenditure currently remains on track with the latest available budget with the pay increase being agreed at 3.3% by the National Joint Council on behalf of Local Authority employers.

3.4. Tables 4 and 5 set out the projects and progress for 2026/27.

Table 4
Dredging

Location	Date	Progress
Upper Bure – spreading sediment on land	Apr-May	Complete
Yare – Thorpe to Surlingham	Apr-Aug	Complete

Location	Date	Progress
Upper Thurne	Oct-Feb	Started in October at Martham Dyke
Lower Yare shoals & Chet	Nov-Mar	Notice to Mariners issued ahead of works

Table 5
Moorings

Location	Date	Progress
Martham Bank – timber refurbishment	May - Aug	Complete
Worlingham – repairs to piling returns	May - Jun	Complete
Herringfleet – timber refurbishment	Winter 26/27	To be contracted
Potter Heigham Demasting - repiling	Winter 26/27	Design stage
Gayes Staithe – timber refurbishment	Winter 26/27	To be contracted

3.5. The three water plant harvesters were active throughout the 2026 season, with 226 workdays spent maintaining the rivers and marked channels. The routinely managed locations are described in the Operations Update Report included in this meeting.

4. 2027/28 Proposal

4.1. Several operational projects are already in the workplan for the next financial year. Mooring works include repairs to the piling at Paddy's Lane, Acle Bridge, Potter Heigham Staithe and Gayes Staithe. Other projects include to refurbish the timberwork and quay heading are planned for Coltishall Common, St Olaves, Wayford Bridge, Reedham and How Hill. Dredging projects include sections along the River Bure between Wroxham to Horning, Waxham Cut, Bure Mouth at Great Yarmouth and the River Chet. A larger project to replace gauge boards is planned. The routine water plant harvesting will take approximately 220 days of work time between May and September. 2027/28 will see the start of a new five-year riverside tree management programme. The assessment of how much length of riverbank will be managed from winter 2027/28 onwards is currently being reviewed and is due for reporting by April 2027.

4.2. An allowance for a pay increase of 3.5% has been made for 2027/28 although this is subject to negotiations by the National Joint Council which have yet to start. The trade unions are expected to put forward their claim during November 2026. The estimate

for 2026/27 was previously 3% but the final agreement was for 3.3%. 2024/25 saw a fixed amount of £1,290 per full time equivalent and 2025/26 was 3.2%.

4.3. Based on current information available a further allowance for reductions in hire boat numbers of £39,000 has been made with a nil reduction in private income. The 2026/27 year proved difficult to forecast.

4.4. Inflation has continued to rise, and the September 2026 levels are as follows:

- CPI 3.5%
- CPIH 3.6%
- RPI 3.9%

4.5. To deliver the projects above officers are recommending an increase of 3.5%in line with inflation. Tables 6 and 7 below provide the current cost and what a 3.5% increase would mean in monetary terms.

Table 6
Hire Craft Cost per m2 by category of vessel

No.	Category – cost per m^2 except rowing, canoes etc	Current	+3.5%	Increase
1.	Weekly hired motor craft	£45.59	£47.19	£1.60
2.	Weekly hired motor craft – electric and hybrid	£31.38	£32.48	£1.10
3.	Day hired – petrol/diesel	£72.45	£74.99	£2.54
4.	Day hired electric	£45.11	£46.69	£1.58
5.	MCA passenger boats and small passenger boats	£60.00	£62.10	£2.10
6.	Hired motorised sailing craft – diesel	£34.95	£36.17	£1.22
7.	Hired sailing boats & hired motorised sailing - electric	£25.55	£26.44	£0.89
8.	Hired houseboats	£23.11	£23.92	£0.81
9.	Hired rowing – fixed amount	£101.55	£105.10	£3.55
	Hired paddle craft – fixed amount	£50.77	£52.55	£1.78
10.	Private motorboats - petrol & diesel	£20.24	£20.95	£0.71
11.	Private motorboats electric	£15.47	£16.01	£0.54
12.	Private motorised sailing craft - petrol & diesel	£14.98	£15.50	£0.52
13.	Private sailing boats & private motorised sailing craft - electric	£12.37	£12.80	£0.43
14.	Private houseboats	£7.97	£8.25	£0.28

No.	Category – cost per m^2 except rowing, canoes etc	Current	+3.5%	Increase
15.	Private rowing, canoes etc. – fixed amount	£50.77	£52.55	£1.78

Table 7
Proposed increase in Private Craft navigation charges by common types and sizes of vessel

Type of Vessel	Current	+3.5%	Increase
5 m2 Private sailing craft	£61.85	£64.00	£2.15
11 m2 Private sailing craft	£136.07	£140.80	£4.73
5 m2 Private motorboats	£101.20	£104.75	£3.55
15 m2 Private motorboats	£303.60	£314.25	£10.65
22 m2 Private motorboats	£445.28	£460.90	£15.62
38 m2 Private motorboats	£769.12	£796.10	£26.98
11 m2 Day hired boats – petrol/ diesel	£796.95	£824.89	£27.94
11 m2 Day hired boats - electric	£496.21	£513.59	£17.38
38 m2 Weekly hired motor craft	£1,732.42	£1,793.22	£60.80
48 m2 Weekly hired motor craft	£2,188.32	£2,265.12	£76.80

5. Financial implications

5.1. The staff restructure in 2025/26 has meant that the Authority is limited in its ability to make further efficiency savings without effecting its capacity to deliver projects. Some short-term savings have been realised by not providing for an annual contribution to the Premises and Plant, Vessel and Equipment earmarked reserves for the duration of the capital grant funding from DEFRA. A 3.5% increase will provide a reserve balance of 11.1% at the end of 2027/28. Although this remains above the recommended minimum of 10% this will provide a cushion if boat numbers reduce further. The draft medium-term strategy currently indicates similar increases for the years up to and including 2029/30.

6. Risk implications

6.1. Risk 3 in the corporate risk register identifies loss of income as a key risk. The uncertainty in determining a further reduction in private boat numbers remains a risk but evidence in 2026/27 has shown previous predictions have not materialised. We will keep this under close review. The reserve position helps mitigate some of this risk.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Each year the Authority faces a challenge in determining the tolls for the forthcoming financial year. For the 2023/24 year that decision was delayed until the January meeting so that more up to date information was available. Aiming for an earlier decision in November each year gives hire yards certainty and the notice they need to set and advertise their prices, enabling clarity for their advance bookings.

7.2. The proposed increase is in line with inflation and that of the other Navigation Authorities. The Environment Agency use the cap of September CPI. The Canal and River Trust do not set their tolls until November, but they use a baseline of the Bank of England inflation. In addition to this they add a range of surcharges between 20-44% to their standard base fee for continuous cruisers and wide beam boats above 3.24m.

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Date of report: 21 October 2026

Broads Plan strategic objectives: C1, C2, C3, C4.

Appendix 1 – Members Tolls Workshop 6 October 2026

Appendix 2 – Annual Boat Numbers as at 1 November 2016-2025

Appendix 1 - Members Tolls Workshop 6 October 2026

Present: Harry Blathwayt, Stephen Bolt, Sue Cadamy, Mark Collins, Alan Goodchild, Gail Harris, Heather Hilburn, Tim Jickells, Tim Munday, Bob Neate, Matthew Shardlow, and Daniel Thwaites.

Apologies: George Boyd, Morgan Brobyn, Tom Daly, Peter Dixon, Tony Grayling, Tristram Hilborn, Martyn Hooton, Siân Limpenny, Remus Sawyerr, Paul Thomas.

In attendance: Sarah Cowley, Chief Executive; Bill Housden, Head of Tolls; Dan Hoare, Head of Operations; Emma Krelle, Director of Resources; Rob Rogers, Director of Delivery; Rob Leigh, Head of Communications; Lorraine Taylor, Head of Governance (note taker).

Meeting Aims

Members received a presentation from the Director of Delivery, Head of Tolls and Head of Operations. Following the presentation, Members were invited to ask questions or comment.

Questions and Comments

- It was questioned whether the Authority had considered employing more staff to carry out the larger mooring refurbishment projects rather than bringing in a contractor? Concern was expressed it would cost more to do large mooring refurbishment due to insurance, wages, NI contributions, pension costs etc.

- The biggest drop in boat numbers is the smaller crafts, is there a question of access? Is it worth time and effort to follow up on non-payment of tolls for paddle boards/canoes? Would it be better to make tolls free for this type of craft.

Explanation was provided of Paddle UK's growing membership and the BA receiving approx. £40k from them – if we decided not to charge, the Authority would lose significant income.

- Recognition that there was a drop in outboards, that previously it had been discussed about the possibility of tolling the outboard so that could be used on several craft.

- Comment that the Authority needed to be careful about diminishing returns. The Authority had been guilty of putting tolls up to cover the loss of craft on the water, and if it were to continue this way, boating will become unaffordable. Thinks 3.5% is grossly too much. If the tolls increase by too much, people will stop paying their tolls.

- A comment was raised that there was a perception that the Authority was in good financial health; this was corrected to explain that because of temporary additional Defra funding the National Park budgets were in a better position than they were last year. The Navigation budget continues to face challenges.

- Understands the above points, and the Authority does need to constantly look at efficiency. Would argue against reducing the work that is currently being done. If facilities

decline, there is risk of declining the use of the waterways. 3.5% is reasonable if work continues, and we cannot cut the tolls at risk of losing the infrastructure.

- Understand the above comments. Commented that it is good that the current figures are not as bad as expected. Cannot see where the growth is but the Authority needs to look at the bigger picture: How can the Authority mitigate costs? We only have one side of the story on the growth element.

- Raised that it was important to look at the bigger picture.

- Looking at the predicted salary increase, did this still allow the Authority to carry out the planned work? If we agree on 3.5% increase, did this allow for projects to be delivered? What date do we take for inflation?

- Concern was raised about small boats as it affected the demographics of people using the Broads, and the loss of the younger demographic is a large concern. Asked whether the Authority was getting more short visit tolls, and whether this balanced out the reduction in small craft.

Wear and tear on the Broads is greatest from large hire boats, these boats cause more damage to the Broads – damage to moorings, speeding causes more wash and damages the banksides.

- It was raised that good arguments were put forward around why hire boats are charged more, and that toll amount is a factor around affordability of owning a boat. No evidence that it is the main driver of the reduction in boat numbers and the Authority needs to understand the reasons why.

There is an impact on H&S if tolls are reduced: if the Broads became known as unsafe for boating, then less people will visit.

Is it possible to persuade Government to help with costs of navigation?

- A question was raised on how much work proposed is attributable to sea-level rise and climate change, and whether this was in mind when projects were selected?

- It is a difficult balancing act. When speaking to toll payers, they constantly raise ‘value for money’: Moorings; number of moorings; how good the moorings are; dredging; and plant cutting. The moment toll payers see those things decreasing or deteriorating, they will not be happy. Improvements to moorings would be a top priority to increase public satisfaction.

Agree that the list of projects on the slides was a sensible list going forward. Gaining a few moorings would be a plus.

- There has been a lot of reorganisation of staff, which can only be cut so many times.

How can we communicate what the Authority does?

People need to be encouraged to the Broads.

Maintaining infrastructure and health & safety is important and this needs to be publicised.

- The funding model is set as a private good and that model is struggling as people have reduced spending capacity and materials inflation is increased. Is it possible to look at alternative funding models?

It was noted that it seems we are on a negative feedback loop.

- Looking at the financial side of the Authority, we do have a fiscal relationship that comes through the tolls. If the navigation is safe and well used, it can only benefit the Authority; a better understanding of this fiscal relationship is required.

- How do we deal with more trees coming down, increased salinity etc. in relation to the effects of climate change? The Super El Nino could put more pressure on the Authority if there are lots of storms.

- We need to investigate pots of money that will help with flooding etc.

Worrying that there are no small boat yards – need to understand this situation more.

Is there any scope to speak to action groups and have face-to-face meetings? It was raised in response that groups are angry, but this was through lack of understanding.

- In two years' time, there will be a visitor levy. How will this affect the number of visitors?

- There was some discussion on whether it would be beneficial to hold a public meeting. It was agreed that this would need to be arranged soon after the November Broads Authority meeting where the tolls were set.

Appendix 2 - Annual Boat Numbers as at 1 November 2016-2025

Table 1

Hire Boats Numbers as at 1 November

Category	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2024 v 2025 Change	2024 v 2025 % Change
Motor Cruisers	789	802	806	801	734	729	673	647	641	630	-11	-1.72%
Auxiliary Yachts	44	45	46	44	39	45	45	45	43	44	1	2.33%
ALL CABIN HIRE BOATS:	**833**	**847**	**852**	**845**	**773**	**774**	**718**	**692**	**684**	**674**	**-10**	**-1.46%**
Day Launches	295	290	301	297	261	326	363	359	344	310	-34	-9.88%
Outboard Dinghies	11	9	9	8	4	4	4	4	1	4	3	300.00%
Passenger Vessels MCA	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	0	0.00%
Passenger Vessels SPB		6	7	7	4	8	8	7	9	7	-2	-22.22%
TOTAL MOTORBOATS:	**1145**	**1158**	**1175**	**1163**	**1047**	**1118**	**1099**	**1068**	**1044**	**1001**	**-43**	**-4.12%**
Sailing Craft	102	101	95	87	74	88	73	71	71	73	2	2.82%
Rowing Craft	192	191	194	193	182	227	230	442	413	376	-37	-8.96%
Houseboats	16	28	26	26	27	27	28	27	32	27	-5	-15.63%
TOTAL HIRE BOATS:	**1455**	**1478**	**1490**	**1469**	**1330**	**1460**	**1430**	**1608**	**1560**	**1477**	**-83**	**5.32%**

Table 2

Private Boat Numbers as at 1 November

Category	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2024 v 2025 Change	2024 v 2025 % Change
Motor Cruisers	5086	5110	5079	5083	5004	5237	5142	5049	4952	4887	-65	-1.31%
Auxiliary Yachts	1127	1132	1093	1107	965	1048	1024	966	904	884	-20	-2.21%
Day Launches	495	556	574	558	562	582	600	592	546	562	16	2.93%
Outboard Dinghies	962	1064	1060	1058	1051	1140	1185	1039	940	917	-23	-2.45%
Workboats	156	158	156	153	144	142	166	159	164	147	-17	-10.37%
Passenger Vessels SPB		22	21	23	13	19	20	22	21	22	1	4.76%
TOTAL MOTORBOATS:	**7826**	**8042**	**7983**	**7982**	**7739**	**8168**	**8137**	**7827**	**7527**	**7419**	**-108**	**-1.43%**
Sailing Craft	1107	1076	1081	1023	844	920	861	820	747	722	-25	-3.35%
Rowing Craft	1513	1483	1513	1545	1800	2039	2054	1874	1618	1516	-102	-6.30%
Houseboats	45	45	49	52	49	52	67	77	73	68	-5	-6.85%
TOTAL PRIVATE BOATS	**10491**	**10646**	**10626**	**10602**	**10432**	**11179**	**11119**	**10598**	**9965**	**9725**	**-240**	**-2.41%**

Table 3

Total Hire and Private Boat Numbers as at 1 November

Total	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2024 v 2025 Change	2024 v 2025 % Change
Grand Total	**11946**	**12124**	**12116**	**12071**	**11762**	**12639**	**12549**	**12206**	**11525**	**11202**	**-323**	**-2.80%**