



The WABC newsletter

www.wabc.org.uk

Our Riverside HQ - Project Update

At last we have news of positive progress since the rather depressing report in the Summer issue. After 11 months of waiting, we finally had the green light from the Environment Agency for both Planning and Flood Risk Assessment. Hurrah! This, together with the SODC Planning permission received a while ago, has enabled the project to move to the next stage - Procurement.

The tender documents for project construction were published at the end of August with a bidding close date of 22nd September. Bids are now being evaluated prior to contractor selection. The question now is "Who is the contractor and when will construction commence?" and that may not be until early in 2024, depending upon the river conditions and the contractor's view of working through the winter. We will have to see.

I think it is sensible to assume we will at least start the new season at Benson operating as now but perhaps hope to move to our 'new home' in May/June 2024. What a day that will be! Fingers crossed!

John Jenkins MBE

Chair of Trustees & Editor

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*Pictures of happy cruises this season
(photos by Chris Haigh)*

A Record-Breaking Season

WOW-one smashes last season's records!
Passenger numbers hit the 252 mark for the season

What an incredible year we have had! As at the end of the season our amazing volunteers have successfully made 65 trips in our wheelyboat WOW-one taking out 252 passengers, all disabled and less mobile people together with their friends and families. At the start of the season we set ourselves a 'stretch' target of 200 passengers to be carried by the end of September and, thanks to all the efforts of so many of our wonderful volunteers, we have smashed that. Amazing!

This is our third year of operation and the number of passengers taking the opportunity of getting out on the river in WOW-one has grown year-on-year which is so pleasing. The good news story of what we can offer is getting around – may it continue to do so!!

And what do our passengers think? The small selection of photos of their trips in this Newsletter says it all – 'a picture paints a 1000 words'!

Monster fish seen at Benson

“A giant leap, silver flanks – perhaps a salmon?”

Our Roving Reporter investigated the alleged sighting of a large fish leaping in the stretch of our river immediately upstream of Benson Weir. The suggestion was it was a salmon (*Salmo salar*, The Leaper)! If true, this would be amazing!

The Thames was a prolific salmon river several centuries ago but this amazing fish effectively disappeared as the river's pollution increased with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Despite the river's water quality improving significantly in the last 50 years, salmon have failed to return even though a reintroduction programme was attempted in the 1970's. The presence of a large salmon now would surely be a remarkable 'one-off'.

Notwithstanding the chances of locating this most sought-after of fighting fish, our intrepid salmon angler, JJ, accompanied by our world salmon fly-casting championship contender, Ally, took to WOW-one in an attempt to entice the fish with a deadly artificial fly. They recognised their chances of hooking up were very, very slim but nevertheless it was a chance that was not to be missed!

We were lucky that our Roving Reporter managed to take the photograph above which captured the essence of the hunt – the concentration of JJ casting the line and Ally in support, ever-alert with large landing net in hand, is manifest!

Sadly, the pair drew a blank – it was not to be. Yet another fishing disappointment but that's fishing for you! - **Roving Reporter, John West**



WheelyFest heralded as a resounding success!

Crowds applaud amazing musical acts



We staged our first ever fundraising event, WheelyFest, recently which was heralded as a resounding success by all and sundry! What great fun we all had on a fine day and such a wonderful example of our great volunteers all pulling together to make the event happen so successfully!

Eleven named bands played a wide range of non-stop music over the 7 hours of the event held yesterday (Sunday) at the Sports Park, Wallingford. There were fundraising games to be played by young and old and a star raffle featuring some excellent prizes. Additionally throughout the run-up to the event there featured an online auction offering more brilliant prizes and on the day a Hog Roast, organised by the Red Lion, Cholsey.

Amazingly all the musicians' acts were provided totally free of charge!

John Jenkins MBE, Chair of WABC and organiser of WheelyFest commented: “What a day, what an event! An extravaganza of musical brilliance, non-stop throughout the 7 hours duration. And all provided on a voluntary, no fee basis! We have to thank not only all the volunteers of WABC who put in sterling efforts to ensure all ran smoothly, all the incredible donors of so many raffle and auction prizes but to Sarah Eastwood, our Musical Director, a top-class musician and actress, who pulled ‘everything musical’ together. We are so thankful to her.”

Jenkins continued: “We had two objectives for the event – increased awareness of the charity and we certainly achieved that, and, as a fundraiser, to support the operation of our Wheelyboat, WOW-one. Whilst final figures are still to come in, we can be confident that our £3,000 target has been well beaten. What an amazing success!”

What does Benson House say?

What could possibly be better than messing about on the river? Well, that's exactly how some of the residents of Benson House spent their summer. All thanks to the marvelous volunteers at WABC and the WOW-one boat.

The crew have given us a warm welcome on every trip, helping us in to life jackets and ensuring our comfort on board. The easy access ramp meant that the boat was accessible to everyone.

During the summer we have made 11 trips, taking 30 residents and some family members to make the most of this wonderful opportunity to enjoy a cruise on the Thames.

The crew thought of everything. Handing out information sheets, pointing out buildings of interest and various wildlife. They even provided us with extra blankets on the chillier days.

Heading up stream, we kept our eyes peeled. It didn't take long to spot ducks, which we fed with special feed provided by the crew. There were swans and their signets and we were delighted to also see Cormorant, Heron and Kingfisher, a real delight! Passing under Shillingford Bridge was a noisy affair, calling out and listening for our echo. We waved at passing boaters and read the names of moored boats. Who knew there would be so much to do on such a tranquil stretch of river!

Passing under Pooh Sticks Bridge, we came to Days Lock where the boat was expertly turned around, ready to head home. The 2hr trip provided plenty of time to reminisce. Stories were shared with much laughter as new memories were made.

Every one of our residents have had a positive experience aboard WOW-one. Now, when I ask them about their trip, I hear a resounding "When can we go again?"

Caroline Shadwell
Wellbeing Coordinator
Benson House

What our passengers have to say...

Here are a few snippets of what some of our passengers have told us about their experience on WOW-one voyage experience:

"Yes, we've had two wonderful trips this week and your teams have been wonderful as always."



We thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. We took time going through the lock but were not at all bothered by the delay, it was just part of the great experience. It was marvellous to see Wallingford from the water and sighting of grey herons, moor hens, coots, and lots of geese. A call of a woodpecker, I shall bring my glasses next time so I may see the kingfisher that others did. All splendid.



"It was a lovely trip and everyone was so helpful."

"Trip was perfect!"

"Everything was perfect, thank you."



Mark absolutely loves his trips out with you! Everyone is super friendly and, it's an all-round enjoyable, mindful and happy experience. Thank you! We will be back again!



"It was a wonderful couple of hours."

"Everything was perfect, absolutely nothing to improve on. Thank you."



"As last years trip, all our people had an amazing time and the volunteers were absolutely brilliant and couldn't do enough. One of our staff members who has worked with us for us for 2 years said it was the best trip he'd been on since he joined our organisation."



WOW-one bridges the age gap



The WABC wheelyboat, WOW-one, set a new record earlier in the summer when a family group spanning 4 generations – yes, 4-generations – went out on a trip upriver, much to the huge delight of the 107 year old matriarch of the family, Mrs Helen Vincent. Daughter Annie and her husband, Helen’s grand daughter, Katie and great grand daughter Annie made up what was a very happy and excited family group.

Daughter Annie had heard of WABC and the capability of WOW-one from a friend and a casual conversation led to what was a tremendous adventure for all the family. Annie said "It was so easy to book a trip, just entered a few details into the WABC website and that’s it. We went upstream towards Oxford, the direction my mother wanted to go, and we had a wonderful time. We saw a Heron and a Cormorant – just lovely. My mother never thought she would get out on a river trip again and now we’ve just gone and done it! Amazing."

Andy Stevens, a WABC Trustee, was glowing following news of the success of the voyage. "What an absolute pleasure it was to enable the family to take this trip. I know the total joy on the faces of all family members was plain to see – we at WABC have been privileged to be able to make it happen."

Photo Gallery

We are very fortunate to have amongst our midst an expert photographer in Chris Haigh. Chris has taken some amazing photos this season of WOW-one in action – fantastic scenic views as well as our passengers enjoying the peace and tranquillity of the river. We asked Chris to select a few of his favourites which reflect these sentiments.



Photos by Chris Haigh

Thanks to our sponsors!

We are delighted to welcome and thank a new sponsor to our midst – InstaVolt, the UK’s largest fully-open public charging EV network. Sincere thanks to InstaVolt for their support!

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