

Floating protest over cuts to canal budget

Noisy flotilla to cruise through Oracle to Thames

by **Natalie Corp**

BERKSHIRE boaters hope a spectacular and noisy floating protest at the weekend will help sink massive government cuts in funding for waterways.

The Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has slashed 10% from the British Waterways budget and protesters say that will hit the preservation and regeneration of the nation's rivers and canals.

And major protests are taking place on Saturday, November 25, in Reading and Goring.

Save Our Waterways, a group of voluntary organisations set up to campaign against the cuts, has co-ordinated more than 50 rallies across the country.



Protest: Former Reading West MP Sir Anthony Durant.

Members of Burghfield Island Boat Club and the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust will lead a convey of narrow boats from County Lock at 11.15am on Saturday.

They will cruise past The Oracle stretch of the canal with horns blaring, before turning round to moor at Star Lane, near the Queens Road car park.

Former Reading West MP Sir Anthony Durant, president of the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust and the River Thames Society, will join the town's MPs and representatives of rambling, cycling, wildlife and angling bodies.

Dozens of boats of all sizes will also take part in a similar blockade on the Thames at Goring Lock at 12.30pm.

DEFRA made the cuts – which have already cost 180 redundancies at British Waterways – to help pay the £200million it was fined by the EU for its handling of farming subsidy payouts.

The programme of dredging and maintenance and repairs to locks and towpaths has been put under threat.

Mike Wyatt, organiser of the Reading blockade, said: "We're determined to send a message to the Government.

"We know there are many thousands of people who enjoy local waterways and who will support us."