

OVERWATER WHEELYBOAT SERVICES

PROVIDING BOAT TRIPS ON THE SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL AND ACCESSIBLE WHEELCHAIR TRANSPORT WITHIN SOUTH CHESHIRE, FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

OVERVIEW

We are based at the award-winning Overwater Marina on the scenic Shropshire Union Canal in the Cheshire countryside and offer a novel experience to all children and adults with special needs or mobility issues. This is especially appreciated by people who are in some ways confined in terms of their access to the countryside and open spaces, giving them and their carers a restful break from their normal surroundings.

Our boat, the “Maughan Lass”, has step-free roll-on/roll-off access via a drop-down bow door, and enhanced stability on the water. It is powered by a quiet-running electric motor which allows easy conversations for the group on-board, consistent with the quiet, countryside environment. Up to 4 wheelchair passengers can be carried on each trip plus 4 walk-on passengers, or 8 walk-on passengers, all plus our 2 volunteer crew.

For those people who find it difficult to access the Wheelyboat because of a lack of suitable transport, we also have our Wheelybus available, which was introduced in 2019. This is a specially adaptable minibus which can carry up to 3 wheelchairs with 3 seated passengers, or up to 11 seated passengers. It is dedicated for groups containing at least 1 disabled or chronically sick passenger.

All of our Volunteers give their time for free to organise and run these trips, with a lot of help from Overwater Marina who also provide the Wheelyboat with dedicated mooring and electrical charging facilities, free of charge.

BACKGROUND

Overwater Wheelyboat Services is a non-profit making, charitable organisation offering transport facilities using the Wheelybus to people with disabilities, to give them access to local recreational venues and, canal trips using the Wheelyboat, especially if they are wheelchair users.

The Overwater Wheelyboat Project was turned from a concept to reality by the late Rodney Cottrell BEM, who created the “Audlem Lass Boat Service” in 2011. This facility has carried over 4,000 passengers every year from Overwater Marina into Audlem village, with donations from passengers going to the RNLI.

After running the “Audlem Lass” for some time, it became obvious that there were often difficulties for people wishing to access this service due to the physical difficulties of actually getting into or out of the boat and seating arrangement on board. So how could these problems be resolved?

Mike Harthern, one of the Audlem Lass Skippers scoured the internet, contacted small boat builders over the UK, Europe and even China without a great deal of success. Then one day, he received a magazine through the post from an organisation named The Wheelyboat Trust, an organisation in the UK manufacturing boats capable of carrying physically impaired people and people in wheelchairs. The bow of the boat dropped down and passengers could walk straight on and wheelchairs rolled on and off. They are not sea going boats but are designed for lake, river or canal use - exactly what was needed!

Mike immediately contacted Rodney Cottrell and after a very brief discussion with Janet, the MD of Overwater Marina, the **Overwater Wheelyboat Project** was born.

Rodney quickly put together a fantastic team of dedicated hard working volunteers and, after many months of really intense work, they managed, through grants, donations and collections, to raise enough money to make the purchase. The order was placed for the boat, with a projected delivery date of May/June 2015 and a cost of £22,634.

The delivery date was met and an official naming ceremony took place on 27 June 2015 at Overwater Marina where the boat was named “The Maughan Lass”, after Richard Maughan, co-founder of Overwater Marina.

Approximately one year after the launch of the “Maughan Lass”, it also became apparent that many organisations and home-bound

members of the local communities, particularly those with mobility issues or special needs, were unable to take advantage, not only of the Wheelyboat service, but other social activities in the area.

This was mainly due to funding cuts and the high cost/lack of availability of suitable private transport, which has led to a significant increase in loneliness, social isolation and social exclusion, particularly within the elderly and most disadvantaged members of our local community.

Prior to the 2017 sailing season, the decision was taken to procure a specially adapted vehicle (the **Overwater Wheelybus**), to respond to this need. This would provide not only access to the Wheelyboat, but also to other social activities within the local area and meet other requirements for specially adapted transport e.g. for medical appointments or hospital visits.

In January 2018, **Overwater Wheelyboat Services** (OWS) was established, to combine both boating and transport activities on a “not for profit” basis, through an experienced Team of local Volunteers.

This put activities on a much more formal basis with Trustees and a Management Committee, supported by a very active group of Volunteers, operating under a formal Constitution with a full range of Procedures and Policies in place.

In subsequent discussions with Cheshire Community Foundation, Cheshire East Council and several major Funding Organisations, the benefits of registering as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) became clear. These were not only in terms of tax exemptions but also to overcome restrictions which many potential Funding Organisations have in place.

Also encouragement was given to procure a new, rather than second-hand vehicle, again to overcome funding restrictions applied by many Organisations.

On 25th February 2018, a formal Application was submitted to the Charity Commission for CIO status and on 2nd July 2018, Overwater Wheelyboat Services was formally advised that this had received favourable consideration The Charity Registration Number is 1179021.

As part of the vehicle procurement process OWS carried out a competitive tender exercise, based on a detailed performance specification and evaluation procedure. From this it was established that the capital cost of the new minibus would be in the order of £34,000 including the road fund licence and registration fee, with additional costs for insurance, permits and annual running costs.

With this target in mind, fund raising activities continued apace and on 8th January 2019, a brand new, specially adapted vehicle supplied by GM Coachworks Group was delivered.

The **Overwater Wheelybus** was “launched” on 25th January 2019 at the Audlem Public Hall, attended by local Dignitaries, Sponsors, Supporters and Volunteers. Following driver training and familiarisation, the Wheelybus was available by early March, well in time for the start of the 2019 Wheelyboat season.

Having raised the initial Wheelybus set-up costs, obviously the subsequent annual running costs for both the Wheelybus and Wheelyboat, estimated at around £25,000 over the next three years need to be funded. Some of these costs have and will continue to be offset by User donations but, continued support from existing Sponsors and other funding sources has been invaluable in helping to sustain the services provided. This support is greatly appreciated and OWS will continue to seek other new funding opportunities and maintain its’ own fundraising activities.

With the encouragement and guidance of Sarah Callander Beckett DL, High Sheriff of Cheshire 2017/2018, Overwater Wheelyboat Services, after much information gathering and performance evaluation, submitted an application to be considered for the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Services.

Assessors visited the Marina on a very cold and frosty morning on 2nd December 2019 to review the detailed information provided in the OWS application and evaluate its’ merit, through discussion with Trustees, Volunteers, and Service Users. On 2nd June 2020, it was formally announced that OWS had received the Award.

Obviously, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on all of the OWS activities. Social distancing meant that the Wheelyboat was unable to offer any services during 2020 but, in anticipation of

the relaxation of some of the restrictions, the Wheelyboat was re-launched on 24th June 2021.

As far as the Wheelybus is concerned, the same restrictions had to be applied but, OWS Volunteers have been able to respond to requests for transport from within the local community for transport to vaccination and other critical medical appointments. The number of passengers carried on each trip was extremely limited to ensure compliance with appropriate restrictions and advice, but the response of the OWS Volunteers was extremely conscientious and greatly appreciated.

Although it is anticipated that the OWS services will take some time to return to pre-pandemic levels due to a very gradual relaxation of social distancing concerns, the Charity is determined to develop and improve the services it provides and its team of front-line Volunteers and Supporters stands ready and able to use its skill, experience and enthusiasm within the local community.

Very sadly, our founder Chairman Rodney Cottrell BEM, passed away on 19th October 2020. This was a tremendous blow to his family, his friends, and the many organizations that he had developed and supported, both within and beyond the local Community. He has left a tremendous legacy and everyone at Overwater Wheelyboat Services, is very honoured and proud to be a part of that legacy.

OVERWATER WHEELYBOAT STATISTICS

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. OF TRIPS</u>	<u>NO. OF PASSENGERS</u>
2015	29	230
2016	36	305
2017	37	336
2018	51	470
2019	44	368 (adverse weather conditions caused 15 cancellations)

From the above information, it can be seen as is to be expected, that summer weather conditions had a significant effect. However, discounting this factor, the number of trips undertaken, number of passengers carried and booking enquiries showed a consistent upward trend over our five years of Wheelyboat operations.

DETAILED WHEELYBOAT STATISTICS FOR 2019

Total number of Wheelyboat trips	=	44
Total number of Wheelyboat Passengers	=	368
Total number of Wheelyboat Passengers who used the Wheelybus to access a Wheelyboat trip	=	91
Total number of trips booked then cancelled	=	22

DETAILED WHEEYBUS STATISTICS FOR 2019

The Wheelybus service started in April 2019. The figures shown below are the actual figures up to 31st October 2019 and a forecast of further trips up to the end of the year.

Total number of Wheelybus trips	=	50
Total number of Passengers carried	=	401
Total number of wheelchairs carried	=	81
Total number of trips booked then cancelled	=	2

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 FROM 2020 TO DATE

Wheelyboat - Due to the restrictions we were unable to offer any canal trips throughout 2020 and the first three months of the 2021 sailing season.

As these restrictions were lifted, the Wheelyboat was brought out of dry storage on 24th June 2021 and, after thorough re-commissioning and refresher training, services started again on 13th July.

Despite the continuing social isolation concerns for our passengers, by the end of September we will have completed approximately half of the trips provided in 2019 in a similar time frame.

Wheelybus - Throughout the pandemic, although with extremely restricted carrying capacity, the Wheelybus has been able to provide transport to passengers with mobility issues, to attend Vaccination Centres, other medical/ personal appointments and social excursions.

Between January 2020 and the end of September 2021 the Wheelybus provided a total of 78 trips for children and adults with disabilities.

OWS MANAGEMENT AND FRONT-LINE DELIVERY RESOURCES

In 2019 the OWS resources were :

Management Team	10
Boat only Volunteers	12
Boat and Bus Volunteers	13
Bus only Volunteers	5
Supporters	<u>15</u>
Total	<u>55</u>

Currently, despite the pandemic, OWS although less active, has broadly maintained the above resource levels and we currently have a further 9 recently registered front-line Volunteers, most of whom have already undergone their initial training

OWS CURRENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Janet Maughan	OWS President
John Humphries	Chairman/Trustee
Michael Cookson	OWS Treasurer/Trustee
Rod Derbyshire	OWS Secretary
John Kemble	Activity Co-ordinator /Trustee
Angus Maughan	Trustee
Mike Harthern	Trustee
Michael Vlasto	Trustee
Christine Cottrell	Co-opted Adviser

OWS KEY SPONSORS

Ableworld

Baker Wynne Wilson

Car Transplants Ltd.

Cheshire Community Foundation

Combermere Abbey

Comic Relief

The Cheshire Leader Fund

The Co-operative Community Fund

The European Fund for Agricultural Development

The National Lottery Fund

Overwater Marina