



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Guidance for leisure craft entering Sharpness Dock from the River Severn estuary

PLAN AND COMMUNICATE

Recent events have shown that some leisure craft operators have failed to understand the basic principles of passage planning and the essential need to communicate with the port at Sharpness. These guidance notes have been produced to help inform the planning process. We hope you will find them useful.

I. General considerations

(a) Narrow channel and avoidance of conflict with large vessels

Large commercial vessels using the dock at Sharpness and the River Severn are confined to the main navigation channel. This is recognized as a narrow channel and skippers of small craft must act prudently and with due regard to the International Rules for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (the “Colregs”) to avoid hampering the movement of larger vessels. Rule 9 applies.

(b) Sandbanks, rock outcrops

Although the difference in the time of high water between Portishead and Sharpness is less than one hour, the significant rise in estuary bed level between the two has a huge impact upon the times and depths at which the sandbanks and rock outcrops are covered by the incoming tide and the depths available in the main channel. It is essential that the passage is not rushed but conducted at a speed which ensures that sufficient depth is available for navigation in and adjacent to the main channel.

(c) Tidal flows

Flood and ebb flows in the estuary may exceed 4 knots and should thus be taken into account when assessing your speed over the ground. Flows at this rate can place significant strain on mooring equipment and may hamper recovery. For this reason reducing vessel speed, rather than anchoring, should be the preferred option if it becomes clear that entry to the port may be delayed. See below.

2. Passage planning

(a) Passage planning is essential in order to:

- ensure that you arrive at your destination at an appropriate time
- avoid unsustainable alterations in speed
- avoid the need to stop or anchor
- ensure that you are able to identify your position relative to charted land and sea marks

(b) In general, and unless circumstances require otherwise, plan your passage to arrive off Sharpness **no earlier than 1 hour before High Water and **no later** than High Water Sharpness.**

No earlier for two reasons:

- Outbound traffic passes through the locks at Sharpness before inbound.
- If you make the passage up the River Severn too early there will be very little water above the M48 motorway bridge, and there is the danger that you will touch the bottom at times. In severe cases craft can be literally rolled over and over on the sand banks between the road bridges and Sharpness. More often you will be “bumped” further and further onto the bank and you could well lose your propeller and/or rudder, endangering your craft and all aboard.

No later than High Water because:

- It is normal practice to close Sharpness entrance gates at high water.
- There are times when for the safety of shipping in the system Sharpness gates **must** be closed at High Water.

The tidal rate should not be underestimated by small craft having limited power. On both flood and ebb tides there can be a strong flow across the entrance to Sharpness in excess of 4 knots. Between the piers a strong flow may remain, and adequate preparation and timely manoeuvring will be required to avoid being set up on to the piers.

3. Essential notification requirements and considerations

(a) If you wish to enter the Inland Waterway system through Sharpness Dock you must:

- Book your passage in advance (a minimum of 24 hours notice is required) by contacting Sharpness Pierhead on 01453 511968 or VHF Channel 13 (call “Sharpness Radio”). Sharpness Pierhead is manned according to operational need and callers should be prepared to leave a message. Booking and early communication is essential in order for the team at Sharpness to plan the tide to allow for all known movements and to liaise with all parties to ensure that movements are achieved safely and efficiently.
- Establish communication either by telephone or VHF as early as possible with Sharpness when en-route (in practical terms that would normally be when passing the M48 motorway bridge). Be prepared to provide your anticipated time of arrival and an accurate indication of your position at the time of making the call.
- Understand the significance of the port entry light signals displayed at the pierhead.
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/wales-and-south-west/sharpness-port>

- Be aware that operational constraints may require that on occasions you may have to stem the tide in the estuary for a period prior to entering the dock. Canal & River Trust staff will be pleased to advise of any movements into or out of Sharpness Dock and the anticipated time at which the entrance will be clear (in order to enable you to calculate and adjust your speed accordingly).
- (b) There are no berths available for leisure vessels within the working dock, (except for vessels which have made arrangements with Sharpness Shipyard and Drydock Ltd for a boat lift or works). Passage is available through the dock into the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal.

The movement of commercial shipping into and out of Sharpness dictates what can and cannot be achieved on any specific tide. At times, small craft may be required to pass through the lock chamber with commercial shipping.

- (c) Sharpness is a gateway into the inland waterway system allowing easy access to both Gloucester and Worcester on “broad” waterways and into the Midlands on “narrow” waterways. Detailed information on vessel size and draft limitations is available from Canal & River Trust or on the internet at <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/wales-and-south-west/navigating-the-river-severn>
- (d) Visiting leisure craft that do not hold a Long Term Canal & River Trust Licence need to buy a Short Term Licence and pay a lockage fee. Licence Fees are based on boat length. The Canal & River Trust website should be checked for details of charges (NB prices are reviewed annually.) Reductions on lockage fees are available for groups of boats if they make a block booking in advance; contact Canal & River Trust for details and prices on 03030 404040
- (e) Canal & River Trust Licences must now be obtained “on-line” at licensing.canalrivertrust.org.uk or by calling 03030 404040. You can no longer purchase a licence on arrival at Sharpness.

If you have not booked a passage and do not intend to enter Sharpness, you must keep well clear of the Port approaches for your own safety and that of other users. If you are using the river adjacent to Sharpness, it is useful to establish contact with the Pierhead to advise them of your movements.