

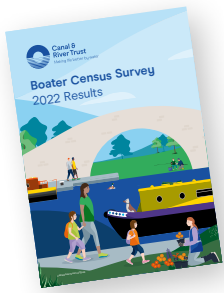


**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Boater Census Survey 2022 Results: Issues & Challenges





In August 2022, the Canal & River Trust launched its first ever Boater Census Survey.

The Canal & River Trust is the charity working to care for a 2,000-mile-long, 250-year-old network of canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks. We are committed to maintaining the waterways and keeping them safe and available for boating, and for the communities that they run through, for today and generations to come.

There are around 35,000 boats on our canals and rivers, which provide a sanctuary for leisure boaters and holidaymakers, a home to liveaboard boaters, and a workplace for the many boats selling goods and services up and down the country.

To understand more about the needs of the boaters who live on and use our waterways and the challenges they face, we ran our first ever Boater Census Survey (“the Boater Census”) in 2022. In May 2023, we published a report with a quantitative summary of the results. This second report sets out the results of a qualitative analysis of the comments respondents submitted in response to open-text questions in the Boater Census.

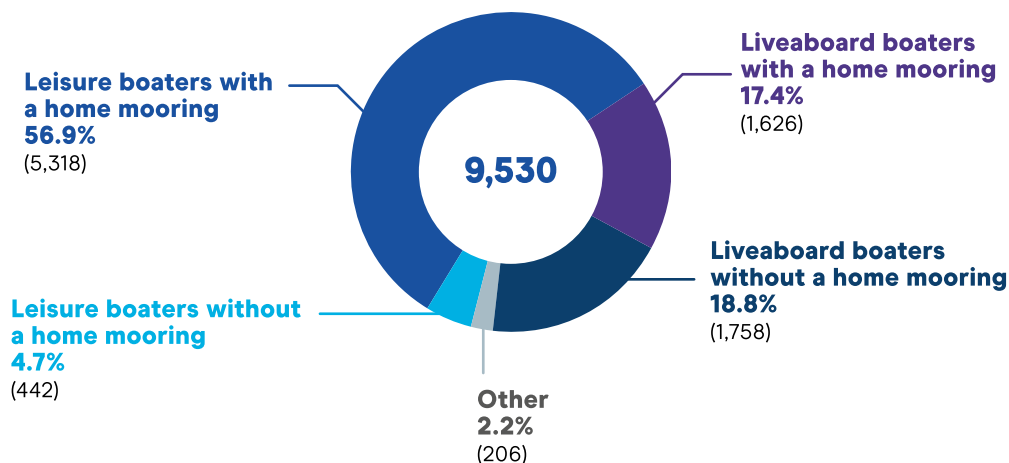
Both the quantitative and the qualitative data will help inform our own work and that of others, such as health service providers and local authorities, to make sure boaters are taken into account and their needs are met through decision-making, policy and services.

About the survey

The anonymous online survey was open for ten weeks and boaters took part by completing a questionnaire online or over the telephone. Invitations to take part were sent to current licence holders by email, text message or post, and we asked people to complete one survey per boat. Roving traders were included but other business boat licence holders were not. This means that the Boater Census Reports do not cover the thousands of hire boaters who enjoy trips and holidays on the waterways each year.

The Boater Census will become a part of the Trust's boater survey timetable. As it is far more detailed than any other survey, and there needs to be an appropriate amount of time between each Boater Census for any actions to take effect, it will not be an annual event. A suitable timeframe for the Boater Census will be established.

We sent out a total of 32,777 invitations to take part, and we received 9,530 responses. The breakdown of responses by boater type is as follows:



This report focuses on a section of optional questions that was only presented to respondents who told us they live on their boats. The questions were about the challenges and issues they face as a result of living on a boat, in a range of areas of life.

We have summarised the key issues and themes from the written responses to these questions. Where we can we have highlighted possible help available or links to support material to address the key challenges faced by liveaboard boaters.

Have you faced any issues or challenges living aboard your boat for you or someone on your boat related to ...?

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A **home mooring** is a paid-for place where you can leave your boat long-term, including private mooring sites or marinas and long-term towpath moorings provided by the Canal & River Trust.



Boaters who do not pay for a home mooring are known as **continuous cruisers (CC)** and they move their boats around the network regularly.

Key Points from the Boater Census

The most common theme throughout the Boater Census responses identified the issues created by not having a fixed address.

- **It was noted that accessing a range of services became difficult, this included registering with GPs, accessing healthcare and financial services, and registering to vote.**
- **Issues were still present for some respondents who were successful in accessing these services. Appointments, test results and similar are often sent by post, which means that these can be missed, as post cannot be collected promptly or may not be received at all.**

- **Applying for school places and arranging travel can also be more difficult when, as a Continuous Cruiser, you have to move regularly.**

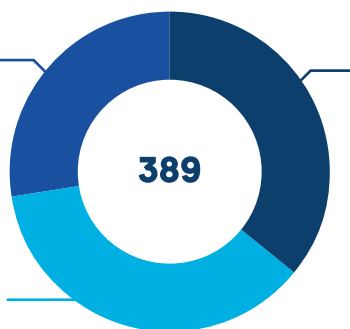
- **Moving and the additional requirements of living on a boat, can make it difficult if a boater has caring responsibilities for someone in a fixed location.**

Further information and the help available directly from the Canal & River Trust or other external agencies can be found throughout this report.

1. Have you faced any issues or challenges living aboard your boat for you or someone on your boat related to a disability or long-term health condition?

I/we need extra support to manage the boating lifestyle, such as help with boat maintenance or assistance with locks.
18.8%
(106 Comments)

It is difficult to meet the requirements for continuous cruisers when accessing medical support and supplies.
25.4%
(143 Comments)



Not having a fixed address makes it difficult to access medical services such as GPs, hospitals and pharmacies.
24.9%
(140 Comments)

“Unable to receive deliveries of prescription supplies direct to the boat [...] Have to travel many miles by bus/ train to collect from pharmacy etc. when cruising in line with CC guidelines.”

“Being disabled sometimes means there are times when you are too ill to move every two weeks. It would be useful to have a scheme similar to blue badge system.”

The Canal & River Trust has two options available if your health makes it difficult to meet the standard requirements for boating: reasonable adjustments under the Equalities Act (2010), known as **Equalities Adjustments**; and short-term **Approved Extended Stays**. There is more information about both, as well as our **Disabled Boater Forum**, on page 15, and on our website canalrivertrust.org.uk/equality

A **Boater's Blue Card** is available from **The Accessible Waterways Association** (www.awa-uk.org.uk). This 'badge' is primarily an awareness sign, intended to inform others that there is someone aboard the boat who could be less aware of, or able to react to, passers-by. It is for optional display and does not carry any entitlement to moor in otherwise restricted or forbidden spots. We supported the production of these first awareness-raising 'blue cards' for disabled boaters.



Right: Boater's Blue Card

There were also several comments about the ways in which living on a boat has helped people cope with different conditions and impairments, and the support they have received from Trust staff and volunteers. Our data analysis volunteers were struck by these boaters' determination and resilience: life may be better by water, but it isn't always easy.

"Age-related osteoarthritis, especially in my hands, not stopping me doing stuff but definitely slowing me down. Volunteer lock keepers have helped a lot!"

"I have a spine disability and have been allowed extra stoppage time at moorings and restricted movement on the canal."

"I have multiple health conditions and living on a boat helps me cope with them all."

The Friends, Families & Travellers website, www.gypsy-traveller.org, has advice for those trying to register with a doctor if they are without a fixed address <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/advice-section/what-to-do-if-a-doctor-surgery-wont-register-you-without-a-fixed-address-or-id/>

2. Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to accessing financial services (e.g. banking/loans)?

The vast majority of comments are about the difficulties associated with not having a permanent residential address, and the lack of a postcode in particular. Even some boaters with permanent residential moorings found that their marina or canalside addresses weren't accepted by financial service providers. Several respondents have resorted to using a friend or family member's address, or even lying about their address, and many were concerned about the implications this might have.

As a result, many boaters feel stigmatised, using terms like "second class citizens", "homeless" or "vagrants" to express their exclusion from financial services despite having permanent homes and, in many cases, good financial situations and job security.

"[Not] Having a permanent address is an issue. The boat is not considered a permanent address and any financial assistance we have needed has been refused."

"Financial institutions insist on an address for verifying ID. If this could be done using the Canal and River Trust licensing system it would be a huge help."

Several respondents mentioned struggling to register to vote. By law, you are able to register to vote and there are instructions for this on the Government's website. Our **Welfare Officers** can also help you. See page 15 for more details. You need to choose a location, which may be somewhere you have lived in the past or an area where you spend a substantial part of your time. You might choose to vote by post or by proxy, in case you are not near that area at the time of the next election. Regardless of whether or how you vote, being on the electoral register can help your credit rating because financial service providers can access the list.

We can provide confirmation that you have a boat licence without a home mooring. Unfortunately, financial institutions are under no obligation to accept this as an alternative to proof of address. Some boaters report successfully using PO Box addresses or mail forwarding services like Boatmail as their correspondence addresses, but it seems more work is needed to raise awareness of boating lifestyles among financial institutions. We may be able to support this sort of action by sharing information with relevant official bodies through data sharing agreements.

3. Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to caring responsibilities?

It can be difficult to follow the continuous cruising requirements and meet your caring responsibilities.

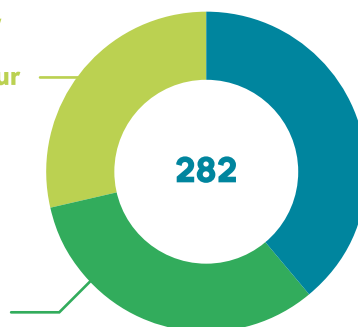
24.8%

(92 Comments)

Access to health services is particularly difficult if your boat is your home.

21.6%

(80 Comments)



It is hard to balance caring for someone with the practical tasks and challenges of living aboard, such as boat maintenance, accessing fuel, water and waste facilities, and working locks.

29.6%

(110 Comments)

"I have elderly relatives and also work full time, so I sometimes don't have time to go for services at weekends."

"Needed help from my sister (also a CC liveaboard) during lengthy treatment for cancer. Permission to overstay was applied for both boats and accepted."

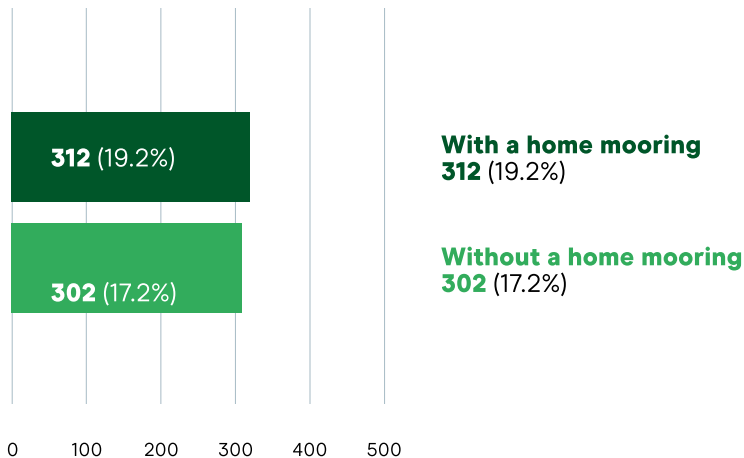
"Access to medical care and regular NHS appointments can be difficult having to move all the time."

We understand that it can be a challenge to balance your caring responsibilities with the everyday tasks of living aboard. If you are struggling, you can contact your Licence Support Officer or the Welfare Officers for help and advice. You might benefit from an **Approved Extended Stay** or an **Equalities Adjustment**. The **Waterways Chaplains** are also a great source of support, whether you need a listening ear or more practical help. You might also be interested in attending our **Disabled Boater Forum**. More details about all of these are on page 15. It is also a good idea to check with the local authority where the boat is situated most often to find out if any local support is available. We can provide sighting information if you need to demonstrate a local connection but do not have a postal address. More information for carers can be found here <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/guides-and-tools/your-guide-to-the-care-act-england/>

4. Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to accessing financial help (e.g. accessing benefits)?

The Boater Census asked respondents if they received any benefits, and 614 liveaboard boaters said they did (18.1% of all the liveaboard boaters who responded to the Boater Census). By far the most common benefit people told us they receive is a pension or pension credit, and a significant minority responded with “prefer not to say” (104 liveaboard boaters).

How many liveaboard boaters receive benefits?



The slightly smaller proportion of benefit recipients among continuous cruisers is likely to reflect their younger age. It is also possible that some continuous cruisers are not claiming all the benefits that they are entitled to.

In 144 comments (43.8%), the specific hurdle boaters faced was not having an address. Several people reported being accused of fraud or treated with suspicion by the staff processing their benefits applications.

“When my partner was ill and couldn’t work, she was unable to get any help towards paying bills as they said that she was either homeless, and therefore didn’t have any heating etc to pay for, or she lived at her parents.”

“Really difficult to explain that you move all the time and having to change job centres when accessing benefits which causes delay and confusion.”

The things respondents suggested would help included greater awareness and training for staff working in the benefits system, to avoid being classed as “homeless”, and for their systems to be amended to handle correspondence addresses.

Energy Support Scheme: 47 comments (14.6%) specifically referred to liveaboard boaters being excluded from the Government’s Energy Support Scheme. We successfully lobbied the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to include boaters in the energy grant scheme since it was first announced, you can read our statement here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views/news/continued-calls-for-government-to-offer-energy-support-to-all-liveaboard-boaters>. The Trust has shared data with the Government department to facilitate payment to over 7,000 liveaboard boaters without home moorings. The grant support available adds up to more than £4 million.

5. Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to accessing health services?

Around two thirds of the comments (19, 59.4%) refer to the difficulty of accessing NHS treatment, whether registering with a GP, getting hospital appointments, or accessing dental care. This is a widespread problem that also affects people living on land. However, some boaters report facing a number of additional obstacles:

- administration systems that require a fixed address (9 comments)
- cruising many miles from their healthcare providers, making it difficult to attend appointments or collect prescriptions (7 comments)
- not receiving post, including test results and invitations to routine screening (6 comments)

The NHS website states that “if you do not have a permanent address you can still register using a temporary address or the address of the GP surgery”. However, in practice, many surgeries only accept new patients who live within their geographical area.

“If I try and register with a GP in the area my boat is in, I have to register as a ‘Homeless Person’ and get a 3 months’ temporary registration.”

“I have had difficulty with accessing mail which has been sent to Post Office addresses, including results for tests and screening invitations.”

“Having no fixed address has been difficult to explain at the GP surgery and appointment letters get lost sometimes.”

There is useful advice on the NHS website and the Friends, Families and Travellers website:

www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/

www.gypsy-traveller.org/advice-section

Register on the NHS app:

<https://help.login.nhs.uk/setupnhslogin/>

Details of websites and apps that can be accessed with NHS login:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/online-services/nhs-login/websites-and-apps-you-can-access-with-nhs-login/>

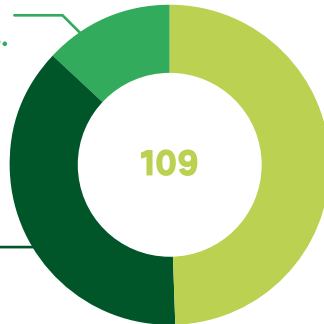
6. Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to accessing education?

Poor internet connection makes it difficult to access online learning portals and materials. **14.4%**

(14 comments)

Registering with schools and universities without a fixed address can be very difficult. **42.2%**

(41 comments)



It is difficult to meet the requirements for continuous cruising when you have children in school or are in education yourself. **55.7%**

(54 comments)

“Had to apply for school place through local authority traveller liaison officer as school online application needs residential postal address and proof of council tax.”

“When thinking about further education I have to factor in that I'll be moving every two weeks which makes things more complicated.”

Advice for boaters without a home mooring

If you need to regularly stay in one place, or a limited area, then it is a good idea to get a home mooring.

Living aboard as a family can be a challenge, especially if the boat doesn't have a permanent place to moor, but some boaters do raise their children on the water. Around 5% of Boater Census respondents told us there are children living on their boats. We urge boaters to talk to us if they need help balancing their needs with the licence requirements.

Make sure you:

- Secure a school place for your child, using your local authority's traveller liaison officer if needed
- Understand the requirements for boaters without a home mooring
- Plan your cruising around other transport, whether that's buses, trains, car parking, or walking or cycle routes
- Carefully consider whether continuous cruising is the best option for you, or whether you really need a permanent mooring
- Consider a winter mooring (permits are sold by the Trust and by many third-party providers)

7.

Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to employment/work?

13 comments (43.3%) indicated that commuting was not easily compatible with the requirements of continuous cruising.

Other common themes were difficulties surrounding having no fixed address for HR processes and job applications (5 comments).

Working from home presents its own issues when you live aboard, largely in relation to poor internet connection in some areas (4 comments), and the limited physical space and power supply you have on a boat (2 comments).

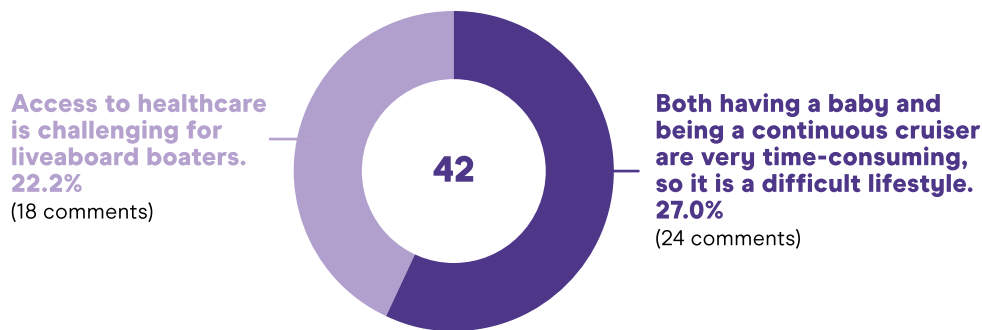
“It has never been said but during work interviews, I have become aware of a change in the atmosphere when my living arrangements have come up, especially having no fixed address in the area.”

“Not having a fixed address is challenging, as employers (or anyone, actually) don't really understand this. Mooring in places with poor mobile data connection also.”



8.

Has living on a boat created any issues or challenges for you or someone on your boat related to having a baby?



Many of the challenges and issues reported in relation to having a baby overlap with the overall challenges of boaters' access to healthcare:

- healthcare providers lack awareness or understanding of what living on a boat means
- administration systems insist on a residential address
- many rely on postal communication rather than email or telephone

"Difficult to CC when having a baby due to a lot of work required when having a baby and then moving it the boat regularly. A permanent mooring would be better however they are very expensive in London."

However, several boaters have found living aboard to be an advantage. Some report being able to move into the catchment area for their preferred hospital and others were glad to be able to moor very close to the place where they chose to have their babies.

"It was great that I had no fixed address so I could move into the catchment area of the hospital I wanted to go to."

Some boaters also shared inspiring and alarming stories about their experiences of having a baby on board a boat.

"Midwives were initially a little sceptical until they came to the boat, had a piece of cake, and realised that our boat was a lovely home and that it really wasn't going to be that different from any other home delivery (except the wellies for the towpath!)."

"The midwives couldn't find us and so we gave birth on the boat alone! Would have been helpful to have a designated place with easy car access available to us so we could be found more simply."

Remember: Pregnant boaters are entitled to a minimum **Approved Extended Stay** of a month before the birth and a month after, and more if needed for complications or extra appointments. It's a good idea to plan this in advance so you can moor somewhere with easy access for you to get to the hospital, or for your medical team to get to you. See page 15 for details of how to get started.

We'd advise using what3words ([what3words.com](https://www.what3words.com)) to share your precise location with your medical team.

9.

Have you faced any other challenges living aboard your boat?

395 comments on facilities

Over a third of comments (35.6%, 395 comments) referred to facilities, chiefly water points, waste and recycling. Many respondents expressed disappointment at the lack of recycling facilities on the network, especially given our Plastics Challenge.

A lot of the waste that goes into boater facility bins is collected together, but our waste contractor then separates the recyclable material from the general waste as a condition of the contract we have with them. Although there is regional variation in how much is recycled, in 2022/23, 95% of waste collected from our waterways was diverted away from landfill, through either recycling or recovered through waste to energy. We know this isn't always clear to boaters, especially when in most places you have to separate recyclable waste yourself. So, we have started putting stickers on our bins that explain a bit more about what happens to the waste we collect.

We provide hundreds of free-to-use water points, refuse and Elsans across our network. Our customer service facility (CSF) policy aims for a cruise time of no more than one day (7hr) cruise between these. We also provide paid-for pump-out machines with the aim of there being no more than 2 days (14hr) cruise between these. If you come across a faulty or damaged CSF please report it as we will try to fix it as soon as possible.

248 comments on having no fixed address

There was a recurrent theme throughout all the questions, but especially in the 'other' section, that not having a fixed address, despite having a home, is a barrier to accessing a wide range of services. Even when the individual staff members at an organisation understand what it means to live on a boat, the computer and administration systems are often unable to cope with it.

It can be helpful to ask other boaters which institutions, such as banks, are easier to deal with as a liveaboard boater. There are several online boating chat forums where you can ask for advice. We are able to provide written evidence that you have a boat licence without a home mooring, and an explanation of what this means, but we can't force other organisations to accept this in place of proof of address. Further work is clearly needed to raise awareness of people who live on boats, and we will support this wherever possible and reasonable to do so. Make sure that you register to vote and contact your Member of Parliament if you need advice or support.

229 comments on maintenance and stoppages

The next most common theme was the maintenance needed to keep the waterways navigable, including overgrown vegetation, broken locks and paddles and a need for dredging. Stoppages to put right some of these issues also cause inconvenience to boaters.

Our response to this?

As our canals and rivers are open for everyone to enjoy, wear and tear is inevitable and faults do develop. We record the details and locations of all the maintenance jobs that need attending to in a database.

At the start of each year we identify which areas need the most attention and schedule them in for repair. This does mean that some jobs do have to wait longer than others, although prioritisation is a key consideration for our teams when planning our work schedules.

We continue to focus most of our funding and resources on our core purpose of caring for the waterways, keeping them safe, attractive and accessible, and we have again been able to increase the amount we spend year on year on the core maintenance and repair works that keep the canals navigable for boaters.

The announcement by the Government of a reduced grant for the Trust from 2027 (a real term reduction of £300 million) puts our core work of maintaining the waterways at risk. Please support our campaign to Keep Canals Alive – find out more <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/keepcanalsalive>

203 comments on crime, anti-social behaviour and personal safety

This group of comments covers a wide range of problems, including boaters' fears for their own personal safety, concerns about theft from or vandalism to their boats, property and vehicles, and inconsiderate behaviour from other boaters and non-boating towpath users.

See page 15 for a list of phone numbers to use to report crime and antisocial behaviour. It's a good idea to have the what3words address to give a precise location ([what3words.com](https://www.what3words.com)). We are committed to our 'share the space, drop your pace' message, and we are working on ways to tackle the new challenges of a massive increase in towpath use since the Covid-19 pandemic, and new technologies such as e-bikes and e-scooters. In July 2023 we launched our new Towpath Code canalrivertrust.org.uk/our-towpath-code

Useful information for boaters

If you are struggling with the issues and challenges mentioned in this report, support is available from the Canal & River Trust and external organisations. Please contact us through our website or on 03030 404040 and we'll direct you to the person who is best placed to help you. That might be your local Licence Support Officer, or one of the Welfare Officers.

If you are disabled, or if you care for someone who is, you might be interested in coming to our online Disabled Boater Forum. It offers the chance to meet other disabled boaters and raise the things that matter to you with our colleagues. More information and dates can be found on our website:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/boating-accessibility/disabled-boaters-information>

Approved Extended Stay

This is a temporary agreement that you can moor your boat for longer than the official stay time in a particular place (14 days at most towpath moorings, or shorter times on visitor moorings). You can request one for reasons such as illness, mechanical breakdown, medical appointments or delivery of essential medical supplies.

Equalities Adjustment

This is a long-term agreement between the boater and the Canal & River Trust, if a disability, impairment or health condition makes it difficult for you to meet the boat licence terms and conditions. For example, you might need longer than 14 days each time you moor up, or you might need extra help with locks.

Want to know more? There's information about both options on our website. You can also find out more and request an adjustment, including informing us that you, or someone on your boat is having a baby, by contacting your Licence Support Officer. **Call 03030 404040 or fill in the web form to get started:** <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/ways-to-contact-us>

Useful websites and phone numbers

Government advice on how to register to vote if you don't have a fixed address: www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-you-havent-got-a-fixed-or-permanent-address

NHS advice on how to register with a GP if you don't have a fixed address: www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery

Support and practical help are available from the Waterways Chaplains: www.waterwayschaplaincy.org.uk

Accessible Waterways Association, set up to inform, represent, and assist people who live with disabilities, impairments or accessibility

issues, and who want to enjoy the Inland Waterways and their surrounding environments: www.awa-uk.org.uk

Share your precise location with support or emergency services: what3words.com

In an emergency, call 999, or if it's not an emergency call 101.

The **Canal & River Trust emergency number** is 0800 47 999 47.

If it's not urgent, call us on 03030 404040 or use our web form: canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/ways-to-contact-us

The Boater Census was run entirely in-house except for the design and graphics of this report, and it was only possible thanks to the involvement of volunteers in several key phases of the project.

- The Navigation Advisory Group and the Boater Representatives on our Council advised the boating team on the focus and aims of the Boater Census, and helped to devise a set of questions that would produce meaningful, useful data.
- Once we had the results, a team of **volunteer data analysts** studied the thousands of open-text comments, and drew out common themes and suggestions. This volume of data would have been impossible to analyse in-house without their input.

All the volunteers involved are experienced, knowledgeable friends who offered their time and expertise as a way of supporting both the Canal & River Trust and the community of boaters that keep our cherished waterways alive.

Volunteering in numbers

18

Advisory Group members and Boater Representatives who helped design and plan the Boater Census

56

Number of volunteer hours spent analysing the Boater Census open-text responses

3,125

Number of individual comments that the data analysis volunteers read and classified

To ensure the confidentiality of the information boaters shared with us through the Boater Census, all volunteers completed GDPR and IT security training and signed a Confidentiality and Data Protection agreement. They were only given the list of comments, so responses couldn't be cross-checked against any other data field in the survey. Finally, all the volunteers flagged immediately any comments that could potentially be used to identify an individual, so that those sections could be redacted.

Volunteering with us takes many forms, and there are opportunities for everyone – including those who would rather handle spreadsheets than lock gates! For more information about volunteering opportunities, please visit our website: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer>

Using this data

The information in this report is free to use but should be referenced to the Canal & River Trust. If you would like further information on the Canal & River Trust Boater Census, please send any requests to information.request@canalrivertrust.org.uk

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