

Nottingham – Boaters’ meeting 8.2.14

Names of those asking the questions are included when they were given/audible.

RP: Richard Parry, chief executive, Canal & River Trust

SM: Seán McGinley, East Midlands waterway manager, Canal & River Trust

Q. Chris Dalton – Outdoor swimming. The Trust own waterways suitable for outdoor swimming but there appears to be no strategy for this or anyone to speak to about it. Thoughts?

RP. Love to see it move forward but there are obvious safety issues. Want to work with you to develop managed and controlled opportunities. Need to get it right in a few locations first.

SM. Have been working with Yorkshire Outdoor Swimmers in relation to Harthill Reservoir – expect to see people swimming there this spring.

Q. Keith Byatt - Boater and seasonal/ volunteer lock keeper. The Trust has been consulting on the election process for Council – concern over the extent to which boaters are represented, around 7,200 boaters per seat, lower representation than for other groups. I think the council should be 100% elected not nominated.

RP. We have been consulting and your concerns are legitimate. Council designed to be broad and inclusive. Many argue for more boaters but we also need to ensure we get people like the Ramblers involved so it comes back to the 10million visitors and engaging that group with the waterways.

Happy to look at if there should be more seats for boaters.

Q. Bernard Jarvis - Grantham Canal. Plans for the restoration of the Grantham Canal?

RP. On the cusp of great things. At the second stage of an HLF bid which would be a huge symbolic step. Supportive of restorations generally and the Grantham is mostly in the Trust’s ownership – it’s a priority. Need to be careful with resources and maintaining the existing infrastructure but it is a good way to energise and engage local people and it is a good national story to grow engagement.

Q. Stuart ? – Interested to know what is considered when planning work, what determines whether some things are done and some things are left?

RP. Assets inspected every month to understand their condition and the criticality of failure and to prioritise jobs. There are about 50,000 jobs each year of which we do the highest priority*.

[*Post meeting note: When referring to how works are prioritised reference was made to High Priority Defects which receive the most urgent attention. Our defect reporting system - where Length

Inspectors report all defects across the whole network - has around 50,000 defects recorded at any point. These defects are prioritised for repair by our engineers on a safety and/or customer service risk basis and approximately 10% fall into the highest priority category for most urgent repair each year.]

Then there are things, like the current floods, so we have to change our plans as other things become a priority. We listen to the engineers but we also listen to you – we've spent at extra £1.5million on off-side vegetation this winter because that is what you told us was important. We will continue to listen to what you need us to do but this also must be underpinned by sound engineering knowledge so we take care of the high risk but less visible assets.

Q. Conrad King, live aboard. Problem with cyclists between Sawley and the City Centre – e.g. heard of dogs being pushed in the canal. How can it be policed?

SM. Aware of the problem in Nottingham, on the Erewash Canal also and it is a big problem in London and other major urban areas. One solution is to design the towpath to accommodate more people but that's not possible everywhere. Need people to share the space. We are working with Nottingham Trent University to find solutions. Installing barriers stops wheelchairs/buggies and some local authorities ask us to remove them. Signage works to some extent.

RP. It is a dilemma with no quick solutions. Need to work together – explain to people the impact they have. We can't just ban people or close off a section as that affects other people. Like other areas of society we need to bring about behaviour change. We're looking at clever ways to intervene, such as making sure the surface doesn't feel like a motorway and people don't feel the need to speed up. In London we have rangers and part of their job is to talk to people and manage hot spots.

Q. Bobby Randall, continuous cruiser – Could we please not have a relaxation of the time people can spend on visitor moorings during the winter (Oct-March)?

RP. There are lots of views about visitor mooring – need to try move that forward to find the right balance. We've had a different policy on winter mooring this winter and it seems to have worked better from the feedback I have had. Not all visitor moorings should be relaxed as some are still busy as boaters still need to access services etc but happy to look at the balance. Let me know specific areas where this could work.

Q. Simon ?, live aboard – Would like your views on the potential for an increased fee that allows people to moor for longer on the towpath if not obstructing visitor moorings. I would pay up 25% more on my licence.

RP. The law defines home moorers and continuous cruisers and there are legal issues around this. I'd also want to understand the balance of views – I suspect a lot of boaters wouldn't like it, either because they wouldn't want to pay the extra, or they don't think we should do it. We're talking to the

Navigation Advisory Group and boating groups to find as large a consensus as possible for mooring policy. We may need a temporary arrangement to solve local issues but this will not define a new category of national licence.

Q. Darren, used to be a live aboard – in some instances found the enforcement team have lied and have been confrontational. I'm wondering how that fits with the Trust's objectives, when even the job title is confrontational.

RP. I have a lot of respect for our enforcement team. The best of them are sympathetic and try and find a way forward with boaters who get into difficulties. The worst case – of costly legal action - is a lose-lose situation for the boater and the Trust. But, need to look at each individual – they are human, may make mistakes, may need more support. As an organisation we need to have the highest standards and the Trust needs to be even-handed and fair. *Welcome more discussion around this afterwards.* The job title may be worth looking at again.

Q. Chris ?, - Referring to the idea of getting rid of the 7 and 14 day moorings – we go out on the system for 6-8 weeks at time but during this time we may need to go home and so like to leave the boat somewhere safe and that has easy access to transport links. Can these longer moorings remain?

RP. We need some 48hr moorings where boaters need to access local services, shops etc but of course also need longer moorings where demand isn't so great. *Happy to look at individual locations.*

Chris – don't disagree, but the longer moorings shouldn't just be in the middle of nowhere.

Q. Ian Johnson, Erewash Canal Preservation and Development Association – Thinking about managing and prioritising work – you have a long list every year for planned work on the Erewash Canal but things get put back, is it not time the Trust work with the canal society to do some of the work on the Trust's list?

RP. All for that idea – that is part of the purpose of canal adoptions. We have a duty of care so need to make sure volunteers aren't doing things beyond their capabilities but generally supportive of the idea.

SM. Welcome the idea. Grantham Canal is a great example and want to expand on this.

Ian – there was time when lengthsman did their own maintenance; is there any way that could come back?

RP. No, not financially viable – but the model of people taking a keen local interest in and some responsibility for their waterway is something we strongly support.

Q. Allan Richards, boater of 50 years - Although press coverage from Birmingham positive he's heard different accounts. I want more 'meat' on the responses given, especially national plans and how the Trust are spending money. Your answer doesn't mention national plans, I think what someone was asking was if you going to publish your 3 year plan. I got the last through FOI and the boating section is 3 pages with lots of redactions. Are you going to publish and will it have a hefty boating section?

RP. I am willing to publish as much as info as we can given our commercial responsibilities. We're looking at our major works plan and how we can distribute this information – we shared our draft plans with the major boating organisations last week. But don't want this to be held up as something we have failed against as plans do have to change as we respond to breaches or new risks. Boaters pay a lot of money and I'm happy to be as open as we can, but it is an old network and sometimes our plans have to change and work can be re-planned or deferred – and people should understand that.

Q. Mary Trott, - Just wanted to say thank you for organising these events.

Q. ? - Thoughts on the number of un-licenced boats? We see a lot when we boat.

RP. Not everyone is as good as they should be at displaying their licences; it doesn't mean they aren't licenced. Or they may already be known to the Enforcement Team who are taking action – often working with people to pay back logs etc; and our data indicates that the number of unlicensed boats is less than 5%. The focus should be about how we can help them get a licence, safety cert., insurance.

Q. Mark – regarding your high regard for your enforcement team, I was told I was too old/too sick to be on a boat etc. etc. [name].he is ignorant and arrogant. You get a note on the boat even if you stop for a cup of tea.

RP. Need to work together. Generally people are positive about the enforcement team. If there are issues of individual conduct then complaints will be followed up. I'm looking at cases in the final stage and generally think things are handled well. *If there is a problem with an individual make a complaint – email me.*

Q. Pam Pickett – You are opening towpaths up to cyclists and no complaint about that but it puts boaters at risk. We can go for miles and miles and not see a uniform. A BW uniform had the same effect as police.

RP. I don't believe BW would have had that many more people visible across 2000 miles of waterway. We understand the importance of a visible presence and that is why we are increasing the number of volunteers – as lock-keepers, rangers, and at locations with new 'welcome stations' etc.

PP. Pam. I don't believe they have the authority.

RP. They have the authority we delegate to them – they are in our uniforms. But neither our staff nor volunteers should put themselves at risk. Happy to look at suggested locations where there is specific need as necessary.

Q. ? - Your thoughts on the suggestion that if people are unable to pay their licence they can exchange time working as a volunteer in return for money off their licence?

RP. Interesting suggestion for us to take away.

Q. ? - Your thoughts on the idea that cyclists pay for licence and insurance?

RP. There won't be a licence for cyclists as our constitution specifies that we provide free access to our towpaths. Government required that as a condition for the Trust. But people should be mindful of other users – society only works if we respect and look after each other.

I don't have all the answers; it is clear from the mood here that we need to be more active at finding a solution – not about restricting access but working together.

Q. Paige ?, - Given our discussions our heritage and conservation of canals, what do you have to say about the impact of HS2?

RP. We all love the heritage of the waterways, and we are close to reaching a new agreement with English Heritage – the first in the UK – to be given delegated responsibility for the heritage in our care- this shows how much they trust us to look after heritage.

On HS2, we are working with IWA and local canal societies to present a common united position. We are working closely with HS2 – both me and our chairman know the new chairman of HS2 so we will be reaching out to him also. I think we will get further by talking to them rather than presenting a position of conflict. But we are determined to fight to protect key locations like Fradley Junction. Some areas could be a benefit. The Digbeth Flight in Birmingham could benefit from HS2, and opening up that area of the canal/Birmingham.

Q. What can we do?

Lobby your MP, I have seen that it can have a powerful effect – and keep talking about it and keep it on the agenda.