



PRESS RELEASE

16 December 2016

HUNDREDS OF BOATS USED AS HOMES IN LONDON AS NUMBERS SOAR

As the number of boats on the Canal & River Trust's London's waterways* continues to increase, research for the first time shows just how many people are making their homes on boats in the capital, the charity reports today.

House prices across London remain unreachable for many and hundreds of people have taken to the water as boats are perceived as more achievable: but the differing needs of liveaboard boaters is placing unprecedented pressure on the waterways' infrastructure, the charity warns.

An explosion in boat numbers in recent years (a 57% increase since 2012) prompted the Trust – the charity that's working to make London's canals better – to carry out its first ever "Who's On London's Boats" survey to build a picture of the capital's boating community in an effort to understand and meet their needs. The results show that boat living is increasingly seen as a viable alternative lifestyle by many, particularly younger, people and those living alone or as couples.

Matthew Symonds, boating strategy & engagement manager at Canal & River Trust, said: "London's waterways are busier than ever before and this survey shows that they are providing a place to live for hundreds of people. It's fantastic that so many people love the capital's canals and rivers but the increasing numbers of people choosing to live on the water is bringing new challenges. We've done this research so that we can work together with local authorities, developers and boaters themselves to make sure that their needs are met."

Who are London's boaters?

- 769 boaters – 58% of the total respondents – describe their boat as their primary residence, with a further 156 saying the boat is either a second or temporary home.
- 50% have been living on boats on London's waterways for three years or less.

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- 50% cite financial reasons as motivation for living on a boat; but an overwhelming 82% are attracted by the waterway environment (boats, wildlife, tranquillity etc).
- 41% of those living on boats are under 35 years old.
- 43% of those living on boats live alone, with 42% living as part of a cohabiting couple.
- 70% own their boats outright.

While boaters have always been synonymous with London's waterways, this is a fast-growing community, with a 57% increase of boats in the capital since 2012. This research shows that a significant number of these new arrivals are living on the waterways, and the needs reported by respondents reflect the challenges of this shift.

Living aboard can be substantially different to living on land. 558 surveys were completed by boats with a home mooring – somewhere a boat can be kept all the time – while 486 surveys were completed by boats without a home mooring. Boats without home moorings, known as continuous cruisers, are required to move their boats every 14 days in a journey that annually covers a significant portion of London's waterways. With boaters needing to empty their toilets, fill up with water, charge their batteries and find fuel for their stoves, as well as cruise to find mooring space on often crowded spots, continuous cruising can be like a part-time job.

What do London's boaters want?

- The top five improvements people want to see are: more mooring places; more mooring rings; water points; more Elsan (toilet emptying) facilities; more dredging.
- 45% would have an interest in securing a permanent mooring if available.
- The most important qualities in a mooring (other than price) are: somewhere people feel personally safe; good services nearby (sewage and rubbish); public transport nearby.

Matthew Symonds continues: "If you live on your boat, especially if you continuously cruise, you need regular and consistent access to mooring space and facilities and, in an increasingly busy environment, this can be a challenge: the growth in boat numbers is moving at a faster pace than we can upgrade the infrastructure. We are looking at ways we can improve things through our London Mooring Strategy, which aims to address the unique challenges and opportunities of boating in the capital, and these results will help inform its development.

"Living afloat is not the same as living in a house but for many people the lower-cost entry point, not to mention the attractions of a strong community, low-impact living and the charms of the waterway environment, means that it is an attractive option. Our advice is not to see living aboard as a way of saving money as there can be many hidden costs, including time: looking after your boat can be like having a part-time job!

"London's waterways are for all boaters and it's important that we manage the space fairly for everyone. The survey has given us greater insight into who's living on our waterways and their needs. Now is our opportunity to gather partners together across the board to make sure that this happens."

[The full results can be found here.](#)

*The results do not include boats moored on the Thames, which is not managed by the Canal & River Trust.

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Notes to editors

The survey monkey, online survey was carried out between Monday 19 September and Friday 21 October 2016. The Trust identified all boats that had been sighted in London during the 12 month period 1 September 2015 and 31 August 2016.

In total the survey was sent directly to 3,675 boaters. It was sent by email to 1,837 boaters with a home mooring and 1,427 boaters without a home mooring, and by post with a web link and details of how to request a paper version of the survey to 268 boaters with a home mooring and 143 boaters without a home mooring.

Postcards with details of the survey and including a web link were distributed around the London waterway, including being attached to boats. Posters were displayed around the London waterway network and the survey was promoted the Boater's Update and London Boater's Update e-bulletins. In total 1,323 responses were received to the survey.

The survey results will be shared with partners, such as local authorities, so boaters' needs can be built into their plans.

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

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