Meeting with disabled boaters

Friday 15 November 2019

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| Location  Aqua House, Birmingham, West Midlands |

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| Notes | Action |
| 1. Welcome and Introduction   Matthew Symonds (MS) national boating manager, welcomed people and thanked them for attending the meeting. The Trust held a series of meetings at the end of 2018 to meet and hear from disabled boaters and carers. This second round of meetings is to provide an update on some of the issue raised and actions agreed at those meetings.  MS and Sean Williams (SW) Canal & River Trust welfare officer, explained how the Trust currently support disabled boaters through the Trusts welfare guidance, equalities policy and reasonable adjustment process.  MS gave an update on the questions asked and issues raised at the last series of meetings. A question and answer sheet has been produced. MS said that there are still some outstanding questions (particularly about permanent moorings) but he is waiting for answers from colleagues before he can answer these. |  |
| 1. General discussion   The following comments (C), suggestions (S) and questions (Q) were raised. MS/SW agreed to follow up these.  S – It would be good to know which flights of locks are staffed and at what hours so that disabled boaters could plan their movement accordingly. Would it be possible for disabled boaters to pre-book assistance at sites where there are staff/volunteers? Could this also link this in to getting help with finding a mooring.  The Trust could publish an accessibility map showing the areas where there are permanent volunteer lock keepers.  C - Watford Council along with the Salvation Army have some dedicated resources to support boaters – SW will look into this.  C - Newbold long-term moorings – Disabled boaters have moorings near bridge 50 and 51 but access for wheelchair at either end is very difficult, Boaters have had to move the boat up towards the nearby pub to be able to get access on and off the boat.  Disabled moorings would be better placed near to the tunnel.  The towpath is now eroded apart from some sections where others (not CRT) have carried out repairs.  There may be some sections of the towpath in good condition, but it is heavily covered in thick mud.  C - Concerns were raised about the permanent moorings team, one boater called to ask what moorings were accessible for a wheelchair, the response was for the boater to look himself. MS is in contact with the permanent moorings team and will follow these up with them.  C – There was a general consensus that the current Canal & River Trust website was awful to navigate around. MS reported that work is underway to update large sections of the website in 2020. The Trust is looking at how to make the website more accessible.  There was a discussion on various short-stay visitor moorings. MS encouraged people to use our webpages to report incidents, concerns, damage, blockages etc  C - In Rugby the short-stay visitor moorings at Elliotts Field Shopping Parks are awful, some are on a bend – not accessible and badly spaced – It was questioned why some pontoons were not installed when the new developments where being built.  C - Tardebigge flight towpath is in bad condition, boulders, holes and uneven surfaces make it very hard to navigate. It is particularly difficult for those with limited mobility or limited sight.  C - Rising Lane – Lapworth Moorings – Broken Access gate and lock – difficult to work the gate with disabilities due to the gate not operating properly – reported some time ago still not fixed.   1. Badge for boaters with an equalities adjustment   C - MS shared a draft of the proposed badge that will be issued to boaters with an equalities adjustment. The room in agreement that it looks fine, and people liked the wording “Canal & River Trust Aware”. The general view was that badge should be on brightly coloured paper but that the colour scheme should not blue, but another colour. A bright colour such as yellow was mentioned. It was suggested that these badges should also be laminated to protect against damp / condensation. A metallic border would make it hard to forge – as we will have reference numbers on their we can check and see the validity anyway.  Q - Can the badge be linked to the current disabled moorings so that others won’t challenge disabled boaters when they use them?  The Trust won’t be able police all visitor moorings where there are disabled mooring spaces, but those with a equalities adjustment will be able to display their badge. Whether this enables them to moor for longer will depend on the specific adjustment that has been agreed between the Trust and the boaters. MS will feed back the comment on the draft badge.  S – Would it be possible to pre-book disabled mooring places? MS said that there are a few places where mooring spaces can be booked (mostly in central London) but that it would be very difficult to manage pre-bookable mooring spaces everywhere. However, the Trust is working to provide more information on where short-stay visitor moorings are located on more accessible sections of towpath.  C - Some lock landings could be perfect as disability moorings!  MS said that the Trust is looking considering the suggestion of setting up a disability advisory group. There are two possible options, a separate group or introduce members with disability expertise onto the existing advisory groups. MS asked the group for their views. There was a general consensus that a separate advisory group for disability issues was preferable. MS said he will gather feedback from the other disabled boater meetings and then the Trust will make a decision.  MS reported that the Trust had considered the request to share a boater’s details with other agencies if for example the boater has been taken into hospital unexpectedly. In an emergency the Trust already has a process to respond to such requests, but generally we cannot share boater’s private details with others without their permission. To be helpful the Trust is going to produce a blank card where boaters could fill in their details (name, boat name, index number) and the reverse there will be the Trust’s contact details. That way any boater carrying the card who is involved in an emergency can present the card and hopefully we will be informed.  Q – At Braunston a local man died about 2 years ago and left in his will £100k to be used to provide an accessible bridge (at present there is a metal scaffold bridge). Where is the money and when will it be built? MS to see what he can find out  MS said that the Trust is very keen to feature disabled boaters in the boater’s update e-bulletin. He asked for volunteers to be interviewed for an article on boating with disabilities. | MS  MS  MS  MS  MS  MS  MS  MS |
| 1. Next Steps   MS said that there will be further meeting in Anderton, London and Gloucester so that the trust has an opportunity to hear from more disabled boaters. There will also be a Facebook live Q&A session on Monday 16 December, between 4-6pm. To take part in the Facebook Q&A people will need to join the Inland Waterways Accessibility Forum (IWAF) on Facebook. The Tracy to write a story/article about the IWAF Facebook page and we can help promote it. | TC |