

# PRESS RELEASE

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17 May 2021

## CANAL & RIVER TRUST PUBLISHES BOATER SURVEY RESULTS

Canal & River Trust is today publishing the results of its Annual Boater Survey, which paints a picture of a year which has seen boating heavily impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

As restrictions ease, with people now able to socialise indoors and boating returning to normal, the Trust will be surveying cruising boaters over the summer to see if their perceptions have shifted. Last year, surveys taken while boats were able to cruise saw significantly higher satisfaction scores than reported in the annual survey, which was carried out during the winter lockdown.

The annual survey showed that satisfaction scores amongst boaters declined overall, with different responses from those living aboard, whose satisfaction improved on average, and leisure boaters, whose use was most severely impacted and where average scores fell.

With the Trust communicating regularly with boaters throughout the year with updates on the latest Government restrictions, familiarity with the Trust rose to 62% (57% in 2020). However, boater satisfaction slid to 54% (60% 2020) and the number of boaters who would recommend the waterways stood at 56% (62% 2020).

Boaters' happiness, and satisfaction with life in general, saw significant declines, which correlates to other Government research about the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health.

The annual survey is complemented by a monthly Waterway Experience Survey that runs in the summer and is sent to a sample of boaters sighted out on the waterways. In 2020 the average boater satisfaction score for the months July to October, when boaters were able to cruise, ranged between 62% and 64%. This year these surveys will be sent out in May, July, and September to get a picture of boaters' experience across the summer.

Richard Parry, Canal & River Trust chief executive, said: "We recognise that this has been a frustrating year for boaters, in line with the rest of society. With everyone looking forward to a more normal summer of boating this year, we would like to thank boaters for their patience during the pandemic. We are committed to doing what we can to deliver the experience that everyone using our waterways expects."

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“Whilst the bulk of the Trust’s £220m+ annual expenditure goes on operating and caring for the waterways and supporting boaters, we’ve again heard from the survey that upkeep and maintenance, particularly dredging and cutting back vegetation, are important drivers of boater satisfaction where improvements are requested. With boaters contributing around £1 for every £5 that the Trust spends on operations, maintenance and repairs, it remains a challenge to generate the wider income to support the level of spending the waterways demand, whilst keeping boating as affordable as possible.

“The feedback that boaters have shared in their survey responses reminds us that we need to clearly explain how we use our property investment to support the waterways, and how we fund the bulk of spending on our towpaths via dedicated funding from third party partners, such as local councils.

“We are committed to sharing with boaters how their financial contribution is spent to keep the canals open and navigable, along with all the other income that our annual spending requires. We publish an annual Boater Report, available on our website, and we would urge boaters to take a look. The 2020/21 report will be available in the autumn.”

The results of the Annual Boater Survey are available here:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/refresh/media/original/43706-2021-boater-perception-survey.pdf>

The current 2019/20 Boater Report is available online here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/boating-blogs-and-features/boater-report-2020>

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