

## Disabled Boater Forum - 11th August 2021

**Sean Williams** (Canal & River Trust Welfare Officer) gave an overview of his role as welfare officer.

- Helping continuous cruisers to claim benefits. [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) is a good website.
- Equalities adjustments for boaters with disabilities or other issues. We don't set the adjustment - we ask what the boater feels they can do, and then assess.
- Behind the scenes: work with Department of Work and Pensions highlighting the issues faced by boaters. Claims are now being turned around a lot quicker - some of this is down to the work we have been doing.
- Getting medical help has always been very difficult. Healthwatch is a local champion to make sure those in charge of local health services hear our voice. Reports have now been published by Wakefield, Cheshire, Oxford which highlight these issues for boaters. This should soon spread to other health organisations.

GPs have guidance that say you don't have to have a postcode or address. Often the problems lie with receptionists who are not aware of this.

Hospitals don't have to provide healthcare to those without a postcode, but they are discriminating against those without a permanent home. This can be raised with a local Healthwatch group if the hospital still won't help. If GPs will only register boaters as temporary patients, Healthwatch should be able to help.

There is only one Sean - he works solo but is aided by local licence support officers. Their names and contact details are on the website. <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/buy-your-boat-licence/boat-licence-customer-support-team/contact-your-local-officer>

Sean gave a quick overview of the equalities process. There were questions about the EA questionnaire is quite contentious. Many people find it very intrusive. How detailed does it really have to be and is there some way of making it unthreatening? If you have a blue badge, surely that should be sufficient?

Sean replied that we have made the wording softer, and we have had a lot of groups looking at it. Local licensing officers can help, as can Sean if you are having difficulties with the form. The blue badge doesn't necessarily demonstrate that the boater will have difficulties with meeting the continuous cruising requirements - it can be awarded for a variety of circumstances.

It was suggested that it might be useful to have files on IWAF to help people perhaps, and to explain why we need so many questions. We can also do it as a video.

The review, at the end of a licence period, is much shorter. The review can help if you are struggling with the current adjustment.

Another question related to discounts for wide beams. At present we are applying a surcharge to wide beam boats. If a boater needs a wide beam because of a disability, we waive the surcharge.

Housing benefit or universal credit and continuous cruisers. Housing Benefit is a legacy benefit, Universal Credit has a housing element. Housing Benefit is determined by local authorities, it is not black and white, so some local authorities will pay towards the cost of the licence and some will not. Camden was taken to court recently and the judge decided that it was applicable to pay housing benefit for a licence. If you are on Universal Credit, the Department for Works and Pensions now say licences can be paid as housing costs. Water chaplains can help those having trouble claiming benefits.

With regards to separate non means tested benefits like winter fuel allowance, Sean has never found out if anyone has been successful in claiming it. He will look into that.

Sean advised that attendance allowance is a massively underpaid allowance, so do apply for that if you are not getting it.

**Accessible moorings:** The message from the forum was, "Get it on the website as soon as possible" but not as a PDF! If it was a separate page it would be easy to put a link from IWAF.

We could link some of the maps to google street view where we have got it.

It was noted that Salthouse docks don't have a rail down the steps, just a chain. A rail would really help. With regard to reporting issues with accessibilities, it is not possible at the moment to put a form on the website, but we do have a new CRM, and we can now track each reported incident, so do report any issues to your local (eg) enquiries.northwest@canalrivertrust.org.uk. or whichever region you are in. You can also use social media.

Lucy Robinson, volunteer leader in the East Midlands reported that the Trust is undertaking a towpath survey across the network with volunteers.

**Boat builders.** It was reported that it is hard to find a competitive boat builder who is prepared to engage with disability features. Boat builders are standardising more and more. We need a list of builders who specialise in disability features. Swan builders had been very obliging. We could ask for feedback from IWAF, or through British Marine. There are variations on VAT exemptions too.

We have been asking disabled boaters to send us a video on how volunteer lock keepers can help disabled boaters. The forum suggested that the best tip is to ask, but don't be intrusive. We will put another reminder on IWAF.

The towpath near Notting Hill has become a fast cycle way - e-scooters, e-bikes, etc. All very unsafe. Matthew stated that these should not be used on towpaths, and we do state that all users should give way to the slowest user. We are trialling 'slow down' signs in the Midlands to target speeding cyclists.

Please encourage people to join IWAF and this group - get National Trust, Environment Agency linked into IWAF.

**Action for the Trust:** Look into Nimbus.