

## Notes

<b>Title</b>	Disabled Boater Forum
<b>Date</b>	Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> December 16:00 – 18:00
<b>Venue</b>	Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	Trust: Matthew Symonds (MS), Michelle Simmonds (MSi), Stephen Bosworth (SB), Ellie Bridgwood-Hill (EBH) 10 disabled boaters (DB)

---

### Welcome and introductions

#### 1. Introduction to the Operational Property team

SB talked about his team and their areas of work. He highlighted the pressures on the budget at present given inflation and rising costs of materials etc. SB also emphasised his personal commitment to improving accessibility wherever possible, within the constraints of budgets, legislation and the requirements surrounding historic buildings. He will return to the Forum regularly in 2023 to present intended works and receive feedback from the Forum.

#### Questions and comments

DB: How is the Trust funded? SB: It is a combination of self-generated income, a government grant, charitable income such as donations and third-party funding such as National Lottery grants. MS: A breakdown of income and expenditure is available in the Boater Report here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/refresh/media/original/46962-2022-boater-report.pdf>

DB: For any building works/repairs/renovations/developments etc, what planning considerations are in place to accommodate the needs of disabled people? For any future plans, consultations etc on building works/repairs/renovations/developments etc., would you please include actual disabled people in those conversations – preferably onsite.

SB: Refurbishment is typically like-for-like at the moment. There are restrictions on historic buildings that make it impossible to improve certain aspects. However we can do better and we plan to consult this group routinely in future.

DB: Many people think they know what disabled people need, but having people on-site with visual impairments, wheelchairs etc., is invaluable. Often small changes can make a big difference. Also, the people who attend each meeting vary. Consulting disabled boaters needs to be more systematic to ensure the right people are involved (e.g. specific disabilities). This may fall within the AWA's remit in future (see section 4, below, on the Accessible Waterway Association).

SB: Yes, I understand this point. We have some ideas about how this might work, which we will work through with MS in the new year.

DB: Is there a plan to increase the number of water points on the western end of the K&A? Currently there are only boatyards, no Trust facilities. MS: At present we don't have a

minimum standard of what facilities you can expect. We are working to establish this at present (see section 2, below), and once it is in place we can identify and address any gaps in this minimum provision.

DB: A lot of work has been done at Greenford Quay but it doesn't seem to include any boater facilities. Is anything going to be built? The facilities referred to are not owned by the Trust but have been built for a private mooring scheme. MS: We have been in contact with the developers to request that they make facilities on their private mooring available to boaters but we have not yet had a positive response. We will ask our regional manager for an update.

There was a wider discussion of property developments that benefit from canal side locations but fail to contribute by providing facilities that boaters can use. MS: We are a statutory consultee in planning applications for canal side developments and we use the process to request improvements for boaters. This is sometimes successful but developers are also required to contribute towards many competing priorities (for example transport schemes, new schools, improving local green spaces) and are not obliged by law to meet our requests. All planning applications are in the public domain and anyone can submit comments on them. Please use the planning process to ensure boaters and the waterways are included; it is all in the public domain, you can search local planning applications in your area here:

[Consultation and pre-decision matters - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

## **2. Customer service facilities consultation**

MS: The Trust provides hundreds of facilities (water points, Elsan, pump-out etc.) across the network and is committed to continuing to do so. We are working to produce a minimum standard (not looking at specific sites at this stage). We ran a consultation that had over 900 responses, including approximately 200 from boaters who said they were disabled. MS summarised the results of the consultation, which will be published in full in the new year.

Based on these results, we are proposing to include water, waste and recycling, Elsan and pump-out in the minimum provision. There will be a maximum 5-hour cruising time between water and Elsan points, and 10 hours between pump-outs (with more provision in very busy areas). We are proposing that showers, washing machines and tumble dryers do not form part of the minimum provision. However, we do not plan to close them immediately. Where possible, we hope that other local providers (mooring providers, clubs) will take over the running and maintenance of these facilities.

Although most boats have toilets on board, the consultation shows that boaters are keen for the Trust to continue to provide toilets. However, they are expensive to maintain and many are vulnerable to vandalism. We will maintain toilets in visitor destinations and where they are used by staff and volunteers, who will be able to open them to boaters on request, but they will not be public toilets for everyone to use all the time. MS welcomes the Forum's comments and ideas in relation to toilets in particular, as more work is needed on this aspect of the minimum standard and it may affect disabled boaters in particular.

### **Questions and comments**

DB: How does the response rate compare to other surveys and consultations? Was it low because it came immediately after the census survey? MS: We publicised the consultation through social media, the website, the Boaters' Update, and through multiple boating organisations. It is about a 2.5% response rate which is only slightly lower than the average for our surveys (with the exception of the census, which was unusually high). The timing may have been a factor and we also expect people to engage more when we consult locally on specific sites.

DB: I was hoping showers would be part of the minimum standard as I use them regularly due to the space available in your showers vs onboard and the hot water, and I know fuel boats use them regularly too. MS: They are very expensive to maintain because of statutory requirements (e.g. prevention of Legionella). We are not looking to close them all immediately: there may be other options for specific sites. We will also run local consultations so we will let you know when they go live.

There was a discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of using Radar keys for toilet access. Several members of the DBF have Radar keys but, like the BW key, they are easily available online and vulnerable to misuse by people who are not entitled to use them. Another option is for the Trust to get better at signposting facilities provided by others e.g. Changing Places toilets, facilities available at marinas. DB: This may be the cheapest solution if we can get public services on board and raise their awareness of the existence of disabled boaters who would benefit from access. This could be part of the AWA's role in future.

There was a discussion of installing a new digital system that would allow much better management of access to facilities, but this would be very expensive. MS: To give you an idea, we are trialling contactless access to pump-outs in some areas and converting each pump-out point to the new system costs around £1,500. The cost to roll that out across all our facilities would be astronomical.

MS: The next steps are site-specific consultations. Nothing is going to change overnight and we will return to this Forum with more details on planned changes.

### 3. Accessible mooring standard

MS: Summarised the work carried out so far with Marcus Chaloner (MC) to develop an accessible mooring standard. Thank you to all those who contributed with feedback and ideas. MC will attend our meeting in February.

- **Bollard/ring design:** MC is mocking up a design to share with you in the new year.
- **Sites for initial roll-out:** We have not had a lot of specific suggestions but please let us know which places/waterways you would like to see included in the first roll-out.
- **Accessible mooring sign:** Thank you for all the feedback on the icons and wording. Based on the feedback, we may drop the tiles showing a wheelchair, walking stick and pregnant person symbols. We are also considering adding a QR code to link to the map which will indicate nearby facilities.

There was a discussion of whether it is appropriate to include pregnancy: being pregnant does not necessarily entail mobility issues, but it is a protected characteristic that we are legally obliged to consider. Likewise the symbol for older people with a walking stick: there are many older people on the waterways and they don't all necessarily need to use accessible moorings.

DB: Although the wheelchair symbol has many drawbacks, it is universally recognised. It is important to remember that only having text and no images could exclude certain people (e.g. illiterate, English not their first language, dyslexia). "Disabled" is a protected term and we should not shy away from using it or contribute to a sense of taboo around the term.

MS: A key part of the scheme is communication, asking boaters who don't have access needs to be aware and considerate. We are expecting a lot of questions about what the accessible mooring spaces mean.

#### 4. Accessible Waterways Association update

Tracey Clarke presented the background and aims of the Boaters' Blue Card. It is based on the Blue Badge used for cars, but different because it will not allow you to moor on no-mooring sites. Rather it aims to raise awareness and encourage considerate behaviour. To administer the scheme, TC is in the process of creating the Accessible Waterways Association (AWA). The AWA aims to raise awareness of disabled boaters (and other disabled waterway users e.g. towpath users, anglers, visitors). Campaigning, providing information, linking with third parties near waterways (e.g. local councils, developers, Sustrans). Networking/chat function between disabled boaters. Tracey welcomes feedback and volunteers for the AWA.

In particular she would welcome feedback on the draft website but stresses that the link should **not be** shared with other people yet.

[Accessible Waterways Association – Campaigning for more accessible Waterways \(bn15.net\)](#)

Please send your feedback to [tracey.clarke@awa-uk.org.uk](mailto:tracey.clarke@awa-uk.org.uk) or [eleanor.bridgwoodhill@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:eleanor.bridgwoodhill@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

You can also join the conversation on Tracey's Facebook page: [IWAF Inland Waterways Accessibility Forum | Facebook](#)

DB: Love all the access features on the website, they are extremely helpful.

DB: Would the Blue Card replace the Trust Aware badge? MS: No. It is different and will not replace the Trust Aware badge. For more information about Trust Aware see [Vulnerable boaters | Canal & River Trust \(canalrivertrust.org.uk\)](#)

EBH: The [next Disabled Boater Forum](#) is on 15th February. We'll post the Eventbrite link on our website and on IWAF on Facebook. Please [let me know](#) if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

Meeting closed 18:05