

OPEN BOATERS MEETING WITH RICHARD PARRY

Date: Monday 6th October 2014
Venue: Kents Hills Park, Milton Keynes

All answers by Richard Parry unless otherwise stated.

Other staff present: Dean Davies (DD), Matthew Symonds (MS), Dan Barnett (DB), Neil Owen
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(Malcolm Dodge) Are you reviewing visitor moorings? This has already been done on the GU North and there are no problems up there but more problems down here. Will there be a GU programme in the south?

We're seeking to establish a national framework to ensure that all the changes we make are part of a consistent national approach, based upon evidence. I am grateful for your feedback about the GU north though I know people's opinions vary.

(Malcolm Dodge) That hasn't answered my question, will a framework be applied? The issue is that the timeframes on visitor moorings are not kept to and enforced. On the GU North it seems to be adhered to but on the GU South they are not adhered to. There are lots of locked up boats, a no nonsense approach should be applied and boaters should stick to the rules. One set of rules for both GU North and South but they're only adhered to in North, the policing in the South lacking. What do you mean by 'vulnerable boaters' mean? Clarity is needed on the definition.

DD: Anyone that has any welfare disabilities, temporary or long term health issues, or social welfare issues would potentially fall into the category of a vulnerable boater. We need to make sure people who are vulnerable don't enter the enforcement process unnecessarily as their needs could be identified earlier and addressed. It will not be a case officer but a role that offers guidance to staff of CRT, forming relationships with other support agencies

(Peter Caswell) There's a published figure of 7k living on boats. If of these 3,400 are vulnerable there are not enough staff having one welfare officer. Will the number of vulnerable boaters increase?

RP: I'm not sure about those numbers, but in any case not everyone will need help at one time. The welfare officer will assist by liaising with others, it's not a case officer role. I think we recognise that the boater population is ageing and so the numbers of people needing some support may be expected to increase.

(Tom McManus) I live on a boat, have a residential mooring and was a continuous cruiser. Are all residential boaters are being included as vulnerable boaters? – I'm a friend of the canals, supported them for 30 years plus volunteering, pay nearly £900 for a trading licence but must give more money to be a 'Friend' of the canal. Can boaters not have the same privileges as a friend?

The Friends scheme was created to reach people who don't normally contribute to the canals, - towpath users, visitors, and those that have an affinity for the canals etc., reaching out to new people who can contribute. I don't want boaters to feel disenfranchised but if all boaters were made Friends some wouldn't want to, it needs to be a free choice. The Council has 4 elected boater representatives, and CRT listens to them. It's proposed that a single seat on the Council will be

elected by Friends but boaters will have greater representation, as well as the opportunity for direct engagement through meetings like this.

(Tom McManus) There are 'draconian' impositions at Stoke Bruerne. There are no 14 day moorings bar one. The proposal said there would be 14 days moorings at the bottom of the locks, all there are now are 2 days and some 7 days. The fines should not have been implemented at all. Is CRT going to lift the restrictions when there is proof there aren't any issues at Stoke Bruerne?

MS: The moorings are 2 and 7 day in summer, in winter the 7 day moorings become 14 day.

There are no 'fines'; we levy overstay charges. We have them because we want to encourage people to move on. This can be reviewed but there are views on both sides; in general I think support visitor moorings being available. I want to see a good mix of moorings. More popular sites have shorter duration moorings so more people can visit.

(Tom McManus) There are no moorings for 2 miles, we were told they would stay?

We will check on what was said.

(Steve Jay) In the consultation, 14 days moorings were included and have been taken away. 2 days are not required. At the bottom lock and tunnel there is space for moorings.

We will look into this and I will feedback to you Steve.

(Jonathan Brown) If you live in a bus motor home, car etc and found somewhere to park and it's illegal, you would be moved by the police not a social worker. Why is CRT not employing people to do this?

The welfare officer role is a new venture; if it helps people and avoids them being caught in enforcement then it would be worth it in financial terms alone. We're also trying to find a way to be clear with guidance about movement and mooring, and encourage people to observe this. If people don't take the guidance further action may be required.

(David Danes) There have been problems on waterways with moorings etc from 1995 Act not being well drafted. Given that we are promised that the Environment Agency will be coming into CRT 'isn't this the ideal opportunity to address the legal shortcomings in the 1995 Act? You can try to bring the governance of CRT in line with the better governance of the EA waters. For example no boat width is listed on applications within CRT, you can incorporate these changes.

Regarding the possible EA navigation transfer, I don't believe it would need primary legislation so the opportunity you describe may not arise. Even if legislation is required it may not be welcomed: people have different views on the 1995 Act. Any clarification we get may not be any more 'fit for purpose' than what we have now. So it is not likely to be an option.

Our position is that we support the EA navigation transfer, but there are lots of detailed questions to consider. How would the assets between CRT and EA be divided up in detail and how would they be managed for both navigation and flooding? Each river/ would be different and require potentially different ways to work. Over the next year or so we plan to look at this with the EA to be

able to make a report for the next Government to consider. The prospect of transfer is a long way off.

(David Danes) It's difficult that the law isn't behind CRT. Members of parliament said it was the worst put together bill they'd seen and now boaters are suffering.

(Trevor Wash) I'm a continuous cruiser and roving trader, I've enquired about trader's mooring permits for 14 days in one spot. I asked Richard to look into this, nothing has been done.

I have raised it with the Business boating team – have you spoken to them? I can see potential objections to this; why should a roving trader have the right to extended stay when others don't? It's a significant step. I'm not ruling it out but we need to think about the wider considerations. This would include potential impacts on those who lease the property by the visitor moorings.

(Trevor Wash) If I want to buy the licence and permit to trade at Stoke Bruerne for 14 days, who would I contact for a trade licence?

You can't do this at present.

(David Danes) Crick, Stoke Bruerne, Braunston take up moorings for longer periods for their events, rallies etc, but he as a trader trying to earn cannot get this? What is the difference?

These are canal events that CRT support, we are supporting these as they are events that promote and bring life to the waterways and bring thousands of people to them.

(Trevor Wash) I've been going for 4-5 years so I have an interest and bring life also.

We are supporting the traders but I'm not sure if this would be popular to change.

(Straw poll conducted in the room – of those who 'voted' roughly 60% in favour of the change, 40% against)

(James Griffen) We need to have more fair licensing. A lot of wide beam boats on the GU South have a good deal as they only pay for a narrow boat. There need to be charges based on length and breadth. People are not buying the correct sized boat to use the system and this needs addressing.

I've been asked this before and have heard strong views on this. It's a boat licence, not a narrowboat licence, though yes its currently only based on length. There are advantages from this as it's simpler to apply but of course it's conceivable we could do something different as they do on other waterways, and we will be carrying out a survey to get a wider range of views in the coming months. Until then we have no plans to change – if we did want to look again at licensing, I am conscious that people should be able to predict what costs they face when they look at buying a boat so any change we might consider would have to be phased in over a period of time.

(Unknown male) What are the conditions on Trade Plates? I walk dogs and boats make regular visits with trade plates. They never seem to be spotted by enforcement officers but I see the same ones mooring and working there. Boats that continually visit the same spot. I

contacted Julia Moore at CRT but didn't get a good response. Why are enforcement officers not looking at this as the boats are there continually.

I understand trade plates should only be used for moving boats from one commercial location to another; they may have to moor up briefly if undertaking a longer journey. I'll take this away to look at and follow this up.

(Unknown female) Wide Boats never used to come above Berkhamstead on the GU but now they do and often there isn't the space for them to pass. Sometimes even narrow boats have difficulty. There seems to be more wide berths on the move.

(Rodney Evans IWA MK) There are facilities locations gaps, 3 facilities in MK is not enough. The operation of the refuse disposals is not an IWA responsibility (though the IWA have adopted the area), Biffa have also been chased and just about manage to keep up now which is an improvement. Refuse disposal points are abused as it's not just boaters using them, non boaters are coming to dump rubbish too. How can these areas be made more secure? Refuse disposal should probably be fenced / wired in. Maybe you should need a CRT key to get in? Can this be revisited to look at should it be more difficult for people to get in to.

I'm pleased to hear we are doing better than before and I understand it needs to be well-managed – though we also need to ensure we don't spend huge amounts of money on this that needs to go to other things. I'll ask Dan Barnett to address the details.

DB: Cosgrove is the worst area in MK and people throw rubbish in even though it has a key system and is more secure. So more security isn't always a solution; we continue to work with and appeal to local residents not to abuse the sites. It is difficult to enforce, for example some boaters bring rubbish by car so it is sometimes hard to identify who's a boater and who's not. If people don't have keys they will still leave waste outside.

(Unknown) Anyone who wants a spare CRT keys can go on to the website and buy one, it's not policed, anyone could buy one?

Well we do want to make keys available to boaters - if it's too hard to get keys it wouldn't work.

(Hugh Mayes) What does Richard see to be the role of the waterways? Are they a linear housing estate, popular tourism or historic legacy. People are dumping rubbish, parking, water etc. There's an infrastructure impact of increased residential impact on local people and the waterways and degrading the historic legacy of the waterways.

(A woman leaves as she is offended about the fact that residential boaters are degraded by the people in the room.)

RP: Let me be clear; we will support and listen to all types of boaters. People will have a range of differing views about the canals and how they can be used. Canals have had many uses over the years and we want to support this diversity. We must have some regard to the legal position and boats shouldn't stay static unless they have a home mooring; we try to encourage people to move. But it is quite legitimate not to have a home mooring. What we have in common is that we all love the waterways, and we should try to be positive: some changes need to be made to ensure use of the canals is sustainable and we have a role in doing this and yes we must get better at it. My plea is that we work together with all users willing to discuss to move this issue forward.

(Hugh Mayes) Leisure boaters cannot moor near attractive places as permanent boaters take the spots.

(Dave Roberts) What are your principles on licensing and enforcement? The licence structure is not working, it costs twice as much to moor your boat as it does to navigate. It makes sense to change this substantially. Summer has seen lots of wide beam boats moving, it used to be limited to Berkhamstead and below. Does the cost of boating need to be addressed?

We are not the majority provider of private moorings. There are lots of private companies, marinas etc and we have to follow Fair Trade regulations and cannot make moorings cheaper than the 'open' market price. The price range for moorings reflects the range on offer - they are priced less if they are without facilities, more in marinas with an enhanced range.

(Diane Witts MK IWA) I have a question about rubbish disposal, I like to recycle at home, but there are not many recycling facilities available.

We are encouraging this – our new contract with Biffa requires them to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, and greater recycling is a key part of that. We're hoping to provide more recycling but there are limitations given the space available.

(Diane Witts) Can new sites have this?

DB: Yes, additional locations are trying to do this. I understand that it is frustrating that not all sites have this but sites are being selected to try it out. General waste is now being sorted away from the canal with recyclables separated where possible, and we want to create more glass recycling sites.

(Harvey Norton) I have a home mooring at Fenny Stratford, as a new boater I moved here 7 years ago. I made a contribution to a mooring adjacent to my property. BW said if I fixed the area I could moor there, and I built a 40ft mooring there. BW then said I had to pay £500 to moor there after I spent the money. I understand all boaters have to pay their way but I can't find the T&C's and don't understand how it's worked out.

Costs for end of garden moorings should be consistent though it can be difficult for us to police as it is not always clear who is the landowner on the off-side.

(Rodney Evans) I live in Fenny Stratford and have a home mooring on a stretch of bank repaired by the home owners and BW did the same thing to them. BW charged people full rates for moorings, asked to be refunded for works, and then charged them a small charge. I can advise you Harvey.

(Molly Carson) I'd like to point out to boaters that there is a speed limit for boats, it disrupts ducks and nests and I can't get into moor because the silt is pushed up by this. Can this be looked at?

DD: The latest draft of our Boater's Handbook which is being sent out shortly reinforces the need for sensible speed limits.

(Unknown) It's the majority and not the minority who are causing problems on speed limits.

We can't manage this in 'real time' as we just don't have the resources but we will try to communicate to everyone.

(Trevor Wass) I journey through the system and see areas where winding holes are blocked and chained off, is CRT doing anything about this?

No we shouldn't take away such things that are useful to boaters. We may block them off temporarily if they have not been dredged or are dangerous to boaters. If you know of areas please speak to Dean, they could be privately owned which means we don't have any control over them.

(Malcolm Dodge) Travelling on boats you meet people who live on their boats and work and live in a location and can't move far. At Hawkesbury on the Coventry a live aboard marina has been cut out purely for this.

DD: I know that basin and the capacity is for around 12 boats. It has been there for some time.

(Malcom Dodge) Is this a solution to create more of these areas?

We have no objection but we will always be required to get the best value for any moorings on our land; if a third party landowner is involved then they may work something out but it's not within our control.

(Nick Bowles) I've been a local Yardley live aboard since 1969 and not heard anything here of the spirit of the canals, the community. I'm worried that people are getting bogged down with rules etc, 'we should have rules and people abuse living aboard'. We need to think, we all enjoy the canals and should have more of a community spirit.

I agree Nick, we want to promote that spirit and all the great things the canals offer. I've seen lots of community spirit when I've been to festivals and events across the country.

(Colin Porter) I've been lucky with customer service and had excellent service from BW and CRT staff on complaints queries.

(Unknown) Can the engineers who look at locks, take a look at the centre bollard and bricks on the swing arm where you can get to, do they understand this?

Can you draw this?

(David Dane) With prices on moorings, a large proportion of marina prices are paid to CRT as a connection charge. You could double licence fees, halve mooring fees, abolish end of garden and connection charges: that would benefit people. Linear mooring costs more than three times the cost of my licences.

I understand we can all devise alternative charging arrangements. Of course shifting from the current position would not be easy and would provoke strong reactions. I understand that we need to consider the overall economics for boaters, and make sure everyone has fair treatment as far as we can.

(Alan Fincher) Can moorings auctions be looked at?

CRT issued a consultation today looking at this. We don't believe an auction system is right for the majority of sites where there is demand is low but it will be retained for highly sought-after locations. We want to make the process of applying for a mooring as easy as possible.

(Alan Fincher) Is it still going to revert to the list price after three years?

My understanding is that it reverts to the guide price which is itself set by reference to mooring costs in the area. We can look at this aspect.

(Marcus) Canals were not intended for just leisure but for working also. Why attack people who are just trying to live? I live aboard and moves every two weeks. Should other housing be provided? I need to live somewhere and live on my boat, but people are saying this isn't sustainable. Should CRT tackle the idea that all problems are caused by the people who live aboard? How are we going to enforce guidance as it is guidance and not the law?

Our guidance is intended to advise everyone what you need to do to satisfy the Trust that you are complying with the law. Of course a boater can challenge our enforcement in the court if they believe they are compliant.

(Paul Berkley) What is the principle between canals being navigable, and the impact of environmental issues? What is CRT's priority and view?

We manage around 60 SSSIs on or around our canals and there are many conservation areas. Many people, including boaters of course, cherish the wildlife and yes sometimes our responsibility to protect the environment can cause issues between this and navigation. I am confident that we can work to manage these tensions. Canals are for navigation but have also become special wildlife areas so we have to respect them. It's not a major conflict and its not unique - we also manage many listed heritage sites alongside navigation for example. Part of our challenge is to achieve these various objectives.

(Paul Berkley) Will this affect the dredging?

We have announced a 10-year dredging programme. Because of our agreement with government and our performance there is more money to do this and we have made the commitment to do it. The main issue is disposing the 'stuff' we dredge from the bottom, which costs a lot more than it used to. We have to respect that it needs disposing of correctly.

DD: For example in the West Midlands where there is contamination, we moved fish from an area that needed dredging as the dredging could have polluted the water and harmed them.

Concluding remarks

RP: Thank you for coming this evening. Some of the tensions we have to manage have been clear this evening but I think we're all here because we love canals and want the best for their future.