

Friday 23 April 2021

WATER SAFETY ZONE STATEMENT

The waterways through London managed by the Canal & River Trust have become increasingly popular with more boats and people using the water than ever before. The River Lee and waterways in east London have been at the forefront of this growth. Since 2012 there has been a 279% increase in boats without a home mooring in East London (2012-277 / 2019-1079). Like any change this has brought benefits and challenges. While it is positive to see more people using and enjoying the benefits of being on the water, like on the towpath, with such a significant increase in use, it is important that everyone shares the space.

It's essential that we ensure an environment where all craft on the water can navigate safely. The Trusts' planned trial of Water Safety Zones is not about designating stretches of the river exclusively for any one waterway user, but ensuring, in these busy stretches, that the boats moor where it's safe to and that the width of mooring along the bank still allows room out on the river for boats and rowers to pass without incident.

Unfortunately, as the river has become busier there have been increased reports of serious incidents where a lack of room out on the river has contributed to collisions, the increase of boats alongside the longstanding use of the river by rowing clubs has reached a critical point with just the other week a scull being broken in two and the rower left hanging onto the front of the moving narrowboat following a collision. Any serious incident is distressing for everyone involved, so reducing the risk of serious incidents on the water is central to what the Water Safety Zones are seeking to achieve.

We recognise that the proposed Water Safety Zones have led some boat owners to feel that their views or choice to live afloat isn't respected by the Trust. This has not been our intention, we value liveaboard boaters equally with our other boaters and waterway users. We will continue to seek to balance the interests of boat owners, with those of rowers and other users, and, above all, manage the waterspace safely. It is important that, in the context in the growth of traffic on the River, we find ways to safely share the waterspace.

London and South East

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Last night, I chaired the Water Safety Zone briefing meeting as we continued our conversation with boaters to clarify the proposals and set-out our commitment to boat owners who want to moor along the river. I heard the strong views and concerns from many who joined the meeting and want to reiterate our commitment to continue to engage with boat owners and other waterway users to make these busy parts of the river safer for everyone. We will bring together representatives of boating stakeholders from the Lee to discuss how the Water Safety Zone trial is taken forward. This will provide an opportunity for all concerns and issues to be discussed in a constructive environment.

Ros Daniels
Director, London & South East