



Meeting with disabled boaters

Monday 25th March 2019

Location:

St Margaret's Hall, Bradford on Avon.

Notes:

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was attended by six boaters (including two who work for Julian House), two representatives from Health Watch Wiltshire and four Trust staff (Matthew Symonds, Sean William, Caroline Robson and Sheila Shaw).

Matthew Symonds (MS) welcomed and thanked everyone for attending, this is the fifth meeting that the Trust has arranging to hear from disabled boaters and carers on their experiences of boating on the Trust waterways.

MS and Sean Williams (SW) gave an overview of the Trusts policies, guidance and reasonable adjustment processes.

2. General discussion

The following comments (C), suggestions (S) and questions (Q) were raised.

Q – if a boater already has Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and/or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) why do they have to complete another equalities questionnaire for the Trust when it's clear that they are legitimately disabled? SW – we ask boaters to complete the equalities questionnaire to make sure that we understand what adjustments the boater needs to help them. Before the questionnaire was introduced people often wouldn't tell us all the information that would help us to help them.

C – one of the most important things for a disabled boater is access to their car. This is increasingly becoming more restricted due to local villages/neighbourhoods requesting no parking at access points to the canal. Could parking for disabled boaters be made available on the Trust's land?

Julian House outreach workers have good contacts with many local councillors and they are often supportive of the needs of disabled boaters who need access to parking. For boaters with no fixed abode it isn't possible to apply for a disabled parking bay on the road.

S - could disabled parking bays be placed where there are hard standing mooring places?

There was a discussion about disabled mooring spaces. Although there was support in principle, there was also concern that creating lots of disabled mooring spaces could reduce overall mooring spaces, especially if they are not used all of the time.

C – often I get challenged for overstaying even when I have permission to moor longer in some places.

S - it would be helpful if there was a clearer badge for people to display to show that they are allowed to moor for longer.

The Trust does provide a permit that boaters with adjustments can display, but it is a personal choice whether to display it. In some cases boaters don't want to draw attention to the fact that there is a disabled boater on board. There was a discussion on what sort of permit or badge there could be.

S – some kind of badge that people could choose to display that was easy to see and gave an indication of what it permitted. Perhaps colour coded badges could be created e.g. yellow for very short-term adjustment, blue for longer term adjustment, green for maternity adjustment. KANDA said they have produced some 'self-declaration' examples that could be useful. It was acknowledged that boaters don't always have access to printers, the Trust could print badges for boaters, Julian House could also help with this.

C – clearer badges for those with adjustments would help reduce tensions between different waterway users in the busiest sections of the K&A.

There was a discussion about when boaters are admitted to hospital. How does the Trust know that they are no longer on their boat if they don't tell you? MS – we do encourage boaters to let us know but that doesn't always happen, and if it was an unexpected hospital admission then the boater may not be in a position to tell the Trust. SW – this can be particularly challenging when it is a single boater.

S - Health Watch suggested that if the Trust advise health services to let them know to contact the Trust if a boater is admitted to hospital. The Trust could try to get this incorporated into local health authority policies.

Producing some guidance to help educate health service workers on the front line to educate them about the barriers for boaters when seeking to access health care.

S – it would be helpful for new boaters if there were some kind of booklet with useful information in it to help them overcome such barriers. Julian House have produced a handbook with useful advice for gypsy, traveller, boater communities in the Bath & North East Somerset area.

An example was given of one boater who needed domiciliary care was told by social services that they would have to move off their boat to receive it, even though he was on a permanent mooring. It was suggested that this may have been because a risk assessment had flagged up higher risks for the worker.

C – when a continuous cruising boater experiences a decline in their health, they may go down the adjustment process and find that taking a mooring would be best for them. The auction bidding process for Canal & River Trust moorings make it difficult for those who can only afford a fixed price due to limited income.

S – could permanent online moorings that have been removed through the online mooring policy reduction process be used for priority moorings for those in need?
MS – most of the moorings that have been removed on the K&A have been removed due to below water obstructions that potentially make the moorings dangerous if there is a sudden drop in water levels.

There was a discussion about the lack of facilities, particularly between Bradford on Avon and Seend. Poor information about recycling was highlighted. It is difficult for boaters without a fixed address to access local authority recycling centres as many are requiring users to show proof of a local address.

S – could the Trust provide some form of proof of local waterway address so that boaters can use this to access these facilities?

S – could the Trust provide a more regular bulky waste disposal service?

The emphasis on increased range of boat movement means that some boaters have moved onto the long pound or the river. This is difficult for boaters with limited mobility as the mooring places are not so easy. Often a plank is required to get on/off the boat. Maintaining the bank condition, dredging and vegetation management are important to maintain mooring spaces.

C- in some places where towpath improvements have been made, the removal of grass verges have made it impossible to moor with pins.

The work of SW as welfare officer was praised. There was some concern that there was only one welfare officer for the whole of the Trust's network. MS/SW highlighted that all the boat licence customer support officers play a role in providing welfare support and SW supports them, while getting more involved with the more complex cases.

C – some boaters who may need help feel uncomfortable engaging with boat licence customer support officers as some were previously enforcement officers taking action against them. Sheila Shaw, licence support supervisor of Wales & South West urged anyone who had concerns about any inappropriate behaviour from Trust staff to contact her so that she could investigate and address concerns.

It was acknowledged that the Trust was going through a change, the new Boat Licence Customer Support team was part of this, and that it would take time to build trust with some boaters.

Health Watch Wiltshire encouraged local boaters to complete the NHS long-term plan survey. For info, the link to the survey is <https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/survey/nhs-long-term-plan-legislation/>

3. Next Steps

MS thanked everyone for attending and for contributing to the meeting, MS will take all the comments noted and review them with the Trust. The notes of the meeting will be on our website and everyone was welcome to share information about the meetings. If anyone had anything they wanted to add at a later date then they were encouraged to get in touch and we can add them to the notes.