

A group of boaters – mostly continuous cruisers – met for two hours with staff from the Canal and River Trust and John Dodwell (Trustee) on Wednesday 28 November 2012 in the Trust's Milton Keynes office. The meeting was arranged by boaters partly to discuss the [recent briefing paper](#) produced for the Trustees' September meeting about Non-Compliant Continuous Cruising, and also to provide the opportunity for continuous cruisers to ask questions about enforcement, mooring, and other issues. The Trust's briefing paper was not intended to affect Continuous Cruisers ("CCers") who complied with the rules

Trust staff present were Sally Ash (Head of Boating), Denise Yelland (Enforcement and Licensing Manager) and Damian Kemp (Boating Consultations and Communications Manager). Also present were Ivor Caplan, a member of the Trust's Council elected by private boat owners), Mike Annan (chair of the Trust's Licensing and Mooring sub-group, Navigation Advisory Group) and David Fletcher, (chair of the National Association of Boat Owners).

The boaters themselves came from various parts of the network – not seeking to represent the opinions of all continuous cruisers but rather to take advantage of the opportunity to meet face to face with Trust staff.

Prior to the meeting, Head of Boating Sally Ash prepared a list of Questions and Answers (see as a download (under Q&A towpath mooring rules) from <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/mooring>) from themes and questions she had read on the Canal World Discussion Forum. This document in itself answered some of the group's questions, though we referred to it from time to time during the meeting, as well as the paper prepared for the Trustee's September meeting. This paper set out the background of the number of continuous cruising licences having increased since 2007 by 37% to 4,400, compared with a 12% growth for pleasure boats generally to about 33,000 (Including hire boats etc, boat numbers total about 35,000) The paper further stated that the Trust's research suggested that about 2,000 boats licensed as continuous cruising moved less than 10 kms between 1 January and 31 August 2011 . Given that not all could be followed up at once, the Trust's staff were focussing on the 600 boats which appear to move the least. The meeting had a loosely set agenda which helped to give some structure, but also allowed for us to spend longer on topics or questions that we wanted further clarity about or wanted to discuss in greater detail.

A key theme from the meeting was the feeling that CC'ers often feel that it is assumed that if a boat is overstaying on a visitor mooring it must be a CC'er – when this is not the case. We were reassured that, in regards to overstaying on visitor moorings, the Trust does not seek to differentiate between CC'ers and boats with a home mooring and will apply the same standards to both types of boater – and that the Trust do not assume that overstayers on visitor moorings are CC'ers. There was some discussion about how the Trust differentiate Overstayers and Non Compliant Continuous Cruisers – which are two different things – and how it is important to make this distinction clearly.

Further to this, we discussed how CC'ers generally feel targeted or singled out for criticism when a great number of us are cruising in accordance to the guidance produced by the Trust. We questioned how the data for the hotspot map referred to in the Trustee's briefing paper was collected and created – and were told by Denise Yelland that the map is part of the Trust's efforts to put together a picture of boater movement on the network. Boaters present pointed out the map was created over the winter months, when stoppages and bad weather limit navigation, and Denise said that data continues to be gathered (as part of the usual work of towpath checkers) which will feed into future hotspot maps.

We were pleased to hear, when discussing moorings and changes to 14 day moorings that, in some cases, these changes do not amount to a change in the number of 14 day moorings. There was no intent by the Trust to change all 14 days moorings to, say 48 hours. There is a 14 days mooring limit at all places, unless a shorter stay time is signed. Therefore, in removing a sign saying “14 day mooring” - the mooring remains a 14 day mooring – it is just no longer signed. Sally also accepted that the consultation around visitor moorings on the Southern Grand Union in 2009/10 probably didn’t reach enough continuous cruisers. She and Jeff Whyatt were discussing extending the consultation in line with the new framework and they are keen for Continuous Cruisers as well as leisure boaters and boating trade to be involved in the creation of a local mooring strategy. One boater was concerned that the Trust might be seeking to provide a solution when there wasn’t a problem in the first place (i.e. where there wasn’t overstaying) .Trust people accepted the validity of this point and said that in some cases it might be concluded that no change was needed. However, in other cases, a distinction might need to be made between shorter term visitors of, say 48 hours, and longer term stayers of up to 14 days. There could be a mixture of both types of moorings at the same sites.

Staff from the CRT told us that, as a group, they sometimes find consulting with CC'ers a challenge because we are disparate across the waterways and because many of us are not members of organisations that the CRT often consult with, such as the IWA, NABO, and RBOA. Sally suggested that perhaps a survey of Continuous Cruisers might be prepared to help CRT staff better understand us and get a picture of our needs and concerns. We pointed out some of the issues we had with last year's boaters’ survey and why many of us chose not to complete it – but said that we were open to helping Sally design a survey that we would find easier to complete while helping paint a more accurate picture of CC'ers and the economic benefit they contribute to local communities.

Denise Yelland explained the enforcement procedure more fully to the meeting, also explaining why, at times, it may seem that the Trust are “not doing anything” about a particular boat that is clearly not moving, has an out of date licence, etc. As Denise explained, because of Data Protection considerations, the Trust can't publicly label the boats that are in the enforcement process – so though it may look like nothing is being done, the boat may be in the enforcement process already. Denise said that the towpath checkers did not rely on licence discs but used hand-held devices to check the index number against the licence register. She outlined the process when CCers were thought to be non-compliant (see appendix)

As regards the Trust's guidance for Continuous Cruisers, one of the boaters present pointed out that it is a challenge for CC'ers who may be identified as not complying because, when they ask “ok, how far do we need to go then” the Trust cannot provide an answer (i.e. move 10 miles, etc). Sally said that it is not possible for the Trust to be that prescriptive because of the legislation which covers the guidance – the legislation does not give a blanket specification for what a “place” is and this will vary from location to location. However, “*place*” can be defined within the context of a local mooring strategy. The Trust accepted, however, that in the past BW’s enforcement and data collection efforts had been poor, which has been part of the reason why some particular areas have a higher concentration of boats that stay within a narrow area than others.

Though there was some discussion about the contribution of Hire Boaters to the waterways, including the money they contribute to the local economy, one of the continuous cruisers present

pointed out that, by running his boat year-round, he contributes significantly to the waterways economy through his purchase of diesel, maintenance of his boat, etc.

The meeting ended on a positive note, agreeing that communication was key to reducing misunderstandings. For their part, CRT staff felt that the discussions had stimulated some constructive ideas and they'll try to integrate these into coming plans. They left CCers with the challenge of thinking about how CRT staff could most effectively and efficiently canvas their views and invited CCers to let Damian Kemp know their thoughts

An appendix to this contains

- the Q&As mentioned near the beginning of the note,
- the policy briefing note that Trustees and Council endorsed in September 2012,
- Overview of enforcement process
- Reminder letter CC1

Click [here](#) for a link to the appendix.