



TOWPATH MOORING MANAGEMENT

PROJECT UPDATE – 31 JANUARY 2014

Introduction

This is the second of our regular updates on the Towpath Mooring Management project: a £1.5 million project running from April 2013 to April 2016 focused on building constructive engagement with the boating community, creating better understanding of the rules, addressing specific local issues, reviewing visitor moorings and working with local stakeholders.

We hope you find this report interesting and informative. If you have any comments or would like future reports to cover any particular aspect in greater detail, please drop a line to fran.read@canalrivertrust.org.uk.

Project Objectives

Our objectives for the project are to:

1. Build more constructive engagement with all segments of the boating community, developing communication strategies to build awareness of and wider respect for mooring rules to influence boater behaviour, thereby reducing dependence on legal enforcement sanctions.
2. Ensure that new 'Continuous Cruisers' are fully aware of and comply with requirements of the 1995 legislation.
3. Develop alternative mooring permit options for those Continuous Cruisers who have already established a lifestyle dependence which is not consistent with 'bona fide' navigation as a stop-gap measure to address specific local issues.
4. Review visitor mooring provision, signage, communications and monitoring procedures at relevant sites.
5. Engage local stakeholders in the development and implementation of the actions arising from the project to build consensus.

Plans

Our plans to achieve the objectives can be summarised under these five headings:

1. Communications
2. New types of mooring permit for already-established non-compliant continuous cruisers, and local projects to develop tailored mooring plans for 'hotspot' areas
3. Assessment of visitor moorings and their management arrangements
4. Community support for those liveaboard boaters who need it
5. Promote and facilitate development of new affordable long term residential moorings.

Below we report on progress for each of these five headings and also on issues and plans for the future.

Report on progress and plans

1. Communications

Boater views and feedback

Our effort to enhance two-way communications with boaters and boating organisations, in order to get their feedback on both national and local issues, has continued over the past two months:

- On 23 January, chief executive Richard Parry hosted the first in a series of open meetings for boaters, to take place across the country throughout 2014, in Birmingham, with over 120 local boaters taking the opportunity to ask Richard and the team questions about the Trust. Further meetings are planned across the country starting, in February, with meetings in Nottingham and Banbury.
- In December the bi-annual Boat Owners' Views survey was sent out to around 6,000 private boat licence holders to gather feedback; we had 1,260 responses to the survey (a 24% response). The information is being analysed over the coming weeks and we will be sharing this with our Navigation Advisory Group and national user group representatives, and publishing a summary when that work is complete.
- During 2014 we are creating a new, more frequent, shorter online survey that will track boaters' views, starting in April/May. Invitations to take part will be sent to 1,000 boaters each time by independent research agency, BDRG Continental, who have just been appointed to conduct the survey for us.
- At the end of last year, Roger Hanbury, our Head of Governance, carried out a review of our waterway user group meetings, to find out whether the meetings were working effectively as a way for boaters to tell their local waterway management team about the problems that are affecting them and gain a better understanding of the work that is being done in their area. We will be publishing the results and conclusions before the end of February.
- In 2014 we will be organising regular meetings with the national boating organisations to discuss our longer term priorities and plans, with the first meeting taking place on 3 February.

Reaching new continuous cruisers and people in the planning stages of boat purchase

From January 2014, everyone taking out a licence without a home mooring for the first time now receives a letter during the first month of their licence explaining how we monitor all boat movements, and that we will give them feedback regularly during their first year with early warnings if we believe they are not moving enough to qualify as a continuous cruiser. If this is the case, we will be clear that they must find a home mooring before we will renew the licence at the end of its first year. In January we sent out 94 letters to customers who newly registered as continuous cruisers in November and December.

We're planning a communications campaign aimed at home seekers tempted by the idea of living afloat, particularly if they expect to stay in one area, to explain that they must have a home mooring and/or agree to comply with our Guidance for continuously cruising. We aim to explain that it may be more difficult than people imagine to comply with the movement rules.

Improving communicating information to boaters

In January, we began to recruit boater volunteers to pilot more local boater-led communications, including more regular, timely updating of noticeboards with relevant information and any other communication methods that suit the local area. The initiative is being trialled in London, South East and Central Shires waterways.

2a. New types of mooring permit

Winter mooring permits

This winter, following discussion with a number of continuous cruisers, we introduced a new General Towpath Permit which on average is some 25% cheaper than last year's site specific permits but excludes extended stays on visitor moorings or in places close to long term mooring sites. We continued to offer dedicated winter mooring permits at 20 visitor mooring sites. To address the complaints about overstayers we have had in previous years, we recruited some volunteers to monitor the sites. These winter mooring 'rangers' are carrying out sightings two to three times a week, and we've had some anecdotal feedback that there has been a noticeable decrease in overstaying boats on the sites they've been covering.

From our sales figures (below), comments sent to us, and from discussion on the internet, it seems that the new permit has been popular overall. The more structured approach we have had to take to winter moorings in London (allocating specific berths and adding boat name tags to the mooring rings) and the presence of the mooring rangers on the towpath has, we believe, helped to prevent problems developing. Whilst it's pleasing to have had positive emails from several appreciative customers, we're also still getting some negative comments, generally about overstaying boats in London.

Permits sold to 23/01/14

	Permits sold
General towpath permit (£5/metre/month (5 months))	477
London towpath permit (£10/metre/month (5 months))	75
Selected visitor moorings	84
Total	636

In March we will be publishing a questionnaire asking boaters for feedback on the new arrangements.

Roving mooring permits

As reported previously, to address a long-standing issue in the Cowley-Uxbridge area of the Grand Union Canal, we have developed a roving mooring permit for those boats concerned – those who have been based in the area since before July 2012 and are not currently able to fulfil their licence requirements– as an interim measure to give those boaters taking them up home mooring status. Enforcement of 'bona fide' navigation will be stepped up in the area to support the permit scheme.

We are fine-tuning the application process and permit conditions ready for the launch of roving mooring permits for Cowley and Uxbridge by the end of February, with permits starting at the beginning of April.

Permits will be limited to the initial qualifying group and will not be transferable: once the boater moves away or sells their boat the permits will not be reissued. The permits, which will be linked to local mooring prices, don't provide facilities or guaranteed moorings spots; they simply narrow the area within which permit holders are required to cruise.

In December we were approached by a group of boaters based on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal requesting that a roving mooring permit be offered for this waterway. They had prepared a detailed proposal which we considered and, with a few minor changes, have accepted in principle. It is very similar to that developed for the Grand Union Canal. The timeline for the permits will also be the same as for Uxbridge and Cowley, launching by the end of February, with the permits starting at the beginning of April.

2b. Local projects

Kennet & Avon Canal, west of Devizes

The Kennet & Avon mooring consultation closed on 29 November and we have evaluated the responses and [published the findings](#). We are meeting with the Kennet & Avon waterways partnership to discuss the consultation responses, and will be publishing our response and next steps in February. Work is progressing on an Equality Impact Assessment for the proposals following a meeting with equalities officers from Bath & North East Somerset and Wiltshire councils.

London

Through the feedback we have received from the Better Relationships Group, which is formed of around 20 people with a commitment to working together to improve conditions on London's waterways for boaters and local residents alike, we are following up the group's priorities. We have introduced a new Boating Bulletin for boaters in London to improve dialogue and communications and we're looking at ways of improving information for new boaters or those thinking of a life on the canals (as described above). We are discussing local policy and management of visitor moorings and developing a practical study of moorings capacity to be undertaken by boaters with support of the London waterways partnership. Safety and security on the waterways is a priority and we are developing relationships with the Police and local authorities around practical initiatives to address community safety, as well as the security of the Trust's boater facilities. These include a community safety day held in December with the local Safer Neighbourhoods Team, supporting the boater-led Operation Whistle Blower to assist in purchasing whistles, and arranging a meeting with London Borough of Islington to discuss cameras at City Road Lock.

We are also developing our broader working relationship with LB Islington and supporting them with their project to improve air quality. We have attended joint pollution training and have supported them to recruit an Environmental Health Apprentice. In December, we began trialling a 'caretaker boater' at the Islington visitor moorings to improve relationships with neighbours and help us manage the moorings sensitively.

Our Mooring Rangers have been developing boater relationships and widening their patrols from the Regent's Canal to the Grand Union Paddington Arm and the Lower Lee. They are reported to be effective in dealing with boater concerns more quickly.

In next few months, we will be presenting to Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, and discussing ways of working together. We are also working with the London Legacy Development Corporation to discuss plans for providing boating access to the Olympic Park.

3. Visitor moorings management

Our South East waterways partnership set up a boater subgroup comprising 10 representatives of different boater interests to help us reach decisions on local visitor mooring issues in the light of experience of the changes introduced in summer 2013 at Thrupp, Stoke Bruerne and Foxton. They, and the Navigation Advisory Group (NAG), are helping us to draft a strategy for the designation and management of visitor moorings. This might be applied beyond the South East area if, following consultation with the NAG and others, we believe there is merit in doing so.

The South East group has met twice and has, on key points, expressed views similar to those of the NAG – you can read the notes of its December [meeting on our website](#). We aim to complete the strategy document for wider consultation with boaters in early spring.

The feedback from the South East visitor mooring review meeting in November has been evaluated and has been used to inform changes and to help us to agree pilot sites for 2014. Volunteer visitor mooring rangers have begun gathering sighting information at Berkhamsted, Batchworth and Marsworth so we can clearly see how the visitor moorings are being used, and we held a meeting with our visitor mooring rangers at Thrupp and Foxton to gain feedback from their experience. We will also be meeting with potential volunteers at Banbury and Oxford. The details of any changes to

visitor mooring arrangements at the first pilot sites (Foxton, Stoke Bruerne and Thrupp) and any additional sites will be published by early March.

4. Community support for live-aboard boaters

We are continuing our support and cooperation with the Waterways Chaplaincy and exploring the potential for creating further local partnerships outside of the South East, in other parts of the country where needs are also growing .

5. Long term residential moorings

Over the last 18 months, we have been researching locations for the possible development of new mooring sites in London. Three small developments, with a total of 19 berths, are scheduled to be completed during 2014 at Acton's Lock on the Regents Canal, Atlip Road on the Grand Union Paddington branch at Alperton, and Matchmakers Wharf, Homerton, on the lower Lee.

During the course of this work, we have identified some 30 possible sites along the offside which are not large enough to be commercially viable but which, subject to further research, might be of interest to a social enterprise. We are working on a 'how to' guide for social enterprises and other third parties who are considering developing residential moorings and we hope we'll be able to publish this soon.

Sally Ash, Head of Boating
31 January 2014