**Meeting with Canal and Rivers Trust and Michelle Donelan MP**

**17 June 2016 at Youth and Community Centre, Bradford on Avon**

**Key attendees**

Michelle Donelan MP and staff members

Richard Parry, Chief Executive, and Matthew Symonds, Boating Manager, C&RT

Councillor Alison Craddock, Bradford on Avon Town Council (Mayor)

Councillor Magnus Macdonald, Chairman Bradford on Avon Area Board, Wiltshire Council

Tracey Dunn, Headteacher, Fitzmaurice Primary School

Paul Faulkus, Headteacher Bathampton Primary School

Sam Worrall, Julian House, Boater and Traveller Welfare Officer

Tracy, Jassy, Panda and other boaters

Jim Lynch, BoACAN

**Key issues raised**

British Waterways Act 1995 does not specify the distance to be travelled for boats without a home mooring. Boaters must demonstrate there are bone fide continuous cruisers, moving to a new location every 14 days and a minimum distance of 15- 20 miles in a single direction.

The law is purposefully vague in this area. The pattern of movement over a calendar year is monitored and C&RT say there are allowances made for periods of relatively high or low travel within a 12 month period.

The Local Mooring Plan identifies neighbourhoods between which boaters can measure their distance travelled. The interpretation of the law has been tightened and more rigorously enforced since 2014 with 6 month restricted licences being issued to boaters who fail to meet the minimum requirement for movement. Warnings are given that unless they comply with the regulation they could lose their license (and therefore their home).

Boaters feel victimised and are living in fear. They say that reminder notices are being issued “by computer” and they would like more “human discretion” to be exercised.

A particular issue arises for boaters with children because the C&RT says the law makes no allowances for attendance at school. Boats are sometimes many miles from school and the children have to travel large distances, sometimes alone, meaning they are often late, tired and muddy from the towpath.

During term time the boaters would like flexibility to stay close to the school. During holidays they are happy to travel longer distances to comply with the law. They avoid “shuttling” back and forth as this is unlawful.

Richard Parry stated that the C&RT make special allowances for boaters in need of medical treatment, pregnancy etc but that boaters choose to live on boats and the law makes no allowance for children attending school.

The headteachers present stressed the duty of care they have to all their children and the benefits of attending school over home tuition. The boater children are special in their own right and bring a new perspective to the classroom. It is Government policy that parents can be fined if their child misses a day’s schooling.

Michelle Donelan asked C&RT to interpret the spirit of the law humanely when it came to children. The numbers of boats with children at school is a small minority of the total live-aboard population and so it must be possible to flag up on the license records where a more tolerant enforcement of the law could be expected.

Julian House reported on the work they do with vulnerable adult boaters suffering from issues such as depression, isolation, disability, poverty and mental illness.

The Town Council and BoACAN talked about the contribution that the boaters make to community life in Bradford on Avon and how this co-operation was an exemplar for other parts of the waterways network to learn from. A Supporters Alliance was being formed along the Kennet and Avon Canal, starting with a Benefit Evening in The Three Horseshoes in BoA on Wednesday 6th July, where there will be a viewing of 'Off the Cut' and music by 'Calico Jack'

**Agreed Actions**

* C&RT to adopt more sensitive management of boater families with children attending school, to allow less movement in term times offset by greater movement in holiday times
* A portfolio of boater “problem cases” to be collated for Michelle Donelan’s attention
* Further home moorings to be designated by the public authorities

**Note taken by Peter Dunford**