

# Meeting with disabled boaters

## Thursday 20 September 2018

---

### Location

Bethel Church, Oldbury, West Midlands

### Notes

### Action

#### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Matthew Symonds (MS), welcomed people and thanked them for attending the meeting. This is the first of several meetings the Trust hopes to arrange to hear from disabled boaters and their carers on their experience of boating on the Canal & River Trust waterways. The meeting was arranged following contact and discussion with Tracey Clarke a disabled boater and member of the Canal Ministries team.

MS and Sean Williams (SW) explained how the Trust currently support disabled boaters through the Trusts welfare guidance, equalities policy and reasonable adjustment process.

#### 2. General discussion

The following comments (C), suggestions (S) and questions (Q) were raised. MS/SW agreed to follow up these.

S - Could the Trust introduce a voluntary register of disabled boaters so that they would know when there is a disabled boater aboard? If the Trust wanted to contact the boat owner about an issue, they would then at least be aware that a disabled boater may be on board.

MS

C – The Trust have always granted me an adjustment when I have requested it due to my disability / health, however, I'm always concerned that they may say no.

S – Could the Trust provide a badge for disabled boaters to display so that people can see that a disabled boater is aboard? There was a discussion on what might be shown on a disabled boater badge. Some did not want it to just show a wheelchair as it would not reflect the diverse range of disabilities. Others felt the wheelchair was a widely recognised symbol for disability.

MS

C – There was broad agreement that there was a need to raise awareness about boaters with disabilities and their needs. It was suggested that news stories and articles on/by boaters who are disabled would help raise awareness. However, it was noted that not everyone wants to be defined solely by their disability.

There was a discussion on the accessibility of towpaths. The Trust has surveys and mapped towpaths that are accessible.

C – While it's positive towpath surfaces are being improved making them more accessible, it's a shame the Trust has removed grass verge where boats can moor without replacing this with mooring rings.

S – Suggestions for where accessible moorings could be considered included close to facilities, shops, local amenities. There was a discussion as to whether/if boaters with disabilities could/should be given priority at accessible moorings. It was recognised that the Trust does not have resources to monitor and enforce moorings and that in the few places where disabled moorings are signed already, these are all advisory.

MS

S – it was suggested that if accessible moorings are created additional mooring space should be provided. There would also need to be clear guidance stating what/who the accessible moorings are for.

MS

C – Managing towpath vegetation – both grass and hedgerow/tree growth is important for maintaining accessible towpaths.

MS

Q – How is accessibility considered in the specification that is set for contractors who cut the vegetations?

Q - When contractors are working beside locks when boats are passing through, are they meant to stop? There was a report of a stone thrown by a strimmer hitting a boater in a wheelchair as they passed through a lock.

MS

C – There is a lot of cut vegetation ending up in the water, contributing to dredging issues and often clogging weed hatches – which can be harder to clear for disable boaters.

Q – A boater in a wheelchair was not permitted to travel inside their boat through the Standage Tunnel – why is that the case?

MS

C – the contact details for the Trust's Boat Licence Support Officers are not easy to find on the website.

C – The Trust's Waterside Mooring (long-term mooring sites) do not provide accessibility information about the moorings so it is difficult for a disabled boater to know whether the site is accessible or not.

MS

C – CRT signage is often not accessible or clear. Signage is also often positioned too high for those in wheelchairs (and those on boats in the water).

MS

MS had received a suggestion from someone not able to attend the meeting, that the design of locks could be reviewed to make them easier to open for boaters with limited mobility. A suggestion was made that a competition could be run to make lock designs more accessible. MS will pass this suggestion to the Trusts assets team.

MS

### **3. Next Steps**

MS confirmed that additional meeting dates for London, the North and west will be arranged so that the trust has an opportunity to hear from more disabled boaters. Anyone who would like to hear about these meetings and/or updates from them was asked to fill in the sign in sheet.

Future meetings will be publicised by the Trust through the boater's update e-bulletin, social media, the Trust website and those who we know are disabled (identified through agreed adjustments). The waterway chaplains will also publicise further meeting, and boaters are welcomed to share this information.

MS