



Meeting with disabled boaters

Thursday 17th January 2019

Location:

Canal & River Trust Offices : Newark.

Notes:

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was attended by 9 boaters and two Trust staff.

Sean Williams (SW) and Roy Dodd (RD) welcomed and thanked everyone for attending, this is the third meeting that the Trust has arranged to hear from disabled boaters and carers on their experiences of boating on the Trust waterways.

SW and RD discussed the Trust's policies, guidance and reasonable adjustment processes.

2. General discussion

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

No-one in the room was aware of the Trust's policies and subsequently no-one present in the room had any form of adjustment in place.

C - The website was hard to access and find information unless you knew the key words the search engine was looking for, the accessibility page is limited and dated.

C - lack of disabled/accessible moorings across the network and lack of information on where to find them. This should also be extended to include accessibility along the towpath and nearby bridges/ramps/stairs etc. It was mentioned that if we are

looking at access overall that it should be undertaken with a wheelchair/wheelchair user who would have experience of the challenges faced.

C - The disability moorings at the Birmingham Convention Centre have been removed as have the ones in Stratford upon Avon.

C - In general there are not enough access points across the network and not enough available information to be able to plan and plot a journey.

S - Respite areas would be useful.

C - a comment was made that sometimes it's a temporary disability, i.e. a person on the boat may be joining them for part of a cruise but they have a disability and would like to ensure a safe cruise by knowing where to go - not necessarily an adjustment needed.

C - It was also noted that one person had seen the equality questionnaire and felt it was quite intrusive.

SW - explained the reasons behind the questionnaire and general feeling was that the questions were pertinent to the request, but maybe more awareness was needed to let people know why - the FAQ's could be easier to find.

C - Discussion around the needs for an adapted boat, many boat owners have had to buy bigger boats to accommodate needs (wheelchair access, lifts, hoists etc) this requires a more expensive boat, license fee, mooring. This also then raises issues of not enough space when they look to moor up or a lack of facilities like sanitation stations.

S - Suggestion of a discounted license fee and moorings.

S - Follow blue badge scheme - concerns raised over how easy it would be for people to take advantage of situation and produce forgeries, perhaps a photo card scheme.

C - Do hire boat companies do enough to support boaters with accessibility needs, more information needs to be provided so people know where to go as per previous discussions around moorings, services etc.

C - What policy do we have in place for new developments/wharfs/moorings, there should be an agreement that there will be a percentage of disability moorings and that the planning takes into level access.

C - Dredging - general feeling that this wasn't done enough, when the boat can't get in close enough to the mooring it makes it very tricky with getting on and off the boat. There is a 2 mile stretch from Braunston to South Oxford that is very bad.

C - There was a comment that a gentleman from Braunston village passed away and left some money to change a bridge to be more accessible but it hasn't happened do we know anything about this? SW to check with local teams to see if anyone aware.

C - We also need to look at accessible moorings in more rural areas as these can be hard to find, more pilings needed and back fill of areas where the land has worn away making access very tricky

S - where possible can dredging be used to back fill in the areas needed for repairs, i.e. where a pilings are in place and the ground behind the pilings has eroded away.

S - Shropshire union water levels could be raised to help with mooring in this stretch.

C - The towpaths camber is quite unsettling when in a wheelchair as it leans towards the canal.

C - Pre-bookable moorings in London are not accessible and in Little Venice the lift that helps to get over the bridge doesn't work on Saturday and Sunday.

C - Vegetation can be an issue, makes it hard to get close to the towpath.

C - Is there a budget to provide money towards disability moorings.

C - General discussion over cyclists on the towpath - not slowing down. Issues when hard of hearing and can't hear the bell or the bike and then getting abused for not moving out the way - also if they do hear the bell they don't always know which way to move, especially if the cyclists are speeding. Examples given included being shouted out for putting in mooring pins, abused when manoeuvring a mobility scooter off the boat, cant put a table or bbq out in the summer and even some pets where kicked by cyclists. a question put forward was "how can i protect my family from abusive cyclists"

SW - work has been done on the share our space campaign and perhaps more needs to be done, cycling clubs have been in contact and we had thought this had helped. - SW to discuss with the Trust.

S - incidents are not being reported and perhaps a 'report an issue app' could be rolled out so that incidents can be logged.

We then had a general chat and everyone came up with a wish list of things they would like to change/improve.

Wish List

- Symbols on bollards for disability moorings
- Communications on making people aware the disability moorings are a priority for those that need them.
- Dredging throughout.
- Easily accessible contacts list (not everyone has internet or a signal)
- More accessible moorings.
- Facilities Map with accessibility symbols.
- Key areas map with links to local GP, hospitals, shops, bus/trains.
- Pre-approved overstays.
- No cycling on towpaths where there isn't room.
- Cycling speed limits.
- More electricity points - especially as some boats need more supply to run the lifts, hoists etc.
- Opening hours for Elsan points published - perhaps easier to find if already on website.
- App to report dangerous cyclists.
- Reduction in license fee.
- Reduction in Mooring fee.
- Priority for winter moorings - with a % allocated as a priority need for senior citizens.
- Make towpaths accessible - also the surrounding areas - ie no cobblestones or where steep stairs (like near bridges) need to offer alternative access.
- A policy on winding holes - more boats mooring there and with the extra length on some of the adapted boats makes this hard to do, also then they need more dredging
- return of lengths person.

3. Next Steps

SW and RD thanked everyone for attending and for contributing to the meeting, SW will take all the comments noted and review them with the Trust. There are more meetings planned so that we can hear from more boaters. The notes of the meeting and future meetings 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.