

Meeting with disabled boaters

Wednesday 7 November 2018

Location

The Pirate Castle, Camden, London

Notes

Action

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

Matthew Symonds (MS), welcomed people and thanked them for attending the meeting. This is the second 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 a disabled boater and a member of the Canal Ministries team.

MS and Sorwar Ahmed (SA) 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/SA agreed to follow up these.

S – There could/should be more disabled/accessible mooring places. It would be helpful if the Trust could publish a list of disabled/accessible moorings, and towpaths with disability access. It was felt this would be especially helpful to visitors from outside London, who are not familiar with London's geography. There was a discussion on how disabled/accessible moorings could be managed and signed so that they were clear to all. The need for signage that is visible while navigating was highlighted.

S - One suggestion was for the bollards/edge to be painted a distinctive colour to denote an accessible mooring, similar to the yellow used in London to highlight lock landings where mooring is not permitted (except for using the lock).

C - There was general agreement that using the wheelchair (as an internationally recognised symbol) on signs would be appropriate.

MS

An optional window sticker/card could be available for those who wished to display it, but it should be entirely optional. The difficulty in deciding who may be eligible for a 'disabled/accessible mooring' was acknowledged. It was felt the key issues were the ability to safely get on and off the boat and access on and off the towpath, e.g. for transfer to accessible transport.

S - It was suggested that more frequent short sections of very short-stay mooring may also help as it increases the possibility of finding somewhere to moor. Some expressed concern that passing through London as a disabled boater was stressful as there was little certainty that you'd find a mooring that was accessible and enabled you to get off your boat. SA explained that plans for more very short stay moorings were included in the adopted London Mooring Strategy.

C - It was also highlighted that being disabled is not a choice so where bookable mooring exists, there should not be a charge for these.

S - accessible moorings should be in places where people want to visit. These can play a part in supporting health and well-being, as holidays can present practical problems for disabled boaters, visitors and their carers.

S – A scheme run by the Environment Agency on the Thames visitor moorings was highlighted. Boaters can ring up and notify the EA that they will be staying for 24 hours and pay for a longer period.

C - There was agreement that promoting stories from disabled boaters would help to raise understanding of the issues facing disabled boaters amongst other boaters. There are lots of good examples of projects that support accessible boating such as the Bruce Trust on the K&A and Waterway Experiences on the Grand Union, these could be promoted.

MS

S - The needs of organisations who provide accessible boating need to be considered – for example, designated pick-up and drop-off mooring places.

C - It was highlighted that boat builders are often very accommodating for disabled boaters. They will make adjustments to accommodate disabilities that are easier to make than if you were trying to do these in a house.

C - If a boater needs a wide beam boat to accommodate a disability, then they should not be charged any wide beam surcharge. MS confirmed that this would be one of the considerations of the existing equalities adjustment process. Not all disabilities would require a wide beam boat, so the Trust won't have a blanket exemption to the wide beam surcharge for disabled boaters but will consider this on a case by case basis. MS will look to make this clearer in the Trust's communications.

S - It was suggested that something like a 'respite mooring' scheme could be set up where disabled boaters who need to moor for a limited longer period, but who don't need/want a permanent mooring, could be accommodated. It was suggested that these wouldn't need to be in the most popular places but would need to be accessible in terms of transport. It was suggested that anywhere close to transport in London would be a popular place.

C - Finding the contact details for who you want to speak to in the Trust is not easy, and in some cases contacting the Trust is not very easy either. The Trust could do more to communicate to

boaters that it will try to help them if they have difficulties. It was suggested that there is a perception amongst many boaters that when you contact the Trust it goes into a 'room 101' and that you won't get a response. It was agreed that many boaters who might need help don't contact the Trust early enough until they receive an enforcement notice.

S - Ideas to improve communication between boaters and the Trust included more 'stories' about how people have been helped, information included with licencing reminders/renewals, and to filter information out through the boating community. Using peers, waterway chaplains and other boaters who've been helped would be more effective at reaching those boaters who are less likely to engage with direct communication from the Trust.

MS/SA

S - It was suggested that boaters on residential moorings could be engaged as 'eye and ears' to look out for other boaters who might be having a problem. There is scope to be able to develop a network of potential support – along the lines of the volunteer network in the London Canal Watch scheme. The Trust could help with this by developing a briefing pack for Rangers with useful numbers, tips and advice. It was suggested that something similar to this sort of pack may already exist as part of the events application pack. MS/SA will investigate.

S – When boaters need help, identifying their precise location can sometimes be a challenge. There is an app called 'what 3 words' which uses three easy words to provide a location within 3m2, this is already being used by the emergency services and doesn't rely on post codes that are not always very accurate.

3. Next Steps

MS confirmed that additional meeting dates for the East Midlands, 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.

MS

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.