



TOWPATH MOORING MANAGEMENT

PROJECT UPDATE – 8 NOVEMBER 2013

1. Introduction

One of the first things trustees requested when they took over from British Waterways in July 2012 was a briefing on 'non-compliant continuous cruising'. In September 2012 they and the Trust's Council considered and endorsed a [policy paper on the topic](#). As a result of this review, and after further planning, the Towpath Mooring Management project was created with additional funding of approximately £500,000 per year available from April 2013. The project is expected to last for at least three years from April 2013.

A lot has happened since then, some of it behind the scenes, and this is the first of what will now be alternate-month reports on the project. This first report sets out our objectives, progress and what we plan to do over the coming months. It is therefore probably longer than we expect future reports to be.

We hope you find this first 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.

2. Project Objectives

We set some simple objectives to guide our work. They were:

1. To build more constructive engagement with all segments of the boating community. Develop 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.

3. Plans

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

1. Communications, including:
 - more use of boater views and feedback in the development of policy relating to towpath mooring;

- strengthening understanding of mooring rules;
 - reaching new continuous cruisers and people in the planning stages of boat purchase; and
 - being clearer on how compliance monitoring and enforcement works.
2. New types of mooring permit exclusively and optionally available to already-established non-compliant continuous cruisers, plus local projects to develop tailored mooring plans for hotspot areas – London, the southern Grand Union & the western Kennet & Avon.
 3. Assessment of visitor moorings and their management arrangements.
 4. Community support for those liveboard boaters who need it, delivered primarily through the Waterways Chaplaincy.
 5. Promote and facilitate development of new affordable long term residential moorings.

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

4. Report on progress and plans

4a. Overview

The project was intended in part to increase the resource we have available to make progress in this important area and so we have recruited five additional staff (two of whom are part time). The team comprises:

Existing staff wholly or partly redeployed to the project

- Sally Ash (Head of Boating)
- Denise Yelland (Head of Enforcement)
- Fran Read and Damian Kemp (Communications)
- Antonia Zotali (Project Manager)

New staff

- Sorwar Ahmed (Boater Liaison Manager, London) started April 2013
- Matthew Symonds (Boater Liaison Manager, South) started June 2013
- Sian Ferry (Project Co-ordinator) started July 2013
- Two part time mooring rangers for London, Mikaela Khan-Parrack & Scott Hamilton, started October 2013

4b. Communications

The appointment of the Boater Liaison Managers has been an important step in providing the time and skills to listen to often conflicting points of view and start the slow process of building relationships between people with a very wide range of views.

Boater views and feedback

The team has invested considerable and necessary time seeking discussion and receiving feedback. This often includes surveys, research, face to face meetings and specific structured workshops:

Examples include:

- Four workshops held with boaters, residents and other canal and towpath users in London to identify key issues and start to work up solutions
- Discussions with all interested parties at Noel Road, Islington
- Consultation papers and workshops around changes to the South East Waterway Visitor Moorings
- Discussions and workshops leading to a proposal for Roving Mooring Permits in the Cowley/Uxbridge area
- Work done by the Kennet & Avon Partnership with boaters to produce a mooring strategy
- Surveys amongst Grand Union and Kennet & Avon boaters to help refine proposals

Our experience has been that, although dialogue can be slow and sometimes difficult, it produces results and improves relationships, making it a valuable investment for the future. We plan to maintain and increase dialogue over the coming months.

Strengthening understanding of mooring rules

For most boaters, compliance with mooring rules when away from their home mooring simply involves making sure they do not overstay the general 14 day rule or any specific local limits on stay times.

To help boaters understand the Guidance better, we are developing some examples of movement patterns which we think illustrate compliance and non-compliance. We will discuss these with our Navigation Advisory Group and national boating organisations before publishing early in 2014. We are also considering publishing maps suggesting possible interpretations of places throughout the network which we will share in the same way before publishing.

We also think there may be a need for greater clarity in respect of the home mooring definition in the light of increased cases of boaters declaring as a home mooring a location which they never use. This will be one of a small number of changes needed to licence terms and conditions which again we will discuss with the Navigation Advisory Group and boating organisations before publishing and communicating.

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 will receive 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.

From January 2014, we will begin a communications campaign to get across the message that in order to buy a boat you must have a home mooring or comply with our Guidance. We will go beyond the usual waterway media to communicate with boat brokers and estate agents, and use social media as well as the more established channels.

Clarity on how compliance monitoring and enforcement works

Responding to early criticism of our former 'pre CC1' warning letter to continuous cruisers, we have changed this to be both friendlier and more informative (a copy of this can be found [here](#)). We will similarly re-visit all other standard enforcement letters and see if they can be made easier to understand.

4c. New types of mooring permit

Winter mooring permits

A proposal for a more flexible permit than those offered in previous years (which were confined to visitor mooring sites) was developed from discussion amongst continuous cruisers. It features a new General Towpath Permit which on average is some 25% cheaper than last years' site specific permits but excludes extended stays on visitor moorings or in places close to long term mooring sites. We announced this in June, publishing outline details of what would be on offer. This generated some useful feedback which included strong pressure for retaining an option for winter permits on some visitor mooring sites.

Over the summer we refined the plans and have included the offer of permits at some 20 visitor moorings, priced on a par with long term mooring rates (as in previous years). Because previous schemes had thrown up complaints when permit holders found that overstayers were getting away with staying put without paying, we want to make sure that we are able to monitor overstayers more frequently in these places. In discussing the September 2012 policy briefing, Trustees specifically asked us to add into the mix the development of volunteer boat checkers, and over the past few weeks, we have managed to recruit for most of the sites. We recognise the risks in this and are doing all we can to mitigate these. The next few months will show us whether this is a viable method to roll out more widely. We are also taking the opportunity to test an alternative approach of using boatyards immediately adjacent to the mooring site for 'three times a week' recording – this is happening at four of the locations.

We restricted sales of the new General Towpath Permit to continuous cruisers registered with us on 1 June 2013.

Report of permits sold to 29/10/13

	Permits sold
General towpath permit (£5/metre/month (5 months))	260
London towpath permit (£10/metre/month (5 months))	63
Selected visitor moorings	47
Total	370

Roving mooring permits

We worked closely with a Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters in the early part of 2013 to develop this concept and offer it on a trial basis in their area. We invited the 1,475 licence holders with home moorings on the Grand Union south of Blisworth and 404 continuous cruisers sighted regularly on the same stretch during the previous six months to take part in a survey on the subject of mooring. One third of people responded. The results can be viewed [here](#).

The proposed roving permits will be introduced from April 2014. An update issued in mid-October to Cowley & Uxbridge Boaters is published [here](#).

4d. Visitor moorings management

Our South East waterways are at, or near the top of, the league of boat numbers around the network and many user group participants have voiced concerns over both the appropriateness of time limits and how they are enforced. The waterway team had developed detailed proposals in consultation with local user groups which they were planning to implement in 2013. At the first meeting held with (predominantly) continuous cruisers following the Sept 2012 Trustees' policy paper, it was clear that many were unaware of the proposals and were highly sceptical of the proposed changes. We therefore took breath, published a consultation and reflected on the findings. Both consultation paper and our report are published on [our website](#).

By August we were ready to try out new arrangements at Foxton, Thrupp and Stoke Bruerne. These involve new signage and information leaflets explaining stay times and the consequences of overstaying. Volunteers have played an invaluable role in distributing information and recording boat arrivals on a daily basis, using our new Mobis web application. As a result, providing we devote sufficient time to supporting them, we are cautiously optimistic about the potential for wider use of volunteers for this purpose. We are currently completing a report on the project to present to a workshop of boaters (including many who attended a similar one in March) to be held on 6 November. The subject has been discussed by our Navigation Advisory Group who recommended that we should develop an overarching strategy for the review and management of visitor moorings, and part of the agenda at this workshop will be devoted to exploring views on this, alongside considering specifically the next steps for the busiest South East sites.

4e. Local projects

There are currently two local projects:

Kennet & Avon Canal, west of Devizes

A community of residential boats started to become established along the towpath in Bath within a very short time of the canal's reopening in 1990 following 40 years of dereliction. Successive generations of waterway management teams attempted (with varying degrees of vigour but without success) to persuade the boats' owners to navigate in accordance with the requirements of the legislation.

Since 2009 we have had regular dialogue with representatives of all sections of the boating community, parish councils and the District & County Councils in attempts to achieve agreement on measures to achieve fairer sharing of the scarce towpath mooring space. A specially formed steering group, which met eight times during 2010 and 2011, made some progress but failed to agree on a workable strategy. We incorporated some of their work into a draft framework mooring plan which we published in 2012 and invited a sub group of the new Waterway Partnership to refine this. The sub group did not support some of the fundamental principles of our plan and instead developed alternative proposals which are currently open until 29 November for public consultation. We still have concerns to the extent to which these proposals will make any material alteration to the availability of mooring space in the most popular locations for visiting boats, but in the spirit of localism and a desire to break the almost 20 year deadlock we have agreed to adopt their proposals for a 12-month trial period, subject to any amendments which emerge from the consultation.

London

London's waterways have more, and a higher density of, non-compliant continuous cruisers than anywhere else on the network. Severe shortage of affordable homes in the capital is a major driver of growth.

During 2012 we began to talk with boater and neighbourhood representatives through a series of professionally facilitated workshops. From this emerged a 'Better Relationships Group' – around 20 people with an interest in and commitment to working together to improve conditions on London's waterways for boaters and local residents alike. Agenda themes of understanding capacity, improving communications, closer cooperation with local authorities and police, incident reporting, clearer and fairer enforcement processes, smoke and noise impacts on neighbours, visitor moorings management and provision and maintenance of boater facilities have emerged.

Following the increase in budget from April 2013 and appointment of the Boater Liaison Manager we have made a start on tackling these many challenges. Activities to date have included: researching and presenting mooring demand and capacity information for the Greater London Authority's special investigation into London's mooring shortage; intensive engagement with London Borough of Islington and boater representatives on smoke and noise generated by boats, with the completion of a

management plan for the visitor mooring site; relationship-building with other riparian councils; and implementation of new winter mooring arrangements.

We are trying hard to balance the pressures for 'quick wins' and the effective resolution of large numbers of individual complaints with the need for well-thought out, systematic strategies for all these issues. Our capacity was increased in early October with the recruitment of two part time mooring rangers (one of whom is a boater, the other a retired police officer).

4f. Community support

We are aware that a small number of our boating customers have a wider range of social, financial or health needs and some have decided to come to our wonderful waterways in an effort to escape the pressures of modern living. We realise that supporting such people is not what the Trust was set up to do, however, as a caring Trust, we want to take into account the needs of all those people that use the waterways in the most appropriate way. As a result we are seeking to establish a partnership with Workplace Matters, an organisation established by a St. Albans based charity, to develop a network of Waterway Chaplains who can help people who may need some friendly advice and support.

Over the past three years, Workplace Matters has worked skilfully along our towpaths, largely concentrating in the South East. Primarily using word of mouth, they come into contact with those boaters who may need help at specific times in their lives. Often the Chaplains help act as advocate for the boater, liaising with our enforcement staff and with local authority housing and social care departments so that debts can be paid, a home mooring can be secured, disputes with other waterway users can be resolved or alternative accommodation on land can be found.

We have made a small grant to Workplace Matters to fund an administration and fundraising assistant with the aim of increasing the capacity and sustainability of the Waterways Chaplaincy. Our fundraisers are helping by developing grant applications for funds to strengthen the chaplaincy's work.

4g. Long term residential moorings

Over the last 18 months, colleagues in our Commercial Directorate have been researching locations for the 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 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 therefore working on initial site assessments and a form of prospectus to explain the process for developing a small offside mooring for residential use, along with a directory of locations for social enterprises to consider.

Sally Ash, Head of Boating
8 November 2013