



BOATERS' SPRING FAYRE GREETED BY GLORIOUS SUNSHINE AND SUPPORTIVE RESIDENTS!



On Sunday 14th May we held our Boaters' Spring Fayre 'Ain't No Party Like an S bend Party' in glorious sunshine on the River Lea towpath of North Millfields Recreation Ground. The location is one of the key sites of the 'Water Safety Zones' that the Canal and River Trust (CRT) is trying to erase boaters from.

The event was one of the largest events we have organised, with close to a thousand boaters, locals and allies of the itinerant boater community, who gathered in a powerful show of support and solidarity against CRT's ongoing attacks on the itinerant boater community.

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ELMBRIDGE COUNCIL PROPOSES PSPO

Elmbridge Council sought consultation over a proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) earlier this year. The PSPO would, among other things, give the Council powers to issue fixed penalty notice (FPN) fines of up to £400 for mooring on the Thames for longer than 24 hours. The affected sections of river maintained by the Council would include Albany Reach, Cowey Sale Open Space, Ditton Reach and City Wharf, Hurst Park Open Space, and Cigarette Island. Also proposed are restrictions on fishing, camping, and lighting of open fires such as BBQs.

This is not the first time that Elmbridge Council has proposed restrictions on boat moorings. In 2019, the NBTA responded to proposals by the Council for an extended PSPO that would cover areas moored on by itinerant liveaboard boaters. There is an existing PSPO in Walton-on-Thames town centre, in effect since March 2021.

A PSPO is intended to address specific behaviours which are having or are likely to have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality. Elmbridge Council's order proposes restrictions on "unauthorised" mooring, which the Council and Environment Agency define as mooring for longer than 24 hours in a location. This is not of itself damaging to quality of life for people in the locality. As the NBTA said to the Council's 2019 PSPO consultation, "there is nothing inherently anti-social in mooring a boat that is your home on a river bank... the simple act of mooring a boat on a river bank does not of its nature have a detrimental effect on quality of life."

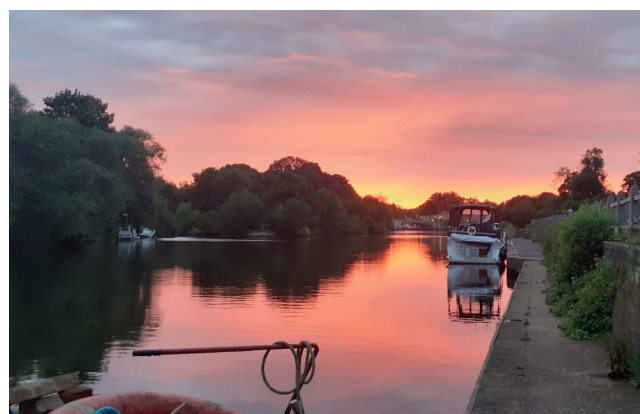
The Council's proposal claims that "boats moored without permission" has led to "increased littering and noise pollution". Restricting the mooring of boats on the Thames does not, however, address the question of "unregistered" boats as all boats, regardless of their permission on the waterways, will be penalised by such an order.

The Council should instead address littering and noise pollution directly, rather than liveaboard boaters as a proxy. As Surrey Live reported in 2020, some liveaboard boaters with licences have been confronted along the river, in an "atmosphere of enforcement" where any distinction between "legitimate" and "unauthorised" moorings is eroded.

Indeed, organisations such as civil and human rights group Liberty have criticised the powers behind PSPOs for the "vague definition of what can be criminalised [that is] ripe for abuse", with many councils issuing fines for homelessness and rough sleeping. According to BBC and the Manifesto Club, Councils have issued fines under PSPOs for unauthorised cycling, spitting, school drop-offs, begging, and putting up an A-frame, as well as instituting curfews for under 16s.

The existing PSPO in force in Walton-on-Thames town centre prohibits riding "cycle, skateboard, scooter or hoverboard in a dangerous or anti-social way", which seems gives Councils the scope to choose what is considered "anti-social". There is a danger that Council's wield the power of PSPOs to criminalise any behaviour of their choosing, in this case the mooring of boats.

Above all, such mooring restrictions will have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable in the boating community, displacing individuals and potentially criminalising them for attempting to live on a boat. Avoidance of negative impact on vulnerable communities is explicitly called for in the LGA guidance. The consultation webpage states that an Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted, but the assessment has not been provided and there is no guarantee that at-risk boaters have been taken into consideration.



Up to £400 fine for mooring on Albany Reach and Cigarette Island

If Elmbridge Council is concerned about anti-social behaviour in its borough, we suggest that the Council address those precise behaviours. Restrictions on mooring specifically target liveaboard boaters, and especially the most vulnerable in our community.

The consultation closed on 11th June 2023. The Council has not yet implemented the proposed PSPO.

NBTA FIGHT BACK AGAINST LICENCE FEE

CONSULTATION

In February, the Canal and River Trust (CRT) sent out an email announcing their upcoming “Consultation on future boat licence pricing”. The preliminary email stated that the purpose of the consultation was “to gather feedback on boat licence pricing over the next ten years to help support the long-term future of the 2,000 miles of waterways”.

Three weeks later, boaters started to receive the invitation to the consultation from a company called DJS Research, who CRT had employed to undertake the process. In our invitation, we were told in no uncertain terms that CRT will be raising the boat licence fee “*by more than the rate of inflation for the foreseeable future*” and what CRT supposedly wanted from us was to help them find the “*fairest way to apply these increases*”.

What followed was an extremely leading, divisive and biased set of questions, heavily aimed at raising the licence fee for boats without a home mooring specifically. Knowing that this consultation went out to all boaters, those with and without home moorings, the consultation felt very much like it was pitting boater against boater. In two out of the first three questions, it was suggested that the licence fee for boats without home moorings should rise. A third question focused specifically on whether it is more or less reasonable to charge higher fees for “continuous cruisers”, with no option of saying “not reasonable in the slightest”. The questions in this survey were clearly implying that boats without home moorings should be priced differently to boats with home moorings. CRT may as well have asked: “Should we raise the licence fee for: a) continuous cruisers; b) boats without home moorings; or; c) itinerant boat dwellers?”.

As such, the NBTA saw the potential results of this consultation as a direct threat to our community, so we produced a set of suggested answers to all the questions. Our suggestions aimed to provide answers that would not divide boaters and instead encourage every boater to stand together in the face of rising fees, the opposite to what CRT seemed to be driving at with their questions. Our campaign was nationwide; information leaflets detailing the threat of the consultation were distributed across the CRT network, and we had a huge social media outreach drive. We hope that we managed to reach boaters everywhere, and thwart the very biased views CRT were pushing.

This consultation seemed to be yet another part of CRT’s continued assault on the itinerant boat dweller community and their bid to force us off the waterways. When the numerous aspects of this sustained effort are considered, it is not hard to see a pattern emerge. CRT have taken away facilities, mooring rings and bollards, and mooring spaces (only to replace them with bookable moorings in some cases), and of course there is their history of attempting to raise licence fees for itinerant boaters specifically (see the history article in this newsletter). Itinerant boat dwellers have been targeted by CRT for decades, and if they get away with pricing boats without home moorings differently to those with home moorings, they will be able to price itinerant boaters out of existence.

The results of the consultation will supposedly be released in early July. If CRT decide to use their survey to justify a decision that has harmful consequences for our community, we will show them that that would be more trouble than it’s worth. Together, we are a strong community who will not be bullied off the waterways.



We are the London branch of the **National Barge Travellers Association (NBTA)**. The NBTA is an organisation open to all and run by boaters without a home mooring. We campaign for the rights of boat dwellers.

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Initially CRT had plans to get rid of 550 mooring spaces along the River Lea where people can moor for up to 14 days at a time. Following the magnificent resolve and resistance of the boating community through a series of campaigns, events and challenges to the policy, CRT eventually relented on the full threatened 550 mooring spaces. However, they have continued to try and eliminate 295 mooring spaces, including the entirety of the Clapton 'S Bend'. Yet despite the CRT's efforts, including hundreds of thousands of pounds wasted on outsourced enforcement contracts to harass and intimidate boaters, Sunday saw the towpath lined with a brilliant array of boats, stalls and stages. The boater community celebrated their life on the water with music, food, speeches and information on the campaign provided by a whole team of NBTA activists. We raised much needed funds and awareness to continue our campaign thanks to generous donations from the public and a flood of sign-ups to NBTA communications.



Marcus Trower, NBTA London branch secretary and one of the event's organisers said:

“This event perfectly encapsulated why itinerant boaters will never back down in the face of CRT's attempts to bully us off the waterways. Hundreds of people have come out together today because of the joy, community and life that boaters bring to the water. We've had huge numbers of locals expressing horror at the idea that the CRT wants to erase us from these areas, with many non-boaters signing up to get involved in ongoing campaigns. We've had boaters from all across the UK showing up to share memories and experiences of time spent on the River Lea, building our community even further. We've had dedicated NBTA activists contributing their time, effort, skills and creativity to making the day a resounding success, and laying the groundwork for future events. All of this goes to show that the boater community and our allies will stay strong against the CRTs boat cull - not just for our own sakes, but for the sake of the local communities who stand in solidarity with us to celebrate and defend life on the water.”



Following on from this event, and the joyful reception we got from local residents, we encourage you to continue to support our campaign in disobeying the 'no mooring' zone by continuing to moor in these areas for up to 14 days at a time. NBTA London Caseworkers are here to support you if needed.

Want to get more involved with NBTA London? We hold monthly meetings on the last Sunday of each month at 4pm.

The meeting can be accessed online via: <https://8x8.vc/nbta/nbta>
 Alternatively, you can use the dial in details: Dial-in: +44 330 808 1706 PIN: 45925961#

CRT. ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM?

Along the waterways, there are signs claiming the Canal & River Trust relies on donations to do its work. A quick look at their annual report shows donations account for a relatively small amount of the Trust's income, at 3% for 2021/22. Boat licences and moorings, however, make up a fifth of the Trust's annual income, at £44.5m for the last financial year. Income and expenditure are recorded in millions, projects are listed in the abstract without breakdown of costs, charts show vague approximations without quantifying true percentage. In the 176 page report; the word "boater" is mentioned only 8 times, "licence" 6, "mooring" 10.

The Canal & River Trust (CRT) is known to most if not all boaters who live on or use the UK waterways. The Trust operates as a charity and as such has charitable objectives, including to *"preserve, protect, operate and manage inland waterways for public benefit... [and] improve the conditions of life for socially and economically disadvantaged communities who live nearby"*. However, they may be best known among boaters for introducing more chargeable moorings, forcing through so-called "Water Safety Zones" that reduce available mooring spaces to boaters without a home mooring, and attempting to hike licence fees for boats without home moorings (again). It comes as no surprise, then, that the "financial strategy of the Trust is to maximise net income from all sources."

So where exactly does CRT get its funds, and how does it spend the money? Despite being a charity, and claiming to rely on donations, charitable giving from the public accounts for only £6.5m (3 percent) of CRT's income. They spend £41.6m on fundraising. £38.8 million comes from charities in the form of grants. £300,000 was left to them in peoples' wills. Tax exempt on income and profits from investments, a large portion of the Trust's annual earnings comes from return on its investment portfolio. Value has increased 26% over the past five years, from £800m to over £1.1bn (yes, billion). With *"ground rents [being] very resilient holdings over the long term"*, last year, returns contributed to a third

of CRT's income. In fact, the submission to the Charity Commission shows an additional £76.7m of investment gains were retained for future use. While the Trust looks around for places to squeeze out a penny, they might also consider digging a little deeper into their own pockets.

While external contractors are listed for reservoir inspection and property surveys, the cost of outsourced contracts is not. CRT has around 1,700 employees on the payroll and 3,700 volunteers, with 83 of its staff earning over £60k. Of those top earners, 10 earn more than £100k and 2 earn up to £250k... with community, volunteer and corporate groups removing "hundreds of tonnes of environmentally damaging litter and fly-tipping", perhaps money might be better spent on bins.

An acknowledgement in the annual reporting of the fact that the CRT is the de facto local authority for several tens of thousands of people who live on boats as their primary residence would be illuminating. As they make improvements to reservoirs, water pumps, towpaths, tree clearing, dealing with contamination and pollution, bridges, slipways



and aqueducts, and the upkeep of towpaths for the 9 million reported fortnightly visitors, bins and taps, however, have no mention at all.

Boaters will be most familiar with the Trust's licencing income stream, which is made up £44.5m in the financial year ending 2022. Of this, around half comes from licences, rather than mooring permits and trade. You would expect the Trust to take more of an interest in the wellbeing of liveaboard boaters, given they contribute a fair sum to the Trust's balance sheet.

While an aim of the Trust is the improvement

of conditions of life for those in the vicinity of its waterways, its proposed increase in licence fees appears to care less for those who live on them.

Boaters do not seem to figure in their calculations much at all. As their strategy is to "maximise net income" with the promise of being "unrelenting in their efforts to generate funds" it is likely the Trust will find other ways to pass on rising costs to boaters. The Chief Executive reported to the Board earlier this year that boater satisfaction remained on a downward trend. Making life better by water, perhaps, but harder if you live on it.

CRT UP TO THEIR OLD TRICKS AGAIN

So this year CRT pulled out of their bag of tricks one of the favourite waterways authorities questions: 'Should people without a home mooring pay more than those with?'; And without much warning they actioned this into their new surprise survey. It's not the first time CRT or their predecessor British Waterways (BW) brought this question out. Within the last 21 years they have bought it out four times.

In the Bill that became the British Waterways Act 1995, BW wanted it to be a criminal offence to keep a boat on BW waterways without a home mooring. However, with an almighty pushback we instead got an Act which gave us the legal right to exist on BW waterways. This was quite a setback for BW; it had for the 20-30 previous years been making life on the water harder. Now it was law that they had to licence our boats as long as we followed three basic criteria. Therefore, BW and following them CRT had to come up with some inventive ideas to deal with their persistent pest - the travelling boater.

They tried a few different tactics in their attempts to eliminate our community from the waterways, from reducing mooring stay times to taking away moorable banks to outlandish enforcement strategies such as 2003's plan to make our travelling boaters travel 120 different lock-miles every 3 months without turning back.

Some plans were beaten back, others weren't. So far each time BW and CRT have proposed that boats without home moorings should pay more; it has been successfully resisted.

In early 2002, BW stated that they believed the licensing system was "felt by many to be unduly complicated"; in a document entitled 'A fresh look at BW's craft licensing structure: Consultation Paper for Boaters May 2002'. They proposed a more complicated tiered licensing system where they would increase the licence fee for a boat without a home mooring to 2.5 times that of the normal licence fee. In their document they even argued, 'there is a compelling argument for a 'pay as you go' system'.

Later that year, after doing a bit a consultation they published 'A fresh look at BW's craft licensing structure: Consultation update';. Here BW put boats without home moorings into four categories: genuine continuous cruisers, bridge-hoppers or short range cruisers, static "live aboard"; boats and boats awaiting a mooring. Just for clarification, BW considered bridge-hoppers or short range cruisers were people who "moved less than 50 km in any three month period". They were concerned that if they charged boats without home moorings more then they would harm the "genuine continuous cruisers"; as well as the other types of categories they'd coined without home moorings.

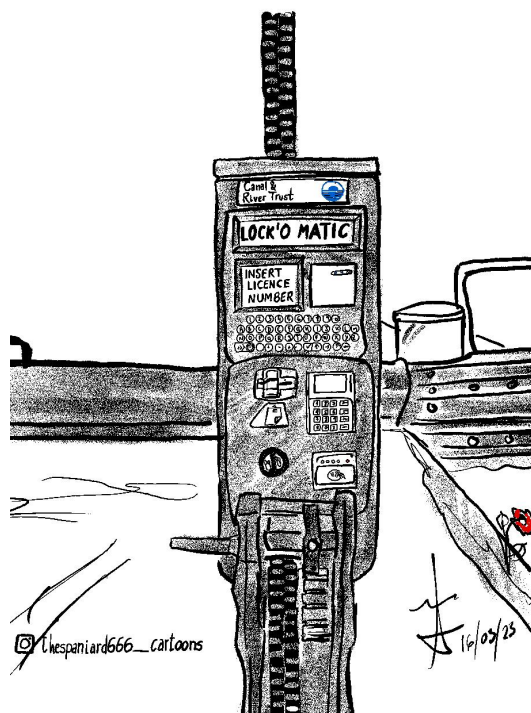
Therefore, they proposed that boats without home moorings who moved within a range in one region "pay a district mooring fee equivalent to the lowest priced BW permanent mooring in the area where your craft is normally kept or used". Under pressure, this idea was also discarded.

In 2005 BW proposed to increase the licence fee for boats without a home mooring by 147%. In a BW document entitled 'Fee Structures for Boat Licences in England and Wales White Paper'; in the same year that if implemented it would have raised £1million from only 1,360 boat licence holders.

A group called the Continuous Cruiser Action Group was set up to coordinate boaters responses to the consultation. A section of boaters organised themselves against it and set up a campaign mobile phone group. Some of the organised boaters travelled across the nation and painted the phone number on locks asking people to get involved. The phonenumber became inundated with texts of people wanting to do something. If BW didn't back down the plan was to send text messages for people to meet at a list of different lock pinch points and do a go slow flotilla to cause disruption. BW backed down so the resistance plan didn't need to be implemented.

In early 2008, hire boat company Wyvern Shipping circulated a petition calling on BW to make continuous cruisers pay a higher licence fee. In January 2008, Sally Ash BW's then Head of Boating had received a letter from the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO), the hire boat companies' trade body, threatening a drop in BW's licence income if BW increased the cost of hire boat licences.

In September 2008, BW issued a consultation document to the User Groups entitled 'Boat Licence Fees - For information & comment on by Waterway User Groups'. This document included a proposal to increase the licence fee for boats without home moorings by £150 in comparison to the published tariff. BW also



Pay as you flow

proposed to introduce higher licence fees for widebeam boats. However, once again boaters organised and beat these plans back.

Then in 2017, CRT announced that the licence fees system was "outdated" with the ridiculous lie that licence fees have never been reviewed.

They argued that licence fees were "complex", "unfair", "outdated"; and that their consultation into the fees would be "cost neutral". This so called cost neutral consultation had three stages and had to change research company for the third stage.

We in the NBTA were involved in each part of the consultation. All the way through this process, CRT attempted to divide boaters, putting forward the question again about charging boats without home moorings more than those with. Therefore, we spent this time preparing to be ready to ballot our members for a licence fee strike if we had to. We weren't going to let CRT price us off the water!

Again, it didn't come to that. CRT decided not to take us on at that time. So they decided to halve the early payment discount, pick on wider boats and further made a statement saying they would think about how to deal with the London waterways problem separately. This thinking has led CRT to plan to implement chargeable moorings on 1.1km of London's regular towpath. In a meeting between NBTA and CRT this year, CRT revealed that they still haven't implemented this plan because they haven't been able to hire someone suitable to manage the project. While that plan is still apparently to be implemented, CRT has reached back into the bag of tricks and found the same old question, once again hoping for different reply.

As in the past, we must show the waterways authorities we aren't a community that they can push around and do whatever they want with. We aren't a social problem that needs culling, our way of life is worth defending and together we can beat them back!