

London Boaters - past, present and future

Lucas Hewett and Mark Walton

London Boaters was set up in 2008 as a means of keeping CCing boaters in touch with each other. The initial idea was pretty much a monthly night in a pub, catching up, drinking and discussing boat stuff or any other old bollocks.

The first Pyrate Regatta took place in August 2009 on the marshes behind Edmonton Ikea but afterwards the monthly meetings kind of dropped off. A sense of 'job done'? Hangovers? Winter? Who knows.

In 2010 we had a go at recapturing the momentum. Day-long workshops were organised on topics such as 12v electrics, diesel engine maintenance, basic carpentry, etc. Again though, winter came round and everyone went into hibernation.

In the Spring of 2011, British Waterways released their Mooring Proposal for the Lee and Stort which, if implemented, would have driven most of us off the canals. London Boaters organised a meeting attended by around 130 boaters.

During the 12 week public consultation on the plans, small groups of boaters worked on research, strategy and media and legal issues. During this period London Boaters formalised a bit. Suddenly we were making decisions that had the potential to impact on everyone. It was agreed to make decisions based on consensus and the following mission

statement and membership was defined.

"London Boaters act collectively to protect the homes and way of life of the people who live on London's waterways. We reach out to all those committed to a sustainable future for our canals and rivers."

"Membership is open to boaters who live on London's waterways who wish to have a collective voice in support of the aims set out in our mission statement."

Despite this statement no formal membership has ever been established.

As a result of the efforts of boaters in London and on the Upper Lee, BW withdrew their proposals in August 2011 and said that they would work with boaters to look at developing new moorings and improving facilities.

In January 2012 London Boaters agreed to work with Locality, a national network which supports community led organisations. BW are paying for Locality to support London Boaters to consider what it wants to do in the future and how it wants to organise itself. Locality have also employed two community organisers to work with London Boaters to listen more widely to the concerns of boaters who may not be on the email list or have any interest in meetings.

In the meantime groups of people are continuing to work on

different projects such as setting up a credit union for boaters, improving waste and recycling facilities and looking for sites to develop new community managed moorings.

Locality have also supported boaters and other local community groups to form a new organisation to take on the management of the Waterside Centre at Stonebridge.

So that's a very quick gallop through where we've come from and what we've done. There are as many different views of what London Boaters *should* do as there are boaters; campaign against CRT, run practical workshops, have parties, run moorings, improve the canal etc. In fact there is no formal structure or membership and anyone can pretty much do what they want provided the they can find others who want to do it too.

There are also many different views about whether we should have a membership and more structure and accountability or not. If you've got an opinion on that or something you want to see happen, join the email list or come to a meeting and get stuck in. London Boaters is open to all boaters who live in London, whether on the tow-path or on a mooring.

You can join the London Boaters mailing list by sending a blank email to londonboaters-request@lists.aktivix.org

Next London Boaters meeting

The next meeting of London Boaters will be held on **Sunday 3rd February** between **2-4pm** at the **Lea Rowing Club**.

Please bring items to discuss on the agenda or submit them via the mailing list in advance on londonboaters-request@lists.aktivix.org

Address:

Lea Rowing Club,
The Boathouse, Spring Hill,
Clapton, London, E5 9BL
(opp Springfield Marina)

Locks on the gates at Angel visitors moorings

Lucas Hewett

Until two years back the gates were always unlocked by the council in the mornings and locked up again after dark. Then the lock barrels were removed by British Waterways, no one knows why, not even BW themselves.

Anyway, there's been various bother down there after dark since then. Thefts, damage to boats, verbal abuse, muggings, racket, the whole anti-social collection. After repeated requests, we've managed to get the locks reinstated. It's a probation period while we see how it goes.

The upside is we've been to a meeting of the Friends of Regents Canal to explain the change and they were *nearly* all, including quite a few local residents, very much in favour. The downside is that CRT can't come to an agreement with the council, so if

we want the gates locked overnight we have to be responsible for it.

We've been approached by local Islington residents about helping. Which would make it a sight easier than having to find a new boater to do it every week. In the long term we'll ideally be able to sort something out with the council. In the meantime, if we want a quiet night's sleep we've to sort it out ourselves.

There's an online gate rota at <http://bit.ly/SBgTNZ>. If you're planning on mooring at Angel, please have a look at it in advance and put your name up if you're prepared to cover a few days. Both the gates can be opened with a standard CRT (BW) key. At the minute they're on unwieldy padlocks. With any luck everyone'll be in favour of locked gates

and we might get CRT to put the barrels back in (were a lot easier to operate).

Both gates need unlocking at 7.30am. Then they both need locking at 5pm (or as soon after as you can manage). We've flyer'd the adjacent properties to let them know what's going on.

Most important, unless you're locking or unlocking them both then please leave any gate the way you found it. That way we won't have joggers and the like traipsing the length of the mooring, realising they're locked in, swearing all the way back, then moaning at CRT about having the locks taken out again.

Research surveys

Included with this newsletter are a couple of surveys designed by some of your fellow boaters for you to complete if you wish; one on what you may want from community moorings, and one on other services that may be of use to boaters. The findings will be used by boaters to help develop ideas, services and proposals on these subjects.

The surveys are completely anonymous, but you can leave your contact details if you want to find out about the results and more info on the issues discussed.

Completed surveys can be handed at the next London Boaters meeting on 3rd Feb or to appointed boaters at various mooring spots (see info included with surveys). You can also complete it online at www.londonboaters.org

Get in touch with LB

Web: www.londonboaters.org

Email forum:
londonboaters-request@lists.aktivix.org

Facebook: London Canal Boaters

Twitter: @London Boaters

Hello from your Community Organiser

Keith Brown

Hello, my name is Keith Brown. I am your area Community Organiser. The aim of the community organiser program is to do grassroots confidential listening in specific areas throughout the country, find out what people want for themselves, their community and what they are willing to do to make that happen.

I am the pilot organiser working in an area which includes a continuously mobile community, and my geographical territory is from the Islington tunnel going East along the Regents to Mile End, then along the Hertford Union to the Lee Navigation up to the moorings above Stonebridge lock. As a live-aboard boater, I have listened predominately to the hopes and fears of the live-aboard community.

The Community Organiser program is a partially government funded initiative administrated by Locality, a charitable network for small to medium sized community groups. The additional funding for community organising was provided by Locality using money from the Canal and River Trust.

The initial funding is for one year which will end in March 2013, and to continue other streams of funding need to be found.

The majority of people I listened to are concerned about the lack of facilities including water points, and all forms of waste disposal. Our relationship with the C&RT, security, and waterways pollution are the other top universal concerns.

I am currently working with community members on ways we can increase security. The work of a community organiser is not about coming into a community and pushing an agenda, it is facilitating empowerment within the community.

I would like to hear from any live-aboards I have not met by door knocking. I also think my work would be enhanced by having more community-based conversations with boaters on moorings in my area.

Contact me on my email address keith.brown@corganisers.org.uk and I will come to hear you.

Social Enterprise - SCENT

Tony Smetham

Following last year's Lea and Stort Mooring Proposals it was suggested we explore the possibilities of social enterprise to improve facilities for boaters and address some of the perceived problems in the London area. While not everybody was convinced, many of us began to give this a try. The project we've done at Stonebridge is the first to have produced tangible results.

History

The Waterside Centre at Stonebridge Lock on the River Lea is a unique building. As well as housing the most extensive boaters' facilities on the whole of the London waterways network, it has a fairly large classroom, and is home to a canoe club.

It belongs to CRT and it is responsible for maintaining it. However, since it became a charity, CRT found this unique to be the most expensive to run and so decided they could no longer afford to do so. They evicted the canoe club and Friends of Tottenham Marshes (FoTM) who'd been looking after it and, in March, invited businesses to submit proposals to take it over.

LB joined forces with these two community groups, plus another group, Living Under One Sun, to form Stonebridge Community Enterprise (SCENT). With assistance from Meanwhile Space, we prepared a proposal to take over the building gradually over a period of about a year, leading to a long-term lease.

Initially, BW were very hostile. They told us that they would close the building and run it as a basic sanitary station if a commercial tenant could not be found. This annoyed the boaters with moorings at Stonebridge, as many of them have moorings that are advertised as "fully serviced" and see the Waterside Centre as something that is extensively funded from their mooring fees.

As a result of BW's statement, moorers at Stonebridge formed their own group within SCENT. Later, Sally Ash was put in charge of the process, and SCENT became the preferred bidder. Although this may seem strange to veterans of last year's campaign, the

result was a sudden thaw in relations between BW and SCENT, including the boaters involved. Finally, we were granted a twelve-week tenancy running until the end of October.

In September, we organised a two-day clean-up session to get the building and the surrounding land into a more presentable state. Volunteers from all of the groups in SCENT were joined by Sally Ash and the local Park Ranger, which saw the building thoroughly cleaned inside and out, the weeds cut back, a dead tree removed and a long-forgotten footpath rediscovered.

The Café

After the Watersedge café closed, about a year ago, the effect on the area was dramatic. Crime, particularly targeting boaters, increased dramatically. The area became desolate and neglected, with much fly tipping, and rats thriving in the resulting filth.

BW wanted a new café to replace the Watersedge, but we were not convinced this was viable. A burger van in the car park had failed; the classroom was not an ideal café, it being designed as a functional meeting room offering visitors a somewhat drab welcome, and only having a narrow window to serve people through. Also, FoTM had run a café briefly here before and found it difficult to get enough volunteers to run it.

Nevertheless, I decided to give it a go. I started up selling posh tea and filter coffee at prices to rival the muck in the local greasy spoon. Over the weeks, the café began stocking a wider range of products. Customers donated folding tables and chairs. Plus we now have a small library.

The Future

SCENT initially secured the use of the Waterside Centre until the end of October, with an extension until mid-January because CRT didn't carry out the work they had agreed to. Unfortunately, the café is currently closed awaiting repairs following a burglary.

We are currently in the process of planning the next phase. This is likely

to be a 9-12 month lease, with CRT still paying building running costs, but with SCENT more involved in its management. During this time, we'll be finalising our business plan for the long-term running of the centre. The café has been a popular addition to the Stonebridge scene, and we believe that this can make a significant contribution to the running costs of the building, but we want to do more than just pay to run the centre. We should be able to use the centre to provide facilities that meaningfully improve the way of life of boaters in the area.

One of the first services we want to offer is a boaters' mailbox. Possibly funded by income from this, we'd look to convert the laundry room into a commercial, coin-operated facility that may in time provide regular income to fund other future LB projects. We are also joining a new bulk-buying group, started by Transition Walthamstow, to source our stock from a wholefood co-op instead of supermarkets. If there is enough demand from boaters, we may be able to start our own group.

We can also reduce the building's operating costs by running it more efficiently. We have seen staggering amounts of money wasted at the same time as simple repairs are neglected for the lack of money. There has been a suggestion from CRT that they may be prepared to use any money we save to fund SCENT, although we don't have details of how that might work yet.

These are just some of the possibilities we hope to develop in the near future. What eventually happens here is limited only by the imagination of the people involved. If you like the sound of what we're doing, we'd love you to get involved to help bring these things to life. The café will always need volunteers, and every visitor brings a fresh perspective. Or maybe you think we should be doing something completely different here. Either way, we need your ideas to help us make the best of this unique resource.

Hell in a hand CaRT - reflections from the new waterways' trust first AGM Marmaduke Dando

Earlier this year, British Waterways, the Quasi Non-Governmental Organisation, changed from being a public body to a trust, changing its name to the Canal and River Trust, or CaRT for short. The new trust effectively meant BW was now a charity. It would still receive a grant from the government each year, although significantly reduced. The new status as charity however, allows the trust to raise money to make up this deficit, from any source it wishes to canvas.

Back in September, I went along to CaRT's first AGM in Birmingham. As a concerned live-aboard boater without a permanent mooring, I went to get a feel for what this new trust was all about, how it intends to operate in the future, and what that might mean for boaters in a similar position to myself.

As one might expect, it was a predictably dreary affair, full of the usual shallow corporate enthusiasm you normally see at these back slapping events. There was lots of talk about how pleased they were to be "working with corporates", and how amazing everyone working at CaRT

is. They gave their opinion on boater critics of the Trust, saying that, to criticise the Trust, is only to damage its image, and therefore its funding potential. If they don't fill their budget deficit, we all suffer.

I first spoke to Tony Hales, CaRT Chairman, about the corporate sponsors and what those sponsors might expect in return, outlining my concerns on the potential mass commercialisation of the waterways. He said no huge billboards would be erected anywhere, but, for example, there was a wall on the Hertford Union (probably by the bottom lock) that is full of "mindless graffiti", and that Bloomberg, the international mass media corporation, want to sponsor an artist to paint a "nice mural" over the top. I asked whether Bloomberg's name would be prominent, and he said it would probably be visible. Imagine how long a corporate sponsored mural would last in Hackney Wick.

I then spoke with Sally Ash, Head of Boating and asked how much of a precedent the £360 moorings during the Olympics had set, regarding the future of CCers in London. She said it was a helpful experiment to determine the demand. I asked if CaRT were trying to legitimise the perceived behaviour of CCers in London, by monetizing it. She said, "yes". She also said they were looking at "community moorings", and were attempting to trial this on the Kennet and Avon first, possibly rolling out something similar in London.

I then asked her about the Winter Moorings, and why they've been extended to practically every mooring spot in central London. Apparently the person tasked with rolling out the extension, was a temporary employee, with no knowledge of the local area, and hadn't been briefed properly, and that a review of the number of winter moorings will occur, and the number most probably reduced. I relayed to her my outrage that, after patiently spending 2 months outside the exclusion zone during the Olympics, I'd come back in to London to find

"Winter Moorings Only – October 1st to March 1st" signs up everywhere, and that the message looks like one has to vacate London yet again. She agreed it was poorly thought through.

I cast my eye over the crowd in the room. It was a depressing sight to see that it was made up almost exclusively of old white men in ill-fitting suits. I appeared to be the youngest person there. And I'm not that young.

I was pleased to have gone, as it was useful to get an idea of where these people are taking us, and I've no doubt in my mind that place is hell in a hand CaRT.

The shift of British Waterways to the CaRT, has changed the dynamics of the relationship between boaters and those managing the waterways. By its very nature, the Trust will now set boaters against each other, those who wish to legitimately criticise it, and those who don't dare to because it may affect the funding required for the services that we as boaters depend upon. I've no doubt we will be hearing many more rallying hollow cries of "We're all in this together".

As for the future of CCers in London, there was an admission of a duty to those already there, but they don't want to encourage any more. How they go about discouraging any more boaters, and diminishing that lingering fallacy of "congestion", will affect us all. I strongly believe they will do this by offering extra "privileges", such as the right to stay in one place for longer, at an additional cost.

This will price some boaters out of London, with the poor marginalised further, just like on land. It will also divide the boating community between those who pay extra, and those who can't pay, or those who don't want to out of principle. This can only foster the unfortunate attitude that some have more right to be in a place than another, simply because they have paid more for the perceived privilege.

The struggle continues.

Top Salaries of CaRT Directors		
Stuart Mills	Property Director	£154,999
Vincent Moran	Operations Director	£159,999
Jim Stirling	Technical Director	£164,999
Nigel Johnson	Legal & Corporate Services Director	£169,999
Philip Ridal	Finance Director	£189,999
Robin Evans	Chief Executive	£234,999
<p>The Guardian (2011) The Public Bodies Bill ensured the transfer of British Waterways to CaRT would not affect the salaries of the directors. http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/03/civil-servants-quango-chiefs-paid-150000</p>		

Security concerns at Victoria Park

Keith Brown

You might have heard about security concerns in the Victoria Park and Mile end areas of the past few months. The following is a historical timeline of the organised criminal activity in the area and the on-going response from the local boating community.

13/10/2012 - First boat burglarised.

17/10/2012 - 3 boats burglarised

21/10/2012 - 10 boats burglarised on this one evening. All boats on Victoria Park mooring vacate, leaving one boat who's owner was away. (If this were to happen again, we should take any unmanned boats with us).

28/10/2012 - Two meetings occurred. London Boaters held a meeting at the Lea Valley Rowing Club, with break-ins and security leading the agenda. Not much later that day, some boaters met with Tower Hamlets police, near the Palm Tree Pub.

Police expressed that they were taking the burglaries seriously and would like to assist the boaters in setting up a neighbourhood watch along the Winter moorings. They gave out boat safety flyers for promulgation.

29/10/2012 - London Boaters group

suggested creating window stickers or signs urging people to find out about the London Boaters group and the email list, which is a good way to communicate security and other issues widely.

01/11/2012 - Boaters used London Boaters and other email lists to comment and share boat safety ideas. The Community Organiser went to the Victoria Park moorings and talked to some boaters who hadn't heard about the burglaries. These boaters replaced the boats that left after the 21st.

03/11/2012 - Start of a weekend of additional burglaries, totalling 5 boats, including at least 1, which the owner was alerted of the crime situation by the Community Organiser days prior.

06/11/2012 - One attempted break-in at the Mile End moorings (probably unrelated to the organised Victoria Park burglaries).

11/11/2012 - Meeting at the Palm Tree Pub consisting of boaters, MET Marine Unit, C&RT reps, and MET Crime Prevention rep. MET cleared rumours of burglars using compressed air/liquid nitrogen, the reported burglaries were from standard techniques; breaking lock hasps,

doors, and door windows. Boaters discussed Victoria Park lighting issue with C&RT and Crime Prevention Rep.

18/12/2012 - Small security meeting held by boaters and community organiser to begin a plan for unified boat security measures.

03/01/2012- Boaters witnessed youths going along Victoria Park moorings looking at locks on boats. 999 called.

04/01/2012 - Boater on Victoria Park mooring took photos of the youths who were again checking out the boats. 999 called, youths apprehended; more details pending.

On 18 Dec, there was a meeting of boaters who want to create a collective community response to criminal behaviour.

To find out more about issues around boat security and how you can get involved in the community response, contact Keith Brown, the Lower Lee and Regent's Canal Community Organiser on 0 7 9 6 4 1 1 0 4 3 6 o r keith.brown@corganisers.org.uk

Loowatt

Rob Darcy

For the past six months a small group of us have been trying to come up with a better solution for toilets on boats than the current porta-potti/elsan situation, or the only marginally better pump out option. We have been speaking to a small startup called Loowatt (see loowatt.com for more details).

Coming up to this December I was planning to write a short piece about how it looked like this had slightly trailed off, and unless we found another company to work with, this project was looking like it might be put under the 'optimistic' projects for some point in the future.

Then I got an email from Fernanda from Loowatt saying that they were keen to meet about doing a trial on boats in London during 2013. We had a meeting to discuss locations for anaerobic digesters, plus what we thought were good alternatives.

It all seems very exciting and perhaps most importantly, do-able. The next step is to see what everyone would be interested in, then produce a feasibility study to reflect this. Attached to this newsletter you will find a questionnaire, please fill it out and we should have a good idea about potential projects in the future.

Stonebridge café temporarily closed

The Waterside Café at Stonebridge lock is currently closed due to a burglary. It is awaiting repairs by CRT and hopes to be back open very soon.

Join LB's email forum

If you want to find out about issues on London's waterways as they happen and share info with other boaters, you can join the London Boaters email forum.

Send a blank email to londonboaters-request@lists.aktivix.org to be added to the list.

A boater with a mooring speaks

Jess Good

My name is Jess. My love affair with Londons canals started 11 years ago when I met my partner who had volunteered with a community boat scheme in town for many years. I crewed for him on boat trips and it was my idea that we should get our own boat.

We moor at Stonebridge North on the Lee. I've also been a moderator for the Canal World Discussion Forums for about four years, my username being Lady Muck. CWDF is owned by Dan, who is a member of the young working boaters association, one of the other site crew runs a coal boat on the Bridgewater Canal and the other two are leisure boaters. It's a very broad spread of boater opinion and due to my experience, I've come to the conclusion that the only thing boaters have in common is boats!

Because of my involvement in CWDF, I've been made very aware of issues facing the waterways, especially those in London - we are often the first to hear the horror stories - thefts, stolen boats and of course the dreaded Lee and Stort moorings proposals and it was then that I decided to get involved in LB. Some are puzzled by this - why, would a boater with a mooring want to get involved with what is seen as a campaigning group for cc boaters?

Well, many reasons - I spend months at a time cruising, so I can understand some of the issues. I feel that CRT has tendency to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut with some of their ideas and proposals to the detriment of all boaters. Some tactics seem divisive to me.

Anyway, did you know that the great majority of moorings in London do not have planning permission for residential use? In fact, many of the same issues that face cc boaters are the same for those that have moorings. There is an underlying feeling of vulnerability, a feeling of, 'keep quiet, keep your head down and don't com-

plain.' Boaters may feel they're not entitled to claim benefits, or vote, or use local services. Even on moorings that do have planning permission for residential use, I know of a boater who faced prejudice because one of his kids mentioned at school that they lived on a boat. A teacher contacted social services and they were home visited on a Friday evening, which happened to be fish and chip night. The SW then filed a report that their living conditions were so bad they could not prepare food at home.

The other thing I feel really strongly about is that we often have a fair proportion of empty mooring space on London's mooring sites that isn't used. On our site we had three

berths empty for over a year before they were re-let. When the demand is so high this is very unfair. For the past few years, (not this year due to Olympicballs!) we have boated the system in the summer for as many as five months each year.

While subletting is not strictly permitted, I'd like to see London Boaters working with CRT to formalise an arrangement where boaters with moorings are permitted to share their moorings with friends (with the agreement with their fellow moorers of course). I know this has been mooted before in various meetings but it would be great to make it happen for real.

The Floating Market

Melissa Ronaldson

I read an article recently that asked 'are shop keepers the only true anarchists?'. Not sure if my own answer would be Yes, but I am pleased for the concept. And certainly I would celebrate the culture of mutualism to be found amongst my fellow Floating Market traders. Some might argue we are stronger on the community side of things than the business side - but is still early days and we are working on all aspects!

We gathered together, only for the second time ever, in December in Islington. Not quite as many traders as during the summer at Mile end, but a significant posse: Lorraine the sandwich bar selling champagne and oysters; Tamsin and her beautiful boat of vintage frocks; Ali selling gluten free cakes; Sam the wood turner; the cosy and far-from-the-madding-crowd-Book barge, me on the Herbal barge, and the brilliant and wonderful stage boat. Not to mention accompanying tow path fire breathing, unicycling and general merriment.

Look out for events to come in the coming year!



The Elephant in the River Kel

There's been a fair amount of soul-searching within London Boaters about apathy and lack of direction but all the while we've been ignoring the elephant in the river; the lack of any resolution to the River Lee Mooring Consultation. When BW withdrew their proposals it was not with the intention of returning to "Business as Usual": they still see London waterways as overcrowded with non-moving CC'ers and sooner or later they will do something about it.

As a group LB needs to face up to the prospect that new proposals are on the way and that we need to get more proactive in deciding a strategy. The recent document by the IWA ("A proposal for reducing overstaying boats in the London area"), whilst not totally negative does have suggestions that will have most CC'ers shuddering. Given the IWA dominance of the CRT council and the cosiness between the pair of them it is reasonable to assume that the preparation of the document involved informal discussions between the two organisations and will be pushed into place if we do not react.

CRT themselves have been muttering about what they see the way forward. A recent article in Canal Boat magazine has them advocating Community Moorings, possibly run by a community enterprise, which are then allocated to boaters who have bought a permit to use them. Although this does represent an interesting possibility it is important to see this as the flipside of a policy of increased winter moorings and visitor moorings; the effective parcelling up of the towpath.

The IWA have no new research; their proposals for London reference work done on the K. and A. and there is no mention of LB let alone the research done in response to the Lee Consultation. This allows them to presume non-movement and treat boaters in London as a cash cow who can pay once for a licence then again to effectively use it. The IWA assume that the waterways are overcrowded and use this as basis

for their most contentious proposal - a new permit that would ration boaters in the London area and prevent any new boaters. Hopefully the reaction of LB members to this divide and rule tactic will be the same as at the Springfield meeting where Sally Ash's similar suggestion was met with a wall of laughter.

At the heart of this lies the non-resolution of the definition of neighbourhood. Whilst BW/CRT retracted the consultation proposals that created stupidly large neighbourhoods nothing has taken its place. This lets them state that CC'ers are not moving enough, but we simply should not accept this. With no accepted definition, all that can be said is how many boats are not moving AT ALL, not how many boats are not moving sufficiently.

Place is not defined in the 95 law and if the consultation was an attempt to legitimise their definition we should insist on our agreement to any new definition. One obvious idea would be that CRT neighbourhoods would be contiguous to neighbourhood wards or Police neighbourhoods. Within this many CC'ers would be moving enough and the justification for additional permits deflates.

Another issue is that despite their increased use of them CRT do not have the legal right to put up notices defining places as Visitor or Winter Moorings and sooner or later we will have to challenge them on this. Otherwise they will carve up all of the towpath and genuine CC'ers will find themselves forced to buy a new permit merely to moor anywhere in the London area, regardless of how much they move. CRT are attempting, in short, to bring in another level of charging on the back of the twin ideas of overcrowding and non-movement

Since the consultation was dropped CRT have attempted to engage with LB and arguably some of their tradi-

tional culture of hostility has been eroded. This however is a precondition for reaching an agreement, not a substitute. Whilst the collaborations with Locality and over the Stonebridge centre may have broken down some bigotry they cannot paper over the fact there are real political and economic tensions between us and them.

Although it's probably too cynical to think of them operating a "give them enough rope" policy this does not mean that when the chips are down they won't just assert that they have engaged with us and "hey, here's the new policy." In particular the severe financial constraints on CRT as an organisation induces them to always prioritise maximising income.

Whilst community moorings sound fine in principal there is no discussion in the IWA document about who or what the community is and on at least one of these sites CRT are planning to develop facilities and auction the moorings to the highest bidder. In practice how acceptable these moorings are to most CC'ers will come down the nitty gritty of price; stating that they are aimed at existing CC'ers is meaningless if the pricing does not reflect this.

London Boaters was successful in rallying wider community support to stop the consultation and the reaction to the Olympic drinking water debacle shows that CRT are sensitive to adverse publicity. It is perhaps not surprising that we have not come up with a blueprint of our own - it is much harder to achieve consensus on specific suggestions than in resisting something as draconian as the Lee Consultation. However if we do not start pushing our own agenda we risk being presented with a fait accompli.

coupleAcouts

Edi

This is my time:) on earth, Taurian, the merry month of May. Everything bursting and busily bonking! I saw a couple of coots making a nest in a tyre onside Melisa's Herbal Barge. The poor fella worked so tirelessly all day (pun lovingly intended!), my heart went right out too him. His Missus was 'orrible to him. He cleaned up our whole stretch of river in his efforts to make a home for him and her only for it to be discarded by her.

I must admit though, to a certain degree, I did agree with her. He seemed to think salvaging up all of the 20 century's plastic bags was the answer to their riverside pad. Sadly and very comically she wasn't having any of it. Precisely none! She sat very content in the rubber mould but that's where the 20 century stopped, plastic was not coming in, no matter how persistent he was. Every time he momentarily clamoured up the boat to lay his catch at her feet she threw it out. Didn't deter him though, he just went right on up and out and got anuva one!

Endlessly all day, sometimes swimming till he was out of site, And then, there he was back again, struggling away with yet anuva plastic bag, totally oblivious to the Missus' wishes for the rustic traditional twig look, he clutched on, beak firmly closed on that deathly overthrow of 20 century living! The water in the river is clean enuf however but the debris, human activity at its worse, and all lead by the dreaded plastic bag!!!!!!

New London Boaters website

LB website team

A fully-working test version of the new London Boaters website is now working on a test server at www.tobyweb.co.uk/londonboaters

Benefits of this new website

Imagine you're interested in knowing immediately about any security matters and also your local towpath clean-up, but don't want to hear the back-and-forth debates or lost/found pets on the email forum. On this site you can simply subscribe to receive emails about security alerts via any security-tagged page or subscribe to your local clean-up via its clean-up page, and then just read any of the other things when you visit the website for a browse. Some users who hardly ever use a computer often set their subscription to everything and receive it on their email-enabled phone, and then simply un-subscribe from the things they know they don't want. There are a wide range of combinations for those who are interested in receiving activity notifications of different kinds.

We are hoping that you, boaters in London, will have your own ideas about what you want the site to help you to say, to do, to plan and achieve - the things that are important, useful or interesting to you. We hope this new website can encourage commu-

nication and cooperation amongst boaters in London, offering more opportunity to organise and work together towards achieving the many different things that we want.

It tries to enable users to take part to whatever degree they want, from just reading about things, to keeping track of particular issues, to taking part in commentary and discussion, to proposing topics, right up to having an active involvement in organising something or taking part in many things - all to whatever extent is desired per-user on the matters and issues that they choose.

It is not really trying to generate, communicate or impose any kind of consensus that can then be delivered as such to an authority eager for one. Instead it is hoped that the site's functional framework helps users to generate and communicate a beneficial resource of information, support, discussion and collaboration, ideally helping to unite boaters in London in achieving results together in matters of importance to them.

How to register

You are free to register for a user-account by visiting www.tobyweb.co.uk/londonboaters/user/register where it asks you to

submit an email address and username. When registering, if you say anything that obviously makes you look like a human then Admin will approve your account at their first opportunity, otherwise you can automatically approve your own account immediately when registering by using the secret-London-Boaters-automatic-instant-account-approval-password which is Banana.

You will then be sent an email which contains your details for logging-in. Once you are logged-in you will see all the members-only content and can create new pages, make comments, upload things, subscribe for activity notifications about chosen topics and sections, and create and sign-up for involvement in various London Boaters projects.

You won't see much there unless you are logged-in because most of our content is only available to London Boaters members, but everything works now and is ready for testing by any interested users.

If you have any further questions about the website please feel free to email toby@tobyweb.co.uk

“Building better relationships on London’s waterways” Conflict resolution meeting

Melissa Ronaldson

The process of cajoling, blackmailing, and occasionally just asking folk to write something for this newspaper has been relatively pain free. Sometimes fun even. In contrast, getting myself to write the article I agreed to do has been like pulling teeth.

My task is just a quick write up of the “Building better relationships on London’s waterways” ‘Conflict resolution’ meeting held in November. That would seem straight forward, seeing as I was there. But I think it is the being there bit that feels a bit weird and gets in the way every time I try to write about it.

The emailed invitation to the meeting was received at the last minute due to some oversight by the independent facilitators engaged by CaRT (they are called ‘Community Resolve’, their strap line is “From conflict to communication”. Recommended, I think by Locality and linked to the community organising program). It was billed as;

“An opportunity for boaters, residents, waterway users and Canal & River Trust staff to build a mutual understanding of how to use and maintain this valuable shared resource.”

The invitation expanded:

“The meeting is part of a process which was commissioned in response to the 2011 public consultation on a draft mooring plan. It has been designed to help all those using or working with the waterways to better understand the views of others, and to work together into the future in a way that accommodates all users’ needs. The purpose is to resolve conflicting needs and views over the use of the River Lee and associated waterways.”

Present at the meeting where the two facilitators, more senior CaRT trustees

and management than I had expected; various waterways ‘stakeholders’, including some familiar London Boaters.

The facilitator outlined some aims for the meeting and explained the evening would follow a workshop structure, of breaking into groups, brainstorming etc. She continued on a soothing cautionary note “I know you will have high expectations of this meeting” I noted a kindly reassuring wink directed at Simon Salem from one of the co-opted trustees and saw the CaRT Director look at the floor, mirroring my own lack of optimism. Expectations were not actually that high.

In the event there were some interesting group discussions; some acceptable and positive proposals presented for future problem solving and a plan to hold further discussions. A verbatim report of the event from the facilitators is on the website. They main discussions flowed from identified issue threads of Enforcement, Behaviour, Mooring, Communication and Capacity.

At the end everyone had a chance to sum up how they felt. One man expressed bitter resentment at the disenfranchisement and lack of representation of different canal users who were no present in the room. I had a feeling he didn’t have in mind the same other users that I did, but I fully agreed with his sentiment. If challenged, (by myself or anyone) else I wouldn’t know how to explain or justify the random nature of who was there. But perhaps at this stage there is no expectation of democracy. Individuals were there as individuals.

These meetings, apparently are designed to unblock stalemate, gather perspectives and ideas, in a prelude to forming policy.

CaRT if nothing else are pragmatic and they can see that ‘taking on’ any relative organised group of stakeholders to is a drain on resources that don’t exist. I have heard Simon Salem cite the 70mile per hour road speeding limit rule as an analogy twice now. It works (he says) because most people agree that it is a reasonable rule. If they didn’t it would be unenforceable. Equally they (CaRT) are caught between a rock and a hard place if different stakeholder groups are in conflict with each pushing conflicting demands. It is in their interests that people hear and understand each other’s perspectives and to reach some consensus about what is reasonable.

Will these meetings actually achieve anything in terms of positive outcomes for boaters who live and work on the London waterways? I don’t know. At least one attendee a veteran of twenty years of meetings with BW was emotionally cynical having (he said) heard it all before.

I think it is too early to tell. But positive outcomes, or outcomes that we shape are more likely if we have talked and talked and argued and dreamed among ourselves. After that all sorts of strategies are potentially useful.

Will I go to the next meeting? I haven’t decided yet!

The next newsletter? And missing articles.

This newsletter is the first one from London Boaters and is an effort to share just some of the key issues people living on London’s waterways face. It hopes to highlight some of the range of opinions, concerns and ideas that are reflective of the diversity of our community, but of course, not all the stories and voices amongst us are present. In particular, info on the various legal battles between CRT and some CC-ers is lacking, as is the debate on the pro’s and con’s of formalising London Boaters membership.

If you think having a newsletter is of value to London’s boating community, and think there is something missing here that you’d like to voice in the next edition, then please get in touch.