

BW's New Proposals Threaten Local Boaters

British Waterways have recently announced a consultation over proposals to bring in a new set of rules governing the movement of boats without permanent residential moorings (sometimes known as Continuous Cruisers) on the Rivers Lee & Stort and the Hertford Union.

Under British Waterways guidelines they are supposed to move every 14 days (unless circumstances prevent this), but there is nothing in law that dictates how far they must move, or that stops them returning to a particular place.

If it goes ahead, British Waterways' new plan will force local people who live on their boats to maintain a relentless schedule of movement and spend no more than seven days every three weeks within the North Circular, (or incur a minimum daily penalty fee of £20, rising to £40 if not paid on the day).



Boaters on the Lea already move around, but for many their daily lives are strongly linked to the local area. Their children attend local schools, many boaters work or study locally, do voluntary work in the community, have friends and family in the area, and need to be able to access health care and support networks. Moving beyond the North Circular after 7 days would make their lives virtually impossible. Residential moorings are expensive and hard to come by. In the case of boating families without a mooring, the new proposals would force many to become homeless or quit their jobs, leading to increased pressure on already overstretched council housing waiting lists and increased reliance on government benefits. British Waterways have stated that they want to reduce the number of people who live on their boats without a permanent mooring, without giving adequate plausible reasons for doing so, other than 'congestion'. They have never really enforced the existing 14 day guidelines, and rather than doing that now, they are looking to change the 'rules' so profoundly that they are threatening boaters low-impact lifestyles, their livelihoods, and ultimately, their homes.

Why We Think Live-aboard Boaters Without a Permanent Mooring are a Benefit to Other Towpath Users:

- Stretches that were once very isolated and dangerous, especially after dark, feel much safer now that groups of boats regularly moor there. This has increased the general use of the towpaths and improved safety for local residents.
- Local boaters are a strong community that know and look out for each other. They are much more likely to respond to a disturbance than passing cruisers who don't know the area or the people they might be moored next to.
- Most people find canal boats attractive and choose to go for walks down the towpath partly because they like looking at the boats.
- We really love and value the river, the wildlife and wider ecology of the area and have a vested interest in keeping it clean, healthy and safe. We are often the first people to notice and report when something goes wrong.

But What Do You Think?

British Waterways claim that there is widespread opposition from local groups, dog-walkers, anglers and other canal users to the increase in boats in recent years, yet BW have made no attempt to bring the consultation process to the attention of local people. After repeated requests from boaters, BW have not shown us any evidence of these complaints. We believe most local people are supportive of live-aboard boaters on the Lea, and this is backed by what we hear from talking to our neighbours and other towpath users in the area.

We understand that minor issues do sometimes arise between different canal and river user groups but we believe that these can be solved through better communication rather than a drastic new set of rules for boaters. This is why Continuous Cruisers have decided to open up this process ourselves and bring BW's proposals to your attention. If you have concerns with boaters, this might offer the perfect opportunity to talk to boaters directly in order to address them.

But if you support our campaign against the proposals, **please let BW know**. You are entitled to submit a response to British Waterways and if you have not been consulted we encourage you to look up their proposals online at: <http://bit.ly/fZF40u> and send your response via the simple online form. If you don't have access to the internet you can send a letter to:

Damian Kemp at British Waterways, 64 Clarendon Rd, Watford, WD17 1DA.

Even if you don't agree with us it is your right to have your views heard. If you do agree with us please argue on our behalf. Your support could make all the difference in our fight to keep our homes.

The deadline for responses is the 31st May

For more info &/or to contact London Boaters Group with any questions or concerns please visit: www.londonboaters.org