

**ROBIN EVANS CUSTOMER MEETING
YHA Lee Valley, Cheshunt, 18 July 2008**

Illegal mooring and overstaying

- One of the biggest issues on Rivers Lee & Stort is illegal mooring
- Visiting boats at Stanstead Abbots Visitor Moorings can't moor up anywhere as moorings are permanently occupied by live-a-boards; these boaters are supposed to be 'continuous cruisers'
- At some locations in Bishop's Stortford fishing is very difficult due to illegal mooring

SS: BW's main efforts have been going into licence enforcement, however, a clamp down on illegal mooring and overstaying is going up the agenda.

It is very labour intensive and costly for BW to take these boaters to court and be successful. Very concrete evidence is required of regular sightings of the boats in the same place for specific periods of time.

The question of a river licence comes up here. BW fought very hard four years ago to introduce the continuous cruiser rules. We now need to work on how this is enforced and close up any loopholes.

SB (local view): BWL is looking into changing the current 14 day stay at some visitor moorings on the Lee & Stort to seven days by the end of the summer. We are also investigating the possibility of having a warden to control use of certain moorings on a day to day basis at Stanstead Abbots.

RE: BW is focusing more attention on resolving the issue of continuous cruisers who are not continuously cruising. The problem will become more difficult when we reveal these boats are people's homes – it is legally very hard to take people's home away.

Overstaying charges at visitor moorings & late payment charges for licence renewals

- How much revenue is BW making from overstaying charges at visitor moorings?
- A boat called 'Amber' has been illegally moored at Stanstead Abbots for the past two years – would have thought BW has collected a good sum from this boat

SB: we have invoiced approximately £2000 worth of overstay charges so far this calendar year. We estimate this will rise to around £3500 - £4000 by December.

SS: BW is introducing late payment charges for licences on top of the standard licence fee. We will endeavour to send out licence renewal reminder notices to customers in advance.

RE: It is the boat owner's responsibility to renew their licence on time, not BW's. However, BW is obligated to be efficient in processing payment and issuing licences; and we will help boat owners by sending out reminders where possible. BW has a huge amount to learn from the DVLA in terms of processing payments and issuing licences as efficiently as possible.

- Often boaters only want six month licences on private marinas on the Lee & Stort, how does BW ensure these boaters don't require a new licence after six months?

SB: Our London enforcement officers carry out regular inspections.

RE: We don't want the waterways clogged up people requiring cheap accommodation and therefore don't want to encourage a 'cheap' form of boating. It is undeniable that boating requires a certain amount of income, though we do need to make it easier for potential customers to enter boating. We need to encourage slipways to trail boat entry.

SS: Residential moorers (naturally) pay more than leisure moorers as they choose to live on a boat.

Use of cameras to track illegal boaters

- There are many live-a-boards cruising between Sawbridgeworth Station and Harlow Station; has BW considered using cameras to track these boaters?

SS: This is a tricky legal issue. We would need to ensure a signed and dated statement is provided by the photographer and regular sightings are recorded.

- The Lee & Stort enforcement officer doesn't seem to be able to cover their patch quickly enough to monitor actions of illegal boaters.

RE: Is in favour of patrol officers on motorbikes (but not users). However this is unlikely to be allowed. Having to go through numerous locks often makes boats too slow to efficiently patrol their patch. We could consider introducing CCTV to monitor boaters as this is a proven cost effective way to track illegal activities. However, this would lead to a backlash from our users who may feel the cameras infringe on their human rights and also take away from the old-fashioned and natural feel of the waterways and their surroundings. However, the cameras could be discreetly placed in trouble spots.

SB: BW has introduced new national reporting methods for our enforcement team which is providing detailed and up-to-date information on all activities carried out by our patrol officers. Our patrol officer on the Lee & Stort has also recently been issued with a bike and is now able to vary his methods of travel and areas covered.

Motorbikes on the towpath

- There have been problems with motorbikes on towpaths of River Lee and in West London

SB: We are looking at ways to address and restrict motorbikes on the towpath.

Walkways on lock gates

- The IWA has been complaining for several years about the lack of walkways on lock gates at Stanstead Abbots

SB: the walkways are not on these gates for health and safety and cost reasons. There is a bridge to cross the lock at Stanstead Abbots which provides a much safer alternative.

- The problem here is that the lock is tough to operate therefore a quicker way across the lock is needed than the bridge (it is too far away). It is encouraging a bigger health and safety issue as people are going across anyway without the walkway. The IWA part funded the walkway back in 1990 and may be willing to do this again.

SB: BWL will look into this as part of our lock gates replacement programme.

New gates difficult for disabled users

- Disabled users will struggle get through the new gate on the towpath at Hunsdon Mill as the latch at the top is too high and difficult to operate

SB: BWL has worked with disabled users to get the designs for these gates completed. However, it seems they are not appropriate and we will investigate them.

Third party contributions to BW

- The number of people using the waterways is huge, but the proportion of users paying directly for the benefit is comparatively small. The local council contributes towards BW's projects in the Lee Valley; does this happen in other areas across the network?

RE: Yes, BW received £49.1m in third party contributions last year from organisations such as local councils and regional development agencies. This income tends to be provided on

a project specific basis for schemes such as waterway restorations and towpath improvements and primarily recognises the value that these funding bodies attach to the waterways for local communities and businesses.

The waterways sometimes benefit from 'Section 106' planning gain funding and BW is also making the case to Government for the waterways to be recognised in the new Planning Bill for the proposed new Community Infrastructure Levy.

BW's network covers in the region of half the local authorities in Britain and there are many examples of excellent funding partnerships with riparian councils. There are however many councils which do not make a funding contribution to the waterways and one of BW's objectives is to develop funding partnerships with more local councils and partners.

Moorings consultation

- Why is 50% of the proposed figure accepted in some areas and no less than 75% in others?

SS: BW works out the market price and uses this to set the minimum lowest acceptable price for a mooring; this is the reserve price.

- At Moorhen Marina there have been four vacancies in nine months. In November 2007, only two vacancies were advertised and no tenders submitted. Earlier this year, only one of the four vacancies was advertised along with a statement that there was a waiting list of 40 people. Why didn't BW advertise all four vacancies at the same time? There is a suspicion that BW may be trying to increase the value of each individual mooring by only advertising one or two vacancies at a time.

SB: In the above case, we did not advertise all of these vacancies as some of the 'cruiser' spaces at Moorhen Marina were offered to customers at Hazlemere Marina as this site is due to be redeveloped. However, customers at Hazlemere have been reluctant to transfer their moorings because of the delays in redeveloping this site. Any subsequent vacancies will appear on the mooring tender website in due course.

RE: the idea behind the mooring tender process is that mooring fees are neither too low nor too high. It is inconceivable that the price is too high in this system. BW strives to be honest and open with its customers and has always said from the outset that we will declare the number of people on waiting lists.

- Will a one-off high spot price mooring bring up the general guide price/minimum price for other moorings?

RE: absolutely not!

- One site (unnamed) was up for tender at £3,575. Only seven people out of a waiting list of 300 submitted a tender. Only three of the seven submitted about the minimum guide price. Is this not an argument that the guide price was set too high? It seems that people are being priced off the waterways.

RE: BW's aim is to find the market price for moorings and a fair way to allocating them. The problem is that many people can find fault in the current tender system, but no-one has come up with a better way of working out the market price for moorings. We have decided to opt for a sealed bid tender system rather than an open auction in order to avoid encouraging escalated prices.

VAT and council tax payments

- Why are residential moorers paying VAT and council tax? Apparently the argument for VAT is because the boat moves, and the argument for council tax is that the boat is static. These arguments are contradictory.

SB: BW pays VAT on all facilities provided at moorings sites. BWL sent a surveyor out earlier this year to check the facilities at each site. It is the job of all our moorings coordinators to focus on maintenance required at sites and ensure it is addressed.

Moorings

SS: BW has just over 300 directly managed mooring sites nationally. It is very difficult for us to obtain residential moorings in marinas as they are seen as permanent caravan parks by local councils.

- The Moorhen Marina now has up to nine residential mooring spaces. Originally it was seven or eight. How has BW managed to get an extra space in?

SB: We can confirm that BW has always had nine residential mooring spaces at Moorhen Marina.

RE: BW estimates that approximately 50% of leisure moorers are using sites as residential. We are working with local planning authorities to combat this. However, we need to bear in mind that we do not want a linear network full of floating homes. Want to avoid adhering to the recent quote that 'Waterways are becoming a housing estate without planning permission.'

Angling facilities

- Does BW have any plans to improve facilities for anglers?
- Anglers in Rickmansworth have lost one third of their patch to residential moorings, and recently a lot more to visitor moorings being occupied by 'continuous cruisers'. They can now only fish across two-three yards of towpath. However, this is the only local section with parking facilities for anglers.
- Between Stocker's Lock and Batchworth Lock all fishing space seems to be occupied by visitor moorings

SB: this area is on the boundary of BW London and South East, we will speak with John Ellis, our Fisheries officer who covers both areas, to investigate the facilities and space for anglers here.