

Bath Water Space Strategy Report on 1 to 1 Consultations

20 March 2017



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1. Report on 1 to 1 Consultations

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. As part of the research for the Bath Water Space Study (WSS) project one-to-one discussions were sought with key stakeholders that use the waterway: these stakeholders were those who ran a business that made use of the water (as opposed to the bankside) or provided a boat related service to those who use the water: thus boatyards were included whilst bankside café's and pubs were not.

1.2. Approach

- 1.2.1. An initial list of around 20 consultees was created: these were mainly businesses that operated or serviced boats on the canal between the bottom of Devizes locks and Hanham. Email addresses were sought and all on this original list have been contacted with a view to making an appointment for a meeting or phone call. In practice much of the communication came about by email and the original list grew significantly in the course of the exercise, partly as we identified new businesses that should be included and partly as participants in other forums (e.g. the focus groups and RUACC) were drawn in and their views became known.
- 1.2.2. Some on the original list have no obvious email address that we could find. For these we had to make contact by phone or, as a last resort, word of mouth. Typically these are small businesses offering permanent moorings that are now fully occupied and have a low turnover.
- 1.2.3. We also held one-to-one meetings with Mark Evans the Waterways Manager at the Canal and River Trust (CRT); this is reported separately as CRT's interest is as a provider of the basic infrastructure rather than as a user of it.
- 1.2.4. We have summarised individual comments where these are notable at the end of this paper, the general points that can be drawn from these discussions are included in the main body of the paper.
- 1.2.5. The businesses and groups that we have had dialogue with include the following:
- BWML – (phone call 20th September 2016);
 - Bath and Dundas Canal Company, Brassknocker Basin (Phone calls and correspondence: October/November 2016);
 - John Webb, K&A Canal Trust (Phone call and correspondence October);
 - K and A Boats (Hire Company) – (Correspondence September – possible meeting);
 - Wiltshire Narrowboats/Bradford Wharf – (informal meeting December 9th 2016);
 - Saltford Marina – 31st January 2017);
 - Bathampton Angling Club (correspondence following RUACC meeting);
 - Rowing Clubs (one representative for all eight – Hugh Vickers: correspondence following RUACC meeting);
 - Caen Hill Marina – (Meeting – 30th November 2016);
 - Bath Narrowboats – (Meeting – 20th October 2016);
 - Chandos Marina – (informal meeting); and

- Bath Boating Station – 2nd March 2017.

1.2.6. Even the larger businesses have limited staff and very few back-room admin staff, so generally we have been speaking to the manager or the proprietor directly. This partly explains the slow response rate, businesses are eager to talk but running such a business, especially those that hire boats, is very much a full time activity.

1.2.7. The one exception to the above business model in the response is marina operating company BWML, whom we had a long discussion with: the other “large” businesses such as ABC Leisure, Oxfordshire Narrowboats (t/a Wiltshire Narrowboats) and Anglo-Welsh depend on local management and thus have a very similar structure to the smaller businesses.

1.2.8. Through various sources we have picked up extra consultees including the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, rowing clubs on the River Avon (above and below Bath) and The Bathampton Anglers, whom operate over the river and canal between Saltford and Dundas.

1.3. Key Consultation Issues Raised:

1.3.1. The principle issues raised are as follows (the canal and the river section are addressed separately to avoid confusion). At the end of this paper, a commentary on the issues is provided.

1.3.2. River Avon

1.3.3. Several respondents claimed maintenance on the river is poor: this relates to three separate items:

- Dredging and bank maintenance;
- Overhanging vegetation; and
- Lock operation.

1.3.4. Dredging and bank maintenance

- 1.3.5. Marina operators are of a view that dredging on the river is inadequate and that the available depth is now becoming restrictive for larger vessels: these vessels are known to be unsuitable for use on the canal and hence bases themselves on the river. If the situation deteriorates too far these will retreat to Bristol Floating Harbour or move to larger waterways such as the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal and River Severn reducing the market for the river and ultimately damaging the boat related businesses along it.
- 1.3.6. One operator expressed concern over bank maintenance stating that lengths of the river bank near Salford were slipping into the river. The party concerned were unclear as to whose responsibility this is and how to go about achieving repairs.

1.3.7. Overhanging vegetation

- 1.3.8. Trees that reach over the river have not been cut back for many years, and are now at such a height as to impeded navigation away from the immediate main channel: this creates issues for vessels that need extra width to manoeuvre or turn, and for rowing fours and eights that use the river for training, the sculls of these boats require a wide fairway and the extensive growth means they occupy the entire channel and can't get out of the way of motor vessels. In addition, the ecological value of the waterside vegetation is noted, a clearer management regime would be welcomed.

1.3.9. Lock operation

- 1.3.10. There are six locks on the Avon managed by CRT: these locks are significantly larger than normal canal locks and the structures are much older than most canals, being nearly 300 years old. Some of the locks are also deep. The view was expressed that these locks are needlessly heavy to work and are off-putting to boat crews and again detract from use of the river. Ultimately this deters people from using the river and undermines those businesses on it.

1.3.11. Moorings

- 1.3.12. Those consulted also raised a perception of overcrowding of moorings; a theme also echoed by those based on the canal whose customers used the river. Operators claimed that their customers (private boat owners) find it awkward to go out at the weekend as the available moorings at places such as Salford are full. Hire companies have commented that they recommend boaters get from Bath to Bristol in one day, which most boaters do not want to do.
- 1.3.13. It was noted by a number of respondents that the main issue is the number of boats along the canal rather than how they were used, although some respondents referred to the use of the canal by boats that had limited movement patterns: if there were fewer boats in total how they were used would not be an issue. In addition it was noted that the demand had gone beyond simply using up established moorings and that boats were mooring in locations that historically have never been moorings. As an example the Duchy of Cornwall has recently authorised "no mooring" signs on their land to protect the interests of those who lease the fishing rights.
- 1.3.14. There are further allegations that some moorings are being abused, in particular with the dumping of toilet waste into the river: whilst these claims often need to be treated with caution, in this instance they appear to have some legitimacy as the claims are site specific and are detailed as to when and where dumping of human waste is noted: there is still some care needed as there is a sewage pumping station nearby and this is another possible source. Other work in this study has revealed in the limited nature of this kind of service provision such that boats spending several weeks on the river might well struggle to find facilities.

- 1.3.15. On river moorings there was discussion about Pulteney Moorings, especially from canal based hire operators. It was felt that these should be the jewel in the crown and would be a real selling point to water based tourism in the area, although they are currently closed for safety reasons. There was reported to be a general shortage of short term moorings in Bath on the river which discourages boaters from coming down Widcombe Locks. There is enthusiasm for seeing these reopened and some interest in seeing commercial boat operations based here.

1.4. Kennet and Avon Canal

- 1.4.1. Comments on the canal section related to the following:

- Standard of maintenance;
- Overstaying on moorings;
- Availability of moorings at key locations;
- Unsanitary use of canal surroundings;
- Relationship between different users;

1.4.2. Standard of maintenance

- 1.4.3. Leaving aside Widcombe Locks in Bath (which were regarded as a separate issue) the standard of maintenance was generally regarded as inadequate by many of those consulted. This particularly related to the available depth (some questioned how the canal ever carried laden cargo barges) and the standard of bank maintenance from a boat use perspective. Views were expressed that things were left until they were on the verge of collapse, and that the default position on bankside vegetation was to do nothing. There is a perception that the volunteers are the only ones doing any maintenance (N.B. perception does not necessarily mean that it is true).

- 1.4.4. Given there are some complaints about the availability of moorings it is clear that some of that problem was attributed to a lack of maintenance. Little was said about Widcombe Locks, any issues here tended to get overshadowed by use of the river beyond the locks

1.4.5. Overstaying on moorings

- 1.4.6. This issue was divisive between the consultees, some not seeing it as a problem and even seeing the community of liveaboards that tend to be associated with this as an asset, others seeing the overstaying on moorings as a cause celebre, arguably the most important issue facing the canal. Cross referencing with CRT, the issue appears to be less about overstaying on any particular mooring and more about the limited distance travelled over a long period of time.

1.4.7. Availability of moorings at key locations

- 1.4.8. With regard to Bath and North East Somerset there are only two “key locations” on the canal at issue: near Bath City Centre and near The George pub at Bathampton. Some visitors moor at Dundas Aqueduct but this occurs either side of the Aqueduct and thus partly in Wiltshire, and these moorings have not been raised as particular concerns. There is some concern regarding congestion at Widcombe and at The George but given the restrictions here (and the enforcement of them) this comes down to there being an issue for a finite resource at times of high demand.
- 1.4.9. Whilst the canal is very busy the complaints regarding mooring are peripheral to the concerns expressed: most boaters can find a space somewhere. However there is concern over the volume of moorings in Bath, which is exacerbated by the lack of moorings on the river in Bath – if there were plentiful and reliable moorings on the river more boaters would go down the locks.

1.4.10. Off line moorings

- 1.4.11. There is reported to be a shortage of off-line moorings, and some comments amount to there are not enough moorings on the canal to cope with demand. There is a general recognition that demand management is not easy, but that off-line moorings would help. Those aware of restoration projects such as the Somerset Coal Canal and the Wilts and Berks (not in B&NES) suggest that these schemes could be beneficial.
- 1.4.12. There was some concern expressed that conventional commercial provision of off-line moorings would not attract those boats already on the canal and as a result could simply lead to even more boats on the canal as newcomers arrive to fill the moorings without relieving the congestion on the existing facilities.

1.4.13. Unsanitary use of canal surroundings

- 1.4.14. There are allegations that toilets are emptied “behind the towpath” on the canal at various locations: this needs to be treated with caution for a variety of reasons although the lack of facilities to empty toilets lends a small amount of credence to this. However observations made by the study team and by some of those that we spoke to also point to a homelessness issue along the canal: if one knows where to look it is not difficult to find tents clearly being lived in, and it is noted that some of the boats are in a poor state of repair and that the issues facing those who live in these are comparable with those living in the tents. In addition, when considering misuse of the canal surroundings the towpath here is a very popular walking and cycling route and there are no public conveniences.
- 1.4.15. Reaction to the ‘homelessness issue’ varies from disdain at the state of the surroundings to compassion for the situation some people are finding themselves in, and these extremes are not mutually exclusive. A comment was made regarding a ‘third world environment in a first world tourist city’.
- 1.4.16. There is recognition (albeit sometimes made grudgingly) that liveaboard boaters and those without a home mooring (and as identified above, sometimes without a home altogether) cannot be ‘wished away’: provision is needed so as to enable other canal (and river) users to enjoy the facilities.

1.4.17. Relationship between different users

- 1.4.18. The key friction expressed here is between hire boats and the rest: there is a significant criticism of the leisure market provision, particularly with regard to stag and hen parties, and there is some evidence that this is a problem. However, having spoken to hire fleets the problem is probably overstated (in part the issue is that the activity one or two problem hirers each season have a disproportionate impact) and one company in particular is taking particular steps to stem any problems whilst still serving this market.

1.5. Conclusion

- 1.5.1. Despite an apparent perception that the canal is overcrowded and in need of further maintenance, overall the consultees in this consultation exercise seem more concerned about the state of the river – which is not to say that they did not report issues with the canal.
- 1.5.2. The position on the river seems to be that those who ‘do not need to use it do not’, citing lack of facilities and moorings, whilst those who are based on it find that the state of the navigation is affecting their ability to operate, whether they are marina operators or rowing clubs or any group in that spectrum.
- 1.5.3. Overall the main issue of the canal appears to be the number of boats and the limited facilities for them. Some concerns were expressed about the behaviour of hire boat users but this was in large part countered by the operators who stated that the use of their boats is regulated by enforceable terms of hire.

Appendix A. Summary of Consultations

- BWML – (phone call 20th September 2016)
 - Concern at lack of visitor moorings on the river and lack of maintenance (dredging/locks). Spoke of their aspirations for a marina on the canal
- Bath and Dundas Canal Company, Brassknocker Basin (Phone calls and correspondence: October/November)
 - Some concerns over the number of boats present on the western Kennet and Avon
- John Webb, K&A Canal Trust (Phone call and correspondence October)
 - Concerned by the boats without home moorings that do not move very far and by what is perceived as congestion, also expressed views regarding unsanitary situation away from the towpath
- K and A Boats (Hire Company) – (Correspondence September 2016 – possible meeting)
 - Do not encourage their boats to go on the river
- Wiltshire Narrowboats/Bradford Wharf
 - Do not encourage their boats onto the river but give advice for those that wish to do this
- Salford Marina
 - Concerned about bank maintenance as they are aware of bank slips (one in their ownership) that have the potential to affect navigations
 - Also concerned that where major failure does occur (e.g silting post flooding which closed Hanham lock) it takes a long time to get it resolved
 - Do not wish to see large marinas open due to potential for congestion but a number of smaller marinas would be welcome
 - Would like to see more boats moving – observe that more boats than ever moored on the river but the lock by them is quieter than it used to be
- Bathampton Angling Club (correspondence following)
 - Concern over informal mooring on private land and over sanitation issues
- Rowing Clubs (one representative for all eight – Hugh Vickers: correspondence following RUACC meeting)
 - Concern over vegetation growth on the river making it difficult for rowing club boats (pairs, fours, eights) to pass pleasure craft). Concern that informal unauthorised moorings can affect their activities if these occur in the wrong place.
- Caen Hill Marina – (Meeting – 30th November 2016)
- Bath Narrowboats – (Meeting – 20th October 2016)
 - Run holiday hire boats from two bases, day hire boats, skippered narrow boats and a restaurant boat as well as the Angelfish Restaurant at Brassknocker Basin. Main concern is that regulations for commercial craft are adhered to by authorities – they manage their operations as a “tight ship” e.g. having off-site parking and transfer for their customers and are wary that other operators may not have to comply with such rigid standards.
 - Overall though Bath Narrowboats see opportunity, many of their staff and crew come from the “liveaboard” community and Bath Narrowboats ensure their boats are operated and handled with respect for others, this is in part through education and in part through taking a substantial credit card deposit from all self-drive hire customers that is forfeit in the event of damage or any adverse claim against the party.
 - Bath Narrowboats would welcome the opportunity to encourage their hirers onto the river and to operate on the river.
- Chandos Marina – (informal meeting)
- Bath Boating Station – March 2nd 2017
 - Bath Boating Station is based between Pulteney and Bathampton Weirs: the river here is not CRT managed and is not accessible from any other waterway. They enjoy rights under their property deeds (going back at least as far as the 19th century) to operate on this length of river.

- The operator does not want access to the river increased by creating a navigable link to other waterways, as this would ruin the character of the river and make their operation (which included large trip boats as well as rowing boats) much more difficult.
- A principle concern is that the radial gate at Pulteney is maintained, as increases in river level cause operation problems and worse, with associated holiday accommodation being liable to flood, the trip boats becoming grounded as water levels recede, and with the rowing boats being damaged or sunk within the boat house (where they are stored dry at summer levels)
- Also, if any works at Pulteney involve the closure of the steps where the trip boats take passengers this needs to be kept to a minimum to avoid disruption to the business.
- The Boating Station are in discussions with Cleveland Baths regarding adding a stop to the boat service
- Other than these concerns Bath Boating Station's main desire is to be "left alone to get on with it"

Appendix B. Commentary on Issues Raised

River Avon

- 1.6. Dredging: without detail it is difficult to comment on this one, river navigations silt up and there is a particular tendency for bars to form where small streams and drains come in, against that there are now boats on the river of a type that weren't present, say, fifteen years ago. Dutch barges (whether original or replica) draw more than most river cruisers, and some river cruisers with estuarial capability have moved onto the river. Referring to Bradshaw's 1904 the maximum available draught then was given as 3 feet 6 inches (1100mm), the same as for the canal.
- 1.7. Locks: our main comment on this would be that the locks are nearly 300 years old and are significantly larger than canal locks in length, and more significantly in width, making the gates larger and heavier than canal lock gates. Whilst it is possible to make locks easier to operate with careful use of materials and adjustments to lock gates the river locks always were heavy: the age and design of the structures being the reason. Mechanisation may be possible but this has both capital and revenue implications and there is no appetite for this from either users or CRT.
- 1.8. Vegetation: There is no doubt that vegetation overhangs the river to a greater extent than in the past, and that this is narrowing the fairway to an extent that causes some problems in places. Related to this is the difficulty of establishing new moorings on the river because of the vegetation and the value placed on it.
- 1.9. The overhanging has increased as a result of two factors, reduced expenditure on maintenance and environmental priorities that favour allowing vegetation to grow and die back naturally. It isn't all that clear who, historically, would have cut the vegetation back and therefore which party's inactivity has led to the current situation. CRT and the EA will have the power to cut back overhanging trees and bushes but will only be obliged to do this in fulfilling their statutory obligations.
- 1.10. Mooring: The mooring issue is ad hoc mooring in particular, although all permanent mooring sites on the river have either closed their books or have waiting lists so demand for these clearly exceeds supply.
- 1.11. Historically there have been no places for informal mooring on the river – leisure boaters in transit could stop in the lock cuts at Weston and Keynsham, neither of which were well suited, or moor up to a pub garden if that were practical. From a boating perspective things have changed little, and many of those accused of "abusing" moorings are actually mooring in locations where historically no mooring occurred. The exceptions to this are in Bath and at Mead Lane, Saltford.
- 1.12. A large part of this increase is because the canal above Bath is regarded as "full" and also, with CRT wanting to increase the cruising range of boats that have no home mooring some boaters are going onto the river (it must be emphasised that many boaters also go on the river through choice). The problem that arises is that many of these ad-hoc moorings create problems for other users or land owners, or at the very least the presence of the boats is unwelcome. Fishing rights are leased along the length of the river, and ad-hoc mooring in many reaches interferes with the exercise of those rights.
- 1.13. *In Bath there have been moorings at Pulteney Weir and at Avon Street: the first is not on the length described in this section, not on CRT managed waters, and is currently closed. The Avon Street moorings are currently being redeveloped but will continue to be available.
- 1.14.

Kennet and Avon Canal

- 1.15. There is no doubt that the boat density on this length of the Kennet and Avon Canal is greater than the average: CRT's Annual Report for 2015/16 identifies just under 33,000 licenced boats on just under 1,800 miles of navigable river and canal in their management, or 18.3 boats per mile. The average number of boats moored online between Bradford and Bath is 35 per mile, or nearly double. The national average includes boats whose home mooring is offline, indeed these will be in the majority, so the number of boats actually on the canal in B&NES at any one time is very high indeed.
- 1.16. Dredging: in 1904 (Bradshaws) the stated available depth on the Kennet and Avon Canal was 3 feet 6 inches (1100mm), and some contemporary reports suggest this was a bit optimistic even then. Boats of this draught now would probably have some difficulty but there are boats using the canal that probably approach this. The real issue will be getting such a boat into the side.
- 1.17. This overlaps with the mooring issue: historically boats didn't stop just anywhere, especially not on the towpath side where they would be an obstacle to other boats when all craft were horsedrawn, thus whilst there are many places where a relatively shallow draught boat can get to the side of the canal, this is more by accident than design.
- 1.18. That said, the same vegetation that is one of the current causes of complaint would also have been absent when the canal was in commercial use, as it too would have fouled the towrope. It appears that current policy away from formal moorings is to cut back vegetation once or twice a year: there is no prohibition on mooring where vegetation is present (unlike on the canal in Oxford, where there are "ecology areas" where mooring is prohibited) and some boaters make their own arrangements to cut vegetation when mooring on these lengths.
- 1.19. A bigger problem for mooring is an inability to get into the bank, this is often the result of bank erosion or of debris having fallen into the canal at the edge (sometimes this is dislodged coping stones from the bank itself). This situation is relatively common across the whole canal network, and especially so where canals have been out of use for a long time as the Kennet and Avon once was, however the number of boats on the canal in the B&NES area means that problems such as this are more noticeable due to the demand for places to moor.
- 1.20. The locks and swing bridges appear no more difficult to operate than comparable structures elsewhere, although it is acknowledged (from the direct experience of the author) than bridge 179 can be challenging to crews. Overall it must be appreciated that the canal structures are over 200 years old and were originally designed for commercial use by skilled manual labourers, whilst changes can be made they were not originally intended for modern leisure use and can only be adapted within limits
- 1.21. Whilst not explicitly stated, there are grounds to believe that some groups fear the canal section is heading the same way but hasn't gone as far yet, partly because it has a higher capacity and the "safety valve" of the rest of canal leading into Wiltshire. To some extent if businesses can operate on a canal or a river that is at capacity and in a neglected state then there may be nothing (other than customer satisfaction) to worry about, however this could also trigger the beginning of a decline for businesses as customers go elsewhere and ultimately are not replaced.



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